

Void 291

Chapter 291 Demon King [3]

“Big Brother!”

Not even a second after he appeared, he heard a spirited exclamation before belatedly noticing a flash of black shooting towards him.

“Woah!”

Damien hurriedly reached out his hands and expertly redirected the force of Little Xue’s impact with vector control as she entered his arms so she wouldn’t get hurt.

“What the hell?”

He couldn’t help but mutter. This girl charged at him with the speed of a car! How the hell was she able to move so fast?!

It was then that he noticed the bundles of green spirits circling around them in the air while giggling to themselves.

‘She hasn’t even trained at all, yet she’s able to use the wind spirits to boost her speed?!’

It didn't make sense. It made more sense to say that the wind spirits had voluntarily helped her without her having to do anything.

Damien smiled wryly. This was talent!

Looking down at the little girl who was happily smiling while rubbing her face against his chest, he wasn't even able to get mad at her.

"Are you liking your new home?" Damien asked softly.

"Mm! It's great! And I have lots of friends here, see!"

Little Xue waved her hands at the elemental spirits, urging them to come closer, but they maintained their distance with auras emanating their hesitance.

"Awww! Why are you being shy? Big brother isn't a bad person!"

The spirits shook their little heads in protest.

"Master? What does that mean? Big brother, they said they don't want to be disrespectful to the master!"

Damien became even more bewildered. For one, Xue'er was fluently communicating with spirits that could only flare their auras to display their intentions. Secondly, the spirits regarded him as the 'master'.

Although he couldn't understand them, he knew that they didn't mean it in the same way Elitra did when she called him Lord.

Elitra was referring to him as her Lord. She had devoted her mind, body, and spirit to him for some unknown reason.

As for the spirits, they meant it in a way that more accurately placed him as the master of the world itself, not their master exclusively.

He didn't know how the spirits developed such complex thought processes, but he let it be. It was another one of those things he wouldn't be able to explain with the limited amount of knowledge he possessed.

But the line of thought suddenly reminded him of Elitra, who had been calmly living in the containment area he set up for her.

Now that he thought about it, the Nihilicity Flames he stole from her were never properly used. Actually, an odd phenomenon had taken place instead.

His reddish orange sunflames had suddenly taken on a golden hue. Evidently, there was some reaction between the two flames in his body.

He realized there were a lot of gains he made from the previous battle that he still had to go over, including the results of devouring the dark material. But that could wait.

Damien played with little Xue for some time to recharge his mental battery with wholesomeness before leaving her alone with the spirits again. His next destination was the containment area.

“Lord!”

The second Elitra saw him, she bent her body ninety degrees into a bowing posture on the ground. Since she didn’t have legs, it was even more awkward.

“Right. Let’s talk about this in detail now. Why are you calling me Lord?”

Elitra obediently raised her head at his instruction and began speaking.

“As I told you before, Lord, I’ve been tortured by the Nihilism Flame since young. There wasn’t a single day that I didn’t writhe in agony wishing that my life would come to an end.

“And within Demon society, such things as loyalty are scarce nowadays. The only people who truly showed me care were my father and his confidants. Due to those people, I decided to grit my teeth and endure the pain so I wouldn’t disappoint them.

“But as you saw, the Nihilism Flame isn’t under my control. Every time I grew strong enough to control it, it would leech my strength to become stronger than me again. Due to this struggle, I would often lose control over myself and go on rampages.

“Luckily, the Nihilism Flame in my body was merely a seedling. Its intelligence hadn’t developed, so whenever I lost control, it was easy to stop me since the Nihilism Flame only knew how to throw random attacks at anyone and anything.

“But it was only easy for those more powerful than me. It wasn’t uncommon for some of the weaker people close to me to be burned as sustenance for the Nihilicity Flame while I could do nothing but watch...”

Damien listened to her story quietly. Frankly, it reminded him of himself a bit. Just like how he had to fiercely fight his bestial instinct to regain control over his body back in the day, she had to do something similar.

However, his instinct was never another entity. It was always a part of himself. On the downside, this meant that when he was taken over, he was still able to use his skills perfectly. But on the plus side, conquering and merging with the instinct was much easier.

He was lucky enough to go through the struggle within the dungeon. Thousands of beasts had become food for his bestial instinct back then. He couldn’t imagine what it would’ve been like if something similar took place while he was surrounded by people he cared for.

“Eventually, the number of people who earnestly cared for me dwindled until only my father was left, and the number who despised me vastly increased. In fact, most demons should be celebrating the fact that I never returned to the city.

“But, then I met the Lord. Although Lord had indeed treated me poorly, it was only necessary since I was an enemy who had information you desired. Considering the hazy and slightly crazed state I was in after the Nihilicity Flame possession ended, I can also understand why the Lord had to use extreme measures against me.

“But even with all that, the Lord still brought me to this mystical place and got rid of the curse that had been tormenting me for so long. If that isn’t enough to make you worthy to be my Lord, what is?”

Damien nodded, but his brows were still furrowed. Indeed, her reasoning made sense. But he felt that there was more to it than just that.

If it was just this much, his intuition wouldn't have rung alarm bells signaling opportunity. Whether he gained a little maid or not, it wouldn't have much effect on the future.

There had to be more. And Damien didn't intend to let Elitra hide it.

"If you truly wish for me to accept you as my maid, isn't it normal that you tell me everything? I have no interest in a maid that hides things from her Master. It's either full transparency or nothing."

Elitra looked into his eyes as if she was trying to pry into all of his secrets. Slowly, the hesitation on her face began to vanish.

"Right, as Master suspected, there was another reason."

"Master?"

"Ah, well, Master just called me your maid and yourself Master, so I assumed you were into this kind of thing."

"Kuhum, you must've heard wrong. I have no clue what you're talking about. Continue with what you were saying."

Damien spotted a hint of teasing in Elitra's eyes as she spoke, but he didn't mind it. He'd rather have a maid with personality than a robot.

'Damn, I'm really getting into this whole having a maid thing. I should control myself.'

I'm already pursuing two women, so there's no need to have an illicit relationship with my maid! Thinking such righteous thoughts, Damien refocused on the conversation.

"Right. As I was saying, Master. The other reason is far more complex than the first. To preface, I must tell a story my father told me many times as I was growing up."

Chapter 292 Demon King [4]

Elitra proceeded to tell a story that Demon King Lucius had been reminiscing about only a few days prior.

10,000 years trapped within a secret realm as a tool for the machinations of a higher existence.

The series of unfortunate events that seemed to follow the Demon race as they lived, the vengeance that the Demon King Lucius had been hiding within his heart, and the way the other Demon Kings had indulged themselves in the pleasures provided by the absolute protection of said higher existence.

The more Damien listened, the sterner his expression became. As Elitra had said, the second reason was much more serious than the first.

It was yet another product of the first Great War that the Nox had raged against the universe.

Originally; Damien had thought Apeiron was the first world they had invaded, and that the Nox had been successfully fended off at the sacrifice of Apeiron's most powerful experts. But it seemed he was mistaken.

Many worlds had been invaded or destroyed before the Nox reached Apeiron. The world the Demons lived in was just one of them. And if he thought about the elves in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, their world must've faced a similar fate.

It wasn't just a matter of universe domination either. From what he was hearing, the Nox were destroying more than they were conquering.

But they had done an excellent job at silencing the victims. Only four demons, five including Elitra, still lived with the knowledge. And they were all slaves to the Nox. As for the elves in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, they were confined to a location they had no hope of ever leaving.

There was no way either of these two groups would've been able to tell anyone the secrets they carried with them when they escaped extinction. That is, unless something like the Sanctuary existed.

The Sanctuary didn't exist in the Real Plane. That was the main benefit Damien focused on as he created it.

Since the Sanctuary existed within the Void, any connections or restrictions placed in the Real Plane would be lifted when one set foot inside. The laws they would have to follow would instead be decided wholly by Damien.

