

# Void 491

## Chapter 491 Dungeon [1]

A week passed steadily.

As the various purges continued, Damien and Alea put their all into conquering the First Dungeon. And since Damien's abilities now allowed him to maneuver the dungeon as he pleased, they were able to level extremely efficiently.

Currently, the duo was on the 74th floor. They finally finished clearing the most dangerous beasts living on this floor, and it was finally time to enter the final fourth of the dungeon.

Damien furrowed his brows in thought. Although it should've been a moment for celebration, he couldn't say he was happy.

'I still can't sense it.'

He tried to justify it as his own lacking abilities not being able to view the entire dungeon, he even tried to rationalize by saying that the dungeon's floor count was wrong, but he knew from the start these reasons were stupid.

The reason he couldn't sense the 100th floor was that there was an existence residing there that could interfere with his awareness, even when it was enhanced with World Force.

'The rumors must be true. Even if I can't kill them, high-level 4th-class beings shouldn't be able to obstruct my awareness when I'm using World Force. But...I don't know if we can make it down 25 floors of 4th-class beasts. Even if we can, it'll take too long.'

They only had until the subjugation ended to train. After that, it was time to move on to grander things.

'There's no need to think about this now. In the first place, it was never possible for me to visit a Demigod if they didn't want to see me. If we're fated to meet, I'll be called down eventually.'

Damien slowly opened his eyes, teleporting back a few feet the second he did so. Glaring at Alea, he spoke. "Didn't I tell you not to get too close? Never heard of personal space?"

Alea smiled and shook her head. "Nope! Not at all!"

"Keuk...!" Damien choked on his words. Ales was, at the end of the day, a wolf. Wolves were, in fact, pack animals who didn't know the concept of personal space.

"Tch, well you can learn it now. Just think about the night I rejected you and be angry at me instead."

Alea pouted to the side. "That hardly counts as a rejection. I could even say you're leading me on."

"You know what leading someone on means but you don't know about personal space?"

"Hm? Did you say something? Ah, I apologize, I think I heard a sound from the staircase to the 75th floor."

Alea quickly scurried away, leaving Damien shaking his head helplessly. He spent another week unintentionally getting close to this woman.

It had to be said, Damien was doing everything he could to fight this pull. Whether it be flat-out rejections as he had given Alea plenty of times already or even s completely avoiding her, none of the things he tried seemed to work.

The strange pull between them continued to affect him.

'Luckily, we're in the dungeon. If she wasn't busy hunting and I wasn't busy training...I just have to hold out until the Niflheim operation begins. At that time, I'll be so far away that this damn pull can't affect me anymore.'

Damien cleared his thoughts and followed after Alea, heading down to the 75th floor. Even though he didn't actively level up with her, he still followed Alea down the floors so he could witness the scenes of the dungeon that he didn't get to see last time.

Besides, the beast corpses in this dungeon were filled with Godbeast bloodline. For the Void Flame, these bloodlines were food for growth, especially fire-attributed ones.

Compared to its previous strength, it was already noticeably stronger. Sadly, Damien didn't find any attribute sources as they descended, so his lightning was still lagging behind.

On a more positive note, his space and time abilities were steadily increasing. Unlike his flames, which were birthed from external sources, and his lightning, which he acquired from the first wolf he killed, these two affinities were naturally a part of him since birth.

If they didn't progress more smoothly than his flames and lightning, it'd be more of a problem.

As he thought about what he should train next, Damien finished descending the stairs to the 75th floor.

And a whole new world opened up to him.

It wasn't much, but there was genuine flora in this space. Small lush trees, grasses and weeds grew through the cave floor, it was completely different from the previous floors. However, the most surprising part was...

"Is that a house?!" Alea's exclamation voiced Damien's thoughts.

Shoddy cottages that were made of the tree wood on the floor, dirt streets that separated different sections of the small town, even though it was only enough for roughly 10 people to live, it was more than one would expect from the lower floors of a hell dungeon.

Damien's gaze sharpened. It was obvious that things would become more morally complicated once 4th class beasts came into play. Unless they attacked first, killing them was like killing a civilian.

Alea's bloodlust surged as she looked at the houses. Her aura surged along with it, alerting the residents of the town.

"This is Zabragor's territory! Who dares show hostility?!"

A booming gruff voice responded. Along with the earthquake-like thumping of footsteps, the figure of a massive man appeared from the town entrance.

Yet, calling him a man wasn't quite accurate.

He stood at a good 10 feet, his body just as wide as it was tall. His body and even his head were that of a giant pig who started acting like a human.

'Partial transformation...'

Damien understood what was happening instantly. He learned quite a bit about beasts from the White Dragon King and the Phoenix Matriarchs.

Partial transformation was a state similar to the 11th and 12th Elder of the Xue Clan, except for beasts. It meant that although these beasts were 4th class on paper, their strength didn't match their title.

And it seemed Alea knew it as well. Before the pig who called himself Zabragor could even finish speaking, she pounced. Her nails extended into claws, she reached Zabragor's neck in an instant, and arrived behind him only a moment later.

In that single movement, Alea sent Zabragor's head flying into the cave ceiling.

"Hmph. Even if it's disappointing, it's the best prey I've had in years." Alea muttered to herself.

And her body moved soon after, invading the village and causing a rain of blood.

Apparently, the morality issue was solved quite easily. Alea simply didn't care about it at all.

Damien shrugged. 'Well, it's not like I'm the one hunting. She's one scary woman, though. I should pat myself on the back for deciding to stay away from her.'

He nodded to himself in satisfaction. There was no more need for him to stay here. While Alea went on another killing spree until she reached the 80th floor, he'd return to his training.

'My previous enlightenment taught me more about Laws than I ever expected. Although I can't use them yet, I can still infuse my comprehension into my attacks and exponentially increase their power.'

The current Damien was imbalanced. His comprehension was far above what even an entry-level 4th class could have, but his power didn't allow him to use the abilities he created through this comprehension.

Yet, he still couldn't level up. This comprehension boost was only in regard to space. His time element was still severely lacking.

Once the time element also reached the pinnacle of what he could make it through his current power level, it'd finally be time to take the last step.

Damien grinned. This kind of training, he missed the feeling of it.

And as he submerged himself in that long-lost feeling, the month flew by.

Chapter 492 Dungeon[2]

Unlike what Damien originally expected, the pseudo-4th class beasts lasted until the 85th floor. Only on the 86th floor did genuine 4th class beasts appear.

But it wasn't like there were no changes. The level of civilization slowly grew until the 86th floor was a genuine city. Plenty of 4th class beings roamed the floor, and even lower-class beasts moved idly. This floor didn't have any of the ferocity that beasts usually held. It was practically a smaller version of the Beast Domain.

It was at this point when Alea finally started to show signs of being uncomfortable. Instead of killing anything she saw, she explored the floor calmly while blending in with the civilians.

As for Damien, he concealed himself in the corner and watched. He was curious about what she would do.

Alea's expression became further troubled as she interacted with the citizens. The conflict within her was obvious.

Power or morality. She had to choose one.

And depending on her choice, her every decision going forward would be affected.

Damien continued to watch curiously. With Alea's nature, he never expected her to hold out for so long. She didn't seem like the kind of person to care about compassion or anything similar.

Abruptly, Alea's bloodlust flared. The crowd around her backed away in fear, the weaker ones falling to the floor, unable to move.

Her mouth moved to form words, but Damien couldn't hear what she was saying. Even if he wanted to, his situation experienced an abrupt change that disallowed it.

