

Void 951

Chapter 951 Retreat [1]

The Marionette Lord's attack was a 20-stage process. The first 10 illusions were each targeting a different weakness in one's identity, while the remaining 10 were more of a combined assault that became more intrinsic with every step, digging deeper into one's psyche to disrupt them.

However, while Damien steadily made his way through one illusion after another, there was something he didn't know.

It was incredibly rare to see the last 10 illusions in the sequence. When the illusions were performed with the Marionette Lord's full strength, even weaker Demigods would fall by the 10th stage.

This time, it was proper to say that the Marionette Lord's presence was largely influenced by Fate.

It wasn't easy to steal a body before a seed had sprouted within. On a power like puppeteering, the universal restrictions were many.

Perhaps they didn't need to be followed as strictly in the Abyss, but when they wanted to attack someone within Grand Heavens Boundary, not only did a seed need to be sprouted, the target needed to submit.

As such, to take Lord Garvy's body urgently, the Marionette Lord had to sacrifice a considerable amount, leaving them with a relatively weak sliver of consciousness remaining by the time they entered Damien's spiritual world.

Damien's mental fortitude was a known strength of his. The Marionette Lord's improved challenges might've been an even better challenge for him, but Fate understood better than anyone.

The universal flow had been pointing toward a certain event for not just months, but years on years.

Currently, Damien's need for a challenge wasn't as strong as his need to attend the Grand Assembly, which required Beast Emperor Star's matters to be concluded.

As he destroyed the final of 20 illusions, he found himself back in his spiritual world, the Marionette Lord splayed out before him.

"You're an entertaining human! More than any of the others I've seen!" They immediately jumped up and said upon his return.

"And you're the second most annoying Nox Demigod I've met. I guess we aren't on the same level," Damien quipped back.

"Why did you come here, anyway? Was Arthur's body that important to you?"

"Hm?" The Marionette Lord's brow raises curiously.

"How could it not be?"

They flashed forward, their face only centimeters from Damien's. He could feel their poisonous breath against his cheek as they stared into his eyes.

"The Bloodlock Clan is one of your universe's most influential Holy Lands. If I can take control of the Immortal Blood Asura who leads it, wouldn't you be in trouble?"

Damien shivered, feeling the odd incongruity from the Marionette Lord's expression.

"Isn't it only right I wish for compensation? And if that old Saint bastard wants you, shouldn't your value be about equal?"

The Marionette Lord's expression was playful, but their aura was anything but. It was eerie, cold, and looked down upon all beings as playthings to be used and replaced.

"But there was something else too...I don't know! I just suddenly felt like seeing you for myself, so I came!"

The darkness behind their words disappeared like it never existed.

And there it was.

'They were really brought here by Fate. Just what is the connection between Fate and universal flow?'

As Damien saw it, the connection between Arthur Bloodlock and the Marionette Lord was formed by the universal flow, however, the connection between the Marionette Lord and himself was formed by Fate.

Damien urgently wanted to understand the connection between these two esoteric and formless forces that supported the universe so he could unearth the truths of universal flow, but he had no connections to Fate.

The concept simply eluded him, even when Astoria allowed him to search her memory for clues.

Nevertheless, the matters of Fate could always be handled later.

Damien currently needed to find a way to get this crazy Demigod out of his head before he was forced to personally experience why they were termed the most insane Nox Demigod of them all.

He threw a glance at them, watching them casually eat from a bunch of grapes they'd materialized through spiritual intent.

'They clearly won't leave on their own. I might as well see if they'll answer questions or not.'

"Didn't you say you'd give me a reward if I passed your trial? Where is that?" He asked, introducing conversation.

The Marionette Lord looked up. For a second, Damien got chills from their gaze.

Yet, just like before, that feeling disappeared instantaneously. I think you should take a look at

'Scary.'

"Reward? Did I say something like that? Hmm...how about you become my subordinate? I'll offer you plenty of rewards then," the Marionette Lord said.

"Funny. I'll pass on any 'reward' that involves switching sides or betraying my homeland. How does that sound?"

"Boring."

"If it's boring then leave."

"No thanks! It's even more boring outside!"

"Then my reward?"

"Why should I give you one? Who even said I'd reward you?"

"Wow, I never expected a great Nox Demigod to go back on their promise. It's almost embarrassing to view you guys as enemies."

"That kind of thing won't faze me, boy. I don't care about all that Nox-Human nonsense."

Damien furrowed his brows and frowned. He originally breached the subject of a reward so he could ease into some more leading questions, but he was even getting tripped up at this step.

'Is it even worth it...?' He wondered. He could definitely get information elsewhere if he tried hard enough. Time and effort would allow the Nox memory fragments in his mind to connect and form a more cohesive picture as well.

He could imagine the frustration he'd encounter if he tried to question this irregular being, and he didn't want to deal with it at all.

"Fine, instead of a reward, give me one favor," he finally said.

"Favor?" The Marionette Lord echoed.

"Right, a favor. At any time, allow me to request one favor from you," Damien repeated seriously.

The Marionette Lord gazed at him, never breaking their eyes from his own.

Damien felt like his soul was being scoured, like countless incorporeal hands were feeling over his body.

But he didn't bend. A favor from a Demigod, especially a Nox one, was worth far more than any material reward ever could be.

The Marionette Lord's lips parted into an amused sneer.

"Do you think you're worthy of my favor?" They said mockingly.

Damien grinned as well. "Do you think I'm not?"

The Marionette Lord's eyes widened slightly. Suddenly, they began to laugh.

"Pfft...hahaha! Hahahahaha!"

"I like you! I really, really like you! Fine, I will accept one favor from you as long as it doesn't hurt me too much," they stated confidently, their eyes sparkling.

Damien smiled back, but he truly didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Having the interest of a character like the Marionette Lord wasn't necessarily a good thing.

However, it was good that he'd received this word.

"The word of a Demigod cannot be broken," he said.

"Whoever taught you that must've been a con artist, but you don't have to worry. You being alive is more entertaining for me, and I'm sure your favor will be even more fun! I'm looking forward to it."

The response wasn't strange on paper, but people who could go to any lengths for their own entertainment were some of the most terrifying in existence.

Nevertheless, with that out of the way...

"When are you leaving? I have things to do."

...Damien desperately wanted this crazy person OUT of his spiritual world!

Chapter 952 Retreat [2]

Getting the Marionette Lord to leave his body was far more taxing than Damien ever expected it to be.

No matter how much they claimed they would leave him alive, it was clear that they still felt unresigned about his survival.

Nevertheless, he eventually managed to convince them, not through any sort of negotiation or promise, but rather a certain strand of Divine Power that was residing in Damien's spiritual world.

Tiamat's will had gone into a hibernating state after their conversation, but her Divine Power was still present. Damien couldn't absorb it, nor did he want to carelessly release it into the atmosphere.

Therefore, while Tiamat herself wasn't present, traces of her existence were.

And as Damien learned through the Marionette Lord's quick exit after sensing those vestiges...

'Tiamat was an Emperor.'

There were no beings in existence who could make the Marionette Lord retreat without a rebellious word besides Nox Emperors, denizen Demigods of the same level included.

'I was once again saved by her, but I once again have to raise my guard against her. If she's an Emperor, it makes sense why she was sealed instead of killed, but she doesn't seem to have been weakened much if her residual aura can still scare off Lord-level Nox.'

Damien was curious about who designed the seal. Back then, he never found any traces of the dungeon's creator, nor did Kurt Galloway mention anything in his notes and research.

However, that person was definitely not a simple character. Tiamat's imprisonment was clouded in a layer of mystery that had to be revealed before Damien could decide how to proceed in his relationship with her.

Whether they'd be friends or enemies?

Only time could tell.

