

# Void 1351

Chapter 1351 New Beginning [7]

Damien spent a few more days in the cell before anyone came to get him, but that wasn't bad for him at all.

Rather than a burden, it was a benefit.

It was impossible for Damien to marvel at the Heavenly World itself. The world was just too big for him to even begin to understand its beauties with such a small stay here.

However, its mana was both beautiful and ever-present.

Its perfection was incredibly beneficial for him to study, because it was a force closer to existence than anything he'd seen in the lower universe.

On top of that, his mana was a unique energy that could transmute into anything. Learning the ins and outs of other energy forms would strengthen him greatly, and the moment he fully understood them and gained the ability to combine or dissect them with a thought, he would reach an entirely new level of power that nobody could touch upon.

It was interesting.

Every once in a while, Damien released a few strings of Void Energy to test both its effects and the perception of those around him, and he came to a few conclusions.

Firstly, the hidden nature of the Void didn't change even here.

No matter how much energy he outputted, unless it got to the point where it affected the physical plane and altered it, nobody could sense it.

He couldn't speak on Gods, but at least Demigods didn't outshine his expectations by too much, which was good for him.

Secondly, the Void's influence was both restricted and freed depending on which aspects one looked at.

Damien had a lot of privileges in the Heavenly World that he didn't have in the lower universe, however, he also lacked some of the freedoms a more chaotic law structure granted him.

Such as his ability to "wish."

He could no longer let the Void do the work for him. Situations like when he helped Yong An escape the Saint Emperor through a "wish" rather than direct intervention weren't possible anymore.

Most likely, it was because if the Void exerted so much influence over a world like this one, it would genuinely disrupt the natural functions of the laws and degrade it to a lower world.

Perhaps an accumulation of such events was what created a universe out of a universe world to begin with.

There was a lot Damien could learn, but there was just as much inhibiting him.

Because, unfortunately enough, he was still a prisoner.

The gorilla man, whose name he still didn't know, and a few other members of the interrogation force would visit him every so often, and they would have relatively light-hearted conversations about themselves, but because of his status, he wasn't given much information.

It was annoying. He was here for transportation only, so he didn't think much of it, but it would've been nice if they at least told him more about the world.

However, they had a reason.

The captain gave them strict orders to restrict his knowledge for unknown reasons.

She was observing him to see what he did without any way to create a plan forward, to test both his psyche and power, and to see if he would do anything to reveal a hidden purpose.

But with no changes from him even after a week, she conceded and stopped testing him.

'This man is interesting.'

Damien literally did nothing to pique her interest, but that was even more interesting.

He knew she was watching him. She could tell that much.

When she'd encountered so many people who acted the complete opposite of him, trying their best to act a certain way to offset any suspicions towards them, and people who would act just like him, but fold after a while because it was a facade rather than their true appearance, the fact that he wasn't trying to do anything special or be anything he wasn't was more interesting than anything else.

So once the week passed, she finally gave her shadow the command and summoned him to her quarters.

He had his senses "isolated" again until he reached, and when he did, he finally laid his eyes on the presence he'd been sensing for the past week.

'So this is that person.'

The only person on this ship worthy of his attention, a being stronger than even the Saint Emperor, the strongest person he'd fought in his lifetime.

And she was just the captain of a starship, not even an important character with high status to be respected.

"You are Damien Grey?" She said, glancing over at him dismissively.

She had long silver hair and a cigar in her mouth, with seemingly no care towards anything. She was dressed roughly, like someone who spent more time on the battlefield than in social settings, but she had an aura of royalty around her that couldn't be denied.

"That I am," Damien responded with a small bow, smiling as he greeted her.

This person was interesting. Just as she'd been watching him, he'd been watching her.

And her senses were definitely spectacular.

The fact that he was called here was surprising in itself. She had noticed something off about him, even though he made no moves to confirm or even give reasoning to her suspicions.

She must've experienced a great deal of things to have vision like that, and Damien always enjoyed interacting with that kind of person.

"You said you only came to our ship to hitchhike, but is that really true?" She asked again.

Damien nodded.

"When I left the forest, all I saw was an empty land. I didn't know how long it would take to find a city without any knowledge of the surroundings, so when I saw a human artifact in the air, I chose to come here instead."

"I see..."

The captain smiled slightly.

"So you really weren't some mountain man."

Damien raised his brow.

"What makes you say that?"

He didn't try too hard to maintain the image since it didn't matter much in the first place, but he also didn't give any obvious hints that he was lying.

After all, he was careful enough to justify his relative intelligence and social ability as the product of a master who died before he left the forest.

But she was able to figure it out already? He was definitely curious about the method.

The woman leaned forward, as if to increase the mysteriousness surrounding her as she answered his question.

"I have observed you quite well over the past few days. While there were no obvious signs, you also did not try nearly hard enough to maintain your identity. What kind of mountain man has the patience to sit patiently for days on end without a problem, and what kind of master would leave his disciple without any clues on how to live in the world once he passed?"

They were small details that nobody else paid attention to, but because she was specifically trying to uncover Damien's secrets, she noticed them all.

"You aren't from some dark force or someone who holds hostility towards us, or else you would've done something already. You also don't look like you have a reason to hide your identity other than self-protection. When I put everything together, there's only one answer that comes to mind."

She looked into his eyes as if to peer into the depths of his soul.

She was certain of it.

"You..."

"...are an Ascender."

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"...an Ascender?"

Damien immediately questioned the term.

"Right. You must've just arrived from the lower world. There is no other explanation for your disproportionate naivety."

"Lower world? What's that?"

"Hahahaha!"

The woman laughed.

"You don't need to play dumb. The existence of the lower world is common knowledge here. It's not like there's been a shortage of Ascenders over the past few million years."

"I see...but, what's so important about Ascenders?"

Damien knew there was no point in keeping a facade at this point. No matter what he said, she wouldn't believe him. She trusted herself to the level of delusion, but since she was spot on, it couldn't really be called delusion, could it?

He had to know what the treatment of people who ascended was, and how they were perceived. Because if it was beneficial to him, admitting it was natural.

However...

"What's important, huh? Well, that depends on who you ask."

The woman furrowed her brows a bit as if recalling an unpleasant memory.

"Ascenders are definitely talented. To achieve Divinity in the backwater environment of a lower world is extremely impressive. The question is how they respond when they realize how much more there is for them to do once they've ascended."

"Just as they are talented, they tend to be extremely arrogant. That arrogance usually leads to them dying without accomplishing much or becoming part of the masses after getting their egos crushed, but those that do make it past all the primary struggles shine more than anyone else."

"It's not like there's a set perception of Ascenders, since none of them are from the same influence or have the same values, but for the most part, it's both positive and negative."

"There will be people trying to recruit them by any means, and people who try to eliminate them before they become a threat. The problem is that most of those who endure this treatment end up going to the lawless region and becoming evil practitioners out of spite or desire for survival, so the general public's perception does lean towards the negative side."

As expected, Damien had to keep himself hidden for now.

"They sound like a troublesome bunch."

"That, they are. Though, you don't seem the same as them?"

"Of course not. If I was an Ascender, wouldn't I have to be a Divinity?"

"Are you not one?"

