

Void 1441

Chapter 1441 Enlightenment [2]

Damien didn't see it coming.

He hadn't done anything particularly noteworthy to prompt enlightenment, so he was wondering just as much as anybody else why it came now.

But regardless of the "why," it was here.

When Damien sat down at the creek, his eyes instinctively closed, and his mind was subtly pulled away from reality.

Something about the moment was perfect.

In the midst of so much chaos, finding peace was a special thing. Damien didn't feel it because he never acknowledged temporary peace as real peace, however, he couldn't deny the feelings in his heart.

That peace was what led to the current situation.

Damien felt the power of "order."

Order, the opposite of chaos, was one of the concepts that governed the world.

Order and chaos didn't have their own laws. They were more like compilations of several laws that embodied a concept, so there wasn't an individual who could wield their power directly.

However, they were always subtly influencing the world.

Order was important. So was chaos.

If chaos represented freedom and choice, order was the opposite.

That didn't mean it was a bad thing.

Order and chaos were always necessary together. Complete chaos would turn into madness, while absolute order would become a soulless society.

In a way, the Divine Order and the Straea Clan could be used as examples of them when they reached their worst.

But just as they could become terrible without regulation, when they were in their perfect forms, they allowed life to adapt and progress properly.

Void Palace was a picture of order right now. Everything went as it should, and chaos didn't have much of a place outside the things it was necessary for.

Being in this environment after being surrounded by chaos for such a long time, Damien suddenly became enlightened.

The concept of order.

He didn't know what it was before now, but information about it was steadily flowing into his head.

And it wasn't something simple.

No, the concept of order was one of the six concepts of Existence that Damien was supposed to master.

He just didn't expect to find it within himself before finding it in the wild.

The concept of order was actually meant to come before the concept of harmony.

Harmony and order acted together, but in reality, order always came first.

Damien learned the concept of harmony to perfection with the help he got from the Unrecorded. He wasn't supposed to have that comprehension, though.

He went in the wrong order, so, as he continued to live and experience life with the concept of harmony inside him, order naturally manifested.

In terms of Existence, if harmony was a method of controlling Existence, order was the prerequisite to do so.

It didn't have much power on its own, but it was the perfect support.

With order, Damien could actually take the first steps to controlling Existence Mana, since harmony really only gave him more ways to use what he had.

Damien's brain expanded.

Once again, he was barraged with knowledge about Existence itself.

The scene was similar to what the Unrecorded showed him.

A world completely influenced by a single entity's will.

The concept of order taught him how to tame the untamable.

In essence, he could use his own power to accomplish something similar to what the Void could do.

He could calm the chaos with his existence. He could turn those disorderly forces into his own power, and leave in his wake a world where everything followed the order he established.

Everything was beautiful.

Everything he'd seen had been beautiful for a few days, and this was like a painting of all of it melded into one canvas.

Was comprehending Existence supposed to be this easy?

The answer was a flat no. There was no question about it. Even if some people had managed to find the concept before Damien, they'd taken millions or even billions of years to reach a point where they could confidently say they could control it even partially.

Damien was a unique case.

It wasn't because of the Void this time, but because of Damien Void himself.

Damien's death did a lot more for him than he ever knew.

That day, he met Nonexistence itself. He'd been embedded with a seed that would never bloom until he realized its existence.

Damien already had a deep connection to Existence. He could say he was one of only a handful of people who'd ever seen reality itself presented before them.

Since he was comprehending a concept he had a natural bond with, he could naturally do so at a faster rate than people who did the same forcefully. It was a similar situation to what he'd felt when he was first comprehending space.

It helped that order and harmony were directly linked as well. Since Damien already had harmony, he needed to gain order before looking for anything else.

Putting everything together, adding over 10 years of life experience and a sudden sense of inner peace, it was only natural for it to find him here.

Damien sat at the waterfall for three days, slowly contemplating on many things.

He didn't think about the concept of order after the first day, but the things he saw when he was being enlightened gave him a new look at several things, and he needed time to digest it all.

When he was finished, he stood up and stretched.

He wasn't quite sure what had just happened.

But he was going to have an opportunity to find out soon, so he didn't worry himself over it.

Rather, he was quite excited.

'With this, I should be able to get that over with too.'

He smiled to himself and disappeared.

For the next few hours, he stayed in the Sanctuary, where he used a time dilation to extend his time for a few days.

He was working on a specific project that would be extremely helpful when the critical time came.

The concept of order allowed him to perfectly disperse chaos from chaotic forces. Even the most disordered energy could become calm under his grasp.

One of the many privileges granted to him by this ability was to handle souls with a touch that nobody could replicate.

And with that power, Rein Winchester could be granted a second life.

Damien's excitement didn't come from the fact that the Sword would be revived, but from the revival itself.

He'd never dabbled in matters like this. It was a new experience for him.

If he happened to be successful...

'Well, I won't become a mad scientist at least.'

Damien didn't think he'd get the chance to do this so soon, but since he was granted a blessing from the heavens, he was planning to use it well.

Spending a few more hours to himself before leaving wasn't going to harm anyone.

Plus, the skills he'd gain from this procedure were well worth the wait.

When Damien appeared at the end of those hours he granted himself, he had a wide smile on his face.

His eyes glowed, filled with anticipation.

'With this, I'm ready.'

There was a Dimensional Crack waiting for him.

And he couldn't wait to greet it.

Chapter 1442 Dimensional Crack [1]

The Bloomberg Principality was somewhere near the center of the Southern Region, near one of the extreme poles of the Heavenly World.

It was a cold region without much civilization, but there were still several tribes that lived in the area for generations and had their own unique cultures.

The Bloomberg Principality was one of those so far disconnected from society that the people were hardly followers of Void Palace, however, even they had connections with the outside world.

This was because of the danger of Dimensional Cracks.

Dimensional Cracks weren't actually a rare occurrence.

Just like the gates and dungeons of the lower universe, Dimensional Cracks would appear anywhere and everywhere with no rhyme or reason.

However, unlike gates, Dimensional Cracks were created artificially, not as a product of the natural order.

Damien had information on all the Dimensional Cracks that he could find, but not all of them were tracked. There were just too many.

For the most part, they weren't too unbelievably dangerous, so they were taken care of by local practitioners and kept in their books, never to reach the ears of those in a much higher position than them.

Also, for the most part, Dimensional Cracks didn't rupture.

That was when they truly became dangerous.

At the end of the day, the Foreign Races were just that, foreign.

The Heavenly Order didn't hold any bias, but when its space was being controlled by foreign entities, its natural protections would be put into play regardless.

When a Dimensional Crack first spawned, it would remain in a closed state.

Nothing could enter the cosmos through it, however, entities from within the cosmos could enter it just fine.

With this mechanism as protection, practitioners could enter the cracks and kill everything inside before they could invade the world, just like how gates worked.

Dimensional Ruptures were avoided in most cases. That was because the cosmos had already realized how dangerous it would be if they were allowed to turn into ruptures.

This awareness of danger just didn't go further than that, which was a shame.

Nevertheless, Dimensional Ruptures happened when the Heavenly Order's protection was whittled down until it was broken.

At that point, the Foreign Races would charge through and invade, turning more and more land into their own territory until all of them were killed and the crack was dispersed.

