

Void 1471

Chapter 1471 Gehenna [8]

Every statue in the plaza represented an Ancient of the jungle that was drawn to Gehenna at the end of its life.

They had participated in wars and slaughter all their lives, only to realize how pointless their struggles against each other were.

Their true enemy was elsewhere, but by the time they figured out that person's identity, they'd already destroyed themselves.

Gehenna was a cemetery for spirits. For some it was heaven, for some it was hell, and for others it was purgatory.

These ancient spirits experienced something in between.

They had to relive their tragedy over and over again for eons. It started before they entered Gehenna, and when they came here, the realm imitated that reality.

It was punishment for their sins.

However, as Damien finally arrived and participated in the demonstration, finally granting purpose to their endless battle, their punishment ended.

They could now experience the heaven that existed for pure spirits in Gehenna.

That was what Damien granted them, and in return, they gave him their blessing.

Whatever the force that made them repeat their battle was, it gave Damien his lesson on tragedy.

The Ancients, on the other hand, provided something that manifested itself physically.

Damien felt his body change. It was subtle and basically didn't constitute any change at all, but internally, Damien could feel his energy flowing much more smoothly.

He was accepted by a portion of this realm.

And more importantly, with their blessing, he'd be accepted by the Sacred Abyss Universe, allowing him to comprehend its laws.

It was a beautiful gift that gave Damien the chance to do what he'd been trying to do since he got here, an apt gift in return for the freedom he granted them.

The plaza remained unchanged.

'There's nothing else for me to do here.'

Damien gave one last look at the statues before following the trail the mist left him.

Its unusually clean surface was still decorated with the many statues that had always been there.

The strange light that glinted in the eyes of those inanimate beings, the slight hint of sentience that caused one to question the border between reality and illusion, was gone.

'There's nothing else for me to do here.'

Damien gave one last look at the statues before following the trail the mist left him.

He arrived at a new area within five minutes. This time, there was nothing present besides him, and there didn't seem to be anything special in the surroundings.

The mist moved once again.

It rose into the sky and cascaded down as a shower of light. It changed color, mutating the atmosphere until Damien found himself in a white room.

There was a pistol in front of him, a common hot weapon that functioned purely on science that Damien hadn't seen in ages.

Around ten feet away were three people tied to vertical tables like experimental subjects.

One was his mother.

The other was his wife, Rose.

And the last was a stranger.

To his own head was another gun, held by a shadowy black figure who silently urged him to take a decision.

This time, the intent was clear.

Damien immediately picked up the pistol and shot the stranger.

He didn't need to think about which life to take in this situation.

However, the test wasn't what he thought it was.

As the stranger's body jerked, the bullet piercing straight into their skull, Rose's body twisted as well.

Blood leaked from her mouth as she weakly smiled at Damien.

A hole appeared in the center of her head.

The stranger was fine.

The bullet Damien shot flew into Rose's head instead.

It was cruel trickery.

Damien knew this was an illusion.

And he understood what it wanted to say to him.

It was the same as last time. He needed to maintain his calm and assess the situation properly before acting.

He knew that was what he was meant to do.

But he refused.

There was a fine line between calmness and indifference.

Damien knew to be calm in every situation. Despite the rumbling volcano hidden in his heart, he had been moving calmly to solve Void Palace's troubles ever since learning his father's fate, and even before that, he usually approached all situations rationally regardless of whether they included his loved ones or not.

However, this wasn't reality. This was a test.

Damien didn't need to consider outside factors or risks.

He wasn't meant to show what he would do logically.

He was meant to show what he wanted to do, what his desire was in this situation.

'I don't think it knows.'

The force that was testing him didn't know the difference between calmness and indifference.

He would show it exactly what that difference was.

Damien raised his mana.

This was an illusion, so he was allowed to use it as he pleased.

With a single move, he changed the scenario.

The concepts of order and harmony worked together, the laws of space and time worked together, and as the bullet was rewound back to its original trajectory and Rose was brought back from the underworld, reality itself changed so that only the stranger would be struck.

It was a change that was big enough to affect causality but not big enough to completely ruin it.

As such, the punishment Damien would receive for overexerting himself wasn't nearly as pronounced.

Still, Existence didn't allow him to casually wield it.

He was forced into a pain similar yet not to the same extent as what he felt when he killed the homunculus back then.

But that wasn't enough to stop him.

Situations like these were always a two-step process.

Calmness. With it, he could make sure his loved ones were safe and secure without any mistakes.

But it wasn't indifference.

So once their safety was certain and they were in a place where it wouldn't be challenged again...

...Damien was allowed to unleash the fury he kept contained while he saved them.

The power he used was an illusion just like everything else, but the true illusion that contained him shattered the second he unleashed the full extent of his aura.

Damien was returned to the clearing where the mist led him, but he wasn't done yet.

He gathered all his barrakh, along with the rudimentary laws he gained access to after being blessed by the ancient spirits, and slammed his foot into the ground.

BOOOOOOM!

A crater almost a kilometer deep was blown open in the ground. It was evident Damien could've done more, but he held back on purpose.

This was enough to show his intent to those whom it concerned.

He would remain calm when he needed to.

However, he would not throw away the emotions that defined his ego.

He would stay his hand when he could, and he would act subtly when he could, but the second his line was touched...

...no matter who it was or where they were, they would face their retribution.

No exceptions.

Somewhere within Gehenna, a certain being twitched.

For once, it had been acknowledged.

It shivered slightly in excitement.

Meanwhile, the mist opened for Damien, allowing him to continue on his way.

This would be fun.

Finally, someone had come who could sense it.

Finally, it could find joy.

It was good for the being in question, however, it wasn't quite the same for Damien.

One could only wait and see how he dealt with that being's twisted definition of joy.

Chapter 1472 Gehenna [9]

Unlike Damien, Thalia did spawn in the wilderness.

The scene was most familiar to her.

If someone asked her where she could find peace, she'd always have the same answer.

The jungle.

Ever since her parents died defending the village from the Uruk, she'd been obsessed with the jungle.

It was the place that housed terrifying monsters like that.

It was a horrifying landscape filled with death and danger, but it was also unbelievably beautiful and captivating.

The jungle was a place that even the Uruk, no matter how powerful it was, could escape.

For that, Thalia respected it, and for its beauty, she loved it.

The wind against her face as she rushed through the trees was one of the most comforting things she'd ever felt, like the feeling of a mother's hand brushing against her.

The feeling of a weapon in her hand being used to kill, not for pleasure or survival, but for the well-being of the clan, made her feel a sense of honor unlike any other.

And just like Damien, she loved to look at the stars and marvel at the grandiosity of the world.

Her reasoning was different.

She never thought about exploring the stars. That was far too advanced for her.

Instead, when Thalia looked at the stars, she saw those she'd lost throughout her life.

When she took time alone, she looked up at the stars to talk to them, always maintaining hope that she'd get a response back.

There was nothing more familiar to Thalia than the wilderness, and as such, that was exactly where Gehenna placed her when she first arrived.

Thalia didn't get repeatedly tested like Damien.

In fact, none of the Gehenna youths did.

For most of them, the instant they arrived in the realm and walked around a little, their guardian ancestors found them and took them for training.

