

## Void 1411

Chapter 1411 Recruitment [8]

Hershel finished the trial of body after experiencing death for the first time.

But his reaction wasn't what one expected.

He was on the floor, holding his head and rocking back and forth. He had the qualities of someone who was going to go insane, but his mind was actually torn.

On one hand, the feeling of death terrified him. It made him feel cold and empty. It was a void that he absolutely wanted to avoid, however, it was also strangely comforting.

That scared him even more. Why would he feel such a thing from death? As if it was family, as if it was something for him to love.

He didn't know what to think of himself, and every time he thought back to the feeling of that goblin's knife digging into his body, he got phantom pains that reminded him of the experience.

However, he was also somewhat calm.

His own actions in that moment were immensely surprising as well.

He didn't think he was capable of something like that, but when he was put in a situation where his life was in danger, his fear and anxiety completely disappeared.

The only thing that remained was his desire to kill. He didn't care if he died. He only wanted to kill his enemy.

Was he someone like that?

Was he born for war?

But if that was the case, why would the heavens birth him with such a weak body?

He didn't know how to explain it, but he felt more comfortable in his skin when he was entangled in a life-threatening battle than he ever had before.

Hershel spent his ten minutes of free time introspecting. He wanted to understand himself better, but he simply didn't have the ability to do so.

He hadn't seen enough of the world to put himself in any specific category. He only knew he wasn't part of the same group the rest of his family was in.

Though, the fact that he'd gone through two trials and still existed in the trial space gave him some confidence. He didn't expect to pass twice, he didn't even expect to pass once, but since he'd done it, wasn't it better to do it all the way?

Of course, the doubt that he didn't pass at all and the trial was just continuing for the sake of continuing definitely appeared in his mind, but he ignored it.

He'd always been pessimistic. He'd never allowed himself to think he had talent or potential in any aspect.

However, in this situation, he didn't want to think that way. He wanted to do his absolute best, and that feeling only got more prominent with the passing of time.

Hershel entered the trial of mind with far more confidence than he showed when the recruitment test began.

And the trial of mind was one that required confidence.

The trial of soul tested character.

The trial of body tested instinct.

And the trial of mind tested will.

The will to persevere, the will to survive, even in the direst of circumstances.

It was a two-part trial. In the first, the participant would be placed in a simulated version of the First Dungeon for several weeks.

Afterward, they'd be influenced to escape on a path that opened up to them and they'd be saved by a mysterious force.

However, that force wasn't a savior at all. The participants who just tasted freedom again would be tortured for information about things they held dear.

If they lost the determination to survive and allowed themselves to die in the first half, they'd fail. If they gave up any information in the second half, they would fail.

Just like the other trials, there were several nuances that allowed Damien to judge the participants for more than just their surface-level qualities.

Hershel was a person who gave up several times in the First Dungeon, just as Damien had.

However, just like Damien, he had a propensity towards madness. He allowed that madness to drive him, and eventually, he gained the will to survive.

He survived for one week, he survived for two, and eventually, he started proactively challenging the dungeon instead of hiding around.

That was about the time when he was saved and tortured.

His response was driven by what he'd experienced thus far.

Pain, fear, and anxiety became nothing more than enemies for him to kill.

Rather than feeling those things when he was tortured, his anger grew.

Rage towards those who didn't want him to progress, hatred for those who inhibited his growth. Those feelings usurped all others and left him as a true berserker.

No matter what kind of questioning he was given, no matter how he was tortured, he persevered.

It was to the point where Damien became interested.

He gave Hershel a chance.

He altered the trial, giving Hershel the ability to escape his entrapment. He wanted to see what the boy would do with his newfound freedom.

And the answer was more than just satisfying.

Hershel immediately lashed out at his kidnappers. He killed and killed until the entire organization was gone, leaving only him.

And when he was done, he returned to the dungeon.

'The will to grow stronger...'

It was something not many had to this level.

Damien could tell.

This boy would do anything if it meant he could be strong and useful, but he had a moral compass that kept him away from self-destructive greed.

The boy's body was weak, but his mind was strong. As long as Damien gave him the opportunity...

'...he'll grow into a monster.'

Damien grinned.

This was a true diamond in the rough.

Hershel had no redeeming qualities to others. Because of his lack of talent, the mental aspect in which he excelled meant nothing.

But talent was something Damien could provide, so Hershel's base traits didn't mean anything.

'This is what I was looking for.'

Rather than someone who could obviously grow, Damien wanted people who would grow even if the heavens disallowed them.

'It's not just him. Void Palace has a great atmosphere. Multiple people with that kind of mentality have been born here.'

Billions appeared for recruitment, but the ones Damien paid attention to numbered no more than 10,000.

Each of them had the talent to become an elite.

They were the ones he wanted in his army.

'It's a good number. When we started, I didn't expect more than a thousand of them to be worth fostering, so I'm more than happy with this result.'

Damien smiled.

He was using clones to watch each and every trial simultaneously, but his main body was having more fun than all of them combined.

'I've tested all the geniuses from the Grand Duke Clans. They aren't bad, but they aren't quite up to standard yet. On the bright side, the fun part is only just beginning.'

Damien's main body had finally arrived in front of the first of his siblings.

Dominic Void. He'd finished his trials and spent a few hours regaining his strength. Since he seemed more than ready...

'...I'm going to beat the shit out of him.'

That was a bit harsh.

Damien was going to test Dominic to see what level he'd reached.

'No, I'm going to beat the shit out of him.'

Harsh was the right word, but that didn't change anything.

Damien was really going to beat the shit out of him.

## Chapter 1412 Recruitment [9]

Frankly, Dominic was amazed.

He was hyper-aware of the trial he was taking, so other than the soul segment, he saw through the rest pretty easily.

He still had to take the trials properly, but while doing so, he was infinitely surprised by the amount of control Damien had over his abilities.

This wasn't at the level of someone who'd newly ascended to Divinity, especially not one who came from the lower universe.

No, the ability to do something like this was past the realm of Demigods entirely. This wasn't just talent or genius, this was an absolute monstrosity in the form of a human.

But that wasn't as terrifying as it sounded.

Because this monstrosity was his brother. He was a man who strived for Void Palace's success and growth. The fact that he was a monster meant that these goals were absolutely attainable as long as he sat at the head of the palace.

It was comforting in a sense, but Dominic wasn't allowed to keep that feeling for long.

"Yo, long time no see."

A voice appeared out of nowhere, forcing Dominic on alert.

He whipped his head to find the very man he was just thinking about.

"First Brother."

His greeting was succinct and a bit cold. He wanted to be friendly, but something told him Damien wasn't here for friendly purposes.

No, not something. Damien himself made it clear with that first message!

'He is here to fight.'

Dominic didn't need long to understand what was happening. His personal test would be a spar, and if he didn't succeed...

'Considering the type of things this man put in the recruitment trial for the army, the things that would happen to me are likely unthinkable.'

Dominic raised his guard and drew his sword.

"Good. You reached faster than everyone else, at least."

Damien's demeanor wasn't like usual.

He wanted to appear as an enemy. He couldn't have Dominic thinking this was a friendly spar between brothers.

No, Dominic was being tested for his worth. If he didn't meet the expectations set for him, then he would be deemed unfit to represent Void Palace.

Damien was usually an easygoing person.

He never showed much emotion externally, keeping the same light and casual demeanor regardless of the situation.

