

Void 1391

Chapter 1391 Grudge [4]

Rain was important not just for the fauna of this realm, but the flora. It was obvious, but it had to be mentioned.

After all, while it was far more difficult for plants to gain sentience, they still could once they had lived for long enough and gathered enough power.

A lot of the flora in the Forbidden Secret Realm was sentient, so when the rain came, they'd become far more active than they were in usual times.

Pria and her group were currently hiding. They didn't move an inch, crouching in place with their auras reined all the way in so they didn't have any presence.

They were petrified by the massive Godbeast that appeared above them, but they made the wrong decision.

Because the Thunderbird wasn't the one who wanted to eat them.

All around them, plants raised their leaves towards the sky, competing to gain as much water as possible while the Thunderbird was present.

They no longer irked a beautiful tapestry in the air between the great trees that made up the rainforest, like a three-dimensional painting made by the most talented of artists.

The plants themselves weren't harmful, but they did give off a slight air of poisonous particles as they finally rid themselves of the fluids injected into them by the species that feasted on their leaves.

And while those fluids were harmful and needed to be expelled, they also acted as a natural pheromone that attracted the very same predators that left them in the leaves.

The buzzing of tiny wings filled the rainy atmosphere. Tens of hundreds of bugs crawled across the ground and made their way to the plants they considered food.

Pria's group was left in the middle of this interaction.

They had to stay silent and still.

They couldn't move even now.

Those bugs were smaller. They spanned from as small as regular bugs to as large as a human head, but relatively speaking, they were quite small.

Yet, their power wasn't different from the rest of the ecosystem.

Thousands upon thousands of them flooded the area, each and every one of them with power that at least rivaled a Demigod.

Luckily, they were herbivores. As long as they didn't feel threatened, they wouldn't attack other fauna.

Pria and the rest didn't know this, of course, but they could gauge it from their extensive knowledge. They sat still, shivering slightly as these overpowered bugs crawled over their bodies to reach the leaves above.

'Khhhhh...'

It wasn't a sound she made outwardly, but she was making it excessively in her mind.

It was disgusting. This experience was the worst. She, as a God, couldn't believe she was being disgraced like this.

However, what else could she do?

She had to wait so she could survive.

She had to explore so she could survive.

She didn't have any other path!

So she could only watch as the bugs reached their desired plants and began their feast.

And she could only watch as a group of frogs that were roughly ten feet tall and twice as fat appeared in the periphery and started targeting those bugs.

'Damn!'

Pria gritted her teeth.

She ducked her head and laid down flat on the ground, prompting her group to follow her.

The frog tongues that whipped around held force enough to behead any one of them, and more importantly, they were covered in a poisonous liquid that splashed around the area as they carelessly hunted for their prey.

Despite the attempts they made to avoid detection or harm, they couldn't stop heaps of that poison from falling on their bodies.

It burned through their clothing and a bit of their skin, and when it made its way into their bodies, it inhibited their mana, making it even harder to counteract.

Pria finally realized the consequences of her decision.

'We have to leave. Now.'

Regardless of how difficult it would be to evacuate, they had to get out of this area and find a safer place to hide until the storm passed.

The rainy ecosystem that appeared along with the Thunderbird was far more dangerous than the regular relatively peaceful environment of the uncharted territory.

"Follow me carefully. Do not step anywhere but in my shadow."

Pria sent a mental transmission to her team and slowly began to crawl.

Humiliation was no longer an issue. Even if it meant she had to grovel and beg, she would find a way to live through this.

One arm after the other, one leg after the other, Pria moved away from the frogs and the leaf canopy.

Luckily, it was mostly concentrated in one area. While several similar leaf canopies existed in the surroundings, none of them were as violently packed with fauna as this one.

'One hundred meters.'

One hundred meters away, there was a cave to hide in. As long as they made it there, they would survive.

That was the truth.

The truth of the situation if it wasn't a trap designed specifically for them.

RUMBLE!

The entire world rumbled.

Bugs preyed on plants, frogs preyed on bugs, and snakes preyed on frogs.

That was the natural order.

And when the natural order ballooned to a scale where even the smallest bugs could be the size of a human head...

'We're dead.'

Existential dread.

That feeling filled Pria's entire body.

As for the Demigods behind her, they couldn't even think in that being's presence.

It was a massive python. Its body was as thick as several tree trunks tied together, and its mouth was large enough to swallow the entire area whole.

The second it appeared, it hissed loudly, striking fear into those frogs who were hunting wildly, and in the next instant, it snapped its mouth open and shut, devouring six of them at once.

It was truly a dreadful sight. To the python, humans who were weaker and smaller than those frogs, yet had the same amount of energy contained in them were easy prey.

Pria was aware of that.

She saw it in the python's eyes.

But it had yet to sense them.

"Just keep crawling."

She told her allies to do so, but it was a question whether or not they could follow her words.

After all, the python's aura froze them in place.

HISSSSSSSSS!

Its spine-chilling hiss filled the area again.

In a place filled with so much prey, how could it not be excited?

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

They weren't explosions. It was merely the sound of trees collapsing and slamming into the ground below as the python carelessly moved through them to capture each and every frog in the vicinity.

'It's moving away from us.'

Pria almost had time to breathe a sigh of relief.

Almost.

BANG!

Another tree fell to the ground.

It was roughly three kilometers tall, relatively small in comparison to its peers, however, it was the last straw among the tens of them that fell.

Hairline cracks spread across the ground.

Those cracks widened almost impossibly fast, spreading several dozens of kilometers in every direction.

That's when Pria realized it.

This whole time...

'...the ground was hollow.'

They were never on a stable surface to begin with.

It was fine when there wasn't much impact force striking the ground, but with the python thrashing around and the trees that weighed thousands of pounds, if not more, crashing down, the ground didn't stand a chance.

RUMBLE!

It quaked furiously.

And just as Pria came to terms with her fate, it collapsed.

The plants, the bugs, the frogs, the python, and the poor humans caught between them all fell into the huge sinkhole that opened up below them.

And deep in the depths under the piece of land where they once stood, a pair of eyes opened.

It was the last piece of Damien's plan.

The second Godbeast he'd found in this realm.

An Earth Dragon.

A hungry Earth Dragon that had been starved for over two weeks looked up at the ceiling that was crumbling above it.

And it saw them instantly.

The heaps of prey falling through the cracks.

Chapter 1392 Preparation [1]

A question arose after this series of events.

How much of this did Damien plan? What was his role in the happenings that took place?

The answer was everything.

He was the one who grabbed the Silver Leaves and placed them in the area, as well as the one who used Life Laws to accelerate their growth until they matured.

He was the one who attracted the Thunderbird by taking all the other Silver Leaves in nearby areas and hiding their auras away.

He was the one who drew the bugs to make their colonies in the vicinity, and he was the one who led the frogs over to eat those bugs.

He was the one who chose the area where the attack would take place, knowing it was the python's habitat.

And he was the one who found the Earth Dragon, perfectly bringing everything together.

It could've ended at the python. No, it could have ended at the frogs. There was really no reason to do as much as he did to kill Pria's group.

But he wanted them to feel fear before they died, just as he planned to do with the rest of the Straea Clan.

There was no need to talk about what happened after the ground collapsed.

The Thunderbird had no interest in humans, but the Earth Dragon was different. As a subterranean creature in a landscape without too much subterranean life, it needed to either conserve its energy and hunt underground or rise to the surface to search for food.

