

# Void 1401

Chapter 1401 Void Palace [6]

The 4 Grand Duke Clans of Void Palace also lived in the main palace...to an extent.

They had branches in the main palace that had direct planar connections to their main residences that were further out in the Brightmoon Principality where Void Palace was.

But in reality, they weren't really branches. They were just parts of the Grand Duke Estates that had been separated from their main residences by displacement phenomena, but really still existed in the main residences.

It was complicated because space was twisted in a way that reality didn't seem to allow, but this was what could be achieved when so many spatial practitioners were brought together and given an environment where they could thrive.

Anyway, Damien made it to the Hugo Clan's branch relatively easily. He thought he'd have to find the main residence after doing so, but outside his expectations, Brontus was already there, as if waiting for him to arrive.

"I knew you would come find me," he said, confirming Damien's suspicions.

"You knew?" Damien echoed.

"Of course! Naturally, you don't want to involve your mother in the serious affairs. I can imagine what the relationship between you and Serena is right now. As for my wife, she can be a bit...troublesome to people who don't know her, but you'll eventually come to understand her kindness."

"I can understand what you're looking for, and if you want someone to provide it, our Hugo Clan is exactly the place to go. You might not know it yet, but we generally take care of the military matters within the palace."

"I see," Damien responded with a nod.

"Then you are indeed who I need to look for right now."

Brontus smiled.

"Come with me. Let's find a private place to talk, and I'll answer all your questions."

He led Damien to a room not too far away. It looked like any other in the building, but when they entered, Damien clearly felt them separating from the Real Plane.

"Interesting. To need this many protection arrays and silence arrays even after entering an alternate space...I guess you guys don't skimp on security."

"We don't have a choice," Brontus responded.

"There exist many powerful figures in this world that you cannot imagine. They can peer through the very fabric of reality and see whatever they wish to see, so even if we believe we are safe, we need to make it absolutely certain."

"Hmm..."

Damien frowned.

He didn't think something like the fabric of reality would be so easy to pierce, but perhaps that was another thing he didn't know because of his fresh entrance to this world.

'Five years isn't anywhere near enough time to learn about a place so massive. And...as I expected, the realm of Godhood is a vast expanse unlike anything I've seen before.'

It was an interesting tidbit for Damien that confirmed a lot of the thoughts he had.

"But that's not what you're here for, no?"

Brontus pinpointed the exact place his thoughts went next.

"Yeah. I can learn more about the world as I live in it. What I need now is everything about Void Palace's internal and external situation."

"Internal and external?"

Brontus' eyes widened.

He looked deep into the eyes of the man across the table from him, and that's when he saw it.

His heart raced uncontrollably.

He had high hopes for Damien. Not only because he was the son Dante went through so much trouble to raise, but because he'd heard a lot about Damien's exploits in the lower universe and the Heavenly World.

It was quite expensive to purchase information from the Sapientia Clan, but this knowledge came to him for free.

Why?

He could only assume Damien did something to earn their favor. Otherwise, even Void Palace with their status and relationship would have to pay a hefty sum for anything of the sort.

When Brontus saw Damien after hearing the stories that seemed to be unbelievably exaggerated, he realized that the man wasn't someone born to disappear in the annals of time.

The spirit he saw from Damien was something only an emperor could possess. That aura, that gait, was exactly the reason Dante took the Lord position of Void Palace when it was created.

Only he had it. The rest of them simply couldn't compare.

What did Dante do with that spirit?

He created an influence that nobody in the world could ever touch.

Yet, he disappeared when they needed him most, and by some twisting of fate, his estranged son arrived as if to fill in the void he left.

With the same spirit and the same determination, he had arrived.

And the first thing he did was ask a simple question.

What was holding Void Palace back?

'His plan...'

Brontus could already picture it.

'He wants to take Void Palace to unimaginable heights.'

To a place only Dante had ever glimpsed.

And Brontus, as a man who'd followed Dante for millions of years...

"Huu..."

He took a deep breath.

"How far do you plan to go?"

It was important to ask the man himself.

"How far?" Damien echoed, as if he was mocking the gall of such a question.

"I don't ever plan to stop. Not until Void Palace stands true again."

Not until they returned to their position above even the eight great clans.

Brontus grinned.

"I like your ambition."

"I hope you can match it."

"Match it? I'm afraid it's already too late for that."

He reached into a nearby bookcase, and pulled out a single book. It looked only around a thousand pages long, but when he opened it, it expanded into a massive compendium filled with knowledge.

"This is what you're looking for," Brontus continued as he flipped through it.

"Clan structure, members, internal and external relationships, usable forces, finances, notable history and happenings, everything you could wish for is here. It is my wife's proudest work, the true written Legend of Void Palace."

Damien looked down at the book with genuine shock plastering his face.

"Did you just say...written Legend?"

"That's right. It's exactly what you're thinking."

"Fucking hell..."

Damien cursed unwittingly. He genuinely couldn't believe something like that existed.

Legends existed everywhere. They were the Heavens way of documenting all things. They were the ethereal form of the system, the Apeiron Records, which took them and made them visible for people.

Void Palace had a record, a Legend, just like all other things.

And somehow, Persia Solstice managed to recreate something only the elusive Apeiron Records had ever managed to do.

She had made a Legend tangible.

Damien had high expectations for Void Palace, but this was beyond his wildest dreams.

'If it's at this level, then maybe "that" will also be possible.'

He made plenty of realistic plans to raise Void Palace, but he also had some ambitions he thought they'd never be able to accomplish simply due to the realm of possibility that reality caged them in.

Until now, he and his wives were the only ones he knew who were trying to escape those bounds.

But this changed everything.

Void Palace was already on the same wavelength since long ago.

Which meant...

"Hahahaha..."

He couldn't help but laugh.

"This..."

He had to change his plans a bit.

'This is going to be a lot of fun.'

Chapter 1402 Void Palace [7]

Damien and Brontus didn't have a long conversation.

Since Damien received what he wanted and Brontus wasn't so free as to spend great amounts of time following his activities, the two separated not long after their meeting.

Brontus returned to his clan, where he went to meet Persia, while Damien once again found himself aimlessly wandering through the palace.

At least, for another half an hour or so.

"...ord!"

"...ng Lord!"

"Young Lord!"

"Hm?"

The voice of a young maid brought him out of his thoughts.

He'd been detailing his plans after learning everything he needed to know, so he somewhat drowned out the real world for a bit.

The maid was standing not far from him, but he didn't notice her at all.

It was clear she'd been trying to find him for a while now from the way she was panting with her hands on her knees.

"Did you need something from me?" Damien asked.

"How could I ever?" The maid hurriedly replied back.

"The Madam has tasked me with leading you to your residence. Please allow me to show you the way."

"My residence...?"

Damien didn't really think about it, but it seemed there was a place waiting for him in the palace.

It was convenient. To have a place all to himself, a home of his own, would make a lot of things easier.

He never really considered where he'd sleep or how he'd fit into the Void Palace structure, but since it was already sorted out by his mother, his mind was set at ease.



"Very well, let's go."

The maid bowed upon receiving his confirmation and led him through the halls of the palace, with purpose this time.

They went through several planar leaps and displacements, leaving the area of the main palace Damien had already explored. They went past the room where Damien first met his mother and the rest, which was thoroughly sealed still, and eventually reached an area where the path split into only two ways.

