

Void 961

Chapter 961 Dragon Pool [1]

There was nothing special about the Ancestral Dragon Pool from the outside. It was definitely a beautiful natural spring, but if one didn't have the perception ability of the All-Seeing Eyes or something of the same caliber, it was impossible to find anything special about it.

At least, from the outside.

Splash!

Damien's body submerged into the spring, splashing its water into the air. As he disappeared beneath the surface, the various statues in the surroundings began to glow with a strange hazy light.

The scenery changed drastically. The beautiful forest and grove withered into an apocalyptic wasteland, and from this wasteland rose blistering volcanos, heaven-piercing mountains, and even roaring rivers that rushed through the sky.

ROAR!

ROAR!

ROAR!

Draconic roars reverberated through the air. Streams of mana came together to form massive projections that danced through the sky, depicting countless mythical beasts and heroes in their prime.

The glowing statues opened their eyes, beams of light connecting them each to a unique projected phenomenon. And while it was so subtle that it was imperceptible, their attention turned to the pool nearby.

The pool filled with several different colors that emanated a strong bloody scent.

It was difficult to see if one was within the scene, but if one took the time to view it as an outsider...

...it would become clear that the multicolor blood pool was the source of all else taking place in the surroundings:

Massive changes were happening outside, almost as if to represent something grand, but Damien wasn't privy to any of it.

The second he was completely submerged in the water, he felt like he was transported to another world.

'It's heavy.' He thought to himself as he gritted his teeth and endured the water's pressure.

He could still see the surface. He wasn't even a few feet deep, but he was already feeling pressure as if he was at the bottom of the ocean.

'It was a surprise, but this is still bearable. Since this is an ancestral site, won't there be greater rewards the deeper I go?'

He turned his gaze downward into the abyss that lay below. The water turned pitch black not even 100 meters deep, and what lay beyond was hidden behind its veil.

However, ever since he entered the pool, Damien felt like he wasn't the only presence within. He could vaguely feel a variety of auras. The closest ones were weak and faltering, but the more vague ones made their presence known despite the vast distance that separated them from him.

'These auras must have something to do with the actual ancestral ritual that dragons get to undergo when they enter the pool. As for me, even with the All-Seeing Eyes boosting my perception, I can only vaguely understand what they are.'

The Golden Dragon Emperor warned him from the beginning that the pool was unsuitable for outsiders, but he didn't take those words seriously until this moment.

He finally realized that it would genuinely be impossible for him to gain anything the conventional way.

'Well, I bet if I try hard enough, I can use the Breath of All Things to change my body structure into a dragon body, but why would I want to do that? I don't know what my race became after my blood was dyed in Samsara, but it definitely exceeds any mere dragon.'

There was a time when Damien looked up to dragons.

There was a time when he saw them as peak existences that he wanted to chase, a race he held pride in being associated with.

But now...?

'Now, dragons are just another species to be dominated.'

Damien grinned to himself and kicked off the water, shooting into the pool's depths.

He passed the 100-meter mark in an instant and found himself submerged once again, this time in darkness.

The pressure constricting his body became fiercer with every passing second. 1 kilometer, 5 kilometers, 9 kilometers; by the time he made it to the 10-kilometer mark, he finally started feeling its effects.

Crack!! think you should take a look at

A small fracture appeared in his forearm, alerting him to the fact that the pressure bypassed his defenses.

'At this level, Transcendent Regeneration can easily cope. I don't even have to use [Heal] yet.'

Or at least, that's what he thought.

WHOOOOOOSH!

When he reached the 20-kilometer mark, he was met with a terrifying underwater current that slammed into his body and manhandled him, throwing him around the depths and completely disorienting him.

'Shit!' He exclaimed as he rapidly used his mana to stabilize himself.

However, his defenses broke in a single second!

Damien's mana dispersed into the water the second it left his body, and to make matters worse, the dispersed mana was absorbed by the current, which enhanced it to a new level.

WHOOOOOOOOSH!

The current came back a second time to harass the unprepared Damien.

He could feel his skin and muscles rapidly tearing under its razor-sharp force, and as if aggrieved that Damien forgot about it, the ambient pressure returned in spades, exponentially strengthening the deadly environment.

'Dammit, the current tossed me at least a few kilometers deeper into the pool! I need to stabilize myself and figure out how to maneuver my mana asap!'

He gritted his teeth and closed his eyes, trusting Transcendent Regeneration to keep him alive.

He sunk his consciousness into his own body, rolling Void Mana through his systems and absorbing how it reacted to external stimuli.

'The mana dispersal is an inherent effect of the water, so trying to overcome it would be useless. Instead, I need to adapt. I'm sure that's what this test is about.'

Damien wasn't a member of a Dragon Clan. The Golden Dragon Emperor never expressly mentioned it, but Damien was certain that there were residual spirits and soul wisps in the area observing him, likely remnants of ancestral beasts.

Those ancient ancestors, how would they feel when they were suddenly awoken only to realize the individual in the Ancestral DRAGON Pool wasn't a dragon at all?

'They would be furious, and I doubt that bastard emperor bothered explaining anything.'

Damien's opinion of the emperor changed as if he was bipolar.

'When I reach Demigod level, I'm going to embarrass the shit out of him in front of Astoria. Let's see how he likes the taste of vengeance.'

Damien shook his head and focused his mind once again.

He was certain the current extraneous circumstances were a result of this hostility, and if he wasn't able to triumph over them, he would be directly killed by these long-deceased experts.

'Honestly speaking, I could probably escape death, but if they target my soul, I won't be able to defend at all. Plus, it's not a good idea to make an enemy out of the Golden Dragon Clan right now. It's highly likely that I'll be able to subordinate them in the future, so I should treat them well.'

He couldn't use brute force, since destroying the Ancestral Dragon Pool definitely didn't align with the decision he'd just made.

He couldn't Devour it either, since that would probably provoke an even worse reaction.

Void abilities were out of the question from the start. It didn't matter if they were dead, those remnant souls were experts in life. They would definitely be able to sense his greatest secret.

The Saint Emperor was enough proof of this, as he was able to sense the Void in Damien even through an Avatar.

With all these factors taken into consideration, Damien was left with only one option.

He smiled wryly at his fate.

'Welp, pain is power...right?'

If all else failed, he'd just endure the consequences with his body.

This was the Secret Way of the Masochist!

Chapter 962 Dragon Pool [2]

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Muffled explosions sounded through the depths, blasting air pockets into the tightly compressed water and disrupting its flow, however, contrary to what one might think, these explosions didn't originate from the environment at all.

Swish!

Damien's body raced deeper and deeper into the Ancestral Dragon Pool, surpassing the 5-kilometer mark quickly and continuing without pause.

As he moved, his body emitted a series of concerning popping noises, each of which was followed by a miniature explosion that rocked the pool.

Right, the explosions weren't an external threat, but rather, the effect of external threats on Damien's internal body.

The underwater current and pressure were both still attacking his external body, but after he crossed the 100-kilometer mark, a new danger joined them.

Small, barely perceptible bubbles rose from the depths. Damien couldn't see them, even with the aid of All-Seeing Eyes. Though ironic, this only meant he was forced to take yet another attack with his bodily strength.

The bubbles were far more dangerous than the other two. Damien couldn't understand the mysteries supporting them, but whenever they came in contact with his body, they'd directly bypass his physical defense and enter his internal body before exploding outward, essentially blasting Damien's organs out of his body.

Transcendent Regeneration worked as fast as possible, and while making sure to conceal it within his body, Damien used a wisp of the Breath of All Things to enhance its effects.

This was how he held up until now, finally reaching 500 kilometers deep in the seemingly endless pool.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

His body jerked forward, to the side, and straight down as three explosions rocked his body and threw him off course.

'Huu...'

He wanted to take a deep breath to calm himself down, but he could only do so inwardly. After all, he was currently underwater and unable to mobilize his mana. If he lost control of his breath, he would easily be swept up and suffocated by the currents.

'Do I have to keep descending?' He thought, gazing in the direction he assumed was downward with a frown.

Shik! Shik! Shik!

His body was impaled by multiple razor-sharp water jets. He gritted his teeth and pushed Transcendent Regeneration harder, moving to avoid any incoming projectiles.