Damien opened his eyes slowly.

'It was smart to move to the Sanctuary before anything happened.'

The first thing Damien saw were wisps of Nox Mana evaporating off his body. He was afraid that if he was outside, someone would've killed him before he had a chance to explain himself.

'I thought I'd age another few years so I set up a time dilation, but it looks like the Marionette Lord didn't affect my physical body at all since they wanted it for themselves. On the other hand, that means this time dilation was useless...'

Damien understood through his body clock that not even a few seconds had passed since the ordeal began, and considering the time dilation, it was possible that those outside hadn't yet perceived his disappearance.

'Return...? No, not yet.'

At this point, all that was left to do was cleanup. Though it was shameful to admit it, the Marionette Lord helped greatly this time. They directly crushed most of the Black Dragons' strongest experts, leaving only a few officials and many lesser soldiers in Beast Emperor Star.

With his skills, Hedrick could lead the charge against these forces and achieve a victory.

It was more beneficial for Damien to spend his time elsewhere.

After all, there were several things in his body that needed to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Just as Damien predicted, Hedrick didn't waste time pondering his fate and instead took the opportunity to lead his army to sweep the Black Dragons.

'That tutor is strong. He will survive if he is worthy of his strength.'

This was Hedrick's thought. He and Damien weren't close to begin with, and his position as Astoria's teacher hadn't shown its value yet, so there was no reason for him to spare more than a single thought.

However, while he had no idea what Damien did with the Nox Demigod in that final instant, he respected the man for creating such a wonderful opening.

The Black Dragon Army was already defeated mentally by Lord Garvy's betrayal, and when they were assaulted with the Golden Dragon Army's full power, they couldn't provide any resistance.

They were promptly captured, not killed, and held within the estate's specialized dungeon.

When the Black Dragons were cleaned up, the army spread out and quelled the unrest plaguing the world, eliminating any lingering threats along the way.

It was a long process that took several days, and by the end of it...

The sky was shining gold, illuminated by a canopy of Fate Clouds.

There was one specific section of the world. As civilians calmed themselves and let go of their fear, as soldiers finished their duties and finally had time to rest, all beings slowly gathered here.

In this place. There was a single gargantuan Fate Cloud that all others strayed away from, creating a halo of natural light among the golden sheen held by the rest of the world.

It was understood not long after the cleanup began. This was the source, the origin of those Fate Clouds who returned to bless the world. I think you should take a look at

And thus, this place became a place of prayer and hope, said to bring good luck to anyone who prayed under it long enough.

After 5 days, the cloud slowly dispersed into the surroundings, filling in the circular gap around it and finally connecting to the rest of the clouds.

DING!

A high-pitched ringing bell sounded as the Fate Clouds shined brightly, lighting up Beast Emperor Star and creating a spectacle for those who saw it as part of their night sky.

In the midst of the beautiful heavenly glow was a single woman who gracefully descended to the ground below.

She opened her eyes to be greeted by several million people staring at her with widened eyes.

Her head tilted to the side.

"Did I miss something?"

One could almost picture the question mark floating over her head when she spoke her first words.

"A-Astoria?!"

Her eyes turned to the voice who called for her. A smile spread on her face soon after.

"Eldest Sister, you're here?"

"Astoria!"

Elizabeth ran forward and embraced Astoria tightly.

"Thank the heavens! I thought we lost you too!" Elizabeth cried as she held her younger sister.

Astoria's eyes slightly narrowed as she picked up the meaning behind those words, but she didn't mention it.

"Eldest Sister, let's go back to the palace and meet Father. It looks like the war is over, but there's still work to be done, right?"

Astoria grabbed Elizabeth's hand and pulled her into the air, moving as she said.

She left behind the crowd below, unaware of the impact she'd left on their hearts.

And when she arrived at the palace, she finally heard of what happened.

She wasn't too close to most of them, but half of her siblings had died.

It wasn't something she could just accept.

While she was being selfish and getting stronger by herself, they were living and dying together with their family.

"I feel useless," she muttered to herself as she collapsed onto her bed.

Though she'd been informed of the outcome of the war, that was it. The Emperor ordered her to rest and return tomorrow to tell him in detail about her experiences after she left.

And now that she was alone, it struck her just how close Beast Emperor Star and the Golden Dragon Clan were to perishing,

"I wish I could've helped somehow..."

"No, rather, if it wasn't for your help, this world would have been destroyed."

A voice refuted her soliloquy. Astoria immediately teleported away and raised her guard, only to widen her eyes and immediately rush back.

"Master!"

She jumped into Damien's arms like a koala and dug her face into his chest.

Damien smiled wryly and sat down on the nearby sofa, patting her back comfortingly.

It couldn't have been more obvious that Astoria was trying to bottle up her feelings and stay strong, but he wouldn't allow it.

No disciple of his would be allowed to follow the same mistakes he'd made in the past.

So his first priority, now that he'd finished up his own errands and returned, was to make sure she was okay.

Chapter 953 Banquet [1]

Astoria broke down once she felt Damien's warmth. She didn't cry or shout, but she dug herself into him and trembled, unable to find a way to properly express the emotions inside her.

The sadness was minimal, as of those who died, none were close to her. One of them was even the 4th Prince who'd caused her so much trouble when she first met Damien.

The main emotion plaguing her mind was frustration.

Frustration that even after she worked so hard to gain so much strength, she still wasn't able to contribute to her family and fight by their side.

Damien sighed. In terms of the conflict itself, it was true that Astoria had no involvement at all. Yet, her nonaggressive contribution of restoring the Fate Clouds did far more for the world's safety than any of the slaughter and death taking place elsewhere.

Everyone else secured short-term safety, while Astoria restored long-term security. If both didn't happen concurrently, Beast Emperor Star would've faced far worse threats in the future, when their enemies came to prey on them while they were weak.

'Convincing Astoria about her importance through words is no use even if it's coming from me. She's too used to belligerence, so she doesn't realize the value of strategy at all, just like the rest of these damn dragons.'

It was definitely a huge flaw in their thinking that only the Emperor had overcome, but since the recent calamity happened due to the lack of strategy and wariness, Damien was sure the Golden Dragons would improve from this point forward.

'But for now, let's cheer her up and go meet with the Emperor.'

Damien grabbed Astoria's hand and pulled her off the couch.

"M-master? What are you doing?"

Astoria blushed, her mind suddenly filled with stray thoughts.

"Come with me, let's go have some fun," Damien proclaimed with a smile.

Astoria's blush deepened.

"Master, be more mindful of your words!" She exclaimed in embarrassment.

"Hm? What's wrong?" Damien asked, tilting his head curiously.

Astoria gritted her teeth and shot a hateful glare at him.

"R-really...you..."

"When a man and a woman are alone in a room together, just what kind of fun can they have?!" She finally exclaimed.

"Uh..."

Damien stared at her in disbelief. "Who said we were staying in your room?"

"..."

Astoria lowered her head, directing her eyes to the ground.

"Hello?"

"..."

Her face turned the same color as a tomato, and then went deeper red until it looked like she was seriously about to explode.

"Earth to Astoria?"

"It's time to die."

Astoria expressionlessly grabbed a dagger from nowhere.

"Alright, stop fooling around. It's not that embarrassing, is it?" Damien said wryly.

"Master, this is social suicide. I can never go out in public again."

"It's only the two of us who heard it though?"

"Regardless."

"Relax, it's fine for you to have these thoughts occasionally. After all, you're at 'that' age."

"What age?"

"Ahaha, don't worry about it. Anyway, come with me. I'll show you something magnificent."

He and Astoria flashed away from Beast Emperor Star entirely.

When Damien was thinking about how to cheer up Astoria, there were a few ideas he had, the first of which was to take her somewhere with dazzling scenery so she could find peace and clear her mind.

