

Void 791

Chapter 791 Winding Down [1]

Black skies, black seas, black land; Calypto was drowned in black to the point where Damien got tired of the color.

"It's worse than I thought." He murmured to himself.

The remaining 6 continents on Calypto were more than just unlivable, they were completely desolated. The ground was cracked and sundered, and even stepping on it would inflict one with a deadly curse.

But this was merely the earth alone. The air was poisonous, and even the waters were filled with corruption that could immediately turn anyone who drank it into a mindless berserker who killed until they died.

'And that bastard was prepared, too prepared. Was this his goal from the start?'

The depth of Calypto's corruption was far worse than when only the World Core was infected. At this rate, it would take hundreds of years after the World Core recovered for this world to accept life once more.

'Luckily, damage control is going relatively well.'

The bright side was the fact that barely any sentient life existed on Calypto, aside from those that'd already been corrupted.

The kidnapped victims in the research sites were mostly rescued, and almost all of the food supplies were also emptied out. Of the total population of prisoners on the planet, only around 10% died in the ensuing catastrophe.

But that was still tens of thousands of people.

'The Saint Emperor doesn't give a shit about captives. His aim in corrupting Calypto was...'

Me.

The thought came to Damien's head instantly. Other than he, the Celestial who would bind Calypto, nobody else would suffer from the planet's current state.

Even Heaven's Army never had plans for Calypto. The world was too deep in the middle of Eden for it to matter strategically, considering the Sector's current state.

'But the luckiest part isn't any of that.'

Damien's awareness connected to the recuperating World Core and spread through the depths of the earth.

It was extremely close to the World Core, almost too close for comfort, but there was a large hollowed cave-like area present there beneath the earth.

'It's not naturally formed.'

Damien didn't notice it until the control efforts began, and when he did, one of his main worries disappeared completely.

'Looks like I'll still be able to complete the mission the Director gave me.'

His body disappeared from the surface.

When the Director prefaced the mission to Damien, his exact words were "devastate and conquer," and while Damien had done both of those things, he'd yet to accomplish the final task he was given.

It was perhaps the most important, and the task Damien fretted over most throughout his stay on Calypto.

After all, it was nearly impossible to discover the underground cavern without the World Core's assistance.

But now...

Damien's body rematerialized in the cavern. The damp smell of blood, sweat, and feces filled his nose.

It was a truly disgusting place.

The walls were lined with chains, each pair holding the wrists of another prisoner. Each of these prisoners was covered in an array of body fluids, not completely their own.

And more than that, their bodies were brutally broken. Some were sewn together with other prisoners, and there were even some who'd been fused with disgusting lifeforms that Damien didn't even want to name.

Damien walked through the cavern slowly, his eyes panning from side to side in search of any life signatures.

'They're all dead...though, it may be for the better.'

For these people who'd undergone inhumane torture and become monsters, perhaps death was the least painful future.

Damien's clothes fluttered as he jumped from the edge of a cliff and fell deeper into the cavern.

All around, similar sights of tragedy filled his eyes. It was hard for him to find a method of torture that wasn't used.

When he finally reached the cavern's deepest depths, his foot touched ground in the midst of a swarming pit of unidentified insects.

'Fuck...'

He cursed as he stomped his foot into the ground, sending a shockwave that pushed away any creature near him.

'Mana is suppressed down here, almost to the point of becoming completely obsolete.'

He walked forward without hesitation, pushing away bugs and decaying bodies until he reached the end of the cavern.

It was an ordinary wall with no special features, at least on the outside.

But the All-Seeing Eyes showed Damien something different.

'I finally found you...'

BANG!

His fist went through the wall, destroying the magic that enchanted it and opening up the passage within.

There was only a single person.

Chains stretched down from the ceiling to cuff their wrists, and chains came up from the ground to cuff their ankles.

A strange crystal lined the walls of the cave in which this person was being held. As soon as Damien entered their vicinity, he felt his consciousness becoming faint.

'Fuck...I guess it takes this much to deal with someone on that level...'

He gritted his teeth and pushed into the cave, using his Mind Prison to numb the sensation filling his body.

He finally reached that person's position, and was able to see their face for the first time.

A smile crept up his own.

"So we finally meet. Aesir Blackwood, I've been looking for you."

World Force materialized in the air, giving off a formless fluctuation that offset the cave's natural defenses.

[Break]

Damien used the absolute power of a Celestial to destroy the chains binding the man named Aesir's extremities and caught the man's limp body before he could fall to the floor.

'Amazing. According to the Director's information, he's been stuck here for at least 3 years, yet he's still in perfect condition.'

3 years was nothing to a practitioner who could survive off of mana alone, but in this manaless environment, accomplishing the same feat could only be called a miracle.

As Damien brought the man's body out of the cave, his eyes slowly opened.

"Urgh..."

A pained groan left his mouth. His vision was hazy, and the feeling of movement after so long almost made him nauseous.

"Put me down...for a second..." He squeezed out through pained breaths.

Naturally, Damien complied. Teleporting to the surface with someone as weak as Aesir would only cause his death.

Aesir closed his eyes immediately upon touching solid ground. Even in the suppressing environment, breaths of mana began emanating from his body.

'At this rate...'

It only took half an hour for Aesir's once terribly injured body to return to its peak condition.

His eyes opened again, containing almost an abyssal emptiness as they turned towards Damien.

"I apologize for the inconvenience. Allow me to reintroduce myself now that I am in somewhat better condition. I am Aesir Blackwood. May I have the honor of knowing my benefactor's name?"

"Mm, I'm Damien Void. It's a pleasure to meet in this form."

"This form?"

"Come on, now. Are you really going to act clueless? You haven't been playing the 'recently rescued prisoner of war' act very well so far."

"What do you..."

"I mean, you didn't even question who I was when you woke up, you immediately figured out how to evade the cavern's mana suppression, and it seems as if you've been expecting my presence for a long time now. With all the hints you laid out in front of me, did you think I wouldn't notice?"

Aesir Blackwood's shocked expression slowly faded into one of curiosity.

"Then, who are you assuming me to be?"

Damien grinned a sly grin, like the grin of a fox. He clearly gave off the aura of someone up to no good.

"Hahaha, who do you think I assume you to be...Director?"

Chapter 792 Winding Down [2]

The cave went silent for a few moments.

"...tch."

Until a barely audible click of the tongue interrupted it.

"Was my acting really that bad?"

Aesir Blackwood scratched his head with a disappointed look on his face, as if he truly didn't expect to get found out.

"I mean, did you even try to hide yourself?"

Damien's words were the final blow.

"Hey, I did my best, okay?! It's not like I was born to be an actor or something. Fuck, that profession isn't even profitable anymore!"

Damien's eyes widened. This manner of speech...was definitely not what he expected.

Though, he didn't find it surprising.

Aesir Blackwood was a different being than the Director, after all.

"This is my first time seeing a clone in real life."

"Well, as a clone, this is my first time seeing a perverse genius like you in real life too, so I guess that's something."

"You're quite the annoying guy. Are you really the Director's clone?"

"Tch! I'm the one who gave you all the information to find this body. Who else would I be?"

"So you know it yet you still pretend like me guessing your identity was something mind-blowing."

"K-kuhum! My mana is still regenerating, so leave me alone for a bit."

Damien rolled his eyes. Aesir Blackwood wasn't anything like what he expected to find when he got here, and it wasn't just a matter of personality.

