

Void 691

Chapter 691 Return [1]

Contrary to the effect Damien's disappearance had on the Human Domain's fate, the actual reaction to the event was quite muted.

It was a strange thing, a situation like the boy who cried wolf. Those close to Damien had witnessed him achieve too many miraculous feats to believe anything could kill him before he decided to die.

This didn't just go for his wives, whose faith in him had reached unholy levels. It also went for those like Tian Yang, Long Chen, Alea, and even the Xue siblings.

With Damien's presence having left such a profound impact on their hearts, they didn't have any worries at all.

The ones who felt the most emotion were naturally Rose and Ruyue. Damien's disappearance irked them, but more than anything it made them hateful of their own weakness.

In a situation where he was taken away by a mysterious force, they weren't even nearby. They were being evacuated away with everyone else while Damien joined a group of Demigods in a battle that even left a portion of them dead!

And even after the battle, Damien had been sucked into an Abyssal Corridor that could kill even the strongest Demigods. They knew Damien would survive, but they hated that they had no chance to do the same.

No matter how much they worked, they never seemed to be able to support him when it was necessary. It was this realization that led them to train in the most deathly conditions to achieve the best results possible.

Their training, Long Chen's training, Alea's training, even Tian Yang's training, was all motivated partially by him. His deeds that they couldn't replicate...next time they met, whether as friends, lovers, master and disciple, or even strangers, they'd be there to stand by his side and show him their worth.

They'd make it clear that none of them were side characters in his story.

2 years later when it was time for the Grand Assembly to take place, they'd see him again. And at that time...they would prove their determination while seeing just what unimaginable level he'd reached in the time he was gone.

The atmosphere of Aquazyl was wrapped in silence. With the events at the Tephit Clan having come to a complete conclusion, there wasn't much else that could bring upheaval to the realm.

In the end, Ria decided to join her clan in the Sanctuary, following her deep conversation and...following night with Maximus.

As for Maximus, he was staying in Aquazyl.

Just as Damien realized before, all people had their own goals and paths. All people had aspirations they worked excruciatingly to achieve.

For Maximus, this was both the safety of his clan and its prosperity. These driving factors and his dedication were the reason the Ruvia Clan could stand tall to this day. He had no doubt that if he entered the Sanctuary like Ria and the Oga Clan, he'd give his clan both of these things. However, he couldn't bring himself to do it.

Maximus had realized something during these past few weeks of interacting with Damien. He realized that even if Damien himself wasn't the successor of Aquazyl, he wasn't either. None of the Sea God Clans were for that matter.

Then, what was the point of the Prominence War?

Was it just a stopgap to keep the realm functioning until the true successor came along?

Regardless of the Prominence War's true purpose, it was true that Maximus gained nothing from remaining in Aquazyl. The reason he decided to stay...

Was far more selfless.

Maximus looked up at the dark sky. Aquazyl's sun had set, allowing him time to peacefully think over the past events.

'Aquazyl will not be peaceful while you're gone...' he thought to himself.

'I don't know when you'll return or if you even will. But if you do, then it means you're truly the one we've been waiting for.'

His arm reached out as if wanting to grasp at the invisible strings of fate. He wondered whether or not his life had any proper meaning.

But even if it didn't, all he had to do was give his life meaning with his own actions. Why would he wait for some unknown force to do it for him?

'I will take control of Aquazyl and await your return. If that day comes, I will serve you loyally and hand over the throne. If it doesn't, I will rule Aquazyl for eternity and make sure the Prominence War isn't allowed to continue destroying our societies.'

Maximus closed his eyes. The face of a woman appeared there. She had beautiful dark skin, beautiful eyes that he could never stop looking away from, a toned and muscular body that showcased the years she spent in battle...

Her rugged exterior and demeanor made anyone believe she was more of a man than a woman. Viewing her as a romantic partner or even as an attractive woman was impossible for most despite her stunning beauty.

But Maximus knew that deep down, she was still a girl who yearned for love and romance. She was someone who was both hard and soft but never had the opportunity to show off her soft side.

If they truly returned one day...

'I'll make sure you'll never have to hide that side of you ever again. From that day until eternity, I will protect you with everything I have.'

His thoughts came to a halt slowly after that sentence. There was so much he needed to do, so many plans he had to execute in order for the future to go perfectly as he wished it.

Therefore, thinking about these idle things wouldn't do him any good.

Maximus opened his eyes. Something in his mind clicked.

Sirens were beings of hypnosis and charm. Their main attack method used sound as a medium, but their general aptitude in mana usage translated in many more ways than just this.

For instance, mental magic. Sirens were incredibly capable when it came to manipulating thoughts and emotions. This was the method they used to feed and kill when they were young and weak. They'd lure weaker beings with their songs, manipulating their minds so they willingly handed themselves over.

This mental magic was most often used on other targets, but that didn't mean it was limited to this much.

A Siren's mental magic could just as easily be used on themselves.

Maximus' eyes dulled, becoming lifeless. His heart numbed to feel nothing and his mind cleared of unnecessary thought. The only thing he kept was his goal and the methods he would use to reach it.

This version of Maximus was like a robot, a puppet. But it was this version of Maximus that could get work done with utmost efficiency, it was this version of him that could dictatorially rule Aquazyl for as long as he needed to before his task finally came to an end.

Until he was exposed to the trigger that would undo this mental magic, he'd remain in this state.

As for what that trigger was...?

She was currently in the Sanctuary, exploring Theavel's seas and looking for a place where she and her clan could have a fresh start.

Chapter 692 Return [2]

"Ah, I guess we're finally out." Damien's voice echoed silently through the surroundings. Only Zara was present to hear him.

"Mm, this scenery almost makes me miss the First Dungeon." She replied.

The two had left Aquazyl already, finding themselves back within the Emperor Bone Sea.

The method of exit was actually incredibly easy unlike that of entrance, but this wasn't due to Aquazyl's laws at all. Instead, it was something that could best be attributed to Tephit.

The transportation device he made was actually extremely intricate and functional. If Tephit wanted to use it to transport himself around Aquazyl, he could've gone any distance, reaching the ends of the realm in a single leap if he so desired.

However, he was too focused on escape to even realize the greatness of his achievements. He rooted the teleportation device to Aquazyl's foundation and forced its function to change, becoming something impossible for him or his technology to truly achieve.

In the end, with Zara's help, Damien stole every bit of this technology that existed. Tephit wouldn't need it, and nobody else knew about it.

When the finale of the small war took place and Aquazyl's foundation began to crack, Zara completely cut off the transportation device and its entire system from the rest of the Blood Sacrament God Array. What she gained was not only the device, but also the mysterious tube of liquid that stood above it.

That liquid...was the coagulated essence Tephit collected over hundreds of thousands or even millions of years.

Through a system that neither Damien nor Zara had discovered during their time in the Tephit Clan, Tephit managed to condense the essence he devoured through the formation into liquid form and house it in that mysterious glass container without it collapsing due to the sheer weight and aura of the liquid.

Damien still didn't know what the glass was made out of, but it was even more miraculous than the essence itself, despite the ridiculousness of that statement.

Nevertheless, Damien only needed to use Void Mana and Dimensional Magic to tweak the base functions of the transmission device and then power it with the coagulated essence to escape the realm.

Because he could do many things Tephit couldn't.

Ignoring Damien's spatial powers and his new ability to utilize the "Something Within Nothing" concept, Damien still had the primary advantage of originally being from the outside world.

This made it possible for Damien to set physical coordinates into the device that Tephit would've had no way of ever finding out.

