

Void 1461

Chapter 1461 Uruk [2]

The Uruk.

Its name had been said many times already, but not much about it had earned the same treatment.

The Uruk was a dragon-esque monster, but only in the sense that there wasn't really anything else from the Heavenly World that could be compared to it.

Its body was as large as a dragon's, spanning several tens of kilometers easily. It had scales running across its entire body that even the strongest weapons couldn't pierce, and its reptilian snout was perfect for breathing storms of fire onto its victims.

The beast didn't have wings. Its body was far too heavy to lift organically. However, owing to its enormous physical strength, it could leap high enough into the air for it to practically be flying.

That massive physical strength and form, along with the occasional elemental abilities it used, made it impossible for the average hunter to challenge.

Hell, even in the wider world, there weren't many who'd dare to challenge it.

It was an incredibly powerful beast.

But it wasn't the most powerful.

From what Damien heard, he felt that the creature couldn't compare to a Primal Sovereign or some of the more terrifying beasts he'd met like the Azure Dragon.

Its description seemed exaggerated, and while its capabilities weren't anything to laugh at, he also didn't think it was strong enough to scare him.

He maintained those thoughts when he saw it in person, but he understood where the rumors came from.

'That thing is a real beast.'

It was ugly with no semblance of humanity at all.

That wasn't to say more humanoid beasts provoked a sense of security, it was more a look into the creature's eyes.

Even dragons had eyes filled with intelligence. There was a reason to both fear and revere them, whether they had sentience or not.

The Uruk had a face straight out of a horror movie, and its eyes were deep and soulless. It lived only for blood and territory, something only the most barbaric of people could ever grow to worship.

It lay there, slumbering in a clearing large enough to build several cities on, taking up the majority of the space.

Damien and Thalia were roughly a thousand kilometers away still, but that was barely an inch to someone of Damien's strength.

He gazed at the beast, trying to gauge anything from it, however...

'...as expected, it's easier to do it firsthand.'

Thalia would be safe at this distance.

Damien knew the Uruk's strengths, and it was up to him to find its weaknesses.

Was there really a need for him to wait?

"I'm engaging."

He left those words for Thalia, but by the time she registered them, he was already gone.

'First off, let's test those scales.'

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Damien flashed away.

He could barely teleport as he'd only skimmed the surface of this world's Spatial Laws, but his speed was more than enough to mimic the act.

He pulled his fist back, covering it in barrakh, and slammed it forward against the Uruk's snout.

It was quite a loud movement.

Naturally, the sensitive beast was immediately alarmed by his presence.

Its eyes flashed open, and the first thing it saw was the reason why it felt a dull pain rattling through its skull.

Barrakh exploded outward, creating a flurry of black clouds around Damien and the Uruk.

The impact force of Damien's strike slammed the beast's head into the ground, but it rapidly recovered, almost completely absorbing the impact into its body without a problem.

ROOOOOAAAAAAR!

It let out a violent roar as it scanned the surroundings for its attacker.

Without detecting even a flicker of his visage in the vicinity, the Uruk attacked wildly.

It spun its body in a circle, using its thick tail to slam through everything within its radius.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Glass-like trees shattered and exploded, sending shrapnel flying into the air.

Countless beasts were left without homes and rapidly scrambling away, wondering just who the hell decided it was a good idea to provoke the Uruk.

And Damien was standing in the air, totally unaffected by its outburst.

'Those scales are no joke. With a defense like that, I'd probably need to use Destruction Laws if I wanted to do any damage.'

Unfortunately, he didn't have access to those.

'So just blindly attacking until it drops dead isn't an option.'

It was a shame, but it was pretty obvious this would be the outcome.

'Alright then, let's move on.'

Damien's arsenal was pretty limited right now.

He could use barrakh just as proficiently as he could use mana, and his capacity for it was nigh unlimited. However, when it came to laws, he was still quite weak.

The progress he'd made in comprehending them was quite pitiful over the past year, but it was mainly because he didn't actively try to comprehend them.

He was allowing his body to naturally adapt to the laws so they came to him instead. This way, he'd meet them in their purest forms, which would allow him to gain more knowledge on the alternate cosmos itself.

He made this decision for his long-term benefit, but in the short term, it was quite inconvenient.

In any sense, Damien had a ton of experimenting to do before he could actually kill the Uruk.

But since he was quite a sturdy specimen himself, the Uruk wouldn't be able to kill him while he did.

At least, that was Damien's assumption from what he'd seen and heard thus far.

To see if it was the truth, all he could do was take action.

Damien charged back into battle.

The Uruk was currently looking for an enemy on the ground. It didn't know he could fly, which was his advantage.

He didn't want to give it up easily and let the beast start confronting him in the sky as well, so before he attacked, Damien returned to surface level.

And he went berserk.

He used his fists as his main weapon, practically engaging in hand-to-hand combat with the Uruk.

Explosions began to cover the jungle over a radius of several hundred kilometers in every direction except the one where Thalia was.

Damien did say he wasn't going to opt for a physical battle with the beast, but while he was testing its capabilities, this was still the best method,

Therefore, he attacked like a beast as well.

The scene was hard to describe.

Well, it wasn't really, but from Thalia's perspective, the scene was the most improbable thing she'd ever seen.

A human and a massive beast were wrestling, throwing each other to the ground and slamming into each other's bodies with all their power.

And that human wasn't showing any signs of exertion as he went blow for blow with the Uruk.

'This is...a real battle?'

Thalia's eyes were as wide as saucers, practically popping out of her head.

She'd never seen anything like this before.

She didn't know a human could have such power.

She suddenly had to reevaluate Damien entirely.

And within only a few minutes, her reasoning for watching this battle changed completely.

Even if Damien was hurt, she didn't think she could help him.

She now understood why he seemed to laugh at her when she confidently came and claimed that she would save him.

But she still had every reason to be here.

Her instincts screamed at her.

Somebody needed to witness this moment.

The moment humanity overcame the wild.

It was a place the tribe had been yearning to reach for its entire length of existence.

And Damien was about to take them there.

That was what she felt as she watched him.

Chapter 1462 Uruk [3]

BOOM!

Another explosion.

Damien was thrown back several tens of feet, but the Uruk had it worse. The massive beast was flung into the sky, its back facing the ground.

It wriggled around, trying to reorient itself to land on its feet, however, was Damien going to allow that?

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Waves of barrakh rushed into the sky. Every time the Uruk moved, a wave of purple-black energy struck its opposite side, canceling out its motions.

'Alright. Stage one is over.'

Damien smiled.

He had taken some time to get here, but it was all according to plan.

The Uruk was powerful. Damien understood that its power couldn't be underestimated from the start. It hit him like a tank whenever it could get a hit in, and the fiery breath it let loose was enough to turn the surrounding jungle into a molten hellscape.

It hadn't even used the acidic breath attack it was said to have, but it was safe to say that Thalia was the only living being remaining in the vicinity. Everything else had either died as collateral damage or ran away.

Damien, as always, started his battle with a physical confrontation. Through it, he learned how dense the Uruk's scales were. After that, he continued provoking it so he could learn its attack patterns and weaknesses.

After experimenting for a while, Damien got a hold of the information he wanted.