Damien lured the Earth Dragon into a place where it couldn't do either, and as if to compensate it for its troubles, he gave it a massive feast afterward.

It ate everything.

Whether it be the plants, the bugs, the frogs, the python, or the humans that got caught between them, nothing could survive against a true Godbeast whose hunger had been aroused.

The sequence of events took weeks to plan and execute, but it ended within just a few minutes.

Damien watched it all from the side, and as the Thunderbird gained the reward it came for and the rain left along with it, he revealed himself with a smile on his face.

'That was great.'

It was extremely entertaining to watch.

Pria wasn't the best of the best. She was a God that was hardly a God. However, she still managed to attain that level.

She was still someone Damien couldn't fight, regardless of how weak she was compared to her peers.

So seeing her helpless, forced to crawl meaninglessly before meeting her eventual end, was quite satisfying.

Because once again, he saw it.

The fact that even Gods were just practitioners.

'I should get moving.'

There wasn't much left for him to do in the secret realm, but there was plenty to do when he left.

'I should start planning to leave for Void Palace, and while I do...'

It wasn't bad to raise the geniuses of the Veritas Clan to a new level.

The Straea Clan and the Divine Order. They were the enemies he knew, but there were sure to be others in the dark as well.

Since that was the case, since Void Palace was struggling, he needed all the help he could get.

And if that help came genuinely, it was even better.

The Veritas Clan was filled with good people. He was certain Yulia and the rest at her level would help Void Palace as they promised, however, Damien couldn't guarantee all of them would help genuinely.

The younger generation was different. If he could raise them properly and make them indebted to him, wouldn't they push for a more sincere approach to their cooperation?

He didn't know how well it would work, but it was a plan worth trying.

After all, in the end, a few characters from the younger generation were the ones who rose up to save Grand Heavens Boundary.

He had seen it work before.

Damien turned his eyes away. He glanced over a few hundred million kilometers and took a peek at what the Kyushu Federation group was doing before heading back into the known region of the secret realm to regroup with the Veritas Clan.

'The Kyushu Federation...'

They were a completely different problem. He didn't need to think about it right now.

'I need to focus on what's in front of me. My plate is already too full as it is.'

He sighed to himself.

He didn't want to do this again.

Being the sole supporter of something he had no business being the only one supporting was annoying. He already knew how it felt from everything he did for Grand Heavens Boundary.

'But information about Void Palace has been restricted to the extreme. I haven't found anything about the internal situation no matter how much I searched, so...'

There was hope.

They weren't defeated yet, they were merely playing on the defensive.

'Void Palace, huh...'

He'd been researching about them for so long, but he never really stopped to think about it.

That place was his origin.

That place was his home.

And frankly, he couldn't wait to see it for himself.

The months passed swiftly after that.

The clans remaining in the secret realm didn't interact with each other much, focusing on their own growth.

As for Damien, he returned to the Veritas group and resumed his role as a protector as if nothing happened.

However, he was more involved than before.

Rather than just protecting from the shadows, he gave the geniuses advice on how to properly utilize their mana and laws.

He focused mainly on Celeste, since she was the one who showed the most promise, but he didn't skimp on helping the rest of them as well.

Aside from Celeste's constitution, Romulus and Reva Veritas had pretty interesting powers as well.

The two of them were truly twins. Their abilities enhanced each other, and though they were great practitioners on their own, their potential could only truly be realized when they fought together.

Damien had met people like them before. It wasn't rare for twins to be born with such complementary abilities. Since he knew how they looked when they acted at peak efficiency, he was able to advise them without experiencing that kind of synergy himself.

Nevertheless, Damien's role in the Veritas group suddenly became far greater than it was before.

Not just the Demigod Elders, but even the two Great Elders treated him with respect and put his word above their own.

He became the leader, and with that authority, he led the geniuses to gain as many opportunities as possible.

The Forbidden Secret Realm had a mechanism that only let people take a single item out with them.

However, what they did within the realm was their own business.

If they found a material they could ingest, they would ingest it right then and there with Damien watching over and helping them do it as fast as possible.

If they found something that could be made into a weapon, as long as it wasn't too complicated, Damien had the forging skills to make it for them.

And with those skills as their support, the geniuses of the Veritas Clan made more gains than they ever thought possible.

Another six months passed like this, and then another six months after that.

By the time the second year in the secret realm ended, Damien started to feel it.

'The density of space is getting weaker.'

The fluctuations were getting more intense every single day.

Which meant, soon enough, the Forbidden Secret Realm expedition would end.

Chapter 1393 Preparation [2]

The secret realm expedition wasn't too crazy of an event.

Well, depending on who one talked to.

Perhaps the Veritas Clan would have plenty of stories to tell. The Kyushu Federation also had a lot of new things to discover from the samples they collected in the uncharted territory.

The Vega Clan spent the secret realm this time relatively the same as every other time, and Damien...well, Damien wasn't one to overhype his achievements.

He definitely did a lot. He killed a God, albeit by cheating a bit, and he discovered a hidden piece he never expected to find.

However, this was just one step of many.

Since it was ending, he needed to collect himself and get ready for what came next.

Though, he first needed to wait for the secret realm to actually open. From the day he first sensed the fluctuations in space, it took roughly two weeks for the secret realm to actually decide on closing and send them out.

Afterwards, there was naturally a huge show.

The Straea Clan raged. Not a single person from the tens of those they sent into the realm returned, whether it was those who entered legally or illegally.

And who were they going to blame?

Naturally, it was the Veritas Clan.

Who else could they drag into this mess?

They'd lost two Gods and several Demigods in a plan to destroy the Veritas group, but the Veritas Clan members came back only missing a single Elder:

If they weren't infuriated, they were stupid. No, either way, they were stupid, since they were placed in the same position they expected their enemies to be in at this very moment.

Nevertheless, what could they do but make a scene?

They had no just cause to blame Veritas, and even if they did, it'd only reveal the fact that they attacked first, that too using underhanded means.

The Straea Clan couldn't be the one injured by this incident, especially now that they'd already taken hits, therefore, after a few back and forths with the Veritas Clan group where quite the harsh words were spit from both sides, they had to gnash their teeth and retreat.

Damien watched from the side with a smile on his face. It was great seeing Straea struggle.

And once the commotion died down, after the Grand Elders had some brief conversation with the Vega Clan group, they returned to their spirit ship, headed straight to the Veritas Estate.

'Regardless, it was a good trip.' Damien thought, looking out of one of the spirit ship's windows.

He improved unexpectedly, he got to take action against his enemies, though the level was negligible in the grand scheme, and he was able to find talents worth raising.

Overall, he gained a lot more than he ever thought he would from a simple protection mission.

The time had come for his relationship with the Veritas Clan to change.

It would no longer be one of client and mercenary, one of leader and subordinate,

They would now be on equal terms.

Two sides of a negotiation between giants.

Everyone went their separate ways when the spirit ship landed.

Damien gave his goodbyes to the elders he got close to and the rest as a show of respect before leaving for the main estate.

It was a place where only high-ranking Veritas clansmen were usually allowed, but for this instance, Damien was given special permission.

He was currently sitting in a relatively simplistic study room. Its design was minimalistic using mainly wood as its building material, and aside from a few bookshelves and paintings against the wall, a desk, and a few couches for guests, there wasn't much to note.

"It's good to finally meet you."

