

Void 1361

Chapter 1361 Hidden Plot [4]

Once the chimera fell, Damien naturally devoured it before he went to the altar.

Through its memories, he learned a bit more about the mysterious man and the ruins this altar led to, but since the chimera remained outside the ruins its entire life, the information it had wasn't much.

'What a single-minded beast.'

The chimera had no real reason to remain a protector of the altar. The duty was assigned to it at birth, and it followed it mindlessly without a single question.

It was a bit of a pathetic existence, but that was that.

'I should focus on what needs to be done.'

The only real useful thing in the chimera's absorbed existence was the method to enter the ruin properly.

'The ruin is supposedly a relic from an ancient society. It's meant to have some sort of religious background belonging to a God from the past, and the person who clears it is meant to inherit his legacy.'

Of course, the ruin was now being used for something more nefarious, and that legacy was probably long rotted to the point where even the mysterious man who made this ruin his home didn't recognize its existence.

'Anyway, if I just...'

He approached the altar and stepped on a few weighted pressure plates.

The ground rumbled, and the ruin changed to its second form. Here, Damien used his mana to trace a specific pattern in the shape of a sword wrapped in lightning.

The pattern pushed deep into the ground and shone bright enough to light up the entire altar. Spatial fluctuations filled the air, and the ground opened up to reveal a staircase.

'Interesting.'

The mechanism did transport one to a new space, but it was a gradual transportation that happened while one took the stairs.

'Even the stairway is a test.'

Damien glanced around as he walked, the All-Seeing Eyes showing him through reality.

His body and soul were being scanned by various mechanisms. They were trying to determine his potential, his alignment, and many other things, but because of Damien's unique existence, it wasn't able to do much at all.

'I'll probably be deemed unworthy of the legacy, but as long as I'm not spit out, it's fine.'

The winding staircase was long. It extended more and more the farther Damien walked, as if it refused to let him into the ruin.

But he was already prepared for this.

'You expect to scare away a spatial practitioner with spatial tricks?'

The only reason he was following the ruins' will was because he wanted to go through the spatial displacement without setting off any alarms.

Since he was already technically within the ruin now, there was no need to keep doing things legally.

Damien put his hands forward and pushed them apart like he was prying open a set of elevator doors. Space tore with his movements, and as he stepped into the crack he created, he found himself in a new space.

'This should be something like purgatory, a space in between spaces, an intermediary.'

From here, Damien could take one of many paths that could take him through the plane he was currently in, and as he looked through them, he quickly found the one he wanted.

'I should observe for a bit first.' He thought.

He opened that space, expanded it, and allowed its light to pass through his eyes.

Like that, a scene was revealed.

The scene of a plot that had remained hidden for tens of millennia.

It looked similar to the inside of a church.

There were no pews, nor was there any religious imagery. All these things had been removed long ago.

In front of the stained glass windows that made up the space's rear wall, a man was chained in the air.

His arms were spread diagonally above his head and shackled to chains that came from the roof, while his legs were in a similar position chained to the floor.

His head hung low, strangely lulling from side to side as if the bones holding it up were twisted and broken.

In fact, many of the bones in his body were in the same state. His skin was covered in thick, pulsating black veins of unnatural birth, and overall, he wasn't in any condition to be considered alive.

Yet, he absolutely was.

In place of where believers once stood and worshipped their god was now a myriad of machinery used by the one who desecrated this space.

The readings showed the chained man's status, along with many unknown percentages and numbers that nobody but one man could understand.

But that man was currently not present in the room.

Instead, he was a bit further away, a few rooms down the hall in a damp storage space of his creation.

He stood by himself amidst a mountain of corpses.

Not a single one was natural. They were chimera-like fusions of various races with humans as the base. Some of them had angelic wings, while others had the features of dragons and beasts. Some seemed like homunculi, while others were more golem-like.

But they all had a single common point.

In the middle of their chests, they had cavities filled with a certain dark material. Their cores, the pinnacle of the man's research, but also, the very thing holding him back.

"Almost..."

He spoke to himself.

He held a syringe in his hand filled with an unknown solution.

"With this, I can accomplish it."

The light in his eyes was mad. His sanity had long left him as he sunk himself in degeneracy.

He was once human too, but that was his state no longer.

No, in a situation where he'd be exposed if he took too many victims, he was forced to experiment on himself just as much as he did others.

He was a twisted and gruesome sight to look at, perhaps even worse than the corpses he left in his wake.

But after so long, he finally did it.

Everyone who followed him was killed. In the lower universe, the majority of his research was burned and the scapegoats he prepared to cover him were slaughtered mercilessly.

The plans he had made to conquer the Nox Race broke down, and without any choice, he fled the lower universe and came to the Heavenly World.

He never knew this would be his salvation.

This world, so massive that a single existence was nothing, gave him the freedom and the opportunity to do whatever he wanted without restriction.

And the beings he found here...

pared to them, the Nox were mere toys.'

They became the source of his obsession.

He didn't want to join them.

No, he'd hardly made contact with them since his arrival.

But the goals he had when he was trying to create artificial Nox transferred over to them, and the intensity of his desire scaled to their power level.

He spent thousands of years on this.

Thousands of years to create his own version of those beings, so he could one day conquer their entire race for his own benefit.

He only knew trial and error, experiencing barely any progress in the time he spent working.

But, somehow, by some miracle, his life changed 100 years ago.

His stunted progress seemed like a work of imagination because of how fast he was making improvements, and finally, the moment came.

He found the perfect vessel.

And he found the perfect equation.

Nobody could stop him this time.

He was going to succeed no matter what!

Chapter 1362 Hidden Plot [5]

That man's name was Richter Snow.

His history wasn't anything significant. He started as an ordinary person who wanted to become strong, and along the way, he developed a sort of obsession with "that which should not exist."

However, his view of that concept was different than most others who sought the same knowledge. Rather than the ethereal forces that qualified under the umbrella, he focused on existences.

His pursuit took him to the Nox first, and when he wasn't able to remain in the lower universe any longer, it led him further to beings he had no business being involved with.

That was why he never made contact with those beings. He knew he didn't stand a single chance against them. He couldn't abuse them, because they didn't have the same limitations that the Nox Race possessed.

He got his hands on materials related to them, genetic codes and organic samples, through black market dealings. And with those materials, he was able to conduct experiments for countless years.

As for why he hadn't been caught?

How many like him were there in the Heavenly World? This place was too massive for every psycho to be pursued, and since he hid his research extensively, nobody knew how close he was to completing it.

But the most important factor was his mobility. He constantly moved. He had been through all the northern regions, moving from base to base as he did experiments on a variety of peoples and beings.

The base in the Vanishing Dunes was his main base, so he spent a lot more time here than anyone else, but as long as he had the spatial mechanisms in this ruin under his control, he could return from everywhere.

He had confidence.

And with that confidence, he approached his next experiment.

'Asher Norn...to think such a specimen would be hidden in an insignificant clan like theirs.'

Asher Norn didn't have a great talent for comprehension, but he was born with a unique physique that could acclimate to any condition, which allowed him to make up for his lacking talent and grow at a speed rivaling geniuses.

"It took weeks, but I am finally certain. His body will perfectly adapt to the foreign genetic code and become something extraordinary."

Richter tested it with small samples and isolated experiments using pieces of Asher's DNA which he extracted, and since he had surety now, he was ready to act.

He approached the chained man with a smile on his face.

"This is the moment you become something grand."

Asher couldn't hear him. There were too many sedatives in his body for that to be possible.

And Richter wasn't going to fly up to where he was chained either.

