

Void 701

Chapter 701 Battle Arena [3]

"Haaa..."

Damien exhaled a long breath as he stepped out of the Blackness Chamber. Unfortunately for him, he needed to end his training early.

The 6th day since his battle arena start dawned long ago, and now had reached its end. The time for the King Bracket to commence was upon him.

Just like the previous day, Damien returned to the arena and waited for his name to be called.

But just like the day before, there was nothing.

The 7th day passed...

Nothing.

The 8th day passed...

Nothing.

On the 9th day, Damien sat alone in the Darkness Chamber once more. While his face was calm on the outside, he was internally seething.

Even if the King Bracket's fighting schedule was less populated than the previous brackets, it was unheard of for a challenger to go uncalled for three days straight.

Damien was well aware of what was happening.

Reavus Bloodlock was taking petty revenge.

What else could be the cause? When everyone around him got their chance to fight multiple times over while he was stuck waiting alone, how could it be boiled down to mere coincidence?

'Haha...I didn't think provoking him would have this effect. Really, for a top genius, he should know how to fight like a man.'

Damien's eyes blazed. It was the 9th day now. Of those 9 days, three were already spent unproductively.

He who had been completely immersed in the rigorous training atmosphere he created didn't take well to its interruption.

'Those normal geniuses might bend to you if you harass them enough, but do you think I'm the same? Reavus, oh Reavus...let me show you what it means to be domineering.'

A pathetic brat who could only show his power through status, Damien had no need to entertain him.

In fact, all he wanted to do was piss the Bloodbitch prince off even more.

And to do that...

What else did he have to do besides be himself?

The atmosphere of the battle arena was the same as always, but the challengers' area was filled with a mocking air directed at one person.

None of the geniuses here were dumb. In fact, some of them were even in on the drama. The fact that Damien was being forcefully rejected from the battle arena made these geniuses especially gleeful.

After all, hadn't he been taunting them from the moment he stepped into the challengers' area? His downfall made them smug.

Arrogance without backing would only lead one to offending the wrong person and getting suppressed. Most of these geniuses had felt it themselves, so while they did pity the man, they also took pleasure in his misfortune.

Laughing at someone else's trouble made them feel better about their own.

Nevertheless, the night continued on as usual. Battles occurred one after the other, and fighters accumulated win streaks only to be struck down by stronger opponents.

The crowd in the stand continued their betting, some becoming rich while others lost their savings to gambling.

And at some point, yet another battle was underway.

The two opponents were a large brown-skinned man with rippling muscles and devilish horns on his head and a smaller more lithe man with beauty far out of the ordinary. Conversely to their dichotomy, both were using pure brute force and body enhancement to fight.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Their every punch caused the arena floor to shatter. As their fists connected, waves of power emanated from the collisions and impacted the arena barrier, causing it to tremble ever so slightly.

Raaaaaah!

The crowd went wild. This level of riveting battle was exactly what they came to see! Both of these fighters, despite their differences, were physical strength masters who surpassed all others in this aspect!

What a fight!

The lithe man ducked below his opponent's fist and spun his body to send a low kick at his stomach. The exact second he made impact, the larger man pounded his elbow down to meet the kick, using his inertia to dispel most of the force headed towards him into the ground!

The two opponents pushed away from each other, panting heavily. With blazing fighting spirit in their eyes, they charged once more and...!

"Hold it."

BOOM!

Their outstretched fists collided with something, but it wasn't each other. The momentum of their attacks disappeared instantly like they'd been swallowed by a black hole.

A dust cloud kicked up from the force regardless, obscuring the audience's vision.

But with their awarenesses spread, the two combatants clearly knew what happened.

Their fists had been...stopped?

When the dust cleared, those standing in the arena weren't two but three. A man stood between the two fighters, clenching their outstretched fists in his hands.

"Sorry for interrupting, but I'm a little tired of waiting. It's my turn now." The mysterious man uttered coldly.

"You...what do you—"

Before the lithe man could finish his words, he found the ground rushing at his face.

BOOM!

Both fighters were slammed into the ground furiously, unable to resist the newcomer's power.

"You know, I don't really care if someone tries to suppress me with strength. If I end up succumbing, it's only because I'm weak. I'll find a way to escape and get my revenge when I'm strong enough."

The mysterious man spoke as he raised his leg.

Bang!

Crack!

He slammed it down on the larger man's body, eliciting a clear cracking sound as the downed fighter's bones broke.

Of course, the man never let go of his opponents' arms. The large man's arm popped out of its socket naturally as the counterforce struck. Luckily for him, he didn't have enmity with the newcomer or his arm would've been completely ripped from his body.

"What I hate, though, is idiots who suppress others with no power to show for themselves. Using others' reputation and power to bully people, how cowardly is that? Now, I won't say I don't understand the concept and I won't spout any bullshit about how it's unfair, but if you're going to do it, just don't do it to me."

The man's leg swept out rapidly. A strong current of mana accompanied its trip as it impacted the lithe man's skull.

BOOM!

The lithe man went flying. His body crashed into the arena barrier, contorting seriously as multiple bones shattered. He coughed out a mouthful of blood as he collapsed onto the ground, unconscious.

The mysterious man turned to face the crowd, his eyes focusing somewhere beyond the arena.

"I'm not mindful enough to tolerate your bullshit."

Clenching his fist, the man caused space to distort around the two fallen competitors. Their already destroyed bodies were crumpled into meatballs, and in the next instant, they disappeared from the arena.

Even after they revived on the outside, they didn't regain consciousness.

The man looked at the announcer standing far above the arena. The announcer's face was especially pale as he watched the ongoing scene.

He wasn't a strong person at all. He was just a smaller genius working this job to get a few contribution points for himself.

If the man came for him...

"Hey."

"Y-yes!" The announcer stuttered.

"Announce my name," the man said. "It's my turn to fight."

"U-um, I d-don't have the authori—"

"Do you want to die?"

The announcer fell backwards as the man appeared in front of him like a ghost.

"Do you think I don't know what you've been doing? Do you think the little bribes you've received are that important? Or maybe...is the Bloodbitch Clan's reputation worth more to you than your own life?"

His foot landed on the announcer's sternum. His cold purple eyes stared down at the helpless man without a single ounce of emotion.

"Announce. My. Name."

The announcer felt tears welling up in his eyes. The man wasn't wrong. The Bloodlock Clan was too terrifying for him to ever think about disobeying them.

But from the look in this man's eyes, he really wouldn't care about the academy's rules! If the announcer kept being stubborn, he was sure to die!

"O-okay! Okay, I'll announce your name! Just don't kill me!"

"Good. Now, repeat after me into that mic of yours. If you miss a word, you die."

The audience watched with bated breaths as the unheard conversation continued on the announcer's podium. A few seconds later, the mysterious man arrived back in the center of the arena.

The announcer stood up slowly. His legs trembled violently, his skin was so pale one would think he no longer had any blood left in his body.

And after what he was about to say...maybe there wouldn't be.

"A new challenger has entered the arena...!" The announcer yelled weakly, trying to sound as confident as he usually did.

"Now introducing the Rising Emperor of Death Emperor Star, the Bane of the Bloodbitch Clan: Damien Void!"

He couldn't stand it anymore. The announcer collapsed to the ground and fainted.

And in the arena, Damien stood with a calm smile.

Oppression? That was something only he was allowed. Not a single soul would be allowed to do the same to him.

Chapter 702 Battle Arena [4]

"Now introducing the Rising Emperor of Death Emperor Star, the Bane of the Bloodbitch Clan: Damien Void!"

The entire arena went silent.

Whether it was the challengers' area, the arena crowd, or even those watching the battles remotely in the comfort of their own homes, nobody spoke a single word.

They all stared at the purple-eyed man on the arena floor with hurried breaths and widened eyes.

Did that man...really dare to insult the Bloodlock Clan so blatantly?!

The display he put on with his entrance was domineering to say the least, but was it worth offending one of the universe's strongest clans for?!

Unlike their apparent worry and mocking at his choice, others felt differently.

More than anyone, Atticus' reaction was especially pronounced.