"Can't you see for yourself?"

"I can, and that's why you should stop trying to uselessly hide it."

Damien smiled wryly. This woman was not easy to deal with at all.

"Let's move on to something else. Isn't it better to talk about why you called me here?"

The captain shrugged noncommittally.

"Frankly, I was just curious. I've never met an Ascender worth befriending, at least not to more than a superficial level, but you have a different aura around you."

"What can I say? I've always been told I'm charming."

"Ha!"

The captain laughed inadvertently at the insanity of his statement.

"You know anyone else who said that in front of me would've been killed already, right?"

Damien smiled back without a worry in mind.

"If you already know everything, then do you still think you have what it takes to kill me?"

The woman's eyes narrowed.

"Bold."

"I'd prefer if you called me honest."



The captain shook her head helplessly.

"I guess I expected too much. None of you could ever be normal."

Damien shrugged.

"Normal people don't become Divinities."

"I guess that's true..."

She glanced at him again, as if telling him to just spit out all his secrets, but his wall was too sturdy and she didn't have enough interest to bother bringing it down.

"Here, take this."

She threw a thumb-sized token, which Damien caught without much effort.

"That has some basic world information on it, so you don't have to go around so cluelessly. It also contains some stuff about Divinity, so study it well."

"We're currently on our way to Asteron, which is an important trade region in the area. Confront the map in the token and figure out the rest yourself."

Damien's eyes widened in surprise.

"I'm sure you didn't do this just to hear me thank you?"

"Of course not. Everything in this world comes at a price, but..."

She smiled confidently.

"...I trust my eyes. If there's really something magical about you, making you indebted to me here is worth more than just losing a little face for helping you."

Damien nodded. Many experts had this kind of practice, where they would help geniuses for the sake of cashing in favors when those geniuses became experts themselves.

These gambles usually ended in nothing, since most geniuses died early, but the select few that succeeded would give them far more rewards than their original favor deserved.

"You don't have to go back to the cell. I've arranged a room for you, so just follow the staff and they'll accommodate you from now on. We'll reach our destination in another week, so be sure to prepare yourself before then. Your usual excuse won't work next time."

Damien nodded and gave a slight bow.

"I get it. Look forward to the favor I'll do you in the future, and make sure you aren't too surprised when you see how fast I grow."

The woman rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, yeah. By the way, my name is Yulia Veritas. Remember it well."

"No problem. Then, I'll be on my way."

Damien gave another bow and walked out of the room, meeting the staff outside who guided him as Yulia promised they would.

Left alone, she lit her cigar and rolled her eyes.

"Kids these days..."

Damien really had no manners, and his arrogance was through the roof whether he wanted to admit it or not.

She didn't know if he was worthy of his arrogance yet, but if he was...

'The returns really will be worth looking forward to.'

She grabbed a communication device out of the air and made a call, which was answered almost instantly.

"Is there anything to report, miss?" A voice said from the other side.

"Put my brother on the phone," she said, her attitude not changing one bit.

The other side was silent for a moment, but another voice came through without too much delay.

"Sister? What are you doing now? Didn't I already say you need to come back to the clan soon?"

"I know you brat, I'm on the way," she replied grumpily.

"But more importantly, you would never guess who I just met."

"Someone who caught your eye? Does that kind of person even exist in this world anymore?"

"Tch. You should watch that tone of yours. How are you supposed to be a Clan Head with all that snarkiness hidden in your bones?"

"After all, I learned from the best."

"I see, so you've forgotten what my fists feel like."

"Ha...hahaha...anyway, sister, you were saying?"

"Mm, there's an interesting kid on my ship right now."

"Talented? Should I try to draw him into the clan?"

"That's funny. If you tried, you'd probably die, though?"

The man on the other side of the communication's eyes widened in surprise.

Those were words he never expected to hear.

"There aren't many people capable of something like that..."

"Yeah, but they are. The purple-eyed clan."

The man's wide eyes widened even further. His eyelids practically retreated into his skull as they popped out of their sockets.

"You mean...!"

"Right, if I'm not mistaken..."

"...that kid is a young Void."

The man's heart skipped a beat.

"A young male Void, huh..."

"I understand. You don't have to worry about it."

Yulia smiled.

"As expected of my brother. Do well this time and you'll probably be able to cement yourself in that position you worked so hard to claim."

The identity of "Void" wasn't something simple at all, nor was it something many could possess.

For a new one to appear now...

Yulia sighed.

'Chaos is going to ensue again.'

#### Chapter 1353 First Expedition [1]

The Heavenly World's size had been mentioned multiple times. It was huge enough to be a universe in its own right, and with so many people living together, it was difficult to have a hierarchical power structure that could be properly maintained.

Or at least, that was what Damien thought.

The Heavenly World was split into eight cardinal regions, the Northern, Northeastern, Eastern, Southeastern, Southern, Southwestern, Western, and Northwestern Regions.

Each of these regions was split into roughly ten thousand principalities that were run by minor forces, and each of those principalities was split into countries, kingdoms, and states that were run by smaller influences.

There was a strict structure where, the larger the influence, the more influences they had under them. And no matter how large an influence was, they would always be under someone else.

At least, for the most part.

The number of subsidiary clans and influences was uncountable, but in each region, there were four influences that governed all the rest, a total of 32 in the entire world.

And above those 32 were eight great clans.

These were the highest authorities of the Heavenly World. They each had sovereignty over an entire cardinal region, and they had power greater than the combination of all of those under them, which allowed them to stand on top of the world without having their positions shaken.

"The Straea Clan of the North, Vega Clan of the Northeast, Holy Empire of the Northwest, Veritas Clan of the East, Dragon Clan of the West, Kyushu Federation of the Southeast, Divine Order of the Southwest, and...Void Palace of the South."

Together, the eight great clans ruled the world.

They were supreme.

And the clan that called itself Damien's birthland was one of them.

'Wow. I knew my father had some status here, but I never expected it to be to this extent.'

There wasn't much information on the actual layouts of the cardinal regions or the nuances of each great clan, but just seeing Void Palace listed among forces that couldn't be reached no matter how much of a genius one was definitely had an impact on Damien's heart.

'So I need to go to the Southern Region at some point, and right now, I'm in the Eastern Region.'

"The Veritas Clan, huh..."

Was it a coincidence?

Why did the captain of this starship share that surname?

'There's no way it's a coincidence.'

Damien didn't believe in coincidences anymore. All of the coincidences he'd encountered in life were guided by something bigger than him, and this one had to be the same.

'I don't know what position Yulia Veritas has in her clan, but if she can throw her name around without any worries, it can't be small.'

Then again, perhaps she couldn't say her surname so easily and revealed it to him for another purpose.

'This is troublesome. I didn't know Void Palace was this relevant, so I didn't take that many countermeasures to conceal myself. If there are any physical traits or other cues that give away my identity, won't I immediately be engulfed in things I can't control?'

If there was one thing he gathered through his interactions with his father, it was that something complicated was going on in his life.

The situation of Void Palace wasn't something he could know at this time, and with his position as a legitimate heir to that place, unless he could be confident he wouldn't be touched, he had to be careful not to die early to schemes.

'I'll have to change my appearance before I leave.'