Converted territories couldn't be regained, as found through past experiences had by the citizens of this world.

And, no matter how many Foreign Races died, they wouldn't stop pouring through the gate until it was destroyed.

Spatial practitioners were an absolute necessity to rid society of these cracks, which was why Void Palace was able to grow so rapidly.

The crack Damien was headed towards was on the verge of rupturing.

Several teams of practitioners had been sent in, but none of them had returned. It got to the point where no local influence could handle it, and Void Palace was notified of the situation.

When Damien got the news, he immediately knew he had to go.

Dimensional Cracks were the Foreign Races' method of invading this cosmos.

They hadn't been trying as hard as they could, so despite their number, the actual impact they'd had wasn't as big as it could've been.

The troops they sent to invade or fight against invaders weren't the strongest they had, nor were the Dimensional Cracks too serious.

They didn't really have to try yet.

The people here hadn't realized the threat they posed.

Just as had happened in the lower universe, they would slowly gnaw on the Heavenly World, converting small patches into their land until they had more ground than the denizens.

And they'd do it before anyone took them seriously.

Damien understood their strategies as someone who'd fought them before.

This Dimensional Crack was special.

The people who were sent to clear it weren't weak. As weaker teams were defeated and the problem made its way up the power hierarchy, even Demigods had eventually been sent.

Damien used his information network to find out a lot about all the cracks he could find, and through it, he realized that this kind of situation wasn't as common as one would expect it to be.

And every time it had taken place, it ended in a portion of land being transformed into a Foreign Territory.

This could only mean one thing.

'There is something inside the crack that's far more powerful than what the cosmos has seen thus far.'

This crack wasn't like the rest.

Damien was going to send a team to the crack regardless to deal with the rupture, but the reason he came himself was because he wanted to see what made this crack special.

Why were there Demigod-level enemies within?

What secrets were they hiding?

Demigods were definitely common in the Heavenly World, but that was still just because of the size.

In reality, Demigods still weren't forces that could be used easily, outside of war of course.

Damien's ability to create them in a mere hundred years was monstrous, and for the same reason that made that true, Dimensional Cracks that could kill Demigods were extremely worrying.

'We still don't know anything about the Foreign Races.'

Even the influences who had direct contact with them were still largely unaware of the true nature of the Foreign Races apart from the most basic information.

What would happen if their forces were just as plentiful or more plentiful than those the Heavenly World had?

All these questions stacked up in Damien's mind as he approached the Bloomberg Principality.

He wasn't alone this time. He'd brought two squads from his newly created army with them, both to give them experience and to have help dealing with the rupture.

These squads consisted of only Demigods. The first was led by Tiamat and consisted of Divinities from the Sanctuary.

As for the second, it contained both Dominic and Darius Void, along with a few talented Demigods from the Void Palace army.

They had come with their identities hidden for multiple reasons. Damien made sure to disguise his siblings' purple eyes as well as his own.

As for the rest, other than a few who had some reputation in the outside world, everyone was a new face being introduced to society as of this moment.

They weren't the only ones here either.

Several Demigods from nearby influences, and even some who came from a distance for this event, were also headed to the Dimensional Crack.

And, of course, not all of them were friendly.

'I purposefully created an opportunity for them, so it's only natural they take it.'

Right now, Damien had the image of someone arrogant, an image he created by autographing his actions in the Southwestern Region and announcing himself as Young Lord immediately afterward.

Leaving the palace now maintained that image, which gave those who despised him an opportunity to aim for his throat.

But his arrogance was a lie.

And everything they knew was a trap laid out for those individuals.

Damien had done so much planning.

At this point, it was hard to find a variable outside his control.

So he approached with confidence that nothing would go wrong.

And he laid his eyes on his very first Dimensional Crack.

Chapter 1443 Dimensional Crack [2]

It wasn't as big as he thought it'd be.

The Dimensional Crack was roughly ten feet tall and only around three feet wide. It didn't have much depth, almost like a two-dimensional structure in three-dimensional space.

It was dark black with red arcs of electricity running across its surface, giving it a pretty dangerous look, but all in all, it was quite easy to write off as something trivial.

There wasn't anything else in the area but snow.

The entire Bloomberg Principality was covered in snow and ice. Even the small villages and big cities that existed here were built into it.

Luckily, the crack opened in a relatively unpopulated area.

It was only spotted by travelers moving between cities, and wouldn't cause havoc in the case that it truly ruptured.

When Damien and the rest arrived in a group of ten, they became one of many groups present in the vicinity.

However, the black and purple robes they wore to indicate their affiliation made everyone part ways for them.

The forces from Void Palace. Even if their names and faces were unknown, the fact that the palace sent them meant their strength was guaranteed.

Damien looked around, the others following close behind him.

'Hmm...are all these people participating in the rupture?'

There were over five hundred present. The number seemed a bit blown out of proportion to Damien, but considering how strange the crack had been acting, it was warranted.

'I guess they don't underestimate as much as I assumed they did. It's still too pitiful on a large scale, but the fact that people showed up like this is good too.'

The group walked from place to place, accepting greetings from the many subsidiary clans who came to see them.

Eventually, though, Damien found a person with some actual value.

"Hello, sir. My name is Inca Smith. It is my job to monitor the crack and judge the time until it ruptures."

The woman who came up to him introduced herself, and after gaining his permission, led his group to a nearby set that looked like it had only recently been set up.

Inside, several pieces of equipment were set up that gave off readings that the average practitioner could never understand.

There were four people present, five counting Inca. According to her, they came from a nearby clan called the Peralius Clan, and they'd been focused on mapping and monitoring Dimensional Cracks for several hundred years.

Damien left the majority of his group outside to their own devices and followed Inca into the tent with Dominic, Darius, and Tiamat.

Meanwhile, Inca continued explaining how they managed to do their research despite the little interest the majority of the world had in the field.

"Our instruments measure a myriad of factors to ultimately come to a conclusion, but the main ones are mana intensity, atmospheric fluctuation, and corrosion."

"Take this gate as an example."

Inca walked them over to a nearby machine being operated by one of her colleagues and continued her explanation.

"Here, we can see that the atmospheric fluctuation caused by the crack is far above normal levels. There have been signs of reality warping, which, on our scale of danger, can be counted as something above the highest degree."

She started strong, letting them know just how bad the situation was.

"However, as we continued testing, we found something even more confusing."

She pointed out another variable and continued. t

"The mana intensity is basically nil. There's hardly any leakage from the crack, which is exceedingly rare. For the most part, we'll be able to tell what's inside the crack by judging the intensity of the mana it emanates due to their presence, but it's completely impossible this time."

"And, the corrosion value is almost just hard to accept."

Corrosion used several factors that Damien didn't quite understand to determine how fast the land would be converted when the rupture started.

It was the most important variable, because of the corrosion rate was unimaginable, then far stronger forces needed to be used to fight against the crack.

If it wasn't closed within just a few minutes, massive swatches of the world would be turned into Foreign Territories, which had more than a few negative effects on the atmosphere.

"Interesting..."

It was a branch of science Damien had never seen before. Despite the wealth of knowledge he possessed, he couldn't understand even an ounce of the actual processes behind their conclusions.

