

Void 561

Chapter 561 Baptism [1]

Damien's eyes remained closed, yet, a string of system windows still appeared in his vision.

[Your achievements have reached the required threshold to change your class. Choose a new class from the list below. The nature of your Baptism will vary depending on your choice.]

[Choose a Class]

[1. Space-Time Grandmaster]

[2. Spatial Sovereign]

[3. True Dragon]

[4. Godsprout]

[5. Harem King]

Damien almost coughed a mouthful of blood when he saw the last option. These class options were based on the achievements he built until this point, and it was true that he had intentionally or unintentionally been together with a bevy of beauties in that time, but he didn't think the system would acknowledge this!

Then again, Damien had a habit of flirting with everyone, even if that person was a Demigod, so it wasn't strange. Still, he didn't realize how many paths the system offered people until this moment.

Regardless, the fifth option was directly thrown out the window by him. He had no interest in wasting his life by pursuing a path of debauchery. But even as he looked at the other options, his brow became increasingly more furrowed.

Space-Time Grandmaster, Spatial Sovereign, these were most definitely classes that were based on his achievements.

Unlike his journey to 3rd class, he concentrated on a more focused path during the past few years spent reaching the 4th class boundary. It was natural that his choices had less variation between them.

Even True Dragon was based on the direction he guided his bodily evolution. Only Godsprout was a mystery.

However, none of these choices felt right. None of them resonated with his being the same way his Celestial class did when he first chose it.

Damien frowned. 'Is changing my class necessary? I have yet to even touch on the precipice of a Celestial, how can I think about abandoning it already to try something new?'

This was his true thought. Damien's lifeblood was that of a Celestial, and as a young Celestial who had only just started realizing the greater abilities of his class, he didn't want to part with it.

But, ironically enough, the system wasn't giving him a choice. Until he chose one of the provided options, his Baptism would be halted.

But at that moment, a change took place.

[Your Legend is being forcefully overwritten.]

[Your Class list has been changed.]

[Your Class has been forcefully chosen.]

[You have become the Voidbringer. This class is an unknown, as it has never appeared in the universe before. Your wish to continue on the path you have forged resonated with an unknown force, bringing about a first-of-its-kind miracle. Following your wish, your new path will run parallel to its predecessor. Your Celestial Class will not be overridden. Your future path cannot be determined.]

Damien was flabbergasted. Something interfered with the system? Voidbringer? There wasn't anything like that on the provided list!

But judging by its name, the source of this change could be easily inferred. After all, that source had been a silent companion for Damien since the very beginning of his journey.

[Your Baptism will now begin.]

Before he could even question what the Voidbringer class entailed, a new system window appeared. After this declaration, Damien felt the power of space around him rapidly twisting and changing.

[Beginning the first trial.]

Bang!

Damien felt as if his extremities were severed. His perception range decreased drastically, his senses dulled, even his mana lost a portion of its original luster.

Space rapidly constricted around Damien's body, but no matter how he attempted to wrest control over it, it wouldn't budge. His dominion over space had been completely removed.

"Haa...haa...haa...haa..."

Damien's breaths became heavy. Not only because of the physical constrictions taking place, but the mental ones as well.

Ever since he was a child, space had always been with him. Even before the World Awakening, Damien's perception of space was strange. It always made him feel warm and cozy as if it was his hearth.

But now, for the first time in his twenty-something years of life, this hearth had been taken from him.

The mental impact was greater than he ever imagined. As he stood in the air, he merely felt things as they were. He felt the air around him, he felt the swirling World Energy barrier in the distance, he felt the strange invisible force pressing down on him, but even though he knew this force was space, he couldn't perceive it at all.

His mind fell into an inadvertent panic. No matter how strong his will was, it was impossible for him to immediately adapt to the loss he was currently feeling.

And as if to mock his mental state, the compression force of the surrounding space increased drastically.

Blood vessels popped out of Damien's skin, his muscles bulging as he was forced to resist the pressure with his bare body. His mana revolved rapidly, but after losing its core attribute, it wasn't anywhere near as fierce as it usually was. Circulating his mana only somewhat relieved his burden, leaving a majority of it for him to continue bearing.

"Haa...haa...haa...haa..."

His breathing was shallow. It didn't help his current situation at all. At that moment, his blood vessels began to pop one after another.

"Argh!"

Although the pain was immense, it allowed his chaotic mind to return to sanity at least somewhat. A wisp of rational thought crept into his muddled head.

'Stop panicking! What the hell are you doing?! Do you want to fail the Universe Baptism within the first few minutes?! Get your shit together!' Damien roared at himself internally.

"Come on!"

Bang!

He recklessly punched out, but with the current state of his body, his punch didn't do any damage. In fact, the surrounding space returned his force back to him, turning his arm into a mangled mess.

'Shit!' He exclaimed. But with more pain came more rationality. It could even be said that Damien purposefully sacrificed his arm to regain his mind.

"Haa....haa...."

His breathing slowed. His eyes remained closed, his body feeling the ever-increasing pressure of compressing space.

But his mind was elsewhere. Damien put his full trust into Transcendent Regeneration to keep him alive, sealing off his senses and submerging himself in his spiritual world.

'Hoo...calm down.'

With his environment becoming more chaotic and the empty feeling of his lack of spatial affinity disappearing, his mind was able to regain enough clarity to think straight.

'To think I'd be so distraught at the loss of my spatial abilities. Although I've experienced extreme suppression before, I've never experienced what it's like to be a normal person without a spatial affinity at all. What a terrifying Universe Baptism.'

Thinking about it, things began to make sense. Even if this was only the first trial, it was still a Universe Baptism. And more than that, it was a Universe Baptism related to the class his Void Physique had forced onto him. There was no way it'd be simple.

'This isn't just a test of my abilities, but a test of my mentality as well. It's clear from my previous state that I thoroughly failed it.' Damien sighed to himself. His previous showing was pathetic.

He prided himself on his will, it was one of his greatest facets. But even this supreme will crumbled when he lost his spatial affinity.

But it couldn't be helped. Quite literally from the moment he was born, Damien had been able to perceive space differently from others. The only reason he couldn't actively control it was because of the lack of mana on earth.

There was no way to describe the horrific feeling of loss that washed over his mind and body when this perception was taken away. If it had to be compared to something, it was an exponentially worse version of losing all of one's 5 senses in an instant.

It was harrowing.

But this was also the kind of ability that only a high-omnipotent entity like the system could possess. Only it could make him feel this level of loss.

Therefore, only it was worthy of testing him like this.

Analyzing the situation with a calm mind showed him a different picture than what he saw before.

He'd already failed this trial in his book, but the Baptism was still ongoing. This meant he had a chance to redeem himself.

'The Universe Baptism isn't just a method of gaining the universe's acknowledgment. To even reach that step, one must first perfect themselves. While the Baptism is a trial, it is also a training ground for practitioners to temper themselves and rid themselves of their previous weaknesses. No wonder the differences between 3rd and 4th class are so substantial.'

"Haa..." Damien took a deep breath. With a stable mind, he returned his senses to his body. Immediately, that terrifying sense of loss enveloped him.

Nothing could prepare him for this. Even if he was mentally ready, the feeling itself still caused his mind to freeze in shock for a few moments.

But the difference was, this time he was able to regain his facilities.

His mana surged. His bodily strength increased madly. In his mind, he wildly shouted.

'Demon Transformation! Dragon Transformation!'

His body morphed, his skin became covered in black scales, his hair turned snow white, and mysterious runes decorated his skin as dragon horns and wings appeared on his forehead and shoulder blades.

'Defense!'

The mysterious runes twisted into a rhombus-like pattern, exponentially increasing the toughness of Damien's body. Even with the horrendous twisting of space around him, he remained unaffected.

And now that his body had stabilized, he was able to focus his mind on his feeling of loss. He was able to thoroughly understand this feeling and submerge himself into it. In his mind, countless scenes flashed by.

His life on earth before the World Awakening was exceedingly bland. Space was his safe haven back then. He was being literal when he called it his hearth.

Without its presence, the young Damien was unable to endure the mental trauma that continued to pile onto his person. Even when he met Elena later, he wasn't able to properly converse with her or become friends.

His sense of self had been suppressed too far without any shoulders to lean on. Even his mother was unable to fill this void.

But he managed to persist until the World Awakening. He persisted until he awakened as an attributeless practitioner.

This kind of character would usually become a weapon master like Long Chen, supplementing their lack of affinity with another Law. For Damien, this was Sword Law.

He became a sword cultivator, but he wasn't a very strong one. At most, he could be considered average.

And when that fateful day came when he was forced into the dungeon, the result remained the same. After all, the Void Physique still hindered his development.

But that was it.

Even without the power of space, he still managed to scrape up a tiny bit of determination to live, even if this determination was only to save his mother.

Even without the power of space, he managed to kill a powerful beast and evolve, starting his journey on the path to strength.

Even without the power of space, he made it out of the dungeon, reaching a height in Sword Cultivation that he had never seen before in reality.

But there was one stark difference.

When he reached 3rd class, he didn't receive a method to return home. He was forced to work like a madman until he gained access to a broken starship, barely making his return.

