

Void 801

Chapter 801 Swing [1]

Hidden Death Valley was bustling far more than usual in recent days. After all, the time of the progress examination was closing in rapidly.

At this time, only a few days remained until the assessment began, and a few details about how it would be held were posted for all to see.

Whether it was the lowest students who were still at 2nd class to those Emperors and Paragons who stood at the very peak, everyone was eagerly awaiting the time of the test.

After all, this progress examination was more than just a simple test. It was a stage for geniuses to prove themselves and compete against each other for resources and status.

The progress examination was akin to a festival for these practitioners who put strength and training above all else.

Within his residence in Star City, Atticus looked over the information provided. As he was a Paragon himself, the amount he could view was far greater than the normal genius.

'So this year's progress examination will take place in the Celestial Realm. How interesting!'

Even Atticus had never entered the Celestial Realm. After all, it was one of the most mysterious and bountiful small realms present on Death Emperor Star!

The Celestial Realm had only been opened twice since the academy's founding, but the mere mention of it was enough to get anyone's blood boiling.

'The Celestial Realm is rumored to be the small realm with the most treasures and legacies on Death Emperor Star. Even the seniors who entered during the first and second explorations weren't able to uncover the realm's secrets or even traverse the entire thing! With that in mind, why would they choose to hold a progress examination within such a critical realm opening...?'

Atticus furrowed his brows in thought. Naturally, he was just as excited as anyone else to enter this mystical realm. Just thinking about the godly artifacts, techniques, and resources that'd been retrieved from the Celestial Realm previously made him drool.

However, he didn't want to enter blindly. Especially when the realm in question was covered in such a thick veil of mysticism, it was impossible for him to not be wary.

'They only released this information now, three days before the progress examination begins. They must've known that we'd try to investigate and limited our time.'

For Atticus, three days were enough time to get a general overview of the past Celestial Realm expeditions, but concrete details would be difficult to find. As for those geniuses without high status, it was nigh impossible for them to do the same.

'They say that background is also a talent. This must be the type of situation they're referring to.'

Atticus closed the holographic windows hovering in front of him and stood from his seat, walking out of his home and gazing at Hidden Death Valley's landscape that was sprawled before him.

'This time...things will get interesting.'

The Emperors and Paragons had been progressing at a rapid pace, becoming much stronger in a short period of time. Competing against them would be well worth it.

However, there were a few wild cards in this time's progress examination.

The one Atticus focused on was naturally the one he introduced to the academy.

Damien Void.

'Last I heard, he was sent to war as punishment for killing the Bloodlock Clan's people. He should be returning soon...how strong has he become?'

Atticus couldn't forget their first battle, the first time he'd ever seen such a tremendous talent who didn't originate from a major sect or clan. Comparing that battle to Damien's last before he left for war...?

His progress was insane. Atticus didn't even think it was possible to become so strong in such a short period of time.

But the genius who'd already proved him wrong multiple times...just what kind of show would he put on this time?

Frankly, Atticus couldn't wait.

Three days passed quickly. The day of the progress examination arrived before anyone could be prepared for it.

All Hidden Death Valley students stood on the streets of the academy, their attention directed to the sky above.

There, the Director and the 11 Zodiacs stood domineeringly, their imposing aura blanketing the entire academy space.

The Director opened his mouth to speak, projecting his booming voice with mana.

"Students! The time has come for you to set yourselves apart from your peers and soar into the sky! The progress examination is not merely a test of your qualifications to remain in the academy, it is a test of whether or not you are worthy of ascending the steps of Godhood in the future! It is an exam that will test your power, your grit and determination, your heroic spirit, and even the deepest desires of your soul!"

"This year, the unfathomable Celestial Realm has opened once more, and we have decided to allow you, our Hidden Death Valley geniuses, to explore it personally!

"The details of the exam will be provided once you enter the realm. Your academy emblems will lead you to complete all the tasks necessary to get a passing grade, and after you've completed these tasks, it is up to you when you wish to leave! You will have three months to explore as you please and encounter your own fortuitous encounters!"

"Young geniuses, are you prepared?!"

""YES, DIRECTOR!!""

A unified cry resounded through the academy. Fighting spirit burned the atmosphere with its fearsome blaze as every genius present prepared themselves to sacrifice their lives for opportunity.

The Director smiled from his position in the air. "Good! I can feel your determination from here! Only geniuses with as much willingness to risk their lives as you can succeed in life!"

"Now, go forth! The opportunities and dangers of the Celestial Realm await you!"

The Director summoned his mana and covered the entire academy in a thick web. The 11 Zodiacs behind him moved as well, forming a strange pattern and creating a myriad of seals with their hands, summoning a grand formation unto the academy.

A titanic array diagram appeared in the air, and a film of blue light enveloped the academy. Spatial fluctuations resonated and shook the atmosphere as disciples began to disappear in groups of many hundreds at a time.

Among the geniuses who were waiting to be transported to the Celestial Realm, a small commotion broke out.

Voom!

The chaotic spatial fluctuations in a certain part of Star City coalesced and caused the atmosphere to shatter. A black hole leading to the chaotic void began to consume everything around it.

Until, a change took place.

Crack!

It was so abrupt that the surrounding geniuses didn't even have a chance to properly process the situation. The suction force of the black hole reversed and blew fierce winds into the vicinity.

Puha!

A strangely human noise came from the black hole as an object shot out and slammed into the ground.

From the smoke, a man rose.

He dusted off his dirtied uniform and looked around, scratching his head sheepishly when he understood the situation.

"Well...at least I got here on time."

Damien swept his hand through the air and calmed the chaotic spatial fluctuations around him. In the next instant, he felt a calm aura of spatial mana covering him.

In that last moment before his body was teleported into the Celestial Realm, he had a thought.

'Aha, maybe I should've figured out what's going on first.'

Chapter 802 Swing [2]

Rumble!

This time's spatial travel wasn't as peaceful as Damien's usual trip.

The instant he was swallowed by the spatial mana, he was met with a furious array of spatial storms and terrifying phenomena that could rip any normal genius to pieces with ease.

However, was Damien ever a normal genius?

"Shoo, shoo. Stop making things annoying."

Damien brushed off the spatial confusion like it was nothing, shooing away the terrifying storms with a single movement of his hand.

The spatial essence that flowed from his body naturally was enough to repel these storms, but they were obnoxious, so Damien personally took action to disperse them.

Perhaps he still had a lot to learn, but just dealing with spatial storms in the chaotic void was nothing for him at this point.

This trip to the Celestial Realm would be a peaceful adventure, nothing like the chaos and destruction of war. Achieving this situation was Damien's current goal.

Eventually, he reached the end of what should have been a perilous journey, arriving in the realm as he was intended. His body materialized within a quiet jungle, sky-reaching trees surrounding him in every direction.

'It's truly beautiful. Worthy of being called the Celestial Realm.'

Damien swept through the information provided through his academy emblem. He was provided the same amount of information as any other Emperor, though it was a surprise that he was even taken into consideration.

'I didn't really have time to inform anyone of my return. Did that old man really just bank on the fact that I'd come back?'

It was nice to know that he had the Director's trust, even if it was only a basic level of respect.

Nevertheless, there was no need to think about the Director at the moment. Matters with him could be settled once the exam ended.

'Three months in this realm to complete all the tasks provided. Should I check those first...?'

The holographic screens in his eyes shifted, showcasing a list of multiple tasks accompanied by point values.

'The lowest level tasks are just herb gathering missions and the likes. After that, there are beast subjugations, which are also relatively easy. As for the harder tasks...'

[Explore the Mystic Emperor's Tomb and return alive - 5500pts]

[Travel to the East Jade Sea and find the Heart of the Sea - 4700pts]

[Explore an unmarked territory and provide a detailed overview of its structure - 2500 ~ 10000pts]

'Oho, now these look more fun.'

According to the information, the number of points a genius needed for their exam to be marked complete wholly depended on their own power level as measured by the academy through their stay within its walls. For some weaker geniuses, only a hundred points were needed to pass. This amounted to merely a few herb-gathering missions.

