

# Void 721

## Chapter 721 Calypto [3]

The trip to Calypto took 2 months even with the starship using the best transportation techniques in the universe.

Not only did it cruise through the starry sky at an insane speed surpassing any 4th class being, it also traveled through three different long-distance teleportation arrays while doing so.

Cross-sector teleportation arrays were widely available in the Grand Heavens Boundary, but all those to Eden, Soul World, and the Beast Domain had been manually cut now that the Nox succeeded in breaching the three sectors.

Teleportation arrays were an immense convenience to the masses, but they were also an easy way to infiltrate the universe. These teleportation arrays were precisely how Nox geniuses like the Saint King were able to arrive in the Divine Realm.

Rather than the safety of those who lived in the invaded domains, keeping the Nox out of the remaining ones was more important to those in power.

Nevertheless, other than the speed of the journey itself, this starship voyage didn't vary much from Damien's usual trips through the starry sky. Whenever he could, he'd leave the ship and bind any Dead Stars he saw in the vicinity. And whenever he came across a lower world or beginner world, he would bind it too.

After all, the difficulty of doing so was the same. Unless the World Core had gained spirituality, it would be dominated by his Celestial Authority.

In consequence, Damien's mana capacity skyrocketed once again. The amount of World Force he could control didn't increase substantially, but the force itself became more dense. It was slowly becoming viable to utilize in combat again.

Still, 2 months wasn't much time, and the starship didn't wait for anyone. As it was rather tiring to Warp back into the moving ship every time he left it, Damien only got a few chances to perform this high-speed farming.

And finally, the starship crossed into Eden.

As the Plant Race's domain, Eden was known for its luscious worlds covered in beautiful greenery and life aura. Yet, none of those scenes could be witnessed anymore.

Eden was submerged in desolation.

Nearly every world the starship passed was charred black and destroyed. Some were even in pieces, their debris floating aimlessly in the starry sky.

Only when the ship reached Calypto was a hint of the Sector's previous wonder present.

But even this wonder had been corrupted.

Calypto was a large planet with a diameter of roughly 300,000 kilometers. This size meant that, if placed between Earth and the Moon, it would almost encapsulate all of the present space.

Only a world of this level would the Nox choose as an Infected Source World.

The world itself was painted in the color green. Even the ocean waters were dyed a similar greenish-white color after being influenced by the atmosphere.

But rather than the luscious and lively green one would usually see in Eden, this green stunk of infection. It was a disgusting color that corrupted the planet's previous atmosphere.

They were only a few tens of thousands of kilometers away from the planet, and at this time, the operation commander summoned the present geniuses to the main cabin of the ship.

"Everyone here has been roughly briefed about the situation, but I will reiterate one more time for safety. Today, we are not here to destroy the Infected Source World; none of you possess the power to do so. Instead, our mission is to distract the Nox forces residing in this world for 2 months to prevent them from aiding the main force on Throh while the main operation takes place." The commander spoke sternly.

"You will be split into teams of five and dispatched to various locations along the world. A world map, as well as general details on both characteristics of the world and those residing in it, have been sent to your academy emblems. Double tapping the emblem will allow you to view it."

The commander glanced over the 5,000 geniuses present with a stern face. At a time like this, there was no room for error.

2 months was an incredibly short period of time, and expecting mere students who hadn't grown into their strength yet to assist in this mission was something he never agreed with.

But there was no choice. Heaven's Army didn't have enough leeway to split their attention to both Throh and Calypto.

The strength of these students wasn't much weaker than Heaven's Army's forces, but their experience with war and slaughter was far too lacking.

Regardless, there wasn't another option for them. The only thing he could do was watch over them and keep as many of them alive as possible.

"There is no overarching plan for this mission as the goal is distraction rather than destruction. Depending on your drop point, you will be given a series of tasks to complete, but this is it. Keep in mind that this is not just a test of your power, but also your integrity, will, and tactical intelligence! Move wisely to accomplish your missions, and if you find yourself with time remaining, use it to destroy the enemy!"

"We touch ground in 3 hours. Use this time to get acclimated with your teammates and prepare yourself!"

With those words, the commander left the main cabin and returned to the starship's control room.

Immediately after, the academy emblems of the present geniuses began to shine. An array of lines lit up the room, connecting each emblem to another.

These lines led the geniuses to their team members. Damien and Zara had a line connecting them as well, and together, they moved to meet the rest of their group.

'It's nice that we were placed together. Is this the Director's work?' Damien wondered as he walked.

The Director was truly favoring him to influence the team pairings on an important mission like this for his sake, not that he minded at all.

It only took a bit of walking for the duo to meet with the rest of their group. The other three had seemingly already met prior to the mission, considering how they were standing together chatting.

When Damien and Zara arrived, the three immediately gave them a once-over.

"So these are the two newbies coming with us? A pretty boy and his toy? How sad."

The one who spoke was a woman with bronze skin and a sleek yet toned build. Her black hair was pulled up in a long ponytail that draped halfway down her back.

"A-ah! You can't say that about people, Synth! How many times has the instructor told you not to judge people by their appearance?!" A girl next to her condemned.

Unlike the first who had a more masculine vibe, this girl was small and cute, almost like a doll. She had shining blonde hair and equally golden eyes, a rosy blush settling on her pale skin as she shyly spoke.

"Whatever. It's not like they'll do anything about it, right? Ash, you need to grow some balls. That shy personality of yours doesn't fit you." The woman named Synth replied.

As the two spoke, Damien succinctly made a mental note to put this Synth woman in her place once they landed on Calypto. He couldn't allow someone so unruly to interfere with his judgement.

While he did so, the third person in their group walked up to him with an apologetic smile.

"I'm sorry about her. She has a tendency to speak without thinking. The instructors have been trying to quell her rebellious nature for years, but nothing they do seems to stick."

"Don't worry about it," Damien replied. "If even the instructors in the Hell Hole couldn't fix her, then it can't be helped."

The man nodded wryly and put out his hand. "My name is Tyler, by the way. I'm a level 300 Contractor. I'm able to tame beasts and fuse their power into my body."

'This Tyler guy...his power is similar to that Hun Fang brat. I wonder how those siblings are doing now...?'

Damien shook off his thought and instead shook Tyler's outstretched hand, replying in kind, "Damien Void. I'm not willing to reveal my class, but I'm especially skilled in Spatial Laws and Dimensional Magic."

He kept his explanation short and didn't mention his level, knowing that doing so would be counterintuitive. As Zara followed his lead and introduced herself, he looked over at the other two.

'Their levels aren't bad...the mana emanating from their bodies surpasses what you'd expect from an average level 300. Also, they definitely aren't what they seem at all.'

"What are you looking at, creep?" Synth sneered, interrupting his observation.

Damien glanced at her with a bored look. "What, are you too stupid to understand my intent? Tyler here was smart enough to introduce himself to his teammates. What about you?"

"Tch. Synth, level 315, Mechanist. That's all you need to know." Synth replied with a disgruntled scoff.

"H-hi! I'm Ash. I'm a level 313 Berserker. Please take care of me!" The blonde-haired girl followed.

"Berserker?!" Damien blurted out in surprise. He'd met plenty of people whose personalities juxtaposed their classes, but this one had to be the most severe case.

"Y-yes..." Ash replied sheepishly.

Damien shrugged. "Well, if you're strong you're strong. Looking at the three of you, it seems your party composition is pretty solid already."

Ash was a Berserker, a frontline fighter who could double as a tank. Tyler was a Contractor, and while his power involved fusing with beasts, he played the mid-range combatant role since he could respond properly to most situations with his varied skillset. Finally, Synth was a Mechanist. Damien first learned of this class type from Lynn Carter in Niflheim. Essentially, people of this class type were technomancers with various control abilities. Synth was clearly the long-ranged damage dealer and crowd controller of the group.

Together, they had an airtight formation and routine that they probably followed ever since they'd been placed together.

Considering that Damien and Zara arrived and ruined this synchronicity as unknowns, Damien almost felt like he could forgive them for their obviously unwelcoming atmosphere.

Though, that atmosphere wouldn't remain for long.



He wouldn't allow it to.