"It's this way, Young Lord," the maid said, taking him through the path on the left.

"What's through the other hall?" Damien asked curiously.

"That's..." the maid hesitated for a second.

"The Lord's residence."

"Ah..."

Damien glanced that way.

It was Dante's abode. The place where his father spent many years of his life and the place where his most important things would be.

'I need to go there eventually, but not now.'

Now wasn't the time to focus on Dante, who wasn't here.

Now, he needed to keep onto Void Palace in mind.

'Problems with the armies, problems with the elders, problems with outside influences, problems with the 12 Swords...'

There was a lot to solve. It would take a lot of time and effort, but Damien already had a game plan to get it all done within a few years.

'Luckily, these kinds of problems solve each other. As long as I deal with them in the right order, the later ones will be so easy to fix that they won't even be worth mentioning anymore.'

Damien nodded to himself.

'That should be alright. Then, firstly—'

"Young Lord, we have arrived."

Damien glanced up.

"Oh?"

He was expecting just a luxurious room and some space in the palace as would usually be given to a Young Lord, but he was wrong.

First of all, he and the maid were outside, not in the main palace anymore.

Second of all, this place was practically an estate of its own, with several hundreds of thousands of kilometers of land surrounding the mansion-like residence.

And third of all, the place was already packed with people. Servants, chefs, guards, and anyone else relevant for the upkeep of an estate of this level was already provided, as if they'd been living here waiting for Damien's arrival for years.

Damien thanked the maid and dismissed her before sending his awareness through the land.

"This is the place, huh..."

He grinned, pleasantly surprised.

"It's way more than I could've asked for, but I'm not one to complain about free stuff."

This was a good starting point.

'I'll settle in here and lay low for a while. When the time is right...'

Damien's eyes glinted with a strange light.

There were snakes in the grass, slithering and lurking. They wouldn't come out if he kept moving around, since they didn't have much power on their own, but the second he dropped his guard, they'd pounce together and bring him down.

Before they could make any moves, he would slaughter them all.

And for that purpose, he would wait.

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"We need to act now. There is no more time to sit on the sidelines and pretend."

"But how?! We do not have any power, nor have we been accepted by anyone else! We are doomed. We made the wrong choice. Just accept it."

"Why are you panicking? Does the appearance of a single Young Lord truly make you feel such fear?"

"It's not about the Young Lord! Didn't you hear it yourself? The Sapientia Clan denied us information on him! That either means he is someone they're protecting, or his information is worth a price we cannot handle!"

"And what? He is the Young Lord of Void Palace. We always knew we were fighting an impossible fight, but we decided to fight it anyway. All of us have our own greed and reasons, but we have come together for this purpose, so it is already too late to do anything else. We must see this through to the end, or the only end for us is a dishonorable death."

There were many of them, 16 to be specific.

Sixteen people who'd been working together for the past few dozens of millennia.

They were under Void Palace, but they were not loyal. No, they'd been slowly selling out their benefactors to the enemy for personal profit.

Their reasons didn't need to be explained, nor did their actions for the past few millennia. In reality, none of them had the capability to do what they wished to do, but they didn't realize that until now.

Because in the past, they'd been supported by the Divine Order. The neighboring influence aided their plans in return for their help in taking down Void Palace from the inside.

The appearance of the so-called Young Lord ruined everything for them.

Void Palace was a turtle hiding in its shell until now. Without Dante, the rest of them didn't make any special moves or try too hard to be involved in the outside world.

This allowed others to take advantage of them and slowly disperse their influence.

However, if the rumors about the new Young Lord's appearance were true, Void Palace would gain a head.

With a head, Void Palace would be able to thrive.

The Divine Order was just as aware of that as others, if not more.

Therefore, they gave an order to their people on the inside.

"Find a way to kill the Young Lord. Otherwise, we will withdraw our support."

The Divine Order was taking a more passive stance until they knew what the new and mysterious character they were dealing with was like.

And for that purpose, they'd abandoned the 16 Elders they'd been working with until now.

"So we have no choice."

The one who spoke was called Rufus Flamedark. He was the head of this coalition of Elders, the one who spoke for the rest.

"We must kill the Young Lord. If we do not try, we die. If we confess, we die. If we fail, we die."

They would die if they succeeded too, but he didn't need to mention it.

The Divine Order was their last hope.

If they could be pulled out after they accomplished the task, they'd live.

It was barely enough to be called a hope. It was really just a way for them to convince themselves they had hope.

But regardless, they had to hold it.

Because it was all they had left.

They felt regret, they felt despair, and they felt rage.

They could blame nobody but themselves for their current predicament.

So just as they entered this bullshit coup on their own terms, they would die the same way.

They would accomplish something.

They would kill the Young Lord.

Chapter 1403 Void Palace [8]

For the next three weeks, Damien secluded himself in his estate.

It was the first thing he did openly after coming to Void Palace, which confused everyone.

The servants in his residence were disallowed from leaving. His wives came over after a day, and other than them, only his mother could enter and exit the area as she pleased.

Everyone else was barred at the gate. Whether it be Serena, his sisters, his aunt and uncle, or anyone else. It didn't matter what their position was nor did it matter how close they were to him.

For now, they couldn't see him.

It started many rumors around the palace.

What was the new Young Lord doing?

This disconnected stance made it seem like he didn't want to be a part of Void Palace. It looked like the only one he cared for was his own mother, while everyone else was insignificant in his eyes.

The negative rumors circulated and got blown out of context rapidly, and Damien's reputation began to fall.

But the positive rumors circulated as well. Some said he was being conscious of his position, while others believed he just needed time to adapt.

Since he'd only been around for a day before he secluded himself, nobody was able to make an accurate judgement on the "why" of the whole situation. They could only observe and try to figure it out for themselves.

Unfortunately, Damien was a cautious person. From the moment he arrived, heavy protections covered the entire estate. Perception of its internal situation by any means was impossible even to Gods, making it clear that Claire had helped him set it up.

People could only assume something was taking place in the estate that he didn't want people to see.

And that part was the only thing they got right about the whole situation.

For the last three weeks, Damien had been focusing on one task and one task alone.

He was bringing his armies into Void Palace.

"How's it going?"

"We're mostly done. The available force isn't extremely useful right now, but we can train them into a better position with this environment."

The one he spoke to was Elvira, not Lynn.

Lynn remained in the Sanctuary, taking care of the executive duties with Luciel.

Meanwhile, Elvira had a more flexible role. While she was also part of the main ruling force, she had a lot more influence in the military than the other two, and her experience as an Empress allowed her to lead them properly.

She was also one of the few Demigods who'd been raised in the Sanctuary.

Along with the rest of the Emperors Damien met in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, she'd come to the Heavenly World to serve under Damien as one of his generals.

"Since we didn't really know the way forward, there are a lot of people waiting at the cusp of Divinity without trying to ascend. Your women are among them. Since we now have both knowledge and environment, we should be able to raise Demigods within a few months if we have the opportunity."

"Good," Damien responded.

He was looking out at the land he now owned.

It was filled with millions upon millions of troops, perhaps even billions. The weakest of them was at the entry-level of 4th class, while the strongest were Demigods.

There were other areas where those with weaker strength were training, but they weren't counted as part of the army that could be mobilized.