And perhaps Aquazyl helped a bit too. After all, there was never a method in place to prevent outsiders from leaving. Only the Sea God Clans were bound by Aquazyl's rules.

Now that Damien and Zara were out of that realm, they finally got a moment to breathe. The previous events had flown extremely smoothly, but that didn't mean they didn't have any stress.

Damien did much more thinking than ever before. His intelligence stat which grew with the rest of his stats as he devoured more foes was finally put to good use. Damien's brain partied so hard after finally being used properly that it had now crashed.

He was ready to go to bed and sleep off his exhaustion, something he hadn't done in many years.

However, there was still one more task he had to complete before he could do so.

Damien and Zara swam at a leisurely pace. They were still at least 5,000 kilometers away from the shore distance-wise. If depth was taken into account as well, it was far beyond that.

With so much space to cover, they'd usually be moving fast. But this time, they decided not to. Whether it was to enjoy the scenery at the depths of the Emperor Bone Sea or just to enjoy the moment, the fact didn't change that they were moving slowly.

And their direction...wasn't quite linear. It was almost as if they were looking for something.

"Isn't that right, boss? I don't think this is a normal movement pattern."

A voice rang out through sound transmission. It belonged to a single shadow among a group of twenty that quietly pursued Damien and Zara from the shadows.

"It's true. They disappeared for an entire month and now they come back so driven? Something is fishy here." Another man said.

The leader gazed at the two with a glint in his eye. This kind of behavior...didn't it mean that their wait wasn't in vain?

If these two were being so proactive, they must've found a grand treasure!

"Come, let's follow them silently. If they've found a treasure, we'll attack after they've claimed it!"

The leader moved first, followed by the others. They were like darkness incarnate, without sound or presence as they swam through the seas.

As they trailed the duo, Damien and Zara made their way closer and closer to the shore, the entire time zig-zagging their path in search of hidden treasure.

When they finally arrived near the 2,000-kilometer mark, they halted.

"Is it over here? I could've sworn they said it was over here." Damien muttered to himself.

"It is! We saw it on the way in, but we couldn't do anything because we didn't know the secret array formation. Now that we've gotten our hands on it, all we need to do is find that weird tree!" Zara replied excitedly.

'Tree?' The group leader wondered to himself. As he thought back, he did indeed remember passing by a strange tree as he trailed the two. However, it didn't look remarkable at all.

Still, that didn't change the fact that he remembered its position.

"Fox, go to these coordinates and make a scene. Don't reveal yourself, but make sure the two of them sense the disturbance and head over there." The leader said.

The one called Fox immediately did as he was told. After reaching the coordinates, he cut a small gash in his pinky and allowed his blood to flow into the water.

As his body disappeared from existence, a dozen or so sea creatures appeared. Smelling the blood scent, they frenzied and began ferociously battling each other.

For some reason, the small amount of blood stench caused such an intense melee. And even as a few seconds passed by, the battle only became fiercer.

Naturally, Damien and Zara sensed this disturbance. They rapidly changed directions and swam towards it.

"Ah, there it is!" Zara exclaimed. A few hundred kilometers away from the ongoing melee was a large tree with roots that seemed to latch onto the water itself.

When Damien saw it, his eyes lit up with greed. "With this, we can finally...come on, let's go activate the secret mechanism. Remember to stay within 5 meters of the trunk or else you won't be transported into the secret realm properly."

The duo immediately entered the air pocket created by the tree. Their bodies moved closer and closer to the trunk as their hands continuously formed a myriad of strange symbols radiating an ancient aura.

The assassin leader and his group watched patiently. They edged closer as the two moved. They'd heard Damien's words. To gain the treasure they sought, they needed to stay within 5 meters of the tree.

So when they reached the 5-meter mark, they halted and waited for the duo to finish the activation ritual.

At that time, the leader suddenly frowned. 'Why the hell are the two of them voicing all their thoughts...shouldn't they be using sound transmissions?'

His eyes widened. His body rapidly moved, trying to retreat, but it was too late!

Damien's face lit up with a savage grin.

"Lock."

VOOM!

The water in a 10-meter radius of the group solidified into terrifying walls. A Dimensional Cage formed around these water walls to further fortify the defenses.

"Yo! My dear pursuers, I know we haven't had a chance to properly meet yet, but I'm afraid this will be the last time we see each other. I've arranged a nice date for you with this here Unrestrained Death Tree, so just relax and get to know her, yeah? Anyway, enjoy!"

Damien and Zara flashed two dazzling smiles directly at the hidden group of 20. In the next instant, their bodies vanished.

Remaining in their place was a large pool of blood.

The Unrestrained Death Tree woke up to this scent.

But above that, it sensed something else.

Wasn't that...the scent of those beings that stole its prey a while back?

And by the looks of it...they were trapped in a mysterious space with it, unable to escape.

The tree's branches swayed in pleasure.

It seemed that tonight it would receive dinner and revenge all at once.

How sweet!

Chapter 693 Return [3]

The Unrestrained Death Tree had limited intelligence, but it could at least emote and carry memory similar to an adult human.

When it first sensed Damien's presence, the main reason it remained unmoving was because it remembered him. He and Zara were like those creatures who shared symbiotic relationships with it, creating chaos for it to feed while using its domain for protection.

The second reason was the fact that they still carried the scent of Aquazyl on their bodies. The Sea God's Realm was a place all creatures in the Emperor Bone Sea desired to go, even if it was at an instinctual level.

Now that Damien had brought the tree a gift so big, it was delighted, to say the least. It remembered his favor deeply in its proverbial heart.

The assassin group, however...

The memories the tree had of them were completely opposite of those it had of Damien.

Now that they were trapped together, it acted without mercy.

The Unrestrained Death Tree didn't have much attack capability, but if its prey was in an enclosed space and unable to escape, there was nothing for it to fear.

Its branches shot out and intertwined into massive arms that had reach covering the entirety of the enclosed space. Hundreds of these arms twisted through space and forcefully grabbed the assassins before they could react.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Dozens of explosions rang out as the assassins destroyed the branches. The Unrestrained Death Tree didn't have much defense when put against these powerhouses, but that didn't matter at all.

It had already marked them.

From the areas the assassins were grabbed, small red flowers began to bloom. They burrowed into the assassins' skin and fed on their blood, intrinsically intertwining with their body composition.

The rest was history. Without even needing to work, the tree could suck the assassins dry of every bit of blood and essence in their bodies.

Even with its low defense, it didn't worry about being attacked while this process was ongoing. After all...

The Unrestrained Death Tree had a symbiotic relationship with many a beast.

Grrrr!

The growls of dozens of beasts congregated and created a cacophony of sound within the Dimensional Cage.

The assassins shivered. The assassin leader in particular was pale-faced.

He'd been blinded. Not just by greed and pride, but also by rationality.

From the beginning, he never expected Damien to sense him. Why would he? He was a level 356 existence, an individual who could barely be considered a high-level 4th class, though he was more often classified as a mid-level being.

Even his subordinates were in similar strength ranges to him. Whether it was the forces from the Bloodlock Clan or the Wellspring Family, none of them were amateurs.

If so, then how could Damien sense them?

A beginner who only recently entered 4th class had no chance to do so. Hell, even Reavus Bloodlock, the Bloodlock Prince who ordered this assassination, couldn't sense their presence if they decided to hide.

'Ah...young master, you've made a mistake...'

The assassin leader smiled wryly. He hasn't even seen a hint of Damien's power. The entire time they were trailing him, Damien had been running from various beasts, never fighting back.

Why was that?