Rather, Damien only realized Aesir's identity in the final few moments before he voiced his assumption.

Clones were a strange thing. There were many different forms of cloning and puppeteering that appeared in Grand Heavens Boundary over time, but the "best method" was always a position left unoccupied due to the sheer variety of techniques and their pros and cons.

The method the Director used was arguably one of the best, but also one of the riskiest.

'Aesir Blackwood...he is a true human through and through.'

Aesir Blackwood was born from a mother and father rather than a test tube. He lived a normal life as Aesir Blackwood likely for the majority of his childhood.

However, his true identity was that of a clone, a piece of the Director's genetic structure, mana, and soul that was implanted into a fertilized egg.

By the time Aesir turned 18, the memories started flooding in,

By the time he was 20, his identity was already established.

Aesir was a living clone who shared consciousness and memory with the Director, but wasn't completely under his control.

He had the freedom to move as he pleased as long as he didn't violate the Director's overarching will.

This was the same reason their personalities differed so much. Even as a clone, Aesir Blackwood was sentient and aware of how important identity was for a person.

He prioritized his own ego over the Director's, and while this led them to constantly clash, their goals were aligned and these clashes were merely on the same level as those between a parent and child.

'What an interesting method. Aesir can act similarly to a Nox Avatar, but with his autonomy, the Director doesn't have to put his full attention into control. This allows them to move independently and accomplish double the work with half the effort.'

Damien glanced over Aesir's body. Even the man's status window was revealed to him, indicating his level.

"4th class, huh. Weaker than I expected."

"Shut up already. If I wasn't a 4th class, I wouldn't even be able to interfere in this war."

"You won't be able to interfere anyway if you keep getting yourself locked up like this. Isn't it embarrassing?"

"Oi, brat. You picking a fight?"

"And if I am?"

Aesir glared at Damien, but in the end, scratched his head and turned his eyes to the floor.

"Fuck, that old man won't let me."

"So much for autonomy."

"You little shit...!"

"Hahahaha!"

Damien shook off his laughter and turned away.

"In all seriousness, the situation isn't good right now. I don't know how much has been transmitted to the academy, but..."

Aesir shook his head in denial. "The situation is actually far more favorable for us than it has ever been. The battlefield on Throh has developed well, and since you were able to finish up here, we've gained an advantage over those scummy invaders for the first time in a few years."

Damien smiled wryly. "Is this the so-called 'lost the battle, won the war' expression? It doesn't feel too good when you're part of the former side."

"You are saying you lost the battle?" Aesir's brows shot up in surprise.

Damien sighed.

"It's best if you see for yourself."

Grabbing the now semi-recovered man, Damien teleported back to the surface.

And Aesir's jaw dropped to the floor.

The recovery efforts on Calypto were progressing smoothly.

Most of the enemy forces were dead, and though the planet's atmosphere was corrupted, the internals of all starships present in its vicinity were perfectly fine.

Everyone that could be evacuated was evacuated, and everyone who needed to be killed was put down.

It wasn't a celebratory time.

It took almost an entire week for the processes on Calypto to end, and the forces present there evacuated as soon as they could. After joining up with the forces stationed in the planet's orbit, they didn't move anymore.

Everyone needed a moment of rest.

Too much had happened for them to move into action again immediately.

But compared to the regular soldiers and cadets, Damien's exhaustion was multiple times worse.

Aesir had already left to speak with Park Jinho many days ago. As the Director slowly filled himself in on the situation through his clone, Damien was laying down on a comfortable bed, his eyes closed and his arm over his face.

'It's been so chaotic that I feel like dying.'

He'd gained a lion's share of benefits over the course of this war, but he'd almost lost just as much. Perhaps his physical body was perfectly fine, but his mental exhaustion was so great that he wanted to drop dead for a few years to recover.

'But I don't have the freedom to do that.'

There were still many things that needed to be done.

'I need to have another talk with Baek Woojin, check up on Tyler and them, check up on Zara, facilitate Calypto's purification until it's over, make sure Aesir doesn't do anything stupid until we get back to the academy, comprehend my new powers so I can efficiently use them...fuck, I don't even want to continue listing.'

The constantly changing chain of events forced Damien into a pit of loose ends like he'd never experienced before.

While some were permanent like his identity being revealed to the Saint Emperor, he needed to make sure the things he could fix remained fixed.

'I should start with Baek Woojin, since I'm still not 100% sure that the brainwashing took full effect. After that, I can...you know what, fuck this.'

Damien's body disappeared from the bed, only rematerializing when he arrived in a different world entirely.

He flashed away, traveling millions of kilometers in an instant as he made his way to a specific area of the world.

It was a paradise for fairies, a place where nature ran rampant to the point where it was almost unnatural.

Throughout these fields, bell-like laughter would intermittently resound as children ran around playing with the spirits and plants.

And among them...

Was one far more special than the rest.

Her eyes turned as if she sensed his presence.

The smile that lit up her face was enough to melt away any fatigue.

"Big brother!"

She shouted in joy as she barrelled towards him.

Damien smiled softly as he gently caught her and dispersed her momentum.

'Just for today, I think a little relaxation should be allowed.'

Chapter 793 Cracks [1]

The explosion was far worse from the outside.

While Aaliyah and Thaddeus were able to avoid it because of Plaguelord's artifact, the forces fighting to block the star destroyer weren't so lucky.

Countless warriors lost their lives.

But with their sacrifice, they saved countless more.

The star destroyer was a planetary object despite being constructed by man, so its collapse wasn't something light. The sheer amount of damage it did to the starry sky alone would remain for hundreds of years to come.

Countless hundreds of kilometers of space distorted chaotically, and traversing the area around Throh became nearly impossible.

In a sense, Heaven's Army had faced defeat on this battlefield as well. After all, aside from destroying the star destroyer, the main goal of the attack on Throh was securing a supply route to the Soul World.

While this was still somewhat possible, it was far more inconvenient due to the area's current condition. Not to mention, the planet Throh didn't exist anymore.

Even the entity that resided within the world had fled during the star destroyer explosion. Heaven's Army wasn't even able to completely confirm its identity, only that its form was similar to a snake.

Only a stray World Core remained in Throh's place.

Perhaps, someday, it would be able to bloom into a planet once more.

Nevertheless, events continued after the explosion. There was no time to ruminate over mysteries that couldn't be immediately solved.

The battle wound down eventually, and because a majority of the Nox forces in the area had been decimated by Sherya's tactics, cleanup was far easier than it shouldn't have been.

The normal Heaven's Army soldiers worked ceaselessly for many days to perfectly clean the battlefield. Meanwhile, the higher authorities were far away, partaking in a completely different type of battle.

A mental standoff against a Demigod wasn't a joke, especially when an unknown situation caused that Demigod's kin to activate a protective charm given to him by said Demigod.

Priscilla Adelaide was barely able to hold the Plaguelord back using her authority and ability, along with the help of those extreme peak 4th classes supporting her.

"The victory...is ours." A relieved murmur leaked from her mouth. In the current pregnant silence, it was incredibly loud.

The atmosphere shifted immediately.

The building tension died down, and even though they were in the presence of a Demigod, these extreme peak 4th classes didn't have any more fear.

They'd won the battle, and since the Plaguelord's son didn't die, they didn't have to worry about retaliation.

"You fools, destroying your own universe, it is hilarious."

The Plaguelord's broken words were like a bucket of cold water on the spreading atmosphere of calm.

His gleaming eyes glanced around the encirclement.