The gears in his mind began to turn as caution filled his veins.

He had an end goal, to reach Void Palace, but he needed to get strong enough to handle himself in this world before he did.

If he could randomly jump on a starship and meet someone stronger than him, he could very well meet people of that level constantly as he traveled.

'For that, I should create a foundation in the Eastern Region before I make my way to the South.'

"Huu..."

Damien took a deep breath.

He didn't spend much time on it because of how vague the information was, but he could feel the weight of those great influences on his shoulders.

They were filled with True Gods, people he couldn't beat with even his current power, and Demigods were just regular troops to them.

He wasn't at the bottom again.

That was an exaggeration made by people from the lower universe who didn't know better.

There were countless existences below him, even within the ranks of Demigods, but there were just as many above him.

He was just average.

And he had a ways to go before he could run around like a supreme genius again.



'Okay. Let's start planning.'

There was more information about the Eastern Region in the token than the rest, since that was where they currently were, and there was plenty written about Asteron, his current destination.

If he wanted to make a name for himself in the Eastern Region and explore the Heavenly World, this was his chance to do so.

And he didn't plan to waste it at all.

Along with the geographical and societal information in the token, Yulia also provided him with knowledge on the progression one had to undergo in the ranks of Divinity.

Unlike the vague structure where people just trained until their limit that existed in the lower universe, the Heavenly World had a totally defined system for how to rank up and grow.

It was less complicated and more complicated at the same time.

The leveling mechanic from the system still existed, but the way to increase one's level changed entirely.

Just killing was no longer enough. The new system relied on "Divinity" and "Legends."

The Demigod rank lasted until level 799, and at level 800 one would gain the opportunity to challenge True Godhood.

Experience would only be granted if one did things that either enhanced one's Legend or defined one's Divinity.

It was a vague way to describe things, but when it was applied to the individual, it was far easier to understand.

Damien's Divinity was that of the Hegemon God.

He had to stand above everyone else and conquer. If he accomplished feats that furthered him towards the position of Hegemon God that he formed his Divinity around, it would be enhanced along with his level.

As for the section about Legends, Damien was too familiar with it. He'd been working to increase his Legend for a large part of his life, and he didn't need an explanation of what it meant to do so.

Still, it was a non-linear system that completely diverged from what he knew, and if he wanted to follow it, he needed to completely change his mentality.

Kill, Eat, Evolve, the mentality that got him through the First Dungeon, finally became irrelevant.

And Damien was all for it.

Funnily enough, no matter how much he enjoyed the simplicity of the previous system, this one was far better for him.

Because he really didn't have to do anything.

He was Damien Void. He was the man who created Legends by just existing.

All he had to do was act like himself, and those conditions he needed to fulfill would fulfill themselves naturally

With a mechanic like this, how could he not be pleased?

Chapter 1354 First Expedition [2]

Every hundred levels of the Demigod rank was classified in its own way. They had their own names, but for the sake of convenience, most people just referred to them as low-rank, middle-rank, and high-rank.

There was a qualitative difference between each rank, and unlike the levels of lower existence, it was common to see both people who could fight between ranks and people who would be absolutely suppressed by those of higher rank.

Because along with one's level, the state of one's Divinity was important.

Someone with a Divinity like Damien's [Hegemon God] could fight someone who was at the peak of the Demigod ranks if that person's Divinity was a mere [Flame Controller] or something equally common.

The nuances didn't really need to be mentioned, since individuality made it hard to put a conclusive definition on who could do what, but it was easy to understand it when it was taken from case to case.

Though, that didn't need to be done now.

As Damien continued to study the Heavenly World's mana and plan for the future, the starship continued its journey across the Eastern Region and after a few more weeks, it finally reached its destination.

Damien had a great trip after his accommodations were provided, and by listening in on the conversations of the other passengers, he was able to discover more about how the hierarchy in this world worked.

It wasn't like he was learning anything that would progress him forward, but rather than encroaching on more ground, deepening the knowledge he already had was more important at the moment.

And when the time finally came to disembark from the ship, Damien met Yulia one more time and thanked her before disappearing into the crowd.

As she watched him go, she called her shadow and gave another order.

"Take a team and follow him. Don't interfere with his activities or stay close enough to intrude when he doesn't want intrusion. Just keep track of his location and help him if it looks like he's going to die."

She couldn't do anything to offend someone with his identity, but she wanted to keep him close until the things she spoke about with her brother were confirmed.

However, just as she gave the order...

"Hm?"

Her eyes widened.

A slight smile formed on her face.

"What a sneaky brat."

Her shadow barely had time to leave before he was summoned back.

"Forget it. Someone of your level can't track him anyway."

The order he was given was retracted in less than a second, and the reason was more than simple.

Even Yulia herself had lost track of his life aura within that second.

Damien was clearly hiding much more than he was willing to reveal, and if someone of her caliber could still be fooled by him, her shadows didn't have any chance at all.

'That makes things even more amusing.'

A genius who lived up to expectations could only ever amount to that much, but a genius who surpassed expectations to the extent of making those who held them feel helpless...

The achievements of that kind of genius would be unpredictable in the best way.

And frankly, those who were watching them would be at the edge of their seats as they anticipated what was to come.

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'Nice. Looks like this works as well.'

Damien smiled as he brushed through the crowd.

Existence was an extremely convenient law. Just as he was able to change his entire genetic structure to match that of a Nox when he was in Al'Katra, he could easily make himself into a different person at a level where no other person could recognize his identity.

Whether it be physical traits or mana signature, they could all be manipulated freely.

The current Damien was still an exceedingly handsome man with sharp features, but his bone structure and everything else were completely different. His eyes were a cool shade of blue that held similarities to his father's, and while his hair was still black, it was now short and clean, unlike how he usually kept it.

His demeanor still stood out from the crowd. Nobody who saw him would ever believe he was just an average person, but that was also to his benefit.

He was now a Demigod. There was no such thing as a Demigod who looked ordinary, so if he tried to emulate the most unimpressive appearance he knew, he would only be more suspicious.

He didn't want to discredit himself, because acting as a lower existence in this world would be extremely annoying. He just didn't want people to know he was "Damien Void."

'I should keep Spacetime under wraps for now too. I'll use Destruction Law to get around and use Existence as a whole when I'm not in a situation where I can be easily exposed. That way, connecting me to Void Palace would be basically impossible.'

The only question was how Yulia would act, but he could slowly observe in the future.

'Asteron is a pretty prevalent city here. I should be able to find something to do soon enough.'

The Eastern Region had 10,000 principalities under the control of the Aequitas, Virtus, Libertas, and Sapientia Clans.

Asteron was in the Verdant Principality under the Sapientia Clan and was responsible for a majority of trades through the upper quarter of the Eastern Region.

People would travel through the city constantly from all corners of the land, and information was as easy to get as dirt from the ground if one just looked for it.

The city itself was massive and modern, with skyscrapers and other similar structures lined side by side for several hundreds of kilometers. It looked like a futuristic Earth more than anything else, and though there was a lot that was foreign to him, Damien felt oddly at home here.

As he walked the streets and took in the sights, he enjoyed the ambiance and listened to the conversations of passing pedestrians.