Damien watched all these scenes take place. Without the power of space, his path would've been completely different. But that didn't mean he had no path at all. In the end, he was a person who yearned for strength and freedom. With his personality, it was impossible for him to die early unless he offended some powerhouse outside his caliber.

Damien sighed lightly. 'My greatest friend and companion is space itself. Even after viewing these scenes, my view hasn't changed. However, I can at least begin to accept my current state.'

His eyes flashed open. Mirage appeared in his hand. Sword Intent covered its blade, slowly becoming more profound until it was nearing the level of Sword Aura.

'My path is my own. Regardless of what method I use to reach it, the peak will always be my goal. If you wish to deprive me of what is rightfully mine, fine. Do as you please. However, do not expect me to sit still and just watch.'

Mirage made a simple arc in the air. There wasn't anything special about this strike. After all, the only sword moves Damien knew were all fueled by his spatial affinity.

But the intent behind this slash was far more profound than that. It was a manifestation of Damien's desire to continue forward regardless of the consequences, regardless of the losses.

Ka!

Space shattered wherever the sword passed. The terrifying force bearing down on his body lessened greatly. And at the same time, the feeling of loss within Damien's body slowly faded.

It wouldn't be long before he completed the first trial.

Chapter 562 Baptism [2]

While Damien was engrossed in the first trial of his Universe Baptism, the outside world didn't stay stationary.

Although he couldn't see beyond the veil of World Energy, Wrath was well aware of what was happening. The Seed was blooming, which meant a Universe Baptism unlike any other was taking place.

'Now!'

His body flashed. He rapidly appeared in front of the World Energy barrier, attempting to use his pure strength as a Demigod to pass through the universe's protection.

Now was the perfect time. Wrath didn't even wish to hinder Damien's Baptism. Just being inside to witness it would allow his strength to increase by leaps and bounds.

This was the beauty of the Seed. It was a gift that kept on giving. And once it was in full bloom, Wrath would be able to consume it and become an existence with the potential to achieve True Godhood!

But before he could even impact the World Energy barrier, he felt a sudden shift in his surroundings. His eyes turned cold and ruthless.

"Even at this juncture, you're so adamant about stopping me?!"

None of his previous playful demeanor was present anymore. Wrath was like a ferocious cornered beast erupting with strength.

Albeus and the Drunken Old Immortal frowned. Seeing Wrath in this state sent a chill down their spines.

From beginning to end, they had moved together to suppress Wrath. Even though they were all Demigods, something about Wrath sent danger bells ringing in their heads.

Therefore, they spared no effort. The instant they initiated combat, they laid down their Authorities.

Domains were concepts formed from Law Comprehension, so they could be formed at any level. However, if one was able to form their domain before they achieved 4th class, it would go through a qualitative change and become something greater.

There was a saying in the wider universe. 3rd class Domain, 4th class Territory, 5th class Authority!

With the way things were explained, it almost seemed like an Authority was an enhanced version of a domain, but this was wrong. Authorities were the crowning ability of Demigods. Every single Demigod possessed an Authority.

However, if one was able to evolve their Domain into a Territory and then fuse it with their Authority upon entering the Demigod realm, the strength of their Authority would become completely different.

But this was an unrelated matter. The reason Albeus and the Drunken Old Immortal laid down their Authorities was to make use of their base ability.

This was Dimensional Separation.

Even if they didn't have an ounce of understanding towards space and time, a Demigod's Authority was able to pervade reality and superimpose a separate space-time onto it. In this way, regardless of how much power they put into their attacks, the Real Plane wouldn't be affected.

It was a completely segregated battlefield.

In combat amongst Demigods, Authorities were usually used for differing purposes and this separation of space-time was only a minor matter of convenience, but when fighting on the surface of a world instead of the starry sky, these Authorities were necessary.

After all, a Demigod's full-powered attack absolutely carried the potential to destroy a planet. Unless they wished the entire universe to turn into rubble, Demigods always fought within their Authority Dimensions.

With two Authority Dimensions working in tandem, even with Wrath's power level, he wouldn't be able to casually interfere in the happenings of the Real Plane.

This was naturally the reason for his immense anger.

"You will not interrupt his Baptism. Regardless of whatever Seed nonsense you spout, I will not betray my own morality." Albeus responded indifferently to Wrath's rage. This was his true feeling, not a front he was putting up. Even if Damien had a treasure that was able to tempt him, he wouldn't make a move on a junior.

Even if he wasn't righteous, Albeus' character still leaned towards the morally just side. He wouldn't stoop so low as to steal from someone so much weaker than him.

As for the Drunken Old Immortal, his reasoning was different. He was merely a curious old man. He had only come to know of the Seed's existence through a discarded Ancient Text he found on one of his many adventures. Now that it was truly in front of him, he naturally wanted to see what its existence entailed.

Wrath looked at these two men with utter hatred. They had blocked him at every step, disallowing him from directing Damien's growth the way he pleased. Did they want to die so badly?

"If you desire death so much, then let me grant it to you!" Wrath yelled out. At that moment, a ripple spread from his body. His own Authority spread, clashing with Albeus and the Drunken Old Immortal's. The area it occupied was dyed inky black, the same color as his mana.

Wrath's arm raised into the air. He was a Nox Demigod. A being that surpassed mere humans from the moment of his birth. How dare they look down on him?!

"Twisted Fantasy."

Wrath's words came out as a whisper, but they had a profound impact on the surroundings. The inky black space was filled with a myriad of illusions depicting the most gruesome scenes one could possibly imagine.

And the worst part of it all was the fact that these scenes originated from Wrath's memory. He was the one who committed these atrocities.

Albeus and the Drunken Old Immortal found their emotions becoming chaotic. The longer the illusions persisted, the harder it was to hold onto their rationality. If this continued, they'd be turned into mindless beasts!

This just went to show the difference between them and Wrath. They became painfully aware of their own weakness. But neither backed down.

Albeus pushed his arm out, his Authority flaring. A blinding white light covered his body in a nearly corporeal set of armor. This armor contained a mysterious property that calmed his mind, allowing him to more easily persist the mental attack from Wrath.

As for the Drunken Old Immortal, his method was far more simple and direct. His mana flared into the air, becoming liquid and slowly taking in mana and other materials to become a fine liquor. This liquor then flowed into his mouth, causing his face to flush.

His name wasn't the Drunken Old Immortal for no reason. His original affinity was water, but after years of development and building his legend, he twisted this affinity until he became a man who lived on liquor! Alcohol wasn't just pleasure anymore, it was also his power!

When the Drunken Old Immortal followed his namesake and got drunk, his power level would increase exponentially. And while his state of mind would become foggier, his mental defenses would actually be strengthened immensely! It was a strange ability, to say the least, but with even Damien receiving the option to choose Harem King during his Universe Baptism, it wasn't too surprising.

But regardless of the methods they used to ward off Wrath's attack, it was still true that they were forced into a defensive position from the very start.

Looking at each other, they came to a tacit understanding. They wouldn't be able to hold anything back when facing Wrath.

This battle would not be a simple one at all.

While the Demigods fought in their Authority Dimensions, separated from reality, a fierce war was taking place around Damien's World Energy Barrier.

Everything seemed to congregate in a single place, the entire chaotic struggle of the unnamed world focusing around Damien.

Whether it be the Nox, Niflheim, Asgard, Shadow Garden, the Cloud Plane forces, or anyone else, as long as they were involved in the conflict, they were likely present.

"Brothers, we fight! For humanity!" A black-clothed young man roared. The massive broadsword in his swung in a sweeping arc, letting out a furious dragon roar as it tore through hundreds of Nox beings.

""FOR HUMANITY!!""

The roars of his subordinates filled the heavens. The Bloody Cavalry charged into battle, slaughtering anything and everything in their path!

But even with their valiant efforts in killing thousands or even tens of thousands of Nox beings every few minutes, they were barely able to put a dent in the overall number.

This was the most terrifying facet of the Nox. Even if the intelligent members of their species were small in number, those unintelligent Nox at 3rd class and below were present in droves. At any given time, millions of them could be deployed as cannon fodder and it wouldn't be considered a loss to the Nox's overall power.

But the Bloody Cavalry persisted in their attack. They were joined by the Celestial and Star Squadrons as well, giving them more leeway within the chaos.

On another part of the battlefield, three women led the charge against a group of 3rd and 4th class enemies from Niflheim.

Rose's illusions covered thousands of kilometers, her Illusory Throne active and sending countless flying swords hurling at the crowd of enemies.

At the same time, Ruyue's spear left a rain of blood in its wake. The spear was often known as the commander of a hundred men, it was a weapon most suited for large-scale warfare! For the first time in her life, Ruyue was able to bring out her weapon's full potential!

The massive Blood Moon in the sky that empowered her every attack and shot out beams of blue iceflames and lunar energy didn't even need to be mentioned. Compared to her spear, the effects of this boost were negligible.

Aside from these two, Aishia was fighting with just as much reckless ferocity as she was before Damien saved her. Only, this time she was doing so consciously. No matter how random her actions seemed, they always followed a specific order and flow, making her wildly unpredictable, yet incredibly precise.

