

Void 181

Chapter 181 - Running Away [4]

Running away

Wasn't it something Damien was well accustomed to?

It was only a few days ago that he finally made the decision to stop running away from his problems and his feelings.

He was still in the process of making that change, and Ruyue ended up helping him a lot. She didn't even have to do anything, just the fact that there was someone here who could relate to his feelings was enough.

It wasn't just his feelings for Rose that Damien ended up running away from. Rather, it was mainly himself.

His emotions and his problems. These were the things he feared. What happened with Rose could be considered as collateral damage from his internal struggle.

What was a person's identity? What was the thing that made them different from the rest?

Although this was a world where everyone had their unique abilities and strengths, it didn't change the fact that everyone's strength was under the presence of the system.

What truly made a person unique, what defines their ego, wasn't it their thoughts and emotions?

The way someone felt and the decisions they made, the moral standards one creates for themselves as they continue living in this ruthless world, the relationships they form through it all.

These are the things that Damien ran from. Because if he actually ended up solving these problems, if he overcame such things, he was afraid he'd be a different person.

He was so used to having these issues within him. He felt that if he no longer had them, he'd allow himself to be taken advantage of.

But these thoughts were simply stupid. After all, overcoming such things was the process of accepting himself. This was what he realized as he listened to Ruyue tell her story.

It was also the reason he decided to tell his. Firstly, he wanted her to feel what he felt, the camaraderie that he experienced when he met someone who could understand him.

And secondly, he wanted her to gain something as well. Perhaps, if she could gain her own realizations from what he learned, she would benefit as well.

And Ruyue was experiencing what he hoped. As she learned about the dungeon, Apeiron, and earth, she realized how small her worldview was. Not to mention, she realized that she was dealing with problems that were much smaller than his.

If she had said that out loud, Damien would call her an idiot. After all, her problems had a much more definite reasoning than his.

But it didn't matter since she didn't say anything. This form of thinking was just something she subconsciously used to help herself, so it was for the best.

Ruyue thought back to those days in the clan. She thought back to the struggles she had been through. Did she go through all those harsh experiences just to become a crybaby?

No. She didn't. She didn't feel that the choice she made or the attitude she took was wrong. Rather, she felt that the reasoning for such an attitude was the problem.

She was no longer a child. She was no longer weak. There was no reason for her to erect such a wall to scare people off. She could do so with her own strength.

But she wouldn't change her personality. Because as she thought about it, she realized that she enjoyed the way she was. She liked herself. Imagining herself being kind or cheerful at all times ended up repulsing her.

Because that wasn't her identity.

Besides, it wasn't like she couldn't be kind or she couldn't be cheerful. She had people she trusted enough to show these emotions to. And that was enough for her.

For what reason should she allow those scum to see her true self? That should be a right reserved for those she allowed it to.

Her thoughts slowly became clear as she reaffirmed herself. She ended up coming out of that state only to realize the position she was currently in.

She was still clinging to Damien as hard as she could, even though her tears had run dry long ago. She slightly shifted her head to look up at him, only to see that he was still stuck in his thoughts.

Not wanting to interrupt him, she decided to stay in her current position. Besides, it was warm here.

‘Yes. I’m staying in this position so he isn’t interrupted. That’s what this is.’

Meanwhile, Damien was still thinking about the same concept as before. He was thinking about why things felt so different with Ruyue. And it didn’t take long to realize.

Rose was someone who could act as his confidant at any time. And through thick and thin, she was always supportive. But there were bound to be some things she couldn’t do.

Her personality, which ended up being much bolder than Damien’s, wasn’t one that could fully sympathize with him. Her problems lay elsewhere, but she never refused to confront them.

Rather, she confronted them as much as she could so that one day she could overcome them.

So when Damien saw Ruyue, who was similar to him, he felt something different from when he confided in Rose. He felt like the simple fact that Ruyue was the same as him helped him overcome himself, albeit slightly.

The process of change wasn't something immediate, in fact, it took a great deal of time to complete. But today, under the moonlight, that process was expedited slightly.

However, no matter how refreshed Damien felt by this, there was no way he could feel completely happy at the moment.