Strong spatial fluctuations rose around his body without warning. The person teleporting him didn't seem to care whether he agreed or not. But since he'd been expecting this moment for the past month, he didn't resist.



"So you finally called me." He spoke when his body materialized again.

"Even knowing my identity, you still dare to speak so crassly. As expected, you are a man raised by this dungeon."

Damien raised his brow. "What significance does that have?"

The figure cloaked in darkness replied, seemingly while smiling. "I know a few others who act similar to you. It is quite the odd shared trait of the powerful people in this dungeon."

"And you're one of them?"

"Why, I'm the best of them."

"Quite arrogant for someone who hides behind a veil."

"Quite arrogant for a brat I could kill with a single finger."

"Tch. Touché."

Damien looked up and down at the figure in front of him, but he couldn't make out a single detail of their appearance. Judging by their voice, they were female, but even that didn't give him much information.

The size, race, age, power level, anything besides that voice of his opponent was masked in a veil of darkness.

"So? You finally called me here, but you're wasting time acting mysterious? You're just like a certain old man I've been meaning to visit. Quickly get on with it and stop wasting my time."

The figure snorted. "Do you think I won't kill you for acting out of line? You're so pathetically weak, where does your confidence come from?"

Damien rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Lady, with your strength, you likely saw every single second I spent in this dungeon. Not only did you see me at my worst, but you probably also bore witness to every single secret I tried to hide after leaving the dungeon. Not to mention, I had a nasty habit of talking to myself back then, so you probably know even the stuff you haven't seen personally."

Damien's tone suddenly shifted. He threw his hands across his body as if protecting himself from a pervert. "Besides, you've even met my little brother. How are you going to take responsibility for me?"

"Pfft...!" A crisp peel of laughter came from beyond the veil, surprising even Damien. "I apologize, but I haven't had a laugh in many millennia. The people here are extremely boring, only knowing how to fight, sleep, and breed."

"Heh heh, I see, if you want help taking care of the...other...things you haven't done in a while, this little one doesn't mind giving a few lessons." Damien grinned evilly.

A fist of shadows appeared above his head, giving him a fierce knock. "It seems you have a bad habit of flirting with every woman you meet. Brat, how do you know I'm not a man in disguise? Ever thought about that?"

Damien smirked. "If you were a man in disguise, you probably wouldn't have stopped at just knocking my head."

"And what if I swing that way?"

Damien's face paled. He backed away slowly. "Hm? It looks like Alea is in danger! I have to go now!"

Damien activated teleportation, but as expected, he failed miserably. He could practically feel the woman behind the veil sighing in exasperation.

"Fine, I can't win against you in words. I've spent too long confined down here to be good at wordplay."

"Confined?" Damien's attention was piqued.

"Of course. Who would willingly stay in a damp place like this after ascending to my level? Do you think dungeons are normally built to withstand Divinity?"

Damien shook his head. Perhaps if it was the rumored Heavenly World, it'd be possible, but not in this universe. The materials needed to suppress a Demigod didn't exist here.

After all, even Demigods weren't supposed to exist here. Only those who resisted their "ascension" remained, though ascension might not be the best word to describe it.

So for a dungeon to exist which could accomplish that impossible feat...

"This dungeon was artificially created?" Damien realized.

It made more sense the more he thought about it. The dungeon was far too unique to be spawned naturally.

Kurt's hypothesis was that this was the first dungeon to be born into Apeiron, which is why he termed it the First Dungeon. However, even then, the sheer level of treasure within the dungeon made no sense.

Godbeast bloodlines weren't simple. They possessed traits unlike normal beasts for a reason.

The shadowy woman nodded, the darkness around her bobbing up and down with her movements.  
"This dungeon is a prison created to house me. The cycle of beast evolution is used to provide a

continuous stream of mana and energy to the dungeon so it can maintain the seal. Even if it doesn't seem like much, the excess energy from 100 floors worth of slaughter reaches an insane level."

Damien squinted his eyes as he stared into the shadow. "Then, for you to be sealed so tightly, you must be..."

The woman seemed to smile. The murky shadow that surrounded her body slowly disappeared into the air, revealing the figure hidden beneath.

Pale greyish-white skin, ash-grey hair, and striking red eyes. Her figure was just as voluptuous as Alea's, but she was far taller, standing at the same height as Damien.

From her features alone, she looked like a Dark Elf.

But Damien knew. It wasn't an instinctual feeling, but something she was willingly allowing him to sense.

From within the murky darkness she controlled, the scent of ink perforated Damien's nostrils.

His bloodlust flared out of his control. He glared at the woman coldly.

Standing in front of him as if nothing in the world concerned her...

Was a genuine Nox Demigod.

Chapter 493 Dungeon [3]

"Why is it that you called me here?" Damien asked. His voice was cold, any previous joking tone he held vanishing entirely.

But naturally, the Nox Demigod didn't feel any pressure from his change. She only watched him with a curious and entertained smile on her face.

"My, you don't want me anymore? And here I thought my form would be incredibly appealing to you." She responded.

"Why did you call me here?" Damien repeated. He didn't care about any of her bullshit.

The Nox Demigod rolled her eyes. "Can't you be a little more fun? You're the first person who has seen me in my true form in tens of millennia."

"Tell me why you called me here," Damien repeated himself a third time. He didn't plan to say it again.

"Tch. Kid, you're starting to annoy me. Fix your attitude before I kill you on the spot."

"Kill me then," Damien replied without hesitation.

"What?" The Nox Demigod questioned in surprise.

"Kill me then." Damien shrugged casually. "If you didn't kill me earlier, you won't kill me now. Am I wrong?"

Although Damien was indeed flirting with her because of his habit to flirt all the time, he wasn't the same brainless fool he used to be. His words weren't without meaning.

Just like when he acted brazenly with the Sect Leaders of the Cloud Plane, he needed to understand how lenient this Demigod would be with him, regardless of what her race was.

Because people of power cared immensely for face. If he could act sleazily to her face and live, it meant she probably needed him for something.

Not that it was hard to figure out what that something was.

"I won't help you escape this seal if that's what you plan to ask. If that's all, then either kill me or let me go."

The Demigod glared at Damien with killing intent in her gaze, causing his mental defenses to crumble. If it wasn't for his Void Physique negating a portion of her pressure, he would've been turned into an idiot with a single gaze.

"Khh...that's not a very nice way to treat your guests."

"Didn't you just tell me to kill you? Are you scared now that death is finally upon you?"

"Ha! If this is death being upon me, then the spatula my mom used to beat me as a kid was a God-ranked artifact. Don't joke with me."

The Demigod clicked her tongue. "It's true that I wish for you to release my seal, but it is not without benefit for you. Tell me what you want, and I can easily grant your wish."

"I want the extermination of every member of the Nox species in existence." Damien quickly replied.

The Demigod glared at him again. "I will only accept requests that are within my power."

"And if I ask you to annihilate as many Nox as your power allows?"

"I shall do it without hesitation."

It was Damien's turn to be suspicious. Obviously, this woman held no feelings toward her race. But if she was really an ally, why would the previous generations seal her in the dungeon?



'Yet, the reward is tempting.'

If she was willing to exterminate her race with her own hands for freedom, it meant she was willing to give everything. If he could capitalize on that...

'I might be able to get myself a Demigod maid.'

Damien grinned to himself at the thought, but he knew it wasn't possible with his current strength. He couldn't even sense the mechanisms sealing the woman, let alone break them.