"HAHAHAHAHA! AHAHAHAHAHA!"

His laughter bellowed through the halls of his palace. He keeled over, unable to stand straight anymore after seeing Damien's display of power.

"Haha...hahaha...really, I didn't think you'd do it so soon!"

Atticus was bewildered and excited. Just yesterday he'd been wondering if Damien had the courage and resolve to face the Bloodlock Clan's fury if he ever killed Reavus. But now, wasn't it obvious what the young hero's choice would be? Atticus almost felt stupid for doubting him.

"Now, put on a performance worthy of your boasts! Hahahaha, I really can't wait to fight you again in the Emperor Bracket!"

Atticus' excitement turned into fighting intent rapidly. Damien's every action served as a reminder of their tie in the Storm Heavens Mystic Realm.

Atticus was unresigned.

One day, they'd finish that battle.

Then, he could finally see the true extent of Damien's strength.

And he could feel the exhilaration of winning against the most promising genius he'd met in many many years.

Back in the arena, Damien remained standing, waiting for a challenger to come greet him. But after his previous stunt, there was nobody willing to do so.

Besides, this wasn't how the battle arena worked! Challengers couldn't just run onto the stage as they pleased and battle! It'd be utter chaos if they did!

But...what were they supposed to do now?

Damien's actions had interrupted the King Bracket's flow, and more than that, had served as a slap in the face to many of the geniuses present.

They'd laughed at him and mocked him for acting too high and mighty and offending someone too big for him to handle. They'd celebrated the fact that he was in the same situation.

But unlike them, he didn't bend.

He arrogantly proclaimed himself the Bloodlock Clan's enemy.

And in the process, he called every single one of those who had succumbed a weakling.

Plenty were angry. Plenty wanted to run onto the stage and beat Damien to a pulp.

But unlike him, they didn't have the reckless abandon to discard the academy and its ruling powers.

The rules that were set, they would follow to the tee.

Damien sighed despondently. "Seriously? You're all supposed to be proud geniuses! What happened to all your gusto from before?! You can't even face a little bit of punishment for the sake of your self-worth?! Pathetic!"

"It's not pathetic at all." Another voice responded.

A man with similar build and stature to Damien walked through the challenger gate. His white hair contradicted his ashen-grey skin, his red eyes shined with a light of intelligence.

"Small punishment? It's nothing like that. How would you feel about confinement and brutal reconditioning in the Hell Hole? Or maybe you want to be prematurely sent into war against her Nox to 'temper your psyche.'" The man said as he walked to the center of the arena floor.

"We are still growing. Nobody wants to submit, but sometimes we don't have a choice. To submit and live until one day we can break free from our shackles and triumph, is that truly cowardly and pathetic?" The man asked. He was now face to face with Damien, only a few feet apart as he stood up to the latter's challenge.

In response, Damien shook his head. "No, what you're describing isn't cowardly. I'd rather escape than submit to pressure, but I have spatial abilities that allow me to actualize this mentality. For someone who can't escape, it isn't wrong to submit and wait for a chance to kill the oppressor."

"Then...!"

"But that's just you." Damien continued, not giving the man a chance to speak. "Those pathetic bitches in there feel joy when others suffer the same fate. To even feel that way, they must first bend to their circumstances and give up. Are they not weak?"

"That..."

"Enough." Damien looked straight into the man's gleaming eyes. "You at least had the courage to step up, and I can somewhat respect you for that. So, fight me. Prove yourself through battle."

Damien took a fighting stance with his arms up like a boxer. He didn't take out his weapons yet, for he didn't think he'd need them in this fight.

Despite his powerful appearance, the grey-skinned man wasn't too powerful. After all, Damien could see through his status. He knew exactly what the latter's level was.

SHIIING!

A collision took place. Without an announcer, there was no set start to the battle. Instead, it began when one challenger decided to move.

In this case, it was the grey-skinned man. His name was Alec, and he was a dark elf from a quiet corner of the Elven Domain. As his world bordered the edge of another sector, he was quick to escape when danger struck.

He was one of the Elven Domain's few survivors. His grudge against the Nox ran deeper than blood, and his shame at his cowardice ran even deeper.

Damien's insults touched the scars in his heart that he endlessly wished to hide. It was recklessness that brought him to the stage, but a fiery determination that allowed him to attack.

In a sense, Damien was right. He was also one of those beings who gave up after seeing ultimate power. The terrifying sight of his world being blown to pieces as a fleet of Nox starships passed by was too striking. It haunted his memory every night.

And when he heard rumors about the Star Destroyer, Exadrion, which annihilated all life on Aurora, the Elven Main World, this fear became even more palpable.

He worked endlessly to conquer it. He trained for years to become powerful enough to have an impact on the war, but the stronger he got, the more hopeless he felt.

The Nox...were just too strong.

He couldn't even stand the oppression of the smaller forces within the universe itself, so how could he stand against the Nox who wished to destroy it all?

This mentality caused a roadblock, one he had yet to overcome.

Damien's words were an inadvertent wake-up call.

The faces of his family as he fled, Alec would never forget their relieved smiles as they saw him leave the world safely.

For them, for his entire race, he needed to remain strong.

So that one day, he could get revenge.

He poured all those feelings into a terrifying strike of his sword, slashing it at Damien with every ounce of willpower he had.

But the metallic ring that rang out...

In Damien's hand was a translucent sword that almost melded in with the environment. In that split second before Alec's attack struck, he managed to parry it and send the latter's sword into the ground.

Damien walked up to his opponent with a smile. "It's no fun if you exhaust yourself before we even fight, but I get it. Congratulations on getting past whatever was hindering you."

Alec's eyes widened, and with an accomplished smile on his face, he fell to the ground.

It was as Damien said. The previous moment of realization drained him. Overcoming his fear of the Nox and realizing his truth was taxing on his mental strength considering the depths of his trauma.

And while Damien didn't get any satisfaction out of his "duel" with Alec, he was satisfied with the results nonetheless.

Indeed, it seemed like among those useless trash in the challengers' area, there truly were some hidden gems.

Damien easily stabbed Mirage through Alec's throat and decapitated him, sending him out of the arena painlessly.

His gaze turned back to the challengers' area, piercing through the arena walls.

"So are there more like him amongst you, or are the rest of you just pussies?"

His words, the previous scene, and all else that had happened in the last few minutes combined as one.

Even those who fit the weakling categorization he'd mentioned earlier were riled up.

Nobody wanted to be seen as weak. Nobody wanted their pride stepped on and crushed by others.

They had no choice back then but to submit. Every single one of them swore on the day they submitted that they'd grow and pay back the humiliation they suffered.

But none of them carried out on their promises in the end. As Damien said, they gave up.

But were they willing?

No!

And even if they were, they'd never let anyone else talk down to them for it!

Bloody killing intent, billowing fighting intent, and flaming determination ram rampant through the challengers' area.

It looked like Damien wouldn't be lacking in opponents for a very long time.

Chapter 703 Battle Arena [5]

Bang! Boom!

A body went flying into the arena barrier. The man it belonged to didn't fold so easily, though. He kicked off the barrier, using his strength to propel himself back at his opponent!

His spear clenched tightly in his hands, he thrust it forward, coating its tip with swirling mana and simmering flames.

Bang!

His opponent raised his hand and swiped it furiously, sending a wave of colorless mana at him and distorting the atmosphere. When his spear collided with this mana, it felt like his strength was immediately diffused.

Still, the man didn't stop. His name was Richard, and he was the fifth member of the King Bracket that had stepped up to face Damien today.

After witnessing how the last four were defeated, he was well aware of his opponent's spatial prowess. He also knew that the man could use Time Laws to a certain extent.

Therefore rather than retreating when his energy was dispersed, he pushed forward with all his might! Long-ranged combat was ineffective against Damien, so getting in close was all he could do!

"Haa!"

With a spirited shout, he broke through the mana wall and arrived in front of Damien with a flash of light. His spear swept out powerfully, his mana moving to activate a skill.

'Cyclone!'

VOOM!

A terrifying vortex of flames engulfed Damien. While this happened, Richard moved his spear again, stabbing out thousands of times within a single second.