The events prior to their conversation were still stuck in his mind. That creature pretending to be Elder Baba, it obviously had other plans.

And he doubted that it was working alone. From how easily it accepted death even though it couldn't achieve anything in the end, he felt that there was something more going on.

But he wasn't in any position to stop it. He was on a deadline. He had to get to that convention and complete the mission his master had given him.

If not for his master's sake, then it was for his own. It was a matter related to his safety and the Nox who kept causing problems everywhere he went.

'Again, I end up running away.'

There wasn't just one village within this vast forest. When Damien spread his awareness earlier, he spotted at least 3 others. And within all of them, there were traces of the same murky mana he felt in Elder Baba's hut.

He knew there were more problems in the forest. He knew more people would end up getting hurt after they left, but there was nothing he could do.

He wasn't some hero with a misplaced sense of justice that would go around helping anyone without any benefit. That simply wasn't his style. Still, he was from earth. He had a sense of values instilled in him since he was young.

Even if he could ignore the suffering of others on a larger scale, he wasn't someone who would ignore things going on right in front of him. At least, that's how it was usually.

But this time, there was nothing he could do.

'Regardless of how powerful one gets, regardless if one can control the winds and rain with a snap of their fingers, time is an enemy that can't be overcome.'

Chapter 182 - Running Away [4]

Flash!

Damien's eyes suddenly became clouded for a moment after he had the thought. It only lasted for a brief second, but when he came to he felt that he had comprehended something good.

It was nothing but a spark of insight, but just from that he knew he was moving in the right direction.

'Soon. I'll have that power soon.'

Damien opened his eyes, unaware of when he had even closed them in the first place, and slowly took in his surroundings.

Although it was still nighttime, the moon was no longer high in the sky, already on its way to setting. Looking down, he noticed that Ruyue was still on his chest even after so long.

“Hey, I think it’s time we leave now.” He said softly, but he got no response. After poking her cheeks a few times, he realized that she was probably asleep.

“Sigh, how troublesome.” Even while muttering it, he had a smile on her face. He lightly picked her up, using his space element to shift her body so she wouldn’t feel uncomfortable, before princess carrying her out of the forest.

The cool wind brushed through his hair and caressed his face as he ran, with the sounds of bushes and trees rustling acting as his background music. In this calm atmosphere, he finally made it out of the forest, where the panther beast had been waiting for them.

It was a beast they had gotten from Tian Yang, so it was naturally tamed. They didn’t have to worry about losing it while they went off and did other things.

He mounted the beast as gently as he could before ordering it to set off, Ruyue still asleep in his arms.

He couldn’t blame her though. She had experienced a good amount of emotional stress in the past day, making her this exhausted.

With the story she had told him, Damien was aware that she had never truly confronted her problems like this, nor had they blown up in her face.

It was a new experience for her, and the whole thing overloaded her. Truthfully, Damien would have been the same if he didn't have his personality.

While he would run away from his problems just as much as she did, he would always find himself introspecting and trying to find ways to combat those problems before pushing them away again.

It was an unhealthy cycle, but at least it prepared him for situations like this one, making it so he didn't end up with the same fatigue she did.

But the past day was annoying for him too. Seeing innocent kids get slaughtered...regardless of how cold his heart was, it wasn't something he could simply accept.

It didn't matter how many adults died. That was something they decided for themselves. They made the decisions that led to that death.

But it was different for kids. Damien made a vow to himself. A vow that no matter what he did, he would never intentionally harm a child.

He closed his eyes and laid down on the beast's wide back, intending to take a bit of rest before they reach their destination. He needed to clear his mind before they got into the truly serious stuff they were about to do.

"Mm..."

Ruyue's eyelids fluttered open as bright rays of sunlight entered her vision, disallowing her from getting any more sleep.

Though, she didn't realize she had fallen asleep until she looked around.

There were bright and lush plains around her, with small villages and cities off in the distance. It was clear that they left the forest long ago.

Not to mention the fact that she was moving atop the panther beast they had gotten from Tian Yang before leaving the sect.

Sitting up, she rubbed her eyes and attempted to get rid of the drowsiness she was feeling. 'I haven't had such good sleep in a long time.'