Rather, they were talents brought to the estate to make full use of the Heavenly World's environment to boost their talent and potential.

'With our guidance, most of these people should be able to breeze through the 4th class. Entering Divinity is a different matter, though.'



There were too many Demigods in the Heavenly World for them to even be mentioned, but that didn't mean the people here had managed to streamline the process.

Each and every one of those Demigods had to experience Cosmic Rebirth and define their Divinity personally. They couldn't use another person's experience for this purpose.

'Luckily, the armies are still mostly made up of 4th class soldiers.'

It was part of the information Damien received from Persia's Compendium.

In the Heavenly World, practitioners in the nine revolutions were used as common foot soldiers. Demigods would usually fight on a separate battlefield.

'Raising them to that level isn't a problem, but we still aren't ready for confrontation.'

It was a shame, but it was something that could be fixed.

To go against influences with an unreal number of Divinities supporting them, he needed to gain an unreal number of Demigods.

'Some of them can be raised from this group, but the majority will be taken from Void Palace itself.'

Damien was not forming a personal army right now. He was preparing his army to integrate with Void Palace and form a comprehensive group that surpassed any other.

'If there's one thing I'm confident in, it's their talent. I don't doubt that these people who were raised by the Void Library can reach Divinity as long as I give them the chance.'

So eventually, they would become what he wanted them to be.

"Keep taking care of organizing. Make sure to let me know when you see someone ready to ascend. I'll take care of it from there."

"Mm, I'll do as you say."

Elvira nodded and excused herself, returning to her duties.

Meanwhile, Damien returned to his mansion.

'The army situation can be sorted out with time, but the other things need to be handled concurrently.'

He couldn't rely on this army to help him with his current problems.

Instead, he would raise them while dealing with them.

'The first thing is the Elders.'

They weren't all Demigods, but the Gods among them were smarter than to try anything so stupid.

Those who'd switched sides were expendable. They knew they were expendable, so they decided to act on their greed.

'But that was the wrong choice.'

Void Palace was a family. They didn't treat people as tools or pawns even if that was the only thing they were useful for.

However, were other influences the same?

The Divine Order was especially cruel to its pawns.

Damien couldn't understand why they chose betrayal in the first place. The situation looked bad, but Void Palace was still a great clan that wouldn't easily fall.

Nevertheless, traitorous people were never meant to be understood or humanized. Not in a situation like this one.

So he didn't even bother trying to discern their intentions.

'Around this time, those Elders are probably getting desperate.'

Damien wasn't as kind as the rest of his family. He wouldn't have lived this long if he was a generous soul.

They let the problem fester because of old feelings, but he didn't have any of those feelings from the start.

'I'll get rid of the filth that was left to its own devices.'

And from there, he would make his agenda known to the entire palace, so they could understand the path they would be treading in the future.

'They should be coming soon.'

He already set up the stage.

He already gave them the justification.

Now, all he needed to do was wait for them to strike.

So he could exterminate them in one fell swoop.

#### Chapter 1404 Recruitment [1]

It only took a few more days for the Elders to get restless.

With Damien cooped up in his residence, they were running out of options.

The Divine Order gave them one month to carry out the assassination. If it wasn't done by then, they would expose everything the Elders had done to Void Palace and allow them to decide their fates.

Little did they know that Void Palace was already aware.

Persia's Compendium was always evolving. It was a written record of Void Palace's Legend, so as events took place, it would also become longer to document them.

Those like Claire and the rest had long since known about the Elders' betrayal, but they didn't do anything about it.

Why?

There were two reasons.

Firstly was a bit of innocent hope. They wanted to think the Elders would eventually turn back to the light side and see their wrongdoings. The group hadn't done anything extremely damaging to the palace yet, so they were still worth forgiving.

Unfortunately, no matter how much time passed, those Elders didn't learn. They got bolder and bolder as they were ignored, and as greed blinded their vision, the thought that betrayal was wrong completely slipped their minds.

They only realized recently the stupidity of their decisions, however, their view of Void Palace had become so clouded by their own negativity that they didn't even think they could be forgiven. They only saw death on the other side of submission.

None of the high authorities of Void Palace were soft characters. They wouldn't allow feelings to ruin them. But they still had positive emotions. For their own people, they still wanted to leave a little bit of leeway.

It was stupid, sure, but it was human, so Damien didn't criticize them too much.

Because the second reason was more logical.

Void Palace's Legend.

It needed to grow.

They were being encroached on all sides by the enemy and they couldn't make any grand movements.

It was mainly because Dante was gone, but that wasn't the only reason.

They had power. They could go to war with the surrounding influences if they wanted to, but if they did, they'd suffer losses that would leave them open to the ones waiting in the dark.

Dante was the deterrent for those people. His strength made them hesitate, so even if the palace was weakened, they wouldn't act.

Dante's strength couldn't be fathomed, but he wasn't the only character like that in the cosmos. There were several people stronger than Claire and the other Grand Dukes in the enemy clans.

If they tried to wage war recklessly and died or got critically injured, the palace would truly lose all the backing that kept people fearing them.

Their current stance was for the best.

People assumed Void Palace was weak but couldn't confirm it. The fact that information about them couldn't spread, even with traitors in their midst, meant they had something to rely on.

This way, people didn't attack the palace, which gave them the chance to conserve their strength and wait for the moment they could fight back.

Void Palace was currently in stasis. It was a state perfect for Damien's interference.

And so, when he secluded himself with the knowledge of both the Elders' betrayal and the ultimatum they'd been presented, he did so with this moment in mind.

They couldn't wait for him to leave the Young Lord's Estate.

They couldn't be mindful of the risks of trying to infiltrate a place like that.

They had to kill him, and they had to do it soon.

Because if there was one thing they were certain of, it was the fact that their deaths at the hands of Void Palace would be less torturous than the ones they'd received from the Divine Order.

So they moved.

A group of 16 Demigod Elders moved together and infiltrated the estate.

Oddly enough, the defenses they'd heard so much about were practically paper thin under their power.

"Remember, we have to be fast and quiet. If we accomplish this, we will go down in history, but if we fail..."

Rufus didn't need to say more. They all knew it well.

But they'd done sufficient research before coming here.

The servants in the Young Lord's Estate weren't too powerful, and from the silence around them, it was clear that there wasn't anyone important present.

When they let their awareness loose, they found some guards patrolling the area, but the number wasn't nearly enough to stop their entrance into the estate.

As for the servants, they were fast asleep, along with the Young Lord, whose presence could be felt on the third floor in his room.

"Move out."

Rufus gave the order, and the sixteen of them turned into shadows that prowled in the dark.

Ten of them, including Rufus, rushed to the third floor to target the Young Lord. As for the other six, they encircled the residence and took down the guards who could alert anyone if things went wrong.

The plan was going perfectly. They had to assassinate a few civilians on the way to the target, but that was nothing.

Their presence was still hidden.

"Is everything clear?"

Rufus sent a mental transmission to his people outside.

"Clear."

A one-word answer. The guards were down.

"Good. We're moving in."

He was already in front of the Young Lord's room. With clearance received, he phased through the wall with his team and quietly approached the bed.

There he was, sleeping. A man with pale white skin and a body built for combat. He looked oddly peaceful in his sleep, but his death would be anything but.