'Fuck, I don't even know what I'm doing right now. This is frustrating.'

In the Wild Continent, Damien could act as he pleased because the fallen Emperors were without affiliation or escape, which meant even if they knew his secrets, they couldn't spread them.

Adding to that the fact that Damien took the Wild Continent for himself, he never had to worry about using his Void abilities back then.

The problem here was less about the remnant souls themselves, but their affiliation with the Golden Dragon Clan.

The outside world, the Real Plane, was what he needed to be careful of.

As he hesitated, he failed to notice the lack of attacks he'd faced as he did so.

Around him, the waters stilled.

And Damien finally looked back into the surroundings, his eyes widening in amazement.

Discounting Aquazel, he hadn't spent much time underwater, so Damien was still a stranger to many of the environment's phenomena.

Therefore, the current scene was an amazing novelty even in his eyes,

The 5 meters of space around Damien was still and quiet, almost like the surface of an undisturbed lake.

It was serene, and gave Damien a subtle feeling of moonlight for unknown reasons.

However, outside that small haven was utter chaos.

No light could reach this depth, but the "darkness" in the water still whipped back and forth like a rampaging bull, terrifying storms tearing up the water, and even more terrifying pressure forcing the water to compress to untold levels.

Deadly attacks zoomed around without any target in particular, merely hoping to impact anything before they dispersed, explosive pockets formed thousands of times every second, and just vaguely...

The smoky cyan shadow of a massive dragon revealed itself.

"Yo—"

Damien tried projecting his thoughts, but even that was silenced by the water.

OOOOOOOOH!

RUMBLE!

The dragon shadow let out a cry that reverberated through the water and shook the very foundation of the Ancestral Dragon Pool.

Through the vibrations tearing through the water, a string of words boomed in Damien's ears. I think you should take a look at

"Act. Without. Resignation. No. Soul. Shall. Witness...No. Soul. Shall. Hear."

Damien's eyes widened.

'This...it couldn't have possibly...!'

Damien wanted to deny it, but there was no way he could just chalk it up to coincidence and move on!

This dragon shadow...definitely knew about his Void Breathing!

'What should I do...'

He wanted to contemplate his options, but how could he be given the time to do that?

Damien watched as the safe zone was rapidly devoured by the outside chaos. He watched it approach him, it's deathly maws hungering for his blood.

There was no time to think.

At this point...

'Agh, I don't even know anymore! Fuck it, let's just go!'

Damien stopped holding back.

VOOM!

The chaotic water flow finally caught up to him, but in that same instant, a terrifying wall of pitch-black mana slammed it back, forcefully taming the chaos.

'You want to see me go all out? Then...'

"COME AT ME!"

Damien roared with all his power. He infused the Breath of Nothingness into his words and forced the atmosphere to accept their presence, causing them to reverberate through the water in every direction, filling the space with his presence.

BANG!

His foot kicked out, pounding into the water like it was solid and using it as a foothold to send him flying deeper yet again.

However, he wasn't going to lose this time.

This time...

XIU! XIU! XIU!

WHOOOOOOOOOSH!

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The countless annihilatory forces barraged Damien with fierceness like never before. Yet, he didn't pay them any mind as he pushed forward.

Void Mana raged into the surroundings, dissolving the water's natural mana and devouring it, feeding it to Damien, who then used it to power his Regeneration.

The energy of Devour didn't stop there, though. It spread up into the areas of the pool Damien had already passed through and exploded into a black hole whose vacuum force voraciously consumed everything the water had to offer.

The underwater current was sucked away like a living organism being drawn into a tornado. The pressure also decreased marginally with Devour's interference.

Devour covered the retreat path, while Void Breathing took the role of clearing the path forward.

The Breath of All Things and the Breath of Nothingness were both directly opposite and absolutely the same.

This meant that, while they contradicted each other, they could be used in tandem and would actually boost each other's strengths.

The Breath of All Things pertained to the material. Just as Devour did from the rear, it cleared the water itself of any negative effects and destroyed the deathly phenomena that were awaiting Damien's arrival. As if this wasn't enough, it also imbued the water with positive effects that returned Damien the ability to use his mana freely.

However, he didn't need it anymore.

The Breath of Nothingness pertained to the ethereal. Unlike the other two Void abilities in action, it didn't aid Damien's charge forward at all.

Rather, it snaked through the surroundings, on the prowl for prey.

Its specific purpose, however, wouldn't reveal itself quite yet.

Currently, Damien was 5,000 kilometers deep in the Ancestral Dragon Pool.

And from the looks of it, there would be at least another 5,000 before he could reach its floor.

'Really, if the rewards don't justify this uselessly long journey, I swear I'm going to rage.'

Chapter 963 Dragon Pool [3]

The Ancestral Dragon Pool, as the Golden Dragon Emperor mentioned, was originally meant for dragons to cleanse their blood and grow.

This process was not just a matter of the body, but also the spirit.

The "blood cleansing" process is the last that takes place before one exits the pool. Before one can gain the opportunity to cleanse their blood, they first needed to obtain the approval of the ancestors.

This was naturally done through a series of tests taken once one dove to the limit of their endurance, offered by the remnant souls slumbering in the specified area.

After obtaining the approval of an ancestral dragon, the young dragon would be granted a portion of the ancestor's bloodline memories and power, which would help them define their future growth path. The immense combined benefits of these many processes would gradually show themselves as the genius grew, manifesting as heaven-defying talent and potential.

Knowing this, one might question: just how could the Golden Dragon Clan maintain the Ancestral Dragon Pool?

Regardless of the clan's power, it couldn't change reality. Every ancestral soul wisp could at most choose a single genius before losing its power, so how could the Ancestral Dragon Pool support the clan for generations on end?

It wasn't due to an excessive number of deceased predecessors, that much was for sure.

Actually, the Ancestral Dragon Pool wasn't a treasure of the Golden Dragon Clan at all.

The truth was far, far more mystical.

The true Ancestral Dragon Pool resided in the Heavenly World, far removed from Grand Heavens Boundary.

However, the Ancestral Dragon Pool was one of the Dragon species' greatest treasures. It was able to project itself anywhere it could find dragons and present them with a minimized version of itself, empowering and uniting the entire Dragon species under a single umbrella.

No matter how terrible feuds between Dragon Clans became, they would never openly attempt to exterminate each other.

At least, as long as there weren't extraneous circumstances such as a fate of enslavement.

Nevertheless, the secret to why the Ancestral Dragon Pool could support the entirety of the Dragon species lay in the nature of Dragons themselves.

It wasn't known to many, but the soul of every dragon that reached the nine revolutions of extreme peak 4th class or higher would be laid to rest within the pool.

It wasn't just one clan or even one universe, but every dragon in existence that was subject to this.

Therefore, how could the Ancestral Dragon Pool ever run out of energy?

Its closed positive feedback loop was precisely what allowed dragons to become such fearsome existences with both knowledge and power in spades.

Most young dragons didn't make it very deep in the pool, but since the pool tested potential rather than strength, it wasn't too rare for those ancestral souls in the 5000-kilometer depths to take interest in those who don't even make it halfway to their perch.

However, the 5000 kilometers of area below that point marked an absolute turning point.

Every dragon soul existing in this area was extremely powerful, each a renowned expert of their era,

It was rare for geniuses to reach these depths, and even rarer for these dragons to take interest.

Unfortunately, today wasn't a day where they could maintain their nonchalance.

ROAR!

A terrifyin— no, a terrified roar rang out.

A dark red dragon soul rushed through the depths with all its power, swerving through the deathly phenomena around it with precision and using everything it possibly could to block the path behind it and delay its pursuer.

Yet, nothing it did worked.

Voom!

A pulse of pitch-black mana spread through the water and instantly dispersed everything it contacted. Rocks and obstructions were directly dissolved into nothingness, while every dragon soul and mana phenomenon was devoured and recycled for a good cause.

The dragon soul panicked. It tried to escape with all its power, but there was quite literally nothing it could do.

Shiver! I think you should take a look at

Its body suddenly shook. An eerie sensation crawled up its proverbial back.

The dragon soul froze.

Its only option was to die.