He inserted the syringe in his hand into a nearby arm-like device.

It was one of three that rose up and injected different parts of Asher's body to prime him for the procedure.

"Next, I must remove his heart and replace it with the dark core before his body withers."

It was a precise process that had failed every time he'd tried thus far, but it was different now.

The past failures showed him the path to success.

Richter was on the ground surrounded by machines. He himself was within a machine that could control the rest like his own limbs. With that, he could properly operate on the subject without relying on processes he couldn't personally oversee.

Tens of robotic arms surrounded Asher as the procedure was brought to its proper start.

And as the only observer in the area, Damien frowned to himself.

'I should probably act now.'

He wanted to see what Richter was up to, so he waited. Unfortunately, the mad scientist was quite set in his ways and didn't reveal much on his own.

Plus, he'd digitized all his research so Damien couldn't easily access it unless he got his hands on one of those machines.

'I guess he learned from what happened in the lower universe.'

It was a bit annoying, but looking at how Asher was about to be cut apart, he didn't really have a choice but to act now.

Luckily, Damien was a unique individual. He didn't need to keep his targets alive or convince them if he wanted to extract information.

Especially now, after his ascension, Devour allowed him to take everything from his opponents, including the very core of their existence.

Basically, there was no longer a situation where he needed to keep the enemy alive.

He pried open the spatial door and stepped through, arriving in the space.

His presence went unnoticed at first because Richter was far too focused on the surgical procedure to focus on what was happening outside, but Damien wasn't planning to make a quiet entrance.

"Yo, wake up."

BOOM!

He slammed his foot into the ground. The physical force alone caused the earth to quake, causing a large portion of the machinery to malfunction and some to even break apart completely.

"Who?!"

Richter took off the headset he had on and looked around, his eyes quickly landing on Damien.

"Who are you?!"

Damien raised his brow.

'He does crazy shit, but he seems pretty rational in moments like these.'

He wasn't lashing out or immediately attacking. He saw an intruder who couldn't be estimated easily and took a cautious stance from the get-go, which was something Damien could appreciate.

"My identity doesn't really matter, does it? Bottom line is that I'm here to stop you, so shouldn't we start fighting?"

Damien grinned.

He wasn't going to entertain all the talking and stalling.

He had no interest in Richter. He only needed the man's memories!

BOOOOOM!

Damien let his mana pulse out. It rushed through the room, pushing Richter back and destroying all the machinery left in the vicinity.

"You..you..."

Richter stammered, his eyes wide as saucers.

He simply couldn't believe what was happening.

It happened too fast and too suddenly for him to even process it, but before he knew it, most of the facilities in this place had been broken into heaps of garbage.

"MY RESEARCH...!"

It wasn't gone. Because he digitized it, he didn't have to worry about losing it like that. However, the resources needed to build a facility like this cost far too much for him to easily get his progress back in a matter of years.

"You monster...you monster...!"

It seemed the insanity within Richter was being brought out by the previous series of events.

Damien patiently watched it happen.

He was going to kill Richter regardless, but he wanted to see what the man could do before he died.

He deserved at least that much of a chance, right?

Damien glanced over at the suspended man in the background as Richter continued to break down.

'He looks fine, but that stuff he was injected with earlier can't be good for him. For now, let's...'

Damien flicked his fingers indiscernibly and separated Asher from the current reality.

'That should be good.'

The target was safe, and Richter seemed right about ready to fight. So without further ado...

"I'LL KILL YOU!"

That enraged scream marked the start.

RUMBLE!

The ruin quaked.

BOOM!

The doors leading to the space shattered, and countless shadows appeared from beyond.

Damien grinned.

"Good, then. Let's fight."

Chapter 1363 Hidden Plot [6]

Richter was never a fighter. He was a researcher.

He didn't put his time into personal strength, but that didn't mean he was weak.

When the doors to the space opened up, hordes of chimeras, both humanoid and not, poured into the room.

There were at least hundreds of them. Most of them were weaker lower existences, but there were several tens of Demigod-level chimeras among them as well.

"You've been putting in work," Damien complimented as he panned his gaze over them.

"Work that you ruined in one sweep!"

Richter was evidently angry, but he didn't raise his voice again.

"Since you've come, then don't even think about leaving!"

He had his chimera horde, which gave him confidence in winning.

Without hesitation, he commanded them to charge, and within an instant, Damien was surrounded by so many lifeforms that his body disappeared under their shadows.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Damien looked around calmly. There were attacks coming at him from every side, but he was dodging without much of a problem.

BANG!

A massive hybrid chimera with a bear body swept its claw at him and struck him in the side, throwing him away.

He stabilized himself and quickly twisted his body to avoid the mantis chimera that swung at him from behind.

'I see. Their physical strength is pretty impressive, but do they not have affinities?'

He didn't immediately attack because he was testing them, but after a few seconds of aggravating them further and further, he figured that they were already using everything they had.

'I mean, yeah. If it was a normal Demigod, their number alone would be enough to put pressure on them and maybe even kill them, but has he really been doing all his research for just this?'

Damien couldn't really see the value in chimeras like this, especially considering the risks and inhumane acts that were needed to create them.

'Whatever. It's not my business, anyway.'

He was here to save Asher Norn. He had to remember that this man's business was not his own.

Their slight shared fate from the lower universe was just that. He had no reason to actually get involved with the man.

'I guess I'll just destroy them.'

He had fun fighting the chimera outside, but this fight wasn't the same.

He was already bored even though it hadn't started yet.

Plus, he really had no need to entertain all this.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

He shot beams of destruction at the Demigod chimeras one by one. Each beam was powerful on its own, but when they struck each other, they combined and exponentially increased their power.

By the time the spiderweb of destruction beams finally coagulated into its true singular form, it was a beam strong enough to eradicate the Demigod chimeras with a single strike.

WHOOSH!

The beam was like a snake. It zig-zagged and twisted through the air, striking each Demigod chimera multiple times before moving on to the next and giving them the same treatment.

Their number was large, but their strength wasn't so much.

After all, chimeras were already soulless beings. Without affinities, they were weak, and because of their inherent disadvantages, they were weak.

They fell one by one without a chance to fight back.

It was an unbelievable sight.

Damien was controlling everything, so he could have ease and boredom in his heart as he fought, however, for Richter who was watching from the outside, it was insane.

The roars and cries of chimeras filled the air with so much sound that the air itself vibrated.

The ground rumbled and quaked as they moved, their steps strong enough to collapse the ruin through physical strength alone.

They were tightly packed, but they were moving in an orderly fashion. The hundreds of chimeras worked together in perfect formation to surround and eliminate their enemy.

Unlike how Damien described them, the chimeras really were terrifying.

But what was even more terrifying was the reddish-black beam that cut through them like they were nothing.

It was like a hummingbird buzzing from target to target. It didn't show any mercy, it couldn't be impeded by anything, and the longer it existed, the more the chimera horde was broken into something not worth mentioning.

'I must run.'

Richter accepted defeat far faster than any other opponent Damien had met.

After all, he wasn't a fighter.

The second he saw the chimeras falling so easily, he let go of any pride or anger he might've had and began plotting a route of escape.

He took everything he could take with him and ran out of the room, ignoring even Asher Norn who he considered the best vessel for his research in the world.

He ran through the corridors of the ruin that he'd memorized after spending so many years here, and within the minute, he arrived at a secluded room that was locked behind a myriad of protections.

A key was all it took to remove them all, and as he entered, Richter rushed to a nearby mechanism. His fingers flew as he inputted command after command, and finally, the device was ready.

VOOM!

A teleportation gate opened.

