

# Void 1451

Chapter 1451 New World [2]

Tall, dark walls made of mossy stone bricks.

A short and narrow passageway that led into the darkness in the distance.

No signs of a ceiling above, but a damp feeling that suggested its existence.

This was what Damien and his group saw when they first stepped through the crack.

Though, it took several minutes for them to see it.

The act of stepping through a Dimensional Crack into another world was spectacular in many ways.

One's body was forced to align itself with the new laws it felt, either adapting or being suppressed by them. Along with that, one's mind would be assaulted by information as one traveled between planes, an experience most couldn't handle.

Adding on top of that the chaotic tunnel that bridged the Heavenly World to the otherworld, it was an overwhelmingly negative experience for those who had it.

Damien was fine.

There was never a situation where Damien wasn't fine after spatial travel.

Darius and Tiamat, however, were a completely different case.

It took them a long time to get their minds in order and heal their bodies from the trauma of the transfer.

Afterward, they had to check the calibration of their bodies to see how they'd been affected by the new world's laws.

They could definitely feel them.

Those laws were like heavy plates of metal on their shoulders, pushing them down.

Their mana was suppressed, and their power was restricted to an extreme degree.

Both of them would be able to overcome it.

Tiamat could feel the inherent connection she had with this place the moment she arrived.

Her body was suppressed, but at the same time, it was changing, morphing as it encountered an energy it considered familiar.

She didn't doubt that she'd be adapted to the new world soon, and perhaps she would even thrive in ways nobody expected.

Naturally, as someone with a far less mysterious birth, Darius didn't have the same fortune.

He was truly suppressed. Whether it be his laws, his mana, or his Divinity, he could feel them all caving under the pressure of these new laws.

Luckily, he possessed a Heavenly Flame.

Even if everything else failed, his flame would not.

Therefore, he would eventually find a way to survive as long as he was given the chance.

Damien didn't have to worry about something like his energy or Divinity being suppressed. He possessed the same energy the people here used, and his Divinity was far too powerful for a mere otherworldly Universal Law to touch.

When the Void was also taken into account, it would've been stranger if Damien was actually affected by the environment,

But since he wasn't, he was able to observe the surroundings with much more ease than his companions.

At first, they seemed to be in some type of tunnel. However, deep in the distance, Damien could see that the tunnel branched off in two.

'Is it some sort of system, or...?'

There was another, more likely possibility, considering the nature of Dimensional Cracks.

'It's a labyrinth.'

Damien could practically smell the stench of a trap-laced beast-filled maze of mystery from this place. It was that same damp smell, like nothing contained within had been able to get out for untold millennia.

'It's more complicated if it's like this.'

Damien was expecting to just arrive in the otherworld, but it clearly wasn't that easy.

Dimensional Cracks were not an organic phenomenon. This much had been made clear from the start.

Since Dimensional Cracks were opened by the Foreign Races, they'd naturally prepared what was on their side.

Whether that was dungeons, mazes, or labyrinths, there was always some sort of structure waiting for those who were brave enough to explore the otherworld.

The only known exit to these structures was the gate itself, which would close after explorers returned to their own world through them.

However, was that really the only answer?

'Is this really just a separated plane used for invasion, or is this a whole new world that we haven't discovered yet?'

Nobody else had taken the time to even try. It was disappointing, but it was true.

Damien would be the first.

And since his goal was not the labyrinth, but what lay outside, he had no plans of entertaining this structure's demands.

Demonic Energy flooded the air.

It was black and demonic, inky like the mana of the Nox.

This was the natural energy of this world. With it, Damien could do whatever he wanted without interference.

Of course, he still had to learn the world's laws to do anything intricate, but if it was just a show of power...

VOOOOOOOOOM!

Rolling waves of fog swept through the entire labyrinth, powered by Damien's mana.

They seeped into the walls, into the ground, into the ceiling.

They brushed past those living and those dead, clogging those inanimate and meant to take the lives of others.

Everything in the labyrinth was touched by Damien's mana.

And when he was certain that not a single spot was left untouched...

'Begone.'

He banished it.

From the walls to the ground to the ceiling, from creatures dead or alive to those inanimate objects meant to take the lives of others, everything disintegrated.

Well, everything except one creature.

"This must be the guy," Damien said out loud.

"This one? Really?" Tiamat responded skeptically.

"Well, everything else is gone, so it has to be him."

"I see...it's a bit disappointing."

"True, but it's reality."

Damien shrugged.

Around thirty meters in front of them was a massive creature that looked like a cross between a bull, a human, and a snake.

It had a deadly aura for sure. It was obviously more than capable of massacring Demigods like they were pigs and chickens.

However, that being wasn't unaffected by Damien's attack.

It was missing half of its body already, and its position was one of submission, not aggression.

"I guess it sensed the threat to its life and surrendered."

Tiamat's guess was spot on. This creature's fight-or-flight instinct was nonexistent.

It was the strongest being it knew other than the ones who contained it here.

In its mind, anyone who was stronger than it was one of them, which meant it had no choice but to submit.

That creature was the guardian of the crack, the one who killed everyone who entered to clear it, and the one who would have caused havoc in the Heavenly World if Damien didn't stop it here.

But it wasn't the only thing in the labyrinth.

The reason Damien didn't participate in the earlier subjugation presented itself now.

This labyrinth, at one point, was filled to the brim with vanguard forces of all five types.

After the first wave, there was meant to be a second and even a third before this particular crack died down.

But the instant Damien arrived in the labyrinth, he wiped all those vanguard forces out of existence with a sweep of his hand.

That kind of power couldn't just be shown in front of the general public now, could it?

Damien's strength didn't need to be publicized more than he allowed it to be.

But that was beside the point.

Since they were in a foreign land now, Damien didn't need to hide so deeply.

And since they were out of the labyrinth due to his actions, he could finally confirm the main theory he'd had since he first learned of the Foreign Races.

'This isn't a separate plane. It's not a separate universe either.'

No, it was deeper than that.

There was nothing in the surroundings to cue him into anything, but he could feel it just from the air brushing against his face.

'This place...'

Damien's eyes widened.

A fact he never thought could be true until today.

There was no way to deny it.

'This place is an entire cosmos, completely independent from the one I know.'

#### Chapter 1452 New World [3]

The labyrinth was built far removed from any sort of society.

When it fell, Damien and his group were exposed to the natural wilderness of the otherworld. However, it was different from what they expected.

The general air of this place was desolate. It gave the feeling that the entire world would be barren, with rotted soil spanning for millions of kilometers without any attempts to purify it.

That was a misjudgment.

While the air still maintained that feeling, the environment itself was quite diverse with unique flora and fauna that Damien had never seen before.

The area they were in now was reminiscent of a jungle. The trees were naturally red and glassy, almost transparent if not for their color.

The surrounding plants also had similar colors, completely opposing the green and lush appearance of their home cosmos' wilderness.

The auras of beasts populated the large area they were currently in, but none of those beasts came remotely close to where their group was.

No matter the cosmos, living beings prioritized survival. After the labyrinth's disappearance and Damien's group's entrance, only a fool would go test the waters and see what happened.

"Let's start exploring. Stay close and report everything. If you see something suspicious or interesting, wait until the rest of us arrive before digging deeper."

Damien gave the orders, which Darius and Tiamat accepted.

It was much faster for the three of them to split up if they were going to properly investigate the area, however, as they were in a foreign land, they couldn't be too pretentious without knowing the consequences.