"Ah, yeah, you too."

A polite greeting and an awkward reply,

Damien glanced over at the man who had just spoken.

He was one of two other people in this room.

'Julian Veritas.'

The Patriarch of the Veritas Clan.

Damien's eyes turned to the second person, narrowing as if to ask "What the fuck is this?"

Yulia smiled and shrugged, telling him outright to just deal with it.

'Haa, this...'

Damien sighed inwardly. He was expecting to meet Yulia today, but seeing Julian was a completely different matter.

After all, no matter what he did or what happened in his mercenary days, he didn't see a wink of this man's visage.

But now that his time with them was coming to an end, the Patriarch had called him for a meeting.

They exchanged several words after their greeting, mostly covering minor things and engaging in small talk.

Damien had to report about the happenings of the Forbidden Secret Realm as well, since he was the one most involved in it all.

He told a simplified story about how he killed the Straea Demigods and led the Gods into the uncharted territory, where they died to the ecosystem itself.

He, of course, skimmed over his involvement in the boundary stele breaking and their deaths, along with his little trip to the ravine, but those were just insignificant matters.

His ability still needed to be hidden. He had to appear strong, but not uncontrollably strong. He couldn't let Veritas view him as a threat.

Nevertheless, after tens of minutes of conversation, the topic finally arrived where Damien wanted it to.

"As promised by my sister, we, the Veritas Clan, will actively support Void Palace in its future endeavors," Julian said.

"Then, I'll graciously accept your aid."

Damien smiled as he shook Julian's hand.

The terms weren't so simple. When they first made the agreement, Damien made sure they couldn't half-ass their assistance in any way.

Whether it be military or financial support, Veritas would provide it as long as it was within reasonable bounds.

They were not becoming subordinates, but it wasn't wrong to say this was the moment Veritas truly became a sister sect with Void Palace.

From this point forth, they would be two peas in a pod, two influences who stood together in victory and defeat.

Negotiations continued from there and didn't stop until a day had passed and both sides reached a satisfying conclusion.

With their business finished and the details sorted out, Damien once again shook Julian's hand before leaving alongside Yulia.

"Do you plan to return immediately?" Yulia asked, glancing at him in intrigue.

What was his next step?

He could very well head to Vega territory and gather even more supporters, but how much time had passed?

Back then, Yulia gave Void Palace a decade before it collapsed.

Though her judgement wasn't completely accurate, over half that time already passed since then. Damien couldn't delay any longer.

"Yeah. It's time for me to see it."

His words were said without much hesitation.

He looked out at the horizon.

His disguise melted away, revealing the amethyst-purple eyes and chiseled features he'd kept hidden for the past six or so years.

"I'd like to see how great my birthright really is."

Yulia smiled.

Damien was great fun to be acquainted with. He didn't seem to realize himself, but even when he tried to hide his true worth, he shined like the brightest of diamonds.

He had accomplished a lot of unexpected feats in the time they knew each other. She never told him outright, of course, but he really did perform feats above what even those eternally blessed by heaven could pull off.

So she'd been waiting for this moment.

"I'll prepare the portal," she said.

She could sense it. She'd been sensing it from the start, and when Julian finally met Damien, he sensed it as well.

The moment Damien Void returned to Void Palace, the landscape of the Heavenly World would change.

And both of them were absolutely sure they wouldn't regret the decisions they made here today.

Chapter 1394 Preparation [3]

Damien wanted to leave immediately, but that wasn't a freedom given to him.

The day after their meeting with Julian Veritas, Yulia approached him with a message.

"There are other people who will be joining you on your trip to the Southern Region, so you will have to wait. Don't worry, it won't be longer than 2 weeks at the very most."

To summarize what she said, a teleportation array that could cross hundreds of trillions or even more kilometers in one smooth jump wasn't cheap to run.

The materials were actually nonsensical to gather, so in terms of usage, the array was quite inefficient. It could at most be fired once a year in order to do so without wasting resources that were needed elsewhere.

Damien wanted to look at the array and see if he could improve it, but there was no reason to. At least, not before he got to the Southern Region.

Plus, he didn't really mind. Two weeks wasn't a short time but it also wasn't too long. It was just enough for him to finish up his business in Veritas.

Currently, Damien was in the process of "relaxing."

Or at least, that was how outsiders saw it.

He spent most of his days meditating, sunk deep into his thoughts as he perceived the concept of harmony. When he wasn't, he was ambling around the various compounds of the Veritas Estate doing this and that without any clear goal.

But that was nothing more than a front.

While Damien did want to comprehend the concept of harmony as soon as possible, it wasn't something that could be realized through meditation.

Harmony had to be achieved naturally, because that was its entire purpose. Damien would eventually harmonize with nature, but he couldn't force it at all.

He spent a lot of time in what looked like meditation, but in reality, his mind was elsewhere.

He just left his main body alone so he could keep up the image of being aimless.

But Damien didn't just have one body. Putting aside the nigh-infinite number of mana clones he could make, he had two other true bodies he could use as he pleased.

The first was Alexander, and the second was his non-living Avatar, which he'd been calling Damian for convenience.

Alexander and Damian were undergoing the tasks he assigned to them.

On one hand, Alexander was building prominence in the Eastern Region.

His job was to build a sect. He would take in disciples, train them, and prepare them as a secret army for whenever they were needed in the future.

Alexander was also in charge of the Sanctuary. Ever since he came to the Heavenly World, Damien used Alexander to help those in his pocket universe ascend through the things he knew and the laws he used.

Rose, Ruyue, and Elena were already at the cusp of Divinity. All they needed to do was cement themselves on the paths they wished to take and form the nature of their Divinities to undergo Cosmic Rebirth.

However, those like Elvira, Bai Yuxuan, Feng Yuxiang, Bianca Snow, and Lucius, who had been stuck in 4th class for a very long time, were able to make rapid progress under his guidance.

The Sanctuary was no longer what it used to be.

Rather than a sub-universe or a separated plane, it was now a true universe in its own right.

It had the capability to provide Cosmic Rebirth for its inhabitants, and it had the ability to contain those who completed the process.

If there was a difference between the Sanctuary and Grand Heavens Boundary, it was what happened after.

There was no ascension mechanism, since the Sanctuary didn't have any connection to the Heavenly World, but it also didn't have the restrictions of Grand Heavens Boundary.

Damien constantly shared the knowledge he gained with his personal universe, and now the Demigods who lived there had a clear understanding of where they stood in terms of power scale and where they needed to reach.

They had the ability to do so with the Sanctuary's firm Universal Law that was edging closer to a Heavenly Order with every passing day, and for the majority, they didn't even feel the need to leave for a higher plane.

The Sanctuary had everything they could ever ask for. There were several secret realms that could aid Demigods and more were popping up every few months.

The existence of the Void Library meant they could be assisted on their lonely roads to true power and didn't have to walk in the dark as they'd have to do if they left.

And most importantly, there was a sense of community.

The Sanctuary was one big family. Yes, there were those who wanted to ruin order. Yes, there were countless conflicts across the vast expanse of worlds.

However, that couldn't be changed unless one removed free will from the equation.

What made the Sanctuary different was that people who threatened its overall security were never allowed to fester.

A threat that could tear its denizens into factions that absolutely hated each other couldn't exist.

Therefore, not to mention safety, just the environment of the Sanctuary was far more welcoming and promoted thoughts of growth and prosperity.