However, his thoughts weren't the same as the way he expressed them.

He was a man who took the things he did absolutely seriously. He never wanted himself to be the reason plans fell through and moves couldn't be made, so he never let variables he could see out of his sight.

His siblings were currently a variable.

He wanted to get close to them and treat them as true family, but that wasn't a privilege allowed to them yet.

When Void Palace was settled, he could enjoy the new home he'd received, but not now.

He wasn't Damien Void, son and brother. He was Damien Void, Young Lord of Void Palace.

He was going to bring this home of his to its peak, so it could never be provoked again.

Dominic's expression became more serious as Damien silently stared at him. It was as if all of those feelings were being transmitted to him clear as day, and he was being forced to accept them.

'He has no openings.'

Dominic refocused his attention on the battle at hand.

There was only one thing in his mind.

'I have to win.'

He was facing an opponent who, while standing completely still, made it clear that he couldn't be touched.

This was someone above his caliber in every aspect, but he still had to find a way to win.

'The only thing I can do is try.'

He would put together the very best of his abilities. That way, even if he lost, it was a loss he deserved.

Taking a deep breath, Dominic raised his sword into position and hardened his will.

'Sword of Severance.'

The first of Void Palace's 16 Swords of Heaven.

It was a sword meant for only one purpose. To sever everything in its path.

Void Palace's techniques didn't just involve space. While it was known for its spatial laws, it was an influence with a variety of specialties.

Dante excelled in Space Laws, but he didn't have much talent in others. However, the Krone Clan was one known for its time manipulation abilities.

With Ellowyn's Creation, Hugo's Death, and Solstice's Fire and Ice, the 16 Swords of Heaven were created, a comprehensive technique that encompassed countless laws and could be used by anyone granted the authority to do so.

The first technique, Severance, did not have a specific law bound to it. Rather, it was flexible, able to cut "anything" the user was able to cut.

For Dominic, who was a descendant of Void and Krone, it was Space and Time.

The imaginary world wobbled. Its simulated reality was cut in half as its space and time were forced apart.

A torrent of sword energy like a charging beast rushed in Damien's direction at full speed, ripping apart anything in its path.

It was translucent. When Damien looked into it, he could see the laws intertwining to create the aforementioned effect.

'It's not bad. To keep space and time in harmony like this without tethering them is impressive, but...'

Damien pushed his hand forward. A pulse of an unknown law pushed through the air and confronted the sword energy.

CRASH!

Under its influence, the energy shattered into thousands of pieces, fluttering to the ground harmlessly.

'...it's not enough.'

Damien had the same blood as them, at least on one side.

He knew exactly what the blood of the Void Clan could do. This was definitely impressive when compared against other geniuses in the same age and talent group, but it wasn't what he was looking for.

Damien was aware he was an outlier. He never held another person to his standard.

However, people twice their age and with thousands of times the opportunity had to at least match up to his wives, right?

With what he just showed, any of the four could beat him in less than ten moves.

"Is this all you can do?" Damien asked, his tone bland and expressionless.

Dominic's eyes sharpened.

"Not even close."

The first sword was a probe. Damien's strength couldn't be measured, which he understood before the battle even began, but he at least wanted to see what he was up against before facing it.

Now, he was even more aware than ever before.

'It's a distance that can't be crossed. Whether it be the law he's using or his comprehension of it, they're all above what I have.'

Beating Damien was impossible. If Dominic couldn't recognize this after that move, he was just plain stupid.

However, he didn't have to beat Damien to win.

'I just need to exceed his expectations.'

And for that purpose...

'The 16 Swords of Heaven aren't enough.'

He had to throw away the things he thought were common sense and go all out from the start.

"Huu..."

His eyes changed again.

They'd been serious from the start, but they contained a different light now.

'Four Seasons Sword Technique...'

His sword was raised in a different posture now, and the aura radiating from it held a completely unique sense of danger.

Dominic closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and opened them once more.

His sword slashed forward, a simple vertical slash that even a baby could follow.

However, a monstrous amount of unknown power was hidden within.

The entire imaginary world changed as the sword technique was released.

A flurry of wind enveloped all things.

'...Spring.'

Chapter 1413 Test [1]

The Four Seasons Sword Technique did not belong to Void Palace.

Instead, it was the unique skill of the Krone Clan, a comprehensive representation of their understanding of Time Laws.

It was, as its name implies, split into four techniques, each with a power different from its peers.

Spring was the first of those techniques.

It represented the season of rising. A season of birth, a season of light, a season of life.

Spring was the start of the cycle, the blooming of all things that grew.

In relation to time, spring represented the way time allowed living beings to flourish.

The concepts were vague. They didn't really represent Time Laws in the way most people viewed them, but it was absolutely powered by time.

The surrounding flora came to life, growing and thriving as if they'd been given loads of vitality they had never possessed before.

'Interesting...'

Damien didn't have a hard time comprehending it. Time was one of his main laws along with space. Even before he started pursuing the entirety of existence, he'd been looking to reach the peak of it.

'Is it being accelerated? It seems like it should be more complex than that.'

Damien could see how the environment was being affected by the technique. He completely comprehended how it affected other things, but he didn't really get it.

'This doesn't seem like an offensive technique.'

Damien himself wasn't being targeted by the effects of the acceleration. If he was, it would have helped him rather than harmed him.

So what was the technique supposed to be used for?

'Oh?'

It seemed Damien didn't have to search very hard for the answer.

Within seconds, the area was filled with massive plants grown by the sword wind Dominic produced. These plants were far larger than their peers, and the powerful aura they radiated was beyond anything a plant without sentience could have.

Those plants were soon taken apart by the sword wind and incorporated, becoming a part of its power.

That was when the attack truly began.

'A blossoming wind...'

'I see.'

Damien smiled in understanding.

It was all an illusion.

The grandiose scene he was witnessing only existed to fool the enemy.

'While you sit around and wait, wary of the storm around you, the flora that is touched by accelerated time becomes a range of weapons that will attack you from the shadows.'

That was Spring.

It was the beginning of the year, a time to understand how the remaining seasons would be.

It was a probe. If the enemy fell for this technique, they weren't worthy of facing the remaining seasons. However, if they could see through it, then the time they took to do so and the way they responded could be used to determine how future combat would be done.

'Smart. He knows he has to go all-out against me if he wants to stand a chance, but he refuses to rush in without any information. My last attack didn't give him anything besides a rough overview of my power, so he's using this to gain more information in that direction.'

Spring wasn't a weak technique. Just because it was illusionary didn't mean it couldn't kill.

The sword wind that swirled in a tornado around Damien was filled with sharp blossoms of sword energy and Time Laws that could cut down any weaker enemy. If they were struck by the laws and had their time accelerated, their balance would be thrown off and Dominic would gain an opportunity to make a decisive move.

Unfortunately, Damien wasn't going to fall for any of it.

He dissected the technique and understood its essence.

'But since I'm testing you, I'll give you what you want.'

Unless the enemy was someone Dominic couldn't hope to defeat, they wouldn't react like Damien did, so it was better to see how Dominic would react if his plan succeeded.

VOOM!

Damien allowed his aura to flare, becoming a shield around his body.

His usual existence was somewhat separated from reality. Dominic wouldn't be able to strike him unless he allowed it.

