

Void 131

Chapter 131 - Power [1]

“You understand why I have come, don’t you?” Long Chen said as he gazed at Damien. His eyes were as sharp as his sword, indicating that he wouldn’t take no for an answer.

“I do. But are you sure you want to do it now?” Damien responded. He was also feeling the desire to fight, but he didn’t want to do so now. He still had a few things he wanted to test after exiting his Void Heart form.

But Long Chen didn’t seem to care. “Let’s fight. I want to truly test my prowess, and you seem to be the only one here that might have the capability to do so.”

“Might?” Damien scoffed. “Don’t underestimate me too much, or you won’t know how you lost. How about this, on the final day of the exam, we meet back at this spot. That will be when we fight.”

Long Chen thought for a moment. It was more convenient for him to fight on the final day as well since he still wasn’t sure Long Bai was the only one out for his head. This way, the crowd they’d attract wouldn’t have time to make any sudden moves.

If anyone wanted to strike them when they were tired, it’d be impossible unless they wanted to fail the exam. Well, Long Chen didn’t know about Zara so this was the security he felt.

“Very well, I will see you in 3 days.” He said. He had taken so long to find Damien that he got a little too excited and caught in the moment. It was a strange feeling that Long Chen hadn’t experienced before.

‘Perhaps my search for a rival has gone on for far too long.’ It was the only reason he could think of for his recent actions. He didn’t think or plan, just acting on will alone.

‘Then I will spend the next few days increasing my level and training before our confrontation.’

Damien and Long Chen weren’t the only ones present in the vicinity. Many other participants and beasts had been attracted by the clash of their auras and had come to find the source of the commotion. Due to this, news of their upcoming duel spread.

“Did you hear? The young master of the Long Clan is going to duel some random guy on the final day!”

“What? Why would I be interested in that? The other guy will obviously lose to Long Chen.”

“But you don’t understand! I personally saw them clash in aura, and the other guy didn’t lose out in the slightest!”

“What?! That’s impossible!”

“It’s true, if you want to see it, just come watch the duel!”

“Hmph, I’ll judge the truth with my own two eyes.”

Many similar conversations took place, everyone having their own goals. Some simply wanted to reach the gathering spot to kill off their competitors, some wanted to kill Long Chen, and some simply wanted to watch the show.

Within a shadowy area of the forest, a black-haired man was talking to a group of what seemed to be his followers.

“Long Chen will be tired out after this match. That idiot Long Bai and his group failed to kill him, so it’s up to us. Don’t fail me when the time comes.”

“Yes, young master!”

As all of this took place, Damien flew around in search of an isolated area within the forest. There was something he wanted to try. It was unrelated to any training or technique he created, but still equally important.

“What does the full power of a 3rd class look like?”

The question was an interesting one, as Damien should be able to feel his exact power level. The problem was that he had never seen large-scale destruction to use as a basis for what he could do.

He had estimated his power back in Apeiron, but never had the chance to test it out.

Reaching a lush area without too much wildlife, Damien began charging his attack.

He wouldn't use any new techniques, but he wasn't simply going to use pure mana. He would use his most destructive attack for this test. The 4th form of his sword art, spatial collapse.

When he previously used this move, he always encapsulated a few kilometers at best, but there was a reason for this. It was the amount of mana he poured into his attack.

He usually did this instinctually, never thinking about the mechanics behind it. He didn't know whether it was a natural talent or a benefit of evolving, but he was always able to naturally tell how much mana he needed to put into an attack.

Due to this, he never used his full power or overused mana even when he was going all out. Besides this fact, he also never had a reason to use large-scale destructive force.

But today was different. He still had two and a half days before he needed to fight Long Chen, and that was more than enough time to recuperate his mana. Not to mention, he had Zara who could guard him while he was recovering.

Damien took out his sword and began channeling mana into it. Since he was testing his all-out force, the amplification feature on his sword was a necessity.

The colorless light of spatial mana coated the 1.5-meter-long blade of the sword, causing it to shine iridescently. Damien slowly moved his arm, bringing it above his head. As his sword passed through the air, ripples occurred in space.

It wasn't quite strong enough to cause spatial cracks, especially with the resilient atmosphere on the Cloud Plane, but its strength couldn't be denied. As Damien continued to pour his mana into the sword, the area of the spatial ripples spread, causing a phenomenon to appear in the air.

Clouds became small boats floating on an ocean of space, the sky ebbing and flowing like waves. Just like before, many people witnessed it, but none dared to go forward.

Damien's mana capacity at the moment was nearing 17,000, and although he didn't know the unit used to quantify it, he had more than 10x the mana he had at 2nd class. He couldn't imagine the sheer power he could produce.

It took around 5 minutes even at Damien's fastest speed for all his mana to enter the body of the sword, but once it was done, the sword itself looked like a second sun.

‘Void Sword Art 4th Step: Spatial Collapse’

He didn't hesitate any longer, swinging his sword down in the air. His target was space itself. Even though it only hit air, the sword made impact as if it was a solid surface. The sky beneath its blade cracked and became a massive black crevasse in the air.

Within seconds, the crevasse expanded to cover a wide area, but other than that, there was only silence.

Thousands of beings watched the crack in the sky with fear, not knowing its next move, but they weren't forced to wait long.

BOOOOOM!

It was chaos. The sky continued to crack, creating a massive black hole that began to relentlessly pull its surroundings.

The sky twisted into the ground and the ground became walls. Trees were uprooted and fused together as their molecules collided. This fusion phenomenon occurred in the grass, the ground itself, and even a few unlucky beasts as well.

The grassy land cracked and splintered, unable to resist the terrifying gravitational force of the black hole.

As theorized by scientists, even light was pulled into this gravity, creating a massive shining ring around the void that slowly became filled with rocks resembling meteors.

Everything went to hell. The beasts that were remaining in the area were shredded to pieces by the opposing gravitational forces or pulled into the black hole, never to be seen again.

The ground no longer existed, leaving room for a massive abyssal chasm with no bottom. The world tried its best to repair the sky, but as long as the black hole existed, it was impossible.

The scene of devastation carried on for an entire 10 minutes uninhibited. And by the time it was over, nothing existed within the area. The black hole slowly became smaller and smaller, turning into a pin-sized dot before disappearing into the air.

Silence once again descended. Not only in the area Damien was in, but through the entire area of the massive forest that bore witness to the event. 1500 square kilometers worth of land was gone just like that.

That number didn't mean much out of context, but it was a plot of land slightly larger than Los Angeles. His full power was at the level where he could reduce an entire city to dust in a few minutes.

Damien simply stood in the air basking in the sensation he felt. He needed to take time and understand why he had so much power, as none of his previous fights had been so large scale. It almost didn't make sense for him to be this strong if he went all out.

But other than that curiosity, he only felt one thing about this experience. The feeling of having this much power...

It was enlightening.

Chapter 132 - Power [2]

The most prominent question at this moment was, why was Damien so powerful?

With the way every fight of his had gone so far, one would expect the collateral damage to have reached city level, or at least something far more destructive than it had.

However, the answer was simple. For starters, Damien needed an entire 10 minutes of charging his attack to reach the city level.

It was a widely known fact that the difference between 2nd and 3rd class could be considered the first true milestone in one's cultivation journey.

