

Void 121

Chapter 121 - Disciple Examination [1]

Built into the side of a magnificent mountain, there was a large city that could house tens of thousands of people.

Its infrastructure was filled with pagodas of varying heights, all following a color scheme of blue and black.

Within the city, various people wearing matching clothing were going about their days, some leaving to adventure the lands of the Cloud Plane and some choosing to stay in their homes and cultivate.

The city was just the base, though. Along the slope of the mountain leading all the way to its peak, there were lines of various facilities and houses, each of these belonging to one or many of the people in the city below.

And at the peak of the mountain, there was a magisterial castle made of glossy black material. From its color scheme, one would expect it to look dreary or haunted, but it didn't fit this vibe at all. Instead, it was mystical, invoking a sense of wonder in all those who laid eyes upon it.

The entire mountain was seemingly cut in half by a large looming wall that was patrolled by these similar black-robed people. And outside of this wall, thousands of cultivators stood in wait.

This was the grand scene of the Celestial Star Sect. Its entire presence, even the mountain it inhabited, was ethereal. It gave onlookers the feeling of vast space and profundity.

When Damien arrived at the sect, he was astonished by its grandiosity. Even compared to the most lavish areas of Apeiron, it was still far greater. The mountain itself was only slightly smaller than the Godspark mountain Damien had visited in the secret realm.

‘Even for one of the peak organizations in the entire world, isn’t this too grand?’

Currently, Zara had returned to his shadow and Damien was waiting amongst the anticipant crowd. Their excitement could be felt in the air as even the mana buzzed due to the congregation of intense emotions.

2 days had already passed while Damien traveled to the sect, and he had only arrived a few hours prior, but it seemed he wasn’t the last. Even as he waited patiently, hundreds of cultivators arrived in various manners.

“This year’s examination is going to be exciting.” One of the guards said to his friend.

“Indeed, many geniuses from the large clans have shown up this time. Did you see the Earth Dragon that the Long Clan’s young master arrived on?”

“I did! That was Long Chen, rumored to be one of the greatest geniuses the Long Clan ever produced! But why would he come here instead of the Jade Heavenly Palace?”

“It’s not just him, though. Bai Ren from the Bai clan and even Shi Ling and Shi Meng, the wonder twins of the Shi Clan are here!”

“This must be a truly fortuitous year for our Celestial Star Palace for so many geniuses to flock to us! Maybe we can finally take the spot of Top Sect from the Jade Heavenly Palace!”

“Well, let’s not count our chickens before they hatch. You never know what twists fate will bring to those who look down on it.”

“You’re right senior brother, I apologize for misspeaking.”

Damien listened to their conversation with interest. ‘Looks like there’ll be plenty of competition for me within the sect.’

If there was one thing Damien feared about entering the sect, it was a lack of action. The entire reason he decided to travel to this new world was for excitement and adventure, so he’d be severely disappointed if he didn’t receive it.

Especially from that last interaction with Wang Ming, his hopes had been dashed. Even if it wasn’t true conflict, he at least wanted some challenge.

‘Maybe I can even find a proper rival in this world.’

The thought brought back the memory of his friend from Apeiron, but he shook it off. Even if Ethan had the appropriate talent, Apeiron itself wasn’t a proper place to groom him. Maybe if he explored the vast universe, Ethan would be able to keep up.

That thought got Damien wondering. ‘Why is it that we didn’t encounter other travelers in our 7-month journey to the Cloud Plane?’

It was odd to him for there to be no one capable of traversing space. Or rather, it was downright impossible. Even if they couldn't freely walk through space with their bare bodies like him, there had to be many worlds that were technologically advanced enough to pull off similar feats.

'No, the Cloud Plane has the ability to do it, so there are definitely other worlds that can too.'

The Cloud Plane wasn't even a scientifically-driven society, and if they could discover space travel using flying treasures, others could too.

"Welcome, young cultivators, to the Celestial Star Palace disciple examination!"

A booming voice interrupted Damien's train of thought. Looking up, he saw a middle-aged man floating above the towering walls.

"My name is Mu Chen, but you can call me Elder Mu. I will be explaining your examination today!"

The entire crowd, which now consisted of many thousands of people, stood silently, watching Mu Chen with rapt attention. Satisfied with their response, he continued.

"As you all know, our Celestial Star Palace is a large power, but that doesn't mean we simply accept everyone! Today, you will showcase your talent, your strength, and your wit to earn a spot among our ranks!"

"Just like always, we will only be accepting 1000 new disciples, so be aware of how competitive this exam will be! And for your own safety, be aware that there are some dangers you may face. If you aren't careful, you may be seriously injured or even lose your life!"

“This is the nature of the cultivation world! Strength is king. You speak with your fists! The winner is right and the loser must wallow in self-loathing! If any of you is afraid of this, you may leave now!”

Mu Chen’s voice boomed through the surroundings. However, even after hearing his words, nobody turned away. Nothing he said was new to them, in fact, it was the rules they abided by every day.

For Damien, these words resounded in the very core of his being. It reminded him of his days in the dungeon. That was the most primal version of the law of the jungle.

‘Strength is king.’

This phrase alone made his blood boil in excitement. His beast side wanted to run rampant, inspired by the majestic intent of Mu Chen’s words. If Damien had his way, he would roar to the heavens right now to exert his will.

But he held himself back. Now wasn’t the time to make a scene. He simply stood with the rest, the excited glint in his eyes never fading.

In fact, even the aura he radiated changed slightly, becoming more unruly. The people crowded around him were forced to slightly make space, and the attention of many geniuses snapped to him for a brief second.

Gazing upon the crowd, Mu Chen smiled. “Good! You all have the spirit of true cultivators. Without danger, there can be no reward! Now, let me explain the many parts of the examination you will partake in today!”

Chapter 122 - Disciple Examination [2]

“The disciple examination will be split into 3 parts!” Mu Chen said, continuing his previous speech.

“The first part will be a simple talent test. You will learn the specifics after you enter the specified area. The second part will test your comprehension ability. As for the last part, well you’ll just have to find out if you reach that far.”

When he spoke the last sentence, Mu Chen had a devious grin on his face that created an ominous feeling in the hearts of the young cultivators before him.

“Before anything else, take these tokens. They will be used as your identifiers during the exam.”

It wasn’t even a long process. Mu Chen simply threw a large mass of tokens into the air like candy, and seemingly without intervention, they landed in the hands of each participant.

Damien looked at his number, which was 3416. ‘Maybe it judges based on the order we arrived?’

“Remember, this examination isn’t simply to gain entry into the sect, but much more than that! If you are lucky enough, you may receive the favor of a sect elder and become their disciple!”

Upon hearing this, the crowd broke out into hushed conversation.

“We will actually become disciples of the elders?!”

“The pressure to do well just increased by tenfold!”

Damien looked around in slight confusion. Was being an elder’s disciple that important? But he quickly berated himself for thinking such stupid things.

The help he had gained from Malcolm after taking him as his teacher was immense to the point where it was almost unquantifiable. His lightning element had been supremely improved and he had gained insights into mana circuits.

