

Void 381

Chapter 381 Struggle [1]

“Holy...”

“Haa...to think I’d live to see it with my own eyes...”

Various expressions of shock filled the air as the geniuses congregated at the location of the Primordial Undying Tree. And their shock was truly warranted.

Even discounting the fact that their end goal was finally before their eyes, the fact that they had lived through the trials that took place to reach here was enough of a miracle.

When compared to what they had heard before they entered the realm, the actual experience was far worse. In fact, most of them would’ve chosen not to enter if they had known it’d be like this.

‘What now?’

Ruyue wondered as she watched those geniuses regain their bearings. Everyone had gathered, sure, but were they just supposed to start fighting out of nowhere?

The tree was standing right in front of them with seemingly no protection. In this situation, the first to move would be the loser.

Ruyue's gaze moved to the very peak of the tree. There, a single purple fruit sat like a king on its throne.

'Although the tree isn't too big, it still won't be easy to reach that place. The branches are like a maze, so moving through the tree's crown is disadvantageous. But at the same time, openly aiming for it will earn the combined attack of everyone else present...'

There was also the fact that they had no idea whether the tree was truly as unguarded as it looked. To account for hidden dangers was also necessary.

'How troublesome...'

If Damien was here, she knew he would just charge for the top without regard for anyone else. But that was the kind of thing only he could do.

His spatial affinity, insane regeneration, and many other factors allowed him to move relatively unhindered regardless of where he was.

But Ruyue wasn't the same. Even if she was powerful, that was it. She didn't have the same versatility that he did when it came to this kind of thing.

'For now, I'll just observe.'

Ruyue wasn't the only one thinking like this. Anyone with a brain had a similar thought process. Leading the charge wasn't a role any of them were willing to take.

And it led to a stalemate where those congregated around the tree didn't dare move any closer.

"Ahh, I hate this!" Feng Qing'er muttered under her breath.

"If you hate it then why don't you charge into the fray?" Another woman responded.

She had emerald green hair and feathers coating different parts of her body. It wasn't that the woman's Beast Transformation Art was incomplete, rather, she simply took pride in her feathers.

"Peng Xiaoyan." Feng Qing'er said unenthusiastically. "You're as annoying as ever, I see."

"Hmph. And you're just as uncouth as I remember you to be. Though, it seems you've grown a fledgling of a brain since then."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever you say. I'm surprised a shit-for-brains bitch like you actually made it this far. I wonder who you sold your body to this time to protect your lousy ass?"

"You...!"

Ruyue watched them argue with an intrigued look on her face. 'Peng Xiaoyan, so she must be the 6th rank genius on the beast record. I didn't know she had a feud with Feng Qing'er.'

But she quickly shook her head and refocused her attention elsewhere.

'I didn't notice his presence until he spoke up earlier. He isn't ranked first for nothing. If there's anyone to be wary of, it's him. And also...'

Her gaze shifted to a black-haired beauty who was standing to the side without drawing anyone's attention. No, it was almost like her presence was erased from the world.

'Qing Tan. According to Feng Qing'er, she and Damien were pretty close in the Trial World. The problem is what happened when they left.'

From what Ruyue had heard from Feng Qing'er, Qing Tan's attitude had taken a total turn when they met in the desert. She had been ignored by someone she considered a friend.

But if that was the case, then something must have happened. Ruyue wasn't sure if she could fully trust Qing Tan.

It was the same with the rest. As she observed the crowd, she realized how alone she was in this struggle.

'If only Luna was here, the two of us could dominate most of these geniuses if we worked together.'

"Did you think I wouldn't notice?"

A gruff voice suddenly silenced all the commotion taking place around them. When Ruyue looked over, she saw Hun Fang staring at the sky a few hundred meters away from the top of the Primordial Undying Tree with narrowed eyes.

But his words were met with no response.

"Not coming out? Very well, it seems I just have to force you."

Hun Fang extended his hand and emitted a murky grey mana. The mana formed a bullet that shot through the air, causing faint ripples as it did so.

And when it reached its destination, it burst into a puff of smoke, causing space to shatter like glass.

"Aiya...! And here I was wanting to make a grand entrance. How could you be so cruel?"

A playful voice came from the shattered space. Ruyue narrowed her eyes. 'This voice...!'

“You guys are so boring! The grand prize is right in front of you, yet you sit here trying to play mind games with each other. Isn’t it a little too cowardly?”

The sarcastic tone of that voice continued as the man’s body was slowly revealed.

Long black hair with silver streaks, and a pair of eyes that Ruyue would never forget.

“Damien!” She inadvertently cried in excitement.

“Hm? Ah, Ruyue! Did you miss me?” He smiled softly and sent her a playful wink.

“Hmph! Who is missing you? I’m just glad that we can finally drop all these pretenses and actually do what we came to do.” Ruyue huffed back.

But inwardly, she was smiling. He may have been speaking in the same casual tone that he always used, but she could clearly feel his heart through the soul connection they had.

His yearning feelings, she could understand them clearly, and it made her all the happier to see him again.

But it wasn't the time for a teary-eyed reunion. She wasn't lying when she spoke to him.

Upon his entrance, he had immediately secured himself a spot far closer to the Primordial Undying Tree than the rest of them. If they continued to stand still, he'd reap all the benefits instead of them.

"Fuck! Don't let him get to the fruits!"

It was unknown who spoke, but those words acted as a trigger.

Those hundred geniuses who made it to the Primordial Undying Tree all charged forth. Intense mana fluctuations enveloped the atmosphere as they pushed their speed to the max.

Bang!

The ground erupted. Massive vines similar to the ones Ruyue had seen previously shot into the air and attacked the incoming geniuses.

And attacks began to fly.

Whether it was fighting against the vines or each other, battle had finally broken out.

Damien grinned. "Yeah, this is what it's supposed to look like."

His gaze moved to Hun Fang, who was staring back at him ferociously.

"What? Did you have something up your sleeve? Sorry, but I'm the direct type. These pansy schemes aren't to my taste at all."

"If that's the case, then you should have the strength to back up your confidence. Whether or not your presence is worthy of collapsing the schemes of others, it isn't up to you." Hun Fang growled back.

"Oh? Well then, whether or not my strength is enough, would you like to try it for yourself?"

These two were different from the rest. When it came to competition, they didn't hold anyone in their eyes besides each other.

That purple fruit at the top of the tree, it would go to one of the two of them. And their battle would decide who.

"You're bold. I don't think anyone has been brash enough to challenge me so openly in many years. Come, then. Let us see whether it is shameless boasting or true confidence." Hun Fang said as he readied his mana.

But Damien shook his head with a sly smile. "Come to you? Don't make me laugh. If you truly want to fight, then you first have to catch me!"

"You...!"

Hun Fang rapidly shot a wave of gray mana at Damien's position. But by the time it reached, the latter had already disappeared into the intertwining branches of the Primordial Undying Tree.

Hun Fang's brow twitched when he saw it. 'Fine. If you want to play games then I shall accompany you. I'll gladly show you how I earned the title of Spirit King.'

Chapter 382 Struggle [2]

Various large and small battles had erupted around the crown of the Primordial Undying Tree.

Bang!

A genius who flew into the air in a bid to rapidly reach the peak of the tree burst into blood mist as the combined attacks of many around him landed on his body.

One thing was certain. Regardless of who they were battling, every genius was doing their best to keep an eye on one another, and every single one of them was aiming to enter the maze of branches that constituted the Primordial Undying Tree's crown.

Skree!

The cry of a phoenix rang out as a swift phantom made of flames dived towards its target. But considering who it was aimed at, it was almost natural that it missed.

“Tch! You lot from the Peng Clan are only good for fleeing. Let’s see how long a rat like you can last.” Feng Qing’er scoffed as she watched it happen.

“Ha! Speak after you actually land an attack on me, you slow-witted bitch. Oh wait, you’ve never managed to do that unless you teamed up with your counterpart, have you?”

Penh Xiaoyan flashed through the air with speeds that matched teleportation. Regardless of what Feng Qing’er did, her attacks wouldn’t hit.