Behind these three women were Shadow Garden's forces. Even the white-clothed Clarice was present, playing a strange melody on her stringed instrument and providing buffs to her allies. This kind of supportive practitioner was rare and incredibly sought after on the battlefield. With her present, Shadow Garden and the three women held an absolute advantage over their foes.

The problem lay in their numbers, just as it did on the Bloody Cavalry's side. Now that war had erupted in full, there was no need to hide any strength. Both Asgard and Niflheim showed their full power, combining their efforts to siege Damien's World Energy barrier under Wrath's command.

Luckily, a majority of Asgard's 4th classes were being held up and slaughtered by the Moon Squadron within Asgard territory. This reduced the burden on the allied forces.

Even the Demigods from Asgard and Niflheim were occupied. The two Shadow Garden Demigods and the two Giant sisters that made up Shadow Garden's core with Albeus were locked in combat with the two Nox Demigods and the two Asgardian Demigods.

Although the numbers on both sides matched, the two Giant Sisters were still young. Comparatively, they didn't have as much strength as the other six present. If this group was to truly begin combat, it was unknown whether or not Shadow Garden's side could persist.

But Demigods weren't idiotic beings. At least, the ones present weren't. Even if one side was able to defeat the other, they'd be forced to endure immense losses, and perhaps they'd even die in the process!

When one's lifespan reached the terrifying boundary of a Demigod's, they'd become extremely attached to the concept of it. None of them wished to die early, leading to the current standstill.

But even with such a great deal of Niflheim and Asgard's forces blocked, the allied forces still had to deal with an immense number of enemies. With thousands of 4th classes and hundreds of thousands of 3rd classes flooding the battlefield, it was impossible to just cut everyone down like chickens.

The battle had devolved into one between strength and numbers.

As for which side would win? It was still far too early to determine.

Chapter 563 Baptism [3]

The scene within the World Energy Barrier slowly calmed down, with Damien overcoming the spatial distortions and acclimating to the feeling of loss washing over his body. Although it was easy to describe, this process actually took many minutes to complete.

And by the time it was done, Damien's perception slowly began to expand. Just like that, his spatial affinity had been returned to him.

The goal of the first trial was mainly to temper his will and body, and this had been accomplished more than just a little successfully. Damien's mental fortitude reached an all-new height, to the point where his natural resistance to illusions and mental magic reached the same level as his All-Seeing Eyes.

But Damien wasn't stupid enough to think that things would become simpler now that he regained his affinity. In fact, the difficulty would only increase.

Bang!

Without giving Damien any time to rest, the World Energy Barrier began revolving. Space began to separate as if it was being run through by a cookie cutter. But this change was only present within Damien's perception. It didn't reflect in the real world.

Swoosh!

With a sudden breeze, the space around Damien strangely twisted. In that instant, he already realized what happened. He'd been separated into a lesser plane.

This type of lesser plane was similar to the separate space-time that a Demigod's Authority could produce. It was a different dimension when compared to the Real Plane.

But even this was only the beginning. After the first separation, Damien continued getting pushed further and further into different dimensional barriers. His situation was like the smallest link of a Russian nesting doll.

The layer of space around him was tiny, only holding enough room to house his body alone. It looked exceedingly weak, almost like it could be crushed with a single touch, but this was far from being true.

'This is a dimension within a dimension within a dimension within...I don't even know how many layers there are. Now that I've regained my affinity, am I supposed to escape from this cage?'

The concepts around him were exceedingly familiar. This was the very same application of Dimensional Magic that could create isolated worlds and spaces, it was the branch of space he was planning to explore more thoroughly once he reached 4th class and gained the ability to manipulate laws.

But it seemed he was no longer given the option to wait. For Damien to continue his Baptism, he had to comprehend these esoteric concepts and free himself from the dimensional prison around him.

'These dimensions are essentially separated spaces, but they aren't that simple. To completely isolate a portion of space from the natural flow of space-time is exceedingly difficult, and to layer these isolated portions on top of each other is even more. This level of difficulty doesn't reach the same level as manipulating two, three, and four-dimensional space as one pleases, but it's still a fairly high-level concept.'

Damien's comprehension of space itself was at a peak he couldn't surpass with his current abilities. However, his understanding of dimensions didn't match up at all.

Most dimensional abilities were supportive. Whether they be sealing techniques, trapping techniques, creation techniques, or anything else, the destructive uses of this branch of magic weren't as pronounced.

Of course, that wasn't to say there was no destructive power at all. It was just that one required a foundation built on these supportive concepts to access that destructive nature.

Damien was a person who excelled in destruction. One could even say it was his main talent. The reason he wasn't able to progress rapidly on Dimensional Magic was precisely because this talent suppressed his ability to use more supportive and creation-related abilities.

Usually, he was able to make up for this difference through Void Essence, an energy particularly skilled in creation, but he wasn't given the option to use shortcuts this time around.

The Void Physique had been quiet ever since forcing his Baptism's direction. Damien wasn't able to sense it at all, nor was he able to draw Void Essence through his connection with it. He was entirely on his own.

'But that isn't a bad thing at all. This is yet another chance to rid myself of a glaring weakness I have.'

Damien didn't think he would be able to break the suppression his destruction talent had on his other facets, but he could at least weaken it to a manageable level.

Without hesitation, he closed his eyes and entered a meditative state. His awareness contacted the dimensional barrier around him and melded with the spatial layers within. He wasn't going to brute force his way out of this problem.

Damien's brow furrowed as he investigated the barrier. 'This is extremely complex. It's like the spatial layers have been woven into an impenetrable web that forms these walls. This isn't merely an application of mana onto space, it is fundamentally changing the properties of space to adhere to one's will.'

He was able to realize this much from a glance, but knowing wouldn't help him. It only reminded him of how difficult the task ahead of him truly was.

'Luckily, this is only the first layer. The complexities of this space are still at a level I can see through. But as I continue forward into greater dimensions, the structure necessary to maintain them will become more profound as well. Let me break out of here first and see how the difficulty increases.'

When it came to the spatial layers, Damien was incredibly comfortable. To finely control his mana to warp through them and meld them wasn't too difficult. Of course, this was only at the first layer.

After following the spatial web for a few minutes, Damien was able to understand its structure and find a flaw within. His mana attacked this spot, causing everything around it to unravel as well.

'Success!' Damien exclaimed. As space shattered around him, he found himself in a new isolated area that was the size of a small room. It wouldn't be a problem for ten people to fit in this area as long as they crowded together.

Damien's furrowed brows relaxed a little when he saw this. 'So I won't have to go through 800 different variations of these dimensional spaces before exiting. There should only be three or four more if the size grows exponentially like this. Although the difficulty will increase as well, this is actually preferable.'

What Damien was learning at the moment wasn't necessarily how to create these isolated spaces. Whatever force was guiding this Baptism was truly giving him knowledge on the most fundamental level.

As he noticed before, to create dimensional walls and isolated spaces was to fundamentally change the order of space. The spatial layers that usually ebbed and flowed like waves would be forced into the shape of the container created for them.

The ability Damien was learning was precisely this. To affect space on a fundamental level and gain enough understanding of it, setting up a foundation for him to affect it on a conceptual level in the future.

Damien was aware of this too. This was why even though he understood the structure of the larger room within the hour, he didn't make any moves to break through it. First, he patiently perceived the way space responded when he changed small bits of the web, then moved on to doing the same with larger changes.

In manipulating these phenomena, Damien was unintentionally learning the concepts required to create isolated spaces. Such was the beauty of understanding fundamentals. Everything else became easier from that point forward.

And once Damien felt that he gained everything he could from the 10-man room, he flicked his finger towards a certain section, using his own spatial mana to create threads that interfered with the ones already present.

Rather than shattering entirely like the first space, this new space merely cracked. A rift the size of a person appeared in the location where Damien's mana was shot. This clearly outlined the level of finesse Damien achieved through his training in the 10-man room.

And without pausing his momentum at all, Damien stepped through the spatial rift, arriving in a room nearly 10 times the size of the previous one.

It wouldn't be a short while before he was able to complete this trial.

Hours passed without end in the World Energy barrier. Four hours after he exited the 10-man room, he made his way out of the 100-man room as well. This time, the rift he created was more defined, almost taking the shape of a door.

Another 8 hours after that, Damien escaped the 1000-man room that followed. With the difficulty exponentially increasing, the time it took for Damien to exit increased as well, but this was only on the surface.

In reality, he could've easily broken out of the 1000-man room within two or three hours, but he consciously decided against it. Before exiting these dimensional spaces, he would reap every reward he could get.

The passage of time was forgotten under Damien's intense concentration. He even forgot about the perilous situation outside the World Energy barrier. His entire perception was submerged in space.

As the hours passed, Damien broke through a 10,000-man space and even a 100,000-man space. At this level, it was impossible for him to break through with brute force even if he wished to; he was simply too weak to do so. Therefore, he could only take the shortcut provided for him.

The method by which he opened the dimensional spaces also improved by leaps and bounds. From a single small door that could only fit his body, he was able to increase his fine control until he could change the concepts of an entire wall of the dimensional space, turning it into a grand gateway to celebrate his entrance into a higher difficulty.