'One Thousand As One: Flame Piercer!'

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

The vortex was filled with holes as the Flame Piercer attack penetrated it and struck Damien. Damien's body was pushed back many kilometers as he used his arms to block.

A grin surfaced on his face. He'd fought five times including this one, and every fight just got better and better.

At this rate, he couldn't even imagine what his tenth opponent would be like.

Damien waved his left hand without hesitation, summoning Freya from his subspace and immediately firing tens of spatial mana bullets at Richard.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The bullets exploded in mid-air as they collided with the penetrating force from the Flame Piercer. With the two attacks neutralized, the two fighters were back to square one.

"Haa...haa..." Richard let out heavy breaths as he used the lull to recover. Damien watched him with an amused look on his face.

But internally, he was truly getting a bit serious.

'These guys aren't the peak of the universe for nothing. It wouldn't be hard for me to stomp someone of Richard's skill level as long as I spammed larger attacks in succession, but I'm not here for that.'

His main purpose in coming to the battle arena was training. If he simply dominated his opponents without a care for his original intent, how would he improve?

Richard was incredibly skilled in one-on-one combat. His techniques were magnificent and skillful uses of mana that Damien found himself admiring as they fought.

With the All-Seeing Eyes reading this mana flow as the battle continued, Damien truly learned more than he'd ever expected.

The two fighters burst towards each other once more. Richard gritted his teeth and slammed his spear into the ground, causing a massive gash in the arena floor that expanded until it was well past Damien's location.

'Arise!'

Richard jerked his spear out of the ground and, following his motion, a massive spout of magma raised along with it.

Boom!

'Earth Flame: Cursed Dragon!'

Roar!!

The magma pillar transformed into a blackish-red draconic avatar. Its body was entirely made of energy and elements, but carried a different type of hardness that Damien couldn't quite put his finger on.

Without hesitation, he charged at the forming dragon.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He shot tens of bullets from Freya's barrel as he moved. The gun in his hand disappeared thereafter, returning as its black counterpart.

Compared to Freya's speed and accuracy, Hel carried unimaginable raw power.

Spacetime mana flowed from Damien's body. The fabric of reality in the surrounding few meters halted, creating a temporary Dead Zone around him. The power of this zone condensed and loaded itself into the forming mana bullet inside Hel's barrel until finally...

BOOOOM!

The bullet fired. It cut through the air relatively slowly, but it was surrounded by a world-bending force that made it impossible to dodge.

When it reached the magma dragon, it burst into its original form, forming a Dead Zone that disallowed the use of mana.

Roar!

The dragon roared furiously as if unable to accept its immediate loss. Its body expanded, furious flames spreading through the Dead Zone and infecting its foundations.

Kacha!

Its borders shattered. The dragon, though weakened, managed to escape and charge at Damien at insane speeds.

'Tch. It's not battle-ready yet. Well, isn't that why I came here in the first place?' Damien thought to himself as he watched it happen.

The creation of a temporary Dead Zone could be a powerful ability once it was matured, but before that point, it had countless weaknesses. Forcefully imposing a Dead Zone onto stable space would naturally weaken its foundation. A strong enough enemy could use their mana to target this flaw and destroy the zone before too much damage was done.

While this would force them to use a good chunk of their mana capacity, it wasn't enough for what Damien eventually wanted to do with it.

Nevertheless, reflection and improvement came after the battle ended. For now...

'Void Sword Art Second Form: Horizon Break'

Bang!

A massive hole was punctured in the dragon's body. Despite the injury, it kept moving. It had no physical presence, after all. As a being made of energy, it wouldn't die until the last flame of its body was snuffed out.

But Damien was prepared for this.

'Void Sword Art Fourth Form: Spatial Collapse'

BOOOOOM!

Space within 1,000 kilometers shattered and bent, becoming a chaotic flow of mana that swirled into a black vortex emitting terrifying suction force.

Naturally, the power of this Spatial Collapse wasn't nearly at Damien's peak, but what could he do? The arena was only 10,000 kilometers across.

ROAR!!

The dragon furiously cried out as it tried to escape the barrier, yet every usage of its energy was a depletion of its life. Against this vortex whose suction force was powerful enough to consume it whole, did it have any choice but to submit?

"Empower!"

A cry rang out from far away. Richard slammed his spear into the ground and allowed his aura to release wantonly. Condensed Flame Essence gathered around him as more and more rampant mana came under his control.

And every bit of this mana was used to empower the dragon he'd summoned.

Sadly, his loss was set in stone the moment he decided to do so.

Damien grinned wildly. His body flashed away from the dragon and appeared directly behind Richard like a ghost.

"Remember, when you're up against a spatial practitioner, distance will never be on your side."

"You...!"

'Seven Stars Encircling The Moon'

Before Richard could finish his sentence, a shining fist resembling a moon surrounded by seven small balls of chaotic energy impacted his chest.

And everything went white.

A terrifying explosive mana wave covered the arena floor. Richard's body was instantly blown to bits by the violently rampaging mana that entered his system.

He was already nearly out of energy after the battle so far, and with the wounds he'd accumulated until this point...

He simply stood no chance.

The brightness cleared up, giving way to the vision of Damien standing alone in the battle arena.

And the crowd went wild.

Chapter 704 Encounter [1]

'What a day, what a day.' Damien thought smilingly as he walked away from the battle arena. He made the conscious decision to stop after accumulating his fifth win in Richard.

After all, a genius' win streak wouldn't be reset until they lost, this was the same even if they left and decided to return another day to continue. Though, delaying for too long would naturally cause their streak to expire.

Damien's reasons to stop were two. Firstly, he wanted to take the time to go over what he'd learned in battle today and improve before he returned to the arena for his second run.

This was because, from the sixth match onward, he'd likely be facing opponents above level 300, people stronger than Aishia and the others he'd met in Niflheim.

If it was just one person, he'd be able to deal with them just fine. But against a group of them that fought him in succession, he was bound to suffer some mental exhaustion along the way.

He couldn't allow that. He needed to maintain his peak shape as much as possible so he could continue his brutal training and sparring routine for as long as he could.

The second reason was more complicated. He'd simply made too big of a scene today with his antics.

'They should be coming to find me soon...'

Despite the fact that his actions were for the sole purpose of slapping a tyrant in the face and bringing him down from his pedestal, in the end, he still broke the academy's rules.

Not only had he interrupted a ranked duel, he'd also fought and maimed multiple students outside of the dueling grounds. This was a serious offense that the school definitely wouldn't tolerate.

If he used every last second of the King Bracket's time for his own benefit without allowing others a chance to fight, he'd be condemned even further. He had to at least minimize the damage so the academy wouldn't punish him through isolation or something similar.

pàndá-ñovêl.cóM 'Still, the rewards were...more than a little satisfactory.'

Aside from the improvements to his comprehension and battle style, his Heaven's List ranking saw a major change as well. From the 40,000s where he once stood, he'd now made his way to the top 15,000 easily.

The battle arena was a place where powerful geniuses gathered, and the King Bracket was a place where some of the most exemplary of them were seeded. Though these geniuses weren't powerful enough to immediately push his ranking to the top 100 or even the top 10,000, this was more than enough for him at the moment.

Once he finished his challenge tomorrow and defeated the Overlord the day after, he didn't doubt that he'd make his way far past a mere rank 100.

Those in the Emperor Bracket were only the best of the best, so the Overlord blocking the Emperor Bracket from reach naturally had to be the same.

As Damien walked back to the training area to continue his usual routine, he suddenly halted. His eyes darted to a certain location on his right side, and his awareness spread around him.

'One, two, three...a total of fifteen, huh. Quite generous for someone like me.' Damien thought sarcastically.

"Oh? Some familiar faces? I thought you were in charge of guarding the trench. What're you doing all the way over here?"

His words were directed at a certain woman hidden in the shadows. Hearing them, she sighed and walked out.

"I knew you were a troublemaker when we first met, but I didn't think you'd be one that had the power to cause trouble in here. How annoying."