As for Damien...

[Points Obtained: 0/25000]

A colossal sum that'd take multiple extreme difficulty missions to achieve.

'Tch, this is that old man's doing, isn't it.'

Damien clicked his tongue in annoyance. He definitely hadn't shown the academy enough achievements for them to put him on the same level as their strongest Paragons. Hell, did Atticus even receive a number as big as his?!

Damien massaged his forehead and sighed. 'Well, I just have to do it, right?'

In the end, what was a little bit of adventure to him? If he was being arrogant, he could even call himself the king of adventure!

Hmph!

Damien harrumphed defiantly and scrolled through the extreme difficulty task list.

'3 months, right?! Fuck it, I'll get 100,000 points from this stupid realm and slap that damn old ghost in the face!'

'But...'

Damien's frown became more pronounced the further he scrolled.

'All of these tasks are fucking long! Even the travel times alone are multiple days long, especially since the terrain is unfamiliar! How the fuck am I supposed to accomplish anything?!'

He sighed and clicked his tongue for the umpteenth time.

'Fuck, for now let me discern where I am. After that, I can cross reference with the map and see what tasks are most suitable for my goal.

Damien flew into the air above the trees to observe his position. The second he did, his brow raised curiously.

'This...isn't this realm supposed to be massive and largely unexplored...?'

What Damien thought was a far-reaching jungle was merely a patch of jungle-like terrain only a few tens of kilometers in size.

This terrain was a small island within the greater realm.

The sky was bluer than blue and filled with drifting clouds. Around the small jungle island was water so clear that it couldn't be told apart from the sky, making it feel as if the island itself was floating in the sky.

Apart from this island, there was only one more piece of land.

It was another small island several hundred kilometers away. Unlike the jungle island, it was completely unpopulated by all but one structure.

A small and humble cottage.

'Don't tell me I stumbled into the den of some prehistoric old monster who's been cultivating in seclusion since the ancient era...'

Clearly, Damien was NOT in the Celestial Realm.

But when in doubt...

'I'll just do whatever the fuck I want and deal with the consequences later.'

Damien moved towards the hut without hesitation and landed on the island. Completely different from when he saw it from a distance, he noticed that there were a variety of accommodations around the cottage, such as multiple patio space and outdoor rotundas to host guests in.

Damien curiously walked around the cottage, and even directly entered it, but he couldn't find any signs of life in the vicinity.

'Yet, this cottage looks like it's been used recently.'

It was clean, and despite the lack of life aura, the cottage itself was lively. It was generously decorated and even had a bookshelf with countless titles lining it.

'Hm? Exploration of the Universal Law? The True Value of Spacetime? Celestial Class for Dummies?! What the hell?'

Damien picked up a random book on the shelf and started reading, quickly becoming enamored in the esoteric theories that were shared through its text.

Before he realized it, an entire day passed as he read.

By the time he finished the book and looked out the window, darkness had already dawned on the small realm.

'Hmm, I should probably che—'

Something beyond the window suddenly caught Damien's eye.

It was a small and nondescript swing hanging from a tree, the type of swing a child would have in their front yard.

Damien felt a pang in his heart as he looked at it.

A vague memory surfaced in his mind.

His eyes widened.

'Wait, that's...'

"It's the swing you used to love so much when you were little. It even has the same engraving you drew on it that fateful summer."

A voice came from behind. Damien flinched. He realized that even after hearing the voice, he still couldn't sense its owner's existence.

But...

There was no way he wouldn't recognize that voice.

Had it been 20 years since he'd last heard it?

He slowly turned around.

The figure of a man was revealed to him.

A man that looked almost identical to himself.

Damien's eyes turned cold.

After so long, they were finally meeting again.

"Father..."

Chapter 803 Destiny [1]

"Father..."

The man standing there had short black hair and deep blue eyes. He didn't look older than 35 and had a roguish and rugged aura around him that was similar to yet contrasted with Damien's own aura.

Damien closed his eyes and massaged his forehead before opening them back up to check whether or not he was hallucinating.

Unfortunately, that man was still standing there when he checked the third, fourth, and even fifth time.

"Yeah, I'm not dealing with this today."

Damien turned around and began walking without turning back.

"Wait, wait! What is this reaction?!"

The man materialized in Damien's path and waved his hands in a panic.

Damien rolled his eyes. "And? What type of reaction were you expecting?"

"Uhm, I don't know, maybe some shock or something? Where's the whole, 'oh my god that's really my father!' moment?"

Damien stared at the man with a dead fish gaze.

Was this really the father he knew?

"If you spring up on me like this before I can even get acclimated to the small realm, how am I supposed to be all surprised? I'm already disoriented from your wacky ass summoning methods."

"Come on, no son of mine will be bothered by a few mere spatial storms and some confusion."

"And how are you supposed to know that, you deadbeat piece of shit?"

"Aha..."

The man scratched his head in shame and glanced away. "Well, here I am...?"

"Tch."

Damien walked around him and continued without hesitation. He was going to leave this island, leave this realm, and continue living his life as if this encounter never happened.

Damien's body flashed and disappeared from the island, leaving only his sorrowful father behind.

'Fuck...what am I doing?'

Damien berated himself inwardly. He was no longer an angsty teen who only harbored hatred for his father. During his journey, he'd seen countless hints that his father's situation was far more complicated than he originally thought.

Yet, he couldn't bring himself to accept this fact wholeheartedly after seeing the man himself.

All those bottled-up emotions rushed to his head and controlled his actions. Because of how unexpected the situation was, he was even more susceptible to these urges.

'But...I don't even know his name.'

Wasn't that madness?

It wasn't that he never heard his father's name. His mother didn't mention him much, but she at least told him that much.

The name she'd told Damien was "Michael," but presently, Damien no longer believed in this name.

The secretive man who descended on a world of mortals, had a child, and left without telling anyone surely wouldn't reveal his true name during the process.

'Fuck...'

Just how was he supposed to process this?!

Damien sat silently on the jungle island without moving. He listened to the brushing wind amongst the trees, and the quiet chirping of birds coming from the distance.

He tried to calm his mind in this peaceful climate.

But...

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

He clutched his chest in pain.

Breathing was hard. He gasped for breath, but the air didn't seem to go to his lungs.

It was suffocating. It felt like an empty void was forming in his heart and sucking his feelings into it, churning violently and regurgitating his emotions after a full round of chaotically messing with them.

Thoughts didn't form in his head during this time. The desire to be calm was present, but it couldn't gain any ground against this agonizing tightness in his chest.

A panic attack.

After coming so far, he was having a panic attack after meeting his father.

It was embarrassing. He thought he'd already conquered all his trauma, but clearly, some things slipped through the cracks.

The only reason Damien was able to converse normally with his father for those few seconds they spoke was his burning desire to never be weak in front of the man who abandoned him.

But in reality, he was in pain.

How dare he?

How dare he appear here after so long, acting as if nothing happened?

DID HE NOT UNDERSTAND THE PAIN HE CAUSED HIS FAMILY?!

"Haa..."

Damien took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and entered a meditative state as best as he could, becoming in tune with the world and blocking out his surroundings.

This world was mystical. Its laws were far vaguer than the outside world, yet it felt complete in an ethereal and unexplainable way.

This mystery and the slight chaos he felt in the atmospheric fluctuations calmed Damien down more than any peace could.

Even the universe could feel turmoil.

Even the universe had problems it couldn't solve, and even if it mobilized its residents, these problems couldn't be solved.

The difference between Damien and the universe was that he had free will.

When a problem that seemed impossible appeared before him, he could break through it as long as he put in enough effort.

At least, that's what he believed for the majority of his life.

At the end of the day, all things needed balance, including the mind and body. Perhaps the constantly growing mental stress toll on Damien's head was affecting him, making his past trauma worse when it finally decided to strike him.

There was a need to view the situation rationally, and Damien didn't have the time to calm down before doing so.

'Vanish, scourge-like emotions.'