He drew a dagger from his spatial ring. It was coated in a glistening purple liquid, obviously poison.

'Quick and easy. He may be a Demigod, but even he won't be able to survive this.'

The poison was provided by the Divine Order. It would directly target body, soul, and Divinity in one go, and corrupt them all together. If one was struck by this poison, one wouldn't be able to even think about healing unless they possessed the Holy Power of the Divine Order.

That is, if they even lasted more than a few seconds under the poison's corrosion.

Rufus wouldn't allow any interference in his work. Without hesitation, he stabbed into the chest of the sleeping man and watched as his skin instantly turned a disgusting shade of black and blue.

The shade spread and soon enveloped his whole body, and as the skin began to crack and wither...

...he opened his eyes.

"Having fun, are we?"



"...!"

Rufus dashed backward on instinct.

Every sense in his body was altering him of danger.

The Young Lord who should've been poisoned and dying sat up, glancing at his withering body, and clicked his tongue.

"Tsk. How annoying. After all that suspense, this is all you amount to?"

He turned his eyes to Rufus.

And Rufus turned his eyes to him.

'I can't escape.'

He already tried.

He could no longer phase through the walls.

He already tried.

The walls wouldn't break if he attacked them, and the door to the room disappeared as if it never existed.

'I can't—'

Not "he" but "they."

When he glanced at his surroundings, he suddenly realized that all sixteen of them were in the room now.

As if they'd never separated in the first place.

It was already over for them.

From the moment they stepped into the residence, they were dead.

But only now did they realize it.

Chapter 1405 Recruitment [2]

The sun rose behind Void Palace, alighting a new day.

One might wonder how a sun and moon cycle worked in such a massive world, and the answer was both simple and complicated at the same time.

To put it simply, there were multiple sun and moon cycles in the Heavenly World.

Each cardinal region had multiple suns and moons that created their cycles. One could simply pass from one principality to the next and find day and night completely switching.

These suns and moons didn't orbit, of course. They weren't even true celestial bodies. They were manifestations of law that existed because of the natural state of the world. They would set and rise so naturally that nobody would ever question it, but in reality, they were akin to illusion.

It was just a matter of day and night. For the most part, it only really affected the common people.

Time remained constant, because practitioners didn't use the sun and moon to consider time. The Heavenly Order itself was the measure of time. The laws in the atmosphere would gradually grow and change, and that very change on a scale only a practitioner could ever realize was the true decider of time.

Nevertheless, the Brightmoon Principality had quite a large sun and moon pair, so it had one cycle that encompassed the whole place.

It wasn't a matter of nature, but a man-made convenience.

The Young Lord's Estate was particularly calm today. The servants went about their duties as usual, the guards did the same, with none missing from their patrol structure.

The mansion was peaceful, as were the fields outside filled with the sounds of training troops.

Damien casually sat in his room, reading through Persia's Compendium without a care in his mind.

For the next few days, he had time to relax, since the next part didn't need his interference.

Even the soldiers were taking some minor breaks in recent days, absorbing everything they'd learned in the past month.

It wasn't the Young Lord's Estate that was in a ruckus right now.

Instead, it was everywhere else in the Brightmoon Principality.

They were standing outside the main palace for all to see.

Sixteen stakes with sixteen heads impaled on them. Their eyes had been carved out, noses torn and tattered, and their mouths filled with blood in the stead of teeth.

Behind them was a stele made of pure obsidian, with words etched on its surface in blood.

[Here stand the heads of our traitors. Let them be a message to those who stand against Our Palace. Blood for blood, soul for soul. From the corpses of our enemies, Void Palace will rise.]

News spread instantaneously.

The entire Brightmoon Principality, the entirety of Void Palace, was aware of the crimes committed by those traitors within a day.

They sold information to the enemy, led allies to their deaths, embezzled the common people's money, and contributed to plans to dismantle and destroy the palace.

Their names were smeared, their influence was torn down, and they were left as scum in the eyes and hearts of all people.

It happened so fast that it couldn't be natural.

Naturally, that was because it wasn't.

This wasn't any ordinary execution.

This was a declaration of war.

This was the moment Void Palace declared its intention to rise.

The news would spread past the borders. It would be known to those who it concerned. The moment it did...

...chaos would envelop the Heavenly World.

It was a grand event, the most monumental thing that had happened to Void Palace in several thousands of years.

And it had been done without the knowledge of anyone in the palace.

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"Brother, what do you think about this?"

Two men stood together. They were shirtless and covered in sweat, their swords down as they'd just finished a spar.

They were Dominic and Darius Void, Damien's two half-brothers.

"What do you mean? Are you talking about what our First did today?" Dominic responded, wiping the sweat off his brow.

"What else? The palace has been chaotic for the past few days. I can hardly walk around without running into someone who's talking about it!" Darius exclaimed.

"And what about it?"

Dominic seemed rather unconcerned, but Darius knew his brother better than that.

"What are you planning to do?"

Dominic glanced over, his expression unreadable.

He knew what Darius wanted.

There was no way he wouldn't know.

Their First Brother who they'd just met once and never saw again.

They'd been raised their entire lives in his shadow.

He was the one born for the Young Lord position. They were people without real status from birth, despite their talent and ability.

But they didn't mind it. From what they'd heard about their First Brother, he was far more worthy of the position than either of them. They didn't feel the need to compete against them, and instead used their freedom from responsibility to grow as they pleased.

However, when they met him, he didn't seem like everything they'd heard.

They couldn't see his aura, which was odd, but his gait wasn't like someone who'd lived as an expert.

So how was he going to do the job he was born for?

The decision they made was to observe before they acted. It was a lesson their mother ingrained in them since young.

And while they were starting to get disappointed with his inaction, the second he moved, he caused a storm.

"Void Palace is not ready for war right now, let alone our brother who just showed up and took up his position. There's no way this is a good decision right now."

Dominic didn't say anything, but he agreed to an extent.

He didn't think it was the time to act either.

But he also knew how timid Darius could be. He was powerful and he was domineering, but he had a tendency to be overly cautious about everything.

If his "overcautiousness" was manifesting like this...

"Have you seen this?"

Dominic finally spoke, withdrawing a piece of paper from his spatial ring.

"This is..."

Darius grabbed it and read the words written on it.

"...a recruitment notice?"

"Yes, it's a recruitment notice," Dominic confirmed.

"These have been spread across the entire territory over the last three days. From the poorest beggars to the wealthiest consortiums, everyone knows the news already."

Darius didn't know because he'd been cooped up in training. Even the news he knew came from rumors around the main palace that he heard in passing.

Therefore, he didn't know everything Dominic knew.

"The distribution method is unknown, but from what I can guess, this is First Brother's doing. Recruiting at this juncture, when the territory's been riled up by the previous event, means he probably has plans for the future as well."

'It may seem reckless, but I cannot see it as such. Our First Brother...he is not the man he appears to be.'

It wasn't an insult, it was the truth. There was more to Damien Void than the eye could see.

And Dominic wasn't resigned to staying in the dark.

"Darius, let's go to the recruitment."

"What do you plan to do?"

"Nothing much..."

A strange glint appeared in Dominic's eyes.

"I just wish to see how amazing our brother truly is."

Chapter 1406 Recruitment [3]

'It's not bad, but it's not where I want it to be either.'