After all, since when was he someone who'd agree to be part of a team he didn't lead?

Chapter 722 Calypto [4]

As three hours rapidly raced by, Damien and Zara got familiar with the trio they were partnered with. As it turned out, they'd been together for many years already.

The Hell Hole was just as torturous of a place as Damien had seen during his brief visit, and despite undergoing the pains of remaining there, these three were able to rely on each other to overcome all odds and survive.

'Still, to be able to take all that torture without bending is admirable, especially for that brat. This group might not be so bad.'

Damien's plans didn't change at all, but he could at least admire the spirit of these three, mostly the Mechanist named Synth.

Even putting aside her fortitude, she'd turned a more engineering-based technomancer class into a battle class with her own ingenuity. She was a genius among geniuses.

Damien's group continued conversing and getting familiar with each other, and in what felt like an instant, the starship was already hovering within Calypto's atmosphere.

"All troops, prepare for transport!" The commander's voice boomed through the hall.

Each group immediately stood straight, separating from each other and grabbing onto their group members' shoulders.

"Follow what they're doing," Tyler said to Damien and Zara, "we will be teleported to our mission coordinates all at once. While holding onto each other isn't necessary, it heightens the chances of us spawning at the same point rather than being scattered around the area."

Damien nodded and grabbed Zara's shoulder, and she did the same with Ash.

The 5,000 geniuses stood in these connected positions for only a few seconds before groups started to disappear one by one.

And soon enough, Damien's group's turn came.

A flash of light enveloped him, a formation circle appearing beneath the five's feet.

In the next instant, they vanished from the starship.

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A mixture of sharp pleasant and foul odors mixed within Damien's nostrils as he rematerialized. The leaves of the tall tree that produced these odors brushed against his face.

'Ha, even with all that talk, we still got separated.' Damien scoffed inwardly.

He spread his awareness into the surroundings and rapidly found the rest of the group. Other than him, they all landed together.

'Just my luck.'

He teleported over before they could even regain their bearings. Other than Zara, the rest didn't even realize there'd been an issue.

"Good, everyone's here," Tyler said under his breath. "Let's find a safe place to look through our mission tasks first and proceed from there."

"Done," Damien said almost immediately.

"Hm?" Tyler voiced questioningly.

"Don't worry about it. We'll be there in 3...2...1..."

The group teleported once again. Nowadays, Damien's teleportation skill didn't have many restrictions. Bringing a group of five people around his strength level with him wasn't a problem at all.

When they reappeared, they were standing in a mossy cave. Just as they regained their senses from another sudden spatial jump...

Hssss!

The plants around them began to hiss violently. Poisonous purple fluid dripped from the ceiling and fell to the floor, burning deep holes in the earth's surface.

"Didn't you say it was safe?!" Synth exclaimed.

Damien flicked his finger. Sixteen spatial lights left his hand and hit the surrounding plants, expanding into miniature Dimensional Cages that trapped them.

"Well, it is now." He smirked.

"Why would you do that?!" Tyler shouted immediately. The previous kind facade he possessed dropped immediately.

"Do what?" Damien responded cluelessly.

"Not only are you acting without consulting your teammates, you're even putting them in danger! Even ignoring the sudden teleportation, why would you choose a cave that you obviously knew was populated?! This isn't how a team member should act!" Tyler yelled sternly,

Damien sighed in response. While he could see the man's point, he also scoffed at it. Truly, these kids were green without experience in the field. They'd never been forced to survive in the wild before.

Meanwhile, Damien had experienced it from a first-person perspective. Whether it was the 10 years of war he lived through as Alaric or the 2 years of brutal survival he lived through as a teenager, both were experiences these geniuses who grew up in the Hell Hole couldn't compare with.

He couldn't take Tyler's words seriously.

"I can at least acquiesce about the teleportation. Though, it wasn't a mistake. I did it on purpose because I'm an asshole." In natural Damien fashion, he decided to start his rebuttal by pissing them off.

"About the cave issue, sure if it's just the three of you, finding an unoccupied cave would be the best. But since I'm here now, it's different." He continued.

"This world was once dominated by plant species. Whether you realize it or not, everything around us has at least some form of spiritual intelligence. The reason I chose this cave is precisely for that reason."

"As long as these acidic grapevines are alive, their aura will mask our scent. Not only that, the local flora and fauna won't randomly intrude on this cave since its existence has already been ingrained in the ecosystem. With the vines trapped by me, they're not only unthreatening to us, they're even helping us scare off those beasts and sentient plants who were waiting to strike us. Don't tell me you didn't even sense their obvious killing intent?"

Tyler shrunk back a bit, intimidated by Damien's eyes.

Old habits died hard. Whenever he put himself in a survival mindset, Damien's eyes would become exceedingly cold.

Indifferent rationality and untameable insanity, only a combination of these two could allow one to survive in a place like the First Dungeon as a classless mortal.

Something sparked within him.

It wasn't just Tyler who experienced a shock from his words. Even the unruly Synth and the shy Ash stepped back a bit.

They fully supported Tyler's outburst a moment ago. Just like him, they were incredibly displeased by Damien's actions.

But even though Damien himself said he was being an asshole for the teleportation gimmick, his following reasoning left them no room to question him.

"I know you all think highly of yourselves, but put away that pride of yours. We've entered enemy territory, there is Nox aura permeating every inch of the surroundings. I don't care about the tactical intelligence the commander told you to exercise, it means nothing in front of me."

Reddish-black sparks erupted from his eyes as they swept across the three.

Space trembled due to the pressure of his gaze.

"I'm demanding obedience from the three of you. I don't mind you playing around when it's time to play around, and I don't mind you gaining experience here. But at least for now, I will not tolerate insubordination. Understand?"

His aura flared. Space and time followed his command and twisted around the three, suffocating them. Despite the commotion Damien was making, not a single existence sensed the group's presence.

They'd long been isolated from the world by a Dimensional Cage.

"I'll ask again. Do. You. Understand?"

Tyler was the first to cave. He nodded immediately, followed by Ash.

Through years of training, differentiating opponents they could face from those who could crush them became instinctual.

And Damien...perhaps he even surpassed the latter category.

Damien's gaze focused on Synth. Despite his show of authority, she remained staring at him with blazing eyes, not speaking a word.

He teleported in front of her. His hand lashed out like a claw and took hold of her neck.

He squeezed. He squeezed as if he was going to snap her neck if she uttered a single wrong word.

"Synth!"

"Unhand her!"

Furious cries came from Ash and Tyler, but Damien ignored them. He heightened his spacetime control, restricting their movements completely.



"Do you think I won't kill you right now?" He asked coldly.

"Kill...me...then..." Synth replied. Her defiance didn't drop even at this juncture.

Damien stared into her eyes indifferently. That blazing light they contained, it reminded him of himself.

But in the current situation, he didn't have the time nor mind to entertain such a rebel.

"As you wish."

His hand tightened immediately. Synth immediately felt the pain of suffocation. Her eyes widened. She...was she really going to die here?

She'd been unruly in the Hell Hole, sure, but the only reason she could do so was because she knew the instructors wouldn't kill her.

Facing a real threat of death...how was she supposed to react?

A gentle hand landed on Damien's shoulder.

"Damien..."

Zara's calm voice rang out through the cave.

Before Synth could even completely comprehend the situation, Damien let go of his grasp on her throat and backed away.

"Haa..." He sighed lightly. Flashing Zara a reassuring smile, he turned back to the trio.

"It's been brought to my attention that I was a bit too heavy-handed with my approach, but let's put that aside for now. How about I explain the situation first, and then you can deem whether or not my actions were valid?"

From the bloodthirsty demon he was a second ago, he transformed into a smilingly handsome young master.

This sudden change...

Was quite hard to adapt to for the unlucky trio.

Chapter 723 Calypto [5]

The mossy cave was silent. The only sounds permeating its walls were Synth's broken coughs as she recovered from her recent near-death experience.

It had been five minutes since Damien's outburst, but no words had been spoken yet. After all, the three geniuses needed time to gather themselves before facing him again.