Richter didn't even wait to see what was happening behind him. He ran at full speed and practically leapt to get through it.

But what was he expecting?

It was the consequence of not knowing who he was up against.

Instead of finding himself in another location, he found himself falling face down on the floor where the gate once stood.

"You trying to run?"

A voice came from behind.

He shakily turned his head.

There stood Damien, covered in bright red blood, smiling with his eyes closed with an extremely menacing expression on his face.

"Unfortunately for you, space happens to be my specialty."

Damien's steps resounded through the room especially loudly due to the circumstances.

He approached Richter and opened his eyes, looking down at the man on the floor.

"W-wait!" Richter exclaimed.

"I can give you anything! All my wealth, all my research, anything you need to know, I will give it to you! Please spare my life!"

"Oh?" Damien hummed in interest.

"But I don't think you could give me anything I can't get on my own?"

Richter's body was shaking.

He'd been in this situation dozens of times before. He'd been cornered by tens of powerful beings who wanted things from him, but he always managed to survive.

Whatever they wanted, he gave to them. Whenever they tried to kill him, he escaped.

Whether it was through the spatial gate or other means, he always managed to get away, after which he could always hide somewhere until the heat was off his back.

But something told him it wouldn't be the same this time.

"A-anything...I can give..."

He reached into his coat pocket as he spoke and pulled out a pen-shaped device.

"Work!"

He clicked it.

If it worked as intended, the space would've been filled with light that blinded the enemy so he could run and activate one of the many spatial devices he kept in storage for this very situation.

However...

"I told you that's not going to work."

Against a man who controlled existence, puny tricks were truly nothing.

Richter tried to beg again, but Damien already lost interest.

He really didn't expect anything from this man anymore.

"Whatever you want to say, I'll hear from your memories. So, kindly die so I can eat them."

With those words as the last Richter would ever hear, Damien stepped on the man's throat, crushing it into pieces.

Richter died. His body and soul were consumed by a deep blackness beyond all else.

And Damien brushed his hands off as he returned to the main space.

"Now that that's over, let's get back to the fun stuff."

Chapter 1364 Hidden Plot [7]

Damien didn't waste time freeing Asher.

The chains that hoisted him in the air were thick and made of a metal that wouldn't break easily even if a Demigod thrashed around in pain, but since Damien had all of Richter's memories, he didn't have to forcefully break them.

He undid the shackles using the correct method, which was far easier than messing with the chains, and after bringing the Norn child to the ground, he inserted his mana into the man's body to check for any abnormalities.

'It doesn't look like any permanent damage was done yet. There's a lot of internal bleeding and injury, and whatever that liquid was definitely had some effect, but I shouldn't have to worry about it.'

[Heal]

First things first, Damien took the necessary steps to get rid of the physical injuries. Once Asher's bones and tendons were reconnected, once his organs were returned to their rightful places, and once the traces of past surgical procedures completely vanished, Damien sunk his senses into Asher's soul to check there as well.

'It really is an interesting physique. It emulates one aspect of the Void Physique but takes that aspect to its maximum potential. A body that can adapt to anything is also practically ready to inherit the Void. The only thing it's missing is a connection.'

Damien almost wanted to fill Asher's soul with Void Energy to see what would happen, but naturally, he refrained.

Such experiments weren't his style.

'Putting all that aside, at least from what I can tell, the serum itself didn't have any negative effects. Rather, it's a net positive since the following experiments were never done.'

The serum was meant to "prepare" Asher's body to receive everything Richter wanted to give him. The primer's basic effect was to enhance Asher's inherent qualities, since the things he was going to be fused with were far too great for even his physique to digest without help.

If it went unchecked now that Richter was dead, the solution would've dispersed into Asher's bloodstream and damaged his physique. However, since Damien was here, that didn't have to happen.

Rather, the solution could be used to provide a permanent enhancement to the man's qualities.

'Phew. It's good that that's over with.'

Asher's state was brought back to normalcy within half an hour, and with nothing but time and some chimera blood on his hands, Damien created a chair and sat down, leaning back and closing his eyes.

'Haa...no matter the world, there's always trouble.'

Damien absorbed Richter's existence. He didn't care about the Legends of a man like that, but the memories he held encompassed far more than Damien had seen since he arrived in the Heavenly World.

This was the first time Damien was able to devour the memories of a Heavenly World being.

Thus, this could be considered his first introduction to the Heavenly World in its truest form.

He already knew about the layout of the world. That didn't need to be reiterated to him.

But there was a lot Yulia left out of her explanation. Maybe it was for his own good or maybe she had her own agenda, but she did forget to mention some of the most important details.

'Like the fact that this grand world isn't as secure as one would think it is.'

Damien expected it.

No, he already knew it would be like this.

Ever since that day on Al'Katra when he saw the memories of the corrupted foreign material, he'd been painfully aware.

The Heavenly World was not safe.

Just like the lower universe, the Heavenly World was facing a grave threat.

It was a threat greater than anything Damien could've ever imagined.

'The Foreign Races.'

That was how they were known.

Their true name wasn't known. They never tried to spread their legends through the world.

The people of this world called them the Foreign Races, because they truly did not have a word to describe these existences otherwise.

Nor did they have a way to logically explain where they came from.

Those beings were the creators of the Nox, and as if their agenda in the lower universe foreshadowed a greater plot, they were treating the Heavenly World the same way.

Like a plaything.

Like something they could destroy as they pleased.

'Richter has more knowledge on them than the average person, which is better for me, since I don't have to wonder and speculate about their existence.'

The Foreign Races shared a lot of similarities with the Nox, but they differentiated themselves plenty as well.

'Mainly, they don't have the flaws of the Nox.'

Things like limited intelligence or insatiable desire didn't exist in the hearts of these beings.

In the first place, those were flaws they created the Nox with for the purpose of controlling them.

The Foreign Races were all intelligent, and their power was greater than or equal to that of the Heavenly World.

And they'd been at war with this world for millions of years already.

'The Heavenly World hasn't been insanely corrupted or put at a disadvantage yet, but that's only what can be seen on the surface. If I learned anything from the wars of the past, it's that believing in the external appearance of affairs will only dull one's senses and point them away from the truth.'

The problem was that, while Richter did plenty of research on the Foreign Races, he was never actually involved in the war.

He only knew about their races themselves, not the details behind their invasion.

'It's useful information, sure, but I don't have anywhere to use it right now.'

Damien's eyes hardened.

'The current game plan was formed under the assumption that things would be calm for a long time, but I can't rely on that anymore.'

Damien needed to change his goals.

He couldn't slowly explore this place and go to Void Palace as he pleased.

'I need to reach Void Palace as soon as possible and find the people who I need to meet. I need to gain a footing in this world fast, because I can't let this situation deteriorate like it did in the lower universe.'

Back then, it ended in total destruction. Damien might've saved a large portion of the universe by sending it into the Sanctuary, but compared to what was lost, he saved less than one percent.

The Heavenly World was still largely intact, enough for the threat of the Foreign Races to still not be catastrophic.

They were his lifelong enemy, and the lifelong enemy of countless subordinates who entrusted their lives to him.

He naturally wanted to crush them before they could cause so much harm that more tragic cases like those he'd seen in the past became common.

'Huu...let's organize first.'

He took some time and sorted out his thoughts, forming a relative path forward while considering the possible futures he'd been ignoring before.

And in that time, Asher Norn also awoke.

Damien turned his eyes towards the man who was confusedly taking in his surroundings and stood up, allowing his chair to dissipate into mana.

'My wariness was never something I could drop.'

He'd accepted it.

'Slow and steady was never an option available to me.'

