

# Void 541

## Chapter 541 Wrath [3]

The chase continued for many minutes. Luo Tian worked as hard as he possibly could to escape from Damien's clutches, but no matter how hard he tried, the latter always seemed to be on his tail.

By this point, it didn't take a genius to know that Damien was allowing Luo Tian to continue running. If he used his current speed from the start, Luo Tian wouldn't have even made it a few thousand kilometers before being caught.

'Shit!' Luo Tian exclaimed inwardly. It was already too late to regret or lament. The only option Luo Tian had for salvation was Evotech!

His body was a mess. One arm, both legs, small portions of his torso, many parts of him were missing as he sacrificed them to increase his speed. On the horizon, the skyline of Evotech's city complex finally appeared.

'Almost there...!'

Bang!

Another portion of Luo Tian's side collapsed and his full potential burst forth. The structures on the skyline came into the foreground of his vision soon enough.

But he didn't stop simply when entering the complex. Ignoring the guards, he shot to the West Wing, taking out a communication device and contacting his backer.

"Sir! Please save me!"

His throat was barely functioning anymore, and those were the only words he could muster. Still, with his target location already reached, he felt a modicum of safety envelop him.

Here, security was impenetrable. The only reason he was able to fly freely was because he'd been given the required authority to move unhindered. If it wasn't for that, he would've died 100 times over before he even reached the West Wing.

'That brat was with the forces of that Shadow Garden organization. If they have spies in Evotech, he might be able to sneak in. I have to meet the Lord quickly before he catches up to me.'

Luo Tian set foot on the ground in front of the main office of the West Wing, sighing a breath of relief as he went to open the door. However...

"Aha, so it's nothing fun. You've led me back to Evotech, but that's not anything new to me. Haa, I should've never tried to act smart. That's just not my style."

A casual voice came from behind him. Luo Tian froze. He didn't even have to turn around to know who was there.

"H-how di—"

"Freeze."

Time came to a halt around Luo Tian. With his current wounds, he couldn't give the slightest resistance. His body no longer listened to his commands.

"Compress."

Another word compelled space into action, matching its counterpart. Space distorted and folded in on itself, trapping and isolating Luo Tian into a death trap that would slowly crush him into meat paste.

But just as Damien went in for the kill, a harrowing aura wrapped around his body.

"Now this is no fun. There's a seed I can't wait to see bloom, or a fully grown rose that I've been cultivating for many years. Which should I choose?"

A man appeared in the air above. His jawline was incredibly sharp, his face looking like perfection chiseled directly by the heavens themselves. His body was wreathed in a suave business suit that didn't match the War God-like aura coming from his body

His piercing red eyes looked down at Damien smilingly. It seemed the hypothetical that he posed was meant for him.

Damien's eyes narrowed. Judging from aura alone, he was no match for this man. He couldn't even estimate his power level.

But at that moment...

[Alert! Host has come into contact with a high-level assassination target! Please retreat immediately!]

[Host's chance of escape calculated to be 0%! Implanting necessary data pertaining to the target!]

Green holographic warning boxes appeared in his mind. Eve, the AI chip, was sending droves of information into his brain

Damien immediately came to understand the situation. In fact, his plan worked flawlessly. The pig he used had indeed lured the tiger. Except...this particular tiger was a Demigod-level existence.

[Target Name: Wrath]

[Target Estimated Strength: Unknown (Stable Divinity)]

[Target Temperament: Unknown, constantly shifting, playful, cunning]

[Suggested course of action if target is encountered: Flee]

The tiger Damien caught was in fact the biggest tiger in the entire world. He was Wrath, the CEO of Evotech and the Demigod stationed by the Nox to watch over Niflheim.

'Why the hell is he here?!' Damien exclaimed inwardly. According to the mission information, Wrath never personally visited Evotech Headquarters. He simply didn't care enough to do so.

Then, why was Wrath here? Why was he interfering in a matter between mortals? As far as Damien knew, there was no way a mere dog like Luo Tian would actually matter to Wrath. If so...

'He came for me?'

Damien's eyes shifted, catching Wrath's upturned eyes. From the start of their interaction until now, the man never looked away from Damien.

"Ack!" A choking sound interrupted the building tension. Wrath looked over, finally noticing Luo Tian who was being tortured off to the side.

His smile wavered slightly. "Now, now. Although my dogs might make mistakes here and there, it isn't any reason to kill them, no? Why don't you save me some face and let him go."

Wrath's words were polite, but the threat in his eyes was clear. His aura was still flared, bearing down on Damien with incredible pressure.

Damien gritted his teeth. He understood. An existence like Wrath no longer needed to care for such things as face, and he sure as hell didn't care about his dogs. If so, the only reason he was forcing Luo Tian's release was to humiliate Damien.

Damien's pupils shrank in disgust. Humiliation, this wasn't a good feeling at all. Being forced to bend to the will of others, he hated it.

But did his hate matter? Wrath was a Demigod. It'd only take a single breath to kill him. What choice did Damien have other than to comply?

He knew that. He understood this truth and understood that biding his time and gaining the strength to challenge Wrath was the smartest course of action.

This way, he could avoid any situations where his life was constantly in danger.

He knew that. He knew that, so why was his hand balling into a fist? Why was space following his movements?

The compression taking place around Luo Tian's body increased exponentially. His remaining arm and torso were compacted endlessly until they became a bloody red sludge.

"AHHHHHH—!"

Luo Tian screamed in agony. It was hard to believe that a human could make such noises.

Wrath watched the scene curiously, not moving to stop it. The faint playful smile that constantly colored his face didn't waver in the slightest.

In fact, there was a small glint in his eye instead.

"Finding a lower existence that's willing to defy me is a really rare thing." Wrath casually commented, his eyes shifting back onto Damien.

"I'm finding that I quite enjoy this feeling."

Damien frowned. "And what feeling is that?"

"Ahahaha!" Wrath laughed. His laugh was oddly feminine, resembling the jingling of distorted wind chimes.

His smile widened. His eyes opened wide, his breath becoming slightly labored. The way he looked at Damien...was close to obsession.

"Ahhh, the feeling it gives me when you resist me...I love it."

Chapter 542 Wrath [4]

Damien's body cringed in disgust. At the same time, he wondered whether he should regret his impulsive action or not.

Killing Luo Tian was a move to provoke Wrath in the same way he provoked Damien. There wasn't much else to it. But in fact, the difference in their power levels made this a feat unheard of.

Damien understood that he could die at any moment, but he simply couldn't stop himself from acting as he wished.

Because that was his end goal.

To stand at the top unfettered by anyone or anything. If he wished to reach that point one day, he needed to embody his beliefs at every step of the way until he arrived there. Otherwise, his resolve would be far too flimsy to see the peak.

And in the same vein, he had to kill Luo Tian. Because if, at this juncture, Damien finally bent to power and authority, he'd cut off his future development.



Malcolm, Tian Yang, Bai Xieren, Albeus, and even Tiamat; these characters were all people with immense power. But not once had Damien acted deferential to any of them.

Perhaps he was just slightly deferential to Malcolm and Tian Yang, but they were his teachers, so this was only natural.

But even then, he was cheeky and arrogant. This was his personality, and he didn't change it for anyone.

But today, he was in front of someone who wasn't nearly as amiable as the other Demigods and powerful existences he'd met. If Damien pushed the limits too much this time, he'd truly die.

So when he saw the disgusting smile on Wrath's face, he was already in the process of teleporting away to make some distance between them.

This move didn't have any tactical advantages, but it at least gave Damien the illusion of safety.