Only Thalia and Damien experienced something different, and only Damien's experience was so unreasonably different.

Thalia didn't immediately meet her ancestor, nor did she only meet one.

As she familiarized herself with the new jungle, warily standing on the trees and scanning below for evil spirits, she was swept into the sky.

Her body became a kite, propelled by the winds to fly higher and higher until she was above the clouds.

Naturally, it was terrifying.

Thalia screamed like a little girl. She closed her eyes, but when she felt the impermanence of her surroundings, she began to panic.

She'd never been in the sky before. To her, this sacred place was not meant for the human body.

If she fell, she died, and if she ascended, she'd meet those who passed long ago.

Stuck in this limbo where traditional belief contrasted with reality, Thalia was continuously thrown higher and higher until she landed on flat ground again.

Or rather, on opaque clouds, a white marble flooring that existed only in the sky.

She continued to remain careful.

Thalia knew much more about Gehenna than Damien.

This place wasn't just a spirit cemetery, nor was it just a prison.

Gehenna was something bigger. Gehenna had its own spirituality, and with it, Gehenna would exert its influence over the world.

Only the Gehenna Tribe had gained the privilege of being blessed by it, but Gehenna's reach spread far beyond the jungle.

How else did all those evil spirits arrive here?

Gehenna was a mystical and esoteric existence that seemed to support reality itself, so even though what Thalia experienced seemed to go against her faith, it actually made her infinitely more of a believer than before.

This realm had its own spirituality. Since it brought her into the clouds...

Thalia followed the path the mist provided her without question.

At its end, she found a majestic structure, unlike anything she'd seen before.

Standing atop the clouds as if it weighed nothing at all was a massive pantheon that seemed to belong to none other than the Gods.

It was pure white like everything else, with gargantuan columns spanning its exterior to hold its weight.

Each and every one was carved with another story, another heroic tale about a hero of the past.

And on the column most near the entrance to the pantheon was a story about two lovers who had given everything for their daughter.

For most people, the ancestors would descend to the earth. They'd train and guide the youths until their time was up and then return to the pantheon.

But Thalia was the next Saintess.

Entering Gehenna meant something entirely different for her.

Every generation of Saintess would be made to enter Gehenna in their youths.

During that time, they would be blessed with a power.

No two Saintesses ever had the same power.

Because the powers they received directly correlated to the fate of the clan.

The Saintess of the last generation had the power to defend. She was able to form a massive barrier over the clan that saved them from countless threats until she died.

The current Saintess had divination, though nobody knew the true level of her ability. Her purpose was to predict the clan's terrifying future and set up an escape path for them, one that was eventually hinged on Damien and made his responsibility.

Thalia was the next Saintess.

But she didn't know about what was happening in the outside world.

She'd come here assuming this appearance of Gehenna would be just like the one she'd witnessed in the past when she was only a child.

How could she know that she couldn't have been more wrong?

Today was the day Thalia truly became the successor for the Gehenna Tribe's Saintess position.

Today was the day she received her unique power.

And today was the day she understood what her role would be for the rest of her life.

A single ability that held so much weight, that was what waited for her within that pantheon.

Along with those who would present it to her.

Thalia took a deep breath.

She was prepared to meet the ancestors. She was actually excited for it.

She'd heard tales about the great heroes of the tribe since she was a baby. She grew up adoring them, and it was because of them that she went into the forest for the first time with the intent of being a hunter.

She couldn't wait to meet those same heroic figures who inspired her life path and continued to inspire her now that she was trying to improve the fundamental techniques of the clan.

However, she couldn't help but wonder...

'...are they there...?'

The people who most recently gave their lives for the clan.

According to the legends about Gehenna, they'd be granted entry for their sacrifice.

The fact that they would be here, resting peacefully, was one of the main things that allowed Thalia to regain her sanity after their passing.

But standing in front of the pantheon where she'd truly find out whether or not she'd ever see them again, Thalia was forced to hesitate.

'Mother...father...'

She couldn't waste time asking if reality would match her expectations.

The only thing she could do was walk up those steps and meet destiny herself.

The pantheon's massive stone doors opened for her automatically as she approached, indicating her belonging here.

And the darkness within, laced with countless powerful auras, assailed her.

'Without cowardice, without weakness...'

She would not remain terrified in front of destiny forever.

She would overcome herself, and in the process, she'd overcome the world.

It was yet another lesson she'd taken from Damien, and right now, it was the reason she could steel herself before the mountainous task ahead.

With that mindset and the will to move forward, Thalia entered the jaws of fate.

Whether what happened inside was considered fortune or misfortune...

Well, only Thalia herself could decide.

Chapter 1473 Gehenna [10]

Pure human emotion.

Unexpectedly, pure human emotion was the so-called "theme" of this realm.

How many days had passed?

With the mist blocking the sky and the law of time vague, it was hard to really follow how much time had passed, however, Damien had been tested so many times that he had gotten used to this realm.

These tests weren't random. Someone or something was consciously guiding them and choosing what would be tested.

And every single time, it was human emotion.

At first, it seemed as if the being was trying to teach Damien something. The first few illusions had the same feel.

However, Damien continued to push back.

Instead of following the grain and learning the lessons he was supposed to learn, he exerted his own beliefs as well, turning every trial into more of a conversation than anything else.

Damien and that being did not always agree on their ideals.

That being believed in indifference. For some reason, it refused to acknowledge the worth of emotions like love when power was concerned.

Damien, on the other hand, refused to give up those emotions, instead using them to fuel his power.

Which of their opinions was right?

Both sides were too stubborn to ever change their beliefs, so it really didn't matter.

But it was rare for someone to appear who could have a conversation like this without it devolving into hostility.

Damien was interested in understanding the psyche of the being he was facing, so he entertained its games.

As for that being, it had never truly been acknowledged before.

It had never felt what it was like to have a conversation until it met Damien.

It wanted to continue that conversation, to understand how smaller beings thought, to see how Damien would resist conformity with his morals.

Because of that, the conversation soon changed pace, from large dilemmas that were meant to force Damien into tough positions to more calm trials.

These were not clashes of opinions anymore.

They were questions.

What is love?

Why do humans cherish it so?

What is the point of relationships when they can break so easily?

Questions one would expect from a teenager or someone first experiencing emotions they'd never seen before were asked one after another.

Damien began to doubt the identity of the one he was speaking to, but that being didn't allow him the chance.

Because it would ask a question like, "Why do you do so much for other people?" and then follow up by asking something along the lines of, "If humans are jealous of the vastness of the universe, could the universe hold the same feeling towards the numerosity of existences within it?"

Damien couldn't necessarily answer the first properly. He did his best to explain what was an inherent and unquestionable feeling for him.

However, the second one...

That was something he experienced himself.

When he spoke to Grand Heavens Boundary's Universal Core, this was the feeling that was viscerally transmitted through every single one of his words.

The universe was massive. The people within it could only look into the stars and wish they could explore and see every corner of it. Yet, no matter how long their lives were, they wouldn't be able to reach the end.

But the universe was not free from jealousy.

The universe was jealous of just how many existences resided within it, it was envious of the connections they could make with each other and the stories they could create.

Now, knowing there were multiple cosmos in existence, Damien didn't know how to feel about this.