It didn't realize this until the very last moment.

Whoosh!

The dragon soul was swallowed up by a beastly maw of mana. Its memories rushed into Damien's head while its power incorporated with his own, strengthening both his mana and his bloodlines.

'Good! The more of these souls I absorb, the easier it is to exist in this water!'

While Damien didn't know it, one was originally only supposed to absorb a single soul, and consensually at that.

But why did he need to care? In the first place, this trial was rigged against him.

Since that mysterious dragon shadow wanted him to go all out, he was going to give it a great show.

'After all, a dragon shadow that can directly suppress the Ancestral Dragon Pool is definitely not a simple character.

And even if it was, Damien would just devour it for fooling him.

His plan was perfect.

He was currently 8000 kilometers deep in the Ancestral Dragon Pool, and this red dragon soul was the 36th he'd absorbed.

He slowed down his pace and set up a barrier so he could peacefully absorb the dragon soul's memories.

Well, it wasn't like any dragon soul would take initiative to approach him after his rampage, but that was beside the point.

'As I thought, the position of these dragon souls isn't determined by strength, but by Legend.' Damien confirmed after watching through the memories.

'Of the dragons I've devoured so far, only 5 or 6 of them were at the Demigod level when they were alive, but their souls were so deteriorated that they couldn't maintain the ability to speak coherently. The rest are all at varying revolutions of the extreme peak, but what all of them have in common is...'

The 6th soul Damien absorbed was a great general who led countless armies to sweep the Nox 10,000 years ago. His efforts allowed the universe several years of respite, which then allowed the universe's forces to make an informed counterattack that almost drove the Nox out of the universe.

The 13th soul was a reaper who served under a Death Dragon Godbeast. He was in charge of managing hundreds of millions of souls that were reaped every day to aid the Demigod in his training. However, appalled by the inhumanity, he rebelled against the Demigod with the help of several allies he met in his travels and overthrew him, bringing safety to an untold number of people in his era.

The 36th soul, the red dragon soul, belonged to a youth no older than 20 years. His life was short, but he was a heaven-defying genius who was able to reach the extreme peak in that tiny amount of time. And while he didn't live long enough to have a long string of grand accomplishments, he held the monumental achievement of exploding his blood vitality to seal an Abyssal Corridor that opened in his sector, both preventing invasion and saving the entire sector from imminent doom.

'...they were all the "protagonists" of their generations.'

The feats that supported their Legends were varied, but they were all fantastical stories of people who accomplished things many never would, even after ascending to Divinity.

In fact, Divinities were even less likely to build pronounced Legends, because they were more cautious than anyone.

'It's interesting. I should experiment more.'

Damien grinned to himself as he clenched his fist and panned his gaze across the surroundings like a predator searching for prey.

It truly was interesting.

These Legends were so great that they couldn't be wholly contained. A portion of their power leaked into Damien's Legend when he absorbed them, empowering him and adding their stories to his own.

It was a strange feeling that he couldn't quite pinpoint, and he wanted to know more about it.

'As expected, this Ancestral Dragon Pool really is exciting.'

Chapter 964 Dragon Pool [4]

Damien immediately acted on his desire.

Before him, these dragon souls were mere worms. They couldn't resist the pull of the Breath of All Things and the crushing force of the Breath of Nothingness. Their souls were dissected and their strengths were divided and repurposed to aid Damien to the best of their abilities.

As a result of their attempt to isolate and suppress him, they faced his wrath.

And they faced it in spades.

Damien didn't move from the 8000 to 9000-kilometer depth, taking his time to tear through each and every dragon soul he could find.

The number of devoured souls increased from double digits to triple digits, and as time went by, it even approached the quadruple digits!

'I've devoured...776. The sheer volume of memories and Legends isn't something I can manage in a short period of time, but the Mind Prison's support is somewhat mitigating that problem.'

Damien was once again forced to thank the mysterious technique he'd discovered in the Cloud Plane.

Originally, it was supposed to be a sword technique, but Damien avoided the "sword" part like the plague.

It wasn't his intent, it was just a result of the circumstances. In the beginning, Tian Yang warned him to practice carefully so he didn't get turned into a heartless monster by the technique, so Damien was cautious in his usage.

After he overcame himself, he'd thought about using the Void Heart Sword Law as inspiration to create more sword techniques of his own, but before he got around to it, he gained so many new abilities that he forgot about it entirely.

Ever since then, Damien had never paid attention to the "Sword Law" half of the technique, however, he'd done plenty of work to improve the "Void Heart" section,

The Mind Prison was always one of his greatest spiritual defenses, and as he grew, he made sure it grew with him.

With its current abilities, not only could it hold his own memories and emotions, it could be used as a storage space for the things swallowed by the Breath of Nothingness...

...including intact souls

The previously figurative mind prison truly became its name.

This ability was crucial in the current situation especially, since Damien would undoubtedly be corrupted and controlled by the memories he was devouring otherwise.

After all, no matter how fortified his spiritual world was, he was absorbing millions of years' worth of memories from several different scattered eras and locations, some not in Grand Heavens Boundary at all!

Yet, there would always be a limit.

As Damien realized himself, the Mind Prison could only "mitigate" the problem, not "solve" it.

'On the bright side, it's not much of a loss. I'll devour one more so I can hit the lucky number 777 and then I'll make my way down to the bottom of the pool. That should be where the previous dragon shadow's aura is pulling me to.'

Damien made good on his word instantly. The next dragon soul unlucky enough to find itself in his trajectory was devoured without much of a struggle and integrated with the rest.

'It's a shame that it wasn't too powerful, but oh well.'

Damien shrugged and pushed his spatial abilities, enhanced by Void Mana, to propel him to the deepest depths of the Ancestral Dragon Pool as soon as possible,

It was an incredibly effective method. Damien was able to directly bypass almost every threat awaiting him, and Void Breathing easily dealt with anything unavoidable.

From 8500 kilometers to 10,000 was a simple journey, but when Damien arrived, he realized...

10,000 kilometers wasn't the deepest depth at all!

'Fucking hell.' He cursed inwardly, mildly annoyed.

He didn't bother to loiter around at the false bottom of the pool. Now, his greatest priority was finding that dragon shadow.

He teleported ceaselessly and used a complex combination of Dimensional Cages and other Dimensional Magic to efficiently traverse several hundred kilometers per minute,

15,000...20,000...25,000...

When he reached the 30,000-kilometer mark, he finally saw a difference in the black water.

'Is this it?'

He excitedly shot down another few thousand kilometers, and finally, after a needlessly long journey...

His foot touched solid ground.

Whoosh!! I think you should take a look at

A breeze brushed past.

Damien silently enjoyed the—

'Wait, a breeze?'

Damien's eyes widened as he realized that the "water" around him was no longer water in any sense.

Rather, it was air colored and textured to look like water.

'Is this a secret realm?' Damien wondered, but the All-Seeing Eyes didn't reveal any signs of spatial disturbance, so he was forced to throw away this assumption.

'These ancestral dragons are so flashy, it's impossible for a humble person like me to rationalize their ways. If I want answers, I need to find him.'

Damien's eyes turned west.

'It feels close. I shouldn't be obstructed from this point forth.'

He rushed west, reaching his destination in a matter of seconds.

He scanned the area, trying to locate traces of the blue dragon shadow, however...

"An egg?"

The only thing he found was a deep blue egg with several swirling patterns decorating its surface. It was about as 4 feet tall, and when Damien went to pick it up, he realized it weighed at least as much as a mountain!

"What the hell kind of egg is this?!" He exclaimed.

Even the biggest Behemoths weren't this heavy in their prenatal states!

Damien dragged the egg out of the hidden crater he found it in and placed it on flat ground before observing it with every perception ability he had.

His awareness pierced it from every angle, but no matter how he enhanced his abilities, he could only vaguely make out the figure within.

'This time, my abilities aren't failing. I'm sure that both my awareness and All-Seeing Eyes are working properly. Then...isn't the thing in this egg quite phenomenal?'

If his perception didn't fail him, then the creature in this egg was still incubating, and it was clear that the process hadn't started that long ago!

Yet, the egg was already as heavy as a mountain and carried such a profound and strange aura?