Damien was still taking his stance as an absentee creator. He didn't want to be too involved in the Sanctuary's development, because he wanted those people to grow in the way they felt was best for themselves.

It was their home, after all, not his.

But Alexander was the one who facilitated their ideas. Alexander was the one they could use to adapt and change the Sanctuary itself to best support them.

So he worked alongside Lynn to do the most important things without actually giving his input on many of those decisions.

Alexander had quite the busy life, but since he was an autonomous clone, Damien didn't have to directly control him.

Damian was different. Damian did have a portion of Damien's soul, but he didn't have any sense of ego. He was a husk, to put it simply.

If Damien wanted to use Damian, he had to place his mind in the Avatar body and move it on his own.

That was the reason his main body was relatively dormant.

Because while Damien stayed in the Eastern Region and Alexander worked ceaselessly for the future, Damian was already on his way to the Northeast.

The Straea Clan wasn't easy to deal with.

In fact, they were a downright diabolical force without any sort of morals. The only reason they could keep their status was because they had unreasonable strength.

Damien had to focus on the Straea Clan itself, but that wasn't all there was to deal with.

Under the main clan were the 4 Evils. They were not clans or sects like the Sapientia Clan under Veritas, but four individuals who had the same standing.

Because those 4 individuals each had the power to rival a minor clan like Sapientia.

To combat them, Damien needed more assistance.

And he had the perfect people in mind.

Damian wasn't headed to the Northeastern Region without a plan. No, he was going to gather the connections Damien made while acting as a mercenary in their territory.

With two great clans at his side, what did he have to fear?

As long as everything went according to his plans, saving Void Palace wasn't even a question anymore.

Instead, it was only a matter of time and effort.

Chapter 1395 Preparation [4]

Two weeks really couldn't be counted as any time at all when events kept unfolding.

No, even with a boring schedule, one would find two weeks passing before one even knew what to do with oneself.

For Damien, who was constantly working in one way or another, two weeks were like a passing breeze.

They were gone before he could even hope to feel them.

"Are you really leaving?"

The one who spoke was the one he'd spent the most time with over the past two weeks. She was a familiar face as well, Celeste Veritas.

"Of course I do. What, did you expect me to stay here for the rest of my life?" Damien returned with a smile.

"I mean, that's a little much, but..." Celeste frowned, hiding her face behind a towel as she glanced at him.

She was the one who found him first.

When they were in the Forbidden Secret Realm, she learned so much from him that she almost couldn't believe it despite feeling the changes in her body.

Unlike others, who shakily guided her to the best of their abilities, Damien knew exactly what she needed.

He knew how to help her improve, and with his help, she saw results unlike anything she'd ever seen before.

Thus, when they returned to Veritas, she found him without hesitation and asked him to teach her.

Damien naturally obliged.

He had no reason not to, and he was quite fond of Celeste as well. She reminded him of Astoria, and her power was interesting. He enjoyed both teaching her and watching the mysterious chaos within her grow more formidable with time.

Today, they'd ended a training session like any other. The only difference was that it was more intensive than usual, but even that was expected from a demonic instructor like Damien.

But Celeste knew it just as well as he did. This would be their last time training together.

"I was hoping you'd stay for a little longer."

She blushed while she said it, but she felt like saying it regardless. The feelings in her heart weren't particularly romantic, but Damien definitely became an important figure in her life in the short time they'd known each other.

Unfortunately, he couldn't live up to her expectations.

"Don't be so sentimental, brat," Damien joked, ruffling her hair like an older brother.

"You probably already know where I'm going and what I'm planning to do, so why make a big deal out of this? Eventually, we'll see each other again."

"I know, but still! Isn't it dangerous?"

"There's no way it wouldn't be, but I still have to do it, don't I? Wouldn't you do the same if it was Veritas?"

"That's...!"

She couldn't refute him.

She thought she hid it pretty well, but it seemed he'd figured out her identity long ago. He just hadn't said anything out of consideration for her.

Yes. If it was Veritas in Void Palace's situation, she wouldn't hesitate to take the same actions as he did. No, she probably would've been far more impatient about it.

The fact that he waited so long, acting at the whims of others, so he could gain enough power to support the people he had back home was respectable enough, because she knew she couldn't do the same in his situation.

Could anyone?

Celeste had no way of knowing, but she knew Damien was a special character.

And she wanted to be by his side a bit longer.

That was definitely the best path for her growth, but what could she do? There was no way to stop him from leaving, and she couldn't leave Veritas either.

"Then..."

She sighed to herself and stood up, putting aside the towel in her hand and facing him confidently.

"What are you do—"

"Teacher!"

Damien found himself interrupted by a shout loud enough to echo off the walls.

Celeste straightened her body, and with a movement as rigid as a military official who'd been doing it for years, she bowed a full ninety degrees.

"Thank you for your guidance!"

She thanked him sincerely for everything he'd done in the least words possible. She already knew he didn't like long and overly heartfelt displays.

Damien smiled.

'This girl...'

"Get up."

He raised her up and patted her shoulder.

"I just did it on a whim. Don't think too much about it, since we'll probably be meeting each other with equal status from now on. Isn't that right, Miss Shadow Disciple?"

"Hehe..."

Celeste rubbed her head awkwardly and nodded.

"If that's the case, then let me introduce myself properly. Though, I still won't stop regarding you as my teacher even with this change."

Celeste looked into his eyes with a smile.

"My name is Celestia Veritas, and I am the future Matriarch of the Veritas Clan. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Damien nodded with the same expression on his face.

"I am Damien Void, the Young Lord of Void Palace. Likewise, it's my pleasure making your acquaintance."

A fateful relationship, to say the least.

Two future powerhouses who formed a connection when neither was aware of the other's status. A curious relationship that was both one of friends and equals and teacher and student.

Only time could tell how this would turn out, but one thing was for certain.

Regardless of what happened, the relationship between Void Palace and the Veritas Clan would only grow firmer from now on.

The goodbye with Celeste was the last one. Damien already participated in a large gathering with all the Elders and even the Grand Elders where he drank himself to death the night prior, so when the next day dawned, he met Yulia and went straight to the teleportation array.

"That's a nice disciple you have. I almost want to steal her for myself," Damien said.

"Don't even think about it. She's our Veritas Clan's great hope, you know?" Yulia responded, a little firmer than Damien expected.

How could he know?

Celeste valued her relationship with him quite highly, so if he really asked her to join him at Void Palace, the chance of her accepting wasn't negligible!

Yulia could only be relieved that he never brought it up, drawing the line with her early.

"You have our contacts, right?" She confirmed.

"Mm, all the preparations have been made as well," Damien responded confidently.

"Good, then..."

Yulia stopped and turned around to face him. They'd already arrived at the teleportation array, and the time they had together wasn't much longer.

"It won't be an easy fight, but we'll be fighting it with you. I sincerely wish you good fortune in all your future endeavors."

Damien smiled.

"This isn't like you. I was expecting a much rougher farewell at this point, I can't lie."

"Damn brat, I'm a Veritas Clan Grand Elder too, you know? I can do the whole official thing if I want to."

"Hahaha, then I'll be grateful to you for showing me such a hilarious sight."

"Tch."

The two conversed happily as they walked towards the array. If there was someone who got closer to Damien than anyone else during his stay here, it was Yulia.

The two of them were practically friends who'd been through life and death together at this point. To Damien, they were "brothers," though he never said that to Yulia lest she kill him on the spot.