Darius went west, while Tiamat went south. Damien was given two directions to choose from, but before moving, he spread his awareness.

'The other two can probably barely sense their surroundings right now. Otherwise, we wouldn't need to do this.'

Darius and Tiamat would need at least some time to get used to their new states. Damien allowed them to explore individually so they could familiarize themselves with this world before they went deep into its midst.

He, on the other hand, didn't need to take such extraneous measures.

His awareness wasn't blocked. Sure, he couldn't use laws like Existence yet so he couldn't access Absolute Perception, but his base awareness was more than enough.

As it spread through the jungle, Damien saw many interesting plants and creatures. The ecosystem built in this jungle over time revealed itself to him beautifully, allowing him to see both the similarities and differences between this place and the world he knew.

But, after a few minutes, Damien stopped his prying.

'This is too inefficient.'

He retracted his awareness. Sending it out in every direction gave him a lot of information about the nearby area, but it didn't allow him to look past what he was already seeing.

Instead, he gathered his perception and shot it in a single direction, pushing until he couldn't push anymore.

The direction he chose was north. It was a good decision, better than he ever expected it to be.

Because, as his awareness flew north, he found himself hitting a wall.

Literally.

'What is this...?'

Damien poked and pried at the wall, but he couldn't get a sense of it.

It wasn't a physical wall. It was completely invisible and ethereal, and while it was blocking his awareness, it didn't seem to exist for the creatures native to this area.

'Strange...'

Damien traced along the wall. His awareness found itself going both east and west, getting further and further away from the central point that was his own body.

'Is it like that, then?'

Damien already had a guess in mind.

If the natural inhabitants of this world weren't blocked by something that could stop him, it obviously meant he was being stopped because of his origin.

If so, then that invisible wall marked the edge of the area he was allowed to explore as someone who came through the Dimensional Crack.

'It doesn't seem like a man-made mechanic. Could it be that the Foreign Races also experience this on our side?'

Damien's mind wandered.

'I'm sure they haven't been restricted like this. At least, not the majority of them. If that's the case, then there has to be an accompanying mechanic that gets rid of the wall.'

His thoughts raced as he tried to uncover the mystery.

He didn't realize he was doing so without much prior knowledge at all.

After entering the new world, Damien's spirit took over.

He was still aware of his overarching goals, but his desire to see and experience new things was far too strong for him to maintain the same single-minded focus on a goal that he kept in the Heavenly World.

He went over several possibilities, walking east from his original position at the same time.

'Whatever this area is, we're at the northern tip of it. Logically speaking, if we head straight south, we'll encounter more than if we go in the other two directions and trace the wall.'

If he wasn't wrong, Tiamat would be first to—

'Hm?'

Damien's perception suddenly picked something up, but he didn't try to dodge it.

Within the same second, something grabbed Damien's ankle and yanked him into the air.

'Well, this is something.'

Damien smiled wryly.

His ankle was currently caught in a rope trap that had been tied to a nearby tree branch. He had been captured by one of the most primitive means imaginable, but that was exactly why he allowed himself to be caught.

Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik!

A strange sound emanated from the distance.

It was like the call of a reptilian beast locating its prey, but it was oddly throaty, as if there was more to the animal than just the functions it needed to survive.

Damien glanced over, peering through the canopy.

And what he found was...

"Kurang-ha..."

...a human.

A female human covered in clothes made from the leaves of the surrounding trees. Her face was caked in blood, purposefully spread in a tribal pattern that seemed to denote her status as a warrior.

She approached the tree where Damien hung from her post in the nearby canopy, maneuvering her body animalistically as she repeated the same word.

"Kurang-ha....un habak tiren-ha cona Kurang-ha!"

It was a language Damien didn't recognize, but it was definitely a language.

That was a word made by a creature with some sort of intelligence, a creature born in civilization.

Damien's eyes lit up in excitement.

How could he not be excited?

It was a language he didn't know.

Since when did something like that exist?

Grand Heavens Boundary and the Heavenly World had plenty of ancient languages that were still practiced by those few and far between who knew them, but everyone spoke the universal language by default.

The concept of a language barrier simply didn't exist.

For Damien to encounter one now, how could he not be surprised?

'This person is a key.'

Damien was happy to play the role of helpless prey to this clueless person.

Because, if she took him to the place where her people gathered, she would be giving him so much more than she ever realized.

The role of an explorer in a foreign land...

Damien had taken it on before, but none of those lands had ever been truly unexplored,

This time was different.

This time, he was truly the first.

And because of that, every experience he had was riveting.

Chapter 1453 New World [4]

The tribal woman approached Damien carefully. She didn't immediately assume that he was captured because he'd been caught in her trap.

Her arms and legs moved in tandem like those of a beast rather than those of a civilized human, which allowed her to maneuver the jungle with much more proficiency than she otherwise would be able to.

It was an obvious adaptation made by the human body for survival, but Damien appreciated it well.

He had reached a point in his life where beauty didn't mean anything to him.

Damien had four wives. When he looked at women other than them, let alone attraction, he hardly even recognized them as women.

His eyes were too indifferent.

Therefore, despite the foreign beauty of this woman, Damien didn't have any such thoughts.

He was focused on her body, though.

The way her muscles flexed and moved, the way they protruded in places where they usually wouldn't, and the way they'd evolved due to her way of life; Damien was extremely interested in it.

He was even more interested in how she developed her power, but he couldn't see that without alerting her to his security, which was the opposite of what he wanted.

The woman already approached him. She was staring at him from atop the tree branch from which he hung, clicking her tongue in that strange way.

Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik!

At first, Damien assumed it was some sort of echolocation or something similar, but he soon found his views changed.

Every time she clicked her tongue, a wave of energy subtly spread into the atmosphere. It registered his heartbeat, his breathing, and even his micro-expressions as he pretended to be prey.

'She's testing the waters.'

The fauna of this jungle likely had similar systems of their own. If Damien responded to her clicking, she would register him as a threat and take measures to neutralize him.

If she sensed anything wrong with his breathing or heartbeat, she would do the same.

It was an interesting method, quite animalistic just like everything else about her, but it was absolutely effective.

Even Damien was forced to control himself, regulating his heartbeat and breathing to make it seem like he was unconscious.

'When is she going to...?'

He didn't get to ask his whole question before he got the answer.

The woman started pulling on the rope he was attached to, pulling him up the tree. The strength she used to do so was far beyond what her smaller frame seemed able to handle, but the lean muscles that were present throughout her frame allowed her to do it with ease.

Damien's body was slung over her shoulder like it was nothing.

Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik! Tik!

She turned in another direction and clicked her tongue again. After assuring her surroundings, she leapt to the next tree.

Swoosh!

'Woah!'

Damien almost opened his eyes in that moment.

The second they reached the next tree, they had reached the one beyond it.

The winds rushed by as the woman moved. Her speed was impeccable, especially considering the extra weight she was carrying.

The environment turned into a blur. If an ordinary mortal was moved at this speed, their body would be torn apart by the sheer pressure of the wind.

To truly understand how powerful the woman was, Damien's weight had to be mentioned.

Damien didn't weigh the same as an average man.

At his weight, if he was still a mortal, he'd be somewhere around 200 pounds, give or take.

However, he was nothing close to a mortal.

Damien's body had undergone several transformations, and on top of that, his physical strength was immense. It was impossible for his body to maintain a normal weight with such power hidden inside of it.

Damien weighed several thousand tons at the very least.