Whether it be random news about personal affairs or more broad rumors about happenings across the Eastern Region, he heard it all.

He singled out those bits and pieces that would be relevant to him, and while there was a lot going on that he could get involved in, he didn't hear anything particularly interesting.

'At the end of the day, I'm working to get stronger and find my way to Void Palace, so I need something that can push me towards those goals.'

Random expeditions weren't what he needed now.

Instead...

"...why would I lie to you? I heard it personally from my cousin who works as a guard for their estate. The Norn Family really is looking to explore the Vanishing Dunes!"

"There's no way. Even if they're a subsidiary of the Sapientia Clan, isn't that too arrogant of them? Especially to hire mercenaries instead of sending their own troops! Do they not have any regard for our lives?"

"No, you know the reputation they have. The Norn Family is known to care for the people, but they can't afford to be careless this time. The mercenaries are being hired to act together with their personal army, because..."

"Don't stall and just tell me!"

"Alright, but keep this to yourself. Nobody is supposed to know this."

"You know I will, so just tell me already. What do I even gain from spreading the news?"

"True...well, from what I've heard...the 2nd Young Master, Asher Norn, disappeared into the Vanishing Dunes three days ago. This party isn't just to explore the ridge, the main purpose is to find him."

The conversation took place in a hidden location that nobody should've been able to eavesdrop on them, but the two men were unaware of the presence of the Demigod casually drinking tea in the shop below them.

'A clan directly related to one of the four major clans and an expedition to a strange place, huh...'

Damien grinned, his face twitching as he tried to stop himself.

But he couldn't.

He had to do it.

'This...'

He took another sip.

'...sounds like my cup of tea.'

### Chapter 1355 First Expedition [3]

The Norn Family was openly hiring mercenaries that could pass their tests, so Damien didn't need to do too much digging to find what he needed.

The only real requirement was combat power. Everything else was relative, and things like unity were completely unnecessary. There was already the Norn Family's personal army among the participants, so the mercenaries were being treated more like meat shields than anything else.

Though, Damien didn't care much.

The reason he chose this task out of everything else wasn't that complicated. He wanted to form a connection with the Norn Family, and if possible find himself an audience with the Sapientia Clan.

If he could get that far, finding ways to gain experience wouldn't be difficult and he'd have an umbrella to shield him if the need ever arose.

He didn't doubt that he could've gone straight to the Veritas Clan with Yulia if he just asked, but that wasn't what he wanted.

He had to think things through. In the Heavenly World, "Damien Void" wasn't a nameless genius.



He was a high-level figure of Void Palace. Even if he himself didn't consider it so, others weren't the same.

If he took a favor from the Veritas Clan without knowing anything about the ongoing circumstances, how would that reflect on Void Palace?

Whether the Veritas Clan was a hostile power or an ally, he couldn't accept favors easily when his decisions had so many implications.

Instead, he had to stack up favors from others, so that when the time came for him to see his birthright for the first time, he could approach with confidence and a name that others couldn't look down on.

Naturally, forming relationships with other forces was a great way to do this.

'I didn't think about it, but maybe the Saint Emperor's memories made me more conniving.'

Those memories had engrained themselves in his psyche and subtly changed his thinking, allowing him to make informed decisions with more accuracy and caution than ever before.

And with that caution in mind, Damien made his way over to the designated location to apply as a mercenary.

It was a martial field roughly ten kilometers away from the Norn Family's main residence. From the employer family, there was a strange old man, a woman roughly Damien's age, and a man who looked like the middle ground between them.

They watched and vetted the participants as they fought against members of the Norn Family's army. Not all those who won would be selected, and sometimes, even if the challengers lost they'd be recommended for the party.

Damien arrived as another nameless mercenary without even the credentials to prove his qualifications. He watched amidst the crowd as person after person was chosen.

The number quickly stacked into the hundreds, and yet, the Norn Family continued allowing people to test.

'It really is like grabbing meat shields. If they actually needed help, they wouldn't need so many mercenaries.'

Damien frowned as his turn arrived. His name was called, and as he made his way onto the martial field, he fell into thought.

'From what I've seen, those with too much power for the Norn Family to control aren't chosen, and those with high defense power are chosen regardless. It's a little unsettling, but the general consensus seems to be that the Norn Family cares about the common people, so there must be something more to it.'

Damien shook his head and took a battle stance.

The fight started without delay, and instead of showing off and using his Destruction Law to win, Damien played a different game.

He took hit after hit, to the point where his opponent was provoked by the lack of damage he was taking.

Stronger attacks continued to rain down on him, but with his impenetrable skin and Authority of Immortality, what could this low-rank Demigod even hope to do to him?

The combat power he showcased wasn't spectacular, and he painted himself as a martial artist more than a practitioner who had great achievements in law, but it was fine.

He was chosen anyway.

After all, who could deny someone who could tank so much damage without a single scratch?

Several other tests followed the first one to verify Damien's identity and make sure he wasn't hiding anything dangerous, and after he passed all of these flawlessly, he was sent with the rest into a new facility where they were informed of the mission details.

It went something like this.

There existed a desert a thousand kilometers from Asteron that separated it from the cities to the northwest. It was hot, dry, and filled with beasts that even Demigods fear. The desert itself was treacherous enough for most to take the long way around it for safety, but within that danger was an even more terrifying environment known as the Vanishing Dunes.

They seemed to come and go as they pleased, like vestiges of an ancient environment that didn't want to be forgotten. Anyone caught in the dune area when it vanished would vanish along with it, and when it reappeared, those people and their traces would be gone as if they never existed in the first place.

The task was to enter that area and uncover its secrets. Survivors would be paid hundreds of thousands in True Gold, the currency of the Eastern Region, and the families of those who died would be compensated double that amount.

It was a great deal, so most of the mercenaries ignored the obvious danger and agreed to participate. Contracts were signed to make sure neither party reneged on the terms, and after over 300 mercenaries underwent the same process, the expedition party was completely formed.

Damien went through all the processes without attracting much attention. Since a meat shield could only be a meat shield no matter how good of a shield it was, most people didn't spend time on him.

This gave Damien enough opportunities to observe and scope out those he'd be traveling with on this mission.

'For the most part, there's nobody worth looking at.'

The Norn Family group was interesting, but that was granted since they were the employers.

'That woman looks around my age but her soul is a few hundred years old. Is that the standard of geniuses in this place?'

Geniuses in the lower universe reached Divinity after several thousand years, and geniuses in the Heavenly World did the same in a quarter of that time at most.

'Where does that leave me?'

The guy who reached Divinity in less than a century...

'...wow. If I wasn't me, I'd want me dead expeditiously.'

Damien smiled wryly.

The expedition was set to take place in three days, so he had some time to prepare, not that there was really anything to do.

'But since I do have time, I should use it properly.'

Asteron was a melting pot. With so many people coming from all over the place, there was no shortage of geniuses in the city.

'Three days, huh...'

Damien smiled to himself.

'Then, let's spend three days properly understanding the standards of these higher world existences—'

—was what he said.

But really, truly, honestly, if one looked into his heart...

He just wanted to beat some people up to relieve his boredom.

It seemed the status of an average man had affected Damien, because his demeanor as a peak genius had completely left him.