This was the reason Elitra was able to speak freely about the things her father had told her in the form of stories, as well as the reason she could acknowledge him as her Master.

As for the reason Demon King Lucius was able to tell Elitra about everything, he assumed it was because he was a 4th class. Even if he was just at the beginning of 4th class, he had still obtained acknowledgment from the universe, which allowed him a certain degree of freedom as long as the Nox wasn't directly enforcing its will to stop him.

Damien's brows remained furrowed. The conspiracies related to the Nox were deeply connected to the history of the universe. It was like the Nox were specifically created as an adversary its inhabitants needed to overcome.

Damien's head hurt as he thought about it, but he soon reorganized his thoughts. He needed to think of what he could do in the current moment rather than trying to unravel the entire bigger picture without sufficient strength and information.

'To start, I need to take out the Demon Commanders, or rather the Apostles, as well as the other three Demon Kings. I also need to find a way to bring Demon King Lucius into the Sanctuary so he can be free from his restriction and tell me more about what I need to know.'

There was plenty he needed to do, but he still had roughly 7 months left in the Trial World before he needed to leave. But obviously, the demons weren't his only priority.

'I can invest at most 3 months into the Demons. The rest of the time I need to focus on both healing my soul injury and making use of the Trial World to deepen my comprehension of Time.'

It had been so long since he learned of his blossoming Time affinity, but even after so long it hadn't bloomed. He had received minor sparks of insight every once in a while, but the environment of the Trial World had presented him with a perfect opportunity.

This world was quite literally the first example Damien had seen of Time Laws in action. Even if he couldn't totally awaken his affinity, he'd still make enough progress to where awakening it wouldn't be too far in the future.

He'd have to be an idiot to not capitalize on the opportunity.

'Okay. 3 months to kill 7 others with similar strength to Polius as well as 3 genuine 4th class existences. That's doable, right?'

Truth be told, he wasn't too worried about the Apostles. Their power was borrowed. In a frontal clash, he'd have to take a great deal of time and effort to deal with every single one of them, but he wasn't planning to use a frontal attack.

Using assassination tactics and careful planning, it shouldn't be hard for him to kill the Apostles. Especially since he already knew that their dark material was afraid of Void Essence.

He could capitalize on the moment the dark material froze in fear and kill the Apostles before immediately devouring the dark material so the so-called Demon God wouldn't be able to predict his movements.

It was a solid plan, so much so that Damien was proud of himself for coming up with it. He had never been a schemer and he had never been a tactical thinker. But now, he had finally made use of his intelligence stat that had steadily increased with the rest of his stats.

"Alright."

Finally, he spoke again. Looking down at Elitra's disabled body on the floor, he sighed.

A vial filled with colorless liquid appears in his hand, which he then promptly tossed to Elitra.

"First, drink this. We can do everything else later."

Elitra caught the vial that was flying through the air and drank it without hesitation. Even Damien was surprised.

She just kept proving how committed she actually was to her words. Every small action made Damien further believe she wasn't trying to fool him.

Soon after Elitra finished drinking the liquid in the vial, a strange soothing sensation spread through her body before concentrating on the stumps where her legs used to be.

The essence from the liquid coagulated and began working its magic. The stumps were opened once more, and kneecaps began to form. After them, the rest of Elitra's bones and flesh followed. She soon had a new pair of legs that were as unblemished as they were before Damien had severed them.

"Master!"

Elitra's eyes glowed with silent tears when she realized what had happened. She immediately jumped to her feet. But due to the fact that it was still a new pair of legs, she stumbled.

“Oof.”

Damien gently caught her before she could fall to the floor. Elitra wrapped her arms around his waist and rubbed her head against his chest without even stopping to think.

“Master! Master!”

‘It seems like this was her intention from the beginning.’ Damien thought as his wry smile resurfaced.

Elitra wouldn’t leave his embrace no matter how much he tried to tell her to. She still had her mana sealed, so she was no different than a mortal, but Damien couldn’t bring himself to push her away.

He knew the glee that came with regaining a lost body part, so he let her vent it before removing himself from her.

Though, he ended up having to back away early when he saw the ravenous look in her eyes. He felt that if he stayed, he would end up losing something he was saving for his reunion with Rose.

When Damien left Elitra’s area, he finally decided to go back to the outside world. His sleep had only lasted half an hour at most, and the following visits to Little Xue and Elitra took another hour. The battle should’ve ended by now.

But when he left the Sanctuary and arrived back at the location where he fought Polius, he was greeted with an unexpected sight.

Chapter 293 Demon King [5]

Damien's battle with Polius wasn't anywhere close to contained. With each impact, they had razed the surroundings and moved tens of kilometers through space.

A massive area had been affected by their battle, with massive craters and rifts forming in the earth and the structures that used to stand being demolished. This kind of damage made it difficult for Feng Qing'er and Qing Tan to actually pinpoint where the battle had ended.

"Wow! This guy seems to have been a lot stronger than the Commanders the two of us fought!" Qing Tan exclaimed as she scanned the area.

"Right. Even though Kroa was doing all that posturing, she wasn't actually that strong without the dark material. It seems this one was different."

They continued to fly across the battleground with the ten Demon Generals silently following them, even coming across the traces of Damien's Dimensional Severance. But they still didn't manage to locate the man himself.

"Where did that guy run off to? Judging from the fact that the mana in the air hasn't even completely dispersed, the battle didn't end that long ago."

"He can teleport, though. I wouldn't be surprised if he was halfway across the realm by now."

"Pfft! You know he isn't that powerful. There's no way anyone of our strength can overcome the powerful suppression in the atmosphere."

“Well, none of that really matters now. What are we going to do with them?”

Qing Tan glanced at the Demon Generals. They had come solely to speak to Damien, so there was nothing the girls could do with them. It was impossible to fish more information out of them even with torture.

And judging from the poor state the Demon Generals were in, it was obvious that they had already tested it.

“You guys! Entertain me until he comes back!”

Qing Tan clapped her hands together and proclaimed, causing the Demon Generals to burst into a cold sweat.

“H-how can we do that, Milady?”

Even the form of address they used had become more respectful after everything they had been forced to endure.

They were Demon Generals. Of course they had pride that befitted their position. But this pride had long been broken by the absurd strength of the two girls in front of them.

“Hmm, I don’t know! You decide!”

The Demon Generals lamented their fates as they began racking their brains for ideas. In the end, they went through a variety of different ideas to keep the two girls entertained.

When Damien finally returned to the Trial World, this scene was the first thing he saw. Ten Demon Generals dancing and performing tricks while two beauties watched with amused expressions.

“You two, what the hell did you get up to while I was gone.”

Qing Tan turned around when she heard the voice and smiled brightly.

“You’re back!”

“Yeah I’m back but what’s with the enthusiasm?”

“Can’t I just be excited to see you?”

“We’ve talked like three times in total. Why would you be excited to see me?”

“You’re no fun!”

Qing Tan pouted at his bland responses. Seeing this, Feng Qing’er sighed and came forward, explaining the situation to Damien.

‘Damn, Stormbringer? Not a bad title if I do say so myself.’

Damien nodded in satisfaction. The people of Apeiron were trash at giving titles. Lightning prince? And even worse, Spatial Lightning prince? He cringed every time he heard someone call him by those addresses.

Even Grim Reaper was bad. Though he didn’t want to admit it, he was a bit chuuni back then since he was still in the process of coping with society. Due to that, he may or may not have enjoyed such a title. But thinking back to it only made him feel immense shame.

Shaking off his black history, Damien turned to the Demon Generals.

“You wanted to speak to me?”

“No, sir. More accurately, our King wishes to speak to you.”

“Which King?”

“Demon King Lucius.”

“I see.”

Damien rubbed his chin. Elitra’s father had taken initiative to contact him. If it was before, he might’ve been on guard hearing such a fact, but now, he didn’t feel the same.

He had heard the story from Elitra. He didn't feel anything towards Demon King Lucius besides pity. But the man was strong, and he was the access point Damien had been looking for.

