

## Void 241

### Chapter 241 Primordial Undying Realm [5]

A flaming red crystal cocoon sat silently within a wasteland where even the cracked ground was the same color.

The crystal was semi-transparent, but even if one looked inside, one would only see a murky black fog.

Crack!

Soon enough, cracks began to form on the crystal before ballooning and covering the entire surface.

Boom!

A glistening white hand reached out of the largest crack and grabbed onto the side of the crystal. Soon enough, a second hand followed. Once they had gotten a firm grip on the hard crystal layer, they pulled apart, causing the already fragile material to shatter.

The murky black fog that filled the crystal parted before suddenly gathering towards a central point, as if being attracted by a suction force. And in the next instant, it disappeared.

What was left was the naked body of a man who stood at 1.9 meters tall. His skin was like a flawless jade and as smooth as a baby's bottom. His eyes were a swirling yin yang of amethyst and red, and his hair was midnight black with streaks of silver like shooting stars.

This hair, which had once only been shoulder length, had grown to the point where it cascades down the man's back, almost touching his buttocks.

"Ahhh..." A refreshed sound left the man's mouth as he regained his bearings, his sparkling eyes gazing around in wonder.

'I feel like I've been reborn.'

The man, who was naturally Damien, felt like ages had passed since he had entered the Primordial Undying Realm that he was currently within.

After the first round of strengthening he received from the strange magma that flowed from the ground beneath him, he had entered a strange state of meditation where he couldn't feel the passing of time. His only focus was the constant changes in his body.

'Damn, my internal body clock feels out of wack.'

It could've been days or it could've been months, he honestly didn't know how much time he had spent. But he was extremely happy with his gains regardless.

Swoosh!

He waved his hand in the air. There was no mana imbued into the action and he didn't even try to put strength into it, but this small movement caused the winds around him to whistle.

'The space here is incredibly sturdy, even sturdier than it is in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range. But the power of my motions right now...if I was on earth it wouldn't be difficult to crack space with just this much.'

It was amazing. Not only did the strengthening improve his physical strength and defense, but it also affected more elusive things. His throat which had been strengthened to breathe the breath of a dragon and even his eyes which he received from a spider, even these received a portion of strengthening.

'But if I walk around with this much power, I might accidentally break shit.'

Cracking his neck, Damien took a stance and began practicing basic fist movements and steps. His feet danced around the cracked ground and his hands waved through the air as if it was an interpretive dance.

In the beginning, each and every step he took caused the ground to crack and each movement of his hands caused the winds to rage, but as time passed, the effects he had on the environment slowly lessened.

What felt like days passed like this, with Damien unceasingly absorbed in consolidating his new strength, and finally, he was able to move normally with steps light enough to not even leave footprints in sand.

When that point was reached, Damien opened his eyes once again, but the first thing he realized was that he was no longer in the same place he was when he started his movements.

'This is...'

Surrounding him, there were roughly 100 crystals that bore striking resemblance to the one he had broken out of only a few days prior.

'Are these the other geniuses that entered with me? Why is there so little?'

But it didn't take long for him to reach the answer. A being like the Primordial Undying Tree, for it, there wouldn't be much difficulty in creating multiple spaces for similar trials to take place.

These must be the survivors from his group alone.

'But why am I out while they're still going through it? Did I not reap the benefits properly?'

But that wasn't it. He was the bearer of the Void Physique. If there was one thing he was confident in, it was reaping all possible benefits of a reward like this one.

'Ah right, that's what it was.'

His Void Physique. It could make the absorption of a treasure that would usually take years to absorb easily reduce to only a few weeks of time.

Like this, it was only natural that he finished before them. It was also natural that he would receive much more strength than them.

'What an overpowered physique.'

To date, he had only discovered the one main function and a few branches of the same function of the physique. He didn't know if there were more benefits for having it, but even if the known function was the only one, he'd be content.

It was an ultimate supportive ability. It would prevent any foreign mana or energy from invading his body, which would counter most poisons as well as more elusive things like possession.

It would also help him safely absorb any kind of treasure as long as it was energy based. As long as the treasure didn't outclass him by too much, he'd be fine.

It was overpowered, but it wasn't broken. But that was perfect. Damien loved training and he loved gaining strength that he earned himself. Even a reward like this one was only granted due to his endurance.

He'd be disappointed if his path to strength was as easy as just absorbing insane Godly Treasures until he reached the peak in one leap.

While Damien was thinking, he sat down in meditation, waiting for the others to wake from their slumbers. It had already been a few hours since he arrived in this area, but he hadn't seen any way to leave it.

Obviously, the next stage or trial or whatever would be something that the entire group would participate in.

Damien's mind drifted away from the current circumstances and began to meld with the space around him.

The boundless wasteland he was in started to feel not so boundless after all. It was just a trick of perception, with space mirroring itself and appearing endless when instead the true area was only a small portion of what it seemed.

Damien felt the layers of space and sent his awareness through them one by one. If the outside world of the Cloud Plane had spatial layers that felt like fabric, the 3000 Beast Mountain Range had layers that felt like viscous water.

As for the space within this secret realm, each layer was like an opaque wall that he had to put genuine effort into passing through.

'Teleportation within this realm will be extremely difficult.'

No, it was almost impossible. His current understanding of space hadn't reached a level even close to being able to freely manipulate the space in this realm.

'As for my offensive abilities...'

He waved his hand lightly, causing space to ripple slightly before distorting into a small black hole on his palm.

'Strange. It's as if there isn't a single law for the space here. It's malleable when it wishes and firm when it wants. It does as it pleases. As long as I'm not attempting to teleport, it doesn't limit my usage of spatial abilities.'

Damien couldn't help but marvel at the abilities of the Primordial Undying Tree. That old monster of a tree was even capable of doing something as unfathomable as this. It was insane.

Crack!

While he was testing his abilities, he heard a light cracking sound from the distance. This sound was soon followed by many others to the point where it seemed like an orchestral crescendo of cracking.

And soon enough, the 99 crystals surrounding Damien were shattered into pieces.

Chapter 242 Primordial Undying Realm [6]

"Bastard! Come let this Big Sister hit you!"

Flames danced wildly in the atmosphere as they rushed forth and seemed to chase a single man who was drifting around with a smile on his face.

"Ah! How can you bully a poor man like me? What am I supposed to do now?" Amused words left the man's mouth. Although the flames that surged towards him seemed to have the intent to kill, he knew that wasn't the case.

"You! You dare tease me?! Let me show you who's boss around here!" A woman yelled towards the man who was dodging her blows without a care in the world. Her face was flushed from the anger that was evident in her words.

But all she was met with was light laughter from the man who her anger was directed at.

Damien smiled in amusement as he thought about how the situation ended up like this.

A few minutes ago, the crystals that decorated the area around him had shattered and the geniuses within them had left their confines.

Unlike Damien, they were somehow able to keep their clothes on their bodies when they left their crystals. Or maybe, they had put clothes on before breaking out. Either way, there weren't any awkward situations that arose from such a problem.

Instead, once the geniuses regained their bearings, they gazed at each other warily, taking note of the people who had been able to survive the hellish trial they had just gone through.

And of the 100 people in the area, one was a strikingly beautiful girl with flaming red hair and eyes. She looked down upon the others like a proud swan, not caring about their various gazes.

That is...until she saw a certain man among them. That man, although they had only met twice, had taken advantage of her both times in different ways.

