

Void 161

Chapter 161 - Second Lesson [3]

“Celestial Authority.”

It seemed like matter itself froze. The reparation of space, the swirling cocoon entrapping Damien, the rays of lunar energy piercing through him, and even the blood moon itself.

Everything stopped as an indomitable aura burst forth from Damien’s body. Suddenly, the blood moon began spinning counterclockwise, its mana reversing and wrestling out of Ruyue’s control.

As for Ruyue, she could only stare in shock as the moon conjured by her stopped obeying her will, becoming an independent existence.

Or was it?

Retracting the energy it shot towards Damien, the moon once again regained its full power before descending from the sky at a rapid pace.

It’s target? Ruyue herself.

The moon barreled through the atmosphere, growing larger with each passing second before it eclipsed even the sun.

Ruyue stared at the oncoming attack with a grim expression before firming herself. She didn't plan on using this here, as she felt it'd be cheating, but Damien's prowess didn't allow her to hold back much.

"Come."

She said only a single word, but it was accompanied by an essence that radiated negative energy. The atmosphere froze over with something other than ice. In fact, the cold was worse than anything mere ice could produce.

It was to the point where even Damien, who was still coated in that same indomitable aura, was unable to approach her.

When the massive moon reached Ruyue's outstretched palm, it didn't result in the explosion that one would expect. Instead, it began to decompose into swirling motes of light before entering her body.

Turning her attention back to Damien, her silver eyes flashed.

"Erasure."

The black space created by the collapsing of space in their surroundings vanished, the cocoon entrapping Damien vanished, and the essence that achieved such feats charged directly towards him.

But Damien wasn't helpless in this situation. Even if he couldn't approach, the new skill he had just discovered was enough to counter this apocalyptic essence.

“Come forth.”

A massive portal opened above Damien’s head before a burning star raced out, charging straight towards the essence of Ruyue’s erasure. And when they met, a silent collision was incurred.

Both forces eliminated each other, with neither having the remaining energy to continue forward.

With this, the battlefield was once again encased in silence. Damien and Ruyue glared at each other fiercely, amethyst aura clashing with silver. Neither was sure if they could make a move that the other wouldn’t be able to counter.

Although they were powerful, their skill sets diametrically opposed each other, constantly leaving them at a stalemate. Still, neither wanted to lose.

And Damien was still confident in his chances. The Celestial Authority had many more uses that he was still trying to figure out, he just had to learn them through battle.

The star summoning he performed was only a basic application of his authority, the same was the case for wresting control of Ruyue’s moon.

After all, he was putting into practice the authority of a genuine Celestial. Any celestial body would be dominated by his control, bending to his will. That is, if the celestial body didn’t possess a stronger will of its own.

He had already tried to manipulate the earth around him, but it was clear that the Cloud Plane wouldn't allow him to do so. If it did, it would essentially be putting itself under him.

Damien mused that this would only happen once he was able to successfully bind the world.

But it wasn't just Damien who had more cards to play. Ruyue had only just begun using her second element, which also happened to be her trump card. There was no way she only had two moves to use with it.

But the problem was, her yin element wasn't suited for attacking. It was an element that mdenied impurity and denied positive force. It was best used for defense and diversion.

Hesitating slightly, she made her decision. She still had one card she was willing to show. She simply didn't want to reveal everything she had in a spar like this.

Raising both hands to the sky, she did something she never expected she would do today.

"Summon."

A dark red runic circle took form in the sky, etching itself into the atmosphere. Its size was so great that the sunlight shining down on them was dyed red.

Once it was fully formed, it shined brightly, releasing austere rays of red light before something clawed its way out of the center.

It was massive, towering over 100 meters tall, and humanoid. It had two goat-like horns protruding from the forehead of its central head, while two other heads were also present on its shoulders, each with a pair of blood-red eyes. On its back were bat-like wings that spanned for hundreds of meters.

By any definition of the word, it was clear that this being was a devil. But when this devil finally solidified in the world, it turned to Ruyue and descended onto one knee.

However, to Ruyue, this was par for course. If the devil had done anything else, perhaps she would have been surprised.

“Go, rough him up a bit but don’t kill him.”

The devil nodded its heads before turning to Damien with a bloodthirsty grin on its face.

Damien was immensely surprised by the sudden summoning, but to be honest, he welcomed it. It was just another challenge for him to overcome.

His eyes flickered between that of a normal human and reptilian slits and large clouds began to gather over his head.

Streaks of black lightning danced through the air as Damien’s chest expanded. Draconic scales slowly covered his arms before disappearing and his teeth grew into fangs.

Rumble!

Thunder and lightning raged as massive tornadoes formed in the periphery. And in the center of it all, Damien floated while staring at the demon.

Both combatants were ready, and all that was left was to start the next round of their battle. However, before it happened, another person entered the fray.

“Alright; that’s enough for now.”

Tian Yang had been watching the proceedings from the sidelines while enjoying the show, but he felt that if they went any further, one of them would end up seriously injured.

Ruyue hadn’t summoned one of her higher class devil servants so it was clear she was holding back, but Tian Yang was well aware of Damien’s character.

Especially the way he could lose himself when a fight got too intense.

The flickering scales that appeared and receded into Damien’s skin were clear proof that such a thing had already started occurring.

Standing in the middle of the battlefield, Tian Yang flicked his wrists. The bloodthirsty demon that had been waiting for battle was thrown back into the runic circle it came from while the storms around Damien quickly dispersed.

Although he felt like he was cockblocked, he couldn’t really complain. After all, he knew that even a portion of his master’s strength was enough to knock him out for weeks.

“You two sure had an interesting fight.” Tian Yang commented with a smile.

Neither of them went all out and they didn’t cause any major destruction like they could have, but he was certain that they both found ways to increase their current arsenal of attacks.

Ruyue and Damien descended to the ground, their transformed states fading as they glared at each other.

Although this battle had ended in a tie, it was solely due to interruption. Both of them were dying to fight once again, their competitive spirits burning with passion.

Chapter 162 - Second Lesson [4]

Not long after the battle, Tian Yang teleported them back to his pagoda.

“Now that you’ve seen each other’s strengths? What do you think?” He questioned the two disciples who still looked sour from having their battle interrupted.

“Hmm, I feel like Senior Sister’s elements are more focused on defense than attack.” Damien pointed out.

It was the biggest thing he got from the fight. Ruyue was able to redirect or entirely block any attack he threw at her, even molding his spatial mana to fit her needs.

It was something he wasn’t used to, the feeling of being completely powerless even though he knew she wasn’t that much stronger than him.

Even with Rose, when they first met she was much stronger than him, the only thing was that her main element was illusions. And with his eyes, he was simply a perfect counter for her.

As for Ruyue, she was feeling somewhat similar. “His base attack power is greater than mine by miles, but he doesn’t have the diversity to keep up with me.”

Throughout their fight, Damien only used spatial element and even then he only used a few moves from it. Even his Celestial Authority, while possessing the potential to be something grand, wasn’t at that level yet.

“He’s a brute. He’s too green when it comes to true complex battles. If I had to guess, he’s made it this far on raw power and absurd mana capacity.”

Although her words were harsh, they were true. Damien knew this as well, which is why he was doing his best to contain the annoyance bubbling inside of him.