Hadn't he just been wondering where to start in his quest to assassinate all of the Demons' upper echelon? Hadn't he just been wondering how to get Demon King Lucius into the Sanctuary so they could speak freely?

Now that he had a point of contact, things would flow much smoother.

"How does your King plan to speak to me? I doubt he can freely leave the demon city as he pleases."

"Yes. Our King does not have the ability to meet you in person, but he can still speak to you in other ways."

"Ah!"

That's right. Elitra had mentioned once that the Demon King Lucius could manifest a projection to protect her if she was ever on the verge of death. Who said the same method couldn't be used for communication?

"Very well. Let me meet your King then."

The Demon Generals nodded and joined hands. They began to channel their mana and circulate it amongst themselves in a strange way.

Feng Qing'er and Qing Tan stood at the side and watched as everything took place.

“He knows something, right?”

“He definitely knows something.”

“Also, could you sense it when he showed up behind us? Even though I had my awareness spread, I didn't notice him until he spoke.”

“It's the same for me. It's like he was always there to begin with, rather than him showing up at that time.”

“What a weird guy.”

Qing Tan nodded. He was truly an interesting guy. Much more interesting than the people she frequently talked to in the 3000 Beast Mountain range.

He spoke freely like he was an open book, but anybody with a brain could tell he was hiding plenty of secrets. It was a strange kind of mystery that didn't come from posturing.

The first-ranked genius Hun Fang was also mysterious, but in a gloomy and unapproachable way. Qing Tan was interested in both of them, but she preferred Damien since he was more fun to talk to.

“Oh, right. Why are we so calm when those guys are literally summoning a Demon King? Shouldn’t we be on guard or something?” Feng Qing’er exclaimed.

“We should! But look at him, he’s acting so calm and unbothered that we also subconsciously did the same! Wow, what a cool guy!”

“What the hell are you saying?”

Feng Qing’er looked at the snickering Qing Tan with a dead fish gaze. Having seen the side of her that tortured people with a smile on her face, Feng Qing’er could no longer take Qing Tan seriously when she acted like a cheery fangirl.

As the two girls conversed, the Demon Generals’ mana finally reached its peak. In front of them, a figure slowly began to form in the air.

He was tall, around 6 feet and 7 inches, and his straight blonde hair flowed down to his waist. His face was handsome and refined like an immortal cultivator, and his stoic expression only complimented his aura and vibe.

“Demon King Lucius,” Damien muttered.

Looking at him closely, he did indeed share some features with Elitra. While Elitra’s hair was pitch black, she had the same blood-red eyes and facial shape as her father.

Demon King Lucius's projection scanned the surroundings slowly as if he was getting oriented with the change of scenery before his eyes landed on Damien.

“So you must be the infamous Stormbringer. Tell me, why do I sense my daughter's aura on you?!”

A fearsome pressure fell onto Damien's shoulders all of a sudden, but he could only smile wryly.

‘Why does it feel more like I'm meeting my father-in-law than a notorious Demon King?’

Chapter 294 Demon King [6]

Damien was confused at first. For Elitra's scent to be on him would make sense since she had been hugging him and rubbing her body all over him only a few moments ago, but aura was different.

Every being possessed their own unique aura, which essentially embodied everything they embodied. But for another person's aura to mix into one's own, it meant that the two had a much more intimate relationship.

Only through dual practice could someone else's aura be imprinted onto one's own, and when Damien realized what Demon King Lucius had assumed when he first saw him, the panic started to set in.

“Senior, calm down! It's not what it looks like!”

“Not what it looks like? Are you saying this King is mistaken? You bastard actually dared to lay a hand on my daughter!”

“Senior! Calm down! Impulsive is devil! I didn’t do what you’re thinking, I just took something from her that had been bothering her for a while!”

“You what?!”

Damien had only worded it in such a way because he didn’t know if he should mention the Nihility Flame in front of so many people, but he immediately regretted it. An overprotective father was truly unreasonable.

The pressure on Damien’s shoulders had already reached an extreme level. Left with no other choice, Damien reached out his hand and let out a wisp of the flames within his body.

A dense golden flame flickered at the tip of his finger. Since Damien hadn’t explored his flames since the change, he wasn’t able to separate the Nihility Flames from his new golden flame, but he knew it didn’t matter when he felt the pressure on his body start to lessen.

“You...where did you get this flame?”

The Demon King calmed down after seeing the flame. He wasn’t stupid, and he wasn’t a 4th class for nothing. He could clearly feel the aura of Nihility Flames from the golden flame in Damien’s hand. His own Nihility Flames were reacting as if to verify what he sensed.

Damien’s words started to make more sense to the Demon King now that he’d seen it. Since Elitra had been born with the Nihility Flame Seedling in her body, her natural aura carried an extremely similar property to the flames themselves.

Demon King Lucius already knew the feeling of Elitra's flame aura like the back of his hand since he was the one who raised her. Since Damien had her flames instead, it would make sense why he had mistakenly thought Damien had forced himself on his daughter.

"Boy, you should learn how to express yourself properly. Otherwise you'll die one day due to the misunderstandings you cause."

Although the Demon King also understood why Damien had chosen not to say it outright, he was an old monster. There was no way he'd lose face by admitting his mistake.

'Thick-skinned is an understatement for this kind of person.' Damien sighed inwardly as he finally relaxed.

"Senior should already know where I got this flame from. But there's no need to worry. I received it with consent and without harming the original owner."

"I see..."

The Demon King Lucius also sighed. He had come to speak about important topics, but things had devolved into such a trivial dispute.

But there was no way he'd trust the words of a stranger so easily.

"If it is as you say, then it shouldn't be a problem for me to see her, no?"

“This...it’s a bit difficult.”

Damien hesitated. He didn’t want to reveal the existence of the Sanctuary so easily.

The Demon King seemed to understand that there was some sort of secret involved, so he immediately signaled the Demon Generals to retreat. Now that his projection had been formed, he only needed them to continue supplying mana. It didn’t matter if they left his position while they did so.

Seeing this, Qing Tan also dragged the unwilling Feng Qing’er away. No matter how curious and playful she was, she knew her limits. Even as a projection, a 4th class existence could cause them great harm with his aura alone. Now wasn’t the time to be willful.

She would just pester Damien until he spilled everything after the conversation ended.

After everyone had left, Damien did a quick sweep of the area with his awareness before summoning Elitra from the Sanctuary.

“Master!”

Just like before, she called out excitedly before pouncing into his embrace.

Damien froze. He felt a frighteningly cold glare land on him immediately.

‘Fuck me!’

He was so caught up in proving his innocence that he had forgotten about a glaring fact.

The girl in his embrace was happily calling him master while ignoring her father who was standing right in front of her. Damien felt a massive headache coming on.

“Ehem, Elitra, why don’t you take a look around before acting.” He said wryly.

It was only after he mentioned it that she scanned the surroundings. When she finally noticed the man she had been ignoring, her eyes went wide as saucers.

“F-father! Since when were you here?”

“Since the beginning.”

“I-I see! W-well then...bye!”

Elitra took off running with her face more crimson than her eyes. She wanted to dig a hole and hide in shame.

Damien quickly teleported over and grabbed her before bringing her back. The girl seemed to have forgotten that her mana was still sealed.

Demon King Lucius sighed lightly. “You’re still the same as always.”

He seemed relieved. Ignoring the whole ‘Master’ thing, if Elitra was still able to act so willful and cheery, it was obvious she hadn’t been mistreated.

“Thank you for taking care of my daughter.”

He sincerely thanked Damien. Meanwhile, Damien was sweating buckets.

‘Let’s make sure he never figures out that she was legless until about 5 minutes ago. That’s probably for the best.’

“It’s no problem. How can I mistreat the daughter of a 4th class existence? It’s simply impossible.”

“Hmm. But you somehow got the daughter of a 4th class existence to happily call you Master. You must be feeling proud of yourself.”

“Okay let’s not twist the facts here. She called me Master first and I begrudgingly accepted it.”