When she saw his face, her mind drifted back to the words her best friend and sister had told her before they entered this realm. The meaning of the term 'little brother' that the man in front of her had used at that time.

And when she remembered that meaning, her face became bright red. In the next instant, she attacked.

And that was how the current situation came about. One chasing and the other fleeing in what looked like a comedic skit due to Damien's actions but was actually a somewhat fierce confrontation.

Or to be more accurate, a probe.

'This man isn't simple at all. Luna was correct as always.' Feng Qing'er marveled inwardly as she watched the fleeting movements of the man named Damien.

Lunaria Snow had already told her that the man was a strong contender even for them, but she hadn't been able to believe it. She was the Fire Phoenix Queen, ranked top 3 on the 3000 Beast Record. There was no way for her to easily accept that a random stranger was able to match her prowess.

But the scene in front of her forced her to see reality. She wasn't going all out, she wasn't even near the peak of her abilities, especially with the previous strengthening she had received. But still, even the level of strength she was currently using was enough to easily deal with anyone below the top 5 on the rankings.

That was the difference between them and the rest. That was the chasm that caused a reality where the top 5 positions rarely ever changed from the ones who occupied them.

Heaving a light sigh, she decided to stop her actions. There was no point in the ongoing situation anyway. The fierce reddish-orange flames that danced through the surroundings slowly withdrew back into Feng Qing'er's body.

Damien stopped fleeing as well. From start to finish he hadn't made a move to attack. He figured that the best way to deal with this probe was to not show anything at all, while also making it clear that he couldn't be easily messed with.

Even if his teleportation was suppressed, he could still move freely within a 1-meter radius. And coupled with his lighting, speed wasn't something just anyone could compete with him in.

'This girl truly deserves her spot in the rankings.'

Although it was just a sea of flames like he had witnessed many times before, Damien wasn't an ordinary person. He could see clearly the amount of fine control Feng Qing'er had over her mana, as well as the purity of the mana itself.

Her mana was as dense as a mountain. The sheer physical force of her flames was enough to crush some of the weaker geniuses who entered the Primordial Undying Realm with them, not to mention the heat.

And with her being a Fire Phoenix, her flames couldn't be as simple as just that much. He knew how many cards she must've been hiding. That was also part of the reason he didn't pay much attention to her attacks and chose to have fun with it instead.

Well, that was like 20% of the reason. As for the rest...

'Teasing people with personalities like hers has always been oddly satisfying.'

Damien smiled lightly at the thought. He really couldn't help himself. He knew that his actions could be considered flirting by others, but he didn't care.

In a place like the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, he could act as he pleased. There was no such thing as making lasting relationships like love in this place, since he would be leaving at some point and the people here didn't have that ability.

So, he teased and enjoyed to his heart's content. Especially with a woman like Feng Qing'er, he knew he didn't have to worry about any burdensome feelings. Her relationship with that Lunaria Snow seemed to be proof of that.

'What am I thinking about at such a time?'

The suddenness of the situation ended up slightly lowering his sense of urgency, but he came back to his senses soon enough.

Ignoring the geniuses who were looking at him with a slight bit of fear now, he surveilled the surroundings.

'Hmm, nothing seems to have changed on the surface, but space isn't the same as it used to be.'



"Oi, rank 3, did you feel it?" Damien asked.

"Are you talking to me?" Feng Qing'er responded in displeasure.

"Duh, is there anyone else here that's ranked 3rd?"

"Hmph! I don't like your tone at all."

"And do you think you have the ability to fix it?" Damien replied with a grin.

Feng Qing'er gritted her teeth. 'If it wasn't for mother's suggestion, I would've burned you to ashes already!'

But outwardly, she just snorted once more. "I've felt it clearly. The flames that swirl through the underground have already cooled, and they seem to be flowing more naturally towards the west. If I'm not mistaken, the exit to this area should be there."

Damien raised his brow. He had come to the same conclusion, but her method seemed to be much more interesting than his.

"Right. But with the way we've all been gathered here, I'm sure everyone needs to pass through for the next trial to start. So, rank 3, why don't you rally up the small fry and bring them with us?"

"Hmph, you don't have to tell me. I was already planning on doing that."

Luckily, the other geniuses weren't able to hear their conversation, as they were generally farther away. Otherwise, there might've been a commotion at Damien's way of addressing them.

Soon enough, the crowd of 100 moved towards the west and arrived at the point of space Damien had noticed earlier.

Just like his previous assessment, space here was flexible. Unlike the solid space that had infested the rest of the area, the point in front of them was malleable, almost as if it was urging them to walk through it.

And walk through it they did. There was no hesitation in the steps of even the weakest among them.

The light of spatial fluctuations covered the group, and when they opened their eyes once more, they were in a completely new environment.

Gone was the barren wasteland and blistering heat of before. It was replaced by mountains and plains in an area that seemed far too large to fit inside the world tree.

"The Primordial Undying Tree is truly magnificent."

A plethora of amazed gasps rang out. The area surrounding them spanned farther than the eye could see. And unlike the trick of perception that made the previous area seem endless, this one was truly so.

"It seems like this next trial will be something big," Damien commented with a serious expression.

There was no way the trial would be simple if they were given so much space. Especially if they took the precious trial as precedent.

"Right. If the last trial was a test of will you weed out the ones who don't even deserve to step foot into this realm, this will be the first true trial that we have to surpass." Feng Qing'er added.

With such a large area, it was impossible for the trial to just begin without them being informed of its contents. But, the one administering the trials was a tree. How would it even inform them?

But they weren't left guessing for long.

In front of each and every one of the geniuses, a light blue holographic window emerged from the air.

[The Primordial Undying Tree is gazing at those who entered its realm.]

"The Primordial Undying Tree is gazing at those who entered its realm.]

A wave of shivers rushed through the group of geniuses when they received the prompt. A good portion of them even took the time to warily glance around, trying to spot the tree that was apparently watching them.

But it was a futile effort. Damien knew this well. If the tree was anywhere in the general vicinity, there was no reason for the message to pop up in a system window. And if the tree didn't want to make its gaze known, there was no way they'd ever know they were being watched.

"How insanely powerful..." a soft mutter left his lips.

Even Feng Qing'er subconsciously nodded at his words. This kind of power wasn't something they could imagine. They doubted even the Beast Kings had the ability to send messages through the system.

[The Primordial Undying Tree watches the outsiders.]

[The Primordial Undying Tree shakes its branches]

[The Primordial Undying Tree decides to speak.]

Damien's eyes sharpened.

[The Primordial Undying Tree administers a trial.]

A new form of text appeared in the eyes of the geniuses.

[Trial of Stars]

[Although there are a myriad of ways for the Primordial Undying Tree to test those who enter its realm, and a myriad of ways for their worthiness to be proven, there is one thing that trumps all else.

Strength.

In this world, there is nothing more important than strength, and for the first elimination round, the Primordial Undying Tree will be testing just that.]

Suddenly, 100 bright flashes of light appeared in the sky like stars. After showing their splendor for a second, they began to fall.

"What?!"

"They're aiming for us!"

While some of the geniuses panicked at the rapidly approaching stars, Damien and Feng Qing'er simply stood and watched them descend.

When those 100 stars reached a point near the geniuses, they split into formation and shot into the foreheads of all those present.

100 stars. 100 geniuses. It was obviously preordained.

The foreheads of those geniuses shone with starlight before the scene settled down. Now, there were dull silver star tattoos on each of their foreheads.