'I should take it with me for now. Maybe I can get some answers by placing it in a time dilation in the Sanctuary and supporting its growth for a while.'

Regardless of what it was, it was interesting, and that was enough reason for Damien to take it.

[Do you really think so?]

A voice boomed through the atmosphere, trembling the air.

"Eh?" Damien raised his brow in curiosity and turned it around.

"A dragon soul with sentience, that's a first," he commented as he faced the being that materialized behind him,

It was only a head.

Yet, it was a head large enough to eclipse the entire secret realm as far as Damien could perceive it.

A single eye of this dragon was larger than any star or planet.

Damien's body shivered in unwitting excitement.

It was an instinctual response.

He gradually opened his mouth and moved his lips to speak, suppressing his emotions in the face of this absolute power.

"Not only did you just read my thoughts, you've maintained your sentience. Since I haven't met another dragon soul even close to that level, I have to assume it was you who called me here," he said, taking a deep breath,

He grinned and firmly brought his fist to his palm in greeting.

"My name is Damien Void, future ruler of everything. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Chapter 965 Ancestor [1]

"My name is Damien Void, future ruler of everything. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Damien respectfully bowed his head and greeted the entity before him, but his words were as arrogant as they could be.

When he first encountered this shadow not long ago, he hadn't been able to sense anything from it and could only gauge its importance by its abilities.

However, after devouring a whopping 777 dragon souls, the situation was different.

Damien felt an inherent reverence that stemmed from the very core of his being, from his Legend.

The memories he devoured from those dragon souls were still being digested, but from what he understood already, he could estimate the status of this blue dragon shadow.

Its gargantuan universe-eclipsing size and aura were one thing, but they could only attest to the fact that the Dragon had definitely reached Divinity in its lifetime, and not to a small degree either.

The effect on Damien's Legend, on the other hand, was unprecedented.

The Legends that merged into his own were practically forcing him to his knees, attempting to destroy his ego when he refused.

He was able to tame them easily since they were now his property, but their reaction indicated a single fact more than any other:

This dragon soul was a true Godbeast.

As Damien learned long, long ago in the First Dungeon, beasts had multiple evolutionary paths.

It wasn't rare for a beast to change its species entirely by the time it reached the peak of its power, but regardless of how it evolved, its growth paths would always stem from Godbeast blood.

Every single beast had Godbeast blood, but for most, this blood was diluted and muddled until its existence lost any meaning.

When a beast grew into its power, its Godbeast blood would also grow and evolve, merging with its own blood and enhancing its state of existence.

And finally, at the final step before Divinity, beasts are offered a choice:

Their first choice was to follow the growth path of their Godbeast Ancestor. This path was safe and relatively stable. As long as one possessed the appropriate potential and was able to stay alive long enough, they would eventually reach the Godbeast level, even if it took a million years to do so.

Along with that, since these Godbeasts were already well-established, their bloodline memories existed to aid their descendants forward, supporting them and granting them compatible techniques to use.

The second choice was much riskier. This choice meant to forgo the ancestral path and carve one's own path. Following this path didn't guarantee success, and in fact, most who chose it ultimately failed and died without achieving anything monumental.

However, for those who were able to succeed in their attempts and rise to the status of Godbeast with their own power, sheerly through devouring other bloodlines and refining one's own, their power would far exceed those following the ancestral path.

And even greater, their Legend would morph, granting them immense prestige on the same level as those primordial Godbeasts who established the paths that most currently follow.

It was a huge risk that most weren't willing to take since it concerned their futures.

But this blue dragon shadow was not one of them.

Not only did it take the risk, it succeeded with flying colors.

Damien didn't know what kind of Godbeast it was, but he was sure that the path this dragon shadow built brick by brick during its lifetime was currently guiding countless dragons to their own peaks.

It was only right for the residual emotions of the devoured dragon souls to feel inherent reverence for this being.

Even Damien felt immense respect for its achievements.

Yet, he maintained cautiousness.

He didn't know this being's intentio—

[Must you be so wary? If this Emperor wished to slay you, would you still be standing?]

The dragon shadow's booming disconnected voice interrupted Damien's inner thoughts, making him cringe slightly.

"You know, most people find it rude when you read their thoughts without permission," he muttered.

[This Emperor does not care for the grievances of mortals.]

"Is it still called a god complex if the being in question is actually a god?" I think you should take a look at

[Child, you must be wondering why this Emperor summoned you here.]

Damien's quip was entirely ignored by the dragon shadow, who easily swerved the conversation into its main objective.

Damien sighed to himself and nodded, not saying anything.

'I mean, I'm definitely curious, but I don't like this feeling of losing the momentum... anyway, this guy is already dead and I doubt any dragon clan geniuses are making it this deep, so I might as well just listen. Let's consider it granting an old man his final wish.'

As Damien entertained himself with some devious thoughts, the blue dragon shadow began telling its story.

[The time of this Emperor's beginning...is lost and unattainable. A matter of millions cannot possibly describe it.]

The dragon shadow's words were accompanied by a change of scenery. The entire hidden realm morphed to follow its words, giving Damien a visual accompaniment.

It was a dark sky that light simply didn't exist with enough strength to penetrate.

There were a few thousand stars total, and while the blackness looked ever-expanding, the truth was that these few thousand were the only worlds in all of existence.

[This Emperor was born Qi Long, a lizard in the 9th Water Tribe. We were not beasts, however, we developed sentience through the Blessing of Water and worshipped it in return.]

The surroundings zoomed in on a single planet, and on that planet, a single small lake that was home to a group of roughly 80 monitor lizard-like creatures.

Among them were 30 adolescents, one of which was Qi Long.

The tribe lived and died together, fighting off threats from nearby tribes and growing until they conquered the rest of the 41 Water Tribes in the world.

When they achieved sovereignty, most of the clansmen became content and lived in peace, but Qi Long was different.

[In this Emperor's 50th year, the joys of life provided by peace became dull. This Emperor lusted after higher peaks that the 9th Water Tribe could not reach.]

Eventually, he decided to leave.

He broke through the bounds of the world and traveled, eventually learning about "power" and the means to gain it, something the Water Tribes never came in contact with.

And through these same travels, he realized that the "Blessing of Water" was actually a curse that limited and siphoned his tribe's potential.

Enraged by this fact, he trained harder and encountered several opportunities, not only becoming an expert, but creating a path for himself and his people to follow that wouldn't be affected by the external curse of the Blessing of Water.

This was one of the very first instances of beast evolution.

And while this achievement was one unknown to him at the time, his repertoire was still growing by the day. He left his mark in every world he visited and even brought several hundred under his umbrella.

[After 500 years, this Emperor returned to the 9th Water Tribe and confronted the water itself, revealing its schemes and defeating it after 100 days of unending combat.]

Qi Long, who was now in human form, stood above an expansive sea. Its water curled around his feet in worship and danced around his body in joy.

The water of his homeworld was not normal water, but a portion of the heavens manifested as water. Its significance was far greater than anything Qi Long could imagine.

[Through victory, this Emperor ascended. From a mere nameless lizard, this Emperor became a True Dragon. The waters branded my soul and body, forever attaching me with a title.]

"Azure."

Azure like the ocean waves, azure like the sky above. Qi Long was a being who came from the starry sky to force the Seas of Heaven into submission, and through this feat unlike anything that had been accomplished in history thus far, he gained a control over water that was almost godly.

Damien's eyes widened in shock.

'Don't tell me...'

Looking at the way this story was going, Damien could already guess this dragon shadow's identity.

The legendary Azure Dragon.

A Godbeast whose influence was so unbelievably widespread that even Earth, so far removed from the true universe until a few decades ago, had several religions that mentioned him.

'Holy shit.'

Chapter 966 Ancestor [2]

'Holy shit.'

Damien finally realized how important the dragon before him was, but his questions only became greater with this discovery.

After all, if he truly was the great Azure Dragon, the first Azure Dragon to ever exist at that, then...

How did he die?

Damien hoped to find the answer as the story continued.

Obtaining "Azure" was the first step in Qi Long's grueling journey to power.

"Azure" wasn't necessarily a direct boost in power, but rather a "key" that would only become useful in time.

