

Void 1541

Chapter 1541 War [1]

Damien had escaped.

The instant he killed and devoured Count Telebris, he used his connection with the Sanctuary to disappear from the Frostbound Mountain Range.

It really was a convenient method of travel.

After all, for as long as someone with an access gate to the Sanctuary was at Void Palace, Damien would always be able to immediately return to safety.

His escape was a good thing.

But Damien didn't feel good about it.

For a long time now, he'd been escaping.

When was the last time he actually went out and fought a battle?

He'd been careful for the palace's sake, keeping his strength to himself so his enemies didn't gain information.

But it was too late now.

Even with all of his preparations, his enemies still managed to learn the things they weren't meant to know.

That was confirmed the instant he devoured Count Telebris.

Straea knew what he could do, as did the Foreign Races.

How?

They got lucky. Damien dropped his guard for no more than a single moment and that was enough for all of their suspicions to become facts.

It was similar to how everything Damien knew was being affirmed as fact by Count Telebris' memories.

Damien made it back to Void Palace relatively unharmed, but a change would come from this point forth.

That battle was the last time.

It was the last time he would choose escape over battle.

The strength he'd accumulated through all of his training, the power that gave him the right to rule billions of people...

It was about time for him to truly use it to its full potential.

Damien learned a lot of things from Count Telebris' memories.

His being a Count meant the information he had on the Sacred Abyss Universe wasn't much better than Count Verex's. He did have his own territory, which Damien could probably lay claim to if he went there, but other than that, everything Count Telebris knew was something Damien also knew.

However, Count Telebris knew everything that was happening with the Foreign Nobility infiltrating the Heavenly World. On top of that, he had a considerable amount of information on the Straea Clan.

Ironically, the Foreign Noble was more useful for learning about the happenings of the Heavenly World than his own homeworld.

Still, in this instance, that was for the better. After all, Damien wasn't looking for the Sacred Abyss Universe's secrets right now.

Anything he needed to be aware of, he now knew.

Which meant he didn't have to hesitate.

Damien didn't waste a single moment when he returned to the palace. After a short greeting to those who saw him arrive, he called another emergency meeting.

It was the same as last time.

An announcement of war.

The second he returned, it was war.

Not the small, irrelevant war that had been taking place until now, but war between Divinities, the true lifeblood of every great clan.

He wasn't the only one who had to stop holding back. Everything Void Palace had done in these years to rise above its fellow great clans needed to be put into action.

Straea had to go down. The Foreign Races had to go down.

Everyone who opposed Void Palace would die.

It was sudden for a lot of people.

For the six months Damien had been gone, the war had been escalating and the power level of the deployed troops had been increasing.

However, neither side had nearly enough of a reason to bring out their strongest warriors yet. Strategically speaking, it was beyond stupid.

But that was before Damien devoured Count Telebris.

As he was now, this was the perfect opportunity.

Plus, he couldn't just give the Foreign Nobility space to do as they pleased.

The chain of command established within the palace army was impeccable. Information traveled extremely fast, and as if they'd been present for the meeting Damien held, the palace troops began their retreat almost instantly.

Rather than pushing the Straea Clan within their own territory as they'd been doing until now, the entirety of the army retreated to the border of the Southern Region and created an iron fortress around their home.

It wasn't just the troops that were already deployed. A large majority of the army's non-Divine combatants were placed on this line.

Meanwhile, the Divinities were gathered together and given their roles.

Or rather, they were given their targets.

As long as everyone they were sent to kill was properly eliminated, the Straea Clan would destroy itself.

Damien's hit list was by no means easy to complete.

After all, the names at the top of that list were very familiar to everyone present.

Malevalon and Malefice Straea, the two brothers who led the entire operation.

And the ones tasked with killing them...

There was really nobody better than Damien's own mother and her close sister.

Claire and Serena were by far the most powerful people in the palace. Damien had seen their strength firsthand only a few times, but they were the primary reason why Malevalon didn't directly strike the palace during Dante's imprisonment.

If they had the power to make that man wary, then Damien didn't have to worry about them.

Nevertheless, plans were made quicker than anyone could process them.

A roadmap that led to the perfect destruction of the Straea Clan without any room for other outcomes was created.

As long as it was followed, everything would end soon.

"Huu..."

Damien took a breath.

The moment Count Telebris' memories became his, Damien entered a warmongering mode. It felt as if all of his doubts had cleared, leaving room for only success.

'I'm going to be on the battlefield too.'

It may have been arrogant, but the fact that he himself would be able to fight was Damien's greatest assurance of victory.

He sat back in his chair, closing his eyes.

This would be the last moment of peace for a while.

So as he learned to do on Ice Luan Mountain, he enjoyed it as much as he could.

His life would be chaos when the war began.

But that chaos was the same environment where he thrived.

'Okay.'

His mind was clear.

His vision saw beyond the horizon.

A few days passed after that, a time that the palace members used to brace themselves for what was to come.

The entire world had been lulled into a silence. Amidst the retreat of Void Palace's troops, the Straea Clan had become oddly quiet as well.

It was extremely odd, especially considering how brutal the war they raged had been thus far.

Millions had died at the very least. It didn't seem like after suffering such losses the two influences would ever put down their swords.

So for a silence like this to suddenly erupt...?

Naturally, it couldn't mean anything good.

This time saw a mass migration of people into the Eastern regions of the world. As people tried to avoid the escalating conflict, they moved across the Frostbound Mountain Range so they could be safe.

Unfortunately, not everyone could make this move in time.

Because there wasn't much time before war erupted again.

And this time, with countless Divinities swarming the world with the blood of their enemies as their only goal...

The world would truly face a situation it had never faced before.

Chapter 1542 War [2]

Duke Horacio didn't make excuses when he returned to Straea.

He told Grand Duke Famas exactly what had occurred and how Damien got away. Rather than trying to beg for forgiveness, he highlighted the mistakes in the information they had and corrected them.

Regardless, the mission he'd made was a successful one. He wasn't a coward who would kneel and beg just because he'd lost a battle.

An honorable one, at that. Damien was never trying to fight from the beginning. He aimed for escape, and expertly tricked Horacio and his followers to achieve that goal.

It was an impressive performance from Damien, and Duke Horacio acknowledged it.

Grand Duke Famas was the same.

Compared to Malevalon, he could actually be considered an understanding supervisor. He always looked at the entire situation and gleaned what he could from it, rather than focusing on defeat.

Nevertheless, this situation was unique, and while the Grand Duke was analyzing it, Void Palace started withdrawing troops.

Their intent became obvious.

They wanted to throw away all pretenses and fight face-to-face.

Whether it was Malevalon or Grand Duke Famas, both were more than happy to entertain this proposition.

The Sapientia Clan noticed their movements first and immediately relayed the information to Void Palace.

Several thousands of Divinities had left the Straea Clan in quick succession and made their way in different directions.

As of today, they'd arranged themselves all across the globe in groups ranging from one person to ten. They all had different strength levels, some of which couldn't be measured at all, and from the way they openly announced their presence...

It was obvious they weren't trying to be subtle.

Damien recognized their intentions immediately.

It was like a circuit.

If one wanted to get to the boss, one had to go through the minions.

The act of dispatching Divinities could be considered Straea Clan striking preemptively.

Rather than allowing the palace to decide the terms of this confrontation, they'd clearly displayed their intent as if challenging the palace.