"Universe prohibits, my participation, otherwise only death..."

"...disdainful."

The Demigod began to move. He stood up from his seated position and floated unhurriedly through the crowd around him.

They didn't lift a finger.

They could do nothing but avoid him, lest the universal law activate its prohibitions.

Priscilla Adelaide watched him leave with an indifferent face.

"You may outstrip us in strength, but remember: the universe's restrictions are protecting you just as much as it protects us. You aren't even an Emperor yet, and you dare to be arrogant? Any of our Holy Masters could end you with a single finger."

Plaguelord's movements paused. His head turned, his eyes glaring at Priscilla's small figure.

"We, will see...Ancient Battlefield, true stage."

Leaving those words, he turned around and left.

Those present couldn't help but feel as if his existence was dissonant, a feeling that got stronger the further away he got.

'A Demigod isn't called a higher existence for no reason.'

It was a shared thought amongst those extreme peak 4th classes who participated in the mission.

They hadn't battled him, and thanks to Priscilla's power, his Avatar had been subdued rapidly as well. But just from that single showing of power and his latent aura, they were clearly able to see that he was Heaven and they were Earth.

Priscilla let out a deep sigh.

"Let's go. Let's regroup with the main army and assess the situation before planning on how to proceed from here, Plaguelord won't be a problem anymore."

"How do you know?" A nearby combatant asked.

Priscilla's eyes became hazy as she looked in the direction the Plaguelord left in.

"...that man isn't as complicated as he appears."

Her eyes were filled with indiscernible emotion, yet within mere sparks of an instant returned to their usual indifference.

There was still work to do.

Now that they'd won the battle, a connection needed to be made with Soul World, and Eden's situation needed to be stabilized,

The war wasn't over. In fact, now that such a huge battle ended in Heaven's Army's victory, they needed to capitalize on their momentum and move with more fervor than ever before,

'Before the Nox can dig their claws too deep in the Soul World and Beast Domain, we need to be ready to counteract them. Never again can we allow the situation to turn out the same way as it did in Eden.'

Perhaps it wasn't a total Dead Zone like the Elven Domain, but Eden was also uninhabitable at this point. The majority of its worlds were either destroyed completely or corrupted beyond repair, and the Plant Races had taken a massive blow to their numbers.

If the universe kept losing as it had been, it wouldn't be long before it was totally destroyed.

'Amidst all this bad news, it's at least good to know that our universe is still producing geniuses.'

A small smile formed on Priscilla's face. This kind of expression was so incredibly rare that if any of her acquaintances saw her currently, they'd directly faint.

'Damien Void, just what kind of person are you?'

The advent of a genius who could hold back an Emperor, create miracles, and single-handedly push both concurrent battles to victory with his own actions...

If this wasn't enough to make her smile, just what was?

Priscilla clenched her fists as she moved towards Throh to regroup with the main army.

As long as Damien stayed on the battlefield, they'd one day meet.

And when that day came...

'If his character is ideal, he could be the perfect successor to the Demon Sealing Pantheon.'

In no time at all, Priscilla and her group reunited with the main army and continued their duties.

All things proceeded as they should, and the universe regained a modicum of peace, even if it was only for a brief moment.

Things were silent for a week or so after the battle as Heaven's Army and all those associated with them celebrated their victory and planned their next moves. Contact between Sectors was at an all-time high as well, with innumerable forces coming together as one to support the relief efforts.

But there was something nobody knew, not even the utmost experts of the universe.

The 9 Sectors together formed a delicate balance that allowed the universe to function at its maximum capacity.

They were all cogs in a massive wheel, and each held a certain significance that couldn't be explained properly in words.

Now that two of them had been destroyed...

Cracks began to appear in the wheel's foundation.

Chapter 794 Cracks [2]

'Haa...'

Peace of mind.

The past few months completely disallowed Damien from feeling it, and though he had gone longer without a moment of peace, the pressure of the battlefield made the feeling completely different.

It was a relief to sit in a field and enjoy the day.

Peace wasn't a right, it was a privilege earned with hard work.

With the little bit of it that Damien had earned, he completely checked on Theavel and became informed on the current workings of the Original World.

Of course, the majority of his day was occupied by Xue'er, who was more than just a little annoyed by his lack of care for her.

He abandoned her in Theavel for several months or even years on end, and through that time, she'd grown almost a head taller.

That malnourished little girl Damien once knew was no more.

Every time he saw her interact with the other Theavel denizens, a warm smile unconsciously surfaced on his face.

She was a beloved princess among all the races, and a leader of the children who lived nearby.

And more than that...

'Her spirit mastery is increasing naturally. It's like she gets stronger by breathing.'

The way Xue'er interacted with spirits made it seem like she should've been born one of them. In fact, Damien had to double-check her status to make sure she wasn't a halfbreed of some sort.

But when it wasn't his own status, the system never lied. Xue'er was truly a full human.

Nevertheless, after entertaining this uselessly talented adopted sister of his, he perused Theavel's five continents and explored its cities.

A population of a few million wasn't much, but with every year that passed, that population saw a dramatic increase. At this point, there were surely over a few hundred million populating the lands at this point in time.

And this also included the survivors that'd been rescued from Calypto. They alone numbered nearly a hundred thousand.

The sights of Theavel truly affirmed Damien's will to continue how he'd been moving. His approach towards the Sanctuary was the right one.

This world was beautiful, and it was natural. It felt like the atmosphere was more complete because the world was allowed to develop on its own, rather than in his image.

'Everyone is thriving together. It's quite surreal to see this place grow.'

It wasn't just the world itself or the population that changed.

Firstly, the Storm Heavens Minor Realm acted as a perfect place for denizens to temper their bodies, and perhaps even acquire lightning affinities. It was a place that could build one's foundation so one could properly step on the path of a practitioner.

Other than that, and far more importantly, a major upheaval took place not long after Theavel's creation.

Dungeons.

The newly established World Core did its job perfectly, and Theavel transformed into a beginner world. Dungeons appeared on its surface, and beasts began to roam, created through them.

A natural ecosystem was created, and the general population finally had a way to grow and level up.

With this, the overall level of Theavel's troops saw a sharp increase. The 4th classes that were so rare to see became slightly more common, and the number of 3rd class and below soldiers grew with every year.

'With the current trajectory, it should only be a few more years before I have an elite army of my own...'

Damien smiled at the thought. Being under someone else's command truly didn't suit him, and while being a commander didn't suit him either, he didn't need to recklessly take that position.

'I'll have to start talent scouting.'

Before the army grew stable, he needed to find a strategist and a commander who could lead them to victory.

Only then would he truly become an emperor.

'The night sky looks dull.'

Damien's gaze pointed at the starless sky.

How could there be any scenery when Theavel was the only world in existence?

'A budding universe, huh...'

It was still just the start. Eventually, the entire sky would be filled with stars. Celestial bodies would span further than even an absolute being could perceive.

That was Damien's goal.

'Has it come time to leave already?'

It was truly a fun day.

The improvements to Theavel were one thing, but more than that, this was likely Damien's first time truly interacting with the common people living in his domain.

It was an odd feeling. They had no idea who he was, yet they treated him with such generosity. The society built on Theavel was completely different from that of the Real Plane.

It warmed his heart.

Damien was extremely content with the type of people and environment his world had budded.

And now that he'd seen it all...

"...STER!"

"Hm?"

Damien quirked his brow at the scream that echoed from the distance.

"...ASTERRRR!"