The Uruk was as heavy as it was strong. It moved slowly, but its large sweeping attacks seemed to reach its enemies before they could react. Damien, however, was able to use its slowness against it relatively easily.

Especially when it was combined with the beast's limited range of vision was exploited too.

The Uruk had forward-facing eyes just like most predators, but its body was too big for it to completely make use of the advantages that gave it.

It had huge blindspots that got bigger as one got closer to its body. From those blindspots, Damien could easily land any attack he wanted.

The problem came back to its defense. The beast had evolved through millennia of battle, after all. A weakness like that had been covered long ago, specifically with a dense canopy of scales that Damien still couldn't puncture.

Hence, he put the beast in the air.

'I think that'll be the method.'

It may have seemed like Damien made no progress at all, but he actually did get somewhere with his experimenting.

By ruling out so many possibilities, he was left with really only one way to kill the beast.

Flash!

He flashed into the sky and slammed his foot down on the Uruk's underbelly. The beast came crashing down to the ground at a speed fast enough to turn any other creature into a bloody mist.

BOOOOOOOM!

The Uruk didn't have sentience, but it was smarter than the average beast.

It understood that Damien was an enemy it had to take seriously, and it understood that he was looking for its weaknesses.

However, it was unaware of what he found, assuming that, like every other challenger, Damien was stumped by the defensive power of its scales.

With that assurance, it waited for the perfect moment to strike back.

And this was the one it found.

The Uruk could be slow at times and fast at times. It really was difficult to understand the limitations of its movement capability.

This was entirely intentional.

Until it found the opportunity to corner its opponent, the Uruk would never show its true power.

That was why, as Damien watched with wide eyes, the Uruk managed to flip itself during its split-second freefall and land on its feet.

ROOOOOAAAAAAR!

It wasn't just a roar.

The Uruk accurately pinpointed Damien's position in the sky, and, with its jaw open, it spewed a mixture of acid and flames that blanketed the sky.

Damien was caught in the attack. No matter which direction he moved in, he wouldn't be able to escape before his body was too damaged to move.

The Uruk's acid could melt most metals and go through organic material like butter. Just like its speed, its acid was an attack saved until the final moment. That meant the Uruk was confident Damien would die here.

Unfortunately for it, Damien was a half-immortal.

'There it is.'

Damien saw it the first time the beast used its breath attack, but he wasn't completely sure.

The Uruk seemed like a beast that prioritized offense, but it really didn't. It was born with inherent strength, and that was the basis of most of everything it did offensively.

The Uruk's evolution through its life was to use defense as offense as well. By getting rid of all its weaknesses, it could become an unbeatable enemy to anyone. That strategy got it to the position it was in today.

Usually, for beasts that had densely protected exteriors, the solution was to attack their internals through their orifices.

The Uruk was aware that its mouth would be a tempting target for its enemies, especially while it was shooting flames, therefore, it evolved so that its throat would be closed off when it did so.

The inside of its mouth was also reinforced so that its tongue and the areas connected to its nose and other organs couldn't be pierced.

This way, in its most vulnerable moment, it wasn't actually vulnerable at all.

Damien had been increasingly impressed with the Uruk's instinctual intelligence as he fought it, but, at the end of the day, it was still a beast ruled by instinct.

If one looked at the minute details, one would find countless cracks to exploit.

The one that Damien found was related to its mouth.

'Let me retreat first, since...'

He could see a certain woman whose skin was usually a dark grey color sitting in the distance, her face a pale white color.

If he didn't show that he was fine, she would surely have a heart attack.

'Plus, I need a better angle.'

Damien pushed out of the acid cloud, barrakh gathered in his hands and feet.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The purple-black energy blasted through the atmosphere, slamming into the Uruk's body from every side.

As the Uruk maneuvered to tank them with its scales, it failed to realize they were just a distraction.

Shik!

Shik!

Two massive needles made of barrakh punctured the beast's eyes, rendering it blind.

ROOOOOOOOOAAAAAAR!

As always, the beast's instinct was to clear everything around it.

It thrashed around in case the enemy was near, and it shot waves upon waves of flames and acid into the skies in case the enemy was trying to retreat.

'Just like clockwork...'

The instinctual patterns of a beast, especially an arrogant beast, would never change.

As the Uruk's flames died down, there was a split-second opportunity.

In the spark of an instant, before it closed its mouth, there was a flaw.

The defensive wall that hid its throat from enemies went down.

And Damien was given access to the easiest method to kill a massive beast.

VOOOOOOOOOOOM!

He summoned a tsunami of barrakh and condensed it into a 100-foot-long harpoon.

His muscles bulged and flexed. He assumed the perfect form, transferring the energy contained in his flesh into the barrakh.

And as he pushed his arm forward and let go, the harpoon flew at a speed comparable to light, practically becoming invisible to onlookers.

The rest was history.

Damien's barrakh had no plans of staying hidden for long.

The second it hit its target, it exploded.

And the world quaked in fear of its power.

Chapter 1463 Uruk [4]

Barrakh, or rather, Malakh.

The Gehenna Tribe viewed it as an impure energy. Their tribe had always been unconventional in their use of the energy because they didn't believe that it was beneficial to absorb it in its natural state.

The spirits allowed them to purify the energy, and with their weapon techniques, they were able to turn the energy into the pure "barrakh" that they'd been using for the majority of their existence.

There was nothing wrong with this method. The Gehenna Tribe had access to a unique set of powers that nobody else could use, and their familiarity with it allowed them to wield it with enough power to protect themselves.

However...

What was this?

What was Thalia witnessing right now?

Damien used barrakh in its normal impure form. Unlike the white halo that appeared around the Gehenna people when they wielded the energy, his was purple and black, with a heavy aura that was more than just suffocating.

She'd seen it before. It wasn't much of a surprise, since it was already known that people outside the tribe didn't use pure energy.

However, the level to which Damien used it was something she'd never seen before.

He didn't even try to control the energy's form. He allowed it to flow as it pleased, and in return, the energy responded to his wishes and did exactly what he wanted it to.

The entire time he was fighting the Uruk, she watched his energy move.

It enhanced his speed and strength, it fortified his body, and it could do practically anything as long as Damien wanted it to happen.

Against a monster who could use energy like a fifth limb, what could the Uruk do?

Thalia didn't understand that Damien was baiting and probing the beast. All she saw was him gliding around, fighting without a single bead of sweat on his forehead.

And before she could even understand what was happening, the fight was over.

The Uruk was impaled by a harpoon made of barrakh.

It didn't seem nearly long enough to accomplish such a feat, but the instant it entered the Uruk's body, the harpoon expanded and slammed out the back of the beast, breaking into the ground below with the rest of its momentum.

That barrakh then exploded, turning the beast it skewered into a rain of blood and meat.

It was that easy.

The Uruk died without any ability to resist, completely unaware of the fact that it had been fighting an unwinnable battle from the very start.

To Thalia, it was something out of a fairytale.

In reality, it was just a difference in class.

At the end of the day, the Uruk was not an Ancient.

The Uruk was not a God.

And if it wasn't a God, then it didn't have nearly enough power to stand against Damien.

Yes, Damien was missing a majority of his strength. Because of that, even he had been wary about rushing into battle with an unknown enemy.