After defeating the Seas of Heaven, Qi Long went along to conquer the 3,000 worlds. With his power and dominion over water, finding someone who could match him was almost impossible.

The era and location of Qi Long's story were both a mystery, but as the story continued, it became clear that Qi Long's homeland was far separated from any sort of true universe.

It took 1000 years to conquer the 3,000 worlds in their entirety.

Another 4000 years passed after that with Qi Long training to his utmost and trying to find a way to further improve.

Until one day, he finally broke the bounds of his small universe and arrived somewhere greater.

'The Heavenly World.' Damien thought to himself.

The scenery around him wasn't much different from what he'd witnessed in his many years of life, but something just felt different.

The mana in the air was different, purer and far more dense. This mana carried stronger power in its ambient form than most lower universe existences could output with all their strength.

The lush grasses and greenery and the resident fauna were new and interesting, piquing Damien's interest even though he had no knowledge whatsoever of herbology and other related fields.

There was simply something mystical about the place that Damien couldn't place his finger on.

And Qi Long felt the same.

His adventure in the Heavenly World began when he had yet to reach the extreme peak and continued until the very end of his life.

For the most part, there wasn't anything strange about his story. It was a tale of hard work and effort combined with talent that could support it creating a genius of untold proportion.

"Azure" aided Qi Long until the very end, eventually allowing him to break free of the shackles of existence and become a true spiritual god.

It was an inspiring and wondrous chain of events that would make any common practitioner worship the genius who overcame it, but Damien wasn't too interested in Qi Long's origin story.

After all, wasn't his life already something similar?

What interested Damien was the concept Qi Long began researching after he plateaued in his Godbeast path.

'Universal Flow.'

As someone who controlled a power of heaven, Qi Long was far more in tune with the universe than the average practitioner, and when he underwent Cosmic Rebirth, he felt the subtle force that guided all existence on its proper path.

He became infatuated with the concept rapidly. He felt as if he'd discovered a hint at the answer to everything. He researched and researched, spending thousands of years trying to come in contact with the concept again...

...only to fail completely.

He theorized that he just wasn't "destined" to comprehend Universal Flow. While destiny wasn't a tangible force and would usually be left out of any sort of research, Universal Flow was a concept heavily tied to the ethereal and intangible.

By Qi Long's hypotheses, the concept known as "Universal Flow" was...everything.

It didn't influence the universe, it was the universe. It didn't influence events, it carried them out as they were supposed to be carried out.

In some sense, the best way to describe Universal Flow was as the "plot" of a novel.

Only, this novel had no writer.

No being controlled the plot, but the plot was created nonetheless.

Universal Flow was the tail of this "plot" that peeked out of the clouds. Its body and head were too profound for even the universe itself to understand, let alone mere existences within it.

Unfortunately, Qi Long couldn't get further than this point in his research without actually coming in contact with the force again. It was especially frustrating since the memory he had of the force was blurred as if it had been tampered with.

Qi Long eventually gave up on his unattainable dream and returned to increasing his power as he'd always done, but little did he know that the small progress he'd made at this time would eventually be received by a junior untold years in the future.

And that junior...

That junior carried the "destiny" that he lacked.

Damien's eyes were wide in shock, but also glazed over like a corpse.

He stood frozen like a statue as Qi Long's story played out around him.

Yet, he wasn't seeing it at all.

In his eyes was reflected a certain "something." I think you should take a look at

He couldn't describe it in words.

How could he, a mortal, ever dare?

However, it was beautiful and incomprehensible, almost directly shattering his ego with its presence alone.

He suddenly understood.

This wasn't a force he should interfere with.

This wasn't something he should have ever touched.

It was best if he followed Qi Long's example and gave up.

'It's impossible for a human to touch something like this. It's impossible for a human to—'

Gasp!

Damien's eyes abruptly focused. He gasped for air and immediately used the Mind Prison to separate any and all unneeded emotions from his mind.

'Dangerous. That was too dangerous.' He thought to himself.

'But...I finally came in contact with it.'

He saw it with his own eyes.

He didn't just mildly feel it like he'd been doing thus far, he truly witnessed it in all its glory.

It was terrifying.

A force that was ever present and constantly guiding all things on their proper paths.

It wasn't just god-like, it was God.

[Have you understood?]

The Azure Dragon's voice rang out.

Damien nodded slightly.

Qi Long never made progress in his research on Universal Flow, he was still someone who'd made contact with it, something that only happened a single-digit number of times in the universe's lifetime.

What Qi Long sensed from Damien when they first met wasn't the Void, but Universal Flow.

The reason he was called to this place was exactly this.

"But if you only summoned me because of Universal Flow, why did you show me the rest?" Damien suddenly asked as curiosity overcame him.

[There is much you can learn from observing this Emperor's experiences.]

The Azure Dragon's answer was simple and perfunctory.

"That's true," Damien said in response, "but what's the use? These memories will only be useful to the dragon you—"

Damien halted his words, his eyes shakily returning to the Azure Dragon.

"You aren't thinking of..."

[This Emperor has rested long enough. It is time to appoint a successor.]

"Shouldn't you be appointing a dragon to be your successor?! I won't even be able to use most of your techniques!"

The Azure Dragon's massive eyes rolled downward, his gaze meeting Damien's.

[An existence chosen by the Universal Flow is more valuable than the entire Dragon species combined. This Emperor would much rather entrust you with my legacy than any other being.]

Damien stared up at the Godbeast at a loss for words. He was dumbfounded by this series of events that was taking a completely different direction than expected.

And the worst part was, that direction was also the most obvious one!

Honestly, there wasn't much to consider. No matter how incompatible he and Qi Long were, the other party was a true Godbeast.

Damien was prepared to take anything he possibly could from the Azure Dragon without leaving a single scrap behind.

Qi Long closed his eyes.

His shadow started to fade into the atmosphere.

And ever-so-gently, a wisp of blue entered Damien's spiritual world.

Little did he know, however, that this little blue wisp would make him suffer more than anything he'd faced since he arrived in the greater universe.

Chapter 967 Ancestor [3]

The Azure Dragon's blessing affected both the material and ethereal, but its effects were centralized in the body.

When that little blue wisp entered Damien's spiritual world, it immediately exploded into a rampaging wave of Divine Power that broke through the ethereal and flooded Damien's body from his head downward.

The pain began almost instantaneously. The second the mana broke through into Damien's body, the first thing it did was refine his brain.

And naturally, as his nerves were being directly attacked and restructured, he was subjected to unbearable torment that rid him of the ability to think at all.

"Ggghhhhh...!"

Damien gritted his teeth and let out a muffled groan as the Divine Power entrenched itself deeper into his systems.

The process of body reconstruction didn't need explanation. Damien had already experienced it many times and while this one was more intrinsic and targeted even his nervous system and other facets that were usually left untouched, it wasn't much different in the actual methodology.

He was broken down and put back together over and over again until he was fortified to a new degree.

However, the main physical focus of this ritual was never body reconstruction. Instead, it was "blood."

The blood circulating through Damien's body was dyed in black and white, mirroring yin and yang at the beginning of creation. This blood was created and fueled by Samsara, already placing it near the level of Divinity in its worth.

Even if it was the Azure Dragon, improving this blood was impossible. The Azure Dragon didn't have much expertise on Life and Death Laws in the first place.

Bloodlines, on the other hand, were a different story.

Bloodlines were indeed incorporated into the bloodstream, but they had an ethereal element to them as well.

Bloodlines weren't regulated by the heart and pumped through the body like normal blood. They were special and had their own metaphorical cores that held all of their base properties.

These properties included purity, bloodline memories, strength, and many other things.

As such, when one bled, their bloodline wouldn't be depleted, but it was still possible to burn one's bloodline to heighten its potential for a short period of time.

Generally, every individual bloodline in one's body would have its own core. The only outliers were those who had multiple different bloodlines from beasts of similar species, whose bloodlines had the possibility of merging.

The Void Physique naturally didn't allow Damien to follow this common path. When he was in the Fiest Dungeon and using Devour to rapidly grow his power, he devoured countless bloodlines that were all condensed into a single bloodline core, leading to a muddled and inefficient final product.