“I called you Lord first, though! I’m calling you Master now because you seemed to like it better!” Elitra chimed in.

“Ha...Haha...”

It was Damien's turn to feel like running away. This girl seemed hell-bent on bringing trouble to him.

'I think I'm starting to regret taking her as my maid, cough, I mean servant. Yeah, servant.'

Seeing the interaction between the two made Demon King Lucius smile inadvertently. Truth be told, it had been a long time since Elitra could behave so freely.

Her Nihility Flames had been a burden that she was never able to properly carry. Now that the burden had been lifted from her shoulders, she seemed to have reverted to her previous self.

And while he wanted to give his daughter more time to act joyful, as well as figure out the whole thing about her calling the man in front of him Master, he knew he didn't have much time as a projection. Those matters could be taken care of once they met in person.

"Very well. Now that I've seen my daughter safe and sound, I'd like to get to the topic I originally came to speak to you about."

Damien also became serious when he heard the words.

"How do you feel about forming an alliance with me?"

Chapter 295 Demon King [7]

"An alliance? Why should I form an alliance with a Demon King?" Damien inquired.

“Well, if I needed to spell things out with you, it’d become quite annoying. For you to be acting so calmly after meeting me, my daughter should’ve told you everything already, no?”

“Tch.”

Indeed, since Elitra had already told him about Demon King Lucius’s story and the Demons’ original plight, there was no need for theatrics.

“An alliance doesn’t sound too bad. The only thing is, how are you going to contribute? Besides the information you can provide me, as long as you are within this realm, you are powerless.”

Demon King Lucius’s brows furrowed. “Powerless is pushing it a bit. While my freedom is indeed restricted, it’s not to the point where it’s impossible to move. Otherwise, how would I have been able to meet you here?”

“That’s certainly true. I’m assuming we don’t have much time to discuss things in depth while you are in projection form, so we can hash out details after we meet. For now, tell me what you came here to tell me.”

Demon King Lucius nodded. “If I was a 3rd class, I would’ve been no better than a slave. But since I’m a genuine 4th class that has received a Universe Baptism, I have a certain degree of control. In essence, unless that bastard Demon God concentrates his focus on limiting me, I can do as I please while abusing the loopholes in the terms he set.

“Anyway, enough of that. The first thing you should know is about the Apostles. While the ones you fought were certainly among them, they were far from the strongest of them. You must make sure not to underestimate their strength based on what you have seen so far.

“Along with that, the Apostles you fought in the previous battle all had record crystals embedded in their dark material. As long as the dark material exists, they will be able to gain plenty of information about you by watching your fight.”

“That’s not a problem. I was never planning to underestimate them, especially after seeing how formidable that dark material is. But I’m assuming that you mean there will be some amongst them that don’t have to rely on their dark material for strength. I’ll be wary of it.

“As for the record crystal, it should’ve been crushed when I devoured the dark material. Is it a live feedback situation, or do I have some leeway?”

“No, while the record crystals can project live feed, with the amount of atmospheric mana disturbance that takes place during battle, their signals will be interrupted. I’d say that you have around a minute after the battle ends to destroy the record crystal if you don’t wish for the recording to be transmitted to the source.”

Damien sighed a breath of relief. Let alone a minute, he had devoured the dark material immediately after things had ended.

At the time, he had also been thinking something similar. Since the dark material was being summoned back to its original owner, it’d be able to transmit information about him to said owner. But even he didn’t know that the transmission would’ve taken place far sooner than he expected!

‘I need to ask Qing Tan and Feng Qing’er about their side as well.’

Although he wasn’t planning to include them in his assassination plan, he still needed to see what kind of information the Apostles had on hand. Even if they didn’t know his strength, he didn’t want them to be able to roughly gauge it through the strength of his peers.

“The next thing is Acier, the demon city. If you are planning to receive me, you need to have an in-depth understanding of its structure.”

The Demon King continued speaking, telling Damien a great deal of insider information on Acier. With this information, it'd be much easier for him to infiltrate and meet the Demon King in person.

Other than these two points, Damien still wanted to know the specific strengths and weaknesses of the Apostles, as well as some more information about the Nox and the Primordial Undying Realm, but he could already see signs of the Demon King's projection fading.

“Boy, I hope I'll be able to see you in person soon. At that time, see how I greet you for turning my daughter into your slave.”

“Listen here, old man. She isn't my slave, but my maid. As a man yourself, you should understand the Grand Dao of Maid Appreciation.”

“Cough, whether I understand or not is a different story. This is my daughter we're talking about. It's not the same.”

“Isn't this the so-called ‘a pot calling the kettle black’? Old man be honest with me, how many maids do you have in that Demon King Castle of yours?”

“That doesn't concern you. In the end, a maid is simply another servant.”

“Oh, is that so? I see, I see.”

Damien nodded in a sagely way, causing the Demon King’s face to turn black. But honestly, he couldn’t find a way to refute. He was a man himself, after all. He had a far deeper comprehension of the Grand Dao of Maid Appreciation than Damien did.

Seeing Damien’s glare on him, Demon King Lucius chuckled inadvertently. He knew that they were just making small talk until his projection faded since there wasn’t much else they could discuss until they met in person, but he found the young man in front of him quite refreshing.

It had been so many years since he was locked in his castle without any hope of making progress, but now that he had found such an outlet, he was quite satisfied to say the least. Just like his daughter, his burdens were slowly being lifted.

‘Well, let’s see how you perform in these coming days. I’ll judge from that whether you are worthy of being my daughter’s master or not.’

Leaving his thoughts unsaid, Demon King Lucius slowly faded away, the mana of the projection dissipating into the atmosphere.

Not long after, the Demon Generals and the girls returned to the area.

“So? How was the conversation?”

“Hmph. That old man doesn’t know what’s good for him. Let’s see how I teach him a lesson when we meet in person.”

“You dare talk about our King so casually?!”

The Demon Generals immediately got up in arms, but were shot down by a single glare from Qing Tan. Damien couldn't help but find them pitiful.

Elitra had already been sent back to the Sanctuary, so these Demon Generals obviously had no way of knowing whether the Demon King had a positive or negative relationship with Damien, but it couldn't be helped.

“Tell me what you talked about! Tell me!”

Qing Tan rushed up to Damien and grabbed onto his arm, shaking it back and forth like a spoiled little sister.

“And why should I tell you?”

“Because...because you should!”

Qing Tan couldn't find a good reason, but she was still unresigned. She didn't want to miss out on the fun, but this damn bastard always seemed intent on hiding things from her!

“Well, I'll tell you some stuff later. For now, let's send these poor Generals on their way.”

“”Thank you Milord!””

The Demon Generals barely even waited for Damien to finish his sentence. They were crying tears of joy at the fact that they could finally escape from Qing Tan’s clutches.

They didn’t even care that they had nowhere else to go. They could just hide in one of the vast forests in the secret realm until the storm died down. Anything was better than the physical and psychological torture they had been enduring for the past day.

“Then, we shall take our leave.”

Without waiting any longer, the 10 Demon Generals bowed to Damien before rushing away.

“So, what’s the plan from now on?” Feng Qing’er inquired.

“Plan? Why do you think I have one?” Damien smirked as he questioned back.

“Please, even if it hasn’t been long since we’ve known each other, I can see clearly that you have something up your sleeve.”

“Well, I do have some plans. I’m going to continue going after the Demons. And you?”

“Hmph! I’ll figure that out later. Why can’t I also go after the demons, hm?”

“I mean, you already reached the White Star level by killing the Commanders, both of you. There’s no need for you to continue accompanying me.”

Feng Qing’er glared at Damien as if he said something extremely idiotic. “Do you really think so lowly of me? I pursued the demons because of justice! I want to soothe the souls of the innocent who died at their hands! There’s no way I’ll leave the job half finished.”

“And you?” Damien asked Qing Tan.

“Hmm~ I’ll stay with the two of you because it’s fun! There’s nothing better to do for the rest of the time we’re in the Trial World anyway.”