Unlike the previous two classes, 3rd class was an evolution of one's being. By the time one completed their leveling and forged the legends necessary to class change once more, they would gain more power over the natural law.

Damien didn't understand much about this "natural law" that was mentioned every time someone talked to him about 4th class, but he was intrigued to figure it out.

At the moment, his powers were at their weakest point, at least in the grand scheme. His elements were just that, elements. They had no power to manipulate reality and perform truly grand feats.

Just thinking about how the spatial mages of Apeiron were able to turn an entire world into a secret realm for the sake of their future generations, Damien could feel the massive power gap between classes.

He had met a few 4th class beings before, and none of them really gave him the same feeling as those he heard tales about from Kurt's remnant soul within the temple.

After much thought, he understood the reason for this. Why would a 4th class being be unable to conceal things from someone much weaker than them? It didn't make sense. Even if his eyes were extremely powerful, they weren't reality-breaking.

What he saw from Malcolm or James in Apeiron was simply what they wished to show him. And the power he felt during their altercations wasn't even enough to be considered the tip of the iceberg.

The after-effects of many 4th class beings going to war on Apeiron was almost the total extinction of the world's population. If that wasn't enough to showcase how much power they could truly possess, nothing was.

His thoughts ran a little wild, considering that there might've been other continents on Apeiron that were totally destroyed and sunk during the war, but that was just his own fantasy.

Every time he had asked Malcolm about the reason for such a wide gap, he was told nothing. Even those elders from the Burning Sun Sect kept him in the dark about it.

But that didn't curb his curiosity, instead making it burn with even brighter passion. Strength and power were things Damien loved, and learning about how they worked was something he had set his mind to. One way or another, he'd figure out how it all worked.

Other than that, he simply had no need to use such levels of power.

Back when he was fighting the leaders of Niflheim, he had the elders of the Burning Sun Sect with him to offset a majority of the pressure he might've faced, not to mention his companions. If he had to fight those dark imps alone, he would have been forced to go all out, maybe even getting killed in the process.

On Apeiron, he simply didn't have any major conflict. The fight with the Nox in the ancient temple might've been much more destructive than any of his other fights, but he didn't have a major part in that one.

With the sturdiness of the palace and Rose's mitigation of damage through the use of her Illusory Throne, the collateral of that fight became underwhelming.

No matter how focused he was on his goal, or how strong his resolve to crush those in his path was, he needed true enemies for that to happen, and Damien had never been one to wantonly make enemies.

The funny part was, the one time he actively sought enemies, he met the laughing stock named Wang Ming. He didn't know whether he should praise his luck or curse it.

His personality craved for battle, it craved for life or death situations, but he was left largely unfulfilled. If his two years in the dungeon were counted, he had more than enough life or death to last him many years, but it wasn't.

The reason being that his time in the dungeon was what caused him to develop such a mentality. Since it developed that trait, it couldn't be considered as fulfilling its desires.

However, he wasn't insane. Damien didn't just hop into situations that'd lead to his death due to his urge to feel that riveting sensation of walking the line. If he was that dumb, he would be finding some Nox-infested planet and charging in headfirst.

At the end of the day, what Damien wanted was more opportunities for destruction like this. He loved the feeling he got from causing it, and he loved the sight of it.

He actually felt like he comprehended something elusive just moments ago, but he couldn't recall it no matter how hard he tried. All he knew was that destruction was something closely related to him, as the core of his being reveled in its sensation.

He felt like the question marks in his affinities section were slowly revealing themselves, with one set being glaringly obvious to him. He just didn't know how to proceed with comprehending it enough to truly gain an affinity.

While he thought of these things, Zara flew him to an isolated area so he could recover. Truthfully, he had almost dropped out of the sky, unable to sustain himself due to the overuse of his mana.

And directly after everything had ended, he fell deep into his own thoughts. His behavior could be seen as stupid and self-destructive, but in another vein, it could be said that he had immense trust in Zara.

After finding an indiscreet cave, Zara quickly scared away the beasts living in it with her aura before taking Damien inside.

“Damien, how did you do that?” Zara asked, intrigue evident in her eyes. She had similarly never witnessed such a scene, and it made her faith in Damien almost turn to worship.

“What do you mean?” Damien chided. “If you try your hardest, you can probably do something like that as well. After all, my Zara will be the strongest beast to ever exist.”

“Mm!” Zara nodded, happily prancing around the cave. Inwardly, she was swearing to not neglect training, wanting to do the same as Damien one day.

Without much action, another 2 days passed. The sun rose over the horizon as the day of the duel dawned on those present. Everywhere within the general vicinity, large movements could be seen.

Crowds of surviving contestants all made their way over to the tree where the meeting spot was set. This was a duel involving a peak genius, so they had to witness it.

When they arrived, they saw a black-haired man floating in the air, his aura radiating serenity. It only took 10 minutes for his opponent to arrive, causing his eyes to snap open.

“Finally, let us see who is stronger.”

Chapter 133 - Power [3]

A 50-kilometer radius surrounding a massive tree was crowded by slightly more than a thousand people who made up a large crowd prepared to watch the upcoming battle.

In the air above the tree stood a heroic man whose flowing black hair and robes fluttered in the calm wind. His sword-like eyebrows were calmly set above his closed eyes. He didn't do anything special, but his presence captivated the attention of everyone in the vicinity.

From the distance, another aura emerged, flying at high speeds towards their location. Most of the crowd was only able to see an amethyst light approaching them. When it finally arrived, the figure it encased was revealed.

Another man whose aura was equally valiant, leaving no obvious discrepancies between him and his opponent. His hair was tied in a ponytail, the silver streaks within its deep black looking like shooting stars in the night.

His brows were equally sharp, drawing attention to his mesmerizing eyes. The two colors that made up his irises swirled hypnotically, causing his cross-shaped pupils to look like a small boat amongst a raging storm.

His clothing was styled much differently from those people were used to, giving him a unique and mysterious vibe.

Floating above the rich greenery of the forest, these two men looked like immortal cultivators peacefully gauging each other's strength. However, this aura changed the second they met eyes.

Their auras flared, starting their preliminary competition. An amethyst aura met a gold one, each displaying its own unique properties.

Winds swirled around them as just the clash of their auras would have been enough to drop any 2nd class cultivator to their knees.

“You showed up.” Long Chen said, excitement slowly emerging in his tone.

“Did you think I wouldn’t?” Damien responded with an amused smile.

But Long Chen shook his head. “I didn’t take you for someone without honor. I am simply excited to see whether I can finally find a challenge.”

Among those who had witnessed the devastating scene that suddenly began in one portion of the forest a few days ago, Long Chen was one of them. Although most were unaware of the cause, he had a good guess.

“Is there any need for more hesitation? Let’s fight.” He said.

In terms of pure aura, they were almost equal, with neither of them being able to gain a true advantage. It was pointless for them to continue with these insignificant altercations.

Long Chen chose not to draw his sword immediately, flying forward at speeds that caused small booms to resound through the environment as even the air was broken through.

In a mere instant, he arrived in front of Damien, throwing a fierce punch directly at his face. But Damien wasn't perturbed. He slightly moved his body, allowing the fist to pass by him as he threw his own punch, his speed not slower than Long Chen's in the slightest.