The Mind Prison took effect, and Damien's eyes turned cold.

'He is not here for no reason.'

If he was here merely to visit the son he abandoned, he wouldn't have done so in such a fashion.

At this critical juncture where the war was tilted in nobody's favor and the universe's denizens needed to take initiative, this visit was too coincidental.

'He needs something from me?'

It was a possibility, but if that was truly the reason for his return, Damien had no need to entertain him.

'A catastrophe is approaching?'

While it was more annoying if this was the reason, it wasn't necessarily something Damien could avoid. He'd need to hear the man out.

'In the end, the reason doesn't matter. I still have to talk to him.'

That man was the answer to many of Damien's questions, not just about his origins, but also the universe as a whole.

He couldn't sacrifice such a great opportunity because of his negative feelings.

'But suppressing them is almost impossible. If I must converse with him, I must do it in this state.'

The Mind Prison was an esoteric concept that Damien learned to naturally control over time. He was able to separate portions of his emotions and ego as he pleased to entrap, making the level of indifference he displayed differ based on the situation.

In this situation...

All feelings and emotions were thrown into the prison.

A cold and indifferent Damien stood in reality, his purple eyes dull and robotic.

He walked across the jungle island and flew across the sea to arrive at the cottage.

The man's visage was still present there, unmoving from his position when Damien left.

"Are you finally ready to talk?"

He spoke when he saw Damien approaching, in a far softer tone than before,

However, Damien didn't respond.

After landing on the ground, he stared the man directly in his eyes and wasted no time.

"Tell me who you are, and who I am."

Chapter 804 Destiny [2]

Damien's father stood silently, staring into his son's eyes.

They were a beautiful purple color that reminded him of a long-lost love.

But at the moment, they didn't gleam with life like a human's eyes.

These were the dead eyes of a puppet, an object without free will.

He felt an unimaginable pain in his heart.

His own child...his own flesh and blood...

...couldn't face him without taking such measures?

He knew this day would come, the day when he met his son again after so many years. He was truly excited to see his growth and reunite with him, but it seemed his thinking was far too wishful.

The wrongs he'd committed in the past, regardless of the reasoning behind them, had lasting consequences that he'd need to slowly compensate for.

He sighed to himself.

In this situation, he didn't have any right to act fatherly.

Besides, he didn't have enough time for that.

"My name is Dante Void, and you probably don't need me to tell you our relation."

Damien nodded. It was good to finally know the name of the man who birthed him after 28 years of existence.

"There isn't too much I can tell you, as knowing too early will only harm you in the long run, but I will tell you everything I can."

Those were the words Damien didn't want to hear. The same bullshit that was always spouted. He hated people who withheld knowledge off such a flimsy personal judgement without taking into account his own desires.

However...

"The matters of God can only be handled by Gods."

Damien couldn't rebut that statement.

'Gods...'

These impossible existences that Damien could only fantasize about...his father was one of them?

Though it wasn't said outright, it was more than slightly implied. If Damien didn't understand this obvious nuance, his brain would've been utterly useless.

He shut off his extraneous thoughts and focused on Dante's words.

"Who I am, I cannot tell you quite yet. All you need to know is that I'm your father, and I would never abandon my own flesh and blood without reason."

Dante's eyes were incredibly solemn as he spoke.

"As for you, is there anything to say that you don't know? You are my son, the heir to my legacy, and the most gifted genius in the entirety of existence. There is no better descriptor for your talent than 'unparalleled under heaven.'"

He gazed at Damien in admiration. The young man didn't look older than 30, yet he already had such achievements.

The fluctuation of Spacetime, of Samsara, and even of something far more ethereal that even Dante himself couldn't place his finger on. With all of these combined, regardless of Damien's weak base level, his combat power was approaching the peak of 4th class.

A son like this was everything he could've ever asked for.

It was a shame that he couldn't preside over his growth.

"Countless years ago, I arrived in this universe to escape my enemies and coincidentally made my way to the planet known as Earth. Around 35 years ago, I met your mother."

"It was a happy life, living mundanely in a world where mana didn't even exist. It felt like I could throw away all my worries and live comfortably for once, unbothered by the innumerable problems waiting for me in the Heavenly World. Of course, this was merely wishful thinking, blissful ignorance that I consciously accepted."

"It didn't take long for my enemies to find me, and at that point, I was forced to leave."

"After all, a lower world can't even handle the aura of a single God. What would happen to it if multiple converged on its location at once?"

Dante looked down with a melancholic smile. "I really didn't want to leave. If I had a choice, I would have done everything in my power to stay with you and quietly protect the world as you grew. But time waits for no man, and my fate eventually caught up to me."

"I will not say it was a mistake to have you. Even though I haven't been present to watch you grow, I've been dearly awaiting our reunion for decades. However, it was a mistake to have you at that time. If I had been more conscious, I would've waited until I could give you a proper childhood before even considering parenthood."

"But just as I said before, fate is a cruel mistress."

He looked up at Damien, but found no response from the latter. He remained standing with the same utterly indifferent gaze as before.

Dante smiled wryly. He couldn't even see his son's emotions, wasn't this too cruel?

But his son was coping in the best way he knew how. Trying to stop him would only further ruin their relationship,

He needed to give the young man time.

Others, however, weren't willing to wait.

"The universe needed you, and you were birthed for that purpose. This is what I believe."

"You were born with a seed of destiny in your body, and throughout your life, I'm sure you've been entangled in the universe's fate whether consensually or not. It isn't a situation where you're forced to be the universe's hero, but you were one of many geniuses born into an era of heroes meant to save it from its destruction."

"Perhaps even my leaving was something the universe foresaw, for with my guidance, you wouldn't have lived a life that tied you to this universe. In a time of catastrophe, I could take you directly to the Heavenly World to save you, making your existence inconsequential to the universe's safety."

"But I guess I'm just rambling. I merely wish for you to understand that there were countless nuances behind your birth, things you will need to slowly unravel with time. Until then, I will answer as many questions as I can before I disappear."

"Disappear?" Damien questioned.

It was his first reaction since Dante began his speech.

Dante smiled regretfully. "Mm, despite the completeness of this form, it is but a projection I've sent to meet with you. A friend who reads the Tides of Fate gave me a location and a time. If not for him, I wouldn't have been able to contact you at all. This avatar will only last a few minutes before dispersing."

"And why is that?" Damien asked again.

Dante answered calmly. "For one, a God cannot exist in the lower universe in any form for too long. The universal law of the Heavenly World will strike us down if we try. As for the second reason..."

His expression turned solemn.

"I'm currently imprisoned by my enemies, and I cannot take any action that alerts them of my ability to stay connected with the outside world."

An explosion went off in Damien's mind. An unknown feeling broke free from the barrier of the Mind Prison and filled his brain.

'Imprisoned?'

That father that seemed so unreachable, the one who claimed himself a God whose mere aura was enough to destroy a planet...

That very same man was imprisoned and suppressed to a level where even a few minutes of conversation required him to risk his life...?

Suddenly, a portion of the raging chaos clouding Damien's thought process cleared up.

If Dante was risking so much just to come speak with him...

'...then the least I can do is hear him out.'

Chapter 805 Destiny [3]

"Ask me anything. I will answer what I can."

This was Dante's declaration. As long as he was able to help, he would do everything he could with the few minutes he had.

Damien furrowed his brows. In this situation, there were many things he wanted to ask about, but he needed to pick and choose.

'I would like to know more about the Heavenly World, but I doubt he'll tell me. If so, I should prioritize things that will help more in the short run...'

There were a few items left on the list after Damien narrowed it down, but the number was far less than it was before.

And as he finalized his questions, his mind also calmed.

Once Damien realized that the Dante Void he was currently talking to was a projection, he was able to cope much easier.

After all, this was a "fake" image of his father. Back on Apeiron, during the illusion trial of the Eternal Secret Realm's Legacy Tombs, Damien faced another face of his father like this one.

As long as he thought of this avatar as a more advanced version of that projection, his mind didn't feel so chaotic.