Watching his antics, Wrath smiled. Mm, the scent he smelled previously was truly coming from this boy. Although it was muted and not nearly as powerful, it was still the same scent that he'd been chasing for a very long time.

And it was for this reason that he suddenly appeared in front of Damien. If it was anyone else who arrived with Luo Tian, they wouldn't have been able to even see a single hair on his head.

But Damien was special.

'I do not know who He is, but if the seed He left behind is truly as miraculous as I've heard...'

Wrath calmed his growing excitement. If Damien was related to the seed he was searching for, he had already done too much. Altering the seed's course of growth wasn't something he had the qualifications to do.

Besides, if he did too much, then...

Rumble!

The ground quaked as if to affirm Wrath's thoughts.

"Alright, alright, calm down. I'll leave things alone." He muttered with a smile.

Looking at Damien, he sighed. The interaction between the two was really too short. They'd only spoken a few sentences before he was forced to leave.

But that was fine too. Wrath was certain that he'd already imprinted himself into Damien's memory, and that was enough for now.

"Grow well, little seedling." His voice was projected into Damien's ear as if he was whispering from a centimeter away. Following this, he vanished.

Damien stood silently outside the main headquarters of the West Wing, unknowing of what to do.

The strange interaction he just had didn't mean anything, but Damien had a strange feeling as if it meant a great deal more than he'd ever expected.

Regardless, about the antics of a Demigod, Damien couldn't speculate at all. That level was too far out of reach.

He could faintly feel it as someone who was on the cusp of achieving 4th class...

If the gap between 3rd class and 4th class was a vast ocean, then the gap between 4th class and 5th class was like the starry sky; impossible to estimate.

Damien sighed. Demigods would move to their whims and those below them had no choice but to follow. In this universe where Gods didn't exist, a Demigod's will was absolute.

Giving one last look at the West Wing around him, Damien flashed away, disappearing from Evotech Headquarters.

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Damien returned to Shadow Garden rapidly. Now that he'd barged into Evotech, it was impossible for him to return to his Damien Grey identity.

After all, even if Evotech security seemed flimsy with how Damien bypassed it, that was only because he had the necessary access.

Now, though, that access was likely revoked. Not to mention, Wrath himself was lusting after the Void Physique. Returning to Evotech was suicide.

Once he arrived at Shadow Garden, the first thing he did was make a brief report to Albeus about everything that happened. Over the course of the few days that Damien stayed in Shadow Garden, he'd formed somewhat of a friendship with the old man.

Reporting to him was a matter of courtesy. Since he was gracious enough to lend Damien his troops, Damien wouldn't skimp on showing respect either.

Nevertheless, after conversing with Albeus about future plans, he immediately went to the small hut that had been prepared for him and sat down on the bed.

A sigh of relief and indignation leaked from his lips.

The previous event was too odd. The way things chained together seemed without order, and many of his interactions were cut off before they could bear fruit.

Damien almost wished he could bring Luo Tian back to life, but he knew that was worthless.

By this point, revenge had lost meaning to Damien. Seeing Luo Tian pathetically plea for help while running from him, Damien suddenly lost interest.

His revenge target turned out to be so weak...

But the big fish that was introduced in return wasn't something Damien knew whether he should be excited or concerned about.

'I can't even say that it was a close one this time. If he didn't choose to let me go, I would've died. As for why he chose to do so...'

Damien frowned and shook his head. The emotion on Wrath's face wasn't something that could be cultivated over a single meeting.

It was an emotion that had festered and bred for years to reach its current magnitude.

That kind of obsession wasn't simple. And for a Demigod to be the one feeling it...the object of obsession couldn't be simple at all.

Damien wasn't conceited enough to think he was the one Wrath wanted. But, at the same time, he understood that he was.

'Fuck...'

It wasn't long ago that he learned about the Nox and their connection with the Void Physique. Now, he'd met someone on that side who was actively chasing it.

'Things are going to get troublesome. But, the only one I have to fear is Wrath. Even if I expose my abilities to those peak 4th class beings, they don't have the status or ability to take anything from me. If so...'

Why did he have to continue hiding the Void Physique? The one he was trying to hide it from already knew anyway. This thought rushed into his head and took root, tempting him.

But he shook it off immediately. With the Void Physique's concealment ability, Wrath shouldn't have been able to confirm whether it was truly present in Damien's body or not.

Showing it off so blatantly was simply seeking death.

But even then, Damien smiled. He smiled because he knew that although things weren't going according to plan, his plan was proceeding perfectly.

Chaos was slowly enveloping the unnamed world.

Chapter 543 Core Extraction [1]

Another month passed.

Unexpectedly, after Damien's encounter with Wrath, the situation came to a grinding halt. News about Damien's position didn't spread through Evotech and they even withdrew the forces that have been harassing Shadow Garden in the past.

As for Asgard, they were also oddly quiet. The only thing Damien understood about that side was that the Moon Squadron's elites had already infiltrated Evotech. As for the movements of Asgard itself, they were unclear, always hidden behind the Cloud Plane forces.

Like this, the three main forces that Damien was aware of began a small standoff. The atmosphere between them continued to intensify, but none took action. The second one of them did, a war would start.

Meanwhile, Damien found himself out of the spotlight. His own role in the happenings of the world became minute, and he mainly kept updated on the situation through the connection between his and Long Chen's AI assistants.

In this way, he came to know of Evotech's general status. In the three or so months that he was in the military, Long Chen showed exemplary growth and talent. After joining his brothers in life-or-death battles many times, he proved himself and slowly rose through the ranks.

Although he wasn't abnormally powerful, he had the support and absolute trust of the General Strohman whom the duo met in the Armament Hall. Like this, gathering information wasn't much of a problem.

But after Damien met Wrath, he realized that any information he received this way was iffy. With Wrath's personality, changing his entire organization on a whim wasn't out of the question.

'Not to mention, the Core Extraction research...'

The leading figure in the Core Extraction Project was none other than Lynn Carter, who brought him into Shadow Garden. Perhaps in a better scenario, he'd have been able to use this connection to view the research site. But now, entering Evotech was seeking death.

Damien realized this in the first few days after his encounter with Wrath. But he had no desire to stay uninvolved in this world's disputes.

His original plan was to take it slow and steady, using the entire 6 months of free reign he was provided to collapse Evotech, but this didn't work out in the slightest. He vastly overestimated the capabilities of his intelligence which only recently began growing.

His previous plan filled with infiltration and carefully planned, precise movements didn't fit his character at all. From the beginning, it was bound to fail.



Aishia's plan was a bit better than his. For Damien and Long Chen to work their way up in the system before taking it over, this could've worked with the proper patience and timing.

But Wrath was the key obstacle that stopped everything from proceeding forward. His presence alone made almost all viable plans inviable.

'There are already many Demigods in this world. Albeus, the other two experts of Shadow Garden, Wrath...I've already met three Demigods in this world, but I'm sure this isn't the last of them.'

Asgard needed to have at least a Demigod to stave off Niflheim for so long. And judging by the fact that everyone from Shadow Garden was a refugee from the two aforementioned organizations, the number of Demigods wasn't small.

There were at least two or three in both organizations, maybe as many as 4. This number was unheard of. If the total population of Demigods in the unnamed world was truly somewhere around 12, that was enough firepower to instantly raze a harrowing amount of land.

'That must be the reason for the initial stalemate that persisted before I arrived. If too many Demigods move, the world is destroyed. If the world is destroyed, many conveniences are ruined and many plans are foiled. They can't allow this to happen.'