He genuinely thought hard about where to take her, as he'd seen many mind-blowing sights in the past, but honestly, there weren't many that could match the simple yet grand beauty of the universe itself. I think you should take a look at

Damien and Astoria arrived at the place where he felt the universe's grandiosity with his own body for the first time.

Just a few hundred thousand kilometers away from Dawn World, in the middle of the starry sky.

A place where beautiful stars of all different colors, shapes, and properties decorated the blackness, where Sky Castle Luxurion shone like the North Star, so blindingly bright yet so incredibly far away.

It wasn't a particularly special place. Honestly, the same view could be found anywhere in the Divine Realm.

However, to a spatial practitioner, the view itself wasn't what mattered.

Just standing there, one would get immersed in the ambiance, and fall prey to the universe's ebb and flow. It was a beautifully serene and calming experience that Damien wanted to show Astoria.

As a talent not much lower than himself, how could Astoria fall short of his expectation?

She synchronized with the universe's body, relaxed her mind, and found the security to view the situation on a greater scale.

She gained the peace and quiet she needed to gather her thoughts and strength so she could move forward with peak performance.

And when she opened her eyes, Damien flashed away with her once again.

This time, they arrived on flat ground, in a world filled with the color orange. Orange sands made up the ground below and orange dust flowed through the air. The sky and sun were mellow and pastel, making the entire environment feel strangely bleak.

"What are we doing here, Master?" Astoria asked, now in a far better state than before.

Luckily, Damien had appeared before she let her feelings fester for too long, so clearing her doubts was also easier.

Damien looked over with a grin. "This is an abandoned world I came across a few years ago. I don't know how it was created or why it's empty, but there is no life in this world at all."

Astoria raised her eyes in interest. "Is there some sort of treasure here?"

"Nope!" Damien exclaimed happily.

"Then...?"

"My dear disciple, the reason we came here is simple. In this abandoned and empty world, you can destroy any and everything without consequences! Go wild, Astorimon!"

Astoria's eyes widened. Her expression slowly morphed, becoming more and more excited.

"Are you serious?!"

She asked with the hope and exuberance of a little girl going to a theme park for the first time, and Damien was happy to say he could meet her expectations.

"Go wild. You have 2 hours to spend however you want, then we're going to meet your father."

"Master, you're the best!"

Astoria jumped up and gave Damien a quick hug before rushing away.

Distant booms resounded in the next instant.

Damien sighed to himself with a defeated smile.

"Haa, just what kind of barbarian princess am I raising?"

Damien returned to Beast Emperor Star with a happily skipping Astoria precisely 2 hours later.

'It's almost concerning how easily violence was able to solve her problems, but it's probably nothing, right?'

Damien walked through the palace halls with Astoria and arrived before the dining hall.

The guards outside bowed upon seeing them, pushing open the massive doors.

"The Emperor has been waiting."

The master-disciple duo walked into the dining hall with confidence, panning their gazes across the room and taking account of everyone present.

The Golden Dragon Emperor, his three wives, his remaining living children besides the 1st Prince, and many unnamed officials that Damien didn't bother with.

Damien's eyes landed on the Emperor, a smile spreading across his face when he noticed the latter looking at him as well.

"What a grand reception this is. Emperor, if I knew you were missing me so dearly, I would've brought gifts!"

Chapter 954 Banquet [2]

"What a grand reception this is. Emperor, if I knew you were missing me so dearly, I would've brought gifts!"

"You! How dare you speak to His Majesty so crassly?!"

An immediate voice of protest rose from among the officials.

Damien sneered, ignoring the man and walking over to one of the two empty seats near the Emperor and taking his place.

Astoria followed after him and took a seat as well.

As they did so, the Emperor sent a glance at the previous official, warning him to not speak carelessly.

At the same time, a transmission entered Damien's ear.

"Brat, you should at least respect my status in front of a crowd like this. It will only make things more troublesome for both of us if you do not."

Damien shrugged. "I can call you 'His Majesty the Emperor' as much as you want me to, but if you want me to change my demeanor, it'll be much harder than that."

"Why do you have to be so stubborn?"

"An expert's pride, you know how it is."

"Tch!"

The Golden Dragon Emperor clicked his tongue without a response, because...

He actually did know how it was!

He was also someone with an extraneous amount of "expert's pride!"

'Khh...dammit, why does this brat have to make so much sense?!'

The Emperor sighed to himself before standing up and addressing the room.

"We Golden Dragons have faced an untold calamity caused by both the strength of our enemies and our own carelessness. While we somehow managed to succeed this time, we have learned our lesson. This banquet was held not for celebration, but to mark the moment when we Golden Dragons change our ways and become cunning enough to rule the universe!"

He raised his glass, his eyes sharpening and his aura flaring out domineeringly.

"To the future!"

""To the future!!""

The crowd enthusiastically followed his exclamation, and a feast began soon after.

Dish after exquisite dish was presented to the attendees, and a jovial atmosphere soon overcame the Golden Dragon Estate.

After a few hours of miscellaneous greetings and conversations, the Golden Dragon Emperor finally brought Damien and Astoria forward.

Originally, they were supposed to meet in a more private setting, but the situation didn't allow it.

This banquet was organized mainly to reassure the people that there would once again be peace on Beast Emperor Star, so it was imperative that it took place, but since both Damien and the Golden Dragons had too much work to do and not enough time, plans were merged.

When she arrived before the Emperor, Astoria immediately bowed with respect.

"Father." She said with emotion.

"Have you been well?" He asked lightly, putting up a barrier around the three of them, as well as some of their nearby family, including Elizabeth and Hedrick.

Astoria nodded slightly, straightening herself and looking her father in the eye.

'Oho?'

This action alone inwardly impressed the Emperor, who maintained an indifferent facade for the sake of face.

His daughter who had never had a serious moment in her life was suddenly looking at him with such firm eyes, how could he not be surprised?

"Sit," the Emperor motioned with a smile, "how have you spent the last few months?" "I think you should take a look at

Astoria began recounting her experiences and travels with Damien that spanned almost 2 years, leaving out only the most secretive details involving Damien's strengths.

The story was fantastical from the start, and as it continued, more than Astoria's journey, Damien's power came to light.

The ability to control time so Astoria could train properly, the ability to teleport all across the universe to find the perfect environments, and strength that Hedrick and the Emperor had personally witnessed during the war; wasn't Damien a bit too monstrous?

Nevertheless, Astoria's achievements didn't go unnoticed.

Especially when Damien explained her maneuvering in the Fate Clouds, the small crowd around them was filled with gasps of astonishment.

Nobody doubted Astoria's claims. After all, with the Emperor present, how could they dare to lie? If such an event occurred, the Emperor would've personally witnessed it from his throne, therefore, he would've been furious at the slightest fallacy.

Astoria soon became a hot topic. She was crowded by her family and barraged with an assortment of questions that she did her best to answer, but she wasn't used to having so much positive attention on her at one time.

Damien smiled warmly as he watched her slowly get used to the atmosphere and adapt to it.

Astoria was originally a very joyous person, but the smile she carried now seemed to have more depth to it, giving her a more mature and put-together atmosphere than the little devil emperor she used to be.

Damien almost couldn't believe that Astoria used to have such a reputation.

'I guess her puberty phase finally ended. Her usual playfulness makes me forget, but she's truly grown into a strong woman.' He thought proudly.

'Speaking of women...'

Damien's thoughts suddenly shifted onto a different track as he turned to the Emperor, remembering a question he'd been wanting to ask.

"Ah, by the way, that girl in the cocoon, any idea who she is?" He asked through mental transmission.

When he returned to the Real Plane, he brought her out of the Sanctuary and handed her over to the Golden Dragons, but seeing how well she was treated by the palace staff, he got a little curious.

