

Void 751

Chapter 751 Black Ink [3]

It was hard to find an opening in Zara's rampage. It was so hard, in fact, that Tyler and the rest wholly gave up on trying to do so.

Instead, they went with the more barbaric option.

"CHARGE!"

Tyler's roar rattled Synth and Ash's brains. With heightened battlelust due to the nature of their current circumstances, they shot up into the battle with peaking fervor!

B-B-BOOOOM!

A collection of drones swam ahead of the titan warrior and cleared an opening in the ink sea. The trio shot into the gap within the single instant it remained open and scanned their surroundings.

It was like purgatory.

Zara's blackness was thick and full without the inky properties of the Nox. Her darkness didn't just stem from the Nox, but also from her own comprehension of the Law.

Therefore, in terms of strength, it far exceeded anything the three geniuses had faced until this point. If the atmosphere wasn't actively avoiding them, they would've died already.

'That's good. It isn't the worst-case scenario.'

Tyler nodded his nonexistent head when he noticed it. Their continued survival was proof that Zara hadn't completely lost her rationality, unlike what her actions portrayed.

The titan warrior's body began to shift. A giant panther-like beastman covered in hell armor appeared in its place, charging out with speed that completely contradicted its size.

Bang!

The trio stood together as one and shot through the darkness until they found their first group of targets. There were five Higher Nox standing together trying to escape Zara's confinement.

But all of a sudden, they felt the blackness loosen.

Just as their limbs became free...

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

They were struck by a slew of explosions that extended into the distance. A massive armored warrior appeared in their midst and swung its arms, utilizing the jagged claws on its fingers to shred into its enemies' flesh.

"Ahhh!"

"How dare you?!"

An array of exclamations left the group, however, they were quick to gather their sentences. Before the titan warrior could execute its follow-up attacks, they'd already converged and begun their counter.

Fine enemies surrounded the titan warrior and blocked its paths of escape. Inky black mana that became invisible due to the atmosphere swirled around their bodies and formed various attacks.

'Now.'

Synth's fingers moved deftly across a holographic keyboard. As soon as she finished typing, the gadgets decorating Tyler's armored form whirled to life.

BANG! BOOOM!

The Nox shot forward as one. Twisting serpents and terrifying tidal waves congregated onto the warrior. The attacks seemed simple, but contained an unorthodox fluctuation of Death Laws that allowed them to move differently.

Flames of Nox Mana combusted all around the titan warrior. Sparks of black lightning danced around the air and focused on striking the warrior down.

But Synth was already prepared. A shield made up of countless individual hexagons materialized around the warrior.

Crack!

Cracks immediately formed on its surface, but they were rapidly repaired by Synth's mana. Black lines began forming on the barrier's surface, indicating the amount of Nox mana seeping through the rapidly regenerating cracks.

When the black lines encompassed half of the barrier, Synth's eyes narrowed.

"Attack now!"

Ash moved as commanded. Her fist raised up and shot out like a cannon blast.

However, something was different about this attack.

The gauntlets on Ash's hands pulsated with black light. As she threw one punch forward and slammed the other fist back, the pulsating light spread with the force of her strikes.

At the same time, the black lines in the barrier faded as if they were being suctioned away.

VOOOOOM!

A ring of blackish-red mana spread from the gauntlets. A terrifying force impacted the 5 Higher Mox, pushing their bodies back,

"Ack!"

One of the Higher Nox let out a groan of pain. His body was split open by the sudden burst of mana. However, how could Nox mana hurt the Nox? He smiled cruelly as he thought about how he'd destroy that mech once he regener—

His thoughts couldn't even finish before his body was bisected.

Like a flash of light, a behemoth of speed appeared before each Higher Nox and broke them into pieces.

'We have help.' Tyler realized.

Taking on 5 Higher Nox at once was an achievement even if they were using their combined power, but it was still impossible for them to do it so rapidly.

One-shotting these terrifying beings who could become Overlords of any lower world and even some of the middle worlds they came across? That was a joke amongst jokes. Only someone like Damien could do that.

But what if they were to receive aid from someone who wasn't much weaker than that level?

If Zara broke their minds while the trio simultaneously broke their bodies, how could the Higher Nox put up a proper fight?

'Mental attacks are scary...'

With that thought as his last, Tyler shut off his awareness.

The intelligent strategy was useless at the moment.

Whether it was Ash or Zara, both were currently beings of pure force.

So, wouldn't their cooperation flow better if they were allowed to showcase this mind state?

Suddenly, Ash became the central controlling force of the titan warrior. Synth and Tyler provided support and stuck within their roles, making sure that nothing could halt Ash's charge.

And they did so perfectly.

BANG! BANG! BOOOOOOM!

Ash's mountainous figure tore through the waters and blew the ocean to bits as she recklessly eviscerated any Nox being in her path. She was more than just a bulldozer, she was a horde of them charging together like bulls.

Her fists were weapons of mass destruction alone, but her power was only enhanced by the support of her comrades. Tyler's control allowed her to freely switch between forms and Synth's support made it easy for her to keep her mind focused without distractions.

With every punch, a Higher Nox died. With every roar, their fighting spirit fell even lower.

The Higher Nox were powerful, but they weren't powerful enough to face this sudden combination of force.

With every Higher Nox that died, Zara's domain would become even more powerful. As her domain grew, her cruelty became more prominent and the level of pressure she placed on her captives became mind-numbing.

The Higher Nox couldn't even see the trio coming.

Their minds were in utter chaos. Their heads were like televisions plagued with radio static, randomly receiving memories and images that confused their egos.

A black space unlike the present universe, an area that existed "outside" of reality's bounds.

A place that the Nox called home, their Motherland.

Scenes of this place flashed through their heads and confused their memories. It was a place that most of them had never visited, but it was a place they yearned for with all their hearts.

As they basked in its existence, they found themselves freed of their mortal coil.

Their souls traveled to that blessed land for rebirth.

And their bodies became a part of Zara's power.

Rather than a terrifying illusion, Zara gave them irresistible temptation.

The Nox were beings of desire, after all.

Their weaknesses were far more varied than they'd ever dare to admit.

Chapter 752 Black Ink [4]

The skies were dyed black.

The clouds parted ways to showcase the void that lay beyond.

'Focus.'

The Heavens shattered, abandoning those on the earth.

A cataclysm turned all life into ash.

'Focus.'

A man looked on with indifferent eyes.

But deep within his pupils, there was a hint of morbid realization.

This place...this was not—

'FOCUS!'

Zara's mind moved in and out of reality. She could hardly perceive what was real or fake.

Her mental state was the exact same as the Nox she was influencing. In fact, despite the rest of the squad's assumption that she was purposefully aiding them, it was more coincidence than anything else.

Zara stood submerged in black ink. She was cut off from the outside atmosphere completely, even unaware of the battle situation,

Everything was being handled autonomously. The connection between her mind and the black ink sea reached an unprecedented level.

Zara couldn't focus on the battle in her current state, anyway,

Perhaps, if she joined the battle...

A cold and damp environment. A familiar environment.

A woman unlike any other, a woman with abyssal black hair.

And next to her...

'Focus!'

Zara snapped back to reality. Her head felt strange, she couldn't fight the wooziness overcoming her, but she did her best to contribute.

'Those guys...doing good.'

Her thoughts were strained, but she was at least able to comprehend reality a little after waking up. Her hands moved deftly to control the black ink around her, using it to play a more active role in supporting the genius trio.

The combination of the black ink and the titan warrior was deadly. Compared to their previous dominance, the Higher Nox currently weren't able to elicit the same fear.

After all, they were separated.

The main reason for their fearsomeness was their number. Their power itself wasn't high.

Despite their bodies being as strong as a high-level 4th class, their power output was still only at the mid-levels, similar to Tyler and the girls.

With Tyler, Synth, and Ash combining their individual advantages to create an exponentially stronger being...

How could these Higher Nox resist without their numbers?

Zara smiled and withdrew her control over the ink. All she needed to do was contain the Higher Nox and force them into a confused state so they couldn't regroup.

The actual battle could be left for those who were in dire need of experience.

Besides, didn't she reap benefits either way?

A strange lullaby, eerie and desolate.

It was the only thing that could cut through the blackness.

What existed before creation?

And what allowed creation to exist?