The two stayed in close combat for many minutes, maneuvering within the air as if it was solid ground. Still, neither of them had been able to land a proper hit.

Separating for a moment, they once again charged, their fists connecting. Each connecting punch resulted in a sonic boom,

As they were in the air, they didn't cause any damage to the surroundings, but their clash resulted in fierce winds that attempted to shred the branches of the trees below them. They moved around the 50-kilometer stage that had been prepared for them at a rapid pace, unperturbed by any damage they might cause.

At this point, the only way they were using mana was to empower their fists, so they hadn't been able to damage each other. Still, they were having plenty of fun.

Each time they connected a hit, grins would emerge on their faces. Both of them felt the refreshing feeling that came with talking with fists.

However, they didn't have all the time in the world to play. At the end of the day, they still had to pass the disciple examination. After 15 minutes, they finally separated once more.

"It's impressive enough for you to match me blow to blow with fists, but let's see if you can do the same with your sword." Long Chen said as he pulled out his massive greatsword.

Damien grinned in response as he withdrew his own weapon. The difference in size between the two was glaring, but the aura they gave off didn't lose to each other.

Damien knew his sword itself wasn't as refined as it could be, but he had confidence in the arts he created. "Let's go then."

Gold and amethyst covered their blades before they charged again. As their blades made contact, a loud screech could be heard from the grinding of metal.

As their exchange continued, Damien slowly lost ground. As he expected, Long Chen's sword mastery was leagues above his. However, he wasn't perturbed.

'Void Sword Art 3rd Step: Dance of the Void'

Damien's figure quickly became ethereal, flashing in and out of existence, randomly appearing in different places around Long Chen.

His movements were patterned in such a way that soon, Long Chen was surrounded by tens of afterimages.

With the addition of his spatial magic, Damien began gaining ground. Seeing himself get put at a disadvantage, Long Chen grinned. "'Using techniques? Let me join you!'"

'9 Dragons Soar through the Heavens!'

Just like before, the ground erupted, leaving way for 9 white dragon phantoms that charged toward Damien. Seeing the incoming dragons, he grinned.

Putting his palm out, Damien pushed down. Long Chen suddenly felt the air around him get heavy as his movements became sluggish. Even his dragons were slightly struggling against the pressure.

‘Gravity!’ He exclaimed within his head. ‘This fight won’t be as simple as I assumed.’

‘Heavenly Dragon Domain!’

A golden light expanded from Long Chen’s body before encompassing a 20-kilometer radius around him. Naturally, Damien was included in this.

Within the domain, Damien felt that his lie movements were slowed to match Long Chen’s under his gravity. Soon enough, those 9 dragons made their way to him, clamping down their massive jaws.

First blood had been drawn, and Damien was the loser. The dragon phantoms attempted to tear through his body, but he soon teleported out of their grasp. He no longer had the freedom to relax.

‘Void Sword Art 2nd Step: Horizon Break’

Long Chen suddenly felt immense danger coming from an unknown direction. He twisted his body at an impossible angle, but he was unable to fully dodge. A massive gash formed on his left side, along his ribs.

Grinning at Long Chen, Damien smugly declared, “Now we’re even.”

Ignoring the pain, Long Chen grinned back. Even though their fight hadn’t become serious yet, he knew. He met an opponent he couldn’t simply destroy if he didn’t show some of his cards.

But as if it was an unspoken agreement between the two, they didn’t use their most powerful attacks. As their clash continued, they only used the moves they had already shown each other.

Blood continued to spill, staining the green forest with blips of red, but neither fighter paused their movements.

It was time for round two.

Chapter 134 - Power [4]

At the edge of the forest, a meeting of elders was taking place. Not all the elders previously in the palace had assembled, but the ones willing to take disciples from the new batch of outer disciples were gathered.

“Have you heard the news?”

“Right, that Long boy is having a duel with the kid from the talent test.”

“Mm, I think it’d be good if they could develop a healthy rivalry.”

“Right, the Long Clan might not have the same influence as us, but they are near the top of the 4 great clans. It won’t be bad for us to make connections to them.”

“Exactly, if the Long boy finds a rival within the sect, their clan will be much more favorable towards our disciples.”

As these miscellaneous conversations took place, someone raised a concern.

“Shouldn’t we be monitoring their duel? We can’t have either of them getting too injured, or even worse, crippled.”

“They are both top geniuses that will benefit our sect greatly, so naturally that can’t be allowed. However, we don’t need to worry. The Old Man is already taking care of it.”

“He moved personally? I wonder which of them caught his interest.”

Even though they addressed him causally, respect and adoration could be felt in the tones of these sect elders as they spoke about the old man.

Nonetheless, after learning that safety was already taken care of, the sect elders resumed their idle chatter.

Meanwhile, the fight between Damien and Long Chen had escalated intensely. Unlike their previous bouts, they both had serious expressions on their faces.

The lush scenery of the 50-kilometer radius around them had already been destroyed. The ground was cracked, and many of the plants in the vicinity had been charred or incinerated.

The crowd of onlookers was forced to scatter since the battle had escalated past the point where they could stand close by and watch. Some decided to eliminate their competitors during this time, so many small skirmishes were taking place in the area.

Clang!

The sound of swords impacting each other was heard once again, but this time wasn't so simple. A wave of lightning crashed into Long Chen, obliterating everything in his vicinity, while the same occurred with Damien.

As it turns out, Long Chen also had a lightning affinity, so after many hours, they had decided to compete on whose was better.

Damien's crackling black lightning contained properties of destruction, while Long Chen's gold lightning felt more pure and authoritative.

When the two waves of lightning collided, a massive explosion engulfed the entire 50 kilometers around them, pushing both of them back.

Turning his head to the side, Damien spit out a mouthful of blood. With their clash becoming more volatile, there was no way to remain uninjured.

‘Well, at least it isn’t as bad as the Sea Dragon.’ Thinking about it, Damien got an idea. He hadn’t been able to test his new trait on any opponents recently.

“Long Chen, we’ve already been fighting for hours without a clear winner. Let us end it in this next clash.”

Long Chen was in a similar state as Damien, and while his injuries were also rapidly healing, his healing factor wasn’t as pronounced as his opponents. ‘Is there no way for me to win?’

Going into this fight, he had expected a challenge, but nothing like this. When comparing raw strength, Damien was above him. However, he won in terms of technique.

With each having their own specialty, their battle stayed at a standstill for this long. Every time Long Chen used his wits to land a critical hit on Damien, he would collapse space or use his odd invisible sword strike to counterattack.

‘Spatial cultivators are truly terrifying.’

He was aware that if this was a life or death battle, he’d lose purely due to Damien’s spatial element. After all, Damien had the ability to flee whenever he felt like it to recuperate, while Long Chen had nothing of the sort.

Even if he used the life-saving talismans his family provided, they were a finite supply, unlike Damien who only needed mana.

Looking at his opponent who was breathing heavily, but still looked in generally good shape, Long Chen checked his own condition.

‘I can continue fighting for many more hours, and my mana capacity is still 3/4ths full, but we can’t fight forever.’

“Very well, the next move will be the last.”