If they chose to circumvent this circuit, they'd be labeled as cowards. A label like that didn't fade easily when the entity in question was a great clan.

Damien should've carefully considered his options here. It might have been safer if he instead tried to storm the castle where Malevalon was.

However, even he fell prey to the pride of the strong.

He didn't just want to end this battle.

He wanted to crush the Straea Clan beneath his foot, totally and absolutely.

For that, what better way was there than to perfectly entertain their little tricks and still slaughter them all?

Since that was the case, Damien first had to get some information.

The strength and location of every Straea Clan group was important because only with this knowledge would he know where to deploy his own forces.

The Sapientia Clan had most of what he wanted. All Demigods and most Gods were categorized by their standards, so the majority of those waiting for him were in the open.

There were a few that they couldn't measure, like Malefice Straea. Others more were completely unknown, never before seen by the world.

Those—

'—are Foreign Nobles.'

Damien was sure of it without even confronting them.

There were only around ten who fit the description, but considering how much the Foreign Nobles had been doing to hide themselves, they likely would only allow this number out into the world at once.

Among them was one Duke Horacio who Damien had already met.

'I see he wants a rematch.'

It wasn't a bad idea, but it wasn't what came first.

'With this...'

Damien looked at the information in his hands.

'...I don't think it's possible for us to lose.'

It had to be known that several thousand Divinities had been revealed by the Straea Clan. This was a number that far exceeded all expectations others had for them.

Of course, most of those were Demigods as was always the case, however...

'...they have over a thousand Gods.'

It was truly a frightening force. If it was any of the other great clans, or if it was the old Void Palace, they would've been defeated with this display of power alone.

A thousand Gods was an insane number. It was a number that was almost impossible, especially with how new the Straea Clan was compared to the other great clans.

But if that was the case, then why was Damien so relaxed about it?

Shouldn't he have been concerned?

Well, as mentioned before, the old Void Palace wouldn't have been able to take it.

But the current palace...?

Those troops who were steadily approaching True Godhood were given all the time in the world to make the transition between Divinities.

And that meant that Void Palace's Gods were also not small in number anymore.

It started with no more than five, who became members of Void Palace's 16 Swords.

However, after those five ascended, it lit a spark behind everyone else.

One after another, those who'd been trapped at bottlenecks overcame those roadblocks, letting them see the land of Gods they'd always dreamed of.

And though his part in it all was minimal at most, they attributed their success to Damien, pledging to him their absolute loyalty.

Every time Damien returned to the palace, it made its appearance during its last visit seem shabby.

The palace itself and all the people within were striving towards greatness with everything they had. It really did fill him with confidence and allow him to act as he wished.

That was why Damien never faltered. It wasn't just because of his confidence in himself, but also the confidence he had in the people around him.

It didn't take more than a few hours from when Damien learned the identities and power levels of his enemies for him to decide which forces to send where.

If one thing was convenient, it was that those Damien had placed on his hitlist were now waiting for him in the open. That meant the teams originally established to deal with them were still right for dealing with them.

That only left him to worry about the people who weren't included in that list.

'Actually, that isn't much of a worry, is it?'

Gods of all levels were waiting for him on the outside.

His people were already occupied dealing with the rest of them.

Didn't that mean...this was a perfect opportunity for him to go out and play?

'That's perfect.'

Damien had just made a declaration that he'd stop hiding his strength, but with the way things were going, he was almost stuck in the palace again.

Now, he definitely had the freedom to move some troops around and fill those empty spaces.

He definitely did.

But, how could he resist?

Damien was practically outside the palace gates already.

His first target, someone he thought he'd have to wait to fight again, but someone who was perfect to use as a way to send a message.

Duke Horacio.

'I'll kill him all flashy and the likes and start this war with a bang!'

Damien's war spirit turned into bloodlust as the thought of fighting filled his mind.

How long had it been since he'd been able to face the world with such recklessness and ignorance?

He didn't know. The only thing that mattered now...

...was the fact that he was absolutely raving at the chance to do it again.

Chapter 1543 Duke Horacio [1]

Damien urgently wanted to get back into the field, but obviously, there was one more important task for him to complete before he did so.

He went to Ice Luan Mountain for a reason, after all. It may have been a spurt of desperation or something like an adventure powered purely by desire, but Damien still ended up getting what he wanted.

With the Harmony Fruit in his hand and war on the horizon, Damien didn't have much time to spend with the comatose Dante.

But he could at least feed his father the fruit and hope that a change would come.

That was Damien's second priority when he returned to Void Palace since the first took a lot more preparation and time to carry out.

Once the various meetings were over and the deployments had been sorted out, Damien went to his father's room with his mother and Serena.

They were the only ones he'd told about the fruit. The news could be spread to others if it actually worked. Otherwise...

Well, it was better not to get people's hopes up.

Dante Void looked peaceful.

His skin shone with the luster of someone who had never been sick before in his life. His expression was calm, like he was taking a short nap rather than suffering from an endless dream.

Damien had to pry his mouth open. No matter what he did, there was no response from the man himself.

Though, Damien had become quite experienced in feeding people who couldn't eat themselves.

The Harmony Fruit was mostly made up of energy, so once it was put into Dante's mouth, Damien's main job was guiding that energy to where it needed to be.

His mind, his body, and his soul.

A pathway needed to be created between these three.

Once that was done, the rest of the work would be on Dante's side.

'There isn't much I can do.'

Damien helped the mana flow as it wanted to. He stabilized the process within Dante's body so it would go according to plan.

But that was all.

Dante didn't wake up. He couldn't do that immediately.

And if he was trying, there was no way for Damien to know:

It was bitter.

Still, it was hope.

'Mom and Serena will watch over him.'

Dante would get better.

Damien kept telling himself that no matter how much time passed.

It was the only way for him to keep himself stable.

It was a world of crimson.

A crimson sun, crimson skies, and dark crimson soil. The monotonous existence of only a single color in the entire vicinity was nauseating, enough to drive anyone insane if they spent enough time here.

That insanity would only be taken to a new level by the complete lack of any life.

This world was created for one man. It was an eternal prison within his eternal prison, a prison that encapsulated his mind and soul while his body rotted outside.

It was the Dark God's gift for Dante Void.

As he was the only one present in this place.

A single man, sat in a meditative posture amidst the crimson environment.

This place never changed. Days and weeks would pass with no activity. Perhaps it had been many years, but Dante had no way of knowing.

He stopped keeping track of time when he realized it was causing his mind to deteriorate.

There was really only one thing he used to measure how long he'd been here.

It was a tally of how many times he'd fought the same battle and lost.

The time had come again.

A being wrapped in darkness appeared over the horizon. It was massive, bigger than the world itself, and its figure was covered in such a powerful aura that it caused space itself to crack and dissipate.

It was a shadow of the Dark God.

And at the same time, it was Dante's warden.

Once again, he stood up.

He had confronted this being 500,000 times by now. This would be the 500,001st battle and the 500,001st loss.

But he still stood up. He would never show weakness to that man.

His eyes opened, a pristine blue that absolutely contradicted the world.

Despite the grueling years he'd spent here, the fire that burned in his heart never dimmed.

He would defeat that man. No matter what he had to do to make that possible, he would do it.

The valiant shadow cast by his back could not be viewed by anyone else. The sacrifices he made to entertain this battle would never be seen by the outside world.

But that also didn't matter.

As long as the Dark God was contained, as long as he couldn't affect the people in the outside world, Dante would continue to fight this battle, trapped within his own mind.