And finally, after what seemed like days of effort, he was able to break through all obstacles and reach his final goal.

A dimensional space capable of housing millions of existences with ease, maintaining stability even if they collectively flared their mana.

Only after breaking through this space would Damien finally escape the prison he'd been trapped in.

Chapter 564 Baptism [4]

Time passed without end, it's ebbs and flows indistinguishable within the thick barrier of World Energy isolating Damien from the outside world.

In the center of that barrier, Damien sat silently, his eyes closed and his legs crossed as if he was an indomitable stone Buddha. Occasionally, his hands would dance through the air, leaving afterimages that gave off a beautifully profound feeling. This was the only sign that he was alive.

In Damien's mind, a massive map was laid out. It was a labyrinth filled with impossible twists and complex structures that he had been studying for an unknown period of time.

Compared to the 1000-man space or even the 100,000-man space, the largest 1,000,000-man space was a completely different monster.

It wasn't just a matter of complexity or stability in the structure of the spatial webs, but also a matter of spatial law itself. Damien's current achievements simply weren't enough for him to comprehend and unravel this kind of conceptual existence.

But the Universe Baptism's trials didn't allow him any shortcuts. The only thing he could do was diligently attempt to understand the structure of the cage around him, hoping that he could eventually escape.

'The 1,000,000-man space doesn't abide by the same laws as the other spaces. I've noticed that every time I entered a new space, the laws were more complete. At this point, rather than being a mere separated space, one could even consider this space as an isolated world.'

It was a similar existence to the Sanctuary. The space contained its own foundational laws that differed from those outside. Due to this, the stability of space was incredible, almost reaching the level of a true world.

But the laws of an incomplete space like this couldn't compare to the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary existed in the void and was formed from it, receiving a constant supply of mana and laws from it as well. Although the Sanctuary wasn't quite self-sustaining yet, it was entirely possible to reach that point when Damien became strong enough.

However, this space was different. While it was true that it had developed its own foundational laws, it didn't have the ability to maintain them forever. As time passed, the traces of these laws would slowly diminish and the isolated space would collapse, rejoining the Real Plane as if it never existed.

But this process would take an exorbitant amount of time to complete. If Damien chose to wait until this space's laws degraded, he'd be trapped within for tens of years at the very least.

And naturally, he had no intention of doing that.

Damien's mind moved rapidly. If he couldn't unravel the space the same way he did with the others, he needed to compensate for his lack of ability somehow. He needed to cope with the fact that he couldn't use Laws yet.

But who was Damien? While this task was impossible for others, he actually had a way to circumvent the universe's restrictions!

Exhaling a breath of chaotic air, his mouth moved to say a single word. "Bloom."

That word served as a trigger. Within Damien's spiritual world, a bright red light encapsulated everything.

In the past, this space had been represented by an endless starry sky with celestial bodies present to display his connections with them. There was a sun, there was Earth, Apeiron, the Cloud Plane, and finally his own spiritual world itself.

But that scenery was different now. Aside from his spiritual world, there was only a single other existence floating in the boundless space.

It was a large world, larger than any Damien had visited before. It would take tens or even hundreds of years to traverse from one end of this world to the other, displaying just how massive it was.

Despite its grandiosity, however, this world was only a spiritual representation. It didn't have any physical form to be showcased to the universe.

This world was the combination of the Cloud Plane, Apeiron, and Earth. Using this world as a medium, the wills of those three worlds could communicate and amplify each other's power. The connection they had with Damien also increased exponentially, allowing him to utilize a portion of their World Force even when he wasn't present in those worlds!

In the center of this massive world, acting as a substitute World Core, was none other than the red magic cube known as the World score Fusion Reactor. After Damien absorbed it, it took root in his spiritual world and refused to move.

But it was constantly proving its use. The only reason this massive world could exist was because of its existence. And it was also the reason Damien would be able to pass his trial.

Voom!

Damien's awareness interacted with the massive planet. He immediately got a response, three wills sending their words into his mind.

Although he couldn't truly hear them, he could understand what they wanted to say. He smiled as he listened to them.

'Ha, I'll never get used to the feeling of having those three in my head. Especially Yun and Apeiron, those two don't mesh well at all.'

Damien lightly joked to himself, his movements not stopping at all while he did so. Through his connection with the three, World Force slowly entered his body, enhancing his state.

And more than that...this World Force allowed Damien to take a shortcut to manipulating laws.

The 1,000,000-man space shook fiercely. After spending days or even weeks comprehending the structure of this place, the only thing standing in Damien's way now was his lack of laws.

Now that his glaring weakness had been covered...

The 1,000,000-man space couldn't withstand the burden of Damien's interference. His hands moved like a conductor guiding an orchestra, letting his mana and World Force play with the spatial web around him and unravel it.

It wasn't an easy process at all. Despite having the tools to complete his task, Damien still had to put in a great deal of effort to do so.

And finally, after an unknown period of time, the shaking of the 1,000,000-man space halted.

Lines formed in its walls, separating them into small puzzle pieces. Once this process was finished, space itself began to drift apart and fall through the air like snowflakes.

Damien felt a sense of freedom overwhelm him. Even though nothing in his surroundings changed at all, he could clearly feel the difference between existing in the Real Plane and existing in an isolated space. The two simply couldn't compare.

This was because the Real Plane was "complete" unlike those isolated spaces.

'Haa, finally. Now that that's over, I guess it's finally time for the second trial?'

Damien was hopeful, but the universe didn't seem intent on fulfilling his wishes. There wasn't a single system notification that sounded after he escaped the dimensional cage. However, there was indeed a change.

'This...!'

Damien suddenly felt like he was submerged in a vat of molasses. His movements slowed to the extreme, forcing him to use his utmost abilities to even budge an inch.

But unlike the previous trial, space wasn't manipulated at all. No, this effect didn't come from space.

Rather, the theme of the trial switched.

'Time has been slowed.' Damien immediately realized. This slowing didn't just involve his body, even his thoughts were being affected.

This could only be caused by a vast difference in strength and comprehension. When one couldn't match up to a Time Law user, their entire being would be frozen. It wasn't a simple physical phenomenon.

Luckily, Damien's comprehension of time, while lagging behind space, was still somewhat substantial. He already understood how to speed up and slow down its flow within a specified area, though completely halting it was still outside of his reach.

'So it's a comprehensive trial? It seems all of my elemental comprehensions will be tested in this first trial. If I can pass, I will be allowed to access their laws. If I fail, my path to those elements will be cut off entirely, or at least hindered.'

This wasn't good news for his flame and lightning abilities, but Damien didn't fret. Instead, a large grin spread on his face.

'It's been a long time since I've been challenged so much. Who would've thought that the universe would be my worthy opponent?'

Without hesitation, Damien delved into the surrounding stagnated time.

Time and space had always been interlinked. Without the presence of mana, time was a measure of the perceived change taking place within space. Lifespan, the cycles of celestial bodies, even a mere human walking from one place to another could be used to represent time.

But when mana was introduced, this relationship became far more profound. Time was no longer a force that only existed through perception. With the foundational laws of the universe as support, time was able to become a true concept just like space.

This was the reason why the rampant Time Essence in the starry sky was able to maintain the flow of time between all worlds existing in the Human Domain and the wider 9 Sectors.

Space was stable, while time was ever-changing. The relationship between the two mirrored that of Order and Chaos.

Precisely because they were so intrinsically linked, Damien could use his spatial comprehension to boost his time comprehension. This was the method he'd used to rapidly become proficient in time elemental abilities in the short period after he unlocked his affinity.

It was a cheat, to say the least, but it was a cheat discovered through hard work and only usable through hard work.

And it was this very cheat that would rapidly propel Damien through the trial he was currently taking.

Chapter 565 Baptism [5]

The time element was extremely strange. This was Damien's takeaway as he spend ages comprehending it within the World Energy Barrier.

The time flow for him had already been altered before he was trapped in the dimensional cage, and now that it had been slowed to the point of solidifying, every second in the outside world took ages for him.

He only had his body clock to make estimations, but he inferred that it had taken at least half a year to escape the dimensional cage. Adding on the time he spent stuck in stasis, it'd been over a year since his Universe Baptism started.

But in the outside world, it had only been a few hours.

Sadly, Damien wasn't able to sense the outside world through the barrier. If he was able to compare the two separate time flows to each other, his comprehension would have come far easier.

Regardless, with half a year stuck in this halted time, Damien made significant gains. Not only did his time affinity become more pronounced, even his spatial abilities saw improvement.

Slowly but surely, a mystical aura began to radiate from his body. When this aura encountered the Time Essence around Damien, it began to alter it, albeit not enough for it to actually matter.

But progress was progress. Now that he was able to affect the atmosphere around him and even think at normal speeds again, he was able to establish a counter flow that would act as his escape route from this time lock.

'This process is too grueling.' Damien thought to himself with a sigh. 'Even with my pace increasing exponentially as I understand the surrounding concepts, it'll still take at least another half a year to whittle away at this static space.'

When he originally began his Universe Baptism, although he fretted over the location, he didn't panic too much. He believed that with his abilities, it wouldn't take too long to pass.