As the events before she passed out entered her memory, a furious blush crept up her face. 'Oh my god. What the hell was I doing?!'

She had both cried and fallen asleep on Damien's chest, making her utterly embarrassed. It wasn't something she had ever done before with another person, let alone a man.

'Is that why I felt like I was sleeping on the most comfortable pillow ever?'

Wait, but if his chest was the comfortable pillow, then why did that sensation continue to the time even minutes before she woke up?

Her head moved robotically as she looked down to see where she was sitting, and in fact, it was as she guessed.

Underneath her, Damien was still fast asleep. Her hands were on his chest as she supported her weight and she was sitting on his stomach, just inches away from...

‘Ah! What the hell am I thinking?!’

She wanted to stand up and move away, but there was no space to do so. The panther beast wasn’t very large right now and Damien’s body was taking up almost all the space on its back.

Ruyue was still in a panic, but what she didn’t know was that all her fidgeting had woken up a certain someone.

‘Fuck! Why is she moving like that?!’ Damien exclaimed inwardly as he tried to suppress himself, still pretending to be asleep.

If she kept moving in such a way, he was afraid that another beast would be awoken, and he didn’t want to deal with the shame that would follow that.

Sighing lightly, he slowly opened his eyes. “I’d appreciate it if you stopped moving around so much, dear senior sister.” He said teasingly.

Ruyue jumped slightly as her movements once again became robotic. She turned her head towards Damien with wide eyes as she witnessed the mischievous smile on his face.

“G-good morning...” she muttered, her voice low due to embarrassment.

“Mm, good morning,” Damien replied as he sat up.

Yet, this movement resulted in another problem. Ruyue, who was sitting on his stomach, slid down and ended up on...another region.

And as she was already facing him, when his upper body was raised, they ended up eye to eye, their faces only inches away from each other.

This time, it was Damien’s turn to be surprised. ‘How did I even end up in this kind of anime situation?! Do things like this actually happen in real life?’

Meanwhile, Ruyue was frozen in both body and mind. All her senses were focused on a certain beast that had inadvertently awakened due to her sitting position.

When Damien realized this, he averted his gaze, his face tinged with a slight redness.

It had to be known that even with Rose, he had never been in this position. They had cuddled enough that he learned to easily suppress his urges.

But with Ruyue...this kind of sense hadn’t been developed in the slightest.

When Ruyue saw Damien's red face, her attention was completely shifted off what was happening with his lower body. She ended up smiling slyly as she watched him.

"I see, I see, so even my cold-hearted Junior brother can make such a face!"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Damien responded emotionlessly. But Ruyue, who had a clear view of his face, was able to see how the redness slightly increased.

'I think I'm beginning to understand why he loves to do this to me.'

She continued teasing him, completely forgetting the position they were in at the moment, as the two of them continued their journey.

They were now only a single day away from their destination.

Chapter 183 - Bloodstone River [1]

The blistering heat covering the land slowly cooled down as the sun began to set over the horizon.

The day had passed without much drama, and finally, Damien and Ruyue could see their destination approaching.

In the distance, they could faintly make out the outline of an expansive mountain range whose height reached the clouds, however, its contents were veiled in secrecy.

“It’s just as described in the reports from those who have been in this region,” Ruyue exclaimed in amazement as she gazed upon the majestic sight.

Damien could only nod his head in response, as his thoughts were also transfixed on the sight in front of them.

The outline of the mountain range they could truly see was only the tip of the iceberg, as the entirety of its structure was covered by a massive fog that looked almost ethereal.

It was hazy, yet translucent at the same time. It covered the view of the mountain range like a large wall, preventing outsiders from understanding its contents.

This fog was so notorious that it had received its own name, the myriad illusion veil. The name wasn’t grand for nothing, describing the experience one would have once they entered the dense veil.

It was said that once one traveled far enough into the fog, they would lose their sense of direction, not knowing up from left, or down from straight. And not only that, there were even rumors that one could lose their entire identity to the horrifying yet mysterious fog.

And by the time the sun finally set and night fell on the Central Continent, the duo reached the border of this fog.