Damien smiled. This meant that he could move with at least some assurance that he wouldn't be randomly targeted by a Demigod. Another encounter like Wrath's was the only thing making Damien wary.

After he came to this realization, Damien left Shadow Garden. For the next month, he practically disappeared off the face of the earth. He didn't enter any Hub Cities and only explored the Outer Wilds, making it impossible to estimate his location.

But news of his adventures did indeed spread. His name simply wasn't attached to these reports.

A Death God appeared in the Outer Wilds. A single swing of his sword would turn thousands of kilometers into an abyssal hellscape, slaughtering all his enemies.

Nobody had seen this Death God. Even the ones who spoke of it only did so after seeing the destruction left in his wake.

Many small organizations and influences in the Outer Wilds disappeared under his blade. While these slaughters seemed random to the common eye, it wasn't the same for those who understood the ongoing situation.

Each targeted force was a subsidiary of Asgard. There were hundreds or even thousands of these subsidiaries spread through the Outer Wilds for various reasons, but none of them could hide from the Death God who ran amok.

As their cries reached their peak, a new rumor began to spread.

The Death God was no longer one, but two!

A new reaper appeared after the first reaper's advent. This reaper's methods were far more cruel and bloodthirsty than the first. His enemies were always found torn to shreds, burned, and sundered by flames and lightning.

And soon after his actions began, people began drawing a connection. This reaper only targeted those subsidiaries of Niflheim! This was clearly a silent war between the two forces!

This was the speculation many had, but it remained true that neither of these Death Gods were ever caught. The 4th classes that moved from both organizations couldn't seem to find them. As for the Demigods, they couldn't be bothered to move for something so minuscule.

A month had already passed since the two Death Gods began their advent. And currently, both of them could be seen sitting together on a cliff overlooking an underground forest in the Outer Wilds...

But there was only a single person there!

Naturally, both Death Gods were Damien. Against Asgard, he used a convoluted spatial power that looked more similar to shadow to match the Nox's methods. When his Demon Transformation was activated, this was especially easy. As for Niflheim, he used his Void Flames and lightning.

At first, he simply wanted to target Niflheim and instigate them into action. He had no plans about Asgard as he still didn't understand their intentions.

But that viewpoint was forced to change. If there was one thing Eve was useful for, it was information. And because Damien broke his AI chip away from Asgard's control, there was no filter on said information.

Finding Asgard subsidiaries wasn't hard. In reality, these smaller companies and businesses were clean on the surface. Anyone who went without the intention to find fault wouldn't see anything.

But Damien was exactly the opposite of these normal people. The only thing he wanted to do was find fault. Of course, his view could be considered biased, but Damien didn't care about such small matters. As long as he was right, there were no problems.

And soon enough, he found that he was more than just right...

Chapter 544 Core Extraction [2]

Asgard had fallen deep. Damien realized this as he fell deeper into the rabbit hole that was the Outer Wilds.

Perhaps the organization was truly just at one point, and perhaps their goal was to destroy Niflheim, but that was no longer true. After generations of oppression and bitter struggle, someone at the top finally caved.

What Asgard was now was essentially a mere subordinate power to Niflheim. However, because of their immense strength, they were able to maintain a modicum of free reign.

Perhaps this free reign was what called the Cloud Plane forces over, or perhaps it was a trap from the start.

Nevertheless, after searching through and destroying hundreds of subsidiaries, Damien was finally able to learn all this.

After all, a select few of these facilities were being used for Chimera Research. Of the hundreds that he searched, no more than 10 were used as such, but even this was a considerable amount.

It made Damien hopeful. If he kept searching and looting these subsidiary companies, he might even be able to acquire clues about the Core Extraction project. This was the best piece of news he'd understood since stepping into this world.

And following the rampant excitement that surfaced with this news, Damien's assault on the subsidiary companies became fiercer and fiercer. He drew closer and closer to his goal, until finally...

"Found it." He muttered under his breath.

Damien's gaze rested on a small room no bigger than a closet. Inside there was a single holographic computer-like device, the rest of the room being filled with junk.

The owner of this room was a classic shut-in just like those from earth. But his true job was far more dangerous.

Damien sat down at the computer. His eyes shook slightly as they skimmed through the reports on the screen.

'This is...insane.'

It was the very Core Extraction research he was searching for. Damien's current location was within a transfer point where information was forced to pass through before arriving in Hub City Avalon due to the strange corrosion effect of the Outer Wilds.

As for this closet-like room and the computer within, this was where the transfer took place.

Naturally, this facility was massive. There were plenty of 3rd class guards and even some 4th classes stationed to protect the transfer point. But the transfer point they protected was a fake.

The true transfer point was the closet room, a place where none would ever suspect. Even Damien was only able to find it because he sensed the aura of a 4th class guarding the room in concealment.

But now, that 4th class was trapped in a cocoon of Void Essence. His body was slowly corroding, merging into the nothingness.

This feat wouldn't have been possible if the 4th class was at a slightly higher level, but 4th classes weren't just cabbages on the side of the street.

Raising them was incredibly difficult. And even if larger organizations like Niflheim had many 4th classes, not many of them surpassed the early stages of early 4th class, the first 50 levels.

The ones that were raised past this level were talents the organization invested heavily in. The rest would be assigned to their duties and then left alone. If they wished to grow further, they could only do so through effort.

Regardless, this disparity was the reason Damien was able to smoothly enter this place. Though, he still questioned why they didn't position a stronger guard at the transfer point.

These idle thoughts passed through Damien's head rapidly, but he didn't have any attention to spare them. His entire mind was focused on the information in front of him.

'The Core Extraction project is so simple, yet so insane. This plan is one that came directly from the Nox, unlike other projects. Even the Chimera research was merely an attempt by humans to recreate 3rd class and below Nox beings, the ones who lacked spiritual intelligence.'

There was nothing to be said about the goal behind the Core Extraction project. And even if the motive was in question, knowing it wouldn't be of any help at the moment.

Damien's focus was on the gritty details in the report that outlined progress and experiment notes. Actually, this report was extremely comprehensive and easy to understand, almost to the point that it made Damien suspicious.

But it only took until Damien reached the end of the report for his suspicion to be confirmed. Signed there was the single name of the one who wrote the report, Lynn Carter.

Damien's eyes narrowed. The way this report was written was more like Lynn attempting to explain the Core Extraction project to a layman rather than someone who'd been working on it for ages.

With how coincidental it was that Damien found Lynn's report at this moment, he suspected whether or not she planned it this way.

But for something like that, she would need an ability similar to foresight.

Damien shook his head to clear away his thoughts. Before he speculated about Lynn, he needed to confirm his suspicions first. And to do that, his body flashed away, moving in the direction of Hub City Avalon.

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Damien's movements were brash and arrogant, perfectly mirroring his personality. There was no hesitation in his step, and his unplanned movements made it difficult for those tracking him to truly find him.

The Two Death Gods of the Outer Wilds became living legends while Damien continued his work. The forces of both Niflheim and Asgard were becoming warier and more hesitant to enter the Outer Wilds.

Damien didn't realize the kind of effects his actions had on society. Once he stopped caring about these things, he never considered them again.

Tensions between Niflheim and Asgard rose exponentially. The two organizations had already had many minor scuffles in recent days, it wouldn't be long before things evolved into a full-blown war.



The powder keg was already filled and just waiting to be lit, and the two Death Gods in the Outer Wilds served as the match.

With the arrogance of these two organizations, even if they knew that the current war was being instigated, they had no desire to stop it. This instigation was giving them probable cause.