He'd accepted it.

'I need to end everything with my power.'

He clenched his fist with determination.

'So that I can enjoy everything I'm forced to ignore because of this bullshit.'

Chapter 1365 Hidden Plot [8]

A strange room, a strange man, a strange body...

When Asher Norn's consciousness returned to him, everything seemed unfamiliar.

"Ahk...!"

He winced. His hands went to his head as a stabbing pain filled his skull.

Memories of past events came back in fragments. He couldn't recall it all because most of it had been repressed by his trauma response, but the bits and pieces he did remember were terrifying enough.

From his head to the rest of his body, his hands rapidly patted him down as he tried to assess his condition.

By all logic, he should've been at least half-dead by now. If not, then crippled.

But looking at himself internally and externally, there didn't seem to be a problem.

Then, when considering everything else...

"You...saved me?" He uttered, still overcoming his confusion.

"I did," Damien responded.

"Ah...!"

Asher exclaimed without knowing what to say.

If this man was here, the one who tortured him was likely already dead.

And if that man was dead, then he was in a position to regain his freedom.

"My savior...how can I thank you?"

He didn't think of anything else. Kindness had to be repaid tenfold. If not because one wished to be just, then because not doing so could very well attract ire from the very one whom one called one's savior.

Rather than that ire turning into a grudge with unknown consequences, wasn't it better to put everything down first and express gratitude?

Damien smiled slightly.

His thoughts were barely ordered after he found himself confronted with a new enemy that needed to be eradicated, but the demeanor of the man named Asher Norn was refreshing enough to take his mind off of it.

After all, Damien could see into his soul. This man was weaker than him, so whether it be thoughts or subconscious beliefs that even the man himself didn't know, they were all clear to him.

"You don't need to be so tense. I'm here because I accepted a commission from your family, so the repayment is already in order."

"I see..." Asher nodded his head in understanding.

"Then, can you explain the current situation?"

His relative calmness was impressive, and since Damien had nothing better to do, he slowly told Asher about what had happened to him.

"There was such a plot!" Asher exclaimed after hearing the story.

"I apologize, but this is something I must report to the Family Head immediately. If it isn't included in your pay, I am willing to add additional compensation if you can escort me home."

"I'll hold you to your word, then."

Whether extra compensation was needed or not, Damien wasn't one to refuse.

"But before we go..."

'I feel bad for the ancient god who originally made this ruin, but it has to be done.'

Damien lit a flame of purgatory in his hands and threw it nonchalantly to the side.

That flame would eventually devour everything in its path and consume the ruin whole, leaving no traces of Richter's research for others to find later.

As for his other hideouts, Damien would slowly destroy them one by one for that purpose.

Such experiments didn't need to be continued.

But that was a story for another time.

"Shall we go now?"

Damien smiled and turned away from Asher. The man was more than capable of walking on his own now, and Damien already clothed him before he woke up.

"Absolutely," Asher nodded, "but...how?"

"Ah, that's the easiest part."

Maybe his teleportation was restricted, but Warp was a broken skill.

It ignored such things as restrictions. As long as Damien knew where he was going and had the mana to take himself there, he could move anywhere.

At his current level, that included travel between planes.

A portal opened up behind him, leading to the same martial arena that was used to test mercenaries before the expedition began.

Damien and Asher came out on that side and saw the sunlight of the Verdant Principality once more, and while it meant nothing to Damien, it was obviously different for Asher.

He knelt on the ground and cried. He tried to hide it, but the tears wouldn't stop flowing from his eyes.

His mind refused to remember his suffering, but his body recalled it clearly. The fact that he'd escaped that hell only set in now, and naturally, that realization was accompanied by a rush of emotions.

'This is going to take a bit.'

Damien stood by without a word and waited for Asher to get himself together. Several minutes and a short apology later, the two were on their way to the Norn Family Estate.

It was a decently large area that encompassed several dozen acres of land, but compared to the grandiosity of structures Damien had seen in the lower universe, it wasn't anything much.

'Well, this is also one of the lowest levels of influence present here. There are ten thousand like it in this cardinal region, and if you include the rest, the number is uncountable.'

Damien followed Asher to the gates, and once his identity was confirmed, the two were able to enter the estate without much trouble.

They passed by anything and everything until they arrived at the main house, and waiting in front of it was a refined man with hair as white as snow.

"Asher...?" He said incredulously.

"It's me, father," Asher responded in the same tone.

The two had a touching reunion that Damien had no business being a part of, and when it was over, the questions finally started.

"Why are you here? The expedition party hasn't even entered the Vanishing Dunes yet," the man who was evidently the Family Head of the Norn Family asked.

"I was saved by this man. It is also due to his power that we were able to return with such haste," Asher responded, giving Damien the credit he deserved.

The Norn Family Head turned his gaze to Damien for the first time and scanned him up and down.

"First and foremost, I'd like to sincerely thank you for saving my son. However, I hope you can understand my doubts."

Damien sighed to himself.

"Naturally, so just ask away. I'll answer what I can."

"Then, please excuse my rudeness."

It started with a simple, "How did you know my son was missing?"

Damien gave his background as a hired mercenary, and the follow-up question was naturally a, "Why are you here before the expedition party?"

The questioning came to an abrupt halt here, because Damien's answer wasn't something the Norn Family Head could easily fathom,

"They were too slow, so I ditched them."

Damien said it as it was, and while the Norn Family Head definitely had more questions to ask, he had to refrain, because Asher's true circumstances were brought to light.

The kidnapping, the torture, and everything else, all leading up to the conclusion that he would've been dead by the time the expedition party arrived if Damien hadn't moved ahead of them.

Asher Norn was an upright person. He made sure Damien was given the treatment he deserved and told his story in such a way that glorified his achievements.

In this way, Damien would be able to properly reap the rewards of completing the mission, which, in Asher's understanding, was the reason Damien did everything from the start.

The trio entered the mansion as their conversation continued. The topic of rewards, small talk about worldly affairs, some prying into Damien's identity, and much more ensued, but Damien was only half paying attention.

He let the events fly by.

His original goal seemed meaningless now, because the slow and steady approach he was attempting to take had been crushed to bits.

The connection with the Norn Family had already been formed, and as a reward, he already requested a meeting with the Sapientia Clan.

Since they controlled the information network within the Eastern Region, they were a perfect match for the current Damien.

But first...

'...I need to find Yulia.'

That woman from the Veritas Clan would be the biggest contributor to his current plans.

So before anything else, he needed to meet with her.

But did he know...?

Just as he was looking for her, she was looking for him.

Their meeting was fated from the start.

And it wouldn't be too long before it took place.

Chapter 1366 Undercurrents [1]

The setting was somewhere secluded, a place where no witnesses could reach.

There were meadows all around, and two people sat at a table with a bottle of spirit liquor between them.

"It took a lot of effort to find you. Should I say I'm impressed?"

The one who spoke was Yulia Veritas, a woman who both had fame and the ability to move without being recognized, a combination barely anybody could replicate.

As for the one she was speaking to, it was a very familiar man.

"I don't know about all that. I think I should be the one impressed by the person who managed to find me despite all that."

Damien finished his business with the Norn Family without much difficulty, and since they were able to contact the expedition party, it seemed Isra and the rest managed to escape the labyrinth somehow.

He didn't have to worry about them. He did want to deepen his friendship with the clan, but since his mentality changed, he didn't put too much emphasis on it for the moment.

Instead, this meeting was more important.

Who would've thought he didn't even have to look for it?

By the time he was done with the Norn Family, he already felt the presence following him. And when he led that presence to a secluded location to confront, he found that it was a friend rather than a foe.

