

Void 1521

Chapter 1521 Ezekiel [6]

As the man said, Ezekiel was greeted by another person within three days.

"You must be Ezekiel," the woman said with a smile.

He nodded, unsure of what to say.

"Follow me. I will take you to your new accommodations."

"New accommodations?" He asked, exiting the room.

"Yes. Since you will be enrolling in the army, you will naturally have to live with your comrades in the barracks. You didn't think it would be easy, did you?"

Ezekiel smiled wryly, rubbing his head.

He did, in fact, think it would be easy. He quite liked this room with its big comfortable bed and peaceful quietness.

Still, since he'd decided to join the army, it was normal for him to be treated as a regular soldier.

With the woman's guidance, he found his way through several corridors and strange areas of the palace, some of which he couldn't explain at all.

There was a strange aura everywhere, as if the things he saw weren't as they seemed.

But he didn't really have the mind to focus on them.

After all, the guide woman was already giving him a rundown of what he could expect from this point forth.

The army schedule, the intensity of training, and other facts that he had to mentally prepare himself for were stated one after another.

They were all important things, sure, but Ezekiel didn't really mind them.

The things the woman spoke about didn't seem stressful at all. Compared to the hidden manor, Void Palace's schedules were nothing.

"—every day. Since the war only recently started, you probably won't be deployed any time soon, but that only means you'll have more time to train, so it can be considered a good thing."

"The war?"

Ezekiel's attention was grabbed by those words.

"Is Void Palace the Straea Clan's enemy?"

It was an obvious question, but it was really just meant to segue into a new conversation, through which he could learn more about this world.

"You don't even know that much? Well, I guess they did keep you guys isolated from everything. That's right. Our palace and the Straea Clan have never been on good terms, but this war is about more than just the hostility between us."

The woman finally got to the main subject.

"By our Young Lord's orders, we began our siege on the Straea Clan roughly half a year ago..."

Damien didn't waste time with the Straea Clan.

It took him a few days to make the decision, but he eventually decided that there was no need to hesitate.

He originally felt that it was too early to start a war against Straea. He didn't know enough about what they had hidden up their sleeve, and with the Divine Order only recently demolished, he was unsure of whether moving now was worth it or not.

But the Straea Clan was a conniving bunch. They definitely had hidden cards now, but if he waited, they'd have even more.

Wasn't it better to disrupt them so they couldn't accomplish whatever they were planning?

That was his intent as he started the war, and the people of the palace followed happily.

They started in the lawless zone, but they didn't spend too much time there.

The criminals in the lawless zone weren't loyal to Straea. They were only in the Northern Region for their own benefit.

For the most part, the Straea Clan actually kept the majority of its forces within its manor grounds.

Those grounds were massive, enough to form a country of their own. There were several manors that housed the many departments of the clan, with the main manor situated at the forefront of it all.

The manor grounds had been surrounded by the Void Palace army near the beginning of the siege, but even as six months passed, not much progress was made.

"The key players on both sides haven't made any moves yet. For the most part, only skirmishes and battles on the outskirts have taken place."

The woman looked back at him.

"Of course, saving kids like you from those vile institutions has been one of the main priorities recently."

Unlike the war against the Divine Order, Void Palace didn't move with an exact plan to take down the Straea Clan.

After all, unlike the Divine Order, Damien didn't know anything about Straea.

He couldn't say he could perfectly see through their intentions, power, or forces.

The current period was one of probing. Both sides were trying to figure out the true strength of their opponent.

And until they had an estimate, neither would truly engage in battle with their all.

'That...was probing?'

Ezekiel was stunned by the fact.

The woman he saw, who was, of course, Elvira, was extremely powerful.

But she was only a Demigod.

She had the ability to fight, and she had the authority to command the army, but even she couldn't be considered a true peak expert of the palace.

The troops she'd brought were also those who were experiencing some of their first battles. As for the ones they were fighting, it was mostly the same.

To Straea, even Demigods were expendables.

Only the best experts, like Damien and the 12 Swords, or Malefice and his people, were considered truly strong.

And all of them were quietly observing on the sidelines and waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

'The outside world is bigger than I thought.'

As he learned more, Ezekiel realized just how closed off he'd been from anything and everything.

There was so much to do, so much to learn...

'...but until the Straea Clan is gone, I can't do anything with peace of mind.'

His eyes turned cold.

The urge to slaughter was strong in his heart. It had been cultivated well.

He didn't know whether to suppress it or not, but it wasn't like he had the chance to make that choice here.

There was nobody to kill.

"Here we are."

He snapped out of his thoughts at the beckoning of his guide.

Before him was a door, a massive door that didn't seem to lead anywhere.

When he walked through it, he found himself in a completely new space.

Ezekiel's eyes immediately widened.

'Is this a training ground or a city?!

The military facility was less of a facility and more of its own nation.

Everywhere Ezekiel looked, he could see soldiers doing drills or living out their daily lives.

There were high-rise apartments in the distance, as opposed to the cramped barracks he was expecting.

And most of all, there was a thick, suffocating aura.

"You'll get used to it eventually."

Ezekiel's head snapped to the side.

He stepped back, raising his guard.

The one who spoke was not the woman who brought him here. She was already gone.

Instead, the person who spoke was a man, a person who arrived in his blind spot before he even knew what was happening.

The man smiled wryly upon seeing Ezekiel's reaction.

"Calm down. I'm not here to hurt you. My name is Henry, and I'll be guiding you from here on."

Ezekiel slowly nodded his head, lowering his guard.

The man gazed at him strangely.

'Is this the guy we've been waiting for?'

He looked Ezekiel up and down, trying to gauge his strength.

In the end, he just shrugged.

'Whatever the case, we'll train him the same.'

A grin appeared on his face.

A grin that made Ezekiel shiver.

'Let's see how he handles it, eh?'

Chapter 1522 Arrival [1]

A man kneeled before another. There were many differences between them, but the most obvious one was the color of their skin.

The kneeling man's skin was white, while the one he kneeled to had an ashen-grey tone to himself.

"Have the others come?"

The grey-skinned man asked the question, but his tone wasn't inquisitive. It was more like he was merely observing facts, no sort of personal emotion present in his demeanor.

"Yes. You are the last one to arrive."

Though he kneeled, the man's tone wasn't submissive.

He spoke as if he was only kneeling for ceremony. There was no respect in his voice.

At least, not the type of respect that viewed anyone as superior to himself.

"I see..."

The grey-skinned man nodded his head.

"The Lord ordered this attack suddenly. I'm impressed with your efficiency," he said, just as indifferent as before.

"We have been preparing for this moment for eons. The only thing missing was the Lord's order," the kneeling man answered.

"I can see that."

The grey-skinned man panned his gaze across his surroundings.

They didn't look like they were in the Heavenly World even though they surely were. The sky was...non-existent, but the ceiling of this place was high enough to create a sky of its own.

The darkness that loomed above was barely capable of representing the massive scale of this place.

Located thousands of kilometers underground, it was an entire civilization, empty and barren.

The area was roughly the size of a Principality, or a Sector of the lower universe. And, just like the most populated Principalities in the Heavenly World, the entire span of land was covered in buildings and structures.