And in fact, when another month passed by, Niflheim and Asgard began a full frontal war. 4th classes clashed above important facilities, ground troops slaughtered until no man was left standing.

According to Damien's understanding of Asgard, they'd never move so blatantly. Being half-subordinated to Niflheim, they wouldn't dare to kill off the other side's experts.

But this war clearly showed that he was mistaken in his view. The relationship between the two behemoths was far more twisted than he could've ever expected.

Unfortunately, Damien didn't receive any information about the war as he had cut off contact with the world. Even the many communication devices he had were dumped in the Sanctuary so their signals wouldn't be transmitted.

At the moment, Damien stood idly in the streets of Avalon. His mouth moved as he munched on a delectable fried meat snack and walked around.

Even if he knew of the chaos he started, he wouldn't have changed his plans. Currently, his main priority was Core Extraction.

And depending on what he found in Avalon, the trajectory of coming events would drastically change.

Chapter 545 Reactor [1]

The Hub City Avalon was different from Hub City Evalion. Evalion was the home of Evotech's Headquarters, which also made it the technological capital of the world. As for Avalon, it had an equally domineering title. It was the world's industrial capital.

Anyone with talent in creation or construction-related fields, as well as researchers who preferred more mechanical experiments, would flock to Avalon, creating an environment of constant productivity and growth that allowed the city to pump out products at a frightening pace.

Of course, not everything in Avalon was moving fast. There were some projects far too large or complicated to match the flow of the rest of the city. But even a single percentage of growth in these projects was related to tens of hundreds of completed smaller products. Their values couldn't be prepared.

Currently, Damien stood in the streets of Avalon, casually wasting his time. He'd already been in the city for a few days already, and he was almost infected by the atmosphere.

When compared to Evalion which gave him a vibe similar to drug addicts itching for their next dose, Avalon was far better.

The only problem was...

"Hey, brat! If you aren't going to do anything productive, then get out of the street!" An old dwarf scoffed as he bumped into Damien. The old dwarf didn't even look up as he spoke, concentrating his entire attention on the trinket in his hands.

Damien smiled wryly and moved out of the way. This wasn't the first time he encountered a similar situation. The residents of Avalon were working almost to the extent of insanity.

But, when Damien scoured their bodies with his awareness, he didn't notice anything altering their minds or bodies. This atmosphere was entirely natural, which was the strangest part.

'What kind of person can cultivate this kind of place? For everyone present here to be united in their craft, it's truly an amazing sight to see.'

Avalon wasn't an attractive city. It had a somewhat steampunk aesthetic due to all the random inventions and metals littering the streets. But this made the city feel homey, which Damien enjoyed.

'Regardless, I need to start searching for leads. From what Eve said, there aren't any Demigods in Avalon, and the peak 4th class masters are mostly occupational rather than combative. I should be able to move freely most of the way.'

Damien's awareness spread to cover a large portion of the city, but it wasn't as helpful as he expected. With the mechanical ingenuity of Avalon inhabitants, creating workshops that blocked awareness wasn't hard at all.

In fact, it was necessary.

If someone's awareness penetrated a workshop at a critical point and disturbed the craftsman inside, it'd be calamitous. Thus, awareness-blocking buildings were customary.

Nevertheless, Damien wasn't attempting to peek into anyone's business. He simply wanted to locate the workshop mentioned in Lynn's report.

And with the detailed description he had of the place, it didn't take long for him to find the small workshop on the outer edge of the city. Compared to some of the other buildings, it was tiny and insignificant, but that was only for those who didn't know the secrets hiding within.

Damien's body flashed, appearing outside the workshop in an instant. He opened the door and walked in, immediately being assaulted with a rancid odor like rotting food.

But this odor actually originated from a man who sat at a counter in the middle of the workshop. Other than the man and the counter, there was nothing else present at all.

"What can I help you with?" The man asked noncommittally, obviously disregarding Damien's presence.

"I was told to come here by a certain woman. Perhaps you know her?"

Damien cut straight to the point. Word games and trickery weren't his style, and he was tired of having to play with people. If his brazen attitude caused problems, he'd deal with them as they came.

The rancid man's eyes finally opened somewhat as he glanced at Damien. "I don't know any woman. Women don't come near me."

Damien rolled his eyes. 'Of course they won't come near you if you stink like shit. What'd you expect?' He thought inwardly. But he maintained at least a minimum level of courtesy on the outside.

"Hmm, she should be going by the name Ashley Ruth when she visits this place. In reality, she's an Evotech researcher who—"

"Alright, alright!" The man sighed in defeat, erecting a soundproofing barrier around them before Damien could continue spouting confidential information like common bullshit.

"You're an annoying one, has anyone ever told you that?"

Damien smiled. "Of course not. Why would anyone find my charming self annoying?"

The rancid man rolled his eyes, not bothering to entertain Damien anymore. "What you seek is down below. Tch, if she told me the one she was sending would be like you, I would've asked for a replacement."

Damien's eyes widened, his mouth opening to question the rancid man's words, but it was already too late.

In the next instant, the rancid man's body dispersed into a smoke cloud that floated around the workshop, penetrating into the walls and floor. When the process was finally finished, the floor opened downward, revealing an elevator shaft that would take Damien to his destination.

There were no more words exchanged at all. Since the rancid man clearly wouldn't answer his questions, Damien didn't bother asking. Instead, he calmly descended the elevator shaft.

But in his mind, anticipation was budding. How could he not be curious? The machine he was currently heading to view...if it could truly do as Lynn said, it would become an integral piece of Damien's plans.

Only, he didn't know if he had the qualifications to claim it.

Damien soon reached the bottom of the elevator shaft and entered the massive underground research and development workshop. All around him, scientists and craftsmen moved busily in work.

To the left and right, many different smaller inventions were being built and tested. Damien even saw something similar to a gravity gun on one of the tables. But his main focus was in the direct center of the workshop.

Even with the workshop's enormous size, the central area was visible regardless of where one was.

There, floating peacefully in the air, was a glowing red cube roughly the size of a head. On its surface, strange runic patterns twisted and agglomerated, creating a profound scene that sucked one's soul from their body

Damien fiercely bit his lip. Even in that brief instant of looking at the cube, he found himself falling into a trance. If he wasn't able to extricate himself, he might've turned brain-dead on the spot.

Hissss!

Damien sucked in a cold breath. Reading about it in a report and seeing it in person were two completely different things.

'With this...'

It might be possible, Damien thought. There was something he wanted to achieve, something so insane that anyone who heard his plan would call it suicide.

But Damien had confidence that he'd be able to pull it off. Especially if this cube landed in his hands, he'd be able to do so flawlessly.

After all, this wasn't any ordinary cube.

The red cube floated in a large seemingly glass tube separated from the rest of the workshop. And on this tube sat a plaque that grandly proclaimed the cube's identity.

[World Core Fusion Reactor]

Chapter 546 Reactor [2]

[World Core Fusion Reactor]

The machine's name was straightforward, but its use wasn't as much. To most, a device like this would have no uses whatsoever.

After all, to use a machine that essentially fused World Cores together, wouldn't one need multiple World Cores on hand?

But Lynn's idea was different. In fact, it was only because she understood the machine so perfectly that she was able to think of something so ingenious.

The World Core Fusion Reactor had two main abilities. The first was to consume World Cores, and the second was the fuse them together. As for the purpose of this fusion? Even Damien didn't know.

Actually, the World Core Fusion Reactor was something akin to a half-heavenly treasure.

Lynn Carter's people found the ominous red cube in the Outer Wilds during an expedition, and at that time, it didn't have the aura of a heavenly treasure yet. At most, it could be considered an embryo.