Peng Xiaoyan spread her arms as she moved, slashing them downwards in a crossed pattern. Light green mana raged and formed an x-shaped blade that spun towards Feng Qing’er.

But Feng Qing’er was never afraid of Peng Xiaoyan’s attack power. When it came to power, she was Queen.

A string of flame runes appeared before her as she drew in the air, forming a sword that seemed almost corporeal. As the sword shot forward, it split into thousands of pieces that clouded the atmosphere and formed an inescapable net.

“You’ve learned some new tricks, huh. But you aren’t the only one!” Peng Xiaoyan sneered.

Her body arched like a bow and exploded forth with extreme speed. She reached Feng Qing'er's position in an instant. A set of twin daggers appeared in her hands and stabbed downward, being coated with wind mana in the process.

"Good! Thanks for delivering yourself to me!" Feng Qing'er grinned.

Being surprised at Peng Xiaoyan's speed was one thing, but being unprepared was another. In fact, Feng Qing'er was extremely glad that the former had decided to engage her in close combat.

A fiery red greatsword that emanated blazing heat manifested in the air. Feng Qing'er grabbed its hilt without hesitation, swinging without even looking for a target.

After all, her opponent was moving too fast. She couldn't track her even if she wanted to.

Sssss!

A sizzling sound was emitted from the spot of collision. Under Peng Xiaoyan's shocked gaze, her daggers were directly melted by the blade.

"A few tricks?" Feng Qing'er scoffed. "Bitch, I've been reborn."

Reincarnation Flames raged. Using the wind mana as a conduit, they billowed into a massive flame tornado that enveloped the two women.

Boom!

The flame tornado caused a large shockwave that pushed back any that were in the vicinity, but upon reaching a certain location, the heat was directly suppressed.

A winter storm seemed to have formed unnaturally within the underground space. The land had been frozen into ice, and even mana moved sluggishly.

Standing in the middle of this space was Lunaria Snow, who Damien had dropped off long before his confrontation with Hun Fang had started.

“To think things escalated so quickly. But, it isn’t unexpected. The most surprising thing is Qing’er’s growth. Even if I heard about it beforehand, it’s still shocking to see.”

Lunaria murmured to herself as she casually blocked a strike aimed for her head. She flicked her finger, causing a crystalline ice shard to shoot through that genius’ head, instantly killing him.

“While Qing’er is having such a riveting battle, I’m stuck dealing with bugs. What a shame.”

Lunaria moved without pause. She soon reached the crown of the Primordial Undying Tree and began climbing its branches.

“Another one.”

She clutched her hand into a fist. Following her movement, a frozen statue of a hidden genius fell to the ground and shattered into pieces.

Her blood had been frozen from within.

“I was unable to accurately judge the prowess of Qing’er’s friend during our time together, but if Hun Fang considers him a threat, then I shouldn’t push my luck. For the goals of our Ice Phoenix Clan, only a green fruit is necessary.”

Truthfully, she wasn’t too interested in the purple fruit. While its effects were astronomically greater than the other two kinds, she knew her limits.

And more than that, the Ice Phoenixes were already existences that symbolized purity. To take a treasure that purified their bodies even more was like a stain on their pride.

“But pride is just pride. In the end, I will still end up taking such a treasure.”

As she moved, she glanced in a certain direction.

“It’s a shame. With power so similar to mine, I wanted to see which of us was superior. But it seems now isn’t the time.”

In the direction she was looking, another tundra had formed. But this one was intrinsically divergent from hers.

The source it came from differed.

The mana was whiteish blue, and within that tundra, hints of another blue flame could be seen along with unknown patches of black.

Inside, Ruyue stared dully at a man who stood across from her.

“The 3000 Beast Record is really just a gauge of strength, huh. 4th rank genius Regis Tiriad, in terms of personality, you’re probably the shittiest one here.”

“Hahaha! A beauty that struggles is the most fun to tame! Come come! Insult me more!”

The man named Regis licked his lips in glee. His tongue was forked like a snake’s.

Ever since he saw the woman in front of him, he has been resolved to make her his.

But he didn't have his clan's power to use at the moment, so he had to do the dirty work himself.

'But that's fine with me! The chase is the most fun part!'

His bewitching poison did nothing to this woman, and aphrodisiacs were the same. The easy tactics had already been thrown out the window.

'So instead of poisoning her mind, I just have to poison her body! If she desires the antidote, then she's mine. Even if she doesn't, she'll still be immobilized so she's mine nonetheless!'

He felt orgasmic as he imagined the scene of this woman pinned under him. A poisonous aura leaked from his body and spread through the realm she had created.

"No matter what, ice is still ice. It'll melt eventually."

Ruyue sighed and shook her head. "I think I understand how he feels a little now. These geniuses that used to be dangerous for me...they're just so weak."

There was no time. While Damien secured the purple fruit, she needed to grab the green ones for both herself and for the White Dragon King so they could fulfill their promise.

“What a hassle. He probably forgot all about that deal we made. I’ll make sure he compensates me properly for this.”

Black mana intertwined with the blue mana Ruyue was normally emitting. Her ice suddenly gave off an ominous aura it didn’t have before.

“Desolation...I’ve always been concerned about using it on people, but if it’s you, then I don’t think it’ll stain my conscience too much.”

The mana shot forward, piercing the fog of poison that Regis had put up previously.

“W-what?! My Thousand Death! How can you pierce it so easily?!”

Before he could put up any semblance of defense, the blackish-blue mana infiltrated his body.

It spread rapidly, more rapidly than any poison. And in an instant, it sucked away all the mana in his body. But it didn’t seem satiated at all.

“Vitality is an interesting thing,” Ruyue muttered to herself. “Thanks to the Tree Senior, I was able to understand more about it than I ever thought I would.”

Regis' body began to shrivel. The mana within him was stealing everything he had, including his life force.

He tried mobilizing his own mana to counter, but soon realized that it had been devoured long ago. The only option left was the poison that ran through his blood.

But when that was stolen from him.

Desolation. That's what happened.

Everything that he had was taken. The poison in his body just served to feed that blackish-blue mana even faster.

And soon, he became an empty husk on the floor. In his place, there was a blob of corrupted mana.

"Tch. I don't even want this. Hmm, I'll just throw it over there."

Ruyue flicked her finger and discarded the blob of mana. In the place where it fell, a massive explosion filled with poisonous gas erupted, slaughtering 10 geniuses at once.

"Alright. Now that that's over, back to the task at hand."

Ruyue soon arrived at the crown of the tree, and just like Lunaria had a few moments prior, she began her hunt for the green fruits.

Chapter 383 Struggle [3]

Saying that there were thousands or even tens of thousands of intertwining branches within the crown of the Primordial Undying Tree wasn't an exaggeration at all.

From the outside, it did indeed look like the canopy of a tree, with the only special thing about it being its size and color, but when inside, one would no longer even believe they were on a tree anymore.

Tens of thousands of branches that tangled and snaked in unnatural directions, they formed a natural labyrinth that was hidden by the leaves and flowers that decorated the outside of the crown.

Swoosh!

As Damien rushed through this labyrinth, he was once again forced to realize the grandiosity of such a tree.

He would run in a straight line across a single branch, but would somehow find himself on a separate branch many meters away without even realizing how he got there.

And it wasn't even an illusion, it was just a miracle of sheer complexity.

'If it's like this, even reaching the purple fruit will be a problem, let alone stealing it from Hun Fang. Speaking of, where is that guy?'

He was sure the first ranked genius had chased him into the tree, but at some point, he could no longer sense the latter's presence.

'Did he stop chasing me? No, it's more likely that he was led somewhere else by this convoluted labyrinth...but our end goal is the same place.'

Even if the clash was delayed, it was inevitable. Until then, though, Damien had to find his way through the labyrinth.

There were no walls or ceilings, only branches in every direction. It was a four-dimensional labyrinth where he was always free to switch paths, but he would never know where he was going.

'But I should still be able to feel if I'm headed upward, right?'

With his awareness spread and his All-Seeing Eyes operating at full capacity, he took the path he felt was best. Now that he had reached this juncture, he could only rely on his own skill.