Without the Ananta System that was currently infused into his body, Damien didn’t think he’d be so well off in his cultivation path. Not only did it boost his mana regeneration rate and reaction speed, but it also multiplied his output enough to give him his current edge.

It could be said to be half the reason he was still able to fight above his rank to such a degree even after becoming 3rd class. After all, the levels in this class were much wider apart than those in the previous classes.

“Alright!” Mu Chen said. “Now that I’ve given you this explanation, it’s time to begin the test! Let me say in advance, I wish prosperity among those of you that will become new outer disciples of our grand sect!”

Right after his words fell, Mu Chen waved his hand, creating a large portal in front of the wall he was standing on.

“Enter through this portal and you shall be taken to the testing grounds! May fate shine upon you all!”

The crowd of cultivators immediately rushed towards the gate, many of them wanting to be the first to get through. They didn't know if this was also a test for them.

However, those true geniuses within their ranks waited patiently and walked calmly to the portal. They had no rush to prove themselves, as they had an inborn pride in their own achievements.

Damien was among these geniuses. He simply walked forward as he admired the structure of the portal in front of him.

'Not just the structure, but the stability and functionality are leagues above what I can do.'

Damien had the eyes of someone trained in space element. He could clearly see the oceans of spatial layers that made up the world. He could also see the way they were distorted by the portal.

'There are so many pathways leading from this single portal.'

Just this single portal could lead to tens of different locations. Damien had no idea how it was done. He could only connect two points in space, and even in this regard, he was limited. Portals weren't something he was too familiar with, as he had only used them for world travel.

'Maybe I wasn't giving this sect enough credit before.'

He couldn't be blamed though. Judging on reputation alone wasn't something anyone would do, even if they used it as reference for their evaluation. Damien wasn't aware of the Celestial Star Palace's feats or achievements, so he was subconsciously looking down on them.

‘Well, it’s to be expected from a sect lead by tens or even more 4th class beings.’

As he wrapped up his thoughts, Damien stepped through the massive portal in front of him.

When his vision was returned to him, Damien found himself in a slightly expansive room filled with other competitors. However, the number was vastly reduced. Out of the thousands that he saw in front of the gate, only around 500 were here with him.

The scenery of the room was simple, yet confusing. There was a large lake filled with silver liquid, it’s surface reflective and depth unknown. At end of the lake, there was a small island with a stone obelisk on it.

After the entrance of a few more people, the portal to the room closed and a young woman appeared before them.

“Alright. Now that everyone’s here, we can begin. This is the talent test, and it is relatively simple. All you have to do is walk across this lake as far as you can. Anyone who can take more than 45 steps will pass this portion of the exam.”

The participants looked doubtful but didn’t raise their voices. Every time the Celestial Star Palace held its disciple examinations, no word was leaked about the process. Even those who failed the exam would never speak about how they were tested.

“Number 2500, come forth!”

Out of the crowd, a young woman stepped forward. She stood at the edge of the lake with nervousness clearly written on her face.

“I just have to step in here and walk?” She questioned.

“Yes, just walk forward until you can’t anymore.”

Hearing the confirmation, the young woman stepped into the lake. The water only reached her ankle and she didn’t feel any change, so she continued forward.

5 steps...15 steps...25 steps

She was halfway through the passing requirement, and the young woman could already feel the purpose of this test.

With every step she took, a minute amount of pressure bore down on her. And with each step further, the pressure would multiply. Now that she was at the 26th step, she felt like there was a large boulder placed on her back.

35 steps...40 steps...44 steps

She only had one step left until she passed, but she felt immense difficulty in taking it. With the pressure continuing to multiply, the previous boulder had been transformed into a small hill.

However, with much difficulty, she managed to take the last step.

Boom!

The water in the lake pulsed due to her momentum, but it wasn't totally moved. With sweat covering her entire body, the young woman turned back and returned to the shore.

"Good job. You may proceed to the next section." The lady in charge said.

Another portal opened up in front of the young woman before she passed through it with a smile on her face.

Disregarding this, the lady continued with the exam for the next few hours. Many people ended up passing, with some even going a few steps further than the goal, but the results were always the same.

Before the 50th step, they'd always be forced to retreat. With the hours passing, the number of people left in the room dwindled, and Damien's turn was fast approaching.

But before him, there was another genius who had to go. Unlike the others who simply had their number called, this person was called by name.

"Long Chen, please step forward."

Chapter 123 - Disciple Examination [3]

The man who stepped forward had flowing black shoulder-length hair and eyes that looked like a deep abyss. The second he made his presence known, the attention of everyone in the room shifted to him.

It wasn't just his looks, but his natural aura was noble and heroic, commanding respect from those who gazed upon him. Looking at this man, Damien only felt one thing.

‘Strong.’

It wasn't the same indomitable strength he had felt from those far above him, but a strength that matched his own even though they were at the same level.

This was a genuine achievement, as there weren't many who could keep up with him. Those he usually fought on equal standing were far above him in terms of level.

When Long Chen was called forward, he didn't hesitate like the rest. Instead, he calmly and indifferently entered the lake and took his first steps.

10 steps...30 steps...50 steps

Even at the distance that limited everyone that came before him, Long Chen showed no signs of struggle. He kept walking with purpose.

60 steps...70 steps...75 steps

It was only when he reached three-quarters of the way to the small island at the end of the lake that Long Chen slowed down. Although his facial expression didn't change much, the beads of sweat that began trickling down his body showed his struggle.

78 steps...80 steps

Seeing him continue, various chatter broke out in the crowd.

“As expected of the scion of the Long Clan. None can compare with his talents.”

“Indeed, it's our bad luck to be put in the same testing room as him.”

Damien's gaze was intense, to say the least. As Long Chen continued, he slowly released his aura to empower himself. The threat Damien felt was similar to what he felt from Ethan back during the Nexus Event.

‘This guy...I want to fight him.’

85 steps...89 steps

Upon reaching the 90th step, Long Chen finally met his limit. It was clear that no matter how hard he tried, he wouldn't be able to continue. But Long Chen wasn't the type of person to simply give up.

“Haaah!”

With a loud cry, he released all his strength. The pressure that bore down on him had increased to the point where his skin began to crack, leaking blood into the pristine silver pool.

“Break for me!”

With a loud bang, Long Chen stomped his foot back into the pool, successfully breaching the 90th step.

“Haa...haa...”

The entire room was silent, the only sound being Long Chen’s rough breathing. And then, he turned around and walked back to the shore with a valiant look on his face.

His firm expression even while covered in his own blood had its own appeal, making many of the women in the room swoon at the sight. However, Long Chen took no notice of this. Instead, his eyes were focused on a single spot.

He sensed it. The concealed aura of a predator that had been locked onto him since he began his climb. At that time, he was too busy with the pressure to check who it was, but now he saw it clearly.

At the back of the crowd, standing inconspicuously, he saw a man he had never seen before. The man’s features looked foreign, unlike those he usually interacted with, but Long Chen didn’t care.

What he focused on was the feeling he was getting from that man. 'He's strong.'

He left the Long Clan in search of experience. He was someone who valued cultivation above all else. And seeing someone blatantly provoking him, even if it was only evident to the two of them, made his blood boil.