But to a researcher, a heavenly treasure embryo was actually far more valuable than its fully formed counterpart. After all, it wasn't every day one was able to research the creation of natural treasures spawned by the universe itself.

However, understanding the cube was a far more daunting task than they ever imagined. It was only after Lynn personally took several months to experiment with it did she understand its qualities.

To consume World Force, this was the ability the cube had when it was still in embryo form. If it was given time to grow, perhaps it truly would've become a World Devourer.

But Lynn's team caught it before it developed a consciousness, turning it into a piece of machinery instead of a treasure.

It took many years to say the least. Lynn didn't mention exactly how long, but Damien could imagine the grueling process it was to turn a heavenly treasure embryo into its complete form using human hands, and even enhancing it.

As he gazed at the mysterious red cube for longer and longer, a thought suddenly appeared in his mind.

Just who was Lynn Carter?

The World Core Fusion Reactor already surpassed the bounds of what Niflheim could do. Even if they had powerful strength and minds, they simply didn't have wide enough perspectives to invent machines like this one.

It was their fate for being trapped in this unnamed world, and the greater Sector 3, for their whole lives.

But Lynn was different. She'd left Niflheim multiple times, though under strict surveillance, and she'd experienced far more.

It wasn't strange for her to have obtained a fortuitous encounter on one of her journeys, allowing her to create something like this.

But even then, why did she lead him here?

Obviously, the World Core Fusion Reactor would be far more useful to Damien than to anyone else.

To use the machine with Lynn's method was to destroy worlds and steal their World Cores. Even disregarding the inhumanity of such actions, they were entirely impractical.

But Damien was different. He was a Celestial. If he use his intrinsic connection with the World Cores simultaneously with the machine, he'd be able to fuse the World Cores without truly fusing them.

Essentially, it was like having one mind but multiple bodies. This would increase the efficiency and utility of his power as a Celestial exponentially.

But how did Lynn know? And if she didn't know, why did she lead him here?

The character known as Lynn Carter was shrouded in a veil of mystery. Her personality was cold and blunt, but her eyes carried an infinite amount of wisdom that didn't match her being.

In the 2 months Damien spent with Lynn before he went to Shadow Garden, he already understood that this woman wasn't simple, but he didn't realize just how deep her depths were.

After all, this entire massive facility belonged solely to Lynn. Everyone working within was working for her. And more than that, from what Damien could infer, she had a relatively tight grasp on Avalon as a whole.

'But...even if she's dangerous, at the moment, we're using each other. This kind of relationship is actually the most trustworthy, at least until our goals begin to conflict.'

He could only assume Lynn's goals, but if she showed him something as important as the World Core Fusion Reactor, she naturally viewed him as an ally for now.

Only...

'I hope you don't regret underestimating me in the future.' Damien grinned wildly. His body flashed, appearing in the tube next to the floating red cube. And in the next instant, he grabbed it and pushed it into his chest.

The red cube turned into a liquid-like substance that sunk into Damien's chest, entering his heart and circulating through his blood. Everywhere the red liquid passed, Damien's body was lit on fire both literally and figuratively. He was forced to endure an unimaginable level of pain.

Was his current action idiotic? Absolutely. But Damien felt like he could do it. It wasn't just confidence in himself, but confidence in his status as a Celestial.

Besides, Lynn Carter clearly showed him the magic cube to tempt him, thinking that with his current ability, he wouldn't be able to claim it. It was impossible for her to give him such a treasure as a mere downpayment.

Therefore, he would consume it. He would make the World Core Fusion Reactor a part of his strength and grow to a level where he could walk unhindered.

But before that...

Alarms blared through the underground workshop. A plethora of scientists and craftsmen panicked as they saw Damien's figure in the central tube, submerged in eerie red liquid.

But what were they supposed to do?

They were already weak in combat because they focused on secondary professions and only leveled up on the side. How were they supposed to contend with someone like Damien?

However, before their panic could become too prevalent, the alarms stopped blaring. A deep voice echoed through the large workshop.

"Leave him. This is all by the will of our master."

Those words were magical. The budding panic was suppressed just as quickly as it appeared, those researchers and craftsmen returning to their jobs as if nothing happened.

Their master was absolute. They didn't know who she was, but anything she planned was far out of their ability to comprehend. Instead of trying, it was better to simply focus on what they were best at.

And so, Damien was able to put his entire focus into absorbing the World Core Fusion Reactor. He could already tell from just the initial phases...this process would not be a short one at all.

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Somewhere else in the unnamed world, a woman sat calmly at a small glass table overlooking the entire world. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that this place was an immortal abode.

As she sat in silence, an old man approached from behind. The woman didn't acknowledge his presence even when he sat down next to her.

"Are things going as you wished for them to?" The old man asked with a smile.

The woman remained expressionless as she answered. "Not in the slightest."

"Hahahaha!" The old man laughed rambunctiously. "This is why I enjoy watching these adventures. It's always fun to see these unexpected events play out."

The woman finally looked over at the old man. "Are you mocking my hard work?"

Her aura didn't waver, flaring out immensely even though she knew she couldn't harm a hair on this old man's head.

But the old man simply brushed off her aura and shook his head. "Isn't my presence enough of an answer? Regardless, fate is truly a strange thing."

The woman looked down upon the world. For some reason, she felt oddly lonely in that moment.

"Mm, fate truly is a strange thing."

With her words falling, the strange duo descended into silence. It was unknown when they'd finally speak again.

Chapter 547 Escalating [1]

Time passed rapidly for Damien as he fully immersed himself in absorbing the World Core Fusion Reactor and understanding its mysteries. But to many others, this period of time slowed to a crawl.

Within Evotech Headquarters' North Wing, a man covered in blood dragged his heavy feet through the halls. The copious amounts of blood drenching his body pooled on the floor, creating a small stream that followed his steps.

This man continued to walk despite his condition until finally reaching a large barracks. At this juncture, he finally felt secure enough to close his eyes.

"Lieutenant General!"

A panicked voice rang out as the barrack guards noticed the falling figure. They rapidly rushed to his falling body, catching him before he could hit the ground.

"Somebody call General Strohman! The Lieutenant General is—"

"Stop. No need."

The Lieutenant General interrupted the guard mid-sentence. After taking a few seconds to stabilize himself, he stood back up on his own two feet and shrugged off the aid of the two guards.

After thanking them for their help, he trudged further into the barracks, past the living quarters of ordinary soldiers, and towards the private room of the General himself.

This was the privilege granted to him not only by his rank, but by his close connection with the General. Although he'd only been a part of the military for a few months, he'd formed a bond stronger than blood with the General. This was the result of fighting countless battles side by side.

As he reached the General's quarters, he pushed open the door lightly. A current of mana enveloped his body, immediately cleansing all the blood and grime that covered him.

"Sheesh," a troubled voice came from the side. "Haven't I told you to take it easy? These small scuffles shouldn't involve figures of your status."

The one who talked was naturally General Strohman himself. But unlike the stern countenance he usually put on, his expression was closer to that of a worried elder brother at the moment.

"Hah," the Lieutenant General scoffed. "Unlike you, I'm still stuck in 3rd class. I need all the combat and experience I can get so I can finally cross that boundary."

"Regardless, overworking yourself is far worse than even not working at all. Long Chen, you must learn to pace yourself."



Surprisingly enough, the Lieutenant General was actually Long Chen! Not to mention his achievement in rising to such a rank in this short period of time, what was even more startling was the fact that General Strohman actually knew his true name!