However, when he got there and started the battle, he realized that he was overthinking.

No matter how strong the beast was, no matter how weakened he was, he still held power that nobody under Godhood could resist.

That was the kind of monster Damien became when he started comprehending true Existence.

But how was she to know that?

What Thalia saw was a miracle beyond her comprehension as someone who'd lived in the jungle her whole life.

The beast that had terrorized her and her people for ages had died.

That unkillable beast.

That unkillable beast who killed her parents.

It died to a force she had never experienced before, from a man she never expected to be a monster in disguise.

How was she meant to feel?

She didn't know.

There were multiple emotions bubbling up inside her.

Fear, relief, respect, intrigue, wariness, and most importantly...

...excitement.

It may not have made sense to an external observer. Damien surely wouldn't understand it, but this was a life-changing moment for Thalia.

One of many she'd have in the coming days.

The territory Damien entered through the Dimensional Crack wasn't just jungle.

Rather, the sacred jungle was the only uncharted part of said territory. There was a reason the labyrinth was placed there.

Outside the jungle that spanned more distance than that between the sun and Earth, there was an entire interconnected society of many cities, towns, and metroplexes.

And just like every other society, this one had its own ruling authority.

Somewhere deep within the territory, members of that ruling authority were moving.

A shadow approached a large mansion in the middle of a grassy plain. It brushed against the grass before disappearing, reappearing in a study-like room on the second floor.

"Reporting."

The shadow immediately kneeled and made its presence known to the man sitting at the desk before him.

"Speak."

The man's voice was dark and brooding, containing a hint of something vile.

The shadow bowed his head deeper and made the report he came to make.

The only thought in his mind was leaving this place as soon as possible.

"Traces of the Spirit Realm have been recorded by our forces bordering the Eucelian Jungle."

The man's eyes flickered over to the shadow. It was clear that his interest had been aroused.

"The Spirit Realm, you say?"

The shadow's body shook at the prospect of this conversation elongating, but he had to speak regardless.

Everyone knew of the Count's obsession with the jungle.

"Yes, sir. The Spirit Realm should be opening within the next 2 weeks. According to the findings of the research division, the Crown should be kept in that place."

The Count's eyes narrowed.

"Leave."

The shadow instantly prostrated himself and vanished, more than happy to leave that terrifying being's vicinity.

Watching the rat scuttle away, the Count felt a bit of amusement.

"Cairo, are you there?"

"I am here, Milord."

Another being appeared in the room, an old butler that had served the Count for eons now.

"Prepare a team. We will go to the Eucilian Jungle."

"Understood, Milord."

"We set out at daybreak."

"Understood, Milord."

"Very well."

Knowing this was his cue to leave, the butler bowed and made his exit, though without the same fear as the shadow.

Left alone in his study, the Count almost couldn't contain himself.

"Finally..."

"Finally...!"

The Crown, an object he'd been trying for over a million years to locate.

A trace of its existence finally came to him.

Nobody knew what the Crown was. Nobody except him.

His people thought he was obsessed with the jungle because of the secrets it hid, and in part, they were right.

However, the reason he became obsessed with the forest was a story that dated back many, many years, to a certain encounter he had in his youth.

He remembered the things he heard that day.

"As long as I have the Crown..."

...he would become invincible.

"As long as I have the Crown..."

...he could kill his God.

The night passed quietly, with none the wiser about what was to come.

And when the red sun came over the horizon, the Count's party set out.

The Saintess was never wrong.

Chaos was approaching the jungle.

The only question was...

...would the jungle be able to survive?

Chapter 1464 Gehenna [1]

The happenings outside the forest couldn't make their way in. It was impossible for the Gehenna Tribe to communicate with the outside world, especially not with how deep in the forest they lived.

They continued on with their lives, completely secluded.

At the moment, practically the entire tribe was waiting anxiously for a single man to return.

The atmosphere had been tense since the morning. When the earth began to shake near the afternoon, their anxiety only got worse.

Perhaps nobody realized how close they'd gotten with Damien until he left.

And since Thalia went with him, their worry only worsened.

Of course, the Saintess had supreme confidence in her decision. She showed no signs of stress despite her successor going to fight the Uruk, and that was the only reason the rest of the village wasn't in a panic right now.

The Saintess' status was immense, practically indomitable. The villagers weren't members of a cult, so of course they had their own individual thoughts, but they still tried to calm themselves using the Saintess as their example.

Nevertheless, the village was a volcano right now, just waiting to erupt. Whether the eruption would be one of joy or sorrow, however, was still unknown to them.

The odd mood in the village drew out a few characters who'd been too focused on their own matters to appear in public recently.

Namely, Darius and Tiamat.

Their reactions upon understanding the reason behind that strange mood were reasonably mild.

They, as people in close contact with Damien, didn't doubt that he could slay some tiny beast. But, they were definitely interested in what he'd been doing since the last time they saw him.

Darius had been working in the forges for a very long time. As days turned into months, he earned the respect of his peers and masters. His fire control became superb, and his power became far more pronounced.

Darius began showing an appearance like the true owner of the Sun and Moon Divine Flame.

Because of this, quite unfortunately in the sense of timing, Darius was sent on a mission at a nearby volcano, where he could enhance himself even further.

He only recently returned, and hearing that he missed Damien's show in the forge, he was definitely saddened.

But, promising himself that he'd ask his brother to teach him some skills when he returned, Darius returned to the forge to train.

He'd become quite attached to the art, after all.

Tiamat wasn't all that different. She was naturally more indifferent than Darius, but she did have an interest in what had happened in the village in the past year.

She hadn't been anywhere close to her.

The instant she got accepted by the village people, the women took her away, claiming she had "impure air around her mind and heart."

They took her to a small zen garden with a waterfall and a calm atmosphere one wouldn't expect in this brutal jungle.

Tiamat was opposed to doing what they wanted of her. Some of it seemed relaxing, but others seemed to be trying to turn her into a more traditional woman, which she wasn't a fan of.

She did end up doing as they said, though.

Not because she had a sudden change of heart, but rather because she found out that the garden was the perfect place for her to connect with the world.

The so-called chaos in her heart and mind was caused by the confusion she felt towards this world. The best way to solve that confusion was to understand the world itself.

She only participated in the various asks of the tribeswomen once in a while. The rest of the time was spent in meditation, which was why she hadn't been around.

Tiamat came out of meditation for one reason.

She felt danger approaching.

Something in the world seemed to be changing. A vile aura was approaching, and Tiamat felt that if she didn't leave seclusion, she would regret it for the rest of her life.

It was only a coincidence that she came out in time to experience this.

The moment when Damien and Thalia arrived at the entrance of the village without a single scratch on them.

As they stepped into the village amidst the silent gazes of the tribespeople, Damien smiled and waved his arm through the air.

Thud!

At first, it wasn't clear what had fallen to the ground.

In a pile of meat chunks that seemed primed for cooking, half of a massive head was buried.

They recognized it instantly.

"The Uruk..."

From her place high above the village, the Saintess spoke, her words resounding through every nook and cranny.

"...has fallen!"

That was the last silence the tribespeople would experience for several days.

They erupted into cheers. Damien was immediately engulfed by the crowd and picked up. He was being paraded around the village before he knew what was happening.