Or at least, that was what he thought.

But as he got ready to fight today, he noticed something different.

'A distinct connection to the outside world.'

Something he thought impossible.

It had miraculously manifested itself.

Dante smiled slightly. A glimmer of hope appeared in his heart.

'Maybe...it is not as impossible as I thought.'

Just maybe, he could one day escape this place.

That sentiment alone was enough to refresh his mind and heal him.

So he walked forward, approaching the dark being on the horizon.

Perhaps he would lose today.

But one day, he would win.

One day, the Dark God would be defeated.

That was Dante Void's entire life purpose.

Duke Horacio wasn't in a group. Unlike many of his compatriots, he decided to stand his ground alone, as if he were waiting for someone.

Because he was.

Damien wasn't the only one looking forward to their rematch. Perhaps they didn't fight that much during their first meeting, but the Duke had clearly sensed that Damien's strength was about the same as his.

The man's choice to retreat was a strategic one. It wasn't that Damien was forced to retreat. Rather, he weighed his options and chose returning to his people over causing a commotion in the Frostbound Mountain Range.

Duke Horacio wanted redemption. Damien wanted that too.

As such, the battleground for their next confrontation had been set. As if they had a mutual agreement between them, they both ignored the rest of the conflict, if only for a moment, to confront each other first.

Damien recognized Horacio's intent easily. That was why he chose the man as his first target.

Since he was getting back into fighting after a long time, he had to pick a battle he would enjoy, right?

The scene was a mountaintop that was separated greatly from society. For tens of thousands of kilometers in every direction, there was only empty scenery without any human interference.

It was a place Duke Horacio chose after a lot of thought, a place where Damien wouldn't be forced to hold back his power.

Duke Horacio wanted to see everything his opponent could offer.

And Damien wanted the same.

So as he approached that place, he didn't hide his aura.

Duke Horacio met him in the sky.

And though no words were exchanged between them, they had a mutual understanding of each other's intent.

This battle had already begun.

It was just a matter of who was willing to make the first move.

Chapter 1544 Duke Horacio [2]

Usually, Damien was the one who took that role, but he found himself beaten to the punch this time.

Their eyes had only connected for a second, but Duke Horacio's arms were already in the air.

VOOOOOOOOOM!

The winds whipped, controlled by his hand. Massive boulders detached themselves from the mountain below and hurled towards Damien.

This kind of move was effectively useless against a Divinity. Mere rocks or boulders couldn't damage them unless their speed was actually in the realm of impossibility.

That was why, when someone who had a power that relied heavily on the environment like Duke Horacio, they would train in a certain technique that others often overlooked.

"Infusion."

Infusing energy into weapons and items wasn't a rare practice. Almost everyone learned how to do it at the very start of their journey, as it was a good way to get familiar with maneuvering energy.

However, that was the end of it. For most people, energy control and output rapidly trumped infusion, because their base abilities became stronger than anything a weapon could match up to.

People like Duke Horacio had to tread a different path because of the uniqueness of their abilities. Rather than a mere training technique, infusion became one of their most important assets, a concept they had to raise to perfection.

Because once they'd reached a high level of infusion, the entire meaning behind their power changed.

This moment was proof of that.

Damien could clearly see the presence of strong malakh within those boulders. In the moment it took for them to be torn from the mountain and flung, they'd been infused with the height of Duke Horacio's power.

It was a proper opening move, a show of respect and ability.

Damien grinned as he watched them approach.

'If he's going to act all proper, then I should respond in kind.'

Damien wasn't averse to showing respect to the enemy. When it came to Duke Horacio, they were enemies by association not by grudge.

He put his hand out in front of him, welcoming the incoming projectiles.

His mana went forth, colorless and formless, almost imperceptible.

It was the mana of Existence.

Damien no longer needed to hide. His enemies already knew he could use Existence. Even if they didn't know what it was, their awareness of its presence meant he could finally stop playing the pig to eat the tiger.

Damien now had the freedom to mess around with his power as much as he wanted.

Which meant he could do things like—

The boulders approached until they were only an inch away from Damien's outstretched arm.

And they stopped.

All of their built-up momentum disappeared as if it never existed in the first place. Even the malakh within the boulders stopped responding.

While Duke Horacio watched, the boulders crunched and morphed, miraculously changing into massive ten-foot-long icicles that turned around and pointed themselves at him.

They were completely freed from the Duke's control, but strangely enough, the energy they used was still his malakh.

"Impressive," he said with a smile.

He had no idea what just happened, but now wasn't really the time to act flustered.

"If you think that's cool, you aren't even close to ready for what's to come."

Damien grinned, flicking his hand.

The icicles immediately mobilized. They shot out jets of frost as if they were missiles and sped past sound and light barriers in an instant.

Duke Horacio immediately mobilized a defense.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

"Khh...!"

Horacio was pushed back by the force of the explosions, but he was uninjured. Compared to his peers, the properties of his malakh were extremely unique.

Duke Horacio had reached a state where he was always in tune with the environment. Regardless of what that environment was, he could make himself a part of it.

This was partly because of his infusion talent and partly because of his telekinesis which had evolved to a level of spatial control.

The Duke's malakh could mimic the properties of the natural environment around it. Whether that meant making it as smooth and fast as wind...

...or as flowing and flexible as water.

Damien felt it when the ice missiles struck. The majority of their force was deflected by the water-like shield of malakh Duke Horacio made.

The missiles tried to pierce, but they simply couldn't fight the downward force of the stream that pushed them into the ground below.

Damien raised his brows in surprise.

'I get it now. This location choice wasn't just for show.'

He smiled as he watched the Duke regain his position.

'He's cunning.'

This location allowed Damien to use his power as he pleased, sure, but it also allowed Duke Horacio to use his abilities to their full potential.

'It really is perfect.'

The first exchange of blows didn't mean much. It was, at most, a greeting.

'He's powerful and resourceful. He'll give me a good fight.'

Damien's thoughts were obvious. He admired the Duke's thinking and was excited to fight him.

As for Duke Horacio...

'He's different.'

Damien only showed a glimpse of it, but that power was obviously what made him an anomaly.

'He is someone that made the Lord wary.'

It was sacrilegious to say something like that in front of the other nobles, but Duke Horacio wasn't afraid to think it.

The fact that anomalies made the Dark God wary was precisely the reason behind conquests like these.

Damien had to be acknowledged as someone of that caliber. Otherwise, they would never be able to defeat him.

'I have to find out more about it.'

Whether he was winning or losing, he would have to drag this fight out as much as possible.

The two of them had very different views on their current battle, but regardless, both very much wanted to fight.

Damien gripped his fists.

The possibilities ran through his head.

What could he use Existence for?

He had to think of things he'd never done before. No, rather, he had to discover things that weren't possible to do with just laws alone.

It was exciting, but it was just as confusing.

'I hope this guy can hold on for a long time.'

Damien didn't underestimate Duke Horacio, but he just couldn't help but be assured of victory.

Their thoughts were different, but they shared a common goal.

A good, long fight.

And for that purpose...

'Let's pick up the pace.'

Damien was going with his favorite, most reliable method of fighting.

He stepped on the air, using it as if it was tangible.

He bent his knee, activating the muscles in his legs.

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

The force his body created as it ripped through the air created huge shockwaves that thundered into the sky and ground.

It was less than a single second of flight, as Damien had already arrived before the Duke in that time.