The calling he felt earlier had become useless.

‘Damn old tree, always making things difficult for me.’

Suddenly, Damien’s eyes picked up a presence standing in the path before him. But it wasn’t anything humanoid, nor was it one of the geniuses who had entered the secret realm.

His eyes hardened. ‘That beast...it’s the most powerful being I’ve seen in this secret realm besides those two Demigods...’

And that was including the Demon Kings.

But he didn’t stop moving. If there was such a beast blocking his path, it meant he was going in the right direction.

He soon arrived in front of it. It was a massive serpent whose body was curled around hundreds of branches. Its head was already twice Damien’s height.

Its eyes were closed and its breathing was steady, indicating that it was asleep.

Damien came to a stop a few hundred meters away and hid his presence. He didn’t know if such tactics would work against a beast so much more powerful than him, but it was the best he could do.

'Damn...going around doesn't seem possible, but there's no way I can defeat it.'

He crept up the branch he was standing on, trying to find a path forward, but he couldn't think of one.

'These hundreds of branches that the snake is curled around are all interconnected far deeper than the rest. It feels like they're reaching a point where they'll convene into a single branch soon.'

If that was the case, then he must be reaching the top layer of the tree. Unfortunately, he was too far away from the outer layer to confirm using the color of the leaves.

But what he did know was that this snake wasn't here by coincidence. Its position was perfectly in the way of his goal.

Snap!

He was too focused on the snake. He didn't watch his step properly because of the frightening pressure that he was feeling from it. And under such a situation, he made a stupid mistake.

A small twig under his foot snapped, creating an obnoxiously loud sound within the stillness of the current atmosphere.

The snake's massive eyes opened. Damien immediately merged with the space around him and hid himself.

But that snake's gaze was still focused on him.

'Fuck!'

Without hesitation, he ran. He teleported furiously, but instead of running away, he ran straight towards the snake.

'I have to get through!'

Even seeing his movements, the snake didn't move much. Its tail slowly uncurled from around the branches and became free.

Thwap!

That tail moved abruptly and with speed that surpassed Damien's imagination. He didn't even realize when it appeared behind him.

Boom!

"Kak!"

The impact stirred his internal organs, causing him to cough up blood, but he didn't stop moving.

The snake chased him with its tail, unwrapping it further with every movement he made. It was swift to the point where it was mind-boggling that a large portion of it was still tangled in the branches.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Damien desperately teleported away, but the tail always managed to find him.

"Agh!"

He barely avoided the last strike, but the sharp edge of the snake's skin swept across his shins and lacerated his tendons.

Without a choice, he surrounded himself in a cocoon of Void Essence to buy himself time to heal.

'This thing is far too great for me. With my current strength, and even my current Void Essence, it's impossible to kill it. If I can withdraw High-Level Void Essence from that space I saw before, I might be able to cut its tail off, but containing that level of essence will undoubtedly break my body.'

His thoughts raced. If it was just this battle alone, then the strategy of using power beyond his capabilities was fine, but the current situation wasn't like that.

He would need to fight Hun Fang for the purple fruit and also escape from this area so he could consume it. To do all that, he needed to be in peak shape.

'But coming out of this unhindered doesn't seem possible. That snake is definitely going easy on me, but I'm still injured to such an extent with only a few strikes.'

The gap between 3rd and 4th class was too wide, especially when it was past the entry-level. But still, he needed to try.

'Fine. No risk, no reward, right?'

Within a few seconds, his thoughts had wrapped up. His injuries hadn't healed completely, but it was enough.

The cocoon of Void Essence faded, and Damien instantly erected his vector field and teleported away.

As expected, the snake was hot on his trail.

Bang! Bang!

The tail whipped back and forth, smashing into the branches around him and causing splinters to rain onto his body, causing a great deal of minor injuries.

But those injuries healed in an instant. And with the snake suddenly targeting the surroundings instead of his actual body, he got what he wanted.

What Damien wanted was just a small amount of time. A few seconds was enough. In that few seconds when the shrapnel was raining down on him, his body went through a massive change.

Black scales covered him from his neck down to his toes, two horns grew on his forehead and wrapped around his head like a crown, wings jutted out from his shoulder blades.

Blood-red runes etched themselves into his scales, his sclera turned black while his irises matched the color of his runes.

‘Demon Dragon Transformation!’

Once he was in his most powerful form, he formed a connection to the space he termed the Void Plane.

Within a second, he repeated the process he used when he was facing the Head Apostle in the Trial World.

Mid-Level Void Essence emerged from a crack in space and covered his body.

He had 27 seconds left in his transformation, but he had no plans to use up all that time again.

When the processes he needed to complete finished, he immediately charged at the snake's head.

Chapter 384 Struggle [4]

A single flap of his wings had the same effect as teleportation. He reached the snake's head in an instant.

Red runes congregated on his arms and coalesced into strange patterns, exponentially increasing his strength.

And before the snake could react, his arm shot forward and punctured its eye:

Kyaaaak!

A screech was emitted from the snake's mouth. If previously, it was simply toying with him, it was now genuinely angry.

With its mouth already gaping from its scream, a blast of murky green liquid sprayed from its throat and covered Damien, who was too close to dodge.

The liquid corroded his scales and tried to get through his defenses, but the runes on his body changed shape and caused his scales to become harder than diamonds.

Damien flapped his wings again. When he reappeared, he was inside the snake's mouth. The poison that sprayed from it covered him like gel as he stood directly in its trajectory, and as it piled up, it was starting to corrode even his heightened defense.

But he didn't care. He came for a single purpose only. He reached up and grabbed one of the two domineering fangs within the snake's mouth.

Then, he ripped it out with all his strength. When it didn't budge with physical strength alone, he distorted space around it and crushed the snake's jaws to help him.

SKREEE!

The snake screamed in pain. Gaseous red mana mixed into the poison that covered Damien's body.

BOOM!

The red mana mixed with the poison and exploded. As more red mana stuck to Damien's body, a chain of explosions rang out.

But even with this, Damien didn't let go of the tooth.

Roar!

A dragon roar left his mouth. His scales cracked under the pressure of the explosions and the poison made its way into his body. But he didn't loosen his grip.

Space distorted to the point of collapse. The snake's gums were being fused and bound in awkward patterns as this happened, and its grip on the tooth lessened.

And suddenly...

BOOM!

Another explosion rang out as more red mana influenced the poisonous liquid, but this time, Damien's body was propelled out of the snake's mouth by the shockwave.

Along with something else.

A large snake fang was in his grasp. Looking at his war trophy, he grinned.

“Damn snake! Try and chase me now!”

There was a reason he aimed for the snake’s fang. When it was dislodged, copious amounts of blood spilled into the snake’s mouth and flooded its throat, blocking the poisonous liquid from spewing.

Of course, his main reason is want just this. It was extremely faint, to the point where he only noticed it once he entered the snake’s mouth, but there were definitely spatial fluctuations leaking from the fang.

If this wasn’t a hint, he didn’t know what was. And besides gaining something that’d most likely help him reach the peak, he had also gained time while the snake coped with the injury he caused.

It had been 10 seconds since he transformed.

He merged with space and flapped his wings, doubling his speed. With two flaps, he had already passed the snake.

And he didn’t look back.

He continued along the path the snake was blocking until he could no longer sense it with his physical senses.

And once another 5 seconds had passed, he undid his transformation.

“AGH!”

Immediately, searing pain spread through his body. Although he only used it for half of the total time limit, his stamina was still plenty exhausted.

And as his scales and body runes faded, the poison that had leaked into his body began acting far more furiously than it had before.

His regeneration worked overtime to heal his internal injuries. His organs were a mess because of his recklessness.

While that was happening, he clenched his teeth and endured the pain, mobilizing his Void Essence to cleanse the poison in his body.

Previously, Void Essence couldn't cleanse physical poisons. But that was when it was being used passively by the Void Physique.

Now, he had gotten much closer to his Void Physique. He could personally influence the actions of the Void Essence it gave him access to.