Nevertheless, their approach could only take so long, and they eventually arrived at their final destination.

There, waiting for them, was another group of five travelers.

Until this point, Damien honestly forgot that he was waiting for them so they could use the array together, but the second he saw them, his eyes widened.

As did the eyes of a specific member of that very group.

"Huh?"

"Hm?"

They both voiced their surprise.

Two faces that were familiar to each other.

Two distinct sets of amethyst purple eyes.

It was yet another fateful encounter!

Chapter 1396 Void Palace [1]

Two sets of amethyst eyes met in the most unexpected place.

Two people who coincidentally planned to return to their homeland at the same time gasped as they saw each other in the distance.

Damien's eyes were especially wide.

He knew this person, but this was a person he wasn't supposed to know.

She had been watching him for a very long time. She spent over a decade of her life trailing his adventures for reasons he still couldn't make sense of.

'That woman is...'

Someone he knew from his time outside reality.

'...Yiren Void.'

The younger sister he never knew he had.

According to what he could understand, Yiren was Dante's adopted daughter and was several decades younger than him.

However, with what he knew about Dante now, he couldn't quite make sense of her existence.

Regardless, she had those eyes, and she had pride in her position. She definitely wasn't someone suspicious, it was just her background that he couldn't confirm.

But Damien wasn't the only one surprised.

Yiren tried to hide it, but she was definitely feeling it more than he was.

After all, she would've never expected him here, not even in her wildest imaginations.

Damien had just recently ascended to the Heavenly World, which she knew would happen, but how did he manage to reach the Veritas Clan's exclusive teleportation array in a short period of time?

Not just that, he was now powerful to the extent that she couldn't sense his aura, and from the look in his eyes...

'...he knows who I am.'

How was that possible?

Yiren disappeared from the lower universe somewhere around the time Damien went to the Ancient Battlefield.

As for the old man she was traveling with, his life was ending soon. There was a conversation he very much wanted to have with a person he very much wanted to see, so he went to the Abyss to amble aimlessly until the time was right.

Logically speaking, unless he told Damien, there was no way for Damien to know.

But knowing him, he wouldn't tell Damien anything, insisting that it was better for a young genius to find their own way.

So what was this situation?

What were they supposed to do now?

They both knew they were recognized by the other party, and they both knew the point of connection that brought them together, but...

'We've never interacted, so I don't know how to approach her. This is a new experience for me.'

Damien was an older brother to several people at this point. He'd played the role and gained a family through his adventures, but this was different.

She was someone his father adopted. She was a family member he didn't know.

How did he breach conversation with her?

Damien took a deep breath and calmed himself down.

'Now isn't the time.'

Yiren was currently together with a couple of other women, evidently her friends.

Now wasn't the time for an awkward conversation between estranged siblings.

"It's nice to finally meet you in person," Damien sent through mental transmission.

"You as well," Yiren replied, her tone a little vague.

The two nodded at each other imperceptibly, but that was the extent of their interaction for now.

They weren't the only ones here, and while others obviously noticed their interaction, nobody else thought it was strange.

Their purple eyes signified their identities and how they knew each other. As for their relationship, the guesses they made could only ever remain guesses with how secretive Void Palace was, so they didn't bother entertaining them.

There was no need for any extraneous conversation.

Nobody present needed an explanation about how the teleportation array worked, so after a few more parting words with Yulia, Damien stepped forward and entered the formation along with Yiren's group.

The man operating the formation gave a few seconds' notice as he inputted the commands, and soon enough, space began to fluctuate.

"Huu..."

Damien took a deep breath as he felt reality fold around him.

His heart raced as he passed through the spatial corridor.

His thoughts were so focused on the destination that couldn't marvel at the sturdiness and security of the spatial corridor created through the array.

And within a second, the scenery changed.

They were in another room similar to the one they just left, however, none of the people who once surrounded them remained.

It was only their group and another teleportation array operator, who promptly bowed when he saw them.

"Welcome back, First Young Lady."

"Mm," Yiren replied dismissively.

She stepped out of the array and started making her way out of the room, her group following her politely.

But before she left completely, she turned around and glanced at Damien.

"Are you coming or not?"

"Me?" He responded in surprise.

Damien saw everything Yiren did while she was observing him in the lower universe. He was very clear on the fact that this sister of his didn't like him.

So why was she calling out to him like this?

"Haa..."

Yiren sighed, somewhat reading his expression. She could at least understand the crux of his thoughts.

"It doesn't matter what we think of each other. Since you're here, you're here."

She turned away, hiding the expression on her face.

"I know it might be a little awkward, but I'll take you to meet them."

"Meet who?"

Damien knew the answer, but he still wanted to hear it.

"Who else?" Yiren responded as she stepped away.

"Your family."

Those words.

Those were the words he wanted to hear all this time.

"Family, huh..."

Damien smiled.

"Good, then. Let's go meet them."

He stepped forward as well, following Yiren's group.

As he exited the teleportation room and gazed at the scenery outside, it finally set in.

He was here.

This was it.

The place he'd been longing for.

Void Palace.

Somewhere not very far yet not very near, a woman sat in her private quarters, mindlessly watching the scenery outside.

Some time had passed since she came here. She missed it, sure, but at the same time, she'd gotten used to the scenery she used to see every day.

The tall buildings, the bustling streets, and the technology, were now replaced with endless expanses of free land.

There were still tall buildings, but the architecture was more archaic than what she'd grown used to. There was still technology, but it was now based on mana rather than electricity.

'Who would've thought...?'

It was only a mere fifty or so years she spent in that place, yet, the memories of its wonders outstripped any memories she had of this place, her home.

And, most importantly, the people she held dear were missing.

The two people who had the highest position in her heart, neither of them were here.

'It's lonely.'

She wasn't alone, but she couldn't help feeling lonely at times like these. It was easy to ignore when the people around her tried their best to take her mind off of it, but what happened when she was left to her own devices?

She could only think about them.

Where were they?

What were they doing?

Were they safe?

She knew their personalities. It was hard for her to believe either of them was doing okay right now, but she had to force herself to believe it, because if she didn't, she would fall apart.

'When can we see each other again?'

Her husband.

The man she loved.

When could she see him again?

And...

Her son.

A boy with an unfortunate fate, yet a boy whose eyes always shined brighter than any star.

She hoped he was living his life well. She wished she could see him spread his wings and flourish, but fate didn't allow it.

And now, the boundary that separated them was too dense for her to even hope to see him soon.

Or at least, that was her thought.

Until the day that message came.

A message from her adopted daughter, the one who'd received all the love she couldn't give her son over these years.

"Damien Void" had arrived at Void Palace.

Chapter 1397 Void Palace [2]

The Southern Region was structured differently than the Veritas Clan's Eastern Region.

Void Palace was located in the southernmost principality, and it made the entire principality its home.

The main palace was located on the southern edge of the region, bordering the Boundless Sea that separated it from all else. And unlike the Eastern Region, where everything was relatively separate, the four minor clans under Void Palace also lived in this same principality.

They all stayed close and closed off their borders. This was where they'd made their last retreat as they were encircled by forces from all sides.

It was a beautiful region.

The architectural style was mainly Western, with large castles and estates that were beautiful in their own right.

Where Damien appeared was inside the main palace. Here, surrounded by pitch-black rock engraved with gold, he found himself traveling through halls upon halls filled with servants and personnel who took orders from the main clan.