However, he was made to wonder if the being behind the mist felt similar to the Universal Core of that time.

It wasn't human, that much was certain. Whether or not it was even a living being was questionable.

That being wanted to learn about humans but never considered things from the perspective of a human.

It seemed to long for the smallest of things, yet it had a supreme understanding of the grander and more vague concepts that plagued the hearts of men.

It was a strange being, as if it had experienced everything yet nothing at all, living a life that could barely be considered a life yet was a life beyond any other.

It was a being of contradiction, and that only made Damien want to find it even more.

That was why he continued entertaining its little questions and tests.

His position was unknown. He'd been walking for ages and in every direction imaginable. It was possible that he was only a few dozen feet from the original plaza he arrived at, but he also could've been several thousands of kilometers away.

He really didn't know.

Until the mist cleared again, leading him into a cave.

It was lined with blue crystals that shone in the darkness. They created a path that led deep underground, to a place no other had entered before,

Damien followed it to its unassuming end, a scene one would expect from a regular cave.

Rather than an illusion, what greeted him there was a hidden pathway.

The cave itself folded inward and consumed Damien, bringing him into the space.

But even then, he didn't feel much different than usual.

Even this place was covered in mist.

It swirled around strangely without a breeze to affect it. Unlike the mist outside, the cave mist was pure white, unaffected by external factors.

'I haven't met a single evil spirit yet, but there's been a few brushes.'

Every time Damien saw red mist in the distance, it was an evil spirit trying to approach.

However, every time an evil spirit approached, the mist would rise up and fight it off, allowing Damien to focus on what he was doing.

The mist clearly didn't want their conversation to be disturbed.

'Is that why it brought me here?'

Was this the mist's dwelling, the place it was assured would remain secure?

There wasn't much to see other than it. The pure whiteness was hazy, but it managed to conceal everything else in the hidden room, if there was anything at all.

Damien still glanced around, confused as to what he was meant to do.

But as he sat there, he eventually realized it.

It danced and swirled.

It flew all around like a collection of tiny spirits trying to get Damien's attention.

It had been present since the beginning, but because of its form, nobody had ever regarded it as a being that could be communicated with.

But Damien had done exactly that.

And it brought him here to continue.

'The mist itself has been my conversation partner this entire time.'

It was the mist asking him curious questions about human existence and telling him about the myriad wonders of the cosmos.

It was the mist that set him up to view the battle of the ancients and learn to keep his calm, and it was the mist that forced those ancient spirits to continue fighting until his arrival.

Was it for entertainment?

Or was there a deeper purpose behind the actions of this strange being?

Nobody could ever know because nobody could recognize it.

But that had changed now.

And as Damien looked into the mist, the mist looked back at him.

It was time for them to have a proper conversation.

Chapter 1474 Calamity [1]

The fact that the mist brought Damien to this place meant that it had already accepted him.

When Damien looked at it in what could only be considered its eyes, it lost all resistance it had.

A strange scene played out for an audience of none.

As Damien sat there, the mist slowly crept towards him. It was shy and tentative, almost doubting every single movement it made, but it still inched closer and closer until it was right in front of Damien's face.

There was no difference between this mist and the mist that populated the entirety of Gehenna. However, it still felt different.

The wisps around Damien were active, as if they were trying to communicate with him.

And as Damien had been communicating with the mist for a while now, he basically understood its purpose.

This confused entity was used to being alive. It had obtained spirituality long enough ago for it to understand the mysteries beyond the universe's creation.

However, it had been detached from reality that entire time.

It never was able to properly interact with existence even though it was an existence of its own, and because of that, it developed a natural curiosity that seemed childish in the eyes of someone who didn't know how fortunate they were.

The mist was always trying to be heard.

It wanted to be seen.

But who could treat mist like a living being? Who could even recognize the mist's spirituality instead of writing it off as a mechanism of Gehenna?

Only Damien did.

And only Damien decided to converse instead of going through the motions and finishing all the trials.

That was why the mist brought him here.

The fact that he possessed those other qualities was only an added benefit.

Regardless, now that he was here, it knew what it wanted to do and was doing its best to convey its intent to him.

Damien watched it curiously.

He knew what it was saying. Interpreting its meaning became easy after conversing with it for so long.

It took him a bit to respond because he was curiously observing this strange entity like none he'd ever seen before.

But in the end, he still closed his eyes.

"Come."

He answered the mist's desires.

With express permission given, the mist danced happily.

Several wisps surrounded Damien's head, and the mist pushed forward into his spiritual world.

'You...'

Damien didn't have to speak anymore to convey his thoughts.

Neither did the mist have to try so hard to be understood.

It entered his mind and formed a connection with him.

To the mist, this was a happy moment beyond any happy moments, as it could finally experience existence as it was always meant to be experienced.

However, for Damien...

'...what...just happened...?'

He could only recognize the mist's identity once it started to merge with him.

'This mist...no, the concept of mist...'

...this was part of Existence itself.

Existence was a massive concept. It represented anything and everything, and due to its sheer grandiosity, it was hard to qualify it.

However, just as the universe could have consciousness, just as higher laws could choose their own wielders, Existence was also semi-conscious.

The concept of mist was a physical representation of the spirituality of Existence.

The mist that found itself trapped in Gehenna was only the main consciousness, but it experienced everything in Existence from the perspective of Existence itself, leading to its twisted sense of identity.

Gehenna was the place where the mist resided, overlooking all of Existence.

Gehenna existed because of the mist.

But to the mist, Gehenna was a prison of its own making.

It wanted to see existence from the perspective of those who resided within it, because from its position high above all things, it genuinely could only long for such experience.

Just as humans were envious of the universe. Just as humans stared into the night sky and dreamed about the day when they could explore the stars with their own two feet, Existence itself wished to walk on the earth and experience the mundane things that it never had access to.

It was hard for Damien to fathom that he'd just found a concept of Existence.

He didn't feel like he'd just found a concept of Existence.

It was because, among the concepts, the mist was unique.

It wasn't something to be comprehended in the first place.

'It wasn't even meant to be found.'

The mist found Damien. No matter what, it would've found Damien eventually because it existed in all things. If it wasn't in Gehenna, then there would likely be another place similar to this one where Damien would eventually run into the same scenario.

But it happened now.

'And that's probably because of my circumstances.'

Damien and the mist began to communicate once it entered his mind.

The mist wanted to bind itself to him. He didn't have to provoke it.

That allowed Damien the chance to answer the questions the mist presented him.

Why had it found him at this juncture?

It was because he found another truth of existence, the fact that there were multiple cosmos in reality.

As for what the mist did...

'You damn brat, just give me an answer.'

Damien clicked his tongue as he tried to find out, but the mist refused to tell him.

While the entity couldn't necessarily speak like a normal person, it could still make its intent clear.

At the moment, it was saying something along the lines of, "Take me to see the world, and you'll find out naturally."

Damien could only scratch his head in confusion.

'Why does it feel more like I've picked up a pet than a concept of existence?'

This was the third one he found. If the Unrecorded wasn't mistaken, then he only had three more left before he could truly control the concept.

However, Damien felt like it would be much more complicated than that.

The list began to clear from Gehenna.