That was Damien's conclusion after the past few days of meetings.

Only the first one was truly important.

After pulling a stunt like what he did with the traitorous Elders, there was no way he could continue on the same course without consulting the higher-ups of the palace.

On the day the impaled heads were revealed, Damien called a meeting with not only his mother and the other Grand Dukes, but also the 12 Swords.



The topic was easy to guess.

"Void Palace will begin preparing for war from today onward."

That was what Damien said to them.

"I have prepared to seal the border so news of what's happening here won't get out for at least a month. In that time, I will raise an army that can stand against anyone else in the world."

And that was the promise he made.

It was an extremely impractical thing. Even his own mother couldn't support such an out-of-pocket statement.

However, Damien made them approve without much of a hitch.

After all, he just needed to show them his trump card.

That meeting ended in success after he told them the details of what seemed like a reckless stunt on the surface.

Whether it be the Grand Dukes who tried to support him unconditionally or the 12 Swords who were only now forming their first impressions of their new "Young Lord," nobody in the room could argue against such a strategy.

As long as it worked, that is.

Therefore, Damien was given a chance. If he could prove his words in the coming weeks, they would accept his proposition and give him the reigns over Void Palace.

If he couldn't, then he'd need to find a way to fix the mess he caused with his own hands before it could affect the palace itself.

It was a bet with reasonable terms, and it was exactly what Damien wanted.

Trust didn't come easy, but if it was earned properly, it would become the most indomitable thing in the whole world.

That was the trust he wanted from them. Absolute unconditional faith. And to achieve that, he needed to accomplish things so grand that they developed such faith naturally.

He'd done it in the lower universe, and now the time had come for him to do it here.

The first thing he did after gaining the freedom to act as he pleased was put up the recruitment notice.

That notice gave a week of preparation and travel time for those involved, and also promised to waive travel expenses such as usage of teleportation arrays so people could be gathered at the fastest speed.

The wages were good, the conditions were extremely beneficial for those who passed the recruitment test, and the honor of becoming the palace's sword was great enough for countless men between the ages of 18 and 300 to apply without hesitation.

The only prerequisite was that they could absolutely obey the command structure of the army. If they defied orders or lagged behind, they would lose all the privileges they obtained.

It was somewhat commonplace for an army recruitment to have such conditions, so it was easy for people to underestimate what they were getting themselves into.

But it was fine.

Damien didn't want a ragtag bunch of soldiers. No, he wanted to pick the hidden gems and exposed diamonds out of the crowd and train them into an absolute elite force that couldn't be stopped.

As soon as the recruitment notice went out, Damien focused on preparing the venue for the test and other managerial duties before going through the rest of the meetings he had planned.

That was where his original thought came from.

The people he was meeting with were those squads under the 12 Swords. The current "army" of Void Palace.

They were definitely experts. He could tell that they were battle-hardened and powerful, but they were lacking something special.

They didn't meet his standards, standards set by the people around him and under him.

'It's fine. As long as I instill them with the qualities I want, there won't be a problem.'

Damien grinned.

Nobody knew it but him, the 4 Grand Dukes, and the 12 Swords.

The second the recruitment ended and the foundation of an army was built...

...Damien was going to turn Void Palace into a nightmare.

\*\*\*

The time for recruitment came fast.

The venue was somewhere outside the main palace, a large field that could house several dozens of millions of people.

Yet, this field was filled to the brim, and the surrounding forest was also packed.

Damien may or may not have underestimated the scale of the Heavenly World.

He forgot just how massive this place was.

Even a single principality was larger than a solar system, and unlike a solar system that was mostly made up of empty space, the principalities were covered in inhabitable land from head to toe.

The population of the Brightmoon Principality was relatively small in comparison to the rest, but still, billions of people showed up to answer Damien's call to arms.

The crowd was bustling, conversations taking place all around to speculate what exactly the trials would be and how they would manage to accurately test every contestant here.

However, these people didn't know the man they were being tested by.

He who controlled Existence. He who mastered the Concept of Harmony.

If it was him, the space they currently inhabited could truly become anything.

Damien stood in the air above them and scanned the crowd with his eyes.

'Void Palace will be Void Palace, huh. Despite the size of the crowd, I can hardly sense anyone with bad intentions.'

It was nice to see, but even nicer were some of the peculiar souls he sensed among them.

'This will be a fun test.'

Especially because...

He glanced in a certain direction, at a certain group who was unnoticeable among the massive crowd, even if one paid close attention to them.

'Their disguises are nice, but they can't fool my eyes. I expected those two to come, but to think...'

Damien smiled.

Dominic Void, Darius Void, Yiren Void, and Hestia Void.

All four of his siblings were present, dressed and disguised as common people.

'I was already thinking of training them regardless, so this is great.'

He would get to see their skills, and he would get to see their worth.

They were the ones representing Void Palace's younger generation. There were some promising talents within the Grand Duke Clans as well, who'd been sent to participate in the recruitment by their Clan Heads who were aware of what Damien was planning.

These were people who'd eventually get far harsher training from Damien than anyone else.

Because if they didn't uphold the standard, then nobody would follow it.

They were the faces behind the name, the ones outsiders would use to judge the palace.

'I can hardly wait any longer. I'm really too excited for this.'

Damien clapped his hands together with a smile.

He was tired of waiting. Anyone who hadn't made it by now was just fated to miss the recruitment.

'Well then...'

He looked down at the crowd one final time before snapping his fingers and allowing his laws to work.

'Let's get started, shall we?'

Chapter 1407 Recruitment [4]

Everything changed in that instant.

Damien never revealed himself. The people who came to apply for the army didn't even see a glimpse of his face.

The second he decided that he wanted to start the test, he did, thrusting them into the unknown without any time to prepare.

The entire world changed around them.

'W-what happened?'

A boy stood with legs shaking in the middle of the same field he was in moments prior, however, it was not the same at all.

The sea of people around him, suffocating him and terrifying him, was completely gone. He was left alone in the field, as if everything he knew was an illusion.

'T-that...w-what am I supposed to do?'

His name was Hershel. He didn't have a last name. His parents were commoners from an ancient line, from a time when they weren't allowed such privileges.

They were proud of their identity as farmers. They provided crops that allowed people to live, but they did not feel the need to be validated by the opinions of others.

Therefore, even when they were allowed to have surnames for themselves, they chose to deny that right.

They were a strong people despite being without status or wealth.

However, Hershel was their dark horse.

He was weak, pale as paper, and just as cowardly. He couldn't work the fields, nor could he take part in managerial duties or housework.

He was utterly useless in all aspects.

The family was close-knit. They did not abandon him due to his negative traits. Rather, they tried to help him look for other avenues to succeed in.

Sometimes, people born with his physique could thrive in the arts, while some others would find themselves specializing in niche and unique trades.

Unfortunately, Hershel wasn't one of them.

He was talentless in every aspect.

So he had no choice but to rot at home.

He saw the recruitment notice during another day of doing nothing in particular. He knew he didn't really have a chance, but he had nothing better to do.

And the opportunity to see the people who were born with all the talent he lacked wasn't something he wanted to miss.

Such a rapid change terrified him, but he gritted his teeth and kept himself standing with the strength of his negligible willpower.

As he glanced around to try and understand anything, a blue holographic screen appeared in front of him.

[Welcome!]