A man walked alone through the ruined halls. His cape fluttered behind his back to bring sound to the pregnant silence around him.

He looked up into the sky and wished for stars.

He wondered when the madness would end.

Why was his memory...so filled with war?

A planet the size of a universe, a world unlike any other.

It was too appealing to stop.

A World Core draped in blackness...

...was swallowed by the void.

A hand of jagged claws slashed through the air, painting the waters in black blood.

Zara's eyes refocused.

In her hand, she found a mutilated head that was slowly transitioning into ink.

Her mind was a mess.

She wanted to collapse and pass out to rid herself of the immense confusion in her memories.

It would've been fine if the memories were coherent, but they were nothing of the sort. Countless fragments that lasted a mere few seconds would merge into one long compilation of nonsense that Zara couldn't understand no matter how hard she tried.

And each one of these fragments held some sort of importance.

She could feel it in her blood, in her veins, in the very core of her being.

If she was able to piece together what she saw, it wouldn't only be her origins that she'd learn...

She'd gain access to something game-changing.

'Just...focus...'

Zara's mind was almost literally splitting into multiple pieces. It wouldn't be odd if she went insane as this feeling continued.

"Ah..."

Just when...?

When did her hands become stained in blood?

Zara looked down at her shaking hands in confusion.

The last time she checked, she was within the confines of a black ink field, protected from the outside world.

Just when did she make her way to the battlefield...?

And just how many had she killed...?

'What...'

Before everything, there was only darkness.

However, this darkness was not darkness. It was the brightest light, the darkest darkness, the world itself, and a reflection of its inexistence.

From this darkness emerged a creature, and from this light emerged a creature.

Upon their first meeting, all things were born.

Zara finally realized it.

'The Nox...don't bleed red.'

The suicidal war that the Stargazer Squad waged against the Nox finally seemed to be headed in a positive direction.

After countless twists and turns, the Higher Nox were finally isolated and kept as prey on the chopping block for Tyler, Synth, and Ash to slowly kill.

However, this was only on the surface.

'We don't have enough mana to continue for long.'

40 minutes, that's how long had passed.

With 20 minutes remaining until reinforcements arrived, Tyler knew they were in a far tighter situation than it seemed.

'This marks 300. The number has gone down significantly, but it doesn't matter. 700 of them can easily kill us the second we drop our guard.'

Currently, they had Zara's support in isolating the Nox, but how long would that last? Even Zara wasn't an unlimited tank of mana. The strain that came along with such a wide-scale liquid domain was likely insane.

'We just have to do what we can while the odds are in our favor and then hope, I guess...'

Tyler's nonexistent eyes hardened as he spread his awareness into the world. He saw the group of Higher Nox that'd just died turning into ink and dissolving into the domain.

'Ash's mana is almost dry. She won't be able to maintain her berserker form for longer than 5 more minutes. As for me...'

Tyler could feel the dredges of his mana pool scraping through his veins so he could use them. He didn't even know how he was still maintaining his armor state, but he was certain that he didn't have the energy to do anything else anymore.

'Synth is probably the best off since she built her machines with the ability to gather their own mana...it looks like we'll have to rely on her for now.'

In their current form, Tyler and Ash were essentially connected at the hip. Only Synth had freedom of movement as someone who was working remotely.

At the same time, she didn't need as much mana as her comrades to survive.

If she used her machines to inject mana into Tyler and Ash, they'd likely gain the sustenance to last for another 10 or so minutes.

'Everything is on track for now. Let's hope that—'

Slash!

The water...didn't cut.

It was too clean, to the point where the passing attack didn't disturb the surrounding water at all.

However, it did dye the water red.

"A-ah..."

A slight exclamation leaked into the air.

Tyler spread his awareness with a look of horror on his face.

The armor he'd transformed into was sliced into three equal sections.

From within, a thick trail of blood leaked.

'That's not a light wound...'

Tyler spread his awareness further. Before anything else, he needed to identify the assailant. It wasn't a hard task since she stood silently not far away, staring into her blood-stained hands.

Tyler's mind shook.

Why...?

Just why was Zara attacking them?

Chapter 753 Black Ink [5]

Life, Death, and Reincarnation; the three concepts that form the overarching concept known as Samsara.

According to the universal laws, life and death were the second from last concepts to emerge at the universe's foundation.

Creation and Destruction allowed all other concepts to exist, Space and Time created a vessel to house those concepts, and Life and Death created and regulated beings who could make use of those concepts. Lastly came the 5 elements and all other things. These concepts spread through the created Spacetime, latched onto Life and Death, and introduced themselves to the world.

Life and Death were integral to the continuation of the universe, and housed the closest similarities to the original Creation and Destruction laws out of all the foundational laws.

However, even more than creation and destruction, life and death allowed one to comprehend the importance of another concept: Duality.

Mortality was something every sentient being had to come to terms with at some point in their life. Even for a practitioner who constantly increased their lifespan through training, mortality was something that needed to be acknowledged.

After all, a practitioner who could escape the bounds of mortality was a practitioner who'd faced it every single day in order to do so.

Life and Death were a beginning and end, yet they were also an end and a beginning. Life and Death were concepts that even the lowliest mortals could understand to a meager degree.

Wherever there was life, there would be death. And wherever there was death, there would be seeds of new life.

The two concepts seldom existed individually. It was something that applied to almost every other concept, but it was most easily reflected in life and death.

Duality. Every force in existence had an equal and opposite to match it. Life had death, space had time, creation had destruction, and even the greatest forces of nonexistence held duality with existence.

Greenish white and murky black mixed together like yin and yang to showcase this relationship. They swirled around each other and formed a funnel that touched ground upon a single seed, acting as water and sunlight to bloom that seed.

The more time went by, the greater this vortex became. Eventually, a trace of black spawned around its edges and began integrating itself.

Whoosh!

The splash of black was like a steroid. The vortex immediately grew massively, and the rate at which the seed was absorbing its energy heightened immensely,

Suddenly, a string of the black mana shot into the seed and rooted itself, afterward, it traveled outside of the Mana Heart where it originated and snaked through the internal body.

Until finally, it phased out of the Real Plane and became ethereal.

A pure white space was revealed. It wasn't vast, but it held more than a few concepts within.

Flames and lightning raced through the entire space without proper form, but even with their chaotic paths, there was a certain area they simply couldn't pierce.

There, a small, almost transparent gold and silver seed sat quietly. A field of distorted spacetime surrounded its existence, disallowing any entry.

This was the most stable part of the mysterious space.

Aside from the flame-lightning and the spacetime seed, there was one final seed of reddish-black color. It emitted an extremely hostile aura, and whenever the flame-lightning passed over it, it was converted into a different, far more destructive force.

The black mana thread ignored this dangerous force and moved in the other direction. When it arrived near the spacetime seed, it diverted its course and positioned itself somewhat behind the seed.

A pulsation spread through the space.

Murky black and greenish-white light traveled through the black mana and spread into the mysterious space. However, soon enough, the spreading mana was met by the spacetime seed's repellent force and sent back to its original position.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

As the mana compounded multiple times, a sound like a sickly heartbeat rang through the space.

The seed forming in the Real Plane became illusory. Through the black mana tube, the energy contained within the vortex connected to it was diverted to the mysterious space.

Until finally...

Ba-dum!

Ba-dum!

Two pulsations of black and white mana spread through the space and formed a dome-like cocoon. Cracks spread on the cocoon almost immediately upon its creation.

Crack! Crackle!

The cocoon's shell shattered and fluttered around the empty air like butterflies.

In the center of the cocoon where the black mana tube once sat was a new seed.

A seed of murky black and greenish white.

Thump!

"Ah..."

Damien's eyes rolled up into his head. A sudden wave of something thumped through his body, completely overriding his systems.

His heart felt like it was going to burst out of his chest. Both vitality and deathly air flowed through his veins at once.

It was a strange feeling.

An almost painful one.

But at the same time, it was...

'Euphoric.'

There was truly no better way to describe the feeling.

Bang!

Sebastian's fist was like a falling meteor as it struck Damien directly in his ribs.

"Kak...!"

Damien's body flew backwards, blood flying out of his mouth.

Sebastian appeared in front of him like a ghost and continued his beatdown. A flurry of punches loaded with Nox Mana rained down on Damien's body, causing blood to spurt incessantly from his damaged organs.