Therefore, when the shield became material, Damien was finally incorporated with the imaginary world.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The explosions were instant. Damien was finally being struck by the sword wind. The shield was sliced and scratched by countless petals of sword energy, and the longer Damien stood in the midst of the storm, the more energy that assailed him.

Since space and time were the basis of Dominic's strength, Damien used those two laws to counter.

He separated Spacetime, pulling apart reality and banishing the sword energy into the void.

The storm began to die down, but before it could, Dominic had already rushed in.

'Attack.'

That was his thought.

Since Damien could block and banish his sword energy, it was useless to keep pushing with it, but he had to attack regardless.

This was the only opportunity he'd have, and he'd use it to set up an opportunity to unleash Summer.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

The ground was blown to pieces first. Damien's vision was immediately obscured by dust, and Dominic's aura disappeared.

'Sword of Severance.'

Once again, the Sword of Severance appeared.

BANG!

Massive fluctuations of space and time crashed against Damien's shield, making it wobble and become unstable,

'Sword of Hephaestus.'

Rather than a sword, the 5th of the 16 Swords of Heaven was more like a hammer, as per its name. It did blunt damage, shattering anything it came in contact with into thousands of pieces.

Dominic appeared above Damien, in his blind spot, and slammed his sword down with all his strength.

BOOOOOOOM!

Damien's shield instantly shattered, leaving him prey for the countless forces trying to kill him.

However, Dominic didn't keep pushing inward.

He took a step back and prepared his blade once more.

'Four Seasons Sword Technique: Summer.'

The time had come for the second season.

Unlike spring, summer was a time when everything was in full season. It was a season of heat and vitality, and to follow up on spring's acceleration of time, it bent the law and created a strange time flow that not many could survive in.

VOOOOOOM!

The sword was unleashed. The storm created by spring didn't disperse, but it changed subtly, gaining a certain aura that couldn't be pinpointed.

When Damien took down his natural protections to feel the effects of the attack, he was swamped by a feeling similar to heatstroke. His mind went numb, and his body became heavy.

'But if you see it as something simple like heatstroke, you'll die.'

It was another illusion, but this time, it was used to hide a hidden blade.

The "heatstroke" feeling was actually a dissonance in the soul caused by the strange time flow he'd been encompassed in.

If he wasn't able to solve it, his soul and body would be forced into disharmony, and if he didn't die to the Time Laws assaulting him from every side, he'd become a sitting duck for Dominic to behead.

'This isn't how I'm used to seeing time be used. Even though the Krone Clan specializes in time manipulation, they've created a sword technique where time is actually more of a supporting element rather than the main one.'

It was truly a sword technique, not a time technique. Damien respected the ability to separate the two and know which should be prioritized at what moment.

'Most people would be dead by the time these two techniques are finished.'

Dominic's sword was extremely powerful, and he was more than just adept at concealing the true intent of his techniques, which would catch most people by surprise.

If he was out in the world, he would be uncontested as a great genius.

'But we're not going against geniuses.'

Damien wasn't judging Dominic's techniques. Dominic was a good practitioner who didn't skimp on his training, so there was no need to judge him too heavily in that aspect.

The question was...

'...how will he do in a war situation?'

Damien was satisfied with Dominic's cautious yet domineering performance thus far, so he only had one more thing to test.

VOOM!

He instantly dispersed everything Dominic had thrown at him thus far.

And his body separated into countless clones.

A situation where Dominic had to fight against armies on his own...

How would he fare when facing it?

Chapter 1414 Test [2]

Dominic was on the floor within five minutes.

"As expected, this is the level you're at."

Damien stood above him as a single person. He'd already unsummoned all his clones.

"Haa..haahaa"

Dominic naturally couldn't respond. He'd been beaten into the floor by hundreds of Damiens. He was trying his best to regain his breath and process what was going on.

'I've seen what I needed to see.'

Damien didn't come here to really spar with Dominic. He came to see what Dominic's level was.

If they had a full spar, it likely would've ended the same way, but Dominic wouldn't have gone down so fast.

However, this wasn't the time for that.

Damien could see the full extent of Dominic's skills whenever he wanted. He'd be training his brother for the foreseeable future, so that wasn't a problem.

He only needed a few minutes to assess Dominic's abilities.

"First off, I can see that you hold pride in your sword skills," he started, giving a small lecture.

"I'm not a swordsman, so I won't speak too much about it, but it's pretty good from what I've seen. The heights you can reach with sword laws are pretty high, but it's not enough."bender

"You have a lot of control over your laws, but the output is lacking because you haven't delved deeper into the crux of their meaning. From now on, I'll be making sure your laws are up to par, so be prepared for that training."

"Putting aside strength, I like your mentality. It won't be a waste to raise you as a general. I think you can really thrive in a war environment."

Dominic didn't put on a great show against the Damien army, but his decision-making during the fight was memorable.

If he was trained properly, he would truly become a war general beyond any other, someone who could go down in history.

Dominic's strengths were his sword skills, his mentality, his decision-making, and his caution.

Meanwhile, his weaknesses were his laws and lack of practical experience.

Damien nodded.

"Alright. I've pretty much figured out what I want to do with you, so take a minute to rest. You'll be transported back to the main palace when it's over."

"Haahaahaa"

Dominic still couldn't speak, but even if he could, he couldn't argue against Damien.

Everything he said was correct. Dominic also knew his weaknesses. He was a practical person who didn't like to view himself as more than he actually was.

However, the fact that Damien could understand that from so little was amazing.

'No. It's no use being amazed at this point.'

He showed six more of the Swords of Heaven during the latter half of the battle. He didn't get the chance to use Autumn or Winter, which were the true essence of the Four Seasons Sword Technique, but he didn't doubt that it wouldn't have had much of an effect on Damien.

'Our brother truly is the man born to lead our palace.'

It was a foregone conclusion. Dominic only doubted Damien because he didn't know anything. Since he'd personally seen what his brother could accomplish, what complaints could he have?

Only

"Are you going to test the others the same way?" He asked between breaths.

"Of course. Why wouldn't I?" Damien responded.

"I see"

Dominic nodded but didn't speak more.

'My little brother'

He sighed to himself.

'...for your sake, I hope you don't act up.'

Darius was a fanboy. He was concerned about Void Palace so he didn't express it recently, but he'd been Damien's fan for as long as he'd known of his existence.

The problem was

'...if the person he's been deifying approaches him like this'

there was no telling how he'd react.

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Damien didn't go to Darius first.

Instead, it was Hestia who finished the recruitment exam trials first.

Hestia was his youngest sibling. She'd only recently become an adult by earth standards, so Damien naturally didn't have the same high expectations for her as everyone else.

Though, his expectations were still proportionally high for a young practitioner to reach.

Hestia's test lasted far less time than anyone else's.

Because the second Damien reviewed her recruitment exam, he noticed.

'She's not suited for combat.'

Unlike Dominic, Darius, and Yiren, Hestia was completely unsuited for combat.

Unlike others, she passed the trial of soul through mediation.

Since the "battle" to find a way for conflict to end peacefully was considered a true fight in Hestia's soul, the trial allowed it.

Damien didn't know how she managed it even after watching the scene over and over again, but somehow, she managed to placate both groups and find commonality between them. She managed to establish the foundation of what could become a trade agreement after her departure, but of course, the simulated world didn't continue far enough for it to be realized.