In their eyes, the amiable youth they'd met in the starship had been replaced by a monster. There was no way they could calmly converse with him anymore,

Damien sighed as he watched them. Though, couldn't blame them for their current attitude. If Zara hadn't stopped him, he really would've killed Synth.

'Was I being too dramatic?' He asked himself.

The second they dropped into Calypto, his mindset experienced an extreme change. It wasn't just due to his survival instinct or the importance of their mission, it was a reaction akin to PTSD.

And perhaps it was, to some extent. He'd lived 10 years of war already, whether it was in his own body or not. His experience didn't translate completely into the real world, but the feelings stayed ingrained in his subconscious.

The stench of Nox mana in the air, the killing intent that surrounded them on all sides, the many factors present on Calypto combined and invoked a primal reaction that he could barely control.

Still, he didn't think he was wrong.

After all...

"If the three of you don't put your guards up and start listening to me, you'll die the second we leave this cave."

The trio's eyes collectively widened in shock

"W-what?!" Tyler exclaimed, speaking for them.

Damien shrugged in response. "The atmosphere is filled with deadly poison. It must be a trait of this forest. Aside from that, every tree and leaf out there is carnivorous. If you even step wrong, you might find yourself with one less leg."

"T-then..." Tyler stammered.

"Mm, the quick teleportation was to isolate you from those effects. I'll be fine because I have a powerful natural regeneration and Zara will be fine because of her beast physique, but the three of you are regular people. None of you have special traits to help you survive the atmosphere."

Tyler and Ash were humans while Synth was an elf. While the first two had average bodies, Synth would be especially affected by the atmosphere due to the elves' closeness with nature.

If they stayed in an open-air environment for more than a few seconds, she would've been instantly poisoned.

From the looks of it, Tyler didn't doubt Damien's words at all. Once he heard them, his brain whirled to life and put the pieces together. The poisonous grapevines in the cave, the foul odor in the air, the ominous hissing of the plants as they stood, it all added up to support what Damien said.

"B-but...how did you know?" Tyler asked cautiously.

"Hm? Because I was poisoned when we first landed. I spawned inside a tree, you see. That bastard didn't hesitate to strike even without understanding who or what I am."

Damien thought back to the leaves that grazed his face when he first materialized. In fact, he didn't even realize he was poisoned until midway through Tyler's words about finding a cave. Only when the poison was expelled by Transcendent Regeneration did he perceive its existence.

He had no desire to stay in an environment filled with poison that could deceive even his senses, and he acted on that notion without another thought.

"If you could survive, why couldn't we?" Synth growled immediately. Her rebellious gaze was now mixed with fear and caution as she spoke, but she didn't hesitate regardless.

Damien sighed. This was why he hated working in teams. It was just too annoying to build trust with people he didn't care about.

'Let's just do it the easy way.'

The Dimensional Cage around them dispersed. Without speaking another word, Damien walked up to the cave wall and released a nearby poison vine from its entrapment.

That terrifying purple acid dripped down without delay...right onto Damien's body.

"What are you doing?!" Tyler yelled in a panic.

"Relax," Damien responded immediately. He sealed the vine once more and turned around, "can't you see I'm fine?"

He was, in fact, not fine.

His flesh and muscles evaporated completely in the areas where he was struck. His right arm rapidly melted into a pile of bloody goo, and even a portion of his face melted down to where his skull was clearly showing.

"Eek!" Ash yelped in terror as she turned away.

Tyler and Synth cringed when they saw his appearance, fighting back the urge to vomit.

"Tch, don't turn away and watch."

Just as Damien spoke, his flesh began to wriggle and reconnect. Sizzling purple fluid was excreted from his pores as he grew a new arm and healed his face.

"Can any of you do that? If you think you can, you're welcome to try." He spoke after completely healing back to peak condition.

"T-this..."

Tyler couldn't rebut. It was truly an insane healing factor, far surpassing anything they had access to. While they had separate antidotes and healing pills that could mimic the same effect, they took far longer to act.

The amount of pain they'd have to suffer before they could finally cure themselves...

"Does it not...hurt?" Synth asked quietly. She couldn't bring herself to raise her voice after that showing.

"Of course, it hurts, dumbass," Damien replied. "But in the end, it's just a matter of endurance. Isn't it simple when you think about it?"

No. It definitely wasn't simple. Synth shuddered at the thought of enduring the pain of her arms and face melting off even if it was only for a few seconds.

Only an insane person could do that with a straight face.

With every moment they spent in this cave, Damien only became more and more terrifying to them. Age didn't matter, level didn't matter. He was someone who defied common sense.

And they'd only known him for a few hours.

They couldn't imagine what kind of insanity they'd experience going forward.

"Anyway," Damien said, somewhat breaking the tense atmosphere, "do you understand why I acted the way I did? Or should I explain more?"

After looking at each other briefly, the three shook their heads in denial.

In reality, they did want a deeper explanation. Even if he wanted control over the group, and even if his intent was to protect them from the toxic atmosphere, he only needed to show them as he'd done just now.



What effect did the first showing have? Why did he feel the need to go so far?

But even if they asked, Damien couldn't tell them.

He couldn't tell them about his inherited PTSD, he couldn't tell them about the strange instinct that guided his actions...

And he couldn't tell them about the mission the Director gave him.

"Alright we're on a bit of a time crunch to exit this forest, so let's ignore this for now and get the important stuff out of the way."

"Now, should we move on to our mission objectives or do you want to continue wasting time refusing my leadership?" Damien segued as he double-tapped his school emblem.

He didn't even give the trio a chance to answer as he continued on.

Ignoring them completely, he began to browse the list of tasks they'd been provided. He'd already memorized the world map when the Director gave it to him previously, so he didn't need to look at it again.

'Oho...' he thought to himself. 'Now this might be interesting.'

Chapter 724 Calypto [6]

Damien's squad's tasks were simple on paper, but were perhaps the hardest tasks given out during this assignment. At least, Damien felt they had to be.

'Is it because I'm on the team? Haha, am I being overevaluated or am I just being too cautious?'

Essentially, their squad was tasked with destroying the periphery bases of the Nox on this world, destroying their food supplies, and cutting their supply chains.

It was a great deal of work, enough to take an entire army to accomplish, but it had been delegated to five people alone.

Damien looked over at the other three curiously. Despite reading through the tasks themselves, they didn't seem too alarmed by the scale of their mission.

'Are these brats better than I thought...?' He wondered.

Maybe he was the scary one and they were normal...

'Nah, that can't be it.'

Swiping his hand, Damien shuffled the holographic windows around him until the world map was displayed.

'Theasi, Engra, and Lilas are the closest nearby cities that have been transformed into peripheral bases. We can start there. Other than that...I wonder how those three will react when they see it.'

He located the nearby food supplies and supply routes soon after pinpointing the cities and turned back to the three, explaining it to them slowly.

"First, we'll attack Theasi and eliminate any troops within. There's a food supply only a few kilometers away, so it's the best place to start. After destroying Theasi and the food supply, cutting supply chains to Engra and Lilas will be extremely convenient. As for how we move from there, it depends on the situation."

"Any thoughts?"

While Synth and Ash put their heads down, Tyler began calculating the viability of Damien's choice. He was the main tactician of their small group, so naturally, the other two would follow his lead.

After a moment, Tyler slowly nodded. "We can do this. There shouldn't be any problems unless something unforeseen happens, but those situations are unforeseen for a reason. As you said, it's best to act accordingly when the time comes."

Damien smiled lightly and nodded back. 'This guy has his priorities straight.'

Unlike Synth and Ash, who were still somewhat preoccupied with the previous event, Tyler forget it entirely in favor of completing the mission.

There was a reason he acted as their tactician.

'Well, I did almost kill Synth so I can't say anything about her aversion. This Ash though...is she really a berserker?'

It was hard to imagine a berserker with such a frail personality, but there was no reason for her to lie about her class.

'Whatever. I guess I'll find out when it's time for battle.'

"Next up on the agenda: escaping this forest." Damien continued.

"In all honestly, it won't be that hard. As long as you remain completely obedient and follow my steps to the tee, you'll escape without a scratch. Worst case scenario you get poisoned, but didn't I say before? It's just a matter of endurance." He finished with an evil grin.