Since they were finishing it here, he might as well go all out. This was Long Chen’s thought. And although he didn’t want to use his trump card, he felt he had the perfect attack for this confrontation.

Both fighters nodded at each other in mutual agreement before their auras flared. They gushed out mana at an incredible pace, putting everything into their final attacks.

‘Only leave enough mana to protect myself.’ This was the thought running through both of their minds.

Above Damien’s head, the sky once again raged. Thunder boomed so loud that it could even be heard by the elders on the outskirts of the forest, and black lightning crackled through the storm clouds that began to gather.

It was like a heavenly tribulation, but much more destructive. But Damien wasn’t done yet. If he was going all out, he’d truly go all out. He slowly began inhaling as a small black dot formed in his throat.

On Long Chen's side, a similarly catastrophic scene was taking place. Heaven and earth rumbled as pillars shot down from both, connecting in the middle with such force that small space cracks formed.

These pillars were entirely gold, forming an illusory golden palace around Long Chen, with him sitting on a throne of swords. The earth cracked apart and gave way for the hot lava within, which rose to create golems that guarded their king.

The sky cleared and the sun shone through the dark clouds, illuminating Long Chen's figure like a heavenly immortal descended upon the mortal world.

Damien's eyes slowly turned entirely red, while Long Chen's became vertical slits of a reptile. Looking at each other, they both yelled at the top of their lungs.

"Heavenly Dragon God's Descent!"

"Storm Dragon's Fury!"

On Damien's side, a beam of destructive black light thicker than any tree trunk shot out of his mouth and entered the storm clouds, empowering them with its strength.

Soon after, the rumbling clouds became pitch black, causing a massive hole to be opened in the space above the battleground. Through this hole, an even larger beam with the thickness of a building shot forward towards Long Chen's throne.

However, the beam was destined to be obstructed. The tens of magma golems protecting Long Chen fused, becoming a massive dragon made entirely of molten rock.

The gold beams creating the structure of the palace shifted their aim and entered the magma dragon's body, covering it in light. Finally, the shining sunlight converged to create a golden dragon hundreds of meters in length.

The dragon opened its massive maw, shooting out a golden-white beam that didn't lose out to Damien's in the slightest.

The scene of carnage could be viewed by anyone near the forest. One pitch black and the other gold, the two beams collided looking like an epic clash between good and evil.

But the destruction it caused had no morality. The world was bathed in light that swallowed everything in its path, including Damien and Long Chen.

The light incinerated everything, even the 3rd class competitors that were too close were immediately turned to ash. This was the result of a combination of Damien and Long Chen's power.

As for whether the two of them could survive it? It was entirely unknown.

Chapter 135 - Celestial Star Palace [1]

Many hours passed and the surviving cultivators made their way to the entrance of the forest. They rushed with whatever power they could muster, as there were more than the thousand that would be selected who survived.

Due to this, the first ones to reach the meeting point would be chosen.

But even while moving at such speeds, most of their minds were preoccupied with the massive explosion that occurred a few hours prior.

After the event, some had even chosen to go back to that area to witness the scene, but they found nothing. There was only a massive crater several thousands of kilometers in diameter, the bodies of neither Damien nor Long Chen being present.

Looking at the cultivators who slowly showed up in front of him, Mu Chen smiled. He got to witness many interesting scenes today and found many talented youngsters for their sect. Observing the kind of power the new generation could hold was one of his favorite pastimes.

‘Especially those two..’

His mind drifted to the two that could be considered as the peak geniuses of this class of outer disciples. One had immense status while the other was entirely unknown, but neither failed to make a grand entrance.

Taking his mind off of them, he once again gazed at those who had gathered.

“Alright! To the 998 of you that arrived first, welcome to our Celestial Star Palace! Your badges should have lit up green by now, so you know who you are!

“You are allowed to return to your families and say your goodbyes if you’d like, but remember to be back at the sect with your token in 3 days’ time! As for those who didn’t pass, you can always try again during the next exam.

“The cultivation path is endless, and there is always a peak above the peak. If you don’t have the fortitude to cope with this loss, you do not deserve to be titled as a cultivator.”

Some voiced their dissent, but in the end, they didn’t do anything. At least, most of them didn’t.

“Senior! I counted myself, and I was the 1000th person to come out of the forest! Why is my token red?!” A black-haired man shouted. He was the same man who had plotted with Long Bai earlier in the exam.

Indifferently glancing at him, Mu Chen spoke. “I said clearly that the first 998 cultivators gained entrance, so why are you complaining?”

“But the exam was supposed to allow 1000 of us! Don’t think my Long Clan will take this slight sitting down!”

“Long clan?” Mu Chen said with a questioning tone. The man’s face became smug.

“That’s right! I am Long Hao! I will be sure to inform my elders about what occurred here!” He said. Long Hao clearly believed he had the upper hand, becoming more arrogant with every word he spoke.

But Mu Chen didn’t care in the slightest. “Why would your Long clan lose face here? Your young master is already our sect disciple. Not to mention that your Long Clan cannot harm us even if they tried.”

The humiliating words in the latter half of the sentence were completely disregarded due to the shock of the former.

“L-Long Chen is still alive?! Impossible!”

Long Hao was part of the group that had almost been incinerated in that massive explosion. He firmly believed that Long Chen was dead, which was why he had the guts to act so brazenly.

“Whether you believe it or not isn’t my problem. If you don’t leave the area right now, I’ll have to force you to do so.” Mu Chen responded.

Long Hao’s face went red with rage, but he knew he didn’t have the strength to do anything. “I’ll remember this.” He said as he reluctantly flew away.

Just like that, the disciple examination was over, along with most of the drama it brought. Many of the cultivators returned to their homes to wish goodbyes to their families, as they were aware they wouldn’t leave the sect often, while others directly entered its premises.

Within a certain building within the expansive city that decorated the Star Mountain on which the sect resided, two men could be seen lying down in beds.

Their bodies were riddled with scars, and even with their healing factors, it was taking them many hours to heal.

Days passed as these men lay motionless, and even after their bodies had returned to peak condition, they still hadn’t awoken.

Next to one of these beds, a large black winged wolf was pacing nervously. She had been watching Damien for the past 3 days hoping for some change, but she saw nothing.

During that explosion, she felt that they would definitely die, but she had no qualms about it. As long as she died with Damien by her side, she'd be content.

Yet, at the last moment, she saw a blurred figure race in. After that, her vision went black. She didn't pass out, nor was she obstructed in any way. Her eyes simply couldn't process the speeds at which Damien's body was being carried.

The next thing she knew, they were in this building.

"Fear not, little one," came an aged voice from the entrance of the room, "their minds are simply exhausted from all the effort they put into their duel. They should be waking up in a few hours."

Zara simply nodded and went back to watching over Damien. By now, she was aware of the old man's presence. He was the one who brought them to this building and fed them the healing pills they needed, and Zara felt no malice from him.

As for how she'd treat him, that depended on what happened when Damien woke up. And after waiting a few more hours, just like the old man said, both Damien and Long Chen began to stir from their slumbers.

"Ugh..."

Damien groaned. The second his consciousness returned, he was met with a splitting headache.

‘How the hell am I still alive?’