[100 stars representing 100 contestants. Within the lands of the small realm, there are a plethora of different beasts and species. Every time one kills another within the realm, their star will grow. The rate of growth depends on the strength of the opponent.

If a contestant kills another contestant, they will be able to absorb half of the light of the latter contestant's star. The star colors are ranked as follows: Silver, Gold, Purple, Black, White.

Only those with Black Stars by the end of the given time period will be able to move on to the next trial.

Trial Duration: 1 year.]

Damien's eyes narrowed. 'As expected, it's an elimination round.' When he looked at the geniuses around him, he noticed that each and every one of them was eyeing the others with concealed greed.

He shook his head. 'These idiots.'

Naturally, the fact that killing another genius would allow them to absorb half of their starlight was too enticing of an offer for them to refuse, but the fact that they were so obviously showcasing their greed over just this much was pathetic in his eyes.

They didn't even have starlight at the moment, so what was the point of all this tension they were creating? It was counterintuitive to the max.

But Damien wasn't of the mind to care about this. 'A year?! This trial alone will take a year?! Shit!'

He wanted to leave the forest in 7 months at the latest. No, he had to. The Empyrean Dragon Realm opening was at that time, and no matter what, he needed to show up there.

With all the benefits he was gaining from this trip to the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, he no longer cared much for the treasures of that realm, but that wasn't why it was important.

'Rose...'

She would be there. For the first time in a year, he would be able to see his beloved. He had no idea how long the Empyrean Dragon Realm would stay open and he also had no idea what would happen after it ended. Either way, there was no way in hell he was going to miss the opportunity to see the woman he had been missing with all his heart.

He gritted his teeth in frustration. 'What can I do?' This was a realm made by a tree that vastly outstripped him in power. From the start, it was made clear that the only way to leave this realm was when it closed or through death.

'Fuck!'

Damien lamented his fate. An entire year in this trial, and even more time in the rest of the trials. By the time he edited this realm, the outside world would've changed already.

The war on the horizon, the movements of the Nox, Devil worshippers, and Wicked Sects, they were all things that would become increasingly prevalent in the coming times.

Not to mention, if they didn't contact Tian Yang around the time they were supposed to exit the mountain range, he'd likely charge into the fray to save them. And if that happened, the outside world would lose a powerhouse because of them.

'I can't let that happen.'

Damien racked his brain for a solution. 'Right, that could work.' He turned his gaze to the other geniuses.

'If they die, if the number gets reduced to a point where the entire purpose of the trial becomes futile, perhaps it will allow us forward earlier.'

A dense bloodlust began to slowly radiate from his body. It was so palpable that the air around him seemed to become dyed red.

'Good. This plan will work. It has to work.'

Inky black dragon scales showed signs of protruding from his flesh. His eyes were almost engulfed in that blood-red color.

But at that moment, he sensed something else.

'Eh?'

It was weak and so ethereal that not a single other person was able to sense it, but he felt it clearly. It was so jarring to him that it snapped him out of his bloodlust.

The other weaker geniuses felt a cold sweat run down their backs. They didn't know where the feeling was coming from, but they felt for a second that they were being stared down by a horror-inducing beast. It was a visceral feeling that made them think death was on the horizon.

Many geniuses raised their guard when that feeling suddenly vanished. Evidently, this trial would be anything but simple. The beasts here must be incredibly powerful.

The crowd slowly dispersed from the area they were in. The trial had already started, after all. Every second from this point forth would count.

Feng Qing'er cast a strange look towards Damien before turning and departing as well. As expected, she had been aware of where the previous feeling originated from.

A hooded figure watched the commotion from the back of the crowd. Inconspicuously, a smile formed on their face. "Hehe, how interesting." Soon after, that figure disappeared as well.

A few moments later, only Damien was left in place, so deep in thought that he hadn't even realized that he was now alone.

Chapter 244 Trial world [2]

"Did I feel wrong?"

Damien wondered. That feeling was so fleeting that he almost questioned whether it was an illusion felt due to his insanity for a second.

But no. It couldn't be. That was a feeling that he had only felt a few times before, but he knew it clearly. It had been ingrained in his body.

'That essence is...'

Without wasting a second, he sat down on the ground and entered a meditative state. His awareness slowly spread from his body and covered the area 10 meters around him.

His forehead wrinkled. 'Why can't I sense it anymore?'

He could feel the extremely solid space and even the myriad of elemental essences in the surroundings, but that specific essence was no longer present.

'No, it's there. I just don't know how to look for it.'

It was something he had tried to grasp for so long, yet even now he barely had an inkling of the path forward.

It was an essence equally as esoteric as space, yet pertaining to a completely different concept.

Time.

For a brief instant, Damien had felt the essence of time swirling through the surroundings.

Although time, like space, would always have its essence permeated through the surroundings, maintaining the order of the universe, what Damien had felt was different.

He had not yet reached the level where he could freely feel the essence of time. If he had done so, his status panel wouldn't be filled with question marks. The affinity for time would be clearly documented.

For his affinity to not yet have bloomed, it showed just how elusive the element itself was.

And for Damien to be able to feel its essence even for a second, there had to be an influx of it.

'Right, I have to be right! If it's like that, then I no longer have to worry.'

He put all his focus into trying to once again feel that essence. Although he had a guess as to why there was a large amount of it in the atmosphere, he didn't want to gain consolation from a mere guess.

His awareness weighed down on the atmosphere like a mountain. He no longer gently allowed it to interact with the surrounding essences, instead bearing down on them and forcing them out of the way, trying to clear the area.



It was a grueling process. These elemental manas weren't things he could just randomly interact with, since he didn't have any affinity towards them. He had to use his affinity for space to try and bend and distort the spatial mana in the atmosphere to actively push away all other outside influences.

And with the sturdiness of the space in this realm, it was an incredibly hard task.

It took almost an entire day for him to succeed in this endeavor, but he wasn't discouraged by this measly speed. He had an entire year in this realm, and he had confidence in his ability to succeed in this trial. Brute strength was, after all, the thing he was best at.

Damien sat still like an old monk, his entire attention on the ethereal essences that made up the air. He didn't even put an ounce of his focus towards the outside world. If someone were to sneak up on him at the moment, he'd be completely vulnerable to their attack.

Well, that was if his eyes and Danger Sense from long ago weren't always passively activated.

A day passed, then two, then three, until finally, an entire week went by with no movements from Damien.

And at that time, his body slightly jerked.

Within Damien's mind, the image of a formless and colorless essence was attempting to form. It swirled around the atmosphere calmly and unhurried, not making its presence known in the slightest.

But still, it was there. It was there and extremely important. Even if others weren't able to sense it or come into contact with it, they would always subconsciously be aware of its presence.

Damien had finally glimpsed the essence of time.

But his comprehension hadn't increased at all in this week. He hadn't even bothered to try. Instead, he had brute forced his way through the process just so he could feel the essence itself.

His goal at the moment wasn't comprehension and he wasn't trying to awaken the affinity. Instead, all he was trying to do was confirm something.

And seeing the essence swirling in front of him, Damien felt his entire body slightly relax.

"Hahaha!" He laughed. It was an uproarious and joyous laugh that one wouldn't expect from someone who had simply been sitting still for an entire week.

"I was right! I was right! Hahahaha!" He almost jumped around like a little kid.

There was only one thing Damien cared about right now. It was the fact that he'd have to spend a year within this realm and that he'd miss his chance to see Rose again.

But when he sensed the essence of time, he felt a faint glimmer of hope. Now that he had properly investigated, that glimmer of hope had fully bloomed.