Now that he was in a situation where his Baptism could potentially take many years to complete, he didn't know how to feel.

Nonetheless, the time he spent within the World Energy Barrier would solely be spent improving. Even if it took a decade for him to finish, he at least wouldn't suffer a loss.

Clearing his mind of unnecessary thoughts, Damien put his entire focus back into the counterflow he was creating. He entered an ironical state where his sense of time was lost but his comprehension of the concept itself was rapidly increasing.

And in this state, he diligently worked. It was the only thing he could do.

While a few hours within the World Energy Barrier could be considered negligible, the situation in the outside world was one where every second counted.

Now that several hours had passed, the ongoing battle had reached an extremely heated state.

"On your left! Watch out!" Rose's voice rang out amongst the chaotic clashes of battle.

Ruyue rapidly spun her body upon hearing them, barely dodging a mana-coated javelin that had been hurling toward her.

Ruyue gave Rose a grateful look and turned to the javelin's owner. He was a middle-aged man with a massive build like a professional bodybuilder. As he looked at Ruyue, he didn't even attempt to conceal the lust in his eyes.

After all, why should he? He was an exalted 4th class existence! A mere 3rd class like Ruyue should be honored to earn his lust.

Only, it was a shame that they were enemies on this battlefield. If he wanted to bed this woman, he'd have to first turn her into a corpse.

But this idea didn't hinder his lust. It even enhanced it somewhat.

Ruyue's eyes were cold as she looked at this man. According to her senses, he was only at the early stages of 4th class, though his high and mighty demeanor seemed to suggest he was extremely powerful.

Ruyue shook her head in derision. With her looks, encountering people like this man was normal. But normal didn't mean she enjoyed it.

'A mere early 4th class, huh. Damien could probably kill this man with a slap, so wouldn't it be too embarrassing if I couldn't even compete with him?'

Fighting spirit burned in her eyes. When she first met Damien, Ruyue was actually stronger than him by a small margin. But as they traveled and adventured, his speed of growth far outstripped hers.

She was also at the peak of 3rd class by this point. The only reason she hadn't initiated her Baptism was due to her lacking comprehension of her elements.

But this wasn't her fault at all. Her yin affinity turned her element into a far more conceptual existence. Not to mention her moon affinity which was even vaguer. The qualifications Ruyue needed to initiate her Baptism surpassed even Damien's.

However, Ruyue didn't use this as an excuse. In her mind, even if Damien was a talent surpassing all others, as his wife, it was her duty to keep up with him.

It was lonely at the top. Ruyue didn't want to see Damien turn into an existence that nobody could match, an existence with no equals and only those who looked at him in reverence. She knew Damien's personality, and she knew how much of an impact such status would have on him.

She simply didn't want to see him hurt by his own talent.

And if she wanted to stand by his side and support some of the weight on his shoulders when he reached that point, she needed to put in hundreds or even thousands of times the effort that he did.

The start of that commitment was matching his achievements. Killing an early 4th class when she was at the peak of 3rd class? This was only the base standard.

Ruyue flourished her spear, drawing an arc of blood across the battlefield. Blue flames lit up under her feet, propelling her at the burly man.

Seeing her incoming figure, he licked his lips perversely. A second javelin appeared from thin air and entered his grasp.

Bang!

The force of his movements broke the sound barrier, the hurled javelin flying so fast it could hardly be traced by the naked eye.

But Ruyue remained entirely calm. The Blood Moon decorating the sky shot a thick beam of energy to her left, clashing against the invisible javelin with the sound of scraping metal.

This beam alone was enough to divert its trajectory far away from Ruyue, leaving her charge unhindered.

She traversed the battlefield in seconds, arriving before the man with her spear primed to strike. Her spear thrust forward with the indomitable momentum of a dragon, straight for the man's solar plexus!

The burly man smirked when he saw the spear. This was an attack from someone who hadn't even passed their Baptism, why should he take it seriously? But before his condescending thought could even finish, a harrowing current of mana enveloped his body.

"Die," Ruyue muttered indifferently. Black mana revolves around her spear tip like a cyclone, exponentially increasing its force and destructive power.

The burly man could only watch helplessly as the spear flew towards him. He hastily projected his mana to defend himself, but how could this half-hearted shield block Ruyue's full-powered strike?

BOOM!

The impact force shattered the mana barrier in an instant, but Ruyue's momentum didn't halt at all. Her spear continued to fly towards the burly man until it struck true in the center of his chest.

"Ahhh!"

The burly man let out a scream of agony as his body was thrown backward. Without giving him time to retaliate, Ruyue chased him, her spear raised for another attack.

"I learned this one from another pretentious 4th class who thought she was better than me. Why don't you have a taste of it as well?"

The tip of Ruyue's spear seemed to bloom like a flower, forming an icy lotus that directly froze the surrounding atmosphere. With a sweep of her spear, the ice lotus rotated madly as it blasted towards the burly man!

The Xue Clan 12th Elder's Ice Lotus lived on even after her death, but its form was far more profound than anything she could've hoped to compete with.

'Yin Lotus: Bloom'

The frightening chilling power of yin transformed the ice lotus on a fundamental level. Even though its appearance didn't change, the aura it radiated caused the burly man to feel death approaching.

"I won't lose to a mere woman!" He shouted. A burst of blood shot out from his body, transforming into a javelin filled with bloodlust.

When Ruyue's Yin Lotus finally reached his body, the blood javelin blocked its path. The collision of the two forces wasn't anything to scoff at.

In the first place, this burly man wasn't a false 4th class like the 12th Elder. Even if he'd only done it recently, he'd still used his own power to cross his Baptism.

With the power he held, he was able to successfully fend off the terrifying ice lotus, though, he had to sacrifice a piece of his lifespan to do so.

It was true that her opponent this time was far stronger than the 12th Elder of the past, but the current Ruyue had been constantly tempered by war.

The Cloud Plane's purge, Apeiron's purge, the war against the Nox, and now this battle, they had turned her combat efficiency into something the Ruyue of the past couldn't hope to compare with. In reality, it had only taken her two or three full-powered attacks to reduce the burly man to his current state.

So even though the burly man was able to block her ice lotus, she had confidence he wouldn't be able to last for much longer.

Chapter 566 Baptism [6]

The battlefield was chaotic, to say the least. It was to a level where an important figure like Ruyue couldn't leave her position unless she wished to cause the deaths of countless allies.

But she was still able to do so without any qualms. This was because she had absolute trust in the person holding the fort while she was gone.

And this person wasn't disappointing her trust at all. She stood at the forefront of the battlefield, her muted pink hair waving in the wind and giving her the valiant air of a hero.

With every swipe of her hand, attacks that were sure to kill many would vanish into thin air. Hundreds of enemy soldiers would burst into cries of pain without being attacked at all. From the position of these common 3rd class soldiers, her actions were like those of a god.

Seeing their reverence, Rose didn't feel anything. Instead, the pride welling up in her chest came from Ruyue's efforts alone.

When comparing age alone, Ruyue was actually a bit older than Rose. But their mentalities couldn't be compared. Regardless of age difference, Rose was still like a big sister to Ruyue.

Since the first time she met Damien, many years had passed. She didn't spend these years idly. In fact, her personality had gone through a myriad of changes.

The time she spent away from Damien impacted her greatly. Being stranded in a new world with only Elena to keep her company was in truth a terrifying experience.

But Rose never hated Damien for it. Rather, she took that time as a smelting trial. In her mind, doing so was only her duty.

Damien had spent the two years before he met her in a far worse environment without a single soul to keep him company. The impact that time had on his psyche was far more immense than any experience she'd been through.

He was a broken man when they met, and while she had her fair share of problems, she didn't believe any of them added up to his struggles.

Her experiences on the Cloud Plane allowed her to experience a portion of what he felt like. If that was only a portion, she couldn't even imagine the true extent of his pain.

This was why when he came to apologize to her, she didn't take long to convince. She never blamed him, only subconsciously bore some resentment that she couldn't control.

But more than that, she was proud of his growth. She was proud to see the man she fell in love with flourishing.

It was an extremely self-sacrificing mentality. Even Rose was aware of this. But when it came to Damien, was it a problem to be self-sacrificing? If the situation required it, she wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice everything for him, even if that meant destroying the entire universe for his sake.

And over time, these feelings began to flood over to the women who she shared him with.

At first, Ruyue and Elena were hindrances in her eyes. Despite her efforts to support Damien's harem, her mind couldn't help but sprout jealousy.

Yet, this jealousy wasn't even allowed to bear fruit. The two women were too outstanding for it to do so.

Never once did they make her feel uncomfortable or unwanted, never once did they make her feel like they were "competing" with her. Her experience sharing her man was far different than what she experienced witnessing her father's imperial harem.

It was strange. No matter how she tried to hate them, she couldn't. Instead, she grew to love them like real sisters. With them sharing life and death on the battlefield countless times, this bond became unbreakable.

Ruyue's glory was her glory. Elena's glory was her glory. Even if their paths separated, they would never forget their bond, nor would they abandon their love. Rose was keenly aware of this, and it was for this reason why both she and Ruyue didn't question Elena's decision to leave.