Synth and Ash shuddered when they saw his expression. Without hesitation, the three agreed to his words.

If they could survive properly, the matter of leadership and obedience meant nothing.

They couldn't trust Damien at all both because they didn't know him and because of his actions until this point, but they could be certain of one thing:

Damien cared about this mission.

And as long as he cared about this mission, he wouldn't needlessly sabotage their team, especially if they followed him properly.

Damien smiled widely when he saw their unhesitant reactions. These three really caught on quick.

"Good, since it's settled, then it's time to go. Remember! Follow me closely!"

With those words, Damien walked out of the cave and began traversing the forest.

He did so casually, recklessly moving without caring about the surroundings. It almost made the trio doubt whether or not they wanted to follow him.

But seeing Zara do so easily, they weren't left with a choice.

Slowly but surely, they exited the cave and followed Damien's footsteps exactly.

And somehow, the surrounding plants never attacked them.

Every step Damien took was followed by a light ripple in space. The path he walked was filled with the element, each step only amplifying its effects.

Hssss!

A nearby plant shot forward, opening its leaves like a Venus Fly Trap as it tried to attack Damien.

But before it could even get near his body, it ran into an invisible wall. Regardless of how hard it tried, it felt like it was stuck in molasses, unable to move forward even an inch.

The concept of distance that Damien used for Horizon Break had plenty of other uses as well. Making an infinitesimally small portion of space nearly infinite was only one of its base abilities.

And with this simple method alone, Damien was able to keep the group safe from any attacks.

Trees couldn't move. Even if they attacked, they could only do so with branches and roots. Restricting these was just as simple as restricting regular plants. Other than the trees, however, nothing else was a threat to Damien's safety.

As for the poison...

'Material Shift'

'Material Shift'

'Material Shift'

The poison in the surroundings was constantly separated from the atmosphere through Material Shift. As Damien's mana depleted, the toxicity of the atmosphere in the surrounding few kilometers began to substantially drop.

His awareness spread to its limits, searching for the end of the forest. As long as he could see it, he could go there.

And while Damien implemented multiple complicated techniques to make the casual stroll he was taking possible, they were incredibly discreet techniques.

To the three geniuses following behind him, it was like a miracle occurred.

Attacks couldn't get near them at all, and every time a block of solid purple material appeared in the sky, the air became slightly more breathable.

They didn't understand exactly what Damien was doing, but his actions served as a greater show of strength than anything he'd done in the cave.

Only half an hour later, Damien found the edge of the forest ten thousand kilometers away.

He surrounded the group with his mana and teleported them without a word.

In the next instant, they were standing on a desolate plain with the forest to their backs.

It was that easy.

'But...if we'd stepped out of line even once, his protection wouldn't have applied to us. We would've been stuck in that strange sticky space, completely susceptible to incoming attacks.'

And Damien wouldn't put in any effort to save them if that happened. Tyler realized it instantly.

'Perhaps...that tyrannical showing was necessary.'



Tyler glanced at Synth from the corner of his eye. No matter how close they were, he had to admit that Synth was still too unruly to act as a soldier.

Tyler was the brain, he was a practical thinker regardless of the situation.

Now, his rational brain was showing him the obvious.

Without being terrified of Damien due to him almost killing her, Synth would've never listened to his orders. Even if Tyler and Ash tried to convince her otherwise, she would've done something out of line just to satisfy her silly pride.

That kind of action would've cost her her life.

Tyler looked at Damien's back with a complicated gaze.

Was it all planned from the start? Or was Damien just naturally tyrannical?

While he couldn't formulate a proper answer to this question, he at least knew this much:

Perhaps following Damien in a brutal environment like this one...

Was actually the best decision they could've possibly made.

Chapter 725 Theasi [1]

Immediately after leaving the toxic forest, the group made their way to Theasi. Even though Damien said it was close, in reality, it was close to 2,000 kilometers away.

The only reason this distance looked short was because of the power of their squad.

Because everyone in the squad had power that at least surpassed mid-rank 4th class, they made it to Theasi within half an hour.

"Tyler, how do the three of you usually do reconnaissance?" Damien asked when they arrived a few hundred kilometers away from the base.

"Reconnaissance usually ends up being my job. I have a few tamed beasts with stealth-based abilities and transformation abilities, so I can get by. Though, since stealth isn't my specialty, it can only be called base-level information gathering." Tyler responded after some thought.

He didn't hide anything, telling the blatant truth even if that meant bringing down his value as a team member.

Damien nodded in appreciation at his straightforwardness.

"That's fine then. Zara, do you mind taking the job?"

"No problem."

Zara responded without much thought and melted into the ground, turning into a shadow that blended with the scenery and disappeared.

"That..." Tyler muttered.

"Hm? Is there a problem?" Damien asked curiously.

"No, it's morning. I've just never seen someone who can use Shadow Laws so blatantly. The shadow affinity is one people tend to disregard since it can only show its prowess with the presence of darkness."

"Is she that strange? She's been able to do things like this since she was young."

"Mm, she is talented enough to utilize her Laws in innovative ways that others couldn't think of. This level of talent far exceeds us."

"Aha, that reminds me. I never got to know you three's Heaven's List rankings." Damien suddenly said.

Tyler scratched his head sheepishly.

"That's probably because we aren't too special. We've barely made our way into the 10,000s. Synth has the highest ranking at 8,127. Ash is second with 8,442, and I'm...well, I haven't made it into the 8000s yet." He spoke in an embarrassed tone.

Damien shook his head. In fact, making it into the top 10,000 on Heaven's List essentially meant that they were in the top 1% of the universe's geniuses. While not everyone was counted on Heaven's List, it still outlined a considerable portion of the universe's talent.

This ranking couldn't match up to Emperors like Damien and Atticus, but it was more than just decent.

While Damien and Tyler continued conversing, the shadows nearby coalesced and Zara's form emerged from the ground.

"Got everything?" Damien asked.

"Of course," Zara replied with a smile.

She'd only been gone for around ten minutes, but that was more than enough time.

Her mana moved delicately, particles of ice forming in the air and combining into the form of a city. This ice sculpture was precise down to the very last detail; a scaled-down model of Theasi.

"The city's layout isn't very complicated, and the Nox didn't change it when they overtook it. Infiltrating wouldn't be a problem, but there's no need for it." Zara started explaining.

"There is a considerable number of 3rd class Nox and below, but the main firepower of the base lies in the 100 Higher Nox residing there. But even they're only early-stage 4th class beings with a single mid-stage 4th class leading them."

Damien nodded as he watched Zara explain the base's structure and the troops' positioning. It was thorough intelligence to the point where it was overkill for the size of the base they were raiding.

After thinking for a moment, Damien opened his mouth to speak.

"I'll take this one with Zara. Save your strength, since I'm going to make you do all the heavy lifting from this point forth." He said to the accompanying trio.

"A-all of it?!" Synth exclaimed.

Damien grinned. "Chill, I'll help out if it looks like you guys can't handle it. But...you came here for experience, didn't you...?"

With an evil smile decorating his face, he finished his words. "I'll make sure you get all the training you could possibly want."

With that, he grabbed hold of Zara and teleported away, arriving at Theasi.

"Was it okay to leave them by themselves?" Zara asked when they rematerialized.

"Eh, it'll be fine," Damien replied nonchalantly. "Instead of worrying about them, let's take care of our own business. What do you think, should we do it like old times and race to see who kills the most?"

Zara glanced at Damien and smiled. "Hmph, if you think you can still beat me as badly as before, I'll prove you wrong!"

Without another word, she dashed forward and entered the Nox camp. Immediately, she was faced with a cacophony of ear-rending screeches. Only a single Lower Nox near the city's entrance smelled her presence, but they reacted as one.

Kraaaaah!

Together, thousands of mindless Nox beings charged at Zara with claws and razor-sharp appendages slashing about. Their inky black forms were gruesome to look at, and as Zara began killing them, ink splashed about onto the paved roads of the city.

Zara didn't even bother to use techniques on these lesser beings. Back when she first fought one with Damien and Rose, they'd been too weak to cope with the Nox's frightening regeneration factor. But now...