"She? She is a lone Valkyrie who aided us immensely in this conflict. If it wasn't for her, we might have collapsed from the very first attack." The Emperor responded.

"Hmm..." Damien muttered.

"Her goal is the Genesis Bead. The treasure is actually in her possession at the moment, so you will have to meet her before claiming your promised reward."

Damien's eyes narrowed. "You're not going back on your word, are you?"

"Haha, we are bound by Mana Oath, are we not? You will receive your promised rewards, do not worry."

Damien nodded. "Where is she now? Have you found out what's going on with her?"

"She is in a private room in the East Wing of the palace. Her strange state persists with cause unknown, but I will alert you when she awakens."

"No need. I'll go see her myself. I felt something about that barrier the last time I saw it. I want to check it out."

"Understood."

The Emperor acquiesced with a shrug. Soon after, Damien found an opportunity to excuse himself from the banquet.

It was Astoria's day today. The banquet was her stage to shine, and while he wanted to accompany her for it, he couldn't be there for every big moment of her life.

Therefore, it was better to leave this to her as an opportunity to adjust to this situation she'd likely encounter often in the future.

As he walked to the palace's East Wing, he fell into thought.

The Genesis Bead was important to his mission, but he wasn't worried about receiving it. Since such a thorough Mana Oath was in place, he was sure it'd come into his possession one way or another.

However, it was truly interesting.

'The Emperor wouldn't even let me see the Genesis Bead when I first arrived. Just what kind of identity does the person who can make him willingly hand it over for personal use have?'

He arrived in the East Wing and found the room in question, knocking lightly on the door before opening it.

The answer to his question was right before him, unconscious and behind a veil of black and white.

Chapter 955 Cocoon [1]

[Daughter of the Void]

When this title awakened, everything changed. The battlefield faded away, the universe itself faded into the distance as Elena's consciousness was taken on a journey through the vast unknown.

And naturally, her body changed along with her mind. The black and white cocoon's energy was fueling Elena's comprehensive evolution into a greater state of existence.

Then, what was truly happening to her?

Elena's current situation was odd and unexplainable from the outside, but in truth, its roots were very easily traceable.

At that moment of life and death, a "seed" awakened within her. It wasn't some esoteric concept like Damien's "Seed" or the Nox Seeds, but it was a seed nonetheless.

And its planting...well, it could be traced back to a night of passion shared within the Empyrean Dragon Realm.

Elena had no natural connection with the Void, nor was the Void an existence that was friendly to those other than Damien, but Elena had achieved a hidden requirement even Damien didn't know of.

She'd been "accepted" by the Void as a spouse of its progeny, and as such, it saved her from death and bestowed her with a blessing.

The cocoon was a representation of this blessing, a safe space where she wouldn't be interrupted before she completely digested her gains.

It had been 5 days already.

Elena immediately understood that the title's awakening was an opportunity rather than a disaster, and with her quick thinking and intuition, she absorbed anything and everything she saw around her.

The problem was that the things she was absorbing had no physical presence. She simply exerted the will to absorb and focused on the mystical and hazy environment, gradually gaining a hold over the ambient natural forces.

The scene became clear with time, revealing Elena to a lush jungle-like habitat overflowing with vitality. Decorating the sky were grand floating mountains and palaces, and in the very middle of the ecosystem stood a towering Yggdrasil that Elena soon recognized as her own.

'This is...'

Her eyes widened in astonishment at the natural beauty, as well as the thickness of the law fluctuations coming from this jungle.

It was as if this place was the origin of life, the place where the concept of life first introduced itself to the universe.

Elena's body suddenly jerked as "something" flew out of her chest.

'The Genesis Bead?!'

Elena's shock only increased when the treasure appeared. She hadn't bound it or claimed ownership in any way, so why was it following her soul to this alternate dimension?

She wanted to ask, but there was no one around to answer. As such, she instead chose to follow the flying bead through the forest until she arrived before the massive world tree.

She raised her arm and gently brushed her fingertips against the bark.

Ba-dum! Ba-dum!

She could hear the jungle's heartbeat, a pumping flow of vitality that powered the entire jungle and allowed this haven to exist.

Meanwhile, the Genesis Bead spun on its own axis in the air, absorbing the purest concentrated Life Laws from the world tree and internalizing it.

Soon after, a new stream of energy left the bead and flowed into Elena's mind, spreading through her avatar body and filling her to the brim.

Voom!

Stray foliage whipped into the sky as the winds swirled around Elena and lifted her into the air.

She didn't know why exactly this was happening to her, but she could at least understand one thing.

The Life Law comprehension that was flowing into her mind far outstripped anything she'd been able to perceive in reality, and the longer the energy stayed within her avatar, the greater the comprehension became.

Mystical abilities that she could never even imagine became possible evolutionary paths, and somehow, it was almost as if the Law of Life itself was beckoning her towards it.

The scenery of the jungle changed. Behind the world tree, three pathways appeared, leading into the distance beyond perception.

Elena intuitively understood that she was being made to choose.

She needed to decide how she would grow her Life Laws from this point forward. I think you should take a look at

There was the path on the far left, "personal" Life Laws. If she chose this path, Elena would continue on her way to becoming an infinite warrior who could constantly buff and heal herself to become undying.

This was the path she pursued when she was just starting her journey to the peak, but as she aged and matured, she realized it wasn't necessarily the best path.

This path would make Elena a great independent force, but with the universe's current situation, a single Elena wouldn't have much impact on the battlefield as an infinite warrior.

The middle path, "emitted" Life Laws, was far better in this sense. This was the classic healer path. If she traveled it, she could become a Goddess of Life who could even bring the dead back to life.

Yet...

'That's not enough.'

Elena never wanted to be a healer. She didn't want to be relegated to the back of the battlefield with no choice but to watch and passively react to the battle situation.

Then, the final path on the far right.

As Elena gazed upon it, she noticed that information on how this path would proceed didn't appear in her mind as it did with the other two.

Instead, a much more esoteric sensation filled her systems.

It was grand, magisterial, and primordial. It was so close, yet separated by distance uncrossable. It was a sensation akin to "the beginning of everything."

'This path...should be called "universal" Life Laws.' Elena thought to herself.

This feeling represented what Life truly was, only, Elena wasn't able to understand it at her current level.

The final path was one of comprehending the universe, and as a byproduct, Life.

It was difficult, almost impossible to traverse, but encompassed the other two paths and provided an even greater horizon for those who could climb up high enough to see it.

'If I'm doing this, there's no reason to settle for mediocrity, right?'

Elena had several ambitions. She wanted to stand at the top just like any other practitioner, but such a goal didn't need to be mentioned.

At the moment, her goals were two.

The first was to grow strong enough to repel the Nox from the universe and save it from destruction. Elena had formed several personal grudges with the Nox over time, which, along with her sense of justice, made her an avid loyalist who would try anything in her power to aid the universe.

This was her most grounded goal, as it didn't just pertain to her own survival, but the survival of everything.

The second goal was more personal.

She wanted to return. She wanted to return to her friends and family and once again enjoy the warmth they provided.

Rose and Ruyue were great sisters who motivated her to do better and always challenged her. They were her closest friends and strongest rivals, people she never wanted to forget.

Damien's status in her heart didn't even need to be mentioned. After so many years, she still thought of him so vividly. Did it need to be further elaborated on just how deep her feelings were?

And aside from love, Elena wasn't an outlier to Damien's exclusive motivation effect.

Anyone who came in contact with him for long enough would end up setting him as a goal to surpass due to his heaven-defying talent, and surprisingly enough, they would always see far greater results with this motivation driving them.

It was almost like the "motivation" was a true universal force with how effective it was.