'I want to fight him.'

"Long Chen, you may now proceed to the next section of the test." The examiner said.

However, Long Chen shook his head. "I will stay. There's something I need to see."

His gaze stayed on the man in the back. Damien had been returning that gaze this entire time, and seeing that Long Chen wanted to compete, he would gladly oblige.

Grinning provocatively, Damien walked to the front of the crowd. "I'll be going next."

His move was immediately met with criticism, the crowd being naturally unhappy that some no-name cut the line, but their dissent was never even considered by the involved parties.

"Right, he's going next." Long Chen said to the examiner, who nodded her head. It didn't matter to her which order they went in, as long as they all did as they were supposed to.

"What's your badge number?" She asked. This was the only information she needed.

“3416.”

Receiving a nod from the examiner, Damien didn't waste any more time. He directly entered the lake and began walking.

Just like Long Chen, Damien continued unimpeded through the entire walk. The 50th step that barred the path of many was nothing but a joke to him.

The pressure that bore down on his body was great, but after all the pain he had gone through, it didn't even make him bat an eye.

70th step...80th step...90th step

Without suspense, Damien reached the same position where Long Chen had previously stopped. At this point, he finally felt the pressure was becoming great.

It felt like he was carrying a small mountain on his back, but he felt he could do more. No. He had to do more.

When he took the 91st step, everything changed. The mountainous pressure on his back increased exponentially, forcing his knees to bend slightly, but he didn't stop.

“Who is this guy?”

“I don’t know, he’s not from any major family right?”

“Young master Long seemed to acknowledge him, maybe they know each other?”

The crowd had long dropped their dissatisfaction and was now fervently discussing the scene in front of them. Meanwhile, Long Chen’s gaze was heavy.

‘Not only has he surpassed me, but he’s done it with ease.’

But he wasn’t envious. It wasn’t in his character to feel such vile emotions. Instead. His fighting spirit was burning.

For too long was he fostered like some sort of holy son, for too long he could never find someone he could match. He didn’t feel envy, no, it was the complete opposite.

Even the examiner was watching with rapt attention. For someone like Long Chen, she had no expectations, as his talent was widely known.

If he did anything lower than the results he got, she would have been disappointed. Rather, seeing someone unknown overshadow the scion of a large clan? That was something she had to see.

Taking out a communication jade slip, the examiner slowly spoke.

“Sect Master, you have to see what’s happening here.”

As all this was going on, Damien continued his walk. Each step multiplied the pressure on his back exponentially, so these last 10 steps were harder than the previous 90 combined.

Still, he persevered. When he reached the 95th step, his skin robes were slowly torn to shreds due to the pressure. With his muscular body revealed, his skin also began to crack.

96th...97th...98th

The blood that leaked from his body began to dye the lake red, but he continued. His body regenerated as fast as it broke down, so he felt no threat to his life.

‘Almost there.’

From the 90th step, Damien had been using his mana to support him, but now it was gushing out like a waterfall. The amethyst aura around him slowly began to turn red as he continued without pause.

99th step...

His aura flared and he let out a massive roar, shaking the pristine surface of the lake. With a final push, he stumbled forward onto the island in front of him.

The 100th step.

Chapter 124 - Comprehension [1]

Within the large palace that adorned the peak of the mountain on which the Celestial Star Palace resided, a meeting was being held.

“Sect Master, is it true that this year will be fortuitous for our palace?”

“That’s right, the prediction simply seems too grand to be entirely true.”

At the head of the table sat a woman with unparalleled grace that contrasted the indifference in her expression. Simply the natural aura radiating from her body could command the attention of anyone in her vicinity.

“It’s true.” The woman said. “Not only did the divination speak of fortune for our sect, but it also spoke of calamity. Not just for us, but the entire world.

“However, the latter half of the prediction isn’t set for the near future, so we only need to focus on the former.”

The gathered elders knew the accuracy of their Sect Master’s divinations. They had personally bore witness to previous divinations come to fruition time and time again.

“We sincerely apologize, Sect Master. None of us dare doubt your divinations or ability, it is just a bit hard to process.” One of the elders said.

“Well, we have no reason to doubt the prediction, however, what makes this year so different?”

“Hahaha!” Suddenly a laugh resounded through the area. When everyone turned their attention to the source, they saw an inconspicuous white-bearded old man. However, none of them dared to speak against him.

“Isn’t that the reason we’re watching the disciple examination this year?” Commented the old man. “Let us be patient and find out with time.”

The attention of all those present subsequently shifted to the large screens that decorated the hall. On these screens were thousands of young cultivators currently taking the talent test.

“The amount of geniuses present in this year’s examination is already high, and some are even like that Long boy whose talent is one of the highest in the continent.”

At that moment, the Sect Master felt a vibration within her spatial ring. Taking out a jade slip, she injected her mana only to hear a frantic message.

“Sect Master, you need to see this!”

It wasn’t hard for her to locate the source of the call, and when she did, she was forced to pay attention. Not only her but the rest of the elders who heard the message as well.

On the screen in front of them, they saw an unknown young man powering his way through the final steps of the talent test.

“Impossible!” One of the elders shouted as he stood up in shock.

“Is he going to reach the obelisk?!”

“There’s no way, that kind of talent wouldn’t remain unknown for so long.”

“You’re right, but he keeps pushing forward without pause!”

While the other elders discussed the scene, the old man and the Sect Master silently looked at each other, interest evident in their eyes.

As they watched, Damien made his way through the final steps and pushed himself onto the small island at the end of the lake.

“Hoh?” The old man said with a raised brow. “I think this boy might be worth paying attention to.”

Meanwhile, Damien was on his knees, roughly catching his breath while his body recovered from the injuries he had accumulated during his final push. Although they weren’t deep, they were numerous.

As he stood up to return to the shore, Damien felt a slight pull from behind him. Turning, he saw the small obelisk at the center of the island letting off a slight glow.

However, he didn't immediately walk toward it. He remembered the last time he randomly touched an obelisk, and he didn't want to relive that kind of experience.

But the obelisk didn't seem to give him a choice. From its center, a beam of black energy coagulated before shooting forward. The whole process was so sudden that he had no means to react.

Without any intervention, the energy entered his body and disappeared. There was no flashy scene or great change, in fact, he couldn't even feel the energy's existence anymore.

The beam was small enough to draw no attention from the others in the room, so he didn't cause any major reaction apart from him completing the walk across the lake. Calming his nerves, he slowly walked back to shore.

The pressure seemed to only work one way, so his walk back was leisurely. He spent the time thinking about the black light that he saw, but he couldn't come to a conclusion.

'I'll just figure it out later.'

On the other hand, Long Chen's gaze was practically drilling holes into Damien. He could accept the fact that Damien beat him, but for the difference to be this large, he was slightly indignant.

'I have to train harder.'

He wasn't the type of person to have prejudice against those without massive backgrounds like him, but it was different with Damien.

A genius of his caliber should be known, but for him to come out of the woodwork here and now without any prior achievement and crush Long Chen's score, was a blow to his pride.