He really had gotten this far on brute strength alone. His sword mastery came from savagery and his spatial comprehension was always on the basis of destruction. When it came to elegance and strategy, he was basically dumb.

“Basically, he’s dumb.”

“Oi! You didn’t have to say it out loud!”

“Hm? But I’m right aren’t I? You’re a dumb brute and that’s that.”

“So? What does it say about you that you couldn’t even defeat this dumb brute?”

“Nothing at all, it’s just like you said. My prowess is mainly focused on defense not offense like you.”

“Those are just excuses. Imagine if I went and told the world that my Senior Sister, the one and only little princess of the Xue clan, couldn’t even defeat an idiot in combat.”

Damien and Ruyue glared at each other with fighting intent once again blazing. Tian Yang could only watch their interaction with a wry smile plastered on his face.

‘If it keeps going like this, they might end up a little too close.’

While his purpose in organizing this spar was for the two of them to get closer, he didn’t expect it to work so well. Looking at them bickering like childhood friends, he couldn’t figure out what led to such a thing.

It was only then that he realized something he had forgotten in the past few years. Although Ruyue liked to portray herself as a cold woman who stood above all, it was only suppressing some of her other most prominent personality traits.

One of which was so important that it basically made her reputation when she was younger. Tian Yang had been her master for many years, but it had been a while since he reminisced on those old days.

The Xue clan's little demon. With how she had grown up becoming colder and more distant, he almost forgot about how much she loved to bicker with others like this.

It was like she had a knack for causing trouble and fully embraced it. Or perhaps, she was just a bit of a sadist.

Either way, it was something that used to be a core of her personality, and it'd be more surprising if it had vanished even after all these years. Perhaps she simply didn't have anyone she could be expressive to.

No, he knew that was the case. Considering the situations she's been in as she grew up, there was no way it wasn't like that.

Once more gazing at Ruyue who was now smiling triumphantly and Damien, whose veins were almost popping out of his head, Tian Yang's smile became heartening.

'I wonder what's so special about this boy to get such a reaction from her.'

He wanted to continue their lesson today, allowing the two to improve on the things they learned through battle, but he decided against it.

It had been too long since Ruyue could have fun like this, and he didn't want to be the one to ruin it.

Silently sitting back in his seat, he continued to watch the bickering duo in amusement.

Meanwhile, the duo's argument had already gone past the previous battle and become slightly personal. And to be frank, largely childish.

"You think you're so cool, I bet you don't even leave the sect that much."

"I leave all the time? For missions and...missions, but that still counts!"

"Hmph, go touch grass."

"As if you're any different! You probably lived in some secluded mountain all your life! Why are you talking like some expert?!"

"Because, of course, I am an expert," Damien replied with a profound smirk, imitating a certain old man who liked to act all mysterious.

"Hmph, as if. Prove it then!"

"Proof? I don't need any proof."

"Of course you do, otherwise you're just a liar and a cheat!"

"Huh?"

Both Damien and Ruyue paused at the strangeness of her words. Although they were both clearly aware of what she meant, it could be taken in a completely different way out of context.

And of course, with Damien being Damien, there was no way he wouldn't capitalize on such a mistake

"Oho? A liar and a cheat huh? Could it be that little Senior Sister is jealous? Or maybe..." he trailed off, but his meaning was clear.

Ruyue's face adopted a slightly red hue as she averted her gaze. It wasn't her first time being teased like this, and usually, she'd have already blasted the perpetrator into oblivion with her lunar energy, but this time was different.

After all, she found herself enjoying it, along with the rest of the childish argument they were having.

Still, there was something she was curious about. When Damien said he had traveled more than her, it was obvious he didn't just mean continents.

She had also gone on missions to other continents, so that wouldn't be a solid argument. As for what he truly meant...

"During our fight, you summoned a star to counter my absolute erasure. How did you do that?" She couldn't hold back her curiosity.

Damien smiled lightly, not minding the change of subject as he decided to brag a bit. "It's because of my class. Not only can I summon stars, but I can also borrow their power for my own use."

As he spoke, Damien flicked his finger, causing a blazing sunfire to manifest on top of it. The wisp of flame skyrocketed the temperatures in the room with its intense heat.

But Damien's mana was also draining at a rapid rate. It was the reason he didn't use sunfire often.

However, watching the sunfire dance around Damien's palm, Ruyue went entirely silent. She stared at the flame of a celestial body as her body began to radiate an ethereal aura once again.

Her eyes became silver and the faint illusory outline of a massive moon took form behind her.

Suddenly, she lifted her hand as something began to manifest on top of it.

It was...a wisp of blueish-white flame.

Chapter 163 - Second Mission [1]

What are the qualities of the moon and why was it able to be classified as its own affinity?

In truth, the latter half of the question could remain unanswered for eons if nobody looked into it. The reason was simple, the sheer number of affinities and elements existing was too large,

Although most people are born with the average affinity towards one of multiple of the most basic elements, it wasn't that rare to see someone with a unique affinity.

Something like Ruyue's moon affinity, however, was especially rare. It was because of how specific it was more than anything else.

In fact, even with her yin affinity, Ruyue had the ability to manipulate lunar energy. It was a facet of yin's connection to all things cold or negative.

However, she was specifically born with an affinity toward the moon as well. It was something that should grant her a less streamlined set of abilities, but even now she hadn't been able to understand it.

Why did she have an affinity with the moon and what could she truly do with it?

That's what she had spent all these years trying to learn. She even halted her progress on the yin element to focus on this. Yet, she got nothing.

At least, not until this moment.

When she watched Damien summon flames from the sun, something seemed to click within her. She watched how he used the energy of celestial bodies and it seemed to make much more sense.

And so, she became immersed in a meditative state as she stared at the flame. And even after the flame vanished she continued to stare at its position.

Why was the element of the sun a fire? That much was obvious considering what the star was made of. But as Ruyue looked at the blueish-white flame on her palm, she had to wonder.

Why was the element of the moon a fire as well?

The moon absolutely didn't align with the element of fire, which was yang attributed. It was too destructive. Meanwhile, what Ruyue had learned from the moon in all these years was how gentle it was.

It didn't use much force, continuing along with the flow of things, but it still managed to assert its power. It still managed to cause tides to rise and fall.

As Ruyue's gaze shifted to the flame on her palm, she tried to comprehend something from it. Oddly enough, the flame felt cold to the touch, as if she was running her fingers along an ethereal form of ice.

Pointing her palm towards the wall to her right, Ruyue mobilized this new flame, causing a burst of flames to shoot forth like a flamethrower.

And in those flames' wake, there was a path of what seemed like ice. Yet, Ruyue knew better. It wasn't necessarily ice but it wasn't fire either. It contained the properties of both.

It burned hot enough to seem cold, but conversely was cold enough to cause burns. This kind of contradiction was something Ruyue simply couldn't fathom at the moment.

Her glowing silver eyes slowly returned to gold as Ruyue was snapped out of her comprehension state. There wasn't anything she could learn at this moment.

All she knew was that she finally had a path forward. Looking at the man in front of her, she knew he was the cause. But the man himself seemed clueless. He was staring at the Icefire Ruyue had released with interest clearly written on his face.