The woman emerging from the shadows was none other than the Head Guard who'd stopped him when he first descended into Hidden Death Valley. The other fourteen she brought along were her personal squad members, people she'd chosen and raised into terrifying powerhouses.

"Damien Void, I've been ordered to escort you to the Board of Directors. Please follow me without causing another scene."

"Relax, that was my plan from the start. I'm not someone who causes trouble just for the sake of it, you know? I like my peace."

The Head Guard shook her head and turned around. With the other fourteen forming a tight barrier around Damien, it didn't look like he could even teeter as he followed them to the Board of Directors.

'They all range from around level 360 to...oho, this Head Guard woman has already dipped a foot into Divinity? Did I see things wrong when I first arrived?'

It couldn't be helped. His abilities, especially his All-Seeing Eyes, weren't developed enough to see through someone so powerful before he began controlling spacetime. Rather than saying he misread them, it was better to say that he read everything he could.

Still, thinking back to his reckless behavior, he smiled wryly. He was lucky he wasn't someone who caused problems randomly, or else he would've died then and there.

The group of guards escorted Damien through Hidden Death Valley, leaving Arcadia and passing through Star City as they arrived at the Hell Hole. When they reached the entrance, the Head Guard flashed her emblem and received permission to enter.

"From this point on, everything you see must remain a secret. You will be promoted to sign a Mana Oath in front of the Director when we reach the office, so don't even think about disobeying." The Head Guard said.

Damien nodded in agreement. Considering the security level of the Hell Hole, this seemed like a basic procedure.

Besides, who did he even have to tell about the place? If it was Zara, they could just share memories through their spiritual connection to share information. In the first place, with her being his beast

companion, he doubted he'd be prohibited from sharing with her as long as she signed the same Mana Oath.

The thick doors of the Hell Hole were made of a metal alloy that neither awareness nor space could penetrate. It was an area Damien couldn't break into even if he had 10 times his current power.

And when the group walked in, he finally saw why it was termed the Hell Hole.

Torture.

The training the people within were partaking in was torture at the very least. He saw dozens of people have their bodies destroyed, only to be resurrected by the mysterious medicines injected into them thereafter.

This was a method of physical body training that most could never stand. It was essentially death and rebirth, repeated over and over again until the body reached a satisfactory level of strength.

Damien had undergone this process nearly every time he evolved, and even a few times outside this process, but he never got used to the pain.

'I even became a bit of a masochist to cope with it...tch, damn Void Physique.'

The body reconstruction training was only one of many torturous training regimens Damien witnessed. All around, groups of geniuses were being put through hell to numb their free will and strengthen their bloodlust and power.

Hell Hole...was truly an apt name for this place.

"Stop dilly-dallying and follow me. We've arrived." The Head Guard spoke after around half an hour of walking.

The group arrived in front of a small but ancient door connected to an unassuming hut. If one entered the Hell Hole without knowledge of the hut's existence, they wouldn't pay it any mind.

But Damien was different. He could sense it clearly.

This hut...was a structure similar to Aquazyl.

It was a self-contained realm transformed from a Mystic Realm.

'Oho, these old geezers are pretty interesting.'

With that final thought, Damien followed the Head Guard through the small door.

This would be his first encounter with the wider universe's Demigods, and frankly, he couldn't wait to see how they compared to his master.

Chapter 705 Encounter [2]

Behind the small door stood the simple scene of the inside of the small hut it was attached to. It was completely unlike what Damien expected.

But that expectation was met only a second later when the Head Guard led him to the hut's backdoor and walked through it.

What lay beyond was a massive room completely dichotomous with the small hut. Ornate platinum and silver decorations lined the walls, which were painted with beautiful murals emanating profound auras. Each of these murals told the tale of a different hero, each of these heroes having made immense accomplishments in their tales. Just looking at them made one feel incredibly fighting spirit and killing intent.

The floor was a similar platinum color to the wall ornaments, completely reflective and allowing Damien to see his own reflection from below.

Centered halfway between the walls and the center of the room were two rows of thrones, six in each row. And finally, a single throne sat at the head, as if clearly delineating its owner's importance.

'Wow...the ceiling is...'

Damien didn't pay any mind to the scene on the floor. His attention was drawn to the beautifully carved and painted mural on the ceiling.

It was a single monster taking up the entire ceiling. With the head of a tiger, the wings of a dragon, the legs of a hawk, the tentacles of a Kraken...this astronomical beast seemed to hold a characteristic of every beast race in existence. Even its mere visage was enough to send shivers down Damien's spine. He couldn't imagine the power of the beast the mural depicted.

And he couldn't imagine the power of the man sitting atop it. His long black hair flowed and fluttered in the wind, his crystalline blue eyes shining with a light of ferocity and power. In his hand was a beautifully crafted sword that carried the universe's will within its blade.

As Damien's attention turned back to the other murals, he realized that every hero painted on the walls was showing reverence to the one on the ceiling.

"Curious of his identity?" An aged voice rang out.

"Should I not be?" Damien answered.

"Ohoho, nothing like that. It's just, even if you're curious you'll never understand who he was. There is nobody present that can answer that question for you either." The voice replied.

"Well, that's a shame then. This man truly feels worthy of these heroes' reverence. I would like to hear his story."

"If you wish to do so, then explore Death Emperor Star to finality. After all, this mural came into existence well before our group of old men arrived and founded the academy."

Damien finally turned his attention away from the mural and looked at the throne at the head of their formation. There, a sagely old man now sat with a smile on his face.

And it wasn't just him. All of the 12 remaining seats were now filled with both men and women of unknown origin.

"So this is the perpetrator?" A man asked coldly. "Why are you being so friendly to him, Director? Let's just expel him and get it over with."

"Calm down, Alphas. The boy has only just arrived here. Can't you let him at least explain himself before jumping to the verdict?" Another man questioned the previous.

"Hmph! Those who do not follow the academy's rules must be punished. Am I wrong for thinking so?"

"Of course not. But since when did we ever expel someone for a crime of this level?"

"H-hmph. The past is the past. This is the present."

"Both of you be quiet." The sagely old man snapped coldly.

"You're quite the interesting boy," the old man said as he turned to face Damien. "Many have come before you, but none were so composed. You are aware of your current position, no?"

"You mean the fact that I'm standing before the Thirteen Zodiacs of Hidden Death Valley; the Demigods that rule over it all? I'm well aware."

"Amusing," the old man said in reply.

"Then, do you know why we called you here?"

"It probably isn't because I broke such a petty rule. If it was, there'd be no need for the 13 Zodiacs to congregate. Is this matter related to my provocation of the Bloodbitch Clan?"

"Brat, I suggest you watch your tongue." Another man spoke from the side. His throne was third from the central throne on the right side.

"For what reason should I do that? If someone wants to provoke me, they shouldn't expect me to sit quietly and take it."

"And you shouldn't expect yourself to be able to handle it. How arrogant of you to even think about challenging the Bloodlock Clan, and even more than that, how presumptuous of you to speak to us in such a tone?!" The man roared, his aura flaring to suppress Damien.

However, another aura burst forth at the same time, completely dispelling the man's momentum.

"Behave yourselves. Both of you." The old man warned. "Instead, student Damien, why don't you tell me your side of the story? There must've been a reason for you to act so recklessly even while knowing the rules."

"Does telling my side change anything?" Damien asked.

"It might," the old man admitted. "We still haven't decided on your punishment yet."

Damien furrowed his brows. If that biased Elder got his way, he could easily be expelled from the academy due to this tiny incident. If he wanted to survive this situation and even obtain some connections and rewards from it...

He needed to turn the rest of the elders to his side.

"The academy enforces both a rule to keep students from harming each other outside the duel arenas and one to keep students from oppressing each other with status and backing. I'm here for a minor offense to the former rule due to someone else's minor offense to the latter. If you want to punish me for my actions, then bring the other person here so he can face the same."

Damien's words were those of provocation. He was well aware of the Bloodlock Clan's influence, and despite Hidden Death Valley being a neutral organization, it wouldn't be strange if multiple of its elders were bought out by other clans.

Damien wanted to know just how many of these people would be against him regardless of what he said, and the best way to do so was through provocation.