He was able to put his feelings aside and focus on what was important.

As such, his first question was simple.

"Tell me everything you know about the Nox."

The most imminent threat and the great enemy Damien had been facing since the beginning of his journey, now that they'd gotten a hold of some of his secrets, he couldn't go without information on them.

"Nox, aye..." Dante muttered with a distant look. "It looks like those pests are still up to no good."

"Well, even I am not completely aware of the Nox's origins. From what I learned through my travels long ago, the Nox's homeworld is a mysterious land in the Abyss called Al'Katra..."

Dante went on to explain everything he knew about Nox society to Damien. For the most part, it didn't vary much from the information Zara learned through her bloodline memories.

The Nox were cannibals who grew stronger by devouring their own kin, and they had a unique species trait to pass bloodline memories down through generations to raise Higher Nox to full intelligence and train them.

The hierarchy of Nox society was strange. From what Dante knew, there weren't many different distinctions.

All Lesser Nox were regarded the same, as nothing more than cannon fodder to send to battle when necessary. The Higher Nox who'd yet to completely develop their intelligence were only slightly above these Lesser Nox. Because of their lack of intuitive ability, they couldn't be used to carry out complex orders.

Higher Nox could follow two routes to gain status after their intelligence was established. Firstly, they could follow a path of blood to grow in strength on the battlefield. And secondly, they could follow the path of scholars, becoming supreme geniuses that stood above the heavens with their minds alone.

This fact was especially surprising to Damien. The Nox he'd met so far were all following the slaughter path, which was natural since they were participating in the war.

Those Nox who followed the scholar path...

'Were they the ones who planned the total destruction of the Elven Domain?'

Even considering the Nox's surprise element, taking an entire Sector before reinforcements could arrive was unfathomable. It wasn't a feat that could be accomplished with power alone.

There must've been a genius strategist behind that attack.

'As for the matters of Eden, I don't know whether the scholars have a greater plan or if they took their hands off the situation for now. I can only find out with time.'

The scholar path was difficult to cultivate, and could only show its true prowess in the later realms. Most likely, the scholar controlling the current war was a Demigod perhaps even at the Emperor level.

Emperors were the highest authorities of the Nox, only standing below the Dark God, the spiritual god that the Nox worshipped. Its existence had yet to be proven.

Under the Emperors were Lords like Plaguelord, and the Nox under them were usually not assigned status until they arrived on the battlefield.

There was no such thing as long-term camaraderie amongst the Nox. At any moment, they were willing to turn against their allies for more power.

Especially since, in some sense, they were all a single massive entity.

"Their reproduction method is unknown and extremely mysterious, but with the way they're able to merge after death and be reborn, I believe that they have a system akin to a hivemind, at least until the Demigod level," Dante said.

Damien sighed as he learned more and more about the Nox.

The existence and habits of their race were so peculiar that it genuinely stumped his brain. He felt like he wouldn't be able to fully understand them unless he went to Al'Katra himself.

But that wasn't something he could do quite yet.

He had to join the warfront as soon as possible, and after about a year or so, the Grand Assembly would start, and he'd finally be able to reunite with his loved ones.

At least until that reunion was properly over, he couldn't leave for an indiscernible amount of time to find Al'Katra.

Damien closed his eyes and processed everything he learned.

If there was one thing that was certain, it was that the Nox's laws were in fact based on Death Laws, but they themselves weren't a variant of Death Laws.

There was something deeper that needed to be investigated, especially with the existence of such a strange system like Demonic Providence. This type of power simply didn't exist in nature.

'That means it isn't a product of Grand Heavens Boundary, which operates on the natural law. Does the Abyss have its own universal law? Or maybe there is some other secret in the Abyss that I've yet to discover...? Now that I think about it, the Abyssal Corridor that originally dragged me to the Divine Realm also seems to have a connection to the Abyss...'

Damien shook his head lightly and cleared his thoughts.

'With the memories I devoured on Calypto and Zara's help, I should be able to get a clearer picture based on the foundation Dante has given me. I think...'

"You're done asking about those pests?" Dante commented with a smile.

Damien nodded. "This is more than enough information for now. It would've been nice to know a weakness, but if one had been found, we wouldn't be in such a dire situation."

"Hahaha, dire, you say. Mm, it can truly be called that. Pests like them are the hardest to get rid of, and even after you get rid of them they always find a way to come back. It's quite the annoying predicament, isn't it?" Dante said with an odd smile.

He snapped out of his strange daze soon and returned to the topic at hand. "Well then, is there anything else you want to know?"

Damien hesitated for a second. "I...I want to know about your power, and the power of the Celestial Class."

Dante's eyes widened, and a grin spread across his face. His excitement seemed to soar higher than the heavens.

After all...

"I've been waiting for you to ask."

He'd been waiting too long to give his son a lesson.

Chapter 806 Destiny [4]

A lesson of five minutes, just how much could be accomplished within its duration?

Unexpectedly, the answer was "quite a lot" when Damien was involved.

Immediately after Damien asked Dante for aid, the latter didn't hesitate to enter "wandering old master" mode to tutor him.

It started simple. Dante was the origin of Damien's spatial talent and an expert who far exceeded him in this capacity at the moment. The first thing he did was check Damien's current comprehension.

Damien revealed his ability to manipulate dimensions, and even showcased his progress with Spacetime Laws, giving Dante an endless wave of surprises.

'I'd sensed the fluctuations of Spacetime from him, but I didn't expect he'd reached such a level. To make the fabric of reality tremble with his strength is an amazing feat.'

Dante was beaming with pride already after this first check, but his pride only became more and more exaggerated with time.

Damien was an extremely fast learner, and his comprehension ability was far greater than anything Dante had ever seen.

The nuances behind the Celestial Class were many, and it was difficult for the normal spatial expert to understand them. This was mainly because the average spatial expert could never touch upon the intrinsic level of dimensional manipulation necessary to reach the peak of the class.

Damien, naturally, wasn't like them. Since he was already so established in the realm of dimensions, Dante had an extremely easy time teaching him to go further with his class.

Damien smiled and clenched his fist as he listened to Dante speak.

'The Celestial Class...who knew it could be so massive?'

"...binding worlds and utilizing World Force are just the most basic abilities of a Celestial. At this level, they can be considered minorly accomplished. Now, depending on whether a Celestial chose to be a Ruler or a Conquerer, their path forward will differ, but since you have chosen the Conquerer's Path, I will ignore the Ruler Path for now."

Dante stopped and faced Damien, bringing his palm up and showcasing a small world that was floating there.

"A Celestial is a dominator. The worlds we conquer are wholly ours, and everything from their future development to their current environments can be decided by us."

Dante snapped his finger, and the terrain of the world on his palm changed. Rocky mountains collapsed into rivers, and the seas rose into towering cliffs.

With another snap of the finger, Damien and Dante were transported into the world. All the miniature changes Damien watched like a god just a moment ago were being shown to him from the perspective of a mortal.

"Celestials are not merely Overseers, but also entities closer to the universe than any other. At the peak of our class, the universe we've bound on the outside..."

Dante's avatar split into tens, hundreds, and even thousands of copies of itself.

Each one emitted a fearsome aura as if each was as heavy as a celestial body.

"...becomes a universe within our bodies."

Dante smiled, and his clones transformed into small worlds similar to the one he'd shown previously.

Every single one was a world Dante had bound before, and every world was capable of producing an Avatar of him.

'This...'

Damien's mouth was agape in astonishment. Cloning techniques naturally existed, but never to this degree.

And the fact that each clone held the strength of a planet...

Damien could truly become a one-man army if he could master this ability.

His eyes sparkled with curiosity and desire.

Dante chuckled when he saw him. "Don't get too excited yet. You think this is the end...?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot show you any more than this with the power of my projection, but I trust that you will one day discover the impossible realm that all Celestials dream to reach."

Suddenly, Dante's expression turned solemn.