She hadn't really taken the time to look at him before today, but he was a really interesting guy. His eyes were strange even by this world's standards yet nobody seemed to have a problem with them.

The two colors contained within them swirled as if they were alive and his cross-shaped pupils were like a small boat in the midst of a raging ocean. It was an oddly peaceful sight.

His hair looked like a representation of space, especially once you got to know him and understand his affinities. As for the rest of him, it was always hidden under layers of black clothing so she hadn't really seen it.

'Wait...why do I want to see that?' Ruyue wondered as she forcefully stopped her train of thought. Since when was she the kind of person to think about such things?

Perhaps the strange atmosphere that had enveloped the room was affecting her. Yes, that had to be it. Either way, she couldn't keep her eyes off him.

However, he soon turned back around and noticed her gaze. "I know I'm handsome but is there any need to stare?" He said with a teasing smile.

And just like that, the atmosphere was shattered. 'That's right, this guy is so annoying, there's no way he could be as I was thinking.'

“You? Handsome? I just found out that hearing those two words in the same sentence makes me want to gag.” She responded in annoyance.

“What do you mean by that?”

“What do you think I meant?” Ruyue clutched her stomach while acting like she was sick, “look what you did, I think I’m going to be sick just by looking at you.”

“As if you can talk! It’s not like you’re any better than me.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know exactly what it’s supposed to mean.” Damien quipped while imitating Ruyue’s previous motion.

“You-!”

“Hahaha! Doesn’t feel good being on the receiving end, does it?” Damien laughed with a triumphant grin on his face.

Tian Yang, whose presence in the room was somehow ignored by the two who were getting closer at a rate he thought was far too fast, decided it was time to step in.

“Are you two ever going to stop quibbling like little kids? Or did you just forget I was here and decide to flirt?”

His interruption immediately shut them up as they diverted their gazes, refusing to look at him. Still, he didn't mind it much. Turning to Ruyue, he continued.

"It looks like you've learned something new. Although I want to congratulate you, I can see that you haven't fully grasped what this fire is. Until then, I can only guide you in practice."

Ruyue nodded in understanding. Her master was always like this, even though he'd recently become more open. She would have to perfect her new ability much more before she would even get a semblance of praise from him.

"As for you," he said to Damien, "Ruyue was right in her assessment. Although you have an extraordinary amount of brute strength, you don't have a proper move set besides your sword art. You need to work on improving this."

Damien also ended up nodding, although reluctantly. He didn't want to accept it, but he really had no choice. There would inevitably be times when raw strength alone wouldn't cut it, or his lacking comprehension would catch up to him.

Especially with the fact that he'd be improving his base understanding to reach 4th class, comprehension and variety were the things he needed most.

"From what I've seen, you lack a proper foundation. It's as if you've learned everything you have through battle alone. Although I don't want to influence your path too much, I will help you solidify this."

For the first time in a few years, Damien would take the time to properly train.

Chapter 164 - Second Mission [2]

The days passed swiftly as Damien and Ruyue spent their time training diligently with Tian Yang.

Unlike before, he was taking an active role in their training and giving them lessons much more often. It was clear that there would be some sort of event happening in the future that he was preparing them for.

And just like that, 3 months passed.

Damien had learned more than he would have ever expected in these 3 months. Even he was surprised by his own progress.

First and foremost was his sword. He had been training the sword for so long that he expected to feel some kind of connection with it, but he really had none.

With the way he found his fighting style evolving, he almost wanted to throw away the sword entirely, but he chose not to. His sword art was still one of his greatest strengths.

With Tian Yang's help, Damien was able to build a more solid foundation for his sword that he previously didn't have. Until this point, he was sure of what his sword was meant for.

It was a tool for slaughter. For savageness, brutality, and killing. That was the only reason he ever picked up a sword. It was the resolve that was bred into his sword when he was still in the dungeon.

But did he still need such a sword? The answer was a resounding no. He was long past the point where he would only move to kill, where he was cold enough to not spare a second thought at anything that didn't concern him.

Well, it's not like he magically became a better person. He just knew that he didn't need to act so animalistic anymore.

So Tian Yang taught him skill to add to his previously brutal sword, attempting to make it more concise and methodical.

But that was only a minor improvement. Damien didn't actually have a great amount of talent for the sword at all. If anything, his talent was for the destruction he could cause.

And for that, his best tool was his spatial element. And with Tian Yang also having the same element, it was only obvious Damien would make immense progress.

His Celestial Authority had been properly fleshed out, and Damien had created a few different moves he could evoke with it. It wasn't an exaggeration to say he was incredibly anticipating the use of them.

His vector control also slightly improved, allowing him to affect a wider range around him. Damien tended not to use this power, since it would take all the fun out of battle, but it would be incredibly important when he truly got serious, so he never neglected it.

But for the most part, he simply firmed his foundation like Tian Yang had told him before. He solidified his base knowledge and comprehended more about space, making sure he would have the ability to back up his strength.

Naturally, he also took the time to visit Long Chen every day of the first week for the pleasure of being called “Boss” by the helpless young master.

And Ruyue wasn’t slacking either. In fact, she worked even harder than Damien to not be surpassed by him. Even if she didn’t look it, she wanted to maintain her position as senior sister and stay stronger than him if possible.

Her main problem was with offense, and she had just gained a weapon that would grant her such ability. All she had to do was understand and refine her Iceflame until she could properly use it in combat.

So that’s exactly what she did. Her first move was to enter a comprehension state, forgoing physical training for a while,

And in this state, she was able to understand a bit about the element that she couldn’t before.

Her main question until now had been, what does it have to do with the moon? And she found that it both had everything to do with the moon and nothing at all.

In the depths of her comprehension, she learned much more than she originally thought. In fact, her comprehension left the ice flame and returned to her moon affinity in general.

In the first place, what is a moon? A moon, in reality, is a natural satellite that orbits a planet. Regardless of whether it opposes a sun or is simply an asteroid caught within a planet’s orbit, they are all technically considered as moons.

So, what was Ruyue's affinity? On her status sheet, it simply said "moon", making Ruyue, or anybody, assume that she had a connection to the lunar body that rose in the nighttime.

But as she delved further into the concept, she realized that her perception was always wrong. Manipulation of lunar energy? That was merely scratching the surface of what she could truly do.

Her affinity...she learned that it was much closer to an affinity with celestial bodies as a whole than simply the moon itself.

It was eerily similar to what Damien originally thought his Celestial class was meant for, connecting to celestial bodies.

The differences between the two were many, but in this specific ability, the main difference was the medium used to form connections.

While Damien used space itself as a medium, having naturally formed ethereal connections to every celestial body in the vicinity, Ruyue had to work much harder to achieve the same result.

The reason was simple. She didn't use any medium to form the connections she needed to form. They were direct connections to the celestial bodies, without any outside interference.

But the difference in their performance would also reflect that. The reason Damien never truly used the plethora of connections that he constantly had was because he couldn't really get anything out of them.

It wasn't the main purpose of his class.

For Damien to maximize the benefits of these connections, he had to bind the worlds and form relationships with their World Cores. It was both due to the nature of the class and the fact that it was a class rather than an affinity.

But for Ruyue, she was born with this ability. She didn't acquire it through legends and class changes. So for her, the process naturally differed.