Well, she wasn’t wrong about that. Damien wanted to nitpick, but he couldn’t find a good reason to do so.

“Sigh, fine. You can do as you please, but I’ll separate from you here. I have other matters to take care of.”

Chapter 296 Demon King [8]

Damien suddenly remembered what the Demon King had told him a few moments prior.

“Right, what happened to the dark material of the Apostles the two of you fought?” He asked.

Although the girls were irked by his obvious move to change the subject, they still answered after seeing the serious look in his eyes.

“Mine’s gone! I killed it!” Qing Tan angered excitedly.

“You managed to kill yours? Mine managed to escape by a hair because I was too focused on burning that bitch. I managed to tag it with my flames though.”

“Tag it?” Damien asked curiously.

“That’s right!” Feng Qing’er responded with a proud look on her face. “My flames now have an even more profound connection with me, so I can locate them no matter how far away they are! Even after they stop burning, they’ll leave a flame scar that’ll respond to my flames if I activate it.”

“That’s a nice ability, but it doesn’t help with our current situation.”

Damien sighed. Although it wasn’t as bad as he expected, a dark material had still managed to get away.

Damien proceeded to explain what the Demon King had told him about the record crystals. Hearing it, Feng Qing’er’s face went red with shame.

“Dammit! If I had just been more focused...!”

“Well, I can’t really blame you. That bitch was seriously annoying.”

“Right? She kept going on and on about who was more beautiful. Like, who gives a shit?! We’re supposed to be battling to the death, why the hell are you still caring about your looks?”

“Ehh~ but you still manage to keep your haughty and arrogant demeanor while you fight. Didn’t you see how many of those geniuses became infatuated at Astoria?” Qing Tan teased.

“Who gives a shit about them?! They can’t even match up to a single feather on my body, let alone have the qualifications to conquer me. Hmph! Let’s see if I ever find a man who can actually do so.”

“But isn’t there one right in front of you~?”

“Him? Ha! Don’t make me laugh. This son of a bitch could never conquer me!”

“But I don’t think that’s true though~?”

“Ehem, girls. Can we talk about the serious things instead?”

Damien massaged his forehead. Before saying I couldn’t conquer you, can’t you consider whether I actually want to conquer you at all first? But he didn’t voice his thoughts since it’d inevitably lead to Feng Qing’er’ incessant rambling.

“In any case, the enemy will know your abilities now, so it’s even less of a good idea to bring you along with me.”

“So what am I supposed to do? Although I don’t like agreeing with Qing Tan, it’s true that there’s nothing else to do around here for the next half a year besides fight with demons.”

“I mean, I never said you can’t fight with demons. I just said you won’t be doing it with me. I have my own plans, and you have yours. So let’s just leave it at that. Me telling you about the record crystals was just a friendly reminder, so keep it in mind before you act from now on.”

After exchanging a few more words with them, Damien decisively turned around and left. He was planning to rest up a bit before starting his infiltration and assassinations.

It was one of the drawbacks of his soul injury. Unlike the past when he could go many weeks on end without sleep, he now needed to take proper rest to alleviate his fatigue. It was annoying, but necessary.

Damien found a secluded location before entering the Sanctuary, entering his private area and lying down on the grass.

With his eyes closed, he began thinking about the previous conversation.

Although he was well aware of Feng Qing’er and Qing Tan’s strengths after fighting so many battles with them, Damien didn’t want to drag these two along with him.

It wasn’t a matter of incompatibility or even the fact that Feng Qing’er’s strength had become known to the enemy. He just felt that he would work better alone.

Especially with his current goals, every single one of them required discretion and secrecy. It was the type of thing that’d function much better if one didn’t work in a team.

The only way he could make this a team effort was if he had people he wholeheartedly trusted with him. For instance, Rose, Ruyue, and Elena.

‘Speaking of them, I wonder how they’re doing.’

He could feel Ruyue’s soul strand in his mindspace was still filled with vitality, so he wasn’t worried about her, but the other two girls were out of his reach in unknown places.

He didn’t know what kind of dangers they’d braved or what kind of strength they had at this point. He didn’t know if they were being pestered by young masters due to their world class beauty or bullied by the seniors in their sect.

He once again began to regret parting with them. How much more fun would the 3000 Beast Mountain Range have been with the two of them present?

‘Then again, there’s plenty of stuff that wouldn’t have happened if we were all together.’

The most important of those things being his budding relationship with Ruyue. Judging from Rose’s upbringing and the negative effects her father’s harem had on her, he didn’t know how she would take to him having other women.

But he couldn’t change his feelings for Ruyue, and after so long, he had no intention of leaving Ruyue’s feelings unanswered.

‘Speaking of unanswered feelings...’

He had truly done Elena dirty. He knew it, but he didn’t know how to deal with it. His relationship with Elena was different than what he had with Rose and Ruyue. They had known each other for far longer, so he felt much more awkward breaching the barrier of friendship and trying to become something more.

‘Well, let’s not think about it. Rose still doesn’t even know about Ruyue, so how could I even consider adding a third? Let’s see how she reacts before deciding.’

If he knew that Rose had already made plans for how to manage his harem, how would he have reacted?

Unfortunately, she hadn’t taken the initiative to tell him. After all, Rose had been expecting Elena to be his second harem member, she didn’t expect a competitor like Ruyue to appear.

And because Rose had been waiting for Damien to develop with Elena before talking to him about it, they had never truly ended up discussing a future where Damien had multiple women, leading to his current indecisiveness.

Damien sighed. His thoughts had gone on a tangent thinking about women again. His relationship problems honestly scared him more than the Demon God he was currently facing.

But he was still somewhat proud of himself. He knew that he’d grown a great deal since he first decided to split up with Rose and Elena when they entered the Cloud Plane.

He was now able to properly confront his feelings for his women without hesitating due to his insecurity or misgivings. The only thing holding him back was the fact that he hadn't communicated with Rose yet, and he felt that this was an entirely justified reason to hold back.

After all, having thoughts about other women and actively pursuing them was already unfaithful of him. The fact that he wanted to build a harem was even more.

He had decided already that if he was going to do this, he'd do it with sincerity. There was no way he'd slight Rose any more than he already was.

He soon threw away all of the muddled thoughts in his head. Along with resting, there was another task that he had to take care of.

And it was something that he was much more excited about than anything else at the moment.

It was finally time to tabulate the gains he made in the previous days.

Chapter 297 Gains [1]

There were two main things that Damien knew he had to focus on when it came to the gains he made. The first was his golden flames, and the second was the dark material he devoured.

As far as he was concerned, there weren't any other gains he made, but he had to check on his own body to be certain. He didn't end up devouring Polius after he died either.

There was a simple reason for this. In that final moment when the dark material was desperately resisting his Seven Stars Encircle The Moon attack, it had sucked Polius dry of all his vitality and experience, making his corpse completely useless even if devoured.

The first thing Damien did when he sent his awareness into his body was attempt to locate his flames.

When he summoned lightning, he usually just transmuted his pure mana into lightning mana to produce his black lightning. After all, besides its color, there wasn't anything special about it.

It was definitely more destructive than normal lightning, but that was all it had in terms of unique properties. Along with that, it was never an external force even though he received the affinity after his first ever devouring.

It was the same with spatial mana. He didn't have a container in his body to store the essence of space specifically, but since he always had an intrinsic connection with space even before the awakening of mana on earth, he never had to concern himself with it.

His flames, on the other hand, were different. From the start, his sunflames originated from his power as a Celestial. At first, he had simply used the connection he had with the stars in the crudest possible way to draw flames for him to use.

They were entirely external.

But as time went on and his control over both his Celestial Authority and his sunflames increased, he began to refine the sunflames into a flame that was incorporated into his body.

The sunflames then became something he could call upon and use at will without using an absurd amount of mana to draw them directly from the sun.

Of course, this also meant that the intensity of the sunflames didn't nearly match up to when he drew them directly, but the difference wasn't much.