People got to the drums, letting music alight the village.

It was time for a celebration.

As night fell, the meat of the Uruk was cooked to perfection. Actors and dancers came out to give performances on Damien's valiant feat, as heard directly from the mouth of Thalia.

Everyone indulged in food, drink, and entertainment without limits. Damien, as the main character of the event, was seated directly in the middle and given the treatment of a king.

Thalia was nowhere to be found, but she wasn't the type to indulge in such events in the first place.

And while Damien thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere and appreciated the way the tribe regarded him as one of their own, he also wasn't particularly a fan of parties.

He stayed with the villagers until a little past midnight when the alcohol started getting to him, and when he saw the opportunity, he slipped away.

He headed deep into the jungle. The Uruk was dead, and since he killed it, the surrounding beasts considered him the ruler of this territory. As such, they didn't dare to even think of attacking him.

The night view here was peaceful.

This world wasn't like the Heavenly World whose stars were artificial.

Out there, beyond the barrier that encaged this territory, was a sea of stars completely foreign to Damien.

'I want to see it.'

Even disregarding his path to Existence or the war with the Foreign Races, he really wanted to get out there and explore the sea of stars.

That was a desire he'd never lose, no matter how old or powerful he got.

He remembered that day. It was the first conscious memory he had in life. It was the moment he awoke from the delirium of infancy.

The stars decorating the sky, creating a beautiful mosaic that no artist could ever hope to replicate.

As a man, he'd already conquered the stars he saw that day.

He was looking at a new sky now, a new horizon.

Yet, there would never be anything more calming to him than that wondrous mosaic painted in the sky.

Damien took a deep breath, thoroughly enjoying the cold breeze against his skin.

'Something good will happen soon.'

Gehenna would open in just a few days.

He wanted to spend those days in peace, just like this, however...

He sat up, preparing to greet the person approaching him from behind.

"Haa...I wonder what it'll be this time."

Chapter 1465 Gehenna [2]

There was only one person who would visit Damien at a time like this, and really only one who could find him.

The person timidly approaching from behind was naturally Thalia.

She had taken some time to herself to process what she'd seen in the jungle earlier. For that reason, she didn't attend the party or even speak to Damien ever since he killed the Uruk.

Their return was a silent one, and while she did entertain the tribespeople when they asked her about the battle, she really needed to consider all the thoughts carelessly swimming around her head.

In the end, she found that none of her questions would be answered unless she went to the source.

It didn't take her long to find Damien. There were many beautiful locations in the jungle, but Damien always went to the same spot to look at the stars when he wanted some time alone.

Usually, Thalia wouldn't disturb him when he was here. She also had a safe space deep in the jungle that she used to get away from the world, so she understood how important silence and isolation could be.

Today was a special case, because there was no better place to ask what she wanted to ask than here.

Damien was expecting her presence, since she revealed it a few seconds ago. She walked up and sat next to him without a word, preparing herself for the first question.

"What are you?"

She didn't know how to phrase it. It came out in the most visceral way.

But that was Thalia's question in its truest form.

Damien looked over curiously.

It wasn't like he was offended. Her question came from a place of ignorance, not judgement. Thalia had never seen someone like Damien before. No matter how human he looked, it was hard for her to regard him as one.

That wasn't the kind of power a human could possess.

In a sense, she was correct.

For Damien to handle this power, his body had changed to the point where even the system couldn't determine his race.

And, even if that wasn't the case, he was still more than human.

He was Divine.

Divinity was like a race of its own. One's original race and roots wouldn't change when they achieved that level, however, that race would always be prefaced by their Divine status.

They were Demigods and Gods before anything else.

But there was no way to explain that to Thalia.

What would happen if Damien told her he was a Divine Being?

She, as someone whose worldview was defined by her surroundings, would never be able to understand it properly.

Worst case scenario, she'd get offended or even think of him as someone deserving of worship.

Neither outcome was good. Though, Damien knew it would just fry her brain rather than provoke such a drastic response.

It was still useless to try and explain Divinity to her at this point. Because of that, Damien had no real way to answer her question.

He really was the monster she saw him to be.

Whether that was a good thing or a bad thing was up to her.

"What kind of answer do you want?"

It wasn't the response Thalia expected.

She didn't know what she wanted to hear.

"A truthful one," she said.

That was where she settled.

Damien nodded. What she wanted wasn't a figurative answer, but a literal one.

Her curiosity stemmed from what she'd seen. She was already aware of Damien's personality. She wasn't going to classify him as something other than what he'd shown her just because his power was so monstrous.

She genuinely just wanted to know what he was.

So he gave her the answer she desired.

"I don't really know. I started as a human, but that changed as I changed. At this point, I've become something far removed from that humble beginning."

"For the sake of that power?"

"Rather, as a result of it."

"I see..."

Thalia furrowed her brow.

"Then, if I reach your level, will I still be human?"

"I don't know that either. That depends on the path you decide to take."

Thalia nodded thoughtfully.

She seemed quite connected to her roots as a human. When Damien was younger, his brutal mentality meant he was willing to sacrifice anything for power, so a race change always excited him. It made him feel the weight of his power physically.

He later became more attached to his humanity, but his thoughts on his actual physical race didn't change. It could change as much as it wanted to. As long as his humanity was maintained, he'd be a human.

That was the answer he had for Thalia if she'd asked the same question more figuratively, but she instinctively understood this reasoning and didn't need it explained to her.

Damien still didn't understand why Thalia had come to him.

She didn't ask him much after that either. Just a few questions on how his power worked and how he used barrakh.

Afterward, she just sat there in silence.

She was considering many things inside her mind. Surprisingly enough, she learned more from that first answer than anyone could imagine.

To Damien, her reasoning for seeing him was confusing, but she wasn't as confused as he thought.

Damien just wasn't used to people like her.

She didn't come here with some sort of deep question in mind. The curiosity that burned in her soul was about those things she didn't know, and human emotion wasn't included.

Everyone, no matter how secluded, experienced emotion the same.

Thalia witnessed something beyond the scope of her existing knowledge when she saw Damien fighting the Uruk.

She questioned whether she could achieve that level, and she questioned what would happen if she did.

Her desire for knowledge was more practical than most.

But there was definitely an aspect to it that others wouldn't understand.

She didn't quite get it either.

Was she questioning the tribe's beliefs?

Was she wondering if she should use barrakh more recklessly?

At first, she was.

But Damien told her that he changed as a result of the power he had. He didn't change for its sake.

In the same way, she didn't have to change for the sake of power.

But seeking its peak would result in change regardless.

That was the kind of change she wanted.

Therefore, rather than questioning the tribe's methods, she went a different route.

"I will become as strong as you."

"I'm sure you will."

It was a statement she couldn't have said if she knew about Divinity, but precisely because of her naivety, Damien believed she could do it.

"I will get there with the tribe's techniques."

"I'm excited to see it."

The way they interacted had changed somewhat, but Damien didn't mind. He also found the Gehenna Tribe's techniques interesting and had actually done some work on his own to improve them.

He was actually planning to give that method to Thalia soon, but seeing this change in her, he changed his mind.

'It won't be too late once she's figured it out on her own.'