Why would any prideful genius decide to lay low if they knew they could achieve better results if they fought?

The assassin leader's realization wasn't small. The fact that Damien wasn't just stronger than the Bloodlock Heir, but instead incredibly stronger was major news. If the prince decided to pursue his enmity with this new rising star, he was assured to die.

But...it was too late for him to transmit this information to anyone.

He fought desperately with his men, killing beast after beast, but it was all in vain. Their strength was being rapidly drained and in the first place, almost every beast that could freely traverse the Emperor Bone Sea was a 4th class. The ones who couldn't silently reach this level could only become prey to the rest.

The entire ordeal only took a few minutes, not even half an hour to finish. In the end, all twenty assassins became dried husks without life or mana remaining in them.

And finally, even those husks were eaten by beasts.

The Dimensional Cage and water wall came down as soon as the life signatures of those assassins disappeared. There was no warning nor any sort of clue as to why it was so accurate.

After all, Damien and Zara were already far far away, approaching the 1,000-kilometer mark in the Emperor Bone Sea.

"Well, that was quite a show," Damien said, pleased by what he'd just witnessed.

His new Void abilities were interesting to say the least. Not only could he affect reality at a material level, but he could also project his consciousness into anything he manipulated.

In essence, his mana no longer needed to be directly connected to his body to function.

Mana was esoteric and all-present, but the way sentient beings could utilize it was restricted. No matter what level one reached, controlling mana outside of one's body would always be subject to the same restrictions.

Mana acted like a puppet on a string. One needed to consciously control it if one wanted to maintain its shape. Otherwise, it would continue through the set action and then disperse into the atmosphere naturally.

An example of this would be Damien's lightning abilities. He could call down lightning from the heavens if he so desired, but he couldn't start a lightning storm and leave it active while he left to complete other tasks. If he wanted to do this, he needed to stay within a certain range of the mana so the "string" wouldn't disconnect, and he'd have to separate a portion of his mental strength to control that mana and keep his hold on it.

Even when Damien created Dimensional Cages, the same property applied. The only difference was that Dimensional Cage's activation range far exceeded most other abilities.

The Dimensional Cage beads Damien gave to his forces during the Tephit Clan raid functioned on a similar concept. Using the user's mana as the "string" and the array etched in the bead as the "base," the bead could activate the Dimensional Cage ability and sustain it.

This was one of the base concepts of Formation Arts. To house one's own abilities in a formation was the most basic art that a beginner needed to learn before they could grasp the creation of more powerful and esoteric formations.

What Damien's new ability did was partially remove that restriction. At least on Void abilities, Damien faced no such restriction of mana. Any mana he outputted with the Void's properties instilled in it would be controlled by him regardless of distance, without the need for his conscious control or any sort of string.

In essence, it was like everyone else was still using cords and Damien alone had access to Bluetooth.

He clenched his fists in glee as he realized this. The Void still restricted him greatly. It would take far more for his comprehension to reach a level where he could use these insanity-inducing abilities freely.

However, he was finally on his path to conquering the Void.

Chapter 694 Return [4]

Leaving the Emperor Bone Sea was a far easier task than entering it. Whether it was due to their apparent familiarity with the environment or the Sea God's lingering aura on their bodies, they didn't run into any trouble at all in their exit.

Within a few hours, Damien and Zara were at the precipice of a cliff, overlooking the scenery they spent the last month exploring.

"It's finally time to return..." Zara said, a bit of melancholy in her voice.

"Mm, at least for now, we should leave the Emperor Bone Sea alone. When the time comes, we're sure to return." Damien commented.

"Are you sad we have to leave?" He asked.

"Hmm, a little?" Zara said, feeling a little unsure. "I had a lot of fun on this trip. It's just sad that it has to end."

Damien smiled lightly. "Ah, if it's just that then it's fine. After all, won't we have many more trips following this one? This is only our first mission, and the first bit of Death Emperor Star that we've seen. In time, we'll explore every single piece of it that exists."

"Mm!" Zara nodded happily.

Her hesitation to leave came mainly from the fact that during this trip, the relationship she had with Damien improved drastically. Well, rather than improved, it was better to say it returned to normalcy.

The closeness of their interactions was far different from the distance they had when traveling to Death Emperor Star, and even if Damien was only treating her as a companion, that was perfectly fine to her.

Even discounting their relationship, this bit of practical experience was also something she enjoyed incredibly. During her time with Tang Lingzi, while she was constantly traversing Forbidden Zones, she was doing so alone.

The atmosphere of brutal training that surrounded those explorations made them difficult to enjoy, and the loneliness made it easy to get bored or go insane.

Now, traveling with someone else and experiencing life and death together, Zara felt a new thrill unlike what she'd felt back then.

She thoroughly loved the feeling of gaining strength and adventuring. A budding adventurer's spirit bloomed in her heart, making her anticipate the adventures that would come.

While they spoke, Damien and Zara made their way back to the little cabin on the cliff. They smiled at the old lady's surprised face as they asked her to transport them back to the academy.

And with one final push, they arrived back in Hidden Death Valley.

"You've mapped 5,000 kilometers in both depth and distance. The reward of 1,000 contribution points will be deposited in your accounts. How would you like to split it?"

"Half and half."

"Alright, I'll send 500 points to Mister Damien Void and 500 points to Miss Zara. In addition to these points, the discovery of an aquatic civilization with intelligent life and detailed information about said society has granted you an additional 1,000 points. I will split this reward the same way. Is that okay?"

"Perfect."

Damien smiled at the receptionist in the Mystic Tower who verified his quest completion. Now that both he and Zara had 1,000 contribution points, they had more than enough to fuel their training for the next few months.

In order to cope with the fact that they never reached the 10,000-kilometer mark, Damien was forced to instead use information about Aquazyl to make up those points.

Still, he was careful about what he chose to share.

Any information about the Prominence War or the Sea God was completely hidden. The only information he gave was a general overview of the 5 clans and their structures, as well as their appearances. He did include information about an ongoing war, but claimed that he knew nothing of it.

As for the location of the realm, how would he know? He was furiously escaping a Sea Dragon when he was suddenly pulled into a mystical vortex that appeared out of thin air. Even if he wanted to go back to Aquazyl, he didn't have the means or understanding to locate it.

At least, that's what Hidden Death Valley's report said.

Even if Damien needed contribution points, there was no reason for him to share a cake that was exclusively prepared for him. He wasn't that generous.

Nevertheless, the required processes concerning the Emperor Bone Sea mission were all completed swiftly. While his adventure in Aquazyl wasn't over yet, Damien had the patience to wait until the time was right before returning.

Until then, there was only one thing on his mind:

Train, train, train.

It was time for his ranking in Heaven's List to skyrocket.

Bang!

A vase shattered on the floor in a castle deep within Hidden Death Valley. It wasn't the first of its kind nor would it be the last.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Countless treasures made of invaluable materials were thrown about like waste, all due to the tantrum of a single man.

"How, how, how?! How did he survive?!" Reavus Bloodlock snarled with bloodshot eyes. He couldn't believe that even with all the manpower he wasted taking care of Damien, he still failed.

His enmity with Damien was only a byproduct of his enmity with Atticus Flamesworth, but somehow, it had become a far more prominent issue.

Damien was just a dog...a mere dog of the Fallen Star Holy Land dared to make him lose face like this?!

"What a cowardly move! Using the Emperor Bone Sea's environment to kill instead of fighting with his own power, how weak!" Reavus scoffed.

He'd seen the mission report. Damien reported his encounter with the assassins, and he also reported the method he used to deal with them.