He didn’t expect the outcome to happen as it had. At first, his only goal was to use his storm talent. Yet, seeing the grand palace that was built around Long Chen, his competitive nature arose and he went harder than he should’ve.

Long Chen was having similar thoughts. He only planned to use his golden palace and lava golems to attack, yet he ended up using one of his most powerful moves.

The two reflected on their battle and in the end, neither could conclude who had won that exchange. They both would have died if it wasn’t for that shadowy figure that swooped them up at the last second.

“Are you kids done with your reminiscing?” A voice resounded through the room. Even if they weren’t in peak condition, they both immediately put their guard up.

“Oho, it’s good to see that you have the energy to look at me like that.” In front of them stood an old man with flowing white hair and a similarly long beard. His look was the epitome of the “old monster” stereotype.

“Well then, if you’re doing good enough to be so vigilant, I might as well begin my introduction.” He said. Shifting his gaze between the two geniuses, the old man once again spoke.

“Welcome to the Celestial Star Palace, new outer court disciples.”

Chapter 136 - Celestial Star Palace [2]

“Eh?!”

A startled sound left the mouths of both Damien and Long Chen. They hadn't passed the last exam since they had fallen unconscious before leaving the forest, but they still gained entry into the sect?

"You thought we'd allow talents such as yourself to fail?" The old man chuckled. "Both of you had already passed the exam after the first test ended. The rest was simply for show."

Now that he was back to his senses, Damien noticed something he disregarded previously. "You! You're that voice from before!"

"Finally recognized me?" The old man smirked. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Tian Yang, and I am the Grand Elder of this fine sect."

The two men were both stunned into silence once again. The Grand Elder? Such a figure had status only below the Sect Master, and he was here taking care of them?

"No need to look at me like that," Tian Yang continued, "I am merely an old man with status. I really have too much time on my hands, so I decided to have a bit of fun."

"Well, let's ignore that for now as I introduce you to the sect." Tian Yang waved his arm, causing two blueish-black tokens to fly into Damien and Long Chen's hands.

"These are your disciple tokens. Not only will they indicate your status within the sect, they will also serve as communication devices and locators for various establishments on the premises."

“Our sect’s facilities span this entire top half of the Star Mountain, so navigating can become quite difficult without such a guide.”

Damien and Long Chen nodded, paying close attention to Tian Yang’s words.

“As for the structure of the sect, it’s quite simple. Since you are new, you will immediately become outer court disciples. The resources you will be distributed will be minimal, and the conditions are harsh. It is the gathering place for the majority of our sect’s population.

“Every 6 months, there is an examination to enter the Inner Court. As for the requirements to do so, you can find out at the Induction Hall. The Inner Court is where the competition truly begins. Each disciple competes with each other for their place in the rankings, hoping to enter the Core Court.

“The both of you witnessed the pagodas lining the areas closer to the peak of the mountain, correct? Each of those is home to a core disciple or an elder.

“So far, our sect only has 10 core disciples. Considering how we have tens of thousands of disciples, you can imagine the difficulty and struggle it takes to reach such a level.”

Pausing for a moment, Tian Yang’s gaze drifted to Damien.

“As Elder Mu mentioned at the beginning of the disciple examination, this year the elders of the sect were looking to take disciples from the new entrants. Being the disciple of an elder will immensely raise your status, and even if you still need to work your way up the ladder, you will have a much easier time doing so.

“Not to mention, with an elder’s backing and teachings, your realm progression and comprehension speeds will catapult.”

“Young man, although I have talked so much, I am still unaware of your name, do you mind telling me?”

Even though Tian Yang’s tone and phrasing was polite, like a gentle old man, it was clear that he wasn’t simply asking.

“My name is Damien, senior. Damien Void.”

His eyes flashed slightly, trying to see through even a hint of Tian Yang’s power, but he failed to do so. Facing such a person with immeasurable depths, Damien decided it was best to be polite.

“Damien, is it. A truly odd name. However, this isn’t important. What I wish to ask you, Damien, is whether or not you’d like to be my disciple. Although you aren’t my only disciple, it doesn’t mean I don’t have the time to teach you.”

This scene was familiar to Damien, as the same had happened with Malcolm in Apeiron. A peak expert was willing to teach him. Not only would he gain status to protect him if necessary, he’d also be able to progress with breakneck speeds.

It wasn’t as if Damien blindly believed what Tian Yang had told him earlier, rather it was something he had felt personally. Even if he couldn’t feel nor see any aura from Tian Yang, he could see the colorless mana that surrounded him.

There were two types of such mana, and Damien felt familiar with both of them. He knew for sure that one was spatial mana, but the other...

It was definitely one of the hidden affinities that appeared in his status sheet while he was in the ancient temple.

Unlike the master-disciple relationships people had in the Cloud Plane, where it would be an insult to take another master, there was no such custom on Apeiron. Malcolm was a teacher at an academy, not a personal master.

And although he trained Damien personally, it was mainly for the sake of the Nexus Event. They barely retained such a teacher-student relationship after the fact, becoming more like friends than elder and junior.

When considering all these facts together, Damien felt no need to hesitate. Quickly bowing his head, he spoke.

“Damien greets Master.”

“Hahaha! Good! I like your decisiveness, young man. Such is a great skill to possess in such a world as ours.”

Raising his head, Damien suddenly looked over at Long Chen, who was watching everything go down with a slightly sour look on his face.

“Senior, what about Long Chen?” He asked tentatively.

“What, you aren’t calling me Master anymore?” Tian Yang teased, causing Damien to look away in embarrassment.

“Don’t worry about him,” he continued, turning to Long Chen. “You are actually a hot commodity among the elders, young man. There are plenty of them who wish to take you as their disciple, and you can choose who to take as your master after you meet them.

“The only reason it was this simple with Damien was because it was me who wanted to take him as my disciple. As for where to find those elders, simply inject mana into your disciple token and it shall show you the way.”

Long Chen nodded, his precious sour look gone. His face now contained a fierce determination. Standing up from his bed, he walked over to Damien.

“Damien, you are the first person I’ve met within my age range who was able to force me into a stalemate. Therefore, I refuse to lose to you next time we fight.”

“As if I’d let you win next time,” Damien smirked. “I was going easy on you last time, so you got off lucky.”

Long Chen couldn’t help but smile back. “Then, until next time we meet.”

With his parting words, Long Chen swiftly left the building they were currently in.

“I guess I shall leave as well. Damien, I will have someone sort out your registration and introductions. Later on, I will summon you when it’s time to train.”

Without another word, Tian Yang vanished from the room. No trace of his existence remained, not even the residual mana from his teleportation.

Left alone in the room, Damien wanted to take rest, but even that was disallowed to him. Instead, he was pounced on by a large black wolf who he had once again worried to death.

Chapter 137 - Celestial Star Palace [3]

Once he finally placated Zara's anger a bit, Damien stepped out of bed. Flexing his muscles that had gone slightly sore from overuse, Damien went and threw on the robes that had been prepared for him.

They were a similar color to the disciple token, and the same ones being worn by those guarding the wall when he first came to the sect.

Their design was fully black, looking like an endless night, but lines and swirls of deep blue that encapsulated its surface made it look more like a starry abyss.

After admiring himself in the mirror for a bit, Damien injected his mana into his disciple token to see where he should be headed.