And until she realized this fact, she wasn't able to truly bring out the potential of her element.

She was only able to use the bare minimum through the single connection that had naturally formed between her and the closest celestial body, one which also leaned more towards yin and synchronized best with her.

She was now able to understand what clicked when she saw Damien's sunfire. It wasn't a matter of elements nor was it something related to the moon she was already connected to.

She had subconsciously formed another connection. She was able to feel it now. It was a smaller satellite that orbited around a much larger axis, making it the second-closest yin-centered celestial body.

She was able to see it clearly now. It was a small world, around 1/3rd the size of the moon, but it was an elemental world.

It was better classified as a star than anything else, but it somehow still fell under her authority. Most likely, it was due to the synchronization between her yin and moon affinities.

The small star was naturally uninhabitable, especially considering its atmosphere.

It was covered, or rather, completely made up of the iceflame that Ruyue was now able to utilize.

Chapter 165 - Second Mission [3]

While Ruyue remained deep in her meditation state, Damien found time to visit his master for a serious talk.

He had almost forgotten about it with the sudden insights and progression in the recent months, but he finally remembered it today.

Reentering the main room of Tian Yang's residence where he had been staying for the past 3 months, Damien greeted his master.

"Good morning, Master."

"Mm. Come sit." Tian Yang responded while brewing a pot of tea.

Damien took a seat in front of him and watched, unsure of how exactly to start the conversation.

"It seems you didn't come for a lecture today, so feel free to speak your mind."

Tian Yang could very easily sense the tense atmosphere around Damien today, and he wasn't one to waste time on mindless drivel if there was something more important to talk about.

Damien also appreciated this bluntness, going straight into the topic at hand.

“It’s about the mission I went on a few months back. I encountered something I wanted to inform you about since something seemed off the entire time.”

Damien proceeded to explain everything that happened during the mission. From the moment they entered the canyon and met the blood fog, to the strange physiques of the devil worshippers, the massive battle and the corruption of corpses, and finally, the devastation left in the wake of the battle between the two strongest beings present.

He made sure he didn’t leave out any details, allowing Tian Yang to gain a clear picture of the events. It was imperative that his master understood the severity of the situation.

“With your status, I’m sure you are aware of the Nox and the threat they pose not just to this world, but many others as well. My concern is how they were able to easily infiltrate and corrupt people without anyone noticing.

“After all, the devil worshippers were working in broad daylight, not even attempting to hide the obvious connection they had to the Nox. Anyone who has seen one of those things would instantly recognize it.

“And while they are called devil worshippers, they really have nothing to do with devils at all. Another concern is whether they are being written off as just disciples of another wicked sect or not.”

Tian Yang listened to everything without much change in expression, only slightly wrinkling his brows at the mention of the Nox.

He stayed silent for a moment, leaving Damien anxiously waiting before he spoke his thoughts.

“Have you told anyone else about this?”

Damien thought it was an odd question, but shook his head in denial either way.

“Good. It would not be good if panic began to spread to the public due to a slip-up. Now, allow me to explain. When it comes to this matter, you are both correct and incorrect at the same time.”

Damien raised his brow, not understanding, but Tian Yang didn’t force him to remain confused.

“The peak experts of the world are all aware of the current situation with the Nox, and most of the large sects have also made countermeasures against infiltration. However, their presence in this world has been publicized as a sort of new cult that has emerged.

“Make no mistake, the wickedness of said cult has been openly spread, but knowledge of a possible invasion or planetary world isn’t something available to the public.

“However, that doesn’t mean everything is safe. There are still suspicions that some powers are colluding with the Nox, it’s simply not possible to eliminate them without evidence.

“We are righteous sects at the end of the day. If we move in such a domineering manner, the reputation of our powers would decrease by a large margin. Not to mention, the involved powers will most definitely spread false information to alert the public.

“Even if we can prove these claims true, the seed of doubt that will be planted cannot be erased easily. Such a situation is what we have been avoiding.

“Still, there are plans being formulated to counterattack. Perhaps not the Nox themselves, as their homeworld is still undiscovered to this day, but they are not the ones moving against us with fervor at the moment.

“It is their subordinate power that we must be wary of. A world known is Niflheim.”

As Tian Yang finished his speech, Damien was left in a slight shock. He never expected there to be so much happening in the shadows.

There was a reason he never prided himself as a schemer.

There was also the matter with Niflheim. He had no idea the world was close enough to the Cloud Plane for there to be talk of planetary warfare.

‘Still, planetary warfare, huh.’ Just the thought of such a large scale and epic battle made his blood boil, but he suppressed it forcefully. Now wasn’t the time to get battle-hungry.

“Is there anything for me to do, then?” He questioned. It seemed that the higher-ups of the world had everything planned out, but he still wanted to be involved in one way or another.

“Hmm,” Tian Yang pondered, looking at Damien with a profound smile on his face. “There’s really no reason for you to get involved, is there?”

His tone was clearly teasing, causing Damien to frown a little. “Master should know I have plenty of reasons. My homeworld is also being targeted by the Nox.”

“Well, if you told me that when we first met I might have believed you, but are you still going to pretend like that’s true?”

Tian Yang was well aware of Damien’s personality. Especially in these past few months, he’d been able to clearly see what kind of man Damien was. And with that information, Tian Yang was able to form a guess on his intentions that he was sure of.

‘The boy simply wants to be part of such a thrilling adventure.’

The thought made Tian Yang smile, being reminded of himself in his younger days. And seeing how Damien was sheepishly smiling back at him, he knew he was right.

“If you already knew then you didn’t have to ask me about it right?” Damien complained. Although it might’ve been wrong to put up a righteous front, he didn’t care much.

He knew how selfish his intentions truly were, and he didn’t plan to publicize them at all. Others would surely label him as someone wicked if he did so.

Tian Yang wryly shook his head, arriving at the same conclusion. But his expression turned teasing again in an instant.

Flicking his finger, he sent an arrow of spatial mana towards the closed door to the room.

“Ah!” A startled shout followed by a soft thump rang out, attracting Damien’s attention to the beautiful silver-haired figure that had just fallen to the floor.

His eyes went wide, staring at Ruyue who had most likely been eavesdropping on the entire conversation before he turned back and glared at Tian Yang.

There was no way he wouldn’t notice her presence if he hadn’t covered it up. As for shooting the spatial mana, it was just for show.

After smiling back at the annoyed Damien, Tian Yang turned his gaze back towards Ruyue.

“It’s good that you’re here. Come, I have something for the both of you.”

Chapter 166 - Second Mission [4]

Once Ruyue was seated next to Damien, Tian Yang continued.

“Ruyue, you heard everything, didn’t you?”

Ruyue nodded. She had just finished a long period of meditation and came to meet Tian Yang before doing some physical training, but she ended up overhearing an interesting conversation instead.

There were many things she was curious about. The Nox and the plans regarding them, the movements of the peak experts of the world, and most of all, the fact that Damien said his “homeworld” was also being targeted.

His homeworld? Ruyue wasn’t stupid enough to not know what he meant by that, she was just too surprised to totally process the fact.

She thought back to their small argument about being well-traveled and realized why he could act so much wiser than her. Still, before she could ponder on it further, she was abruptly pulled into the conversation.