His face turned pale.

'Don't tell me...'

"MASTERRRRRR~!"

'She found me.'

The abundant body of a certain demon princess appeared over the hill. She was clearly out of breath and covered head to toe in sweat, but the fervent aura emanating from her body could be felt several meters away.

Damien smiled wryly. 'Well, I guess I won't regret leaving anymore.'

His body immediately vanished.

If it was to dodge the clingy obsession of a certain maid that he completely regretted taking in...

He would use any means necessary.

The juxtaposition between Theavel and Calypto almost convinced Damien to endure the obsessive love of a woman he'd been diligently avoiding, but this feeling was pushed down instantly.

The warmth of Theavel stayed in Theavel, but it left Damien with energy that he didn't have before. It cleared the mental fatigue that made him dread moving forward, and allowed him to focus on what needed to be done.

As he'd planned earlier, his first stop was Baek Woojin.

The duo sat across from each other in a cafe within one of the academy starships in the fleet. They were both silent, as if waiting for the other person to speak first.

That silence was eventually broken by Baek Woojin himself.

"Why did you come visit me? We are not so acquainted for you to care about my well-being."

"Sheesh, there's no reason to be so uptight is there? The battle ended already, you know."

"The war never ends."

"But the battle does."

"And that matters because...?"

"Naturally, if you don't rest your mind between battles, won't you die from carelessness one of these days?"

"I will never lose control over my mind."

"Alright, enough of this."

Damien sighed and massaged his forehead. Dealing with a prude like Baek Woojin was the hardest. Truly, nothing got through their skulls.

Damien shook his head, his eyes turning serious.

"I can heal your sister."

"You've said this before, yet you have shown no proof of your words."

"Didn't you say the previous battle would attest to my credibility?"

"..."

Baek Woojin didn't speak. Although he hadn't been there himself, he knew all about Damien's deeds. Tales of his heroics spread all throughout Heaven's Army like wildfire as soon as the situation died down.

His credibility truly couldn't be doubted.

In the hearts of countless soldiers, the purple-eyed genius was a hero.

Baek Woojin's gaze softened.

He let out a tired sigh.

"Tell me, what do I need to do?"

Chapter 795 Separation [1]

'That went...perfectly.'

Damien walked into the starry sky with a smile on his face. His conversation with Baek Woojin had ended, and it had gone far better than he'd ever expected.

'I knew he was an army man to the bone, but to think it had such an insane influence on his opinions.'

Damien was able to easily confirm that the brainwashing worked properly. Baek Woojin didn't doubt his false memories at all, and due to the care Damien put into changing each memory, he was even slightly influenced by the pseudo-emotions present within them.

Aside from that, Baek Woojin was heavily influenced by the army's opinion. Damien was now considered a war hero. If it wasn't for his spatial abilities making him extremely elusive, he would've already been swarmed by people trying to get acquainted with him.

When those two factors combined, it made for a Baek Woojin that was actually amiable, something Damien never expected to see.

'I'll have to stop by Heaven's Army headquarters at some point to heal his sister, but that should be nothing after I master Samsara. For now, everything is flowing perfectly on Baek Woojin's side.'

The instructor was now considering a true long-term alliance with Damien, an alliance that extended to the Hunting Dogs.

'I hadn't even heard their name before, but it turns out they're really something.'

Of the squads battling in Throh, the Hunting Dogs were one of the top performers. When added to their other feats throughout the war, it wasn't surprising that they were so renowned.

'If I can get such a strong force under me...'

Damien grinned at the thought.

He lifted his head and looked at the door at the door his feet led him to. Opening it, he was greeted with a strange scene.

Synth sat on a chair with her back hunched. Her eyes were on the floor, and her hair fell messily, obscuring her face.

Her entire aura was gloomy. Ash stood next to her patting her back lightly, while Tyler paced with concern on the other side of the room.

While it was a great thing seeing the three of them up and moving as if nothing happened...

"What's with this atmosphere?"

Damien's voice cut through the silence.

Synth's body shuddered.

Tyler froze, turning his face away with shame.

Even Ash couldn't look Damien in the eye.

'Though, that last one is just the usual.'

"What the hell happened while I was gone?"

Damien walked into the room with a solemn face. He couldn't imagine what could've put his squad members in such a state.

Synth shakily looked up.

Tears formed at the corner of her eyes when she looked at him.

"I...I can't believe it..."

She choked out the words, seemingly unable to formulate her thoughts properly.

"How could you...HOW COULD YOU SELL YOUR BODY TO SAVE US?! UWAAAAAH~!!!"

Synth immediately broke down into a fit of uncontrollable sobbing. Tyler looked away in pain, and Ash...continued being Ash.

As for Damien...

"...bruh."

...he facepalmed so hard the two surfaces almost fused.

Pak!

Pak!

Pak!

Three dimensional flicks resounded, and three bumps swelled on three different foreheads.

"What the fuck are you idiots on about?"

Damien stood like an exhausted teacher dealing with his students as he faced his three squad members, who were now kneeling on the floor in front of him.

"T-that..." Synth mumbled.

"That?" Damien repeated with a raised brow.

"W-well...I mean, it's your fault for looking suspicious! How could you do... "that"...with that squi—?!"

Pak!

Another flick resounded.

Damien's eyes turned to Tyler.

"So?"

"Baek Woojin came to us a few days ago to apologize, and then today she caught wind of the two of you meeting privately. You can guess how it went from there."

"And you joined because...?"

"Uhh...because it sounded fun?"

"Tch. Fair enough."

Damien shook his head wryly. He was glad his squad members were in peak condition, but at the same time, he was somewhat lamenting that his squad members were in peak condition.

Since the emergency situation wasn't really an emergency at all, Damien relaxed and sat down in a nearby chair with a relaxed look on his face...

After disciplining Synth a little, of course.

"You guys are really living lavish. To think they'd provide you with a suite like this."

Damien looked around the room, impressed. It was seriously like a five-star resort, completely unlike the other more "economy class" rooms on the starship.

"It can't be helped. After all, aren't we the squad members of the great Death Emperor Damien Void?" Tyler responded teasingly.

"Khh..." Damien cringed at the nickname. "They just named me after Death Emperor Star, didn't they."

"They 100% just named you after Death Emperor Star."

"Fuck."

Damien sighed at his luck with titles. It seemed that everywhere he went, he'd only get half-asses titles that made him endlessly cringe.

He looked out the window with a frown.

"Putting that aside, how was it? Your first experience at war, that is." He suddenly said.

"..."

The room was still for a few moments.

"...it was terrifying."

Tyler was the first to speak.

"We've been preparing our entire lives to enter the battlefield, but virtual simulation can never truly emulate the feeling of being here. The stench of blood, the screams of dying allies, the atrocities of the Nox, nothing could've prepared us for the reality of war."

Synth nodded in agreement. There were multiple times throughout the few months they spent on Calypto when she felt like giving up and leaving. The mental stress was far greater than anything she'd experienced in simulations.

"But still, I don't regret it." She said.

Looking at the starry sky beyond the window, a small smile crept up her face.

"Our narrow worldviews were expanded, we were able to experience many things we never would've known if we'd stayed in the Hell Hole, and most importantly..."

"...we got stronger."

Synth clenched her fist.

"Never again will we be humiliated like we were back then."

Her determination blazed through the room, coalescing with the blazing ferocity of her two closest companions as they reminisced on the past few months,

Overall, none of them regretted this experience, and none of them mourned their fates.