The Nihility Flame was an even better example. He had drawn the Nihility Flame Seed from Elitra's body and directly swallowed it, allowing his Void Physique to manage it in his stead while he went and joined the battle that was about to occur.

Due to his focus being elsewhere, he hadn't noticed anything. Even during the battle he had no time to question the change in his flames' color.

Now that he had specifically gone to look for it, his awareness accurately pinpointed a small flame seed resting within his Mana Heart.

Similar to the color of the flames he had seen previously, it was mainly gold. However, it also contained wisps of black that he didn't notice before.

'Rather than a positive reaction between the two flames in my body, it seems as if they were forcefully melded together and fused into something entirely new.'

His sunflames didn't possess a flame seed due to their nature. It looked like the Void Physique had taken his sunflame source, which was essentially just a ball of fire, and merged it with the Nihility Flame Seed.

'This result is probably the best I could've hoped for. Although I've lost the ability to use Sunflames and the Nihility Flame separately, the combined product isn't just a matter of simple addition.'

As he continued observing the flame, the more surprises he found. Indeed, the power of the flame seemed to have exponentially increased after the two flames combined.

‘Their properties merged too...’

The sunflames were, at the end of the day, flames that came from a star. They were also very closely tied to his power as a Celestial. Due to this, the sunflames had always carried slight properties of starlight within them. Only, these properties had been far too muted to show any worth.

But now, they were out in full force. Damien could clearly feel the stellar energy that the flame contained.

‘As for the Nihility Flame, it seems its consciousness was preserved, and its devouring abilities have been enhanced by Void Essence.’

Damien didn’t think this was unnatural. After all, the Void Essence was the king of any devour-type abilities. Now, along with the fact that his flames could devour other flames to gain strength, they could also absorb the properties of those flames similar to what happened when the sunflames and Nihility Flame fused.

‘What kind of flame would this become? If I can find the 22 flames that trumped the Nihility Flame on the Heavenly Flame Index and devour them, what kind of monster would I create?’

Damien grew excited at the prospect. A flame combining the properties of all the most powerful flames in existence...he had the urge to go out and try his luck immediately. But he quickly calmed himself down.

How could it be so easy to find a flame on the Heavenly Flame Index? There were only 100 ranked flames, and of them, he had only seen one even in the close to 6 years that he had been practicing.

It was best to take such a matter slowly and let fate take its course.

As for the fact that his flames had a budding consciousness, this was even better. While controlling his flames on his own was natural and didn't have much delay, he still had to put attention on shaping and guiding his mana.

This was normal for any practitioner to do.

But a conscious flame would be able to perform those processes for him, making his efficiency and output reach their greatest potential.

'I must nurture this flame spirit well. Perhaps it'll become one of my most trusted allies in the future.'

Damien soon withdrew his awareness from his body and stood up, summoning his golden-black flames on the tips of his fingers.

The best way to learn the true limits of its abilities was to test it practically. Although he didn't have anyone to fight at the moment, he had a spacious training area that he could destroy as he pleased.

Damien flicked his fingers, causing a flame arrow to shoot towards a nearby tree. Before it even reached a foot away from the trunk, the entire tree had been incinerated.

‘Not bad at all.’

It wasn’t just a matter of heat, nor was it the devouring properties of the Nihility Flame. It was also a result of the stellar energy residing in the flame.

Properties of gravity, nuclear radiation, and even cosmic force were slightly represented in the flames.

Stellar energy was something Damien hadn’t totally explored yet. That and starlight were the defining features of a Celestial, but he had entirely neglected them.

He felt embarrassed about it, but there was nothing he could do. He had so many skills and so many energies to focus on that he was always diverting his focus during training to choose whichever path would be most beneficial in the short term.

Perhaps this realization was the biggest gain he had made from the battle.

Damien was someone who always prided himself on his versatility. Unlike others, he was always gaining new paths and new methods that he could use instead of being stuck with only the affinities and talent he had from birth.

Of course, neither his affinities nor talent were bad. They could even be considered as heavenly. But he had always been ready to give himself more choices.

However, he had realized that his outlook wasn’t entirely correct.

During the previous battle, instead of simply abusing his mana capacity and being freeform with his elements, he had mainly stuck to physical combat and the use of skills he had created.

And frankly, he felt that this structured battle style reaped him much more advantage than the untamed battle style he usually used.

Even though he hadn't managed to kill Polius using Dimensional Severance due to the interferences of the dark material, he had completely suppressed his opponent to the point where he had no other paths to turn to.

If it had been anyone else, they were guaranteed to die by Dimensional Severance, and that was if they managed to survive the onslaught that came before that.

As for Seven Stars Encircling The Moon, it was an ultimate attack that didn't lose out to Dimensional Severance in the slightest.

Damien knew that his versatility was indeed a good thing. It wasn't something he should ever take for granted. But he now knew that too much versatility could also be harmful.

The saying was 'jack of all trades, master of none' for a reason. If he wanted to reach a pinnacle, he needed to become more single-focused than he had been before.

But that didn't mean he needed to totally throw away his versatility either.

Chapter 298 Gains [2]

What he needed to do now was find a balance. A halfway point where his versatility could still shine, but also be constrained in a format where he could master everything he already had control over.

It was inevitable that he'd continue gaining more sources of power since his main form of leveling and strengthening was devourment, but he didn't plan to be burdened by that.

He was sure that awakening his Time affinity was only a matter of time at this point, especially since he was planning to spend a few months meditating on the temporal distortion in the Trial World after dealing with the demons.

Before that awakening took place, he needed to clean up shop.

But this was something that'd take time and effort to work. He needed to condense his various powers into a skillset that he could fluidly maneuver through without difficulty. For now, it wasn't possible.

Damien played around with the golden-black flames for a while before a sudden thought came to mind.

'These aren't sunflames anymore, nor are they Nihilicity Flames. If so, what should I call them?'

It was an important matter. Such an imperious flame; especially one that'd develop consciousness at some point, required an even more imperious name.

‘The Emperor Flame! No no, that doesn’t work. Even if it became exponentially more powerful after my two flames combined, there’s no way it’d be more than 20th on the Heavenly Flame Index. It doesn’t deserve such a name yet.’

Damien thought long and hard. His naming sense had always been simple and minimalistic. He never aimed for anything flashy just for the sake of being flashy.

‘Well, Seven Stars Encircle The Moon exists...’

But even that one was simply named after the way it looked. It was literally seven stars encircling a bright moon that formed around his fist. Was there a more direct way to name it?

‘Nihility Sun Flames is a bit too straightforward...damn, and my dragon flames will also become incorporated into it once my bloodline improves and I awaken them. Hmm...’

His thoughts shifted in another direction.

‘What if I just follow the theme?’

It was a genius idea. He was Damien Void! He possessed the Void Physique! He had recently gained access to Void Essence! And so, why not just call them Void Flames?

‘Actually, it makes some sense now that I think about it...!’

The Void he had come into contact with was both nothingness and everything at the same time. While nothingness was easy to explain, the everything part was more complicated.

Every essence in existence, even the ones that had never been discovered before, were incorporated into the Void. Even though he couldn't perceive their existence or even verify his conjecture, he was sure of it due to the intrinsic connection he had with the Void due to his physique.

It was similar to how when every color was mixed together, it'd form a brown color that was infinitely close to black.

As for how it related to the flame, wouldn't his flame also grow to incorporate every flame that existed? Wouldn't it become similar to the void in that sense?

As for the nothingness of the void, of course the devouring properties of the flame would serve to embody it. Void Essence itself had enhanced said properties, so it wasn't wrong to interpret it as such.

'Perfect! Even though it's a golden flame right now which doesn't really fit the color scheme of the void, its properties are more than enough to make it deserving of the name!'

Damien directed his awareness towards the budding consciousness of the flame as he attempted to convey his will to it.

'From now until the end of time, you will be called the Void Flame. A flame that encompasses all others, and drives its enemies into nothingness! Your name is as imperious as the hopes I have for you. Do not disappoint me!'