It was a grandiose sight, as if he was really in the abode of a great emperor. Compared to what he expected to see, a decrepit and failing palace, this was a complete 180.

He hadn't seen much of the Southern Region, but if it was all like this, then half the planning he did would be for naught.

'It's too early to overestimate, though. One thing I've heard more than anything about Void Palace is the loyalty of its people, so this situation makes sense.'

Just because the people were loyal didn't mean they were powerful. The situation could very well be even worse than he imagined despite the state of affairs that he was witnessing.

Nevertheless, he kept his thoughts to himself as Yiren brought him through the halls and introduced him to the surroundings.

Her friends had already left. According to her, they weren't even friends in the first place. Rather, they were members of the four Grand Duke Clans that served under the Void Clan, and their group had just returned from an expedition.

'To summarize it, Void Palace was created by Dante along with the party members he traveled with during his younger days. Unlike the other great clans, this one is a real family.'

Void Palace had a simple structure. 1 Lord, 4 Grand Dukes, 12 Swords, 64 Elders, and several named clans under them with various positions that didn't necessarily need to be mentioned.

The Void Clan took the main position. Underneath them were the Ellowyn Clan, the Krone Clan, the Hugo Clan, and the Solstice Clan. This was the main force of the palace.

As for the 12 Swords, they were in a prestigious position separated from the other groups. Being a part of the 12 Swords was an honor amongst honors. It was a position that could only be won through strength and achievement.

This was the crux of Yiren's explanation, but since she was speaking to Damien Void, who, by technicality, was Dante Void's firstborn, she went into more detail than usual.

"The main duty of the Grand Dukes..."

"The 12 Swords are..."

"When it comes to Elders..."

"But more so the common people..."

Her rundown was quite detailed, and Damien paid close attention to everything she said. He couldn't let these details slip his mind, because they were the most important facts for him to determine the future path of this place.

As they walked and talked, the number of people around them noticeably thinned until they were the only ones in a hall that was much smaller than the rest.

It could allow around six grown men to walk side by side, and at its end was a pair of large double doors reminiscent of the entrance to a throne room.

But this was no throne room.

When they reached the door, Yiren turned around and faced Damien with a troubled expression.

"What's up?" He asked curiously.

"Just..."

She hesitated for a second before sighing.

"Don't lash out. Remember, father is a man too."

Damien raised his brow, but shrugged without being able to decipher the meaning behind those words.

And the doors opened.

There were seven people standing in the relatively small hall, but Damien didn't pay attention to most of them.

No, his eyes went straight to one woman who was standing among them with tears in her eyes.

He hadn't seen her in decades.

Last time he went to visit her, he found that she had disappeared and couldn't be found anywhere.

He worried about her, but with Lynn's assurance, he put down those worries and focused on what was necessary.

But seeing her again, all those worries came rushing back.

Was she okay?

He knew she was a God, but was she living well?

He couldn't help but worry for the woman who tirelessly tried to raise him into a proper man without the funds to do so. He couldn't help but wonder if she was finally happy now that her responsibilities were lessened.

He wanted to see her again and show her the man he'd become.

He wanted to make her proud.

And now he had that opportunity.

"Mother..."

He could barely hold back his tears. He wanted to cry, but he couldn't cry here,

Instead, he rushed forward. He was in front of her before anyone could say a word.

"Damien..." she said, her voice breaking.

"My son!"

He couldn't hold back upon hearing her voice.

Tears fell from his eyes, and without hesitation, he hugged her with everything he had.

"I'm here, mom."

He didn't know what to say, so he said the only words he could.

"I'm finally here."

There was a lot he wanted to say to her, there was a lot he needed to tell her and ask, but none of that came to mind now.

Only the feeling of longing he had for the only blood family he knew in this world, his mother, who he'd been missing for so long, appeared in his heart and soul.

Claire wasn't much different.

A mother couldn't help but worry about her son.

No matter how well he was doing in life, no matter how healthy or happy he was, a mother couldn't help but worry.

But seeing him in front of her now, seeing his demeanor that had matured far more than she'd ever expected, she finally felt relief in her heart.

He was safe.

He was okay.

Her son grew up into a fine man.

And she was incredibly happy, to the point where words couldn't describe it.

The two hugged each other for many minutes. They cried and let out all the worries they'd had for all these years before finally separating.

It was a heartfelt reunion between mother and son, but, unfortunately, they couldn't catch up on everything right now.

There were others in the room.

Claire put her hand up to his face, looking into his eyes with a vague expression.

She didn't want to say anything, but she could see it. Maybe nobody else could, but she could see it.

Damien was a wanderer.

He never really had a place to call home.

He joined several influences throughout the years for his own benefit, and he'd made many connections in those places, but he'd never had a place to proudly call home.

He was a man of the wind, a man whose steps were both lighter than air and heavier than the universe.

He may not have expressed it to anyone, but she was his mother. There was no way she wouldn't feel it.

There was a hole in his heart that had never been filled.

But no more.

She wouldn't allow him to drift aimlessly any longer.

Because now that she was back to her original self, she finally had the capabilities to properly be his mother.

"Welcome," she said with a smile, stepping back as Damien looked over the group who was in the room with them.

No, that wasn't the right way to call them.

Claire stepped back, becoming a part of the crowd.

Because she was one of them.

They were one.

They were family.

And this...

"Welcome home, my son."

...was the home Damien had been wishing for his entire life.

Chapter 1398 Void Palace [3]

Damien had a family.

Damien had a home.

But these were things of his creation.

Since the very moment his mother fell ill all those years ago, he didn't have a place to return to.

He'd moved from place to place, even slept on the streets a few times, and eventually, he was thrown into the First Dungeon, a place where he had no choice but to move around.

Whether it was any of the stops he made in the Human Domain, anywhere in the Divine Realm, or anywhere in the lower universe at all, he never found a place to truly call his home.

Because there just wasn't a place that could keep up with him. He would always have to leave eventually to continue forth his ambitions, so he never got deeply attached to the influences he was a part of.

Instead, he made connections to the people he met within them.

And they became his home.

The Sanctuary was created so they could always be with him, so he never lost the feeling of "home" that he dearly missed, but there was never a location that could fill the hole in his heart.

The Sanctuary was created so they could always be with him, so he never lost the feeling of "home" that he dearly missed, but there was never a location that could fill the hole in his heart.

He filled it himself by building a family and building a home. He was satisfied with what he had.

But could it ever be the same as the image of a "home" in his heart?

It couldn't.

This void was never brought to the forefront of his emotions, because Damien's unrestrained personality actually gave him the qualities of a wanderer from the start.

He quite enjoyed that life, so despite the longing he felt, he never got bogged down by the emotion.

But it was still there.

Perhaps Claire noticed it before he did. It was always lying there in the recesses of his heart, never truly allowing him to feel complete.

But all that would change today.

Because Claire would not allow her son to live in such a pitiful way.

She would give him the home he deserved, as she always should have as his mother.

"Come, Damien, let me introduce you to your family."

She led him through the room and slowly helped him make acquaintance with everyone present.

"Let's start with me," she said with a smile.

"You?" Damien echoed in surprise.

"Mm, didn't little Lynn tell you already? Your mother is quite the character, you know?"

Claire smiled proudly as she spoke.

"While I was called Claire Watson on Earth, my true name is Claire Ellowyn, and I am the Clan Head of our Void Palace's Ellowyn Clan."