It, of course, would still exist here, just as it existed everywhere else, but its main consciousness had now been transferred to Damien's soul.

It had merged with him.

And according to it, there was more to Gehenna than Damien or the Gehenna Tribe knew.

There was indeed a Crown here, but that crown's identity was far beyond what had been postulated by even Count Verex, whose obsession with it was the precise reason for his attacking the tribe.

"You want me to go find it?"

Damien raised his brow with intrigue.

He was getting a positive response from the mist.

"I'll get more powerful with the crown? Is that something you want?"

The mist shook its head as if it couldn't say any more.

"Is that an 'you should find out yourself' look or a 'I can't say anything more' look?"

The mist quirked its head in confusion.

Damien sighed.

"I forgot. You don't even have a head. I'm going to go crazy."

There he stood, talking to himself like a crazy person.

Damien absolutely felt insane with the way he could hardly interpret the mist's meaning through its implied expressions.

Still, the fact that the mist wanted him to find the crown remained true.

And Damien really did want to see it.

The reason a True God would lay his hands on an innocent village in the middle of nowhere...

...how great could it be to provoke his greed?

Chapter 1475 Calamity [2]

They approached not even an hour after the youths were sent to Gehenna.

Their numbers honestly weren't that high. There were 1000 of them at most. In comparison to the usual army that existed under the influence of Gods, it was minuscule.

But in front of the Gehenna Tribe, it was massive.

The entire tribe consisted of at most 500 people, and of them, only around half could fight.

Standing with their numbers only a fourth of their enemies, with the help of two otherworldly guests, the Gehenna Tribe was forced to prepare for a fight.

The Saintess watched her people evacuate the village and hide in the severed garden, praying that their peers would return from battle safely.

She watched those peers grab their weapons and prepare for battle, expressions of doubt on their faces as they questioned whether they'd live past this day or not.

This wasn't the first time she'd seen this scene, but it would be the last.

She knew what would happen from this point forth, but she had no power to change it.

Her job was to take care of the tribe until this moment.

Every Saintess would have to deal with a cataclysm during their rule.

For her, it was the Uruk's attack that almost eradicated their people.

This time, the Count's arrival was a test for Thalia.

The Saintess was still alive, but the arrival of this calamity meant the end of her rule.

And it also meant she could not help in this battle.

Her eyesight spanned a great distance, homing in on the approaching army.

The thousand men at the head were not too powerful. Rather, their power level seemed perfectly matched to that of the villagers.

It was the Count's sadistic tendency that led to such a scenario.

This army was unnecessary.

The Count needed the Saintess and the elders to let him into Gehenna, but he didn't need anyone else's help to get that.

With his power, what could the tribe do?

They could either be eradicated, or they could comply.

But what was the fun in an easy victory?

The Count wanted to see a show.

He wanted the villagers to maintain hope that they could win. Only then would they act the way he wanted them to.

As such, an army that was impossible for them to beat was assembled, but it was made up of weak people, giving them the sense that they could win this battle.

Perhaps some of the villagers were fooled by that facade. Perhaps some of them knew the truth but convinced themselves otherwise so they could fight confidently.

Tiamat and Darius didn't participate in their antics.

They were not members of the village, but they had no choice but to fight in this battle regardless.

For one, Damien was in Gehenna, and they really had nowhere to go until he returned.

And on a more emotional level, both of them had become attached to the tribe to some degree.

Still, they had more experience than the Gehenna people, and their power was also on another level.

When they looked out into the approaching army, what they saw wasn't the small amount of weak troops, but the three people behind them.

Two of them were Demigods, standing to each side of the Count, the only God present.

One was a butler, while the other was a woman in dark robes. The two of them had powerful auras, sure, but they were nothing next to the man they served.

The Count's aura was extremely terrifying for Tiamat and Darius, these two Demigods.

They couldn't see a way to win against him.

This was a hopeless battle from the start.

'Unless Damien can return.'

The two of them had the same thought.

Neither of them had seen it happen before, but Damien's reputation was quite extreme in Void Palace. The deeds he did during their ten-year training period had spread far and wide among the people at the main palace.

The fact that Damien killed a God was well-known, and a huge part of the reason why he was able to take the Young Lord position so rapidly.

There was no way for Tiamat or Darius to know the specifics of True Godhood, since nobody had taught them yet, but they believed that Damien could defeat the Count.

"We just need to hold off until he shows up."

Tiamat spoke. Darius nodded in agreement.

They could tacitly understand each other in this situation. It wasn't that hard.

The villagers wouldn't be able to deal with the army alone, but they couldn't help, because they had to take the two Demigods and make sure they couldn't interfere.

As for the Count...

"...we can only hope that his personality is like that."

Tiamat was used to the Nox. She'd seen how they operated, and if this man was part of the race that created the Nox in their image, it was obvious how he would act too.

'They never think their arrogance will bring them down. At one point, I didn't either.'

But at the end of the day, one would always meet one's fate if one lived one's life arrogantly.

'Okay.'

The villagers would fight the army, they would take the Demigods, and they'd make sure the battle didn't end until Damien appeared.

The most important thing was making sure the Count didn't notice anything off.

If he believed he was being toyed with, or if he realized someone stronger was coming, there was no guarantee he'd remain arrogant.

There was a lot of time.

Five long minutes passed before the army finally arrived at the tribe's borders. It was made up of mostly weak people below 4th class, after all.

They stood facing the 250 villagers who readied themselves for the battle.

These people didn't come here because they wanted to.

When the Count asked for troops, he would get troops. These people were regular farmers and citizens, but they'd been forced to fight in a war they didn't understand the purpose of.

They'd been terrified the entire way here, but they kept their mouths shut to keep their lives.

Now, seeing their enemies, who looked like a bunch of uncivilized tribe folk who only knew how to use primitive weapons, their eyes glinted with hope.

If it was just this much, they could survive and return to their families.

On top of that, they'd received a reward that would help them live much more lavishly than before.

They didn't know what crimes the villagers had committed. They didn't know how this tribe in the middle of nowhere managed to offend the Count.

But it didn't matter.

They also had livelihoods. They also had families to return to.

So they couldn't think about the livelihoods and families of others anymore.

It was a war where neither side wanted to fight. It was a war that existed only for the pleasure of a single man.

But it was a war that would take place nonetheless.

The Count grinned.

His eyes were on the Saintess. Nobody else had worth in his eyes.

"It has been a long time, Saintess..." he said, his voice dark and malevolent.

He grinned, his aura blackening the sky.

"This time will be different. This time...I have prepared a festival just for you."

He raised his hand, memories flashing through his head.

"You will give me Gehenna. Otherwise..."

His army began its charge.

"...I will take everything from you instead."

Chapter 1476 Calamity [3]

Every battle ended in tragedy.

There wasn't such a thing as a fight where nobody got hurt. It didn't matter who was good or who was evil, in the end, everyone would end up mourning someone they lost.

In this battle, that tragedy was even more prevalent.

There were indeed only 250 fighters on the Gehenna Tribe's side, and they were definitely weak by the standard of someone like Damien.

As he and his peers dealt with unreasonably powerful people and unreasonably talented geniuses on a daily basis, the average person would always appear weak to them.

However, the Gehenna Tribe wasn't necessarily weak.