The night passed in relative silence.

Thalia left Damien alone a few minutes after that short conversation, leaving him to gaze at the sky alone again.

To Damien, it was just a passing moment, a promise from someone young and full of energy.

But for Thalia, it was monumental.

She finally got a hint.

A hint about how she could take the Gehenna Tribe higher than it currently was.

Chapter 1466 Gehenna [3]

Solitude seemed to be a trend these days.

First, it was Darius and Tiamat, and now Thalia had also joined them in the endeavor.

After leaving Damien that day, Thalia found herself with a new motivation like she'd never had before.

As she acted on that motivation, she naturally lost the time to focus on other things.

Thalia had to break down what she knew about her clan's techniques and rebuild them from the ground up. It wasn't an easy task, but Thalia's understanding of those techniques surpassed that of even some of the elders.

She was the hunter who represented the village. Regardless of her young age, she managed to stand on par with the most experienced hunters and even show them up on occasion.

Every single day she went into the jungle, and every single day she got more and more experienced.

The basis of the clan's techniques was to convert barrakh into a purer form with weapons as a medium and utilize it from there.

Every hunter understood the inefficiency of this method. Weapons, at the end of the day, would only be a hindrance if one relied on them too much.

However, nobody had been able to find a way to purify barrakh internally. Even if they had an idea, none of them dared to attempt it because that would require breaking the clan's traditions.

Thalia didn't lose faith. Her conversation with Damien actually allowed her to gain a faith she didn't have before.

But she also lost the thought process that led her to follow that faith without question.

She was willing to ask the questions that needed to be asked and do the things that needed to be done for the sake of her faith, even if that meant deviating from its path.

The Gehenna Tribe needed to evolve.

They'd been stuck in their current position for too long.

Seeing Damien, a single man, eliminate the threat that haunted their entire tribe for generations, Thalia realized just how weak they were.

If they could just use energy with their bodies, if they achieved the versatility and power offered by that method, wouldn't they become something greater?

Her way of thinking was somewhat naive since she was just starting to grow out of her static mindset.

However, she was on the right path.

Everyone in the village could see it.

Many people wanted to know what she was up to, but none of them bothered her as they watched her diligently work towards her goal.

Some even went to Damien to see what he knew, but he feigned ignorance.

After all, Thalia's path was her own, and he was more than happy to just contribute to her growth silently.

Unfortunately, while her spirit was there, she didn't have enough time to make real progress.

It had already been several days. Damien's spectacles were definitely grand, but nobody forgot about the real reason behind his endeavors.

Gehenna would be welcoming visitors soon.

The Saintess had already proclaimed it. The youths who were selected to enter the realm would leave in five days.

Still, Thalia sat in her own residence, paper strewn across the floor.

Time?

She didn't need to worry about it.

She was already close to a breakthrough.

If she could make it there before Gehenna, then wouldn't that just be an added plus?

Life continued to move.

It continued to approach.

The day for everyone to realize the strange ways in which destiny worked.

Silence reigned in a small zen garden far separated from the tribe.

This place was odd in nature. While it did exist within the village, it was a place not even close to it.

There were several places in the massive jungle where space folded upon itself and gave way to connections that could take one to various different locations.

There were three such phenomena in the tribe's land, and the zen garden was by far the safest of them.

It was also the most hidden, both in its entrance and true location.

The zen garden was a place that no being could enter without express permission.

Therefore, for Tiamat, there was no better place than this to meditate.

Tiamat came out of seclusion for a few days after hearing about all the racket in the village, but she returned afterward since nothing of note was happening.

She wasn't really interested in Gehenna. Neither she nor Darius were given the right to enter because neither of them had the qualifications. Darius was disappointed about it, but she didn't really care.

She was obviously going to attend the realm's opening, but in the days before that, she was planning to continue doing what she'd been doing for the past year.

Tiamat allowed herself to be swallowed by the world.

One had to wonder what she wanted to see.

Ever since her youth, Tiamat had been alone. She never felt a connection to anyone or anything. In fact, the only semblance of the feeling she got before meeting Damien was the closeness she felt to the prison that entrapped her for over 10,000 years.

However, this world gave her that feeling.

She wanted to know why.

As for what came after that, even she didn't know, because she had little to no information about what she was actually looking for.

But the world was providing her with it regardless.

As if welcoming home a child it had dearly missed for a very long time, the world accepted her and allowed her to witness the things she was never meant to see.

They started as dark flashes of memory, just flecks that didn't have any real meaning on their own.

When Tiamat concentrated and exerted herself to dive deeper, however...

...those flashes expanded into something indescribable.

This world's energy accepted her.

Instinctually, she felt that this place was her home.

But...how?

She had never been here before. It didn't exist in her memories no matter how early she went.

Those flashes told a different story.

She saw herself, or rather, a version of herself that she didn't know.

A dark queen, yet a newborn baby.

An unbelievable monster born from inconceivable circumstances.

Lost in reality, trapped in the depths of her own mind.

A figure was there, a huge figure she could never seem to see the face of.

Something about that figure felt familiar.

As its hand approached closer to her, she felt what should've been warmth.

It was cold.

Extremely cold.

That being was not human.

That being was not living.

Yet it was alive.

And it terrified her.

From that being, she felt what should have been love.

But it was really the indescribable urge to tear her to shreds.

Her existence was a burden.

Her existence was a blessing.

What was she?

Not a single person knew.

Tiamat clutched her head.

It hurt, like thousands of needles were stabbing into her scalp.

She didn't understand what was flashing through her mind. The more she saw, the more uncomfortable she became.

She pushed on for the sole purpose of getting what she wanted, but the further she pushed, the further she seemed to move away from reality.

Yet...

The less "real" reality felt, the more she felt as if she was witnessing the truth behind the images shown to her.

For the past year, she'd only been experiencing spiritual chaos.

That chaos had been dying down recently, but it still appeared in the aforementioned form, a blob of memories and words with no semblance of rhyme or reason.

She wanted to see the bottom of it.

But for now, she had to take a break.

Not only to calm her own psyche, but to witness the event that everyone had been waiting for.

Gehenna.

It was finally time for Damien and the rest to enter that realm.

Chapter 1467 Gehenna [4]

Many things had to occur before Gehenna could be entered, but the time to enter was approaching fast.

The ceremonies of the tribe were incredibly important. As a society that lived by tradition, they believed it absolute.

The events began three days before the day Gehenna appeared.

First came a tribute to the spirits, a ritual to request protection for the young ones entering their realm.

This took an entire day, and consisted of many tribal dances and ritual sacrifices where the best of the tribe's food and wine was burned at an altar while the entire tribe prostrated themselves around it.

On the second day, the actual entrants were all brought together.

Damien finally saw the other twenty or so youths who'd be entering the realm along with himself and Thalia.

They were brought together by the elders of the tribe and made to worship for a day.

Damien experienced many things he hadn't before.

The Gehenna people had many statues made in the likeness of their ancestors and the Ancient Gods of the jungle.

Once protection was requested from the spirits, prayers were given to those deceased to introduce them to their future generations so they could recognize each other in the Spirit Cemetery.

And finally, on the third day, everyone returned to their homes.

They remained indoors without contacting each other, staying in meditation and connecting themselves to the jungle.