He could easily control this weight in normal cases. It never hindered him, nor would others feel it.

This was a special case where he had to stop regulating it.

Yet, the woman was carrying him with ease.

'If she's a picture of the average hunter of their civilization, then I really can't underestimate them.'

Strength was normal.

Thousands of tons meant nothing to a Demigod. Even if Damien never regulated his weight, whether it was his wives or others, nobody would have a problem lifting him or pulling him around.

This woman wasn't a powerful practitioner, though.

She didn't have any signs of mana training in her body.

This obviously didn't stem from her origins, since the Nox and members of the Foreign Race vanguard had clear signs of mana training in their bodies.

The system of practice this tribal society used was different from the norm, another interesting fact Damien was able to realize before he even met them.

The woman rushed through the jungle with extreme familiarity.

She didn't move in a linear path, taking extra precautions so that on the off chance that Damien wasn't as neutralized as she thought, he wouldn't be able to trace the location of her home.

It wasn't just Damien, but all the beasts in the vicinity that she was wary of.

But she still eventually made it to the village.

Her steps became heavier and her pace slowed.

Soon enough, Damien once again heard her voice.

"Umak tara-ha! Ton Kurung-ha di pethol reveen."

"Pertak nikten. Kurang-ha ni di pon."

"Sen."

The woman had a short conversation with a man, evidently another member of her village, before seemingly reaching a conclusion.

'I can't understand them at all. Their language bears no similarity to ours, but I think I can roughly assume what they're saying.'

The word "Kurang-ha" was one Damien had heard more than others. It was obviously being used to refer to him.

As for the rest, Damien had no idea, but they were probably discussing what to do with him.

They were tribal people, but they weren't stupid. They could clearly tell that Damien wasn't some beast that resided in the forest.

They were probably confused by his presence.

The question was how they would respond to that confusion.

Damien couldn't spread his awareness or open his eyes, so he could only perceive the village with his natural spatial connection.

It was ingrained in the trees. He couldn't tell the exact details of the residences and facilities around him, but they were made out of a material different from the ones he'd seen before and had a structural integrity that made it somewhat difficult to teleport between them.

The village society was in the sky, not the ground.

The woman took Damien up several layers of canopy before reaching her final destination.

At that point, she took him into a building and threw him on the floor.

'Damn. Not enough time.'

Damien was in a cell. He was certain of that.

Unfortunately, he didn't have much of a chance to scope out the village while she was bringing him here.

She was just too fast.

'From what I can tell, they're more advanced than I originally thought. It's as if they're a budding civilization with the knowledge of an old one, but for some reason, they're only developing in certain aspects while ignoring the rest.'

It was probably a product of their environment. The jungle didn't give them room for many amenities.

But they still chose to live here, which meant there was something here that was worth staying for.

Damien waited a bit before he opened his eyes.

And the first thing he saw...?

He had no choice but to smile wryly.

"You guys...?"

In front of him were two very familiar people with two very embarrassed expressions on their faces.

It seemed Damien wasn't the only one who was captured.

But, judging from their expressions, it seemed he was the only one who did it on purpose.

"Haha..."

Damien laughed in astonishment.

"This is...quite an interesting situation."

Chapter 1454 Gehenna Tribe [1]

"So? What happened to the two of you?"

Since they were stuck in a cell anyway, Damien thought he might as well ask.

"Well, um..."

Darius spoke first.

"I fell...into a hole..."

Frankly, when he was barely aware of what happened. He was just walking through the jungle like normal and looking at everything around him in wonder when he suddenly found himself at the bottom of a hole.

It wasn't even a deep hole. Darius had more than enough strength to jump out and continue on, but somehow, he couldn't do anything he thought.

He was caught off guard. In those few seconds he spent in the hole, he'd been tranquilized by an extremely powerful substance.

He passed out, and when he woke up again, he was here.

It was similar for Tiamat.

She didn't get caught so easily, of course, but after a series of events that involved several primitive traps that were strangely powerful, she was also tranquilized and brought here.

The two of them weren't weak just because they'd been suppressed. Damien was surprised to find that they'd been genuinely captured, and with such regular means at that.

"I guess this tribe is really something special," he said after hearing their explanations.

Damien didn't admonish the two or doubt their abilities. Since he knew what he could do, he instead opted to change his perception of the tribal village.

And, the question arose.

'Why wasn't I tranquilized?'

There wasn't really an answer, but it was a question that had to be asked.

"Anyway, what's the plan?"

Tiamat and Darius looked to Damien for structure, but he didn't have anything to give them.

"I think there's something interesting in this jungle. I want to investigate it. We might be delayed in our main goals for a bit, but I don't think it's a useless endeavor."

Damien didn't get much of a chance to survey their current whereabouts, but he was certain about his assumptions.

There was something here.

And this tribe was heavily related to it.

He wanted to know more about them after seeing the woman from before.

Their language, their culture, their ways of using power, he wanted to study it and see how it differed from the conventions he knew.

And, with the jungle's dense mana activity, this was a great place for him to familiarize himself with the laws of the foreign cosmos.

"I'll follow whatever you want to do," Tiamat said.

"Same here. You're the leader. I don't think I can make decisions better than yours anyway," Darius added.

Damien nodded with a smile.

"For now, we should lay low. Keep your strength contained, and don't thoughtlessly provoke the villagers. We need to get on their good side before anything else."

The villagers currently viewed them as a threat of some sort, different from what they usually faced. This much could be ascertained from their imprisonment.

However, as Damien's group represented the unknown, the villagers didn't immediately bare their fangs.

Instead, it looked like they'd chosen a more mindful route.

Damien, Tiamat, and Darius remained in their cell for several days.

Every few hours, a villager would enter the prison and bring them food. Said villagers wouldn't interact with them or even look at them, but it was obvious how curious the people were about the group of travelers they'd found.

Damien's group didn't look like them.

Their skin was white, their bodies were taller and wider, and they gave off a scent like something exotic, something the villagers had never faced before.

With the villagers' natural greyish complexion and smaller bodies optimized for rapid movement and hunting in the jungle, Damien's group practically appeared like aliens to them.

Even Tiamat, whose skin bore some resemblance to theirs.

They kept the trio imprisoned for over three days not as a show of power or something similar, but because they had to decide what they wanted to do with them.

Naturally, a conclusion didn't come easily.

There were several arguments among the people.

Some conservative tribe members wanted them killed, while some more pacifist ones wanted to send them away and pretend they were never here.

Some wanted to test if they were prey, and some others wanted to get to know them and satisfy their curiosity.

The village was only home to a few hundred people, but they were a tight-knit family. A decision on matters this important couldn't be reached easily.

After all, the consequences had to be considered.

Nevertheless, after three days of debate with no sign of compromise, Damien's group was hauled out of the jail cell and brought in front of the people.

They were stood on a raised platform on the ground, surrounded by the village.

People stood on balconies and treetops everywhere, gazing at them with a myriad of expressions.

Damien caught the woman who captured him in the crowd as well.

She was standing behind an old woman with a crown of feathers on her head, evidently an important figure in the tribe.

The old woman was one of ten elderly figures who sat like a council in front of Damien's group, judging them.

By the way the rest of the tribesmen showed them respect and gave them space, it was clear that they were the main decision-makers of this group.

"Umbak tarik! Eria teesha ka ni Kurang-ha!"

"Geh! Harash topan golang. Pen ni-ha no Kurang-ha di Gehenna!"