But he was still a cultivation fanatic. He made no plans or schemes to bring Damien down, instead, he decided to see if Damien was a new goal for him to surpass. Simply having the talent didn't qualify him as such, so a battle between them was necessary.

And he could feel the same fighting spirit from Damien. He could feel Damien's will to be challenged and pressured to grow simply from his aura and demeanor alone.

If Long Chen was forced to state what his feeling toward Damien was after this first meeting, it'd be mainly admiration.

With Damien's test done, there was no need for him to stay within the room anymore. And so, without delay, he entered the portal to the second exam.

'What an interesting guy.' Damien thought as he reached the shore. Ignoring the stares of everyone present, he followed Long Chen into the portal.

What entered Damien's view was an isolated space. Rather than a large room like last time, he found himself alone in darkness. While it felt like it expanded to infinity, it also gave off the feeling of a small enclosure.

Since he was aware he was still within the disciple examination, Damien calmly walked forward to explore the room, but after only a few steps, he was forced to halt his movements.

The space in front of him twisted and melded together before becoming a jumbled mess of things he couldn't understand.

Words in ancient languages he couldn't read floated through the air, and various images flashed by and disappeared in an instant. The entire thing seemed random but planned at the same time.

The entire room was filled with contradictions, confusing Damien's senses, but his eyes were focused on the floating words in front of him.

There was something profound about it, but he couldn't quite make out what. At some point, without his conscious thought, he had sat down on the floor and slipped into a meditative state.

As he focused on the scene in front of him, three large blocky words appeared in his field of view.

“Wall of Comprehension.”

Chapter 125 - Comprehension [2]

“Wall of Comprehension.”

Although there were only three words in front of him, the intent behind them was vast. Sitting in front of these words, Damien was immediately made aware of what he needed to do during this portion of the exam.

‘The wall of comprehension contains countless martial skills dating back centuries or even millennia. As for what skill you will comprehend from it, that is decided by fate. In 3 days’ time, if you have not succeeded in comprehending 25% of the martial skill, you fail.’

The test seemed too simple at a glance, but he knew there had to be some twist to it. Still, he never doubted his comprehension ability, counting it as one of his strongest points. So Damien continued to stare at the words in hope of gleaning something from them.

He was also curious about what a martial skill was exactly, as he had only heard about cultivation techniques, but there was no point in pondering about it. He’d find out soon.

After he understood the underlying intent

behind the three words before him, they once again scattered into the sea of characters. Sometimes these characters would come together as if forming something greater, but the second he focused on them, they’d once again scatter.

It was like the skills in the wall were purposefully evading him. But Damien had just arrived at the wall, so he wasn’t too concerned. With a relaxed attitude, he let himself sink into his meditative state as he stared daggers at the flowing wall.

It only felt like minutes to him, but several hours had passed since Damien began meditation. Yet, he wasn’t able to see anything of value.

‘Wait...if there are thousands of years’ worth of knowledge here, how is it supposed to just randomly give me a skill that’ll reflect my prowess?’

He found the entire concept illogical. If he just sat there and stared at the wall, there was no way it could do anything. It was an inanimate object. Continuing down this line of reasoning, he made another assumption.

‘I have to pick the branch of skill I want to learn?’ Whether it was a skill for his spatial element, his lightning, or his martial arts, each was a different category. It wasn’t an easy decision, though. He had to consciously understand his strengths and weaknesses and figure out what he needed to improve.

Yet, being unbiased in such a situation was difficult for anyone. After some serious thought, he understood what he had to do.

‘The thing I haven’t focused on much is my sword. Although I’ve been developing my sword art, all of those moves are centered around the space element. My raw sword aura hasn’t been polished at all.’

In fact, he had almost completely forgotten about sword aura. It was something that helped him immensely within the dungeon once he had begun grasping it, but once he reached the peak of sword mastery he didn’t put any more attention into it.

‘It’s too conceited to say I’ve gotten to the peak of the sword path. I’ve probably barely scratched the surface.’

Just because the skill was max level didn’t mean his attainments matched it. He had to refine his sword style more, or it would simply become a tool to display his spatial prowess.

‘I want to be like those sword cultivators in the manhwa I read. Those guys could slash planets in half with a single swing.’

Imagining such a scene made Damien’s heart race in anticipation. It might’ve been a bit childish to think that way, but he didn’t care.

Slowly but surely, he released his pure sword aura out of his body. Being something that hadn’t improved since his dungeon days, this aura was different from most other powers he possessed.

It hadn’t been refined yet, and it hadn’t been domesticated. It was an embodiment of the Damien who only knew the inside of a dungeon.

The aura was colorless, but its undulation could still be seen and felt. If someone were to drop a sheet of paper within a 5-meter radius of Damien, it’d get shredded to dust in an instant.

The sword aura surrounding his body was wild, untamed, and uninhibited by such concepts as morality. Its sole drive was to kill, its only motivation was survival.

As he basked in this feeling once again, Damien felt reminiscent. Not traumatized or sad about the past, but reminiscent of his days in the dungeon. It wasn’t so obvious externally, as even Damien had subconsciously avoided noticing the fact, but he was still broken.

He never truly took the time to heal from the dungeon, and it was unknown whether he ever would. Something had snapped within him during those years, a core part of his being was convoluted.

Even as he bathed in his own sword aura, momentarily forgetting about the test in front of him, he avoided realizing this fact.

On the wall of characters in front of him, many pieces began clicking together like a puzzle, as if reacting to the aura that had been released upon them. Characters connected to form words, and lines of text layered to become a paragraph.

But this paragraph didn't last long. The myriad ways outlined in the paragraph condensed upon themselves to create another set of words that contained boundless intent.

There were no more floating characters and no more flashes of scenery. In the empty void, there were only two things. One was Damien, and the other was the text facing him.

When Damien opened his eyes once more, he was enraptured by the scene.

“Void Heart Sword Law.”

The second the words left his mouth, Damien felt his entire world fade to black.

Back within the palace, another commotion was taking place.

“The young master of the Long Clan was chosen by 9 Dragons Roaring through the Heavens!”

“Yes! That technique belonged to an ancient dragon that once graced our sect, considering the Long clan’s connection to the dragons, it isn’t surprising that he would receive such a skill!”

“Bai Ren has also received a powerful skill! I heard she is practiced in Sound law!”

“Both the Shi clan twins managed to receive the same skill! How is such a thing possible?! I thought the wall’s effects were unique based on the individual!”

“What about that boy from earlier?” An elder suddenly asked.

“Ah, he just got some random unknown technique. Sadly, his comprehension must not measure up to his talent.” Another elder responded.

However, the old man from before had a completely different outlook. He had been watching Damien the entire time, and he saw the whole process that led to him receiving his technique.

‘The Void Heart Sword Law. Such a skill should have never showed up here.’ He thought to himself.

That specific sword law had a harrowing past in the Cloud Plane, but very few were aware of it. The historians had done everything they could to rid the world of its existence.

‘Yet, it still showed up for that boy. His future...’

The old man didn't continue his thoughts, but he knew the fate of most who had previously practiced the sword law. With a hardened face that hid endless sorrow behind it, the old man made a decision.