Aside from that, Reavus still remembered the scenes he saw on the assassins' memory beads after their deaths.

Every assassin connected to the Bloodlock Clan had a memory bead in their body to transmit images of what occurred during their death. In this way, the Bloodlock Clan could assess their enemies' strength and plan accordingly.

What Reavus saw was incredibly confusing. It was a tree with branches like human arms, surrounded by a dark red stream of blood.

After cross-referencing Damien's report, Reavus learned of the Unrestrained Death Tree's existence. He also learned about how the assassins he sent foolishly revealed themselves at the prospect of treasure.

Though nobody other than he knew of his involvement with the assassins, Reavus still felt like his reputation was tainted! Both by the low quality of his men and Damien's craftiness, he was embarrassed!

"Kill them all!" He roared. "Any family members of the assassins, kill them all! If you find any good women, bring them to me! Hmph, how dare they die so insolently?!"

His hands gleamed with the same red light as his irises.

He never lost to anyone other than those with higher status than him. For those people, he could quietly accept defeat and train until he could surpass them.

But for a mere commoner scum who was brought in as the Fallen Star Holy Land's slave boy...?

Reavus clenched his teeth until they cracked. This insult...he sure as hell wouldn't take it lying down.

Chapter 695 Training And Thoughts [1]

Arcadia was, funnily enough, not named as such due to some profound reason. Instead, it was a spin on the simple word "arcade."

This was how Hidden Death Valley's geniuses viewed the northern sector of the land. It was an arcade filled with various training games they could use to grow stronger, and of course, they needed to use points to do so.

But Arcadia wasn't just a place to train, it was also a place where one could test the results of their training. Aside from the various facilities that the area presented, the most popular attraction it held was the battle arena.

The battle arena was separated into four brackets: Pawn, Knight, King, and Emperor. Each of these brackets had its own Overlord that held the longest winning streak, a winning streak that was undefeated regardless of which Overlord one was paying attention to.

The brackets were usually separated by Heaven's List ranking, and if one didn't have a Heaven's List ranking that accurately mirrored their strength, they'd have to start from the bottom and win 10 consecutive wins to then challenge the bracket's Overlord.

After defeating an Overlord, one could either take that Overlord's place or advance to the next bracket. Of course, if one's strength was too drastically above those in the same bracket, the former option wasn't available to them.

At that time, a new Overlord would be born after their ascent, holding the spot thereafter.

The battle arena served multiple purposes. Aside from testing one's strength and gaining battle experience, one could also advance their Heaven's List ranking rapidly through the ranked dueling system.

If one wanted a good fight, this was the best place to go for it.

But training always came first.

When Damien and Zara returned from the Emperor Bone Sea, their first and only goal was training. Arcadia became their new home.

Gravity Chambers were best for training endurance and physical defense. Tempering one's body with the sheer force of the atmosphere brought a comprehensive strengthening that many other forms of body strengthening lacked, as they tended to focus on a specific facet of the body instead of overall improvement.

Dungeon Simulators allowed one to gain battle experience against rapid beasts, a completely different type of battle than one against an intelligent lifeform. This trained one's instinct and perception, making them more attuned to their raw strengths which then improved their overall battle capacity.

There were plenty of other general training arenas like these, including areas like the Blackness Cage and Illusive Forest that comprehensively increased mental strength. Aside from the general training areas were also countless affinity-specific training areas that people could use to enhance their law comprehension to another level.

With Damien and Zara being different people with different paths, they naturally didn't have much contact during this training period. Still, neither of them minded much. The improvements they made with their time were far more beneficial, and would help them spend more time leisurely in the long run.

"Lock."

"Collapse."

"Bind."

"Seal."

"Break."

"Collapse."

"Collapse."

"Collapse."

Damien stood stationary in the middle of a vast empty space. His arms hung relaxedly to his sides, but his fists clenched and unclenched constantly as he forcefully used his mana in the harshest way possible.

Small pockets of space around him broke down, twisted, locked, and sealed themselves endlessly before collapsing in on themselves and creating spatial tears that Damien then used his mana to repair before starting his routine again.

His actions created chaos in his surroundings, but the environment itself remained still. It was built to withstand this level of intense training.

"Dimension Shift."

"Material Shift."

"Phase Shift."

The dimension split in half horizontally, the physical presences within the two halves swapped places, and finally, their molecular structures shifted until they were completely different than their original forms, almost like alchemy.

"Revert."

KRRRRR!

A sound like gears ruggedly grinding against each other rang out piercingly, causing Damien's ears to bleed. Rather than taking it slow and reverting each process one by one, Damien used the "Something Within Nothing" concept to withstand the impact of doing all three actions at once.

However, this was already at the level of manipulating reality. At Damien's level of Void Comprehension, this wasn't yet possible.

"Kh hh...!" Damien gritted his teeth and let out a rough exhale. He could feel rampant mana wracking his body with untold pain. Blood leaked from his eyes and lips as he tried to control this chaotic flow.

"Re...vert!"

Haaa!

A battle cry left his mouth along with a spray of blood. The dimension returned to normal, all things returning to their rightful places.

In consequence, Damien's body took on the damage they sustained.

Spurt!

Fountains of blood gushed out of various points in his body like a broken fire hydrant. The amount of damage he'd dealt wasn't light, so naturally, the consequences were equally harsh.

[Heal]

The greenish-white light brought by the trait covered his body and halted the limitless bleeding. His pale face regained a tinge of color.

'It's not enough.'

Despite the insanity of his actions, Damien wasn't satisfied at all.

What had he accomplished?

He could only use these abilities in their base forms. He couldn't manipulate their properties and conceptually alter them to fit his needs like he could with simpler abilities like Spatial Collapse.

'The trigger...isn't spatial anymore.'

He realized it quickly. In fact, his spatial abilities had never been a problem. In terms of comprehending this law, even saying he was heaven-defying didn't do him justice.

It had to be known, something like Dimension Shift was a feat even Tian Yang couldn't achieve. Despite his natural power and stature as a Demigod, Tian Yang's spatial path was far more straightforward than Damien's and didn't reach such an intrinsically conceptual level.

Was this a matter of effort or power? Not at all. It was a matter of sheer talent alone.

Not all beings were created equal. This rule applied especially to Damien.

'Status'

[Status]

[Damien Void]

Human/Dragon/???

Male - Age 27

Level 215 - [Voidbringer] - [Celestial]

Experience value: 18,790/325,000

Title(s): [••••••, Bearer of the Void Physique, Evolver]

Affinities: Spacetime, ???

Physique: Void Physique

Magic Power: 100000

STR: 2550

AGI: 2250

DEF: 2500

INT: 2000

DEX: 2325

Skills: [Dimensional Magic Level 6], [Transcendent Regeneration Level 2], [Void Art Level 6], [Devour Level 7], [Dragon Transformation], [Demon Transformation], [Awareness], [Celestial Authority], [Reality Shift Level 1], [Sea God's Descendent], [Void]

Trait(s): [All-Seeing Eyes Level 7], [Dragon's Breath], [Ananta Matrix], [Storm], [Void Essence], [Void Flames], [Heal]

Even after his Baptism, Damien's status hadn't changed much. Though, at this point, Damien no longer trusted his status to accurately pinpoint his strength.

It had never been truly accurate after all.

He had a speculation as to why this was. Naturally, it was due to the Void Physique. Just like any other abnormality in his body, the root cause could always be narrowed down to this particular facet.

Because the Void wasn't something the system could understand. The power Damien gained through it couldn't be accurately reflected.