The trial of body assigned opponents to participants based on their strength and potential. For Hershel, it was a single goblin, however, for Hestia who'd reached such a high level at a young age, practically a whole swarm of beasts came after her.

And once again, she didn't fight.

She used her environment to her advantage and created traps that took down her enemies. She won through schemes and trickery.

Even during the trial of mind, she used a combination of both methods to persevere. She endured the torture surprisingly well, and she protected Void Palace with her life at stake, but when she was given the chance to escape

'...her first instinct isn't to fight, it's to return to the palace and gather reinforcements to take down the enemy.'

Sure, she was unconventional, but that wasn't a bad thing at all. Everyone had a speciality, and for Hestia, that was not fighting.

lightsvel 'Her mind, on the other hand'

Not just her mind, but her skill in healing and vitality techniques, were extremely valuable.

Damien didn't personally arrive before Hestia. Instead, he gave her a second test. It wasn't combative like the rest.

Her task was to find a way out of an enclosed white room in a set period of time. She wasn't given any clues on how to escape, but she was allowed full use of her mana.

Brute force didn't work, nor did laws of any kind.

Before Damien finished testing the remaining siblings, she had to discover the key to the room's mechanism.

Surprisingly, she accepted the challenge with open arms.

Rather than feeling negative, she was excited about the problem placed in front of her and happily started working on it.

'It's a good mentality.'

Damien was very proud of his youngest sister. Maybe he was being a bit biased, but she really did have the talent to become a genius from the back lines.

'Training her will be far tamer. She just needs knowledge and time and she'll grow into something wonderful. It's the benefit of being young.'

She was a blank canvas, unlike his other siblings.

She just needed to learn and grow.

As for the others

'I have to beat them up until their old habits disappear and instill new ideas into their heads.'

They'd lived plenty of years and were stubborn because of it.

'But that's okay.'

Damien grinned.

'I'd be more than happy to fix your habits.'

Chapter 1415 Dire Situation [1]

After Hestia came Yiren, and after Yiren came Darius.

They were both fighters, so they received the same treatment as Dominic. It didn't end well for either of them.

Yiren was relatively skilled for her age. There was a reason for her arrogance.

Not only did she have good control and understanding of her laws, but she'd also been going in and out of the palace to experience the outside world far more than her siblings, so her practicality and instincts during battle were leagues above her peers.

However, even she had weaknesses. They, of course, weren't to the level that they betrayed Damien's expectations, but Damien was planning to turn Void Palace into something magisterial.

It was only natural for him to bring his siblings past their current level.

Yiren's problems were more mental.

While she excelled in battle, she wasn't very good outside of it. Her tactical thinking when facing multiple enemies was lacking, and she had a tendency to rush into battle without enough caution backing her actions.

Fortunately, these weaknesses were far easier to correct than what Dominic dealt with.

And Darius

Well, Darius was another level.

When Damien appeared and did the same thing to Darius as he did to Dominic and Yiren, the response he received was completely different.

Darius rushed into battle immediately, using the 16 Swords of Heaven to strike Damien down.

Instead of standing in place and dispersing all his attacks, Damien instead chose to teleport, matching Darius' flow and casually dodging.

It infuriated Darius, who acted more on emotion than his other siblings. His attacks became more frenzied and reckless, and he stopped relying on his eyes as much as usual.

Damien was both impressed and disappointed as he entertained Darius.

'His instincts are crazy. He's like a beast who knows exactly when to attack and retreat, exactly where to strike to kill the enemy.'

Darius was amazing in that aspect, and considering his lack of experience outside the palace, he was surprisingly adept at using the environment to his advantage.

He would kick up sand and rock whenever he needed to, and he wasn't afraid to take everything at his disposal and use it to support him, even if that meant taking risks.

However

'He's just not suited for space or time.'

Space and time were both elements with little fluctuation. People who used them needed to make calculations and be perfectly in tune with their flow, otherwise they always ran the risk of ruining themselves.

They needed to be calm. Even if they were reckless in battle, they could never waver in their use of the laws.

Darius was

Well, he didn't fit this criteria.

At some point, he completely threw away space and time, using the 16 Swords of Heaven as a pure sword technique with no other laws supporting it.

'I'm amazed he made it this far. What kind of Divinity did he establish with this kind of suitability?'

His affinities were probably space and time since his parents' genes were incredibly strong. However, there has to be something else, something he'd neglected because it wasn't in line with the family's practices.

Damien opened his eyes wide, focusing on Darius' soul.

He found that space, the place where he tethered his laws together, within Darius' body and peered into it.

'As expected, space and time. There's a surprising hint of destruction, but it isn't enough to be an affinity. It's more like a buff for his other abilities. Aside from that'

It was difficult to search someone else's soul so deeply without being in direct contact with them, so Damien had some trouble finding it.

It was hidden behind the other two since it'd been neglected while they grew for so long, but it was there.

Something fiery, but not fire. It was a greater law, but it had so much resemblance to fire that Damien almost doubted its identity.

'Or maybe'

There was another option too, something Damien never thought possible.

'I should look for it.'

Damien always thought the possibility was out there, but he'd never found evidence to back that thought.

Not until today.

Because inside Darius' soul was a flame unlike any other flame.

It was an inborn Heavenly Flame.

Within Darius' soul, the third-ranked Heavenly Flame, the Sun and Moon Divine Flame, lay in hibernation.

'Holy shit.'

It was more than Damien ever expected to find.

The Sun and Moon Divine Flame was Damien's most coveted Heavenly Flame.

It was a flame with two sides, a two-for-one deal.

The Sun Flame which alit in the day burned brighter than anything else. It was fueled by excitement and acted like a berserker, endlessly growing stronger the longer it was used in battle.

Meanwhile, the Moon Flame came alive in the nighttime. It was a cold, ruthless, and soulless killer that burned a dark blue color. Under a fully grown Moon Flame's soul torture, not even a God could survive.

Both sides had their own advantages and were equally strong. It was a difficult flame to master, but if someone could truly control it, they would become indomitable.bender

'It's not just Fire Laws contained within the flame. It's a mixture of fire, death, light, and several other forces. This is an unexpected boon.'

Damien obviously wanted the Sun and Moon Divine Flame, but he wasn't going to steal it from his brother.

Rather

VOOOOM!

Damien let out a pulse of mana, immediately breaking through Darius' attacks.

lightsnvl "What are!"

"Sleep for a while."

Damien appeared directly in front of him and put his hand on his head.

A fusion of strange laws entered Darius' mind and pushed his mind into a state of sleep. He collapsed onto the ground, and Damien immediately went to work.

"Come out."

A flicker of black flames appeared on his hand.

With a flick of his wrist, Damien sent that flame into Darius' soul.

The Sun and Moon Divine Flame had been suppressed for too long. It couldn't be awakened through normal means.

Therefore, Damien judged that the best way to rapidly awaken it was to feed it.

Traces of all the Heavenly Flames Damien had ever collected, traces of his past Sun Flames and even a part of the Void Flame itself rushed into Darius' soul space and encircled the sleeping Heavenly Flame.

THUMP!

It was like the beating of a heart.

With so much Heavenly Flame aura surrounding it, it was impossible for the Sun and Moon Divine Flame to stay silent.

THUMP!

It beat again.

The flame expanded, encompassing the rest.

They devoured, filling the hunger they'd been suffering from for over a century.

And they thumped again.

Over and over again.

'This is going to be fun.'

Damien grinned.