"Lopar ni. Kolahar kuramba ra boni. Gehenna ni pola tarade, esra polak di neti?!"

"HERET!"

The elders went back and forth, arguing in their own language.

Of the ten of them, nine were participating in the fierce argument that got louder and louder with time. Arms were flung, several gestures being made towards Damien's group, none seemingly friendly.

It was a chaotic scene.

Judging from the expressions of those observing, this kind of conflict didn't happen often.

But the tribe was split.

There was a clear divide between them on how to deal with the group of sentient beings they'd captured.

The only one who remained involved was the elderly woman with the feather crown.

She didn't speak.

Her eyes remained on Damien.

And sensing her gaze, Damien looked back up at her.

Something mysterious happened when their eyes connected.

Zip!

It was the sound of an object moving incredibly fast, but nothing moved at all.

It was a sound only Damien and the crowned elder heard, a sound like electricity arcing back and forth between their gazes.

They hadn't formed some sort of connection or anything like that.

But, there was something there.

It was as if they both realized that their purposes could be fulfilled through the other.

Or...maybe it was something deeper?

Damien couldn't quite explain it. This wasn't similar to anything he'd experienced before, but he knew it was a good thing.

Because the second he felt that feeling, the crowned elder banged the staff in her hands against the ground.

THUD!

The sound silenced everyone.

Whether it be the other elders or the gossiping crowd that had gathered, none of them dared to speak.

The Saintess had come to a decision.

"Haa..."

The crowned elder, the Saintess, slowly stood up.

"Ton Kurung-ha ga resz ni Gehenna."

She said those words, and immediately, the crowd went into an uproar.

THUD!

Her staff struck the ground again.

"SIEN!"

She shouted, her voice resounding through the entire village.

Even with the language barrier, Damien could understand that she'd just told them all to shut up.

Dirty looks came at him from one side, while fervent curiosity struck from the other.

These looks made the verdict evident to Damien as well.

It was good that these people were quite expressive.

"They will be allowed to stay."

What the Saintess said was something along those lines.

And that was the end of it.

Damien and the rest were taken back to their cell, but the treatment they received on the way was far removed from the rough pushing and pulling from when they were first brought out.

Within the day, as they waited in their cell, they were once again escorted out.

To a nearby hut that had clearly been recently built, exclusively for them to reside in.

It was that easy.

Perhaps trust wasn't gained and hostility was still rampant, but Damien and his group had been given permission to stay in the village.

For a conclusion that came without them having to do anything at all, it was quite welcomed.

As for what came next...?

None of the three could've expected what their lives would turn into.

Chapter 1455 Gehenna Tribe [2]

A year.

It flew by before anyone even realized it.

With the Saintess' approval, Damien's trio was given permission to live in the village, however, it wasn't an unconditional thing.

The three of them were far too uncultured by the villagers' standards.

They didn't know any language, they didn't know how to properly hunt in the jungle, and they didn't know the customs of the world that everyone else knew.

The Saintess permitted their stay, but they weren't expected to stay for long.

She basically just freed them and allowed them to do what they wanted.

However, Damien chose to stay.

Since that was the case, he had to assimilate himself into the village.

That was the start of a new life.

If Damien's group wanted food and shelter, they needed to contribute to the tribe.

As for how to do so, the past year was really a learning experience to figure that out.

The three of them were split up, since each of them had their own specialties.

Tiamat was taken by the village's women.

She, of course, had several things to say about this, but she didn't really have a choice.

If they were going to stay here, they had to abide by the village's ways.

Luckily, though, this wasn't a tribe with a heavy patriarchy or matriarchy.

There were women in many varied roles, so Tiamat definitely could've become a guard or something of the sorts, but the tribal women thought differently.

When they took her away, Damien didn't see her again for the rest of the year they'd been here.

The only thing he knew was that she was fine.

After all, the tribe wasn't openly hostile to them.

A majority of them were curious about these people who'd appeared in their lands so mysteriously.

That group was the one with Tiamat, so Damien didn't worry about what she was doing.

Darius' role was more surprising.

Darius was a man who only thought about combat. He never thought of himself talented or suited for anything else, nor did he want to be.

The tribesmen didn't think the same.

They took him to their forges.

He became an apprentice there, where body language mattered more than language, and began learning from the blacksmiths.

They'd seen the flame inside him from the moment they set eyes on him. That flame was wild and untamed, but it was so beautiful that no blacksmith could resist it.

They didn't want to see such a flame go to waste, and for that reason, they decided to bring Darius in, both to satisfy their own interests and help him.

Darius and Tiamat didn't leave the village often.

They didn't need to for their roles, and while Tiamat's situation was still unsure, Darius didn't have the strength to enter the jungle as he pleased.

At first, the tribesmen thought none of them would.

However, they hadn't met Damien yet.

Damien attracted the most hostility out of anyone from their group, particularly from the men of the tribe.

He wondered why for a while, but the answer was sillier than he thought.

It wasn't because he did something disrespectful.

It wasn't because he was strong.

It wasn't because he'd become a hunter, one of the most prestigious roles within the tribe, and had gathered a great amount of praise from the Elders and his peers.

It wasn't even because the Saintess seemed to be protecting him.

No, rather, it was because of the woman who'd been sticking to his side ever since the first day.

The same woman he'd been learning the local language from.

And the same woman who'd captured him when he first arrived in this world.

She was something of a darling to the tribe.

The hostility shown to Damien wasn't some petty nonsense like misplaced love. Rather, it was the protectiveness of hundreds of men who all were like older brothers to her.

Her name was Thalia.

The tribe had a tradition where surnames were only given to those who were married based on a number of factors, so she didn't have one yet.

She'd shown an interest in Damien from the start.

He couldn't understand it at first, but as she taught him the language, he became more familiar with her reasoning and character.

She was a playful one.

She liked to explore the jungle and understand more about the world. She truly enjoyed hunting like no other, and when she was doing so, while she looked extremely serious, her enjoyment was beyond anything Damien had ever seen.

She was a loving person who viewed the entire tribe as her family, and she was also the successor of the Saintess.

Thalia took interest in Damien because she realized how he'd fooled her when she first captured him.

She wanted to see his strength, mysterious and esoteric compared to the tribe's methods, and she wanted to understand how he hunted.

They became friends fast.

And thanks to her, Damien had an easy year with the tribe where he learned more than he ever thought he would.

They were the Gehenna Tribe.

They had been living in this jungle for at least tens of generations, and they had such a unique culture that Damien was fascinated by something new every day.

The environment they lived in, this sacred jungle of theirs, was a diverse environment with rivers of clear water, mountains, and huge swatches of land filled with a mystical variety of creatures.

Learning to hunt them, learning to prepare and cook them, learning what they meant to the tribe...

Damien felt like a kid again, just recently introduced to the wide world.

Today was another regular day with the Gehenna Tribe.

Damien and Thalia had just returned from their hunt, bringing a massive panther-like alien beast carcass with them.

As always, they were greeted at the entrance by a large crowd of people, all of whom praised them for their kill.

Once again, Damien and Thalia managed to hunt something none of the other hunters were able to touch.

It was a meal that would feed the entire village on its own, which meant the rest of the meat could be stored for later use. How could the tribe not be happy?

Despite Damien being a "kurang-ha," the Gehenna Tribe's word for "foreigner," there were many people who already considered him a part of their tribe, a true member of their family.

It happened in just a year.