'I'll have to meet with them again after all this is over.'

But for now, they couldn't focus on the details of the science.

"How long until the rupture occurs?" Damien asked.

That was apparently the final goal of their research, but clearly that was a lie used to interest people in their work.

Predicting ruptures was at most a byproduct of their efforts.

Still, it was their hook for a reason. It was the reason Damien came, and he needed to hear that before everything else.

Inca and her colleagues were obviously a bit disappointed by his words, but they understood as well.

Plus, Damien showed a clear interest in what they were doing, unlike most who visited them, so they didn't immediately lose hope.

They wanted Void Palace's backing. With support from such a large influence, they'd be able to do so much more with what they had.

And to succeed in gaining that backing, they needed to properly impress the group that came to investigate this crack.

"Thirty minutes."

Inca spoke without hesitation, giving not a timeframe, but a specific point when it would open.

"I like your confidence, but are you sure?" Damien responded.

"I'm sure. Just watch, and you'll see soon enough."

Damien smiled slightly.

'I like her confidence.'

Inca had the eyes of someone who'd make it big.

After taking note of her existence, Damien left the tent with his people and began preparing for the rupture.

"You believe her?" Tiamat asked.

"Why wouldn't I?" Damien returned.

"...I don't know. It just felt a little fast."

Tiamat had been in the Sanctuary for the majority of the time Damien was in the Heavenly World.

She wasn't familiar with this place's environment, but she knew not to be so trusting of people she'd just met.

However, Damien just shrugged in response.

"Scientists don't like to lie. There's no harm in trusting her abilities. Even if she's wrong, it just means her confidence was a lie. It doesn't affect me much."

More than that, Damien could read souls now. He didn't really need to worry about people with hostile intentions, since he'd always know beforehand.

Nevertheless, it was just a question out of nowhere. Tiamat also got ready to attack the crack. Her complaints were no more than words.

The group was given strange looks from all around for their actions.

Some just laughed, some questioned Void Palace and called them cowards, while others took note of them and followed their actions, preparing for the crack.

And as thirty minutes ticked by with Inca on the edge of her seat watching its movements, the crack began to fluctuate.

VOOM!

A huge aura was revealed from the previously sleeping beast.

Hundreds of people were thrown away, with only those who sufficiently readied themselves beforehand able to keep their footing.

As Inca predicted, exactly thirty minutes after Damien and the rest arrived at the Dimensional Crack, it opened its jaws.

And a flood of otherworldly beings poured out.

Chapter 1444 Dimensional Crack [3]

The beings that came out of the crack didn't bear any resemblance to the Nox, especially not the Higher Nox.

They shared the same pitch-black ink-like skin of the Lesser Nox, however, their forms were defined.

There were five types of creatures that rushed into the Heavenly World.

Some were large, some were small, but regardless of their appearances, Tiamat felt a connection to them all.

It was an extremely disconcerting feeling.

From the moment they arrived at the crack, she'd been on edge. It was the reason she asked Damien why he trusted that scientist.

She felt the need to voice something, anything, because if she stayed silent she'd be pulled into the crack.

She could feel that this was her origin.

The place beyond that crack was the place where the people who created her race were, the people who led to their tragic fates.

But that didn't have anything to do with Tiamat.

She was hardly a Nox. No, rather, she never once had anything in common with them.

She was never subjected to the same restrictions as them, and no matter what she did for them, they always regarded her in fear.

The Nox species had no right to associate with her.

But standing in front of the crack, she couldn't help but feel like she was one of them.

The undeniable urge to go beyond and find what lay on the other side was hard to resist, but Tiamat wasn't a weak character. When she set her mind on something, nothing could stop her from accomplishing it.

She'd given her life to Damien.

Right now, she had to trust in him rather than her instincts.

Besides, he wasn't a man who knew how to disappoint.

Her wishes would be fulfilled somehow, so until then, she just needed to focus on the tasks she was given.

The second the Foreign Races started pouring out from the crack, the battle started.

The experts who'd gathered in the vicinity all charged in, claiming areas around the tear in reality that they would guard.

This was a method used to make sure nobody would interfere in another's battles. The territories claimed by each Influence would only be handled by them.

And, of course, Void Palace had a spot in front of them all, just a few tens of feet away from the crack.

Dominic, Darius, and Tiamat led their squads to that spot and started fighting.

For Dominic and Darius, this was an opportunity to measure their growth and use the skills they'd accumulated in the past century.

For Tiamat, it was a sort of cathartic relief. She just wanted to get rid of the feeling haunting her.

Damien stayed back while they moved, observing the battlefield from a point where he was unaffected by it.

Though, he wasn't skimping on his duties.

As explosions filled the air and it became hard to distinguish friend from foe, nobody could really notice as several otherworldly enemies disappeared from the crowd.

Especially since there were hundreds of them already in the Heavenly World and hundreds more pouring out every second.

Several tens of them disappeared from reality together every few seconds.

Their existences were purified.

The Foreign Races were beings of chaos. Damien didn't even need to directly see them to confirm it.

With the new concept of order he'd comprehended, Damien was given the ability to remove chaos from the world.

Against that power, combined with the weight of Damien's league, these creatures, despite being Demigods themselves, stood no chance.

He devoured them in droves, intaking their existences.

It was almost too easy for him.

With such a simple action, Damien learned so much.

But, at the same time, he didn't learn anything.

'Their strategies are still the same.'

The creatures that everyone was facing now were just manufactured soldiers meant to rapidly invade other worlds.

It was the exact same strategy the Nox used in the past. These were the equivalent of unintelligent Lesser Nox whose numbers and durability were their only advantage.

'But, as expected, it's to another level when it comes from the original source.'

Unlike Lesser Nox, these creatures actually had purpose.

The, with lack of a better name for now, "Lesser Foreign Races," came in five types, each with its own specialization.

The ones being taken care of by the weakest of the present influences were called grunts. They were short and fat, with malformed bodies that looked more like blobs than living organisms.

They were the most like Lesser Nox, since their numerity was their speciality. They came out first, swamping their enemies and creating openings for those who came later.

Second came the Titans. Titans were massive beings that were twenty feet tall at the very least. They had monstrous physical strength and bodies that couldn't be penetrated without special means.

Third were the Sword Demons. Like their species name suggested, they were really demons of the sword. Their arms, four of which each of them had, were blades themselves, and with the ability to use sword aura and Sword Laws, they could dominate any battlefield.

The fourth kind was Sentries. Sentries acted from range like archers, barraging the battlefield with attacks and precisely eliminating those who'd dropped their guards.

And finally, the Shadows, assassins with extreme speed and concealment ability.

Together, these five types defined the invading army of the Foreign Races.

They didn't really need to use anything else.

After all, each of the archetypes complimented the rest. When all five were used together, they hardly left any openings to be exploited.

Naturally, they could still be defeated with enough power, strategy, or numbers, but despite their low intelligence, they were able to fight back against much smarter foes toe to toe without a problem.

The problem was, they were artificially created like the Lesser Nox.

Damien couldn't see the process through their existences, likely because their memories were distorted by the differences in the laws of the two planes, but Damien could at least see the dark facilities in which they were made.