So, cleansing physical poisons also became possible to an extent.

'Is it not chasing me?'

Damien concentrated his awareness on the direction he just fled from, but unexpectedly, he didn't see the snake at all.

At first, he panicked thinking it followed him, but as he carefully sensed his surroundings, he realized that it wasn't anywhere nearby at all.

'Did it leave? Well, whatever. Doesn't matter to me anyway.'

He inwardly smiled as he thought about the fang he stole from it. Besides its practical use, he is also keeping it as a memento of his achievement.

The fight was short and could barely even be called a fight. He simply acted recklessly to buy himself a chance at escape.

And it didn't even seem like the snake was fighting back at full power either.

But nonetheless, he had achieved victory over a foe far stronger than him, and he'd happily take pride in that.

His wounds slowly healed and the poison inside his body was also extracted with time. He took out a jade bottle and stored the poison in his subspace alongside the poison he had gotten from those Eclipsing Shadow Sect assassins a year ago.

And many hours later, he had returned to peak condition. Without hesitation, he took out the snake fang and injected his mana into it.

'Back to work. I have no time to waste.'

Far away from where Damien was, a man emerged from the shadows. He had jet-black hair and red eyes, his face holding a devilish sense of handsomeness.

Suddenly, the man grinned. One of his canines was missing.

"I know you said that someone interesting had come, but I didn't expect it to be so much of an understatement!"

He rubbed the space where his missing tooth used to be. A small trail of blood was still there.

“Tsk, tsk. To think he even stole a fang of mine. He could’ve activated the spatial formation by just pouring his mana into it. Tch, if that old fogey didn’t prohibit me from killing anyone, he’d be dead 10 times over by now.”

The man spoke sarcastically to himself, his smile never fading.

“Even if I went easy on him, that wasn’t the kind of power that someone at his level could overcome within a few seconds. That form of his...truly impressive! Oi, old bastard! Are you going to make me talk to myself like this forever?!”

[The Primordial Undying Tree smirks. It says that you were already a crazy person to begin with, so this isn’t anything new.]

“Tch. Damn old guy, only talking through transmissions like this. When are you going to come out of your hole?”

[The Primordial Undying Tree sighs. It says that the time hasn’t come yet.]

“And when the time comes? It’ll be too late by then.”

[The Primordial Undying Tree says it can only place its hope in the younger generation.]

“And if the younger generation can’t make it that far?”

[...]

“Haa...I get it, I get it. You have it tough, old friend.”

The black-haired man cracked his neck. Gaseous red mana coagulated in his mouth, soon forming into a tooth that replaced the one he was missing.

“In any case, my job ends here. As for what happens after, it’s none of my business.”

The man’s form changed. His human body disappeared, replaced by that of a massive black snake.

Within a clearing somewhere in the Primordial Undying Realm, that snake closed his eyes and entered a long slumber. One that he expected to last for another 10,000 years.

Chapter 385 Struggle [5]

In the hours it took Damien to climb to the point he reached, the battles around the Primordial Undying Tree never stopped.

Corpses of geniuses that were once hailed as the supremes in the younger generation littered the ground around the tree, while those who survived stood within its crown.

The final victors had already been decided.

When Ruyue killed the 4th-ranked genius, none dared to oppose her anymore, and she was able to quickly get her hands on a green fruit.

The problem stemmed from when she attempted to take a second one for herself. She naturally met fierce resistance for attempting to hoard the treasures, but none of those who tried to stop her had the ability to do so.

After all, Lunaria had acquired the fruit she came for easily, and Feng Qing'er had done the same after stepping over the corpse of the 6th-rank genius, Peng Xiaoyan.

At some point without anyone's recognition, the 5th green fruit had been stolen by Qing Tan.

Looking at the results, Ruyue figured it was expected. Since these people were all close to, or at least on friendly terms with, Damien, she knew that they wouldn't oppose her.

'But that Qing Tan...she's far more dangerous than I originally gave her credit for.'

Granted, in this chaotic environment, it was easy to lose sight of someone. But for Qing Tan to have reached the green fruit without a single person's detection was still an amazing feat.

She had even avoided Ruyue's eyes, which had been activated and scanning the area the entire time.

Now, four geniuses stood in four cardinal directions on the middle area of the Primordial Undying Tree's crown, each having claimed their place.

The rest of the geniuses looked at them in both awe and greed, but there was nothing they could do. Instead of focusing on the fruits that had already been taken, it was best to try and get their hands on a red fruit that those peak geniuses didn't even give a second look to.

Unlike some, most of them knew their limits. Aside from Ruyue, who was a wild card, the ones in the middle area of the tree were already ranked in the top 5 before they even entered the secret realm.

With the kind of opportunities they must've received within, the strong had only gotten stronger.

So the fight for red fruits became far fiercer than the previous fights. Even if there were 10 fruits, there were still almost 100 geniuses.

And of those 10 fruits, 4 of them had disappeared at some point, claimed while others had been fighting for the green ones.

Ruyue soon ignored the commotion below and directed her gaze to the purple layer of the tree's crown with furrowed brows.

'After so long, there hasn't been any movement at all. It's strange.'

The fighting here had almost come to a close, yet there was nothing at all from the peak where the two most talented geniuses were supposed to be fighting.

In fact, everyone was directing a portion of their attention to the peak in hopes of witnessing that fight, but they were only left with disappointment.

Suddenly...

BOOM!

A massive explosion rang out. Shrapnel from combusted tree branches rained down onto the ground, and flaming purple leaves drifted through the air.

There was only a single branch left from the purple layer of the Primordial Undying Tree. That single branch that housed the purple fruit that all geniuses dreamed about.

In the sky, two figures suddenly emerged.

One was the familiar figure of Damien, and as for the other, it was a grey-haired, red-eyed man with an eerie aura.

'It's finally begun.'

Feng Qing'er and Lunaria watched on in interest, eager to see the result of the fight. Qing Tan stared at the two figures in the sky with a complicated gaze.

Ruyue tightly clutched the necklace that hung around her neck. This fight would be the most important one since the start of the secret realm.

When Damien re-emerged after using the spatial transference formation etched on the snake's dang, he found himself in a wide-open area.

The ground beneath him was made of countless branches that intertwined to create a sturdy floor, and the walls were filled with purple leaves.

In the center of the room, a double-stranded branch snakes up from the rest, and in that branch's grasp was a beautiful purple fruit.

Rather than being completely purple, the fruit was crystalline like jade, but emitted a purple luster.

It looked more like an ore than a fruit, but still provoked one's desire to feast on it. It was an odd feeling.

As Damien observed the fruit, he suddenly felt another presence appear in the room.

The man across from him was no longer wearing a hood. Judging from how his clothes were tattered in some places, he must've lost it in a fight similar to the one Damien had just had.

"Is it just coincidence that we arrived at the same time, or was it premeditated to be like this?" He asked casually.

Hun Fang looked at him without a change in expression. "Regardless of which one it was, we were bound to fight. I highly doubt you would let me peacefully leave with the fruit even if I acquired it first."

"It's the same for you."

"..."

"So? The mysterious Spirit King of the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, you're different from what I expected. To be honest, I don't like you at all."

"Am I supposed to care about that?"

"I suppose not...the scent of your mana, it's disgusting."

As soon as Damien said those words, Hun Fang's gaze sharpened. "The scent?"

"Ah, don't worry about it. I was just talking to myself. In any case, only one of us will be leaving this place alive, and I have no intention of dying."

"You and I have no enmity or grudge between us. Is there a reason for you to take things so far?" Hun Fang asked inquisitively.

Damien smirked in response. "Didn't I already tell you? The scent of your mana, it's disgusting."

Without warning, Damien vanished, reappearing behind Hun Fang. His fist shot out with the speed of a bullet, throwing a punch that was set in motion before he had even finished teleporting.

Voom!

Hun Fang's grey mana emanated from his body and formed a shield. When Damien's fist impacted, it felt like he was punching cotton.

A sense of danger enveloped his body. He teleported away the second he felt it. But as he did so, space around him shattered, thrusting him back into the Real Plane.