"Hahahaha! The time flow here has been altered! So it's like that, it's like that!"

The time flow within this realm was different from the outside world. It wasn't just a simply 1:2 ratio either, it was much larger than that.

Since Damien wasn't an expert or even a novice in the time element, he wasn't able to come to a proper conclusion on the exact conversion ratio, but he was still someone with a blooming affinity towards the element.

Not to mention, space and time were always mentioned in the same breath. There would rarely ever be one without the other. Due to this, he had a sort of instinct that he couldn't quite explain.

Although he didn't know how much time would pass in the outside world while a year passed here, he knew that it wouldn't be long at all. He knew that he'd still have plenty of time before the predetermined date of his departure from the mountain range.

And if it was like this, he no longer had any worries.

'I can go crazy.'

In an environment with no 4th class existences who could stop him, where killing meant moving forward in the trials, where time was sped up, he didn't have any worries.

He could go crazy. He could relieve some of the stress that had been unknowingly built up over time since he had come to the Cloud Plane.

Even he wasn't aware that he had built up stress until this moment. Only when his worries about Rose were cleared, he felt the massive weight that had been burdening his shoulders.

Such was the result of him being constantly embroiled in things that a normal 3rd class existence shouldn't be getting involved with.

But none of that mattered. Looking at the rolling plains and forests, as well as the towering mountains in the distance, Damien felt a smile bloom on his face.

Crack!

The ground cracked under the pressure of his feet. Black lightning raged across his body. And in the next second, he disappeared.

Boom!

A dust cloud rose from his movements and followed him as he rushed towards the scent of beast mana in the atmosphere.

Perhaps, it was time to go on another killing spree.

## Chapter 245 Trial World [3]

When Damien made it down the small hill where the group of geniuses originally arrived at, the first thing he was met with was a vast and seemingly endless forest. From within the forest, the cries and howls of beasts could be heard.

Ignoring any unnecessary thoughts, he continued to charge forward, his speed enhanced by lightning and a hint of space.

This was something Damien only learned how to apply recently, but had been pondering over for a long time. It was a new movement technique that specialized in short linear bursts rather than free movement like teleportation.

The reason he had never prioritized its development was simply because with the freedom of teleportation, why should he? His teleport skill was incredibly versatile, and it was able to carry over momentum when he moved through space, so there was no need for a technique like this.

But he still put some spare time into developing it. After all, it wasn't the concept of the technique that mattered, but what it represented.

Right now, every time Damien moved, a flash of lightning would slightly swirl and mix with his restricted spatial mana, creating a new illusory form of lightning. This lightning would then burst, causing him to essentially teleport forward close to 5 meters at a time.

But unlike normal teleportation, this effect was mainly brought about by pure speed.

And the reason it was important? Damien had reached a preliminary understanding on how to fuse his different elemental manas as one. Although his foundation and knowledge on the principle were lacking, he was totally fine with taking things one step at a time. He would eventually reach the proper answer as long as he kept trying.

Damien flashed forward speedily, ignoring all the low-rank beasts that littered the surroundings. In the first place, most of them had already been killed by the other geniuses. But even if they weren't, Damien wouldn't care.

He was familiar with this kind of setup. It was more efficient to hunt a smaller number of stronger beasts than a large number of weak ones. It'd probably reap him better rewards as well.

Damien's steps didn't halt even when he came to the edge of the forest, instead, speeding up. He didn't have a target location, but he at least wanted to get somewhat farther into the small realm.

"A trial of simply strength and hunting. Although I would prefer it if it was something so simple, I highly doubt a venerable old monster like the Primordial Undying Tree wouldn't have a few tricks up its sleeve."

Damien had a lot of spare time as he moved since there weren't any beasts in the area that could threaten him, so he decided to ponder on the nature of the trial.

"Not only that, but the trial window also didn't mention any treasures or rewards for the winner. The only reward is moving forward to the next trial.

"But the Elf Queen had clearly stated that there would be rewards in every trial. Sometimes, the treasures we could gain wouldn't be from completion but instead from participation.

"A secret realm within a small realm in a secret realm? Haha, imagine. But still, there has to be something."

Damien recalled the trial window once more, trying to find flaws in the wording. It would always be some sort of loophole or suggestion within the original text that would contain hints at times like this.

"Hmm, according to the trial window, it isn't just beasts and contestants within this realm. Another lifeform? Maybe an indigenous population?"

Damien's thoughts raced. 'If there's an indigenous population of sentient beings living here, the trial probably won't be simple. Although we outsiders can start a war here without worries since we won't be staying for long, I doubt the Primordial Undying Tree would appreciate us committing genocide of people it chose to house in its realm.'

The line of thought came out of nowhere, but Damien couldn't stop thinking of it. After all, he needed to plan for unexpected situations.

Unbeknownst to him, the answer to his questions was only a few tens of kilometers away from him.

Within a murky swamp, a little girl had fallen into the muddy ground in front of her, her legs unable to move anymore. Still, she did her best to move. Her immature hands clawed at the ground in a bid to inch her body forward.

"Huuu...Huuuuman..." a low growl was emitted from the space behind her.

"Human...kill..."

"Kill...kill..."

It was soon accompanied by tens, maybe even hundreds of other similar growls. The atmosphere of the swamp was dark and gloomy, making it hard for the sun to show its color, but the faint outlines of the groaning creatures could still be seen.

Their bodies varied in size and girth, some being 3-meter tall giants while others were merely 1-meter tall like dwarves. Their bodies also ranged from fit to lean to fat without any sort of rhyme or reason. But they all had similar features otherwise.

The creatures stood on two legs and had humanoid shapes. Their heads and bodies were riddled with holes and wounds and their gait was awkward and unnatural.

But the most striking feature was their eyes. The eyes of these creatures were hollow and caved in. Their eyeballs were entirely blackened as if they had been corrupted by poison.

These creatures seemed to move with one will. The will to kill and devour the human they sensed in front of them.

And the little girl knew this. She knew this, but she didn't want to die. Glistening tears streaked down her face as she continued to claw at the ground. If only her legs worked, she might've had a chance to escape. If only the ground was more solid, movement might've been easier.

But unfortunately, none of those were the case. As the little girl tried her best to move forward, she was soon blocked by one of the many massive boulders that littered the land.

"Ah..." a slight murmur was all she could get out of her mouth. She had been running and running for days on end. Her eyes were muddled and her throat was dry, but she couldn't stop running.

'Somebody...somebody please...!' The words she wished to say couldn't make it out of her throat. She knew she no longer had hope of surviving.

For the first time, the little girl decided to turn back and take a look at her approaching murderers.

The crowd of humanoid abominations hadn't stopped moving, uncaring of her pleas. By this point, they had already arrived near her.

The little girl closed her eyes. 'Remember! Remember to never let them get you! No matter what, you have to remember!'

A mournful voice rang out in her head. The little girl gritted her teeth before reaching under her torn shirt and grabbing the final measure of protection she had been left with.

The dagger in her hand was rusted and already broken in half, but the rest of the blade was enough to do what she needed to do.

The memories of what happened to her village, to her mother and father, were still fresh in her head. Without a hint of hesitation, the little girl pointed the dagger towards herself and plunged it forward.

But...the pain never came.

"Eh?"

When she opened her eyes, she saw a large hand in the space between the dagger and her neck. No matter how much she used her small strength to push forward, she wasn't even able to leave a scratch on that hand.

The little girl looked up with her watery eyes and saw a face filled with warmth and pity looking back at her.