It looked like it was the home of an ancient civilization, a place that had gone undiscovered for millions of years.

However, it was anything but.

This massive area had been created by the Straea Clan within the last 1,000,000 years. It had only been sitting untouched for around 100,000 of those, while the rest were used to build it.

This Principality existed for two reasons.

The first was fairly obvious, and explained the purpose of the grey-skinned man.

This was a place where the Straea Clan could safely interact with the Foreign Races without being subject to the eyes of others.

And secondly, the Dark God ordered it.

Nobody else could know his purpose other than him.

But as it stood now, this place was a den of corruption.

Isolated from the perception of those on the surface by extremely advanced technology lining the entire ceiling of the cave, this pseudo-Principality was entirely corrupted, a true Foreign Territory.

Though it didn't appear on the surface due to the sheer distance, this territory was spreading its corruption throughout the Heavenly World. It had already encompassed the entire Northern Region in its darkness. However, the aura of corruption was masked due to the sheer evil existing in droves on the surface.

The lawless zone itself was the Straea Clan's creation, made to hide the presence of this very place.

And currently, it was being inhabited by 243 beings.

There were meant to be 244 of them, but a certain member of their ranks had been eliminated a bit ago, leaving them with this strange number.

It was a number that felt misfortunate, so perhaps it was more worthy of them.

After all, they were a true plague.

The grey-skinned man who just arrived, the man whom even Malevalon Straea had to kneel to out of courtesy, made them whole.

"Call the rest," he ordered.

Malevalon nodded his head and sent a wave of mana through the pseudo-Principality. Immediately, multiple waves of dark energy returned his welcome.

Those waves of energy turned into auras, which then morphed into the shape of a crowd of men and women as they grew closer.

This was the entirety of the Foreign Race nobility.

The 243 of them were the ones who served the Dark God, people who stood behind him as he turned the Sacred Abyss Universe into his toy.

And they'd come for only one purpose.

"Do you know what it is, the disturbance that the Lord sensed?"

The grey-skinned man...no, now that his peers had arrived, perhaps it was better to address him by his position.

Grand Duke Famas looked down at Malevalon and asked him about "that thing."

They did not know its identity yet, nor did Malevalon. The trace that the Lord sensed was too vague for any of them to comprehend its true nature.

That was the reason they came together, even though they didn't all plan to show themselves to the public eye yet.

Malevalon furrowed his brows.

When he made his contract with the Foreign Races, he did not swear loyalty to them.

He swore loyalty to only one man, the Dark God.

The people around him now were his peers. When it came to the Grand Dukes, that wasn't just an expression but a courtesy, but a truth about their power levels.

Malevalon's eyes flitted between them.

He wasn't accustomed to having "peers," nor did he particularly enjoy the feeling.

But for now, he had to cooperate with them.

"I do not know what the Lord sensed. However, I am aware of the most unique beings and events in this world. Therefore, it should not take too much effort to find it."

The Straea Clan was made partially for this exact purpose.

It wasn't a unique situation. Every time the Dark God's forces made contact with a new cosmos, they made sure to do the same thing.

They created or subjugated a force large enough to cover the entire world.

In the case that an anomaly appeared in the Dark God's plan...

With the influence of their chosen force, they could find the cause instantly and crush it without resistance.

Malevalon welcomed the war that was taking place on the surface.

The aura of blood and slaughter created by it allowed him to bring the entirety of the Foreign Race Nobility into the Heavenly World without complications.

And now that they'd arrived, it wouldn't be long before this war was brought to an end.

After all, what could Void Palace do against such a force?

What could anyone do against such a force?

Malevalon's mentality wasn't a new one. It had been seen amongst countless people in Grand Heavens Boundary.

He'd given up.

He'd submitted to the absolute power he saw when he saw the Dark God.

In Malevalon's eyes, the subjugation of the Heavenly World was a foregone conclusion.

So, in order to hold power in that subjugated world, to rule it, to be part of the conquerors instead of the conquered, he joined the Dark God's side.

When this world was submerged in darkness, he would be its ruler.

Even if he was always under the rule of one man, he would absolutely stand above everyone else.

That was why he stood up, looking the Foreign Nobility in their eyes.

"I look forward to our cooperation."

He was their equal for now, but he would be their superior in the future.

So only for now would he show them such courtesies.

Really, they should've considered themselves lucky.

Chapter 1523 Arrival [2]

The Straea Clan never seemed to care about worldly affairs. Anything that was unrelated to them was irrelevant, or at least, that was how they treated the world.

However, the Straea Clan had always been watching.

They didn't need to do any extra work to provide the information Malevalon spoke of.

Even up to the current day, every special event in the entire Heavenly World, barring a few locations like the Western Region and the main palace of Void Palace, had been recorded in the Straea Clan's archives.

"Follow me. I will take you there."

Malevalon spoke to Grand Duke Famas. It was a well-known fact that he was the one who'd represent his peers.

The rest would stay in the hidden Principality, biding their time until their turn to act came.

Grand Duke Famas accepted his role, using malakh to change his appearance.

His skin changed, and his features became more human. Within seconds, he looked no different from the denizens of the Heavenly World.

With that, he followed Malevalon as the man led him to the surface.

As mentioned several times before, the pseudo-Principality was isolated from the world above. There was no way to easily make it back to the surface.

However, in a method reminiscent of Void Palace's halls, a series of strange warps in spacetime allowed one to make one's way all the way to surface level within a few seconds.

Of course, if one didn't approach them with the knowledge of how they worked, one would be shredded by the fluctuating spacetime.

Malevalon and Famas naturally weren't caught in the traps, arriving in the main manor of the Straea Clan in just a few moments.

From where they stood, the explosions and war outside couldn't be heard.

"Blood?"

But it could still be very clearly sensed.

"Right," Malevalon answered.

"There is currently a war ongoing. A few bugs who believe they are strong have come to challenge us, but it is nothing but that. A mere distraction."

"Hmm...if that is the case, then fine. However, it does not seem to be so simple."

Famas commented on the situation, but Malevalon swiftly ignored it.

Frankly, he hadn't been paying much attention to the situation outside. He hardly had the chance with the amount of work it took to bring the Foreign Nobility over.

Malefice was the one leading the war effort, but that alone was enough knowledge.

As long as Malefice was in charge, Malevalon didn't believe they would lose.

Especially not against Void Palace.

It didn't matter if the palace had been getting stronger. They were still in the infancy of their strength.

If they still needed Veritas and the Holy Empire to help them take care of the Divine Order, thinking they could take down Straea was pure arrogance.

After all, even if all three came at the Straea Clan together, Malevalon was still not confident in losing.

He and Famas soon reached his study, where all the information was contained.

The room didn't look much different from how it usually did, but there was one key thing missing, one thing making the atmosphere feel incomplete.

"Where is it?"

Famas instantly noticed the inconsistency.

"It is hidden."

Malevalon replied without batting an eye.

If there was one thing he wouldn't allow, it was for his reputation to be stained.

Perhaps the Celestial Prison had been lost, but there was no way for anyone else to open it.

Even he couldn't touch it. The only existence still alive in the current day who could unlock the Celestial Prison's mechanisms was none other than the Dark God.