Nevertheless, even her short-term goals required her to be excellent, above all others.

Therefore, a mediocre path simply wouldn't fly.

Elena stepped forward without hesitation, her foot firmly crunching against the soil of the "Universal Life Law" path.

And she walked, following the path to the ends of the earth.

The processes of her body and mind coincided in that moment, and the final stage of her evolution began.

Chapter 956 Cocoon [2]

To be a Daughter of the Void meant more than just being Damien's spouse.

While Damien was something like an "apostle" of the Void in Grand Heavens Boundary, he wasn't yet at a level where he could contact the Void's will and control it.

The Daughter of the Void title and the seed that initiated its blooming wouldn't manifest in the bodies of every woman Damien had relations with, only those the Void approved of.

This was why the seed would only show its presence in the very final moments before death, saving the woman in question and presenting her with power.

Those who were worthy of the seed's existence were recognized by the Void itself as people with potential.

As for the identity of this potential and how it would be used for the Void's elusive agendas...

That was something that could only be discovered in the future.

Elena was undergoing a cohesive transformation far above the level of something like body reconstruction and almost approaching a race change like Damien underwent when he achieved Samsara.

However, there was no such thing as a free meal.

For the Void to give her such a profound blessing...whatever it required from her would definitely be harsh enough to balance it.

Creak!

The door creaked as Damien pushed it open, revealing the luxurious setting of the room within.

It was filled with the most pristine furniture and decoration, along with the top physicians of the Golden Dragon Clan who were keeping close watch on the black and white cocoon lain on the massive bed.

"Sir Teacher!"

One of the nearby physicians recognized Damien and slightly bowed his head in greeting. The others also turned and gave their short greetings before continuing their work.

Although it couldn't be compared to Elena, Damien also had a certain status within the palace. He was young, powerful, charismatic, and mysterious, making many wonder about his origins and identity.

He'd only spent a few days with the palace staff, with the rest of his time occupied with teaching Astoria before they left, but it had been enough to strike an impression, especially with the grand entrance and proceeding show he put on in front of the Emperor.

Still, he hadn't shown his face enough to warrant such high-quality treatment like Elena was receiving.

His role as a teacher wasn't very well respected at first, but now that the war was over, who would dare show Damien disrespect? Even if he couldn't do anything for the princess' growth, his own power and character were already exemplary enough!

Of course, Astoria's contributions hadn't yet spread amongst the common populace, so these people didn't know about her rapid growth, or else their reception towards Damien would've been far, far warmer.

Despite the size of the clan, they had a surprising amount of loyalty and a very familial bond that one didn't usually find amongst larger and more powerful influences.

"What's the situation?" He asked the first physician, curious about what they'd found so far.

The physician handed over a tablet filled with information for Damien to skim as he began to explain.

"It is impossible for us to penetrate this cocoon with any of our latest artifacts and technology, so we haven't been able to probe it at all. However, it has become clear through external observation that the cocoon is quite literally metamorphosing the individual within."

He tapped a few times on the tablet, bringing up a series of research results gathered over the past 5 days.

"By our calculations, the cocoon is made up of mostly solidified Life Laws, but the main structure is supported by an unknown substance. More than being unable to investigate, our tools were directly disintegrated by this substance, so we decided to stay away from it in further experiments."

It was just a fancy way of saying they didn't know anything.

Damien glanced over at the cocoon in understanding, approaching it with the physician.

'No wonder I'd been feeling strange since I first saw it. This cocoon is supported by Void Mana.' He thought to himself.

It was a little silly that he knew more about the situation than the professionals, but what could they do? This simply wasn't a medical or scientific problem.

Damien had personally experienced his own share of cocoons. They were very clearly the Void's favorite way to initiate an evolution where it intrinsically changed one's body into something else entirely. I think you should take a look at

'Last time I was in a cocoon, the Void cleansed my chuuni, so something good is probably happening to this person too.'

He smiled to himself as he reached out, brushing his hand against the cocoon's smooth surface. Gently, he tried to insert his mana into its surface.

Bzzt!

'Hm? Rejecting me?'

Damien's brow raised in surprise. This was the first time he'd ever seen the Void outright reject his touch, making him ever more curious about the individual inside.

'I guess whatever's happening in the cocoon is only for that person to experience. Well, it's not like it matters. Nobody will gain more advantages from the Void than me, anyway.'

As the owner of the Void Physique, Damien was definitely a bit baffled that the Void was showing its presence so easily, and even more so that it was supporting another being.

'Hmm, if it's like this, there's no point in me being here. I can only wait until they wake up to ask about it.'

Damien turned and thanked the physician who gave him the information he desired before walking towards the door and leaving the room.

However, just as he closed the door behind him...

VOOM!

A huge burst of mana violently whipped the door back open, slamming it into the unprepared Damien's body and pushing him back a few steps.

"What's happening?!"

"Everyone calm down! Watch the readings and respond accordingly!"

"Set up barriers! We don't know if this reaction is hostile!"

Damien rushed back into the room to the sound of the physicians desperately trying to adapt to the change in the situation,

The cocoon was glowing fiercely with pure white light, emanating a suffocating density of vitality into the surroundings.

'This is...Samsara?!' Damien thought with widened eyes, but soon corrected himself.

'No, there are no Death Laws involved in this, but that Life Law fluctuation alone has the same complexity as my Samsara Intent! That's amazing!'

Life was only a part of the whole in Damien's Samsara, so purely in terms of the element, Damien actually lost out in comparison to this fluctuation!

His heart raced at the connotations, and under his unbending gaze, the cocoon slowly melted and dispersed into the air.

Flash!

The light became blinding, even hindering Damien's perception before dying down.

Now, instead of a cocoon, only a single person remained on the bed.

Her eyes shot open, immediately scanning the room and assessing her surroundings before...

"...!"

Her expression morphed into astonishment as her gaze landed on a specific figure.

And that figure shared her emotion, unable to rationalize what was happening.

Damien and Elena looked into each other's eyes.

Silence filled the room.

A reunion after almost so many grueling years of loneliness...finally, it was taking place.

Chapter 957 Reunion [1]

From Dawn World, the Storm Heavens Mystic Realm, Azure Rain Star, and Death Emperor Star to Calypto, Eien, the Wild Continent, the Ancient God Clan, and finally Beast Emperor Star; in the almost 10 years since he left the Human Domain, Damien never stopped moving.

He became stronger and stronger, and even fumbled a few times along the way. He met countless friends and enemies alike, and suffered untold pain to rise as fast as he could.

Somehow, he'd been able to propel himself from the very beginning of 4th class all the way to its extreme peak in the same amount of time most people took to just cross 50 or so levels, and yet, he was never satisfied.

The longer he stayed in the wider universe, the greater he felt those forces that held him down and the more he realized the need for forces that kept him grounded.

It was difficult to think about "family" in Damien's situation.

After all, if he ever allowed himself to waver, he'd fall. He'd been on an incline ever since the Fifth Primal Sovereign died, but the steeper the incline became, the easier it was for the smallest touch to send him tumbling back down the mountain.

To adapt to this pressure, his mind changed and elevated itself, viewing the world similarly to an Emperor, though Damien's behavior didn't match his mentality.

It had been several years since the last time Damien truly thought of his family, barring the traumatic illusion the Marionette Lord showed him not long ago.

He didn't want to admit it, but he'd pushed them to the back of his mind because he didn't believe he'd be able to see them any time soon.

It was the same thing that happened when he first surfaced on Apeiron and realized how difficult it'd be to return to Earth, only, the scale was far, far more massive.

However, recently, with the Grand Assembly approaching, Damien had been gradually preparing himself for that moment of meeting again, so he could embrace his loved ones at his full capacity.

Still, for someone as in touch with himself as Damien, his feelings always manifested vaguely.