It was the first time she had seen eyes as mystical as the ones in front of her.

Chapter 246 Trial World [4]

Sensing warmth for the first time in many days, the little girl felt the firm will that she had just built up crumble in an instant. Her watery eyes once again began to pour with tears as she clutched the hand of the man in front of her.

She didn't know where he came from and she had been told many times not to trust strangers. But she didn't care. Seeing someone other than these horrifying creatures and seeing someone who was looking at her with such warmth had pushed her over the edge.

Sorrowful and cracked wails left the dry throat of that little girl. She wanted to climb up and hug the man for more warmth, but her frail and broken legs didn't allow her such comfort.

But seeing how hard she was clutching into his robes, the man seemed to understand her desire. Gently grabbing her, he picked her up and carried her, hugging her lightly and patting her back.

"Alright. There, there. No need to cry anymore."

The little girl's wails only became louder. Her face was buried in his neck as she desperately absorbed as much warmth as she could.

Luckily, she was too immersed in this warmth to feel the dense killing intent radiating from the man. Or perhaps, he just wasn't allowing her to feel it.

Killing intent. No matter how severe the word sounded, Damien didn't think it was enough to describe what he was feeling right now..

The pure and unbridled rage he was feeling, the conscious desire to murder that was greater than any he had ever felt before. Was mere killing intent enough to describe it?



The surroundings no longer held any similarity to the murky swamp they originally were. The bloody red aura emanating from Damien's body had begun to twist reality, creating an illusion of seas of blood and a mountain of corpses.

Damien wasn't a soft-hearted person. There was no way he, who hadn't even batted an eye at the slaughter of so many, could be considered as such. But children? Children were a red zone for him.

For adults, even for teens, innocence could be considered a sin. It was something that was useless unless one had the power to back up such innocence. But for kids? Innocence was the thing only they could retain in this cruel world where everyone else was a murderer of some sort.

To see this little girl who didn't look a day older than five point a rusted knife at her throat, to see her plunge it towards her body without hesitation, it sent Damien over the edge.

The pressure from his reality warping killing desire was like a decree of death. The second any of those humanoid abominations got within range of it, they were crushed into pulp that dyed the muddy ground in a dense black color.

Smelling the scent of another human, a stronger human, those creatures charged forward without fear or care. Even when they saw the others being crushed without effort( they didn't stop. But Damien didn't focus on any of this.

His focus was entirely on the little girl in his embrace. It was probably one of the first times in his life that he lamented not having the ability to share his regeneration.

It could only be counted as luck that Ruyue had forced him to take some of her healing pills with him just in case. After all, she had witnessed Damien being unable to heal due to lack of mana before, and she wasn't one to take chances.

The warmth of Damien's embrace seemed to be overwhelming for this little girl who had been running on pure adrenaline and will for the past few days. After only a few minutes of despairing sobs, she directly fell asleep.

Damien gently pried open her mouth and fed her a healing pill, using his hand on her back to inject mana into her body and gently guide the healing essence to do its job.

'This girl...she doesn't even have an ounce of mana.'

It wasn't something like running out of mana, no, this was a girl who had never slain another in her life, never gained experience. Although it could be considered as normal for a 5-year-old to be as such, Damien had long grown accustomed to the twisted standards of the new world.

5 years old, even if it was incredibly young, it wasn't rare at all for people to force children of this age to kill. This was so that they could get acclimated to the true environment of the world.

While many would just use pills or regular cultivation to boost a child's growth and give them a few levels, the former method wasn't rare at all.

Damien felt immense pity for this little girl. How long had she been struggling with her weak body and pathetic strength? But at the same time, he couldn't help but admire her tenacity.

In some ways, she even reminded him of himself. Before he had become the Damien Void of today, before he had mutated and gained a path towards strength. Back when he was just a kid who was pushed into a dungeon, when he had strength so puny that everyone felt he was guaranteed to die.

‘Actually, comparing the two of us is an insult to her.’

It had taken him so long to build up the will to survive, and even then, that will was weak. It could be said that the battle with the wolf and his descent into insanity thereafter was like a cheat for him to steel himself easier.

But this little girl didn’t have any of that. Her strength, her age, it was all below what he had at that time, yet she had done so much better than him in the face of adversity.

It felt like tears would start gathering in his eyes if he continued thinking about it, so he stopped. Turning his attention to the hundreds of abominations that still littered the surroundings, his eyes turned cold.

“Oi, you little shits. You probably can’t understand me with your Jin’s-dick-sized brains, but listen anyway. I’m going to murder all of you to vent my frustrations, so just wait patiently to die, okay?”

Black lightning viciously crackled in the air, snapping forth like whips of darkness and rending even the wind around him. A layer of spatial mana covered the little girl in bud embrace so she wouldn’t be harmed.

Since he made sure that even sound couldn’t pass through the barrier he laid around her, he had no need to hold back on using some of his more destructive attacks.

‘Besides, too much movement might wake her up.’

Damien raised his free hand towards the sky, his cold and emotionless eyes never leaving the abominations that still attempted to charge him. Opening his mouth, he spoke 3 words that he had only spoken once before.

“Storm Dragon’s Fury.”

The murky skies became even murkier as dense clouds filled with the weight of thousands of strands of black lightning encased them.

Booming thunder rumbled, causing the ground to quake in fear.

The black lightning within the clouds migrated towards a central point and combined into a massive ball, compressing endlessly until it was too small to see with the naked eye.

And in the next second, it descended.

Unlike the previous time he used it, Damien now had confidence in protecting himself from the aftermath. Not only that, but he was also genuinely aiming to kill.

A small beam with the width of an arm quietly struck the ground. And all hell broke loose.

The destruction caused by that small beam couldn’t even be described. A black light similar to a black hole swallowed everything in a 10-kilometer radius without pause.

“Wow...”

A small mutter was heard from Damien’s chest. When he glanced down, he noticed that little girl watching the ongoing mayhem with eyes that shone like stars.

Damien smiled wryly at the sight. Even though he had just killed hundreds with the flick of his finger, and even though he was still technically within the blast radius of the attack, his thoughts were elsewhere.

‘Fuck. In the end, I still woke her up.’

Chapter 247 Trial World [5]

The thundering clouds that filled the sky soon faded away and melded into the air. A cool wind blew through the atmosphere that was once a murky swamp and cleared away the massive cloud of debris that was in its place.

When the smoke cleared, the only thing left in the area was a large pit that was slowly being filled by the brownish water of the swamp, and two people who silently stood in the middle of that pit.

‘Damn, I think I overdid it a bit.’

If Ruyue were here, she’d probably chide him about his definition of ‘a bit’ but that was besides the point. The enemies this time were all small fries who had at most hit the peak of 2nd class of the very beginning of 3rd class. An attack like his Storm Dragon’s Fury that could even kill a heavenly genius like Long Chen if he was unprepared was most definitely too much effort.

But his rage ended up getting the better of him, leading to him causing such a commotion.

“Wooooaaah!”

Although the little girl he held in his bosom still found it hard pressed to speak actual words, sounds of amazement and wonder continuously left her mouth, and the shining gaze she directed at him made Damien slightly embarrassed.

“Kuhum, let’s go somewhere more comfortable first and get you some tasty food and drinks. How does that sound?”

The little girl eagerly nodded, only then realizing the hunger she had been suppressing for many days..

Damien smiled. It seemed his presence had alleviated some of the burdens this little girl had been carrying. And if his otherwise stupid move earlier had accomplished that, then he no longer felt bad about using it.