Therefore, even in the worst-case scenario where Void Palace had the prison, he was certain they wouldn't be able to do anything with it.

The only thing that changed was its location.

In the end, Dante Void would remain sealed for the rest of eternity, suffering in unending punishment.

Famas didn't press the topic any more. He also knew about the Celestial Prison's strength, so it really didn't matter where it was.

Only, he had also seen the strength of the man it was created to hold.

Flashbacks appeared in his mind, fragmented memories of a time he never wanted to remember.

His interaction with that man was also the greatest defeat he'd ever suffered in his long history of existence.

His imprisonment was the sole reason not only he, but the rest of his comrades as well, came to the Heavenly World willingly.

But the reason he was here this time was not that man, so for his own sake, he pushed those memories down.

Malevalon handed over the data he promised, giving Famas something to use to get his mind off of it.

As he flipped through them, he saw many potential objects that could have been the cause of the disturbance.

Among them was a familiar name, Ezekiel Straea.

"A human weapon who mysteriously developed consciousness."

That was the description by his name.

Luckily for him, Famas didn't pay him much attention. A small strange phenomenon like that meant nothing to his current search.

And considering that the object of his search was able to alert even the Dark God's perception, most matters and individuals were considered small.

Grand Duke Famas didn't know what he was expecting. He certainly didn't believe that the search would be easy. However, the sheer amount of information he was presented, and the surprising amount of it that was relevant to his purpose intrigued him to an extent.

The True Void Universe was unique in this aspect. When he accompanied the Dark God to siege other cosmos, none of them were as packed with strangeness as this one.

As Famas flipped through the information, marking in his mind the places and people he needed to investigate, his eyes suddenly shook.

A name he was familiar with.

"Who...is that?"

He pointed it out, letting Malevalon have a look at it.

Glancing at Famas, he spoke that man's identity.

"He is Damien Void. The first son of Dante Void. He only recently appeared in the Heavenly World, seemingly having come from the lower universe, but he has caused quite a lot of trouble already. He is suspected to be a child Dante had during the time we were pursuing him."

Famas nodded, somewhat shakily still.

He saw Dominic, Darius, Hestia, and Yiren as well, but their names didn't strike much of a chord in his heart.

Grand Duke Famas was skilled in the art of reading Fate. Though this world was different and he wasn't entirely accustomed to mana, his intuition was still as accurate as ever.

Something about Damien stood out to him.

'Dante Void's firstborn son...'

It was common in families with Godly blood. The first child born to two parents would inherit more of their talents than those who came after.

The majority of the parents' essence would be transferred into that first child, which is why the firstborns of many clans and influences were their most talented geniuses.

There were, of course, exceptions, but they were called exceptions for a reason.

This rule held true more often than not.

'If that boy inherited even a single percent of that man's power...'

Whether it was logic or intuition, all signs pointed to the same conclusion.

"Damien Void is dangerous."

Grand Duke Famas' eyes hardened.

"When the anomaly has been successfully eradicated, we must take care of that variable as well."

It was an absolute necessity.

"Before we return to the motherland..."

No mistakes could be tolerated.

"...Damien Void will die."

Chapter 1524 Worldly Force [1]

It had been half a year since Ezekiel joined the Void Palace army, and he had to say...

'This place is really the best.'

The work he had to do was monstrous, but it was always worth it.

The drills he was put through made his entire body squirm in pain. When he laid down to sleep, he'd be unable to move in the slightest until the next morning.

It was really brutal. At times, it was even more brutal than Straea Clan's hidden manor.

But there was one key difference between them.

Rewards and merit.

In the first month, Ezekiel truly suffered. He wondered if his decision was a mistake or not, and he dreaded the fact that he'd merely moved from one hell to another.

However, by the second month, he was already faithfully doing his training without a single complaint.

That was because there was nothing wasteful.

Everything his instructors forced him to do was for his own sake. His strength would see a direct improvement proportional to the amount of work he put in.

And while the exercises themselves were brutal enough to match Straea, the atmosphere wasn't.

The soldiers were free men. They were given days to explore the military city and engage in entertainment. The instructors would push people past their limits, but if they realized that their students were approaching a breaking point, they'd slow them down and make sure to prioritize their health.

Straea never did this.

Those who died were weak. Those who couldn't handle training were weak. Those who lost their minds were weak.

No matter what happened, if one didn't adhere to their standards, one was weak and deserving of death.

Comparing that environment to the palace made the palace look like heaven.

And in a sense, it was.

The men of the army were always given opportunities. As long as they could grasp them, they could become strong enough to stand atop the world proudly.

Plus, there was a merit system.

As long as one worked hard, not only would one become strong, one would become privileged.

Merit points could be used to buy resources for training and growth, weapons, and even access to places like movie theaters and sporting arenas, where events would take place semi-frequently to ease the soldiers' minds.

Damien had created this army to be absolutely loyal to the palace, just as Malevalon created the hidden manors for the same purpose.

However, while Malevalon desired absolute obedience through force and control, Damien wanted that loyalty to come from the heart.

He wanted his men to be proud to fight for the palace, proud to die for it.

Those were the people who would truly cause a difference on the battlefield, not those who didn't feel pain or suffering at all.

The soldiers here were not only well taken care of, they were allowed to be people outside their posts.

They were welcomed by the palace, they were treated with respect, and even their families received countless benefits for their service.

And, in the case that they died, the people they cared about would be given death gratuity enough to let them live their entire mortal lives in fortune.

Frankly, not many of these soldiers had been to war yet.

Only a small portion was taken to siege the Divine Order, and only those more powerful than the people on Ezekiel's level had been deployed to the Northern Region.

Compared to those who'd experienced war, they were naive. Their loyalty was also somewhat weaker, since they didn't know what it was truly like to be on the battlefield fighting for one's cause.

Still, even they were willing to lay their lives down for the palace.

This was proven in the many simulators used by the army to train them.

They'd experienced death before. They'd made the conscious choice to sacrifice themselves for the cause.

So when the time came for them to experience it in reality, they would be trained to exhibit a similar level of calmness to soldiers who'd been brainwashed and conditioned.

However, the fact that they still had emotions and free will gave them an aspect of unpredictability. They could make flexible decisions, and when they realized they were going to die, they could push out far more strength before their flames of life finally died out.

Even if Damien was an indifferent person who viewed his men as tools, this would be the best strategy to make them the best army imaginable.

However, he did not think of them that way.

And they didn't just think of him as an unseen Young Lord whom they'd sworn their allegiance to.

Damien was actually pretty active in the various departments of the palace.

He was now spending most of his time on the back line. It had been over a year since he'd been out in the world.

Of course, he spent a whole lot of time with his family, but he wasn't that selfish. His wives wanted to train, and others had their own matters to attend to as well.

While he would take breaks to meet the people he wanted to meet, he spent the majority of his time becoming more familiar with the people of the palace.

He went to the forges and became peers with the smiths there, acknowledged for his skill at the forge. He went to the servant housing and learned the names of the people who were serving him, and he even went to the kitchen to discuss culinary matters with them.

Damien had an expanse of knowledge gathered both through his own experience and through the devouring of countless individuals with countless talents.

Their memories became his, and their experience became his.

He was skilled in a variety of random things, but his most experienced department was obviously the military.