His fist raised perfectly, shooting forward with a huge infusion of mana pulsating around it.

Since that was the Duke's speciality, that was where Damien would challenge him.

The Duke's eyes narrowed.

Damien's fist approached closer.

And as he made the decision to face it head-on...

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

...the environment around them experienced its first great catastrophe.

Chapter 1545 Duke Horacio [3]

Two fists collided at supersonic speeds. Both were infused with monstrous amounts of energy; opposing forms of energy at that.

The impact was almost perfect. Both forces canceled each other out, pushing those who created them backward.

Meanwhile, the residual force slammed down into the ground below with nowhere else to go.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The mountain peak was completely destroyed, leaving it as a plateau. The shower of flying rocks and debris struck the ground at the base like a meteor shower, creating a mass of craters that destroyed a lot of the flora that once inhabited that area.

The force of just one collision was enough to create a disaster for the creatures that lived on this isolated mountain, but it would've been pitiful if it ended at only one.

Damien and Duke Horacio immediately regained their balance and charged at each other, fists outstretched and mana recalibrated to destroy the other side.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The two traded an array of punches. To the outside observer, they became two flashes of light that rapidly jumped around in the sky, causing sparks to fly with every movement.

Countless shockwaves spread through the air, causing boom after boom to resound through the atmosphere.

But the details within their fight were more complicated than they looked.

Every punch both of them threw was aimed at the other's fist. It was indeed a fight that took physical strength into account, but their true battle was in the concept of infusion.

Telekinesis was a power derivative of spatial laws. The Sacred Abyss Universe law that Horacio used was pretty much just space.

Every time he threw a punch, he infused it with different concepts of space that were present in his home cosmos.

They were highly similar to the concepts of the True Void Universe's spatial law. After all, they were both defining characteristics of space, no matter how convoluted that space was.

When Damien noticed that Horacio was mainly using space, he happily reciprocated using the same law.

Space was his origin as well. His power had blossomed into something magical with the passing of time, but the very first affinity he awakened was space. It was his most favorite law.

Damien's current space law was enhanced by Existence. Using this superior law, he was able to alter and combine concepts in ways he could've never dreamed of before.

A foreign spatial law versus an enhanced one. These two forces continuously collided in ways equal and opposite to each other.

Damien and Horacio constantly made micro-adjustments to their energy, trying to usurp each other's law. However, neither had been able to find an upper hand yet.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Out of nowhere, Damien flipped his body, bringing his foot to Horacio's chin.

BANG!

It wasn't a cheap move, but an abrupt show of proficiency that Horacio wasn't expecting.

Damien's movement took place within the spatial layers. In his perception, the man's body inverted out of nowhere.

His kick to the chin was powered by space, and through the momentum gathered within the spatial layers.

When it struck Duke Horacio, it snapped his head back and sent a shockwave straight through his skull.

The world was warbling in the Duke's eyes.

He could feel within his body, several systems had been spatially displaced. He didn't recognize that it had happened until he started feeling the aftereffects of such a change.

"Hmph!" He snorted.

It was definitely an impressive showing from the enemy, but he wasn't to be outdone!

VOOOOM!

A huge pulse of mana was expunged from his body. Along with it, his organs were rearranged back to their regular positions, and Damien was thrown away by the spatial chaos.

The Duke cracked his neck. Against an enemy like this, using regular power wasn't enough.

His eyes rolled back, revealing his pure white sclera.

Damien's brows furrowed.

'Strange.'

He took three leaps back and made substantial distance from the Duke.

The aura around his body was completely different from before. He still felt like himself, but at the same time, he gave off the feeling of a higher entity.

A strange energy swirled around in the air. Malakh and Mana met in one place, but they did not reject each other as they usually did.

'In front of True Godhood, all energy is just energy.'

Damien's eyes narrowed. He had sensed this aura before. He knew exactly what the Duke was doing.

'An Edict.'

As far as Damien knew, Edicts were exclusive to the True Void Universe. However, it seemed a similar concept existed everywhere.

'A proof of Godhood. It is something granted to all who can reach that level, no matter where they come from. Only the form changes to match the laws of the home cosmos.'

If Duke Horacio was using his Edict, a concept Gods didn't use unless they were facing truly dangerous enemies, then it meant that he'd acknowledged Damien's strength and ability.

He wouldn't be holding back anymore.

'This is good.'

Damien wanted to test his limits. He needed an enemy who wouldn't look down on him.

And he needed to improve Existence, which wasn't something he could do unless the enemy was at his best.

'Let's do this.'

Did he want to go big, or did he want to go fast?

BANG!

Duke Horacio appeared beside him before he realized what was happening.

'Fast it is.'

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Damien moved back at extraordinary speeds, but the Duke always managed to keep up.

The atmosphere made loud bangs as it became unable to handle Horacio's presence.

He was moving on an "impossible trajectory."

That could only mean...

'...he's started to influence time.'

Damien grinned wildly. His body was soon covered in a formelsss film of energy. He disappeared from sight.

The rest of the battle could not be viewed from the outside world. Damien and Horacio were now zipping around inside the fabric of spacetime.

It was a confusing ethereal dimension that almost didn't exist. They both were accustomed to it, but if anyone else was put in their shoes, their minds would have been broken by the sheer conceptuality of their position.

Back and forth, they attacked each other.

Strengthened by his Edict, Horacio was exerting a level of control over the natural world that Damien had never seen in someone other than himself.

It was beautiful.

It was fun.

Damien was having a great time, but he wasn't satisfied with just this.

He didn't want to control the fabric of spacetime.

He wanted to warp reality itself until it was nothing more than a reflection of his desires.

He wanted to be an Absolute.

VOOOOOOM!

The universe heard his call.

The "Existence" within him roared, begging him to complete it and gain the control he spoke of.

Reality began to twist.

That "something" which had been changing in the Heavenly World, that "something" which Damien only recently sensed...

It began to rear its head again.

Damien felt his blood getting hotter. His mind got clearer as his thoughts disintegrated.

At a certain point, all he saw was white.

Space and time were merely a single aspect, but they were fundamental in keeping reality as stable as it was.

Space and time...

Under the weight of Damien's presence, they began to tear.

It seemed something like an "Edict" was blooming inside of his body.

Chapter 1546 Duke Horacio [4]

Damien's strange state of existence confused the entire cosmos.

He had the power of a God. He had the aura of one as well.

However, his actual level hadn't changed much, only being adjusted numerically by the system whenever it noticed that he was too strong for its judgement of him.

Leveling up hadn't affected Damien in many years. In truth, the concept of levels didn't matter to him at all, because he was outside the control of the system.

Damien's Legend was only his to control. It would be enhanced by him and him alone. The system didn't have any place to interfere in the process or aid him.

And if the system couldn't do it, wasn't it natural that the Heavenly Order couldn't either?

Edicts were meant to be granted to people who were acknowledged in their Godhood. They would be manifestations of everything the God stood for, a true coalescence of his self.

But for Damien whose soul and body were unreadable, whose power was Existence itself, how could the Heavenly Order create an Edict?

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The sounds all took place within Damien and Duke Horacio's bodies. Their current environment didn't allow the intrusion of sound.

Spacetime warbled, creating pulses that resonated with each other and spread outward, affecting a large area.

A hundred thousand-kilometer-wide area around the two men had been plunged into chaos.