Damien's eyes widened in surprise.

Claire really started off with a bang.

While the Ellowyn Clan was now part of Void Palace's 4 Grand Dukes, it had a deep history before it gained that position.

In fact, the Ellowyn Clan alone had the ability to stand as one of the eight great clans. It was only a subsidiary because of Void Palace itself.

It was an influence created by friends, and the Void Clan was only created after the four great clans came together.

Naturally, it took the leadership position amongst them.

Because...

"And this..." Claire continued, walking over to another woman roughly the same age as her.

"...is my sister, Serena Krone."

She had long raven-black hair and piercing red eyes that swirled mysteriously like clockwork. When Claire walked over, she smiled and nodded, introducing herself.

"I am Serena Krone, Head of the Krone Clan. While it is a bit embarrassing to say it myself, me and your mother are indeed sisters. It may be uncomfortable at first, but I sincerely hope you can eventually view me as a member of your family."

Damien's jaw dropped.

That was...

'...isn't that kind of introduction...'

'...usually given by a step-parent?!'

Damien glanced over at Yiren, who nodded as if to crush all his hopes.

'This is what she meant when she said that bastard is also a man.'

"So, Dante Void is..."

"But I'm also..."

"This is...definitely something."

Damien's thoughts were broken for a second, and the first thing he managed to say was:

"Let's make things clear. First off. Who's the first wife?"

"Who else? Naturally, it's this mother of yours," Claire responded with the same proud look on her face.

"..."

'I have to cope.'

'I am severely coping.'

'But this is reality.'

He couldn't escape reality.

His father had two wives.

He wanted to be angry, but how could he?

It looked like Claire was long aware of Serena's existence, so obviously he didn't cheat on her.

And as a man with four wives of his own, how could he fault a man with multiple wives, especially when those wives seemed to get along splendidly?

'But still, it's my mom...!'

"Haa..."

He sighed and accepted it.

From the look on Claire's face, she loved each and every person in this room.

If his mother and father were both lovingly accepting of his...aunt, then who was he to complain?

'As long as mom's happy.'

It was all he could think without being a hypocrite.

'And if she's happy, I'm not going to ruin the vibe.'

His personal feelings could be overcome, because the happiness of those involved was all that mattered.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Aunt."

Damien had been thinking for a pretty long time, so the words he spoke had become anticipated by everyone present.

However, the ones he spoke were words of acceptance.

Serena let out a sigh of relief, while Claire patted her back supportively.

Serena was definitely afraid to see how Claire's son whom she'd heard so much about would react about her. She thought she would be hated, and she'd prepared to be scolded.

Because she also wanted everyone to be happy. She didn't want to ruin Damien's introduction to the family by acting like the second mother he never knew.

His acceptance not only made her relieved, but made everyone present smile.

The family they had was built on strong bonds and loyalty. They didn't want it to be ruined by Damien's presence, but they couldn't help but worry about what would happen when an outlier was forced to accept their dynamic.

But their thoughts were wrong from the start.

Damien was never an outsider.

And he never planned to act like one.

He smiled at their reactions.

'They were really that worried, huh?'

He didn't know any of their names yet, but their expressions were enough for him to tell what kind of people they were.

'Plus, even though I've been trying to ignore it, my eyes really can't avoid seeing it.'

Their souls were pure.

Their true emotions that were bared to him because of his perfected All-Seeing Eyes showed him relationships he'd only ever seen amongst the best people he'd ever met, people like Tian Yang and Malcolm who'd taught him and helped him through his younger years, and people like Long Chen and Su Ren who became his closest friends.

"Alright," he said, clapping his hands.

"I know it's an emotional moment, but it can wait, right? I at least want to learn everyone's names before we start crying."

With smiles all around and a jovial atmosphere built around them, everyone nodded together, and the introductions began.

'Really, the complications of a big family...'

Damien smiled again. He hadn't stopped smiling since he came here.

'...it really isn't so bad.'

Chapter 1399 Void Palace [4]

Damien was soon introduced to everyone else who made up the core of Void Palace, those who would be his family from now on.

First came Yiren Void, his adopted sister. She was the second youngest of the batch, but her seniority was above the rest because of her unique situation.

Second was a girl named Hestia Void. She was Claire's second child, his blood-related younger sister, and was the true youngest of the group.

She looked just like him, with the same hair, eyes, and sharp facial features, but her personality was far removed from his. She was shy, and hardly said a word when she was introduced, but it only added to her charm.

She had just turned twenty years old and she was already a 4th class practitioner. As for how she reached that level, Damien had no idea.

He only knew that the Void Clan's talent was unparalleled beyond belief.

Aside from his two sisters on his mother's side, he also had two brothers on Serena's side.

They were named Dominic and Darius Void. They were 150 and 100 respectively, older than Damien, but oddly enough, they didn't act it at all.

Rather, the second their turn came, they rushed up to him and asked him numerous questions about his adventures in the lower universe and his power, as if they were younger brothers who'd been waiting for their older brother to return from a trip overseas.

These two were powerful, and almost at the Demigod level despite their young age. It would likely only take them a few hundred more years to reach it at their current pace.

And while Damien expected there to be some grievance among them, he was wrong.

None of them found his presence unwelcome, including his uncle and aunt, the last two people in the room, Brontus Hugo and Persia Solstice.

Void Palace was truly a family.

Dante married Claire and Serena, while Brontus and Persia got married as well. In reality, their five clans could be considered one major clan. The only reason they were kept apart was because they each had their own specialty and purpose.

And Damien...he was their Young Lord without question.

The Young Lord position had always been designated for the first son between Dante and Claire. When Damien's fate was unknown, there was talk about giving it to one of the other sons, but when his life was confirmed, the spot was returned to him.

Yet, despite the twists and turns, there were no bitter feelings more than childish grievances among the heirs of Void Palace.

Dominic and Darius viewed Damien as their close brother, Hestia saw him as the older brother she'd always wanted, though she was too shy to admit it, and while Yiren is more resistant towards accepting him, she stopped doubting his qualifications after seeing his growth in the lower universe.

Obviously, Damien couldn't become close to each and every one of them in the short time he'd been here, but that was something that could be developed over time.

Once the introductions were finished and some conversation was had, the rest of the family departed from the area so Claire could have some alone time with her son.

It was clear they had a lot to catch up on.

They really did.

When they were finally alone, Claire practically broke down. Her tears didn't stop streaming for a very long time, to the point where Damien couldn't hold himself back either.

But they eventually got into conversation. Damien was able to tell her everything, from the moment he left her in Apeiron to the moment he saw her again in the Heavenly World.

Claire was a God. She had experienced her fair share of dangers and fortune, however, hearing the stories of her son was a completely different monster.

She almost had a heart attack hearing about smaller things like his fight against Sebastian, the butler. Her reaction when she heard about the Ancient Battlefield's happenings could be imagined.

She didn't want her son doing so much dangerous stuff, but since she couldn't do anything about it, she at least wanted him to exercise caution while doing so.

Knowing he was doing his best to stay alive was the most she could ask for.

Of course, Damien conveniently forgot to mention the time he actually died, but Claire didn't need to know that, did she?

"My son..."

There was a hint of sorrow in her voice.

"...I truly apologize for not being there for you."

She knew it wasn't enough to apologize, but she apologized anyway. She truly regretted not being there for him, but their circumstances didn't allow them to have the familial relationship everyone else had.