'Never again. I must take him under my wing and ensure that such a tragedy is never repeated.'

Chapter 126 - Comprehension [3]

Meanwhile, within the darkness, Damien was seated motionless, his eyes closed. All his senses were shut off from the outside world as his mind was transported elsewhere.

When he opened his eyes, Damien was still within darkness, but something felt different about it. The darkness of the trial room was just that, dark. However, this darkness was much more abyssal.

Damien didn't move. He had no idea where he was, and his mind was still focused on the sensation he got from the words earlier. Even within this abyssal space, he concentrated on comprehending those words.

'Void Heart Sword Law'

He didn't know what it meant, but its name was overbearing enough to leave a great first impression. He did his best to delve into the mysteries of this sword law, but every insight he had was fleeting.

The original sensation he received was disappearing quickly. When he tried to remember the feeling he got from those words, it'd only vanish faster. Before long, he could barely remember it at all.

"You aren't doing it right."

A cold voice echoed through the void. No matter how Damien attempted to locate its source, it was futile.

“Don’t waste your time trying to find me. I ceased to exist long ago.” The voice once again spoke. Despite the fact that it was talking about its own death, the voice remained emotionless.

“Then, what am I doing wrong?” Damien responded.

“Everything.”

The casualness of the voice’s response irked him, but he said nothing.

“When you hear the words Void Heart Sword Law, what do you think of?” The voice questioned.

Damien thought for a moment. The name of the skill was unique, as it could be interpreted in many ways. The inflection of each word should clue him in on how to correctly interpret it, but the voice was so stoic and emotionless that such inflections were neglected.

‘Void Heart Sword Law. What does it mean?’

From a first glance, he could only understand that it was a sword move, which was what he had already expected after releasing his sword aura. Still, he didn’t think that’s what the voice was referring to.

“You really are an idiot.” The voice continued. “Do not focus on the sword yet, for you have not even met the basic requirements to learn it.”

‘Do not focus on the sword.’ Damien didn’t quite understand what it meant, so he took it at face value. ‘Void Heart. What is void heart?’

Damien had plenty of connections to the word ‘void’. Not to mention his last name, even the physique that kept him alive at his weakest point was named void. But even with this, he didn’t know much about the concept.

‘I have my space element, but space doesn’t seem to be the same thing as void.’

To Damien, space was an all-encompassing concept. Everything existed within space and space existed within everything. Void, however...

‘The void is all-consuming.’

It was either a part of space or space was a part of it, but Damien felt that their purpose was completely different. When he imagined the void, he imagined emptiness or a black hole that swallowed everything.

‘If I put that concept with the word heart, does the meaning change?’

Heart wasn’t as elusive as void, at least not in Damien’s mind. It was either a biological aspect or an emotional one. And judging simply on instinct, Damien felt it was the latter.

‘All-consuming and emotions. If I put those two together...’

There was a major clue in front of him the entire time, and when he got to this point in his thinking, he finally realized it.

‘Emotionless.’

“That’s correct.” The voice said. “Void Heart is emotionless, but that is simply the surface. A true void heart is free of anything. Desire, ambition, emotion, attachment, morality. It all becomes irrelevant in front of a truly void heart.”

The concept was terrifying. Someone who cared for nothing, someone who had nothing to lose, that was the scariest kind of opponent. That kind of person could do anything to achieve their goals, using even their own body as a tool.

“The Void Heart Sword Law is an embodiment of this concept. Your sword will be swung without hesitation. Free and unfettered from all restrictions. For you to arrive here means you have shown compatibility with this ideal.”

Was he compatible though? Damien didn’t think so. He had plenty of attachments and things he cared about that he couldn’t just sacrifice.

‘But this sword law could be a game-changer in battle.’

If he could shut out any distractions and focus solely on what needed to be done...

The benefits were unimaginable. Plus, something was steering him towards accepting.

“And how do I free myself of emotion?” He asked.

“I am not here to mentor you. Figure it out yourself. However, I shall show you what it means to practice this art.”

The void was lit as the surroundings changed. Suddenly, Damien found himself on an expansive battlefield.

On one side, a massive army adorned in all black, and on the other, an even larger army adorned in white. At first glance, they seemed like opposing forces.

Yet, this wasn't the case. As he observed, Damien noticed that both armies were working in tandem against a third party.

‘A single person?!’

At the forefront of the battlefield stood a single man. His long black hair cascaded down his back like a midnight waterfall and his eyes were like a deep abyss that could steal one's soul.

His body wasn't large, but it was clear he had experienced his own share of battles. The man held a single sword in his hand as he faced both armies.

The man raised his sword and swung. Without warning, thousands of black lines appeared on the battlefield, intersecting with each other countless times to create intricate patterns. As quickly as they came, they disappeared. But the effect they had was catastrophic.

Anyone caught within those black lines was shredded to pieces, thinly sliced chunks of their bodies thumping onto the ground. Just like that, thousands of soldiers died.

“Why must you do this to us?!”

“We have wives, children, people we love! Why must you force us into death?!”

The armies couldn’t take it anymore. A similar scene had played out before them countless times, but they were never able to stop it. They pleaded and begged, hoping to be spared, but the man paid it no mind.

“You were in my way.” It was his only response to their cries before he slashed out once more.

The scene soon faded and Damien arrived back in the void, reflecting on what he had just seen.

It was true ruthlessness. Uncaring about circumstance and uncaring about consequence.

Although he was frightened at the prospect, it also somewhat excited him. That scene...there was something familiar about it.

He thought back to a certain scene he had once witnessed. A man standing before an army, simply raising his hand to cause a mass slaughter.

That was the level of power he wished to achieve. And this Void Heart Sword Law could give him that power. After many minutes of silence, Damien finally spoke.

“This sword law, I want it.”

Chapter 127 - Comprehension [4]

2 days had passed since Damien witnessed the benefits of the Void Heart Sword Law. For the past two days, he had done nothing but sit in a meditative position with his eyes closed.

After expressing his desire to practice the sword law, he was sent back to his real body from the void space he was transported to. The emotionless voice he had heard said nothing else to him.

But it wasn't without benefit. When his mind returned to his body, he could feel an immense wave of information imprinting itself onto his consciousness.

The Void Heart Sword Law actually wasn't very difficult to learn in theory. The main caveat of the art was the user's capability at emptying their mind of all emotion. Without passing this first step, it was impossible to practice the art.

And even in these past 2 days, Damien wasn't able to complete this step.

‘The first phase of the Void Heart Sword Law is called Mind Prison. The description seems easy enough, but damn is it hard to actually do.’

Mind Prison wasn't an attack at all. Instead, it was a method to cage the user's emotions so they could effectively perform their art.

Mana, in most definitions, was considered a form of energy. It could power technology, cleanse the air, and allow beings in contact with it to perform mystical feats. Yet, not everyone believes energy was enough to term mana.

It was something that could do anything. It was theorized that even true creation, creating something out of nothing, or even revival could be made possible through mana. And mere energy shouldn't be capable of such feats.