Spreading his awareness, Damien noticed that the surroundings were no longer as quiet as they once were. Many beasts and even a few humans and abominations were headed in this direction, attracted to the commotion he had caused.

Once again looking at the little girl, Damien grinned. “Hold on tight, little one. This big brother will show you the meaning of speed!”

Two people, one big and one small, shared the same shining gaze for a moment before flickering away, their speed so fast that it didn’t even leave impact on the air until many moments later.

Boom!

As the rush of wind from Damien's departure filled the atmosphere, a fiery red figure arrived in that place as well. She looked at the now destroyed environment with a frown on her face.

"What happened here?"

It had already been a week since the geniuses that came to this realm had spread out in search of prey to enhance their stars, but Feng Qing'er was different.

Although she had taken similar actions at first, she had soon run into the remains of what seemed like it used to be a village.

Signs of infrastructure were evident, but anything that was built had been razed to the ground. The ground was littered with planks of wood and dirt, sometimes even rubble of stone. Dilapidated portions of buildings that seemed to have aged and eroded considerably decorated the sides of what used to be a street.

But that wasn't even close to the worst part.

The dead bodies that littered the ground took the crown.

"What the fuck..." a rare curse left Feng Qing'er's mouth as she looked at the scene. Perhaps if it was just ordinary slaughter she wouldn't have batted an eye, but this was different.

These bodies looked like they had been tortured and mutilated before death. And even after death it looked like they had become a feast for something else. There was rarely an entire intact body among the mass, and even the ones that were close were corroded by a black inky substance that Feng Qing'er's Fire Phoenix Flames seemed to abhor.

Although she was a beast, it didn't mean she had no sense of decorum. The larger beast clans like hers rarely even took their beast forms unless it was necessary. Perhaps it was due to the environment she was raised in, but such a disgusting sight almost made her vomit.

Feng Qing'er spread her awareness to cover the village, but sadly, she found no signs of life. 'What kind of creature would commit such a heartless massacre?'

The Phoenixes in general were a graceful race in both bearing and temperament. They weren't afraid of violence at all, but they would never needlessly commit such massacres. Especially when...

'There's no mana in the atmosphere.'

Yes, ambient mana was ever present, but Feng Qing'er was thinking of a different phenomenon. When a person died, their mana would dissipate into the atmosphere. This was common knowledge.

And even though the atrocity in front of her looked like it had been committed long ago, she had checked with her awareness, and by the state of the bodies, she knew it had only taken place a few days ago at most.



For there to be none of that dissipated mana in the atmosphere, especially when hundreds of people had died at the same time, it could only mean one thing.

‘They had no cultivation to speak of.’

Feng Qing’er trembled in rage. She wanted to find the ones responsible and tear them to pieces. But just at that moment, bright flashes of lightning lit up the air. By the time Feng Qing’er looked over, a large portion of land had been covered in a sphere of crackling black light.

‘Is it them?’

Flaming wings manifested on her back as she blazed forward, reaching the location of the commotion only a few minutes after it died down.

But by the time she arrived, there was nothing left besides a deep crater and traces of unbelievably dense killing intent.

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“Wooooow! Big brother is amazing!”

A youthful voice cried out in wonder within a discreet cave hundreds of kilometers away from the previous swamp.

“Aren’t I? This big brother is what you would call a master-level chef!” An older voice responded.

In front of him, a burning flame that originated from the sun was being used to...cook a pile of beast meat he had pulled out from his subspace.

Damien grinned. Although he hadn't dabbled much in cooking, his skills were still anything but average. He had gotten used to dealing with beast meat within the dungeon, even if he had eaten it all raw, and he had learned the more refined cooking methods from Rose.

The current meat was from a beast that looked like a massive chicken. Damien had spotted and killed a few of them on their way over. As for seasoning, he had plenty in his subspace.

'Damn. Some of the useless stuff that mom gave me is actually coming in handy.'

His mom had left him a plethora of random household items when he left her on Apeiron. Although she also must've known he wouldn't need them, she still felt the need to provide at least something as his mother.

And Damien happily accepted her feelings. In front of the mother that he had worked so hard to save and bring back, he would never be anything more than a little boy.

Anyway, Damien had been cooking and feeding that little girl the beast meat for a while now, but her appetite seemed insatiable. Damien was beginning to wonder if she was actually a Heaven-Swallowing beast in disguise.

And after drinking what seemed like a gallon of water, the little girl had also regained her ability to talk. But Damien didn't push her to say much. He wanted to let her have a moment of peace after the travesty that she had obviously been to.

After that peace ended, perhaps he'd get the answers to a few questions that had been on his mind...

## Chapter 248 Trial Wworld [6]

After cooking a portion of beast meat that would usually be enough to feed a family, Damien quietly sat and watched the little girl eat away.

However; his thoughts were elsewhere.

'This realm is nowhere near as simple as I thought it was. Trial World? Secret realm? What a joke. If that was all this place was, then the existence of those creatures would be impossible.'

Although he had been driven by his rage, he had obviously retained his clarity when he saved the little girl earlier. Even if he didn't, the passive abilities of his eyes would always be active whether he liked it or not.

Eventually, he would've noticed what he had already noticed. Still, he wanted to ask the little girl about her story before he came up with any true conclusions.

But he was hesitant. 'She just got out of such a perilous situation, and for a little girl with no cultivation like her to have even ended up like that, there must've been some kind of tragedy beforehand. There's no way hundreds of those things would chase one person otherwise.'

Was it a wise idea to directly ask her about something that would obviously be her trauma? Damien knew how hung up he was on his own trauma, so he was a bit sensitive about the topic.

Just as he was pondering how to move forward, the little girl moved from her spot at the little table Damien had made her and sat on his lap.

“Daddy and Mommy said to run, so Xue’er ran.”.

Damien was surprised by her sudden shift in attitude, but he didn’t say anything. He focused his gaze on her and quietly listened.

“Xue’er’s village was nice and small. All the little kids like Xue’er were always happy and playing. But Daddy and Mommy always told Xue’er about the scary ghosts that live in the world.”

The little girl, whose name Damien now knew was Xue’er, slightly shivered as she spoke.

“Daddy and Mommy said that the ghosts were bad people who listened to the Devil and that Xue’er should be careful to never leave the village alone. But they also said that Xue’er would be safe as long as she was with the adults.

“But Daddy and Mommy were wrong. And now, Xue’er is alone.”

Xue’er’s light shivers had become uncontrollable. Tears had once again begun to spill from her eyes. Damien sighed and turned her around, once again hugging her into his bosom and lightly brushing her midnight black hair.

It seemed that his actions were able to slightly calm her down because not long after, Xue’er continued to speak.

“The bad ghosts came to Xue’er’s village and did bad things. They took everyone Xue’er loves away. But Daddy and Mommy didn’t say anything. They only told Xue’er to run away.”

And so that’s what she did. While the people of her village were being slaughtered, Xue’er ran as fast as she could into the nearby forest.

But those things were insatiable. After taking everything they could from the people of the village, they chased Xue’er down as well. They were fast, faster than a little girl with no cultivation could run.

Xue’er could only be counted lucky. She had run for 3 days straight before those things even caught her scent and began chasing. As for what they did during those 3 days, Feng Qing’er would probably have the best idea.

“The ghosts covered Xue’er’s friends in black ink, and then Xue’er’s friends disappeared. Will-will Xue’er disappear like them too? Xue’er doesn’t want to die!”