It seemed Dominic was worried about how his brother would react when Damien appeared, but the result was beyond anyone's expectations.

'There's so much hidden talent in Void Palace.'

It was really a den of dragons.

That fact made Damien infinitely anticipate the future.

Because this was his den of dragons.

This was the homeland of his people.

This was his palace.

'With this, the recruitment part is over.'

'What comes next'

Damien's eyes narrowed.

'...is a shitton of training.'

Chapter 1416 Dire Situation [2]

Something changed in Void Palace after that day.

10,561 candidates passed the recruitment exam out of the almost 5 billion that appeared. Rumors about the harsh exam requirements that even terrified experienced mercenaries spread far and wide, and soon enough, the entirety of the Brightmoon Principality understood that something huge would happen soon.

They also began to wonder about the 10,000 people who passed the exam, but unfortunately, there was no way for them to get news of those people.

Ever since the exam ended, they'd been taken to the main palace, and the main palace had been completely closed off.

There was a strange barrier surrounding its periphery. It was solid, but not opaque. The people could see the main palace that defined the Brightmoon Principality, but more perspective viewers noticed that the palace seemed oddly picturesque and unchanging.

Because, in fact, even the palace they saw was a product of the barrier, an illusion of the main palace.

The true main palace had been entirely sealed, and unknown to everyone outside, it was now existing at a completely different frequency than the outside world.

For every day that passed for the rest of the Heavenly World...

'...a year has passed so quickly.'

It had to be extreme.

Damien wanted to raise an army that would be able to stand proudly in the Heavenly World, which meant they needed to be experts who'd forged their own Divinities by the time war actually broke loose.

They didn't have much time, because Damien was pushing as fast as possible. He had some more stuff to solve before Void Palace's internal situation was completely calmed, but the second he finished those things, it would be time.

They had at most a few months remaining. To make that time meaningful, Damien turned months into centuries, which, with the training plan he'd created for them and the talent they each possessed, would be more than enough time for this army to grow into something formidable.

It had been a year, which meant only a day had passed in the outside world. The news about the recruitment exam hadn't spread yet, but Damien was certain the news about the traitors would make its way to the Divine Order soon enough.

'I have at most ten days before I have to return to the outside world.'

It was a decade he could spend personally training them. After that, he had to trust the remaining experts in the main palace to properly raise them.

'But it's fine. Ten years is plenty of time.'

It would've been, if Damien didn't have over 10,000 people to train.

It took three years just for him to create a personalized training plan for each of them to use after he was no longer present.

For the next five years, he mainly focused on his siblings.

He helped Yiren by setting up illusionary worlds for her to train in.

He continued to give Hestia complex mental puzzles to solve and equated them to real-life situations so she could slowly adapt to her role as a strategist and backline leader.

For Dominic, training was more practical. Damien simply left a clone with him at all times, which would spar him and force him to constantly be wary of attacks, slowly bringing him to the level he needed to reach.

And finally, Darius got training more special than the rest.

"What is your Divinity?"

That was the first question Damien asked.

Before anything else, he needed to know if they had to start over or not.

Darius hesitated for a second.

"Can I tell you honestly?"

It was a secret. Even his mother didn't know the true nature of the Divinity he'd formed.

He always knew he was unsuited for the clan's techniques. He was reckless, but he wasn't dumb. He'd always tried to pursue the clan's teachings, but when he noticed that he was always twisting those techniques to resemble a flame, he began to doubt himself.

Could he continue this way?

Putting aside grand goals like reaching the peak, would he even be able to keep up with his siblings like this?

Those thoughts plagued him until the day he forged his Divinity.

Within the bounds of the law barrier, while he was undergoing his Cosmic Rebirth, he decided to take a chance.

Instead of forming a Divinity based on space and time, he created something else.

"It's called [Guardian of Heaven]."

Darius spoke with a bit of embarrassment, but Damien didn't think he needed to be embarrassed at all.

"Guardian of Heaven, huh..."

He smiled.

It was a Divinity formed not on Darius' pursuit of strength, but on his desire to protect Void Palace.

It was not only an admirable Divinity to form, it was perfectly versatile, so Darius' strength didn't need to be broken down and rebuilt.

No, the foundation he created could be used as a springboard to bring his Heavenly Flames to great heights.

"Perfect."

Damien grinned.

"I've possessed quite a few Heavenly Flames, so I can be considered somewhat knowledgeable about them, but there's no way I can know everything. We'll be working together to find out exactly how your flame functions and what you need to do to grow it."

Each Heavenly Flame needed a different method. Damien got lucky to possess a flame that ate other flames to grow, but Darius didn't have this luxury.

Until they found out the Sun and Moon Divine Flame's characteristics, Damien wouldn't leave Darius alone.

And that was how another year went by.

Damien was left with no more than two years to spend on his personalized army, but it was fine. He finished most of the work in the first three years. What was left was just training.

He oversaw them all using clones. He paid special attention to people like Hershel, using Existence Law to sprout talent inside the talentless so they could make full use of the potential they didn't know they had.

And eventually, the ten years he could spend freely in the palace came to an end.

'I've been busy, and I'll only continue to get busier from here.'

Damien sighed.

It sucked, but he barely had contact with his wives in these years.

Between their training, his training, the army's training, and the integration of the Sanctuary Army, the palace's forces, and the new recruits, there were hardly any opportunities for alone time.

Besides a few days here and there and a week before his departure, they couldn't find the chance to relax together.

But none of them minded.

They all hated it, but it had to be done. It was because they knew this that they rested so long before coming to the Heavenly World in the first place.

Now, they had priorities and responsibilities.

For Damien, it was solving Void Palace's problems, and for the girls, it was getting strong enough to have a say in the Heavenly World.

Aside from Iris, they'd only recently formed their Divinities, and before the time for the barrier to be released arrived, they had to become even stronger than Damien's siblings and his army.

As for Iris, she had a lot to learn and relearn about the Demigod realm she'd been in for so long. She had to break her own habits and adapt to the Heavenly World, possibly an even more difficult task than what the rest had to do.

Nevertheless, as everyone worked their hardest to reach for their goals, Damien left the main palace.

There were two remaining problems to solve, and he was headed to solve the first.

12 Elders of the now 48 Elders of the clan had been secluded by enemy forces in a valley bordering the Southwestern Region.

They, unlike those he'd met previously, were loyal to the clan, and without them, a large part of the Elders' authority was diminished.

Now, Damien was headed to their location to save them.

This would be his first true confrontation with the enemy that had been suppressing his people.

The Divine Order.

#### Chapter 1417 Dire Situation [3]

Damien's current destination was the border principality, Aeria. The Aeria Principality was one of the first to fall into a state of chaos when the Divine Order started openly moving against Void Palace.

It was a point of interest, so they focused many of their forces there and slowly took territory after territory until Aeria was surrounded by enemy forces on all sides.

There was a reason 12 Elders were stationed there.

Aeria was the location of one of the Southern Region's greatest traveler's hubs. It was a place most people would pass through if they were entering the south from the west, including members of Void Palace.

The timing was terrible.

Originally, there were only three elders stationed in Aeria. They were heads of commerce and had been staying in the city to facilitate trade agreements between Void Palace, the Dragon Clan, and the Holy Empire.

However, in recent times, a few more had gone to join them.

Some were just using Aeria as a springboard to reach another location, while others were doing jobs in the area, but the point was that all of them were in the principality when the surrounding areas were conquered.