A bolt of grey mana followed his movements through the spatial layers as if it was alive. As it approached him, Damien charged his Void Flames and shot a bolt to meet it.

Bzzt!

The two bolts of mana collided in the air and destroyed each other.

"Teleportation. It's a good skill, but it will not work against me." Hun Fang commented indifferently.

"Whether or not it'll work, that's not up to you to decide." Damien quipped back.

He merged with space, achieving a far deeper level of synchronization than when he normally teleported.

In this state, it was impossible to track his movements even if one could peer into the spatial layers.

Another bold of grey mana shot into the void, this one containing far more power than the last.

Boom!

Space shattered once more, and without suspense, Damien's figure was revealed.

A frown decorated his face. 'This fight...is going to be much harder than I thought it was.'

Chapter 386 Struggle [6]

It wasn't that Hun Fang's attacks were too powerful. In the first place, those attacks were never meant to harm Damien.

It was more like a warning. A warning that spatial movement would be useless regardless of how it was done.

'The problem is, I have no idea how he's tracking me. At first, I thought he was just seeing through the spatial layers, but now I know that isn't the case.'

The only thing Damien knew was that Hun Fang had some insane method of tracking that could see him even if his presence was totally erased. Perhaps the only method to avoid this tracking was to enter a completely separated Plane like the Sanctuary.

'But that doesn't matter. Although not being able to teleport will hinder me, I've long since stopped relying on teleportation for movement in battle.'

His thoughts didn't last long. After he reached this point, he covered his fists in Void Flames and stomped the ground, propelling himself forward.

He reached Hun Fang in an instant, his fists throwing a barrage of punches in every direction.

Hun Fang moved just as swiftly. A palm-sized black flag appeared in his hand. Every time he waved it, gusts of grey mana swept through the air and mitigated the damage of Damien's punches.

But in that instant, Hun Fang's figure vanished into a veil of fog and reappeared many meters away.

"I don't have time for this. Enough probing, let's finish this quickly."

Hun Fang waved the flag in his hand. The grey mana that swirled around it began to morph into a fog filled with countless faces.

Some were screaming, some were crying, while others still had expressions of shock on their faces that never vanished. The one thing that they shared was the fact that all of them expressed some form of horror.

Damien narrowed his eyes. "Those...souls? Or spirits?"

Hun Fang grinned wickedly. "Did you think the Spirit King title was for show? Although I hate the way they classify me, I have to admit that the ones who made that deplorable record have a solid information network."

OOOOOH!

The cluster of ghastly spirits soon expanded into a swirling tornado of screams that surrounded Hun Fang. Within a second, that tornado had already charged towards Damien.

Damien furrowed his brows. Soul and spirit attacks were what he hated the most, since he had no real counter to them. But he still had to fight it somehow.

Mirage manifested in his hand. He quickly took his stance and thrust his blade forward.

'Void Sword Art Third Form: Horizon Break'

Bang!

A hole was blasted in the tornado of souls, but it soon closed up. But Damien wasn't disheartened by the sight. Within the tornado, he could see the flickering wisp of Void Flame that he had added into his strike.

Damien kicked to the side and avoided the tornado's trajectory before readjusting his foot and kicking off the floor, closing the distance between him and Hun Fang.

'Void Sword Art First Form: Bladeless'

A gash appeared in space, rapidly expanding towards Hun Fang and threatening to swallow him into the void. Hun Fang's body turned into smoke once more, but Damien had already predicted it.

Damien's sword slashed through the air, creating tens of gashes with Bladeless that blocked off Hun Fang's retreat.

But Hun Fang wasn't just standing still while Damien dealt with the tornado. The grey souls that exited his flag had already permeated through the area and formed a ghastly domain.

They clustered together in front of him as the spatial rend reached his position. Like a horde of zombies, those souls bit into the spatial rend as if it was a physical object, shattering it like glass.

"What a nasty technique," Damien muttered. He jumped into the air, wings jutting out of his back. With a flap, he appeared above Hun Fang and swung his sword down.

Clang!

The flag in Hun Fang's hand grew into a staff that collided with Mirage. As the two clashed against each other, Damien utilized vector control to increase the weight of his strike.

Boom!

The floor caved in below them, but Hun Fang didn't lose his balance. His staff grazed against the edge of Damien's sword and parried it before swinging through and shooting towards Damien's chest.

Bang!

As the staff hit Damien's chest, his foot stomped on the ground to offset the impact. At the same time, his hand that wasn't holding Mirage curled into a fist and shot forward, sending a hook towards Hun Fang's jaw.

'Void Sword Art Second Form: Dance of the Void'

Damien's figure flickered out of existence, turning into multiple phantoms that circled Hun Fang's position.

Even if spatial movement wouldn't work on his opponent, Dance of the Void was different. When he first created it, the move was simply a sword dance combined with bladeless, but over time, it had been refined into something different.

Even if Hun Fang could track his position, it wouldn't change anything.

Mirage moved like a ghost, leaving tens of cuts on Hun Fang's skin.

Hun Fang frowned as he looked at the dozens of Damians that were surrounding him. He completely ignored the damage he was taking.

"So be it."

His hands clapped together and formed an ancient seal. His mana raged as he did so. Even as blood began to pour from his body, he didn't stop.

"Heed my call and appear before me, Velzagard."

The grey mana around him formed a whirlpool, making it so Damien's strikes could no longer reach him. Seeing this, Damien teleported out of range.

'He's definitely preparing something big. Although I would love to stop the process halfway, it doesn't seem like I can do that.'

In all honesty, Damien was vexed. His combat style that leaned towards frontal confrontation and short-distance attacks seemed to be perfectly countered by Hun Fang's attributes, whatever they were.

'If I want to have an effective battle against him, it has to be one like mages. Long-ranged combat seems like it'd be more effective. The problem is, spatial abilities don't seem to work well against him.'

He had grown a lot in the secret realm, but he had also lost a great deal. For instance, his lightning had slowly become useless as he acquired more special abilities.

Not only that, Sunflames were no longer available to him either since they had fused into the Void Flame, and since the Void Flame was still in its growth phase, it wasn't as effective as he hoped it'd be.

These two had been a pivotal part of his combat force prior to entering the secret realm, but now, he was almost wholly relying on his spatial element.

But the abilities he most frequently used had been countered already by his opponent.

'A match like this is new. An opponent that isn't insanely stronger than me or just weaker than me...it's annoying.'

But he wasn't hopeless. The spark of Void Flame that had been left within the soul tornado previously had already consumed all the mana within it, and was proceeding to devour the mana of the pseudo-domain Hun Fang had set up.

'It's almost strong enough for me to use in combat. But until then, I need to manage with other abilities.'

It had been a long time since he used his spatial abilities for long-range combat, but wasn't that an easy thing? Him using space in short-range combat so often should've been the more odd outcome.

'I guess I'll just have to innovate...I guess it's true when they say competition is the best driving force for improvement.'

As Damien planned for the rest of the battle, Hun Fang's preparation also came to an end.

They had been fighting for some time already, but neither was able to get the upper hand. And neither of them had used their most destructive abilities in fear of harming the fruit they had come this far to acquire.

But that kind of cautiousness, it seemed that it would no longer be present. Their true battle would only be starting now.

Chapter 387 Struggle [7]

"Heed my call and appear before me, Velzagard."

The incantation left Hun Fang's lips and within seconds, the mana whirlpool that formed around his body expanded to an astonishing degree. From within it, the form of something otherworldly appeared.

Its skin was just as grey as the mana used to summon it, and its form was similar to a massive Minotaur with striking red eyes. Puffs of flame exited its nostrils every time it took a breath, and an aura of unbridled power emanated from its entire body.

"Merge."

Hun Fang indifferently called out. The Minotaur's physical body seemed to morph and shrink, becoming incorporeal and hovering like a phantom behind Hun Fang.

In response, Hun Fang's entire aura changed as well, becoming a mixture between the ghastly aura he had before and the aura of the Minotaur that had fused with him.

As the process took place, Damien had no intention of waiting silently. His body also began to change, undergoing Demon Transformation.