“Since you’re both aware of the Nox and the devil worshippers in the world, I have something I want you to take care of. Think of it as a mission.” Tian Yang said after receiving her confirmation.

The duo’s interest was piqued at the mention of this. Missions were always assigned by the mission hall. That is, unless they were too important to go through such a wide selection process.

For specialized missions that came straight from an elder, especially a Grand Elder like Tian Yang, there had to be something much more important at stake.

“You both must be well aware of the Empyrean Dragon Realm opening in 9 months already. The event isn’t too big of a deal in usual times, but with the probability of war on the horizon, this year’s entrance holds much more significance.

“I will not go into details at the moment, but if you weren’t already aware, the Empyrean Dragon Realm isn’t a secret realm as much as it is a hidden world. The entire realm was actually the location of the Empyrean Dragon Palace that ruled the Cloud Plane in ancient times.”

This information was new to Damien, but he wasn't exactly surprised. Even in the current world, the Supreme Fairy Paradise was said to reside in a hidden realm. Although, a hidden world seemed to be a much greater version of such a concept.

"The reason I bring this up is simple. There are plenty of forces that are planning to send their youths into the hidden world this time, just like every year. The problem is, we don't know how many of them are in collusion with the Nox.

"If any devil worshippers were allowed to gain an inheritance or legacy from the ancient sect, who knows what could happen. And that's if we don't even mention the true inheritance of the sect.

"The inheritances found thus far have been good enough for the secret realm entrance to be widely anticipated every 5 years when it opens. And even with such consistency, merely 1/3rd of the world has been explored. And even within that 1/3rd, only half the treasures have been claimed.

"What I want from you two is simple. I will give you the location where many wicked powers are said to have gathered, and you will investigate.

"As I said, only investigate, nothing more. If the information holds true, there will be many Law Connection powerhouses present. If you find anything of substance, leave immediately and report back.

"And if you get caught, crush these talismans and you'll be transported directly back to this pagoda."

Tian Yang pulled two slips of paper out of his spatial ring. They were both palm-sized and had a series of runic lines on them that seemed to be drawn in ink. Yet, the power of their aura clearly represented their might.

Taking his talisman from Tian Yang, Damien raised a question. “If it’s as dangerous as you say, why do you need us to do this?”

“That’s even simpler,” Ruyue interjected, “wouldn’t they be much more on guard if a powerhouse suddenly showed up? Even if we are powerful, our cultivation levels don’t reflect it as much.

“As long as we have Chaos rank artifacts to disguise ourselves, we are the best choice for this kind of mission.”

Damien nodded in agreement once he heard her reasoning. Indeed, it was a stupid question of him to ask. But his attention was drawn to something else.

“Chaos rank artifacts?”

“That’s right,” Tian Yang said, “for this mission, I’ve prepared Chaos rank artifacts for the two of you. Luckily, we already had them in the sect treasury, or I would have been forced to call in a few favors.”

The artifacts Tian Yang pulled out were shaped like bracelets with entirely black surfaces. They truly had no defining features, looking as average as an accessory could get.

Looking at the first Chaos Rank artifact that he had ever seen, Damien was a bit disgruntled. He expected something more flashy for a rank with such a domineering name. Not to mention how powerful they were supposed to be.

Looking at his expression, Tian Yang let out a slight chuckle. “Don’t be fooled by their mundane appearance. They are disguise artifacts, not weaponry, so naturally they are made to blend in. Their power is still as great as you imagine.”

Damien nodded. He already knew it was like this, he was just slightly discontent. It was just him being an inconvenience more than anything else.

Ignoring Damien’s grievance, Tian Yang pulled out the next item he would give them. “This is the final help I’ll give you. It’s a map of the location I mentioned previously and also the identities that you will be taking on. Furthermore, there is a list of all the potential powerhouses that might be present.

“I’m aware that this mission is serious, but your safety takes priority. If worst comes to pass, I will personally move to ensure that you both stay safe.”

The duo nodded solemnly. If Tian Yang was giving this much assurance, there was really nothing for them to worry about.

This kind of mission was a new thing to Damien. They had just been talking about how he always used brute strength to force his way forward, and now he was being put in a situation where he could no longer do so.

He didn’t know how he would fare on this mission, especially with its importance, but he wanted to do his best. Not only for the completion of the mission, but also due to the sense of duty he felt.

It was an odd thing, to say the least. He, who never cared for anything besides his own people, felt a sense of duty in the boiling conflict with the Nox.

He was only half lying when he said it was for the sake of his homeworld. While he didn't care about the people residing on the planet, he cared about the world itself.

It was bound to him. He didn't want to think about what would happen if it got destroyed or conquered by a race like the Nox. That connection was much deeper than the other ones he had to the random celestial bodies in the distance.

He had a gut feeling that as he was now, if the earth was destroyed, he'd inevitably die.

Chapter 167 - Setting Out [1]

Two days had passed since Tian Yang had given Damien and Ruyue their mission, and at the moment, they were busy trying to plan as much as they could.

For the most part, they'd be going in blind, not knowing exactly what they were supposed to be doing. But, the goal of the mission was investigation and reconnaissance, so they couldn't do much about that.

At most, they could flesh out their disguise personas and figure out who to avoid while they were there.

Looking at the map in front of them, the two had grim expressions on their faces.

"This location...it's the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, isn't it?"

"Yeah, there's no doubt about it. In that kind of location, it'd be a miracle if we survive without protection."

Even with the escape talismans Tian Yang had provided, it was still necessary to be safe. It was unknown what kind of dangers they'd face over the course of their mission, not to mention the talismans were only SSS rank.

Although they were powerful in their own right, if the duo was being pursued by a 4th class expert, there was a chance they could be intercepted.

And if the location of the meeting about to ensue was the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, they needed to be much more cautious than they were previously.

Within the Central Region, there were many notable mountains that were immediately recognizable from a distance. However, even among these, there were some that stood at the top.

The first few one would think of were the Jade Mountain and Star Mountain of the Jade Heavenly Palace and Celestial Star Palace respectively, but these were simply due to their status.

With the vastness of the Central Region which was bigger than some continents back on earth, there were a variety of dangerous areas that caused the deaths of many cultivators.

These danger zones ranged from poisonous swamps to grand canyons filled with spatial wind. And among the plethora of dangers within these zones, there were bound to be fortuitous opportunities as well.

This high-risk high-reward environment was what drew cultivators to these locations, and it was what made their names famous and widespread.

But when it comes to danger, there was a mountain range that eclipsed almost all other danger zones.

This was the 3000 Beast Mountain Range. The range itself didn't boast an incredible size, containing around 50 mountains in total, but that wasn't its main selling point.

After all, it was in the name. When one heard the term "3000 beasts" they wouldn't think much of it. Although it was a large number for any single cultivator to handle, it didn't mean anything in the greater scheme of things.

3000 beasts could be found in any medium-sized forest, even if the level of these beasts was low. For a mountain range to contain this number would seem pathetic.

But that wasn't what the name of the range referred to. In reality, it wasn't that there were only 3000 beasts within the mountain range. Rather, within those 50 towering mountains, there were 3000 beast kings.

4th class existences, some even being in the Law Sea realm.