Instead, some people theorized that mana was something akin to the fabric of the universe. It was something that created reality itself. And if that was the case, then mana could be used in a much larger variety of ways.

Mind Prison was a concept that capitalized on this theory, and in some sense, proved its truth. Thoughts, emotions, ambition, all of these things were conceptual. There was no way to give them true form, even when taking into account the chemical responses of the brain.

However, Mind Prison was designed to do exactly that. It used mana as a base to cage those illusory concepts like emotions into a specific area, contained until they were released once more by the user.

However, the method to create a mind prison was never mentioned in the information implanted within Damien's mind. According to it, each individual had different aspirations and created different mind prisons to cater to their goals.

Damien couldn't even begin to understand how to cage emotions, as that didn't make any sense to him. So instead, he focused on designing a structure for his mind prison.

At first, he tried to structure it like a jail cell, something he'd actually seen before, but that didn't work well at all. The things he was trying to contain didn't have physical form, so bars weren't ideal.

Next, he tried something similar to a white room. It was a completely solid box with no defining features. If a human was forced to live within such a construct for a prolonged period of time, they'd go insane with 100% certainty.

However, there was a problem with this structure as well. He found that if he used this white room, he'd have a hard time releasing his emotions once again, regaining his full self.

Damien's view of the Void Heart concept was like he was splitting himself in two. On one side was his rational mind, and the other was his emotional one. He didn't know what state he would be in once the two separated, and he didn't want to take any risks.

What if his rational mind refused to release his emotions? What if his emotions, trapped within the white room, become chaotic and self-destructive? He didn't want to take any chances.

He needed to make sure there was a way for both exit and entry from both sides. He viewed both sides of him once he activated the mind prison as conscious beings.

And so, Damien began experimenting with other shapes. On the second ah, he finally settled for something akin to a soccer ball. Connecting hexagonal panels that created a circular construct.

With this structure, he could effectively seal his emotions, leaving no clear exits for them to seep through without permission, yet he could install a backdoor for emergency situations.

He had learned long ago to be prepared for any situation, which is why he had rarely been surprised by the developments that took place since he left the dungeon.

With a structure in mind, Damien immediately wanted to get to work, but he was still clueless about where to start. Should he crystallize the mana and make a solid structure, or would it be more ethereal like mana circuits?

He was charging forward without knowledge, and although he was aware of its dangers, he didn't stop. He had gotten so used to simply bulldozing his way through obstacles that it became second nature to him.

Damien focused his awareness into his mind. He was trying to find something like a sea of consciousness that he could use to root the mind prison. But he only saw darkness. After searching tirelessly for what felt like days, he came to a realization.

'Wait, I'm seeing darkness?'

Logically speaking, he shouldn't be "seeing" anything. This was inside his mind, the only thing he had ever witnessed here was memories.

But the fact that he was seeing darkness...

'Could this be my sea of consciousness?'

Rather than that, it was more like a mind space. There wasn't anything established within it yet, but its existence couldn't be denied. Damien called forth his mana and led it to the location his awareness was currently at, and it actually appeared in front of him.

Staring at the shining amethyst energy before him, Damien smiled. 'I finally have a starting point.' Without delay, he started working. Since he had already thoroughly planned the structure beforehand, the actual creation process wasn't too difficult.

But the process itself was enlightening to Damien. He was using mana to create an ethereal construct inside a space he didn't know truly existed. The process made Damien aware of how versatile mana truly was.

Time passed in a flash as Damien continued this process. The single hexagonal panel he created at first multiplied a dozen-fold until it became 64 panels of equal size. Then, he carefully attached them together in a process similar to welding metals.

When the spherical prism finally took root, Damien could feel a specific feeling in his mind that he couldn't quite place. However, this feeling confirmed the existence of the Mind Prison he had just painstakingly created.

Just this was enough to make him want to leap with joy. Just because he was working without pause didn't mean he held no doubts about his methods. The entire time, he wondered whether all his hard work would collapse like an illusion once he wasn't concentrating on it.

But it was there, a fully formed construct that embodied his completion of the Void Heart Sword Law's first phase.

Chapter 128 - Final Exam [1]

Damien wanted to quickly move on to learning how to cage his emotions, but the opportunity was denied. His body was soon bathed in the warm sunlight as the darkness receded along with the wall of comprehension.

Looking around, Damien noticed that he was in the middle of a vast field surrounded by thousands of people who he assumed were the other cultivators taking the disciple examination.

Each of them was separated by around 10 meters of space, creating a semi-isolated area around them.

‘This must’ve been the space that the last examination area took up.’

Within a few hours, the rest of the cultivators also woke up from their meditation and were made aware of their new location.

But Damien didn’t feel any joy about the fact that the test was over. He felt that he most likely failed it since he had barely completed half the first phase of his new art. He was fully prepared to leave and try his luck at joining another sect.

“Young cultivators, welcome back from the 2nd exam,” a familiar voice greeted. Looking up, they saw Mu Chen floating in the air above them.

“I understand that many of you are confused, so allow me to give a brief explanation. The Wall of Comprehension is a unique treasure, and the skills you were granted were done so by fate.

“Although not all of you have passed this test, you have all benefited from its contents. For this reason, I advise you not to share the process of our examination if you do not gain entry to our sect.

“You can try if you wish, but you should first question why news of the process has never been leaked to the outside.”

Damien finally realized why the Celestial Star Palace was able to remain secretive. It wasn't simply due to respect but also fear and quick decision-making. Anyone who attempted to reveal their information was promptly dealt with.

As for how they were able to track anyone who did so? Damien could only shudder at his own wild assumptions.

“Now, if the area below you lights up red, you may leave back to your homes, but if it is green, stay in place as you have passed onto the final phase.”

Damien looked down, fully expecting a red glow to emanate from the ground, but the result was the complete opposite. The lush grass below him shone in its own color, illuminating his square green.

‘I passed?’ He wondered. He felt that there was no way he comprehender 25% of the entire Void Heart Sword Law in such a brief period.

“Young man,” an aged voice suddenly rang out in his head, “do not question the results. If you can succeed in this final segment, the answer shall be revealed to you.”

For someone to send him a mana transmission that went undetected by those around him, they had to be extremely strong. So Damien simply nodded indiscreetly to show his affirmation before focusing his attention back on Mu Chen.

All around him, cultivators were showing different reactions to their squares. Those who passed were jubilant, some even crying tears of joy while those with stature like Long Chen stayed indifferent.

The reaction of those who failed was the complete opposite. Some simply left with downtrodden expressions, but others cried and begged, hoping to gain sympathy.

Others simply didn't accept the results and tried to revolt, but they were shut down without hesitation.

Anyone who overstayed their welcome was forcefully removed from the area, and although no deaths were incurred, plenty of injuries were handed out.

Although the scale was much smaller, their tragic scenes reminded him of what he saw in the vision about his sword law. Cries and pleas, unwillingness, and hope were all disregarded.

'That's right, this whole world revolves around such a principle. The Void Heart Sword Law is simply the peak of such a thought process.'

"To those of you who passed, welcome to the third phase. The rules of this phase are incredibly simple. All you have to do is survive for an entire week within the forest to your right.