Their methods may have had many weaknesses, but they survived in the cruel jungle for many generations for a reason.

Damien himself said it at an earlier time. The heights they'd reached with their backwards techniques were genuinely impressive.

Their opponents weren't weak either. They may have been common people, but they lived under the reign of a Count who would draft troops for random death missions regularly. They were forced to learn how to defend themselves so they could have hope of survival.

In fact, the training centers offered by the governing entity were one of the main sources of income for the territory. The Count's estate didn't even eat up funds like that from the extremely high tax rates.

In a place where fighting power was important for the most common of people, there was no such thing as an easy target.

The two sides collided without much conversation, and deaths immediately became commonplace.

The Gehenna hunters who took the frontlines immediately rained down attacks with arrows, culling several tens of enemies with ease.

Before the rest could advance, they took their swords out and charged.

Weapons collided and blood was shed. Body parts and chunks of flesh and blood started to paint the jungle's soil, creating the foundation of what would soon evolve into a huge mosaic of crimson.

There were no shields present on the battlefield. On the Gehenna side, it was because their bodies were more flexible than anything else. It was more efficient for them to dodge and use wristguards and similar light armor to block attacks.

As for the enemy troops...well, with a sadistic Count leading them, it was granted that they wouldn't be given shields.

The battlefield was quieter than a usual one.

The sound of weapons clashing would always remain the same, as would the screams and shouts of those fighting. However, there was a lack of explosions and large areas of madness.

The Gehenna Tribe had developed a precise fighting style meant for hunting with absolute efficiency. They aimed for weak points to kill enemies in the least amount of strikes possible.

Their opponents were humans. The Gehenna Tribe never hunted humans.

But they learned how quite easily by using what they knew about the weaknesses of their own bodies.

Their fighting power turned out to be far higher than that of the enemies, mainly due to their cooperation.

The enemies had good fighting skills. They couldn't match up to the Gehenna hunters who fought every single day of their lives, but not everyone on the Gehenna side was a hunter.

Only fifty of them were hunters. The rest were merely people who could pick up their weapons and fight for their families.

Against those people, they could fight properly and even kill. Over ten tribesmen had already died.

Still, the tribesmen had known each other for their whole lives. They lived together and interacted daily. Their understanding of how their peers would act in battle was at its peak.

The enemy was a force randomly chosen from throughout the Count's territory. Most of them had never even heard of each other's cities before, and because they had to make the trek to the jungle in silence, fearing the Count's personality, they couldn't get to know each other either.

They were extremely unorganized and often got in each other's ways. It wasn't rare to see one of them accidentally kill his fellow in the heat of battle.

The Gehenna people naturally took advantage of this. It was precisely because of the enemy's lack of coordination that they'd only lost ten people thus far.

They got more and more confident, and the grief that flooded their hearts every time they saw someone they knew and loved die helped them find the drive to keep fighting.

"Maybe victory isn't impossible."

In the heat of battle, where the Count's presence was forgotten, sparks of hope continued to collide in their hearts, making attempts to create a huge blaze that enveloped them.

It was probably because they couldn't see it.

They'd moved far away to make sure they didn't cause any collateral damage, and the explosive force had been contained within a certain area. Plus, the absence of two foreigners at a time like this wasn't something the tribesmen could pay attention to.

It was good that they couldn't see it. If they could, they would immediately lose all will to fight.

But the Saintess could see it.

And, without a doubt, it was taking place.

A battle on a completely different level from the one the Gehenna Tribe was fighting.

Tiamat and Darius were stealthy as they approached the Count and his people.

Their goal was to take the two Demigods as far away from the Gehenna Tribe as possible, so they didn't opt for a head-on confrontation.

Instead, they traveled far away from the clan, far enough that they could have sufficient space to fight while keeping their battle contained.

The Uruk ruled a relatively large territory in the jungle, so it wasn't hard to find a place that met their qualifications. From there, they focused their auras and locked onto those two Demigods, flaring their bloodlust.

Two heads immediately snapped in their direction, before turning to face the Count.

"Go ahead," the Count said with a smile.

"If you have been provoked, then you must answer accordingly. Go on and show them the terror I represent."

The two kneeled and bowed their heads, thereby vanishing into clouds of smoke.

They rushed several hundreds of thousands of kilometers to the west and finally laid eyes on the ones who dared to mock them.

"Hello."

Tiamat nodded, giving a mild greeting.

The two didn't respond. They merely flared their auras, directly combating those released by Tiamat and Darius.

The butler had a pompous expression on his face, as if he was looking at beings who weren't worth an ounce of time or attention.

The woman, on the other hand, remained completely stoic.

"I see. Straight to the point types, are you? That works out better for me."

Tiamat glanced at Darius.

"Which one do you want?"

Darius rubbed his chin as he looked them up and down.

"I'll take the woman. That butler looks pretty strong."

"I agree. I've been wanting to fight him since I sensed that vile aura he's releasing."

'Aura...?'

Darius didn't sense what she was talking about at all, but he let it be, thinking nothing of it.

"Since matches have been decided..."

Darius grinned wildly.

He was really starting to resemble Damien in his youth.

"...then let's get to the fun part."

Flames appeared in his hands.

And without a single second of delay, the first explosion of the day rang out on the battlefield.

Chapter 1477 Calamity [4]

First things first, Tiamat exerted her power, creating a dome that spanned several tens of thousands of kilometers to envelop the prospective battlefield.

It was a domain of her own, which allowed her to use her power better, but it was also an isolation barrier that would make sure others didn't know the results of the ongoing battle.

The dome was made of pure blackness, a representation of Tiamat's Death Laws, so in the sunlight, it looked somewhat odd.

However, since it was almost time for the sun to set, it was fine. The barrier would eventually blend in with the surroundings.

Darius was the one who attacked first.

His Sun and Moon Divine Flame, which was actually just the Sun Flame at the moment, filled the atmosphere and pushed the woman in the dark robes back.

Meanwhile, Tiamat approached the butler, provoking him into following her further away.

It didn't take much for him to respond.

Cairo had been the Count's butler for a very long time now. If anyone knew how the Count liked things done, it was him.

While Count Verex was indeed a sadist that enjoyed watching people suffer, he wasn't someone who allowed loose ends.

If he saw an enemy that would be a variable in his plans, he would make sure they were eliminated as soon as possible.

These two Demigods who provoked him and Caissa were obviously not members of the Gehenna Tribe. One of them even had the skin of an otherworlder.

It was impossible for him to know why they decided to provoke him, but regardless of their reasoning, they were variables that needed to be eliminated.

He would respond to provocation with action. In the end, it was all the same.

But as he approached the woman who called him out, a strange feeling enveloped him.

It was a feeling of familiarity, yet one of equal hostility.

It was a disgusting emotion that he couldn't name.

It almost felt like submission. His eyes narrowed as he stared at her.

She certainly had the appearance of a noble. Compared to some of the other women he'd seen in the Count's circle, she was even more beautiful, and that was putting aside her dominating aura.

It was rare to see people who looked like her, even rarer than seeing someone who had a skin condition and ended up looking like a foreigner from the otherworld.

However, Cairo had never seen her before.

That was only possible in two scenarios.