"Because we Celestials are so in tune with the universe, we are able to sense things that others can't. For instance, I'm sure you've noticed the existence of the 'flow.'"

Damien's eyes widened once more.

"I'll take that as a yes," Dante said with a smile. "The flow is an ethereal concept, and it is one of the rawest materializations of the universal will, and perhaps even a greater force. The Flow is immensely tempting for Celestials, as comprehending it would allow them to conquer and even bind the universe itself."

"However, do not be fooled by illusions of grandeur. The risk of following this path is greater than the reward. Barely any Celestials have ever reached the end of that road, and the ones who have lost all emotion and free thought, becoming slaves to the universe."

Damien's eyes hardened. This...wasn't a truth he expected to hear.

He'd been feeling the call of the flow for many years now, and while he ignored it because he didn't have enough information to follow it, he'd always been of the mind that he'd get to the root of it one day.

"Are you asking me to give up on that path?" He asked melancholically.

However, Dante shook his head in refusal. "How could I tell my own son to give up on his dreams of the peak? Merely, I wish to warn you. Follow the flow, comprehend it, and escape its clutches so you can rule it. Never, and I repeat, never allow the flow to envelop you and drag you forward. This path only leads to death, regardless of the temptation you feel when you encounter it."

Damien nodded seriously, internalizing everything Dante said.

Before he knew it, he was conversing casually with the man as if his hatred didn't exist in the first place.

And honestly, it didn't,

What Damien was feeling were merely vestiges of his past emotions, ghosts of trauma that tried to haunt him even after he slayed them.

He didn't need to overcome this trauma again, he merely needed a reason to quell its screams.

Dante's attitude during their interaction built this reason in Damien's heart.

He could tell.

This man was an asshole, an absolute tool who left his family, regardless of the reason...

But at the same time, he was a father, Damien's father. It was evident that he was being conscious of Damien's feelings as he spoke, and from the way he entertained all of Damien's questions, it was clear that he wanted to make up for his past mistakes.

Perhaps the time of reconciliation wasn't now, but Damien didn't think it'd be impossible in the future.

The only problem was...

'This bastard acts exactly like me.'

Dante was completely unserious, domineering, and uncaring of anyone but himself. He was a braggart that tried to sneak hints of his achievements into every conversation they had.

This trait was annoying, sure, but it also gave Damien a clearer picture of who his father was.

Dante Void was far more active in the lower universe than he'd expected, and it was clear that many vestiges of his past actions were left in Grand Heavens Boundary.

While it was too much to say they were legacies left for Damien specifically, it was true that only he knew of many of their existences.

Unfortunately, time decided to act as Damien's enemy once more.

5 minutes felt like an eternity to Damien, but at the end of the day, they were only five minutes,

They would eventually reach their end.

Dante's body began to fade mid-conversation. His lecture on Celestials had already ended, and the father-son pair were merely having idle conversation at this time.

Was it sad that this was Damien's favorite part of their encounter so far?

The stories of the Sea Kingdom of Alatria, the Sand Wyrms of Uhar, and the many other civilizations Dante had visited in his time, Damien truly was enjoying listening to them.

"It seems like it's time for me to go."

Those were the words he wanted to hear the least.

His head hung, downcast.

Dante smiled sorrowfully. He was glad that his son still cared for him enough to react like this at his departure, but the act of departing tore his soul apart.

"I wish I could stay. I wish I could stay by you and your mother for all eternity, enjoying the beauties of life...ah, why must our family have such convoluted destiny...?" Dante's voice became softer with every word.

"Damien!" Dante suddenly shouted, causing Damien's head to snap towards him.

"A man's will is his greatest quality! Never bow your head, never submit, and always fight until the very last breath! As long as you persevere with everything you have, the road ahead will reveal itself!"

Dante's eyes were serious and filled with pain. His fading body didn't allow him to say the goodbye he wanted to say, so he instead said everything he could in the time he had.

With barely any time remaining, Dante stood stalwart.

A final roar left his mouth.

"Make our Void Palace proud!"

Dante's projection dispersed into the air with those words.

The powerful reverberation of his voice continued to spread through the small realm, echoing endlessly.

Damien's eyes hardened, and his gaze turned cold.

"Our Void Palace, huh..."

That damn bastard was leaving a trail of breadcrumbs until the very end.

But...

'I'll happily follow it if it means I can beat your ass at the end.'

A new goal, a God who needed a beating, renewed determination, and...

Damien gently touched his chest.

Before his father vanished, he'd flicked a speck of something magical into his body.

Damien could feel a new sense of power coursing through his body, mirroring his renewed purpose.

It was time for him to dominate and conquer, just as Dante said.

Damien Void...this would become a name that provoked only fear and reverence from now on.

Chapter 807 Ants [1]

'...now what?'

Damien stood alone in the small realm, and while he'd just made a major promise to himself...

...he didn't quite have a method to leave this realm and enter the true Celestial Realm.

'What a grand start.' Damien thought wryly as he plopped down in one of the outdoor rotundas surrounding the small hut.

Perhaps his mind was still too confused from the sudden encounter that'd just ended.

Despite how long it felt, his father's avatar had only been present for around 20 minutes, and Damien spent half of those minutes building his courage to actually face the man.

'Hahaha...even if it's something I overcame, it's a little pathetic.'

He shook his head and stopped berating himself. It was yet another pointless action.

Now that his father was gone again, Damien found himself bearing a different weight than before.

'That projection had answers, but couldn't give them to me. The only way to truly find out what I want to know is to explore on my own and break Dante out of his imprisonment.'

It was an insane goal, especially considering that Dante's enemies were all Gods, but Damien didn't shirk away from it.

Instead, he embraced his newfound destiny.

A path forward was always important to have. A practitioner could wander aimlessly for countless years if they veered off their path, perhaps never finding their way back.

Of course, everyone's path was of their own creation, but many refused to follow the path that their destiny and efforts culminated, and many more strayed from their paths for more dire reasons.

Damien lost his path when he was forced into the Divine Realm, but as he connected further with the war and became more active in the universe, he found the path before him becoming clearer and clearer.

Dante gave Damien the final piece he needed to complete that puzzle.

A rough framework formed in Damien's mind.

'But currently, the progress examination is still ongoing. I have three months...'

Damien's eyes sharpened.

He made the decision to leave Hidden Death Valley before even returning, but he didn't know how to use the 3 months of buffer he had before he could exit the Celestial Realm.

'It's not ideal to gain more power at the moment, especially since I still have to stabilize my Samsara Intent and internalize the new power Dante granted me. I also need to implement the new Celestial methods he taught me. Even if there are opportunities in the Celestial Realm, they aren't fated for me.'

Besides, there could be no opportunity greater than a gift from a God himself.

'Then...should I make a final splash before making my way out...?'

Damien looked into the night sky with a small grin on his face.

In the next second, he vanished.

When he reappeared he was in Theavil. The clean atmosphere around him cleansed his soul, and the feeling of control in his hands refreshed his mind.

But his goal today wasn't refreshment. He teleported once more and appeared inside an isolated log cabin in the woods somewhere in the world.

Here, only a single resident stayed.

"Enjoying your new life?" He asked with a smile.

"A very apt line for a kidnapper to say to his victim, don't you think?" The woman living in the cabin replied sarcastically.

"Come on, now. If you really felt that way, you would've tried rebelling already. It's actually a little funny to me how quickly you adapted to your new circumstances."

The woman turned her head towards Damien, revealing her beautiful features. She was none other than Bianca, the Bloodlock slave he'd fought during his 10th match in the King Bracket.

'Her attitude makes me regret my decision.' Damien thought wryly.

That day in the battle arena, Damien didn't have a single thought of killing her. His showy usage of Dimensional Severance and the disappearance of her life signature were merely facades he set to fool the public.

At that time, he'd viewed the Bloodlock Clan as a major enemy, and he couldn't let the enemy realize he'd caught himself an informant, could he?

"So? What did you come here for this time?" Bianca asked, changing the subject.

"Ah, that. Well, I was just wondering how credible you are since the situation you talked about hasn't happened yet."