Whenever Damien devoured a beast, he took its essence without the system's aid. This was something only he could do and something that naturally happened outside the system's bounds. The best it could do was attempt to put his strength into numbers.

But those attempts never truly worked out. After all, with the Void Physique not being completely anchored to Damien's body, how could the system perceive it properly? It could only understand a portion of the strength the physique provided Damien.

Nevertheless, Damien didn't look at his status for his abilities or even his physical stats. His attention remained focused on the top of the holographic window.

He sighed a weary sigh.

'Damn...when did I get so old?'

Chapter 696 Training And Thoughts [2]

Time truly was a strange thing. Because Damien spent the majority of the years he'd gained since he last checked his status in his Baptism Space, his mentality didn't register those years at all. He didn't feel like it'd been almost 3 years since he exited the Primordial Undying Realm.

He was truly growing old.

On a universal scale, 30 years was nothing. Even geniuses like Atticus were well in their 40s despite looking no older than 20. Because high-intensity training usually caused one to lose track of the flow of time and the lifespan of an individual became increasingly longer with every rank up, 20 and 40 were essentially the same age.

Hell, even Damien's lifespan was, at the very least, well into the tens of thousands of years already.

Still, Damien was an earthling at heart. Turning 30...wasn't this the perfect age for a midlife crisis?!

Honestly speaking, he was doing well for himself as someone in their late twenties. He was never a teenager who viewed 30 as old. He'd seen the way 30-year-olds acted and the way people in their mid-twenties thought. While they were much more emotionally mature and experienced than any teenager, they still kept a spark of youth within them.

"Old" was a term that only applied to people who succumbed to their mortality. Even an 80-year-old could be described as young if their heart was young.

Nevertheless, Damien didn't like the age reflected in his status.

It had been a decade.

His fall into the first dungeon happened when he was 17.

And now...

27.

In that time, what did he accomplish?

Sure, he grew to an unparalleled level in 10 years, but did he live up to what his talent could achieve?

No.

Damien wasn't some country bumpkin from a beginner world who didn't know how the universe worked anymore. He was an accomplished rising star that many Holy Lands at the peak of the universe were paying attention to.

He'd seen the level of talent that came with this kind of position.

And frankly, he was disappointed.

Self-awareness was something Damien lacked for a long time. He could never see the ends of his talent and therefore used the talent of others to measure himself. This method only made him lower his expectations of what he could achieve.

And regardless of how one utilized mana, mentality remained the core of its use.

Regardless of how childish it sounded, imagination was incredibly important to a practitioner. To delve into the concepts and embody one's Law, one needed the imagination to expand one's comprehension and carve a spot for oneself inside that vast Law's bubble.

If one mentally limited themselves, how could they reach the epitome of their talent?

Damien always thought it was arrogance. He didn't want to cloud his mind with delusions of grandeur and end up like the overconfident enemies he'd killed numerous times already.

Recently, however, he'd realized the difference between him and them.

For him to think of himself highly wouldn't be arrogance. Simply because he deserved such a high evaluation.

He was the Bearer of the Void Physique, a truly unique existence among the endless beings existing in the universe and beyond it.

If he couldn't be considered heaven-defying, who could?

The realization of his sheer level of potential left Damien feeling wholly unsatisfied with his improvements. Rather than competing with people his own age, he should've been stomping them to the ground and thoroughly crushing them.

To do so, he could no longer underestimate himself.

His affinity was no longer space or time alone, but spacetime as a whole. The creation of the Space-Time River that resided in his domain was proof of this.

If he wanted to improve further, he couldn't keep limiting himself to being a mere spatial practitioner or temporal practitioner. Instead, he needed to truly control spacetime and become a master of the continuum. He needed to become a master of the universe's "flow."

'The flow...I've only just started realizing it, but this esoteric process is too intertwined in my destiny for me to ignore it. At the end of the day, what is the "flow" and what significance does it hold?'

He'd known it since he was young, but he'd never taken the time to truly think about it. Once he realized its existence, he took some time to relive his life and try to pinpoint it.

He once again realized how little time he'd had to rest.

From the beginning, Damien had always been forcefully thrust into the universe's most important events.

Apeiron's Eternal Secret Realm where he first learned of the Nox's existence and met Kurt Galloway's remnant soul, Earth's bout with invading forces of Niflheim and the Cloud Plane, becoming the Void Old Immortal's disciple, the 3000 Beast Mountain Range's Demigods and deep-rooted Nox influence, including the Elven Race and White Dragon King, encountering Wrath and the Fifth Primal Sovereign; the list was too long to even name all the events together.

These events were ongoing with or without his presence, and discounting a few, they would've reached their proper conclusions even without his aid.

If so, what was his purpose in being present?

Was he a mere observer watching the universe's gears turn? Or was he being purposefully led to these scenes to view them and grow from them?

At the root of everything was the Nox. The universe seemed intent on putting Damien against the invading race regardless of his own desires.

But...

'The Nox...is eradicating them the best solution?'

The Nox were Damien's main clue regarding the Void Physique and its origins. Even the Fifth Primal Sovereign's obsession with the Void Physique was related to the Nox.

And with how Wrath reacted to the "Seed," it was clear that the Nox had some sort of information that he direly needed.

In the event that the Nox were a race he could subordinate rather than eliminate, which path should he choose...?

'Haa...what am I doing when I should be training?'

Training was a time of solitude. It gave Damien time to think about the things he usually neglected in favor of completing the tasks at hand.

Whenever he trained, Damien's mind was always clouded with idle thought. Perhaps it was a result of his neurodivergence, but his train of thought would always shift away from the task at hand to contemplate matters that had no basis behind them, matters such as subordinating the Nox.

What was the use of thinking about it? Even if it was something that could happen in the future, how many years would it take for him to be powerful enough to even consider it?

Whenever Damien thought to the future, he'd always end up on tangents, creating situations in his head that would often never pan out.

It was dangerously distracting.

Thus, he liked to keep his mind in the present. He had a vague outline of the future he wanted to see. As long as he worked towards this outline, that was enough for him.

'Spacetime...I will conquer this concept before my training is over.'

He returned to the topic at hand. Every day he spent in a new training area was spending more of his contribution points, and he didn't have any time to waste.

There were now 8 months remaining until the progress assessment.

In that time, Damien was determined to become a completely different monster than he already was.

Chapter 697 Training And Thoughts [3]

Damien's training period lasted for over a month, and though it was a short time in the grand scheme of things, it was quite a frustrating predicament for his enemies.

After all, Hidden Death Valley wasn't friendly to conflict outside of established duels. While anything could happen within them, external battles would be heavily punished regardless of one's status.

Hidden Death Valley was a land ruled by multiple Demigods, and through their strength and influence, had no need to bow before any outside influence. This was half the reason why it gained its current reputation.

Damien's enemies could only bite their nails and wait until he entered the battle arena. When that time finally came, they could get rid of him.

As for Damien himself, he paid no mind to these raging voices, despite being fully aware of their existence. In fact, he made particularly sure to flaunt his daily routine to rile these people up and fuel their anger.

When he finished training, he would go to the battle arena and properly sweep the floor with them. If they weren't offended enough to continuously challenge him, what was the point of fighting them at all?

Nevertheless, thoughts on these people didn't cloud Damien's mind at all. As he ignored their presence entirely, he settled into a routine by which he could train to his full potential.

There was not even an ounce of rest involved in this routine.

6 hours of physical body training in the Gravity Chambers and Force Chambers, 6 hours of mental training in the Blackness Cage and Illusive Forest that also helped him improve the abilities of his All-Seeing Eyes, 6 hours of Spacetime training in the elemental training areas, and finally, 6 hours of focus in the Blackness Cage aimed to improve his Void Comprehension.