Damien also used this time to meditate.

The reasoning behind the event was to clear away the trials and tribulations of reality from the hearts of the tribespeople.

Meditation to connect with the jungle, to tune themselves into frequencies only those ethereal forces could sense, meant reaching a state of selflessness.

That state brought one closer to truth.

It brought peace to the heart and mind.

Damien didn't necessarily feel such things from the jungle, but he wasn't as skeptical as he used to be.

He had personally experienced the jungle's spirituality on several occasions as he explored it on its own.

However, the jungle had not accepted him. For that reason, it never allowed him to truly connect with it.

Damien didn't mind. It was obvious for him to be treated the way it was treating him. If anything, the Gehenna people were the strange ones for being so welcoming.

Still, the rejection of the jungle was the main cause of his lack of comprehension in the past year.

How could he comprehend the laws if the law didn't allow him to see them?

Nevertheless, he meditated.

Even if he couldn't get much, he could still slowly make progress as long as he tried.

The night passed as everyone in the village partook in the traditions, and when the sun broke over the horizon again, everyone gathered again.

Damien and the rest were led into the forest under the gazes and cheers of the village people.

The youths were proud. Thalia had a serious expression on her face, but even she couldn't hide the excitement in her eyes.

They walked through the forest with the guidance of the elders, taking a path where they encountered not a single danger until they reached a clearing roughly ten kilometers from the village.

This location had an aura of spirituality that even Damien could sense.

"Here, Gehenna will embrace you. Sit down and meditate."

The Saintess spoke, motioning towards the center of the clearing.

Damien and the rest walked there and followed her instructions.

Once they were in a meditative posture, the Saintess raised her staff into the air and began chanting in an ancient tone.

The language she used was different from the ones Damien had learned, but it shared a resemblance that made it evident that it was an ancestor of the languages that existed in the current era.

The entire village had followed them here. They formed a circle around the clearing and watched as the elders raised their staffs behind the Saintess and joined her in her chanting.

Little bulbs of white light, like dandelions in the wind, rose from the ground and decorated the entire clearing.

Those light balls gathered together and flew into the sky before cascading down as a collection of auroras that beautifully lit up the clouds.

A hazy mist filled the air, blurring not only vision, but consciousness.

Damien kept his eyes closed and felt the changes.

He could sense space getting more and more chaotic, reaching a breaking point where it would swallow everyone sitting in the middle of the clearing.

'It's time.'

Within a few seconds, he would be entering that mysterious place called Gehenna, where, according to the Saintess, he'd find his destiny.

He readied himself for the transportation, sinking deeper into meditation until...

'Hm?'

He felt something enter his palm.

His eyes peeked open, and he subtly saw the movement of the Saintess' hands.

Along with the smile on her face.

It wasn't a happy smile.

What did that smile mean?

He wanted to check what she had given him, but before he could, he found himself stuck in the midst of a spatial transmission.

He gripped his fist, making sure the object wouldn't fall out, and allowed the energy to embrace him.

And, in a single moment almost completely hidden in an aurora of light, the group of twenty-something individuals vanished.

Silence reigned in the clearing.

The tribespeople looked at the Saintess, while the Saintess stared into the sky.

She brought her staff down slowly and turned around.

The expression on her face was now one of utmost seriousness, completely different from the one she sent Damien and the rest off with.

"Prepare for war."

Damien stood at the entrance of Gehenna. He didn't pay a single bit of attention to the realm. Instead, he took the token that the Saintess put in his hand in that final moment and read its contents.

The tribespeople got their weapons ready. Though Tiamat and Darius didn't understand what was happening, they prepared themselves as well.

The things written on that token weren't small tidbits of knowledge at all.

This cosmos was called the Sacred Abyss Universe.

The one Damien came from was the True Void Universe.

This cosmos was ruled by a being called the Dark God and his ensemble of lackeys, organized in a feudal hierarchy system.

And this territory where the Gehenna Tribe lived was ruled by a Count, a God that viewed lesser beings as ants.

These were facts that could've been mentioned outside.

Why did the—

"—FUCK!"

Damien roared when he realized it.

But it was already too late.

He was not able to tear through the realm and leave on his own without access to Existence.

It went just as the Saintess had planned.

"DAMMIT!"

He could only remain trapped here as she intended.

As she stood before the entrance gate to Gehenna, the entire tribe behind her, she smiled.

A terrible foe was approaching, carrying with him a terrible fate for the tribe.

But, everything would go as she planned.

All the pieces would line up perfectly.

No matter what happened as that great evil approached closer and closer...

...as long as she had any say in it, her tribe would not fall.

Chapter 1468 Gehenna [5]

It was difficult to understand what had occurred without experiencing it personally.

The Saintess left a lot of information in Damien's hands, to the point where he could barely focus on the changed atmosphere around him.

The information about the names of their two cosmos came out of nowhere and didn't seem to have any place in the rest of the things contained in the token, but it was a clue to what the Saintess' power could achieve.

As for what came after, it was a slew of knowledge about the Sacred Abyss Universe.

More so, a slew of information about the world the Saintess saw.

Damien never realized how powerful the Saintess was. Her power came from a force he couldn't see, so it was only natural for him to underestimate her.

Damien had been in the Gehenna Tribe for over a year now, but the time had passed so fast it hardly felt like it had been that long.

The village people were great and welcoming, and in that atmosphere where he felt like he could do whatever he wanted securely, his perception became hazy.

He was already disconnected from the laws. When he was fed a proverbial lotus that made his awareness of reality drop, the effect was only multiplied.

Everything had gone according to the Saintess' plans from the moment Damien's group arrived in the tribe.

Everything had taken place in such a way that Damien would be rushed into Gehenna without a chance to reconsider things.

Because if he just sat down and thought about it for a second, he obviously would've found something odd about it all.

The Saintess knew something bad was coming for the tribe, and she knew exactly what it was.

The problem was that she didn't see a way for them to win against the threat they were facing.

So, by any means possible, the Saintess drove destiny forward and pushed those who needed to see Gehenna into the realm before an all-out war broke out.

But she knew her plan wasn't absolute, and those who entered Gehenna needed to come out at some point.

That was the only reason she informed Damien.

The Count. Specifically, Count Verex.

He ruled this territory of the Sacred Abyss Universe and was one of 32 Counts under the command of the Dark God.

None of them were particularly good people, but Count Verex's reputation was bad even by Foreign Race standards.

He was known for abusing the people who lived in his territory, and his greed for power allowed him to sacrifice anything and everything.

The Gehenna Tribe had an encounter with him in the past.

Or rather, the Saintess did.

Ever since then, she knew he would appear before her one day as the person fated to bring her death.

She knew how much he lusted after the Crown that was contained within Gehenna.

She couldn't allow him to have it.

And she couldn't allow him to interfere with the destiny of her tribespeople.

As such, she only let Damien know.

There was no way to stop what was already happening anyway.

Damien obviously made a huge scene at the entrance when he broke it all down.

With the information presented and the way the Saintess decided to present it, with the way Gehenna cleared away the confusion in his mind, Damien was able to put it all together.

The Saintess had prophesized her own death.

She had seen the end of her clan.