This problem was solved later when Damien used the Primordial Undying Tree's fruits to restructure his bloodline and purify it. His new bloodline was far stronger and aided him many times in the conflicts that occurred afterward.

Still, the question remained: why did the Void Physique make him follow such a seemingly disadvantageous path?

As time went on, this question remained unanswered and Damien's bloodlines gradually became irrelevant.

His strength improved too fast. He devoured thousands or even tens of thousands of beings, but they were either beings with lesser bloodlines than his own or Nox who didn't contribute anything to his bloodline at all.

If there was any place for Damien to find a hope of increasing his bloodline's power, it was the previous conflict filled with dying dragons. Unfortunately, aside from a few Black Dragons, Damien was unable to devour the rest of the countless enemies he'd slain.

It was almost as if the Azure Dragon was aware of Damien's flaws.

Damien kept his mind focused on the pain and his perception focused inside his body. He watched with as much lucidity as he could muster as tiny blue wisps infected his bloodline core and altered it.

It was an odd feeling that didn't contribute to his agony, but made him feel a sense of disconcertion and discomfort that stacked on top of the pain.

He didn't know what was happening.

Currently, he had two main bloodlines: Dragon and Demon. The first had clear origins and could be easily traced and improved, but the second...

Even Damien wasn't quite sure how he managed to extract this bloodline and internalize it, nor did he know its origin.

Damien always figured in the back of his mind that this bloodline had mysterious and powerful origins, but at the moment the blue wisps contacted it, his assumptions became truths.

Damien's bloodline core tremored as the Divine Power of an Ancestral Godbeast collided against the unknown power. I think you should take a look at

Bang!

His body rapidly morphed, becoming tall, pale, and demonic. The unknown bloodline bared its fangs against the Azure Dragon's influence like a prideful lion resisting hunters.

The bloodline's influence spread through his body and covered him in various blood runes, most of which Damien didn't know the identity of. He could feel the Azure Dragon's Divine Power reeling like an offended young master and preparing to strike back.

"...!"

Damien immediately became alert. If that collision was allowed to occur, his bloodline core would undoubtedly sustain damage.

His bloodlines didn't matter much anymore, but Damien couldn't risk that explosion affecting his soul or abilities in any way!

Whoosh!

Damien's worries were solved before they could properly manifest:

A stream of essence Damien hadn't seen in a very long time forced itself between the two powers.

The pure force of the Void Physique, different from Void Mana and Void Essence but sharing the same origin, rolled through Damien's body and reeled the many ongoing processes under its control.

Huu...

Damien exhaled slowly, believing he had a moment of respite now that the Void Physique would regulate the changes.

However...

Did he forget...?

The Void Physique was the very thing that turned him into a masochist who lived by the slogan: "Pain is power."

The bodily effects were controlled now, so they'd resume without the same pain or conflict they'd produced thus far.

Therefore, the ethereal portion of the process could finally start.

Gasp!

Damien's chest jerked forward. He threw his head back and his eyes widened into saucers as he gasped for air with everything he had.

Divine Power invaded the core of his being, the depths of his soul, and began a secondary metamorphosis.

This time, there was truly no other sensation besides pain.

Damien couldn't sense his soul yet, nor could he sense what was happening to it.

He only felt that it was being torn apart.

His ego was threatening to collapse directly. His mind almost shattered into a million pieces, mentally crippling him.

Damien urgently moved everything important to him into the Mind Prison. Emotions, memories, the World Core Fusion Reactor, and the manifestations of stars in his spiritual world packed the Mind Prison until it couldn't hold anything more.

And by the time he finished setting up this emergency countermeasure, he completely lost control of his mind and body.

He felt like he was floating in a white space with no sort of definition. The pain that resonated through his body yet didn't originate from it at all manifested itself as several bloody illusions in this space that kept Damien company.

With no witnesses, and to the knowledge of only a single remnant soul, a brand etched itself onto Damien's soul.

The brand...

...of "Azure."

Chapter 968 Ancestor [4]

An unknown amount of time passed after the soul transformation began, and by the time it ended, the bodily processes reached their conclusion as well.

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

Damien fell to the ground and desperately tried to catch his breath.

That was truly an unbearable process.

Usually, Damien could at least watch the changes taking place and he could use this to maintain his lucidity and focus, but this time, he was alone with the pain.

It was enough to make any normal person lose his mind. It didn't matter how strong Damien's mental defenses were; the Divine Power would have absolutely crushed his mind into oblivion if he didn't take the initiative to hide away everything that defined him.

His spiritual world was an absolute mess in its current state, which made it extremely difficult for Damien to take his mind off the terror he just experienced and move on,

It was only after he removed his ego from isolation and regained the warmth of a "sense of self" that he managed to calm down.

'What...happened?' He muttered inwardly as he inspected his body.

First of all, his physical body had been strengthened to a new level. He would definitely be able to resist attacks from anyone under the High Commander level without any mana defense at all.

His response time was nearly instantaneous now. His body could now react to his intentions before he could even fully realize them.

His thoughts and processing ability were much faster than before, a noticeable change caused by the refining of his brain and spiritual world.

Damien skimmed over these changes as he focused his perception on his bloodline core.

It used to be pure red, almost like a blood clot. Now, however, it was entirely different.

It was pitch black in its base, with intricate patterns of gold, white, blue, and a hint of red wrapping around it to form a beautiful and profound picture.

'This is...have my bloodlines been merged?'

Not just merged, but empowered. The previously immovable demon bloodline had somehow swallowed its draconic companion and merged with the Azure Dragon's Divine Power to create a completely new "bloodline-like force" that resided in Damien's bloodline core.

"What a good thing," he muttered somewhat spitefully as he realized that he'd have to put effort into fully digesting his bloodline change.

"No, instead of focusing on that, why does it feel like I can..."

Damien summoned a ball of Void Mana on his palm. He moved it around and played with its wisps, observing it thoughtfully.

"If I just..."

There was a new instinct in his body, backed by mysterious comprehension.

Damien followed that instinct and altered the structure of his mana.

The wispy pitch-black Void Mana gradually brightened and shifted in color as well as texture.

Its entire state of matter changed.

From what exhibited itself as a gas, the Void Mana became liquid.

No, it became "water."

Damien flicked his finger and let the ball of water fly forward with the strength of a regular mortal's throw.

Without much suspense, it arced through the air and separated into droplets before splashing against the ground.

It was just ordinary water...

'Holy shit...did I just do that?!'

...however, Damien's reaction suggested anything but.

'Even the Saint Emperor can only imitate other elements with his mana. I have no affinity for water at all, and I've barely come in contact with it. How can I...'

How could he bend the laws of reality so easily?!

Affinities existed for a reason. Humans, or all living things for that matter, were granted affinities at birth and would follow their paths until death. It was still possible to gain new elements, but only those one already had some affinity with.

Damien's Time Law was an inborn affinity that took time to manifest, but his lightning was a perfect example of the aforementioned phenomenon. If Damien originally had no affinity for lightning, the Void Physique wouldn't have been able to implant a new affinity into his weak and malnourished body.

Simply put, to directly control an unrelated affinity was one of the greatest impossibilities for a practitioner.

Or at least, it was supposed to be...?

'Is this an inherent effect of the Void Physique that was revealed by the new instinct I gained, or is this a direct result of the Azure Dragon's blessing?'

Damien was in a rush to find out, because if it was the former, it was massively important; the most grandiose breakthrough in training he'd had ever encountered.

[Child, are you satisfied with your gains?]

The Azure Dragon's voice broke him out of his trance.

Damien wasn't the slightest bit bothered. He directly stood up and bowed until his face was parallel to the ground, deeply expressing his thanks to this primordial being.

"I will never forget this graciousness you've shown me. Until the day I die, I will be an ally to your Azure Dragon Clan."

He didn't just say it, he swore it on his mana and his soul, letting the universe acknowledge his sincerity.

Disregarding every other benefit, the Azure Dragon gave Damien a hint about how to move forward in comprehending the Void. This alone was worthy of utmost respect.

However, the Azure Dragon didn't stop at this. Rather, he gave a greater blessing than what even the greatest geniuses of the Dragon Clan could receive.

He gave Damien "everything."