Instead, he was reverting just a bit to that man he used to be, who didn't have to worry about responsibilities and put his own fun over everything else.

Whether that was a good thing or a bad thing...?

Only the Heavens knew at this point in time.

Chapter 1356 First Expedition [4]

The people of the lower universe had a skewed perception of the Heavenly World.

Because it was a plane outside their understanding, they exaggerated it massively and used it as a scapegoat to cover their cowardice.

Therefore, to lower universe existences, the Heavenly World was a terrifying place where one could die at any moment despite the power they accumulated before going there.

They allowed fear to control them and keep them away from this beautiful place.

But, at the same time, they weren't wrong.

The Heavenly World had a LOT of Divinities.

There were so many Gods they couldn't be counted, and for those below their level, even trying was impossible due to the scarcity at which they appeared in the public eye.

As for Demigods, the numbers were practically the same as 4th-class existences in the lower universe.

They were a plenty, and they were so varied that Demigods should've had their own power system to define them.

No two low-rank Demigods would have the same power, and no Demigod could be judged until their Divinity was revealed to the world.

Also, it was a very long journey to make it from a Demigod to True Godhood. It was more taxing than becoming a higher existence from a lower existence, and even the greatest geniuses took at least ten thousand years to make the journey.

Still, they needed to reach Divinity from somewhere.

The only reason there could be so many Divinities was because the number of lower existences was even more plentiful.

So even if one ascended and became average or less than average amidst the crowd, as long as one was able to put down their pride and slowly acclimate to the world, it was entirely possible to regain that past position without much danger.

The problem was arrogance. After being of high status for a long period of time, nobody wanted to return to commonness and become irrelevant. Nobody wanted to be treated normally, because even Demigods weren't held on high pedestals in this world unless they truly earned their title.

Lower universe Divinities who ascended, aptly named Ascenders by the Heavenly World denizens, needed to learn how to adapt.

That was really the only thing holding them back.

Because while they were unaware of this truth, they had talent that stood out even in the Heavenly World.

The act of reaching Divinity and ascending from the lower universe was enough proof of that.

Putting aside the difficult conditions one had to endure to reach that point, ascending itself was a sort of cleansing process that would transform one's body and soul and bring out their full potential.

Only Damien didn't experience this since he technically "descended" from the Void rather than "ascending" from the lower universe.

But, that was beside the point.

Three days had passed since Damien passed the test and joined the expedition party for the Vanishing Dunes.

And the time to depart had arrived.

\*\*\*

A strange rumor began to spread through Asteron.

As the expedition party made their way out of the city, they couldn't help but overhear the countless rumors that appeared over the past few days, talking about how any and every young Demigod in the city had been beaten down by a single person.

The craziest part? That person's identity was still unknown. Even those who watched the fights firsthand couldn't remember anything about their identity, whether it be gender or appearance.

The rumor definitely gained a lot of traction, but by the time people started to really speculate about that person's identity, the expedition party was long gone.

And the person they were speculating about as well!

Damien stood in the midst of the crowd without doing anything too special.

The conditions of the Heavenly World made Demigods more similar to mortals than they ever could be in the lower universe. There also weren't restrictions on their power usage, so they had both more freedoms and more consequences to deal with.

The expedition party needed to take a break every few days or weeks to rest, and there were people specifically designated to take care of food and accommodations for them as they traveled.

It took two weeks for them to reach the cusp of the desert with their speed, even though they all had the power to reach it in just a few days.

Nevertheless, Damien was trying to stay a part of the group, so while he didn't really speak to the rest, he didn't try to stand out and make a name for himself either.

He wanted to see how these people cooperated and moved.

When they entered the desert, things became more serious.

Beasts started attacking, and the expedition party took shifts fighting and defending as they continued to move.

It was interesting seeing Divinities move like normal people. Damien was so used to seeing them on pedestals, raised above the masses, that when it came to this, he felt it was a bit bland.

There were definitely positives. The Norn Family made sure the expedition party remained united for the most part. With their leadership, the cooperation led to progress lower existences couldn't have imagined.



Their power also wasn't small. The beasts that attacked them weren't all lower existences. There were plenty of Demigod beasts that had developed sentience who attacked their party for various reasons, and seeing how they were subdued definitely gave Damien a lot of knowledge about Divinity itself.

However, his main takeaway was different.

'This is suffocating.'

Damien was never really a team player.

There were times when he worked with others, and if they could form a good relationship, the partnership ended up as a net benefit.

But Damien never preferred this kind of cooperation.

He got the feeling that, if he moved alone, he would've already been at the Vanishing Dunes looking for the Norn Clan's 2nd Young Master.

Besides, his strength was definitely enough for him to stand on his own properly.

'Is there a problem with moving alone?'

Around the time the first month passed, he began to consider it.

He decided to be part of the expedition party because he was still new to this world. He didn't want his arrogance to control him and get him into another situation where he stared death in the eye. But if he had to be honest, he was bored.

These people couldn't benefit him at all, and he didn't see any proper chances to form relationships with them that would be beneficial.

He just didn't click with their personalities, nor did he feel the need to stay by them.

It was a bit difficult to find reasons to stay in the party, and when he realized that, he decided to be bold.

'Nobody will notice if I slip away, so I should just go.'

The Vanishing Dunes were why he came, and saving the 2nd Young Master wasn't something he needed help with once he got there.

Damien was an adult now. He didn't really feel the need to have people around him at every waking moment to feel secure.

He was tired of all the networking, and he'd prefer if he only did it when it was necessary.

Therefore, he started looking for an opportunity to vanish.

And soon enough, that opportunity came on its own.

#### Chapter 1357 First Expedition [5]

As the expedition party made its way through the desert and fought many battles in their search for the Vanishing Dunes, they experienced a drop in their wariness.

It was just for a mere second, after a particularly powerful beast was killed, but that moment was fatal.

The great desert was that kind of place. It was filled with not only beasts, but natural traps that could activate at any time and pull practitioners into the depths of hell.

With the trying environmental conditions supporting them and making it so those traveling through the desert would have their senses weakened with time, these traps were more deadly than even the strongest of Divine Beasts.

When the Sand Wurm that blocked their path fell, it created a massive hole in the sand, which, as it was filled, revealed the hidden mechanisms of a natural formation underneath it.

A careless mercenary took one step in the wrong direction. That was all it took for the entire group to plunge into the ground below.

Damien watched it all happen without a word, and as he observed the trap formation that was consuming them, he took notice of its nuances.

'It should be a labyrinth formation, so most of these people will be fine at least until they get transported to the labyrinth. As for what happens inside...'

'It should be a labyrinth formation, so most of these people will be fine at least until they get transported to the labyrinth. As for what happens inside...'

Damien shook his head. It wasn't his problem, but if he could help it, he needed to save the members of the Norn Family.

'I don't think they intentionally tried to hide it, but it's only an assumed fact that the woman among them is the Young Lady of the family.'

The Norn Family Head was said to have three sons and two daughters. The red-haired woman was the eldest daughter of the family, who was said to have a strong bond with the young master who disappeared.

'It's a little annoying, but if she was soft, she wouldn't have been able to leave with the expedition party. Her family would have stopped her.'