Naturally, each of these kings had their own army underneath them, causing this mountain range to be infested with a number of beasts that would be unforeseen anywhere else.

Unfortunately, the exact number was never publicized. The 3000 Beast Mountain Range was concealed by a thick fog that blanketed its perimeter, blocking any peering eyes trying to discern what was within it.

The information that people already had about the mountain range was found over the period of many years and many cultivators spreading what they found.

Still, the survival rate of those who entered the mountain range was abysmal. Rarely anyone was able to truly make it out of that hellish environment with their mind intact.

And this was the kind of place Damien and Ruyue would soon be charging into. Even if the meeting grounds were on the perimeter, within the fog on the outskirts, it was still incredibly dangerous to even be in the area.

“Seeing this once again makes me doubt why we are being sent on this mission instead of someone more qualified.” Damien sighed.

He loved danger and he loved teetering the line between life and death, but a going to place where thousands of 4th class existences resided? He wasn’t stupid enough to put that in the same category.

“But, is there truly anyone more qualified?” Ruyue argued.

And she was correct to some extent. The more Damien thought about it, the fewer people he could think of that could take on the role they were taking.

Within the sect, the only other person he could think of was Long Chen, but that guy was the same as him. He was the kind of person who would go in guns and fighting intent blazing.

He hadn’t met any of the Core Disciples, but they were Law Connection realm experts so they were automatically disqualified.

As for the inner court, with him being as strong as Ruyue and her being one of the strongest inner disciples, he didn't really put them in his eyes.

And the Celestial Star Palace was 2nd in terms of power among the great sects. Damien hated that there truly wasn't anyone else that could take this task from them.

"Alright let's not dwell on the topic anymore. The next thing we need to figure out is disguises."

Perhaps Damien was a bit dumb, but it took him a while what it meant for Ruyue to be the little princess of the Xue clan. Her status was immense in this world, even though he blatantly disregarded it.

If she walked around in public, heads would immediately turn. Let alone her status, her beauty was also enough to drive many men insane. There was no way she could be incognito the way she was.

And Damien wasn't any different. Although he didn't have the same status as her, his looks were anything but ordinary. And even if his attractiveness could be attributed to his level, his strange eyes and hair would immediately give away his uniqueness.

"Hmm, we need a backstory, I guess. Not to mention, names. If I have to be honest, my naming sense is trash." He replied, continuing the conversation.

"True. Spatial Collapse? Could you seriously not think of something better than that?"

"Oi, I like that one! It's short and to the point without any uselessness. It's my minimalistic flare."

“It’s a lame name. You should learn from me when it comes to this kind of thing.”

“Yeah, okay Miss Moon Goddess.”

Ruyue’s face turned red in embarrassment as she averted her gaze. “T-that one isn’t my fault. Its name came from my cultivation technique.”

“I totally believe you. Well then, oh great and holy Moon Goddess, how about you come up with some good names for us?”

“Fine, just watch. I’ll create disguises so perfect that you won’t even be able to recognize me after.” Ruyue responded with slightly puffed cheeks.

Damien simply smiled in response. The only reason it had taken them 2 whole days already to come up with all their preparations was due to how often their conversations would devolve like this.

Yet, oddly enough, he couldn’t find it in himself to be bothered by it. After all...

‘Her pouting expression is pretty damn cute.’

Chapter 168 - Setting Out [2]

Their discussion continued for the next few hours before Damien returned to his residence. There was nothing else they could possibly plan for, and as they had agreed earlier, Ruyue was in charge of the disguises.

At this point, there was nothing Damien could do besides sit patiently and wait for the next day to come.

He found himself lying on his bed alone for the first time in many months and honestly, he didn't know how to feel about it.

Ever since arriving at the Cloud Plane, he had been moving constantly either by training or going on missions, completely absorbed in the activities he was partaking in.

Perhaps it was a subconscious thing, but he never allowed himself to have time alone like this. He knew what would happen when it came. He would inevitably find himself drowning in his own thoughts.

Well, recently it was mainly self-loathing.

It was this self-loathing that kept him running away from his thoughts, trying his best to ignore his feelings and continue on with his happy everyday life.

And he knew the reason for this. It wasn't that hard to figure out.

'I wronged her.'

Every time he was alone in bed like this, his thoughts would drift towards the woman who had silently supported him ever since they first met.

Even when he made such an outrageous request to separate, even when he was clearly running away from his feelings, she didn't say anything. She continued to support him and wish the best for him from the side.

And every time he thought of her, he would hate his guts for leaving her like that. He knew they were still together and that this was just a small period of separation, but that didn't diminish his guilt in the slightest.

Why should Rose have to deal with his emotional insecurity? Why does he have to affect her with his mood swings? He hated the idea of it.

He didn't want to run away from happiness anymore, but he couldn't find it in himself to embrace it.

'I'm...pathetic.'

Pathetic. It was the only word he could use to describe the current him. He could charge into a valley of death or a sea of corpses with no hesitation, he could face the aura of a 4th class existence and resist with all his might, so why was it that when it came to his love life he was so trash?

Were his trust issues, his abandonment issues, this deeply engrained within his psyche? Was he that broken?

The odd thing was that Damien had never had a romantic relationship before he met Rose. He hadn't even had a fling with another woman. His situation on earth and his one-track mind wouldn't allow it.

Not to mention, with how he would walk around like a homeless person most of the time after the world awakening, there was no girl who would look his way.

He was new to the relationship thing, and even more than that he was new to such dense affection like the one Rose would always show him.

‘Think. Think about why it is that I’m so scared to express my love for her.’

That was the thought that kept running through his head. Damien wasn’t the type to leave his problems unsolved, especially if he could find the solution with a bit of thinking like so.

He wanted to get to the crux of the problem as soon as possible so he might have hope of fixing himself or at least acknowledging what he needed to fix.

And as his level increased and brought his league up together with it, his memory had become much sharper. He could vividly remember the happy childhood he used to have and the shitty days that came after that.

‘That’s right, it all began when Dad left.’

His mother was forced to work three times as hard, never having time to show him the motherly love he used to experience daily, he became a laughingstock at school to those children who weren’t aware of the concept of boundaries, and he slowly became more introverted.

That was the day his downward spiral began. It was after that day that he subconsciously conditioned himself to run away from affection, knowing that it could disappear in the blink of an eye.

It was after that day that he couldn't trust anyone, the ones he used to spend his days with turning their backs on him.

In the end, the core of his trauma was his family.

'How stupid of me.'

Why was he letting such an old scar take such prevalence in his life now? This life of his was so much different from what it had been previously that it was such a negligible memory.

But that was normal. Trauma wasn't something that would disappear just because you wanted it to, or just because your life turned around.

Damien had never healed his trauma. He hadn't even taken steps towards such a goal. Instead, he did as he was doing now.

'I ran away from my problems.'

For how much he loved to talk big about not leaving problems unsolved, it seemed he had a rich history of running away from such things.

Maybe that was the thing he needed to fix most. Maybe before he could go and meet Rose with utmost confidence, he had to learn to face himself seriously.

When his thoughts came full circle back to Rose, his face slightly contorted into a grimace.

Although what he had previously been thinking about was the main cause of his guilt towards her, it wasn't the only one.