The first, she was related to the Dark God himself.

Laughable.

It left only the second scenario for him to take as truth.

She merely had the appearance without any of the class.

If so, he had even more reason to kill her.

His body flickered.

He wasn't planning to give her a chance to fight back.

Cairo's hands turned into blades of their own, coated in heavy layers of malakh.

He slashed out, already in Tiamat's blind spot.

Or so he thought.

Tiamat stumbled.

It looked like a lucky move, allowing her to barely dodge the butler's blade.

However, to everyone present, it was obvious this was a planned move.

The butler's eyes narrowed further, and he pressed his attack harder, making sure Tiamat would die before she could show her skill.

She didn't fight back.

She dodged and dodged and dodged, making Cairo infinitely angrier, but she didn't make any moves to even the playing field as she was pushed into a corner.

'Hmm...'

When she was observing Cairo's fighting style, what she saw was something like an assassin.

Tiamat's fighting style was already set. She would always measure her opponent's skill before charging into battle.

Her mind was a weapon among weapons. In the few seconds or minutes she spent on the losing side of the fight, she could come up with a plan that assured she'd be the last one standing.

When she was observing Cairo's fighting style, what she saw was something like an assassin.

He always tried to end things as soon as possible, but his attacks had a hint of boredom, as if he was already thinking about what he was going to do next.

His malakh didn't seem to contain any laws either.

Tiamat was actually more established than Damien in this aspect for now.

As she'd felt a connection with the Sacred Abyss Universe, she had understood a lot about its relative law structure.

Of course, she could only comprehend the Death Laws of this cosmos, but she was able to see how the others functioned in the process.

She didn't see anything from Cairo.

He was incredibly trained and had the skills to beat people above his level without the use of laws, but that didn't change the fact that he couldn't use them.

Was it his own choice, or was it something forced upon him to keep his power in control?

Honestly, Tiamat didn't care.

'For someone like him...'

An open hand, fashioned like a blade, swung down on her arm.

'...just let his own stupidity kill him.'

Tiamat raised her arm and blocked the attack.

Her eyes flashed, connecting with those of her attacker.

Cairo felt Death.

A sensation beyond words that could only be described as absolute terror.

And Tiamat struck.

VOOM!

Black mana flared out of her body.

No, when Tiamat used her power in this world, the surrounding malakh expanded and allowed her to wield it as she pleased.

It looked like she was using her own mana, but she had yet to convert her energy or find out how to store two separate energy forms in her body.

Cairo didn't notice that. If he did, would he have chosen to run?

It didn't matter.

At the end of the day, Tiamat was a Demigod who was on the cusp of Godhood.

And she really, really didn't like Cairo.

His aura had the disgusting smell of whatever she'd been sensing in recent times.

The man in her memories, the man she couldn't decide whether to long for or hate, had a similar scent, and Cairo's was an extremely degraded version of it.

She didn't want to be reminded of that person.

She didn't want to think about the things that would distract her from the task at hand.

But she was distracted regardless.

She really was having a hard time keeping her cool. The longer she stayed in battle, the more that scent made her want to kill.

That was why she decided to attack so early.

And that was why, when she attacked, all hell broke loose.

The blackness of the surrounding domain was all in her grasp.

Instantly, the tides switched between Tiamat and Cairo.

The environment itself rose up, supporting Tiamat and trying constantly to trap Cairo in a prison of its making.

And Tiamat wasn't one to stand back and wait either.

She gathered malakh, instinctually following the correct procedures to create a technique in the Sacred Abyss Universe.

Death gathered in the vicinity, making its presence impossible to ignore.

But even with Death causing such a scene, there was a spark in the darkness that refused to go out.

A spark of flame, like a shining sun illuminating the world.

There were two battles taking place within Tiamat's domain, and among them...

...Darius was definitely putting on more of a show.

Chapter 1478 Calamity [5]

Darius had been close to fire for his entire life.

When he was young, he was notorious for running around causing mayhem. He always enjoyed visiting the palace forges to pull the beards of the blacksmiths and play with their fire.

There was a time when said blacksmiths wanted to take him as their disciple, realizing his love for fire, but those plans fell through.

At the end of the day, Darius was a member of the Void Clan. He was meant to use the main techniques of the palace.

From the day he started learning about space and time, his connection to fire began to fade, but he had several small experiences that seemed to hint towards his affinity.

And when Damien arrived, he was able to fully bloom, realizing his connection with fire and embracing it.

Damien's arrival was a breath of fresh air for everyone in the palace, not just Darius, but it was to another degree for the youngest of the Void sons.

Ever since then, he'd been able to truly feel like himself.

Ever since then, he'd been able to get rid of the hole in his heart, left by the lack of true affinity in his life.

Every single day Darius spent training with fire was fun for him. He was happy when he was at Void Palace with ample time and resources, but when they came to the Sacred Abyss Universe was when he really gained a connection with flames like never before.

The smiths of the Gehenna Tribe viewed fire spiritually in a way others couldn't comprehend. When he started to learn from them and internalize their ways, he gained a new appreciation for the flames that he'd been getting used to for the past ten years.

Of the three of them, Darius was the one who made the most improvements overall.

He had been waiting for a chance to test his mettle on the battlefield. This war couldn't have come at a more perfect time.

However, it was a shame that the Gehenna Tribe was involved.

Because of them, this battle meant more to him than it should have.

Which meant his actions were governed partly by emotion.

The woman he chose to battle, whose name was Caissa, didn't look like an easy target. The reason he chose her was because he could instinctually feel that he had an advantage against her.

He started off strong. Since it was currency daytime, his flame was in its sun mode. The benefit of this was its explosive power and ability to spread rapidly.

The Sun Flame was more obnoxious in every way than the Moon Flame. It represented yang, and it was just as wild and untamed. The Sun Flame was far more suited for Darius' personality than the Moon Flame, so when he started fighting, he immediately took the advantage.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Explosions rang out everywhere, illuminating the darkness. Flames spread rapidly and enveloped a huge portion of Tiamat's domain, marking it as Darius' territory.

Caissa wasn't weak just because Darius felt an advantage against her. Rather, she wasn't much weaker than the butler Cairo.

Darius felt superiority because of the laws he used.

Caissa flitted around the domain to dodge Darius' large sweeping attacks. Her body moved in and out of the darkness, expertly weeding through the chaos to stay in her enemy's blind spot.

It could be expected from her attire. Caissa was an assassin trained since young by Count Verex. In line with her career, she used Darkness Laws.

Darkness and Shadow were the two laws used most by assassins. Shadow had two sides, but not everyone could use them like Zara, which usually left darkness as being considered the best affinity for an assassin.

The problem with darkness was that it was a force leaning absolutely to one side. Unlike a Shadow affinity, which had a natural resistance to many light elements, Darkness had its enemies.

Fire was a big one.

Fire got humanity out of the darkness at a time long past. Its perception in the hearts of many was as the force that drove away the cold, dark nights.

Fire inherently suppressed Darkness, which meant when the battle began, Caissa was instantly put in a position where she couldn't take initiative.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

She was able to survive because of her experience, but it wouldn't be long before the fire consumed too much area and forced her into the light.

Caissa was observing her enemy closely.