And Damien was enjoying himself far more than expected.

Life in the tribe was great.

It really was.

But in the back of his mind, Damien always remembered his original goal.

There were things he had to do.

Which meant this well-spent time would come to an end soon.

Damien sighed to himself as he thought about it. That moment would definitely be a sad one, but it was inevitable.

Though, it wasn't in the foreseeable future, so he allowed himself to enjoy the time he had without thinking about it.

Stray thoughts filled his head as he walked through the village, and only when he finally got rid of them did he hear the voice calling for him.

"...ter...Great Hunter!"

His eyes turned to the side, where a small woman had appeared at a time unknown.

She was calling him by a title given to him by the older women of the tribe, so he knew she was here for something more business than casual.

"Was there something?"

Damien's words were a little choppy, since he still wasn't used to the language, but he got his point across fine.

The small woman nodded, her eyes relatively serious.

"The Saintess has summoned you."

Damien's eyes widened.

The Saintess whom he hadn't seen since that day they were granted permission to live here.

What did she need from him?

#### Chapter 1456 Gehenna Tribe [3]

The Saintess lived at the highest point of the village, at a point almost above the canopy of the surrounding jungle.

The Saintess of the Gehenna people was told to have the ability to converse with spirits. This ability also gave her a connection to the "Great One" above, the Gehenna Tribe's interpretation of the Heavens.

To get her abode, which was meant to keep her most connected to the highest power, one needed to use a complex set of rope bridges and unique floating structures made out of the surrounding foliage.

It was intentionally made difficult to reach, but the people of the village could get there without any sort of trouble whatsoever.

Naturally, Damien didn't have the same familiarity they did, but after living in the village for a year, it was easy for him to follow along as the small woman guided him through it all.

When they finally reached the place, Damien was surprised by how humble it was.

All the houses and facilities in the village had an almost spherical design. They looked absolutely beautiful, and were an incredible display of architectural skill.

These facilities were usually relatively uniform, but everyone liked to decorate their own abode. The houses in the village could be told apart by their various colors and the decorations put on the outside, some of which were similar to things that existed in Damien's own cosmos.

The Saintess' house, however, maintained the natural faded red color of the wood it was made from and didn't particularly have any flair to it.

It was the most normal-looking residence. Its position in the sky told enough about its true stature.

Entering the house, Damien was left alone by his guide, meant to proceed further without interference.

The house wasn't too big. It was only around 30 meters across, so Damien could see the other side from where he stood.

However, there was a curtain separating the house into two parts, and to meet the Saintess, Damien had to first walk through the curtain.

It was a sort of ceremony that would cleanse his body and adapt him to a world where spirits could manifest.

Damien, of course, walked through with an extreme sense of intrigue.

He didn't feel anything particular as he passed through, but...

"As I thought."

The Saintess' voice came from the space in front of him, her figure still yet to appear in his vision.

"You are not like the rest."

Her words were relatively simple as she dumbed down her speech for a non-native speaker like Damien to understand.

But it immediately became clear that he wasn't supposed to feel nothing when he walked through the curtain.

"Saintess."

Damien gave his greeting, bowing lightly to show respect.

"No need for that. Come sit.

The Saintess beckoned him forward. Despite not being able to see her, he still felt the gesture and knew where to sit.

He walked forward five steps and sat down where he stood. His rear met a small cushion that wasn't present before, and the scenery around him changed.

It was the same wooden house, however, the Saintess was now present, just a few feet in front of Damien facing him with a small table between them.

"Have you enjoyed our home?"

The Saintess asked a simple question.

She looked the same as the first time Damien saw her.

An elderly woman with pure white hair. The wrinkles on her face were prevalent, but each and every one told a story of the life she'd lived.

The feather crown on her head remained there despite her being in the comfort of her own home. It was a sign of her position, and wouldn't leave her head for the rest of eternity.

She would carry it even in death.

Damien always felt a profound aura from this woman. It made sense that she had a position like "Saintess." She seemed incredibly suited for it.

But Damien still didn't know why he'd been called here.

"It's a great place," he responded, following the flow of the conversation.

"Your place is nothing like what I've ever seen before."

"Mm. You are a foreigner."

The Saintess nodded as if it was natural.

"This world is new to you, no?"

Damien's eyes widened slightly.

The term "foreigner" always bugged him.

The obvious definition was obvious. Since they were not of the tribe, they were foreigners.

However, it was clear now that in their case, the meaning was deeper.

"Your kind does not exist here."

The Saintess spoke as if she understood Damien's doubts.

"Doesn't exist?" Damien echoed.

"Yes."

The Saintess nodded again.

"You. Nothing like you in this world."

Was it a matter of appearance?

It was true that Damien had only seen skin tones that would be considered unnatural in his own cosmos here. To them, he probably looked like some sort of twisted clone of their species.

But the look in the Saintess' eyes didn't seem to be referring to something as superficial as appearance.

"What did you see?"

The Saintess. An existence that could converse with that which was ethereal to all others.

What did she see when she looked at him?

"What I see..." she said, mirroring his words.

Her eyes became hazy, as if she was looking at something beyond reality.

"I see...Gehenna."

Gehenna.

The namesake of the tribe.

It was not the tribe itself, but something else.

Damien always assumed it was a concept they worshipped, but he was wrong.

Gehenna existed in reality.

And when the Saintess looked at him, she saw a reflection of it.

"The land of Mist, the Spirit Cemetery, Gehenna."

The Saintess' eyes snapped into clarity. Her eyes focused directly on Damien, peering into his soul.

"Gehenna will open soon. You must go."

Damien raised his brow.

"Is that why you called me?"

"Yes. To enter Gehenna, you must pass many trials. Today, I tell you about Gehenna, so you may begin your journey."

The way she talked was like it was predetermined for Damien to enter that place, whatever it was.

Damien didn't like how that sounded, but it was true.

The instant she mentioned it, he felt his heart skip a beat.

"This Gehenna...is it the reason you allowed us to stay in the village."

"No."

The answer was so instant that Damien almost reeled when he heard it.

The Saintess smiled, as if mocking his wariness.

"You are fated with our tribe. You may not feel it, but you are already family. You were not allowed to stay for Gehenna. Rather, Gehenna chose you."

"Gehenna chose me...?"

The Saintess didn't give him a clear answer.

She just smiled that same vague smile, as if telling him to find out the rest himself.

Damien took a breath.

Whatever Gehenna meant, for it to be the tribe's entire namesake, it had to be something grand.

Naturally, he wasn't going to give up the opportunity to go there.

'But before that...'

...there were some things he needed to know.

And the Saintess seemed to have called him here to tell him those very things.

'It's only been a year...'

A development like this was surprising, but more than welcomed.

"Then, please..."

Damien nodded, covering his excitement with a blanket of caution.

"...tell me about Gehenna."

Chapter 1457 Gehenna Tribe [4]

Gehenna.

The namesake of the tribe.

According to the Saintess, it was a land beyond reality that would only open when it chose to.

There was no rhyme or reason to its appearance, but when it was preparing to do so, the Saintess would always know.

As the Saintess said when she first introduced it, Gehenna had another name.

The Spirit Cemetery.

It was a direct translation from the Gehenna Tribe's native language into the universal language of the cosmos.

The Saintess explained with great grandeur.

She spoke about legends and myths, about stories as old as time, but as Damien wasn't one to believe such stories until he saw for himself that they were real, he took most of it with a grain of salt.

Though, he didn't completely put them out of his mind.