It had been almost 5 months since they separated, and only 4 of those months were spent at the sect. During that time, how much had he thought about her?

How much had he missed her?

He felt like he was belittling her position in his heart by avoiding even the subject of her like this.

And there was another thing as well. He was beginning to...

'No. Let's not think about that.'

He immediately suppressed those feelings the second they appeared in his mind, trying to deny them with all his might.

Even if he couldn't deny them, he at least had to suppress them so they wouldn't interfere with both his daily and romantic life.

“Agh, why does this shit have to be so complicated?”

He covered his face with his hands, shaking his head furiously. Was love like this for everyone?

‘I’m tired.’

It wasn’t physical exhaustion at all. He had just been forcing himself to think about too many things over the past few months. Not even including his personal problems, he had been forced to think about the Nox more than he would like.

“A damn alien invasion. It sounds awesome on paper but why does it have to bring me so much work?”

If he could choose, he would just go to the secret realm and then explore another world. Maybe he would also check out a few danger zones before he did so.

But no, it seemed the universe had other plans for him, seeing how the Nox would pop up in one way or another everywhere he went.

‘It’s not like I can do anything about it, they’re literally aiming for universal conquest.’

Shaking his head once more, Damien started succumbing to his exhaustion. He needed to clear his mental fatigue before tomorrow since he couldn’t screw up on this mission.

‘Ugh. Life is so damn complicated.’

It was the last thought that streaked through his mind before he finally drifted into a deep slumber.

Chapter 169 - Minor Delays [1]

When Damien woke up the next day, he was feeling much more refreshed. It was as if a weight had been lifted off of his shoulders.

Even as cultivators, whose need for mundane things like sleep would diminish largely as they gained power, mental exhaustion was something they needed to keep track of.

Not taking proper care of mental health could lead to many complications, even hindering one’s ability in battle.

After stretching his body lightly, Damien got dressed and made his way over to Ruyue’s residence, where they would make the final preparations and don their disguises before leaving.

Standing in front of her house in the inner court, Damien knocked on the door before waiting patiently for her to answer. He could hear the sound of items clattering around inside before the door was opened.

“Did you wait long?” Ruyue asked as she stepped to the side, allowing Damien into her house.

“No, just got here.” He said while stealing glances at her appearance.

At the moment, Ruyue wasn't wearing the normal sect robes that he was used to seeing her in, rather she was wearing a more casual set that one would wear for comfortability.

Her hair was slightly messy as well, making it evident that she had just woken up. Seeing the senior sister who always loved to appear perfect in such an appearance made Damien feel some type of way.

Naturally, Ruyue noticed his gaze and realized why he was acting in such a way, causing a slight blush to appear on her cheeks due to embarrassment.

"Stop staring so much. I was just too busy working on our disguises to care about my appearance right now."

Damien smiled teasingly before averting his gaze. Now wasn't the time for them to play around.

"And so? What are the genius disguises that you promised me you'll make?"

Ruyue nodded before taking out the two Chaos rank disguise artifacts, tossing one to Damien.

"Here, put this on."

Damien caught the artifact and did as he was told, feeling the effects right away. His height and even his body structure reduced a bit, his hair and eyes changing as well. It was almost like he truly became a different person.

Looking over at Ruyue, he noticed the same happening to her. Her silver hair became painted black and the gold in her eyes began to fade.

“For the duration of the mission, you will be Zhen Fang and I will be Xiao Li. We are rogue cultivators who were desperate in finding a sect to join, but to no avail.

“After many years, we decided that the unfairness of the cultivation world was too much, so we joined a wicked sect to cultivate quicker and more efficiently. Still, we held on to the small amount of morals we still had and made sure to stick together as much as we could.”

“Hm? The story makes sense, but why would we stick together everywhere? What is our connection?” Damien questioned.

It was common for people to defect to wicked sects simply for the sake of gaining power faster. Not everyone within them was inherently evil.

The cultivation world was one that favored the talented. And for those without talents, there weren't many paths they could take. Many of them would end up on a crueler path simply due to these reasons.

But it was definitely rare for people to hold true relationships when they go through experiences like that. Especially when their minds start being corrupted by their cultivation manuals.

“T-that...” Ruyue trailed off, unsure of how to answer his question.

As Damien looked at her, pressing for an answer, she did her best to avert her gaze, not looking at his face.

“We are...” she trailed off, her voice becoming fainter with every word until Damien could barely hear what she said at the end.

But with his hearing ability, there was no way he would miss it. And once he knew what she said, his eyes widened in shock.

‘We are lovers.’

The words reverberated in his mind, shocking him to his core. But he quickly regained his bearings, a sly smile creeping up on his face.

“Oh? What did you say? I didn’t quite hear you at the end there.”

“S-shut up! I know you heard me!”

“I really didn’t though? Oh well, I guess I will go into this mission unaware of such an important fact. What a shame, what a shame.” Damien groaned with a destitute expression on his face.

He covered his eyes with his hands, continuing with his complaints. Perhaps he was overacting, but he didn’t care. This was incredibly fun.

“Ahh, when they ask me what my relationship is with you, I won’t be able to answer! What if they pull us apart for questioning and our stories don’t line up! Oh, how the heavens have failed me! How could you-”

Ruyue finally broke, unable to endure his acting anymore. “F-fine! We are lovers! There, I said it! Happy?!”

Damien grinned mischievously at the furiously blushing Ruyue. “Oh, what is this? But I already have a woman, you know? What an atrocious act of infidelity this is!”

A small blast of lunar energy shot towards Damien, which he deftly dodged, his smile never fading.

“It’s for the mission! Who wants to be your woman anyway!”

“Oh? Then why did you choose such a relationship between us?”

“Hmph, isn’t that obvious? There are so many lustful men out there who don’t even care about a woman’s appearance before they try to forcefully take her. I’m using you as a meat shield, that’s it.”

“A very handsome meat shield, of course.”

“No no, definitely not handsome at all. A meat shield that looks like a pig for sure.”

Although he teased her for it, he agreed with her reasoning for such a disguise. The only thing that felt strange was how half-hearted she was when she said it, almost as if she was making it up on the spot.

Either way, he didn't dwell on it much, opting to tease her as much as he could instead. This flustered side of her was something that only he could see.

Such a fact made a strange feeling well up in his heart, but he chose to ignore that as well.

And like this, their departure time ended up being delayed by a few more hours.

The vast plains of the Central Region were surrounded by a plethora of towering mountains that almost seemed to blot out the sky.

And on these mountains and even throughout the plains themselves, there were plenty of towns and cities where the common populace of the Central Continent resided.

The largest of these cities had a surface area equal to some medium-sized states in America, spanning farther than any city the earth could ever produce.

And outside of the borders of these cities was a land filled with danger and opportunity, a wildland where beasts and nature thrived.

In a particular area of these wildlands, a large beast could be seen rushing through the tall grasses. Its paws made contact with the ground in such a manner that it barely made a sound.

The beast looked like a panther, with sleek black fur covering its entire body, a cat-like tail, and sharp blue eyes.

Surprisingly, there were two people mounted atop this charging beast.

“Li’er, how much time do you think it’ll take for us to arrive at our destination?” The man among them said.