Luckily enough, there was a small city on the border, where plenty of mercenaries and cultivators would gather before setting off to test their luck within the 3000 beast mountain range.

“I think we should stay here for the night. Regardless if we know exactly where we’re going, I don’t want to risk getting lost in that fog when visibility is at its lowest.” Damien remarked warily.

“I agree. The fog’s reputation is already bad enough. Though, I don’t think our destination is far enough within for us to experience its true horrors.” Ruyue responded.

Still, the two of them didn’t take any chances and made their way into the city. They had already left the panther beast they used for transport, allowing it to return to its original owner.

It was only accompanying them to take them this far, as it would only be in danger if it continued with them. For their return trip, they already had the talismans that Tian Yang gave them, so it wasn’t necessarily a problem.

Entering the city, the two were immediately able to feel the gloomy atmosphere that encased it. Considering the location, it was only natural.

Many of the cultivators currently residing in the city had already been through the fog, losing their companions on the way. Besides them, there were those who sternly prepared for expeditions. As for the residents of the city, there actually weren’t that many,

It would be crazy for someone to voluntarily become a permanent resident of a city such as this one which always stunk with the aura of death. The only ones that truly made this decision were the owners of the many inns and establishments that made up the city’s area.

These people were fearless in the face of profits.

Anyway, Damien and Ruyue disregarded it all as they entered one of the inns and booked a room.

Being infinitely close to the convention they were about to attend, it became much more important for them to keep up their roles, so they only purchased a single room.

But both of them were adults. Even if they tended to bicker like children whenever they wanted to have fun, this wasn't the time for such things. Damien took his spot on the floor without saying a word while Ruyue took the bed.

And like that, a peaceful night passed. When the sun once again rose, it was time for them to enter the tiger's den.

Standing in front of the myriad illusion veil, the duo looked into each other's eyes as they firmed their resolve. Although they had always been aware of the importance of their mission, it was only settling in now.

They were going to be surrounded by enemies on all sides, with some being far out of the scope of their abilities. If they made one wrong move, they'd be crushed without even knowing how they died.

But it was the life of a cultivator to take risks. And it was their responsibility to acquire good information and make it out safely. For the next 3 months, they would have to be on their highest alert.

Nodding at each other silently, they rushed into the fog.

‘This fog... its reputation is well deserved.’ Damien sighed inwardly as they made their way forward. They had only been running for a few minutes, but he could already feel the range of his awareness slowly decreasing.

What used to be enough to cover an entire mid-sized state became only enough to cover small states, before gradually sinking to the level of a city. It was such a drastic decrease that Damien felt slightly claustrophobic.

He was someone who loved to be in control. And the current feeling he was getting was the complete opposite. The fog was making him wary. He was now feeling much luckier for the escape talismans they had on them.

If he was feeling this uncomfortable with just the outskirts of the fog, he had no desire to find out what it would feel like to go deeper within it, especially if he had to do so while fleeing.

Luckily, he wouldn’t have to deal with it for long as he saw their final destination up ahead.

The location they had marked wasn’t some majorly specific area on the outskirts of the mountain range, as the fog would never permit them to find such a place.

Rather, it was a landmark that could be widely recognized. Tian Yang had gathered a truly concrete amount of information for them to make preparations from.

Since the same problem with the fog would affect everyone, the wicked sects had set up checkpoints along the location where those attending the convention could be guided to the true location.

As they made their way closer, he saw the glorious form of a large river that snaked through the myriad illusion veil, creating a border between the outskirts and the truly dangerous parts of the fog.

The river wasn't enormously wide, with 3rd class beings able to cross it with a single leap, but its depth couldn't be underestimated. However, this wasn't the river's main attraction.

Rather, it was the blood-red color of the water that gave this river its name and fame.

A river that was rumored to be formed by the blood of countless cultivators that had died within it. A river that used to just be a simple gorge on the outskirts of the 3000 beast mountain range.

"The Bloodstone River," Damien muttered as he witnessed it with his own eyes.

Chapter 184 - Bloodstone River [2]

"The Bloodstone River," Damien muttered as he witnessed it with his own eyes.

It truly deserved its name. He couldn't even tell the difference between this water and true blood. Even from this distance, its consistency didn't seem the same as pure water.