Darius seemed reckless. He was obviously good with fire, but his mentality seemed to be prone to rushing and not properly thinking through things before acting.

She, as an assassin, wasn't somebody who fought directly. Her style was discreet, and just like the butler, she aimed to kill her opponents in a single attack.

However, unlike her male counterpart, she didn't look down on anybody.

She had been looked down upon for her entire life, whether by her peers or her employers.

She was well aware that she could kill most of them quite easily if she wanted to.

And she was aware that she couldn't be the only powerful person in the world.

She was taking a similar position to Tiamat as the battle began, but unlike Tiamat, she didn't start attacking soon.

She, instead, continued to wait.

Could her hesitation be considered indecisiveness?

Perhaps in the eyes of some, Caissa was too afraid of the suppression she felt from the flames and refused to move forward because of it.

In part, they'd be correct, but Caissa's mind went deeper than that.

Darius was the reckless type. If she could bait him into making a huge move and leaving an opening for her, she was confident in taking him down.

Because she hadn't been dodging without attacking.

She'd actually sent out several probes of malakh to judge Darius' perception. As of now, he couldn't sense her energy unless it was in an amount far higher than what she needed to kill him.

The opportunity would come to her as long as she waited. It was even better if the enemy thought her a coward.

Darius was throwing flames pretty wildly,

It was the best way to use the Sun Flame.

Unlike the Moon Flame, the Sun Flame didn't like to be controlled. It would listen to its owner, sure, but it would be sure to cause mayhem in the process.

As such, the best way to use it was to just let it do as it pleased.

Darius loved blowing things up. He was more than happy to blow up the environment in a way that his enemy could only interpret as recklessness if it meant using his flame properly.

The Sun Flame may have been wild, but it was still a flame with an owner.

As Caissa moved around, trying to avoid it, it set its proverbial eyes on her.

It watched her and stalked her movements, waiting and watching as it enjoyed the struggles of the prey it planned to consume.

The flames grew bigger and bigger, creating massive pillars that reached the sky,

It crashed around like a tidal wave, and as it all gathered in one place...

Caissa saw her opportunity to strike.

Her body started to flicker. She rushed forward with all the speed she had access to, practically teleporting through the darkness.

She was behind Darius before he could notice her presence. The Sun Flame was too busy running wild to attack her before she could reach him.

She pulled out a knife, coated with a poison of darkness that would immediately dull Darius' power.

She stabbed out, aiming for his throat.

Swoosh!

The blade swept through the air.

But there was one thing Caissa forgot to consider before she made her move.

She may have been able to use darkness to her advantage, but the darkness here was not natural.

This darkness had an owner.

And that owner was very happily praying on her downfall.

Chapter 1479 Calamity [6]

The moment Caissa arrived behind him, Darius grinned.

'Perfect.'

He clapped his hands. They came together at the exact moment before Caissa's blade pierced his neck.

And the Sun Flame responded.

The massive columns disappeared, and instead, a powerful spout of lava-like flames burst out from underneath Darius' feet and swallowed both him and Caissa.

The woman immediately screamed.

Darius was immune to the flames, but Caissa wasn't anything close to it.

Especially when the flames in question were Heavenly Flames from another cosmos.

Darius grinned, spinning around and grabbing her by the throat.

Her dark cloak was burned away, revealing her beautiful appearance and figure, but Darius wasn't fazed.

Damien was quite thorough in training him.

Knowing Darius was still a hot-blooded youth at heart, Damien made sure he was taught not just how to use his power properly, but on how to be a proper man.

He couldn't be affected by beauty or unwanted emotion when he didn't need to be. For that purpose, he had to learn how to separate his emotions into those he wanted and those he wanted to throw away.

Perhaps a decade ago, Darius would have hesitated seeing this woman almost naked in front of him, but he didn't have any of those feelings anymore.

This was an enemy, and enemies could not be shown mercy.

With sharpened eyes, he flared his flames, exponentially increasing the surrounding heat.

Caissa's skin began to melt off.

She used malakh to slow down the burning and save herself, but her main focus was on finding a way to escape.

She now understood how disadvantaged she was.

The surrounding darkness belonged to the enemy. If she tried to move through it, she'd immediately give away her position, which would be shared with Darius.

If she wanted to kill him, she needed to do it now, at a time when her loss was the expectation from everyone present.

She gritted her teeth and endured the pain.

Darkness began to creep out of her body. It was the darkness in her heart and soul, formed through the endless suffering she'd experienced at the hands of many powerful figures.

Most of them were dead. As they died, however, the darkness in her heart faded.

So Caissa stopped killing them.

She left them alive so the seething hatred she felt could continue to fuel her power.

And the man who made her feel such emotion most viscerally...

That was the man she decided to dedicate her loyalty to.

Because just as much as she hated him, she couldn't help but love him.

Malice, hatred, and twisted emotion created darkness beyond darkness, a force that Caissa could control even better than she could regular darkness.

Damien always said pain was power, but Caissa took it to another level.

She allowed herself to suffer constantly, because only in suffering could she make those she despises suffer as well.

The new darkness oozed like sludge. As it came out of Caissa's pores, it swallowed the surrounding flames, trapping them in a prison without light.

Caissa turned into a blob of blackness. Her physical body melted into the substance, allowing her to maneuver in ways a human could never imagine.

Darius' eyes widened at the sight he didn't expect.

He took several steps back as the blackness got closer to him. It was already on his body, since he was holding onto Caissa's throat when she turned, and as he tried to use the Sun Flame to burn it away, he frowned.

'Dangerous.'

His eyes went up to the growing blackness.

He could sense the twisted insanity within that mass. It was far deeper and more cynical than anything he'd seen before.

'I can't burn it.'

His flames weren't strong enough to compete against such malevolence.

'Dammit.'

He almost had it. The fact that he lost it at the last moment irked him, but he had been learning to control his emotions.

He focused on the battle.

His inherent battle instinct, the one Damien himself praised, was telling him to retreat.

He had no choice but to follow what it told him.

He took several steps back, covering his retreat using the Sun Flame.

Caissa had grown massive in the few seconds it took for him to make that decision.

She was like a tsunami that melded into the surrounding blackness, charging forth with such stealth that one wouldn't recognize one was within it even after being swallowed.

Darius knew that even he would be heavily injured if he was struck by that.

He varied his path, making it hard for Caissa to track him. At the same time, he enveloped himself in flames to burn off the small bits of darkness that had stuck to him.

If she could possess those, his life would be over. It was absolutely integral to make sure no part of it could reach him.

Darius' eyes narrowed.

He stopped in his tracks, stomped his foot into the ground, and summoned the height of his flames.

They formed a huge tsunami to fight against the one approaching, and as they met, the atmosphere itself exploded under pressure.

BOOOM!

The Sun Flame wasn't good for a battle like this.

It was good for head-on collisions, of course, but in her current form, Caissa was hardly a physical entity.

He needed something more magical to defeat her. At most, his current flame could only hold her back.

'How long...?'

Darius looked up into the sky.

The sun had moved far along the horizon during the time he'd been fighting.

It was already approaching evening when the battle started, but with the minutes ticking by, the sun had already made it to the end of its cycle.

Soon, it would set beyond the horizon and be replaced by its serene counterpart.