The first message was simple. When the screen registered that he'd seen it, the message changed.

[This recruitment test will be broken into three segments that can be taken in any order. You will have 10 minutes to rest between segments. If at any time you wish to quit, shout, "I surrender!" and you will be transported to a safe location.]

[Our Void Palace is looking for elites. Keep in mind that these tests will not be easy, nor will they be safe. You will have to risk your sanity, perhaps even your life, if you wish to pass. Quitting is not a shameful thing, but you will not be given a second chance once you do so.]

[In the next 5 minutes, please pick which section you wish to begin with. If a choice is not made in that time, one will be made for you.]

One after another, the messages appeared. Not just in front of Hershel, but in front of every participant in the test.

There was no doubt several hundred, thousands, or perhaps even millions had quit by now, but those who decided to continue after hearing the ominous warnings of the holographic screen found themselves faced with a choice.



[Mind]

[Body]

[Soul]

Three sections that would have three different tears.

Hershel looked between them, biting his lip.

'I...'

He didn't know what to pick.

He didn't think he'd be given a question like this, nor did he think the test would take place in this kind of format.

But isolation wasn't always a bad thing.

To Hershel, it was a relief, because he didn't have to embarrass himself in front of the world.

He was so scared he was about to collapse. The warnings only made his fear worse.

There was a chance he could die?

Like hell he wanted to risk his life!

He could hardly hold a shovel properly, let alone a sword. What was he ever thinking about coming for an army recruitment test?!

'But...'

His mind wandered to dreams of glory, of worth.

He'd never been able to do anything. He'd always been trash that burdened the people around him. They might not have shown it, but he was painfully aware of his position.

He didn't want to disappoint them. He didn't have a choice until now, because no matter what he tried, he always failed.

But, he always tried regardless.

No matter how many times he failed, he wanted to keep trying until he found something he could do.

'Maybe I'll fail, but...!'

...he didn't want to fail without at least trying.

He closed his eyes shut tight, gritted his teeth, and forced his finger to move forward and choose one of the three options.

It was a random choice, but it was the choice he made.

[Soul]

The option glowed bright green and the scenery changed.

The first test had begun.

\*\*\*

'Everyone's gone.'

Dominic glanced around with wary eyes. The scenery looked the exact same as it did before, but it was different at the same time.

It was hard to ignore the obvious. He'd been transported into a different space. After seeing billions of people disappear, nobody would miss that fact.

But they probably wouldn't realize what it took to pull off something like this.

'Is this First Brother's power?'

He couldn't be sure of it, but he knew exactly who was recruiting right now.

'The 12 Swords are extremely skilled in spatial manipulation, but this is more than just creating multiple billions of subspaces. This is like...'

Dominic's expression hardened.

'...reality itself has been altered.'

That was why it felt so natural despite obviously being an illusion.

"Hmm..."

Dominic took his attention off the environment and finally looked at the screen hovering before him.

[Welcome! This space has been created specifically to test you, Dominic Void. Did you think you could hide from me with a shoddy disguise like that? Anyway, have some fun with the tests everyone else is taking for a bit, and I'll be with you shortly. If you aren't confident, then leave now, because if you can't live up to my expectations...it'll really fucking hurt. Welp, that's all I wanted to say, so hand tight. Adios!]

"..."

"For some reason, this feels targeted."

He soon saw the options others got, the same ones Hershel was viewing at the same time, but he couldn't get his mind off that first provocation.

"He didn't just know we were here, he happily accepted our presence for this exact purpose."

Dominic wasn't one to fall for such cheap provocation, and neither was Hestia, but...

'...I can't say the same for the rest.'

Dominic thought over it for a moment, making full use of the five minutes he was given.

"He must be testing the younger generation."

If they were going to represent Void Palace, they needed to do it properly. Judging by their First Brother's personality that had been exhibited over the past week or so, he wasn't someone who could be taken lightly.

So the main test really was just an appetizer.

Whatever the personalized test that came after was...

'...I really can't tell whether or not I should look forward to it.'

Chapter 1408 Recruitment [5]

Talent couldn't be judged easily.

Some people had obvious talents, like Celeste from the Veritas Clan, but not everyone's talent stemmed from a great bloodline, physique, or affinity.

Talent came in many forms, to the point where it was rarer to find someone without any talents than someone with one.

Therefore, Damien didn't make his tests where only the strong could win. It wasn't a place where obvious talents would shine, for those didn't need his light.

The three tests were based on three aspects Damien considered important for troops under him. They didn't have to fit all of them perfectly to be accepted. They didn't even have to pass one. But everything from the way they went about their tests to the order they took them in gave Damien ideas on who fit his requirements.

Hershel's first test was soul.

His body and mind disappeared, and his soul was temporarily erased of all ego.

It was then placed in a new body, the body of a man with great power.

When Hershel opened his eyes, he was left with nothing more than his base instincts.

"Where am I?"

He didn't stutter anymore, for the fears of his mind were gone.

However, his curious tone and slight wariness towards everything were still absolutely present.

He stood up, getting off the rickety straw bed he was lying on, and walked out of the small, wooden room he was in.

He found himself in a city, bustling with life in every way.

Stalls lined the streets selling assorted snacks and markets were open everywhere, crowded with people going about their days.

Hershel walked through the city without knowing what to think. He didn't know who he was or where he was, but his first instinct was to look around and see what he could gather.

But what was there to gather?

No matter who he asked, nobody knew who he was. No matter what he did, nobody came after him.

It was like his presence only half existed in this world.

But despite his state, he could still feel it.

The mana coursing through his veins.

It was plentiful. He felt like he could level the city with a single flick of his finger.

It was calm now, flowing smoothly like a stream, but the second he decided to mobilize it, it would become a weapon of absolute destruction.

That ferociousness hidden in the mana was enough of an indicator of the type of life he lived.

But he didn't remember it, nor could he associate himself with such a persona.

He walked until the sun went over the horizon. He didn't have money, but a few kinder stall owners assisted him and gave him meals when they noticed his aimless expression.

The sun came and went to show the passing of time. Hershel continued to wander the city, and eventually, his face became one remembered by the residents.

He didn't do much. He spent every day simply wandering, going about the same aimless routine, but something about him drew people towards him.

He developed a slight attachment to the place.

It was a good city filled with good feeling.

But the power rushing through his veins kept begging him to take it down.

Every time he saw injustice, every time he saw unfairness, he realized he was above these people.

Because the second he unleashed himself, everything here could be his.

Any problem could be solved, any woman could be his, and any luxury became dirt.

He felt the itch in his fingers.

The itch to dominate.

The itch to kill.

BOOM!

A loud bang broke him out of his unstable state.

His head snapped in that direction, and he immediately saw the massive fire enveloping the guard walls.

Before he knew what was happening, he was already rushing over.

Past families desperately protecting their children, past homes being engulfed in flames, and past the bodies of guards who died in combat, he ran.

Until he reached the edge of the guard wall, the opening that had been created by the explosion.

'They're fighting. No, they're being massacred.'

The guards were surely mana users. They were powerful enough to be tasked with protecting such a big city, but they weren't nearly enough to fight those who attacked them.

'The enemy group has roughly 100 members, but they are all powerful enough to slaughter the people here in no time.'

He didn't realize how fast he summarized the situation.