Suddenly, a masked man appeared before them. His entire body was covered in a black cloak as well, making him look overly suspicious.

Yet, nobody would question him. It wasn't irregular for cultivators to hide their identities as such when they went out on adventures. Who knew what would happen?

There were many cases where naive rogue cultivators accidentally offended powerful young masters or similar people and had their entire lineages eradicated. Such concealment became a regular practice for those without backing.

Gazing at the suspicious man, the duo didn't feel any nervousness. They knew his purpose in approaching them.

"Would the two of you like assistance in crossing this river?" The man asked, motioning towards a small ferry that was positioned on the shore of the river. Coupled with the man's appearance, it was like a blatant allusion to crossing the River Styx.

However, the duo had no intention of crossing the river. "No. Instead, we want to explore what's held in the deepest depths of this Bloodstone River."

Hearing Damien's words, the man's eyes flashed for a second. But it wasn't something either of the two would miss. Slightly nodding his head, the man beckoned them forward.

"If that is your wish, then so be it. The deepest depths of the Bloodstone River lay 5 kilometers east. There, you will meet a man who can guide you to your desires."

Damien nodded lightly towards the cloaked man before turning eastward.

The words Damien had spoken were the keywords to announce participation in the event about to take place. It wasn't that hard to figure out, but it was still enough to guarantee veracity.

Damien and Ruyue once again took off running before reaching the location the man had pointed out. Soon, they met the guide the cloaked man had told them about.

From there, the process of gaining entry was simple.

The new cloaked individual took Damien and Ruyue towards a large tree in the vicinity and placed his hand on its bark. This action in turn opened up the tree trunk, revealing a passageway within.

“We hope you enjoy your stay.” The cloaked individual said as Damien and Ruyue entered the passage, the hidden entrance closing behind them.

In truth, this event wasn’t as secretive as one would expect. It wasn’t actually a hidden event at all.

Just like how the righteous sects held an annual tournament and gathering of sects, the wicked powers did the same.

It was a showcase and a sort of festival.

For this reason, they didn’t need to care too much about spies infiltrating the event. They did the same for the righteous sect events, so why shouldn’t they allow the same?

In reality, the righteous sects were well aware of this convention, they just left it alone as there was nothing to gain from interrupting it.

Even if they wanted to use the gathering to annihilate the wicked powers, they would obviously fail miserably. And if they didn’t, they’d lose too much manpower in the raid for it to actually be a worthwhile investment.

And with such a delicate balance in place, this was the perfect place for many covert operations and plans to take place. It was a similar concept to hiding in plain sight.

This was the reason Damien and Ruyue had to take so much effort to conceal themselves. Even if righteous sect spies weren't monitored within the main convention, they obviously wouldn't be able to gain entry to anywhere important.

This was the same for those who came from other uninvolved wicked sects.

As Damien and Ruyue made their way down the steep staircase that made up this hidden passageway, they came across a heavy iron door with a single latch on it.

As if sensing their presence, the latch opened, giving way to a piercing set of eyes that scanned them up and down before the door slowly opened, revealing the scenery within.

It was a large cavern that could almost be mistaken for an open-air city if not for the rocky ceiling above them.

There were tens of pavilions and stalls set up around the area, forming a scene reminiscent of a state fair on earth.

The makeshift streets were lined with cultivators of all shapes and sizes, the only thing they had in common being the half masks that covered their faces.

It was another measure of ensuring that no identities were revealed unless one chose to do so themselves. As for what happened if they did, well that was their own problem. The organizers of the event wouldn't clean up after the idiots who made their own messes.

Damien and Ruyue had also donned these half masks, as they were given out by the cloaked individual that opened the passageway for them.

The duo strolled the streets and took in the sights, in awe of how little the scene resembled what they had originally thought it'd look like.

'This place is a lot cleaner than I expected it to be.'

'Yeah. From the way the wicked sects are usually portrayed, I didn't think they'd abide by conventional standards like this.'

Damien and Ruyue communicated through mana transmission.

The perception Damien had formed of the wicked sects from the way those at the Celestial Star Palace talked about them was much more primitive, to say the least.