And he was forced to step back and ask himself:

Just...what was he supposed to be feeling right now?

The Valhalla Mystic Realm wasn't like most others. Rather than a Mystic Realm with a task that needed completion before it opened, it was a prison realm that trapped its successors until it felt they were ready to leave.

Elena stayed there for years on end, trying her best to grasp the abilities of the Valkyries, but as she did, she realized that the grand race of the past had several flaws.

Aside from their black-and-white perception of the universe, they were extremely reclusive and rarely had contact with outsiders. Even when birthing new members of the clan, Valkyries would get pregnant on the outside and return to their clan land, cutting all contact with the father without making him aware of the baby's existence.

It was a cruel method of survival that the Valkyries felt justified as it "maintained the sanctity of their clan," however, as a descendant, Elena couldn't agree with this philosophy.

The longer she stayed in the Valhalla Mystic Realm and learned about the Valkyries, the more she believed there was a justified reason for the clan's downfall, and a large part of it was their own fault.

Therefore, she vowed to never become like them.

Being honest, Elena's past self wasn't much different from them. She also had such a decisively one-sided view of justice that separated the world into black and white, and when it came to interacting with others, she was never the best at expressing herself, making it difficult for her to find people she could genuinely trust.

And in a fit of youthful impulsivity, she ran away from those people with her black-and-white worldview guiding her actions.

She always believed she was right in leaving, and that didn't change because of what she saw, but she came to regret the "method" by which she left.

It was hurtful and cold, almost as if she was casting aside those she cared about.

Her outlook began to shift, and as if acknowledging that shift, the Valhalla Mystic Realm opened its doors for her. I think you should take a look at

Almost like it was also aware of the flaws of the Valkyrie race.

Nevertheless, from that point, Elena traveled to Eien and spent years fighting on the deathly battlefield, making several connections and enemies of her own and establishing a position in the universe.

Even though she hadn't spent much time climbing the Dimensional Leaderboard, her name was quite well-known in certain sectors of the universe.

And as she grew, her desire to return to the Human Domain only heightened.

That was, until she one day saw a familiar name at the top of the Dimensional Leaderboard.

She suddenly realized that something must have happened in the Human Domain, and if she wanted to meet all her loved ones at once, returning wasn't the best solution.

Instead, she turned her eyes to the upcoming "Grand Assembly" that she heard so much about from her comrades,

Supposedly it was a meeting of the universe's top forces that only the most prestigious could attend. It was said that all sectors would come together, even the ever-elusive Human Domain, to plan a true counterattack on the Nox.

However, the only people allowed at the Grand Assembly were those top forces, as well as the best of the younger generation from these forces.

Thus, as someone who'd wandered as a vagrant for so many years, Elena needed to find a force to join.

Didn't the Genesis Bead reveal itself at the perfect time?

Elena originally planned to gain both the treasure and the Golden Dragon Clan's support in this escapade, granting her a spot in the upcoming event, but an entirely unexpected turn of events took place and landed her here, on a bed somewhere in the Golden Dragon Palace, a higher existence than she was than she arrived.

Yet, regardless of the elevation of her being, she was still at a loss for words.

She could confidently say that at this moment, she was prepared for every possible situation except for the one she was in.

And she couldn't form a single cohesive thought on how to proceed.

In the silence of the small, isolated room, two people stared into each other's eyes, never breaking the connection between their gazes even as minutes passed by.

Noticing something odd about the situation, the physicians and medical staff excused themselves several minutes ago, but Damien and Elena didn't even notice.

They were still lost in each other's eyes, neither able to formulate thoughts or words to break the ice.

Damien could feel his palms becoming sweaty. It was a strange feeling, one he'd forgotten with his control over bodily responses.

However, today wasn't a day where "control" held much value.

In the end, he raised his eyes and cracked a half-smile, letting his words flow as they wanted.

And the result...

"Uh...hi...?"

...made him want to bury his head in the concrete and die.

Chapter 958 Reunion [2]

"Uh...hi...?"

The pregnant silence was broken by an attempt at communication, but not a successful one.

Elena's eyes widened slightly as she watched Damien. It was impossible to see it normally, but in Elena's eyes, Damien's minute awkward fidgeting was clearly displayed.

A warm smile spread on her face.

Even after so many years, his romantic awkwardness was the same as ever, eh?

"It's been a while," she said lightly with a smile. "How have you been?"

Her words were simple, but carried a mysterious air that washed over Damien and calmed his anxious mind.

As he looked on at the woman in front of him, he barely recognized her. From her personality which had become so firm and calm to her appearance which had matured and bloomed into its full potential, Elena was truly a changed person.

"It's been a while" held far more weight than its simplicity let on.

"How have you been," just how was he supposed to answer that question?

He tried as best he could, but all that came out was:

"You know how it is. I've just been doing this and that, making my way around. What about you?"

"Same," she responded lightly.

The room was enveloped in another lull of silence.

The tension between them was thick, so thick that they weren't able to maneuver through it.

They'd both changed so much over the years, what if they weren't compatible anymore? What if their feelings were mere idealizations that only existed in their minds?

They were useless doubts, but doubts that surfaced naturally and couldn't be ignored.

However, Damien would no longer allow these doubts to rule him. That was the greatest difference between him in the past and present.

"Shall we go for a walk?" He asked lightly, holding his hand out to Elena.

She looked at it, her eyes serene and without waves. When she looked back up into his, they softened.

She gracefully held his outstretched hand and nodded happily.

"I'd be delighted," she said, standing up off the bed.

Damien nodded, and soon after, the duo vanished.

When they reappeared, they were on a beach at the edge of existence.

On their left was nothing but blackness, and to their right was an ever-expanding ocean that was illuminated under the light of 6 moons.

There was no better place for a serene walk than this place that left one alone with their thoughts and the beauty of the world.

Damien and Elena experienced this personally.

They walked along the beach for hours without a single word, their entwined hands never separating and their minds and bodies slowly melding into one.

It was true that neither of them could quite put what they wanted to say into words.

But in the current situation, they didn't need to.

Wisps of pitch-black mana flowed between their interlocked fingers, turning the previous expression literal.

Their minds and bodies became one.

They could feel each other's hesitation and anxiety, and gradually, even their memories began to intermingle and display themselves.

It was dark and quiet. The cascading waves of the ocean ebbed and flowed against the beach, slowly pulling inward with time. The subtle light of the moons that shone on its surface rippled, creating beautiful lunar phenomena over the water.

And Damien and Elena slowly "learned" each other once again.

Hesitation faded into the background, and rather than a silence brought about by tension, the silence shifted into one of understanding.

Words were no longer needed to convey their feelings.

The two of them were mature now. Damien was already in his 30s, and Elena wasn't far from reaching that point either.

After all they'd experienced, they didn't have the ability to have a blisteringly hot, love-filled reunion as one would expect of them. I think you should take a look at

Without them realizing, their love for each other had become deeper and more rooted, it had matured into something more intrinsic that didn't manifest itself so powerfully.

Because it didn't need to. They simply didn't need to be so explosively affectionate to convey their intentions anymore.

The sand crunched under their feet as they came to a stop. As if already aware of each other's intentions, they set down on the beach and faced the sea.

"You've been through a lot," Damien muttered, never breaking his eyes from the horizon.

"Can you really say that after what you've been through?" Elena quipped back with a smile.

"Haha, why can't I? I don't have your main character energy, so I had to work hard to make enemies, you know?"

"Aha, so all that targeting was because of main character energy! Why didn't I think of it sooner?"

"Naturally, it's because I'm a peak genius that can't be matched. I just have that kind of intuition."

"Oh, that makes sense. I've always known you were a peak genius, especially back on Earth when you predicted the World Awakening way before it happened."