With the shifting of space, objects and living beings were displaced into random areas. With the shifting of time, life forms aged rapidly and sometimes even aged backward, finding themselves in a completely different state than they were originally in.

If that was the end of it, the problem would be somewhat manageable, but it wasn't even close. The environment itself was subject to the displacement of space and time.

The mountain was sliced into chunks and thrown all around, the forest below aged and died, becoming a barren land. Even the soil went through a myriad of changes, absorbing mana, evolving, and dying all at once.

Still, Damien and Duke Horacio remained unseen, hidden within the folds of spacetime. To an outside observer, this change could only be considered a terrifying disaster caused by a miracle.

With the shifting of space, objects and living beings were displaced into random areas. With the shifting of time, life forms aged rapidly and sometimes even aged backward, finding themselves in a completely different state than they were originally in.

Fighting the Duke took a lot of mental concentration.

Ever since the man began inadvertently touching time, his moves had become more dangerous.

BOOM!

Damien got hit in the shoulder. He flew back, cushioning his fall with the spacetime layers around him.

'Necrosis.'

His cells were dying. They rapidly aged, and as if that wasn't enough, the fundamental organelles within were displaced.

Damien's genetic code itself was being changed by Duke Horacio's power. And as he found out, while the necrosis could be dealt with through Transcendent Regeneration, the displacement couldn't.

He had to manually rearrange his cell structures so that he as a person wouldn't be changed into something monstrous or nonliving.

And all the while, he had to dodge the Duke's attacks and counterattack so that this situation wouldn't be prolonged for too long.

Duke Horacio approached again. His fist went out in the form of a punch, but Damien didn't dodge backwards.

Instead, he ducked down, changing his orientation.

It was as Damien predicted. In the last moment, Duke Horacio pulled his arm up, and the spacetime layers on both sides crushed in.

If Damien had dodged in any direction that wasn't up or down, he would've been caught in that move.

'Damn.'

Damien had a lot of fine control over space and time, but Duke Horacio's Edict was more instinctual. It allowed him to mobilize the power of his surroundings far faster.

'The basis is still telekinesis.'

It was just that his power had been transferred to an ethereal level.

Damien pushed his arms out.

BOOM!

An explosion of space and time rocked the Duke, throwing him back.

Damien chased him, sending forth a barrage of concentrated spikes made of the two laws, cutting through the Foreign Noble's body.

Every power that Horacio used, Damien could use as well.

After all, the basis of the Duke's strength was the two laws Damien was most familiar with.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The back and forth between them was unending. With spacetime itself at their command, they worked to destroy each other's bodies and repair their own.

This process was relatively easy for Damien since he only had to worry about half of it, but it was different for the Duke.

Despite using his whole strength, he was being whittled away by the accumulating damage Damien caused.

'More.'

Duke Horacio pushed his power to the limits. The spacetime layers around him began to flow more uniformly, merging into a massive wave of chaotic energy.

VOOOOOOOM!

He threw his arm forward. The entire spacetime tsunami tore towards Damien, threatening to wipe his entire existence away.

Damien's eyes narrowed.

'This...'

He frowned, but it wasn't an expression of discontent.

'I can do this.'

Damien felt like he could take this move easily, despite what his mind told him.

Logically speaking, he would still have to dodge even if he could dissipate the massive wave of spacetime, however...

As he let his arms fly, controlling the spacetime around him, he found it to be smoother than he thought.

For some reason, the difficulty he had with controlling his mana was starting to disappear. It became easier for him to maneuver it however he wanted.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

With one push, Damien recorrected the spacetime layers to their original positions.

The tsunami dissipated as if it had never existed, but the force it contained was still left untouched.

Damien took the force itself under his control, making that intangible force tangible.

And as he slammed his arms to the side, reality itself obeyed, throwing the Duke back into the outside world.

Damien rushed forward, exiting the spacetime layers. He saw the chaos in the surroundings, but he didn't focus on it.

VOOOOOOM!

Damien's mana roared.

Duke Horacio's malakh did the same. He was obviously trying to push Damien back into the place where he held the absolute advantage, but Damien couldn't allow that.

Space solidified around the Duke, blocking his movements.

He tried to bend it back to its normal state and counter, but it didn't work how he expected it to.

This iteration of Space Law was Damien's own creation. It was completely separated from both of their home cosmos, and it would take more than a moment for Duke Horacio to understand and solve it.

'That was...'

Damien looked down at his hands in surprise.

He swept them through the air a few times, wondering if what he was feeling was a lie.

'Isn't this...easy?'

Damien flicked his finger forward. The prison around Duke Horacio changed. The space turned into darkness, and the darkness itself was a reflection of light, of the elements of Yang.

The laws merged and changed so fluidly that it caught Damien off guard. And on top of that, none of those laws he used were similar to the ones he knew.

'Can I alter things this easily?'

Duke Horacio had used an Edict. Since that moment, this battle had become far more difficult for Damien.

However, why did it feel like he was using an Edict now as well?

The Heavenly Order couldn't provide him with one.

The system couldn't do it either.

But something similar to an Edict still blossomed within Damien's soul.

It was born from Existence, but it was more than just Existence.

It made Damien's usage of Existence far easier, but that was only the base effect.

If one was able to take a peek into Damien's soul, one would be able to see something like a cage, a "housing" for power.

It was still in the early stages of formation, but its sheer presence made Damien's power more accessible.

That was exactly the difference he felt.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

The cage Damien created was blown to bits. The energy that kept it together burst into the surrounding area, razing the sky.

'He's free.'

It was nice to have a moment of thought, but this fight was still going.

Though...

Something in Damien's bones told him it would be over soon.

Chapter 1547 Duke Horacio [5]

Now that they'd been fighting for a while, Damien had a relative understanding of the Duke's strengths and weaknesses.

The man had an incredible physical body. For him to take so many strikes from Damien and not have a single visible wound was an extremely impressive feat.

His laws were also highly developed. Including the concept of inclusion, the Duke had an understanding of his laws that others simply didn't possess, especially not Foreign Races who focused more on their individual powers than the laws they were derived from.

In terms of power, Duke Horacio was the strongest person Damien had fought since Malevalon Straea.

But the two could be differentiated by a single key difference.

'The Duke's mental defenses aren't up to par.'

During their fight in the spacetime layers and even in the time before and after that, the Duke had shown signs of mental confusion wearing him down.

His power was burdensome to handle. Damien knew that from experience. While he was able to compensate for that burden with several different creative methods, the Duke hadn't done the same.

'He's tanking the mental hits, but they're wearing him down.'

That could be observed from the amount of time it took for Duke Horacio to escape the cage Damien made.

Plus, his eyes were unfocused as he attacked in the current moment.

'If it's mental attacks... '

Damien's mind worked at light speed. The gears turned and turned, and suddenly, an idea appeared.

Rather, it was a question.

A method to defeat the Duke arose from within it, but Damien's main focus had shifted to the question itself.

'Existence...it can do anything, right?'

His eyes sharpened.

Seeing the Duke charging at him, he realized that this was the perfect opportunity.

He threw his body forward and propelled himself to the maximum speed he could reach in the distance between them.

He primed his hand, infusing it with Existence mana that held a concept that Damien didn't know yet.

No, it was the concept Damien was currently comprehending.

Chaos.

To enforce absolute chaos onto his enemy's body. That was Damien's goal.

And with the Duke disoriented, he miscalculated Damien's position, completely missing his prepared attack as the man arrived next to him.