"And that's my fault?" Bianca rolled her eyes. "I only predicted the course of action that Reavus would take. Do you think I'm a prophet or something?"

Damien chuckled at her blatant disregard for his words. "Hahaha, I'm just messing with you. Truth be told, the forces he sent after me probably died before they could even reach me. The situation on Calypto was a little...special, after all."

Bianca sighed. "You look like a devil laughing at that."

"I'd say I'm pretty normal compared to your former young master, though?"

"Touché."

Many months ago, Damien visited Bianca to inquire about the Bloodlock Clan's situation. At that time, the former enforcer warned him that Reavus would likely send an assassination squad after him, since he would finally be away from the academy's protection.

Unfortunately, Damien never had the chance to meet this assassination squad.

'The most probable situation is that they couldn't reach me after seeing how heavily Heaven's Army decided to protect me.'

During the first few months of the mission, their lack of contact was likely because the assassination squad landed on a different continent than them. After that, however...

'Did Park Jinho and them secretly deal with them...? Or maybe the squad was just killed in action before reaching me...?'

It wasn't impossible. The Nox on Calypto were all high-level, with even a few late-stage 4th class beings among them. For an assassination squad built to take out an early-level 4th class, this level of threat was evidently too much.

Damien's thoughts swam as Bianca reiterated what she'd told him months prior when he first visited her.

Convincing her to be an informant didn't take long considering her situation. Her only worry was a certain blood seal that prevented her from spreading information, but due to the Sanctuary's existence being wholly separate from the Real Plane, the seal couldn't affect her inside.

This was the same principle Damien used to recruit Lucius.

Nevertheless, according to Bianca, Reavus Bloodlock was never the type of person to take a grudge lying down. Since Damien was still alive after offending him, the arrogant young master would take any necessary measures to take him down.

"The problem is, you destroyed so many forces at the Emperor Bone Sea that his actions were being watched by his father. He wasn't going to get any more second chances if he messed up again. If you really didn't encounter the assassination squad, you'll either be targeted during the progress examination, or Reavus is already on his last legs."

Damien rubbed his chin in thought. "Still, the forces he has access to shouldn't be insanely powerful, right? He's not even the Crown Prince."

"Rather than power, it's more a matter of numbers. My position as an enforcer wasn't high or low, so I only know a little bit. All I know for certain is that he only has a single extreme peak 4th class servant who stands by his side at all times."

Damien smiled at her revelation. It was absolutely impossible for Reavus to bring an extreme peak 4th class servant into the Celestial Realm with him. And without that extreme peak master...

'This is the perfect stage for me.'

Damien grinned savagely.

Reavus lost his use after the events of Calypto. Damien didn't need a whetstone to grow anymore.

Therefore, it was finally time to clean up the trash.

...after he figured out how to leave the small realm.

Chapter 808 Ants [2]

"Fuwah!"

A splash of water was accompanied by a gasp for air as a figure surfaced in an ocean in the middle of nowhere.

"Finally!" Damien exclaimed.

He didn't care about his current predicament at all. After all, he finally made his way out of that damn small realm!

'That fucking old man...he definitely knew what he was doing.'

Damien clicked his tongue and flew out of the ocean as he thought about the extremely annoying escape route he had to take.

As it turned out, the small realm was a portion of the Celestial Realm that had been severed and dimensionally separated by a spatial expert of "unknown origins."

When Damien used the All-Seeing Eyes to observe the realm's foundation, he found an extremely complicated set of steps engraved in the formation that'd allow the small realm to reconnect with the rest of the Celestial Realm.

However, never did Damien think it'd be such an intensive process!

Hell, even ignoring the sheer mental torture it was to untangle the small realm's foundation, when he finally succeeded, the realm collapsed in on itself!

The small jungle island sunk to the bottom of the ocean, the cabin island disappeared entirely, and the ocean between the two islands recombined with the actual ocean existing in the Celestial Realm.

Naturally, Damien was dragged into the whirlpool and sinkhole hell that formed afterward while the two bodies of water merged.

It was only now, many hours later, that he'd made his way out of that predicament.

The waters around him were dyed red with blood, and countless corpses were intermittently surfacing amongst the waves, proof of Damien's fierce battle to return to the surface.

Damien looked down at these corpses lamentably. 'I want to devour them, but I have to contain myself. Even putting aside the fact that I don't want to get stronger quite yet, I can't carelessly devour whatever I want anymore,'

Devour became a far more intrinsic skill after his Baptism. Now, it could devour memories and even World Cores if necessary.

A power like this couldn't be used on mere sea creatures without complete intelligence. Their memories would only clog Damien's mind and take up space needlessly.

'Haa...such is fate, such is fate.' Damien shook his head and sighed as he moved away from the bloodied ocean area.

'I guess I should first find land, and from there, I can go about finding Reavus.'

Damien received a very handy tool from Bianca before he left Theavel. It was a talisman that could contact Reavus Bloodlock from any distance, no holds barred.

This type of talisman was incredibly rare, and usually would only be seen among the most trusted confidantes of an expert. The only reason Bianca had one was because of her cannon fodder status.

'This talisman has a forced summoning effect, so Reavus could summon Bianca from anywhere to use her as a shield...how cruel.'

Nevertheless, this cruelty currently acted in his favor. Even if he didn't get force summoned, Damien could track the fluctuation from the talisman and follow it through space to find Reavus.

'Being a spatial expert really is handy.' He thought with a smile.

Damien spread his awareness and teleported multiple tens of thousands of kilometers at a time, finally reaching land after three tries.

The first thing he did was pull out the map that the academy provided.

'This area is...just my luck.'

Of course he landed in an unexplored territory. If things were easy for him, would he even be Damien Void?

'Well, it's more accurate to say that the universe is trying to make things hard for me. In reality...'

How could this faze him?

Damien teleported like a madman, covering hundreds of thousands and even millions of kilometers without breaking a sweat.

Because he wasn't interested in it, the territory below him passed his perception without any oddities, but Damien knew better than anyone just how many legacies were hidden within this area.

'My awareness caught at least a few Legacy Tombs, and when it comes to natural treasures, they're present in droves. This Celestial Realm truly is a paradise!'

While he admired the realm, Damien kept a portion of his attention on the talisman in his hand.

Just ringing Reavus with this talisman would make his approach too obvious, so Damien didn't choose this method. Instead, he intermittently sent small pulses of mana through the talisman and followed the general direction the signal flew in.

The method reminded him of his endless quests as a mortal to find "the End" of a certain video game.

'Silverfish are lucky I've never met them in real life.'

Damien eventually made his way across millions of miles, an amount of space that he didn't expect to be present in this secret realm.

Rather than a realm, this was closer to a small universe in itself.

'Fuck...do I need to come back here to explore these mysteries...?'

Either way, Damien would have to come back to Death Emperor Star.

After all, a large number of his father's legacies were left on this planet.

'He said he used this place as a cemetery, but I don't know how that makes any sense when he's alive and well and none of his enemies were buried here...'

Damien shook off his father's nonsense and sighed. He was happy to have so much more to do, but at the same time, he could clearly feel the weight of his responsibilities due to how heavy they'd become.

'Yeah, I need to cool off.'

Damien's eyes snapped in a certain direction. There, only a few thousand kilometers away, was the endpoint of the talisman's signal.

'Have they noticed me already?'

Damien smiled in anticipation.

'I should give them a proper show before sending them off.'

His body disappeared into the distance. As for his plans...

Even the Creator himself couldn't predict the wicked thoughts in the purple-eyed genius' mind.

"Hurry up! We still have ten kilometers left before we reach the Legacy Tomb!"

An arrogant voice resounded through the valley that the group was traveling through.

There were over 20 of them in total, with one man situated in a palanquin in their center.

This man was naturally Reavus Bloodlock, the Third Prince of the Bloodlock Clan who was extremely aggravated at all times in recent days.

How could he not be?

Everything he tried ended in failure!