Risk and reward often came hand in hand. War was merely the most visceral representation of this concept.

Tyler, Synth, and even Ash had been trained for war since young, and now that they'd survived their first tribulation...

'I can't wait to see how you grow in the future.'

Damien smiled lightly.

He didn't know if he'd ever see these three again after he returned to Hidden Death Valley, but he couldn't deny that they'd left a deep impression in his heart.

After staying with them for so long, Damien realized the importance of many things he'd neglected in the past.

Most importantly, camaraderie and teamwork.

Damien was a lone wolf. Nothing could ever change this trait of his.

However, perhaps it wouldn't be bad to have a force under his command, a force that obeyed him absolutely.

For helping him realize the importance of such a force...

Damien would forever be thankful to these three rogues that he'd met by fate.

Chapter 796 Separation [2]

A few days passed after that.

Damien spent most of his time with the Stargazer Squad, and when he wasn't with them, he was off making sure Aesir didn't get himself into any trouble.

Aesir, unlike the Director, was an extremely mischievous and sarcastic person. He was almost a perfect rich young master, except he lacked all the class a young master would possess.

It wasn't uncommon for Damien to be forced to break up a random fight that Aesir instigated or appease higher officers who were affected by his antics.

Nevertheless, throughout these few days, Damien was able to take care of most of his priorities in the Real Plane.

The only reason he hadn't visited Zara yet was Calypto.

'After the first day, progress has slowed immensely.'

The academy's fleet would be leaving Calypto tomorrow, far ahead of their projected return date. After the preceding events, there was truly no reason to remain in this desolated world.

'The Saint Emperor made a full retreat out of Eden. It's projected that his Avatar is back in the Abyss right now recovering his forces. Aside from the polluted atmosphere, Calypto is a pretty safe place to be.'

In fact, because of the poisonous air that killed Nox and humans alike, Calypto was probably one of the greatest places to hide from the war.

'There's still some more time until the progress examination. I should be able to make it back on my own by the time it starts.'

Damien furrowed his brows as he looked out at Calypto.

In the end, this world would become his. Even if he himself wasn't a ruler like Leona, he still had a certain responsibility towards the worlds he bound.

Calypto was a special case even among them, since its World Core was his own creation to an extent.

'I want to see how it ends. And I need time to train by myself as well.'

It wasn't a hard decision to make. The hard part was explaining his decision to those around him and separating himself from them.

This process took the entirety of the day to finish.

From the Stargazer Squad to Baek Woojin and Park Jinho, Damien had a lot of goodbyes to say before he could leave.

Before he knew it, he'd met more comrades than he knew what to do with.

"Be careful! Even if it's you, surviving isn't a guarantee! Always keep your guard up! If you see an enemy that's too great to handle, run away! Your life is more important than your pride! Do you understand?!"

Park Jinho gripped Damien's shoulders furiously and shouted every possible piece of advice he could think of.

The young man in front of him was a genius without predecessor or successor. He, as a mid-level 4th class being, stood equal to a Demigod's Avatar and fought without hesitation or fear.

He was an example for the younger generation, and a rival for the old. He was someone who would one day become a central figure in the war.

How could Park Jinho ever think about losing the future hero of the universe?

"You have to survive!"

Damien wryly smiled as his body was flung about by the distraught commander. To the side, the rest of his comrades stood snickering amongst themselves.

"Tch. So much for a wholesome goodbye." Damien muttered.

"Hah? What'd you say, you bastard? Wholesome goodbye?! WHOLESOME GOODBYE?! You're lucky I'm not beating your fu—mmgh mmph!"

A pair of arms appeared behind Synth and dragged her away, covering her mouth as she continued trying to yell out curses.

Tyler smiled apologetically from beside where she once stood.

"As you can see, she's not taking the news well."

Damien wriggled his way out of the commander's grasp and walked over.

"Well, I never expected her to. Good luck dealing with that when I leave."

"A bastard until the end, huh."

"It can't be helped. It's my defining trait, after all."

"Tch. I feel bad for the poor souls who follow a bastard Captain like you."

The pair chuckled. After a moment, Tyler straightened his body and faced Damien head-on. Keeping his head lowered, he deeply bowed.

"It was an honor serving under you."

Damien's eyes widened for a second, and before long, softened as his smile turned warm.

"It was an honor serving alongside you as well."

The pair stood in silence for a while. They knew each other inside and out after going through life and death together for so long. No words needed to be said to convey their intent.

"Ah, but I guess Ash isn't going to say anything until the end." Damien suddenly said.

Ever since that fateful day, Ash hadn't spoken a single word to him, even in battle. Though it was understandable, he still felt it was a shame.

Tyler turned away with a strange look on his face. "Well...it isn't quite for the same reason anymore."

"Hm?" Damien questioned.

"You...never mind, it's probably better if you don't know. Who knows what'd happen if you got your bastard claws in her."

"What the hell are you on about?"

"Hm? Ah, I was just wondering how those Nox's claws work. They change shape so naturally that it almost feels strange."

"Hmm..."

Time passed as Damien mindlessly conversed with Tyler and the rest who'd come to see him off.

It was truly a larger group than he'd imagined. There were plenty of people Damien hadn't even met before, purely coming to thank him for what he'd done.

It didn't feel that special to him.

All he did was his best to survive and grow stronger.

But somehow, he'd managed to make such a deep impact on so many people's lives.

The strings of fate and karma were truly strange. The more he felt the effects of his newfound fame, the stronger this thought became.

Damien smiled. He found himself smiling often in this atmosphere, almost as if he was born to live on the battlefield.

But like all good things, his time with these comrades had to come to an end as well.

Damien stood in the starry sky alone, watching a fleet of starships fade into the distance.

He kept remembering his final conversation with Tyler. The happy moments were one thing, but more than that...

'Captain, you must exercise utmost caution from this point forth. I don't know what secret you're hiding, but it's a surety that the Saint Emperor is fully aware of it at this point. As long as you are on the battlefield, you will not have a single peaceful moment.'

Tyler's last words to him were words of warning.

Damien was aware of it.

He'd been trying not to think of it with everything else on his plate, but now that things had calmed down, there was nothing else to push the thought to the back of his mind.

The life of a target that he'd been avoiding ever since he learned of the Void Physique's peculiarity was likely going to become his from this point forth.

And to prepare for what was to come...

'I need to get stronger, unbelievably stronger.'

There was only a single solution.

Damien flashed into Calypto's corrupted atmosphere.

He had until the World Core was completely purified.

By the time the process ended and it came time to return to Hidden Death Valley...

'I need to become a monster.'

Chapter 797 Shadow [1]

The Homeworld of the Nox was called Al'Katra. Rather than a world, it was better to call it an entire universe condensed into a world.

It was a place where a matter of millions of kilometers was nothing, and the population exceeded any named number in the human language.

A Nox being born wasn't a special occasion. Even though the Nox had no concept of fertility and reproduction, new members of their species would always appear as if they were destined to prosper and expand their influence.

What truly caused a scene was when a Higher Nox was born.

Occasionally, in extremely rare situations, a Nox being was born with consciousness from the start.

Life for these beings was hard. They needed to adapt to the world on their own, and do everything they possibly could to survive in a world where everyone around them wished to consume them.

After all, the Nox grew through cannibalism.

One day, a special being was born even amongst Higher Nox. He possessed an ability that was even rarer than the concept of his existence.

He could reproduce, not with other Nox, but with species other than them.