The city wasn't strong enough to fight these people back, even if there were only one hundred of them.

He had the power to fight them and win if he wanted to, but he would probably sustain critical injuries in the process.

He was left with three options.

He could fight. He could protect the city and the people living within it, if only at the cost of his health.



He could run. The city would be destroyed and the people would either die or be enslaved, but he would live.

Or he could dominate. The city would be injured but not conquered, the enemy force would be eliminated, and he'd gain control over the people.

But the last option required him to throw away his morals and conquer through fear, becoming a ruler by subjugating and plundering everything the city had.

There was no other option. Hershel could feel it instinctively. He wasn't allowed to choose a fourth path.

He didn't want to run.

His soul was itching for blood, so he had to choose either the first or third choice.

Did he want to be righteous, or did he want to be corrupt?

Whichever one he chose, the people would still live as he intended. The only difference was the amount of power he held, the kind of person he would be.

This moment felt definitive. He felt like he had to choose without an ounce of hesitation.

It was difficult.

With the power he had, the third option seemed tempting. The more he thought about it, the more the feeling of power and domination seduced him.

His greed reached an all-time high. He forgot about the people who'd treated him well, and he'd forgotten about the city where he made his home after losing his everything.

He only thought about personal gains.

The opportunity to become great.

The opportunity to have everything.

He stepped forward.

His choice had been made.

"I..."

Hershel spoke out loud for no particular reason other than his own satisfaction.

He drew the sword that appeared on his hip before he even realized it wasn't meant to be there.

"...will fight."

He would not abandon his morals for greatness. He wanted blood, but he didn't want it from innocents.

Something in his soul was absolutely repulsed by the thought.

He would fight for the people. He would be injured, sure, but it was fine as long as he didn't die.

His feet followed his will. He moved one step after the other, until he was already in the midst of the enemy, his sword already slashing.

The cuts and gashes accumulated on his body. His blood painted the ground. But his enemies fell one by one. Their heads accompanied his blood.

He practically lost sight of reality within the pain, killing just to kill, only regaining his senses when the deed was already done.

He kneeled in a river of blood, a hundred headless bodies surrounding his person.

And as his blood dripped down to join theirs in a picture of brutality, he collapsed to the ground.

The last thing he saw as his consciousness faded was the sight of tens of guards rushing towards his falling body.

Chapter 1409 Recruitment [6]

When the contestants saw the word "soul" on the test segments, they all had pretty much the same thought.

The power of the soul. Something that could be considered the quality of a Divinity.

Some people had extremely powerful souls since birth, like Damien, and those people had talent beyond talent. They could comprehend a hundred things for every one thing comprehended by an average genius.

These people were highly valued by any influence, and above all, if their soul had a specialized quality that leaned towards a specific law...

Nothing else needed to be said. All sects and influences tested people's souls to look for this exact quality, because it wasn't something that could be seen with the human eye.

However, they were wrong. Damien's eyes weren't like the usual person. He could see the things they couldn't, so he had no need to test for soul quality.

The purpose of his test was character.

No matter what kind of character one developed through their lifetime, the effect of ego wasn't as high as one would expect. The core qualities of an individual would be burned onto their soul, becoming something that absolutely wouldn't change no matter the circumstance.

For Damien, these were things like his desire for freedom.

Damien didn't care about their alignment. Good and evil hardly ever had enough severity to judge a person in this world.

Whether they were good or evil, whether they were motivated by justice or fame, what Damien wanted to know was how they'd act in the critical moment, what side they'd show when they were put in an unstable position.

Therefore, he allowed them to become acquainted with the people of the city. For some, they even built full lives among the people there.

And then, he gave them an ultimatum.

Fight.

Run.

Or dominate.

There was obviously only one right answer

The option to flee existed to weed out cowards.

The option to dominate existed to weed out those with self-destructive greed.

However, the option to fight didn't manifest the same for everybody.

For Hershel, it was the desire to save the innocent.

For Dominic, it was the desire to protect his family.

For others, it was the desire to gain fame, the desire to be a hero, and even the desire to earn a reward. The intent behind the decision changed from person to person.

It didn't matter what their intent was. They all answered correctly.

Because at the core of their soul, they chose protecting the city as the method to achieve their goals.

Even those who wanted money chose to earn it by saving the city, rather than plundering or conquering it.

The test of soul was to find people who wouldn't turn their backs on Void Palace even in the direst of circumstances, as well as those who could properly carry the palace's name without tarnishing it.

Character was an important determiner in decision-making that most people didn't judge, but Damien didn't care about talent that came at the expense of others' well-being.

The soul test eliminates tens of millions of participants. They did not have the option to lie. The decision Damien gave them was guided by their egoless souls that didn't have the ability to entertain complex thoughts.

They couldn't hide their true nature before Damien.

It culled roughly a third of the crowd that had gathered.

But it was only one of three tests.

\*\*\*

Hershel never woke up in that strange body again. He never got to see the results of his choice.

The second he fell unconscious in the illusionary world, his soul was slingshotted back into his own body, his ego returned to its proper position.

He woke up 13 hours later, his mind in a state of confusion.

'I...where am I...?'

His soul remembered his brief stint in another life, but his mind held no memories of it.

'I...I am...'

He struggled for a moment, wrestling with the feeling of dissonance within him.

However, a few moments later, the land around him shone gold, and a soothing fluctuation enveloped him.

The dissonance slowly faded, allowing Hershel to regain stability.

"Haa...haa...haa..."

He breathed heavily, steadying himself. Standing up, he noticed that he was still in the same strange space, the field empty of people.

In front of him, the holographic screen only had two remaining options.

[Mind]

[Body]

"Did I...pass...?"

Hershel's eyes widened into saucers.

He fell on his rear, backing up as if he was being chased by something terrifying.

"I passed...? I actually passed...?!"

He didn't remember the trial, but he knew he'd taken it. He didn't know what he did there, but he was certain it was horrifying.

"Just...what happened?!"

He was baffled, to say the least.

He quite literally didn't know how to react, and in his clumsy attempt to stand back up...

"...ah."

He accidentally pressed forward and chose another test.

[Body]

The ground lit up again, and before he knew it, Hershel had been transported to a new realm.

He didn't even get to use the 10 minutes of rest allowed to him by the trial.

It was red in every direction. The earth below, the skies above, and even the clouds that drifted between. Everything was red, crimson like blood.

Hershel looked around to gain information about his surroundings before another holographic screen appeared in his eyes.

[Choose your weapon]

A sword, a shield, a spear, a bow, a dagger, a hammer, and several other weapons appeared in holographic form.

[Once you grab hold of a weapon, you will not be able to change your selection. Choose wisely.]

Hershel looked through his choices. He'd never used a weapon before, since they were too heavy for him to carry, but he felt like he had to choose something here.

Otherwise, he'd surely die.

"Strong people usually use swords, right...?"

He questioned himself. Most of those gathered in the field were using swords, so he had a misconception about weapons, but it didn't really matter.

Hershel chose a pair of twin daggers, because it was the only weapon he was confident in being able to carry.

[Your weapon has been chosen. The trial will begin now.]

A new message appeared, and along with it, all holograms present in the surroundings disappeared.



RUMBLE!

The ground rumbled. The thumping of a stampede appeared in the distance.