The old man was a high-rank Demigod, and the middle-aged man wasn't much weaker. As long as she had them by her side, she would be fine.

'...but it never goes that way, does it?'

Damien smiled wryly as his feet touched solid ground.

He was in a damp hallway that was just tall enough to stack two of him on top of each other. Its width could support no more than two people walking side by side, and it extended in both directions seemingly without end.

'Damp is a strange thing to feel from a formation found in the desert, but I guess that's the whole point.'

Damien spread his awareness and tried to find an easy way out of the formation, but it was strangely difficult.

'The mana is being twisted. I can't see outside of the labyrinth, but I can see the entire labyrinth for what it is.'

Finding a path to the center was easy, and finding a path to escape was even easier, but...

'If I'm not mistaken, I can use this to my advantage.'

The labyrinth was massive. As long as he could confirm that it was connected to the real world and not a separated plane of its own, he could absolutely use this to escape the group without much trouble.

'Then, I should start—'

"Mmgh..."

"Haa..."

Damien sighed.

'Right, there was that.'

On the floor a few feet away was a woman who was just now waking up from her unconscious state. She had bright red hair and green eyes that immediately turned hostile the second she opened them.

"You are...?"

"It's a bit of a shame that you don't remember your own mercenaries."

"Hmm, and we are...?"

"In a natural formation. We have to find our way out quick if you want to save that young master of yours."

The woman glared at him, but Damien didn't really pay her any mind.

Isra Norn. She was known as a genius and treated as such by everyone during her youth. She grew into a promising young Divinity faster than expected, and her arrogance had grown along with her strength.

This woman always had a slightly condescending tone when she spoke to anyone other than the two Norn Family members whom she came with. Damien didn't really have to deal with it since he never stood out from the crowd, but facing it directly, he immediately lost all interest in entertaining it.

"I'm going to start moving now, so you should decide whether you're coming with me or not."

Damien was fully prepared to leave her.

He already placed a small seal of Existence on her body which would protect her from fatal danger, so he didn't have to worry about the Norn Family.

'I've already done enough to gain their sincere gratitude, but when I save their young master on top of that...?'

Well, it would be nice to have a subsidiary clan at his beck and call.

With that thought, Damien walked north through the labyrinth, following the path straight without any deviation.

Meanwhile, Isra Norn took a few more moments to acclimate herself, took a few moments to curse out the disrespectful mercenary she happened to land with, and took a few moments to scout the area with her awareness.

However, it didn't take long for her to realize her awareness was cut off.

Not just from the outside world, but completely.

Damien offset the ban naturally because he had a half-complete Authority of Existence, but others weren't the same. Let alone the structure of the labyrinth, they couldn't even see ten feet ahead of them unless they used their eyes.

It was an extremely dangerous labyrinth.

Several tens of mercenaries and private soldiers already died during the fall, and around a hundred more were already killed by the labyrinth's traps.

Isra had no way of knowing this, of course, but the second she tried to move on her own and encountered a life-threatening trap as if it was candy in a candy store, she instantly turned around and rushed in the direction Damien went.

She was arrogant, sure, but her survival instinct brought her far enough for her to know when to put down that pride.

A semi-permanent scowl painted Damien's face when she finally caught up to him.

Because as the hours passed and they made their way through the labyrinth, the barrage of questions he was subjected to never ended.

"What's your name?"

"Where are you from?"

"Do you have any family?"

"What's it like being a mercenary?"

"Why'd you join the expedition?"

"Actually, my brother..."

The questions were so immense in number but so lacking in substance that Damien almost doubted whether she was testing him or something, but she really just seemed to be curious for no reason.

But he couldn't ignore that fact.

No matter how she acted...

'...this woman is at least 500 years older than me!'

The point was, she talked a lot.

For a second, Damien even considered leaving her behind, but he couldn't do that.

Unfortunately, they'd come in contact with the other Norn Family members soon, so he couldn't do anything that would lower their favorability.

'Just endure. In another kilometer, we'll reach "that place," and I can take the opportunity to escape.'

He would execute the plan and leave this place alone no matter what.

For the sake of his sanity!

#### Chapter 1358 Hidden Plot [1]

It was hard to see Divinities as people who could easily die.

The expedition party was made up of both Demigods and lower existences the same, and they died all the same as well.

The method? Traps and missteps.

One might believe Demigods infallible, but that simply wasn't true.

In the lower universe, there didn't exist anything that could fell a Demigod except other Demigods.

But here? In the Heavenly World, where Demigods had been a part of their infrastructure for millions upon millions of years, ingrained in the society without any restrictions separating them from the masses, the truth was different.

Demigod rank artifacts, Demigod rank materials, Demigod rank resources, and many more things were prevalent enough to be considered relatively common.

If one used an alloy made of metals with Demigod rank density and power of their own to create an artifact, how could a Demigod be expected to stay unharmed when attacked by it?



If a spike pit appeared in the labyrinth, those spikes were made specifically with the intention of skewering Divinities. If arrows flew out of the walls, they would be tipped with poisons and venoms specifically curated to murder Demigods.

The traps themselves seemed simple. No matter how powerful one became, the actual mechanisms didn't have to change. They were the most basic mechanisms because of how effective they were.

When those basic mechanisms were taken to a level where each of those spikes had a mind of its own, where each arrow traveled faster than the speed of light, they became something entirely new, something absolutely capable of slaughtering those who shouldn't have been slaughtered.

The ban on perception was the most deadly part. Even the weakest of Demigods could avoid these traps if they just had the ability to see them. After all, the uniqueness of Divinity was the ability to freely control one's law in whatever way one can imagine.

But they didn't have these capabilities. It was almost like the labyrinth was made for the sole purpose of slaughtering these great characters.

Wasn't it supposed to be a natural formation?

Damien originally believed it was. The sand trap that led them here was definitely a product of nature.

And perhaps these tunnels were made by nature as well.

However, this labyrinth's current form was no longer natural.

"Somebody" created this shit for an unknown purpose.

'I can't help but be curious about it.'

Damien was already by himself.

When he and Isra Norn ran into the two men who accompanied her from the clan, they began traveling as a group, and Damien was naturally excluded.

The two older men both looked down on him for being a mercenary and held great suspicions about his motives for approaching Isra.

Naturally, Damien never approached her to begin with. He was looking for a chance to ditch her from the start.

They would never believe it, though.

They might have been from a clan with a good reputation, but they were still "nobles."

They weren't going to listen to Damien's words, and Isra, no matter how curious her personality was, didn't have enough speaking power to change their minds.

It worked out for him, though.

As they pushed Damien further from them and tried to put him in a lower position, he was able to gain distance without alerting anyone to his intentions.

By the time they realized he was gone, they'd passed through so many trap formations that they could only assume he'd died.

'Haha, I'm finally alone.'

Damien celebrated his freedom silently.

'I know I'm the one who planned to make connections, but wow, interacting with people of status is annoying.'

It was different when Damien could be Damien, because his power was enough to match their status. But when he was just a regular mercenary?

'I'm starting to realize where the class divide comes from.'

Actions like those taken by the two men from the Norn Family felt insignificant for them, but for those under them, these were the actions that turned a good reputation into a bad one and made a noble clan lose public support.