There was a reason the Divine Order was able to create homunculi.

The entire process had been given to them by the Foreign Races in return for their subordination.

Or, at least, that was Damien's assumption.

Regardless, the details of it all could be figured out when he entered the crack himself.

But before that, the invasive forces had to be defeated so his land wouldn't be corroded into theirs.

'I'll leave my squads to take care of things on their own. As for the rest...'

Damien glanced around.

There were a few impressive people, but for the most part, it was a lackluster show of power from these subsidiary influences.

Since Damien wanted to contain the spread of corrosion as much as possible, and these people would definitely hinder him from doing so if left alone...

'...I guess they wouldn't mind if I gave them a little help.'

Damien smiled and called on his power.

A change began to take place on the battlefield.

A subtle aura was exuded by his body, but nobody present could feel it.

But somewhere in the distance, a certain being's head turned in that direction.

"That is..."

A grin formed on their face.

"...Void."

Chapter 1445 Dimensional Crack [4]

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Tiamat's Death Authority was just as powerful in the Heavenly World as it was in the lower universe.

Along with Iris, Tiamat was one of the strongest people in Grand Heavens Boundary. They may have come to a place where stronger people existed, sure, but that didn't discount the amount of time they spent growing and training.

They were already high-rank Demigods. They'd been at that level for thousands of years, unable to progress much further because they were near the ceiling of their current power level.

Tiamat was a top powerhouse even in the Heavenly World. Perhaps she couldn't have the level of authority a God could hold, but under that level?

She was practically unparalleled.

The enemy vanguard completely collapsed because of her interference.

Grunts were durable. They didn't have much power, but their bodies could take hits like no other.

They didn't have much use offensively, but that wasn't how they were used. Once battle commenced, they became living shields who would willingly jump in front of their allies to absorb attacks.

Their allies would also pick them up and use them as shields before throwing them like blunt weapons.

They were like human-sized meatballs. Despite having no power of their own, if their weight was used as a weapon by others, it became quite dangerous.

There was obviously a limit to how much they could endure, but that wasn't Tiamat's problem.

She was at the very forefront of the battlefield. The first thing she did when she saw how the Grunts were being used to negate incoming damage, she spread a web of her mana over the ground and used her skills.

Skeletal hands pushed out of the dirt and grabbed any Grunt they could find. Some were suffocated in the ground and killed, while others were pushed towards the periphery forces who were tasked with taking care of them.

While she was manipulating the web, the Grunts were powerless and effectively useless.

Naturally, Tiamat was left unprotected while skillfully manipulating her mana like this, but the current battle wasn't an individual one.

If there was one thing Tiamat tried to learn more than anything else, it was cooperation.

She trusted Damien and she trusted Iris. There weren't many others she trusted, but because everyone else she worked with was related to them, they were given something of a pass.

She'd never had a reliable family around her that she could give her back to. Since she considered this one able to become that, she didn't hold back in trying to learn new things.

Of course, she didn't become more sociable. Her personality wouldn't change so easily. However, when it came to battle, she was absolutely confident in the team she'd trained and learned to work with over the past hundred years.

The Sentries immediately started shooting at Tiamat when they noticed the Grunts being hindered.

However, two shadows appeared before Tiamat and blocked all the incoming strikes.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The two women who protected Tiamat withdrew their swords and charged forward, keeping the path ahead clear.

They didn't need to worry about Titans or Sword Demons since Dominic and Darius had led their teams to deal with the giant monsters and bladed beasts, but there was still another power they'd seemingly forgotten about.

From Tiamat's own shadow, a black being arose, its knife aimed at her throat.

SHING!

The sound of its blade cut through the air. It approached, just inches away from Tiamat's throat.

Yet, that strike never completed its trajectory.

Black blood sprayed out of the Shadow's neck, hitting the wall of mana that Tiamat always maintained around her and dripping down to the ground.

The head of a spear stuck out of the Shadow's throat for only a second before it was ruthlessly pulled out, leaving the creature to die.

Tiamat had three squad members, not two.

These three women were hand-picked by Damien, or rather, Damien's Avatar, while they were still in the Sanctuary.

They had situations similar to Tiamat's, though to lesser extents, and their personalities were good as well.

These were people meant to support Tiamat and become her arms and legs, so naturally Damien picked the best of the best.

With years of training together, these four women knew each other better than they knew themselves, so when they found themselves on the battlefield, they moved in such a fluid combat formation that not a single attack could get past their barriers and inhibit them.

The Foreign Race vanguard was no match for them. When the other forces supporting their every movement were also taken into account, the battle situation became almost magically advantageous.

The subsidiary influences found themselves without roles after just a few minutes of combat.

With the way both Tiamat's and Dominic and Darius' squads tore through enemies, they were left with nothing to do but kill a few stray Grunts that were left on the outskirts of battle.

BOOM!

Another explosion rang out.

A massive head, at least five feet long, flew into the air and crashed into the ground near the tents set up for research purposes.

Compared to Tiamat's battlefield, the one Dominic and Darius led was far more brutal.

Heads were flying everywhere. The blood and guts of enemies piled up on the ground, and if that wasn't bad enough, the stench of burning corpses breezed through the air.

Ever since Darius unlocked his Sun and Moon Divine Flame and learned to properly wield it, he'd become a monster like Void Palace had never seen.

Even now, the way he moved his arms through the air like a conductor and used the brutal flames of the sun to incinerate massive beings far greater than himself was demonically beautiful.

Dominic was forced to work hard to compete. He never thought there'd come a day when his family's space and time techniques seemed dull, but they paled in comparison to the abilities Darius showed.

Therefore, he was given no choice but to improve.

He took those space and time techniques and really looked into them; he searched for their essence.

He wasn't anywhere near the end of that path, but the second he started treading it, he realized that space and time were far more than he ever thought they were.

He'd been looking down on them because everyone around him could use them.

But those who could bring out their full potential were few and far between.

He planned to be one of those people.

As he held his sword in his hand, reality warped around its blade.

Space and time became his to command, his to sever.

Every time he brought his sword down, tens of Sword Demons would split in half at once.

It was similar to the technique Damien taught Butcher, but executed at a far higher level.

The brothers were a perfect combination.

Dominic had speed and pinpoint accuracy. Meanwhile, Darius had a huge area of effect and power from a ranged position.

When they went into battle together, their squad wasn't left with anything more than morsels.

They still did their jobs regardless.

The performance of their squad leaders invigorated them. They were like barbarians acting on pure emotion, letting their valiance show on the battlefield.

Void Palace.

This was Void Palace.

Those who thought their mother sect was falling, those who worried about the future of the Southern Region, as they watched this scene, they felt that feeling in their hearts.

This wasn't the Void Palace they knew.

It was a far stronger version of its past self.

That was the greatest comfort they could ever receive.

And as Damien's people earned those feelings, he himself was nowhere to be found.

To know where he went, time had to be rewound by just a few minutes.

Chapter 1446 Old Burned Bridge [1]

A few minutes back, as Damien was watching the battle, he felt a sudden aura fluctuation in the distance.

It was subtle, almost imperceptible. It traveled in such a strange pattern that nobody else could notice it, but that pattern led straight to Damien.

This was obviously a summon.