He expected them to be killing each other wantonly, committing debauchery on the side of the street, and many other less than civilized things.

Yet, it wasn't like that at all.

Perhaps there were some who had fallen so far into depravity that they didn't care about image or public decency in the slightest, but most had enough sense to not act so idiotic.

And such rules were enforced in this place. Well, to a certain extent.

"Hey, you! Didn't I tell you to stay the fuck away from me?!" A burly man yelled towards another man in front of him, evidently annoyed.

"Did you? I'm sorry, I don't tend to remember the buzzing of flies around me." The smaller man responded.

"The fuck did you just say to me?!" The burly man yelled furiously.

"Ohhh I remember you now. You're that idiot who I crippled a while back because you tried to lay hands on my woman."

"Your woman?! She was my woman from the start! Who gave you the right to call her that?!"

"Well, she didn't seem to think she was your woman when she was moaning my name last night."

The burly man's face had turned redder than a tomato at this point, and it was clear he could no longer hold himself back.

"That's it. If I deal with you, she'll be mine again. That's all it takes, right!" The aura of an entry-level 3rd class surged from his body and the earth around him trembled.

Suddenly, a massive spike protruded from the ground, aiming at the smaller man's stomach.

"This is the price of messing with me."

Yet, the smaller man made no move to dodge. Instead, he lightly waved his hand, causing the earth spike to crack and shatter into pieces.

"W-what did you just do?" The burly man asked in trepidation.

"Well, let's just hope you learn how to pick your opponents in your next life. Also, you shouldn't fall in love with sluts who lust after any man with even a bit of power." The smaller man responded.

Before the burly man could say another word, the smaller man vanished, appearing in front of him and pushing his palm towards his head.

It was too late for the burly man to block, so he tried to use his aura for defense. But he was no match for his opponent. As the smaller man said, he had no idea how to pick his opponents.

When the palm reached the burly man's head, the reaction was instant. The force of the palm completely obliterated everything in its path, causing the man's head to explode like a watermelon, his skull fragments and brains painting the ground in their color.

Lightly flicking the blood off of his hand, the smaller man looked at the falling corpse in disdain before walking off, pretending as if nothing had ever happened.

And just like him, the rest of the witnesses of the event went on with their days as if the prior interaction never took place.

‘Due to a small quarrel like that, a man lost his life.’

Damien wasn’t one to highly value the lives of others, but it was the first time he had seen someone get killed over something so minuscule. Shaking his head lightly, he made a mental note to himself not to end up in the same situation.

‘The world truly is a much more ruthless place than I thought.’

Chapter 185 - Convention [1]

In a certain part of the underground space, there were 8 raised platforms where many battles were taking place. On two of those, there were familiar figures taking part in the festivities.

Damien and Ruyue had spent the last day browsing the convention and understanding the proceedings so far, and they were generally underwhelmed by what they found.

The stalls lining the streets were like market vendors, selling everything from artifacts and herbs to cultivation techniques.

Yet, at least one out of every ten stalls was full of scam treasures.

However, the thing that stood out most was probably the cultivation manuals. They were the main reason why wicked powers were considered wicked in the first place, and they were the main cause of the deteriorating humanity of those who join these sects.

There were many different methods within these techniques, some even made to turn victims into cultivation cauldrons.

It was an interesting experience seeing all these wicked techniques, as it opened Damien's mind to many methods he didn't think were possible.

With the way the system functioned, killing was the most effective way to gain levels. With this kind of system, he didn't think that stealing cultivation was such a big deal.

After all, experience gained through killing was essentially stolen from those that died. However, it was different with these manuals. Rather than a part of their experience, they would maximize the amount of experience gained from the victim.

But there was a penalty for doing so. The system was an entity that prioritized balance, leaving every action with a reaction. In return for gaining such immense benefits from killing, the user of these techniques would lose their sanity.

Not only that, but some of these techniques also deteriorated the appearance of bodily function of the user. Damien passed many people who already looked like soulless husks as they perused the convention grounds.

And after they made their way past these stalls, the duo found the dueling stage they were currently on. It was a place for the younger generation to show their fangs and compete.