"Anyone who doesn't arrive back at this area once the week ends will be disqualified or counted dead. Now, all of you may go forth, and may fate allow you to keep your lives."

Mu Chen immediately moved on to the next portion without sparing a glance at the failed cultivators. Hell, he didn't even pay attention to the states of those who passed.

While the others stood confused, Damien didn't hesitate to move. Without even doing a rough sweep of the forest, he charged in. Long Chen, who saw him move, quickly did the same, followed by the rest.

Only after entering the forest did Damien notice its strangeness. The towering trees and lush vegetation, although normal on the outside, contained too much life force to be simple.

Not only that, he could feel the aura of countless beasts roaming the area.

'Everything living here can be considered an enemy.'

But Damien didn't care about any of it. 'I have a week of spare time I can use to finish the first phase of my sword law.'

He was still hung up on this. For some reason, he wasn't apprehensive at all about closing off his emotions. It wasn't even something new to him.

For Damien, he lived his whole life burying and suppressing his emotions. The few years he spent with Rose were the only ones where he let himself roam free. But that alone wasn't enough to change his personality.

He was still running from his problems. It was the reason he had separated from Rose and Elena in the first place, and it was most likely the reason why the concept of void heart appealed to him so much.

He hated the control his emotions could have over his life. While he loved the time he spent with Rose, Elena, Zara, and his mother, he felt that in other situations his emotions were usually a burden.

They were something he reserved only for people he cared about, and he wanted a way to make them exclusive to those people.

‘Why should others be allowed to sway me?’

He didn’t want to be swayed by beauty, he didn’t want to be swayed by pity, and he didn’t want to be swayed by trust. Trusting people wasn’t something Damien was ever willing to do.

And while he was aware that running away from his emotions would never work as a long-term solution, he didn’t care. He would rather call himself a hypocrite than solve his emotional problems.

In this case, he was the opposite of his usual self. For someone who charged unhesitatingly in the face of danger to avoid it like this was a sight to behold, but it wasn’t funny in the slightest.

The trauma he developed on earth followed him everywhere. It haunted him even in his relationship, forcing its development to halt.

There was a reason he and Rose didn’t act much different than they did in Apeiron when they were simply friends. It was entirely his fault.

‘These emotions, I don’t need them.’

Without his conscious effort, some ethereal concepts floating within the blackness of his mind-space migrated into his Mind Prison. And then...

Click!

It trapped them within.

Chapter 129 - Final Exam [2]

In the dense and eerie forest, a single man walked with relaxed yet calculated steps. His eyes were entirely emotionless as if everything around him was irrelevant.

Boom!

The man waved his hand, causing a large explosion to occur. A few meters to his left, a massive crater was formed. Its shape was perfectly round as if someone cleanly removed that portion of land.

And in fact, they had. The man kept walking forward and a few seconds later, a massive chunk of rock fell from the sky and crashed into the ground.

On that rock, there was a large plant, however, each of its petals was coated in razor-sharp blades that looked like a mouth. On landing, that creature was squashed into paste.

Feeling the experience enter his body, the man continued walking. He had no purpose besides to find life forms and kill them so he could level up.

‘The goal is to survive, but such a thing is too simple.’ The man thought. Merely surviving wouldn’t cut it. He wanted to gain something beneficial out of this time.

However, he only cared about his goals. In order to gain experience at a faster rate, he made his way as far into the forest as possible. There was no rule about not harming other participants, and they were the closest source of exp in his vicinity, but he thought further.

‘There will be problems in the future if I commit mass slaughter without cause.’

But it didn’t mean he wouldn’t do it. He just wouldn’t go out of his way to do it, instead, he would kill anyone who was unfortunate enough to run into him.

As the man continued to walk, he suddenly felt movement to his right. Twisting his body at an unnatural angle, he dodged an incoming claw.

Behind him stood a massive panther, retreating after its attack failed.

“You made a grave mistake stepping into my territory, human.” The panther hissed while releasing its full aura. The beast was clearly at 3rd class just like him, only it was somewhere in the mid-levels.

However, Damien said nothing in response. He waved his hand, retrieving a large shining sword from thin air. In the next second, he swung it down.

A massive sword wave was released when he struck, cleaving its way towards the panther. The ground rumbled as it was split in two, and even the air whistled as it was torn apart.

Sensing danger, the panther quickly dodged to his right. However, even this was of no use. Just the simple move made the panther feel lightheaded.

Wait...that wasn't right. He was a proper 3rd class beast, there was no way for him to get exhausted from such a small movement. Upon making this realization, the panther looked down at his own body.

To his shock and horror, there was a small hole within his chest, leading directly through his heart and out the other side of his body.

Looking up at the human standing across from him, he only saw the man's hand on his sword hilt as he stared on with those cold emotionless eyes. With this scene, its consciousness faded to black.

‘Void Sword Art 2nd Step: Horizon Splitter’

The concept of distance became irrelevant with the use of this move. Without giving another glance at the beast, he continued walking.

‘Next prey.’

Meanwhile, Long Chen was having a different experience from Damien.

“Long Chen, I dare you to move against us. Now that we’re alone, I can finally take action against you.” A black-haired young man said. From his facial structure alone, it was clear the two were related.

Looking at the crowd of people that had formed around him, Long Chen stayed calm. “Long Bai, you should be aware that you gain nothing from this. Even without me, you won’t receive the successor position.”

“Shut up!” Long Bai screeched. “With you out of my way, the rest are nothing but trash! Today is the day you meet your end.”

Long Bai signaled with his arms, causing all 10 of the goons he had brought to charge as he watched from a distance.

“Young master, forgive us, but we are loyal to the Luo Branch!”

“Hmph.” Long Chen snorted. “The Luo Branch is simply a bunch of trash wishing for death.”

Reaching out in front of him, Long Chen withdrew his sword from his spatial ring. Unlike Damien’s, it was a large broadsword. Its design was ornamental, its blade shining in the sunlight that peaked through the foliage.

The hilt was covered in golden designs on a white base. A long golden streak ran through the middle of the double-edged blade, whose length was around 2 meters long. With such a large

sword, one would expect equivalent weight, however Long Chen wielded the massive blade with a single hand.

“Come, then. Allow me to show you the difference between us.”

The surrounding cultivators also drew their weapons, simultaneously attacking Long Chen.

‘Heavenly Cloud Steps.’

A small white fog materialized beneath Long Chen’s feet. Slightly pushing against the ground, he shot through the crowd of cultivators.

His movements were light as a feather, yet contained speed faster than the eye could see. He seemed to blend with the air with every step, randomly appearing in a different place.

His elusive movements alone were able to spread panic within the crowd. Soon enough, attacks were being thrown into empty space, none being able to touch his figure.

Fire pillars rose from the ground, shards of ice and spikes of earth charged toward him. With such a large crowd, it was impossible to use large-scale destructive attacks, so they were stuck using smaller ones. Still, the power contained within them was nothing to scoff at.

‘Heh, the last time it was recorded, Long Chen was only at the peak of 2nd class. With this group of 2nd classes and my own strength, he has no chance.’ Long Bai thought as he watched the battle.