Damien would occasionally head down to the military city. He'd observe the ongoing training, and sometimes even train the troops himself.

Only the main group of elites he gathered were given the chance to get a free personalized training method from him, but that opportunity hadn't been completely eliminated.

As long as the current soldiers could gather enough merit points, they could purchase it.

It wasn't an unreasonable amount of points either.

Damien wanted to give them as much as they wanted. He wanted his troops to grow and bloom into their full potential.

Merely, with the army growing, he couldn't promise the time necessary to create the perfect technique for each and every one of them.

A barrier of entry was added, sure, but it was a barrier that could be broken by anyone as long as they worked hard enough for it.

That was the part of the army that Ezekiel liked the most. As long as he tried, anything was possible. It was a truth that didn't exist anywhere else in the world.

And he'd been trying his hardest since he arrived here. He trained harder than anyone else, gaining and saving merit points by not spending them on vices or entertainment.

And after six months, he'd reached that point.

He had already gone to the merit shop, and he'd already purchased his ticket.

Soon enough, it would be his turn to meet the Young Lord he served in a private setting.

It was his turn to discover where his potential truly lay.

Chapter 1525 Worldly Force [2]

Damien was quite excited for this meeting.

He'd been watching Ezekiel from the start, and since long ago, he'd known exactly what technique to create for him.

Ezekiel was a special person. He had many special things inside his body, and the source of them all was only one thing.

His main talent.

The thing Damien had been waiting to nurture until this moment.

After all, he couldn't just give Ezekiel the key to his potential easily. He first needed to see if the boy was worthy of such a treasure.

At the end of the day, Ezekiel came from the Straea Clan. Damien could see the nature of his soul, which was inquisitive and overall leaned towards good.

However, there was a darkness inside of him that had been nurtured by Straea.

He had an extreme desire to kill that he had to consciously suppress at all times. For all intents and purposes, he was a time bomb.

Ezekiel's bloodlust was directed at the Straea Clan, so in his normal day-to-day life, there wasn't much of a worry about him going berserk.

But what if his emotions were taken to the extreme? What if, when he found himself on a real battlefield, he couldn't stop himself from killing his comrades?

No matter how much of an interest he had in a genius, Damien wouldn't risk the safety of the rest of his people for their sake.

That wasn't his way of doing things.

Luckily, Ezekiel had shown himself to be level-headed and mostly rational.

The simulation program used to train the army was personally created by Damien. It had multiple settings, the most extreme of which made the simulation feel like reality in every sense of the word.

Somehow, Ezekiel learned how to control his bloodlust and utilize it only for the purpose he desired it for.

Ezekiel was put into this level of the simulation, forced to face the Straea Clan in an environment where he was forced to forget that everything was an illusion.

And he performed perfectly.

Yes, his bloodlust was heavy. When he was facing Straea, he became a demon above all other demons.

However, no matter how much stress he faced, he refused to cross his bottom line and involve those who were innocent in his revenge.

Somehow, Ezekiel learned how to control his bloodlust and utilize it only for the purpose he desired it for.

Damien was thoroughly impressed.

He wanted to meet the genius right away and see if he was worth the hype, and conveniently enough, Ezekiel had also used his merit points for a chance to meet him.

It was as if this meeting was fated.

Damien was already waiting in a designated location, a small structure made with the sole purpose of housing meetings like these.

Ezekiel was currently being led here. Judging by the time...

'...he should be arriving right about now.'

A respectful mana fluctuation pushed through the door, a practitioner's equivalent of knocking.

Seeing how Damien allowed that signature's presence and didn't return it, those outside could understand that he'd given them permission to enter.

The doors swung open, and two men were revealed on the other side.

One was a military instructor, a man named Brian Frieze whom Damien had picked out from the members of Void Palace when he established the army.

Brian was a subordinate of the 9th Sword, Terra Bloodmoon. He was an experienced war veteran, and on top of that, he had prior experience being a teacher.

The military instructors were all great leaders. They were hand-picked talents who hadn't been able to achieve their full potential because they weren't playing the roles they were most suited for.

Brian was one of the instructors Ezekiel liked most, which was why he happily accompanied him when it was time for them to leave for this meeting.

"Good afternoon, Young Lord," Brian said, bowing his head.

Meanwhile, the boy next to him curiously looked Damien up and down.

The man called "Young Lord," seeing him in person was a different experience than what Ezekiel expected.

He'd never personally seen Malevalon Straea, but he'd seen the kind of people who were in charge of Straea.

When comparing Damien to them...

He had a completely different aura.

'Is this the guy who controls this entire place...?'

"That would indeed be me," Damien said with a smile.

Ezekiel's eyes widened.

'Is he reading my thoughts?'

"I am."

'Cheesy potatoes.'

"To each their own, but I'm sure the canteen provides better food than that, no?"

"Woah!"

Ezekiel exclaimed, finally accepting the truth.

Damien shook his head wryly.

'Reading his mind...well, I guess it's something similar?'

Damien did indeed have the power to directly infiltrate Ezekiel's mind, but he couldn't do it without being noticed.

Not because he was weak, and not because Ezekiel was strong, but because of Ezekiel's special constitution.

Instead, the method he used to make a first impression on the boy was a little bit more roundabout, but it still achieved the same purpose.

"You must be Ezekiel, right? Sit. I've heard a lot about you from your instructors."

"About me? I thought they all hated me."

Ezekiel made a sarcastic comment, shooting a sideways glance at Instructor Frieze.

"You brat! All you know is how to act cheeky!"

Brian gave him a light knock on the head, shaking his head helplessly.

"Young Lord, I will be leaving now. Don't be afraid to discipline this boy if he decides to act out."

"Hey!" Ezekiel exclaimed.

Damien smiled slightly.

"Go on ahead. I don't think we'll have much of a problem."

As Brian left, Damien motioned Ezekiel to sit down.

The boy was jittery, obviously awaiting the reveal of a perfect technique.

Unfortunately, Damien had a few questions for him before that happened.

"Tell me, what do you think the perfect technique for you looks like?"

Ezekiel raised a brow at the unexpected question.

"Me...?"

He fell into thought for a moment.

There were many things he was skilled in. Most weapons, self-healing, defense, even pure brute strength; he excelled in anything that had to do with combat.

So when asked what the "perfect" technique would be, he didn't know. He didn't think the right answer was as obvious as a combination of all of these things.

'What...am I lacking?'

That was the key question. It wasn't about what he had, but about what he needed.

'Compared to everyone else...'

He was leagues above in physical abilities. He was leagues above in battle sense and mental acuity.

The only thing others had that he didn't...

"Laws."

He didn't have an affinity.

That was the only crutch keeping him from achieving perfection.

Damien smiled.

"That's right. The perfect technique for you is one that allows you to compete with people who have natural affinities for laws."

One could say Ezekiel had a bad start. Not having a law affinity could be treacherous at higher stages of power, even if one managed to reach the pinnacle of something like the sword.

In most cases, that would be a correct assumption.

However, Ezekiel was not most cases.

Rather, Ezekiel's lack of affinity for laws was exactly what made him so special.

It was what made Damien excited to reach him.

"Ezekiel..." he said, drawing a piece of paper out of his storage space.