No, rather, he was being alerted of that person's presence.

Damien was a naturally curious person, and on top of that, he didn't necessarily be present at the battlefield. His people were more than capable of taking care of this situation themselves. The corruption was guaranteed to not spread too far.

With nothing holding him back, Damien took the opportunity to investigate the incoming aura.

His search led him tens of millions of kilometers to the west. Not just that, he found himself descending into the earth through a ravine and finding a cave hidden deep within it before he started to feel the aura strongly enough to indicate its closeness.

There, hundreds of kilometers below the surface, Damien traveled through a cave for another few hundred meters before he found its end.

Along with the source of the aura.

"..."

Damien didn't say anything. He had to take a second to process what he was seeing before speaking.

'Is this even a living being?'

Damien thought Rein was beaten up when he found him, but the being in front of him was in a much worse state.

To start with, he only had the top half of his body. That top half was a sack of bones just barely held together by skin and muscle that had worn away with time. His head was like a sunken skull, his eyes just barely dots of light left in the abyss they represented.

And those eyes were staring right at Damien, emitting the aura of someone far stronger than a man who was left like this.

"You...are not him."

Those were the first words the man said to Damien.

"Not him. Not him. Not him. Not him."

The man clutched his head in his arms and rocked back and forth. His torso wasn't equipped for so much movement, causing him to fall over as he continued to chant the same two words.

"Not him. Not him. Not him. Not him."

Damien didn't know what to think.

Whatever he expected to find here, it wasn't this.

The aura he felt wasn't inherently hostile, but it had something evil about it. He investigated because he thought it was his enemies hiding in wait, but he was completely wrong.

This being had the strength of a God, according to the aura he gave off, but his mind was obviously not all the way present.

Combined with the state of his body, Damien wondered how this man managed to continue living for so long.

The man completely ignored Damien after that first sentence. It was as if he'd genuinely forgotten everything outside himself.

And those last words he said...

'I'm...not him?'

The man's aura was obviously calling Damien here.

Damien wasn't someone who could be confused with others easily. His aura was unique, and even that was to those who could sense him in the first place.

There was nobody who could mimic Damien's energy.

Therefore, it was practically impossible for anyone but him to be the one the man was looking for.

'Unless...'

Unless, the resemblance wasn't in power, but something else.

Damien was beyond curious.

'Should I just read his existence?'

This man had sentience, so there wasn't a guarantee that he wouldn't be killed in the process.

'But it doesn't look like I can get him to cooperate otherwise...'

The man's mind wasn't right. If Damien could enter his spiritual world or scan his soul, he might've had a chance to help him, but Damien couldn't do any of those things.

The man's condition was too strange. His power was fully present, but everything about him was gone. In this state, if he rampaged intentionally or unintentionally, it would be extremely dangerous.

'Hmm...'

Damien tried to think through solutions, but he couldn't necessarily find anything in his—

'No, there is something.'

A new ability he had yet to understand the capabilities of.

'Does this state count as chaos?'

He didn't know, but it didn't hurt to try and find out.

If chaos could be purified, couldn't this man's mind be brought back to normalcy?

Damien immediately put his theory into action.

He summoned his mana, infused with the concept of order.

For the sake of it, Damien also added the concept of harmony, knowing that the two went hand in hand.

He didn't quite know how to control the mana. When he was purifying the Foreign Races' vanguard earlier, he didn't have to think about it. He just directed his power at them and they fell.

However, for a more precise operation like this, didn't he need to be delicate?

'Is that even the case?'

Damien's sudden thought surprised him.

He followed the train it led to, seeing where it went.

'Every time my power has gotten stronger, the need for delicacy has lessened.'

He no longer needed to finely direct the output of his power or put the majority of his thought process into controlling it.

Those processes took place automatically.

When he became more powerful, he'd end up reaching a point where his wish became the universe's command.

Treading a path like that, Damien was actually returning to simplicity. All the complications lay in actually getting to a point where he could use the powers in his hand.

So when the time came to actually put those forces into motion...

'...can't I just will it?'

Damien knew what his intent was.

And as long as he knew his intent, his mana would know it too.

He allowed it to flow as it desired, leaving his palm and entering the ill man's body through his seven orifices.

"...!"

The man's chanting came to a halt. His hollow eyes widened along with his mouth, and his hands went to his throat.

Strange sounds exited his throat, almost like he was choking, but more like something was forcefully crawling up his esophagus.

The blackness in his eyes slowly faded, leaving room for his pure white sclera and bright green irises to shine as his eyes bulged out of his head.

It was a gruesome scene, but Damien watched with interest the entire time.

He could feel his mana working.

It went into the man's mind and began changing things, and not only that, it entered his body and swirled as if it was being circulated.

That was the cause of the man's suffocation.

Something Damien didn't realize the existence of was being pushed out of his body.

And as his mind became clearer and clearer, and as the visage of the man before him became clearer too, the man's eyes welled up with tears.

"Ah...ah...!"

He prostrated himself on the ground.

His body shook demonically.

His head jerked, and heaps of bloody red liquid and a slug-like black substance were vomited out of his mouth.

The disgusting substances wiggled on the floor like they were alive. It wasn't just one or two of them, but hundreds that eventually exited the man's body as minutes passed.

It took a very long time for the process to come to an end. Far longer than Damien was ever expecting.

But, eventually, the shriveled-up half of a man that he saw when he first entered the cave finally gained some life.

His blueish-purple skin returned to its original bronze color, and his muscles gained a little bit of vitality, just barely growing enough for him to somewhat function.

"You...are not him."

The first sentence the man said was the same one from before. Damien almost thought he failed.

However...

"You are not him, but..."

The man's face was still streaming with tears. His body was still prostrated on the ground.

"...who...are you?"

He asked another question.

One that meant far more than what it seemed on the surface.

Chapter 1447 Old Burned Bridge [2]

"Who am I?"

Damien repeated it back.

"Who...are you?"

The man was still coming to consciousness, so he couldn't say much more than the words he was already saying, but the look in his eyes was desperate, as if his entire life hinged on Damien's answer.

'Is there really a need to lie?'

He'd been concealing his identity whenever he left the palace, but he didn't feel the need to do so this time.

More so, he felt like it would be wrong to do so.

"I am Damien Void."

He answered truthfully, removing his disguise.

When the man saw his purple eyes, when he heard his name, his face morphed once again.

"Ah...ah...Void...!"

He knew he'd felt it properly before.

The aura of Void, he'd sensed it when Damien acted earlier. It was because of that aura that he called Damien over, but Damien wasn't the man he expected to see arrive.

"Void...?"

It became clear at that moment.

This man had indeed confused him for someone else.

And that person was nobody other than his own father.

"Were you perhaps looking for Dante Void?"

The man shook upon hearing the question.

'As expected.'

The name "Dante Void" meant something to this man, and whatever that something was, it made him so desperate he sent out a pleading call without any hope for an answer.

Damien frowned.

He didn't know a lot about his father.

However, he knew who his father had positive relationships with in this world.

Claire told Damien everything about Dante when she heard he was curious. Since he was a grown man now, he deserved to know the hidden truths behind his birth.

Those hidden truths included the origin story of Void Palace, the origin story of Dante Void.