The second he did so, a small sheet of information appeared in his vision.

[Disciple- Damien Void]

Status- Outer Court Disciple

Master- Grand Elder Tian

Living Quarters- 17A

[Tap to open map]

He realized that the Cloud Plane was more technologically advanced than he originally thought, they seemingly just preferred their old school customs.

Clicking the map icon, he saw many locations highlighted in red, with one shining particularly bright.

[Induction Hall 6]

‘This must be where that old man wanted me to go.’

Even if he had accepted Tian Yang as his master, he still hadn’t witnessed the old man’s capabilities. This led to him not recognizing him as his master any more than superficially.

Still, Damien did as he was told and exited the building, walking towards the location that was outlined.

Along the way, he saw many beautiful scenes. Disciples laughing and enjoying their daily lives, the lush greenery that lined the mountain and melded with the sect perfectly, and the sound of music that would occasionally resound from somewhere within the large city.

The mana in the atmosphere was especially calm and ethereal. It was like the soft hum of a lullaby but at the same time the lively music of a renaissance fair. The ambiance was, in his opinion, a very accurate representation of the word celestial.

It was otherworldly and uncaring for mundane affairs. It was something he truly appreciated. He felt that he should really explore this place at some point once he had settled down.

As he enjoyed its products, he ended up smiling. The battle he fought with Long Chen brought him the excitement he was searching for when he adventured to the Cloud Plane. But he also realized he had plenty of flaws.

Thinking back to the battle, he realized that he really did have a lot of cards he didn't use very often. Since he was always focused on improving his sword art or fighting at close range, many of the abilities of his Vector Controller class were collecting dust.

Even his vector field, which had the capability to offset much of the damage he took during that final impact, was mostly unused. It wasn't that he had forgotten about it, he simply didn't like using it if he wasn't fighting with his life on the line.

His fight against Long Chen was purely a friendly duel. Even if the two of them had gotten out of hand with their final confrontation, it didn't change their original purpose. And in the end, Damien felt like he had lost.

Logically, the two of them had tied, but it didn't matter. The only thing Damien had at the moment was brute strength. If his raw power was equal to or inferior to Long Chen's, it was impossible for him to win.

Realizing this made him think about all his previous fights. He couldn't think of a single one where he won based on strategy or technique.

Even his most recent fight with the sea dragon was purely based on raw strength. They had bombarded each other with devastating attacks until only one of them remained standing.

'Am I an idiot?'

His thought process always revolves around what was currently going on, never thinking about the future. Sometimes he would introspect and realize his flaws, but even that only had him reevaluate his past.

He realized that his journey so far was genuinely without purpose. At first, all he wished for was survival. He needed to stay alive so that his mother wouldn't die a lonely death without ever waking up from her coma.

But he had never truly believed that he wouldn't be able to save her. The only time when that thought could have possibly shown up was while he was in the dungeon, but back then he didn't have the time for idle thinking.

'Why do I even want to gain strength?'

It was the core of his being, the desire to become strong. The desire to dominate everything and become the most powerful. Yet, there was quite literally no reason for it.

He wanted strength because he wanted strength. He wanted to travel worlds just for the adventure and new experiences. He had no grand goals, and he hadn't experienced any true tragedy to drive him.

But he had no intention to lose anyone, so he didn't know whether it was a good or bad thing that his life's trajectory was going the way it was.

'A true goal. Motivation.'

It wasn't something simple to find. Life was easy on Damien. Perhaps it was fate or purely luck.

'Or maybe I just have some incredible plot armor.'

He didn't think so. He had worked hard to get where he was today. He spent years and years doing grueling work to achieve his current strength. But he knew it was naive to think it was all his own achievement.

There were plenty of times when pure luck was the reason he could continue forth.

Arriving here at the perfect time for the disciple examination, gaining a connection to earth's world core, meeting Rose, finding Kurt's subspace in the dungeon, and even succeeding in his very first evolution after killing the 1st class wolf. All of it could be considered as the machinations of fate or destiny.

Everything was going so perfectly that he started doubting whether he was truly in control over his life or if some supreme being was steering him in a specific direction. But he shook off that thought.

He wasn't nearly important enough for someone with the power to manipulate things like that to care about him.

He also realized that he might be ADHD or something because his thoughts had skewed so far from his original intention that they were almost unrecognizable.

By the time he snapped out of his thoughts, he was already in front of the induction hall. Its structure wasn't anything special, but it was clear that it was meant for large gatherings of people.

When Damien opened the door, just like he expected, there were another hundred or so new disciples there as well. These were some of the others who passed the exam with him.

However, when they turned back to see who had entered the hall with them, any and all conversation was hushed.

"Hey, isn't that..."

"Yeah, when they said there were only 998 spots I thought of the possibility but..."

"He is a supreme genius on par with Long Chen."

Facing the countless stares and mutters about him, Damien indifferently walked up to the crowd.

Chapter 138 - Celestial Star Palace [4]

Only a few minutes after Damien's accidentally grand entrance, a beautiful woman entered the room. In fact, the word beautiful didn't do her justice in the slightest.

Her skin was pale white and smoother than even the finest jade, her posture was akin to a swan in a crowd of ducklings. The grace she exudes captivated the entire crowd within the induction hall, forcing their attention onto her.

Her long silver hair cascaded down her back like a river made of moonlight, contrasting her golden eyes that shone like two suns. Her face and body could make any man lose their sanity, but none would be stupid enough to approach her.

If there was one thing that could be said to ruin her beauty, it would be the coldness of her gaze. She looked upon everything as if it was below her, not even bothering with the disciples that were going to be her junior brothers and sisters.

However, even this added a sort of charm to her. A woman who had the strength to back such undaunted arrogance was someone who would inevitably be coveted by many powerful men, and in a world like this one, many of them were destined to be caught by at least one of them.

But the purity she radiated and the fact that she was able to keep her disposition made it clear that she wasn't one to fall to such destiny. This fact made it so not only were the men infatuated with her beauty, the women were in worship of her tenacity.

Her clothes were also different than the ones they wore. They had the same black color as the base, but the lines outlining them were purple in color. It wasn't the same one as the elders, but it was clear that her position in the sect wasn't the same as theirs.

Even Damien fell into a daze while watching her. Yet, his reasons were different than the rest.

‘That mana...it’s beautiful.’

What his eyes showed him was a sight he wanted to engrave into his memory forever. A cool silver mana with aura as cold and desolate as an apocalyptic ice age, but security like a loving mother.

Damien didn’t understand how mana could give off such a human sensation, but it was one he had never experienced before. He was so enraptured by the mana that he barely took note of the woman’s beauty or grace in the slightest.

Rose’s mana was deceptive as if it was never allowing one to know its next move, Elena’s mana was holy, disallowing any impurity, Zara’s mana was secretive as if it wanted to evade anyone’s senses.

As for Damien’s own mana...it was brutal and ethereal. It existed at its own convenience, yet could become vicious at a moment’s notice.

The feeling each person’s mana gave off was partially influenced by its user, but the elements themselves also played a large part. It was why Damien’s mana was ethereal even though he as a person was always direct.

This woman’s mana was contrasting itself, but not in a way that created contradiction. Even if the two emotions were vastly different, they interlinked and formed a synergy with each other.