"...have you perhaps ever heard the term, 'Worldly Force?'"

Chapter 1526 Worldly Force [3]

"Have you perhaps ever heard the term, 'Worldly Force?'"

Obviously, Ezekiel didn't.

The concept of Worldly Force wasn't well known at all. Since this world was one that was ruled by Law, other forms of energy were relatively ignored.

After all, even if they were studied, they couldn't be used to the efficiency of laws, so their study was never invested in.

Damien wasn't like the rest of the world, particularly in the way he had made contact with several different types of energy over the course of his life.

"Worldly Force" was something he was especially familiar with, since it was similar to a concept he used often as a Star Master in the lower universe.

Ezekiel had a confused expression on his face, as if he had no idea what was happening at all.

It was expected, so Damien went into an explanation of what exactly "Worldly Force" was.

"It could be said that Laws are the foundation of the world, and that is a correct statement. Laws are indeed the creators and upholders of reality. However, they are not the only source of energy in the universe."

"For instance, mana is not created by law, or as a product of law. Mana is a natural energy of the universe that exists simply because the universe exists."

"Worldly Force is the same."

Damien waved his hand through the air. A strange energy followed his movements, something clear enough for Ezekiel to sense, but too vague for him to understand.

"Worldly Force is quite literally the vitality of the world. It is the energy of the world itself, rather than an energy that forms its structure. Sure, you could say it's a product of Law, but just like mana, as long as reality exists, as will Worldly Force."

"You know about the Heavenly Order, don't you?"

Ezekiel nodded. The Heavenly Order was something he only recently became familiar with, as the talents who excelled in the army were given the chance to watch people undergo Baptisms.

Until then, Ezekiel had no idea what the concept was. Straea didn't have any desire to inform its younger generation about the dangers and opportunities ahead.

Rather than giving them a rope, Straea would push them down the cliff just to see if they would survive.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel knew what the Heavenly Order was to an extent.

"It is the governing entity of the world. Isn't it like...a combination of all the laws or something?"

Damien shook his head.

"You're partially right and partially wrong. The first part is correct. The Heavenly Order does govern the world. However, it is not a combination of laws. Rather, it is an entity above all laws, something like a natural version of the system."

"Natural version?"

"Don't worry about it."

Damien smiled wryly internally. The secrets behind the system were a whole different matter that even he only had an inkling about. Someone with a worldview as narrow as Ezekiel's wouldn't be able to understand it.

"Anyway, the Heavenly Order is above laws. It has the power to govern laws purely due to its existence. And the force it uses to govern Baptisms and Rebirths...?"

"Worldly Force."

Damien nodded.

"That's right. At its peak, Worldly Force can surpass and control laws. That is why it cannot be called a product of their existence."

"Young Lord, are you saying that I have a talent for Worldly Force?"

Without even noticing it, Ezekiel had already accepted Damien as his Lord in his heart. This explanation that opened up a whole new world for him...it was more than enough to earn his respect.

However...

"Talent would be an overstatement."

Damien said it bluntly.

"There is no such thing as talent when it comes to using Worldly Force. However, you have the potential to comprehend it, which means as long as you put your heart and soul into your training, you have the chance to become a true master."

"And when you reach that point..."

Damien snapped his fingers.

The small meeting room grew, morphing into a massive pagoda. The view from the outside changed until Ezekiel could gaze over the entire military city without straining his eyes.

Worldly Force filled the air and changed the climate entirely.

The small meeting room grew, morphing into a massive pagoda. The view from the outside changed until Ezekiel could gaze over the entire military city without straining his eyes.

RUMBLE!

Dark clouds swirled through the sky, thundering with arcs of powerful black lightning, and the air itself heated up until Ezekiel felt his skin was boiling.

"With Worldly Force, power like this is nothing," Damien said, smiling mysteriously.

"With Worldly Force..."

BOOOOOM!

The thunderclouds exploded, turning into a sea of water floating in the sky, and then transforming again into solid ground, a fiery volcanic region that somehow managed to keep itself suspended despite its weight.

"...you can change the world itself."

Damien brought his arm down.

"NO!"

Ezekiel shouted.

It was too late.

The floating volcanic island slammed down into the ground below, sending blazing magma flying everywhere and crushing the entirety of the military city.

Ezekiel fell to his knees, unable to comprehend what he'd just witnessed.

"Young Lord...you...you just..."

His eyes shook in terror.

But Damien merely continued smiling.

"Relax."

He snapped his fingers again, and everything returned to normal.

The room returned to its usual mundane appearance at ground level, the military city returned as if nothing had ever happened, and the entirety of the destruction caused a moment prior was reverted.

Outside the room, Ezekiel sensed the same people he'd grown familiar with living out their days.

They hadn't been obliterated...?

Ezekiel's mind was thoroughly blown.

"Young...Young Lord..." he said, stammering as he tried to regain his calm.

"If I learn Worldly Force...can I do that too?"

"Hmm..."

Damien shook his head.

"If you want to drop a volcano on someone, you can probably reach that level after some hard training.
As for what came after..."

"Well, let's just say that I used some tricks."

Ezekiel nodded shakily.

"Huu..."

The power of Worldly Force was clearly presented to him.

A power that seemed like a mixture of many laws, but had the power to usurp their throne.

It was a power that could not only close the gap between Ezekiel and his peers, but a force that could allow him to stand at the top, to challenge the people he truly wanted to fight.

Moreover, he saw something greater than Worldly Force, greater than Law, greater than anything.

'A glimpse of the Young Lord's power...'

It was amazing.

There was a time when Ezekiel questioned the direction he chose. He wasn't sure if Void Palace was enough to help him achieve his ambitions.

Most of those doubts had faded during the time he spent with the army, but as of this moment, they were completely gone.

As of this moment, as he witnessed something improbable, Ezekiel started to truly consider himself a member of Void Palace.

He kneeled before Damien, his head bowed in submission.

"Young Lord, please teach me how to use Wordly Force."

Damien smiled, nodding his head.

"That was my plan from the start."

Damien didn't know it yet, nor did Ezekiel, but this was the start of a tale that would be told for millennia.

A story that told of the rise of the Absolute's most loyal sword.

Chapter 1527 Worldly Force [4]

Worldly Force, as an energy that existed ambiently in the world and parallel to mana, was the cause of a lot of Ezekiel's natural advantages.

The natural healing factor he possessed which was second only to Damien's Authority of Immortality, the durability of his body, and even his talent to learn techniques at a glance, all of it came from the blessing of Worldly Force.

The first few were obvious. With the energy of the world nourishing him at all times, it was only natural for Ezekiel's body to become monstrous.

The last point, on the other hand, was a bit more intricate. Worldly Force was, as Damien said, in a similar position to the system.

While the system actively recorded any and all things, Worldly Force did the same in a passive manner.

All things that flowed through the world would be touched by Worldly Force, and thus, recorded in its flow.

Ezekiel couldn't consciously read that flow yet, but he was inherently connected to it. Damien told the boy he wasn't especially talented only so he didn't become arrogant.

In reality, there was nobody born with as unique of a body as him.

His innate connection to Worldly Force meant that any technique recorded in its flow could eventually be comprehended by him.

That included any law.