Damien raised his head to look the dragon in the eye. I think you should take a look at

"Has the time come?"

[Indeed. The time has come.]

"..."

Damien didn't respond. He walked up to the Azure Dragon and took a seat, leaning back against one of the being's massive claws.

[What are you doing?]

"Nothing much. I just felt like sitting here for a bit. Is there a problem?"

[...none.]

Silence enveloped the realm. Neither Damien nor the Azure Dragon took initiative to speak, but it was as if they shared an intrinsic understanding of what they wanted to and needed to say.

Those words didn't need to be voiced.

Time passed slowly. Every second that ticked by was perceived to its greatest by the only two beings existing in this space.

Damien gritted his teeth.

He didn't want to acknowledge the fact that the feeling against his back was disappearing.

He didn't want to acknowledge...that the Azure Dragon was fading.

So he sat there.

He stayed silent before this being who could passively read his every thought.

Until the Azure Dragon's body was no more than an outline of wispy blue energy.

At that last second...

"I will fulfill your final wishes. Go in peace."

The Azure Dragon's hazy consciousness snapped back to reality.

His eyes widened.

He showed true emotion, something he forgot after millions of years.

A small smile spread on his lips.

[Hmph.]

Pride.

The expression he wished the world to remember him by was the last one he exhibited.

The hidden realm that housed only two...was left with only one.

The Azure Dragon's body slowly dispersed into a beautiful display of crystallized azure blue shards, like snow ascending to the heavens.

A hollow smile surfaced on Damien's face as he watched it.

He only knew the Godbeast for a short period, but in that period, he not only gained immensely, he saw how that being lived his life.

He was a powerful Divinity that provoked fear and reverence wherever he went, but he was always alone.

He never met someone who could see the world from his perspective, and he ended up isolated in his own research and chasing after the peak.

He lived in an era Damien couldn't imagine and fought millions upon millions of enemies that were equally unfathomable.

He wasn't some kind of hero, nor did he have an exemplary character. He was arrogant and domineering and did anything to grow stronger, but he never crossed the bottom line he set for himself, and despite the sheer amount of failure he faced, he never faltered.

The Azure Dragon was not a hero, but he was without question a being worthy of utmost respect.

There were only two before him.

Kurt Galloway, the Spatial Grandmaster of Apeiron, Alaric Alfheim, the Primordial Undying Tree, and now, the Azure Dragon, Ruler of the Seas.

They were seniors who lit the flame in Damien's heart, seniors whose memories and vestiges inside of him would always remind him that there was someone better, whether it be in character or strength.

"Haa..."

Damien sighed.

Death was a concept all too familiar to him, but it never hit as hard as it did when these people he respected met their inevitable ends.

'If only I met them sooner...'

This thought clouded his mind every time, but he knew it was useless.

They died with pride and were remembered in glory, exactly as they wished to pass.

Selfishly interfering with their fates would be a sin.

Damien quietly stood up and looked into the sky. There, the passage to return to the Ancestral Dragon Pool revealed itself.

He wished he could've spoken to the Azure Dragon more, but this was the end of their fated encounter.

It was time for Damien to set his sights on the next goal and move on as he always did.

It was time for him to set out for the Grand Assembly.

Chapter 969 Prophecy [1]

Damien was in the Ancestral Dragon Pool for no more than a single day. As he left the pool and the scenery faded around him, he finally realized that there was a time dilation around the space.

It was so flawless that he didn't notice it until he left, which was incredibly impressive.

'I'll have to visit the original Ancestral Dragon Pool in the Heavenly World so I can experience it in all its glory.' Damien thought to himself as he walked through the halls of the Golden Dragon Palace.

The banquet came to an end not more than an hour ago, and countless people were moving through the palace halls, returning to their quarters or homes to rest and finally succumb to their fatigue.

The atmosphere of the world had calmed down drastically. It was a miracle just how fast people could readjust after a tragedy.

Now that the celebration of life had ended, the time to celebrate the dead arrived.

The number of casualties from the catastrophe was in the several millions at the very least. People all over the world had lost their friends and loved ones to the war, and while the urge to place blame did exist in their heads, how could they?

The Emperor himself suffered more than anyone else in this tragedy, losing half of his children to the enemy.

The burial rituals of the Golden Dragons were quite fascinating. As beings who were so close to fate, they didn't view death as a sorrowful thing. Death was inevitable, and though fate could be cruel in the way it toyed with lives, it was a just entity.

Those who died in this battle, those who defended their homeland or died innocent of any crime, would be reincarnated with blissful destiny. This was without a doubt.

Therefore, it was not a time to mourn, but to celebrate.

To celebrate the achievements the deceased made in their past lives, and to pray for their happiness in the next.

Damien quietly watched the ceremonies without participating himself. He was just an outsider after all, and his achievements weren't broadcasted to earn the people's affection.

Unlike him, Elena was widely accepted among the Golden Dragons. She was personally requested to participate in the processions, and her acts of spreading vitality across the world and healing its people practically made her a saint in their eyes.

Funnily enough, being Elena's spouse granted Damien more status among the clansmen than his role as Astoria's teacher.

Not like he minded it, though. Who wouldn't feel pride seeing their wife achieve greatness?

Damien had no interest in stealing her stage.

Instead, he silently obtained the Emperor's permission and made his way into a secret corridor in the palace, walking down a damp hallway and down an extremely cramped and weathered staircase until he was near the core of the world.

'Another prison near the World Core. The Director's Avatar was trapped in one of these too; I guess it's a common practice.'

It was also likely that the invaders who were aiming for the World Core during the war were actually trying to enter this prison and let loose its inmates to cause chaos.

Damien reached the end of the staircase and stepped on flat land again. He was met with a thick metal slate with no visible openings that was guarded by a group of 5 High Commander level guards.

"State your name and affiliation," the head guard commanded, raising his weapon.

Damien shook his head wryly, "you don't have to be so on edge. The war is truly over."

He took out a plaque the Emperor gave him and tossed it to the guard, who caught it and carefully inspected it with his awareness before nodding at his comrades.

"I apologize for the misunderstanding, sir. Please enter," the head guard said as he returned his focus to Damien.

Damien smiled and nodded. "Don't worry about it. You're just doing your job."

He watched as the guards acted together, positioning themselves against nondescript locations on the two walls on their side of the metal slate with no particular rhyme or reason.

Rumble!

The ground began to rumble and the metal slate showed immediate changes, but the guards hadn't moved in the slightest. I think you should take a look at

Damien opened his All-Seeing Eyes and took a deeper glance into their actions.

'Oh? That's interesting.'

With the new perception opened by his trait, Damien could see the mana streams exiting these guards' bodies. The mana streams entered the walls and flowed in multiple randomly intersecting paths.

Each connection point would cause the metal slate to change properties and become illusory, and while the movements looked thoughtless, the mana control required to be so precise in intricate work like this was genuinely nonsensical.

'If they make a single misstep and the connection point is even a millimeter off, the formation will counterattack. These guards have been specifically trained to do this job.'

It was an incredibly smart decision that Damien honestly didn't expect from the Golden Dragons considering their track record.

It became clear to him that if these guards and this mechanism hadn't been so complex, the war situation would have been far, far worse than it already was.

'Hmm, those invaders who went down to the World Core pretty much just disappeared by the time the conflict settled down. I guess their fate is clear now.'

The metal slate finally turned fully illusory, allowing Damien into the prison.

He was immediately struck by the stench. It was a putrid and disgusting mix of feces, body odor, varying body fluids, and several other unidentifiable yet repulsive scents, all enhanced by the damp environment of the underground prison.

It was pitch black and lifeless in appearance. Damien could see clearly using the All-Seeing Eyes, but his regular visual ability wasn't nearly enough to see through the artificially amplified darkness.

'Hmm...'

Damien walked through the prison indifferent to the maniacal cacophony of prisoners around him.

They screamed and taunted, they provoked and pleaded, they did anything they could possibly think of to grab Damien's attention, with some even urinating through the cell bars or touching themselves when they saw him.

'There is...no time dilation in this place.' Damien thought as he poked his senses through the air. 'These rabid ones; just how long did they have to stay here to lose themselves to insanity?'