And she'd tasked Damien with protecting the most prized geniuses they had birthed in the past generation, so that the legacy of the tribe wouldn't fall easily.

Damien gritted his teeth furiously.

'I should have realized it earlier.'

Damien had extremely positive emotions towards the Gehenna Tribe. They treated him like family without a hint of prejudice, accepting him as one of their own.

However, he didn't actually get close to anyone, including Thalia.

Was the Saintess trying to prevent him from getting emotionally invested in their fate?

Was she trying to protect him?

If she was, then she failed.

Because the things she did for his sake without asking for anything in return were enough to earn his utmost respect.

'Focus.'

Damien closed his eyes.

He took long, deep breaths and arranged all the new information he'd just learned.

He spread his senses into the surroundings and completely calmed down.

Only in this state would he be able to do something meaningful.

'Okay.'

He boiled down the compiled facts into only the things he needed to focus on.

A God was approaching the tribe with their deaths and this realm was his goal.

He couldn't leave Gehenna on his own, not without accomplishing whatever the Saintess sent him here to accomplish.

But he had to leave soon, so that he could save the tribe from their doom.

"Huu..."

The Saintess may have been planning for this moment for a very long time, but to Damien, everything changed too fast.

Life was calm until the instant Gehenna opened. If there was anything that stood out about it all, it was that the Saintess really knew how to hide her fangs.

'Focus.'

Damien kept his senses focused on the surroundings.

He immediately felt the differences as compared to both cosmos he'd been in.

'The laws are chaotic.'

This place also had its own unique law form, which meant—

'—time is also different here.'

There was nobody else in Damien's surroundings. The geniuses were all separated during spatial transmission, which allowed Damien to act without worry.

He sat down where he was, judging this area safe, and immediately went to work comprehending the time dilation.

Time passed, and he felt its flow. He compared it to what he knew from the True Void Universe, and he compared it to what he learned in the Sacred Abyss Universe.

In the end, he was able to roughly determine some things.

'It's good. Very good, in fact.'

From what he could tell, he had at least a few months for every hour that passed outside. It was hard for him to get a completely accurate picture without being connected to the Sacred Abyss Universe's Time Laws, but his rough estimate was enough.

'I have around a year.'

He didn't know when the Count would arrive at the tribe, but he knew that once a God took action, they wouldn't last for more than a few seconds at most.

Count Verex's personality, from the information the Saintess provided, was extremely arrogant.

Damien was going to rush and get out of this place as soon as possible, but in the worst-case scenario where he couldn't arrive in time, he had to place his hopes on the Count's arrogance and pray that he would send weaker troops to attack first, giving Damien some time.

Everything was properly digested in his mind.

Damien finally got the chance to look around and actually see where he was.

No matter how urgent the situation outside was, he had to put it out of his mind.

Before he could worry about that, he had to get out of here.

And to get out of here...

...he had to personally find out what all this fuss about destiny really meant.

Chapter 1469 Gehenna [6]

Damien was not in the wilderness right now. He wasn't in a place that looked like it should be in a secret realm at first glance.

He was in the middle of a cobbled stone pathway that spanned for several tens of meters in both directions.

In the distance, he could see a massive arch that looked like the entrance to a city. There wasn't much behind him, but the path at least made it seem like there was something to see in the distance as well.

If this path was crowded with people, it would look no different from the outside world, like a path leading towards a bustling metroplex filled with life.

However, this path was not filled with anything but mist.

The white fog was extremely prevalent, more prevalent than anyone else. It existed as a layer that crept against the ground and went all the way into the sky, but surprisingly enough, it didn't block vision or perception.

It actually made Damien's eyes see farther, and it made his mind clearer than ever, allowing him to swiftly react to the situation he suddenly found himself in.

'My awareness doesn't spread very far. I guess I have to give up on actively looking for others.'

Damien had made the decision to follow what the Saintess wanted to an extent.

He would protect her kids, but he wouldn't allow her to die so easily.

To do so properly, he wanted to team up and move with them through this realm, but since it wasn't at all possible to find where he was yet, he had to give up on finding them too.

'Luckily, I know at least a little bit about the realm.'

Gehenna had two types of beings within it.

Good spirits and evil spirits.

Good spirits were usually ancestors of the clan and human heroes.

The Ancients of the jungle were also mainly good beings, however, one could never be sure. Some of them had tricky personalities, and some teetered on the border of evil, making their actions and personalities chaotic.

As for those who were completely on the side of evil, they didn't have one specific form.

They were unequivocally vile.

It had to be known that the Gehenna Tribe didn't know how to deal with souls.

They came in all shapes and sizes, all races existing in the world, but they all had one thing in common.

They were unequivocally vile.

It had to be known that the Gehenna Tribe didn't know how to deal with souls.

Nobody put these evil spirits in Gehenna. No, the Sacred Abyss Universe forced them into this realm because their sins were too heavy.

They were people who absolutely could not be allowed in the reincarnation cycle because their evil was too powerful to be cleansed by this cosmos' Wheel of Samsara.

Damien didn't want the others to be tempted by those evil spirits. The problem was that none of them were powerful enough to resist such powerful beings.

'No, my thinking is wrong.'

This place didn't work like any other world Damien had been to.

Strength didn't matter nearly as much here as will.

If the youths of the tribe had the appropriate mental propensity, they wouldn't be affected by forces beyond their control.

'Plus, this realm favors the Gehenna Tribe.'

This place was their namesake. They had an eternal connection with it that none could replicate.

That was the reason Count Verex was attacking them before entering the realm.

The youths of the tribe would likely be met by their ancestors before anything terrible could happen to them.

Even if those ancestors didn't find them worthy of their opportunities, they at least wouldn't let them be touched by the evil spirits.

'I guess I'm the only one on my own then.'

Damien smiled wryly.

He was used to it.

Plus, this was probably for the better.

'I'm not here to meet the ancestors of Gehenna.'

If he was, then the Saintess would've made sure he gave the ancestors a reason to meet him.

'I'm here for something else entirely.'

Damien started walking towards the arch in the distance.

It was hard to learn what to do in an abandoned place like this without a single clue.

He knew what would happen to the Gehenna youths, but what did that matter to him?

Thalia was probably already facing a lucky chance, while the rest would be the same soon.

He, however, had to just walk.

The arch was closer than expected. He reached it within five minutes, and as he walked through, he found himself encountering a large plaza with several statues lining its edge.

There was a fountain in the middle with a huge statue of a dragon. Its eyes were made out of rubies, and its every scale was finely outlined and detailed, making the statue seem like it was filled with vitality.

The loosely cobbled pathway turned into an organized grey brick formation that drew one's attention to the central figure.

There was nothing around the plaza. The mist once again came in and shaded the periphery, making it seem like there was nothing in this world but this place.

Damien carefully observed the floor, but he didn't see any mechanisms within it.

He had the option to turn around and look for something else, but he had no plans to do so.

Everything the Saintess said about this place tied back to destiny, that esoteric force that worked on all living things in mysterious ways.

If Damien appeared here, he was meant to be here,

He approached the dragon statue with caution, staring into its gemstone eyes.

He could see some sort of glint within, even though there was no sunlight for the jewels to reflect.

"Are you...alive?"