They couldn't act against the powerful combat force of the Divine Order on their own, so they chose a defensive stance, keeping at least Aeria safe from war.

The borders of the principality had been challenged several times. The stalemate that wasn't really a stalemate was all the Elders could create, because stopping the Divine Order entirely was impossible for them.

Luckily, they'd held out quite well. The borders had moved several million miles inward, but the Aeria Principality was, for the most part, still in one piece.

This was the situation Damien arrived at.

On one side of Aeria was the border to the Divine Order's Southwestern Region.

To the left was the Bristeria Principality, to the right was the Reistone Principality, and blocking the path deeper into the Southern Region was the Liensia Principality.

'From the moment Liensia was conquered, the Divine Order had a complete advantage. If they wanted to, they could continue pushing into the Southern Region, but they instead chose to focus on conquering Aeria.'

Unlike the surrounding principalities without much reputation, conquering Aeria would deal a serious blow to Void Palace in various ways.

'The Elders are also lucky. If the Divine Order wasn't focusing on multiple things at once...'

If they weren't making similar plays across the border and reserving the majority of their troops for other purposes...

'...Aeria would've been a wasteland by now.'

The stalemate had been ongoing for more than five years. The fact that the Elders had been able to hold out for so long was already extremely impressive. Damien was certain that 90% of people would've crumbled long ago if they were put in the same situation.

It had reached a point where Damien was concerned whether his interference would mean anything or not.

'But I'm not in a position to question that. It'll be difficult if there are Gods there, but if it's just Demigods...'

This was about to either be an extremely taxing or an extremely easy endeavor.

And as Damien had just arrived in the vicinity of the war zone, he would soon find out.

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Somewhere near the border of the Aeria Principality facing Liensia, in a stronghold that was clearly on its last leg, a meeting of war generals was taking place.

"It doesn't look hopeless, but unless the clan sends aid, we likely will not be able to hold the border for longer than another month."

The speaker was named Perseus Vanheim. He was the 36th Elder of Void Palace, a loyal follower of the palace who'd always stood on its side.

Beside him were two others of similar stature, the 38th and 40th Elders, Monique Destero and Fidora Price.

They, the 12 Void Clan Elders present in the principality, had split into four groups to take charge of each border. They'd been communicating amongst themselves and using said communication to properly distribute their forces, but they were starting to run thin.

"What does the enemy number look like?" Monique asked.

"It's still increasing. Unlike us, they have a consistent source of support from nearby. Luckily, it doesn't seem like they've called experts in yet," Fidora replied.

"However, our strongholds won't last much longer, and the troops are beginning to struggle. It hasn't been easy since the supply lines were cut."

The three of them collectively sighed.

Practitioners at the level of those participating in the war didn't have the need to eat or drink to sustain themselves. Pure mana was enough to cover for such processes.

However, it wasn't the same for everyone.

The territory's population was majorly common people who hadn't trained at all and people under 4th class. For them, 5 years without any supplies was extremely difficult.

They'd been surviving mostly off the crops farmed in the principality itself, but due to the harsh weather conditions that had recently assailed the area, it was difficult to produce enough food to sustain the entire population.

And even with food, water was a greater problem.

"Those damn Divine Order scum!"

Perseus became infuriated just thinking about it.

One of the first moves they made was to pollute every aqueduct and water source in the principality with poison, making it undrinkable.

It was extremely unfortunate. The Aeria Principality had one interconnected waterway that ran through the entire territory.

While it normally wouldn't have been a problem, the Divine Order used mysterious means to run their poisons through the entire water system spanning billions of kilometers in less than a week, something everyone thought impossible until that point.

If the people died, there was no principality to save. The land had no value without them.

And those people were the families and friends of those participating in the war. If anything happened to them, the army's morale would plummet, and defeat would become even more inevitable.

"We can try our best, but it looks like retreat is absolutely impossible in our current circumstances," Perseus continued, summing up every problem and potential solution they'd encountered thus far.

"The only viable option is to keep defending to the best of our abilities and hope for a miracle."

They didn't believe it would come, but they had to believe, otherwise they'd lose hope before their armies even had a chance.

The situation was dire to say the least. The 12 Elders were doing everything they possibly could with the resources they had, but they simply didn't have enough power to attain victory against this foe.

Disregarding everything else, the Demigods leading the enemy force were at the absolute peak, just a step away from Godhood.

Elders who stood from the 30s-50s in the hierarchy weren't equipped to deal with them.

It was an entirely disadvantageous situation.

Perhaps if the 4th and 5th Swords hadn't disappeared...

It was too late to be having such thoughts.

The Elders could only focus on the dire situation in front of them.

However, their dire situation wasn't as dire as they believed.

Because someone with the power they lacked was coming.

Their "miracle" would be arriving soon.

Chapter 1418 Massacre [1]

The timing couldn't have been worse.

The meeting hadn't even ended yet. The Elders, along with the main parties who worked together with them to lead the armies, were still trying to find a solution to their current problems.

But alarm bells rang.

Throughout the entire stronghold, the sound of warning was clear to all.

The Divine Order was staging an attack. Not just any attack, but a full frontal onslaught that left no room for counterattack.

And the worst part?

"We've received news from the others. This attack has surrounded the entire principality. It isn't just on our border."

If someone stood above Aeria and looked down on it, no matter which direction they looked, they'd see the Divine Order's people on the border.

Clashes had already begun. It hadn't escalated to a full-out war yet, but it would be there soon enough.

"DAMMIT!"

Perseus slammed his fist against the table.

"These bastards won't give us a single moment of rest!"

He was pissed. He was losing hope. But he couldn't focus on that right now.

"Tell everyone to prepare for mobilization. We'll be preparing to confront their armies from now on!"

If confrontation was what they desired, confrontation was what they would get.

"Regardless, we cannot win against them. We've been doing our best to hold out until now, but under an assault like this, we will either be exterminated or driven back until we've lost the entirety of Aeria."

That was reality,

They only had two options.

"Either we continue to play passive and protect as much as we can, even if that ends up being no more than a single city, or we fight! We fight until our last breaths and make sure that those who come after us will not face the same powerful armies we are facing today!"

If one thing was certain, it was that the Divine Order couldn't dedicate all its resources towards conquering Aeria.

With the sizes of the armies growing each day, they'd probably already reached their limits on what they could assign, but since those limits far exceeded what the defenders of Aeria could handle, it wasn't a problem.

Perseus knew it was hopeless, but he refused to lose hope.

He didn't think retreating here was the right option.

"Our people will die no matter what. With every time we are pushed back, thousands of soldiers will die protecting our rears. Should we sacrifice their lives for a meaningless and pyrrhic victory, or should we carve a path for our reinforcements to walk?!"

He didn't know who it would be, but he was sure somebody would come.

Whether it be from the main palace, from other principalities, or even from within Aeria itself, he was sure somebody would appear to stand up against the Divine Order.

Because that was the kind of place the Southern Region was. They, unlike others, truly had a sense of community that held them together. They weren't the type to abandon each other.

And though nobody could come in time to save them, Perseus was certain somebody would arrive by the time they died.

In that case, wasn't it better for them to use their lives to guarantee a path to success for those people?

Wasn't it better to bring down the enemy's number so others didn't have to struggle like so?

As he expressed his feelings, others gradually voiced their agreement as well.