He sat down with Yulia without much of a fuss. She was too sure of his identity for him to convince her otherwise.

The problem was how she found him. Whether it be his physical genetics, his aura, his mana, or even his soul, they had been altered to trick the general public.

For someone to see through this, regardless of strength, meant they had means that were mysterious even to him.

"I want to ask about it, but I'm sure you won't tell me, right?"

"Naturally. A woman's secrets aren't so easy to uncover."

Damien rolled his eyes.

"What a cheeky answer. I didn't expect you to be a 'womanly' individual."

"Hm? Was that an insult? I guess you've gained some confidence after spending time here, haven't you?"

"Something like that."

Yulia entertained the conversation normally, but she wasn't lying when she said she spent a great deal of effort to find him.

None of her sources or subordinates were able to find a trace of him, and only when she personally took action did she even find a clue.

It was surprising.

She was forced to use the strength she was hiding. Not just anyone could force her into a position like that.

She wanted to meet Damien to forge a relationship with him that would draw him closer to the Veritas Clan and confirm his identity, but what surprised her was his desire to see her as well.

'Did he realize something...?'

She wanted to probe him and see what he was thinking, but Damien wasn't the type to talk in circles, something she should've realized from their last meeting.

"I have to thank you for the information you gave me last time, but didn't you hide a little too much?" Damien started, bringing up the main point without delay.

"What are you talking about?" Yulia responded, still trying to see what he knew.

"The Foreign Races."

Yulia's eyes widened just slightly.

She expected him to talk about Void Palace or something along those lines. She never expected the first thing on Damien's mind to be a hidden enemy that had no connection to him.

"What about them?" She asked.

"Tell me everything. Everything you know about them, and everything about their invasion. I won't let it slide if you keep hiding things right now."

Damien's gaze held a level of seriousness she didn't know he had in him.

'For some reason, I feel like my strength has become less significant.'

She was hiding more than Damien could ever imagine, but she suddenly got the feeling that even with her hidden strength, she wouldn't be able to act as she pleased.

'Though, this doesn't have to devolve to that.'

She didn't hide information about the Foreign Races with hostile intent, nor did she do it to help him.

Since he was clueless about the Heavenly World, the main thing he needed to know was the structure and power of their denizen races.

As for the Foreign Races, people would always learn about them eventually if they just continued living here. It wasn't information that needed to be prioritized, especially since new soldiers didn't really need to be drafted for the war right now.

"Haa..."

Damien was leaking a subtle yet noticeable aura of hostility, not towards her, but towards the subject in question.

She couldn't just half-ass her answer here.

"I don't know how much you already know, but it's something like this..."

She reiterated the information Damien learned from Richter's memories first.

The Foreign Races appeared on the periphery countless tens of millions of years ago. They never made their reason for attacking known, but the fact that they had high intelligence was well known, not only through their scheming nature and cautious movements, but also due to attempts made to communicate with them.

Their stance was something similar to a dominator. From the highest ranks to the lowest, they viewed the people of the Heavenly World as prey, people who weren't worth communicating with.

And unlike the Nox, who had a physical place in the lower universe, the Foreign Races came from "somewhere else."

Nobody knew where that place was. No matter how much they investigated, it was impossible to find its location.

However, when the Foreign Races invaded, a connection between those two places was formed.

"They're called Dimensional Cracks," Yulia said.

"They're connection points between the home of the Foreign Races to our world. The Heavenly Order has made moves to combat them, which gives us some advantages, but if we cannot make full use of those advantages, the Foreign Races can turn portions of our land into their territory."

"The war has been proceeding slowly. I'm not sure what they've been waiting for, but they've never gone all out against us. For the first few million years, they just tested the waters and moved in the shadows. After that, they started invading slowly, but never really pushed us. We know that they have high-rank beings among them, but none of them have made an effort to invade the world yet."

"Hmm..."

Damien could understand it somewhat. Since the Foreign Races had been plotting in the lower universe during the time they spent probing the Heavenly World, they clearly had plans to take everything the universe could offer before destroying it.

But since the lower universe was gone now, would they continue to wait?

Damien didn't speculate much. There was definitely more Yulia had to say.

But she stopped explaining there.

"I'm not sure what kind of grudge you have against the Foreign Races, but that's hardly what you should be worrying about."

Yukia's eyes narrowed as she observed Damien's reactions.

"Right now, I think you should focus your attention on Void Palace. After all, their situation has been getting more desperate by the day."

Chapter 1367 Undercurrents [2]

"Void Palace...?"

Damien was surprised when she suddenly brought it up. He had no idea she'd figured out his affiliation, nor did he know how she did it.

"What do they have to do with me?"

"There's no point trying to act uninvolved. Unfortunately for you, each of the eight great clans has their own insignia to set them apart from the masses," Yulia replied with a smile.

"For our Veritas Clan, it's the third eye on our foreheads..."

She raised her bangs so he could see it. It wasn't a physical eye, but a tattoo-like marking faded into the skin like it was natural. It looked mystical, and just gazing into it made Damien feel compelled to tell the truth.

"...and for Void Palace, it's your unique purple eyes."

Void Palace was different from the other clans because their trait wasn't a marking, but something genetic. It made it seem like everyone in the clan was from the same lineage, but that wasn't true.

The direct descendants of the Void Lord were born with natural purple eyes, while the members from other lineages and those taken in from the outside would eventually develop the same eyes when they started practicing Void Palace's techniques.

There was a difference between the two, but it wasn't something known to those outside the clan.

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"You did a good job hiding when you left the ship, but you made a mistake forgetting to hide before meeting me."

Damien raised his brow.

"It's definitely an interesting thing, but haven't we already had the conversation about me being an Ascender? You know that kind of thing doesn't exist in the lower universe, right?"

Yulia's smile widened.

"Isn't that the most curious part?"

She grabbed her cup and took a sip of spirit liquor, pausing as if she wanted to make her next words more impactful.

"This rule applies throughout the entire cosmos, whether it be here or the lower universe. The fact that you are an Ascender just makes your existence even more mysterious, and far more amusing to understand."

"..."

Damien didn't know what to say.

'Well, that's some shit.'

He really got played.

"Don't worry," Yulia continued.

"My crew is absolutely loyal. None of them will reveal anything unless I tell them to, and most of them probably didn't even put two and two together on their own."

The unique traits of each clan were definitely noticeable, but there was also a specific demeanor that those who ruled the world possessed.

It was impossible to stand in a position where quintillions of existences bowed before one's feet and remain someone without regality.

However, Damien didn't possess it at all. He did have eyes that set him apart from the rest, but he acted like a commoner.

It was a small detail, one that nobody would directly notice but inherently understand, but it was enough to make people believe in coincidence.

Damien sighed to himself.

"I guess there's nothing I can say to deny it...?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then let's just continue with the conversation. What's the situation with Void Palace?"

Yulia nodded, her brows wiggling slightly as she reveled in her victory.

"A few million years ago, Void Palace wasn't an influence that could be considered one of the eight great clans. Rather, it was an influence that stood above us all. Unfortunately, that status couldn't be maintained. It all changed so fast that it seemed like it happened in a day."

As the story went, the war with the Foreign Races had become large and small over the eons, but it always had a place in the Heavenly World's history.

And because they came through Dimensional Cracks, the influence known as Void Palace rose to prominence faster than anyone else.

On top of their main lineages, whose powers and abilities were varied and unpredictable, they gathered all the spatial practitioners in the world and became a haven for them.

These spatial practitioners were incredibly important, because only they had the ability to regulate Dimensional Cracks, which gave the Heavenly World a great advantage against the invading enemy.