‘What kind of person and what kind of element can create such a scene?’ Damien wondered, but he wasn’t able to remain in his thoughts for long.

He suddenly sensed an icy gaze on his body. His eyes lightly glowed as the two colors within them swirled. It was an automatic response that he had never had before. The trait simply acted on his own.

But he didn’t need an explanation of what it did. For a brief moment before his eyes reacted, he felt like he was naked, all his secrets being unraveled by that cold gaze that landed on him.

Looking up, he noticed that same woman staring at him with a well-hidden look of disdain on her face. Even if she tried to hide it, he could still read it in her eyes.

‘What did I do to offend her?!’ Damien cried inwardly. He didn’t know what kind of status she had, but her noble aura wasn’t something that could be cultivated by a commoner.

Her gaze didn’t linger long, with the entire interaction only spanning a second at most before she continued to pan across the crowd. To anyone unaware, it didn’t seem like anything special had happened.

After a long silence, the woman began talking. “You are now outer court disciples of our Celestial Star Sect, so listen carefully to what I am about to say.

“As outer court disciples, you are the lowest of the low within the sect. Even if you choose to flaunt your status when you are outside, within the Star Mountain you are nothing.

“There are tens of thousands of outer court disciples like you, yet there are only a few thousand of us in the inner court. You can imagine how rigorous the test to enter will be.

“Your life as outer court disciples won’t be monitored nor policed. What you do is your own choice. However, there are a few requirements you must meet.

“Every year, you have a mission quota. This quota ensures that you will contribute to the sect instead of being useless wastes after joining. As for the specifics, you can go to the mission hall to learn them.

“As for the basic rules, they are simple. Don’t be a trash person. Killing your fellow disciples is not allowed, but if you have unreconcilable grudges, you may take the issue to the life or death arena to settle it once and for all.

“Also, if you try to force yourself on someone, you will be either expelled or killed. We do not allow filth within our ranks.

“You will have a monthly allowance of 100 spirit stones, with other resources being purchasable at the Star Plaza. If you wish to higher this amount, you have to work for it.

“Just for reference, we inner court disciples get 5000 spirit stones a month, while the core disciples have an almost unlimited supply.

“I will neither lead you on a tour nor give you any more information. If you are worthy, you shall climb the ladder and if you aren’t, you shall rot within the outer court.

“As for where you will live, anyone who isn’t an idiot among you should have already received such information from your disciple tokens.

“That is all. You are dismissed.”

With those final words, the woman swiftly left without another glance at the stunned disciples she left in her wake.

‘Well, that was certainly something.’ Damien didn’t think they were supposed to be left to do everything themselves, but he didn’t care either way.

The first impression that woman gave him couldn’t be considered good, but he doubted they’d ever interact again. With how much she seemed to disdain the outer court, he shouldn’t be seeing her soon.

‘I wonder what the food is like in this world.’

Ignoring the rest of the new disciples, he left the induction hall to go explore the sect.

Within a large pagoda near the peak of the mountain, a woman was sitting obediently in front of an old man.

“Master, why did you force me to do that? It is a task usually designated to other outer court disciples, so there was no need for me to go.” The woman complained.

“Hahaha, if you didn’t have such poor social skills, I wouldn’t need to do such a thing, now would I? So, how was it?”

“Hmph, it was stupid. I didn’t gain anything from interacting with them, not even one of them could stand straight in front of me.”

“Oh? And what did you think about him?” The old man pressed.

The woman slightly hesitated. “He...I was only able to see through him for a second before I met interference, but I briefly witnessed a field of stars slowly being formed within his being. Still, it doesn’t make him worthy in the slightest.”

“Hoh?” The old man uttered with an intrigued expression. Soon, he slightly smiled. “What an interesting junior brother you’ll soon have.”

Chapter 139 - First Lesson [1]

A week passed by in a flash.

During this time, Damien did his best to explore every corner of the sect that he had access to as an outer disciple, and it was much livelier than he expected.

After that woman’s explanation of the outer court, Damien’s view of it changed, seeing it as a rat race to reach the better resources of the inner court, but he was sorely mistaken.

Most people didn't mind staying at such a low tier. They were able to enjoy themselves and live comfortably with just the 100 spirit stones a month they were given.

He realized the reason for this, though. While the sect promoted competition, they only wanted those who were worthy to thrive. By giving the outer court disciples a comfortable living environment, they could automatically weed out those without the drive to move forward.

These people still had value to the sect. They'd always fulfill their mission quotas to keep their status as a sect disciple, and they'd take all the odd jobs necessary to keep the environment clean and friendly.

These odd jobs also counted as missions, but they were more long-standing. Damien learned that even those disciples guarding the sect walls did so while earning spirit stones for their efforts.

The buildings Damien found to be most useful for him were the Mission Hall, the Grand Library, and the Star Plaza. While there were other facilities, the ones that would help him progress in cultivation all cost more spirit stones than he currently had.

The Mission Hall was structured similar to the adventurers guild but without all the unnecessary parts. There was a large board spanning the entire back wall of the hall that was filled with different quests and missions.

There were disciples who regulated who could take which quests and a few elders that cataloged everyone who left the sect.

There was also a disciplinary hall where the law enforcers of the sect gathered. However, selection for this position was harsh and only a few were able to maintain it. Being a part of the disciplinary hall was something that could gain one plenty of adoration from fellow disciples.

As for the Star Plaza, it covered a large part of the central area of the city. In the plaza, one could buy almost anything they'd ever need. Resources, beast companions, and even cultivation techniques were for sale at the various stalls that made up its area.

The rest of the city was mainly housing and entertainment, functioning like any other city. The housing for outer disciples wasn't bad, but it couldn't be considered good either.

Damien's room was about the size of a one-bedroom apartment. He didn't know if everyone was able to live alone or if it was a privilege granted to him because of his master, but he didn't mind either way. The living space was still nothing special.

As for his favorite area, it was either the woodland areas surrounding the city or the grand library.

He enjoyed the atmosphere that both areas had, and with the forest, he could go hunting if he ever wanted to. It was common for disciples to hunt within the mountain, and they could even sell the beast corpses back to the Mission Hall for spirit stones.

As for the grand library, it helped him learn many things that he didn't previously know. He learned about the holy lands where every major sect was located. Star Mountain was one of them, and each was something akin to a mana hotspot. They were points in the world where the mana density peaked and ambient mana was drawn towards.

He also learned much more about meridians and the cultivation system here. Based on his educated guess, meridians were actually another form of mana circuits. The difference was that people in the Cloud Plane were born with them rather than having to create them later.

It was an interesting concept, but since the knowledge was only regarding meridians and didn't touch on the systems of other worlds, he wasn't able to test the veracity of his conjecture.

Since he was waiting for the first lesson from his new master, he chose not to research anything on his elements. He wanted to see what he could learn as a clean slate when he went into that lesson.

The Grand Library had 3 floors, and he only had access to the first one, with the second and third floors being open to inner and core disciples respectively. Although it was located in the outer court, it was a location where disciples of all three ranks gather.

If there was one more location Damien was particularly excited about, it was the Star Tower.