The first time, he sent a number of 4th class lackeys to take care of a pest, but they never returned. As for the pest, he survived like a cockroach and rose to prominence.

But while Reavus was scraping his mind for ideas of how to deal with him, that pest went and made himself an enemy of the entire school, and eventually got himself banished to war for an unknown period of time.

Another group of assassins was sent to take advantage of this opportunity. Unlike the previous group, there was no room for error this time. The assassins were all extremely skilled forces that absolutely could not be used as cannon fodder.

Reavus didn't have a choice but to mobilize them.

All of his cannon fodder had already been used up.

Yet, even with all their accolades, even the second assassination attempt failed!

And the reason was...the assassination squad was never able to approach their target?!

Reavus didn't even care to hear the rest of their report. He didn't care about the "why," only that the mission had failed.

Thus, these 20-something assassins were forced into the Celestial Realm like pawns.

'This is my last chance. If I can't kill him here, Father will surely have my head!'

Reavus' head spun wildly as he tried to think of a way to locate Damien.

Bzzt!

"DAMMIT! WOULD YOU SHUT UP ALREADY?!"

It happened again.

Reavus kept feeling a strange buzzing from his spatial ring, but no matter how he checked, he could never find its source.

It was aggravating him, and he was already in a bad mood because of Damien.

So when all sound vanished from the surroundings and the sky suddenly became cloudy...

Reavus was too enveloped in his own useless rage to even notice.

Chapter 809 Ants [3]

The sky turned grey.

Swirling clouds formed from thin air and gathered into a thick canopy spanning countless tens of kilometers.

It was instant.

A group of twenty-something people came to a halt, warily watching their surroundings.

"Keep your guard up!" A man shouted. "This is either a natural phenomenon of the secret realm or an attack. Move based on your best judgement!"

Many silent affirmations were given as the group surveyed the surroundings.

However, no matter how they spread their awareness, they weren't able to find a trace of a perpetrator.

Crackle!

Black and silver lightning crackled through the clouds.

Rain began to pour.

"Dodge!"

KA-BOOOOOM!

A hurried exclamation was followed by a shattering sound as lightning struck the ground. The terrifying force of nature drilled into the ground and formed a massive crater almost as large as the storm itself.

Bodies flew through the air as the group stabilized themselves and moved away from the explosion.

"Get in formation! We need to leave the vicinity of these clouds!"

The same man shouted once more, making his status evident. The group followed his order and rapidly fled the area, palanquin in tow.

However, the storm didn't leave them alone.

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

Bolts of harrowing lightning struck behind them constantly as the storm followed their movements. The shockwaves from the resulting explosions pushed against their backs, both helping them in their escape and slowly injuring them further.

"Dammit! If we can't avoid it, let's fight!"

The leader halted his flight and stared at the storm. Even though the lightning bolts struck with the strength of a late-stage 4th class being, it wouldn't be too difficult to avoid them if they worked as a group.

"Get into formation! Split into two teams and form two lines of defense! First group, follow my command to fend off the lightning! Second group, focus on dispersing the storm!"

The group leader gave out a barrage of orders that were quickly followed. The group formed a barrier with the palanquin at their center, intent on protecting it at all costs.

"Franklin! What is happening out there?!" Reavus shouted from within the palanquin, not bothered to even observe the situation for himself.

"Everything is fine, young master. We are merely being targeted by a natural phenomenon. It will be taken care of soon."

Franklin, the leader, calmly replied while facing down the storm.

'Something doesn't feel right...' he thought with a frown.

For a natural phenomenon, the storm's movements were too intentional. Even now, the lightning halted while he conversed with the young master. No natural phenomenon would do such a thing.

'Are we being targeted?'

Franklin's eyes narrowed. If they were being targeted, the enemy was someone far exceeding them in power. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to stay so perfectly concealed from the group's perception.

'We will deal with this storm first, and find the perpetrator afterwards.' Franklin decided. At the moment, the immediate threat was more pressing.

As long as he remained on guard for the enemy...

'This...when...?'

Franklin's eyes snapped open.

Or rather, he rapidly blinked his eyes to make sure they were open.

Total darkness.

Since when had it enveloped them?

The crackling thunder of the storm could still be heard from above, but all sight was blocked from an unknown point in time.

'Not good!'

Franklin immediately mobilized his mana and lunged for the palanquin. If the enemy was so skilled, then the young master would be...!

"Keuk...!"

Franklin coughed out a mouthful of blood and keeled over.

'...my mana...?'

He couldn't feel its existence.

No...

"HAK!"

Franklin clutched his throat, his eyes bulging out of his head from the suffocating pain in his body.

It was being torn apart from the inside. The mana within him was raging and rebelling, rapidly destroying his Mana System and targeting his organs.

'Why...?!'

Franklin gagged and tried to drag his body forward, not even realizing that at some point, he'd been transferred from the sky to the ground.

He moved his bloodied body and finally caught sight of the palanquin...

...and the demonic purple eyes of the being standing atop it.

'A...devil...'

Franklin took his last breath.

The mana in his heart rebelled and burst it, killing him instantly.

And the twenty-something companions he once had...

...all suffered the same fate as him.

'Good. My attainments in Void comprehension are much more substantial than they were before. It seems that understanding the universe to a greater extent through my Celestial Class supports my comprehension. Is this the result of having a duel class?'

Damien casually took his time to arrange his thoughts from atop Reavus Bloodlock's palanquin.

[Storm] was a trait he'd had for a very long time, but with his lightning losing its value over time, Damien didn't quite have a use for it anymore. This time, he'd merely used it to lure the enemy in a certain direction.

The main reason for the assassination squad's rapid deaths was Damien's Void comprehension.

The two concepts he'd comprehended, the "Breath of All Things" and the "Breath of Nothingness," were base abilities of the Void, but actually represented grand concepts that needed to be deeply explored before they could be considered wholly comprehended.

From the Breath of Nothingness, Damien obtained the ability to destroy, manipulate, and erase. The abilities of the Breath of Nothingness tended to lean towards the spiritual or conceptual aspects, rather than the material ones. Damien's previous ability to alter Baek Woojin's memories could also be attributed to this ability, though he didn't know it at the time.

On the contrary, the ability Damien gained from the Breath of All Things was centered around "control." Control over all material things was a grand concept in theory, but Damien couldn't harness the absolute dominance of this ability with his current comprehension.

However, controlling the mana of these unsuspecting assassins was a minor task.

They were weaker than him, after all.

"MMPH! MMGH!"

"Hm?"

Damien snapped out of his thoughts and looked below him where the strange sounds were coming from.

"Aha, my bad. I almost forgot about you."

Damien smiled at the passenger of the palanquin, a miserable Reavus Bloodlock who was currently bound and gagged by chains made of space itself.

"Did you enjoy the show? Ah, sorry, sorry, let me remove that gag so you can speak."

"Puha! Damien Void, you trash! How dare you do this to me?!" Reavus immediately screeched upon regaining his ability to talk.

"Are those words you should be saying to someone who holds your life in their hands?" Damien responded sarcastically.

"Ha! You? Hold my life in your hands? Such a thing is impossible!"

Haa!

Reavus let out a fierce battle cry and galvanized his mana, flaring his aura to its limit as he tried to formulate blood mana in the air.

Damien watched him blandly.

The Void Curtain that surrounded them was like an enhanced domain. All mana was under Damien's control, and even those stronger than him would feel pressured by this nigh-absolute ability.

Reavus Bloodlock?

Even the fact that Damien considered him an opponent in the past was a great honor.

Now, the two simply couldn't be compared.

At this time, Reavus seemed to finally realize the situation he was in.

His face paled, but at the same time, a slightly crazed smile spread from his lips.

"Damien Void, Damien Void...HAHAHAHAHA! If you kill me, you're dead! My father won't let you off! Hahahaha! Even if I die today, I'll be seeing you in hell!"

Damien's eyes turned mocking.

The fish had finally taken the bait.

Chapter 810 Ants [4]

"Your father? Even if your father is a late-stage 4th class, do you think he can match me?" Damien taunted openly.