Damien couldn’t help but sigh once more. It was truly tragic, to the point where Xue’er probably wouldn’t realize the full extent of the tragedy until she was much older.

Hundreds of villagers had been reduced to nothing, even the women and children weren’t spared.

Damien hugged her tightly and continued to brush her hair. He gently injected warm mana into her body to lessen her shivering.

“No. Xue’er won’t die. Didn’t Big brother already say? Big brother is very powerful, and he won’t let anything bad happen to you.”

Xue’er lightly nodded her head, but the tears didn’t stop falling. Although Damien couldn’t see her eyes, he could guess what she was thinking.

‘She’s a lot smarter than I gave her credit for.’

Most likely, Xue’er knew. She knew that she was alone in this world now, and that her parents and friends had been slaughtered. A little girl with the determination to kill herself before being caught would naturally have this small amount of maturity.

It was just...regardless of how much she had been forced to mature in the past few days, she was a child. A child who, before this, had never been through those kinds of hardships. Perhaps Damien’s presence was the only reason she was able to truly vent her feelings and act like a child again.

‘This level of trauma...I don’t know if she can ever truly recover. No, I can’t let that happen. There’s no way I’ll let such an innocent little girl become an empty shell of her former self.’

Damien’s will seemed to ignite. He didn’t know why, but he felt a connection to Xue’er. He truly admired the grit of this little girl, and her current condition reminded him too much of his previous self.

But his feelings aside, Xue’er’s story ended up confirming what Damien had speculated.

‘That inky black substance she was talking about...combined with the mana I saw around those abominations, there’s no mistaking it.’

Once again, the Nox had made their appearance. He had suspected their involvement with the elves in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, but how could their influence even spread into this secret realm that was controlled by a mythical existence like the Primordial Undying Tree?

As he thought previously, things became much more complicated.

Truthfully speaking, Damien had no reason to get involved. He could always ignore the problems happening with the Nox here and simply go on a killing spree until his star was black.

But, could he really?

For one, anything related to the Nox was directly or indirectly tied to the fate of the entire universe.

Secondly, Damien was feeling rage in Xue'er's place. The feeling of this little girl cut into his heart, and he couldn't find it in himself to simply ignore her and continue on.

And lastly, there had always been something nagging at Damien's mind. Back when he was in that little forest with Ruyue, when he killed the thing disguised as Elder Baba, he had been forced by the situation.

He had run away from an obvious conspiracy that he most likely had the power to stop, all because he simply didn't have the time to get involved.

It had always been nagging at the back of his mind. It was a subconscious thing. He felt like, on that day, he had done something that went against his moral principles.

But this situation was different. He had an entire year in this realm. Even if he couldn't solve the problem in its entirety, he could at least somewhat help alleviate the burden.

Damien didn't want to run into another situation like the forest. He wanted to always be certain that no matter what actions he chose to take, he'd always do so of his own volition, instead of being forced by the circumstances.

His principles were incredibly important to him. Even if he lost everything else, he at least wanted to be true to himself until the end.

There was only one situation where he'd allow himself to fall into madness. Only a single situation that would justify him betraying himself. And that was if his women or someone he cared for equally was killed.

As Damien firmed his resolve, he ended up smiling. 'I really have a habit of getting involved with bullshit, don't I?'

But he quickly changed his outlook. His smile became a lot less stiff. 'If I have to kill to strengthen my star, then aren't those related to the Nox the perfect targets?'

Chapter 249 Sanctuary [1]

Soon after she finished telling her story to Damien, Xue'er soon fell asleep in his lap once again. Damien could only sigh lightly while gently adjusting her into a more comfortable posture.

'It seems the stress of the past few days is simply too much for her.'



No matter how much she wanted to stay awake, now that she was out of danger and felt safety, her mind could no longer handle the fatigue. Especially now that she had eaten and drank to her heart's content.

While he patted her head, Damien once again fell into thought.

'I already know I'm going to target the Nox, but that can barely even be considered as progress. In the first place, I have no idea where they're located. Besides that...'

Where was he going to leave little Xue'er? No matter what, he refused to bring a small child into the battlefield with him. Especially when it was a completely unknown terrain.

The problem was, he also knew he couldn't leave her behind. Little Xue'er was obviously suffering from intense trauma due to the loss of her village and her parents, as well as the subsequent days of fleeing and survival.

It wasn't something a little girl like her should have to handle, but fate was cruel. With no regard for anything, it thrust her into such a situation..

He could still feel her lightly shivering in his arms as she slept. He had no choice but to constantly feed gentle streams of mana into her small body to somewhat soothe her pain. But it wasn't physical pain, it was emotional stress, making it incredibly hard to deal with.

Even his current measures were temporary at best. He was only doing it so that she could get a decent sleep for the first time in days.

‘I can’t take her with me.’

Damien was firm about this. There was no way he’d change his decision. He had never considered himself good with kids, and he was pretty sure that he’d be a shitty father if he had his own right now, but he at least had the basic amount of decency as a human being.

“Daddy...Mommy...don’t leave...”

Damien shuddered lightly. Every shiver of her body, every mutter that came out of her mouth, it all made it more clear to him that he couldn’t just leave her somewhere to take care of his business.

If he did so, he didn’t know whether or not she would break. She was barely holding on to a sense of stability as it was now.

‘So, what am I supposed to do in this situation?’

Can’t take her, but can’t leave her. He was too conflicted to make a proper decision. In the worst-case scenario, he would just have to leave her in his shadow.

It was an ability that he and Zara shared due to their mental connection, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t put anyone else in the shadow. Zara’s presence had already affirmed that it could carry life.

But the problem with that was the same as before. Even if he put her in his shadow, she’d be able to clearly see what was happening inside. He also didn’t think it was a good idea to have her in the same place as a sleeping Zara.

While Zara's bubbly personality would be enough to put her at ease in usual times, right now, her coma disallowed such a thing. Like this, her presence would most likely terrify Xue'er, bringing the opposite of the intended effect.

'In that case, should I just do that?'

Truthfully, Damien had always been studying the nature of his shadow. Ever since he first gained the ability, he had been curious about how an ethereal thing like a shadow could be used as a container. And even further, how it could support life.

The reason for this was obvious. He had a subspace Inventory that was constantly expanding as his mana capacity increased. How much better would it be if he could structure it like Kurt's?

At that time, his subspace would become closer to an inner world, a sanctuary. It would be a perfect place to escape in dire situations, and he would also be able to bring his people with him when he needed to travel discreetly.

Up until now, he had gotten a decent understanding of what he had to do to convert his subspace into an area capable of sustaining life, but he had never gotten around to putting his theory into practice. Things had simply been too hectic.

But now, for the sake of giving little Xue'er a safe haven while he traveled, actually putting his ideas into motion was perfect.

‘I have a year’s worth of time. And I’m not like the rest of them. They have to conserve stamina while they hunt, and they most likely won’t be hunting intelligent species. Besides that, there’s going to be a lot of them hunting each other.’

Damien’s Void Physique was perfect for long drawn-out large-scale battles. He could kill and then devour his enemies, replenishing his stamina so he could kill some more. It was a great way to imitate Elena’s infinite stamina style with his own methods.

If he spent many months straight doing battle with this kind of warfare style, he felt he could easily catch up with or surpass his competitors.

And so, he didn’t feel bad about spending time to experiment with his spatial abilities.