His appearance was as plain as one could get. He had short brown hair parted to the right and eyes of a similar color. He was around 6 feet tall, and it was evident he put work into training his body.

The girl he was talking to blushed at his form of address, but still answered his question.

“It should take us another week on this beast. It’s not nearly as fast as yours, Brother Fang.”

She wasn’t much shorter than the man she was talking to, being around 5 feet 9 inches tall, and her appearance was similarly average. She had long black hair cascading down to the middle of her back and light green eyes.

These were the disguises Damien and Ruyue had donned for their mission, and for the sake of getting used to their new dynamic, they opted to use the common terms of endearment used by couples in the Cloud Plane.

“Well, it’s not like we’re in a rush. Plus, Zara is too eye-catching to be riding her on a reconnaissance mission.”

Ruyue nodded. The wolf in Damien's shadow had an appearance that practically screamed its rarity. Especially the multiple tails that grew in number every time she ranked up.

Suddenly, Ruyue made a suggestion. "Since we aren't in a rush, how about we do some hunting and leveling up on our way?"

Damien smiled at the suggestion. His gaze became predatory as he looked at the pack of beasts that was trying to stealthily surround them.

"Sounds like a great idea to me."

Chapter 170 - Minor Delays [2]

From what Damien could sense, none of these beasts were that special, all being around the same level as him, yet they still had the nerve to stalk him and Ruyue like prey.

In fact, there wasn't even one among them with considerable strength to be called a leader.

'Maybe this is just a small part of the pack?'

In the end, it didn't really matter. The only thing these beasts were to him were levels.

As if realizing that they had been spotted, the group of 15 beasts stopped hiding and showed themselves to the duo in full force. They were feline, similar to the panther they were mounted on, but their fur was a dark orange color.

Damien looked at Ruyue, who nodded back at him before they both charged in opposite directions. They would split the beasts as such.

The battle started immediately. Ruyue summoned a blue fire atop her palm before slicing in a horizontal fashion, causing a wide arc of light to sweep towards the 7 beasts she had taken.

Meanwhile, Damien flashed forward with streaks of black lightning streaking across his body, making a similar motion.

Boom!

Two simultaneous explosions rang out along with the howls of the beasts. Although there were a few that were laced with pain, the rest were of rage.

These beasts weren't weak by any means, so they were easily able to dodge.

Glaring ferociously at the duo, the beasts charged forward, flames erupting from their orange fur. The ones at the forefront opened their mouths and shot breaths of flame towards their opponents.

Damien deftly dodged what he could, creating a barrier out of lightning to block the rest. He let the lightning course through his veins before entering his muscles and tendons, boosting his speed.

He pressed his foot to the ground, causing cracks to appear as he flashed away. When he reappeared, he was directly next to the beast in front of the rest.

A ball of lightning was charged in his hand as he crashed it downwards, slamming it onto the beast's head. Without suspense, it exploded, leaving a gaping hole in its wake.

The light dimmed from the beast's eyes as it fell lifelessly to the floor, but before Damien could do anything else, two others pounced at him from both sides.

He twisted his body, avoiding their jaws, but a third beast stealthily appeared behind him, slashing its flaming paw at his back.

Even though his eyes had warned him about the sneak attack, he wasn't in any position to dodge. If he tried to speed in another direction, he might break his back due to the uncomfortable angle he was currently at.

The claw sunk into Damien's flesh, dragging scars along his back while sending blazing heat into his body.

"Argh!" Without any other choice, he discharged a massive field of lightning in every direction, attempting to push the beasts away.

The two at his sides were paralyzed for a moment, but the one who was still attached to his back received the worst impact. Its fur was singed and its eyes had rolled back, foam coming out of its mouth.

Finally having breathing room to move again, Damien grabbed the beast and ripped its claws out of his back, breaking its legs before throwing it towards the other four that were waiting for a chance to attack.

As for the two paralyzed beasts on his sides, he directly stomped on their heads, crushing their skulls.

Ruyue's battle was a bit different. Rather than a close combat clash like Damien's, hers was a battle of flames.

Her blueish white iceflames coursed through the surroundings, leaving a flaming trail of freezing cold in their wake as they met with the orange flames of the beasts.

She coalesced her new flames into spears, sending them towards the 7 beasts she was fighting with precise accuracy.

But the beasts didn't have such control over their flames. Unlike Ruyue, they couldn't form weapons or constructs using their elements.

They tried to combat her flying spears with their flame-coated paws and breath attacks, but they simply couldn't compare. After all, Ruyue's flames were much more concentrated than theirs.

The spears pierced through their defenses, impacting the torsos and legs of the beasts. Almost all of her opponents were immobilized, but there were still a few who dodged.

They surrounded Ruyue, growling in fury as they discharged waves of flames in her direction. With them coming from every direction, Ruyue was trapped within a dome of fire.

But her expression remained calm, the only emotion felt from her being the iciness of her gaze.

A silvery essence leaked from her body, combining with the ice flames surrounding her before she let out a similar wave of flames, mimicking the 360-degree attack that Damien released a few moments prior.

When the two flame waves met, a large explosion resounded through the area. The biting cold of her flames and the heat of the beasts' met, causing the air to combust.

The 4 beasts around her were sent flying by the winds that were released by the combustion while Ruyue held her ground, using the spear she pulled out of her spatial ring as an anchor.

It wasn't the spear she used when fighting Damien, however, it was a silver spear that was of an obviously lower grade.

The spear almost bent under pressure but managed to hold its ground. And when the dust cleared up, Ruyue walked towards the incapacitated beasts, ending their pathetic lives.

With her battle finished, she looked over towards Damien who was similarly finishing up.

Beams of lightning were being shot from his palm, accurately piercing the heads of the last 4 beasts whose legs had already been broken while she was occupied.

Waves of experience entered their bodies as they smiled at each other. It was the first time they had fought together, and even though they didn't necessarily work as a team, they were able to fight efficiently without hindering each other.

It was definitely a good start.

As they regrouped and were about to mount the panther beast to continue their journey, a sudden scream stopped them in their tracks.

“Someone help, please!”

It was a girl’s voice, obviously immature. Damien spread his awareness in that direction, his mana sense being able to cover a massive area, and he was able to grasp the situation.

“There are about 40 more of these beasts over there, with one being even stronger than you. That must be where the rest of the pack is.”

Ruyue nodded. “And the scream?”

“The pack is surrounding a group of teenagers. There are 10 of them and none look over the age of 17. As for the scream, one of the girls is holding onto a wounded boy. Looks like he tried to fight.”

If they were kids as Damien said, they obviously wouldn’t have the strength to fight against an entire pack of 3rd class beasts.

“Should we save them?” Ruyue asked.

“Do you want to?” Damien questioned back. He honestly didn’t care whether they lived or died, but the beasts would be enough to push him into the level 120s, so he wouldn’t mind fighting some more.

Ruyue nodded once more. “They are just children. Even if I couldn’t care less if other people die, kids should be spared from such cruelties.”

Damien averted his gaze. He wanted to pretend as if he didn’t give those kids a death sentence in his mind only a second ago.

“If that’s the case, then let’s go. Either way, it means we get some levels.”

With the decision made, the two moved, intending to stop the soon-to-be massacre.