In that story, everyone was mentioned. Whether it was the Veritas Clan, Holy Empire, Dragon Clan, or even Kyushu Federation, almost every influence was filled with people who had relationships with Dante Void.

Most of those were positive. Dante never went out of his way to make enemies.

And since Damien was going to take the reins of Void Palace until Dante was back, Claire made sure he knew all those people by name and appearance. That way, he could always turn to others for help when he encountered something he couldn't handle alone.

The information given to him for the sake of his safety came in handy at times like this.

Because there was nobody among Dante Void's associates with an appearance like this.

Damien didn't know if this man was an enemy or just a random man who got a look at Dante once in his life, but it didn't matter.

'He's not a friend.'

Which meant he was a foe until proven otherwise.

Damien didn't have any mercy for foes.

His arm flashed out.

He grabbed the man's head, prepping his mana.

It would be extremely easy to read this man's existence.

All he had to do was try.

But why was he hesitating?

There was definitely a real chance that this man wouldn't be left in one piece when Damien was done, but did that matter?

He could have the information he wanted if he just pushed for it.

He didn't need to wait for this man to recuperate.

Plus, what if he was an enemy?

This man, no matter his state, was a God. If he was given the chance to use his strength, Damien wouldn't be able to stand it.

That was the main reason Damien healed the man's mind and left his body alone.

Everything pointed towards doing it. Damien couldn't find a good reason not to.

But there still was one.

Morality.

He didn't want to lose it.

Morality was a precious thing that could only be possessed by those in fortunate positions.

He didn't have any when he was suffering in the First Dungeon or surviving after that, but as he became older, as he became more powerful, he started caring about others again.

He didn't want to ruin his morality by crossing a line he shouldn't cross.

And that line was exactly what kept him from taking the easy road this time.

He would rather take some more time and effort to get the answers he wanted than open the gate for less morally acceptable means against people who hadn't been proven guilty yet.

It was hard to fight against power.

With power, Damien could have everything he wanted. He tread his difficult path because he wanted to see the light at the end of it.

But power corrupted even the most upright of men.

Power made it easy to cross the line.

Damien fought because he refused to be corrupted.

As someone close to the natural order, he knew exactly where his line was and what he needed to do to stay away from it.

It was because he knew that he couldn't bring himself to simply read this man's existence.

And, if that wasn't enough...

'...that shit on the ground is...'

Damien thought it was something along the lines of "impurities" at first, but seeing how those globs of black slime wriggled and gathered together like a living organism, Damien figured it had to be more than that.

'With that size, it's hard to tell how long it's been inside him.'

Carrying a parasite was usually a sign that someone had a story to tell.

A brutal one, at that.

'For stories like that, isn't it better to hear it from the mouth of someone involved?'

Damien wouldn't understand the emotions behind it anyway.

'Or maybe that's all just excuses.'

He didn't care. Those excuses helped him justify his decision to ignore ease, so he allowed them to flow like running water.

It took quite a while for Damien to get a hold of himself.

He didn't want to admit it, but he was definitely feeling a serious sense of urgency after learning about his father's situation.

His emotions were desperately wanting to burst out, but he kept himself calm.

The problem was that Damien was always an emotional person. If the right stimulus appeared, he couldn't guarantee that he would stay calm.

But, this wasn't the time for him to explode.

He loosened his grip on the man's head and stepped back.

He could see the man's fear-filled eyes staring at him, but no words were exchanged yet.

Since the man didn't seem capable of starting the conversation, Damien decided to speak first.

"Who are you?"

He repeated the question back to the man in the simplest way he could so the man's mind could process his words easily.

The man's eyes lit up. He was excited that he was able to understand something.

And his mouth opened.

Words didn't come out first. The man had to cough out several mouthfuls of blood first.

But he got them out somehow.

The words he knew best, his own name...

"Alex...West..."

...and his most earnest wish.

"Please...please...read my story."

Damien's eyes widened.

Those weren't the words he expected to hear.

But, as he thought them over, a strange thought came to his mind.

He thought he was crazy, but he had no choice but to wonder.

'Does...does that mean what I think it means?'

Chapter 1448 Old Burned Bridge [3]

Damien hesitated for a moment, but seeing the man's pleading eyes, he stopped holding himself back.

Those words.

"Read my story."

They weren't words that alluded to a story that could be told.

Damien was told to read the story not listen to it. The problem was that his ability to do so wasn't something others were supposed to have.

This man was assuming that Damien could read his story.

Or, at least, that was Damien's assumption. When he put his hand back on the man's head and felt with his mana, though, that assumption became fact.

'There's no barrier.'

The man's mind was now open like it wasn't before.

'Maybe it's because I healed him?'

It may have been an instinctual reaction towards his savior, but it also could've been something deeper.

No person, no matter how mentally crippled they were, would willingly open their mind to others without a basis of trust.

That action held great meaning that every living being instinctively knew.

To allow another person into one's soul was an absolute show of trust. To do so without trust was an absolute show of submission.

The natural response of a human being was to protect his or her independence. As long as ego existed, it was impossible to invade another person's soul without injuring them.

Even for Damien, who targeted existence rather than soul, this logic held true.

'He's looking for Dante. Can my father also...?'

Damien shook his head.

'He asked me to read his story. Whatever it is, I'll learn it when I do so.'

He allowed his mana to flow as it wished.

He entered the man's mind, entered his soul, and read the truth of his existence.

Alex West.

He had a more important part in Dante's life than Damien thought.

In the beginning, there were six.

Dante, Hugo, Alex, Serena, Persia, and Claire.

They were a group that traveled and did everything together.

They were the ones who created their legend together, and they were the ones who created Void Palace together.

Six of them, not five.

Among them, Alex was the one who knew Dante the best.

They grew up in the same city. They didn't actually become friends until their teens, but they'd been acquainted through mutual friends and on good terms since they were kids.

Their relationship wasn't a shallow one.

When they actually found themselves becoming friends outside their mutual groups, they realized they had a lot in common.

As Dante began his adventures, leaving his hometown and traveling the world to become powerful, Alex followed him.

When Hugo was recruited, when Serena and Claire joined, and when Persia was saved, Alex was there.

He was Dante's right-hand man. From the very beginning of his journey, Alex had been his most trusted comrade.

They went through countless struggles together. They grew together, becoming people their old peers could never imagine them as.

They fought together, cried together, and almost died together.

No matter what happened, Alex was always standing by Dante's side.

There was never any resentment between them.

It was surprising. There was hardly ever a time when relationships like theirs could remain pure.

Dante's talent began to show early. The longer they stayed together, the further Dante went as Alex lagged behind.

Still, Alex didn't resent his or Dante's talent. He just tried his hardest to keep up, gaining his own opportunities and chasing his own goals.

But Alex made an easy target.

Unlike Dante, he didn't have overwhelming strength, and unlike the rest, he didn't have any great background.

The enemies the group made through their travels always targeted Alex when they found themselves unable to touch the rest.

Of course, for a while this led to chances that let Alex get stronger, however, the level of their enemies eventually became far too much for him to deal with.

It was a story as old as time, one that had repeated itself an immeasurable number of times over the course of history.

One day, when Alex was out on an expedition, his enemies found him.