The two stared at each other from across the room. They had both chosen forms that heightened their physical power, but their battle from now on wouldn't be at close range.

But they were well aware that they needed to heighten their defenses for what was to come.

Damien's eyes sharpened. His vector field was erected in an instant and his hand flicked through the air.

Multiple spatial cracks appeared wherever his arm traveled and shot toward Hun Fang in a frenzied manner.

Ziu! Ziu! Ziu!

They sipped through the air and arrived at his position, attempting to cut him as the Dance of the Void had done before, but Hun Fang was quicker. A wall of souls formed and absorbed the impact before they could reach his body.

But Damien was just starting. Tens, dozens, hundreds of space blades shot forward with every passing moment. His vector control was put into full use as well, altering the trajectory of the blades so they attacked from unpredictable angles.

The soul wall that Hun Fang mobilized continued to block the damage. But as it did so, chunks of it were also banished into the void.

All of a sudden, a lone space blade separates itself from the masses, traveling far faster than the rest.

Zip!

It rushed through a crack in the soul wall's defense and when it arrived in front of Hun Fang's face, it tore apart and expanded as if someone was opening the zipper of a suitcase.

"Keuk...!"

Hun Fang coughed blood and shot backward due to the force of impact, but as he did so, he rapidly waved his flag in a strange pattern.

Ding~!

A formless wave of mana spread like a shockwave, accompanied by the crisp sound of a bell. Damien immediately put his vector field to work to divert the attack, but the formless wave kept moving regardless.

"Agh!"

When it passed through his body, Damien felt his internals churning. He didn't know how a mere sound could do such damage, but he knew he had to be careful of it.

Ding~! Ding~! Ding~!

The sound waves kept spreading, and as they bounced off of the walls around them, they impacted each other and multiplied.

As the sound continued to pass through Damien's body, he felt his mind becoming numb. A shadow appeared behind him while he attempted to reorient himself.

Bang!

The heavy force of a staff infused with intense physical strength impacted the back of Damien's head. His body leaned forward, and with the disorientation he was already feeling, he lost his balance.

'Fuck!'

Without hesitation, he spread Void Essence through his inner body and used it to protect his vitals. At the same time, he used mana to seal his sense of hearing so the sound waves would lose their effect.

He regained clarity in the middle of his fall. Instead of stopping his momentum, he planted his arms on the ground, pushed with all his strength, and twisted his wrists.

He infused his lower body with pure mana as he spun, emitting a wave of energy that pushed Hun Fang back before he could continue on his attack.

Damien flashed away. Behind his body, black and white balls began to form. He used spatial mana to form the exterior, trapping his volatile mana within the balls and compressing it. In an instant, he shot them out all over the room.

BOOM!

A massive chain of explosions rang out. Although the bombs had no real target, they had at least stopped the spread of the sound waves that had been continuously multiplying the entire time. At the same time, they created a veil that obscured Hun Fang's vision.

Damien's All-Seeing Eyes swirled in full force, allowing him to pierce through the veil he created.

His mana concentrated inside his throat. Pure spatial mana and blistering Void Flames combined together and amplified each other's effects. And in the next second, he roared.

Roar!

A beam of dragon's breath spewed from his mouth and charged towards Hun Fang, defying the concept of distance and reaching him instantaneously. Hun Fang's eyes widened as he suddenly sensed the fluctuation, but it was too late.

BOOOM!

The resulting explosion blasted apart the thick branches of the Primordial Undying Tree that made up the floor and ceiling of the strange room. Meanwhile, dozens of branches shot up and protected the purple fruit from any damage.

Seeing this, Damien grinned slightly. With the blood that leaked from his mouth due to the internal damage he had taken, he looked especially devilish.

'Good! I can go all out without worry!'

Even though they had begun fighting with more vigor, both he and Hun Fang had always been worried about damaging the fruit that stood in the middle of the room.

But it seemed their concerns were unwarranted.

"Hoo..." Damien breathed out deeply. He closed his eyes briefly before opening them once more, but they now contained a different glint within.

"Come."

Rumble!

Storm clouds began to brew within the confines of the room. Due to Damien's will, they didn't spread outside, but rather concentrated in one place.

Black lightning raged through the clouds. Even compared to any other time he had utilized his storm talent, it was much fiercer.

It was to the point where he couldn't control it.

Bzzt!

BOOM!

A massive bolt of lightning struck the ground wildly without his command. Following it, tens of lightning bolts did the same.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Each one was deafeningly loud. It was like the lightning was roaring.

No, the lightning was truly roaring.

Those massive black bolts of lightning were like pillars. They were furiously striking the ground as if venting their frustration.

An unbridled aura of fury filled the room.

'You dare...ignore me?!'

Damien could've sworn he heard those words, but he knew it was just in his mind. But seeing the lightning's fury firsthand, he could understand what it was trying to convey.

The lightning's aura began to influence him as well.

Belligerence and destruction, these were the things that lightning was supposed to represent. But what had it become? It had become a useless part of Damien's power that he neglected even before he acquired the Void Flames.

The only time his lightning was used was when his Storm trait was used. The lightning itself was never given any importance ever since he had gained those mysterious affinities in his status.

Yet, that neglected lightning affinity, no, that mysterious affinity that Damien still didn't understand was furiously baring its fangs.

Whether or not Damien wanted it, it didn't care.

Damien's eyes were already red due to his Demon Transformation, but they began to give off a particularly bloody light.

His aura changed. A bestial desire emerged in his mind.

But he didn't lose his sanity. Not this time.

Damien clearly felt the changes in his body brought about by that third affinity of his. But he didn't try to stop them. No, he embraced them.

Because this whole situation gave off the scent of opportunity.

Chapter 388 Struggle [8]

Before Hun Fang could even completely recover from the beam of volatile energy that bore a hole through his stomach, he found another problem arising.

Terrifying black lightning burst apart the room they were in. He felt that if he was struck by that lightning, the damage he'd take was far more severe than a mere hole that he could heal within a minute.

He gritted his teeth in frustration. 'It isn't supposed to be like this. It can't be like this. I can't allow this fight to continue for much longer.'

There were things he needed to do. Things that had to be done as soon as possible. The longer this fight drew out, the more disadvantageous it was for him.

'Dammit! Since the beginning, I was never a frontal combatant. Why should an assassin engage in head-on combat?'

He truly wanted to do things the way that was most comfortable for him, but it was impossible. His opponent was a spatial cultivator, and not only that, a spatial cultivator with eyes that were far greater than his own.

He already had some information about Damien. It was the reason he was able to counter Damien's teleportation and other moves so efficiently.

But in the same way he could efficiently counter Damien, Damien could do the same to him. That is, if he used his original combat style.

'Forcing him into long-range combat bought me some leeway. Velzegard also gave me the physical resistance I need to stand against his frightening bodily strength, but I don't have any proper offensive counters.'

His affinity was special. It was probably one of the most special affinities out there.

An affinity for souls and spirits.

This kind of affinity gave him an unprecedented amount of auxiliary skills that could save his life, but it also meant that he didn't have a great deal of individual combat power.

The reason was simple. The soul wasn't something a mortal could touch.

For his affinity to truly bloom, he needed to at least be a half step into Godhood. It was a troubling burden that he had carried ever since he started his path to power.

And so, his main fighting style naturally became stealth-based. A single sure-fire attack that'd kill without making a sound, that was what he was known for.

Of course, he had other means as well.

'But my summons won't be able to hold up to that man at all. He is a beast on a completely different level.'

Summoning spirits and beasts from a different Plane to fight for him, or to merge with him and lend him their strength. This was his main combat style when he had to fight directly.

The problem was, he had to merge with Velzegard to acquire the defense he needed. And with those terrifying lightning bolts littering the area, he didn't have the option to switch summons.

Before he could finish up his thoughts, he suddenly felt a wild aura engulf him from behind.

Bang!

He quickly turned around and raised his arms to block. But the force of impact was far greater than he expected.

Crack!

The bones in his arms broke in two. 'Even with Velzegard's reinforcement...!'