"You brat...!" The earlier man said. His name was Silcerin, Scorpio of the 13 Zodiacs. Though he wasn't a member of the Bloodlock Clan, he had deep ties with the Wellspring Family through the marriage of his sister and one of the family's elders. His grudge against Damien began long ago with Julius' crippling.

Damien ignored the man, knowing he was suppressed by the Director, and poured mana into the All-Seeing Eyes. His gaze moved through slowed spacetime to study every minute change in these elders' expressions.

But...would they allow him to continue?

"Quite bold of you to think you could read us so easily, don't you think?" A woman said teasingly. Her words sent an invisible tremor through space, interfering with Damien's skill.

Damien shrugged in response, not taking it to heart. He'd expected this to happen. He was standing against a room filled with Demigods, after all.

He remained bold against them even while knowing they could kill him with a single breath because he was banking on a single fact.

His gaze turned to the Director. The things he'd heard about this man...

If there was anyone Damien needed on his side from this point forth, it was none other than him.

Chapter 706 Encounter [3]

"Alright, let's end this charade and get back to the topic at hand. Do you have anything else to say before we decide your punishment?" The Director spoke, cutting the tension that had been building between Damien and the Board.

Damien looked at him curiously. His lips widened into a small but vicious smile. "To allow oppression to continue on such a low level, I doubt it's because you want us to submit? If my actions aligned with what you wanted in the first place, what's the use of punishment?"

The Director's eyes widened slightly in surprise. In the next moment, a small smile appeared on his face. "How interesting. Alright, if that's all you say then that's enough. I shall convene with the others and decide your punishment."

A transparent screen of mana erected itself between Damien and the elders. From the way it appeared, Damien almost thought it was a usage of Space Laws, but it was completely different.

It was like the world's atmosphere itself solidified into a barrier.

'What a strange group.' Damien thought to himself. His interaction with them was short and mostly to the point. Every time it looked like some drama would appear, the Director stepped in and quelled all sides.

'He has them under his grasp so tightly...what a guy.'

The Thirteen Zodiacs. In common mythology and knowledge, only twelve zodiacs were ever acknowledged. When Damien first found out about the Board of Directors and how they classified themselves, he wondered why they decided to include the thirteenth.

But after meeting them and seeing their dynamic, he understood.

Ophiuchus, the Zodiac Killer.

Other than this sign, there was no better way to describe the Director.

Despite the Board of Directors being seen as an entity of equals by the outside world, the Director held every ounce of power in Hidden Death Valley. The others obeyed his every word even if they hated his instruction, simply because they had no other choice.

If they disobeyed, they would be devoured.

'Is that what he was trying to show me?'

Even though the interaction was short, the Director's attitude while it was ongoing was strange. In front of outsiders, there's no way he'd show such a domineering and oppressive appearance towards his peers.

After all, he had to maintain the image that they were harmonious and equal.

If so, why did he make it so blatantly obvious to Damien that he was in complete control?

Was it a move to intimidate him?

Or better, was it...?

'He wants something from me. He's showing me that if I have his backing, I can be rampant and unhinged without worrying about people outside of my means coming after me...but there's no such thing as free lunch in this world.'

As Damien submerged himself in thought, the transparent barrier dispersed and reconnected him with the world.

"It has been decided!" The Director said dominantly. "Because your sin was light, we will not threaten you with expulsion or anything of the sort. Instead, I will give you two options..."

"The first is that you spend 5 years in the Isolation Chamber reflecting on your mistakes. Through this, you might even gain some special insights that help you grow stronger. The second option..."

"...you must participate in the ongoing war and achieve promising results. If your achievements reach a certain level, you will be allowed back to the academy."

"I choose the second," Damien said without hesitation. "I just have one question."

"Ask it."

"Will I still be allowed to take the progress assessment if my punishment is still ongoing in 6 months?"

The Director furrowed his brows. "Is the assessment that important to you?"

Damien shrugged. "I've been training in preparation for it for a while now. If I miss it, wouldn't it be a shame?"

The Director let out a small chuckle at his words. "Indeed, it would be. Very well. I will allow you to return for the progress assessment in 6 months regardless of whether your punishment has ended or not."

"This is my final verdict!"

Damien's encounter with the Board of Directors ended just like that. Unlike the mess of conflict he expected to walk into, it was far more succinct.

In fact, Damien had barely seen anything of a majority of the Zodiacs. Aside from the biased Scorpio and that woman who chimed in, none of the others spoke at all.

Damien walked with the Head Guard and her squad and left the Hell Hole. While he could've returned to the battle arena to finish his run, he instead decided to return to his Star City home for a small period of rest.

A grin lit up his face the entire time. He couldn't believe his luck.

'And they said it was punishment. Since when was giving me exactly what I want considered punishment?'

He'd been itching to join the war for a very long time, but he'd never had the opportunity. Before entering Hidden Death Valley, he was simply too weak to even consider it.

Now that he had a decent amount of strength, he was more than qualified to join the war. As long as he remained careful, he wouldn't die an early death.

Only, he had no method to access the battlefield. Hidden Death Valley geniuses had to go through strict procedures and training before they were allowed into the warfront. This was a safety measure to make sure no promising geniuses would die before their time.

'I was told that I depart in 3 days. That's more than enough time to finish up at the arena. Ah, I should probably call Zara too.'

Zara had been off doing her own training since they returned. Damien hadn't even seen a glimpse of her. But, he knew she'd want to join him on this expedition. Even discounting her new love for adventure and thrill...

The Nox held an integral key to her identity. If she wanted to understand her origins, she'd have to face them as much as possible.

Damien submerged himself in thought as he visualized various scenes he'd seen through both Alaric and the Fifth Primal Sovereign's memories. Those scenes of war both motivated and humbled him, preparing him for what was to come.

After an unknown amount of time, he faced a much-expected interruption.

"It's quite dangerous to be so unaware of your surroundings, you know?" A voice appeared from nearby, snapping him out of his thoughts.

At some point, an old man had entered the house.

"I mean, no matter how much attention I paid, I wouldn't be able to sense you. What's the point of trying?" Damien responded with a smile.

Standing up from the bed, he picked up a bottle of spirit liquor from the counter and sat it down at the table.

"So? What great deed have I accomplished for the Director himself to give me a home visit?"

The Director smiled and sat down opposite Damien. Taking a sip from the glass of spirit liquor Damien poured for him, he spoke.

"Well, I'm sure you've already guessed it by now but I'm not one to enjoy mind games and riddles. I'll get straight to the point."

He put the glass down and stared directly into Damien's eyes, his atmosphere becoming solemn.

"This time, when you go out to war, there is something I need you to accomplish."

Chapter 707 Encounter [4]

"This time, when you go out to war, there is something I need you to accomplish."

The Director's words served as an affirmation of Damien's previous suspicions. However, there were still a few curious points.

What made the Director choose Damien specifically?

At least in Hidden Death Valley, he hadn't accomplished much. Even if the Emperor Bone Sea expedition was taken into account, Damien's recount of Aquazyl was too vague for it to pique the Director's attention.

'Ah, has this old man been paying attention to me?' Damien suddenly realized. He hadn't been in the Divine Realm for long, but his entrance into the Dimensional Leaderboard wasn't a small one. If Atticus' high evaluation of him was also considered, it wasn't surprising for high-level figures to have their eyes on him.

"You should at least have a vague understanding of my strength. I hope you aren't trying to ask me to change the tides of the war or something." Damien said straightforwardly.

Even if it was a task from a Demigod, an extremely powerful one at that, he still had his boundaries.

"Haha, nothing like that. What, do you think I want to kill off a young genius before he can grow?" The Director responded with the same manner.

"Fair enough. Then, what is it that you want?" Damien asked.

The Director nodded and pulled out a projection device, displaying a wall of holograms in the air showcasing various sceneries and statistics.

"The world you will be deployed to is called Calypto, the Infected Source World of Eden."

The Director waved his hand in the air and switched the order of the holograms, bringing to attention many images of a corrupted and decayed world.