And Reavus reacted just as a dumb dog would.

"Hah? Late-stage 4th class? Don't joke with me! My father is an extreme peak master, and my grandfather is the Immortal Blood Asura himself! Damien Void, if you let me go now, I will forgive your sins and you won't be targeted by the Bloodlock Clan anymore! I can swear a Mana Oath by it!"

Reavus' words were both mocking and sincere at the same time. Threatening Damien with his family's power before offering a Mana Oath for trust was exactly the carrot-and-stick method that leaders tended to use on their lackeys.

However, Damien was no lackey.

He seemed to have forgotten something after getting caught up in the moment.

'I can just devour him and find out everything I need from his memories.'

Damien grinned.

"Reavus, my friend. It seems you don't have any use after all. However, your father and grandfather, now those are stepping stones to look forward to!"

Reavus' eyes widened. "You wouldn't dare...!"

"Oh, I absolutely would."

Damien's grin turned savage.

In truth, Reavus' efforts to sabotage him were all in vain and never actually succeeded in inhibiting him.

Reavus himself was trash, only able to bully the weak.

Damien truly could leave Reavus alive and allow him to return to the Bloodlock Clan. This way, he'd be subjected to an endless stream of assassins and other experts before the actual high-ranking figures of the clan moved.

This, of course, would provide Damien with apt material for growth and combat practice, but it was unneeded at the moment.

The Nox were far better punching bags.

On the other hand, if Damien killed Reavus here...

'Won't the big boss come from the start?'

If so, he had to make a scene.

'I heard that these big clans have various methods to find out who killed their disciples. The Demigod-level influences can create soul lamps since a Demigod has control over that esoteric concept, but I heard they have a few more surefire methods...'

Among them, runes and restrictions that could transmit the last scenes before one's death to another party.

'If Reavus has one of those, then don't I have to leave a convincing enough show for his father to come to me personally?'

Damien cracked his knuckles with anticipation.

It had been a long time since he was able to torture someone.

Reavus Bloodlock...

The young "genius" could only lament his fate making an enemy of someone like Damien.

The cycle of night and day in the Celestial Realm was completely disproportionate to the Real Plane. The nights were far, far longer, almost endless.

A certain soul felt this eternity far more than his peers.

His screams resounded through a lonely mountain valley. They were visceral screams, almost as gruesome as the squelching sound of his body being slowly picked apart.

'I didn't know vultures existed in this realm.' Damien thought curiously as he watched the proceedings.

[Heal]

A white light streamed from his finger and entered Reavus' body, healing a portion of his injuries.

'This should be the last bit. I don't know how much the Bloodlock Clan will be able to see once the feed gets transmitted back. I should keep it suffice.'

As night turned to day, Damien realized he'd already tortured Reavus Bloodlock for over 40 hours. The man's spirit was long broken, and his consciousness was barely being maintained by Damien's healing.

'It's quite the poor sight. I almost feel bad for him.'

Damien shrugged and walked over to Reavus' body, shooing away the vulture beasts as he did so.

"You look terrible."

"Ugghk...iusuug..."

Damien snorted, trying to hold back his laughter.

Well, it was his fault for expecting cohesive words from a blob of meat that didn't even have a proper mouth anymore.

"Hmm, I wanted to put the finishing touches on this masterpiece of mine, but I think this is enough."

"Well, then...this is our goodbye, young master."

Damien smiled warmly and slashed his hand out, severing Reavus' last string of life force and sending him into the cycle of reincarnation.

"Hey, hey! To whoever is watching this, my name is Damien, and...well, what else can I say? I'm a bit camera-shy. Umm...it looks like we'll be seeing each other often after this, so I just wanted to say I look forward to our first meeting! Ta-ta now!"

Damien flashed a toothy grin at the transmission signal that formlessly exited Reavus' body.

And in the next instant, he watched that formless transmission signal fizzle as it tried to exit the Celestial Realm's barrier.

Damien rubbed his nose awkwardly. "Looks like it'll have trouble reaching the Bloodlock Clan until the Celestial Realm reopens. What a shame, after all that effort I put into my acting..."

He let out an exaggerated sigh of melancholy, but inwardly, he was widely grinning.

'Good! This means I have 3 months to get the fuck out of here before the Bloodlock Clan catches up! Hahahaha!'

His overall plan was a little on the crazy side.

He couldn't face an extreme peak 4th class with his current strength, yet he went and provoked one anyway.

He was hoping he'd get to have a few experiences at war before the Bloodlock Clan's people found him. At that point, he'd be ready to take whatever came to him.

A three-month respite was actually a heavenly-blessed opportunity for Damien.

'I can accomplish the final task I wanted to take care of before leaving the academy and then leave. By the time the Bloodlock Clan arrives here, I'll be long gone. Let's see how they find me after that.'

The smile on Damien's face had gone through a myriad of changes since the beginning of this interaction, and now that it was ending, that same smile looked particularly mischievous.

He soon vanished into the void, leaving behind a mountain valley filled with corpses.

However, strangely enough...

The most important of them was missing entirely.

3 months passed rapidly, especially for those in the Celestial Realm. Despite participating in countless perilous adventures in this time frame, those who'd experienced the realm's mystical properties and endless rewards were naturally enamored by it.

Unfortunately, staying past one's welcome was impossible. The Celestial Realm's opening was random, and it had only opened 3 times in the past 100,000 years. Getting trapped inside was a death sentence no matter how one looked at it!

Disciples poured out of the secret realm entrance in droves. Their disciple badges flashed with various colors that showcased their progress and the results of their examination.

But unlike a usual progress examination, nobody was focused on their results when they exited.

After all, an utterly inconceivable rumor had been spreading recently.

It was a rumor about a mysterious genius who made his advent in the Celestial Realm.

It was said that he could leap millions of kilometers in a single bound, summon the winds and rain with a thought, and even wholly erase his enemies from existence.

It was a terrifying rumor, but a rumor that had no validity behind it...

...at least, at the beginning,

A second round of rumors began circulating afterwards.

That same genius, the terrifying entity that most had chalked up to fiction, was a true monster. After all, that person's existence was confirmed.

Every Emperor and Paragon of Hidden Death Valley had been defeated.

It didn't matter their level or elemental comprehension, as long as they were below the extreme peak of 4th class, they were suppressed without exception.

The mysterious genius who achieved this feat vanished after completing his round of challenges.

There was no name for him on Heaven's List. His identity became an utmost mystery of Hidden Death Valley.

However, these geniuses refused to forget his feats.

The number one spot on Heaven's List was filled by a new name, a name fit for someone who could dominate the rankings of Heaven in a single string of challenges.

[1. Heavenly King]

Atticus looked at the ranking wryly.

He cracked his shoulder and winced in pain. It was an old injury at this point, but it still hurt like hell.

'Dammit...you didn't have to be so heavy-handed, did you?'

He knew from the start that that man would become something great.

But to think it happened so soon...

'Heavenly King is truly an apt title for a genius like him.'

Atticus smiled lightly.

The Heavenly King or the Saint King...

Just which one would win in the end?

'I have to get stronger.'

Atticus wanted to be there for that moment, and he was unresigned to being a mere spectator.

'When we meet again, I won't let you thrash me like that. Never again.'

Atticus eyes hardened.

That guy disappeared after causing such a scene, likely headed somewhere he could become an even greater monster.

In that case, Atticus would become a monster too.

He was absolutely determined to do so.

He was one of many affected by the sudden appearance of such a heaven-defying genius, though his case was far more severe since he knew the man personally.

From the weakest disciples to those Emperors and Paragons who'd faced humiliation under the purple-eyed demon's hand, all geniuses of Hidden Death Valley were spurred into action.

The Director watched this change take place from above.

He smiled to himself.

'I've helped you as much as I can. Your identity is now only known in this academy as the Heavenly King. "Damien Void" never returned from Calypto, so go. Run wild as you please and become the Ruler of Heaven that you were meant to be...'

'...Successor of Void Palace.'