This talent existed within the Nox community beforehand, but every time it appeared was a time for celebration. After all, sowing seeds in nearby universes was a great boon for the Nox, who were forced to live in the Abyss to survive.

However, this talent also turned its users into slaves, worked to death to propagate the species.

That boy grew up with such a power, and over time, he became aware of his importance. He began to grow his position, and instead of allowing his power to consume him, he used it as a great tool to assure his rise in society.

That man's name was Ultak Murrobun. To the outside world, he was known as the Divine Emperor.

For over 100,000 years, he lived domineeringly on Al'Katra. Whenever he needed to, he would explore other universes and utilize the power he was granted to spread the Nox's influence across reality. His reputation reached a high that couldn't be surpassed by any other.

And that was exactly the problem.

A large majority of newly born or promoted Higher Nox subordinated themselves to the Divine Emperor, and a great portion of Lesser Nox and halfbreeds were being born from his seed alone.

He became too powerful.

It was unacceptable.

Over time, his appearances in other universes halted. His actions were strictly supervised and impeded by the other Nox Emperors. For 10,000 years, he was forced to hole himself up in his dwelling and watch events on the outside world progress.

During this time, the only thing he had with him was his own thoughts.

He was barred from moving his own troops, lest they all be mercilessly slaughtered by his enemies.

It was only natural for him to get curious.

About the human world, about human society, and about the concept of "culture" that the Nox wholly lacked.

With his world transformed into a prison, the human world became a beautiful fantasy in his mind.

It didn't take long for him to abandon his post.

He made a secret visit to the human world and experienced the feeling he'd been craving so much. He satiated his curiosity as much as he could, and in the process...

The unfeeling Divine Emperor who only ever knew death and propagation fell in love.

Gasp!

Zara's eyes shot open. A drop of cold sweat dripped down her face as she gasped for breath.

"Haa...haa..."

Her pupils shook fiercely as she tried to solidify her ego. Her body trembled at the same tempo, extreme cold overwhelming her senses.

'That...'

Zara clenched her fist—

Zara's paws dug into the earth of the Prison Realm.

'I'm still in beast form?'

It took a few minutes for her senses to reorient to reality.

A flood of chaotic memories entered her head.

Blood, battle, and...

Betrayal.

'I...'

Zara shook for a different reason.

She, with her own hands, attacked her savior and only family in this world.

Even if she was unconscious and controlled, the fact that she attacked Damien was true.

'I am a failure.'

She closed her eyes in disappointment. After everything she went through to awaken her memories...

She barely received any answers.

'That man is my father.'

That was the only thing about her lineage that she could gauge.

The man in her memories, the Divine Emperor Ultak Murrobun, undoubtedly provided half of her genes. And along with that, it was his power that allowed her to see such memories in the first place.

'The Nox can inherit bloodline memories.'

This was the second most important fact that she'd learned.

Actually, in terms of knowledge of the Nox and her power, Zara learned a great deal. She could likely exercise far better mana control now, and the range of her repertoire greatly expanded.

She couldn't be completely unhappy with what she'd received, but the gnawing feeling that something was missing simply wouldn't go away.

The memory she received skipped over a great deal of the Divine Emperor's over 100,000 years of existence, surely including many things that clued towards Zara's future existence.

And with all the clues she had gathered until this point, she had a relative idea of why that was.

'I need to find whatever is at the end of that spark of light.'

It was the key to her memories. If she was able to understand it better, perhaps she'd unlock what she truly wanted.

Reaching this conclusion, she calmed down somewhat.

'This was merely my first attempt to unlock my bloodline memories. In usual cases, the introduction of bloodline memories into the ego causes it to become unstable. Compared to the usual result, I'm in a far better position.'

The effect of newly introduced bloodline memories was exactly why many entry and early-level 4th class Nox were far stupider than they should've been.

In the most basic terms, the confusion of their ego completely messed up their ability to think and make decisions, which turned them into idiots for a period of time.

Though, this wasn't much of a consequence considering how unnaturally the Nox acquired sentience.

Nevertheless, it was true that Zara avoided this consequence while obtaining a great deal of benefits. What she needed to do now was organize the information in her mind and guarantee the stability of her ego so she never lost herself as she'd done previously.

She refused to become anyone's puppet.

Zara stood up and observed her surroundings. She found herself in a strange desolated landscape where the only life present was her.

'This is...?'

While the realm itself made her wary, she could sense Damien's aura in every single direction. Considering that he wasn't present, there was only one place she could be.

'Sanctuary.'

She sighed in relief. If she was here, it meant he was safe. Now, she only needed to worry about the other thr—

"AGH!"

A furious pain overcame her.

Her body convulsed. She foamed at the mouth and her eyes rolled back into her head as a sticky black substance began to leak from her pores.

"Jie jie jie jie...!"

Eerie laughter traveled through the air, just as sticky and repulsive as the inky substance that produced it.

A shadowy being took form before Zara and looked down at her.

"Jiejieje! Girl, you are maturing well!"

Chapter 798 Shadow [2]

"Jiejieje! Girl, you are maturing well!"

The shadow spoke ominously. Its words seemed to echo through space, as the shadow had no mouth of its own.

"You..." Zara muttered, glaring coldly at it. "So you are my Demonic Providence?"

"Jiejie! So you have unlocked a portion of your bloodline memories. Good! This one's holder should at least be at this level."

Zara didn't respond. She'd seen this shadow only once before, and at that time, it had threatened to consume her and steal her body.

Naturally, she didn't have any good feelings toward it.

But that didn't change the fact that it was her Demonic Providence.

The third most important concept that Zara learned through her bloodline memories was of Demonic Providence.

Demonic Providence was something like a coalescence of a Nox being's life and power before sentience. This agglomeration would grow along with its user, and when its user reached the required level, it would merge with them and provide them a special power.

Just like the Plaguelord's ability to control disease, or even the Saint Emperor's ability to mimic other elements.

Every Nox being that achieved sentience would automatically gain their own Demonic Providence, and though she was a halfbreed, Zara also had her own.

The shadow manifested before her was its ego. It was her own power, but at the same time, it stood against her.

"State your purpose." She said succinctly.

"Jiejie! I merely came to check on my owner! Is that such a crime?"

"It is. You know as well as I do what you represent."

"Oho? Has the little girl finally matured a bit?"

Zara's eyes sharpened. She didn't have any mind to entertain this being.

Another Nox's Demonic Providence would be completely in sync with them and obey them unconditionally, but Zara wasn't so lucky.

Because of her halfbreed status, her Demonic Providence took a skewed path to growth. While it did emulate her life and power as she grew, it also served as a container for her Nox abilities before she'd developed her bloodline.

In this way, her Demonic Providence gained the thought process of a Nox, along with all of Zara's negative thoughts and energy. Though it was formless, she couldn't help but see it as a convoluted mirror of herself.

'To fully come into my power, I must make it submit.'

She understood that, but she also understood that it wasn't in her current capacity. Perhaps after she mastered the techniques in her memory...

"Girl, I have not appeared today to fight. Lower your guard." The shadow said suddenly.

"Then why have you come?"

"Jiejie! I merely wished to see your progress! I felt such a beautiful rush of energy and emotion a bit ago; how could I not come?"

"You aren't needed, so go back."

"Is that a command...?"

Grr...

Zara growled at the shadow's mocking words. It seemed that even it was aware of its position.

But just as it said, it didn't come today to fight.