Every single day for 40 days, Damien partook in this routine. With his Void Comprehension taking place at an incredibly slow rate, he was also able to use the final 6 hours to recharge his physical and mental state before continuing the routine again.

Through this, the gains he made weren't small. But rather than saying that he increased his power, it was more accurate to say that he was able to properly utilize the power he already possessed.

At least, to some extent.

Damien always heard about people solidifying their foundations or consolidating their power, but he never expected himself to land in the same situation. With the past 10 years of misconstrual holding him back, all he could do now was grow into his strength before trying to improve again, essentially putting him in the same situation.

Though, it wasn't his first time doing something like this. Damien realized just how often he gained power without properly being able to use it. It was a consistent problem for him dating back to when he first evolved, when he acquired vector control, and perhaps every other step of his journey.

A regular 4th class, the lowest of the low, still had the power to annihilate an entire continent if they used their life as collateral.

Someone of Damien's strength level should be able to do so by exerting every last bit of mana in their body, as well as damaging themselves somewhat.

He, on the other hand, didn't need to physically injure his body to accomplish the same feat. If he was using the power residing in his body alone, the extent of his mana pool was more than enough to destroy a continent.

But if he used his Celestial Authority to empower an ability like Starfall...?

Even world destruction wasn't out of his reach.

Now, a world like Death Emperor Star with its incredibly dense foundational laws wouldn't succumb to his measly power, but if he wanted to destroy Apeiron or Azure Rain Star, it was entirely possible.

Damien sighed and shook his head wryly at the thought. No matter how much understanding he gained about his own strength, he still couldn't believe it.

It was hard to feel that powerful. It was hard to fathom that he could destroy a world if he wanted to.

After all, he couldn't physically feel that power. His body contained incredible amounts of mana, but because of the Void Physique's external presence, the physical weight of that mana was never translated into his physical body.

But its existence was a surety nonetheless.

Damien clenched his fists and reveled in that realization. His gaze panned over the horizon of the Space and Time training area he was in. His mystical purple eyes seemed to swirl with profundity, countless patterns forming in his irises.

Bzzt! Crackle!

Sparks flew threw the air as a projection attempted to manifest itself. An invisible and formless yet streamlined image tried to break through the fabric of reality and appear before Damien's eyes.

Those All-Seeing Eyes didn't gain their name from nothing. Until this point, they'd let him see countless things. Illusions became null, mana became clear, the very essence of the universe was revealed to him...but he could never break the fabric of reality and see through the dimension entirely.

The potential of his eyes could allow this. If he could evolve them to a certain level, seeing through reality would be passive. But currently...

BANG!

Space and time exploded, creating a warped area the size of a quarter in front of Damien. In this area where nothing else could exist, Damien felt the presence of the Void he knew...and a faint sense of something even vaguer.

"Khaah...!" Damien let out a pained breath as he wiped the blood leaking from his eyes.

Waving his hand, he spoke.

"Reversal."

A strange coagulated essence flowed out of his body and repaired the small hole in reality. Spacetime essence that created the very box that the universe was stood tame in front of his control.

To affect the environment like this was easy. It was something he could do since long ago. After all, hadn't he been creating black holes since the early stages of 3rd class?

Only, these black holes didn't contain the mind-numbing suction force of true black holes. They were rudimentary materializations that could exist without breaking the foundational law of the worlds Damien was in when he created them.

His current abilities bordered on reality manipulation.

Below creation and destruction, the forces that allowed all others to exist, space and time were the most powerful and most necessary. Without them, how could life even come into being?

As he learned to control these two forces and bring them together into one, he began to understand more about reality, more about the universe, and more about himself.

The Space-Time River he'd once seen almost a decade ago, that blurry memory of a hazy blue river in the midst of chaotic nothingness, it didn't leave his head for the past 40 days.

It was his goal, his aspiration.

That river...as he grew, its outline became clearer. The fog blocking his view didn't seem so thick anymore. And as he explored the properties of that river in full, he realized that spacetime, the Void, even the esoteric "flow" that he'd just come to know...

Perhaps all these facets, all these little pieces that comprehensively formulated his power and his being...

Were never separate to begin with.

Chapter 698 Training And Thoughts [4]

In the end, 40 days weren't enough to achieve what Damien wanted to achieve. The forces he was trying to control were out of reach for even Demigods, let alone mere lower existences like himself.

His improvements mainly took place mentally. He was comprehending the path forward so that he could walk it properly without making the same mistakes in the past.

But this was enough.

He didn't need to gain strength in a single month. He had at least another seven to continue improving himself to reach where he wanted to be.

And he was perfectly content with what he'd gained so far. Even if there wasn't a substantial increase in his current strength, his road forward would be much breezier because of the training he did now.

This type of forethought wasn't something he possessed before. Growing into his intelligence allowed him to make a decision that benefitted his future and allowed him to grow as a person.

What better result was there than this?

At the end of the day, what mattered more than any sort of material power was mentality. Damien's mind which was a broken mess from long ago was healing and growing, his mental state was stabilizing into something that actually helped him rather than hindered him as it had done in the past.

And his mental state was always his greatest weakness. Insecurity made him miss out on opportunities, trust issues made him miss out on relationships, commitment issues made him miss out on love with his wives; he didn't need to list out every single facet of his life that had been ruined by his mental issues to understand their significance.

Fixing himself meant fixing everything else. There was nothing more that needed to be said.

Damien walked out of the Spacetime training zone with a refreshed smile on his face. He'd been feeling this freeing sensation ever since he began solely focusing on improvement again.

He'd been growing in strength through practical experience for so long that he almost forgot the pure joy of taking time to himself to sort out his thoughts and train.

That alone time, that peace, was something he'd never forget again.

Sadly, it wasn't something that could continue forever.

Training and practical experience went hand in hand. While training alone could achieve results, without testing these results in actual combat, they were pointless.

What was the point of an attack that took multiple seconds to charge in a battle where every millisecond counted?

Unless he could fight until he cut that activation time down or fight until he learned to multitask and control his opponent's movements before the attack was ready, there was no point in even having it in his arsenal.

There was a reason Damien avoided using his larger and more powerful attacks in combat more often than not. There was a reason he only used Starfall for environmental destruction rather than actual combat.

His current training was too esoteric for its abilities to translate well in combat. Unless he could experience it personally, he would only be carving a useless path.

Therefore, his steps led him to the battle arena.

The battle arena was a large open-air colosseum that could seat tens of millions of spectators, though that was only a matter of circumstance. The ring itself was already ten thousand kilometers long, so one could imagine how large the stands surrounding it needed to be to maintain its shape.

Still, this amount of space was necessary. In a battle between experts, a mere 10,000 kilometers only accounted for a few steps at most.

The battle arena's atmosphere was raucous as always. The roaring cheers of geniuses as they watched the ongoing battles shook the ground and raised the earth. The blood-boiling atmosphere caused one to thirst for combat, thirst for blood.

Even Damien was partially infected by it.

The battle arena functioned on time slots, with the Pawn Bracket taking place early in the morning and the Emperor Bracket taking place deep into the night. Though, not all this time was used every day. After all, Emperor level geniuses didn't appear casually. When they battled, it was always a scene that filled the stands to the brim.

Instead, the main matches that took place in the battle arena were usually of the Pawn and Knight brackets. A few thousand geniuses at the very least would always be present in the stands, utilizing the betting booths as a way to gamble for quick contribution points.