With the passing of time and the growth of their power, Void Palace rose and rose and rose until nobody else could stand up to them.

And naturally, that attracted ire from other forces.

They had large and small conflicts with several influences, including a few of the eight great clans, and their power was diminished to an extent, but even then their foundation couldn't be shaken.

Until that day.

"The Void Lord disappeared."

They lost their pillar.

The man who created Void Palace and led their development, the man who was the source of all of their inheritances and legacies, the man who was regarded as the strongest in the world...

That man disappeared from the world, and no matter how much time passed, he never returned.

"Void Palace could never be broken. Their influence is too strong, the common people support them to almost a fanatical level, and their importance to the world is too great for anyone to force them to disband."

"But without their pillar, they weren't able to maintain their previous status. They eventually became the eighth of the eight great clans, and their land was encroached upon by several other forces."

"The Divine Order of the Southwest and the Straea Clan of the North both started biting off chunks of the Southern Region, and while the Kyushu Federation never showed real hostile intent, as a mercantile empire, they naturally started expanding as well."

"The legacy of Void Palace became weaker, and they were forced to hole themselves up in their own principality. They haven't been able to properly fight against those trying to destroy them. Their geniuses still come out and show their strength to prove that Void Palace is still a great clan, but that isn't enough to fight the other great clans."

"The situation has been getting worse recently. Divine Order seems to have encountered something that greatly raised their overall combat power, and the Straea Clan has become more forward in their conquest. If this continues, the Southern Region will be divided between other powers in at most a decade and Void Palace will lose its standing."

"They need a leader, they need unity, and they need a chance to start fighting back."

Yulia basically finished her overview there. She outlined the enemies and allies of the clan among the eight great clans, where the Veritas Clan was called their greatest ally, but Damien didn't pay much attention to that part.

He could hear it directly from the people at Void Palace when he got there.

His mind had been elsewhere for a while now.

The Void Lord...

His father...

Dante Void...

'...has been missing for millions of years?'

Damien knew something was wrong.

Dante had been in a situation where enemies and tragedy pursued him everywhere even when he was born, but Yulia was saying it had gone on for millions of years...?

'No, more importantly, he's still missing.'

He was still gone.

The man who had been speaking to him as if nothing was wrong ever since the first time he met his projection was missing at a time when his clan was being attacked from all sides.

'He might be an absentee father, but the Dante Void I know would never leave this situation alone if he knew what was going on.'

There was something deeper here.

Something was happening to his father and his clan. He needed to find out what it was as soon as possible.

'Void Palace was meant to be the backing that allowed me to move freely in the Heavenly World once I had some status. Even the plans I made for the Foreign Races relied on their influence to an extent.'

He was staying in the Eastern Region because he wanted to prove his worth to those people before heading there, but, as Yulia said, he couldn't be so leisurely anymore.

'The Southern Region...'

He had to go there.

But not yet.

'Yulia said the Veritas Clan is our greatest ally, but they seem relatively uninvolved in the happenings of the Southern Region.'

His plans didn't necessarily change overall, but the intent had to be revised.

'Rather than recognition, I now need backing.'

He needed to pull the Veritas Clan into the struggle, so Void Palace could gain the footing to return to its proper place.

'And to do that...'

His eyes hardened.

'...I need to work.'

His gaze turned to Yulia once more. He took a deep breath and calmed himself before opening his mouth to speak.

"Let's make a deal."

Yulia's eyes sparkled in interest.

'This brat...'

She smiled to herself.

Her thoughts didn't need to be spoken. She was the only one who needed to know them.

But she was looking forward to it.

The moment Damien Void returned to his palace, that is.

Chapter 1368 Mercenary [1]

The deal was simple.

Damien Void would be an exclusive mercenary for Yulia Veritas for 5 years and follow her command. In return, she would guarantee the Veritas Clan's support in Void Palace's endeavors.

It was an odd deal on paper.

What Damien suggested was a deal that would result in the Veritas Clan's support, but he didn't know what they wanted, since he didn't have any sort of deep relationship with Yulia or anyone else from their influence.

Yulia herself was the one who suggested the five-year mercenary side of the deal.

She didn't specify exactly what she wanted him to do in that time, but because it was a negligible condition for the rewards it would beget, Damien was clear on the fact that he would be worked like a slave for 5 years doing things he couldn't even imagine.

Still, he signed off on the deal, and with the Heavenly Order as witness, it became something inviolable.

Through this, Damien also managed to learn that Yulia was someone with enough say in the clan to guarantee support with her promise.

The two of them parted ways after making their agreement and exchanging information so they could contact each other.

Damien had one month before he would be given his first task.

That was one month he could use to set up a foundation for himself.

'It's time to visit the Sapientia Clan.'

They were another important step in his plan.

No matter how strong or influential the Veritas Clan was, and no matter how loyal the Sapientia Clan was to them, he couldn't guarantee their support just because he had a deal with Yulia.

He needed to form a separate relationship with the Sapientia Clan. Why? Because they were people who controlled information better than most other forces in the entire Heavenly World.

Only the Kyushu Federation had an information network better than theirs, and since they didn't move for anything other than profit, Damien wasn't interested in working with them quite yet.

He didn't have enough to bring to the table, after all.

What did he have to bring to the Sapientia Clan, then?

The answer was still nothing.

Damien was just a baby in the Heavenly World. Unlike the lower universe where he had plenty of time to become something before he got involved in the larger scheme of things, he immediately jumped into muddy waters the second he arrived here.

When facing influences large enough to control billions, trillions, or even more existences with a single word, he couldn't just say "I'm strong, so form a relationship with me," and get it over with.

Not yet, at least.

But at least he had a point of connection with the Sapientia Clan.

He had a relationship with Yulia Veritas. Even if that was something they formed outside the public eye, there was no way the Sapientia Clan didn't know of it.

Yulia already raised his value, and the Norn Family did the same. His power was mysterious enough to outstrip everyone on the expedition party that went to save Asher Norn, and he had the ability to travel faster than any single practitioner anywhere near his power level.

These facts gave the Sapientia Clan a reason to pay attention to him, so when he arrived on their doorstep for the meeting they'd arranged beforehand, they welcomed him with open arms.

He was taken into a small eastern-style abode and served tea as he waited for a representative to meet him.

When they finally came, the conversation started easily.

The goal was another deal.

Damien wanted the Sapientia Clan's information network for himself. He wanted access to what they knew, and he wanted the privilege of moving their forces to find out things he wanted to know, both within the Eastern Region and without.

As for what they asked from him in return...?

"Information."

The representative was a woman with strange cloud-like eyebrows and eyes that remained closed regardless of anything else. She was mysterious and dressed like an ancient scholar, but spoke in an approachable tone that was off-putting considering everything else about her.

What she requested was information Damien had that the Sapientia Clan didn't.

It wasn't what he expected.

'The Sapientia Clan is tied to the concept of "wisdom." They don't just gather information, but have an obsession with it, because they believe information is the foundation of wisdom. Even if said information is useless to them, they still want to possess it to deepen their foundation. It was this belief that allowed them to become what they are today.'

To gain knowledge from them, one had to give knowledge to them. It was a completely equivalent exchange.

And if it was information they didn't know, Damien had plenty of it.

After all, there was no way for a Heavenly World clan to spread their influence into the lower universe.

Damien had a wealth of knowledge they couldn't fathom, and thus, no matter what he wanted from them, he could get it.

'This is more convenient than I could've hoped for.'

Ascension was a rare phenomenon.