Nobody wanted to die meaninglessly, but in a situation where they had no choice in the matter, they'd much rather do something potentially great than something cowardly in their last moments.

The armies of every border gathered. It wasn't just Perseus and his group in the south.

They were no more than a ragtag group of bandits in front of the full force of the Divine Order's armies, but they gave off an aura of valiance that the enemy could never possess.

Because they weren't fighting for greed. They were fighting to protect their homes, their families, and their livelihoods.

Perseus stood before his army along with Monique and Fidora. He looked at each and every person present, acknowledging the emotion in their eyes.

He wasn't the type to give speeches, nor was a speech necessary here.

They all knew what he wanted to say. Saying it again would be pointless.

Instead, he raised his sword to the sky. He flared his aura, letting his mana run wild. And he shouted.

"KILL!"

The raw emotion they all shared. The only thing they wanted to do.

""KILL!""

The army responded to his call.

Together, they exited the stronghold and faced the enemy proudly.

"DIVINE ORDER SCUM!" Perseus roared.

He didn't care that they were a mere 300,000 facing over 3,000,000 troops.

He didn't care that there were over 10,000 Demigods on the enemy side.

He didn't care.

He just shouted at the top of his lungs.

"TODAY, WE WILL SHOW YOU THE MIGHT OF OUR VOID PALACE! FACE THE RAGE OF THE SOUTH!"

He didn't care if they could hear him.

He didn't care if they were provoked or disgusted by his words.

He didn't care.

He just wanted to see their heads at his feet.

"CHARGE!"

300,000 troops moved as one.

And on the other borders, similar scenes displayed themselves.

The entirety of the Aeria Principality's combat power only amounted to a single army of the Divine Order if one excluded Divinities, but none of them showed fear.

It wasn't just people at the lead like Perseus. Even the most common soldiers had the same pride and rage in their hearts, motivating them to kill until the moment they died, and then keep killing.

The gap of a few thousand kilometers would close itself in an instant now that they'd begun moving.

And that was the situation Damien arrived to see.

He stood above Aeria and looked down on it. No matter which direction he looked, he saw the Divine Order's people on the border.

He saw the valiant troops of the Aeria Principality making their last stand, and he saw the 12 Elders who stood in front of them as generals.

And he smiled.

'I'm proud.'

He was proud of his people. It was a feeling he had several times since he arrived in the Southern Region.

But his smile wasn't completely pure. Deep within it, there was a boiling rage that no mortal could bear.

'The Divine Order...'

They really had some nerve.

He couldn't believe the scene he was witnessing because of them.

Though...

'...I don't see any Gods in the crowd.'

Not only in the crowd, but in the general vicinity, there wasn't a single God present.

Which meant...

'...it's my time to shine.'

Damien had been in this position before.

When he was at the extreme peak of 4th class, and even before that, he'd been here.

He was so far above his peers that they were like ants in his eyes, yet those stronger than him were strong enough to crush him like an ant himself.

But, right now, the second half of that statement didn't matter.

What mattered was that Demgods didn't stand a chance against his power.

No matter how close they were to establishing Godhood.

He raised his arm into the sky, his mana billowing around him.

Clouds gathered in the air, not because Damien changed the weather, but because his mana was heavy enough to change the atmosphere.

This much of a scene was only natural.

Before the Divine Order got news of what he'd done to their little spies...

...he would show them who he was.

He would properly introduce them to the monster that was Damien Void.

Chapter 1419 Massacre [2]

Damien's mana began to flood the sky.

He didn't aim at the people below. No, he had other plans.

VOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The gathering of dark clouds that encompassed the entirety of the surrounding principalities was hard not to notice.

The battle that was about to begin came to a complete halt as both sides stared at the unexpected event that neither of them caused.

Damien didn't pay attention to them.

His body had been completely concealed in the folds of reality, so nobody could perceive his presence. They were busy believing the clouds were a natural phenomenon, so he didn't have to worry.

His mana was spread out over a massive distance.

When Damien became a Divinity, the Ananta Matrix experienced a huge evolution.

Its circuits became thicker and denser, and as it learned to constantly draw a small amount of mana from the surroundings to utilize for its own purposes, it came infinitely close to the concept of perpetual motion that Damien had in mind when he created it.

As long as he wasn't in a manaless environment, he'd never run out of mana.

But he'd never been able to explore what that meant.

There were usually cases where he could extend his power to the heights of his capabilities without having to worry about risking the lives of innocents, however, he was different now.

He'd understood the concept of harmony. He may not have been able to totally control Existence yet, but he was confident in distinguishing between friendlies and enemies.

Therefore, as he spread his mana, he didn't give it a limit.

He let it expand and expand until it didn't just cover the Aeria Principality, but Liensia, Reistone, Bristeria, and even several billions of kilometers of Divine Order territory.

The massive storm rumbled and thundered, giving off an aura of majesty that made countless Divinities reel on fear.

They had no idea what they were facing.

All they knew was that it was dangerous.

That was when the rain started.

From a single droplet of water, no bigger than a crumb, a huge rainstorm appeared, pouring with such intensity that it turned the ground into a swamp within minutes.

Rain?

Rain was odd.

While it wasn't always sunny weather, it was rare for there to be fluctuations in temperature in set areas.

Where it rained, it would always rain. Where it was sunny, it was always sunny.

Aeria became so popular as a hub partly because of its beautiful climate and location. For it to rain over Aeria...

People began to doubt if the phenomenon was truly natural.

However, it was already too late to doubt.

From the moment the first drop of rain touched the ground, the hidden attack had already struck true.

Perseus and the rest could only look up at the sky in confusion.

To them, there was nothing strange about the rain. It was simply odd in nature, and due to its ferocity, their opportunity to strike had been ruined.

It wasn't as if normal rain could inhibit a practitioner, but rain like this...?

In rain like this, there was even a chance they could die.

After all, it was already turning the environment into something it had never been before. If the intensity became focused on the quality of the rain rather than quantity...

...it could become a true natural disaster.

The forces supporting Aeria retreated back into the stronghold behind them and began preparing for the situation where the rain was weaponized.

They left before they could see it.

The forces from the Divine Order didn't retreat.

They didn't even try to chase their retreating enemies.

Entire armies stood in confusion. Millions upon millions of people, including tens of thousands of Demigods, were frozen like statues creating a natural wall around Aeria.

The rain that touched their skin, entered their bodies through their pores, and assimilated with, that rain invaded their minds.

There was a question Damien asked himself before he decided to attack.

What was the best way to deal with these enemies?

He could always use the abilities he was confident with like space, time, or even destruction.

But he was practicing Existence Law now. He needed to use it properly if he wanted to get a grip on it.

What was he to do, though? Existence was such a broad concept that he couldn't think of any ideas.

He'd never tried being a necromancer, and they were quite rare in general, so he thought about killing a few, having them kill their allies, and slowly turning the enemy army into his own.

However, it was a bit bland.

Still, he liked the idea of turning them against each other.

And the best way for him to make them do so?

Naturally, it was by abusing their own vices.

He made rain. It poured down not just on the armies surrounding Aeria, but those stationed in nearby principalities and even across the border.

He targeted every member of the Divine Order he could find in the distance his mana covered.

And he made them face their own greed.

Glory, wealth, power. Whatever they aimed to reach in the end, it appeared before them, and the negative emotions in their heart gained a voice.