He felt stupid talking to it, but this universe wasn't short of its strange beings. It wouldn't be odd if the statue had sentience.

Damien didn't receive a response to his call, but the eyes flashed strangely, indicating there was something here.

He walked around under the statue, observing it from every side.

'I've never seen a dragon like this before.'

Damien was no stranger to dragons. He'd seen them in every shape or form they came in through the Azure Dragon's memories.

However, this wasn't something he'd seen.

A black dragon with red eyes. It was a common archetype, but this one had a particularly shaped scale pattern that seemed more like that of a fish than a flying beast.

'Do I touch it?'

'Or...'

Damien moved away from the statue in the middle and looked towards those in the surroundings.

More fantastical beasts.

Not a single one bore similarity to another, and not a single one looked like something that existed in the True Void Universe.

And they were all staring at him with those gemstone eyes, soulless yet filled with spirit.

A hazy red halo began to fill the beautiful white mist.

Yet, the white mist also rose.

It felt like a spectacle was about to begin in this plaza, with Damien at its center.

'No, spectacle is the wrong word. This aura is...'

Damien was very familiar with it.

The entirety of Grand Heavens Boundary was laced with it for as long as Damien had lived.

It was the aura of war, something that could only appear if bloody slaughter had been occurring in a location for tens of dozens of millennia at the very least.

'The start of my destiny...'

Damien watched as the statues came to life.

A picture was painted in front of his eyes, one where he could see who these statues used to be.

And as he guessed, the start of his destiny was here.

The beginning, as always...

'...is war.'

Chapter 1470 Gehenna [7]

War.

It was something Damien had long been used to.

But this was a form he'd never seen it in.

An illusion formed around him. He was encased in its grasp, and his body was changed into another one.

Damien was sent to a place that bore similarity to the Ancient Battlefield, and on it, he was faced with and surrounded by two different armies.

One was made up of dragons of all kinds. This was the group he was with.

As for the enemies, they were a variety of mythical creatures including qilins, dryads, and everything in between.

They oozed an aura of malevolence, a clear indication of their hatred for the dragons.

And the dragons were filled with absolute pride, believing themselves unshakable.

The war began before Damien had a chance to fully understand the situation.

Both sides charged at each other, and deaths immediately appeared on both sides.

'Ah...'

Standing in the middle of it all, Damien suddenly felt a stabbing pain in his heart.

He watched a dragon fall.

He remembered that dragon's name.

And he felt the anguish of losing a good friend.

His eyes turned red with fury.

Not taking a single second to think, he joined his fellows in battle, killing the enemy he didn't even know the identity of.

And he killed.

His claws which were once only used to calmly trek the earth became weapons that carried the blood of hundreds.

His maw, only ever used to eat and speak, had been wetted with the taste of iron, a disgusting taste that easily became addicting.

He was truly a powerhouse.

He had never killed before, but when he was taken to the battlefield, his true purpose in life was revealed to all.

Yet, with every dragon that fell, the rage he felt was deepened.

He had a personal feud with the enemy side now, unable to recognize himself within the beast he was possessing.

But it didn't matter what he did. He was only a single dragon, recklessly charging in without a plan.

He could kill as many enemies as he wanted, but his comrades would continue dying.

As they did.

The dragons who once thought themselves invincible were felled one after another. As they continued to fight, they didn't realize how their numbers had diminished.

Damien wasn't aware of it either.

His boiling rage was the only thing defining him. Under its guidance, he killed his way all the way through the enemy line, coming out the other side with not a single being in front of him.

Only then did his eyes return to normal.

Only then did he realize he was the only one left.

'This...'

How long had it been?

The battlefield was long gone.

His young body which had never tasted war was now built for it, covered in scars and wounds from previous battles.

He was no longer just a youthful dragon. He was old, nearing the end of his life, and yet, his rage had only just faded.

How long did he spend drowned in his emotions?

Even he couldn't tell, but from the signs in his body and mind, he had been on a blind path of revenge for at least several tens of thousands of years already.'

His eyes panned his surroundings, clearly showing his confusion.

He was surrounded, the beasts from the statues preparing to end the Dragon Race's legacy through him.

He had been trapped in a cage of his own making, and while he ran around in its confines none the wiser, his enemies took ownership of it and truly left him without a chance to escape.

If he had just moved wisely...

If he had rallied his comrades and worked together...

Would the dragons have fallen?

They were noble creatures above any of the others here.

But because of their pride, because of their arrogance, and because of their impatience, he was the only one remaining.

A single black dragon with burning red eyes, a physical reminder of his futile rage.

That futile rage which became the very reason for his demise and the extinction of the Dragon Race.

The scene paused.

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

Only Damien's rough breathing remained, all other sound banished from existence.

He looked around at the scene of slaughter around him.

'The message you're trying to show me...'

As he came to himself and thought about what had just happened, his true intelligence allowed him to realize what the purpose of this place was.

"...I will always remember it."

Tragedy was one of the most ancient concepts.

Whether it be the beings who existed at the very beginning of time or those who would come to exist far in the future, everyone would experience tragedy the same.

Damien was not an exception to this rule.

He'd lived a fortunate life. Despite his struggles, he always managed to gain the power to overcome them mentally and physically.

But he would also experience tragedy, and he had to accept the concept's permanence.

That was the reason he was made to experience this war.

So he would reaffirm himself and not lose himself when the time came.

The power Damien was coming into was too immense for his emotions to fluctuate heavily.

Once he truly become one with Existence and surpassed it, Existence would move with the slightest change in his demeanor whether he liked it or not.

It was a war Damien watched and participated in, brutal and filled with split-second decisions that sometimes had to be brash and erratic.

It was in that atmosphere that he learned the true consequences of failing to control his emotions.

He had to keep himself stable.

No matter what happened to him, no matter what he experienced, he couldn't fold under pressure.

Calmness.

It was a war Damien watched and participated in, brutal and filled with split-second decisions that sometimes had to be brash and erratic.

It was in that atmosphere that he learned the true consequences of failing to control his emotions.

And as he came out of it, he now understood more deeply than ever the importance of reigning over them.

Damien was usually confident in doing so, but he'd been wavering recently.

It was naturally because of his father.

He knew Dante was in a bad situation from a long time ago, but realizing how dire it was agitated him greatly.

He'd been going through the motions, living life in such a way that the Saintess was easily able to manipulate his perception.

He couldn't do that anymore.

No matter what happened outside, no matter what he saw when he left this place, he had to remain calm.

That was the lesson he internalized.

And as he did, the purpose of this battlefield vanished.

The great beings surrounding him began to fade, their expressions now changed into warm smiles, visible even on their gnarled beastly faces.

They may have been enemies on the battlefield, but it had been a very, very long time since that battle ended.

They no longer felt the hot-blooded emotion that forced them apart in the first place.

Now, their role here had been fulfilled.

Which meant they could finally return to rest.

They were tired of reenacting this same moment from the past over and over again. They were forced to do so because they could not satisfy the purpose their war was intended for.

Damien's arrival changed that.

They were finally free to enjoy the peace of Gehenna as they lived out the remainder of eternity.

And Damien was also free.

The mist opened a path for him when the ancient spirits departed.

It was time for him to see what else this place had in store.