But...why?

Sebastian frowned in displeasure. Oddly enough, he couldn't find any of the previous joy he gained from beating Damien to a pulp.

It felt...empty.

'That human is no longer reacting.'

Sebastian stepped forward. His body blurred and appeared dozens of kilometers away where Damien's body had landed.

BOOM!

He kicked the limp body. He stomped on it until all of its bones were shattered.

Even recognizing this body as the human known as "Damien" was impossible in its current state.

But this was even more fearsome than anything else.

Because even with his body in such a state...

'He is...smiling?'

Right, Damien was smiling.

He was smiling so widely that it made his deformed face even more gruesome to look at.

'It doesn't hurt.'

Sebastian's attacks didn't hurt anymore.

The pain in his body was negligible.

Even with the current level of damage, Damien didn't have any panic in his mind.

A strange feeling brewed in his mind...

A feeling that said he was unkillable.

Under Sebastian's suspicious eyes, Damien's mutilated body fused back together. His bones snapped, crackled, and popped back into place, his skin and muscles following thereafter.

It was only a few seconds before he could stand up again.

'Don't be delusional.' He reminded himself.

Damien knew just how hard it was to fully kill him, but that didn't make him unkillable.

However, he did feel something strange in his body.

A new type of energy he'd never used before was laced into his Void Mana, and the seed in his Mana Heart had disappeared completely,

Did the process...finish?

Damien clenched his fists in curiosity. He was expecting some kind of grand declaration of strength, but he didn't quite feel anything at all.

'Hmm...I guess it needs a test drive.'

He smiled and cracked his neck. His eyes turned to the enemy standing only a few feet away.

"Ahahaha...well, this is pretty awkward. I forgot what round we're on, but are you ready for the next one?"

Smilingly, he beckoned his opponent over with a finger.

Even the Higher Nox Sebastian who wasn't fully aware of human gestures could sense the provocation laced in that finger.

The butler's eyes narrowed.

This child...

...was quite annoying.

Chapter 754 Black Ink [6]

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The two's battle continued with raging ferocity after that brief respite. However, the battle situation itself was quite different.

In the beginning, Damien was only taking attacks without countering. He focused wholly on defense to keep himself alive under Sebastian's brutal onslaught.

But as time went on, his disposition shifted. He became bolder, wilder, and more reckless. His weapons disappeared from his hands and his fists struck out without fear.

The shattering of their bones rang out constantly.

Yet, it only took an instant after they shattered for the bones to regenerate.

In a situation like this, why would Damien have to worry about injuring them?

He struck out with insane fervor. His fists were like unfeeling machines attached to his body. Sebastian found himself cornered not by Damien's force, but by his madness.

'This human...is insane!'

Sebastian realized long ago that Damien wasn't right in the head, but at this point, even such an evaluation didn't do the young genius justice.

He was utterly mad. There wasn't a single shred of rationality in that outwardly stable mind.

No matter how he got hit, no matter how he got injured, and no matter how close he got to death, he always stood back up with a grin and continued fighting.

In fact, his excitement only grew as he took heavier hits.

'Dark Touch.'

Sebastian's hand struck out like a snake, his finger poking multiple spots on Damien's body.

In the next instant....

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Whizzing sounds emitted from the young genius' body as his joints collapsed and blood spurted from his pores. Nox Mana penetrated his defenses and began corrupting his Mana Circuits.

"Hahahaha!" Damien laughed wildly.

He could feel it.

With every injury he got, the strange essence populating his mana stream was being further integrated with his body. Not only was his life force increasing, but his durability and power were also doing the same.

'It's a good power, something I need to explore more in the future. Before that, I'll just do what I can through this battle and hold this asshole back until reinforcements arrive!'

Damien grinned. At this point, it had to have been at least 45 minutes.

15 minutes was a long time, but it wasn't nearly as long as the time that had passed.

'And now, I have the qualifications to fight back.'

Perhaps he couldn't kill Sebastian, but living wasn't an issue anymore. Sebastian wouldn't be able to kill Damien as long as Damien's focus didn't waver.

And how could it?

There was nothing present to distract him.

The Vinyard continent was nothing more than a collection of shards in the ocean at this point. The ground below was almost nonexistent, especially after Damien and Sebastian's last clash.

The two stood in the air now, and if they wanted to land on solid ground to fight, they'd need to relocate to another continent entirely.

'I can't allow that to happen.'

The air was Damien's domain. With nothing blocking his range, he could teleport essentially anywhere. As long as he had this advantage, leading Sebastian on was much easier.

'But that guy isn't as dumb as he looks. Actually...dammit, he even looks like a smartass.'

Damien dodged a fist and sent his own punch forward. He teleported in the same instant Sebastian caught the punch and appeared behind the butler, aiming Hel at his head.

BANG!

A loud explosion of spatial mana laced with unknown concepts rang through the air. Space quaked and almost shattered from its impact.

An iridescent blue stream appeared above Damien's head along with the spread of a domain. Space suddenly came under his complete control.

Damien clenched his fist, causing an intense distortion to spread into the surroundings along with an intense spatial confusion.

"Oho, have you decided to use everything in your arsenal?"

"Hah! With your power, you can sense it, right? Someone interesting is on the way."

Sebastian's eyes narrowed. "Indeed they are, but does that affect me? I shall kill you before they can even reach my toes."

"Try it if you can," Damien smirked.

'Lowly Souls...Come.'

Sebastian's eyes suddenly lit up with dim black light. His hands came together to form a string of complex symbols as if performing a summoning ritual.

A pulsation of power spread through the air.

Nox mana danced like beautiful women, slithering through the air and creating a spiderweb that spread to the far reaches of where the Vineyard once stood.

The mana burrowed into the ground and disappeared.

The atmosphere turned silent.

Xiu!

Damien flashed to the right to avoid the terrifyingly fast object that cut by his side.

"Oh? Now this is interesting..."

Sebastian's amused voice brought him back to reality.

Damien's eyes turned cold.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

His voice was laced with thick killing intent. The killing intent fumed into the atmosphere and dyed the world red.

BOOOOOOOM!

Reality warped under its weight. A mountain of corpses that reached Calypto's atmosphere appeared like a mirage behind Damien.

"So this is your reverse scale? That's fun to know. Does it hurt to see?"

Sebastian's teasing voice went completely ignored.

Damien's eyes were trained on the figure that just arrived.

Black hair like the dark skies revealed by moonlight at night, golden eyes that shone like beautiful gems above the mortal world, a crescent-shaped mark on the glabella that added a mystical charm to her appearance...

Zara.

Zara was standing next to his enemy submissively.

Her golden eyes gleamed with killing intent. A disgusting aura of blackness swirled around her like a swarm of bees.

'She's been corrupted.'

Damien realized it as soon as he saw her, but this only made him angrier.

"She's quite the specimen. Who would've thought one of our seeds would survive until this era!"

The Soul Summoning spell was meant to summon any Nox Being with lower strength than Sebastian to fight for him as a puppet. When he used it, he expected to see a revived army of millions that would pressure Damien into a quick death.

But instead, he summoned someone else. Someone who'd apparently devoured every Nox in the environment and remained as the last living Nox Being.

She was a specimen that greatly interested Sebastian.

He looked at Zara like she was a precious doll, bringing his hand up to investigate her internals and Mana Circuit.

BANG!

A shot from Hel exploded the space between Sebastian and Zara.

"Don't you dare touch her."

Damien's cold voice rang out again.

He was enraged. He was more furious than he'd ever been.

Although Sebastian didn't say it out loud, his demeanor alone was enough of a tell.

Zara had become his hostage.

Zara had become his puppet.

"Ohoho, little lass, how about you show your worth by killing that human over there?"

Zara's body moved like a machine. Resistance was clear in her eyes, but her body evidently didn't follow her will.

VOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A massive aura burst out of Damien's body. Space swirled into a mess, time lost its flow, and an aura of utter desolation spread across Calypto.

He didn't care.

He didn't care how it happened and he didn't care why it happened.

The second Damien saw Zara standing next to Sebastian...

Something within him snapped.

Chapter 755 Black Ink [7]

Weakness.

Damien had always been thoroughly aware of his weaknesses, but they'd always been internalized.