'Still, it's not my business. If they have high standing, they'll probably be able to maintain it. Since I've parted from them already...'

He was going to go straight to the Vanishing Dunes, but he was curious about the labyrinth after experiencing it for so long.

'My spidey sense is tingling.'

His intuition told him there was some kind of plot here, and if he was looking for entertainment, wouldn't something like this be the best?

Instead of directly leaving, Damien followed the labyrinth covertly and teleported into the central area.

One With Dimension was active, sinking his presence into the spatial layers, and with the Authority of Spacetime guiding it, the skill was far more powerful, enough to conceal his presence from everyone in the labyrinth.

'Hmm, it almost looks like...'

He remembered the last time he was in a structure like this, in Alexander's body with Luciel and the rest.

The room he found himself in when he reached the center was almost the same. The only thing missing was the Nox being sealed in the middle.

'But something was there.'

Damien spread his awareness and made sure there was nothing waiting for him, and when he confirmed that he was alone, he made his way to the center of the room and investigated the traces he found there.

He closed his eyes and inserted his mana into the ground.

The abilities of Existence were hard to define.

Saying he could control "everything" in existence made him seem omnipotent, but he hadn't quite reached that level.

Still, there were things he could do that were impossible for most, specifically because his law was Existence.

Things without life had life in Damien's presence. All things had "memory" including inanimate objects.

When Damien put his mana in the ground, he pulled out the "memories" of the room itself, the vestiges of past events.

And those memories filled his head.

'As expected, there was something like this.'

The traces in the middle of the room made him doubt whether the scheme here was connected to the lower universe or not because of how similar it was to back then.

There were several beings kidnapped and kept here over thousands of years and used as experiment subjects for a man attempting to create an abomination, something forbidden by the heavens.

Damien didn't know what he was trying to make. He couldn't hear what was being said, he could only see what was being done.

That man tortured the beings he brought here like a lunatic without any sense of humanity. He did so many unspeakable things that Damien almost wanted to stop watching, but he didn't.

Because he realized something.

'It's not that the schemes are connected. It's more apt to say that it's the same scheme.'

The labyrinth from back then and this labyrinth, their owners were the same man.

Damien thought he'd died, but it turned out he ascended instead, and while they destroyed the research he left in the lower universe...

'...I guess he's still pulling bullshit up here.'

Damien's eyes hardened.

That man was trying to make artificial Nox in the past.

What was the continuation of that experiment that made it worth continuing in the Heavenly World?

'If I want to find out, I have to go to the Vanishing Dunes.'

Suddenly, the expedition party's fall didn't feel like a coincidence anymore, nor did the 2nd young master's disappearance.

The expedition party was meant to die here.

And their target...

'...if I don't hurry, he's probably going to become the first success.'

#### Chapter 1359 Hidden Plot [2]

Damien checked for any secret rooms before leaving, since he knew what that man's usual habits were like.

Unfortunately, this labyrinth wasn't a main base and was just a death trap, so there was no information stored here.

Once he was certain about this, he immediately used his control over Existence to bypass any and all restrictions and return back to the surface.

'The problem is that this is still just the great desert. I need to find the Vanishing Dunes.'

From what he knew, they appeared and disappeared randomly and had been around for so long that they were involved in countless ancient myths and folk tales.

That meant they weren't a product of the mysterious man, but a natural phenomenon he'd taken advantage of for his benefit.

'It'd be easier if he made it. That way, I could at least predict the pattern.'

The great desert was hundreds of millions of kilometers wide. Even for Damien, it was impossible to immediately find something so elusive in a large area like this.

With no other choice, he began to teleport randomly in search of any traces of the phenomenon.

'They supposedly leave a huge disparity in the environment when they disappear, and when the sand fills in the gaps, it creates a unique pattern.'

'But even though all these years have passed, nobody has found a pattern in the movement of the dunes.'

'If it was really just a phenomenon, it would have to follow a pattern of some sort. Nature is filled with unique geometry like that, and true randomness is rarer than one might expect.'

'If it's really random, there's a possibility it isn't a natural phenomenon at all. And if it isn't that, the only remaining answer is...'

Damien shook his head.

He didn't want to think of the worst-case scenario here.

Instead, he diligently tracked trace after trace. He didn't even know how to determine the Vanishing Dunes apart from any regular part of the desert, so it was an especially annoying task.

But, as he continued teleporting, he suddenly felt a sensation like he was passing through a wall of slime.

He stumbled out of the spatial layers due to its interference, and though his surroundings didn't change much, he knew he'd found what he was looking for.

'That barrier wasn't something simple. This is probably it.'

The Vanishing Dunes.

Without delay, Damien tested the majority of his abilities to see if he'd been placed under any restrictions.

'There's nothing that can actually affect me, but there's definitely a ban on Divine Energy. Those who travel through this place have to use their bodies alone.'

That must've been why Damien was stopped by the barrier in such a forceful manner. His "Divine Energy" was blocked, and his teleportation was cancelled.

'Void Energy and other forms like what the Envoy'a demon race uses are fine. Only the Divine Energy of the Heavenly World is restricted.'

Damien could still function at full capacity, but he didn't immediately make that known.

'If there's someone else here, it's better to make them think I'm defenseless.'

He couldn't raise any alarm bells without knowing the full situation, after all.

With that thought in mind, he spread his awareness and took note of the boundaries of the Vanishing Dunes. After developing a clear understanding of how much space this area contained, he began the search he came here for.

'That second young master, what was his name again...? Ah, right, Asher Norn.'

Damien recalled the information he knew about the man, mostly that which was provided by the Norn Family.

'His affinity is fire, but Fire Laws are so prevalent in the desert that it's impossible to distinguish a specific frequency of them. His appearance isn't too obvious, and overall he's a pretty average guy.'

He didn't really get what significance Asher Norn held for his family to spend so much manpower on him, but that was a question for another day.

'If I can't find his traces, I have to look for anything else.'



He explored the area, which was around ten million kilometers wide and fifty million kilometers long, on foot.

His speed was something to marvel about, and despite the great distance that was seemingly impossible to scour without mana, Damien did it without much issue.

Of course, if he had to search every corner of the space, it would have taken him many months at the very least, but Damien had an awareness that surpassed the perception of even some Gods.

He was able to find the first trace through it and beeline there. After that, going from trace to trace wasn't too difficult.

They were physical, after all. Slight indents in the dunes, traces of battle, and even footprints hadn't disappeared, making it evident that they were left not too long ago.

'He disappeared around a month ago. If he was actually kidnapped, these traces wouldn't be so obvious. I think he came here for some other purpose, and the kidnapping happened when he collapsed from weariness.'

Damien's presence here was caused by a collection of coincidences, which made him a bit uncomfortable, but he ignored that feeling.

Because after almost a full day of searching, he found what he was looking for.

The final line of footsteps led to a clearing in the range of dunes that made up this natural phenomenon.

In the desert, this would've been nothing special, but in this place, flat ground was basically nonexistent.

They weren't called the Vanishing Dunes for nothing. It was basically a mountain range of sand, with each valley just barely wide enough for a single person to fit through on the flat area.

So when Damien found the clearing, he immediately felt suspicious.