With every swipe of her hand, hundreds fell. It wasn't even a challenge to take out the several thousand Lesser Nox that were charging towards her.

Xiu! Xiu! Xiu!

Ink piled up on the streets like rainwater as Zara's shadows permeated the air. She moved through the city with ease, slowly making her way towards the 4th classes.

But before she could reach their location, she noticed something odd.

The ink polluting the ground was wriggling around like it was alive. It was coalescing together, and with each second, the large ink ball they formed grew larger and larger.

'What is this?' Zara wondered. Unlike Damien who'd seen many imparted memories of the Nox, Zara didn't have much information on them.

Instead of stopping the process before it could finish, she decided to watch what happened when they were done.

And soon she found her answer.

The ink ball grew until the streets were clean once more. Its surface hardened into something akin to a shell, and when it cracked...

A greyish-black hand punched out from within.

"Hm..." a mutter came from the being that stepped out of the ink egg. It looked at its new body in marvel.

"We have been...reborn..."

Zara's eyes narrowed. 'A...4th class? How is that possible?'

Even if they were otherworldly invaders, the Nox still followed the same growth system as everyone else. For a phenomenon like this to take place was simply impossible.

After all, a 4th class wasn't just an amalgamation of 3rd class beings. Even if one transmuted thousands of 3rd class beings into a single larger existence, it would merely be a stronger 3rd class.



To access Laws, to connect with the universe, to contain higher forms of mana, one needed to pass their Baptism and reach 4th class.

Yet...why was it that she could feel the energy of laws from this newly-born Nox?

For a moment, Zara was stumped.

'Never mind. I can just ask Damien about it when we finish here.' She thought to herself. She'd yet to ask him for information about the Nox both due to circumstance and pride, but in a situation like this, she didn't care about pride anymore.

What she wanted were answers, answers about her origins and answers about her race. And if she had to lean on someone to get those answers...

As long as it was Damien, she didn't mind at all.

Chapter 726 Theasi [2]

While Zara still wanted to experiment more with this newly born Nox being, she knew she'd have plenty of chances to do so in the future. Their mission on this world wouldn't end with just a single Nox settlement, so she had an abundance of time to observe and learn about the species.

Right now, however, she was in the middle of a competition.

She couldn't just let Damien win after all that boasting she did, could she?

Without hesitation, she mobilized the power of her Shadow Laws, putting into motion the comprehension she earned through the past few months of rigorous training.

'Shadow Inverse: World of Light'

Voom!

The surroundings were painted in blinding grayish-white light. All darkness in the world faded as the concept itself was overwritten.

"Kaaaaah! W-what is this?!" The newly born Higher Nox screeched.

It had only just been birthed into existence. It barely had control over its body, let alone the ability to resist someone of Zara's strength.

"Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it right now!"

As its screeches became louder and more ear-piercing, the blinding light focused on the Higher Nox's position and intensified. When it reached a level where it seemed like a second sun had swallowed the earth...

...the Higher Nox's screams died down.

The light faded soon after.

The battle ended just like that.

'Time to move on.' Zara said inwardly. 'If I delay, I'm bound to lose.'

Her body faded to shadow and dashed through the city. Wherever she went, she would find a new group of Lesser Nox to slaughter.

But even as she did so, she could feel it.

Fierce vibrations emanated from the city center. The fluctuations from the battle there spread even to where she currently was.

As expected of a spatial practitioner, Damien ignored all the small fries and went straight for the bosses.

And considering that the battle was taking far longer than it needed to, he was clearly having a great time.

Zara shook her head in dismay at the thought.

'Tch, cheater.'

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Just as Zara guessed, Damien didn't waste any time on those Lesser Nox. They didn't mean anything to him, and even if he wanted to kill them, he could easily do after he got rid of their leaders.

The Higher Nox however...

'These guys somehow gained intelligence through means that the Heaven's Armies of countless generations have failed to grasp. But if I can devour them...'

Damien didn't even see these beings as opponents. In his eyes, they were bundles of essence and memories for him to devour.

'I need to be quick, though. It'd be annoying if these bastards dissolved into ink like their lesser counterparts, and it'd be an even greater disaster if they do that transformers shit too.'

Damien dodged a jagged blade as he entertained his thoughts. Just as he did so, three more surrounded him from each side and tried to block his escape routes.

But how could such a strategy work against him?

His body disappeared as the blades converged on his prior position, rematerializing elsewhere.

Still, he wasn't necessarily safe. There were 100 4th class Nox who all gathered together in the central area of the city. When Damien arrived, he provoked them all into action, fighting them at once.

'Then again, it was only two or three at the beginning. Who knew the Nox were so short-tempered? Just a little bit of provocation and they gathered like sheep.'

His body ducked and weaved through a flurry of attacks. Inky black liquid surrounded him from every angle and morphed into various weapons and attacks as he moved around.

Despite the efforts of 100 beings coming together as one, even touching a hair on Damien's body seemed impossible.

"Why are you running?! Fight like a man!"

"Fight us! Fight us, don't run!"

Various exclamations of anger rang out from the surrounding Nox beings. Their bodies morphed and mutated to give them an advantage against him, but nothing they did worked.

They were too weak.

Early-stage 4th class beings were next to nothing to Damien at this point.

'Especially since these guys haven't adapted to their intelligence yet. I can't be certain if it's only those who've just been promoted who are like this or all early-stage 4th class Nox, but at least the ones in this camp are still in the process of learning how to utilize their newfound spirituality.'

Damien didn't think it was strange. Even he, as a human who was born with consciousness, needed a copious amount of time to learn how to use his intelligence. The version of him who existed in the First Dungeon, despite being more fluent, wasn't much smarter than these Nox.

Turning around, Damien slashed his arm through the air and sent an arc of spatial mana at the inky sludge wall that was about to attack him, splitting it in two.

'Their attack patterns are too simple. They have access to Death Laws, but they haven't learned to use them. They're still using the same physical attacks they're used to, but consciously infused with death mana in the crudest way possible.'

He teleported away, appearing behind one of the nearby Nox beings and crushing its skull with a single press of his hand.

The being immediately melted into a puddle of ink emanating a slight low fluctuation.

'As I thought, this is a racial trait. It's not that bad when they're still Lesser Nox, but if the Higher Nox are allowed to combine through this method...'

It might actually create a challenge for him.

Unfortunately, Damien didn't have time to entertain this challenge. He couldn't be certain how memories were affected when the Nox were reborn, and memories were his top priority at the moment.

'Alright, there's no point in delaying further. It's time to get down to business.'

'Dimension Shift'

The world turned grey and one became two. The dimension split horizontally where Damien slashed his arm out, bisecting his enemies without fail.

Their bodies began to dissipate, both halves individually turning into puddles of ink.

Yet, in that split second before they could melt...

'Stagnant Reality'

Spacetime Essence flowed from his body and permeated the surroundings. Within the bisected world, reality itself was brought to a screeching halt.

"Khhh...!" Damien let out a pained breath. Even though his ability to control spacetime had improved, tampering with the fabric of reality on a large scale brought him immense pain, even if he did so for only a few moments.

Not to mention, the mana usage was enormous. Damien was usually someone who never had to worry about running out of mana, but in the current instance...

...100,000 units of mana flowed like water, exiting his body to maintain the space. At the rate his mana was depleting, Damien could only hold the effect for a single second.

But this was enough time.

'Devour'



Rumbling black energy clouds dispersed into the surroundings, centered on Damien's body. Like a horde of beasts, the clouds charged at the bisected Nox beings frozen in time and enveloped them.

Within mere sparks of an instant, they were devoured whole.

When time resumed once more, no trace of them could be found. An influx of essence rushed into Damien's body, accompanied by a sticky and disgusting mana that he found himself unable to integrate.

He didn't even have to think before coagulating this mana into a ball and expelling it from his body.

And just as he did so, he was hit with another wave of boons, the exact benefit he was seeking when he attacked these beings.

Their memories began to flood into his mind.

Chapter 727 Cruel [1]

"Ack!"

Damien clutched his head in pain as a wave of fragmented memories rushed into his spiritual world.