The prisoners were from all different races, some human, some beast, some angel, and even some Nox. Many races that had death feuds against each other were placed near each other as if to create the utmost chaos in this controlled environment.

However, Damien didn't come here for them, nor did he dare to entertain them. Any reaction he gave would be pleasure for them, even if that reaction was to torture or kill.

He walked and walked through the seemingly endless single corridor of the prison, passing thousands upon thousands of cells and areas until he finally reached his destination.

"Look at this. They really hate you guys, eh?" He said with a slight smile as he looked into the large cell block.

This isolated area was created with the sole purpose of housing Black Dragons. It was built with far worse conditions than any other cell block, and there were specialized guards who stayed in the area to torment the Black Dragons and break their spirits whenever possible.

'It's inevitable to form a god complex in an environment where you have mana and your enemies are helpless and crippled.' He inwardly noted as he watched a group of guards humiliate a group of older Black Dragons.

He sighed and entered the cell block. The guards immediately looked up and turned hostile, but Damien just had to repeat the same process he did with the gate guards to placate them.

After they left, he faced the millions of Black Dragons that were in the cell block. He knew very well that all of their gazes were currently on him, filled with hostility, hatred, and fear.

He grinned.

There was one more thing he had to test before leaving Beast Emperor Star.

He raised his arm parallel to the ground and gracefully outstretched a single finger.

He gently tapped the air.

"Bind."

Chapter 970 Prophecy [2]

Thousands of years ago, an ancient prophecy was told.

It was a prophecy that set two clans with no conflict against each other and made them mortal enemies. It drove them to clash swords and eventually to the war that finally ended with the past encounter.

Yet...how could one be so sure that the war was over?

The Black Dragons sent an army to Beast Emperor Star, but they didn't invade with their entire race. There were still several hundred million Black Dragons in their homeworld, including their Demigod Ancestor.

Of course, this wasn't common knowledge. To most, the last of the Black Dragon Clan was locked away in the depths of the world.

Those with power could never rest as long as the Black Dragons remained unruly.

They needed to be thoroughly tamed.

This thought led to another question: how could one tame a clan that both concealed themselves well and had the backing of a Demigod?

The Black Dragons needed a thousand years to whittle away at the Golden Drsgons before they could launch a direct invasion.

Spending that much time on internal conflict wasn't something the denizens of Grand Heavens Boundary could afford at the moment.

It seemed that the universe was relatively at peace internally, but trusting this facade was only for the naive and willfully ignorant.

2 entire sectors had been destroyed.

The lives lost were innumerable, uncountable unless one used increments of quintillions.

An ancient prophecy, Damien learned about it while interacting with the Marionette Lord.

The prophecy was centered around the so-called Golden Star, a being the Black Dragons assumed to be the Golden Dragon Emperor, as he was the man who ruled the Fate Star.

However, Beast Emperor Star, the Fate Star, was an entirely different entity than the Golden Star in the prophecy.

And even more so, the Golden Dragon Emperor was not the ruler of the Fate Star.

He merely took residence on its surface and ruled from it.

The Fate Star was an aged world that naturally had its own spiritual intelligence, and thus it also had the ability to choose who could command it.

The Golden Dragon Emperor was powerful, but he never gained the Fate Star's acknowledgement.

The reason was simple.

He was lacking in "potential."

This wasn't to say he had no talent. He was already a Godbeast and it was almost guaranteed that he'd ascend to being a true spiritual god if he had the opportunity.

Yet, his potential was blocked by two factors.

The first was his decision to stay in the lower universe. He gave away his chance to grow further than the Demigod level for the sake of his clan, and while admirable, it wasn't a smart decision in the slightest.

The second factor was much vaguer.

It was the very path he followed that hindered him.

The Golden Dragon Emperor never made decisions without considering his people. His Cosmic Rebirth ended with him following the Golden Dragon Godbeast's evolution path, which also meant his achievements would only ever reach the height of his ancestor, never to improve further unless he met some extraneous fortuitous circumstance.

The Fate Star understood what it represented. Being its ruler wasn't a title, but a state of existence that put one in direct contact with the concept of Fate that remained esoteric to all.

It was extremely careful in choosing its master, but it eventually succeeded in finding a genius it felt it could put its faith in.

For once, that genius wasn't Damien.

It was a girl born and raised on its surface who finally received an opportunity to bloom into her potential just recently.

It was none other than Astoria Golden.

The Golden Star.

Not the master of the Fate Star...

...but the master of "Fate" itself.

"Bind."

Black lines of Void mana spread from his finger like a massive spider web that stabbed into the heads of every single Black Dragon present.

It wasn't possible before.

Though Damien believed the prophecy had something to do with him, he couldn't do anything to control the Black Dragons as the prophecy stated, which originally made him doubt his assumptions about Astoria. I think you should take a look at

However, if she didn't have the kind of potential that could move the Fate Star, why would the Void ever bestow her a title?

The event that made the impossible possible was obvious.

Once again, it was the Azure Dragon whose aid gave Damien the proper tools to accomplish his goals.

In this case, it was "authority."

Damien couldn't completely understand this authority, but it gave him some sort of coercion over the Dragon Race. Those weaker than him would submit without question, and those stronger than him would be suppressed by its effects.

This authority did not give Damien the ability to enslave an entire race of dragons.

It was the "key" that allowed him to truly integrate himself into the Fate of the Dragon Clan.

After that, it was just a matter of following the prophecy.

The Black Dragon Clan was fated to come under his rule, and Fate itself would go under Astoria's.

There was no resistance, to the extent that it was eerie.

Damien furrowed his brows as he traced the Void Mana spiderweb with his eyes and noted down its processes.

The fact that nothing was off was all the more disconcerting.

'If we follow the precedent, the ancient prophecy should've been the result of...'

VOOM!

Void Mana burst out of the spiderweb's every thread and rocked the cell block's foundation.

'...yeah, it could only be this.'

Damien's eyes hardened. He clapped his hands together and set up several thousand interwoven Dimensional Cages to isolate the cell block from the Real Plane and hide what was happening.

As he did so, the Void Mana that burst into the atmosphere concentrated into several pillars, one for every Black Dragon, and then...

Zip!

Each pillar impaled itself into its respective Black Dragon and disappeared into their bodies.

One by one, their bodies jerked forward and they raised into the air as if possessed. Black draconic features polluted their human forms and turned them into half-human half-dragon hybrids, almost like Damien after Dragon Transformation.

The raging mana calmed down soon enough since it was all absorbed into the Black Dragons. The scene quieted down, but Damien could vaguely feel the pulses of Void Mana metamorphosing the Black Dragons from within.

He smiled wryly.

'Well, it's not too surprising since this whole trip to Beast Emperor Star has been defined by Fate and Universal Flow. If there wasn't something like this, there's no way I would've ended up here at all.'

Damien had no idea if it had its own ego, but he was sure of one thing: the Void was always silently watching him.

Recently more than ever before, it involved itself in almost every conflict he'd been a part of, almost as if it was urging him to focus on it rather than his Law comprehension.

And he listened to that call.

The comprehension of Universal Flow, the constant usage of Void Breathing, and most recently, the discovery of elemental alchemy all contributed to the Void's agenda.

'Should I consider this a reward?' Damien thought, chuckling to himself.

He swept his hand through the air and pulled the spiderweb of Void Mana back into his body, using the same moment to send the Black Dragons to the Sanctuary.

'They were practically driven to madness trying to avoid their fate, so they definitely won't be pleased when they find out it came true. I'll send them to the Wild Continent for now and let Galantis whip them into shape. Afterwards, they can be transferred to Theavel to join the main army.'

Damien patted himself on the back for a job well done and took down his Dimensional Cages.

'I'll have to find time to deal with the rest of them after the Grand Assembly. Finding the location of their homeworld won't be a problem with all the slaves I just got, but I am a little worried about the Demigod...I'll just have to trust the Void on this one and go for it.'

Damien nodded contentedly and turned around.

Without a word, he left the prison, nodding at the guards in acknowledgement as he did so.

He made it back to the Golden Dragon Palace without a hitch, but he was left wondering...

Just what kind of expression would they make when they realized what happened?

He truly regretted not staying to see it.