His awareness didn't find anything off, and when he walked across it, nothing special happened, but...

'...the smell of blood is too thick.'

There had to be something here.

If blood was the key...

'My blood happens to be quite the delicacy.'

Damien grinned.

He cut into his palm and allowed his blood to drip onto the ground below. He even cut off Transcendent Regeneration to let copious amounts of the red liquid paint the ground, just in case a few drops weren't enough.

Nothing happened instantly, but Damien knew he was on the right track.

After all, the sand wasn't stained.

His blood sunk below the surface and disappeared into the mouth of "something."

And when that "something" got a taste of the heavenly treasure known as Damien's blood...

RUMBLE!

An earthquake shook the Vanishing Dunes.

The sand in the clearing sifted to the side as something rose from beneath it.

'It's...an altar?'

An altar of blood, a sacred yet corrupted imagery that Damien wasn't expecting to see, appeared before him.

And along with it, as if par for course, an altar guardian.

Damien's eyes widened.

"Ah, is it that time?

He hit his fists together in excitement.

The beast before him was a true chimera with a lion's head, a scorpion's tail, and the claws and wings of an eagle.

Its aura was tremendous, flaring out with such intensity that it increased the gravity in the area several times over.

It wasn't just an aura of power.

It was an aura of true Divinity.

Was there any better situation?

Damien flared his aura back, making his intentions known.

It was a challenge.

Damien had seen many Demigod beasts as the expedition party moved through the great desert, but he never had the chance to actually fight one.

Now that the chance had come, how could he let it go easily?

He raised his arm and pointed at the chimera with a large grin decorating his face.

"You..."

"You're fucking dead!"

#### Chapter 1360 Hidden Plot [3]

Damien hadn't had a chance to test his power in the Heavenly World yet, so he was definitely excited for this fight.

He did beat up a bunch of young geniuses, but that wasn't much of a test for him. It was more to see what the standard for geniuses was in the region.

He couldn't use the majority of his power in public yet, so he had been eagerly awaiting a moment like this.

And now that it had come, why would he hold back?

He slammed his foot into the ground with such force that the sand below was directly melted into particles of glass. He shot forward with the same intensity, approaching the chimera before it could even try to take the first move.

The chimera was massive. Its head was the size of a two-story building by itself, and the size of the rest of its body could be imagined. Damien arrived under its chin in an instant and punched upward with extreme force, lacing the Law of Destruction into his mana as he did so.

BOOM!

Its head was snapped back with such force that the rest of its body toppled over. It used its wings to regain its balance, but Damien was already gone, high above its head with his hands together.

BOOOOOOOM!

A beam of reddish-black energy struck down like a pillar from heaven and burned into the chimera's back, slamming it into the ground.

It opened its mouth to roar in pain, and its scorpion tail whipped through the air to force Damien away, but its attacks were futile.

After all, no matter how restricted he was, Damien was still a spatial practitioner.

How could the speed of a blind tail match his?

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Damien teleported all around the chimera and barraged it with beams of destruction. Once its skin was torn, he pushed in and dug his mana into the wounds, using his laws to make sure they'd never heal.

He tried to use Destruction exclusively. It was both because of the decision he made in the previous days, and because he wanted to train this affinity that he was naturally born with.

As for why Damien chose Destruction out of all his laws?

It was because Destruction was rare, but not absolutely unique.

According to Dante, Damien was the sole inheritor of Destruction, but that title was nuanced.

People still had Destruction Law. Just as the Saint Emperor did, others had also comprehended Destruction and gained the affinity in the later years of their lives.

These people couldn't be considered inheritors of Destruction, and they would never be able to wield it like he did, but they could still wield it all the same.

Damien wanted to be seen as a genius among geniuses. If he could be regarded like those people, as someone who comprehended Destruction and gained an affinity, but at an age far younger than anyone else, wasn't that perfect?

Plus, he wanted to get more familiar with the affinity closest to his soul.

Therefore, he fought with Destruction, and absolutely enjoyed himself while doing so.

The law of Destruction didn't have any real form of its own. It could be anything Damien wanted it to be as long as it was laced with the intent to destroy.

Damien's most preferred method was through fire. He could use his own Void Flame, which had been upgraded in the Ancient Battlefield, and combine it with the Flames of Destruction to create something absolutely terrifying.

The chimera felt it with its body.

The burning black flames seared into its skin and aggravated its injuries so they could never heal. It dug deep and corroded its flesh and bones to weaken it with every passing second, and no matter how much Divine Energy was used, it couldn't be extinguished.

The worst part was its effect on the soul. The chimera's consciousness was subtly slipping away, making it less aware of reality. It was so calm and indiscernible that the beast was barely able to sense that it wasn't a natural thing, and despite sensing it, it simply didn't have the time to counter it!

"HUMAN!"

The chimera roared. It was a Divine Beast, a Demigod-level existence, so naturally, it had a sentience of its own.

The process for beasts to reach Divinity varied a lot from humanoid lifeforms, and while sentience wasn't necessarily a requirement for them to do so, most of them had sentience by the time they reached 4th class.

The chimera was here as an altar guardian. It had been protecting this place for tens of thousands of years without any problem, but recently, it had encountered setback after setback.

Another man bothered its rest several thousand years ago and almost killed it. It only lived after begging for mercy, and it was still being used by that man who broke into the place it was supposed to be guarding.

It knew that atrocities were being committed in its sacred land, but it couldn't do anything about it if it wanted to stay alive.

That day, it learned how weak it was. Despite millennia upon millennia of training, it could still be treated like a dog when someone stronger arrived.

So it trained even harder to become strong enough to truly stand on its own.

For several thousand years, it did its absolute best for that purpose.

But...

Why did it have to be like this?

Why did it have to run into another monster out of nowhere?!

It tried to attack.

It used the height of its physical capabilities, the power granted to it by the combination of traits that created it. It used its laws, a twisted version of Fire Laws that was specifically designed for chimeras.

No matter how weak it seemed now, it couldn't be underestimated. It was a powerful Demigod that could cause mayhem if it was let out of the Vanishing Dunes.

It was a shame that it found itself facing an even greater monster.

That monster didn't give it a chance to shine at all. That monster made it look like some weak cannon fodder that had no business being an altar guardian.

Because that monster was enjoying himself greatly.

Damien explored every bit of Destruction Law he could in this battle.

He transformed it into thousands of different forms, caused physical and ethereal damage, attacked the mind, twisted the environment, and even affected the high heavens to cause phenomena that he then controlled to attack.

The chimera was definitely unresigned to dying like this, but at the same time, it didn't think it would ever find a better way to die.

The swirling colors, the twisted laws, the fractured environment...

When put together in the eyes of a beast that had never left its territory, it created a beautiful picture of chaos unlike anything the world had ever produced.

The chimera fought to its last breath. It accepted that it couldn't win, but it still wanted to fight.



To prove that its attempts to become strong weren't in vain.

And as Damien entertained the beast and allowed it to relish in its last moments, their battle came to an end.

He stood on its head with a pitch-black sword of energy stabbed directly through its eyes. The beast was already dead, and only he remained.

"Haha..." he laughed quietly, clenching his fist and unsummoning the sword.

"Good battle."