"I assume you already know what an Infected Source World is and understand its significance, so I won't spend too much time explaining it. In reality, Eden's Infected Source World has lost most of its value already since the Sector itself is on the brink of destruction."

"Nevertheless, before the Sector falls completely, we must still protect it. Eden is a gateway into the wider universe. Once Eden is taken, the Nox attacks in the Soul World and Beast Domain will heighten and war will spread further than we can control."

"The goal of your deployment will be to destroy Calypto. If this mission succeeds, we will have far more control over the battlefield in Eden. With Calypto acting as a sort of central command post connecting the Nox forces to Throh where their main base resides, destroying it means effectively severing their chain of command."

Damien furrowed his brows as he looked through the information presented to him. "Even if the chain of command is severed, how much can we benefit? By my understanding, the Nox have already spread their claws into the Soul World and Beast Domain."

"Even aside from that, the mindless Nox beings under 4th class will rampage with or without commands. Rather than having them run wild, wouldn't it be better for us if they maintained the strict formation they have under the Higher Nox's control?"

The Director's brow raised curiously. He didn't expect Damien to know much about the war as he hadn't been exposed to it yet, but surprisingly, the young genius was generally well-informed.

'I guess it's a benefit of being a rogue. Without the shackles of a major organization, he can move however he pleases.' The Director thought.

Soon enough, he continued the conversation and refuted Damien. "The societal structure of the Nox is much more complicated than you think. In fact, while most 3rd class Nox and below are mindless, it's possible for Higher Nox to share a portion of their intelligence with a lower being and use them as an avatar."

"Through this, they can effectively act without having to sacrifice their main bodies. Destroying Calypto holds numerous benefits, and among them is our gaining the ability to find these Nox Avatars and eliminate them, forcing the stronger forces out of hiding and striking them with a critical blow."

Damien sunk into thought. Information about Nox Avatars was new to him. Whether it was Alaric or the Fifth Primal Sovereign, neither had run into this concept before.

But as Damien thought about it more, he realized something. Didn't the first Nox he ever encountered have this ability?

'The Nox trapped in the ancient temple was only a 3rd class. I always thought the purpose of trapping such a weak being was for the sake of introducing the Nox to the younger generation...but maybe it was something greater?'

While its intelligence had decayed from years of solitude and stasis, the Nox he met still had the ability to speak and think properly. What if...that Nox was originally the Avatar of a much stronger being?

If that was so, sealing it made more sense. Killing the Avatar would allow the strand of consciousness sealed within to escape and return to its original owner, and while the death of the Avatar would injure the Nox it was connected to, the effect was something that could easily be healed from over the 10,000 year period that separated the past war and the current one.

If the Avatar was instead sealed, it would mark a permanent loss of that strand of consciousness for the Nox who owned it, thus leading it to be partially crippled for the long period before the war started.

When Damien and his group killed that Nox, the strand of consciousness would've returned to its original owner, injuring it and forcing it to spend time healing in this era rather than the last.

'What a plan...if the original Nox was a supreme powerhouse, Kurt's actions essentially forced it out of the war. We might've saved a portion of the universe without even realizing it.'

Naturally, sealing an Avatar wasn't an easy task. Even Kurt could only seal one at the peak of his power as a Demigod. Killing them, however, was a different story.

And if the Avatars were killed...

"Not only will the chain of command be disrupted, the stronger forces will be harmed without me having to touch them. Even if the mindless lesser Nox beings rampage, the consequences of their actions won't be enough to offset the advantages of going through with this plan." Damien realized.

It wasn't apt to call this move a major blow to the Nox, it would definitely mess with their momentum and trajectory, giving the Army of Heaven some leeway in their actions.

Still, attacking an Infected Source World was incredibly dangerous. While the main base of the Nox was located in Throh, a world over halfway across the Sector, Calypto would still contain a large portion of the Nox's power. There would be no shortage of extreme peak 4th classes present there.

"It's dangerous...but possible," Damien muttered. Turning back to the Director, he asked, "what is my role in this plan? For you to come to me specifically, it must be pretty big."

The Director smiled. He enjoyed watching the wheels in Damien's head turn. It made him appreciate the new generation of geniuses that they were raising, and it helped him reaffirm his determination to run the academy as he'd been doing for countless millennia already.

With a wide grin on his face, he spoke. "If my information isn't wrong, your class is Celestial, no? Naturally, I want you to do as a Celestial should."

"Devastate and conquer."

Chapter 708 Encounter [5]

The conversation between Damien and the Director lasted through the night. The duo went over the statistics in the hologram and Damien learned more about what the Director actually wanted from him.

The task in store for him wasn't small, but it wasn't unachievable. It also helped that it was a task that aligned with Damien's goals, incentivizing him to complete it.

'What a crazy old man.' Damien thought to himself. The plan itself was relatively streamlined, but it was something only an insane person could think up.

Damien had to admire the Director's spirit.

'Old monsters are usually like this, huh? The Director isn't as casual as Master, but I feel like the two of them would get along well.'

The Director's attitude towards Damien could be considered good. The Director was a Demigod and the heading figure of Hidden Death Valley, if he was even somewhat cordial in his treatment then it could be considered a good thing.

Hidden behind those eyes of his was a ruthlessness that could only be bred in calamity. It was something Damien infinitely admired, as this type of attitude would always achieve the best results in wartime.

'Still, he's lucky he chose me. If it was someone with a hero complex then...'

Damien shook his head and stopped thinking about it. He took the Director's projection device and placed it in his subspace. This was a gift from the Director, and the information on it would be an immense help to him in his quest.

'I guess I should finish what I started...I have another two days. As long as I don't fall, that's enough time to dominate the King Bracket and move upward.'

Damien stood up and walked out of his Star City home.

His battlelust was especially high after his previous conversation with the Director, and he was more than just a little excited to entertain it.

BOOOOOM!

"Winner: Damien Void!"

The terrifying explosion that rang out was immediately followed by the announcer's excited voice. The cheers of the crowd rocked the entire coliseum, causing space to tremble with their fervor.

On the arena floor, Damien stood silently. Blood ran down his body from the numerous wounds he'd received from the previous battle, but Transcendent Regeneration made sure those wounds wouldn't hinder him.

"This is our rising star's 9th win in the King Bracket! With just one more, he gains the right to challenge the Overlord for supremacy!"

Despite the uproarious atmosphere of the crowd, Damien's face remained cold. Unlike his first five matches, the sixth through ninth weren't as enjoyable.

But this wasn't a matter of the battle itself.

Damien's most recent victim dematerialized from the arena floor and appeared outside the barrier. His face was pale white and drained of any blood, and despite being fully healed, he didn't wake up at all.

The torture Damien had inflicted onto him was too much to bear. His psyche had already crumbled.

'That's four. From level 300 to level 330, they've been getting stronger every time. But...is this the best the Bloodbitches can do? Even if their levels are powerful, their law comprehension is lacking. They'd die in a heartbeat if they were ever sent to war.'

His opponents didn't try to hide their affiliation. Each and every one was a servant of the Bloodlock Clan sent by Reavus to hinder him.

Knowing this fact, Damien didn't go easy on them. In fact, he did everything he could to make sure they'd never wake up again no matter how much healing they'd received.

On one hand, he was offended by how little Reavus thought of him. To send these people to destroy him with brute force alone, did he really think Damien was weak?

4th class was a rank where law comprehension mattered far more than levels. If one couldn't match their comprehension with their base power level, they'd be infinitely weaker than even those beneath them.

Now, an average genius wouldn't stand a chance against these forces. Damien was well aware that he couldn't underestimate their power. But against someone like him whose comprehension far outstripped their base level, these men were nothing more than bugs.

A stronger physical body and higher existence level meant nothing to him who could devour existences to heighten those factors easily.

'Those four weren't bad solely because of this weakness. Level 300 and even 325 beings are manageable in single combat, but unless they're lacking in law comprehension like those idiots, I won't be able to face someone higher level than that...'

By this point, Reavus should've been aware that he couldn't hinder Damien with such sloppy methods. Most likely, he was facing some restrictions that didn't allow him to send geniuses too overly powerful to fight him.