He hurriedly backed away, but the beast was relentless in its chase. Wild black lightning crackled through the air and caused miniature explosions with its every movement. That lightning wrapped around a shockingly fast fist that was currently flying towards his chest.

Boom!

Hun Fang grabbed his staff and poured his mana into it. An array of souls flew out and coated the shaft in the second before it was hit by that fist.

OOOOOOH!

Harrowing shrieks rang out. The lightning dashed through the souls that coated the staff and burned them into oblivion. With every move the lightning made, Hun Fang could feel the soul collection he spent so much time building lose its force.

"Dammit!" Hun Fang gritted his teeth. A trail of blood leaked from his lip.

But even as he did so, the beast in front of him twisted his body at an unnatural angle and let out a kick that whipped through the air.

Hun Fang rapidly evaded the kick, turning into a trail of smoke that escaped to the other side of the room.

'He's using too much force. At this rate, Velzegard won't be enough. I should be able to counter him but...my body won't hold up.'

He made a split-second decision. Multiple thoughts flashed through his head, leading his decision to be obvious.

"Heed my call. Come forth, Behemoth."

The Minotaur phantom disappeared from his back. Hun Fang felt a sudden emptiness as he lost the strength of his summon, but that emptiness was soon filled.

No, it was more than filled.

Crack!

His bone structure was altered as his body became far larger than it ever was before. The aura of power emanating from him caused space to quake.

But at the same time, cracks formed on his skin. He wouldn't be able to hold this form for long.

'I have 10 minutes at most before my body fails me. I must end it within that time.'

Damien appeared before Hun Fang like a shadow while he was in the middle of transforming, but Hun Fang didn't panic like he did last time.

He calmly held out his hand, grabbing Damien's leg. And then, he clutched his fist.

CRACK!

The bones in Damien's leg shattered into paste. The leg itself became flimsy without support.

Hun Fang's fist shot forward at the same time. It was slow and steady, but the power behind it was no joke.

Damien's eyes widened. This power was far greater than what was shown before. His gaze hardened as Mirage appeared in his hand once more.

The blade sliced downward with all of Damien's strength behind it. At the same time, vector control increased gravity around the sword, as well as the sword's velocity and momentum.

Spatial mana raged, creating multiple tiny space cracks that created a minor suction force. These space cracks collided with each other and formed a massive gash in space within an instant.

But that was only a side effect of what Damien was doing. He poured heaping amounts of mana into the blade. It was to the point where he almost exhausted his entire mana reserve.

But it was necessary. Hun Fang's fist was simply that powerful.

'Void Sword Art Fourth Form: Spatial Collapse'

The sword and the fist finally met. And as a result...

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

An explosion far greater than any other.

The massive black hole formed through spatial collapse met a pure physical force great enough to shatter space like glass. The suction of the black hole couldn't cope with the sheer amount of energy contained in that punch, but Hun Fang's fist also couldn't get past the swirling black hole.

The energy waves of the collision ripped apart the room that the two were fighting in. Shrapnel from the Primordial Undying Tree's branches rained down on the rest of the realm around them.

The Void Flame immediately stopped devouring the souls Hun Fang had sent out at the beginning of the battle. They shot towards Damien and wrapped around his body, solidifying into a black-gold flame armor that protected him from the blast.

The two geniuses were thrown backwards by the force of the explosion, readjusting their balance in the air.

It was only because they were within the Primordial Undying Tree, this extremely powerful tree, that their collision didn't cause more damage.

In reality, that force would've been enough to decimate every other genius in the secret realm with them with ease.

But it didn't.

Now, the two were standing in the sky opposite from each other, sparks flying in the air between them.

This was the second time they had ended in a stalemate, and neither of them was going to allow a third.

Chapter 389 Struggle [9]

The mana of the Primordial Undying Realm swirled and seemed to gather around a single point. At that place, two figures stood in the air opposite of each other.

The two men stared at each other with gazes filled with hostility. With every breath they took, mana raged and stormed.

The area surrounding the Primordial Undying Tree was wrapped in stillness. Those geniuses that had been furiously fighting only moments prior were all directing their gazes at the battle in the sky.

Just by feeling the mana emanating from those two figures, they were made painfully aware of the gap between them. Interfering in such a fight, or even being in the same area as it, would definitely cause their deaths.

Damien shook his hands as he watched Hun Fang. The force of their previous collision was no joke. If it wasn't for the Blood Runes from his demon form, he would've taken heavy damage from being in the same area.

And he was sure Hun Fang was the same. That form that gave him frightening physical strength was the only reason he could still stand there unharmed.

"Haa..." Damien took a deep breath. Now that they were in the sky, things would be different. The environmental constraints of combat within a large room would be gone, and the scale of their attacks would get bigger.

His gaze panned down to the purple fruit that was being protected by an array of branches.

'Neither of us has been able to reach the fruit yet because of the other's assault, but when we have this much breathing room, it might be different. Instead of prolonging the battle between us, I should try to keep him occupied while I snatch the fruit.'

It was the best thing to do since he couldn't win against Hun Fang easily. But his cards had mostly been put on the table already.

'I haven't found a suitable combat application for Void Essence yet besides the basics, but such meager use of it won't be of any help in this battle. There's really only one more thing I can do to increase my combat power. If even that doesn't work, then I have to resort to the Demon Dragon form again.'

Damien closed his eyes and concentrated. Ever since entering the secret realm, a portion of his abilities had been limited.

Of course, the most prominent was his teleportation range. That was something that hindered him from the Trial World all the way until this moment. But it was nowhere near the most restricted ability.

"Celestial Authority."

A formless aura filled with starlight surrounded Damien. It was the will of a Celestial, a ruler of stars.

Being a Celestial was amazing. It granted him many different ways to use his spatial abilities as well as an intrinsic connection to the universe that no other class could grant him.

But a class that had limitless potential like this one had a glaring weakness.

In isolated spaces like secret realms, there were no stars to draw power from. Even the sun and moon that hung in the sky were artificial.

A large portion of his power would be locked because of this. What was a Celestial without the stars under his command? He was just another spatial practitioner.

But he had realized something in the three months he spent diligently comprehending space and time.

What did it mean to have an intrinsic connection?

Because he couldn't "feel" the connection he had with the stars, did it disappear?

No. It didn't. Regardless of where he was, regardless of whether or not his connection with the stars was interrupted by outside forces, it would still be present within his body.

That was the true Celestial Authority. The authority to rule over stars, and the authority to draw that power regardless of any circumstances.

Starlight bathed Damien's body as he stood in the air. He looked like a human torch. Rays of starlight pierced through the boundaries of space and time to answer the call of their ruler.

It was a sensation of utmost bliss, but Damien didn't have time to concentrate on it. Hun Fang rapidly approached him as he welcomed the starlight. A fist wrapped in hundreds of souls charged towards his body.

An aura of resentment enveloped him. The cries of those tortured souls tried to break his mind. But in response, the sun in his spiritual world let off heated rays of light that burned any invading forces.

Damien pulled his arm back, utilizing vector control to enhance the momentum of his actions, and then punched forward at a speed that far surpassed his physical capabilities.

BOOOM!

Pure white and blue starlight collided with those grey resentful souls, creating an explosion of light in the sky. A shockwave spread from the point of impact, uprooting and destroying all the trees surrounding the clearing.

The geniuses on the ground were pushed back by the furious winds brought about by their fists. Only those within the Primordial Undying Tree's protection were safe from the blast.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

But it wasn't over. Starlight scattered and purified the resentful souls, while the souls also attempted to eat away at the starlight. In the middle of the bright sun-like light that wrapped around the battle location, Damien and Hun Fang traded hundreds of blows.

Damien's fist grazed across Hun Fang's face, his starlight burning the matter's cheek. At the same time, Hun Fang turned his body and shot a kick at Damien's chest.

Damien twisted his body to dodge and teleported behind Hun Fang, charging starlight into his fist and throwing another punch.

Ziu!

A beam of light left his fist as he punched forward, reaching Hun Fang in an instant. Due to the short distance between them, it was nigh impossible to dodge.