"Girl, I will give you five years. If you cannot mature in five years...jiejiejiejie!"

The shadow began to retreat into Zara's body, continuing until it completely vanished from the air.

Zara sat on the ground with a frown on her face.

The shadow's visit today signified two things.

Firstly, it wanted to remind her of its existence. Now that Zara was aware of its connotation, it had come to flaunt its existence and mock her.

And secondly, Zara was being accepted as a Nox being. If the shadow didn't find her worthy of her lineage, it would've consumed her already.

While these things didn't seem extremely significant, reality was different.

The second fact was a boon since it meant Zara wouldn't be immediately killed by other Nox beings who had yet to identify her as an enemy. Her status would grant her a lot of leeway on the battlefield.

The first was a relief. Since the shadow took initiative to contact her...

'It is at least somewhat on my side.'

If the shadow was an enemy, it would've been in its best interest to let Zara forget it for now, only appearing at the critical moment to kill her.

'But its allegiance is fragile. 5 years...'

If she couldn't meet that deadline, she'd die and be replaced by her mirror version.

Before that, she needed to grow stronger and find the origin of that mysterious spark.

Zara's body changed and shrunk into human form. She sat down on the floor with her legs crossed and closed her eyes.

She couldn't leave this Prison Realm until Damien came to get her, so until that time came...

She would train like a beast.

Somewhere within the vast sea of stars, two bodies rapidly moved without any sense of direction or purpose.

Eventually, these two beings came across a beginner world where they stopped to rest.

A beautiful man and woman walked through the streets of this world, their existence alone infatuating many denizens of the world.

But the two themselves were entirely disconnected. They seemed to have formed a bubble around them that none could penetrate.

"Isn't it great? Here, try this— ooh! This too!"

The woman happily rushed through the streets and purchased an array of sweets and treats, forcing a majority of them into her male companion's mouth.

He begrudgingly chewed with dull eyes. He had to admit that this woman was interesting, but after seeing how she acquired the money she was so wantonly spending now, he couldn't see her the same.

"Hm? What's wrong?" She questioned as she turned to face him. Her large green eyes were filled with curiosity and innocence, making him doubt whether or not she had a split personality.

"Nothing. I am merely perusing the world as you suggested." He responded noncommittally. His bored gaze watched the same sights as the woman, but he simply couldn't understand her excitement.

Nevertheless, she smiled at him warmly. "It's okay if you don't understand yet. How could I expect you to immediately change? Don't worry. We'll slowly make our way through the universe, and by the time we're done, you'll fall in love!"

The man glanced away awkwardly.

Just what was he doing right now?

Since when was he someone who could casually peruse a world?

Honestly speaking, this was his first time walking through a world without its residents cowering in fear.

His hand touched his face subconsciously. His skin didn't feel any different from before, but a mere change in color was able to cause perception to change to such a degree.

It was a different feeling, an interesting one.

He didn't hate it.

But to say he'd fall in love...

He didn't know if this universe could truly appeal to him enough to make him feel something as esoteric as love.

However, to say that there wasn't anything in the universe that could do so...

Was a complete lie.

The woman smiled.

Change was an extremely gradual process, but it was a process nonetheless. At some point, it would reach its proper end,

This particular process, the experience of showing a young and naive foreigner the beauty of life...

How could Aaliyah not feel excited at the mere prospect?

Chapter 799 Monster [1]

Time passed without end, and the universe flowed without pause. The strings of fate and karma continued to intertwine as all beings moved to accomplish their own desires and purposes.

During this time, Damien remained on Calypto with limited contact with the outside world.

He traversed the mountains and rivers, explored the subterranean world, and became completely acquainted with this new world that he was to bind.

It was a novel experience.

Aside from the peacefulness of solitude, the clarity of mind Damien gained from mindlessly walking the earth was curious. He didn't quite know how to describe the way he felt.

It was an experience that made him feel bigger than himself. He, as a human, experienced the mindset of someone far transcending that level.

'Though, I guess I'm not quite human anymore.'

Damien smiled wryly. Even his status had no clue what his current race was. After changing his blood, he'd become an entirely unique existence under heaven.

Wasn't that exhilarating?

At least, Damien thought it would be.

Yet, it wasn't like that at all. Rather than feeling like he grew stronger, he felt like he'd grown into himself, becoming more complete.

He clenched his fist quietly as he stared at it. White and black wisps of mana circled his hand like koi fish, making their presence known.

'What do you want from me?'

Mana was a mere energy source for others, but to Damien, it always felt alive. His mana was playful, and even occasionally disobeyed his command. After interacting with such strange mana for so long, how could Damien not view it as a sentient creature of its own?

He asked the mana a question like it could answer him, and to his expectation, the mana jumped in response to his thoughts.

Still, he was left sighing. Regardless of the mana's reaction, it couldn't truly communicate with him, nor could it help him understand it.

When it came to comprehending Life and Death Laws, he was entirely on his own.

'But isn't that what makes the process exciting?'

Originally, it was difficult to comprehend Life in an atmosphere so corroded with Death, but that problem only lasted for the first few weeks before he understood how to solve it.

Life and Death themselves had helped him comprehend duality, and duality was what would help him comprehend Life and Death.

Death was cold and harrowing to some, bliss to others, and merely void to some. The perception of death was wholly dependent on one's life experience, tying the two concepts even further together.

In a situation where the meaning of death couldn't be understood without the presence of life, Damien was able to find absolute duality, and even within this desolate environment, he felt life.

He felt the life of the World Core that was slowly budding within the earth, he felt the life of those creatures who lived so deep in the subterranean world that they weren't affected by the Saint Emperor's final move, and more than anything else...

He could feel "Life" from existence itself.

The universe's breath of life entered his pores, filling him with a sense of enlightenment unlike anything he'd ever felt before,

Just as the two forces had done within his body, the external Life and Death Laws Damien observed intermingled and showcased their relationship, allowing him to comprehend both at the same time.

This kind of observation was ten times better than any sort of individual comprehension. Comprehending the interactions between Life and Death allowed one to gain double the understanding with half the effort.

And all of this was possible due to the strange trance-like state of mind that Damien entered. In this state, he cut out any thought not pertaining to his training, and Life and Death began to breathe through him.

His blood churned through his body, the white and black glow of it surfacing on his skin as time passed.

He began to understand.

Life was beautiful, but so was Death.

Life and Death were a measure of existence. In a sense, the stronger one became, the more they strayed from the two concepts.

'If one reaches the Demigod level and completely sheds their mortal coil, comprehending these laws becomes impossible.'

It wasn't that life and death had no impact on Demigods, since it was true that they still lived and could still die. Merely, internalizing the true meaning behind life and death wasn't possible when one was so distanced from them.

Nevertheless, both life and death were extremely amicable towards Damien in terms of their mana, and comprehending them was only more difficult than comprehending space and time, which came naturally to Damien at this point.

What he was more curious about was the intersection between them.

Death marked the end of Life, and to a certain extent, it also marked the start of a new life, but this was only in a situation where the concept of reincarnation was present.

Damien's greatest find in this time of reflection was that reincarnation was fickle. Not always did it allow existences into its cycle.

For some, Death was the true end.

Their egos would be erased, their souls would break down and vanish into the folds of reality, and the entirety of their existence would crumble.

pαndα---nove1,coM 'It sounds torturous, but it's no different than regular death. Since the ego is erased first, the "person" that the soul represented is already gone by the time it is erased from existence. Rather, the universe's indifference is the most interesting facet of this process.'