But those restrictions wouldn't apply for the tenth match. That was a match that decided whether or not he'd fight the Overlord, and the strength of his competitor would likely be a glimpse into the Overlord's own strength. It wouldn't be an easy win at all.

'I should be prepared to sacrifice a limb or two.'

"Contestant Damien Void, would you like to continue fighting?" The announcer asked.

Damien's eyes narrowed in thought. If he could, he'd prefer to take a day to recuperate before continuing.

But his current circumstances didn't give him time to do so.

And besides, wasn't the best way to improve being pushed to the brink?

After a slight moment of thought, Damien nodded his head. The crowd's reaction to his decision could be imagined. It was hard to describe just how excited they were.

People in the King Bracket didn't usually have win streaks for so long. Whenever it looked like someone would reach the Overlord, countless powerhouses would arrive to suppress them.

But Damien didn't face this challenge.

His performance and his empowering words from his first entrance didn't just gain hatred from the battle arena geniuses, but respect as well.

His determination to face the Bloodlock Clan without backing down was more than just admirable, it was something to be worshipped.

Those unaffiliated geniuses and those with different affiliations didn't interfere with Damien anymore. This was partially due to the prior factor and partially because they didn't want to offend the Bloodlock Clan by stealing their prey.

Now that he'd reached an almost impossible height to these observing geniuses, they naturally wanted to see him triumph.

Everyone loved a good underdog story.

As the battle arena rules mandated, Damien was given half an hour to recover his energy. This period of time was greater than that of the lower brackets due to the King Bracket's difficulty and the connotations of Damien's next fight.

During this time, Damien not only healed and used Devour to replenish his mana, he also calmed his mind and sunk into a comprehensive state.

His spacetime abilities weren't fully developed yet, but any small improvement he could have in this area would be an immense help to him.

Unfortunately, half an hour wasn't any time at all. It passed faster than a shooting star.

Damien stood up confidently.

The announcer's voice rang out to introduce his opponent.

The crowd went wild.

A woman walked through the challenger gate and entered the arena.

The mere residual power of her footsteps caused the ground to quake.

As Damien looked on, his eyes hardened.

'Level 340...'

This fight...

He'd be hard-pressed to win.

Chapter 709 Overlord [1]

Despite the powerful fluctuations emitted by her movements, the woman's steps were light and airy. Her small frame made it hard to imagine how she put so much weight into the ground so effortlessly.

"Now entering: the rising star's final challenger! Not many know her name, but many know her power! Bianca Weiss, the Earthshaker!"

The woman's name, Bianca, was truly unknown within Hidden Death Valley. Even on Heaven's List, she didn't stand out much.

But the title that followed that name was more than just well-known.

One of the strongest enforcers working under the Bloodlock Clan's Hidden Death Valley influence, a genius who surpassed even Reavus Bloodlock in talent, the Earthshaker.

The Earthshaker's gender was never known before this day, but due to her reputation, everyone assumed she was instead a gargantuan man. Reports of her actions listed the way she brutally tore opponents apart, how she could use a single stomp to cause a civilization-destroying earthquake.

Seeing the face behind that horrifying title, the crowd was especially stunned. Rather than a grotesque man, she was actually a beautiful woman!

Damien, unlike the crowd, was of no mind to pay attention to these small details. He could see her level with his eyes, and he could sense her law comprehension with his perception.

This woman was truly strong. She wasn't like those wastrels he'd fought before.

Bianca soon reached the center of the arena floor, standing a few feet away from Damien.

"Mm, you have to at least be this strong to make the young master send me." She commented nonchalantly.

A vein bulged in Damien's forehead. The immediate dismissal didn't feel good at all.

But...

His blood was boiling. Just as she thought of him...

'Right, I need someone of at least this level to challenge me.'

As the two faced off, the crowd finally registered what they'd heard. People ran about to rapidly change their bets or alter the amounts. The announcer smiled as he saw this.

He wasn't the same announcer Damien almost killed last time, rather, he was the replacement. And unlike the previous announcer, he didn't care about Hidden Death Valley's political drama at all.

He only cared about money.

And considering the fact that Damien's matches always raked in insane amounts of money, how could he not be excited?

After all, he got a cut of that betting pool as his payment.

The battle was delayed another ten minutes to accommodate these late betters. The entire time, Damien and Bianca didn't speak a single word to each other.

Bianca stood quietly with her eyes closed. Meanwhile, Damien poured mana into the All-Seeing Eyes to see through as much of her as he could.

'She only has an earth affinity...but this affinity doesn't feel as weak as the other earth affinities I've seen.'

The mana passively swirling around her body was simply too powerful for her earth affinity to be as simple as controlling rocks.

Damien started thinking, just what could one do if one expanded an earth affinity into the conceptual stage?

Minutes passed as both challengers fell into a silent lull. The arena soon filled back up, the millions of spectators returning to their seats and waiting for the battle to start with utmost anticipation.

The announcer smiled and opened his mouth. "Challengers, are you ready?!"

Damien and Bianca opened their eyes. They succinctly nodded, not taking their attention off each other.

With a wide grin on his face, the announcer raised his arm into the sky.

"Battle...Start!"

BANG!

A fist impacted Mirage. In that instant the announcer called for the start of the battle, both Bianca and Damien moved.

Dark yellow mana coated Bianca's fists as she moved. Her speed wasn't particularly fast, but she was adept at attacking perfectly to counter this weakness.

Despite being much faster than her, Damien couldn't find an opening to attack. He was stuck using Mirage to block the immense force of her punches, all the while being gradually pushed back.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The punches continued to rain down. Damien immediately activated teleportation and made distance, reappearing tens of meters away.

'Void Sword Art Second Form: Horizon Break'

His sword angled parallel to the ground and shot out like an arrow. The distance separating him from his opponent became negligible.

Bang!

Bianca raised her arms in an X to block, but the force of the attack still managed to push her back. Narrowing her eyes, she waved her arm through the air.

'Earth, rise.'

Rumble!

The earth quaked as countless pillars sprouted from its surface. These pillars were massive, and numerous, enveloping the entire arena in their shadows.

And as they rose, they specifically targeted Damien with a heavy impact force that made his bones rattle and his organs shake.

'Shit!'

Damien teleported constantly, avoiding the rising pillars. He knew that getting hit by them would only hinder his progress.

He needed to get close to her. The entire arena was her weapon, so long ranged combat wasn't a viable option anymore. Unless he could touch her, he wouldn't be able to win.

Material Shift would be the most convenient ability to use at the moment, but its main limitation was the necessity of a second target to shift with. In Bianca's vicinity, even the rock on the floor was connected to her mana. He didn't have any targets to lock onto.

'Then...!'

He immediately moved to enter the spatial layers and teleport. But at that moment...

"Keuk...!"

A strong repelling force pushed him back and disallowed him from doing so.

Damien's eyes widened. Right, he'd forgotten about this possibility.

The battle arena was mostly fair, but it had its loopholes. For one, artifacts were allowed.

Including spatial locking artifacts.

'This isn't some easy spatial lock...I can't unravel it easily.'

Damien's face turned dignified. His most useful movement ability had been locked away. With space still being his main method of attack, this limitation was genuinely severe.

Luckily, he'd spent time learning how to adapt to battling within a spatial lock after his previous encounters.

Even without teleportation...

'Seven Stars Encircling The Moon!'

Damien's fist immediately turned into a shining moon. Seven stars of spacetime essence and flame-lightning essence formed around the shining moon, chaotically spinning around each other.

'I've never tried this, but it should work!'

Damien's fist shot out. The seven stars collided with each other one by one and exponentially multiplied the force of the attack. The rampant energy finally centered on the moon after all seven stars collapsed, and when Damien's fist reached the end of its path, completely outstretched...

VOOOOM!

He directed the energy in a straight line, disallowing it from exploding outward. A fearsome beam of shining white chaotic light burst through the air, shattering space and turning the rock pillars around it into powder as it rushed at Bianca.

'Earth, shield!' Bianca shouted inwardly. The earth around her body condensed and pressurized, turning crystalline as it rose from the ground and created an eight-point barrier around her.