'I don't think he'll be able to reach my level, but he definitely has a chance to touch Existence based on potential alone.'

Damien gave Ezekiel his technique that day. It was the first time Ezekiel had ever seen a technique that he couldn't immediately understand.

Hell, he didn't even know what those things were.

He'd taken the entire night reading over it as many times as he could, but no matter what he did, the matter didn't become clearer to him.

At the end of the day, this was Ezekiel's flaw. He had a lot of natural talent, but since growth had come easily to him, he didn't know how to consciously focus on practicing small things to perfection.

It was a skill he would've had to learn at some point if he wanted his growth to continue smoothly, but now that it was at his doorstep, he just couldn't figure anything out.

After all, he didn't know what to do.

He didn't have a direction, nor did he know where to start and in what order to do the things he would eventually need to do.

Hell, he didn't even know what those things were.

The technique Damien gave him was extremely detailed. To any other practitioner, all the things Ezekiel lacked could be found within it.

But it had to be remembered.

Ezekiel had never been taught to read.

Nor had he been taught how to learn.

He had never seen a written technique before. Ezekiel had spent his entire life learning by watching others and copying them.

Thus, as time passed, he found that the task of gaining Worldly Force wasn't something he couldn't complete on his own.

From then on, his training schedule changed.

Ezekiel stopped focusing on physical drills, and he started spending the majority of his points to buy vacation days that excused him from attending training.

He put a hold on everything he already knew and prepared to forget everything he thought he knew.

For the moment, he put away the training manual he'd received from Damien and focused only on himself.

There were only two things he knew how to do.

Observe, and fight.

And in both matters, his instinct was what gave him the biggest advantage.

If that was the case, then in this situation where he didn't know what to do, he had to rely on that very instinct.

Ezekiel began to coop himself up in his own room, which was also purchased with points. He sat in meditation every day, ignoring the rest of the world.

He was trying to connect to his mind.

In material terms, he was taking steps to prepare himself for Worldly Force rather than attempting to gain the power as soon as possible.

A slow, thought-out process through which he could reap the most benefits. That was what he needed.

Because in the process of trying to learn Worldly Force, wouldn't he learn a great deal of other things as well?

Right, there was no way Damien didn't know about his flaws. Damien was the person in the palace who knew the most about Ezekiel.

Damien knew from the start that Ezekiel wouldn't be able to gain Worldly Force easily. He couldn't even read the manual yet.

But that didn't mean he would baby the boy and feed him everything.

Whether it was a basic skill like reading or something more complex like comprehension, Ezekiel needed to gain these skills on his own. Not just for power, but for general education and his growth as a person.

There weren't many soldiers in the army that Damien was this interested in.

Even as Ezekiel started to understand his intentions, Damien watched over him, smiling the whole time.

No matter what was thrown at him, Ezekiel never betrayed the expectations others had for him.

Perhaps that was why he seemed so reliable despite still being in his growth phase.

"This kid..." Damien muttered to himself.

"...he's not too bad."

In the main residences of both great clans, events seemed relatively peaceful and slow-moving, but it wasn't so for those outside of those places.

The war between Void Palace and the Straea Clan was getting more and more heated by the day. It wasn't just one or two people who died in every single battle they fought. The the number of battles had stacked such that their corpses could form an entire range of mountains.

The majority of the war had taken place in the Northern Region, since Void Palace made the first strike, but it wasn't exclusively there anymore.

The war was expanding further south into Void Palace territory, and as Malefice continued to command his troops, the palace army was pushed to its limits.

They also had Swords supporting them from the back line, but it wasn't enough.

That is, until Hestia Void joined the fray.

She had received permission to take full command over the army, and though she was on a probationary period at first to test her skill, her strategic mind was able to make her position final in a matter of weeks.

She was able to not only recover several thousand kilometers of land that had been taken by the armies of Straea, she was able to reduce the average casualty rate of every battle by a considerable percentage.

Damien's training had paid off more than anyone had ever expected it to. The second Hestia was given the chance to shine, she showed that this was where she was always meant to be.

When it came to strategy, only Hestia could compete with Malefice.

While neither of them were on the frontlines, the battle between armies soon turned into a battle between the two of them, a true showcase of the most advanced minds of the era.

Regardless of what face the war was showing now, it was only background noise to the truly powerful characters of this world.

The key players had yet to come out.

But a storm was surely brewing on the horizon.

It wouldn't be long now. Within a year at the very most...

The strongest forces of those two great clans would lose their patience.

That was when the real war would begin.

Chapter 1528 Ice Luan Mountain [1]

Ezekiel was a quick learner. He'd spent his entire childhood learning how to adapt and problem-solve so he could survive. Even if the environment had changed, his behaviors didn't.

Once he'd taken a step back and understood the problem, Ezekiel immediately acted to solve it.

First, he worked on the more baseline problems. He spent a year learning how to read and write properly, while also focusing on comprehension, understanding the complexity that language could hold.

By the time that year was over, not only had Ezekiel learned to read the manual Damien gave him, he'd also corrected many critical flaws that had formed due to his past environment.

His sense of time was one of these. He was now able to follow the time flow as everyone else did, which was not only a matter of convenience, but one of vital importance.

After all, for a practitioner to tell time meant reading and feeling the law of Time. As Ezekiel familiarized himself with the process, something that could be done with mana and perception rather than Law itself, Ezekiel finally sensed the energy for the first time.

That was extremely helpful for him. Since Worldly Force felt somewhere in between Law and Mana, it gave him somewhere to start.

In just four seasons, Ezekiel had built a foundation for himself to stand on.

All he needed to do was utilize it.

He finally delved into the manual Damien gave him.

He learned the method to move his mana, the method to feel the environment around him, and the method to connect it all together.

The first steps of the manual only allowed Ezekiel to obtain Worldly Force.

As for his training beyond that...

Well, while Damien highlighted some key things he needed to pay attention to, the majority of his development would depend on his own creativity.

Worldly Force was versatile beyond all else. It didn't necessarily have a specific set of uses, which meant it could mimic the uses of many laws at once.

Of course, until Ezekiel reached a very high level, it would be difficult to incorporate too many properties into the force, so he needed to pick the best properties to stick with as his base combination.

This was entirely up to him, and based on what he chose, his future would change immensely.

That wasn't just in terms of the potential height he could reach, but also in the path he could take.

In a sense, he was given the freedom to choose anything.

Because in a sense, he had an affinity for everything.

Damien couldn't get too deeply involved in the process precisely because of how much it relied on individuality.

He wanted to help Ezekiel and see the boy thrive in this niche concept that nobody else could touch.

He wanted to see someone in the generation after him who could create feats like he and his father had.

Ezekiel had that potential, and as he adapted more and more to life outside of the Straea Clan's hidden manor, he started to reveal more and more potential like a blossoming butterfly.

It was wonderful. Such talents came once every few generations, people who could become main characters in their own stories.

And if Ezekiel did as he always did, if he fulfilled and exceeded the expectations set for him...

Damien already had plans in mind that he was excited to execute.

Ezekiel's legacy surely wouldn't end somewhere average.

Nevertheless, the more Ezekiel progressed, the less Damien paid constant attention to him.

He would make visits to the military city as he always did, and whenever he was there, he would check on the boy.