"I am not asking for your immediate cooperation. I am asking for your consideration and help in the future when you become powerful enough."

"How do you know I won't die before then?"

"You will not die." The woman's answer came without hesitation. As she looked at him, a trace of respect surfaced in her eyes.

"I have witnessed your beginning, and I wish to be there to witness your end. Until I allow it, you are not allowed to die."

The woman flicked her finger, causing a portion of the darkness behind her to separate and shoot at Damien's body.

"H-hey!" Damien exclaimed in shock while attempting to dodge, but he never had a chance.

The piece of shadow submerged into his body, but no matter how he scoured himself, he couldn't find traces of it.

"What did you do to me?" Damien growled. His killing intent flared even greater than it did when he found out she was a Nox.

"Relax." The Demigod replied noncommittally. "It's just a wisp of my Divine Power. If you're ever in life-threatening danger, it will protect you once. Even a Demigod won't be able to harm you while it is activated."

Damien calmed down slightly hearing her words, but he couldn't let his guard down. It was still highly likely that this woman was lying to him.

But for now, he couldn't do anything about it.

"Haa, fine. I'll consider your offer. Since the war is starting soon, I'll be able to witness for myself whether or not unsealing you is worth the effort. But...what happens if I refuse?"

The woman smirked in response. "Do you think you can still refuse me? Even if it's just a trace, Divine Power is still Divine Power. If I really wanted to, I could just..."

The woman curled her finger. Responding to her motion, Damien's body instantly began to experience great pain similar to that of evolution.

But this pain didn't come with any benefit.

"Khh..." Damien gritted his teeth and endured without saying a word. He refused to lose to this woman.

Looking at him writing in defiance, a smile unknowingly crept up on the woman's face. 'This boy...is quite fun to play with.'

Even if he didn't know her thoughts, Damien instinctively felt danger. If he broke here, his life would become anything but fun.

The pain continued for close to 10 minutes before the woman finally got bored of his lack of reaction and stopped. Finally, Damien was given a moment of respite.

'Haa...haa...this bitch...!' He sneered inwardly. 'Just wait until I reach your level. I'll turn you into a spitting image of Elitra.'

As he formulated in his mind, he finally regained his bearing. And even though he was internally raging, he pretended as if nothing happened on the outside.

"I have one final question." He said in between breaths. Looking at the woman seriously, he asked, "Why me?"

"Hoh? Are you curious? However, your curiosity might cost you more than you ever thought. Are you really willing to lose—"

"Oh wait, I'm literally the only one you know." Damien interrupted.

"Die."

Damien deftly dodged the shadows that sprouted under his feet to stab him. "Lady, don't be so harsh. How can you treat your only friend and future benefactor like this?"

"Who cares about that? I want you to die, so die."

"Tsk tsk, what a pitiful Demigod. An over 10,000-year-old virgin NEET with no friends. Such a shame."

"Die."

The attacking shadows became fiercer. Seeing this, Damien grinned. "Alright, since you're kicking me out on your own, I'll leave. Don't kiss me too much when I'm gone, 'kay?"

Damien's figure flashed away from the 100th floor in an instant. This time, the woman didn't block his escape.

Once again left alone on the 100th floor, the woman sighed helplessly. 'Tch...if only I knew even a single other person, I'd choose them over you without hesitation. Stupid brat.'

Chapter 494 Dungeon [4]

'My name is Tiamat. Do not forget our promise during your coming adventures.'

Damien smirked as he received the mental transmission. 'Bitch, you're more desperate than I thought.'

He had no good feelings for the Nox Demigod named Tiamat. From the second she decided to torture him needlessly, his grudge became something she couldn't escape.

'Just wait. I'll definitely come free you. On that day, you'll start maid training under Elitra.'

In fact, Elitra was already receiving maid training in the Sanctuary, learning to control herself somewhat. The quarrels between her and little Xue for his attention were far less frequent than they used to be.

'Speaking of the Sanctuary, I wonder how that plan is coming along?'

Damien's figure disappeared from the First Dungeon. When he appeared in the Sanctuary, he immediately spread his awareness to a certain area to the west of the large mountain in the middle.

'Hmm, looks like training has started, but they aren't anywhere near where I want them to be. Maybe I should push them...'

Where his gaze was directed stood a large dormitory where a group of 10 men and women stayed. They were the beginning of an elite squad Damien was in the process of forming.

There were 3 Phoenixes, 4 Elves, and 3 Dragons. They were also chosen so that their specialties complemented each other. However...

'Currently, they aren't even united. Their loyalties lay in the leaders they follow instead of me. While this isn't bad for the common populace, I can't have it for a team that'll become my strength in the future.'

To build this team would need time and effort. For now, it wasn't even worth mentioning.

'By the time we finish up in Niflheim, I'll have them combat-ready.'

Thinking such thoughts, Damien exited the Sanctuary. This time, his visit was only to check on them.

'The Sanctuary really is strange, though...'

Damien didn't know what his role in the Sanctuary was supposed to be. The dynamic he was setting made it ambiguous.

He owned the Sanctuary and he was its creator, but he didn't take an active role in its development. Instead, he quietly watched over them unless he needed something.

He didn't know how his lax attitude towards the society growing in the Sanctuary would impact him in the future, but he didn't mind it much.

The Sanctuary was its own world, and the people who lived in it would have their own lifestyles and governments. In the end, it was already a requirement for every 4th class in the Sanctuary to submit to him through a System Oath, which was inviolable.

He didn't need to worry about betrayal.

Returning his senses to what was happening in the real plane, Damien spread his awareness in search of Alea.

'So this is your decision.' He commented inwardly. As he watched, Alea conversed happily with the residents around her, experiencing their culture with a smile on her face.

Though he didn't care which decision she made in the end, he had to say that his impression of her improved somewhat when he saw her choice.

It wasn't easy to forgo power for morality, it was a choice not many would make. Especially in a place like this where there was nobody around to judge that decision, making it was admirable.

Damien shook his head. 'She's the leader of the Beast Domain. It'd be stranger if she didn't feel something after seeing a second Beast Domain in the dungeon. But since she won't be training anymore...'

It was time for them to leave. The subjugation on the surface would soon reach its conclusion as well.

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"You look like you enjoyed yourself," Damien commented to Alea.

The day already ended and the two left the city on the 86th floor. Currently, Damien was accompanying Alea as she cleaned out the higher floors before they left.

"To be honest, I had more fun than I was expecting. My hubby really knows how to pick a good date spot." Alea smiled and responded.



"Try calling me that around my wives and see how fast you die."

"They aren't powerful enough to kill me, though~?"

"You'd be surprised," Damien remarked with a grin. "Those three have an unexpected level of synergy. Even I might struggle if they work together."

"Are you implying that you're stronger than me?"

Damien quirked his brow. "Am I not?"

Dragon Pressure leaked from his body, immediately causing Alea to lose strength in her legs.

"Ahh~! This doesn't count~!" Alea protested while squirming in pleasure.

"Really? You won't admit defeat?"

"Never!" Alea exclaimed defiantly.

"Okay." Damien shrugged. He retracted his Dragon Pressure easily, leaving Alea stuck trying to catch her breath.

"Wait...I change my mind...you're stronger than me, I admit it, so use your pressure again." She panted.

Damien glanced at her in disdain. "I bet nobody in the Beast Domain would've expected their Empress to be a hopeless pervert. The Beast Emperor really starved you, huh."