The weaknesses that stemmed from his own lacking existence could be fixed through training and effort, so he never put too much stock into them.

Instead, he worked ceaselessly to rid himself of weakness and truly become untouchable.

However, there was one thing he'd forgotten.

As a practitioner, emotions were both a blessing and a curse. The presence of emotions allowed for the presence of determination and drive, and the presence of emotion allowed for expanded creativity which helped with comprehension.

However, at the same time, when these emotions were directed towards other people, they became a curse.

Strong hatred could be a source of determination, but it could also cause one to fall into the depths of despair and bottleneck their training.

In the same vein, strong love could be an equally strong source of determination, but it was the greatest exploitable weakness in existence.

The second a loved one became one's captive, it was unimaginably easy to manipulate the enemy.

Damien had this weakness just like any other human being. However, he'd originally believed it negligible since his women were in the Human Domain, tucked away and safe from his enemies.

Zara wasn't a factor he'd considered.

He simply never pictured a situation where Zara was captured.

'I should've known.'

Nox Mana's main property was always to corrupt. The reason Damien was so much better equipped to deal with the Nox in comparison to his comrades was also because of his immunity to their corruption.

Zara didn't have this immunity. The more she devoured the Nox, the more she was corrupted by their mana.

Damien fought with his everything.

Space became a malleable substance that was used to attack and defend. Calypto's space was manipulated and twisted to the extent that it wouldn't naturally heal for many years.

The seas were split into countless sections and dried up, any land even tens of thousands of kilometers away was heavily impacted by the spreading fluctuations of Damien's madness.

But he didn't stop.

He was like a feral beast without limits.

Damien's eyes were dyed in reddish-black. Flame-lightning of the same color arced from his arms and burned the oceans to nothingness.

He punched with the force of a thousand meteors, he slashed Mirage like a swordsman making his last stand.

But all throughout, he never touched Zara.

His body swerved through the air and flashed about randomly. Zara's terrifyingly powerful claws and shadows found themselves striking nothing but empty air due to his intense evasion tactics.

Damien could sense her. Through their spiritual link, he knew exactly where she'd be and what she'd do.

Of course, since their contract was one of equals, she could do the same for him...

But her spatial perception wasn't nearly developed enough for her to effectively block his advent.

BOOOOOOM!

Space compressed and folded before exploding over Sebastian's head. The butler was flung down into the sea floor, surrounded by mountainous walls of water that had yet to fill the empty space between them due to the spatial distortion in the air.

BANG!

A terrifying fist landed on the butler's face as he took in the situation. It was followed by a flurry of physical attacks that didn't leave him any room to maneuver.

Xiu!

At that moment, Zara's body flew through the air and cut by Damien's side once more. She landed next to Sebastian and immediately slashed out her claws, coating them in a swirl of shadows that attacked Damien as they sliced through the air.

'Dammit!'

Damien found himself trapped in a world of darkness. Everything around him became an enemy.

Sticky shadows tried to restrict his movement, shadow constructs of all shapes and forms charged at him and shot at him with harrowing destructive force, and Zara herself was like the world's most skilled assassin, attacking in the narrowest gaps that even Damien couldn't fully defend against.

'I can't fight them at the same time...'

'Seven Stars Encircling The Moon'

A chaotic fist of countless different streams of mana combusted and shattered the surrounding darkness. Damien teleported away, grabbing Mirage and slashing with all his might.

'Void Sword Art First Form: Bladeless'

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

'Void Sword Art Fourth Form: Spatial Collapse'

'Void Sword Art Fifth Form: Dimensional Severance'

Mirage became a weapon of mass destruction.

Massive gashes in space spanned thousands of kilometers and blocked in the battlefield. Damien's figure became a collection of afterimages as he danced around the constricted space and made his movements impossible to read.

BOOOOOOM!

Space collapsed around Sebastian and trapped him in a black hole spatial phenomenon. As the butler began to break the phenomenon and escape, a thin black line cut towards him at an incredibly slow, yet almost instant pace.

SHING!

The spatial collapse and Sebastian were cut together, but Damien wasn't able to see the end of this fight quite yet.

Zara's body flew at him the second Dimensional Severence left his blade. She tracked him no matter how he teleported and deflected his attacks effortlessly as if she knew their each and every weakness.

And she might as well have. As the companion who'd stayed by Damien's side the longest, she was most aware of his bad habits during battle. Even if she wasn't consciously controlling her body, her instincts alone were enough to completely counteract him.

'Fuck!'

No matter what, he couldn't harm Zara.

It wasn't a matter of sympathy. If he could save her by defeating her completely, he'd do it in a heartbeat.

However, he could feel it through their connection.

Zara's current state was similar to his state moments prior. Some integral process was taking place in her body, something that could seriously benefit her if allowed to finish.

'Ah...I see.'

Damien finally understood.

'This is like a parasitic battle.'

Zara was being corrupted, but she was earnestly fighting for control. While Damien didn't know the details, he could at least understand the stakes involved in that battle.

'If she wins, she gains everything she's been working towards, but if she loses, her ego gets extinguished and she remained a puppet.'

Damien's fury almost raged out of control again. Sebastian must've known. He must've provoked Zara into attacking him because he knew that the second Damien struck Zara, he'd harm her progress.

A puppet that couldn't be attacked, what better tool was there than this?

'I just need a single opportunity...'

If he had a single second to himself when Sebastian was unable to defend against him, he felt like he could turn the situation around.

'I can't kill him, but now that he's this weakened, I can at least...'

Damien felt it when he struck Sebastian. The butler's strength wasn't nearly what it was when they first started.

After all, he wasn't an unkillable monster either. Even if he was too strong for Damien to affect him much, his mana capacity was still the same as everyone else's.

After using so many mana-filled attacks, it was inevitable for him to start running low.

Damien shot out like a rocket and engaged in combat with Sebastian again.

His fist connected with the butler's jaw, but in consequence, he was kicked in the knee and his flow was disrupted.

He kicked like a whip into Sebastian's side, but the butler instantly used the force to his advantage and redirected it at Damien.

'His skill level outstrips mine too much.'

Damien couldn't land a hit without being countered. After a few sparks of an instant, Zara joined as well and forced Damien into a deeper hole.

His eyes darted around like mice. His awareness was extremely focused on the current two enemies he needed to fight.

Everything other than the battle was disregarded.

'One second is all I need...'

Reddish-black sparks decorated his eyes and aura. His power level suddenly spiked.

'Just a single second...'

The reddish-black sparks began to pollute his mana. He swiped his hand through the air and covered Zara in spatial mana, teleporting her away as he slammed his hand down in front of Sebastian.

BOOM!

Sebastian covered himself in a cocoon of Nox Mana to evade the blast. When the chaotic mana explosion died down, the cocoon shot out like a curtain of sand and enveloped Damien.

Damien thrashed within the curtain in a bid to remove all the Nox Mana latching onto his body. He roared like a mad Titan as he tore his way through any obstacles in his path.

'Just one second...if I can distract him for a single...!'

BOOOOOOM!

The ocean below burst into an explosion of foam.

The valiant figure of a nearly-destroyed Titan warrior spiked out of the water and slammed into Sebastian like a tank!

The Titan warrior's arms and legs wrapped around Sebastian's body and forcefully held him in place.

"GET HIM NOW!"

"BEGONE, VERMIN!"

Damien's perception heightened to the maximum. Every spark of an instant felt like countless seconds.

In this slowed world, he flashed away.

His body appeared behind Sebastian.

He grabbed the Higher Nox butler's head like a basketball.

And at the same time, he sensed the terrifying agglomeration of mana gathering between Sebastian and the Titan warrior.

'I...don't have time.'

BOOOOOOOOOM!

Sebastian's gathered mana exploded forward like a beam of deathly light.

Time resumed.

Damien and Sebastian vanished from the area.

And the Titan warrior stood in the air with a massive hole in its body.

Chapter 756 Black Ink [8]

'How...did it come to this?'

Minutes prior to its eruption from the ocean, the wreckage of a Titan warrior could be seen strewn about the dark sea. Pieces of metal and debris floated away from the main body, leaving it battered and filled with holes.

Still in his armor form, Tyler sighed. Surprisingly enough, he could feel the terrible pain arcing through his body even in his current state.

The armor's damage was his bodily damage, and currently, the armor itself was torn to the point where it was almost multiple separated pieces.