In that second, Damien and Duke Horacio made eye contact.

Their faces were less than a foot away from each other, but only for a millisecond before they sped past each other.

But that millisecond was enough time.

Because, unlike the Duke, Damien didn't miscalculate his trajectory.

Damien's palm crashed into the Duke's face.

"Strike one."

VOOOOOOOOOM!

A jaw-dropping pulse of mana split into Duke Horacio's skull. His brain rattled around, and his consciousness was pulled in between reality and the land of dreams.

Vertigo was an understatement for what the Duke experienced. His entire soul was put in a state of disharmony and disconnection from his body.

His spiritual world was heavily protected, but those protections were torn down one by one by the terrifying force that threatened to incinerate his mind.

Damien shot past the Duke and turned around.

The man was wobbling in the air like a drunk. He didn't know what the difference between up and down was right now.

It had to be remembered that Duke Horacio's physical body wasn't in the best state. His cells had died in many isolated locations, and while he'd also corrected his displaced organelles, he had to suffer consequences for using his power at such a minute level.

The Duke was properly incapacitated because of the combined effect of his physical and mental injuries.

It was the perfect opportunity.

BOOOOOOOM!

The atmosphere cracked as Damien redirected his momentum and shot back in the direction he came from without any deceleration.

Like a speeding rocket, Damien turned into a jet-propelled monstrosity that locked onto the Duke and refused to let go.

Damien's hand shot out again. His aim was the same as the previous shot.

However, the Duke wasn't planning to go down so easily.

His brain was a mess and he could hardly think, but his instincts were roaring at him to dodge.

Using the bare minimum amount of malakh he could, he teleported. Just enough to completely avoid Damien's charge.

BOOOOOOOM!

The sheer force Damien carried with him exploded past Duke Horacio. As it grazed his cheek and gave him a sense of death, it brought his consciousness back to reality.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Duke Horacio had understood something in that moment.

If Damien wanted him dead, he could absolutely kill him.

He no longer had the chance to act as he pleased. He needed to recover this situation as best as he could using any means at his disposal.

Rather than heavy-hitting, powerful attacks as he'd been producing thus far, the Duke switched to faster attacks with less power, painting a 360-degree radius around him in spatial chaos of his own creation.

It was a temporary measure to keep Damien wary and away. Until he regained total control over his—

"Strike two."

The Duke's eyes widened.

When did Damien get next to him?

And...how?!

VOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A palm struck his forehead with immense force.

The same scenario repeated itself. The Duke's internals were filled with terrifying mana that broke down his mind and severed the connection between his soul and body.

Everything was spinning. Everything was spinning, including his body.

The Duke couldn't tell if reality was real anymore. He felt like he was back in the spacetime layers as an ordinary mortal.

Memories of the past and present melded as his mental protections were destroyed. His sense of self was thrown into chaos, making him confuse the abilities he had with ones he remembered from others.

Duke Horacio could hardly control his malakh anymore. It wildly sprayed out of his body as his systems entered a confused state.

He was both exerting power and losing control over it at the same time.

Like a machine that was malfunctioning, Duke Horacio twitched as he desperately clutched at straws to keep himself stable.

Unfortunately, Damien didn't give him the chance.

"That's game."

He appeared in front of the Duke as if he wasn't supposed to be far behind the man right now.

He reached out, slammed his hand into the Duke's face, and grabbed his head in a tight hold.

VOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The final expulsion of mana was completely different from the first two.

The Duke's eyes rolled up into his head and leaked blood. He foamed at the mouth, losing all signs of humanity.

His mind was absolutely crushed. His soul was still within his body, but it was swirling like a galaxy and no longer held its original humanoid shape, evidence of the level of dissociation it had experienced.

Chaos.

That was what Damien wanted to come from his attacks. That was what Damien wanted to enforce on Duke Horacio's existence.

And the effects produced by that attempt...

Needless to say, chaos worked exactly as it was advertised.

Duke Horacio was alive, but only by the technical definition of the word.

'That's the right state.'

This was exactly what Damien had intended.

'Now, if I just...'

He unleashed the power of devouring that he held, however, he did not aim for Horacio's entire existence.

Instead, he focused his power on the man's spiritual world, exclusively aiming to devour his memories.

Naturally, it was a success. Damien was no longer a youth who didn't know how to control the essence of the Void.

Duke Horacio's memories flowed into Damien's mind, and at the same rate, they flowed out.

It was time for the primary portion of this experiment.

Chapter 1548 Duke Horacio [6]

Damien took hold of Duke Horacio's existence and maintained it.

He healed the man's body, reconnected his soul, and with those memories he gained, reconstructed his spiritual world.

However, he made changes as he saw fit.

He altered Duke Horacio's confused soul and made it believe it was loyal to Void Palace.

Duke Horacio's new memories now included a scene where he defected from the Foreign Races and Damien took away the Dark God's control over him.

That was partially correct, since the latter half did happen, but obviously, Duke Horacio never surrendered on his own.

Damien wanted to see how much control over Existence he truly had.

It was an incredibly broad concept, so there was no real way for Damien to understand his limits. If he was able to imagine it, he could likely do it with Existence, but he'd never know for certain unless he actually tried.

Battle was the perfect testing ground for Damien, and enemies were the perfect test subjects.

The question he wanted answered today was simple.

Could he alter another living being's existence?

Could he manipulate their soul, their mind, their Legend, and even the very root of their existence to turn them into someone completely different?

As he continued to work on Horacio, he made sure that he didn't make any mistakes. This was his first try, but he wanted to see a success.

It was hard to fool existence. The very core of one's being, a concept a level deeper than the soul, was not something that could be interfered with easily.

Often, even if people had their memory erased or their souls wiped, they'd instinctually react to stimuli that reminded their existence of its past experience.

This could sometimes even lead to miraculous situations where individuals suddenly regain memories they had lost, or where certain lucky souls with powerful "existences" remember the events of their past lives.

Existence was a powerful thing that could withstand any kind of torment or chaos. But Damien was currently interfering with its natural processes.

He was able to "touch" the intangible force since he himself was creating "Existence." As such, he could subtly change the base structure to prevent those "miracles" from ever happening.

Saying it wasn't that hard, but actually doing it was different.

Damien kept making mistakes in the beginning. He altered things that couldn't be altered, and with those alterations, Horacio's soul would morph.

Those subtle changes in the soul alerted Damien, and allowed him to correct his mistakes and continue moving in the right direction.

He didn't have that many tries, but eventually, he was able to do the best that he believed he could.

And when he stepped away, Duke Horacio's body continued to hover on its own, emitting a soft halo as it retained the changes that had been made to it.

Damien watched with anticipation.

VOOOOOOM!

Malakh raged into the surroundings.

Damien stepped back and prepared himself to attack, but...

As the Duke opened his eyes, something changed.

The hostile nature of the malakh disappeared, and within a few seconds, it retreated back into his body.

He looked around in confusion, taking in his surroundings.

It made sense for him to do so. After all, this was quite the strange location.

The ground below was filled with random patches of differently-grown flora. There were swatches of dense jungle that were only ten meters wide, surrounded by deserts that turned into fields of green.

There was a...mountain? ...but it was more of a stump in the ground, surrounded by massive rock formations created by the debris of its now destroyed peak.

As for the fauna that once called this location home...

There really wasn't much left of them.

Most were dead, some had escaped, while others suffered the cruel fate of being fused with other animals due to the massive fluctuations in space.