He respected the Gehenna Tribe. He wasn't immediately going to declare their beliefs as something fake.

Nevertheless, as its name suggested, Gehenna was a place where spirits resided.

It was the graveyard where the most heroic beings of the Gehenna Tribe rested their souls, along with the ancients who ruled the sacred jungle in eras long past.

And it was a prison for beings whose souls could never be allowed to enter the cycle of reincarnation.

Gehenna was the source of the tribe's strength, and it was the place where their beliefs stemmed from.

While its appearance was mysterious and erratic, the tribe naturally had traditions related to it.

For instance, their Acknowledgement Ceremony.

This ceremony would take place for whatever generation Gehenna opened for.

The rising youths would be allowed to enter the cemetery, where they would find opportunities and chances to grow.

It was quite similar to the secret realms of the Heavenly World, but there was a key difference.

These "chances" only came to the Gehenna Tribe because of their bloodline, because they were people of the jungle.

It wasn't a place others could just enter.

"That is why you are so mysterious, young hunter."

The Saintess gestured into the air around her.

"You can see them, can't you?"

Damien glanced away from her, merely panning his gaze around the room.

"I can."

He'd been seeing them since he got close to the Saintess' residence.

They were flying through the air, appearing in all shapes and sizes. Some were animate, while some were not at all.

But they all possessed the same light halo, the same glow that marked them as beings of a different, more ethereal, world.

"They're spirits?"

"That is right. They have yet to reach the other side, but they will one day become spirits too."

Damien didn't know what spirits were in this world.

In his home cosmos, spirits were not such grand beings. They were wandering souls, or maybe just beings made of mana.

Some were just part of a race of spirits that didn't necessarily have a special state of existence compared to others.

However, it wasn't just the Gehenna Tribe's belief that spirits here were special.

No, all of these tiny beings he was seeing, all of these small white specks in the grand, grand world, had Legends supporting their existence.

All of them had some kind of meaning, and their existences were special. There was something more to them than just their form.

"It is because Gehenna chose you."

The Saintess spoke again.

"I do not know why. I am only a messenger. If you want to know what your connection with Gehenna is, then you must go there. It will allow your entry."

Damien was the only foreigner to ever be welcomed by Gehenna. The Saintess was naturally curious about why, but she didn't ask any questions.

However, he couldn't just enter because he wanted to.

People still existed.

Gehenna was a sacred place. A foreigner entering that place as he pleased was naturally not something everyone in the tribe could accept.

But there was a way to make them.

Damien had to undergo several trials the tribe had set in place for those who wished to enter Gehenna.

It would be somewhat difficult, but as long as he could do it, he would be able to not only move onto the next step properly, he would be able to extinguish most of the hostility those few tribesmen had for him.

Damien accepted without much of a second thought.

The Saintess smiled happily.

"Go to Pehran. He will give you your first trial."

Those were the last words she said to him.

She'd called him to deliver the message. She didn't have anything else to say.

Since their meeting was over, Damien gave her a respectful bow before bidding farewell and leaving.

It was a short meeting.

It was short because the Saintess couldn't say everything she wanted.

She was just the messenger.

She didn't have the authority to decide which messages could be delivered at what time.

So she had to withhold the things she knew. The time to deliver those messages had not arrived yet.

"The man with eyes of gold..."

She whispered to herself, her eyes once again hazy.

"...has he finally come?"

Her body shook as if she'd been struck by a cold breeze.

"To overrule the darkness, to corrupt the corrupted, he shall arrive. A man with eyes of gold, the apostle of the ancients. With his mighty sword, he will bring light to the darkness. With his burning heart, he will save the world."

A story she'd heard when she was young.

A story she thought would always remain just a fairytale for children.

Was it finally time for it to come true?

She stood up, using her staff to support her movements.

"Time is running out."

She didn't expect to have guests this time, but she'd known Gehenna was opening for several years now.

The problem was the other things she knew.

She stepped out of her residence, looking down at the entire village sprawled out below her.

There, she saw a smiling woman, young and innocent. That woman was her successor, and someone she treated like her own daughter.

Her eyes contained a trace of melancholy as she looked at that woman.

"I trust in you, Thalia..."

She knew Thalia couldn't hear her, but she continued speaking.

"Become the woman I believe you to be, and bring our tribe back to where it once stood."

Damien didn't know it.

Actually, nobody in the village did.

The Saintess' power wasn't just to converse with spirits.

No, it was something far greater.

The Saintess looked into a time yet to occur, and she saw the fates of all living beings.

She herself was not excluded.

The future was not set in stone.

Fate was something that could be changed.

It was.

...right?

Regardless, time waited for no man.

Before long, chaos would ensue.

Even the Saintess, with her mystical power, was left to wonder.

Would everything go as she'd seen?

Or would a miracle occur in its stead?

As she looked down at the village, days passed and turned into weeks.

Damien began to blaze through the trials placed upon him.

No matter what the villagers and the world threw at him, he moved like an unstoppable beast.

Gehenna continued to approach until it was only a few days away.

And Damien was left with only one trial before he could gain entry.

Unbeknownst to him, however, chaos was approaching.

Extremely fast, at that.

Chapter 1458 Gehenna Tribe [5].

The tasks given to Damien weren't all life-threatening things.

Actually, the trials weren't always meant to be life-threatening.

The Gehenna Tribe was made up of a variety of peoples. Some of them had incredibly unique trades, while some worked in more common occupations that contributed to the well-being of the tribe.

Regardless, everyone had a role. When they all came together, they formed an amazingly functional society.

The trials Damien was to undergo weren't special to him. Rather, every youth who was set to enter Gehenna had to do them.

However, they already had their roles.

Their trials would be within the role they'd chosen.

They would still be extremely complex and difficult, but not every youth had to risk their life in the jungle to earn the privilege to enter Gehenna.

That was the job of hunters.

Damien had been acting as a hunter since he came to the tribe, and with the talent he'd shown in the trade, everyone accepted him as one almost immediately.

However, Damien technically didn't have an assigned role. More than that, just being a hunter wasn't enough to earn him the same privileges as the native tribesmen.

He was still an outsider. No matter how much the tribe accepted and loved him, not all of them would allow him to intrude on their sacred internal traditions just because of that.

Damien's trial was harder than his peers. That was because his trial was a combination of all of theirs.

The man the Saintess sent him to meet was a blacksmith.

His first trial was in the forge. It was one he was particularly happy to partake in.

Damien had a great deal of experience in front of a fire. When he was stuck in No Return Pass, he used both liquor and forging to appease his boredom.

He'd been using his alchemy skills to make liquor relatively consistently since then.

He hadn't done much since the last one he made for Grand Heavens Boundary's Universal Core, but he was still touching up on his craft whenever he found the time.

His forging skills hadn't seen the same attention.

Mirage broke on the Ancient Battlefield. Since then, Damien had slowly become someone who didn't need to use weapons, so he never got around to repairing it.

He didn't plan to start using weapons again any time soon. He didn't think they'd be able to handle the power of his Existence Law no matter how much he enhanced them.

But he did plan to bring Mirage back.

It was a sword that accompanied him for a very, very long time. Decades upon decades of experience, the blood of millions or even more enemies, and the memories of those times were all contained in the sword.

Plus, it wasn't soulless like the Devourer he used when he was young.

Mirage had a rudimentary consciousness. Damien couldn't just let it die and be done with it.