"Brother Athan, your worries are unfounded. I know my limits more than anyone else, and these small scuffles with people at a similar level as me constantly help me test them. If I didn't know the importance of rest, would I have returned here today?"

General Strohman, or Athan as Long Chen called him, shook his head wryly. "If it wasn't for me threatening you 2 months ago, would you have ever bothered?"

Long Chen smiled, but didn't respond. Joining the military and spending these past few months on the battlefield was truly the best method of training for him. Even without the overarching plan that required him to do so, he still would've done it without hesitation.

Especially after learning the truth. This General Strohman who casually sat in front of him was actually a spy from Asgard! His status in the organization wasn't low at all either, and he was constantly updated on the general situation of the world.

If it wasn't for General Strohman, no, Inquisitor Athan Strohm, Long Chen wouldn't have been able to achieve nearly as much as he had. Over time, especially after baring themselves to each other, the duo became as close as blood brothers.

"How is everything going?" Long Chen suddenly asked. He washed himself with mana once more, clearing his cracked skin and giving way to a new layer of pristine, unblemished skin. Of the blood that stained his body moments prior, barely any was his.

"Hmm..."

Hearing Long Chen's question, Athan's brow furrowed. "It's not looking too good. Asgard and Niflheim are edging closer and closer to full-blown warfare. The two Death Gods in the Outer Wilds aren't helping the situation at all."

"Mm," Long Chen nodded in agreement. "It feels as if these two Death Gods appeared at the perfect time to stir up the already volatile situation. Whoever planned their advent is a true mastermind."

Long Chen was frowning as well. He understood that the storm caused by these Death Gods would accelerate the situation and further envelop the world in chaos. Naturally, this result would make it far easier for people like Long Chen or Athan to move, but Long Chen didn't know how to feel about it.

He had always been a righteous person. Even his Sword Aura held traces of his indomitable will to follow the righteous path, manifesting as a holy radiance. To someone like him, starting a war just for the sake of achieving one's goals was far across his bottom line.

But, in this situation, he could only endure his internal crisis. If he acted based on his heart alone, he'd only end up ruining himself.

'Enduring is not a problem. And when the chaos begins, I must make sure the collateral damage isn't too great. The goal of this mission is to eliminate the Nox's influence on both this world and Sector 3 in general. This way, we won't have to worry about internal strife when the Great War begins in the future.'

There was no reason for the innocents in this world to die because of the sins of others. Evotech might've been scum, but what about everyone else? What about the craftsmen of Avalon, the doctors of Caduceus, and all others in the world who were genuinely promoting humanity's growth?

Was the destruction of the Nox worth the sacrifice of so many talents?

Long Chen sighed to himself. It'd been roughly 5 months since the mission in Niflheim began, and it'd only be another month or so before the Celestial and Star Squadrons appeared in the world to begin their full frontal assault.

Time was running out. If Long Chen wanted to follow his righteous heart and guarantee the people's safety, he needed both strength and backing to do so.

Strength was one thing. It couldn't be gained easily, and even if Long Chen tried his hardest, he didn't have the ability to promote to 4th class any time soon. However, he had plenty of backing.

Evotech's military was closer to a mercenary group in their mindset. Rather than loyalty to Evotech, they had loyalty to one another. Only those who earned their respect on the battlefield were qualified to receive their loyalty and reverence.

As for Long Chen, he'd achieved this dozens of times over. Even if he told the military to rebel against Evotech at this very moment, at least 3/4ths of them would follow his command without hesitation.

Not to mention, Athan would support him as well. With their combined momentum, even if they began a hopeless assault without any prior planning, they'd at least be able to bring down two wings of Evotech Headquarters before faltering.

But the military wasn't enough. What Long Chen wanted to do went against the wills of Niflheim, Asgard, and even the Cloud Plane's forces. The path he wished to follow was entirely of his own design.

And the determination he had to follow this path was a blazing inferno that could easily encompass the entire world.

Chapter 548 Escalating [2]

With so many months passing, the Moon Squadron's forces had all but solidified their positions in Evotech. The plans created by those at the top were running smoothly.

Of course, Wrath's presence was still an unknown variable, but Wrath had no interest in Evotech at all. These inventions, no matter how heaven-defying some of them may be, held no benefit for him. The only thing he cared about was the "seed."

Therefore, he didn't interfere even while understanding that Evotech was being corrupted from the inside and turned into something else. Even this was a war between humans that was instigated by the Nox's intervention. Regardless of what he did, his goals were being achieved.

But it wasn't simply the Moon Squadron and Long Chen within Evotech. There were also Asgard and Shadow Garden's forces as well.

Namely, Aishia and Lynn. Currently, these two women stood together in a personal lab, half-heartedly conducting experiments on Nodal Technology.

This kind of research was likely the most valuable to the common populace of the unnamed world. Nodal Technology was the reason why weapons like the Twin Moons existed, though those specific weapons developed entirely on their own.

The unnamed world's Mana Utilization System was inherently flawed in that it didn't allow people who practiced it to freely manipulate the mana in their bodies to produce external phenomena. Something like Damien's spatial distortion could be done, but anything more difficult than that was impossible.

If they attempted to guide their mana externally for too long, it'd easily fizzle out and disperse. Even the old witch who tortured Damien had a large portion of her body replaced with mechanical parts to circumvent this weakness.

This was because the Nodal System was specifically tailored to be used with weaponry. The internal system was only half the completed product.

For the people to show the true extent of their power, they needed weapons of high enough caliber to accommodate them. This was a major flaw that could easily lead to one's death on a chaotic battlefield.

But naturally, humans would adapt. Since the Nodal System was already too deeply entrenched into the unnamed world's society to completely rewrite it, another solution was presented. That was, the introduction of armor suits that complemented the Nodal System.

These mechanical suits ranged anywhere from personal body armor that sleekly clung to the skin, to massive machines that blotted out the sky. The possibilities were limitless.

And these limitless possibilities were what the two women were exploring at the moment.

But they didn't seem too happy even while knowing that.

"If you design the Mana Connection Points like that, it'll disrupt the flow between the Superior Node in the nape and the Sub-Nodes in the wrists. I didn't think a seasoned researcher like you would make such a fatal mistake." Lynn mocked as she looked over at Aishia's progress.

Aishia scoffed in response. "And I didn't expect someone as quiet and headstrong as you to be so annoyingly involved in my business when I never asked for your opinion."

The two women glared at each other fiercely. The enmity between them had been formed long before the Cloud Plane's mission began. This was an enmity that spanned over many years.

At first, it was just minor conflicts of interest, but as time went on, things became more serious. Especially when Aishia began reporting directly to the Board of Executives, her arrogance shot through the roof.

Lynn could only sit back and stomach her anger. Although the Core Extraction Project gave her immense status in Evotech, she hadn't actually accomplished much in this regard, leaving her position to be precarious.

But it wasn't her fault. The duty assigned to her was quite literally the most daunting task to ask of someone like her. How could she be expected to produce results like candy?

The reason she was able to maintain her position was that every breakthrough she had in the project was a major one. Over time, Evotech slowly gained enough confidence in her work to give her the time she needed.

Of course, this was only because they were completely in the dark about her side endeavors. If her control over Avalon was ever revealed, who knew how Evotech would react?

Nevertheless, Lynn continued working on the mechanical armor in front of her. After Damien's disappearance, Evotech had stuck her with Aishia. It was her own fault that she ended up in this situation, so she had no choice but to bear it.

As for the disappearance itself, it strangely didn't cause a stir in Evotech at all. It was as if the researcher Damien Grey never existed in the first place.