She was no longer the little girl she was in Apeiron, she was no longer the sheltered little princess who only wished to explore the world. Her goals had evolved and changed.

To support those she cared about with all her power and help them achieve their dreams, this was what Rose wished for.

Now, seeing Ruyue set a goal for herself and act on it, how could she not be proud?

Rose turned her attention back to the battlefield. She didn't know why she suddenly became sentimental, but she didn't mind the small interlude that lightened her mood within this bloody battlefield.

Only, it was hard to be optimistic. There were too many enemies and too few allies. If the current pace was kept, it would only be another day before they were defeated in a battle of attrition.

'Before Damien finishes his Baptism, only Ruyue and I can hold the fort. I can't rely on these weaker soldiers to accomplish anything noteworthy.'

For every hundred enemies she killed, a single soldier below her would kill at most ten. When combined together, their might was undeniable, but their numbers were slowly dwindling as people ran out of mana and were forced to withdraw.

Rose's eyes hardened. It had been a very long time since she last had to fight seriously. She never held the same desire to challenge herself that her peers had.

But now, seeing Ruyue's fervor, her fighting spirit unintentionally erupted. She couldn't let her little sister overshadow her now, could she?

With a fiendish grin on her face, Rose snapped her fingers. In that instant, the surrounding hundreds of kilometers and the countless thousands of existences within were encompassed in a mysterious black barrier.

"Illusory Throne, show them your might."

The Illusory Throne was a domain Rose first gained when she reached 3rd class, but since then, it had changed constantly.

Her crude use of its abilities from the past looked like child's play compared to her current control.

A throne appeared in the air within the black barrier. Rose drifted through the air, calmly arriving in front of it and sitting down as if she was an emperor overlooking the world.

"Mana cancellation."

Sitting on the Illusory Throne, her command was law. Mana itself became illusive, shifting into an ethereal plane that these soldiers could never even dream to access.

In that instant, the battlefield came to a screeching halt. Every attack fired within the barrier was erased from existence as if it never existed.

But Rose was only getting started.

"Hell flames."

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The ground erupted with magma. Burning red flames danced through the air, rapidly spreading until the entire dark domain was dyed in its color.

"Ahhhh!"

"Someone save me!"

"Hel- huh?"

Cries of anguish and pain rang true, but within those cries were also mixed many confused reactions. After all, Rose didn't just encompass enemies in her domain. A few rogue soldiers were trapped as well.

The Hell Flames she summoned never existed in reality in the first place. These illusory flames burned on more ethereal concepts, and the pain they transmitted was decided wholly by Rose.

Vengeance, bloodlust, anger, negative emotions like these were used as fuel to the flames. Compared to the safety of her allies, the fate of her enemies could only be imagined.

Those weaker Niflheim and Asgard soldiers were corrupted in an instant. Unable to bear the burning negative emotions around them, these soldiers' eyes turned bloodshot, their reasoning disappearing.

Without suspense, they began wildly attacking. But in the current situation, the only ones around them were allies!

Clang! Clash!

Swords and spears moved zealously through the crowd. The deranged soldiers attacked fiercely, however, without access to mana, their attacks didn't contain the same power as they used to.

However, everyone else was in the same position. Their weapons were deadly against the weak mortal bodies of those they used to consider their friends.

"Burn brighter."

Rose's voice rang out again. The intensity of the Hell Flames increased exponentially. It wasn't just one or two bloodlusted soldiers turning on their allies anymore. All 3rd class soldiers were forced into a maddened state.

Without Rose having to move a single step from her throne, her enemies began killing each other wildly. If she gave the word, they would do anything she said. Their minds had been corroded to such a terrifying degree.

And to cause this mayhem, Rose only spoke a few words. This was the nature of her power.

Rose's original affinity was for illusions, an incredibly rare non-elemental affinity. Matching their rarity, non-elemental affinities tended to have more conceptual leeway than their elemental counterparts.

Even Ruyue's moon affinity could be used as an example of this. Through this strange affinity, she was able to control a power that mirrored that of a Celestial.

As for Rose, her situation was even more special. Her illusion affinity was similar to Ruyue's yin affinity in that it was able to showcase far more power than an ordinary illusion affinity.

As Rose became more and more powerful, she found that her abilities were allowing her to manipulate reality itself.

It was almost god-like.

Naturally, there were plenty of restrictions on this power. One couldn't simply manipulate the universe's foundation because one wanted to.

But to Rose, these restrictions were negligible. With the power she currently possessed and the power she possessed in the future, she had no doubt she would be able to achieve the impossible.

Within an hour of Rose laying down her domain, every enemy within a thousand kilometers had been slain, leaving a gaping hole in the battlefield. As for Ruyue, she'd long since killed the burly man and moved on to new prey.

But no matter how optimistic their situation looked, reality wasn't so kind. The massive gap was soon filled by the endless number of enemies they were facing, and the only thing they had to show for their efforts was their depleting mana reserves.

The current state of affairs wasn't positive in the slightest.

Chapter 567 Baptism [7]

While Rose and Ruyue did their utmost to keep hold of their side's dwindling momentum, the war never stopped growing in scale.

It had to be remembered, while Wrath had turned the war into a fierce struggle to reach Damien, it didn't start that way. The reason the war began was merely a conflict of interests, just like any other war.

Niflheim and Asgard were originally enemies, Shadow Garden fought against both sides, and even the Cloud Plane forces did the same.

Therefore, not everyone was aiming for Damien's Baptism. The chaotic battlefield was in a state where only those from the same influence were allies, with everyone else being nothing more than targets.

Even now, with hundreds of thousands already dead, the war hadn't reached its climax. Almost every side still had hidden cards up their sleeves, only to be used at the critical moment.

But it was still true that more than just a few hours had passed. When translated to time in the World Energy Barrier, it had already been another year.

Two different streams of energy streaked through the air, opposing each other but coexisting without a problem. While one of these streams was noticeably stronger than the other, they somehow were able to maintain a delicate balance.

In the midst of these harmoniously conflicting energies was none other than Damien, but the past year had not been kind to his appearance.

His clothes were torn to shreds, portions of his hair were charred and flaking off, and his body had been destroyed and rebuilt so many times that he no longer registered the pain of it all. But his eyes still shone as bright as the stars.

While his main focus in the year that passed was indeed countering the time flow around him, the universe wasn't so kind as to let him easily do so. Even while the temporal cage remained active, he was forced to endure trials related to his other elements.

Spatial lightning was a form of lightning generated in the starry sky due to the intense concentration of spatial essence interacting with stray elemental particles that entered space due to the movement of celestial bodies. When it came to types of lightning, it was one of the rarest and most destructive.

When Damien's lightning trial began, he was already being forced to endure spatial lightning.

The rampaging energy that was like a fusion of two equally destructive energies destroyed his body outright. If it wasn't for Transcendent Regeneration leveling up due to how constantly he used it, he would've died in that instant.

But the spatial lighting was only the beginning. Afterwards, the lighting rapidly evolved until it surpassed even black demon lighting, becoming true heavenly lighting similar to what Damien absorbed when he went through his Partial Baptism.

However, the silver heavenly lightning from back then, the lighting that was still residing in his Mana Heart, actually acted as a catalyst for the new heavenly lighting that rained down on him. The impact force it had on his body was several times worse than it would've been if he hadn't possessed something so forbidden.

The benefits he gained from doing so were the only thought that kept him sane throughout the process until he eventually completed it.

Afterwards, he faced a flame tribulation that wasn't much different. The degree of flame he was forced to endure increased exponentially with time. The impurities on his body, both physical and ethereal, were rapidly reduced to ashes by these flames.

But the flame tribulation didn't cause nearly enough pain as its lighting counterpart. After all, Damien had a cheat code.

If anything, he had to thank the universe for the format in which it tested him. Starting from flames that could be found in nature and moving up to flames that were more elusive and powerful meant that his Void Flames were essentially provided a buffet!

Besides the flames needed to temper his body, Damien let the Void Flame eat everything. And looking at its progress, he was more than just satisfied.

Until this point, the Void Flames had been relatively useless in battle, only showing their worth against a large number of weaker enemies. With Damien's powerset, he didn't need another ability that did so.

However, the current Void Flames couldn't be compared with their pathetic past self. As they burned on Damien's body, even the Time Essence in the vicinity was burned away, giving Damien more leeway to establish his counterflow.

It was still unfortunate, though. While the Void Flames devoured a Nihilism Flame Source to gain the ability to grow stronger by eating other flames, Damien's lighting didn't have such an ability. The best he could do was store heavenly lightning as a one-time-use treasure for later.

And when the lighting and flame tribulations finally passed, Damien finally managed to completely establish his counterflow. The strength he gained through those trials wasn't wasted in the slightest.

Time was like an indomitable river. Reversing its flow was impossible, but if one had enough capital, accelerating or decelerating that flow could be done easily. As for halting the flow entirely, that was far more difficult, even though it was still possible.

Damien was fighting against time that seemed halted, but in reality, it was merely slowed to the extreme. The solution to this problem was simply to counteract the slowed flow with an accelerated flow, but this was far easier than it sounded.