That sword meant a lot to him, but if he wanted to fix it after it was shattered by something as esoteric as a chaotic mixture of everything he had, he needed a forge worthy to do so.

Void Palace didn't have one.

Well, they did, but it wasn't enough. Void Palace's forge wasn't meant to repair weapons like Mirage.

There was an ethereal aspect to it since the sword's sentience had to be restored as well.

When Damien walked into the Gehenna Tribe's forge for the first time, he got that feeling.

Feeling the heat of the flames, the sound of metal clanging against metal, the smell of ash and chemical reactions, Damien understood it with his body.

This was a place blessed by spirits.

There was no place better than this to restore Mirage.

It lined up with his trials too.

Basically, Damien needed to obtain acknowledgement from the professionals in these fields so they could support him later. That was the nature of his current task.

It was easy when it was put like that.

Because all Damien needed to do was show off a little.

In front of blacksmiths, he was more than happy to flex his skills.

Damien got in front of the forge. He took out the anvil and hammer he received in the Ancient Battlefield, and closed his eyes.

"Huu..."

With one breath, his mind and body became one with the forge.

Pieces of mirrored material almost like glass but far too powerful to be glass appeared in the air along with the frame of a sword, and Damien went to work.

The main materials he used were already part of the sword, but Damien had quite a collection of resources after spending decades in the Heavenly World.

He was working on instinct, mixing metals and creating alloys to test. However, he trusted his instinct more than anything.

And more importantly, Mirage did too.

Every move he made was like a work of art.

The flames in the forge left their owners, swallowing him in an inferno as he harmonized with their motions.

The Law of Fire.

Damien was familiar with its form in his home cosmos.

But only now did he understand it in this one.

Damien thought they'd be different because he changed cosmos, but as he'd learned over the past year, the base structure was the same.

The laws here were chaotic. They seemed twisted to be more oriented to chaos, burned away from their original forms, but at their core, they maintained the same formula.

First came Creation and Destruction, followed by Space and Time, Life and Death, and the Five Elements.

Was that the formula for existence?

Or was there something more to it?

A seed of thought entered Damien's mind.

It was a question that didn't seem to hold much weight, especially since Damien had a sub-universe of his own, however...

'Can I create Existence?'

Standing in front of the flame, experiencing the miracle of creation occurring naturally, he wondered.

And as he wondered, he dreamed.

'A new goal...'

A goal he'd never imagined before.

It wasn't attainable anytime soon, or perhaps anytime in the future, but he would make it happen.

'But before that...'

He had to focus on what was happening in the present.

Damien spent hours in the forge. He impressed and astonished the onlookers long ago, having gathered a crowd that had gone beyond just the blacksmiths, but he wasn't putting in effort just for them anymore.

Still, they stood there watching his every move, enamored by the beautiful performance he'd unwittingly put on.

Time passed. The flames died down slowly, and Damien's fluid movements became clear to all again.

Like a dance, he floated around the forge. Each step of the process was accomplished with utmost precision, but more importantly, the loving hand of a blacksmith who cared for his creation.

And when the process finally came to an end, not only did Damien pass his first trial with flying colors...

...he once again held Mirage in his hand.

A pure sword made with his heart, a sword that meant more to him than just its role as a sword.

That sword now stood in front of him again, blessed with the power to slay Gods.

#### Chapter 1459 Gehenna Tribe [6]

The Gehenna Tribe was interesting in many ways. In some facets, they were surprisingly advanced, while in others, they lagged behind a larger society.

Their usage of power could be considered a little bit of both.

To preface, the energy in this cosmos was not mana. It was the force Damien had been calling "Demonic Energy," but a name like that was no longer accurate.

The tribespeople called it Barrakh. In the universal language of this cosmos, it was called Malakh.

Either term could be used, but Damien chose the former since he had a good relationship with the tribe.

In any case, both words meant the same thing.

They both were directly synonymous with "energy," just like mana.

Barrakh was a more convoluted and chaotic energy than mana. In easy terms, it was like mana's evil twin.

To use such an energy effectively usually required one to embrace its properties and seek destruction over order.

However, the Gehenna Tribe didn't abide by that belief.

Their doctrine was one of order. Since they followed the will of the spirits, they also followed the way of nature.

They didn't utilize barrakh the way it conventionally should've been used.

Instead, they learned how to use their natural bodies to change the nature of that power, turning it into something purer.

But even then, barrakh didn't carry the same properties as mana.

They were two completely different energies with two completely different frequencies, even if they could mimic each other's properties.

The Gehenna Tribe didn't use barrakh with their bodies.

They believed completely internalizing the energy would make one's body impure and ruin one's connection with the spirits.

Instead, they'd developed a system similar to Damien's Ananta Matrix, which could control the ambient mana in the atmosphere.

And their chosen medium to use that energy was weaponry.

This was the relatively unevolved part.

Weapons were probably the most barbaric medium one could use. They were liabilities on the battlefield, since their quality and unique structures had a huge impact on how one's power would actually be manifested.

There was a reason most people only used one weapon for their entire lives, choosing to upgrade instead of replace at every turn.

That weapon would become suited to them, able to release their power as they wished it to.

However, it would never be as efficient as using one's own body.

In most cases.

Because they had been using weapons as their medium for so long in this jungle ecosystem, the Gehenna Tribe had mastered a unique method of utilizing their weapons that others couldn't easily replicate.

Even Damien had some trouble understanding it at first. It was the type of thing that had to be seen rather than heard about.

The first trial ended far earlier than it was supposed to. Damien was meant to spend several days with the blacksmiths, showing them his mastery of every aspect of their art.

He, however, managed to do so with the creation process of Mirage. They didn't need to see anything else after that.

His second trial was with the medical sector of the tribe, where he spent several days learning their esoteric methods and showcasing the unique splendor of [Heal].

After that, Damien experienced the lives of cooks who had to make food for the entire tribe, soldiers who guarded the tribe and managed judiciary duties, and even people who practiced the various arts, who provided the tribe with their entertainment.

Weeks passed as Damien spent time with them. Outside of his role, as a true member of the tribe, he learned their traditions and the hard work they put in to sustain themselves in this cruel environment.

And as time passed, that final trial approached.

It was the hunter trial.

For all intents and purposes, it was Damien's main trial, the test he had to pass to truly be acknowledged in the role he had chosen.

The people of the village had seen as Damien earnestly worked with them and understood their culture.

They watched as he became more and more proficient in their language until he was practically a native speaker.

They knew that Damien wasn't just some ordinary foreigner anymore.

That was why they did it.

Not out of discrimination or hostility, but out of respect.

"For your last trial, you will hunt the Uruk."

Damien once again stood surrounded by the entire tribe with the elders looking at him from above.

However, this time, as the Saintess spoke, he kneeled respectfully and accepted his final trial.

The reactions from the crowd were far different this time as well.

Nobody spoke.

Nobody showed hostility.

Rather, they all cast Damien glances of worry.

They were unable to say anything.

The Uruk was a creature close to an Ancient. It had lived for millions of years and had reached the level of a Deity.

Wasn't sending Damien to face it a death sentence?

But Damien accepted the trial. He didn't have to. He'd already done more than enough to earn the right to enter Gehenna.

If Damien accepted, what could they say?

The atmosphere wasn't as excited as it should've been for Damien approaching his final task, but the people did maintain hope for his success since they'd witnessed his power.

They dispersed as they did when the Saintess gave the final word.

Damien went back to his home to prepare for his coming expedition.