This level of thorough erasure had to be the work of someone extremely powerful. Just the fact that this person took the time to personally erase any trace of Damien's presence made Lynn infinitely wary. She wouldn't tolerate any unknown variables.

'Unless that man possesses some treasure of untold proportions, I can't imagine why anyone with such status would care about him. It's either that or he's a spy, but it can't be the latter since he doesn't even originate from this world.'

She clicked her tongue in annoyance. As expected, involving a variable like Damien was both a blessing and a curse at the same time. While his erratic actions would accelerate her plans dramatically while also making it far easier to achieve her goal, his presence alone would bring along trouble.

This was the curse of immense talent and fortune. It could be said that Damien was extremely lucky in his journey so far, not encountering anyone with enough greed or knowledge to pursue him seriously.

But this could also be attributed to the fact that he was born in Sector 3.

The Human Domain was heavily impacted in the previous war and often looked down upon by the other Sectors, leading to a situation where geniuses were valued far more highly. Those with the potential to reach the peak of 4th class or even the Demigod realm were usually given an easier time than others, especially if they showed off their capabilities.

As for what would happen when he left Sector 3...only time would tell.

Lynn shook her head. Why was she thinking so far into the future when the problems in Niflheim hadn't even been solved yet? Being able to see so much was just as much of a curse as it was a blessing.

'By now, he should've already seen the World Core Fusion Reactor. It's impossible for a Celestial to resist the temptation of that device, so bringing him over to my side shouldn't be a problem. Only...'

She had no desire to bring Damien under her. A subordinate she couldn't control didn't interest her at all.

But she wasn't the kind of person to rely on something as flimsy as "allies" either.



A business relationship where they used each other for their own purposes, this was her favorite kind of interaction. There was no useless sophistry or morality, only pure benefits.

In Lynn's mind, this was the purest type of relationship. Trust was ethereal, but benefits were tangible.

Bzzt!

Lynn pushed a small tool similar to a soldering iron into the center of the mechanical armor suit and began welding. Sparks flew and lights flashed as the armor neared completion.

To her, this armor was a representation of her hard work.

She was already closing in on the final steps of her plans for this world, and when she was done, she'd finally be able to branch out into the wider universe.

But before she added wings to the armor suit, she needed to make sure all the foundational mechanics worked properly first.

Slow and steady won the race.

All she needed to do now was lead her little outlier on the correct path and patiently wait for her years of planning and scheming to bear fruit.

Chapter 549 Escalating [3]

"Tch!"

Aishia set down the materials in her hands and leaned on the workbench in front of her. A heavy sigh leaked from her lips.

Looking at the machine in front of her, she couldn't tell whether she was relieved or disappointed.

The machine itself was a mechanical armor suit, a technology that had long become integrated into society. However, she wasn't treating it as an armor suit at all.

Even Lynn had scolded her around a week prior for her placement of Mana Connection Points. While Lynn's criticism would've been true in any other case, it wasn't quite this time.

This was specifically because Aishia wasn't following the script for a normal mechanical armor suit. Only, she did most of the in-depth work outside of Lynn's supervision, leaving her in the dark about the project's true worth.

Of course, being forced to swallow Lynn's mockery wasn't a good feeling. Aishia's strength far surpassed Lynn's. It'd only take a few slaps to kill her. Knowing this only made it harder to endure, because she also knew that Lynn wasn't a character Niflheim would let go.

But as long as the end product was worth the effort, Aishia didn't mind stomaching these insults.

Aishia brushed her hand against the armor suit's cold metal exterior. As her mana intertwined with the suit's systems, thin blue vein-like lines began to spread across its body.

Flash!

Its eyes lit up. Its head raised as if it were alive. Its gaze landed on Aishia, and it immediately kneeled down on one knee, its head lowered once more.

"Rise," Aishia commanded softly.

After spending so much grueling time and effort on this project, after failing so many times that she almost destroyed it entirely, her feeling after completing it was no longer joy, it was pure relief at having finished.

The mech suit stood up following Aishia's command. Watching it, Aishia continued her testing.

First came basic motor responses, followed by more in-depth fine control tests. To check every system this way was inconvenient, but she at least had to personally check the main systems for any bugs.

When her arm waved, the mech suit would follow her action. When her body flashed across the room past the speed of sound, the suit would do the same. However, if she wished to...

Aishia pointed at the wall and spoke. "Kill."

Boom!

A concentrated ball of mana flew from the mech suit's palm and reached a nearby wall in an instant, drilling a hole roughly a foot in depth.

Considering the fact that the material constituting this wall was one of the strongest alloys in the entire world, a foot-deep hole was a substantial achievement.

"Haa..."

Aishia breathed another sigh of relief. She put her hand on the mech suit's shoulder, withdrawing the strings of mana she inserted moments prior. With this, the suit powered down and entered an inanimate state once more.

In essence, what she created was puppet technology. For denizens who would become headless chickens on the battlefield without custom armor and weapons, this new approach to battle would surely be extremely popular.

A metal known as Polar Star Iron was the most important ingredient in her innovation. This metal seemed to possess some sort of mysterious polarity with mana, being able to attract and contain it within.

This was incredibly important. Even when mana was infused into the ground or any foreign object, it'd naturally dissipate over time. A practitioner's control over this mana would wane at an even faster speed, making remotely controlling one's mana a nigh impossible feat.

For normal puppet techniques, this wasn't a problem. The puppet and caster would be connected by mana strings or similar methods, and this connection was the very weakness that made puppets irrelevant in today's society.

But with Polar Star Iron, Aishia was able to develop a mechanism to hold the caster's mana and maintain their connection within a certain radius. Although this radius was currently only around 30 feet, it was something that could surely be improved with time.

This was why, behind all of Aishia's sighs, was a smile she could barely contain.

Her goals in life were few. Vengeance and justice. For vengeance, she would destroy the Nox from their very roots. And for justice, she'd protect this world and its people to her last breath. From the beginning, this was her creed; this was Asgard's creed.

Puppet Mechs would only be one of her many contributions, but they would inevitably become one of the most important.

Because if every citizen was given the ability to fight their oppressors, what kind of beautiful scene would that be?

Aishia smiled naively as she imagined it. The world outside Niflheim, outside Asgard, what was it like?

Even though she'd lived over 10,000 years, she'd done so while being sheltered heavily in Asgard. Her status as the Final Valkyrie made her one of the most important persons in the organization.

When she went into the Outer Wilds to train, she'd always been given 4th class protectors. Whenever she wished to interact with strangers, Asgard would vet them first and decide whether they were safe or not.

The response was almost always a resounding no, but Aishia knew it couldn't be helped. The outside world was a dangerous place that far surpassed her imagination. If she even wanted the qualifications to properly explore it, she'd have to first complete her primary objective.

'I should report to Lord Odin soon. News of this joyous occasion cannot be delayed.'

Aishia wiped the sweat off her brow and rapidly prepared to leave her laboratory. She tapped a small cube against the Puppet Mech prototype, causing it to rapidly compress and reside within said cube.

However, just as she was planning to leave...

"Unholy Sanctum."

An abyssal voice called out from behind her. The lab was enveloped in a poison-green domain that painted the air in its hue.

Aishia's eyes went dull. Her arms loosely fell to her sides.

"Show me the progress." The voice demanded.

Aishia absent-mindedly withdrew the cube in which the Puppet Mech resided, resummoning it into the world. However, it wasn't the same as before.

When her mana entered the mech, it followed a specific pattern, revolving through the Polar Star Iron like a counterflow.