Even seeing Long Chen's mind-numbing skill, he had no fear. He was confident that Long Chen's mana reserves would run dry soon. But as time passed, he felt an ominous feeling rise in his chest.

It had been half an hour, but Long Chen was still actively evading every attack thrown at him. Continuously using a powerful technique should have emptied his reserves already, but he wasn't even sweating.

Suddenly, Long Chen spoke.

"I'm getting bored already."

Making distance, he changed his stance into a more offensive one. "Try taking my moves then."

'9 dragons soar through the heavens!'

Grabbing his sword hilt with both hands, Long Chen swung it down with all his might. His muscles bulged at the pressure of his swing, becoming visible through his loose-fitting robes.

When the sword made impact against the ground, a massive earthquake erupted. The ground shook and cracked, segmenting into hundreds of different parts.

From the space below 9 of the cultivators in the group, fear-inducing roars could be heard. The earth exploded, letting forth 9 holy white dragon phantoms. Their jaws opened wide, clamping shut on the 9 victims before they continued soaring into the sky.

Long Chen quickly appeared behind the final cultivator and cleanly severed his head from his body. The last thing that cultivator saw was 9 dragons in the sky, opening their mouths to let out mighty roars into the heavens. And out of the mouths of those dragons, 9 lifeless bodies falling to the ground.

Paying no mind to the falling corpses that were soon to become meat paste, Long Chen turned to Long Bai, who was attempting to slowly back away, with a twisted smile on his face.

Chapter 130 - Final Exam [3]

“Did you think I, Long Chen, was some sort of easy target?” He said. Although his face stayed indifferent, the pride infused into his entire being was almost palpable.

“Did you think you could simply ambush me and succeed? You truly are a fool, Long Bai.”

“D-don’t come over here!” Long Bai stuttered with fear evident on his face. He wasn’t the type to spend his time training, rather he would spend it scheming.

How he reached his current level with such a mindset was inconceivable to Long Chen, but he knew that Long Bai had no actual skill besides raw strength. After all, for a 3rd class to kill a 2nd class, raw power was usually enough.

But Long Bai had underestimated Long Chen. He didn’t even spend time crosschecking his information to prove its truth. The second he saw that Long Chen was a 2nd class, he assumed it would be an easy feat to stomp on him.

But the current situation wasn’t playing out how he expected. “You know who my father is! Do you really want the Grand Elders to turn on your Yun Branch?”

Long Chen paused briefly but continued walking as if his hesitation was never present. “Your Luo Branch turned on our Long Clan the second you decided to fight the Clan rules. You simply don’t know that you were dead a long time ago.”

Long Chen reactivated his movement technique and appeared directly in front of Long Bai, causing the latter to fall on his butt in horror.

“Let me show you why I am titled as a peak genius of this generation. Let me show you what it means to be Young Master of the Long Clan. Let me show you what power is!”

Just like before, Long Chen raised his sword into the air, taking a similar posture. But the way his mana moved was entirely different.

‘Divine Dragon Roars to the Heavens.’

The sound of thunder tumbled through the area as thick dark clouds began to gather. Any living being, whether magical beast, plant life form, or other cultivators, all scrambled away from the vicinity.

Ka-boom!

Pillars of lightning descended faster than the eye could see and impacted the earth, causing massive craters in the surroundings. Trees were charred and then reduced to dust. The lush greenery on the ground had been incinerated, making way for a barren wasteland.

A 20-kilometer radius around the duo was nothing but scorched earth, but no attack had landed near them. It was clear the amount of control Long Chen possessed.

Boom!

Lightning descended once again, this time striking Long Chen's sword, which was still pointed skyward. A strange scene occurred, the lightning was absorbed by the sword, causing it to glow ominously.

Long Chen swung the sword, eliciting another massive roar from the sky. An eastern dragon made entirely of lightning emerged from the clouds. Its destination was directly on Long Bai's body.

Following the path of Long Chen's sword, the dragon descended, piercing Long Bai through his chest before entering the ground. Seeing this scene, Long Chen flew into the air, where the thunderous clouds had begun to disperse.

When the dragon entered the ground, it signified the end of this battle. A bright light shone inside the cracked earth, illuminating the already bright day. Following this light, many pillars shot out of the ground, before the entire thing erupted.

Sound seemed to have been put at a loss for what to do, as the actual sound of the explosion only rang out minutes after it had already happened. The previous 20 kilometers' worth of scorched land had been torn to shreds, creating a large sinkhole whose depth couldn't be seen through.

Looking at the destruction he caused, Long Chen slightly shook his head. He attached no significance to the event. Instead, he lifted his gaze to survey the land around him.

'Now would be a good time to fight that man from earlier.' He thought. 'But first I should recover my mana.'

4 days had passed in the forest and currently, Damien could be seen seated on the massive branch of a tree. Within his mind, a careful process was taking place.

Damien sent his awareness into the black area he had titled his Mind Space. He was currently watching a formless aura trapped within an ethereal cage.

‘This is my emotions. It’s time to revert to normal.’

There were no other thoughts in his head. He simply used the exit he created to open the Mind Prison. As soon as he did, that formless aura was released and it dispersed into his Mind Space.

Damien felt a rush of emotions. Excitement, anger, intrigue, and many more wild feelings plagued his mind, causing him to grab his head in pain.

Luckily his feelings were mostly positive, or he couldn’t imagine the side effects. It took an entire half-hour before Damien’s raging headache calmed down, allowing him room to think.

‘That was...intense.’

The feeling was completely different from what he imagined. He didn’t feel trapped in his own body as logical thought took over, rather he was completely himself.

It was surreal. He could act like a completely different being, and since his emotions were sealed, he felt no guilt or dilemma from doing so. He was left without room to even question himself.

He had spent the last 4 days killing anything he came across, soliciting him an increase of 5 levels. This was barely anything, but it made sense. 3rd class was always said to be much harder to cross than the previous two.

‘This skill could be extremely dangerous if used incorrectly.’

The main problem he saw was that he had no ability to change his actions from the logical ones he took. If he felt he made a mistake, there was no turning back.

And if, for instance, the emotionless version of him decided that abandoning those close to him was the most ideal scenario...

‘I don’t even want to think about what would happen.’

He didn’t have a goal in mind while activating his Mind Prison, so the chosen goal was his deepest desire to grow in strength. After the 4-day killing spree, his rational mind decided that there was no need to use the Mind Prison to take such actions.

Due to that, Damien ended up in his current position, finally regaining his true self. If he had to judge it, he felt that overall it was a positive experience. The only problem was that he still had no idea how he managed to seal his emotions in the first place.

‘All I was doing was suppressing them as hard as I could. There’s no way it could be that easy.’

Yet, it might've been exactly that. Damien wanted to test it out once more when he suddenly heard rustling from the tall grass on the ground. Whoever the newcomer was, they weren't trying to hide their presence.

Damien spread his awareness to check who it was before a smile emerged on his face. 'Well well well, I didn't expect this to happen any time soon.'

The figure finally exited the grass, revealing its form. It was a familiar black-haired man whose valiant and battle-hungry aura was on full display.