As he sat calmly, going over strategies in his head, he heard a knock on his door.

He knew who it was.

There was really only one person who'd come to visit him like this without warning.

"You're here?"

He spoke as he opened the door, his tone playfully annoyed.

"Why wouldn't I be? After you did something stupid like that, I had no choice but to come and beat some sense into you!"

Whoosh!

A punch flew past Damien's face the instant those words landed. He, of course, dodged it easily, but it was only the first of its kind.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

A flurry of similar punches came from all directions.

Damien casually moved right and left, avoiding them with simple movements as he took a few steps back into his house.

His visitor wasn't going to let up so easily, but the time for greeting had already ended.

Thud!

The door closed behind them naturally, leaving only the two of them alone in the house.

"So, what's up?"

Damien smiled and sat down. Since she was done greeting him, he was certain she wouldn't throw any more punches.

"What's up? That's all you have to say?"

Thalia sat down as well, the expression on her face very obviously angry.

"How could you say you'd hunt the Uruk?! Do you know what that is?!"

Damien knew she'd come tonight.

If there was anyone who was willing to directly confront him about anything and everything, it was her.

"I know you are powerful, however, the Uruk is more than just power. That is a beast beyond beasts, something a mere man cannot handle!"

Thalia had hunted with Damien. She'd seen his strength firsthand.

But even that didn't give her confidence that he could fight that monster.

To Thalia, Damien was a young beast, powerful but incomparable to an Ancient.

The Uruk, on the other hand, had terrorized the jungle for generations.

It had seized a massive portion of the land as its territory, and that territory had been unchallenged for a reason.

Yet, Damien said he was going to hunt that beast and bring it back?

How could he say something like that so easily?!

"I can't let you do this."

Thalia had made up her mind already.

"I'm coming with you. I will not allow you to do something so dangerous alone!"

Chapter 1460 Uruk [1]

"You want to come with me?"

Damien smiled wryly.

He understood her worry, but he didn't understand how her presence would make the situation any better.

After all, if he looked at the situation through her eyes, then the Uruk was far too powerful even if the two of them tried to handle it alone.

Of course, he'd done extensive research on the beast, having been aware of this task for a few days now.

He was confident he could defeat it even with his current abilities, withholding almost all of his powerful laws.

Still, it was a bit amusing that the solution Thalia came up with was accompanying him in the battle.

"Yes. If we cannot fight it, I'll grab you and run."

"Grab me and run?"

"Over the shoulder. Just like last time."

Damien's wry smile only got more pronounced as Thalia spoke.

He just realized how much she'd underestimated his strength.

It was true that they'd hunted together. Damien could handle most of the beasts in the forest alone, but when they hunted together, he never opted for this path.

He was learning about the Gehenna Tribe through its people. As he moved with Thalia, he allowed her to take on most of the fighting so he could see how she maneuvered her energy and techniques.

And, without the context to understand that, Thalia assumed it as weakness.

Yes, she respected Damien, but she wasn't going to view his abilities unrealistically because of that.

In this situation, she trusted their teamwork more than his power, and in the worst-case scenario, she had absolute trust in her own speed.

'What to do...?'

Damien understood Thalia's character quite well at this point, and if there was one thing that stood out, it was her stubbornness.

She was strong, and just like all strong people, she was headstrong as well.

No matter what he said here, he'd surely find himself with her on his tail.

He couldn't prevent her from coming with him once she'd made up her mind.

The fact that she was even here in the first place meant the elders had given up on trying to convince her otherwise.

Damien sighed.

"Alright, you can come with me."

Thalia's eyes lit up.

"However...!"

Damien didn't allow them to stay that way.

"You won't be fighting with me. You can observe, and if, at any time, you think I'll lose my life, you can intervene and save me. How's that?"

It was the best compromise he could make.

In this way, he could keep Thalia out of danger as best as possible. If she was in a place he knew and didn't move, he could keep the battle away from her and finish things before she could act recklessly.

"Hmm..."

Thalia stared at him suspiciously, but after a few minutes of thought, she relented.

"Fine, but if there's even the slightest chance that you'll get harmed...!"

She let her meaning be known without saying it.

'That's not what I asked for, though...'

Damien was a bit befuddled by the leap she'd made so casually, but he had no choice but to accept her words at this point.

In any case, he just had to avoid getting hurt, which was pretty easy for him since his body was nigh-immortal.

"We leave at daybreak, so go home and prepare."

Damien sighed again as Thalia happily pranced around his house, having gotten her way.

"Mm, I'll meet you at the entrance."

She knew his personality as well as she knew his. If she pushed anymore, he was sure to get annoyed.

With those words laced in playfulness left for Damien's ears, she made her way back home.

And her expression immediately faded.

She put up a smiling front for Damien, but she was certain he didn't know the gravity of the situation.

No matter what he had heard about the Uruk, it wouldn't be enough to prepare him for what it truly was.

She clenched her fists until her palms bled.

Flashes of memory went through her head, reminding her of a terrifying time long past.

"Uruk..."

No matter what, she had to see it die.

If for nothing else...

...then for her revenge.

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The sacred jungle where the Gehenna Tribe lived was home to a plethora of flora and fauna. It was massive, spanning over such a great distance that most of it was unexplored, whether by the tribe or those in the larger societies existing outside it.

However, there were some things that everyone knew. Not because they wanted to, but because they were forced.

The Ancients who ruled the jungle were one of those things.

Ancients were massive beasts beyond imagination, able to destroy populations of the Gehenna Tribe's size with less than a breath.

They were equivalent to Gods in the perception of most, and in the truest sense, that was pretty much what they were.

The concept of Godhood didn't exist in the Gehenna Tribe.

Their elders were definitely around that level, and the Saintess couldn't even be measured, but they didn't necessarily chase Godhood or understand what it was.

They reached it naturally like beasts, which meant they didn't actually possess the divine status they had earned.

The way it worked for people who gained godly strength without Godhood was complicated, but that was beside the point for now.

The Uruk was a creature approaching the level of an Ancient.

And it shared territory with the Gehenna Tribe.

It was a threat that needed to be destroyed for the tribe's continued existence. If it managed to grow into an Ancient, they would be either slaughtered or forced out of their homes.

Therefore, the tribe's elders had been planning to get rid of it for a very long time now.

The problem was that they didn't have the firepower to do it.

Their original solution was technology in the crudest sense of the word.

They would create contraptions that could kill the Uruk, which gave them both power and the ability to strike without risking their lives in close proximity with the beast.

However, Damien fell into their laps before they got the chance to finish designing said technology.

And while the elders and a majority of the tribe didn't think he was powerful enough to act as a perfect solution, the Saintess personally backed his strength, so they could only believe in him.

It was difficult.

Because they had personal experience with the Uruk.

It had attacked the village a little over a decade ago, and in its wake, it left an almost exterminated Gehenna Tribe.

A brave group of warriors from the tribe managed to drive it away, but they sacrificed their lives in the process.

The tribe had been recovering since then, and they'd never left the periphery of their village enough to provoke the Uruk again.

Such a drastic move was completely against the way they'd spent the last ten years.

But Damien didn't know their story.

Nor did he know the Uruk.

All he knew was that there was an enemy in front of him.

And he needed to kill it.

It was true that the Gehenna Tribe still didn't know much about Damien.

Because if they did, they'd have known.

When Damien's mind entered a state like this, hell was guaranteed to break loose.

For anyone he declared his enemy, that is.