People didn't just reach the Demigod rank willy-nilly. There were definitely people who came to the Heavenly World and used this same method to gain standing in the past, but none of them knew what he did.

Because Damien possessed all the knowledge of the lower universe.

In totality.

"How much do you know about the lower universe?"

He asked so he could gauge what to share and what could be avoided. He could also use this to learn how much different pieces of information about the lower universe were worth.

The Sapientia Clan knew about the Nox, the different sectors and their dominant races, the power structure and clans, and a lot more general information.

However, aside from facts about specific sects and races that were gathered from other Ascenders, they didn't have much detailed knowledge.

Damien could provide them exactly that, and more than anything else, he could tell them the secrets of the Nox and the Abyss that nobody else knew.

Especially information about the Nox Race's connection with the Foreign Races.

'That's probably worth more than everything else combined since it actually has a place in the Heavenly World. I could tell them now, but I should save that for later.'

There was a part of him that wanted to make it public knowledge for the sake of the greater good, but he couldn't be so kind right now.

Cooperation was more important. He could personally spread that news when the time came:

To gain what he needed, Damien started with Grand Heavens Boundary itself.

The Dimensional Leaderboard, the war that collapsed sector after sector, and a few tidbits about the Nox that heavily implied the wealth of knowledge Damien was withholding.

The Sapientia Clan representative noted down everything he said on a jade slip as he spoke, her expression remaining still as always.

But the wiggling of her eyelids as she tried to keep them closed made it obvious she was surprised.

"I will consult with the council, but this exchange should grant you high clearance," she said when he finished.

It was a short business interaction, and they only said what needed to be said, but it was enough.

The representative left and Damien waited for her return.

'Okay.'

He was calm.

He was calm.

He was remaining calm.

But it was difficult.

He wanted to be done with all of this. He wanted to move, get stronger, and reach a point where none of this was necessary anymore.

He missed it a lot.

He didn't realize how much he'd miss it until it was gone.

But he understood them now.

Standing at the peak was amazing. The convenience was hard to let go of once it was experienced, so even if it came at the cost of wasted talent and potential, he understood why those lower universe Demigods refused ascension.

However, he was already here.

He had to go through this.

Because only after going through these steps could he get back to that place where he wanted to stand.

'It's annoying.'

It was incredibly annoying.

Still, he did it without fail.

And as his cooperation with the Sapientia Clan was eventually established, he left them with a task and went on his own way to train.

29 more days passed after that.

And finally, Damien's communication device rang.

The person who called?

Naturally, it was Yulia Veritas.

Chapter 1369 Meecenary [2]

"Are you ready?"

Those three simple words held a deep meaning.

Was he ready for 5 years of slavery?

But his answer was just as succinct.

"Yes."

He had mentally prepared himself long ago, and he was waiting for this moment to come.

"Good. I've marked a location somewhere within your radius. Find it and reach it within three days. That's your first task."

Damien smiled wryly.

"No more information than that?"

"None at all. You need to be at least that good if you want to prove yourself."

Damien rolled his eyes.

"Understood. I'm still being underestimated, huh. Three days? That's laughable."

Damien cut the call there. He didn't need to pry more.

'When she says somewhere in my radius, that could mean I'm either already there or it could be a billion kilometers away. And when she says she marked it, am I looking for a structure or something mana-based?'

"Well, it doesn't matter either way."

If she wanted him to find it on his own, it had to be something he'd recognize.

He spread his awareness first. Hundreds of millions of kilometers were covered in an instant, and as he sifted through all the information coming into his head, he quickly learned that whatever he wanted to find wasn't there.

However, there were clues.

'She's toying with me.' He thought with a smile.

There were markers everywhere, some large and some small. They all stood out in his perception, and it was clear she wanted him to go to each and every one to see if that was the designated location.

However, he had no need to do so.

'Should I work a bit harder?'

He knelt down and put his hand on the ground, activating an ability he developed in the Ancient Battlefield.

'Absolute Perception.'

Back then, he only had Partial Existence Law. Even with that, he was able to search the entirety of the Ancient Battlefield and find traces of someone as elusive as the Ancient Sovereign.

So what about now?

That incomplete law had now become an Authority. It wasn't complete, but it was far greater than anything he could've imagined at that time.

When he entered the state of Absolute Perception, he was no longer just becoming one with the earth, but with the mana as well.

His spiritual body became one with the entire atmosphere, and his perception became that of the Heavenly Order.

Puff!

"Damn!"

His mind was instantly overloaded with information. Blood puffed out of his nose like a cloud of mist, and leaked down his ears and eyes.

There was too much.

Whether it be what was happening below the surface in various bestial societies, or what was happening in the skies where a few select races made their homes, he saw it all.

It was just too much.

The Heavenly World was massive. It had been mentioned to death already, but it seemed like Damien saw the true extent of that grandiosity every time he did something new.

He saw far more than he ever wanted to, because he forgot to limit the range of his perception.

From hundreds of millions, he instantly jumped to hundreds of billions of kilometers.

He practically had half the Eastern Region in his grasp.

'There's a lot of interesting stuff going on, but that's not my problem right now. I have to limit my search radius.'

He wasn't nearly equipped to deal with this level of perception yet, nor did he need it at the current moment.

'I should definitely get used to it, though. If I can see this much unregulated, I should be able to get a lot more out of the Sapientia Clan than I originally thought.'

Nevertheless, he enclosed his awareness in a 10 billion-kilometer radius. That was the greatest his mind could handle.

'Now, if I filter for just traces of Yulia's existence...'

Everywhere she'd left traces were revealed to him. He sifted through them one at a time. He could directly see what was there instead of receiving it as information, so it was easy for him to find what was a facade and what was true.

In the end, there were three locations that caught his attention.

'The first is a totem in the middle of nowhere, the second is an empty land that has an active underworld, and the last is a den of shady characters.'

Since he didn't know exactly what he was looking for, it really could have been any of those locations.

'But my gut tells me it's the third.'

It was a place perfect for a mercenary, a bar where only people who desired the freedom of such a job could stay.

'Let's beeline then.'

It was roughly 6 billion kilometers away, a completely random distance.

With ten million kilometers covered with every teleportation, and every teleportation taking roughly a second, it only took Damien 10 minutes to arrive at the door.

He opened it and walked in.

The atmosphere was rowdy. Those gathered were all crass individuals who didn't care to abide by social customs if it meant they could be themselves.

They were from all different races, with so many strange personalities and appearances that the word "strange" became irrelevant.

This was a place those with status like Yulia would usually avoid, calling it uncouth, but Damien quite appreciated this kind of environment where everyone could be in the same room regardless of differences because of their shared passion.

'Plus, I don't know what it's like for others, but Yulia would definitely fit in here.'

Damien walked past several tables full of mercenaries who eyed him as he passed and sat down at the bar.

The bartender glanced over, but didn't go out of his way to attend to him.

"Unwelcoming, aren't you?" Damien said sarcastically.

"I apologize, but you look a bit too pristine to be in a place like this."

Damien raised his brow and looked at himself.

'Is cleanliness a problem? Or maybe I look too much like a noble?'

He shrugged to himself.

"I don't think bartenders are supposed to care about shit like that? Just serve me some good liquor and be on your way."

"Hmm..."

The bartender scrutinized Damien with his gaze for a moment before sighing to himself and doing as he was told.

As the drink arrived as Damien ordered, someone sat down next to him and ordered their own drink.

"What do you think?" Damien said as he took a sip of the liquor.

It burned, and the taste was piss poor. It wasn't like the liquor he personally made, but it had its own charm like a barbarian warrior on a battlefield of blood.