'If I turn back into human form right now, I'll probably die instantly.'

Tyler thought back to the previous battle, if it could even be called that.

Rather than a battle, it was a one-sided beatdown.

The power of the Titan warrior after Tyler, Synth, and Ash combined their individual power was immense, but it didn't seem to matter at all to Zara.

She was feral, but strangely rational at the same time. She moved like a beast, but her every attack was fatal and calculated.

Her claws moved as if ignoring space, always hitting their target. The myriad of scars and gashes lining both Tyler's armor form and Ash's body were innumerable.

Her shadow was a terrifying assassin with a mind of its own. Whenever it attacked, Ash and Tyler had to use everything in their power to evade or block. The shadows were extremely strange as well. They changed properties multiple times, making blocking them completely an almost impossible task.

If Tyler and the rest hadn't been focused to the utmost, they would've died.

'No, she spared us.'

"Keuk..."

Ash's strained breaths resounded through the area as Tyler tried to pull her up to the surface. Synth stood nearby with dark circles under her eyes, furiously typing away on a holographic keyboard she manifested.

"Synth...what are you doing...?" Tyler asked through sound transmission.

"...maintenance."

Despite her attempts to remain calm, that single word shook as much as a magnitude 9 earthquake. She could barely input the proper commands on her keyboard with the level of tremoring in her hands.

"Relax..." Tyler said with a smile, "We aren't dying yet."

Synth sighed. Even if they weren't dead, weren't they already on the brink? If Ash and Tyler took even a bit more damage, they'd be in a fatal state that couldn't be healed with their current methods.

"I barely have enough mana to repair everything. At this rate, it's better for us to just give up and wait for the battle to end..."

"No!"

Tyler immediately stopped her from continuing.

"No matter what, we will not abandon our comrades...even if that means we die!"

Tyler was determined. He didn't care about his own state at all.

As a child, he never dreamt of becoming a soldier on the battlefield. He never dreamt of putting his life on the line for the sake of merely surviving.

The ones who'd forced him to do so were the Nox.

Their followers killed his family, and years later, they destroyed his homeworld completely.

His grudge against the Nox was immense, but he'd thoroughly suppressed it so he could grow without losing his life to recklessness.

However, the Nox were doing the same thing again. They were threatening to take away the things he cared about.

"But I'm not powerless anymore."

Damien was strong, but he wasn't strong enough to take Zara and Sebastian at the same time. He needed someone to at least act like a meat shield so he could move unhindered.

"As long as we have the ability, we will perform."

"That's the fucking problem!" Synth shouted abruptly.

"You don't have the ability! We're out of mana, we're out of stamina, and the two of you are so wounded that you can't even move properly! How the fuck do you expect to help without dying?!"

She understood Tyler's mentality. While she didn't have the same strong hatred for the Nox as he did, she'd heard his story more than once already.

Still, she couldn't condone his suicidal actions.

"I'm shutting down operations. You won't be able to move until reinforcements arrive. Use this time to heal."

Synth decisively pressed a button on her keyboard, which immediately restricted Ash's movements. Naturally, Tyler was restricted as well.

"We...go..."

At that moment, Ash opened her mouth. She couldn't articulate herself properly in berserker form, but she could at least voice her intentions.

She wanted to go.

Not for any grand reason like Tyler, though.

She just wanted to save the woman who'd been treating her like a younger sister all this time.

Zara was kind to the trio and never treated them wrong. If Damien was the devil who chastised and tortured them whenever he had the opportunity, Zara was the angel that'd pick them up afterwards and make sure they were alright.

Ash didn't want to repay Zara's kindness with cowardice.

She wanted to help in any way possible.

"Will...move...!"

Ash's titanic body began to slowly drag itself through the water. Electric sparks fizzled out from Synth's machines as they tried to restrain her.

But what was a berserker without power?

RAAAAAAAH!

Ash's roar reverberated through the dark waters like a whale call. Her muscles bulged to their greatest extent, and veins popped out of her skin.

BOOM!

A wall of reddish mana burst from her body and pushed back the devices holding her.

But even with her newfound freedom, she wasn't moving very fast.

Her berserk transformation would end without mana, and she didn't have much left. At most, she could attack a few more times before being forced to revert.

'But that's enough.'

Tyler's voice appeared in her head.

"Just a single decisive moment is all we need. After that, we can leave everything to that bastard."

Ash smiled. He was a devilish training instructor and a man with a heart blacker than Nox Mana, but Ash didn't doubt his reliability.

Damien would always turn a situation in his favor if he had the opportunity.

"Haa, you two are going to be the death of me one day."

She already knew it when she was forced to be the voice of rationality, but these two had truly lost their minds.

With yet another sigh, Synth closed her eyes and hopped into a compartment on the Titan warrior's armor. This was a space she'd made specifically for herself.

"Fine, then let's go. But if I die, I'm haunting both of you from the grave!"

"Mm!"

Ash pushed herself through the water with Synth's technological support.

And with that, the three made their way to the surface.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

"You...!"

Damien's shocked exclamation was jolting.

Even through the pain, Tyler smiled.

"What do you think...? Is this...enough to get acknowledged?"

There was a massive hole in Ash's torso. The bottom of her heart could be seen dangling from its top. Tyler was acting as Ash's armor, so the damage on his body didn't even need to be mentioned. He was just as fatally wounded as the berserker.

As for Synth...

The compartment she sat in exploded. Shards of thick glass flew through the air and stabbed into her coffee-colored skin, drawing a painting of blood upon her body.

At the same time, the impact itself rattled her internals and caused countless ruptures within her body. If it wasn't for Synth taking a majority of this force, Ash's body would've completely exploded in that moment.

The Titan warrior fell out of the sky, unable to continue operating.

And those who piloted it...

Even if they were still alive now, their injuries already fated them with death.

The reddish-black in Damien's eyes became far worse. The sparks crackling around his body started to shatter space itself with their presence.

Everything was going wrong. Everything was falling apart...

...because of one man.

Damien's crazed eyes locked onto Sebastian spewing hatred.

That man had to die, even if it meant Damien would die with him.

That was the only thought in Damien's mind as he dragged Sebastian into the void.

Chapter 757 Rescue [1]

Reddish-black.

Just what was the significance of this color?

To this day, Damien was barely consciously aware of the reddish-black sparks that would occasionally populate his aura, but he knew that there was some sort of force in his body that he wasn't aware of.

Usually, when the reddish-black aura activated itself, Damien was sent into a state of frenzy, unable to properly comprehend his actions until he'd finished whatever task he was handling.

However, this time it was different.

Damien's cold and indifferent eyes shone like amethysts as he dragged Sebastian through the spatial layers. He flew through Calypto's atmosphere until he eventually left it completely.

"Get up and fight me."

Damien flung Sebastian's body into the starry sky and stood tall. His hand pressed down on the universe, beckoning its assistance.

'Celestial Authority'

'Starfall'

An iridescent blue mixed with the reddish-black sparks in Damien's aura. The starry sky rumbled as countless entities swam through it with untold speed.

Starfall was a skill that summoned celestial bodies for Damien to control. At its base, it was a skill that could be used for far more than just a few meteor showers.

However, it was never able to show its full power within a world's atmosphere. This wasn't just because a portal was necessary to allow those bodies to enter the world, but also because Damien himself didn't desire the destruction of the world.

In the starry sky, there were no limitations.

In fact, the range of Damien's abilities only increased.

VOOOOM!

Thousands of meteors appeared in the distance, concealed by the darkness of space. They blazed trails through the silence and arrived at Sebastian's position in an instant, exploding on impact!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The first to strike were the smallest pieces of space debris. These pieces flung Sebastian around, disallowing him from regaining his composure.

When this attack was nearing its end, a second, far larger force appeared behind the Nox butler.

BOOOOOOOM!

A planetary body the size of a moon eclipsed Sebastian's own body. He turned around coldly and faced it.

'Unveiling Darkness'

Sebastian flicked his finger into the planetary body and sent a concentrated strand of Nox Mana into its center.

Within an instant, cracks began to spread across the moon. Black splotches stained its surface until finally, it exploded into dust that floated away with the streams of Spatial Essence in the surroundings.

"Human, I commend your strength. However, do not mistake my kindness for weakness. You are not powerful enough to fight me as an equal yet."