Grabbing a small blanket from his subspace, he gently laid it on the cave ground and wrapped Xue’er within. Although she grumbled in her sleep after losing his warmth, she didn’t end up waking up, leaving Damien sighing in relief.

Without any obstruction, he went straight into construction.

The structure of his shadow was quite odd now. He had realized that the way Zara used her shadow affinity actually held properties of space within it, and his shadow mirrored this.

Through the analysis of this use of space, as well as the properties of the shadow affinity itself, Damien had come to a basic conclusion. At most, it could be considered a hypothesis.

Actually, the way it sustained life was pretty simple in theory, but complicated in practice.

It all had to do with mana.

Mana was the fabric of all things, it was an energy that was even more fundamental than something like atoms. To be frank, mana alone was enough to sustain life in any environment.

That was the reason why cultivators lost their necessity for food and hygiene. Mana alone was enough to maintain them. But for mortals, it didn't work the same.

That's because ambient mana had no properties and had no direction. Only when a cultivator had their own mana circulating within them would these effects slowly become prevalent.

But for Damien's idea, he couldn't simply bank on the basic properties of ambient mana to sustain life within his subspace. No, he wanted it to function as its own small world. A world that could sustain even a mortal like Xue'er without burden.

For this, he'd have to dive far further into the depths of magic theory than he had ever gone before.

'But first things first, I need to clean everything out of my subspace before I can start.'

Chapter 250 Sanctuary [2]

The reason Damien had to clear his subspace was equally as simple as everything else. The coming processes would be relatively dangerous.

Not for any of the people involved, but for his items. If he made a mistake, there was a high chance that they'd be thrust into the void and consumed by its nothingness.

Soon enough, various beast carcasses, weapons, pills, and random items that would probably have use at some point spilled out onto the cave floor.

Even Damien's sword, Devourer, which he hadn't been using much was within the pile.

Once he was done, he quietly sat down in a meditative posture and focused on the space around him.

There, tethered to him was a small pocket that would go unnoticed by the untrained eye. It wasn't big at all, perhaps the size of a quarter at most, but the space inside was expansive. This was the nature of a subspace.

'Good. That was probably the only easy part of this whole ordeal.'

Mana was the building blocks of all things, and mana was exactly what would solidify his plan. But that was only a part of it.

What Damien wanted to do was essentially create another dimension.

Damien's subspace was an ethereal concept, and it was heavily tied to the concept of space, but the thing about it was that it would always be tethered to the three-dimensional space that made up the universe..

This was one of the main things that prevented it from sustaining life. With its reliance on outside forces to maintain its structure, there was no way it had any potential for evolution.

What Damien wanted to do was create a fourth dimension. It didn't have to be big enough to actually contribute to the universe as a whole, but what he would be doing was creating his own plane.

Rather than being tethered to the space that already existed, it would be entirely its own space. The only tether it would have would be Damien himself.

This was an idea he derived from his Void Physique. After all, didn't it operate on a similar concept? It was part of him, yet it seemed to be located elsewhere.

The Damien of before would never be able to do such a thing as create a dimension, and even the current Damien didn't possess this ability, but he had one thing that would work as a sort of cheat code.

His dimensional magic.

He had gained a great deal of enlightenment on this new and upgraded form of spatial magic over the year or so that he had possessed it, but he had never actually been able to raise its skill level by much.

Why was that? Obviously, it was because he never truly delved into the essence of dimensional magic.

But now, he was doing just that. Although his current experiment was only a portion of the capabilities that dimensional magic had, it still mattered.

With his attention focused on the subspace, Damien soon coated that small piece of bloated space in his mana.

And then, he activated his dimensional magic.

The full scenery of the cave was soon lit by starlight. Flashing motes of blue and black light littered the air like stars.

The subspace that was coated in Damien's mana began to expand. It expanded continuously until it reached the point where its true size was visible.

Luckily, it existed between the spatial layers, or else the entire cave would have been collapsed. His subspace was already the size of a massive city, perhaps even larger.

Once it had been enlarged, Damien knew the first step had been completed. It was no longer tethered to the space around it. Its integrity at this time was being wholly maintained by Damien's mana alone.

The glistening starlight in the air swirled through the atmosphere like a cyclone, centering around Damien. His utmost focus was on maintaining the space of the subspace and making sure it didn't collapse and rejoin the surrounding space.

Now that it was untethered, the next step was to remove it from three-dimensional space entirely.

In simpler words, he was removing the subspace from reality.



There was only one reason this was possible. Damien hadn't realized it much before, but he felt stupid for not noticing.

The void. The void was so elusive that it even trumped space in that aspect. Even though it was technically a concept of space, it was entirely different.

Space was all-encompassing, while the void was all-consuming.

But this all-consuming entity was the exact reason Damien had confidence in separating his subspace from the existing reality, something he wasn't sure was possible otherwise.

Of course, he had the option to forgo this entire troublesome process and just set laws and restrictions, creating something similar to a secret realm that he carried around with him, but that wasn't what he wanted.

His ambitions went far beyond a mere secret realm.

There was an image in his mind. An image where one day, when his power was so vast that the current him couldn't fathom it, he would take this rudimentary design he created now and blossom it into something else entirely.

'A world...no, a universe...no, an entirely new reality.'

Crack!

Cracks began to form between the spatial layers as the weight of Damien's subspace bore down on them.

These weren't the normal spatial cracks that Damien would create, they were dare more dangerous. The integrity of the space within space was cracking.

In simpler words, this was a minuscule example of a crack in reality.

It wasn't something Damien would ever be able to do on his own. If it wasn't for the sheer weight of his subspace as well as the dimensional magic that permeated through space, he doubted whether it was possible to create such an crack.

But the thing was, the amount of mana Damien was continuously pouring out could have already charged an attack far worse than the massive black hole he created in the Celestiak Star Sect Disciple Examination.

If he wasn't actively using his Void Physique to greedily absorb every ounce of ambient mana around him, he wouldn't have been able to sustain it.

Yet, such a massive amount of mana expenditure could only form a crack the size of a fingernail at best.

Suddenly, another essence started leaking from the crack.

It was pitch black and illusory. It wasn't like the inky black mana that the Nox used, it was much darker.

This essence leaked from the cracks in the spatial layers and made its debut in the Real Plane. And when it did, it immediately started to devour.

It devoured everything. Space, time, all creation. It seemingly wanted to revert the universe to nihilism.

It was lucky that there was such a small and finite amount, or else nobody would be able to predict what this essence would do.

But this essence was currently trapped between spatial layers. Slowly, Damien exerted his will. He focused his awareness on that pitch-black essence and attempted to dominate it.

A black fog began to emanate from his body, similar to when he used his devour skill. The second the fog met the pitch black essence, the essence immediately became docile.

Damien smiled at the sight. 'As expected. There's no way it'd be called the Void Physique for nothing.'

With the newly termed Void Essence under his control, Damien knew that the next step would be easy. That is, as long as he concentrated his everything on performing it.

The pitch-black Void Essence was directed to gently cover the subspace in a similar way to what Damien's mana was already doing. In fact, the two forms of essence melded together in the process, heavily increasing Damien's control.

Damien exerted his will once again, calling out to the Void Essence. The wild essence that heeded no command, the essence that devoured everything. The rate it spilled out of the spatial cracks increased drastically.

Slowly but surely, the gathering Void Essence concentrated on the subspace. From an outsider's perspective, it looked like the subspace was being devoured.

But Damien knew that wasn't true. The spatial mana he used to create the subspace in the first place was being corrupted.

It was becoming one with the void itself.