Duke Horacio was more than just confused about why he was here. Nothing in his memories could explain his current position.

But when he looked at the person in front of him, it all came rushing back.

'If it's him...'

Duke Horacio's eyes sharpened.

Damien kept his poise as the Young Lord of Void Palace just in case, but he already had an attack prepared for safety's sake.

'Though it seems...that won't be necessary.'

The look in Duke Horacio's eyes changed.

In a single fluid motion, he knelt in the air and bowed his head.

"Young Lord."

If it was the Young Lord's doing, then it made sense that he'd arrived here magically.

The Young Lord's power couldn't be comprehended by an ordinary God.

"Hmm..."

Damien nodded his head.

'It worked...I think.'

"Go back to the palace and tell them I sent you. They'll understand"

They wouldn't, but Damien already sent back a message to make sure they wouldn't make a fuss.

According to Duke Horacio's memories, this was already months after he'd sworn allegiance to Damien. However, as Damien didn't trust him, he didn't allow him into the palace.

This was his first time being allowed there, and naturally, he was ecstatic about it.

"I will obey your command, Young Lord."

He spoke stoically to hide it, but he truly was thankful.

The Young Lord treated him far better than the Dark God ever did.

Duke Horacio stood up, and after bowing to Damien once again, he started making his exit.

But...

Wasn't something about this...wrong?

Duke Horacio's brows furrowed. He felt a strange aching in his head, as if something about his current actions was very, very wrong.

He tried to think about it, but the more he thought about it, the more his head hurt.

'What...is it?'

He tried to pry deeper, to find the source of that gnawing feeling that ate away at his soul.

Something wanted to come out.

Something wanted to change.

And if it didn't change now...

"Oh, Horacio," Damien suddenly said.

Damien's call broke the Duke's sudden stray thought.

He turned around curiously.

"Is there anything else?"

Damien smiled.

"No, it's nothing. Congratulations on your promotion."

Click!

One could almost hear the sound of everything clicking into place.

A rush of emotion filled Horacio's mind.

Joy, fulfillment, validation...

They were bright emotions, emotions that burned away the shadows of doubt that began to cloud the Duke's mind.

And as those shadows burned away, the space they once filled was completely occupied.

The opportunity for Horacio to break free of Damien's spell...

That opportunity was already gone.

A bright smile lit up the Duke's face, something that had never been seen on his visage before.

"Thank you, Young Lord!"

They were words of happiness that he spoke before departing for the palace.

But to Damien, they were anything but.

Those words, that expression, they didn't belong to a person who was free.

They belonged to a puppet, the objects of his machinations.

The real-world consequences of such a power were immense.

Anyone and everyone, as long as they were weaker than Damien, could be forced to turn into anyone he wanted them to be.

Anything and everything...

It was gradually coming under his control.

Before long, people would have no choice but to see Damien as a higher being, a God above all Gods.

And that...

That was a terrifying prospect.

Chapter 1549 Ambition [1]

Damien didn't return to the palace with Horacio. He was already on his way to the next stop in his combat circuit.

But if he had, he would've had a great time.

After all, even if Damien informed people that he would come, they still couldn't believe their eyes when a Foreign Noble walked into their palace and kneeled, declaring himself a follower.

It was truly incredulity across the board. From the highest members to the lowest, the reactions of everyone in the palace were right about the same.

For the most part.

There were, of course, the people who never doubted Damien's power, those who believed that if Damien said he could do it, it was possible.

Included in that group were the four women who held more faith in Damien than anyone else.

His wives.

They'd faded into the background a bit after he came to the Heavenly World. Damien definitely made time for them whenever he could, but as he began advancing at a pace too rapid for any other person to follow, they secluded themselves to do anything possible to catch up.

They'd all made the same promise, saying that they would stand by his side, not behind him.

And they all wanted to honor that promise to the best of their abilities.

Rose and her sisters were all different people. The way they expressed and responded to love was different. However, at the most fundamental level, they all held the same emotions.

At times like this, those emotions brought them together and allowed them to form a bond beyond friendship, something none of them thought possible when they first entered the relationship.

After all, while harems weren't uncommon, it was hard to make one work.

Rose was especially experienced in this problem.

When she was young, she'd been driven by her father's experiences to try to bring perfection to Damien's harem behind the scenes.

She suffered a lot for that before realizing that it wasn't worth it. Their natural bond that developed through time and conflict was stronger than anything she could artificially fabricate.

It was back then when Rose learned to live for herself.

She was always a free-spirited and curious person. She met Damien when she was just a girl, exploring the world because she was bored of her royal atmosphere.

At that time, she was immature. She didn't know the kinds of scars and baggage she'd been carrying around with her, and only through her interactions with Damien and the wider world he showed her did she begin to unpack it.

It was a fact that was both a blessing and a curse.

The fact that he had such a huge impact on her life, the fact that he took her off of the small and boring world of Apeiron, it made her love him harder than she'd ever loved before.

Perhaps that was when she started living for him.

She wanted to gain power for his sake. She wanted to stand beside him so he would never be lonely. She wanted to see the peak only if he was there with her.

She'd never really had that ambition on her own. That just wasn't the type of person she was.

Rose didn't abhor power, but she didn't necessarily like it either. It was a necessary thing to her, and while she was well into her adulthood when she finally admitted it, she used it as a coping mechanism for a long time.

The sadistic behavior she'd exhibited on the battlefield had developed into her combat style and had influenced the way her power grew, but it actually didn't stem from a natural sadism.

It stemmed from the things she'd seen and experienced.

A weak person; a compassionate person just couldn't survive in this world.

But hundreds of years had passed.

Rose wasn't just an adult now, she was an experienced adult.

And that experience revealed to her the true heart she'd been hiding for so long.

Rose was calm. She wasn't ambitious, but she really, really liked helping others.

To do so, she didn't mind getting stronger. It was a sort of half-ambition that didn't really drive her anywhere.

But if that was her motivation, then why did she practice so hard?

Anyone who had seen her train called her a monster.

She would constantly place herself within illusions indistinguishable from reality, forcing herself to experience terrifying events.

The number of times Rose had felt real death couldn't be counted with four digits anymore.

Why would she put herself through so much if she wanted to live peacefully?

Rose wasn't afraid to admit that it was all for him anymore.

She wasn't afraid to acknowledge her dependence.

But she also wasn't going to get rid of it.

This was how she was. This was her personality, no matter how others saw it.

She missed her husband. She didn't want to spend time away from him. If she could, she'd spend every second of every day by his side for the rest of eternity.

When Damien was absent for long periods of time, she didn't complain. She was understanding of his circumstances, after all.

But she hated that she just had to accept it.

If she was stronger, wouldn't she be able to go out and experience his adventures together with him?

She didn't want Damien to leave her behind anymore.

And for that reason, she trained herself like she was her own worst enemy.

She put herself through hell and forced herself to either improve or die.

Because of the insanity she showed in training, she raised her strength rapidly.

It wasn't as rapid as some others, but it was an extreme pace that even the most talented people in the army couldn't match.

However, it wasn't enough.

The second Damien sent news that he'd somehow converted a Foreign Noble to their side, she realized that.

She was already doing everything she could.

She really didn't have a way to grow faster, but Damien was moving at a pace that she couldn't catch up to even if she did.

That was when she received word of the deployment notice.

She'd known of its existence for a while. She saw Damien working hard to create it.