Sebastian coldly spoke as he vanished from the air. He arrived behind Damien and spread his arms out, gathering a great amount of Nox Mana in his palms.

'Strength of the Abandoned Land'

Sebastian's eyes glowed with black light. The mana in his palms spread across his body like spiderwebs.

BOOM!

Sebastian's aura suddenly exploded, becoming exponentially stronger.

"I may have fought you, but you haven't drawn out even a portion of my skills yet. Lacking mana? If that was enough to make me fall, I would have died ages ago."

Sebastian took a stance for the first time in the battle. He lowered his body and pulled his fist back, concentrating his power within it.

His eyes shot open.

His fist shot out.

B-B-BOOOOOOOOM!

Space cracked and tore for countless tens of thousands of kilometers. Damien was immediately surrounded by chaotic spatial storms and terrifying fluctuations of mana that made him feel like his insides were burning.

However, Damien didn't react to the pain.

'Focus.'

He closed his eyes and moved as one with the spatial storms. The chaotic mana fluctuations couldn't even touch the hem of his clothes.

Damien's focus was split in two. The first part was wholly dedicated to Sebastian. His every movement, his every expression, and even the movement of his mana was clearly reflected in Damien's eyes and internalized in his mind.

As for the second portion, even Damien couldn't quite pinpoint where his attention was being directed.

Rather than focusing, it was better to say he was earnestly feeling something within his body that he'd never noticed before.

'What is this empowering feeling...?'

Damien could feel those reddish-black sparks pulsating in his veins. With every pulse, he felt like a dam broke in his body, allowing him to contain and utilize more mana.

'It's not just that, the quality of my mana has increased.'

Damien's body became a blur. He teleported high above Sebastian and swept his arm through the air.

'Dimension Shift First Variation: Land of the Dead'

Damien's eyes blazed with purple light. The aura of Spacetime essence flowed through his body and altered the world.

The dimension split in two around Sebastian. His body was bisected into the top and bottom half of the split.

Yet, Sebastian remained unfazed. He formed a myriad of seals with his hands and pushed the formed runic symbols into the starry sky. Suddenly, the severed dimension began to heal.

Unfortunately for Sebastian, this attack wasn't the same Dimension Shift Damien used previously.

Crackle!

Reddish-black sparks appeared in the severed dimension. With their spread, the two halves that were almost connected once more split immediately, and continued to split into thousands of tiny pieces.

'Break.'

Damien clenched his fist.

The reddish-black sparks connected into a strange spherical pattern and lit up like fireworks.

The thousands of dimensional fragments collapsed at once. They became independent entities that repelled each other instead of healing back into a single piece.

The following explosion was silent. Space became nil, time became nil, and even the universal law lost a portion of its power.

Outside of Calytpo's atmosphere, a temporary Dead Zone had formed, trapping Sebastian within.

Damien's body passed through the Dead Zone's boundaries.

"Human, where did you learn this trick? It's quite interesting."

Sebastian grinned as if he knew Damien could hear him.

"Judging by the lack of law fluctuations in the surroundings, I can understand that you utilized this trick to suppress me. However, I'll have to disappoint you."

Sebastian's eyes glowed with such fervor that they lit up the Dead Zone.

"This atmosphere...feels just like home to me."

BANG!

An explosion of Nox Mana spread through the Dead Zone and latched onto its foundation.

'This is...!'

Damien barely had time to process his shock before he was forced to dodge.

'The Dead Zone itself became his weapon?!'

Whenever Sebastian made a movement, Damien could clearly feel the boundaries of the Dead Zone moving with him. It was something that felt impossible, yet Damien was seeing it happen right in front of him!

'Dammit! Just how do I kill this monster?!'

Damien felt frustration like nothing he'd ever felt in his life. Since when was there an enemy he couldn't defeat? Even if it seemed inevitable for him to lose, he always found a way to turn the situation around.

'I refuse...to let this bastard stain my record!'

With the heightening of his emotions, the reddish-black sparks in his aura became more and more powerful.

As Damien dodged and blocked Sebastian's attacks, he could feel the impact force becoming lighter with time.

He was still getting stronger.

'But...I don't have time to wait.'

Support would be arriving at any time on the planet's surface.

And the most dangerous Nox being remaining there was...

'Zara.'

Chapter 758 Rescue [2]

'I can't let the academy learn about Zara's origins. If that ever happens, she'll likely lose most of her freedom.'

Zara's Nox heritage was something Damien accepted because he knew her. If the higher authorities of Grand Heavens Boundary learned of this fact instead, they'd either turn Zara into an experimental subject, a slave, or an exile.

'And none of those options look promising.'

Damien gritted his teeth. His body flowed through the air and became one with the world. He became an entity that Sebastian couldn't hit no matter how hard he tried.

Yet, Damien couldn't land a single strike either. Sebastian was using the Dead Zone itself to his advantage, an advantage Damien hadn't yet found a way to rid him of.

'To defeat him and return to the surface with enough time to bring Zara back...is that even possible?'

Damien's eyes hardened.

'Ten minutes. I have ten minutes at the maximum.'

Ten minutes until reinforcements arrived...

In that time, Damien either had to force Sebastian back into Calypto, which would make his choice to bring the Nox butler to the starry sky negligible, or he could defeat the butler and head back to the surface himself.

Damien calmed down the incessant thumping of his heart and cleared his mind of the strange buzzing he'd been hearing since earlier.

'Since it's come to this, it's time to be extreme.'

Damien sighed. He really didn't want to get blown to bits every single time he had an intense battle, but it seemed masochism loved him too much to let him go.

With fiery resolve in his eyes, Damien charged forward without regard for anything.

His body was like a guided missile. The Dead Zone around him tried to stop him with everything it had, suppressing his mana and laws, suppressing his body, and even directly attacking with methods similar to Zara's.

Yet, Damien didn't waver.

Xiu!

Damien's body was pierced by a tentacle of darkness. He could feel the hole next to his Mana Heart, a hole that would be lethal to anyone but him.

But he didn't waver.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Darkness sprayed over Damien's body like water, each droplet exploding and tearing off a chunk of his skin. He was closer to an undead than a human at this point, his appearance reminiscent of zombies from older movies.

But he didn't waver.

His left arm was torn to pieces by what looked like a beast's maw. His right arm became a bag of flesh after his bones were turned into powder by a blunt impact. His torso was riddled with holes and gashes, pieces of his internal organs flying into the starry sky as he moved faster and faster.

But he didn't waver.

He would never waver.

He would never lose.

Damien arrived in front of Sebastian's horrified face. He stood there for a moment to bask in the feeling of sheer terror that the Nox butler was feeling.

Perhaps it wasn't fear of his power, but it was fear nonetheless.

"You are...utterly insane."

They were the only words Sebastian could mutter before he found a fist in his face.

"You Nox love to corrupt, right? So why don't I corrupt you instead?"

Damien pushed forward without a care for his bodily condition. He trailed Sebastian and grabbed the butler's face once more.

Haaa!

With a spirited shout, Damien pushed his mana with everything he had.

Void Mana penetrated Sebastian's body through his pores and spread like wildfire.

10,000 units...50,000 units...100,000 units...

Every unit of mana Damien had in his body was pushed into Sebastian. Within the butler's body, a storm unlike any other was taking place.

'This...!'

Sebastian felt panic for the first time since the fight began. Void Mana traveled through his systems and infiltrated everything. His Mana Circuits were covered in foggy black clouds, and with their existence, Sebastian could feel a fierce devouring force unlike anything he'd ever...

'No, this is...!'

The mana was familiar, far more familiar than anything he'd ever expected to feel in Grand Heavens Boundary.

"Who are you?!" Sebastian roared through the pain he was feeling.

"Who am I? The bastard who's going to kill you, that's who." Damien responded coldly through gritted teeth.

Void Mana went into a frenzy. It didn't stop at Sebastian's mana, but instead latched onto every nook and cranny of his body. Unlike its usual silent yet rebellious behavior, the current Void Mana was like a starved beast.

'What's going on?' Damien wondered in confusion.

From the beginning, his only goal was to corrupt Sebastian's mana and cripple him so his advantages would leave him, but the current situation was completely unexpected.

'The Void Mana is expressing...desire?'