'Ten minutes.'

Darius had learned how to judge exactly how much time it took for the sun to set over the horizon. In every new world he visited, the first thing he did was judge this cycle.

Ten minutes.

He was assured that in ten minutes, the moon would rise.

And the Moon Flame would awaken.

Darius continued to watch his flames compete against the darkness.

The physical weight of the flames created the wall they represented, but they weren't actually able to burn much of Caissa's darkness.

Small flecks could be destroyed, but a mass like that wasn't something it could handle in its current form.

The Sun Flame was powered by emotion, and compared to the emotion he could put into it, the emotion within Caissa's darkness was monstrous.

Physical damage wouldn't work here.

'And if physical damage won't do anything...'

Darius gritted his teeth.

'...then I have to hit her soul.'

It was something he never thought he'd be capable of in the past.

'Speaking of the past...'

The Sun Flame probably wasn't the right choice for this job.

Until the Moon Flame appeared, space and time techniques would be Darius' best bet at cutting down Caissa's size.

He smiled slightly as he watched the darkness crash through his fire.

'It's been a while, huh...?'

A sword appeared in his hands.

He took a stance that he'd nearly forgotten due to all the retraining he'd undergone.

The 16 Swords of Heaven...

...what would they look like when the current Darius used them?

Chapter 1480 Calamity [7]

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Bursts of dust and rock flew into the air every few seconds. Black sludge was flung through the air, infecting more and more of the environment with every move.

When Caissa changed her form, her entire attack method changed. She became more disorganized and instinctual, but at the same time, the power she could output was no joke.

It was a trade-off she didn't usually like to make, but in a situation like this, it was necessary. She didn't have time, nor did she have an advantage to exploit.

Still, no matter how disorganized she was, she could still destroy a great amount of things without much effort.

The environment was currently under Tiamat's control, but the domain she put up wasn't being actively controlled by her.

She was able to read the feedback from it to help Darius when she needed to, and she could use it to her advantage to fight Cairo, but in general, the majority of the domain was self-governed based on the rules Tiamat set beforehand.

Caissa was abusing this fact to try and turn Tiamat's darkness into her own.

In the end, darkness and death didn't have much in common, so it was difficult if she was using her original power.

However, when the power in question was driven by emotion, it was far easier to convert a death domain into one of darkness.

Caissa's every attack was aimed at Darius.

He was forced to dodge using his instincts alone because of the speed at which they struck.

Darius was still a spatial practitioner even if it wasn't his forte. If anything, he did have the ability to teleport.

With that, he could avoid Caissa's attacks quite well, and despite their power, because her control had weakened, he didn't have to worry about old attacks chasing him or homing in on his position.

He could dodge as he pleased, using the 16 Swords of Heaven to cut paths through the sludge for him to traverse.

The problem was that the sludge didn't leave once it fell to the ground. Instead, it coagulated and created a coating on Tiamat's domain, claiming space for itself to thrive.

'If this continues, she'll trap me.'

Darius frowned.

He did the right thing switching to spatial attacks when Caissa transformed, but he didn't have enough firepower this way.

He was forced to continue teleporting around, wasting his energy reserves. Since he couldn't use malakh like Tiamat and Damien, he was truly limited in what he could do once he ran out.

The Sun and Moon Divine Flame was able to burn as long as energy was present, making it the best method to fight in an alternate cosmos.

'If only I had more control...'

Darius put in a lot of work, but he didn't have nearly enough time.

With just a few more decades of experience and practice, he would definitely be able to fight against Caissa on even footing and even overpower her in direct confrontation using the Sun Flame, but the current Darius was not so capable.

BOOM!

Another wave of sludge struck down near him. It stretched out, trying to reach him, but as he teleported away, it was forced to give up and connect to its peers.

This was routine at this point and had been happening for several minutes.

And that was exactly the problem.

Darius was waiting for his opportunity to come, but in the process, he'd left a huge opening for Caissa.

The amount of sludge on the ground now was definitely enough to cover a whole football field. When it came together and acted as a living being independent of the main body...

'Holy shit.'

Darius' eyes widened.

Caissa was relatively far away, but her massive figure still stood out in the blackness. It was intimidating enough on its own, but before Darius' eyes, another massive sludge being rose from the ground and extended its tentacles.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The attacks that only came from one side now came from two. Darius could still teleport, but it became easy for Caissa to read his direction when she could see him from multiple angles.

BANG!

Darius was thrown back as a heap of sludge landed only a few inches away from him as he came out of the spatial layers.

'Damn!'

Darius glanced back. His trajectory was going to throw him into a new sludge monster that was rising from the ground.

He planted his foot in the ground and let his Sun Flames loose.

The soles of his feet burned, and as the flames came in contact with the ground, their force propelled him into the air, narrowly allowing him to avoid the inevitable collision.

'At least I'm getting better at this dodging thing...'

Darius joked with himself to ease his mind, but he really was in a tough position.

Time was ticking. It had already been eight minutes, which meant there were only two remaining before he could make his move.

Whether he could survive for two more minutes or not at the rate Caissa was growing was definitely a question, though.

Even Tiamat had to ask herself if she needed to support him.

Unlike Darius, who was really fighting a life-or-death battle, Tiamat was having a pretty easy time.

The butler, Cairo, was definitely a powerful person, but it was clear that he had rarely fought people with equal or higher strength than his.

At the end of the day, he was just a servant of a more powerful being. He did not journey for strength or try to increase his power to be the best. He only worked to be of service to his Lord.

His Lord was not someone who liked people stronger than him, so Cairo always limited his growth willingly.

And when he had to fight, it was usually because there were weaklings his Lord wanted gone.

Those who would actually aid Cairo's growth were all taken care of by others.

Therefore, when he fought Tiamat, he did so like he was facing someone weaker.

That was his mistake.

Tiamat wasn't weaker than him at all. In fact, she was a few notches stronger.

When she unveiled the true strength of her Death Laws, empowered by the malakh that seemed to willingly respond to her every command, he was left on the losing end of every collision.

He was thrown back and injured several times. He suffered from tens of internal injuries, as well as many that ruined the pristine appearance he worked so hard to maintain.

Tiamat didn't care about Cairo's feelings at all. She could tell he was getting angrier as they kept fighting, but that anger only made him more careless.

It was pathetic.

Tiamat entered this fight at the height of emotion. She felt an inherent disgust that made her want to end Cairo in the worst way possible.

However, she didn't feel that anymore.

Cairo wasn't worthy of such emotion.

As they fought, Tiamat lost all respect she may have had for him. She couldn't help but look down on him, because he was nothing more than a dog.

He was pathetic in every way.

It was a shame that someone like him could elicit such emotion from her.

But since Tiamat realized this, she was able to rein in those emotions and fight with a level head.

That version of Tiamat wasn't something Cairo could handle.

And as his death approached closer and closer, Tiamat stopped putting so much attention into her own battle.

Even if she stopped attacking now, Cairo would die to his injuries if he couldn't escape her domain.

More importantly, Darius' battle had to end soon.

It had to be remembered that they were not fighting for themselves right now.

Almost an hour had passed since they left the Gehenna Tribe.

And if Tiamat's gut feeling was correct...

...things were not looking good for them at all.