Death, destruction, darkness; these three words were the only ones he could use to describe their contents.

'What is this?' He wondered as he tried to organize the messy array of images.

It wasn't just the fact that he'd devoured 100 of them at once, even the memories of each individual were in pieces, never following a singular time flow.

Like shards of glass littered across his spiritual world, the memories remained. But regardless of how he tried, he was unable to find order within them.

'Is something missing?'

When he devoured the Fifth Primal Sovereign, he was shown a great deal of the latter's life. Damien had no way of knowing if he saw everything, but he knew that at least the important parts were covered.

The memories played out like a film back then. He watched from the Fifth Primal Sovereign's perspective while his life unfolded.

The memories of these Nox, however, didn't hold any semblance of similarity, whether in content or form, to those of the deceased Sovereign.

'Let's put them away for now.'

Damien quickly used his own spiritual intent to suppress the chaotic memories and seal them away within his mind.

When he had the opportunity, he could naturally look over them. But for now...

'Is that bastard finally going to show up?'

There was still one enemy left, a mid-level 4th class Nox who was acting as the leader of those he just faced.

But no matter how critical the previous battle became, it didn't show itself at all.

Damien's awareness spread through the city. Before long, he found exactly what he was looking for.

'Heh, trying to run?' He scoffed inwardly.

Mirage appeared in his hand, and without a moment of hesitation, he slammed it into the ground.

'Void Sword Art Sixth Form: Worldbreaker'

BOOOOOOOOOM!

Dust and debris flew chaotically into the sky, the surrounding buildings collapsed in a domino fashion as the attack's shockwave spread.

Within seconds, the city was leveled to the ground.

'It's nice to see Worldbreaker's effects outside of the battle arena, but still...I wonder how it'll look at full power?'

Damien naturally held himself back so he didn't ruin the world too much. He couldn't afford for it to be destroyed quite yet.

Nevertheless, he achieved his purpose. With the city now leveled, the small mid-level 4th class Nox was exposed in broad daylight.

"Running with your tail between your legs isn't very leader-like of you, is it?" Damien asked sarcastically after teleporting in front of the being.

"Ah...ah...!"

The Nox whimpered as he backed away. Just a second ago, he'd personally witnessed how Damien slaughtered the other 4th-class Nox.

Just because he was a mid-level 4th class didn't mean he was insanely powerful. It was a given that Damien could kill him just as easily.

Only, his intelligence had completely developed. He knew exactly what was happening.

'I...I need to escape!' He thought in a panic. His eyes darted around, but because Damien collapsed the town, there was nothing he could use as a distraction while he ran.

'Ah, the ground!'

"Thinking about escaping?"

The devil's whisper entered the Nox's ear. Suddenly, he found the ground drifting away from him.

Rather than being lifted into the air, though, he was instead being separated from reality.

"I was wondering why the memories I devoured are so disorganized and fragmented, but there's really no way for me to figure it out. After all, when has there ever been a case where someone devoured a Nox's memories?"

'What is he talking about?'

The mid-level 4th class Nox felt a wave of confusion hit him, along with a certain ominous feeling that he couldn't pinpoint the cause of.

But then, before he could regain himself, Damien's voice appeared right next to his ear.

"So I was thinking: if I have to put the puzzle together on my own regardless, shouldn't I acquire as many pieces as I can first?"

A large hand grabbed the Nox's face. Through the gap in those fingers, the being could see a pair of gleaming purple eyes looking down at him.

"S-spare...m-me..."

"Thank you for the meal."

It was the last sentence he heard. Spacetime Essence transferred into his body from Damien's hand and wrecked his internals. Before he could even writhe in pain, a cloud of black gaseous essence swallowed his body.

'Devour'

Damien licked his lips as he watched the Nox being struggle to escape. The Void's maws entrapped its prey, slowly savoring his taste as it devoured him.

Without suspense, the mid-level Nox died even more pitifully than his underlings.

'Too easy. I guess there's a reason why Theasi is just a peripheral camp.'

Damien dispelled the Dimensional Cage and floated down to the ground. Just as he expected, even the mid-level 4th class Nox's memories were the same.

Because it was only a single target this time, Damien could feel it far more clearly.

'They obviously don't live with broken memories. It feels more like something is forcefully shattering them during the process of transmission. Or maybe...does it happen upon death?'

In the first place, the Nox were a strange species. Despite following the same growth system as every other species, they were able to do things that fundamentally went against the universe's laws.

For one, the way they dissolved upon death.

'In their dissolved state, even if I devour them I don't receive any benefits. Whether it's memories or power, it all vanishes as if the beings were never alive in the first place.'

Yet, the Nox also possessed the miraculous ability to gather together and fuse as one after they died. The puddles of ink that even the Void Physique couldn't find value in would suddenly become priceless limbs and organs for the newly born Nox being.

'Is it truly that? When they die, are they completely broken down into their base components so that the newly born lifeform isn't just an amalgamation of egos? If that's the case, then...'

As Damien was stuck in thought, Zara materialized next to him, bringing the trio of geniuses that accompanied them along as well.

"Damien, are you okay?" She asked quietly, snapping him out of his thoughts.

He smiled back with a reassuring look. "I'm fine, I was just thinking about something. Never mind that, though. How was your hunting?"

"Great! I think I killed around 10,000 before you brought the city down. The rest died as collateral, so I couldn't count them."

"You might've killed more, but I got the big ones. Who's the real winner here?"



"Obviously me. Didn't you say we were competing for most kills? You sabotaged yourself from the beginning."

"Tch."

Damien scoffed, knowing he couldn't argue. He really could've killed a decent number of Lesser Nox before targeting the 4th classes, but he got too absorbed in the prospect of devouring their memories.

'I didn't even get anything good from devouring them either.'

"Alright, fine. You win." He said with a sigh.

"Hmph! I told you from the start!"

While the two playfully bantered, the three behind them were forced into shock once more.

Leveling the city was one thing. Even they could accomplish the same feat as mid-level 4th classes. But the fact that it took less than 5 minutes for the duo to completely obliterate the Nox present within?

That wasn't something any of them could accomplish.

'I see why he wanted to take it alone now...' Tyler thought to himself. Besides the obvious efficiency, it was yet another show of power.

'But this time, it wasn't meant for us.'

Damien definitely knew that their trio had no thoughts of rebelling or disobeying after the incident in the toxic forest. The reason he went so far as leveling the city had to be something else.

'Haa....never mind. I won't be able to understand his actions no matter how hard I think.'

As Tyler resigned himself to ignorance, Damien's voice entered his ears.

"Now that we're done with that, it's your turn. Are you all ready?"

This time, the trio would have to show off their power.

And they had to be sure not to disappoint.

Chapter 728 Cruel [2]

Another 5 minutes passed after Theasi's destruction. With this time, the group made their way to the food supply nearby.

They found themselves outside of a large fortress-like city that even surpassed Theasi in size. It was quite ironic to see a food supply that looked grander than the base it supplied food to.

'It's finally time for that, huh.' Damien thought as he looked at the three.

They were huddled up together, going over a plan to take down the food supply.

Because it wasn't an actual base, the number of Nox present within wasn't too high. Because the duties at the food supply were much more hands-on, every Nox within was an intelligent Higher Nox as well.

Damien and Zara stood to the side and watched how the three decided to proceed. The only help they provided was in reconnaissance.

Zara gave the group a general overview of the fortress' structure as well as an accurate view of the strength of each Higher Nox within.

There were only 20, and every single one was still in the early stages of 4th class, but that didn't mean the group could let their guard down.

"We'll go with the same strategies as usual. Are you both ready?" Tyler asked with a solemn face.

"Mm."

"Let's get it over with already!"

He received two vastly different responses with the same intent. After giving Damien a nod of confirmation, he moved towards the fortress with one woman on either side of him.

"Was it okay to not tell them?" Zara asked as she watched them leave.

"Mm, I don't know. I felt like it'd be more impactful if they saw it for themselves." Damien replied with a shrug.

Zara looked at him for a second and sighed.

During the time she'd spent under Tang Lingzi, she learned a little about what humans were supposed to be like.