Damien roared out as he tried to control the rampaging mana. At the rate it was leaving his body, no amount of recuperating would recover it in a short amount of time.

On the other hand, Sebastian's eyes almost popped out of his skull.

'This mana is interacting with...no, it is actively following his orders?! How could this...this is inconceivable!'

Originally, Sebastian had been of the mind to kill Damien where he stood. While the young genius wasn't at the Saint King's level yet, Sebastian was already sure after fighting him.

The Saint King could never win against Damien.

When facing a genius of untold proportions, his first and main thought was to destroy the seed before it sprouted.

But this seed was special.

This seed...

Intense greed filled Sebastian's body. It was a sticky and hideous feeling that threatened to consume him whole.

"ARGH!"

Excruciating pain hit Sebastian's body the second this emotion surfaced, somewhat bringing him back to his senses.

'I must report this to Master.'

The terrifying mana was already encroaching on his vital systems. At this rate, even if he didn't die, Sebastian was sure to be seriously injured.

'But as long as I can get this information back to Master...'

A light of anticipation filled his eyes.

Right, if it was for the Master, being crippled was nothing.

Fear was nothing.

Pain was nothing.

It was all just an illusion to keep him from the peak.

"HAAAAAAAAA!"

Sebastian roared with all his might. He gripped Damien's wrist with all the force he had remaining in his body, and pulled.

Rrrrip!

The gruesome sound of Damien's arm being torn from his body was especially prominent in the pregnant silence of the Dead Zone.

Yet, his hand remained latched onto Sebastian's face.

Damien grinned. "You think that's enough to stop me?"

A black mana thread connected Damien's detached arm to his shoulder. The current of Void Mana leaving his body was sustained by this thread, and even though he'd escaped Damien's grasp, Sebastian was still in serious danger.

But...he simply didn't care.

"HUMAN! YOU HAVE NOT SEEN THE LAST OF ME!"

Sebastian roared as his body turned into a flash of light. He immediately shot towards the boundaries of the Dead Zone, molding it around him so that Damien couldn't catch back up.

"Khhhhh!"

Sebastian's every breath was strained. Void Mana suffocated him and clogged his throat, almost forcing him to vomit.

Regardless of the pain, however, Sebastian didn't stop. He moved like a dying man attempting to fulfill his last wish, filled with blazing determination that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere.

"Did you think you could run?"

Just as he appeared at the Dead Zone's boundary, Damien's harrowing figure appeared before him.

Those purple eyes sparked with reddish-black light and shone with overwhelming bloodthirst.

"I've already prepared your grave, so don't expect to leave it."

Seeing the furious genius, Sebastian felt an unquenchable desire budding in his heart.

"What, did the loss of your little servant girl hurt you so much? Do not worry, for my master has never mistreated his servants. She will be well—"

"Shut the fuck up and die."

Damien spread his arms out and gathered his mana. He acted completely on instinct, ignoring everything he knew about mana utilization and following his heart.

Reddish-black sparks spread through the air and interacted, igniting into a massive flame that emanated a deathly aura that even threatened Sebastian.

"Ah..."

Sebastian made a sound of disappointment.

"Unfortunately, I will not be able to die today, for I have other obligations to fulfill. Young human, we will meet again."

His body began to fade from existence. An inviolable force called to him and dragged him away.

Damien shot his destructive flames forward with all his might in the exact same instant. The flames teleported through the Void and appeared on Sebastian's position.

The half-faded figure of the Nox butler began to burn. He burned with reddish-black hell flames that wouldn't extinguish no matter what.

And along with these flames, he was forced to endure the horrific pain of the Void Mana corrupting him from within.

"AHHHHH—"

The scream was cut off in the middle.

It was the last sound Damien heard from the butler.

His eyes remained cold, perhaps even colder than they were before.

But he didn't give chase.

That was a Demigod's aura. The Saint Emperor was the one who took Sebastian away.

Yet, he didn't even say a single word to Damien, nonconforming with the attitude he'd shown thus far.

In the end, Damien turned his eyes away from Sebastian's previous position.

It didn't matter if the butler was gone.

Damien could still sense him.

His mana was within Sebastian's system, and it wouldn't leave unless he commanded it to.

Currently, rather than the butler, there was another problem Damien needed to rapidly resolve.

He needed to make sure he kept his promise with Zara.

Chapter 759 Rescue [3]

Damien and Sebastian only battled in the starry sky for a series of minutes before their confrontation ended, however, the impact of their battle rattled the entirety of Calypto, bringing mass attention to the flashing scenery that momentarily appeared in the sky.

Among these people was a certain woman, her eyes glowing golden with feral and bloodthirsty energy.

Though, her attention only remained on the sky for a moment.

Murky black shadows surrounded her and bloomed into beautiful yet deadly lotuses. The sea below her feet was corrupted by these shadows and used as a vessel to transport them further across the world.

The destroyed Vineyard Continent could only contain a mere portion of these shadows. They spread further and further, congregating into a straight path that connected the ruined continent to another, the Willow Continent that was closest to it.

Zara's body turned into a blur. Her figure traveled along the massive shadow and became one with it, traversing the continents in a mere few minutes rather than the hours it would've taken otherwise.

And upon touching ground, she didn't waste a single second.

The shadows extending into the ocean retracted into her body, and a new domain spread around her current position.

She could sense their presence.

Millions, billions of Nox beings with varying power levels. While most of them were still mindless, several tens of thousands of them were above 4th class.

Zara's unstable mind didn't even bother comprehending the consequences of her actions.

Tens of thousands of kilometers were immediately covered in inky blackness.

And as Zara pressed her hand down...

BOOOOOOOM!

The earth below crumpled like paper. Any Lesser Nox within her range was smashed along with it, becoming nothing more than sustenance for her growth.

But these Lesser Nox weren't nearly enough.

They didn't have the memories she desired, they didn't have the power she desired.

What she wanted could only be found through those with intelligence.

She moved towards the weakest presence she could sense. It was a Higher Nox surrounded by ten others near his level, all still within the ranges of low-level 4th class.

Xiu!

Her figure shot out like an arrow, immense speed and precision lacing her movements. She coated her claws in a layer of mana to empower them as she sliced out ferociously.

Shing!

Her first target's head flew into the sky with a single swipe of her hand. The ten others followed soon after, unable to even speak a word before they died.

There was a world somewhere deep in the Abyss, a world teeming with Nox, and a world that birthed them into existence.

Zara could now feel its existence. She could feel a slight connection with that place, allowing her to better access the fragmented memories polluting her mind.

Her figure flew through the Willow Continent with increased fervor. Her domain expanded with every Nox she devoured, slowly growing to cover a large portion of the continent's surface.

Despite how rapidly her power was increasing, however, Zara's situation was worse than ever before.

Within her spiritual world, a raging battle that far exceeded the scale of her slaughter in the Real Plane was taking place.

Memory fragments were like fragments of glass. They were beautiful and perhaps even extremely important, but they were dangerous all the same.

The chaos in Zara's mind turned these glass fragments into deadly weapons and mobilized them. A terrifying tornado of memory fragments flew through Zara's spiritual world and tore it apart, opening cracks for Nox Mana to invade.

The current sight of the spiritual world was tragic. Inky black mana and distorted memories flew about without rhyme or reason, utterly corrupting Zara's mind.

And as this damage became more severe, her actions in the Real Plane became more reckless and brutal.

She stood in combat with Higher Nox that far exceeded her usual power level, but she wasn't even conscious of what her body was doing.

It was hell.

Zara stood hidden in an isolated corner of the spiritual world, grasping at any sense of order she could find. Her avatar was like a flickering flame, but one with endless determination behind it.

Still, her head hurt.

Every time a new batch of memories appeared, they'd join the swirling tornado and aid it in breaking apart her defenses.

And it wasn't like she could focus on the tornado and stop it.

After all, she was actively dealing with the mental shock of receiving these fragmented memories as they tried to destroy her.

'Control...difficult...but...key...'

Zara's thought process was broken, but she could still comprehend the situation.

The growth of the tornado was both a blessing and a curse to her.

If she could stop it, she'd gain control over the fragments and their current combined state would aid her in chronologically ordering them.

However, if she failed...

'Failure...not...option...'

Zara's illusory figure gritted her teeth hard enough that they would bleed if she was physical. She closed her eyes and concentrated, feeling her connection with the surrounding space.