"When you went on about underestimation, I got a bit curious, but ten minutes was beyond my expectation."

The person beside him spoke, taking a sip of her own drink.

"Didn't I tell you when we first met? This is normal for me."

"Arrogant brat."

"Isn't that why you picked me?"

"Touché."

Damien and Yulia sat in the bar and finished their drinks as if they were regular customers, but there was a silent war going on between them.

They had a contractor-contractee relationship that was close to a slave contract, but Damien refused to be treated like a slave.

Yulia respected it, but she also expected him to act like someone who was taking orders, because she couldn't put a wild card into a team of mercenaries who had their own hierarchical structure.

What Damien wanted to show her was that he didn't need something like a team, and while she didn't like it, she had no choice but to accept it.

He'd won this time.

"Haa, whatever. Welcome to The Den. This is where you'll be taking your missions from now on, and that guy..."

Yulia motioned towards the bartender with her eyes.

"...is the one who'll act as the middleman between the two of us."

Damien nodded.

"Alright, then, since you're here now, I'm assuming you're giving me the first one on your own?"

"Naturally," Yulia responded with a smile.

"It wouldn't be any fun if I wasn't present for the initiation."

"That..."

Damien frowned.

The air in the bar suddenly changed.

And all eyes were on him.

"It's simple," Yulia said.

She grinned as she stood up and started walking away.

"Either defeat everyone here and get your way, or lose and do things my way."

She opened the door to the bar and gave him one last look, her eyes slyer than ever:

"Well then, good luck."

Bang!

The door closed.

And murderous intent ran wild throughout the bar.

"Good," Damien said with a grin.

"You guys might not know this, but letting off steam like this is one of my favorite pastimes."

He stretched slightly and turned to face the crowd, raising his own aura to match theirs.

They wanted to fight?

Then he would give them a fight they'd never forget.

It was becoming his signature phrase at this point, so he felt the need to say it.

"Come at me, bitches!"

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"Well, that's that."

Damien brushed his hands off and walked over to the bar.

"The last one was a little bit disappointing. How about trying one of mine this time?"

He pulled out his own spirit liquor and poured himself a glass, glancing at the bartender, who sighed and raised his own glass as well.

As the two enjoyed their drinks, they completely ignored the scene behind them, a bar full of broken bodies.

Nobody was dead, but there wasn't a single one who didn't have at least five broken bones.

The worst ones were covered in bruises and leaking blood from various places. They'd be unconscious for at least a few days. The rest...well, while they were doing better than that, they were still groaning and clutching their wounds in far too much pain to pay attention to anything else.

It was an easy fight to say the least. The fight itself didn't even need to be mentioned because of how easy it was.

And naturally, it was fast too.

Yulia re-entered the bar with the same surprised look on her face that she always had since she met Damien.

"Do you have a habit of finishing fast or something?"

"Only when I need to. You can be assured that I don't have the same problem in other situations."

"Gross."

"I agree. That was my bad."

Damien smiled wryly. He may or may not have forgotten Yulia was a woman for a second, but saying that would probably actually get him killed.

'Plus, it was too easy. She's not stupid, so she definitely knew I would say something.'

Damien shook his head and ignored it, moving on.

"I've been tested quite a lot since I got here and I'm getting a little tired of it. We're done with all the useless stuff, right?"

Yulia rolled her eyes. She wasn't a fan of his arrogance, but she couldn't deny that it was warranted.

"Yeah, I won't bother doubting you anymore. Your first task will be simple, but it'll get harder with time, so be prepared."

"Naturally."

Nodding slightly, Yulia stopped delaying. She explained the task both simply and complexly at once.

The task itself was the simple part.

Yulia didn't test Damien without reason.

She needed to gauge his capabilities so she could use him to the best they offered.

Through these tests, she learned that Damien was an all-rounder.

He had movement speed beyond movement speed, surveying and intelligence abilities that rivaled the greatest among his power level, and combat power that could do more than just protect himself.

He was pretty much a cheat character.

The struggles he went through in the lower universe didn't allow him to have any weaknesses. The ones he did have were properly smoothed out with time, and now that he'd reached a level like this, the only growth he really needed to undergo was in his abilities themselves.

Nevertheless, since Damien could be used in any kind of mission, Yulia really didn't have anything left to worry about.

She already planned how these five years would go.

"The first task is a simple information-gathering mission," she said.

He was a one-man army. The tasks she usually needed to use multiple teams for could be done in quick succession by him.

"Go to the Yunix Principality and investigate the ruling powers there. There's been news of a brewing rebellion and rumors about demonic forces infiltrating the ranks of the larger clans. Verify what needs to be verified and disprove the rest before coming back. You have one month."

This part didn't need much explanation. It was fairly simple and straightforward.

The complex part came after. It was a rundown of the Western Region's affairs.

Everything Damien needed to know, not just about the principality he was headed to, but about its neighboring powers and the large and small conflicts taking place across the cardinal region, was explained to him piece by piece until he had a clear understanding of the Eastern Region in its entirety.

"Alright. Seems easy enough. Do I just report back here when I'm done?" He asked.

"Mm. Pass any information you have to Sebastian. You can trust that it'll get delivered to me no matter where I am."

Damien glanced at the bartender, whose name was apparently Sebastian, curiously.

'I wonder what kind of person he is for her to guarantee something like that.'

But just as soon as he gained that curiosity, he shrugged and dropped it.

'It's not my problem.'

He had long since reached a point where he stopped caring about things he didn't need to care about.

"I'll look forward to your work," Yulia said, standing up to leave.

"Yeah, look forward to it," Damien replied confidently, bidding her farewell.

Without another word, he vanished from the bar.

He already knew where he needed to go. Yulia's first token he got on the starship was incredibly detailed about the layout of the Eastern Region, after all.

The only ones left in The Den were Yulia and Sebastian, along with the mercenaries who were just now coming to their senses after the beating they received earlier.

"What do you think of him?" Yulia asked.

"He's dangerous," Sebastian answered immediately.

"Dangerous, huh..."

Yulia smiled.

Maybe Damien didn't know it, but she was the one who hired Sebastian. She knew his capabilities better than anyone else.

For him to call someone dangerous...

"Would you win?"

Sebastian frowned.

He looked down at the cup on the bar, still half filled with the spirit liquor Damien had poured for him.

"I don't know."

He couldn't answer that question.

Damien didn't take any effort to defeat a bar full of mercenaries, and none of those people lying on the ground unconscious right now were weak.

Some of them had great reputations in the Eastern Region, some of them had names that resounded through multiple cardinal regions, while some were unknown but more powerful than the other two groups combined.

They weren't characters who should've been left in pieces after five minutes.

Especially not when over thirty of them were working together.

"Damien Void..."

Yulia's eyes narrowed strangely.

"I guess a great change really is coming to our world."

Yulia was confident in her intuition, and she was confident in Sebastian's experience.

When both of those things aligned and agreed that one man who appeared out of nowhere was great enough to shake up the entire world, the question of helping him wasn't even important anymore.

Getting involved in Void Palace's conflicts was something the Veritas Clan was already planning to do. Helping Damien just meant getting involved more directly.

And to do so in return for five years of servitude, Yulia wasn't really trying to gain anything.

She wanted to form that positive relationship.

Because while Damien didn't know it, his importance was already understood by those who'd interacted with him for a longer period of time.

The only thing that remained was to decide if they were going to stand with him or against him.

And the Veritas Clan was not an evil influence.

Rather, they were a people who held an absolute conformity to righteousness.

'Whether we'll stand behind them or stand beside them...'

Yulia's lips curled up.

'...we will be on the right side of history.'