And they overpowered him.

He didn't have the luck to find a way out.

Instead, he was captured. He wasn't killed, but instead tortured for several days without pause.

Unfortunately, his enemies were smart. They didn't keep him locked up long enough for his allies to get concerned, and they didn't announce his capture at their hands.

Alex was left hopeless, and in that state, he was infected with a parasite that took control of his body.

His mind was locked away, forced to watch the actions of his body through a screen.

That was the state he returned to Void Palace in.

As if everything was normal, his body continued acting. He watched as days turned into months and months turned into years, but no matter how much time passed, nobody could tell that he was no longer himself.

Until that fateful day.

That day when he stabbed Dante in the back.

At that time, Dante hadn't become invincible yet. He was still in a phase where he couldn't stop everything with power alone.

And, when he was weakened after a huge breakthrough, Alex struck.

With a blade coated in the worst poisons known to man, he drove a blade through Dante's heart.

It was a terrible day for Void Palace.

Not only did Alex betray them and fatally wound Dante, but he also destroyed several of the palace's facilities and killed several of their rising geniuses before escaping.

None of his old friends could stop him.

All of his bridges were burned that day.

And he could do nothing but watch as he was slowly driven to insanity within the confines of his own mind.

His body started working with the Straea Clan from that day forth.

The parasite had all his memories and experience. It acted perfectly as if he'd truly become a traitor.

The Void Palace group had multiple encounters with him over the coming years, but they were never able to see the oddity within him.

He desperately pleaded for them to save him. He wanted someone, anyone to see what was happening to him and tell his friends that he wasn't the man they thought him to be.

But it was impossible for him.

He was forced to work as a slave for the Straea Clan under the control of the parasite for thousands of years.

Or was it millions?

He couldn't tell.

But it went on until another fateful day.

Dante Void disappeared.

And suddenly, Alex West became useless.

The only reason they used Alex was because of his relationship with Dante.

It gave them the ability to maneuver around a lot of obstacles to get to him, especially with the knowledge Alex had accumulated from spending years together with him.

When Dante disappeared, they lost the need to use Alex.

As for what happened to useless tools?

The answer was clear.

Alex was thrown away.

He was meant to be killed, but with the last of his sanity, he managed to overcome the parasite for barely a second, fusing into its consciousness.

He became one with the creature, and, as his mind devolved due to its influence, it started acting on his base desires rather than the orders it was given.

He escaped the Straea Clan because of that fusion, but the only place he could go was into hiding. Nobody would accept him anymore.

That was how he found himself in the cave.

His bottom half was severed when he fled from his captors, and his mind was in pieces.

Millions of years passed once again.

And Alex's state only got worse.

All hope was lost for him.

Until he felt that aura. The one he thought he'd forgotten after so many years.

Void.

Chapter 1449 Old Burned Bridge [4]

Damien sucked in a deep breath after reading Alex's existence.

It was a truly sad life he led. One where he was never able to accomplish anything he truly desired, and where he only felt suffering without any light at the end.

He'd been rotting away in this cave for millions of years. It didn't seem like he was using mana to keep himself alive either, so he was probably trying to kill himself before he sensed Dante's aura from Damien.

He was a traitor, but he wasn't a traitor.

Damien couldn't imagine how he'd feel if he was forced to betray his allies while trapped in his own mind.

He would've raged. He would've done everything possible to rid himself of the parasitic existence.

Because of his fortune, he would eventually be able to bring himself out of that predicament.

No, in the first place, the Void would never allow that predicament to occur in the first place.

But Alex didn't have the Void supporting him.

Alex didn't have anything supporting him.

Damien sighed.

It really was a cruel fate.

His mother didn't mention Alex even once in their conversations. His name was even erased from Persia's Compendium, banished from the records of the palace.

It was evident that the people of Void Palace still held hostility towards Alex in their hearts despite all the time that passed.

They didn't have a single clue that their hostility was unwarranted.

'It's concerning as much as it's sad.'

Damien's father and mother were the strongest people he knew.

For them, along with his aunts and uncle to never realize the truth behind Alex's betrayal was extremely concerning.

There was no way they didn't consider the possibility. If they did so and still didn't get a clue, it meant the parasite controlling Alex was a supreme entity beyond their perception.

'Alex left their group before my father reached the heights that made him the strongest, so I don't know if he was able to figure something out, but...'

Damien glanced at the black slime on the ground.

It was already dead. Its lifespan was practically nothing when it wasn't within its host body.

Plus, this one was connected to Alex. It was a true copy of him with his desires and emotions.

Alex's desire for forgiveness and understanding stayed with his mind, and his desire for death to end his suffering died with the parasite.

What was left was the Alex from before he was ever corrupted.

'No, he'll probably never return to that point.'

But he was at least freed from his suffering.

His mind could heal with time as long as it was allowed.

'This man doesn't deserve a fate like this.'

Damien didn't have any mercy for traitors, but this situation was different.

He could see through Alex's eyes and feel through Alex's heart. He knew exactly how much Alex valued his friendships.

It was why he managed to grasp onto any string of vitality he could find to call Damien when he sensed his aura.

'Haa...it'll be a task to explain everything to Mother and the rest, but...'

He couldn't abandon this man here.

Not after all the talk about morality he was doing earlier, and definitely not after seeing the life this man led.

[Heal]

The [Heal] trait was no longer a trait anymore. It was now included in Damien's body as if it were a natural process, and it was extremely enhanced through the Authority of Samsara.

Alex's body was in a terrible state, but it was mostly caused by the parasite's existence and mana loss.

Most of Alex's vitality could be returned to him as long as mana was put into his systems, but [Heal] was still necessary to kickstart his Godly regeneration and completely bring him back to his previous state.

It took several minutes to bring luster back to Alex's skin. It took even more time to regrow his legs and recalibrate his entire body so he could use it like normal.

However, his mind couldn't be easily fixed.

The problem wasn't something Damien could fix with his current abilities.

Just like when he had to heal Iris in the past, he would need to control Nonexistence to bring Alex's mind back.

But, of course, there was no easy solution like the [Void Daughter] title for Alex.

It would be a slow process of bringing back function and ego, but Damien was certain Alex could eventually be returned to his past self.

'Until then...'

"Can you stand?"

He wasn't just testing if Alex could move his body, but also if he could comprehend the words spoken to him.

Alex stared at Damien for a minute with big eyes like a clueless dog, but eventually, he shakily put his feet on the ground and lifted himself.

Damien took a step back.

Alex took a step forward.

Damien raised his brow, taking another three steps back and one to the side.

Alex mirrored his movements, taking three steps forward and one to the side.

'Hmm...it's worse than I thought.'

Damien expected Alex to have at least regained some sort of intelligence since he was speaking earlier and could understand words now, but it seemed it was selective healing.

Alex was able to follow orders as they were given to him, but he wasn't able to think on his own yet.

'His ego almost completely died.'

To bring back an ego was far more difficult than bringing back an entire soul.

Egos were ethereal, nonexistent representations of identity that managed to exist in reality.

Since Alex's egos only contained his base desires and nothing else anymore, he could only act on things that followed those desires.

Damien held Dante's aura. Damien was related to those desires. Therefore, Damien's commands would be followed.