The process seemed like punishment for vile souls, but it was nothing of the sort. It was merely a matter of random chance, an event that took place at the whims of a conceptual existence without sentience of its own.

It was cruel, unbiased, and indifferent.

'It's also one of the most confusing processes I've come across.'

Damien shook his head and decided not to think about it. For now, he didn't have the proper level of Life and Death comprehension to break down the nuances behind such a vague process.

What he did have, however, was a newfound connection to the two Laws as well as a few different means to utilize them, whether in combat or support.

'It's just unfortunate that I didn't have much time. If I had another half a year, I feel like I could truly become one with these Laws.'

Sadly, Damien was a man with many responsibilities.

He'd stayed past his welcome on Calypto, and the progress examination was only a matter of days away.

Damien's awareness sunk into the world. He set his eyes on an almost wholly iridescent blue World Core.

The traces of Nox Mana in the World Core Space were still many, but their actual influence on the World Core had become negligible.

Damien snapped his fingers. A large shadowy maw appeared in the World Core Space and began devouring every bit of Nox Mana it came across.

With just a bit of effort, the entire World Core Space was cleansed.

'The only thing left to do is bind the core, I guess.'

There were too many things that made Damien lament his short stay on Calypto. The greatest was his inability to comprehend just "how" the World Core changed and recorrected itself after his original interference.

'Though, it's become a bit clearer.'

With the introduction of Life and Death into Damien's repertoire, his Void comprehension saw a sharp increase, which allowed him to see a vague representation of the process.

Everything would come to him in due time. This much, Damien was sure of.

But for now...

His consciousness teleported to the World Core Space. A Celestial Mana Thread left his finger and gracefully entwined with the World Core's pure mana.

When the two forces made contact...

An explosion of light enveloped Damien's mind.

Chapter 800 Monster [2]

The birth of a world.

This was what Damien saw upon binding Calypto.

It was a scene he'd seen once before, but not nearly in the same level of detail as what he was currently witnessing.

From the moment the universe's mana coalesced into a tiny sprout that would bloom into a World Core all the way until that World Core matured, formed a world around it, and birthed life, Damien saw it all.

He was an observer, someone who shouldn't have existed as this happened. And from this position, he was able to witness things the common eye wasn't supposed to see:

Traces of the universal law in its purest and most unadulterated form.

'This...'

Damien's mind raced. The matter of the world itself was secondary. Even the immense Life and Death comprehension he could gain from watching the world grow was secondary.

If he could obtain even a trace of comprehension of the universal law, all else would become mundane.

'Khh...!'

His mind pulsed as he tried to hone in on that barely noticeable trace. He pushed his mental energy to the limit, using his awareness to pierce reality and reach that strand of intent.

It was shapeless, formless, colorless, almost nonexistent. Yet, it was the exact same intent that formed the entirety of the universe. It was nowhere, yet it was everywhere at the same time, making it almost impossible for Damien to touch it.

But he did his best. He put everything he possibly could into locating it. He got closer and closer, the fluctuation of that power becoming clearer with time until...!

His mind snapped back to reality.

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

In the end, he wasn't able to grasp what he wanted.

However...

'That...'

His eyes sharpened.

'Wasn't that similar to the breath of the Void?'

Damien's interaction with the World Core was short yet meaningful. As soon as his consciousness returned to his body, he felt droves of World Force becoming his to use, and a new celestial body appeared in his spiritual world, connected to his other worlds through the World Core Fusion Reactor.

It was truly a completely different entity than the rest.

The World Force was weak in comparison to its quantity, but that was merely because the World Core was still new and without spiritual intelligence. In terms of purity, this new breed of World Force was far greater than anything Damien had ever touched before.

'It feels like this World Force's fluctuation is closer to the universal law that I barely felt earlier.'

The universal law clearly had a connection to the Void that Damien had been unaware of, and since the Void itself influenced this World Core's formation, it was natural for it to be closer to the origin than a regular World Core.

As for the benefits of this change, Damien would have to slowly uncover them with time. Calypto's new World Core couldn't even transmit hints of emotion like Earth could yet, so it couldn't help him in any way.

Nevertheless, Damien was immensely satisfied.

The binding was a success.

'This is a viable process.'

In the future, he had yet another card to use against the Nox, one that could strike serious blows to their efforts in destroying the universe.

If Damien could continue to refine his craft, perhaps there would come a day when he could revive destroyed World Cores as well.

If that day came...

'Hah, it's no use thinking in hypotheticals. Rather than that, I should start heading back to the academy.'

Most of the worries that had been troubling him were dealt with.

Damien had gone to the Sanctuary to visit Zara long ago, and he'd seen that she was safe. While she wasn't yet ready to share what she'd experienced with him, that'd come with time.

Her safety and health were far more important than the information she could provide.

Since she wanted to quietly meditate and organize her mind, Damien created a new section of the Sanctuary specifically dedicated to her practice and allowed her to stay there.

While she took care of her own matters, he had a progress examination to breeze through.

'At this point, it feels useless.'

Death Emperor Star still had countless forbidden zones for Damien to explore, but he didn't currently have the time to explore them all.

He urgently needed to head to the battlefield and participate in the war. This was something he realized after his adventures in Calypto.

'For now, I'll go back to the academy since I have a promise to uphold with the Director. And since Aesir and Calypto were both saved by me, shouldn't I be rewarded?'

Damien grinned greedily as he thought about extorting the Director. That stoic old man who didn't know how to be jovial, it would be nice to see a distraught expression on his face, right?

'Yeah, now that's some quality motivation.'

With a smile on his face, Damien flickered out of existence and disappeared from Calypto altogether.

Only a lonely and desolate world was left in his wake.

It was a few minutes later when new life signatures appeared in the vicinity.

A little girl and an old man stood together in the starry sky above Calypto. Despite the oddity of their presence, the strangest part about them was...their familiarity!

This duo had encountered Damien once before, long ago when he was still on the unnamed world in the Human Domain. It was because he eavesdropped on their conversation that he learned of Wrath's danger.

However, this duo never personally interacted with Damien.

In this instance, they'd come just barely after he departed.

"He's going to meet them soon, isn't he?" The little girl asked as she gazed at Calypto.

pαndα---nova | com "He is, indeed. Why do you ask?" The old man replied with a smile.

The little girl was silent for a moment.

"Say, if you utilized everything in your arsenal, could you alter the base structure of a World Core to your liking?"

She asked the old man without answering his previous question, because she knew. If it was her, it'd be utterly impossible.

In fact, just the thought of doing so was inconceivable.

The old man's gaze traveled from the little girl to Calypto with an unchanging smile on his face. A trace of solemnity flashed through his wizened eyes.

"...no. Even if I used the Lord's Divine Providence, I would still fail."

"I thought so."

The girl's indifferent facade twitched.

The last time she'd seen him was only a matter of years ago, yet in such a short period of time, he was able to reach such a level?

Even if this was the lower universe, affecting the fabric of reality was something even a Demigod couldn't do.

Hell, even a God couldn't take such a task lightly.

"Just what the hell is he?" The girl muttered under her breath.

The old man's smile widened. "Of course, the answer is obvious..."

His gaze shifted to the horizon, as if his eyes could pierce through the veil of reality and see anything they wished to see.

Those eyes gleamed with a sense of curiosity and pride that couldn't be hidden even under his usual smiling facade.

"...only a monster like him is worthy of being the Lord's kin."