The ground wasn't flat. The environment was more mountainous. However, Hershel appeared somewhere near the peak of one of said mountains, so he could see it in the distance.

Hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of beasts charged in a massive horde, aimed straight in his direction.

They weren't all the same species. There were some as small as a dog and others as large as a dragon. However, they all ran with the same expression in their eyes, as if they'd found their shared worst enemy.

'That expression...'

Hershel felt a chill run down his spine.

'...it isn't aimed at me, is it?'

He was truly an unfortunate boy.

Because no matter how much he wanted to deny it, he knew.

It was.

All that hatred was meant for him.

And if he didn't face those beasts today, if he didn't win...

This would be his grave.

End of story.

Chapter 1410 Recruitment [7]

The first thing Hershel did was simple.

He ran.

He ran until he reached the peak of the mountain and had a clear view of the entire biome.

This trial was one he was aware of, unlike the trial of soul. He was completely present in the head, and because of that, his instinct had changed from fighting to fleeing.

However, as he did so, he eventually realized that it was impossible for him to run away.

This was a test, not a natural encounter. No matter where he went or what he did, the beast tide would eventually reach his position, and he'd have no choice but to fight it.

Hershel was a coward. It was natural for him to be one, because if there was one thing he hadn't tried in this life, it was battle.

He didn't have anything close to the opportunity. With his weak constitution and tendency to freeze up during confrontation, he would die the instant he tried to fight, so neither he nor his family ever even considered the possibility that his talent was there.

But since he'd been thrown into this situation, since he'd confronted the beast tide and come to the understanding that it was his enemy, his mind...

'...is strangely calm.'

He was calmer than when he was transported to the strange space with the screen. No, he was calmer than he'd ever been before in his entire life.

There was a scent of blood lingering in the air, as if battle was commonplace in this plane. Something about that smell spoke to him.

The version of him that existed in the soul trial.

It didn't just have the desire to protect the innocent. It had one other defining quality.

A thirst for blood.

It was a miracle that Hershel hadn't realized it before. Perhaps it was because his personality had developed into such a passive one, but somehow, his bloodlust had never manifested in real life.

But it was ever-present.

Now that Hershel was on the battlefield, his senses were at their most sensitive, he had one dagger strapped on his hip and the other in hand, since he knew he didn't have the technique to use them together.

Standing on the mountain peak, gazing at the approaching beast tide, he made several judgements, each ending in the same conclusion.

'It will reach me in three hours.'

He had three hours to prepare for the beast tide. Whether it be through developing his own strength somehow or using his brain, he had to find a way to beat it.

'What if I...'

He instantly ignored the first thought that came to mind. It was insane to even consider.

'Then, maybe I should...'

'What about...'

'No. It's all stupid.'

It was a test rigged against him from the start. He was a country boy who'd known nothing but the farm his entire life. He was a useless person who'd never even been within a hundred meters of a battlefield.

Even the forests where the village people gained their meat he steered clear of.

So how was he supposed to find a way to defeat a beast tide?

It was stupid to even ask.

He would die here if he confronted it.

'I have no choice!'

His thoughts returned to fleeing.

He looked around for a method, a route he could take to run and hide from the tide, a place they couldn't find him.

When suddenly...

"Kekekeke...."

A laugh from the rear.

He whipped around quickly, grabbing hold of his knife with both hands, trying his best to stabilize it in his grasp.

He almost laughed at himself.

It was a single goblin. Small, green, and with eyes full of malice, it pointed its knife at him.

"Are you provoking me...?" Hershel asked.

"Kekekeke...!"

The goblin could only laugh. It didn't know human language. But the look in its eyes made it clear enough.

Despite the fact that Hershel was at least twice its size, despite the fact that he was armed, it still chose to face him.

Because he was determined as weak prey.

"KEHAAAA!"

The goblin let out a strange cry and charged forward. It raised its knife and stabbed toward Hershel's thigh,

Hershel's eyes widened.

'W-what...?!'

He didn't expect it to attack.

He moved his feet to quickly dodge.

No, he tried to.

'M-my feet...? My body...?'

It wouldn't move as he wanted it to.

A single mountain had rooted him in place, his fear too strong for his body to act otherwise.

Shik!

"ARRRGH!"

Hershel yelled out in pain as the goblin's knife sunk into his thigh.

Shik!

Shik!

Shik!



Three more stabs, two in his stomach and another in his other thigh.

Blood gushed out of Hershel's body like a foundation, and his screams made the quiet mountain atmosphere just a bit livelier.

He was a mortal. He'd never fought before in his life, nor had he practiced with mana.

Hershel could not fight.

He was considering facing a beast tide?

He couldn't even best a single goblin!

'I'm...weak...'

He was loud on the outside, but his thoughts were pathetic.

The goblin didn't kill him either. It stood there, laughing maniacally as it watched him bleed out.

'I'm...dead.'

Hershel knew what was coming,

But he couldn't let it happen so easily.

'To...a goblin...?'

Even a ten-year-old child could defeat a goblin.

Yet, he was being manhandled by that same goblin?

He didn't care if he was weak or talentless. He didn't care about any of that.

But he couldn't lose here.

Not after passing the first test, not without a chance to fight back.

He couldn't die here.

'I can't...!'

His mind went black.

Crimson fury overtook his emotions.

He raised his eyes at the goblin in front of him. He was foaming at the mouth, and the sounds coming from his throat were less than human.

He couldn't stand up. His legs were too injured.

But his arms...

"GRAH!"

He grabbed the goblin's leg.

His knives were gone, confiscated by the creature.

But he needed to attack somehow.

Before the goblin could adapt to the current circumstances, he dragged his body forward.

He pulled with all his strength, knocking the goblin off balance.

And...

"RAAAAAAAH!"

He bit down on its leg.

"KIEEEEEK!"

The goblin screamed in pain, hurriedly stabbing him to get him off.

But Hershel didn't pay attention to its blade.

He ripped off the goblin's skin with his teeth. He bit into its muscles and tore its leg apart before crawling towards its neck, his intent clear.

Even if he died here, he would kill the goblin.

He didn't care how weak he was.

He would do it.

One arm before the other. He crawled, dragging his limp body behind him.

He only needed to move a few feet. The goblin was also bleeding out now. He could do it.

"KIEEEEEK!"

SHIK!

SHIK!

SHIK!

SHIK!

The goblin wasn't playing around anymore. It repeatedly stabbed Hershel in the back as he approached, drawing more and more blood and turning Hershel's internal body into a mess.

However, by some miracle, Hershel continued to move.

Until he was near the goblin's neck.

He opened his mouth and bit down with as much force as possible.

He raised his arm and shoved the goblin's head into the ground, blocking its movements.

And he turned into a beast.

He bit anything he could get his teeth on. He ripped skin and tore flesh, turning his face and torso into a mess of goblin blood.

It was almost over.

He was almost there.

But he didn't have any steam left.

He'd been stabbed over twenty times. He had already run out of blood.

Yet, the expression on his face was a massive grin.

Because regardless of his inevitable death, that goblin was coming with him.

He forgot about the beast tide. He forgot about the trial.

The only thing that mattered was his enemy, the enemy he defeated.

Somewhere, hidden in the folds of reality, Damien grinned.

'This kid...'

His eyes were on a certain dead body that was currently in the process of being reanimated.

'...has some insane potential.'