Like devils and demons, those vices and desires tempted the ones who birthed them. Whispering in their ears, they slowly corroded the wills of their creators until they were no longer able to think logically.

No, the evil hidden in their hearts became the very thing defining their every action.

And for that evil, they were willing to do anything.

If two people were standing next to each other, if one of them had an immense greed for wealth, and if the one next to him possessed even a single coin, he would kill.

It didn't matter if that person was his sibling, his closest friend, or his lover.

He would kill for that single coin.

The first death sprouted in the crowd.

It went unseen. It went unspoken. It was a silent death where the murdered party didn't even have the sane mind to mourn his last moments.

It was a death followed by a storm of the same scene, making it obsolete in the greater picture.

For wealth, for power, for control, for desire.

The people of the Divine Order showed their true colors, and those very true colors slaughtered them en masse.

Damien's work ended the moment the rain started.

He stood in the sky and silently watched the carnage below, his eyes indifferent to any emotion.

This was just the start.

A massacre like this was just like the death of one Divine Order soldier in his eyes.

It was irrelevant in front of the countless massacres that would occur in the future.

'This is just the start.'

The Divine Order was the closer enemy. They were a greedy bunch who only cared about growing their own power.

But they were only the first.

'The Straea Clan...'

The ones whom he encountered in the Forbidden Secret Realm.

Unlike the Divine Order, the damage they'd done to Void Palace wasn't something that could be repaid in blood.

For the Straea Clan, even their souls wouldn't be spared.

And to prepare for that, Damien was going to exterminate the Divine Order.

In totality.

Chapter 1420 Ambush [1]

Bodies formed a blanket over the landscape.

They didn't pile up like a mountain, nor did their blood flow like a river.

They were cold corpses that absorbed all the blood they spilled, and their bodies were spread out because of the widespread carnage that killed them.

The scene ended in a few hours. The armies were enormous, or else it wouldn't have taken so long.

But whether they were Divinities or lower existences, they fell all the same, becoming part of the blanket of corpses that decorated the surrounding territories.

Damien looked down on them indifferently. His thoughts were still the same, but he was starting to contemplate other things as well.

'Maybe I shouldn't discriminate?'

He, of course, wouldn't kill the Void Palace forces, but he was wondering whether or not he should place them under a similar spell to see how they would react.

After all, Damien never forced the Divine Order troops to die.

He never forced them to succumb to their vices.

Their vices tempted them like the devil, but everyone had vices. Damien didn't think everyone in the Divine Order would be a bad person.

There was a way out. As long as they overcame their greed and stood on their morals, they could escape the temptation and regain their sanity.

In that moment, if any of them succeeded, Damien was willing to save them from the madness and send them to a safe place.

Unfortunately, none of them managed to succeed.

Maybe there were good people in the Divine Order, but none of them were here. None of them were participating in the massacre of innocents the order was trying to create in Aeria.

'Regardless, it's over now.'

Damien sighed to himself and descended through the skies, aiming to return to the—

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Suddenly, a massive force exploded in the air. The dark clouds that gathered were instantly dispersed by the power, and Damien was sent flying millions of kilometers to the west.

"...!"

Damien's senses suddenly went on alert. His natural barriers kept him from taking any damage, but he was still extremely wary.

The force that attacked him came from somewhere he couldn't detect. He didn't know who attacked him or what their purpose was, but it wasn't hard to guess.

'There's—'

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Another explosion, this time even more ferocious than the last.

It was infused with so much Light Law that Damien's eyes were temporarily blinded. His skin was burned and his insides were starting to be touched to.

But more importantly, laced within the light so covertly that Damien almost couldn't sense it, was a trace of Death Law, an absolute corrosion beyond anything he'd ever encountered before.

'—a God.'

Damien's eyes narrowed.

He put up a barrier of existence to block him from the light and pushed himself away, returning to the world outside the explosion.

His eyes widened as he expanded his field of view to its greatest capabilities.

His awareness spread out along with his mana, creating a net that would detect anyone or anything that entered it.

'There.'

It was only for a brief moment, a spark of a flash of a second, a number with so many zeroes after the decimal that it wasn't even worth mentioning.

"Something" flashed into the mana net, and it arrived before Damien in the same instant.

'Shit!'

BOOOM!

Damien's mana turned into a massive flame that solidified into a wall that folded the fabric of reality into a defense.

That was when Damien finally got a look at his opponent.

Their gender was unknown. They looked both male and female at the same time.

But they were pure white.

Whether in skin, in robes, or in anything else, they were absolutely white.

6 massive angel wings sprouted from their back, giving them a propulsion force others couldn't compete with, and their eyes...

'...are empty.'

There was no soul remaining in those eyes. Whatever made this creature a living, breathing, entity and not an automaton could no longer be called a soul.

It was devoid of all things other than the ability to execute orders it was given.

'It's a homunculus.'

But it had the strength of a God.

'Is this the true face of the Divine Order?'

As their name suggested, the Divine Order was a religious organization. The people of the Southwestern Region were believers of their doctrine, and in the eyes of those people, the Divine Order was an absolutely just force.

Void Palace had been painted as an evil influence that needed to be defeated, and their brainwashed believers didn't question the validity of that statement at all.

Because it was real brainwashing.

The Holy Empire was also a religious organization. They also had an extreme number of believers and amount of influence.

However, the Holy Empire did it naturally. The "Absolute" they worshiped and the doctrine they spread truly grasped the hearts of people.

The Holy Empire was what a religious organization was meant to be. Damien was assured of their righteousness and benevolence, because the Holy Empire, just like the Veritas Clan, was one of Void Palace's greatest allies who stood by them despite their declining state.

So when he looked at the Divine Order, all he felt was disgust.

Damien knew the Divine Order was only just on the surface. They were a corrupt and vile influence pretending to be righteous.

However, he thought it ended at brainwashing and greed. He didn't think they were killing souls and using them to create homunculi.

'The amount of torture it takes to break an ego and plunder the soul it was attached to is absolutely monstrous.'

And for the Divine Order to send a homunculus after him meant they had far more than he could imagine.

'Fucking hell...'

He didn't have time to think. In the brief span of time he took to understand the situation, the homunculus had already broken through the cage he enclosed it in.

'I have no choice.'

He had to defeat this thing.

Not only for short-term victory, but for the soul it carried.

'Even if its ego is gone, the memories in its "existence" are still very much present.'

The things he'd learn if he devoured it...

'Whether or not it's a God, it's too enticing to resist.'

Damien released the restrictions he kept on himself.

He freed the entirety of his power, because he'd need it if he wanted to win this fight.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

With a single blast of light, the homunculus broke free and forcefully charged towards Damien.

However, this time, Damien didn't retreat.

He contained heaps of mana in his eyes, enhancing his vision. He kept mana circulating through his body, so it could be summoned whenever he needed it.

And subtly, he added Void Energy into his circuits, keeping it ready in case of emergency.

It all happened in less time than it took for the homunculus to reach him.

So when they finally locked eyes only a few feet away from each other...

Damien was also ready to attack.

His arm flew forward, and the homunculus raised a spear of light to meet it.

Laws clashed through the sheer force of their auras, and as the two weapons of mass destruction came together...

The force couldn't even be described.

The skies shattered apart, and Aeria was instantly plunged into the dead of night.

In that darkness, only two stars remained.

Competing endlessly for dominance.