Alea shuddered. With the state she was currently in, even Damien's look of disdain was giving her endless pleasure.

"Stop...no more...I can't take it~" Alea moaned.

Damien sighed helplessly. For just a single second, Dragon Pressure emitted from his body once more.

But that single second was enough to send Alea over the edge. While she experienced orgasmic bliss, Damien left her alone and returned to the 20th floor of the dungeon.

Looking at the small shack where he spent his days between training and killing, a warm smile unknowingly crept up his face.

'It's still a work in progress, but I've really grown. It's hard not to be proud of myself when I remember the old days.'

Damien spent a few moments in reminiscence as he looked at the house. But, reminiscence was just that. To leave things in the past and move forward...

Now that he saw this place again with his own eyes, he was finally ready to do it.

After spending some more time retracing his steps from years ago, Damien returned to Alea.

"Ready to leave now?" He asked, ignoring the puddle of clear liquid she was sitting in.

"Haa...haa...not ready...can't walk...too much pleasure..." Alea responded.

"Alright. I'll leave you here and return alone. I'll come back for you in a few days."

"W-wait! I suddenly feel better now!" Alea exclaimed, jumping up off the floor and patting herself down.

Damien looked away. No matter how indifferent he tried to act, Alea really made it too hard on him.

The way her breasts bounced with her movements, the trail of liquid between her thighs that she clearly let him see on purpose, her seduction tactics were impossible to ignore.

But Damien persevered. 'Just a little longer. Just a little longer and I'll be safe.'

Praying that he didn't make a mistake, he grabbed Alea and teleported them back to the surface.

"You do whatever you want now. I'm leaving."

Once they reached the surface, Damien was quick to leave Alea behind. The woman was too dangerous for him to stay around unless he was prepared to take another wife.

So instead of focusing on her, Damien returned to the three women he already called his own.

In specific, he went to the location of a certain blue-haired Valkyrie.

He had been stalling for too long. Even though he knew what he wanted to say, telling Elena to her face was harder than he expected.

The coming conversation would be far more difficult than the one he had with Rose. That was why he waited so long to have it.

But after spending so much time with Alea, he missed his wives. He didn't want to have trivial problems with any of them anymore.

So it was finally time.

Time for him to settle old grievances and start anew.

Chapter 495 Talk [1]

Two people sat on a large bed, leaning against the headboard and staring at the opposite wall. Even though they were on the same bed, there was a clear separation between them, neither willing to bridge the gap.

The reason for their posture was simple. They couldn't bear to face each other while saying the things they wanted to say.

Elena fidgeted restlessly. When Damien said he wanted to have this conversation over a month ago, she was already nervous. She knew as well as he did how twisted their relationship had become.

They started off as simple childhood friends. They had a bond that not even the strongest God could break. When Elena thought about this bond...

She wondered whether falling in love with Damien was ever the right decision.

Maybe it was because of her love that their relationship became so twisted. If she never desired progress in their relationship after Damien already had Rose, she wouldn't be feeling the ugly feelings in her heart right now.

It was hard to suppress these thoughts. And because of the lack of contact from Damien, her thoughts only became wilder with every passing day.

"...I hated you." Damien finally opened his mouth and spoke. His voice was so low it was almost inaudible.

But the words he said made Elena's heart jump. An indescribable pain filled her heart, almost disallowing her from hearing the rest of his words.

But Damien didn't leave her waiting for long. He knew his words could be easily misinterpreted, and he wanted no more misunderstandings between them.

"It was an unreasonable hatred, and it was concealed so deep I didn't even notice it until a few months ago. From the start, the reason our relationship became so twisted is my fault."

Damien's gaze never left the wall, but he could practically feel Elena's nervousness. Yet, he didn't look over. He didn't know if he could say what he wanted to say if he looked over.

"Before I fell, I ignored your feelings. It wasn't that I didn't know how you felt, it was that I thought of your feelings as another burden for me to carry." Damien sighed.

"I've tried to justify my thought process from back then many times. I've tried to say it was inevitable for me to act like that since I had so much on my plate. I tried to say that I was simply prioritizing survival over anything else.

"...but that was always just me trying to absolve myself of blame."

The room was quiet. Even the sounds of crickets chirping in the nighttime outside were muted. But the cool moonlight still illuminated the area, giving something for Damien's eyes to follow as he spoke the words he hid in his heart for so long.

"I didn't love you back then. I won't lie to you and say that I did. Before my fall, I never thought of you as anything more than a childhood friend. And because I was afraid of our relationship crumbling if I ever acknowledged your feelings, I ignored them.

"I was simply being selfish. I didn't want to lose the only support pillar I had remaining in my dreary life. To me back then, you became an object of dependence rather than a human being. It was a really cruel way to treat you, and the only thing I can do about it now is apologize.

"However, I don't think it's something I should be forgiven for. The attitude I held back then was the beginning of our twisted relationship."

Damien closed his eyes. These were feelings of long ago and feelings that didn't affect him much in the present. When compared to the other things he needed to say, this was the easiest.

Yet, he was still having so much trouble.

Elena, on the other hand, was trying her best to not break out into tears. To describe her current emotions in one word, she was heartbroken.

It was hard. How was she supposed to simply take in Damien's past perspective without feeling anything? Even if emotions of the past didn't have any say in their current relationship, did that mean it wouldn't hurt?

It wasn't just the rejection that hurt. Damien practically said that he used to view her as a "tool" he could use to keep himself supported. Would any sane person be able to accept that?

She felt betrayed.

But she held on and continued listening. Even if his words hurt, they were words she needed to hear. It was a side of the story she needed to know if their current relationship was to progress at all.

Damien knew this too, and that was why he poured out all the negative feelings he hid without reservation.

"Perhaps it was because of how I used to view you that hatred was born in my heart. When I was thrown into the dungeon, the target of my unreasonable blame was you.



"The little immature shit I used to be felt betrayed by his support pillar. The fact that he was left alone in an unknown world whittled away at his sanity, further fueling that hatred. Since he had to put his everything into surviving, he slowly forgot about this hatred.

"But it didn't disappear."

Damien sighed again. He couldn't stop himself from sighing during this conversation. In the end, he told Elena about everything he saw in the Trial of Self.

The raw emotions of a broken Damien, the result of his insanity, the irrationality of everything he did, he let Elena know it all.

Not for forgiveness, not for pity, not for justification. He told her only so she could understand another root of the problem.

"...after that, I met Rose. Rose was the one who pulled me out of the trench of insanity, she was the one who saved me from the personal hell I forged for myself. That might be the reason why I fell in love with her in the first place. Another case of pathetic dependence.

"It's a miracle that my relationship with Rose didn't turn out to be toxic as well, but that's most likely because I put conscious effort into preventing that development. Since Rose was beside me all the time, I was able to do that.

"But it was different for you. Because most of the development between us happened when we were apart, I allowed our relationship to continue twisting without even realizing it was happening."

For the first time, Damien looked over at Elena. Her face was already stained with tears, but her expression was cold. He didn't like the disconnect, but he couldn't do anything about it.

It was his fault.

"Have I ever told you about the illusion trial I went through in Apeiron?" He suddenly asked.

Not waiting for an answer, he continued speaking. He talked about the life he saw, the "what if" that would never come to be.

"In that life, our relationship was able to develop without all the complications we experienced in reality. It was really a heartwarming scene. And it was that scene that dispelled the built-up hatred I had and planted a seed of interest in my heart.

"This is where we get to the second change."