Damien was definitely not like them at all. If anything, he was more bestial than even she was.

But that wasn't her place to judge.

As long as he remained the same Damien she knew, she didn't care in the slightest.

Putting away her stray thoughts, Zara refocused her attention on the trio who'd just arrived at the fortress gates.

Tyler silently gave the signal, and on his command...

BOOOM!

The fortress wall collapsed. A 10-foot-tall mech suit encapsulated Synth's body at an unknown time, and a single blast from its cannons was enough to take down the wall.

With utmost confidence in their abilities, the group charged forward...

...only to stop the next instant.

"This is...the food supply...?" Tyler spoke shakily. He was barely able to formulate his words.

"Ah...!" Ash muttered a sound of astonishment, unable to speak at all.

And as they reacted...

"What is this bullshit?!" Synth's roar resounded through the surroundings.

In front of them wasn't anything like a food supply at all.

It was a city filled with livestock.

Sentient livestock.

Lining the streets were hundreds and thousands of beings from all races. Humans, angels, elves, and even plant species sat withered in long lines aside the road.

Their bodies were frail, their skin without blood or life.

They were dead.

Within the various buildings of the fortress that was better termed an enclosure, even more life signatures could be felt.

Clearly, food supply meant something completely different when considering the Nox.

'Concentration camps.'

Damien knew it from the beginning. The fact that the Nox were keeping the universe's lifeforms in concentration camps and torturing them before devouring them as food, it was included in the Director's information.

But nothing he said could've prepared his squad members for this reality.

'They've been trained for combat, but they haven't been trained for the brutality of war. I guess part of the reason they have practical training like this is so they can experience it first-hand.'

It was a cruel method. Those who couldn't adapt would die in battle, while those who could would return victorious as changed men and women.

Was it to temper them? Or was it to dull their emotions and control them?

Damien didn't know the academy's intent, but what he could see was that Tyler, Ash, and Synth...

"Attack. Leave none alive."

...were part of the latter category.

They moved without hesitation.

Synth flew into the air, using her mech suit to target the environment itself and destroy the fortress.

Tyler's form changed into a mix between a panther and a human, speeding across the ground as he pulled the living victims away from their enclosures into the center of the city.

Their main goal was to save people.

By the time the Nox present reacted, Ash's trembling form was already in front of them.

"You...you...how could you...?" She muttered as she faced them.

"Human?"

"Hahaha! A human has come!"



"Capture her! Capture her!"

The Nox didn't respond to her question. Their thick bloodlust permeated the air as they moved to slay her.

Ash's entire aura changed in that moment.

"HOW COULD YOU?!"

Her eyes blazed red with fury. Her small body emitted a series of cracking and popping sounds as she suddenly enlarged in size.

Bulging muscles populated her form, veins so thick they could be mistaken as snakes writhed across her skin.

"ALL OF YOU...SHOULD DIE!"

The female gorilla known as Ash charged without mercy. Her fists were covered in a thick red killing energy and her body seemed impervious to pain.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

With every punch, a shockwave rang out. Loud bangs accompanied her fists as the air collapsed from the pressure of her movements.

The Nox began to splatter across the ground as ink.

"Kill!"

"Threat! Threat!"

The Nox screeched miserably, mobilizing their mana and turning their appendages into various weapons as they charged at the berserker.

But before they could reach her...

VOOOOM!

A laser-like beam of energy descended from the heavens. Synth stood in the air with her mech suit primed, aiming at any Nox who blocked Ash's path.

The slaughter continued just like that. Ash acted from the front, Tyler joined the two and supported Ash from the middle, and anything the two couldn't handle was covered by Synth who watched from the air.

Their teamwork was impeccable. Within just 5 minutes, the 20 Higher Nox within the camp were killed.

What followed was a tsunami of hellfire. Tyler's form changed into a draconian. When he opened his mouth, furious flames encompassed the entire battlefield and consumed the inky ground.

'Thorough. They weren't trained in the Hell Hole for nothing.' Damien thought with a smile as he watched them.

They first cleared a proper amount of space for them to battle freely by destroying the buildings and moving the victims of the camp while Ash distracted the enemy with her insane defense and power. Once this step was done, the other two joined and used their synchronicity to absolutely decimate the Higher Nox.

They even remembered to eliminate the inky residue so the Nox couldn't be reborn from the ashes.

It was a flawless victory.

But one that took a heavy toll on their minds.

Their rage and the proceeding battle allowed them to face it without much thought, however, it was over now. Reality was shoved in their faces.

There were tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of these food supplies all around Calypto. There was an uncountable number if they looked at the entirety of Eden.

And each and every one of these food supplies was another concentration camp filled with denizens of the universe.

Denizens who suffered every single day without any hope of salvation.

Chapter 729 Cruel [3]

There was only silence in the air.

A massive battle that destroyed a majority of the fortress just ended, but those who were contained within didn't show any emotion.

As Tyler, Synth, and Ash walked through the crowd and provided healing pills to the victims, they were only met with dull eyes and hopelessness.

'No, this is worse than hopelessness. They no longer have life in them even if they're alive.'

Hopelessness was a feeling akin to despair. The fact that it could be felt meant that the possibility of a spark of hope appearing still existed, since emotion still ran rampant within the mind.

But when even hopelessness was lost...

'They can't be saved.' Tyler realized.

Even if these people were saved, nothing would change. They wouldn't regain their minds. They'd been broken to that extent.

Ash shivered as she walked through the aisles of bodies.

Malnourished wasn't a strong enough word to describe their condition. They were practically hanging onto life by a thread, a thread the Nox created to forcefully keep them in the land of the living.

And perhaps the lack of proper nutrition was the least of their problems. It was rarer to see an unblemished body than one covered in scars in this place.

The wounds on their bodies were rarely healed properly. Scar tissue and disgusting infected gashes painted their bodies in an atrocious yellow color.

Was this reality?

Was reality always so cruel?

The cruelty of war was something veterans spoke of constantly. It was something that was drilled into the heads of everyone who was bound to experience it.

War was never painted as something grand to these Hell Hole soldiers.

But this was a different level.

The Nox were inhumane to say the least. They didn't care about respect or integrity, they didn't care about the universe's perception of what should and shouldn't be done.

They exercised cruelty by whatever means possible, their only goal to bring ruination to the land of existence.

Damien and Zara landed on the ground nearby and watched the geniuses quietly as they tried to cope with the truth they'd been faced with.

Tyler was the calmest. His rational brain long told him that the possibility of something like this existed, but he consciously chose to ignore it in favor of his mental well-being.

Now that reality was in front of him, he sighed and faced it head-on.

Synth was much fiercer. She had a fiery personality from the start, and the moment she became aware of the suffering these people must've gone through, her temper exploded.

It was only due to the solemn atmosphere that she kept her mouth shut. But from the way her fists clenched so hard she drew blood from her palms, her feelings were evident.

Of the three, Ash had the most severe reaction.

From the beginning, she was a reserved person. She could be called the "innocent" one in the group despite her ferocity in combat.

Reality hit her like a hammer. She stumbled as she walked, her face incredibly pale from what she witnessed. It looked like she was barely holding herself together.

But she still did her best to try.

Perhaps the atrocities that had already taken place were impossible to reverse, but the purpose of the Hell Hole and the soldiers it raised was to make sure future atrocities could be prevented.

Despite her own fears, Ash ingrained the image of these suffering people into her mind so she'd never forget it.

While the three did what they could, Damien walked through the crowded streets and gathered the bodies of the dead, piling them up in the center of the ruined city.

Their corpses formed a hill that almost reached the top of the fortress walls.

Looking at the hill of corpses, he sighed lightly.

'I sincerely hope fate gives you bliss in your next lives.'

Void Flames sparked on his fingers. As he flicked them, the small spark of flame fell into the hill of corpses and set it ablaze.

The silence was interrupted by the sound of flickering flames. The putrid stench of the burning corpses spread through the city and attracted the attention of all those present.

Even within the dull eyes of the survivors, a small trace of sorrow could be seen.

But it was accompanied by a trace of relief.