The mech suit powered up. Its aura flared wildly, filled with bloodthirst and madness. It began thrashing around like a living creature, but the owner of the abyssal voice restrained it with a single thought.

The mech attempted to wrangle out of the thick greenish-black chains that bound it, but that wasn't possible. Even if it had strength, it was still only a prototype.

"It is not satisfactory yet, but it is infinitely close. Good, the Master will be pleased." The abyssal voice nodded.

"And what of Asgard?" It asked once more.

Aishia's lips quivered for a brief instant, her eyes beginning to clear. But at that moment, a shrill sound traveled through the air. Upon hearing this sound, Aishia's eyes dulled immediately. Her mouth opened and she began casually retelling secrets that had never left Asgard's upper echelon.

The abyssal figure smiled as it listened. Just as it had always been, and just as it always would be, Asgard was a mere dog under their control.

"The Cloud Plane? Even Odin himself wouldn't dare move against us. Which little faction from Asgard actually dared to conspire? Jajajaja, It seems we must once again teach our dogs to behave."

The abyssal voice faded from the lab, the Unholy Sanctum vanishing without a trace. Even the Puppet Mech returned to Aishia's storage box.

Aishia's eyes suddenly cleared. A puzzled look appeared on her face. For some reason, she felt as if she was missing something. A faint memory popped into her head.

"...what...Asgard..."

"Agh!"

Aishia gripped her head in pain. Her mana shot through her Nodal Points and entered her brain, allowing her to rapidly rid herself of her splitting headache.



But along with her headache vanished her suspicions about the events prior. And perhaps, even the headache itself would be forgotten soon as well.

Aishia soon picked up her items and left the lab, returning home so she could finally relax.

After creating something with the potential to greatly benefit humanity, she could at least be allowed this much, right?

Chapter 550 Escalating [4]

Following that day, the passive approach Niflheim had taken in the growing conflict enveloping the world vanished.

But their actions didn't leave the confines of their own territory.

In the depths of night, a shadow swept across the horizon. In the next instant, it vanished into thin air. The only thing left behind in its wake was a corpse.

The owner of this corpse was an old man. His eyes which used to hold a light of child-like curiosity were now dull and forever frozen in an expression of terror.

This old man was a member of the Moon Squadron that Damien had seen during Bai Xieren's speech. His death wasn't the first, and it wouldn't be the last among those who dared to act against Niflheim.

In the coming days, spies from the Moon Squadron were constantly uprooted and slain. It was as if Niflheim had completely accurate information on their identities.

And in fact, they did.

Naturally, Aishia didn't have such a massive swathe of information in her mind. This information had been provided by a hidden group managed by Niflheim and Asgard together. They were the true shadows of the world.

To this point, the group was unnamed. Their members were unnamed, their fingerprints and even mana signatures burned away using self-sacrificial methods. The only purpose of these individuals' existence was to serve the cause they were given.

And a few months ago, they were ordered by Asgard's executives to keep note of some suspicious personnel who would be landing in the world.

Even Damien and Long Chen had run into an agent from this group, but due to Damien's decision to enter Niflheim before the Moon Squadron, they were saved from suspicion.

Especially Long Chen. While Damien was missing and assumed dead by those who cared, and unknown to those who didn't, Long Chen was a rising hero in the military with plenty of fame and merit. If his status as an otherworlder was revealed, it was unknown how the people around him would react.

But even being spared from the slaughter wasn't something that made Long Chen happy. What he wished desperately was to end this slaughter once and for all.

However, he would only be a fool if he moved alone.

Nevertheless, Long Chen wasn't alone from the start. At the edge of Asgard territory, Bai Xieren stood with a heavy frown on her face.

If she didn't realize there was a problem even by this juncture, she was unqualified to be a leader.

In fact, Bai Xieren understood from the beginning that there was likely a trap involved in this plan. It was simply far too convenient of an opportunity to strike the Nox. From her years of experience, she was well aware of how tricky the Nox could be.

But she still decided to move forward with the operation, as did Tian Yang and the rest of the Cloud Plane's experts. In their long lives, had they ever encountered rewards that weren't accompanied by risks? This was merely reality. Faltering because of something so intangible as risk was the mentality of a practitioner who would never achieve anything.

Yet, her forces were being destroyed faster than she could cope with. The information they'd received and the fears they'd achieved weren't nearly satisfactory yet.

Bai Xieren breathed out a wisp of chaotic air as she steadied herself. If the Cloud Plane's forces were truly going to be targeted by the two largest organizations in this world, they didn't have a chance. Even if they brought a large number of people, their comprehensive strength was only roughly equal to Niflheim at most. Adding Asgard's forces on top of that...they didn't stand a single chance.

But there was no going back now. Before the Celestial and Star Squadrons arrived in a few weeks' time, she needed to set the stage in such a way that victory was a viable path.

And to do so...

[Receiving input...]

[Error!]

[Deciphering encrypted data...]

[Error!]

[Error! The Core Processor has sustained a substantial impact! Please evacuate while the system reboots itself!]

Bai Xieren commanded her mana, turning it into an incandescent white light that showered her body. As it seeped into her skin and came into contact with her bloodstream, the AI voice in her head began erratically sending messages.

But she didn't stop. The ongoing purge in Niflheim was already enough to be considered a betrayal by Asgard. There was no need for her to keep up false pretenses and allow them to control her.

The nanomachines from the AI chip were rapidly destroyed. A powerful stream of light even entered Bai Xieren's brain, encasing it in an inescapable cocoon.

[Requesting aid from the Administrator...]

[Contacting the Administrator...]

[Contact Failed!]

[Reattempting communication...]

[Failed!]

[Reattempting...]

[Failed!]

[Failed!]

[The Administrator is unavailable. Setting temporary Administrator as Bai Xieren.]

Only when she finally heard this message did she stop her assault. Unexpectedly, the AI processor and its nanomachines were quite stubborn. It took nearly an hour before it finally accepted her as the Administrator.

And while having Administrator permissions without access to the control rooms was mostly useless, it had one main benefit.

[Hidden Dragon Group, prepare to move.]

A message was sent to a few select individuals, only ever to be viewed by them. Because it was sent by an Administrator, it was both heavily encrypted and untraceable.

After the first message, many more were sent off in rapid succession. From the missions given to the Hidden Dragon Group members to orders for the regular Moon Squadron members, Bai Xieren gave as much instruction as she could within a few minutes.

Because that was all the time she had.

[Connection reestablished!]

With a light "ding!" sound, the AI processor rebooted itself, returning to its original chain of command.

Seeing this, Bai Xieren actually sighed in relief. Even if the time was short, she'd done all she could. Now all there was left to do was wait and hope that her people could bring her a miracle.

As for those miracle workers...

Five individuals in vastly different parts of the world received five different messages with extremely similar goals.

To kill.

Kill, kill, and then kill some more.

It wasn't a simple mission anymore, it was an order they were given extreme incentives to carry out.

To kill a Researcher was to gain a bit of wealth, but to kill an Executive was to gain a fortune!

The disparity of rewards naturally corresponded to the difficulty of the targets, but it didn't change the fact that many hefty prizes were being offered to them on a silver platter.

Whether it was Li Xiu, Jiang Hualing, Hebi, or even Long Chen, they were all tempted by these offers.

As for the final member of the Hidden Dragon Group...he was a bit preoccupied and missed the message entirely.

As such, four individuals silently made up their minds that night. They'd already heard about or personally seen what was happening in Evotech. Wouldn't the Cloud Plane's people lose face if they took such an insult sitting down?

From today onward, Niflheim would understand...

They would understand why that tiny faction in Asgard actually dared to oppose them.