"Stop." Elena interrupted before Damien could continue to speak.

Looking at him coldly, she finally began voicing her thoughts.

Chapter 496 Talk[2]

"Knowing you, I can roughly guess how things play out from here. Let's see, you met me again but avoided me because you thought your feelings were fake and produced by an illusion, then you let your insecurity take hold and completely abandoned both me and Rose when we arrived at the Cloud Plane."

Elena sneered unintentionally. "I'm not as forgiving as Rose. She might've brushed this matter off, but I have no desire to do so."

Elena wiped the tears from her face and looked directly at Damien. Maybe when this conversation first began, she was afraid of facing him, but it wasn't the same now.

With his words, her bottled-up emotions were set aflame. She couldn't control herself anymore.

"What, did you think that this conversation would fix anything? Did you think telling me the reason behind your actions would matter? Sure, things are justified if you look at it from your perspective, but what about me?"

"I spent YEARS waiting for you to look at me when we were still on Earth. Do you know how much that hurt? Even when you were doing your best to survive, was I not doing the same?"

"I was one of the most talented people after the World Awakening, and at the same time, I was one of the most powerful. For me to love someone who the world considered trash, do you know how much bullshit I had to go through?"

"Political power was still a strong force on Earth back then. Reputation meant everything. And it's not like I hid my love at all. The blindest of people could understand my feelings. Think for a second. I had beauty and talent yet the only man in my eyes was trash. How do you think others reacted?"

Elena took a few deep breaths to calm herself before continuing.

"Attempts on your life, attempts on your mother's life, nasty rumors that tried to destroy you, do you know how much I protected you back then? And you're saying you only viewed me as a pillar?! As a support you could use whenever you were feeling down?!"

Elena's voice crescendoed into a roar. And hearing what she had to say, Damien felt ashamed to the core.

It was true that he never considered it. He looked down on Earth too much, thinking that there was no way weaklings in the 2nd class could do anything major.

But he forgot that back then, he was a Classless weakling without even the physical stats of an average human.

It was obvious when he thought about it. It was impossible for the incident with Jin to have been a one-of-a-kind thing.

His body shuddered.

How many dungeons did he go into back then? How many times was he almost killed while being none the wiser? And how many times was his mother targeted with Elena placing him under her protection?

The guilt he felt was multiplied manyfold in a single instant.

But Elena wasn't done.

"And that was just before you fell. But, I can't be too harsh about the time when you were in the dungeon since you were going through something far worse than me. I can at least understand the sentiment you held at that time.

"But just because I understand it doesn't mean I'll discount my own efforts. Did you ever acknowledge it? The fact that I, someone from Earth, someone with far worse conditions, was able to keep up with you even a little when you returned, did you ever even say a word of praise?"

"I'm not saying that I desired your praise so desperately, but I at least wanted my efforts to be seen. For the sole goal of staying by your side when you returned, I worked tirelessly. I was in dungeons every day. I never stopped killing, never stopped bathing myself in blood for this one purpose. The number of times I almost died is uncountable at this point.

"But when you came back, you had another woman by your side. Can you even imagine how torn I felt at that moment?"

Elena paused, sighing helplessly. "Again, I can't blame you here. How can I blame you for falling in love with Rose? During the time I've spent with Rose, I've come to wholly understand why you fell for her, and I support it as well.

"Still, try putting yourself in my shoes. If Rose never accepted your feelings, if you returned to Earth alone and upon visiting Apeiron later learned that Rose found another husband, how would that feel?"

Damien didn't have to answer her question. The bubbling rage he felt from just a mention of the scenario was enough. If it actually happened...

"You wouldn't be able to stand it right?" Elena voiced his thoughts.

"Yet, I withstood it. I stayed beside you even while knowing I had no chance, I buried my feelings and accepted my role as your childhood friend...all so I could stand by your side."

"And what did you give in return for my devotion? You abandoned me. You left me with the woman who stole my love and went to play around on your own. What kind of horribly dense person do you have to be to make that decision? Or were you too selfish to even consider the damage you caused?"

Elena shook her head lightly. "Everything turned out fine, though. Unlike you, Rose understood my struggle and supported me. If it weren't for her help, maybe I would've already abandoned my love for you. And if that had happened, it would've been nobody's fault but yours."

Damien gritted his teeth. He felt humiliated. It wasn't Elena's words, but his past actions that caused this feeling. Without Elena's rant, he would've never known.

He was too selfish. He never considered it for even a second. Even now, when he came to have this conversation with Elena, he never considered how deep her grievance would be.

Instead of feeling closer to her, he felt like their rift was widening.

Elena sighed to herself. She knew just as well as Damien that her rant wasn't having any positive effects on their relationship. But it had a positive effect on her. She was finally able to release the weight on her chest.

And if Damien was allowed to be selfish for so long, she was allowed to do the same.

"I don't want these feelings to interfere with the current us," Elena muttered. "From the day you accepted my feelings, I also accepted you, whether it be the good or the bad. I slept with you knowing that my grudge would have to vanish.

"But I still feel that you need to know about it. Know that I am not saying all of this to demoralize you or hurt you, I'm saying it so you can realize your mistakes. Knowing you, you didn't know any of this before now, right?"

Damien nodded slowly. He couldn't refute her.

"I only want you to grow. I want you to become a person who doesn't make these kinds of mistakes anymore. I want our relationship to last an eternity, and for that, we can't ignore the problems of the past."

Elena reached out. Her cold hand covered Damien's, intertwining her fingers with his.

"By being open and honest with each other, we've finally set the foundation. All that's left is to build ourselves into different people and grow. And for that..."

"I'll be leaving to focus on myself for a while."

Chapter 497 Parting [1]

Raindrops fell quietly and met the earth below, but their combined might turned their whispers into the roars of beasts, covering the entirety of the Central Continent in the sound of their pitter-pattering.

On a nondescript mountain peak somewhere along the way, Damien sat on the roof of an old cabin, staring into the clouds with a lost expression.

It had been a week. A week since the day Elena poured out her grievances in full, and a week since the day she left his side.

It was a quiet week. A lonely one spent atop this unknown mountain peak.

The rain painted Damien in its color, but he didn't move. He closed his eyes and relished in the gloomy atmosphere that was created around him.

It felt like the rain appeared whenever he needed it, whenever he needed the time alone to quietly submerge himself in peace and sadness.



But it wasn't strange. Ever since the incident when he received a Partial Baptism, his synchronicity with the world skyrocketed. His extreme emotions would be reflected in nature.

And today, just like every other day of the past week, the Central Continent was covered in rain.

Someone said parting was a sweet sorrow, but he couldn't feel anything sweet about it. The only thing Damien tasted was bitterness.

The situation made him think of another quote instead. A quote that said parting made one think. About what was once possessed, what was lost, and what was taken for granted.

Damien was submerged in himself, unable to move forward. Elena's words kept repeating in his ears without pause.

"I'll be leaving. There is somewhere I want to go, somewhere far away. It's not a place where I can take others, but it's a place where I can be reborn. Now, before the situation becomes too chaotic, I wish to visit that place." She had said.

"You aren't the only reason that I'm leaving, so don't worry yourself about it needlessly. However, I do believe that some time apart will be best for us. Once we have become the best versions of ourselves, we will meet again. At that time, we will truly be husband and wife, inseparable by even Heaven's decree."

He could still see her expression when she spoke. The coldness in her gaze. Although the missing sentiments were present as well, they were largely hidden.

'I've fucked up.'