The Behemoth summon didn't give Hun Fang any bonuses in speed and dexterity. In fact, it lessened those aspects. But in return, he was given an impenetrable defense and unstoppable attack.

So he didn't even try to dodge the starlight that was shooting towards him like a missile. He turned his body halfway, flinging his fist horizontally at where Damien was standing.

Spatial mana wrapped around Damien as he prepared to teleport, but a bullet of grey mana appeared in front of him and shattered that attempt. With no other option, Damien crossed his arms in front of his chest to block.

Bang! Ziu!

Hun Fang's fist impacted Damien's arms at the same time the starlight penetrated his body.

"Keuk!"

"Kah!"

Damien shot backward tens of meters due to the force. The bones in his arms had been directly shattered even with the defensive runes he was using.

And although Hun Fang wasn't pushed back, a small coin-sized hole had been opened in his sides. The starlight had penetrated his body underneath his armpit on the left and exited from the right, creating a clean wound.

"Tch!" Damien clicked his tongue. It was annoying to lose to someone else in physical strength. But he knew that he hadn't taken the most damage in this exchange.

'My bones should heal within a few seconds, and while I don't know his regenerative capabilities, he should've sustained internal injuries from that attack.'

Although his arms were currently out of commission, Damien didn't want Hun Fang to recover while he waited to heal. He flashed away, appearing in front of his opponent with starlight radiating from his legs.

Bang! Bang!

He twisted his body, sending a fierce double kick at Hun Fang's chest. When the latter raised his arms to block, Damien turned his head and opened his mouth wide.

There, a ball of volatile mana was waiting to be fired.

Roar!

There was no room to dodge. In that instant, while he was blocking the starlight that tried to invade his body, Hun Fang was swallowed in a torrent of dragon's breath.

Chapter 390 Struggle [10]

"Haa...haa..."

Damien rapidly teleported away. He didn't know how Hun Fang was doing after his attack, but he certainly wasn't in good condition.

With two broken arms and a leg that was still in the process of healing after turning into meatpaste moments prior, he wasn't in good shape at all. His internal injuries from Hun Fang's sound attack had been healed already, but his organs had been considerably shaken up by the following physical combat. In short...

"It hurts like hell."

But he wasn't going to leave any loose ends. Void Flames sprouted from the air in front of him. Due to all the souls it had consumed while they were still inside the room, it had grown considerably.

"Go."

At his command, the Void Flame shot into the collision area where Hun Fang was swallowed by the dragon's breath and lit even the sky itself on fire.

The space was already filled with light because of Damien's starlight and the brightness of the energy beam he had shot just now, but now that it had also been wrapped in flames, it truly looked like a sun.

'Now's my chance.'

He moved rapidly. The runes on his body changed to enhance his speed, and spatial mana raged around him. He disappeared from his position instantly, appearing in front of the purple fruit that he had been coveting. At that moment, an unexpected problem arose.

'Tch! How am I supposed to grab this?'

The fruit was still being protected by an array of branches. If he wanted to claim it, he needed to move or destroy them. But he still needed a few seconds to heal the bones in his arms, so they were currently unusable.

As he was trying to figure it out, the air behind him exploded.

"NOT...SO...FAST...!"

Hun Fang's ragged figure appeared without warning.

Crack!

Damien felt a sudden impact on the back of his head. His skull had cracked slightly.

'What the hell!'

It felt like he was smashed in the head with a hammer. His vision was getting blurry from the sheer force. When he turned around to see what hit him, he finally saw Hun Fang's condition.

If Damien thought he was in bad shape, he had to change his mind when he saw his opponent. Hun Fang looked on the verge of death.

His skin was charred black and falling off in flakes. Some portions of his muscle were already visible. His face looked similar to a certain DC villain, with one side no longer containing any skin. His arms and legs were dangling as if they were boneless.

Blood leaked from his body in insane proportions. It looked like it'd form a river below. Damien was surprised that he was even standing.

'Did he just...headbutt me?'

It was an insane tenacity. His arms and legs were incapable of moving and from the looks of it, he was running out of mana as well. In that situation, wouldn't it be better to give up?

Even Damien would do so if it wasn't for his insane regeneration speed. But this guy in front of him was still fighting. Damien was sure that if his skull cracked, Hun Fang would still find another way to continue fighting.

'What's driving him so far?'

Damien couldn't help but wonder. The Primordial Undying Fruit was indeed a Heavenly Treasure, but it wasn't worth dying for. Hun Fang's motivation couldn't be so simple.

But now wasn't the time to be thinking of it. Although he had sustained yet another injury, the time it took for Hun Fang to attack him was enough for his arms to heal enough to be usable again.

He appeared in front of Hun Fang in an instant. His leg whipped around like a whip and impacted him in the center of his chest.

"Urgh!"

Even as he was thrown away, Hun Fang didn't yell in pain, only letting out a muffled groan.

Hun Fang didn't have any strength left. Even the last attack was just one of desperation. After being pushed away, there was nothing else he could do to stop Damien's advance.

'DAMMIT!' He furiously yelled inwardly. 'I can't lose like this! If I do—!'

"I don't understand your resolve, but I can respect you as an opponent. Therefore, I thank you for the battle. It's been a good lesson for me."

Damien spoke seriously. He had learned too much from the battle against Hun Fang. From the weaknesses he still had to the things he had become overly reliant on without realizing it, there was too much he had to think over once he had the time to do so.

He bowed in sincerity. At the same time, his body flashed away. Hun Fang could only watch powerlessly as he did so.

Damien's arms didn't have any strength left in them, but he used spatial distortion to make up for the lack of strength. Within seconds, the branches keeping the purple fruit safe had been ripped apart.

That crystalline purple fruit was finally revealed before his eyes. But as he looked at it, he felt a wild and powerful aura spread from behind him.

'Again?!'

He grabbed the fruit hurriedly and teleported away from where he stood. In the same second, the remaining branches of the Primordial Undying Tree's peak were blasted to shreds.

"I. CAN'T. LOSE."

Hun Fang roared. His mouth didn't move. He had to use mana to move his vocal cords for him.

"COME FORTH, IRA. LEND ME YOUR—"

Damien knew what Ira was. It was the Sin of Wrath itself. He had been preparing to do everything he could against the final being Hun Fang was preparing to summon, but his preparation was in vain.

A shadow appeared behind Hun Fang without warning. A swift chop hit his neck, knocking him unconscious. He was already at the end of his rope, so it wasn't a difficult task for the shadow at all.

That shadow enveloped the unconscious Hun Fang. A pair of eyes within stared at Damien.

And Damien stared back. Soon, though, he shook his head with a sigh. 'It can't be helped.'

He turned away from the shadow that was taking Hun Fang away and looked at the fruit in his hand.

'It would be best to look for a better environment before consuming this. Let me save it for now.'

[The Primordial Undying Tree tells you that it's best if you consume it now. It says it will be able to help you digest its power if you do so.]

Damien raised his brow with interest. Although it didn't seem like an ideal situation, having help from a Demigod would definitely help him reap the most benefits.

His gaze turned to the ground below him. There, he finally saw the aftereffects of the battle he had just been in.

Within a hundred kilometers, all the existing flora had been torn asunder and strewn about. Within the debris were also the corpses of geniuses who couldn't escape the blast radius.

But aside from the purple layer of leaves, the rest of the Primordial Undying Tree was standing tall, and the geniuses within it were also fine under its protection.

Among them, Damien's gaze focused on a single one. Seeing her face now, he unconsciously smiled.

'Just a little longer...'

As if she had heard his thoughts, Ruyue nodded at him with a smile. Seeing this, Damien only felt more guilty.

'She's been so understanding this entire time, but I haven't done anything to reciprocate her trust. Looks like I have a lot of work to do when we leave this realm.'

Suddenly, his smile turned into a mischievous grin. Looking at Ruyue, he brought his hand to his mouth and blew a kiss.

And leaving a final wink while feeling the satisfaction of seeing Ruyue's blushing face again for the first time in a year, he threw the purple Primordial Undying Fruit in his mouth and bit down.