Today was such a day where the crowd was low. The ongoing matches weren't spectacular at all, mere showings by weaker and younger geniuses trying to establish a name for themselves.

It was in this atmosphere that Damien arrived. As someone who still only ranked in the 40,000s on Heaven's List even after his prior mission completion, he was forced to start at the very bottom and climb his way up.

After registering his name and rank, he made his way to the waiting area for the fighters. Sitting in the room, he calmly observed these young geniuses and their battle styles.

'Hmm...weak. This one doesn't have the potential to go beyond 3rd class. I wonder how he made it to Hidden Death Valley?'

'Ohh, this one could do well if she improved her fighting style. Her wind element is actually focused more on power than speed, but she's conforming to the usual beliefs on how wind should be applied and limiting herself. I wonder when she'll learn otherwise?'

'That kid...they're actually not bad? I've never seen someone utilize fire as an armament rather than a projected attack. How interesting...'

As he watched, he became more and more fascinated by these young geniuses. Despite their obvious flaws and weakness, most of them had immense potential and unique elemental abilities that could put them at the top of Heaven's List one day if they worked hard enough for it.

It was just unfortunate that most of them would die before they reached their full potential. Even those who survived would likely not put in the necessary pain to reach the unimaginable heights he projected for them.

This was the reality of the universe, especially the universe in its current war-torn state.

As Damien remained in idle thought, hours passed by. The fights in the arena continued, and the riveting atmosphere became more and more pronounced every time a new genius raked up a winning streak.

Whoosh!

A wind arrow was fired from an archaic wooden bow. The arrow turned into tens and thousands, filling the entire arena's area and blocking off the archer's enemy from any escape routes.

BOOM!

The arrows naturally found their target in such an impossible situation, leaving the other competitor riddled with holes. He coughed up a mouthful of blood and collapsed, turning into holographic light as his body was transported out of the arena and reconstructed.

"Winner: Ray White!" The announcer yelled with vigor. The archer, Ray White, had just achieved 9 wins. He was only a single win away from being able to challenge the Overlord.

Unfortunately...

"After a 10-minute break to recharge his energy, our rising star Ray White will face his final match before potentially battling the Overlord! The unfortunate soul who's been summoned to face him...a newcomer called Damien Void! Place your bets! Grab your seats! And get ready for a ferocious showdown!"

The announcer's words caused another roar of cheers from the audience as they followed his words. As Damien walked into the arena, he almost felt sorry for his opponent.

'What a shameful coincidence...well, if you're truly that strong, you should be able to reach this point again once I'm gone.'

With a light smile on his face, Damien arrived in the center of the field. As he waited patiently, 10 minutes easily passed.

Ray White entered the field again. His short brown hair rustled in the wind and his amber eyes shone with a light of determination.

He'd reached this point with pure effort. He wasn't some Holy Land genius, but instead someone who'd been scouted from the wider universe by a recruiter like Atticus.

Now that he was here, he would let the world know his name.

He was only one victory away, and he didn't plan to lose his streak easily.

With Ray White and Damien facing each other on the stage, all that was left was for the match to start.

The arena went quiet.

The crowd held their breaths waiting for their champion to achieve his victory.

"Match: Start!"

The announcer's voice rang out.

The crowd cheered.

And then...

"Sorry about this."

Damien's voice quietly perforated through the atmosphere.

He didn't move at all.

Space constricted.

The poor Ray White who was still at the early stages of 3rd class didn't even know what hit him.

In the next instant, he appeared outside of the arena.

The silence that followed was especially glaring.

Chapter 699 Battle Arena [1]

9 more geniuses fell the same way Ray White did.

They all had their own stories, their own ambitions, but Damien was hard-pressed to care about them.

After all, he had his goals too, and they far outstripped the importance of these young geniuses in his heart.

Besides, if they couldn't take their defeats today as a lesson and humble themselves before improving to one day reach his level, they weren't worth the title of genius.

The battle arena had strict rules. Only 10 matches could be fought every day, if one fought an Overlord, they couldn't fight another match until the day after they won.

This meant that Damien yet again took the opportunity to spend his day training before returning to the arena.

As for the Overlord? He wasn't even worth mentioning. Regardless of his position, he was still the Overlord of the Pawn Bracket. Damien only needed a slight bit of mana to defeat him.

The Pawn and Knight brackets were meant for 3rd class competitors. The fact that Damien was even forced to plow through them was ignorant.

Then again, if it was anyone else, they wouldn't have been forced to do the same.

Despite Hidden Death Valley's abject rejection of status, that didn't mean the geniuses within would completely abide by those laws. In smaller situations, bribery and oppression wouldn't be monitored.

These facets came with existence. To live was to experience them. Therefore, in spite of their desire for fairness, the leaders of the academy didn't completely quell this oppression.

Bribing the battle arena staff was quite an easy task for Reavus Bloodlock. Even though he knew that Damien wouldn't be held back by these small brackets and young geniuses, he thought he could at least use them to relatively understand Damien's strength.

An early 4th class being under level 225 still needed to put in a bit of effort to defeat a genius at the extreme peak of 3rd class. This effort might've been only a slight excess amount of mana in their attack, but the amount of excess still signified the level their strength had reached.

Damien, however, didn't let this faze him. What could Reavus gain from a petty trick like this? Damien wasn't a mere dog as Reavus had been assuming him to be, and naturally he wouldn't perform like one.

Whether it was the Pawn Bracket or the Knight Bracket, Damien breezed through them by merely constricting space around his opponents until they were crushed. There was no excess use of mana, no lack of control that could reveal a hint of his true power. The only thing Damien gave his enemies was a show of dominance.

Just like that, using the 4 days he was required due to the restrictions, Damien passed through the bottom two brackets like a storm and arrived in the King Bracket.

'Finally, things should get interesting.' He thought to himself.

The King Bracket was a different place than the previous two in that there wasn't necessarily a set level of strength for those present within it. Every 4th class genius in Hidden Death Valley that couldn't rack up a 10-win streak was placed in this category.

Of course, high-level 4th classes above level 375 who dominated the competition were immediately seeded into the Emperor Bracket, but even without them, there were countless beings between levels 350 and 374 who remained in the King Bracket.

Most of them weren't even trying to compete.

Due to the harshness of the King Bracket, the Emperor Bracket had become a selective club of sorts. Those who could fight there were only the peak geniuses of Hidden Death Valley and the universe as a whole.

In this sense, a level 380 genius who was over the age of 300 didn't qualify for the Emperor Bracket. Despite their strength, their talent was still lower than the required level.

'300...Bai Xieren and the rest are all over 10,000 years old and still stuck at the higher end of 4th class. The disparity in talent is a little jarring to look at.'

It couldn't be helped. The Human Domain's precarious situation naturally led to a lack of talent. This trend only changed with the current generation of geniuses like Damien and Long Chen. Now that wartime was upon them again, the Human Domain was fated to rise.

Nevertheless, seeing young geniuses who didn't even reach the age of 100 yet standing equal to the peak figures of the Human Domain filled Damien with a different kind of fervor.

He couldn't wait to battle.

And he knew...

The King Bracket would provide him a ton of entertainment. His enemies would be here in droves trying to hinder his path, even those unrelated to him would do their best to block him from entering the Emperor Bracket sheerly due to the exclusivity its existence now held.

On the 5th day of his arena run, Damien arrived back at the battle arena and made his way to the challengers' section. The day was already over, and it was deep into the night. The arena was lit up by mana-powered torches and beautiful dancing spirits that lit the way. The ambiance it gave off was completely different than it was in the sun, emitting the aura of something sacred.