It was the only thought Damien had. He completely screwed his relationship with Elena. But if it didn't happen now, it would've happened in the future.

And at that time, it would've been far worse.

'She wasn't wrong.' He thought to himself. 'Our current dynamic is just toxic, hatred and love intertwining to create a strange and twisted relationship. That was never what I wanted, nor what she wanted. Perhaps...'

Perhaps her decision was the right one. Even if he knew what he wanted to think, he refused to manifest the words.

It hurt. It hurt a lot. It hurt even worse knowing it was only his own inability that caused it.

But what could he do?

It had already been a week. Elena was probably long gone.

Their talk didn't end after Elena's rant. The words she spewed were filled with emotion, and even she knew they were skewed by her perception.

Elena acknowledged her mistakes and carelessness in the past. She knew that her affection was the reason Damien was targeted in the first place.

And so she found herself apologizing to him as well. Her brazen and childish attitude back then did indeed cause many problems.

But what could they do? At that time, they really were just children. And even with what came later, they couldn't find it in themselves to blame each other.

Their relationship simply wasn't blessed by fate. Things went wrong due to accidents and negligence, and then naivety towards those mistakes blew them out of proportion.

So, taking a step back was the logical conclusion. Starting over anew when their old feelings subsided was truly best for them.

But he couldn't get it out of his head.

Damien's figure vanished, appearing in the Sanctuary. Without hesitation, he went to the territory of the Demons.

"Lucius, let me borrow your maid." He spoke when he met the former Demon King.

Lucius raised his brow in surprise. "No father-in-law today? It feels a bit weird now that I've gotten used to it."

Damien shook his head. "I'm not in the mood right now, I apologize. Allow me to borrow your maid and I'll be eternally grateful."

Lucius dropped his joking attitude. "How long do you need her?"

"I'm not sure."

"You aren't sure? Then what do you need her for?"

Damien hesitated for a moment. "I need her to protect someone."

Lucius rubbed his chin curiously. "I see, so it's something like that. You could've gone to any of the other 4th classes here, but you specifically chose her, which means you need her stealth...are you sure you just want her to protect?"

Damien nodded. "Yes. I only wish for her to protect."

Lucius carefully examined Damien's face and nodded. "Fine. Just this once, but you'll owe me a favor. Latia, come here for a moment."

The maid appeared next to Lucius in a blur, kneeling on the ground. "Yes, Master."

"From now until he tells you to come back, you'll be following young Damien's orders. He has a task for you."

"Yes, Master," Latia replied concisely. She stood up and turned to face Damien, bowing to him in courtesy.

Damien waved his hand dismissively. "No need for formalities. This is the woman you'll be protecting."

Damien used his mana to shape Elena's face. Along with it, he used his Star Master abilities to secure her mana signature so Latia wouldn't get confused.

"You don't need to go overboard. Let her do whatever she wants. But if there is an instant where you judge she can't escape the situation on her own, act. Unless that moment comes, do not move even if she looks on the verge of death."

Latia bowed again. "Yes, sir."

Damien nodded and took her out of the Sanctuary. "She headed off to the south. With your speed, you should be able to catch up in a few days."

"Yes, sir." The maid turned around to leave after receiving instructions, but Damien grabbed her wrist and stopped her.

When she looked back at him, her body froze instinctively.

Bloodlust.

An insane amount of bloodlust.

Damien's killing intent was released in full force. It was something he usually didn't do. As for the reason why...

Blood red killing intent filled the air for tens of kilometers. It almost formed a domain with how palpable it was.

It reeked. The blood stench flooded into Latia's nostrils, making her want to gag. She had seen many people before, ruthless ones that'd kill at the most casual slight.

But none of them had killing intent like this.

World Force pulsed from Damien's body, further heightening his killing intent to the point where it began to warp reality.

Blood red clouds in the sky, a blood sea forming around them, mountains of corpses manifested, stacking up to the Heavens.

Latia was frozen in fear. Even if she wanted to move, her body refused to obey her command.

Damien gazed into her eyes coldly. He looked like a reaper trying to steal her soul. His mouth opened and he spoke slowly, annunciating every syllable.

"I will say it one time and one time only. If she dies, regardless of the circumstance, it isn't just your life on the line. Your master, everyone around him, anyone you've ever cared about will die under my hand. Even if you can't return, you better make sure she does."

Boom!

Blood-red lightning fell from the sky, incinerating the mountain on which the two stood.

And then, everything vanished.

Damien let go of Latia's arm and walked away, his figure flying into the sky to find a new mountain to reside on.

As for Latia, she stood in place for many minutes without moving. It seemed...this job was the most important mission she'd ever been assigned.

Chapter 498 Parting [2]

Why did he do it? Even he didn't know. Did he not trust Elena? That wasn't the reason. He just wanted her to be safe. He wanted a guarantee.

So rather than providing her a bodyguard, he was providing her a human shield. A one-time-use item that could protect her from death.

Considering her attitude before she left, if he tried to give her anything more, it'd be a mistake.

But just giving her one more safety measure didn't improve Damien's mood at all. The rain encapsulating the Central Continent was endless.

'Have I not been growing?' Damien questioned. He didn't even realize how much he had left to learn until Elena said it to his face. If he couldn't even recognize his faults, didn't that mean he was still stuck? Was all his talk of growing just for show?



'No.' He realized it instantly. He had definitely grown from the person he used to be. 'But my starting line wasn't the same as everyone else's.'

He regressed emotionally and became a beast in the dungeon. From there, he had to regain his humanity before anything else. Only after that was he able to focus on solving his own trauma. In that time, he didn't have any chance to consider anyone else.

After all, personal mental health was more important than anything else. Sacrificing one's own mental health for someone else was just as, if not more, toxic than their relationship had been so far.

It could be said that he was absolving himself of blame again, but it was simply the truth. How could a Damien who was running away from himself accommodate others?

When he completed the Trial of Self, he broke even. He was finally on the starting line.

But everyone else was already many laps ahead.

Time didn't wait for him to grow. The knots of his relationships didn't stop getting further tangled just because he wanted them to.

He was already too late by the time he was ready.

It was a situation where everyone was a victim, but Elena definitely took the brunt of the pain. Damien at least had Rose by his side, while Elena was alone. Damien's other struggles kept his mind away from these kinds of problems, but Elena was submerged in them for years.

There wasn't a right or wrong in this matter, and that was why Damien couldn't get mad at her and couldn't deny her words at all.

'To meet again when we're the best versions of ourselves, huh...but, I don't think I'll be able to achieve that at the same time you do.'

Damien sighed heavily. The rain became fiercer. He didn't know what to do.

But he had to move forward.

Elena was gone, but she wasn't gone forever. If he wanted to be together with her when she returned, he needed to improve himself.

'Strength is important, but the mind is as well. Perfect balance between the body and mind, this is the peak state that I wish to reach.'

Maybe it wasn't possible before Elena returned, he could accept that. But he couldn't accept not making any progress in the time he had.

Now that he knew his mistakes, all that was left was to fix them. And then, he could prove that he was worthy of Elena's devotion, the very same devotion he neglected until it was no longer by his side.

About what he had, what he lost, and what he took for granted. His parting with Elena truly made him reflect on it.

Perhaps the skies wished to remain filled with rain. It was a seasonal change that the Central Continent rarely got to see.

But it was enough. The skies had cried until their tears ran dry. The Central Continent thoroughly understood its sorrows.

So, the rain would have to give way to the sun's rays at some point.

And time would drift on regardless.