After all, time was being slowed by the universe itself. This wasn't a level Damien was able to match simply because he understood the concept or knew what to do. Even when his comprehension was sufficient, he still needed to proficiently wield World Force in order to affect phenomena on a level intrinsic enough to compete.

Now, it had been a year. Damien stood silently as he waited for the next trial to begin.

Spending two years in this space absorbed in training and forgetting everything else had a severe impact on his mentality. He found that although he still had the ability to joke about his situation, it was harder for him to maintain the personality he upheld before.

He didn't think he could act so immature as to annoy every Demigod he met just for the sake of it anymore, acting far above his station out of a false sense of rebellion.

Was it a bad thing for him to change? He didn't think so. He didn't think that this change would turn him into a stoic brick who didn't interact with anyone. It was more accurate to say that he understood his capital. He understood how much arrogance he could possess without it becoming harmful.

And more than that, his mind was calmer. His ability to react situationally had improved drastically. Even if Damien were to suddenly lose all his power, he wouldn't panic as he did 2 years ago.

Thus, when the time flow around him began to stabilize and all light slowly faded from within the World Energy Barrier, he silently put his guard up and waited.

Whatever the next trial would be, he'd pass it with flying colors. And after that, he'd truly be reborn.

Chapter 568 Baptism [8]

As light faded from the World Energy Barrier, a myriad of changes took place, but they all had one main purpose.

Everything was being erased except Damien.

All essences, whether they be simpler elemental essences or more esoteric ones like space and time, vanished from the air. This was a phenomenon that was quite literally impossible to mimic using human hands.

In Damien's mind, even gods couldn't do such a thing.

It was one thing to establish a domain where other essences were suppressed, it was even possible to banish the ambient mana into separate planes to mimic this effect, but Damien could clearly feel that neither of these were the case at the moment.

These essences were quite literally vanishing, ignoring concepts like the law of conservation of energy.

At the same time, even the mana in Damien's body was being chained down. It was a similar feeling to the first trial when his spatial affinity was taken away, but now that he'd been thoroughly tempered by the past few years, he didn't panic about it.

He calmly waited, and as if to respond to his calmness, a new system message appeared.

[First Trial completed.]

[Beginning Second Trial.]

But that was it. It was only an indication that Damien had moved on to the next stage, without actually telling him how to pass through.

In this situation, what was he supposed to do? There was no cage trapping him, there wasn't even any essence in the surroundings for him to comprehend. It was just him, alone in the expansive darkness.

'So I just have to endure...' Damien thought to himself. From the beginning of his Baptism until now, the general theme seemed to be "enduring."

He had to endure the years that passed without contact with the outside world, endure the endless dimensional cages that he had to escape, endure the infinitesimally slowed time flow, endure the physical destruction of his body through lightning and flames, and now, he was put in a situation where he no longer had anything to do.

In a black space where time didn't flow, a place where one could easily go insane or lose their sense of self if their mental strength wasn't adequate, he would simply have to endure...

Until the trial finally ended.

Once he realized this, Damien directly sat down in a meditative posture. Walking around was pointless, and without any Time Essence around to indicate its flow, Damien couldn't even use this walking to satiate the boredom that would eventually overcome him.

Therefore, it was better for him to adapt as fast as he could. With his eyes closed, he simply sat like a stone Buddha, clearing his mind of any thoughts.

Like this, a day passed, then two, then multiple weeks. An entire month passed while Damien did nothing but sit silently.

It was only at this time that a change occurred. A subtle pressure began to fill the air, bearing down on his body. However, at its current level, Damien quite literally didn't feel it.

4 weeks...5 weeks...6 weeks...

When 2 months passed, the pressure finally began to tickle a bit, but Damien still ignored it. He was submerged in his spiritual world, attempting to glean some sort of benefit from his current situation.

'I can't wantonly use my mana. It's already hard enough to move it due to the restriction, but more than that, my supply at the moment is finite. Now that all ambient mana and essences have been removed from the surroundings, even Devour can't help me recover.'

For the first time in a very long time, Damien's stamina became similar to an average person's. It wouldn't be easy for him to cope with this, having gotten used to easily replenishing his mana whenever he needed to.

'But this is good too. Accommodating this situation will help me tune my fine control and mana utilization abilities. I can also tweak the Ananta Matrix to work more efficiently too. If I can connect Eve to the Ananta Matrix and have her program solely focus on algorithmically managing my mana, the whole system will be heightened to another level.'

There were some calculations that the human mind simply couldn't accomplish. Even after evolving and being tempered as one's league raised, the mind would still hold a limited capacity, especially for complicated processes like operating a mana system.

This was why Mana Utilization Systems were always semi-automatic. One only needed to command their mana to follow the system, rather than personally guide the mana. This not only increased one's efficiency, but also allowed one's mana output to grow and gave one far more leeway when it came to processing ability.

If Damien could connect the AI chip in his head to the Ananta Matrix and make it his own power, however, he would be a level above even this.

He would have another entity with limited intelligence and unbreakable loyalty managing his mana and helping him move it. Not only that, but Eve, being a miracle of technology and mana, could do so at a level the human mind couldn't compare with.

And the AI chip was still functioning based on Asgard's specifications. Once it was connected to the Ananta Matrix and evolved to fuse with it, its fundamental systems would also be heightened to another level, giving Damien even more benefits.

Until now, Damien hadn't found the time to take care of this. Because Eve was an external source that he was attempting to turn into a part of his body, the process would be far more involved than when he created Nodal Points or other constructs out of his own mana.

Now that he finally had the time, how could he miss this opportunity?

With that thought in mind, he immediately went to work. Without any indication of the flow of time, he completely lost himself.

Another 3 months passed, marking 5 months since the second trial began. The pressure in the air was becoming less and less faint by the day, but Damien still didn't feel it at all.

His body was just too powerful. It was mainly due to this powerful body that he could compete with early 4th-class beings so easily.

When he possessed a body that surpassed those that went through Baptism, how could such a small amount of pressure affect him? He was still calmly altering Eve and extending Mana Nerves into his brain to connect with her.

But since he was working with his brain, he did so with utmost focus. A single misstep could turn him into an idiot.

Even if Transcendent Regeneration healed his brain afterwards, he'd lose all the progress he made, and he might even fry the AI chip that was at the core of this procedure. He didn't have any room for mistakes.

It was just, the current environment didn't necessarily provide him with the total security he needed.

As if the universe felt challenged by his casual demeanor, the rate at which the surrounding pressure increased hastened exponentially.

Within a week, the pressure had doubled. By the time 6 months passed, Damien's skin was already turning red from enduring.

It wouldn't be much longer before his body started truly feeling the pain that came along with this. Even in his utterly focused state, he was doing his best to maintain his calm and continue the procedure.

He was in too deep to back out, but if he took even a few days too long to complete the process, the pressure would break his concentration and ruin it.

Suddenly, Damien found himself in the midst of an extremely high-stakes gamble.

Chapter 569 Baptism [9]

Bang!

With an explosive sound, the pressure within the World Energy Barrier once again increased exponentially!

Damien's flesh rapidly tore. Even after being tempered by the blood of countless beasts and even the Purple Primordial Undying Fruit, his mortal body wasn't able to bear the burden that was being placed on it.

More than anything, this went to show just how great said pressure was. If even Damien couldn't resist it, then that meant any common early 4th-class being would die instantly under its strength!

Damien gritted his teeth. In his current situation, he didn't even have the extra processing capability to analyze the situation. The only thing he could do was put his utmost into enduring and finishing the current task as fast as possible!

Damien's mind worked without pause. Luckily, the Ananta Matrix was highly self-sufficient, so while he still had to guide the process and enact most of the changes himself, he didn't have to do any of the complicated calculations that became necessary for such a substantial change.

After all, no matter how much his intelligence had increased from the past, he wasn't some super genius who could do everything.

His advantage lay in the fact that he was self-aware of his own lack of intelligence, or at least, he became self-aware of it not long after leaving the dungeon. As such, his every step was made with accommodating this weakness in mind.

The fact that the Ananta Matrix could actively assist him in the process of its evolution even without any semblance of spiritual intelligence was proof of this.

Nevertheless, the intensive process continued. The AI chip in his brain was slowly enveloped in a wrapping of Mana Threads that connected to the Ananta Matrix. Through this connection, the AI chip was being altered to fit the Mana Circuit while also building an unbreakable connection with it.

Essentially, the chip was becoming an ethereal existence that surpassed its original self. While it would lose most of its abilities in the process, it would become more specialized and would fit Damien's needs far better.

'Phew...' Damien sighed internally. Reaching this step meant that most of his work was done. He still needed to watch for any outliers in the process, but his main job now was to endure the pressure surrounding him and protect his body so that the process wouldn't be interrupted.

Damien's eyes flashed open. It almost felt like he didn't open them at all, though. For the past half a year, he'd been submerged in his consciousness and almost forgotten the state of the world outside.

'What do I do here?' He asked himself after acclimating to the environment. His body was still wracked with pain and the pressure wasn't decreasing in the slightest. Transcendent Regeneration was being pushed to its limits every second to keep him in one piece.