"I did that?"

"You didn't? Then what was all that 'Black Fla—"

"Wow, bringing up decades-old dirt. Low blow."

"Ehh? I'm sure our peak genius can handle it?"

"You're the devil."

"Right, I'm the devil who seduced you, Mr. Peak Genius."

"Mm, it's really annoying. You should compensate me for the emotional damage."

"Should I?"

"Definitely. You should spend the rest of your life atoning for it by my side."

"Hmm, what should I do? It seems I was already planning to do that, though?"

Damien and Elena smiled at each other.

This dynamic, it was different from the past, but it hadn't changed as much as they'd expected.

Because no matter how they changed, the cores of their personalities remained the same. And as people who'd known each other from young, how could their relationship be broken by just a little tension and doubt?

After viewing each other's experiences, they understood each other perfectly. Elena's [Daughter of the Void] title also acted, bringing her and Damien's souls closer together, though the two in question didn't realize it.

"Romance."

It was something they were both terrible at.

When they saw each other's perspective of their separation, they felt their faces burning up in embarrassment at how childish and stupid they used to be.

But back then, they were right about one thing.

Their relationship had become too twisted by needless complications to function. They needed a fresh start.

Now, meeting at a time like this, they were finally given that fresh start.

And neither of them planned to waste it.

Their conversation continued until the moons set beyond the horizon and two suns rose above the ocean, one red and one yellow.

They talked about the experiences they viewed, Elena taking an avid interest in Hidden Death Valley and Damien's encounters with Demigods, while Damien was more interested in how Elena maneuvered herself in Eien to rise the ranks so fast.

Eventually, their conversation branched away from the past and became more random as they talked about even the most mindless topics for hours at a time just to listen to each other's voices for as long as they could.

They relished in the feeling of closeness between them, a feeling they'd both missed for so long.

This was it, that grounding force that Damien was searching for, and that beautiful connection that Elena had been chasing.

This was "family."

And now that they'd taken hold of it, they never planned on letting it go ever again.

Chapter 959 Reunion [3]

Another day cycle passed as Damien and Elena remained on the beach, but with a newly set time dilation supporting them, they had all the time in the world to waste.

At least for a bit.

For hours on end, the two talked about their experiences, their thoughts, and so much more. Even though they'd viewed each other's experiences already, there was a different feeling hearing it directly from the other party's mouth.

They laughed, they mourned, and they reached a point where they understood each other far more than they ever did, all in the span of that single day.

Only with the Void's quiet support was this possible.

And the duo themselves completely embraced the elusive force's pushing. After all, now that they were older, they truly understood how key communication was in a relationship.

When they were younger, this was another fact they thought they knew, but of course, considering how their relationship derailed so rapidly, it was clear that they didn't know anything at all.

What they thought was "communication" was just venting. They merely threw their emotions at each other and expected the other party to accommodate them.

But since when was that viable at all? If anything, it could even be considered toxic to an extent.

With calm minds and connected hearts, they solved any previous misunderstandings between them easily. Though they'd already moved on from these issues and grown out of them, it was still important to clarify so they could truly start over.

And that's what they did.

They ignored the universe, they ignored their responsibilities, and with this time they had alone, they made sure nothing would ever drive a wedge between them again.

"Jealousy" was the emotion Elena felt so fiercely back then, jealousy that clouded her positive feelings and drove her to act impulsively.

As for Damien...well, his main problem had always been biting off more than he could chew.

There was a common saying that it was impossible to love others if one didn't love oneself, and Damien somewhat embodied this concept.

He was never ready to have more than one wife, but in the heat of passion and romance, he'd forgone his better judgement and made a mess.

Did he regret it?

Not at all.

But did he feel sorry for the three women he disappointed with his bullshit?

Absolutely.

In the end, both of them were blaming themselves and absolving the other party of all blame. It took a very long time for them to finally accept that the problem was in the relationship's very existence.

Luckily, the past existed to reminisce on, not to live in.

"Do you were the Valkyrie aiming for the Genesis Bead, huh? That damn emperor should've mentioned a name or something, it would've saved me so much trouble," Damien complained as he lay back in the sand.

Elena chuckled, summoning the bead from her spatial ring. "It's the same for me. If I knew you were the one who needed the bead, I wouldn't have tried so hard to snatch it."

Damien shook his head. "No, it's fine. While I did sign a Mana Oath with the emperor to return the bead to the Ancient God Clan, nothing can be done if they don't accept it, right?"

He glanced at the bead and cracked a sly smile.

"Plus, it's not like it's possible for them to take it anymore, am I right?"

"You noticed quick. Even I don't know what happened. It suddenly appeared before me while I was stuck in that strange space and bound itself to me. I can feel that this bead is now truly a part of my body."

Elena reached out and touched the Genesis Bead, causing it to lightly ripple with light fluctuations, almost as if it was happily receiving her touch.

"That strange space..." Damien muttered, glancing at their interlocked hands.

The wisps of Void Mana surrounding their clasp didn't disperse even now.

"Elena, did you perhaps receive anything while you were in the cocoon?" He asked.

"Multiple things, actually," Elena said with a nod, "I found a path to the peak, gained immense comprehension of Life Laws, and I even gained a title."

"Title?"

"Mm, it says [Daughter of the Void]. Cool, isn't it?"

"Keuk...y-yeah, very cool," Damien stammered.

He slightly turned his face away, feeling heat rising to his cheeks. I think you should take a look at

'Is this what it feels like when your girlfriend gains the approval of your parents?' He wondered to himself, trying to calm down the slight fluttering in his chest.

If there was anything he expected, it definitely wasn't that!

Of course, while Elena knew about the Void Physique, she definitely didn't know about the strange relationship he had with the Void, thus leaving her unaware of the title's true meaning.

'Luckily, the Void hid anything about itself in our memory exchange, otherwise, I would be dying of embarrassment right now,'

While he didn't want to admit it, he was definitely already dying of embarrassment, but that didn't need to be mentioned.

'Putting that aside...'

"Being acknowledged by the Void is definitely a good thing. You're already at level 399, right? Stepping into the extreme peak should be a breeze now that you have the Void's backing," he commented.

"Right? I don't quite understand it, but I can feel that if I focus on Life Laws, I'll be able to grow stronger at least 10 times faster than I could before!"

"Haha, then you'll finally be able to keep up with me," Damien stated, puffing his chest arrogantly.

"Tch, you only know how to brag," Elena said teasingly, lightly punching his arm.

Damien glanced over, catching sight of her and inexplicably getting lost in her eyes.

Those deep, ocean-blue eyes that were even more beautifully pronounced with the true ocean in the background truly had his soul in a chokehold.

"Should we get going?" Elena suddenly said, looking into the air.

"Should we?" Damien repeated hesitantly.

"We have to," Elena said with a smile.

"Do we?" Damien asked again.

"Mm, we do. Your time dilation won't hold out for much longer, right?"

"I mean, we could always go to the Sanctuary..."

Elena's smile widened. She giggled lightly as she stood up and reached her hand out to him.

"What're you hesitating for? Even if there are things left unsaid right now, don't we have an eternity to say them?"

Damien returned her smile warmly, grabbing her hand and standing up.

"Indeed we do," he said, gazing into the beautiful horizon one last time.

He really, really didn't want to leave.

He was afraid that once he began working again, he would never have the time for a moment like this again, ironic coming from someone who could control the concept.

Yet, it was true.

He had a history of neglecting the most important things when he became too set on a task.

'Ah, what am I thinking about?'

Damien shook his head and cleared his thoughts. His eyes went down to his and Elena's hands as the smile on his face widened.

'An eternity...right, even if I'm absolutely romantically incompetent, even I'll be able to better myself if I have an eternity.'