Damien stood up, his mind free of extraneous thought. His body flickered like a candle wisp and faded from existence.

2 days later, the rain finally stopped.

And 3 months after that, the Cloud Plane's purge ended as well.

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Somewhere in the starry sky, thousands of kilometers away from the Cloud Plane, a woman sat atop a flight artifact that drifted through space.

But her pace was slow. She couldn't seem to take her eyes off the direction of the world she was leaving.

She sighed to herself. She made the decision to leave after a great deal of thought. Even though her timing in announcing it made it seem like it was directly related to her issue with Damien, that simply wasn't true.

Regardless of how their conversation went, she was still going to leave.

And that was why it hurt so much.

'I wonder how long it'll be until our next meeting...?' She wondered inwardly.

If she was being honest, she wasn't as mad at Damien as she made it seem when they talked. She was plenty aware that she also played a large part in their twisted relationship.

But her bottled-up emotions influenced her in the moment and caused her outburst.

And although those emotions were plenty real, they weren't how she was feeling anymore. The knots in her heart loosened greatly after she finally voiced her inner negativity.

But perhaps, it was best that way. With the way she parted from him, they were both filled with determination to move forward.

And that was all she could hope for.

'Haa...the goodbyes are all done, but I still haven't left. Won't it be embarrassing if they see me?' Elena joked, trying to cheer herself up.

But there was nobody there to answer her. Her mood became somewhat downcast.

Everything in the world represented duality. Within the good there was bad, and within the bad there was good. Regardless of her words, Elena's memories of the time she spent with Damien and his party were mostly memories she cherished.

The issues in her heart didn't stop her from thoroughly enjoying the atmosphere created within the small group.

But, now that they were gone, now that she had to continue onward alone for a nondescript period of time, she regretted acting hastily.

'No, this is a necessary step. If I want to keep up with those geniuses and stand by their side, I must train constantly and get stronger. Just like I've always done.'

She spent nearly 24 hours a day in the dungeon after Damien fell. She ate in the dungeon, slept in the dungeon, and hunted in the dungeon.

Although her situation was far better than Damien's since she had the option to leave the dungeons, along with access to anything Earth had to offer, it wouldn't be a mistake to say she spent 2 years trapped in the dungeon as well.

All she needed to do was channel that spirit, remember her drive from back then...

And then capitalize on that drive to gain power.

So she remembered.

She remembered how hungry she was back then, how she devoured all the experience the dungeons provided her...

Elena's eyes shot open. They glowed in sapphire-white light as her purpose was reaffirmed.

With one last look at the Cloud Plane, she turned her flight artifact around and shot off into the distance, her destination unknown even to her.

#### Chapter 499 Departing [1]

Upon completion of the purge, news spread throughout the Cloud Plane describing the events that took place under the surface.

The purge, the traitors, all of it reached the ears of even the most common people.

There were 3 women that took the forefront of even this news, but unfortunately, from a certain point onward, only two of them remained.

But their fame wasn't light at all. It rivaled even the recently created legend of Heaven's Wrath.

While the people of the Cloud Plane were in an uproar, a meeting took place in a secret location hidden amongst the clouds. It was a floating island similar to the one Tang Lingzi resided on.

"Our goal is simple." Shangguan Yu spoke seriously at the front of the crowd. "We will exterminate Niflheim entirely."

The crowd wasn't filled with a large number of people. There were at most a few thousand. On an operation where they were facing millions or even billions of enemies, this number was nothing.

But each and every existence present was a powerhouse, an elite chosen specifically for this mission.

"We will split into four teams. The Sun Squadron will be under my leadership. We will stay in Asgard territory and command the entire mission. We are the main connecting point between every other team and the ones who relay information between them. Not only that, we'll also be keeping track of the Niflheim executives' movements and delaying them if need be."

Shangguan Yu held up a jade slip, which turned into a few hundred specks of light that hovered over the same number of individuals in the crowd.

"Those of you who have been marked, come over to the Sun Pagoda. I will give you a more specific briefing of your missions."

As Shangguan Yu led his group away, Bai Xieren took the floor. "The Moon Squadron will be under me. We will be in charge of reconnaissance and infiltration. Follow me to the Moon Pavilion if you are marked."

A few hundred more specs of light flew out, and unexpectedly, one of them arrived atop Damien's head.

Damien's eyes widened. 'Infiltration again? Aren't I more suited for a main attack force?!'

He lamented inwardly, but he couldn't do anything about it. This mission was too big for him to bring personal preference into.



He could only wish his wives goodbye and follow Bai Xieren to the Moon Pavilion.

Tian Yang grinned seeing his disciple's downcast expression and sent a mental transmission.

'Brat, don't worry too much. I'm sure you'll love the task that's been assigned to you.'

Damien shot a glare at Tian Yang as he walked away. 'Hmph. It better be good. I swear I'll beat your ass if it isn't.'

Tian Yang rolled his eyes. 'Yeah, yeah. By the way, I know you're probably worried, but little Yue'er and your Rose are both in my attack force because of their performance during the purge. You don't have to worry about their safety.'

Damien didn't respond, but he couldn't hide the relieved smile on his face as he walked away.

As long as he had Tian Yang's promise, he really didn't need to worry about Ruyue or Rose. His master would protect them from anything they couldn't handle.

And after his worry was cleared, curiosity immediately got the better of him.

When he walked into the Moon Pavilion, he was greeted by a familiar face among a group of strangers.

A certain black-haired sword cultivator stood amongst the ranks with a downtrodden expression on his face. Seeing him, Damien grinned.

He flashed next to Long Chen and gave him a hard slap on the back. "My good brother! It seems we're fated to work together once again."

Long Chen's head shakily turned to the side, his movements like a robot's. And seeing the face he expected but didn't want to see, a defeated sigh leaked from his mouth.

"Fuck."

Damien's grin widened immediately. His arm moved, giving Long Chen a few more heavy pats. "Ah? Don't be like that! Aren't you excited?"

Long Chen rolled his eyes. "I'd be more excited watching a dog shitting."

Damien's face wrinkled in disgust. He backed away slowly. "Damn, you're into that kind of thing? I might have to reconsider our brotherhood."

"Into what kind of...you little bastard. Don't let me catch you alone. I won't let you off the hook."

Damien jumped back exaggeratedly. "I-I appreciate your feelings, but I'm sorry. I'm straight."

Long Chen's forehead twitched unceasingly. His face was practically tomato colored. Instead of speaking again, he turned around and refocused on the happenings of the Moon Pavilion.

Damien smiled in satisfaction. Annoying Long Chen was always a great way to get rid of his worries.

"Good, it seems everyone is here."

Bai Xieren's voice rang out from the front of the crowd, where a small elevated stage was located.

"The Moon Squadron, as I said before, will be in charge of mainly reconnaissance and information gathering. We will create a network that reaches the top of Niflheim's management and coordinate with the Sun Squadron to create chaos within their ranks and create opportunities for the Star and Celestial Squadrons to attack.

Bai Xieren paused, panning her gaze over the crowd slowly.

"However, we will accomplish all of this within 6 months."

The crowd immediately went into an uproar. Although 6 months was a long time, it was nothing when the opponent was a foe the size of Niflheim.

"I will not hear your complaints. If we do not complete our mission properly, the entire plan will be derailed. Instead of complaining, take the time to understand the roles you will be assigned. The Moon Pavilion is fully equipped with all supplies you could possibly need for your tasks. Visit the attendants if you wish to know more."