'It could be dangerous to bring him into the real world right now. It's uncertain what he'd do in response to external stimulus.'

For now, it was better to keep Alex contained in the Sanctuary.

'I can slowly introduce him to stimuli until he's become accustomed enough to interact with society.'

He had a lot of work to do without a lot of reward at the end of it.

But Damien was going to do it regardless.

This man was too pitiful to leave alone.

For Alex's sake, and to resolve the pit in the hearts of his family, Damien was willing to put in the work.

That was enough for him.

Damien didn't have trouble taking Alex into the Sanctuary.

He created a new space to contain him and made preparations for his future healing.

Left alone in the cave, Damien sighed to himself again.

Unfortunate situations and tragic fates were everywhere.

Alex had a terrible life, but it wasn't a unique one. The same thing that happened to him had happened to countless people throughout history.

Of them, he could be considered lucky, because only a rare few of them had people like Damien who could save and redeem them.

But that was something for Alex to realize on his own when he'd returned to normalcy.

'I've been gone for a while now.'

Damien had to return his attention to the matters at hand.

'The battle is probably coming to an end right now, so I should start making my way back.'

Dominic, Darius, and Tiamat had been putting in a significant amount of work while Damien was gone, so the battle was indeed almost over.

But the scene there no longer looked like it did when Damien left.

In the middle of the snowy biome that held its own brand of ethereal beauty was now a rotted circle.

A mark of the Foreign Races' corruption.

Chapter 1450 New World [1]

The original goal was to stop the spread of corruption into the Heavenly World.

Tiamat and the rest did their jobs perfectly. They eliminated the incoming threat with speed and precision so that the corruption didn't get further than they wanted it to.

But they couldn't stop it completely.

The corruption began spreading the instant the Foreign Races' vanguard entered the world. There was no way to stop that.

By the time the battle ended, an area the size roughly a hundred square feet in size was left rotted. In the pure white scenery of the principality, it stood out quite severely.

When Damien came back, it was the first thing he saw.

The people who'd come to deal with the crack had already retreated to recuperate.

Tiamat and the rest were the same. They were waiting for Damien to return while entertaining those who tried to make connections with them.

It was good practice for Dominic and Darius, who were part of the ruling clan of Void Palace, but they didn't have the eyes necessary to know how to treat each and every person.

Luckily, Tiamat was different.

She could judge people well with her years of life experience, and she'd been taking time throughout the battle to see how everyone else was doing, so she knew better than anyone who to associate with and who to shun.

With her help, the two gained social skills they never thought they'd need, and even the belligerent Darius learned how to be eloquent when he needed to.

It was a convenient few minutes of growth that would become useful in the future.

Damien saw them second, but seeing how his brothers were acting, he decided to leave them alone for a bit and study the corruption.

'It's gross.'

The ground was reddish black and flaking like polluted skin.

It had a disgusting mushy texture, and as Damien stood on it, he could feel himself being subtly affected by its aura.

'I see. Even this is an offensive tactic.'

They weren't just claiming land, they were creating traps for their enemies.

'Thinking about how many of these corrupted patches exist in the world makes me want to gag.'

Foreign Territories weren't as rare as they needed to be. It was a real concern.

Damien knelt down, putting his hand to the ground.

'Can I purify it?'

He closed his eyes and felt the world.

'I...am not sure.'

Damien could definitely do it. If he could purify the chaos in Alex's body, there was no question about whether or not he could purify such a small Foreign Territory.

The problem was something else.

'These laws...don't feel natural.'

He recognized it somewhat.

These laws functioned similarly to the Demonic Energy in Damien's possession.

'As expected, it's different over there.'

Just like how the Severed World had its own laws, just like how the Sanctuary had its own laws, the place the Foreign Races came from had a unique set of laws.

Until Damien comprehended them, he wouldn't be able to properly get rid of the corruption or anything related to the Foreign Races in the same way.

'It ends up coinciding with my original plans, so that's good.'

Damien glanced at the crack in the distance.

Despite the battle being over, it hadn't closed yet.

This was routine.

Dimensional Cracks would remain open for several hours or even days after the Foreign Race invasion. There was a possibility of a secondary invasion, but for the most part, they'd easily close once their energy was dispersed.

The problem was that their energy would enhance the surrounding Foreign Territory, which not only made the corruption spread, but also worsened the negative effects experienced by those in its vicinity.

The usual solution to this problem was to bring in spatial practitioners who could close the crack prematurely, but Damien had other plans for this one.

'I'll have to wait until the others leave...'

He couldn't do it outright. He also couldn't evacuate them all under false pretenses, because the processes for such a situation had already become streamlined across the entire world.

But, since Void Palace was in charge of closing the crack and there were several research teams present to take measurements of the strange structure, there was still an excuse to use.

The first wave ended too easily.

For a crack that killed so many Demigods to be cleared without a problem could be amounted to Void Palace's interference, but to guarantee safety, it was better to excavate the area so the palace's experts could investigate properly.

Or, at least, that's what Damien had his people spread.

It was somewhat suspicious, but did Void Palace have a reason to lie?

Other than the researchers, who were given a few more hours to finish getting their readings and pack up, everyone left.

And once they were gone as well, Damien finally approached the crack with his people.

'I'll have to leave most of them behind.'

He was planning to go alone, but he gave that up in return for giving his brothers a good training trip.

'But someone has to stay back to command the rest.'

It had to be either Dominic, Darius, or Tiamat.

But it couldn't be Tiamat.

This trip meant more to her than it did to anyone else, so she was definitely coming.

Of his two brothers, Damien didn't know who would be more suited for a trip like this, but...

'...Darius will probably grow more.'

His power source was a Heavenly Flame. Heavenly Flames were extremely adaptable, and even if put in a situation where the Universal Law or Heavenly Order was completely reversed, they'd be able to maintain their power.

It wasn't the same for Dominic. He'd be essentially crippled until he learned how to maneuver around the new laws.

'Alright.'

Damien just had to break the news to his brother now.

He really expected it to be a huge argument.

Surprisingly, though, Dominic was quite receptive.

He pretty much understood Damien's reasoning. He was a smart man. His intellect was one of his specialities.

Since he knew why he wasn't chosen and knew what role he was necessary for in the Heavenly World, he readily accepted Damien's plans, promising to hold down the fort while the expedition team took care of business.

With everything settled, Damien approached the crack with Darius and Tiamat.

They stood before it, feeling its chaotic energy.

It was dark and malevolent.

But it was also something unique.

This kind of aura just couldn't be found in the Heavenly World. Not because the Heavenly World was all righteous, but because it simply couldn't configure its laws in such a way to create it.

They stood there in silence. They weren't hesitating. They were taking a moment to digest the weight of their actions.

It had been done before.

Cracks were entered all the time.

But not in this manner.

And not with Damien heading the expedition.

This would not be something normal.

They would likely see many jaw-dropping things from this point forth.

For that, they needed to mentally prepare.

A minute passed as those who would remain in the Heavenly World watched them.

Damien looked between Darius and Tiamat, seeing them nod back at him.

With his eyes wide open in search of something amazing, he took his first step forward.

To enter the homeworld of the Foreign Races.