Thinking too much was a habit that always wronged him, so he would crush it right here and now!

With that final thought filling the air with an aura of determination and spirit, Damien and Elena vanished from the mysterious world.

Their presence was the first in several million years, and perhaps it would be the last for several million more.

As time passed, perhaps the beach itself would be swallowed by the ocean current, and perhaps this entire world would become an aquatic paradise.

Yet, the vestiges of two lovers who finally reunited on its sands would remain with it for eternity.

Just as they would each other.

Chapter 960 Reunion [4]

The duo returned to the separated room in the East Wing together and calmly exited, walking through the halls of the palace with no particular destination.

Damien wanted to introduce Astoria to Elena, but that would have to wait until after the banquet ended, so for now, they were going to enjoy just a bit more alone time before returning to the tasks at hand.

The first to see them were the very physicians who watched over Elena while she was comatose in the cocoon. They didn't approach or say anything outright, but both Damien and Elena were more than powerful enough to hear them whispering and gossiping to each other.

What they didn't expect, however, was for the gossip to spread like wildfire!

The palace was in an incredibly precarious situation right now. Everyone was finally winding down from the great war that just barely ended, which meant any and all pieces of good or juicy gossip were passed from jolly denizen to even jollier denizen with the speed of nervous response!

The rumors got so big that they even entered the banquet hall and the Emperor's ears, by that point becoming so out of proportion that Damien and Elena were painted as some sort of group sent from a mysterious God Clan to audit the Golden Dragons!

The result was a summon from the emperor, who currently gazed at the duo with mild surprise coloring his eyes.

He had called them into the banquet hall, and while it was awkward, they were now sitting at the head table together with the royal family, including Astoria, who was watching Damien with eyes wider than saucers.

"How do the two of you know each other?" The Emperor asked with genuine curiosity.

Damien glanced at Elena and grinned, turning back to the Emperor.

"How could we not? We're husband and wife, after all," he proclaimed proudly.

Bang!

"WIFE?!"

An abrupt exclamation came from the side, where Astoria had slammed her palms against the table and stood up in shock.

"Eh? What's wrong with that?" Damien asked.

"Hnngh..." Astoria whined as she slumped back into her seat. "Master, why can't you be single?!"

"Why should I be single?"

"So I can snatch you up, of course!"

"What are you on about?"

Damien grabbed Astoria's ear and pulled, making her wince in pain.

"Ow, ow, ow! I was just joking! Master, please spare me~!"

"Spare you? Give me one reason why I should spare you."

"Umm, because I'm your favorite disciple?"

"You're my only disciple."

"Which makes me the favorite!"

"Glib-tongued brat. Who taught you to speak like that?"

"Teehee~"

Damien let go of Astoria's ear and subtly healed the red spot with his trait while she giggled to herself.

On the side, Elena raised her brow as she looked at the young princess.

Astoria also looked over after feeling her scanning gaze.

Elena's eyes were serene and without ripples like a secluded lake. It was especially intimidating to Astoria, who was currently in the position of a daughter meeting her new stepmother.

Soon enough, Elena shifted over, sitting next to Astoria

"H-hello," Astoria greeted, slightly bowing her head.

"Mm, you must be Astoria, right? I've heard a lot about you from Damien. What do you think, he's a big bastard, isn't he?" Elena entered the conversation with a small grin.

"B-bastard?!" Astoria exclaimed, hurriedly covering her mouth and glancing around to make sure nobody heard.

Elena's grin turned sly as she continued: "Right, right. I've known that bastard since we were kids, so I'm more aware of his tendencies than anyone. If he ever bullies you, just call me over. I'll be sure to put him in his place for you."

Astoria's eyes widened.

She even teared up a little.

"M-mistress!" She exclaimed.

"Eh?!" Elena gasped in shock.

"Mistress!" Astoria repeated again, jumping into Elena's arms and hugging her tightly.

"You're right! Master is the biggest bastard in the world! You must get justice for me!" I think you should take a look at

"Pfft...hahahahaha!"

Elena laughed brightly at Astoria's antics, understanding why Damien was so animated when he talked about her.

A harmonious atmosphere formed around them as they began to converse about this and that, glancing over at Damien every once in a while and giggling.

As for the man himself, he'd been pulled into another conversation with the emperor now that such a development had taken place.

"So in the end, it turned out like that. Fate is truly strange, isn't it?" The Emperor commented as Damien gave him a brief overview of his and Elena's past.

"I guess so. I'll definitely have to thank Fate for this one, since I doubt our meeting would've happened so easily if it wasn't for its aid." Damien responded with a smile.

"Mm, however, it seems you'll have some issues completing your side of the Mana Oath?" The Emperor teased.

"Ehhh, let's not sweat the small stuff. I'll make it work somehow," Damien mumbled, looking away sheepishly.

"I also believe you will," the Emperor said. "Truly, I must thank you for what you've done for both my daughter and my domain. Even if I give you the Genesis Bead, I don't think it'll suffice."

"Then give me some more," Damien replied instantly, his eyes lighting up.

"Hahaha, I like a man who knows what he wants. Then, shall I show you the reward I've prepared?"

"You were being serious?"

"We Golden Dragons never lie."

Damien grinned. To say he wasn't curious would be a lie. A reward chosen by the Golden Dragon Emperor himself couldn't be something simple.

"Then, what are we waiting for? I'd like to see just what our gracious emperor has prepared for me," he proclaimed with mock sarcasm.

Whoosh!

It happened before his brain could adapt. It wasn't spatial transmission, but Damien was somehow transported to an entirely different space in a single moment.

"This is..."

Damien squinted his eyes as the scenery revealed itself to him.

He was in a small grove in a forest. Trees lined the horizon, and the vicinity was decorated by several beautifully intricate statues depicting different dragons and domineering figures.

In the midst of these statues was a small and almost unnoticeable path that led deeper into the forest, towards "something" whose aura was attracting Damien like a tantalizing snack.

He followed the path until he eventually arrived before a large spring of deep, azure blue water. A translucent waterfall crashed into the spring, but despite its force, not a single ripple was formed on the water's surface.

"This is the Ancestral Dragon Pool, one of the three sacred lands of our clan."

The Golden Dragon Emperor's voice resounded from a location unknown, reverberating through the strange realm.

"Ancestral Dragon Pool?" Damien echoed, activating his All-Seeing Eyes and gazing into the water.

ROAR!

"Woah!"

He immediately stepped back as a wave of ferocious draconic intent overcame him, pressuring the dragon bloodline hidden in his body.

And in that same instant, his mind was submerged in a wave of uncontrollable excitement.

The Golden Dragon Emperor's following words did nothing to calm his raging emotions.

"The original purpose of the Ancestral Dragon Pool is to cleanse bloodlines and build the perfect dragon body for those who enter it, but though you have traces of dragon bloodline in your body, you are not a true dragon, thus this effect will not be particularly useful to you..."

"...in truth, this is the first time an outsider has entered this sacred land. In most cases, I would not deign to allow such a thing, as doing so would be useless to non-dragons, however, you are different. I do not know why, but my intuition tells me you will gain some unexpected boons if you enter the pool."

"You will have 7 days. After this, we must set off for the Grand Assembly, and you must also leave for the Ancient God Clan to do the same. What benefits you obtain will be entirely up to you. From this point onward, I can only wish you luck."

Damien grinned.

His grin widened with every passing instant as he did everything he could to suppress the urge to dive straight into the pool.

He looked up into the sky, hoping his gaze would reach the Golden Dragon Emperor.

"Emperor, make sure to take one last good look at me before I go in. In a week when you see me again, I'll show you what a true heaven-defying genius looks like."

Finally, with his words all said and his spirit raging, he let go of his inhibitions...

...and jumped.

Splash!