After giving a few more words of rundown on the overarching situation, Bai Xieren turned around and left. However, as she did so...

'If you are hearing this message, split off from the main group and meet me in the rear courtyard. If you are able to arrive unnoticed, I shall reward you. However, if you are discovered, you will lose your qualifications to participate in this raid.'

Damien heard the sudden sound transmission clear as day. And from the look on Long Chen's face, he heard it as well.

Damien grinned wildly. "It looks like the old man wasn't lying. Something fun is going to happen."

But of course, Damien was a benevolent and kind saint. He believed in fairness and justice.

Therefore, he chose not to use his Star Master abilities in the challenge Bai Xieren gave out.

Instead, he just spread his awareness normally and found the rear courtyard, used vector control to mask his spatial fluctuations, and teleported directly to the specified location.

He stepped out of the void with a casual smile on his face, facing Bai Xieren with pride.

"I was almost worried when I was put on some bullshit spy squad, but it seems your ambitions are far grander than that. Mm, this is a satisfactory job. I'll be looking forward to it."

He walked confidently and took his seat in one of the 5 chairs spread around the table Bai Xieren was sitting at.

"So? How about a rundown, Sect Master?"

Chapter 500 Departing [2]

Bai Xieren rolled her eyes indifferently. "Wait until the rest arrive."

Damien shrugged and spread his awareness to cover the floating island. He watched as four others, including Long Chen, made their way to the courtyard using various methods.

To the East was a woman submerged in shadows. Her body moved from shadow to shadow indiscreetly, slowly making her way to the room. It was a method Damien had used before by borrowing Zara's power.

To the North was a man with a lanky build, almost to the point of looking malnourished. As Damien watched, his body disappeared, leaving only his clothes to fall to the floor.

On the ground below, a small green snake slithered unnoticed through the crowd, its destination the same as the previous woman's.

To the Northwest, another woman, but her following actions made Damien unsure of her gender. Her physical form shifted and morphed constantly, taking the visage of other members of the Moon Squadron and using their appearances to slip through the crowd without raising eyebrows.

And finally, to the southeast where Damien just came from was Long Chen, the least graceful of the four. Yet, his performance was the one Damien was most curious about.

Ever since Damien knew him, he knew Long Chen as a sword cultivator. The mana he used was always attributeless and imbued into his Sword Aura.

But, would his sword skills help him with stealth? Damien really had to wonder how he was going to manage.

As Damien watched, Long Chen stood motionlessly among the crowd, seemingly pondering on how to move.

His eyes closed lightly as he did so, his awareness spread to the brim.

'This is a stealth mission. Why would I be chosen for a stealth mission? My strong suits aren't geared toward stealth at all...'

He was utterly confused. He'd been in this state since the moment he was chosen for the Moon Squadron instead of Tian Yang's Celestial Squadron.

But, he didn't have a choice in this matter. Besides, there was no way those powerful Sect Master-level personages didn't understand his strengths and weaknesses. His placement must've held some meaning.

For him to understand that meaning, however, he needed to first complete Bai Xieren's challenge.

Long Chen hesitated. 'I'm confident in my speed, but there are high-level 4th-class beings present. I am not fast enough to avoid their detection. Do I really have no choice but to...?'

Long Chen's face wrinkled in frustration. To be honest, he truly hated his elemental affinity. There was a reason he completely forwent it to become a swordmaster.

But this was a situation he didn't think he could get through without using it.

Long Chen clicked his tongue in resignation. 'How did they even find out? I've only practiced it intermittently, and that was in complete privacy...'

In the end, he shook his head. There was no point in trying to justify the actions of people he didn't understand.

'Fine. If that is what you wish, then I'll accompany you to play.'

Elemental affinities were strange. Most of the time, they perfectly matched the personality and ideology of the individual who possessed them. There was a reason the individual had an "affinity" toward a specific element.

But sometimes, this rule didn't hold steady. Some people were born with affinities that completely clashed with them, and these were the people who pioneered fields like Sword Laws or Formations.

So when Long Chen's body became hazy, and a colorless, formless poison spread from his skin to infect the people around him, it became clear that he was the latter case.

'Tch. Even the strongest poison in my body will only neutralize a 4th class being for a few seconds. I must hurry.'

The poison spread rapidly and infected everyone within several meters. One by one, their gazes become cloudy and their minds confused.

'Now.'



At the most opportune moment, Long Chen's body bent like a bow and released like an arrow, zooming through the dazed crowd and arriving at the rear courtyard within an instant.

His speed was nothing to scoff at. And because of his strange clearing method, he actually arrived in the room second to Damien, who was sitting and watching him with an entertained grin on his face.

"Who would've thought you'd be born with a poison affinity? Haha, the Heavens must've been jealous of your sword talent." Damien joked.

Long Chen smiled wryly in response. "I must be quite talented then, since they gave me a special poison physique along with this affinity."

"What?! A physique too?" Damien's brow quirked in curiosity.

"That's right, I have the Heart of Poison. My blood is capable of storing and assimilating poisons that I can later dilute and excrete through my skin or use directly through blood. What, are you scared now?" Long Chen bragged.

Damien scoffed in return. "Scared? Why would I be? If there's one person your poison will never affect, then it's me."

"Do you want to test that?" Long Chen grinned evilly.

Damien matched his grin. "Oh? If you want to test me, you'll have to be willing to lose something."

"If you win, I'll submit and let you be the big brother."

"I'm already the big brother though?"

"Tch, minor details."

As the two continued to converse, the other three participants slowly made their way to the room.

First to arrive was the woman with the transformation ability, followed by the snake man and then the shadow woman. Once they all successfully completed the trial, Bai Xieren nodded in satisfaction.

"Good. This team should do for now, but it'll need to be expanded in the future."

As she stood indifferently, the snake man hesitantly raised his hand to ask a question.

"What?" Bai Xieren asked off-handedly, "speak if you have something to say."

"I-I apologize f-for my brazenness, b-but...w-what are we being g-gathered for?" He asked, barely stuttering his way through the question.

"Hm?" Bai Xieren looked up at the group. "Ah, I see you have not yet been told what your task is. Very well, I shall give a short explanation."

Standing up from her seat, Bai Xieren towered over the five seated individuals that had been called for this mission.

"Starting tomorrow, until the day this mission ends, you will no longer be known by your names. Everything that signifies your unique identity as an individual will be erased, and you will be placed under a Mana Oath to prevent information leaks.

"And once that process is finished, you will be assigned new identities as the Hidden Dragon Group."

"H-hidden Dragon Group?" The snake man repeated, confused.

The shadow woman narrowed her eyes instead. "I see, so these people must have similar skill sets to me. I didn't think the grand experts of our world would use such petty tactics."

"Petty tactics?" The transformation woman scoffed, "this is war, little lass. There is no such thing as a petty tactic."

Damien nodded his head in agreement, while Long Chen looked slightly uncomfortable with the words. As for the snake man, he was still utterly confused about what was happening.

"C-can somebody p-please explain to m-me?!" He said, practically spilling tears.

The shadow woman looked over at him in derision. "You still don't get it?"

Her gaze panned across the room, seemingly gauging the individuals around her.

"This ragtag group, ahem sorry, the Hidden Dragon Group we'll be forming..."

Her gaze returned to Bai Xieren, who sat indifferently as if nothing concerned her. The shadow woman was forced to ignore her and continue her thought.

"We are the assassin division hidden within the Moon Pavilion, and what might very well be its main purpose."