Like that, Ezekiel slowly became comfortable around Damien, but never enough to erase the status gap between them.

It seemed he was aware of his post and had no desire to overstep his bounds.

Damien didn't mind that either. He was at a stage in his life where he wasn't in a hurry to form relationships with others.

What others wanted, he would entertain if he felt it appropriate.

He wouldn't reject a good friend.

However, nor would he reject a good subordinate or an unfortunate enemy.

Damien was still young. To many of those around him, he was young enough to still be called a boy.

However, Damien was from Earth. By his standards, he'd already lived enough to fill two lifetimes.

Relationships were important, but he already had enough of them to satisfy him for eternity. Whether it be his wives or his newfound family, they'd be with him for the rest of time. He wasn't hurrying to make friends and find people to spend that same eternity with.

Though, there was one relationship he was itching to recover.

The problem was that it wasn't up to him whether it could be recovered or not.

Damien walked through the halls of the palace, arriving in front of a room that only he and a select few others had access to.

Pushing open the large, ornate doors, he was welcomed by darkness.

It wasn't a bad thing. This was merely how the room was designed. The darkness was a product of the technology keeping the man within comfortable.

Damien made his way through the room until he reached a large bed, the only real piece of furniture here.

That was where Dante Void lay.

Despite the passing of time, nothing had particularly changed on Dante's side. His body was starting to look better, since he was constantly being nourished by the machines around him, but the strange condition that kept him asleep never diminished.

At first, Damien thought it was caused by the foreign energy that was in his system, however, that was incorrect.

Damien had removed that foreign energy, yet Dante was still like this.

It wasn't soul damage, since Damien healed his soul personally.

It could've been something in his spiritual world, but if that was the case, it would have been more obvious.

'His spiritual intent is still relatively normal, and there's definitely activity inside of his brain.'

It wasn't as if Dante's mind didn't work.

It was just that, for some reason, his mind couldn't connect with reality, like there was a rift between them keeping him away.

'A rift...can I fix it with the concept of order...?'

Damien placed his hand on his father's forehead and attempted to send the energy of Existence into his body.

Bzzt!

"Tch."

Damien pulled his hand away quickly with a disgruntled expression.

'Same as always.'

This wasn't the first time he'd tried. Existence was something of an end-all-be-all cure, so it was obviously Damien's first choice when it came to treatment.

The problem was...comically ironic.

'Since he has also reached this level to an extent, his Existence is repelling mine.'

Damien couldn't use Existence on Dante without express consent. Even then, the two of them would probably have to maneuver their energies so they didn't make contact.

Existence was always meant to be a whole.

When two different strains of it met, they would obviously reject each other, as each believed itself the true manifestation of Existence.

Unless one had control over True Existence, there was no way to suppress another partially formed strain of Existence.

"Haa..."

Damien sighed.

'All of these specificities are annoying. The universe is pretty simple at a glance, but I guess the complexity is in the fine details.'

Damien couldn't get past this problem with brute force.

'Another method...'

When he started looking for it, it was only natural for him to find it.

'It exists.'

He didn't know what it was.

But he was sure it existed.

In order to turn his assumptions into a reality, he rushed to find a certain book.

Persia's Encyclopedia.

The answer would be there.

Chapter 1529 Ice Luan Mountain [2]

Damien knew a lot about the Heavenly World. From the memories he'd devoured, he learned things from massive secrets to small things.

He didn't care about what was for dinner on Monday or who had cheated on who. Usually, he filtered out memories unrelated to the things he was looking for when he devoured those people.

However, included in the tidbits that usually went forgotten were tales of things impossible, myths and legends created by the people of this world.

Damien never got rid of the useless information, because there was always a chance that it would come in handy.

Today proved his hoarding valid.

He barely remembered it. The memory was extremely vague, and he wasn't even sure of who it came from, but it was a legend from ancient times about a location not many had ever dared to explore.

The Heavenly World, while mostly covered in civilization, had a lot of unexplored land. These areas were usually forbidden zones, hazardous areas where even Gods could easily die.

No major force was willing to risk the lives of their greatest assets for what lay beyond the horizon, but many a wanderer and adventurer had tried their luck with these places in the past.

Some returned with glory, finding things unseen to the rest of the world, while the majority died, their corpses unable to ever be retrieved.

In one of such places, a man was said to have found the cure to all disease.

A fruit that could turn one into a reflection of Buddha, granting one longevity and fortune.

Damien rushed to find Persia's encyclopedia because he knew that Void Palace would have records of such an item.

And he was correct.

Written in the book was not only the first legend that Damien knew, but also several other accounts of adventurers who'd seen the fruit in the wild.

'Only the one man was able to actually take it out of that place alive.'

The rest didn't speak about anything other than the fruit's existence.

'Either they were scared away from the start, or they encountered something they can't talk about.'

Whatever the case was, it didn't matter to Damien.

Several eye witness accounts were enough to validate his random hope.

'That fruit, judging by the effects that were recorded in the legend...'

The original man lived to be over a thousand years old. It was said that his body never aged, his mind never dulled, and his spirituality increased by the day.

'...it's not just a fruit containing immense vitality.'

If it was something like that, the man would've gone insane.

There was no record of that man being a practitioner, despite him entering that dangerous place, and if a thousand years was considered a long lifespan, then the most he could've been was 3rd class.

A mortal's mind wasn't made to last such a long time.

The power that came with longevity for a practitioner allowed them to adapt to the lengthened lifespans. They had a constant goal to reach a higher level, and when they were engrossed in training and seeking out practical experience and wealth, the years passed by fast enough for change to happen on its own, unnoticed.

His body never aged.

His mind never dulled.

His spirituality was always increasing.

These three things didn't happen one by one. They were related. No, they were all caused by the same thing.

'The base effect of that fruit isn't something outwardly recognizable, but if I'm not wrong, it should be exactly what I'm looking for right now.'

It was a fruit that could bring one's mind, body, and soul into harmony. It formed an everlasting connection between them that would only fade when one's lifespan was truly at its end.

'This is such a reach.'

Damien smiled wryly. Even for him, this was too coincidental.

The chance for him to remember the exact legend he needed and for that fruit to be the exact thing he needed was...actually quite probable honestly.

But that didn't mean Damien could easily accept that this solution would be THE solution.

Still, wasn't it worth trying?

'Existence won't work, and if anybody else had a solution it would've worked by now.'

Damien wanted his father cured sooner rather than later.

It was truly his final worry.

Even if it seemed like he was reaching for the clouds, making up facts to support his point, it didn't stop him from wanting to try.

'The location of that fruit...'

The tallest mountain of the Frostbound Mountain Range, Ice Luan Mountain.

It had only been seen from afar by most observers, so it was named for its unique shape, like a luan rising from its nest in the morning.

Ice Luan Mountain was one of the tallest mountains in the entire Heavenly World, and it was just as dangerous.

However, Damien didn't think it was too much for him.

'I should set out soon. The Frostbound Mountain Range is in the Eastern Region, so the Northeastern Region, so it'll take a bit longer to get there.'

Luckily, the territory of the Vega Clan was somewhere Damien could act without worry.