The Void Flame Seed in his Mana Heart flickered excitedly as if it understood his words. With a smile, Damien finally took his attention off the flames.

There was a second thing he needed to pay attention to. It was the dark material.

Honestly, after the realization he just had, he was hoping that the dark material didn't give him too much more freedom. He was especially hoping that he wouldn't suddenly gain an affinity towards Death mana. Luckily, it seemed his worries were pointless.

The dark material didn't turn into essence and enhance him in a similar way to the rest of the things he had devoured so far. However, it did have one similarity.

It had become a black substance that dispersed into his bloodstream, joining his bloodlines and taking a spot for itself among their ranks.

If he had to put it into context, his bloodline now contained roughly 30% dragon bloodline, 20% of whatever the dark material had turned into, and 10% of the various lesser bloodlines that he still needed to purify.

Suddenly, Damien felt his blood boil as the dark bloodline began to pulse. It was as if it had been waiting for him to acknowledge its presence.

Damien hesitantly poked at it with his awareness, and surprisingly enough, two words came to his mind as he did so.

“Demon Transformation.”

The pulsing in his blood became furious. As Damien stood silently, changes began to occur in his body.

His height grew drastically until he was close to 7 feet tall. Thick black runic patterns surfaced on his skin and curled around his body like winding snakes.

His skin itself had paled until he looked as if he had no blood left in him. His hair quickly changed from its original midnight black color into a pure white like snow. His sclera turned entirely black which enhanced how glaringly unique his eyes were.

His whole body felt like it was brimming with power. He felt that he could crush a mountain in a single punch. Along with this boost in physical strength, a thick black mist surrounded him that seemed to corrode anything that came too close.

‘Holy shit!’

Damien couldn’t help but exclaim inwardly when he saw his current appearance. He didn’t even look like himself anymore. The white hair he now had especially irked him.

‘Damn, thank god my height and physique became more robust. Otherwise, I’d just look like some random chuuni bastard on the side of the street. All I need now is an eyepatch and a metal arm and I’d be no different than that guy from that one anime.’

Damien sighed in remorse. The power and uses of his transformation definitely pleased him, but the changes in his appearance were a bit too much.

Thinking about changes in appearance, Damien had another genius idea.

‘What if I...’

“Dragon Transformation.”

Pain immediately racked his entire body. It was like millions of needles had pierced into him at once. His innards w started to contort and inflate, his body brimming with so much energy that it was on the verge of exploding.

Still, the transformation he intended happened.

He knew it would be like this. Two equally domineering bloodlines would naturally compete if they were given the opportunity. It was simply that the Void Essence had quelled them and turned them docile.

Now that such a sudden change had occurred, he was feeling what would’ve become of his body if he tried to do the same thing without the assistance of Void Essence.

But once the Void Essence was given enough time to do its job, the pain in his body naturally subsided and the rampaging energy calmed down.

Two pitch-black horns jutted out of Damien’s forehead and wrapped around his head like a crown. His scales were already close to black in color, but now, blood-red runic patterns were drawn along their surface.

Massive wings sprouted from his shoulder blades, and a draconic tail elongated from his lower spine. His teeth and nails became fangs and claws.

His sclera had been changed by his Demon Transformation, and now his pupils became vertical slits due to his Dragon Transformation.

‘This power...’

It was insane. Damien didn’t think his body could properly house the amount of power he was brimming with at the moment. With a single flap of his wings, he was able to move hundreds of kilometers.

“Argh...!”

But it didn’t last long. After a mere minute, his transformations slowly became undone, leaving a shirtless Damien collapsed on the floor gasping for breath.

The powers of his bloodlines were largely exempt from the consumption of mana due to their nature, but in return, they consumed vitality and stamina.

Of course, since his body was his own, he didn’t need to worry about being sucked dry like Polius. And due to his regeneration, vitality could be restored.

But that restoration took time. After only a mere thirty seconds, his Demonic Dragon Transformation had consumed all of his reserves, leaving him in a severely weakened state.

‘This form can obviously only be used as a final resort.’

But just because it wasn’t too practical didn’t mean Damien wasn’t happy with it.

After all, every second mattered in the midst of battle, let alone thirty of them. And when that minute was consumed by a form that’d even let him fight on par with some weaker 4th class existences head-on...

There was no reason for him not to be satisfied with it.

Chapter 299 Gains [3]

The Demon Dragon Transformation and Void Flames were the two main gains Damien had made in the past battle. Although he didn’t pay much attention to levels, he noticed that he had passed the level 150 mark, making him halfway to the level requirement for 4th class.’

But even after he had tabulated the gains so far, there was still much left to test.

The Demon Dragon Transformation was a final form. It was something Damien couldn’t use unless he was sure of victory or if he had no other options. But the two transformations that created that ultimate form were things he could use as he saw fit.

Evidently, both the Demon Transformation and Dragon Transformation bloodline skills drastically advanced his physical strength, but he had to see what other benefits they had. If they only amounted to this much, then what was the difference between a dragon and a demon?

What Damien knew about dragons was scarce. Even though he stayed in White Dragon Grotto, he had never reached an appropriate status to gain the information he needed to fully understand his bloodline. But he at least knew some of the basic facts.

For one, dragons were a race with a strange dichotomy. They were both a warring race and a race of scholars, with most dragons choosing between these two paths.

Dragons were known as the domineering rulers of the sky. Their breath could burn the heavens and their claws could split the world into six. This kind of dragon was what Damien was most familiar with, as it matched his own belligerent personality.

However, there was also another title the dragon race had acquired over the years. That was their identity as rulers of mana. Dragons could summon the winds and rain at will, maneuvering mana as if it was an extension of their body and performing miraculous feats that others couldn't even fathom.

In fact, these dragons were responsible for many of the advancements in mana control and development that the universe had seen to this day. Even Damien had received the benefits of the knowledge they passed down.

For instance, Mana Circuits. Or rather, the concept of using a medium to optimize and increase the efficiency of mana circulation and output.

This was knowledge that was publicized on a universal scale eons before Damien's time, and over the years many different variations of the concept emerged.

Apeiron's method of creating one's own Mana Circuits, the Cloud Plane's method that allowed their people to possess inborn Mana Circuits, and even Damien's own Ananta Matrix were all examples of these variations.

But at their core was knowledge publicized by dragons who took the path of the scholar, becoming sages that contributed largely to the development and prosperity of society as a whole.

Damien himself had only learned this through the White Dragon King when they conversed on their way to Taesi. Although he took the battle path, he held heavy admiration and pride for the accomplishments of his extremely distant ancestors.

Worlds like Apeiron had long forgotten the origin of their methods. And while Damien hadn't explored the Cloud Plane enough to know for certain, he figured that only the ancient records of some ancient sects would still possess such knowledge.

The reason Damien's thoughts moved in this direction was because he was sure his Dragon Transformation didn't simply lean towards one path or another.

While his physical strength would receive a large boost, it was only a result of his body acquiring draconic traits. If he truly mastered his transformation and gained the ability to use his bloodline abilities in tandem with it, he was certain he could elicit much greater results.

Like this, his Dragon Transformation could heighten his mana control to unprecedented levels and allow his mana capacity to temporarily increase as well. With his vessel gaining the appropriate strength to contain such energy, he could become a true master of mana.

'In short, I'll be able to spam my strongest moves and harass people like mad!'

It was only theory, but Damien was more than a little excited to turn it into reality. There was no way he'd simply sit still and let his two transformed physiques take such a boring path of just increasing physical strength.

As for his Demon Transformation, it was a different story. For one, the word Demon was something he used out of convenience. He didn't actually know the origin of the bloodline he gained from the dark material.

Damien sat on the ground in a meditative posture as he examined the bloodline. Soon, a blob of inky black liquid appeared in his hand.

'It's not the same.'

This was the conclusion he made. The blob in his hand was naturally the bloodline he had acquired from the various Demon Captains and Generals he had devoured during his crusade.