This barrier wasn't just made of earth, but of the powerful minerals hidden within it. Even those above her level would have an extremely difficult time breaking through her turtle shell.

CRASH! BOOOOOOOOOM!

Damien's chaotic light beam impacted the crystalline shield almost the exact second it appeared. An ear-piercing screeching sound rang out as the blazing mana tried to pierce through the shield. Rays of light were reflected all over the arena, destroying the rock pillars and even forming cracks in the arena barrier.

But Bianca already knew the attack wouldn't pierce her defense. Her opponent was weaker than her. How was he to accomplish something even those above her level couldn't do?

'Pierce him!'

Her arm waved through the air like she was conducting an orchestra. The debris from the destroyed rock pillars rose into the air and shot through it like a group of shooting stars. The yellowish-brown mana lighting up the atmosphere became active, attacking Damien fiercely!

He flew into the air, dodging with everything he had. Time mana circled around his body and sped up his own personal time, increasing his speed.

Bang!

Freya appeared in his hand, bullets leaving its barrel and shooting down as many of the rock bullets as it could.

And as a final touch on his defense, vector control activated. Any rock projectiles that appeared too close to him were redirected and shot back at their owner.

Still, Bianca was too powerful.

How could she allow her own attack to harm her?

She poured mana into the crystalline barrier and reinforced it. Even with the doubled strength the rock projectiles gained through Damien's vector control, they couldn't pierce its surface, exploding as soon as they made impact.

Seeing this, Damien gritted his teeth.

It seemed he'd need far more power than he was currently using if he wanted to defeat her.

Chapter 710 Overlord [2]

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The battle continued for minutes on end, becoming a constant exchange between Damien and Bianca as the former tried to break the latter's barrier and the latter tried to limit the former's movements.

Xiu!

Damien's body shot through the air, zooming in random patterns to avoid the hail of stone shards rapidly bursting towards him.

Every time they impacted the arena barrier, they caused frightening cracks to form. Even the audience could no longer cheer due to fear.

"Elders, now!"

A voice came from outside the arena. Without anyone realizing it, a group of enforcement elders had arrived on the scene. They galvanized their mana, sending it into the barrier to strengthen it with all their power.

The cracks soon healed and the barrier strengthened.

The foremost elder watched the ongoing battle with a look of trepidation. They'd only just arrived yet the two geniuses within forced them to use all their power to contain the battle. If this continued...

"Call for reinforcements immediately! We need the High Elders to support us if we don't want the entire coliseum to shatter!"

The elders hurriedly moved to contain the destruction. Meanwhile, within the arena, the battle was only becoming more heated.

Flames and lightning billowed from Damien's body and clouded the atmosphere, destroying any projectiles coming his way.

He landed on the ground and glared at his opponent.

[Storm]

Crackle!

Furious lightning clouds formed in the sky. Silver Heavenly Lightning surged within, booming as it impacted the ground around Bianca.

Still, the strange crystalline shield she'd erected was incredibly powerful. Even as the third strongest lightning in the universe impacted it, it remained unharmed.

Bianca raised her arm from within the safety of the barrier and commanded the world. Her mana raged around her and sunk into the earth.

'Arise, my legion!'

The earth trembled fiercely as cracks spread through its surface. The ground below seemed to mold itself and take shape, rising into the air and turning into a row of soldiers that separated Bianca from Damien.

'Attack!'

The rock army charged. They acted as if they had independent consciousnesses of their own, circling around Damien and blocking his escape routes. Once their formation was complete, they attacked.

'Tch!' Damien scoffed as he battled them back. Mirage swung through the air and parried the close-ranged attacks that got near him while he wielded Freya in his other hand to rapidly diffuse any projected attacks flying at him from afar.

'I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but I didn't think it would be this bad!' Damien thought to himself. From the moment space was sealed near the start of the battle, he'd been placed at a disadvantage.

After all, this sealing wasn't something rudimentary that Damien could break easily. He would need to dedicate a portion of his focus to the barrier and a portion of his mana to his All-Seeing Eyes to find a weakness, and even with this, it'd take a few minutes to do so.

Bianca, however, didn't give him the opportunity to divide his attention. Each of the rock soldiers she summoned had the power of an early 4th class, and while they were individually weak enough for Damien to handle them easily, their combined power wasn't a joke.

Boom!

Damien's sword clashed against the rock sword of a nearby soldier. While he attempted to parry, a spear shot towards his abdomen!

'Dammit! Freeze!'

Time slowed to a crawl. Damien watched as the spear moved through space, but he knew it was already too late to dodge completely. In a last-ditch effort to preserve as much strength as he could, he slightly moved his body to the left to avoid the brunt of the spear's tip.

Spurt!

Time resumed thereafter. The spear cut a gash in Damien's side but failed to pierce him. Damien parried the sword and spun around, sending a mana-infused kick into the spear-wielding soldier's head with immense force.

Bang!

The soldier's head burst. While it was dazed by the damage, Damien retreated dozens of steps and maneuvered his way out of the encirclement.

'I can't continue like this. She knows my mana capacity is great so she's trying to wear me down. The Storm trait is forcing her to stay within her barrier, but looking at the way her mana is flowing, she doesn't have to actively provide it to these soldiers for them to move. Compared to the mana it takes her to maintain her barrier and the spatial locking artifact, I'm in a much worse position if I keep wasting time on these soldiers...'

Damien's eyes hardened. He wiped the blood off his lips and took his sword stance.

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

His body became a haze. While Dance of the Void's usage was severely limited when Damien couldn't travel through space, that didn't mean he couldn't use it.

He just had to use time as a substitute.

Rather than flickering in and out of existence, he was simply moving fast enough to emulate the same effect.

And through this...

Xiu! Xiu! Xiu!

The slashes Mirage made through the air were like zipping bees. With every movement he made, another head went flying into the air.

The group of soldiers originally had over twenty members, but in an instant, that number had been reduced to below ten.

Still, the soldiers weren't the main priority.

'Shackles of Earth! Tsunami!'

Bianca stomped into the ground, causing the rock below to fluctuate like waves of the sea. The ground rose and rose and rose until it formed a towering wall almost as high as the coliseum's peak.

The rolling rock wave then pulsated and pushed forward, sweeping away everything in its path!

At the same time, the rock soldiers around Damien shattered and merged, turning into thick spikes that jutted out of the earth and stabbed into Damien's body. The change was so quick that he didn't even have time to react!

Two spikes impaled his calves while ten more jutted into various parts of his back. Damien gritted his teeth and shattered the spikes, scattering dust and debris in all directions.

He winced in pain soon after. With pieces of rock trapped in his muscles, Transcendent Regeneration couldn't properly heal him. And while he could expel these rock fragments with just an instant of time...

The earthen tsunami was already upon him. Its towering appearance blocked his vision of everything else. An overwhelmingly powerful mana fluctuation wrapped around his body as his face turned dignified.

"Hoo..." Damien exhaled a slow breath.

His mind raced, everything in the surroundings seemingly slowing down as his processing speed surpassed the rate at which they moved.

He closed his eyes.

Mirage raised above his head.

A strange current of mana covered its blade. Spacetime essence gathered and empowered the sword.

And then...

Damien swung it with all his might. He didn't aim at the tsunami and he didn't aim at Bianca who was hidden behind it. He slammed Mirage directly towards the ground with every last ounce of his power!

He'd been training every facet of his being in recent months. Whether it was his elemental abilities, his physical body, or even his mind, they'd all seen an increase in fortification.

He'd been wondering to himself for a long time what it would be like to destroy a world.

And when he realized he had the power to do so already, inspiration struck him like lightning.

The result...

'Void Sword Art Sixth Form: Worldbreaker'

Mirage struck the ground. The essence trapped within combined with the sword's aura and submerged into the ground.

Crack!

Cracks began to spread through the earth.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The cracks widened and widened, creating a web thousands of feet across. The web of cracks raced to the base of the earthen tsunami and spread behind Damien to cover the entirety of the arena that he could access at the moment.

And finally, when the cracks finished spreading...

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

The body of Death Emperor Star itself exploded.