The Star Tower, from what Damien had understood, was a massive treasure. He didn't know who owned it or who put it on Star Mountain, but it was said that it was there since the sect's beginning.

The Star Tower was a place where one could be challenged and in return receive great rewards. He didn't know much else about it, since he didn't try to do any in-depth research, but he definitely wanted to try it at some point.

With his exploration of the sect finished, Damien didn't really have anything to do. He spent his time in his small dorm room in meditation, attempting to comprehend more of that elusive new element he had been gaining small enlightenments about.

At this point, he was very clear on its identity. It had begun after his long meditation during the trip through outer space, but he had been perceiving its flow in much more detail recently.

It should have been obvious from the start what its identity was, considering how close of a relationship it has to his space element, but he didn't think he'd actually gain it. After all, having control over both of them was too op right?

But his thought process was always logical when it came to comprehension. He knew that the element would have many drawbacks if its power was vast, or there'd be many limitations on what he could do with it.

It was only natural, since disrupting its flow could potentially lead to dire consequences.

But he still wanted to comprehend it. He didn't leave meditation even for the smallest convenience, submerging himself entirely within his consciousness.

And his perception was much stronger there. If space felt like a stable seafloor that made a home for everything to live, time was like the waves that allowed things to live and grow.

With both of them working together, the universe would cease its function. Without time, even if things lived, they would be robotic, in total stasis. And without space, where would they live in the first place?

Damien based plenty of his knowledge on the books he had read on earth since he had already confirmed that they were based on truth. And if that truth extended to the truths of the universe...

Even Nihilism could exist. That nothingness that existed before even the concept of existence. If there was one place that existed outside of space and time, it was that.

Still, that wasn't his focus. After another entire week he spent focusing on meditation, Damien felt a vibration from his disciple token.

Chapter 140 - First Lesson [2]

"Come to my residence. Your disciple token will lead the way."

The message was short, but it was all Damien needed. He had been anticipating the teachings he could get from his new master for an entire week.

It wasn't simply due to his new master's strength or status, but the fact that someone with the same affinity as him was going to teach him.

This was someone whose comprehension of space was undoubtedly leagues ahead of his, this much could be judged based even just on how Tian Yang teleported. Without wasting a second, Damien got dressed and left his residence.

The distinction between the three versions of disciples was made prominent even by their position on the mountain. Outer court disciples didn't have their own place. They lived within the Star City where many of the sect's other functions also existed.

This was a way to show that they genuinely didn't have any position in the sect. Even if they made it in, they didn't work to climb the ranks. But if that was what they desired, so be it.

The Star Mountain had a massive ancient staircase that spanned its entire length, from the very base to the peak. The staircase was made of polished stone and looked like something one would usually see at a shrine. As for its steps, there were thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands of them.

After all, Star Mountain was massive.

The Inner court was slightly higher up the mountain compared to Star City, and the only way for outer court disciples to access it was by climbing this staircase.

There was an odd feature to it. Unless one's disciple token had a mark of authorization that allowed the disciple to climb the steps, they would feel a growing pressure with each step they took.

It was rumored that by the time one reached the Sect Master's abode, the pressure could even crush any normal Law Connection realm expert.

This both prevented outsiders from moving unabatedly within the sect and lower-status disciples from wandering where they weren't qualified to be. A part of the inner court examination was to climb these steps while bearing the pressure.

However, none of this mattered to Damien. He had the authorization needed to climb uninhibited. Reaching the grand archway that indicated the entrance to the inner court, Damien was met by two powerful auras that locked onto his body.

"Halt! What business do you have in the Inner Court, outer court disciple?" A loud voice came from the gate.

Although the pressure did weigh on him, it wasn't nearly strong enough to make Damien feel constricted. Raising his disciple token for the guards to see, he responded.

"I've been called to my master's residence."

The pressure he felt reduced by a large margin and was replaced by two waves of mana that scanned his token. Obviously, Damien wasn't the only one who could spread his awareness.

The two gazes stayed on the badge for close to a minute before receding along with the remaining aura suppression. "Alright, you may continue."

The gates to the inner court opened, allowing Damien to pass by. The scenery he saw was a massive improvement compared to the outer court.

Large pagodas intermingled with the trees of the forest, walkways and fountains decorated the scene. Even if it still looked like a small town, it was much less cluttered than the outer court. Not to mention that the quality of the ambient mana had increased.

But Damien didn't pay any attention to this. He just continued walking until he reached the staircase leading to the core court before repeating the same procedure.

After another scan of his disciple token, he was allowed entry once more. However, the core court truly stunned him.

There were only a few dozen residences within his immediate vision, but they were all grand enough to be the most expensive mansions on earth. The flora of the mountain was much more lively here as well, with the plants actually seeming to have gained sentience.

Damien didn't know why the plants were so tame even after gaining a sense of self, but he assumed that the sect had cultivated them to be so.

What took his attention, though, was once again the ambient mana. If the ambient mana at the inner court was a 10x increase in density and purity compared to the outer court, the core court was a 100x increase.

The mana was insanely pure to the point where Damien could genuinely feel its weight on his shoulders as he walked. It was like wading through shallow water, except the entire atmosphere felt like that.

Damien continued forward, looking around for the residence he was supposed to go to. In the distance, he could see the expansive palace where the Sect Master resided.

Not too close yet not too far from it, he saw another residence that didn't quite fit the rest of the core court's ambiance. It was a small pagoda the size of a two-story house. It looked simple and comfortable, like something an average family would live in.

Yet, that was his destination. It was the residence of the Grand Elder of the Celestial Star Palace.

'As expected of that old monster' Damien thought as he reached the house. He felt that this setup would fit the "playing pig to eat the tiger" saying very well if not for the old man's status within the sect.

Without even needing Damien to announce his presence, the door to the residence swung open, revealing a plain room with minimalistic decoration.

"Welcome, Damien. This is where you will be spending most of your lessons with me, so get used to it. However, we will not start right away. We need to wait for your senior sister to arrive."

“Eh?” Damien exclaimed. Senior sister? Well, he didn’t know anyone here and hadn’t made any enemies, so he calmly waited until she arrived.

He didn’t need to wait long, though. Within a few minutes, a crisp voice resounded through the room.

“Master, why did you call me here? You know I am trying to have a breakthrough in my Yin element.”

Damien felt that the voice was somewhat familiar as if he’d heard it before. Yet, the tone of the voice didn’t nearly match what he had heard last time. Due to this, he didn’t expect to see the person he saw when he turned around.

The two of them locked eyes, and the woman’s gaze immediately chilled. “What’re you looking at?”

That was the tone he had expected. It was cold, arrogant, and held a slight tinge of disgust.

“Hm? Well, my master just told me I’d be meeting my senior sister, so I turned to look at her.” Damien responded with a deadpan face.

This girl might have been arrogant, but he didn’t lose out in this department. It was just that he usually tried to push down his arrogance by keeping his eyes on the taller mountains.

But he didn’t like the way this woman always seemed disgusted by his presence. He literally did nothing to offend her, but he was receiving this treatment? He wouldn’t take such a slight lying down.

Damien's sarcastic answer clearly pissed the woman off more, and as the two glared at each other, Tian Yang smiled in amusement.

“Damien, meet your senior sister, Xue Ruyue.”