Their friends and families who died, perhaps their fates were for the better. At least they didn't end up as meals for the Nox, and at least their suffering finally came to an end.



At least they wouldn't have to endure the terror of living on.

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"What should we do with them?" Tyler asked after the deceased were properly sent off.

Damien looked over at the survivors with furrowed brows. "That depends. In our current situation, we can't necessarily save them. That would only be possible after our mission ends."

pαndα`nove1~coM "Then..."

"But that's under the assumption that they want to be saved."

Tyler looked at Damien hesitantly. "You don't mean..."

"It's probably what you think."

"But...wouldn't it be better to provide them a new lease on life? What if they realize in the future that living on was better than dying futilely?"

Damien sighed. Indeed, it was normal to think that way. He had personal experience that told him that living was better than dying without accomplishing anything. If he'd succumbed to the First Dungeon long ago, he would've simply become another statistic on earth, never to reach his current heights.

But at the same time, he couldn't force his own experience onto others.

At the end of the day, it was only his opinion or Tyler's opinion that said living was the best course of action for them.

If they wished for death, however, who was he to deprive them of it?

To live and create a future where life was better than death, one needed to have the desire to do so. Without that desire, the realization of this fact would simply never appear.

With that thought in mind, Damien walked over to the survivors who had been gathered together in the city center.

"I will offer you two choices," he said, infusing mana in his voice so his words couldn't go unheard.

"The first is death. If you wish for the comfort of death, I will grant it to you. If this world is not one you wish to live in anymore, then that is your decision. You will not be judged, and you will not feel pain. Eternal rest is likely a more appropriate term in this scenario."

His eyes panned across the crowd. It wasn't just a few who reacted to his proposition.

"The second choice is survival. Survive and live, overcome your circumstances and earn your happiness back. The road to doing so will be arduous, there will be countless times when you wish you chose to die today, but if you can truly utilize the life you earned yourself, then the prospect of normalcy won't be hidden from you. Perhaps you may even come to cherish your pain, for without it, you would've never become the person you became when you overcame it."

He didn't try to butter his words or speak lightly. He didn't try to promote one option or the other. He laid out the facts as they were, indifferent to his impact on these people's decisions.

He wasn't some hero. He wasn't someone who could provide uplifting words that allowed people to gain the will to live.

He knew the responsibility that came with that position. If these people chose to live based on his words alone, if they found that life didn't improve how he promised, their worship would turn to hatred in an instant.

He had no desire to bear the weight of their feelings, whether it be grudge or gratitude.

"I will come back tomorrow to hear your decisions. Remember, your life is your own. Do not feel ashamed regardless of what choice you make. There is more pride in following your heart than following the crowd."

With those final words, Damien teleported away, disappearing from the crowd's view entirely.

What was left was a silent atmosphere that hadn't changed.

But within the dull eyes of those people, various emotions began to rise.

Chapter 730 Cruel [4]

The day passed rapidly. On the next morning, Damien returned to the city center where the survivors were located.

It wasn't hard to understand the decisions of these people.

Damien followed their wishes without remorse or hesitation. If one wished to die, he provided them with death.

The city population was roughly 100,000 including those who died before they arrived, but of the 50,000 or so who survived, not many could muster up the will to live.

Salvation, what did it mean?

Salvation depended on perception.

To these people who'd experienced tragedy unlike any other, salvation often meant death. The bliss of nonexistence was their only desire.

Because the world wasn't a place that welcomed them anymore.

Young girls who'd been sullied by the Nox, those who'd been forced to carry their bloodline, how could they bear to live on with that shame engraved in their bodies and souls?

Even the strongest of these young women was too utterly disgusted by the prospect of carrying a Nox's lineage to live on.

Every single survivor in that category chose death.

For men and women who'd been forced to watch as their families were brutally tortured and killed, reuniting with their loved ones was the most prominent desire.

While some chose to survive, the majority chose death.

The stench of death, Damien had become used to it after all this time. But today, it was particularly pungent.

As Damien acted as an executioner, he didn't let the burden of his actions pollute his mind. But that didn't stop his grudge against the Nox from growing.

What if it was Rose and Ruyue who were captured? What if it was his mother?

Damien couldn't imagine the person he'd become if something untoward happened to them.

In a sense, he could empathize with the feelings of these survivors, yet they differed sheerly due to power.

Perhaps he'd become suicidal as well, perhaps he'd wish for nothing but death, however, he had the power to at least make a dent in the Nox's army before he died.

He could charge the enemy and destroy a few worlds to vent his anger, perhaps finding a will to live in that time. He had the potential to grow into a figure who could exterminate the Nox, allowing him the revenge he'd so desire.

For these people who didn't have the ability to do so, he could only feel pity.

Still, not everyone chose the easy route.

There were some, some with determination and some with courage, some with the flames of vengeance burning brightly in their eyes, who chose to live.

Damien's speech wasn't empowering in the slightest, the words he said weren't the words they wanted to hear. If anything, his harsh portrayal of the future pushed some over the edge in their decision to die.

"But you forced us to accept reality." A man said earnestly. He was one of those who decided to move forward and live, and looking at how he was treated by the rest, he had become a sort of spiritual pillar for them.

"I'd much rather hear the blatant truth than flowery words of pity. I cannot stomach what took place here, and I cannot live with my powerlessness, but regardless, I will live on."

The man's eyes turned to the horizon. He tried to look past the bounds of reality. He felt like he could almost see his wife's face smiling down at him from Heaven.

"Didn't you say it before?" The man said with a weak smile. "Perhaps I will realize that life is better than death despite its cruelty."

There were only around 5,000 people remaining. Even if it was a large number, it wasn't even a fraction of the city's total population.

Damien was curious about why they chose to live and survive, but the answer he was given was far simpler than he expected.

"You're able to move forward with only that slight ray of hope guiding you?" He asked.

The man smiled and shook his head. "It isn't that. I do not think anyone here still has the faith in existence to believe in such a small chance."

"Then..."

"We simply do not wish to see their stories end here." The man said.

"We will live so they can live vicariously through us. We will endure hardship and earn our happiness back, so that those who suffered with us can feel a portion of this happiness from Heaven."

"It may be childish, but I feel that our continued existence is the only spark of hope that our people have remaining. Even if they've already passed on, I wish for their spirits to be at peace in the afterlife. For that, people like you must exterminate the enemy, and people like us must overcome our twisted fates. Those are the roles we've been granted, and the roles we must fulfill."

As Damien panned his gaze across those behind the man, he saw a united will that didn't exist before today.

It was a will born from suffering that existed amongst a community of people that couldn't relate to anyone else.

'It isn't that they didn't want to die, they just ignored their instinct and decided to live anyway. That...'



"I understand," Damien said succinctly. He felt a strange emotion welling up in his chest, one he wasn't used to at all.

pαndα`nove1~coM "Then, for now, I will provide you a home. If you choose to leave it in the future, I will respect that decision. If you choose to utilize the opportunities that place grants you, I will respect that decision as well."

He put his hand out and released a wave of spatial essence that covered the 5,000 survivors.

"I wish you all the best. I hope life gives you a reason to find meaning in it once more."

As the group disappeared, the man in the front smiled lightly.

"We will not wait for life to give us meaning, we will instead give meaning to life. The next time we meet, we will not show you such a shameful appearance. This much I can promise."

"Then I'll be looking forward to it."

Their interaction ended with that. The group was transported into the Sanctuary where they'd be settled by the 5 Clan Leaders.

The Sanctuary would provide them peace away from the universe. They would never have to experience the same pain again.

This was the extent of Damien's consideration.

How they lived their lives from that point forth depended wholly on themselves.

'I guess it's time to return now. I shouldn't keep them waiting for too long.'

Damien came alone today, leaving the rest of the group behind. He didn't want them to witness what took place.

But he knew that this wasn't the last "food supply" they'd come across as they continued their journey.

Eventually, the rest would come to realize what he was doing.

'But that's a conversation for another time. For now, I should give those kids a place to vent their frustrations.'

This was only the first step of their journey.

Since the hardest part, adapting, had been completed, it was time for them to pick up the pace.

The Nox couldn't be allowed to survive in this world any longer.