However...

'...I never expected my name to be on here.'

Rose and Ruyue were paired together and assigned to take care of a group of Viscounts. Looking at the strength of their enemies, it didn't seem like a difficult task, but...

'The outside world.'

The true Heavenly World.

Truthfully, Rose hadn't even seen it once yet.

She didn't have much of an interest in it.

'But...'

She contemplated it for a moment.

'That might be the only way.'

It was an easy conclusion to come to.

Maybe if she kept herself trapped here, dreaming of peace, she would never actually be able to achieve anything.

Maybe the answer she couldn't find within the palace would be somewhere outside.

Rose liked the palace a lot.

She got along extremely well with her mother-in-law and the rest, and when she could, she would help Hestia in the operations room.

She was also a skilled commander, after all.

To Rose, this life on the backlines was far more her style than fighting directly on the frontlines.

But it was obvious that if she wanted her goal to remain the same, if she wanted to spend more time with Damien, she'd have to go and fight.

Because until there was no more fighting left to be done, Damien wouldn't have peace.

'Okay.'

It was a little funny how she and Damien calmed themselves in the same way.

Since Damien had assigned her this mission, it meant he trusted her strength and believed she'd find something on the battlefield that she'd been lacking.

He never did anything without a reason.

And if her husband was giving her this kind of push, if even he believed in her absurd dreams...

'...then maybe I can too.'

Maybe it was time for her to start living for herself a little.

Maybe she could finally find a purpose of her own, something that could ignite her passion and help her in achieving her ultimate goal.

It was a prospect like none Rose had ever considered in the past.

And honestly...

Like a gentle breeze, flowing through a mountaintop above the clouds, meeting the sun as it set through the sky.

Cold, yet refreshing, putting one's mind at ease, yet filling one's heart with a surge of indescribable wonder.

'...this might not be so bad after all.'

Chapter 1550 Ambition [2]

Rose was an empathetic person. She wore her heart on her sleeve sometimes, even if she tried to keep it hidden.

She was an understanding person as well. She was able to see things from all perspectives and take all things into account before making decisions or letting her emotions overrun her.

But that didn't mean she didn't get hurt.

It was extremely obvious to others how she felt about Damien's continuous long absences, especially when those absences were even longer inside the palace.

However, that was just Rose.

Out of Damien's wives, she was likely the one who missed him the most consistently.

The rest of them all had their own thoughts.

Elena...really didn't mind much.

No matter how much time passed, nobody saw her get dispirited. Nobody saw her missing him. Rather, with every day he remained gone, she got stronger and more determined.

Obviously, the two things weren't directly related, but that was how it looked to outsiders.

Some questioned Elena's feelings for her husband and their Young Lord, but those who mattered like her sisters and her in-laws, Claire, Serena, Hugo, and Persia, didn't raise a fuss.

They knew more than anyone else that those uninvolved people were having a huge misunderstanding.'

And they rightfully corrected them and silenced those voices.

Elena let them speak because they didn't bother her. No matter what they said, it wouldn't be able to affect her bond with her husband.

It was just that the bond they had didn't manifest in a traditional way, at least not to those of the palace.

Elena's ambitions and Damien's weren't that different. Rose and Ruyue also had a desire for strength, and Iris was already far ahead of the three of them, but none of them could really match Elena.

Her competitive spirit wasn't something to be underestimated. When she saw Damien improving at such a fast pace, she didn't get discouraged. She got motivated.

Elena wanted to be something on her own just as much as she wanted to be something with Damien.

For her, whether he appeared or not this was the exact position she'd be in.

In the Heavenly World, as a Divinity, preparing to become something even more.

If Damien didn't exist in her life, she'd still be here. The couldn't be said about Rose, who gained her motivation from Damien, or Iris, who gained confidence from him.

However, that didn't change the fact that she loved him.

She truly cared for him more than anyone else. She loved him just like her sisters and would never feel the same way about anyone else.

It was just that their love wasn't the kind that needed constant nurturing and physical touch.

Their love transcended those bounds. The two of them would always know how each other felt. No matter how much time passed or what the two of them were doing, they would always be there when the other was in need.

Elena wanted to do things outside her relationship with Damien. She wanted personal success just as she wanted success for them as a group.

So the fact that Damien wasn't ever present in her life anymore didn't bother her.

She put her head down and trained, focusing everything she had on her desire to become stronger.

She hadn't left the palace only because she didn't have a need to.

The time dilation was extremely convenient in allowing her to manage her time, and with all the facilities present within the palace walls, she was able to train in an environment she had control over.

This was great for rapid progress. She could experience danger and she could learn how to manipulate her laws with absolute precision.

It was because of the various simulations and rifts the palace had control over that she was able to ascend through the ranks of Divinity so rapidly.

She, Rose, and Ruyue were on equal footing in terms of power when they first arrived here, but at this point, Elena was confident she could beat either in a fight.

Though, it wouldn't be an easy fight.

'Who am I kidding. It wouldn't even be an assured victory.'

Rose and Ruyue were scary people. They might not have had the same motivations as her, but that didn't mean they weren't training hard too.

'Plus, Rose is crazy.'

Rose's training methods were...not something another person could handle.

She and Ruyue had gone extremely broad in their Divinities. Rose was trying to control reality itself, while Ruyue wanted all elements of yin in her grasp.

Unlike them, Elena had chosen to follow a more constrained path. She wanted to take a single concept to its absolute limit and transcend it.

This meant that she wasn't as versatile as the two, but it also meant that the potency of her attacks couldn't be compared with theirs.

'The problem is...'

...she hadn't been outside in a long time.

It was the exact reason she could stand proud as a level 550 Demigod who could fight above her rank, but now that such a long time had passed, it was only inhibiting her.

She needed real-world experience. She needed real danger, real death around her so that she could advance beyond this level.

As someone who'd personally experienced it, Elena knew the value of danger just as well as the next expert.

The things one could discover when control was removed from the situation, when life and death were ambiguous, were absolutely monstrous in comparison to what one could learn within the confines of their own security.

If there was anything Elena was sure of, it was that her power wasn't just a showpiece. It needed to be used properly, or there was never a point in having it at all.

Originally, she planned to slip out of the palace on her own and figure things out from there, but she didn't get that chance.

Though, the reason brought a smile to her face.

'Damn. He read me.'

She was currently looking at a plan that had been made not long ago.

It was a deployment of various powerful forces with the goal of destroying the core forces of the Straea Clan.

And included on that list was her very name. Not just on a little Demigod, but on an entire group of five.

She wasn't given a team, she wasn't given any special orders.

Damien's intent was clear.

"Go and have fun with them. Just keep me updated."

'Really...' she thought, her smile growing wider.

'I fell in love with the right man.'

Freedom and independence, the things she valued, were never taken from her.

Instead, he was always by her side, pushing her forward and helping her improve.

'Then, I can't disappoint him, can I?'

The gift Damien had prepared was a good appetizer, but it wasn't Elena's entire purpose for leaving the palace.

No, she had a personal quest that she'd yet to complete.

Every clue she'd found led to this place, to the Heavenly World, yet she hadn't heard a single peep about them since she'd come here.

The Valkyries.

Elena's people, including her parents...

What happened to them?

And where could they possibly be?

These were questions she needed answered.

And rather than waiting for them to reveal themselves...

...she was going to find them herself.

That was something she'd sworn to herself from the moment she embarked on her path to strength.