He had met the executives of that clan many times while he was working for Veritas. Though their relationship was with Damien Grey, not Damien Void, he was sure that they wouldn't bother him as long as he didn't do anything extreme.

'And as long as I'm in the Frostbound Mountain Range, the extreme doesn't happen unless I destroy it and everything around it, which would never happen...'

He remembered his last memorable experience in a mountain range, and, well...

'...I wasn't the one who destroyed it that time, so it should be...fine?'

Putting aside his track record, with a plan in mind, there was nothing more for Damien to do but act.

He spent the rest of the day informing others about his plans and making preparations, and by daybreak the next, he was already gone.

This was the first time Damien had left the palace in over a year, and when it came to adventures like this, it had been even longer.

Damien was quite excited, but he wasn't too hung up on the excitement. His first priority was the goal, so even if he had to skip the adventuring and go straight for it, he would do so without regret.

Nevertheless, he arrived in the Northeastern Region within a day and moved towards its northernmost point, where the Frostbound Mountain Range was.

In fact, the mountain range was the very thing separating the Vega Clan and the Straea Clan. It was a natural border that even Gods didn't dare to cross, so it offered a sufficient amount of protection for those like Vega and Veritas.

Otherwise, how could the Vega Clan remain uninvolved in a war between its neighbors?

It wasn't hard for Damien to reach the mountain range, nor did he face any sorts of obstacles.

But that was temporary.

Because while Damien was unaware of it, he was being watched by many eyes.

Many of whom were aiming for his throat.

This trip to the Frostbound Mountain Range was destined to be a turbulent one.

And that wasn't just because of the threats Damien would face from those outside.

Chapter 1530 Ice Luan Mountain [3]

A land of pure white.

There was no better way to describe it.

The forbidden zone that spanned the border of an entire cardinal region, the Frostbound Mountain Range, was not given its name without reason.

Its base elevation was already over a hundred kilometers above the rest of the world. Unless one arrived at that height, one's only memory of the mountain range would be that pure white wall.

However, such scenery was only the beginning.

The true beauty was at the top of that wall, from which one could see the mountain range beyond.

There were tens or even hundreds of mountains that spanned as far as the eye could see no matter where on the range one was. It was so extensive that it was almost impossible to be within and see what lay outside.

The pure white snow swept up hills and down valleys in the periphery of the range, but the main characters truly were the mountains.

Tall, rocky, ice-covered, and full of danger. Rather than beauty, it would be better to describe them based on the terror they caused.

Because in no way could they be considered beautiful.

They were covered in a harsh never-ending blizzard. One couldn't observe what lived on those mountains from afar, but one could imagine how powerful those creatures had to be to make this environment their home.

The closer one approached to the mountains, the less one would see aside from their massive gait.

Once one had chosen a mountain to conquer, that would become one's entire life.

There were hundreds of bodies on each and every mountain, some millions or hundreds of millions of years old.

They could never be safely recovered, but they'd also never rot and decay, forever kept in stasis by the mountain range's chill.

Damien's goal was Ice Luan Mountain.

It was quite obvious with its shape. It wasn't directly in the center of the mountain range, but it was close enough that Damien could see it from the time he first arrived at the top of the ice wall.

The mountain was treacherous. Aside from the environmental challenges, it truly was inherited by a plethora of powerful beasts, namely Ice Luans.

Though, luans were a relatively peaceful species as long as they weren't provoked, so they were the least of one's worries.

'There is a surprisingly active ecosystem here.'

That was Damien's first observation as he stood at the base of the mountain and scanned it with his awareness.

The ecosystem wasn't only diverse, but the animals also seemed to have established some sort of societal hierarchy. This was completely unexpected from creatures that lived in these conditions.

A harsh environment was a natural suppressant. Creatures who evolved to adapt to those conditions tended to be much stronger than their counterparts, however, as a result, their intelligence suffered.

They would be mostly feral, unable to recognize anything other than their own instinct for survival.

Comparatively, the beasts of Ice Luan Mountain were a true anomaly.

Damien hadn't met them yet, but even the hints of society they had formed were more than he could've ever expected.

He wanted to explore it a bit more, but of course...

'I should try to find that fruit first.'

After covering his body in a layer of Existence, concealing himself from the world, Damien began teleporting up the peak.

His movement ability was unmatched, and he didn't plan to waste his advantages.

While others would have to arduously climb the mountain, a place where even flight was impossible due to the extreme blizzard, teleportation was a true gem to have.

It allowed several weeks and months worth of work to be done by Damien in a matter of minutes.

And once he'd reached the heights he desired, it wasn't hard to find traces of what others had witnessed.

A cave near the absolute peak of the mountain. It glowed with a blue halo that stood out even in the mostly blue icy atmosphere, so it was hard to miss.

Damien entered that cave curiously, dubious as to what could actually be inside.

And what he found was...

'...the fruit.'

The Harmony Fruit, as Damien had been calling it since it didn't have a name of its own.

And alongside it...

A beast of untold proportions.

It was something like a mix between a dragon and a luan, two species that should've never had the chance or ability to come together.

With its graceful yet scale-armored and domineering appearance, the beast curled around the small tree from which the Harmony Fruit was birthed.

'Is it a guardian...?'

It wasn't rare for treasures like these to have guardians.

Damien wasn't particularly wary of it, especially when it didn't seem to be able to sense him in his concealed state, however...

The moment he took a single step forward, truly entering the cave, it raised its head to look at the entrance.

"I do not know who you are, but you cannot come here."

It spoke, its voice low yet feminine. Its eyes flitted from side to side, making it clear that it didn't know where Damien was, but it managed to sense him regardless.

'Should I come out, or should I just take it and dip?'

"You will not be able to take the fruit like this."

The beast spoke as if it could read his thoughts.

"You have hid yourself from me, so you must be a thief. However, the tree has sensed you, and unless you earn her approval, you will not be able to see the glorious effects of the fruit she bears."

Damien raised his brow.

'So that was the case.'

If it was like that, then his concealment no longer mattered.

This was another case like when he met the Primordial Undying Tree.

Alaric wasn't willing to give his power to just anyone. Only after a load of trials did he finally set on Damien, granting him his everything.

Though the Harmony Fruit was nothing compared to Alaric's existence, it was the small tree's everything.

Even if it could form another one after many years, that wouldn't change the sense of loss it would feel.

If Damien wanted to take the fruit by force, he could try, but he didn't want to take too many risks when it came to Dante's life.

He undid his concealment, appearing on Ice Luan Mountain with his body for the first time.

'It's cold.'

For Damien to feel it, it really had to be cold. His body was far too evolved for any normal temperature to affect him at all.

The slight cool in the breeze was actually a little refreshing, since it was a feeling Damien hadn't felt in a while.

After all, he didn't spend too much time in icy areas.

As he became accustomed to his surroundings and brushed the snow off his clothes, covering himself in a bit of mana, the beast's eyes slightly widened.

The intruder was a human...?

No, that wasn't it.

Its nostrils flared as it sniffed the air.

'That scent is...a qualification?'

The look in its eyes became even more incredulous.

And for a moment, it even forgot what Damien had originally come here for.

It couldn't hold itself back from asking the question that was now burning in its mind, no matter how stupid it sounded.

"Human, you aren't a dragon, are you?"