It made her infinitely sorrowful, but it was reality.

"No."

It wasn't reality unless Damien said it was.

"Mom, you can't be saying things like that. To me, you are the most perfect mother I could ask for. You did everything possible to give me happiness even when you were at your lowest. Back then, I was too young to notice it, but I'm an adult now. This time, let me take care of you. Just sit back and watch as your problems solve themselves. I'll show you what kind of man your son has grown into."

Those were his honest feelings. He had gripes upon gripes upon gripes with his father, but there was nothing of the sort for Claire.

His mother did everything she could with what she had. Asking for more was just entitlement on his side.

And she'd always felt guilty. If she was really a bad mother, would that feeling have any sort of place in her heart?

Damien didn't want her to feel it anymore. He wanted her to see him thrive and realize how great she did as a mother.

He wanted her to have peace and happiness for the rest of her life.

For that, he was prepared to do anything.

"Damien..."

The tears started again.

She was proud beyond belief. She truly couldn't find a way to express it properly.

Damien knew that as well, and he didn't need her to say anything.

Rather...

"Mom, remember how I introduced you to some people last time we met?"

Claire's expression suddenly brightened.

"Ah! That girl Rose and our little Elena, right? Of course I remember them. Don't tell me..."

She remembered his strange reaction from a while back.

And Damien nodded as if to confirm her thoughts.

"There are a few more introductions to be made."

He wanted to make his mother happy.

Wasn't the best way to do it by introducing her to her daughters-in-law?

He made sure to tell the girls about this meeting a bit back, and they'd been rushing to prepare themselves in the Sanctuary since then.

They dropped everything they were doing, from training to executive duties, and prepared their appearances and hearts.

And the time came.

Four women appeared behind Damien, each with their own unique charm and appearance.

Yet, the one thing they had in common was how they awkwardly squirmed as they struggled to compose themselves for this meeting with the parents that happened without nearly enough prior notice.

Claire looked at each of them individually before glancing back at Damien.

And the look in her eyes...

Well, what came next was definitely a spectacle.

Chapter 1400 Void Palace [5]

What happened when Claire first laid her eyes on Damien's wives?

Well, obviously, she shot him a glare beyond glares, something that terrified him to the core.

As for what happened after...?

'Well, even I want to know.'

Unfortunately, Damien was kicked out of the room almost instantly so the women could talk to each other.

He could only hope his mother would be accepting, but he wasn't too worried.

After all, she was his mother.

She would definitely be snarky about it and judge him silently, but she wasn't an unreasonable person. If their happiness was real, she wouldn't cause too much of a fuss.

Plus, she had the same problem as Damien!

If she was too against his harem, it would only make her a hypocrite as someone who allowed her husband to have a second wife!

They were both put in awkward positions by the choices they made in the past, but since neither of them regretted those choices, they were stuck forced to be happy for each other.

It was a bit comedic to say the least.

Personally, Damien didn't mind the situation much. He and his mother were alike in many ways, so he was well aware of how she'd react.

Because of that, he didn't need to worry about anything, because if she was going to act the same way he would, everything would end up okay.

Nevertheless, Claire needed her alone time with his women for many reasons.

She was probably going to vet them by her standards for about five minutes before realizing how great Damien's taste in women was. The rest of the time would likely be spent getting to know them.

Next time they saw each other, she would probably be their greatest supporter.

'Or at least, that's how I see her reacting.'

Damien made his predictions as he walked the halls of the main palace.

It was a large place. It was easy to get lost, especially because it wasn't a completely "real" structure.

The main palace was actually disjointed in many places. A lot of facilities had no connection point between each other and a lot of others were quite literally impossible to enter by normal means.

That was because Void Palace existed in a spatial pocket that was intertwined with the real plane.

Every part of the palace was separated by several planar layers. The spatial practitioners that thrived in Void Palace made full use of this nuance to create a place that only they could freely travel through.

If one didn't know how to properly walk between the planar layers, one would find themselves completely disoriented or maybe even dying in the void of space somewhere.

But it wasn't as if everyone living in the palace needed to know a complex and accurate code that allowed them to move between spaces.

Since they were residents, there were special provisions in place to aid them.

However, an outsider could never raid the main palace and succeed.

'This is part of the reason we've been able to stay untouched for so long. They've tried in the past, but they've always failed. At this point, raiding the palace has basically been stigmatized too much for anyone to attempt it.'

Because of that, rather than attacking Void Palace itself, they attacked the surrounding territories so they could encroach upon the palace's influence and slowly break them down.

'Reunions are nice, and family is nicer, however, these are things I can't enjoy right now.'

Damien felt it. He very much felt the atmosphere of love and generosity that existed around him. He could tell that everyone here was welcoming him, and he couldn't help but want to sit back and enjoy the pleasantries a "home" provided him.

But he couldn't. If he wanted to enjoy everything he'd gained today, he would first have to protect it and make sure nothing could ever take it away from him.

'I don't want to trouble Mom, and meeting Serena right now would probably be awkward, so...'

He could either go to the Hugo Clan, Solstice Clan, or one of the 12 Swords for information.

'The 12 Swords...'

He'd only heard of them. They were some of the strongest masters in the entirety of the Heavenly World, and they were completely loyal to the Void Palace that raised them.

'However, they're like battle machines.'

It wasn't that they didn't have personality, but if Damien wanted something from them, he'd probably have to prove himself and go through a lot of trouble.

'If I want to avoid that, then Brontus is probably the way to go.'

He was an open-minded and carefree guy from what Damien could tell, making him the best bet at free and easy information.

'Alright.'

Damien didn't know where the Hugo Clan was, but he didn't think it would be hard to find it.

The only issue was his position.

'According to what mom said, my position is a little vague right now.'

Damien Void, firstborn son of Dante Void, hadn't been introduced to the palace officially yet in fear of what external influences would do upon learning of his existence, but most of the important individuals already knew he was here.

The problem was that his position was unofficial.

He wasn't necessarily accepted as the Young Lord in every part of the palace, and there were definitely people plotting against him in the dark.

On top of that, the actual power he could command within Void Palace wasn't much at all.

'It's basically a puppet position, a shell without anything inside.'

Damien made his way through the palace, easily discerning the planar movements he needed to do so as he looked for the Hugo Clan's residence.

'But that's fine too.'

He wasn't here alone.

No, he didn't just bring his wives or his friends or his compatriots.

He didn't just bring a force or an army.

He brought an entire universe with him to the Heavenly World.

And for the past who knows how many years, he'd been using that universe to raise an army that was loyal only to him.

'They haven't had much to do until now.'

They participated a bit in the lower universe's war, but it was just a playground for them to test some of their skills.

They'd never truly operated as an army before.

And more than anything...

'...Void Palace doesn't have its own army. It has a lot of disjointed combat units, but nothing like a structured army for real wars.'

They never needed it. The small number of elites they used was always better than an army of weaker beings in the battles they fought.

'But no longer.'

It wouldn't remain that way under Damien's control.

'Because now that I'm here, we're not going to play passive anymore.'

They were going to take everything back from those who thought it was funny to steal from them.

And they were going to take everything those people held dear as well.

'Once our two armies are combined, once I can control the palace properly, once we take care of all the internal problems preventing us from acting at our full capacity...'

Damien's eyes narrowed.

'...I'll let the Heavenly World remember why they fear our palace.'