The atmosphere, however, was far more thrilling. Millions of people stood in the stands cheering. With Hidden Death Valley recruiting geniuses from all 7 remaining intact sectors, it would've been stranger if it didn't contain at least this many people.

The earth shook with their cheers. The sky trembled with their battle intent. The enclosed space of the battle arena was like a completely different world compared to the serenity outside its barriers.

Entering the challengers' section, Damien immediately noticed the difference between those young geniuses and the people present. Everyone emitted a slight latent bloodlust accumulated over countless years of combat. Their gazes didn't carry any of the innocent exuberance of youth, despite their appearances not being much different from those youths themselves.

Damien inadvertently cracked a smile as he took a seat. He crossed one leg over the other and spread his arms across the seats next to him, relaxing entirely.

He closed his eyes and waited his turn. What he wanted was battle experience not sparring experience. There would rarely be moments in war where he knew his enemy's every ability and saw them fighting beforehand. If he wanted to prepare for that scenario, he naturally couldn't be as observant as he was before.

Still, his stance was one of dominance and fearlessness. In a room filled with peak geniuses, he actually dared to recline so casually?!

More than just a few were offended. And more than just a few aura pressures converged on Damien's body in a bid to suppress him before he got too arrogant.

The smile on his face twisted into a sneer.

Hoo...

He blew out a small breath of air.

The aura pressure was dispelled just like that.

Damien scoffed in his mind. How could any mere aura pressure stand against his Void Mana? Laughable!

'But...this is how it should be.'

Prideful geniuses, endless competition, and bloodlust clouding the air...

'Mm, the atmosphere is just right.'

Chapter 700 Battle Arena [2]

Compared to the previous brackets, not as many battles took place on a day-to-day basis in the King Bracket. This was mainly due to the length of each battle being much longer, and the repair time for the arena itself being the same.

Unfortunately for Damien, he didn't get to fight at all on the 5th day. He sat there in his same posture waiting for some genius to provoke him all the way until the timing for the King Bracket ended.

While he was a bit disappointed, he knew that the second he went up, he'd dominate. Therefore, it didn't bother him too much.

Casually standing up at the end of the time and stretching, he began to walk out of the battle arena.

But...

The end of the King Bracket signified the start of the Emperor Bracket.

As he exited the arena, Damien came face to face with the one man he wanted to see the most.

"What a thick scent of blood. Is it a fetish thing?"

Those were the first words that came out of his mouth when he locked eyes with the red-eyed man in front of him.

"Damien Void. You're just as scummy as I expected. A commoner from the bottom of the bottom naturally won't have the class to give a proper greeting." The man replied.

Damien grinned. "Mm, and apparently spoiled rich brats like you are the same. The difference between us is that I don't let eloquent bullshitting cloud my intent when I speak."

"Hah, the only reason you dare to make that comparison is because you've never felt the power of a Holy Land yourself. When the time comes, let us see if you can still be so bold." Reavus scoffed.

Damien smiled nonchalantly. "Yeah, yeah. Whatever you say. Anyway, I need to go do something actually productive instead of wasting my time with flies so I'll take my leave. I'll see you in the Emperor Bracket soon, Bloodbitch prince."

"You...!"

Reavus shot his hand out, but it was already too late. Damien's figure was long gone, space and time coalescing to take him back to the Gravity Chamber training area so he could continue his usual routine.

Reavus stood alone outside the battle arena, his teeth clenched in anger.

He never would've thought that in their first face-to-face encounter, he'd lose to Damien in a war of words.

"Crass...pathetic...vermin!" He spat in hatred.

His heart was already dead set on revenge. To face a loss so early in his quest only fueled this thought, driving his enmity with Damien to a point nearing obsession.

"Hahaha, looks like you're struggling with something. Need some help?"

A teasing voice came from behind. There stood a man with long black hair and equally dark eyes, a familiar man that Damien had met once before.

"Atticus..." Reavus seethed. "What help would I need from a clown like you? Get out of my face."

"Haha, come on, now. Don't be so harsh. I heard you've recently made enemies with a rising genius. I assume it isn't going well for you?" Atticus continued with a condescending smile.

"What do I need to tell you? Have you not been keeping a tight enough leash on your dog to know what he's been up to?" Reavus replied hatefully.

"Pfft...hahahahaha!" Atticus broke out into a fit of raucous laughter. "Dog? That guy? If I could have someone like him as a dog, I'd even give up my Holy Son position!"

Reavus' eyes inadvertently widened. Atticus' offhanded comment might have seemed joking, but he wasn't someone to speak pointlessly.

Especially when his title and position as the Fallen Star Holy Son were at stake, he absolutely couldn't speak sarcastically. The connotations behind the Holy Son position didn't allow any mistakes. A Holy Son wasn't just a representation of the sect, but also its most sponsored genius.

A Holy Son reneging their position was more than just a disgrace for a Holy Land, but a massive slap to the face that would never be tolerated!

If he was serious, didn't that mean...

"Don't overthink it." Atticus suddenly said, interrupting Reavus' thoughts. "Sooner or later, you'll become food for his growth. I'm just excited to see how long you can last before it happens."

With a cool grin on his face as he walked, Atticus passed Reavus and entered the battle arena.

Reavus Bloodlock, while he was a Bloodlock Prince indeed, he wasn't the prince set to take the throne when the Immortal Blood Asura decided to step down. That position actually belonged to his 4th brother.

Reavus himself was 3rd in line. He was a genius, sure, but not a genius satisfying the standards of a Demigod-level Holy Land.

This year he would be 87. Still stuck with mediocre law comprehension despite his high level, how could he be compared to a genius like Atticus?

The reason for his Heaven's List ranking being higher than Atticus' was solely due to his raw power that made his talent a secondary consideration.

Even if Reavus was more powerful now, Atticus had no doubt he'd surpass the Bloodlock prince in time. He held no fear towards a moody prince with daddy issues who wouldn't even be able to kiss his feet in 100 years.

And Atticus knew very well Damien's talent. He was weak right now, too weak to be put on the same pedestal as other Emperor level geniuses.

But...that was only if one looked at his level.

As someone who'd actually fought a few rounds against the man, why would Atticus be stupid enough to take Damien's level to heart?

That man was powerful, more powerful and talented than any genius at his level that Atticus had seen in his many years of life both as a Holy Land genius and a Hidden Death Valley recruiter.

Reavus Bloodlock? That pathetic prince?

The fact that he couldn't even see Damien playing him like a fiddle was laughable.

If it would take Atticus 100 years to become untouchable for Reavus, it would take Damien only 50 at most.

Atticus' concerns were elsewhere.

'When the time comes, will you have the heart to strike him down? Despite his position, Immortal Blood Holy Land won't take his death lightly. His father is still the Immortal Blood Asura's most talented son, and he will undoubtedly come for the person who kills his son.'

Atticus entered the Emperor Bracket challenger section. Compared to the previous brackets, it was relatively empty.

Only 10 people sat in the seats awaiting their matches.

None of them emitted any aura. They sat quietly to themselves without speaking, emitting a solemn atmosphere that couldn't be broken by outside forces.

Atticus took his seat among them with an interested smile on his face.

'I'm curious. With your unyielding personality, will you finally succumb when you face a power too great for you to handle? Or will you take on the challenge and find some miraculous way to survive?'

Haa, he couldn't handle the anticipation. It'd been too long since he'd seen a genius who could make him feel so excited.

The more he saw Damien grow, the more the belief firmed in his heart.

Damien...

Could he possibly be the genius who could stand against the Saint King?