He didn't want to associate with the Nox, so he never allowed their bloodline to merge with them. He expected the same thing to happen when he devoured the dark material, but he was entirely wrong.

The amount and purity of Nox blood within these corrupted Demons was minimal, but with the refinement of Void Essence and the coagulation of blood from hundreds of their species, Damien was able to get a decent sample of what the blood of a purebred Nox would be.

But when comparing it to the Demon blood in his body now, he was certain they were different things.

Damien furrowed his brows as he fell into thought.

‘It’s impossible for that Demon God to be anything but a pure born Nox. I’ve seen it with my own eyes, and the evidence from my encounters with the Demons confirms it. If so, then why is the bloodline I received from a piece of that Nox something entirely different?’

He couldn’t understand it. Even with the existence of mana, creating something out of nothing was near impossible.

‘The refinement of Void Essence is definitely a variable that could’ve caused this change, but in the end, that’s still refinement. It isn’t able to intrinsically change the bloodline into something else.’

Damien barely had any comprehension towards his Void Essence, so he couldn’t be entirely certain if what he thought was the truth, but he still assumed it was so. If Void Essence was actually so broken even at the lowest level that he possessed, then what was the point of there being higher levels of the essence?

In the end, he couldn’t figure it out. The only thing he knew was that the bloodline he possessed was from a far higher race than the Nox could ever be, and the Demon Transformation he had gained was barely even scratching the surface of its abilities.

But it was still so powerful.

Damien shuddered when he thought about the implications of this new ability. Perhaps, he had inadvertently gotten involved in something even those 4th class experts were too weak to understand.

‘Sigh, I never want to meddle with these crazy things, but I always end up getting involved in one way or another. Well, whatever. Until the time when problems actually begin to arise, this bloodline will be something that I rely on heavily. If so, then there’s no need to fear it.’

As Damien meditated, he slowly regained the lost stamina and vitality from when he used his Demon Dragon Transformation and waited patiently.

Only after this process was finished would he be able to properly experiment on his Demon Transformation.

Chapter 300 Gains [4]

‘Thirty minutes of rest to recuperate from thirty seconds of usage. I don’t know if that’s a good or a bad thing.’

Damien rolled his arms as he mused. Although he was glad that the recuperation time wasn’t in the days or even weeks, thirty minutes was still a considerably long time.

As he grew more powerful, the length of his fights became shorter and shorter. It wasn’t that things became easier or that a lower number of clashes occurred, it was just that the speed of movement and perception grew as he grew in strength.

For instance, back when he decimated those Demon Generals, it had taken him five minutes. And that was only because he spent most of that time playing around.

When he fought with Polius, the entire duration of the fight was only around half an hour even though they exchanged thousands of moves.

Damien had often heard about powerful cultivators fighting for years on end without stopping, but he didn't see the practicality in such a situation. In the end, even a fight on equal terms boiled down to stamina.

The person whose mana was exhausted first would lose. If they were exhausted at the same time, it came down to who was willing to sacrifice more.

If two people remained fighting for years on end, it meant they were taking constant breaks to replenish their stamina and mana. If so, it also meant those two weren't fighting to the death.

Damien needed half an hour to return to peak shape from thirty seconds in his Demon Dragon form. Even if it wasn't a long period of time, it was enough for him to die thousands of times over.

The main problem was how sluggish he became during that recovery period. It took a great deal of effort for him to even move from being collapsed on the ground to entering a meditative posture, so fleeing the area after his transformation ended wasn't feasible.

That meant he had to enter a safe space while the transformation was ongoing. Luckily, he had the Sanctuary to make up for this disadvantage, but he couldn't abuse the Sanctuary if he didn't want others to find out about its existence.

And so, in most situations, his transformation would realistically only be combat effective for twenty seconds.

'Hmm, it's not bad but it's not great. But the power I felt from just standing around was insane. If I mobilized that power in combat, it'd be even fiercer. Such a power would be too broken if it didn't have such drawbacks.'

The universe seemed intent on keeping balance. Whether it was balance of laws, power, or anything else, the concept of balance was extremely important.

Damien still remembered how otherworlders weren't able to access earth through the gates that formed in their dungeons due to earth being a beginner world. When earthlings had asked about the reason, the response they got at that time was also due to balance.

Of course, balance went both ways. When otherworlders discovered earth's coordinates and traveled there naturally, there was no mechanism to forbid their invasion. The Cloud Plane and Niflheim forces that were on earth when Damien first returned were living proof of this.

Damien soon stopped his thoughts and initiated his Demon Transformation again. His height grew, his hair turned white, and those pitch-black runes formed on his skin once again.

'I still don't understand why my hair turns white...'

His white hair, black sclera, and pale skin weren't related to power at all. His height change was to compensate for the vast physical force in his body and the runes were obviously something special as well, but the other features were strictly for appearance.

'Well, no matter how useless they are, It's still a clue.'

Now that he had examined the new bloodline and understood its differences from the Nox bloodline, he was more willing to accept his appearance changes.

After all, these changes were similar to how his pupils became vertical firing Dragon Transformation. He adopted the physical traits of the race whose bloodline he possessed, so if he ever met someone who possessed similar traits in the future, he'd be able to easily identify the relation between the two.

That way, he'd have a much easier time understanding the roots of this new bloodline.

‘Good. If I use this form alone, the stamina and vitality drain can be compensated easily by regeneration. I can stably use this form for extended periods of time without worry of repercussions.’

Damien hadn't been solely focused on his appearance. He had been more so testing whether his time limit existed in this form as well. With the assurance that it didn't, he could now patiently observe the benefits he received without feeling hurried.

‘These runic lines are probably the mainstay of this form. I don't know the qualities of this race, so I can't form a deeper understanding and development path like I did for Dragon Transformation, but I can at least understand the surface-level things that are already presented to me.’

Damien circulated his mana and poured it into those runic lines, watching how they lit up with a faint black hue. As mana continued to insert into them, they squirmed and wriggled around his body like little snakes on his skin.

‘Attack.’

With his command, the randomly squirming runic lines moved in order and formed geometric tattoos on his body.

The second these patterns formed, Damien felt the physical force contained in his body increase exponentially.

He was even scared to throw a punch at the moment since he wasn't sure if he would cause spatial instability in this secluded realm.

‘Defense.’

The runic patterns swiftly changed shape again before settling down. The gathered physical force in his body didn't disperse, rather it melded into his physique and made his body extremely sturdy.

This force was now in a form where it couldn't be outputted, but he felt that even if he stood still and took a head-on attack from Demon King Lucius, he'd still be able to survive, even if he was heavily injured in the process.

‘Speed.’

A similar process took place. Damien's body became increasingly agile to the point where he felt like he was teleporting through the spatial layers. But it was an effect brought forth by physical power alone.

Continuing from the three most basic configurations he could figure out, Damien experimented continuously with his new power, occasionally taking breaks so he didn't exhaust all his stamina and vitality.

He had already lost track of time, and when the artificial sun of the Sanctuary rose once more after numerous days, he finally stopped his experiments.

If he needed to describe the runic patterns in one word, it would be enhancement. Almost any singular force could be enhanced by the runic lines.

Of course, he could mediate the enhancement to multiple facets as well, but the degree of enhancement would decrease based on how thinly he spread it.

It was like stat points. If he had 10, he could only distribute 10 total to all of his stats combined. He couldn't magically raise all his stats by 10 points.

The only thing that couldn't be enhanced was soul-related concepts.

But Damien wasn't put off by this. He had somewhat expected it even. After all, the soul wasn't something his vessel was allowed to touch upon yet, even when he was boosted by his transformation.

Once he was finished, he also took some time to study the stellar energy within his Void Flames so he would be able to properly wield them.

Time passed quickly like this until a month went by. It was time for him to focus on his main objectives again.

Damien smiled while clenching his fists.

‘First goal: infiltrate the demon city and kidnap a Demon King!’