'This...my...domain...!'

VOOM!

A wave of power spread through the spiritual world.

The tornado was briefly disrupted. Its chaotic swirl slowed heavily as the repelling force of Zara's power impacted it.

Zara spread her awareness and spread her mana. She spread everything she had, allowing her existence to latch onto reality and maintain itself.

Before she tried to combat the tornado, she first needed to secure the safety of her ego.

Unlike Damien's spiritual world, Zara's was bathed in darkness. It was a darkness darker than black and darker than the abyss.

However, she also had her own spiritual continent.

Zara flashed through the spiritual world with everything she had. She used her spiritual intent like vines, uncaring of how much damage she did to her mind with her actions.

Did it matter if she broke?

She would break either way.

All that mattered was that she won this battle before she did.

Eventually, she arrived at her destination.

Just in time for the tornado to resume its cycle.

WHOOOSH!

"Mmgh...!"

Chaotic winds swirled through the spiritual world and struck Zara. Her already illusory figure faded even more.

But she held onto her mind. She placed her hands and knees on the spiritual continent below and dug her spiritual intent into its surface.

'Control...finally...'

Zara's mind suddenly became somewhat clear. In the center of the spiritual continent, she saw a single spark of light.

'That is...my lifeline...'

That spark of light was what called her to the spiritual continent in the first place, and it would be her only source of security while she fought against the tornado.

'I will...survive.'

She firmed her resolve. She had no plans of dying in this place. Not before she answered the questions that had plagued her mind for so long, and not before she met Damien again.

'Please...stay safe.'

Spiritual intent congregated on the continent and grew into a massive halo.

Under Zara's control, the continent began to move...

...straight towards the center of the tornado.

Controlling the tornado from the outside was impossible. Even trying to consciously control the stream of memories entering her head was currently impossible.

However, if she was in the eye of the tornado, perhaps she'd have a chance.

It was a gamble with her life on the line, but Zara wasn't hesitant at all to take it.

Because either way, her life was on the line.

And as she'd learned from a certain crazed genius...

Wasn't it better to die on your own terms, regardless of the circumstance?

Chapter 760 Rescue [4]

"Haa...haha...I didn't expect it to be this difficult..."

Immediately after Sebastian retreated, Damien dragged his haggard body into the spatial layers and began moving at his fastest speed towards Calypto.

Unfortunately, the task was far harder than he originally expected.

The previous battle was extremely intense, and even if it was abruptly cut off, Damien still used the majority of his power to fight off Sebastian.

He'd even used his Void Physique's abilities, something he'd been avoiding doing openly ever since the Wrath incident.

'That butler...he definitely knows.'

"Khhh...!"

Damien trudged through the muddied waters of space with a metaphorical limp. His body was healing, but at a far slower pace than Transcendent Regeneration usually allowed.

'Haha...is this the consequence of low mana reserves? While it's fun to feel something new every once in a while, this isn't really the time for that, is it?'

Transcendent Regeneration, no matter how heaven-defying it was, was still a skill. Its continued activation was heavily reliant on mana.

In truth, it was only because of Damien's unorthodox Mana Circuit and ability to gather mana into his body that Transcendent Regeneration could function. For any other person, it'd be a nigh-useless skill in battle.

Damien was currently experiencing what it was like to be "normal."

'Dammit. Has the Ananta Matrix been affected as well?'

Bodily regeneration and mana regeneration were both moving at a snail's pace, but Damien didn't have the time to check on the damages in his body.

All he knew was that he was a wreck, a wreck that urgently needed to return to Calypto and save his companion.

What felt like hours passed within a few seconds. Damien exited the spatial layers within Calypto's atmosphere and took in a breath of fresh air.

'Right, the air here sucks.'

Ignoring the foul stench filling his nostrils, he spread his awareness to its limits. His spiritual intent raged as a substitute for mana, connecting with space and forcing his awareness past the bounds of its usual reach.

'Where the hell did you go?'

Damien wondered for only an instant before he realized.

'Ah yeah, the answer is way too obvious for me to dally like this.'

For a blood-crazed Zara who wanted to devour every Nox in sight, what better location was there than the Willow Continent?

Damien flashed through the atmosphere. He redirected his mana so that Transcendent Regeneration only focused on his arms and arrived on the Willow Continent in a little over a minute.

'Holy shit...'

The scene of destruction before him was terrifying in its connotation.

'I can't let this continue.'

Zara's feral state was a secondary concern. The existence of the Sanctuary allowed Damien the peace of mind when it came to Zara's overall safety.

But that was only within the Sanctuary.

'If our allies find her, they'll kill her, and if our enemies are given the chance, they'll turn her into a puppet.'

Zara was in a situation where she could become an enemy of the universe in a single instant.

Damien couldn't hesitate.

His body became a blur as he kicked off the air and rushed towards the area of the continent where rampant mana fluctuations were currently tearing everything apart. From the sky, he could clearly see the intense battle taking place.

Zara had completely shifted back to her beast form. Her titanic wolf body crushed everything in its path and spread a plague of shadows across the continent.

The inky and horrid smell of Nox Mana in her aura was growing by the second, and the complexity of her utilization was growing with it.

At this rate, Zara would become a full-fledged Nox being before the battle ended.

In front of her stood a group of thousands of Nox, far outstripping the number that the Stargazer Squad had fought only mere minutes prior. These Nox were in strict formation, emanating a devastating killing intent as they formed a myriad of seals around Zara's body.

'No...!'

Damien immediately became alert. Those seals were too similar to the ones Sebastian formed for him to stay still.

His body came crashing down like a meteor. With the dredges of mana he had gathered while making his way to the continent, he activated his most chaotic ability without any of the care he usually showed.

'Starfall: Endless Rain'

BOOOOOOOOOM!

A flurry of portals opened in the sky. Massive chunks of space debris and equally large meteors streaked out of their depths and crashed into the continent below.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The deathly impacts seemed never-ending. The massive Willow Continent was bombarded from one end to the other, with no land left untouched by the terrifying rain of celestial bodies.

Damien's body blurred through the storm and arrived atop Zara's mountainous body. He slammed his hands down against her back and pushed any remaining mana he had to swirl around her.

Yet, with his measly reserves, how could he cover a body spanning multiple thousands of kilometers?

"FUCK!"

Damien roared. His blood began to boil and burn, roaring alongside him.

A second wave of power filled his body, but at the same time, he could feel himself weakening immensely.

Still, his mana was doing what he desired it to do. Zara's body was coated in a thin filament of spatial mana that was slowly becoming more pronounced.

It was at this time that Zara herself noticed his continued presence on her back.

AWOOOOOO!

A fearsome howl left her maw. A layer of shadow immediately spread across her fur and activated, turning every single follicle of hair into a blade to attack her enemy.

The enemy, however, was her only ally in the current circumstance.

"ARGH!"

Countless thorns stabbed through every inch of Damien's skin. Even his heart was pierced, darkness permeating its core and interfering with its operation.

Damien felt suffocated. Blood spurted from his body in fountains, dying Zara's black coat in red.

'DAMMIT! THIS...FUCKING...HURTS!'

The thorns piercing his body didn't stop after a single barrage. With every passing second, his worsening wounds were further aggravated by their continued assault.

He felt the stench of death encroaching upon him, making him nauseous.

But at the same time, this stench was invigorating. Death wasn't some new concept to Damien. He'd been living while teasing its keeper for years, and its presence only brought his attention to a new high.

Something within his body came to life, empowering him further. A black and white seed hidden somewhere within him emitted a strong pulsation of light that filled every nook and cranny of his system with energy.

"I WON'T...GO DOWN...UNTIL I FULFILL...OUR PROMISE!" Damien bellowed through halted breaths.

His blood burned brighter, reddish-black sparks enhanced his abilities, and his spatial mana...

...finally succeeded in covering Zara entirely.

"COME ON!"

He made his final push. He put all his focus into his connection with the Sanctuary. With the smell of burning blood vitality, he used every ounce of power remaining in his body.

His blood drained rapidly, his face turned pale white, his aura deflated like a popped balloon, but even then, he didn't have any mind to stop his actions.

HAAAAAA!

His spirited shout echoed through the world, and in the same instant, finally...

...he and Zara completely disappeared from its surface.