But this wasn't a viable solution to the problem. In the end, Transcendent Regeneration was also a skill. It would cease functioning when his mana was depleted.

In the current situation where there was no way to replenish mana, using this ability was hurting him more than it was helping him.

'I can use Demon Transformation to increase my defense and Heal to mimic the effects of Transcendent Regeneration, but even this won't hold up for long.'

These two abilities weren't skills, but traits. While they functioned similarly, the key difference between them was the fact that traits used stamina instead of mana.

Damien's stamina was no joke. Especially with Heal retaining the ability to replenish even his blood vitality, it was far more viable in the long term than Transcendent Regeneration at the moment.

Without hesitation, Damien enacted his plan. His body went through a massive change as he embodied his Demon Form, and a greenish-white light subtly emanated from his skin. Under these effects, the burden he felt lessened considerably.

'Haa, I finally have room to think. Luckily, I've reached the final steps in integrating the algorithmic system into my Ananta Matrix. That process shouldn't even take a few more hours to finish...but who knows how long a few hours will take in this strange space.'

Damien quite literally had nothing to do. Endure, endure, endure. This was the only thought in his mind.

It could be said that Damien's Baptism was already a unique case. From the Dimensional Cage to the Temporal Prison and finally this dark space, none of these trials would've impacted the average 4th class.

If the Universe Baptism was really such an intensive trial for everyone, there wouldn't be so many 4th class existences around. There was no way any normal influence could stomach the burden of raising them.

But in the end, the format was still the same. Elemental mastery and mental fortitude; these were the two elements being tested in the Universe Baptism. While Damien didn't know how the latter was usually tested, he was sure that the average elemental tribulations weren't as complicated as his.

After all, pseudo 4th class beings like the Xue Clan's 11th and 12th Elders only passed their Baptisms with outside help. Naturally, their Baptisms were also easier to stomach.

In Damien's opinion, there were two main reasons for this difference.

The first was the most obvious: the change that took place during his class selection.

It was clear that the Void Physique somehow altered his Baptism to suit its needs. Turning him into a Voidbringer against his will was enough proof of that. If the situation had to be compared to terms he was familiar with, Damien would classify Voidbringer as a "hidden class."

Hidden classes having more difficult trials was a commonplace trope among video games he played in the past, so it didn't surprise him that such a thing happened.

As for the second reason, it was far more practical. Compared to the average existence, Damien spent far more time consolidating his power before impacting the 4th class threshold.

Speaking realistically, Damien could've begun his Baptism at any time after his Partial Baptism had been completed. If he just played an active part in any single one of the purges that took place in the 6 month period before the Moon Squadron left for Niflheim, he could've easily accumulated the levels and achievements necessary.

But he didn't. Under Yun's influence, he suppressed his desire to rapidly increase his strength and familiarized himself with what he already had. In the process, he discovered a portion of Dimensional Magic's true power and even brought his Time comprehension to a level far higher than he expected it to grow in the time he had.

As for his flames and lighting, although they didn't receive any direct strengthening, they were consistently growing stronger along with him. Even Damien didn't quite understand why this was possible, but if he had to take a guess, it was the influence of the final set of question marks in his status window.

Regardless of which facet he looked at, he reached the peak or at least near the peak of what he could achieve as a mere 3rd class. With these kinds of achievements, how could he receive the same level of trial as someone like the Xue Clan 12th Elder?

If that were truly the case, he'd be an embarrassment to everyone and everything!

Damien's trial reflected his skill level, and more than that, his potential. When all the complicated matters were boiled down to such a point, the difficulty of his Baptism became easier to imagine.

Chapter 570 Baptism [10]

With Demon Transformation and Heal supporting him, even with the increasing pressure, Damien was able to easily hold out until the evolution of his Ananta Matrix was completed.

Voom!

Damien felt an explosion go off in his mind. Even in this space filled with unending blackness, his vision was dyed white.

Within his body, minute changes were taking place, but each one carried a profound intent. With the new algorithmic chip guiding the Ananta Matrix, not only was its function drastically improved, even its autonomy leapt to another level.

Now, Damien barely even needed to command his mana before it followed what he wanted to do. For the first time in his life, he felt like he and his mana were connected as a single being.

Every being under the system had access to mana. Regardless of talent, regardless of affinity, everyone was given the chance to utilize this mystical essence.

That was one of the universe's beauties. Even though talent was important, it was never the end all be all law of things. Any hardworking individual had the same ability to reach the heavens as a genius if they worked hard enough and continued to level up.

But in the end, mana was an external force. Even once it was internalized, one needed to change their body to accommodate it. Humans, at least, weren't naturally evolved to use mana in the most efficient

way they could. This was simply because they lacked the intrinsic connection with mana that many other races had.

Humanity was versatile and adaptable, and while this was their main advantage against other races, it was also their downfall. Humanity was quite literally a prime example of the saying: "jack of all trades, master of none."

And as a human himself, Damien wasn't able to escape from this quality. Regardless of how many times he evolved, his core would always remain human. That 50% of his bloodline would never be wiped no matter how much the Void Physique changed him.

But in that moment when the Ananta Matrix finally evolved, Damien felt an orgasmic bliss spread through his mana. With every exhale, mana was pushed into the atmosphere, and with every inhale, it entered his body and infused itself into his systems.

His pores opened wide like hungry mouths, mimicking the breathing done through his mouth. If it wasn't for the lack of mana in the surroundings, Damien would've sucked this space dry.

'Is this how elves feel when they breathe? No wonder their physical appearances are heightened. This kind of connection with mana isn't comparable to ordinary mana use. Just being in such close contact with the energy would do wonders, giving a mortal the ability to easily live for hundreds of years.'

It wasn't just a feeling. The barrier between thoughts and reality was so thin it was negligible. A subconscious desire was enough to mobilize Damien's mana to do his bidding.

At the moment, his level of mana affinity was actually more harmful than beneficial. Because Damien wasn't used to such fine control, it was easy for him to idly waste mana. This was when the Ananta Matrix came in.

Its autonomy was imperative. It could regulate his mana for him and decide when to initiate its movement and when to ignore his subconscious thought. The best part was, the Ananta Matrix would never be wrong in its judgement of his desire.

This was the intrinsic connection between circuit and man, between creator and creation.

But even with this new level of efficiency, Damien wasn't out of danger. Once again, the pressure around him exponentially increased. The universe clearly didn't like that he was enduring so easily. Otherwise, how could the current circumstance even be called a trial?

Crack!

The sound of Damien's skin cracking was as loud as a gunshot. As his blood began to leak, he rapidly suppressed Transcendent Regeneration and endured with his body alone.

Crack! Crack!

The cracks on his body didn't stop spreading. Within minutes, his skin was segregated like puzzle pieces, thin lines running all across his body. In this state, it looked like a single breath could shatter him to pieces.

And it really could...at least, the outside layer of his body.

"Khh...!" Damien suppressed a groan of pain. Before things could get worse, he already acted to save himself.

'Dragon Transformation!'

Biting his tongue to help him remain rational, Damien activated his second transformation ability. When the two were stacked, they were an unstoppable force. The only reason Damien avoided this ability beforehand was because it consumed his stamina extremely rapidly.

When he first gained the ability, he could spend at most 30 seconds in this form. But he wasn't the same person anymore. Even lasting 5 minutes wasn't a problem for the current Damien.

And when time became inconsequential, when its essence no longer existed to cement its flow, the concept itself returned to a representation of perception of change.

In this environment where there was almost no change at all, couldn't 5 minutes become 5 years without worry?

This was what Damien kept telling himself as he resisted the pressure. Because his mana and stamina were being depleted at an insane rate, he couldn't even resume practicing like he usually would've done.

At one point, he was even of the mind to train the Space-Time River. No matter how hard he tried to comprehend it, he couldn't even take a single step past its most basic form, a form that wasn't worth anything to the current Damien.

Space and Time altered by the universe itself seemed like the perfect source from which he could draw inspiration. Unfortunately, the universe wasn't that charitable. At the end of the day, Damien was being tested, not trained.

And this was truly a test of mental and physical fortitude.

Even disregarding the physical test, Damien almost didn't realize how daunting the mental test would be for most people. Humans feared the unknown more than anything else. And after that was loneliness.

In a dark and lonely place where nothing was certain, going insane wasn't shameful at all.

The only reason Damien could survive so easily was because he'd already adapted to similar environments many times before.

Even disregarding the First Dungeon, his first experience with intense loneliness and darkness, and Alaric's memories, his most memorable experience with the concepts, just the half a year he spent comatose and piecing together his spiritual continent in the Trial World was worse than this trial.

Without realizing it, Damien had built up more experience than he could've ever imagined. He was even at the point where he looked down on a Universe Baptism.

But he was painfully aware of one fact.

His Baptism wouldn't end with this trial.

The strange Baptism he underwent started with the Void Physique, so it would end the same way. In Damien's opinion, the physique had been far too quiet considering the circumstances.

Now that he'd passed the elemental trials, he'd passed the mental trials, and he was infinitely close to passing the physical trials, it was finally approaching time for it to make a move.

This made Damien insatiably curious.

What kind of surprise would the Void Physique show him this time?