Yet, from their observation before joining, it was evident how little they cared about magnanimity in the wicked powers. The winner of the duels was never the last one standing, rather it was the last one alive.

It made him wonder what the wicked sects were doing since they were effectively killing off seedlings that could become important to their powers in the future, but Ruyue explained it to him well.

It was a similar concept to what went on with the economy on earth. The rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Those who won would be fed all the resources that would have been distributed among many if it was a righteous power.

Even if the righteous sects also poured more resources into the strongest and most talented, they never forsook those with less talent or strength.

The wicked sects were clearly more prone to building elite forces with smaller numbers than the righteous sects.

Boom!

Black lightning coursed through the dueling stage as Damien unleashed his power.

However, his opponent didn't do the same. A deep purple mist spread from her as her body began to move rhythmically.

Her lithe and graceful movements entranced the audience watching her, making it so they couldn't take their eyes off of her.

Even if they were watching from afar, the effects of her technique still affected them. A slight purple aura began to radiate from their eyes as their expressions began to dull.

The woman smirked at the sight. This was the power she was proud of, the power to seduce any and every man to become her loyal slave.

The Lustful Fairy Sect. It was a power diametrically opposed to the Supreme Fairy Paradise in principle, and the members of the sect fully embraced their traits, evident in the name of their power.

The power of lust was something that could be incredibly dangerous when exploited. It was the foundation of their power and the reason they were highly regarded and despised by other powers.

Yet, it had a fatal weakness. And the man that was her opponent at the moment happened to be one of those weaknesses.

Before the woman could even understand what was going on, Damien was in front of her with her neck clutched in his iron grip.

The power of lust? Damien knew it well. It had tried to control him before when his bestial instincts went out of control, but such experiences had led him to learn to control such feelings.

But that wasn't the reason he stood on the stage unaffected at the moment. The power this woman was using wasn't necessarily lust itself, it was closer to charm.

And this kind of fake charm was nothing more than an illusion. An illusion that he had absolute immunity towards.

His cold eyes looked into her's and without remorse, he tightened his grip. He could clearly feel the disgusting feeling of bones cracking within his hand, but he didn't care.

This was a gathering of scum. Even if he knew well that not everyone here was scum, he had to be scum to fit in. Not to mention, he felt that this woman very much deserved death for daring to attempt what she was doing.

There were 3 things Damien hated most in the world, if spiders weren't counted. And being manipulated was absolutely on that list.

He wouldn't stand by as someone attempted to pull such a trick on him.

The second the woman died, the purple mist that surrounded her dispersed and the audience slowly regained their senses. Naturally, many cheers followed this.

Damien wasn't the only one who hated being manipulated, after all.

Seeing that the result was finalized, the one in charge of the match raised his voice.

“Winner! Zhen Fang from the Twilight Blood Sect!”

Damien smiled lightly before looking over at the adjacent stage, where Ruyue had also finished her match.

Naturally, the two hadn't come to such a large event without backing.

The Twilight Blood Sect.

It was a reclusive power that had a powerful name within the wicked sect community. The power had a rich history of conflict with the righteous sects, making it an example that mana sects follow.

The sect even accumulated a blood debt with the Jade Heavenly Palace, launching a campaign 100 years ago and successfully assassinating the Young Palace Lord of the sect.

Ever since that event, the two sects had been engaged in a silent war in the shadows. Many people on both sides had died in this conflict, but the power of the Twilight Blood Sect never seemed to diminish.

However, the entire conflict was a facade. The Twilight Blood Sect was actually a power sponsored by the righteous sects, being their key into the wicked society.

It was a fact that remained unknown to most, but due to the nature of this mission, Damien and Ruyue became privy to such information.

And although it was a cover for the righteous sects, it didn't discredit the power at all. The Twilight Blood Sect was truly as vicious as it portrayed itself.

Chapter 186 - Convention [2]

The lives that were lost in the false war between the Twilight Blood Sect and the Jade Heavenly Palace were real. Those were sacrifices made in order to keep the wicked sect away from suspicion.

Even the Young Palace Lord was sacrificed for this purpose, making it evident that the facade was more important to those in power than the lives of a few, regardless of their importance.

And even besides the war, the Twilight Blood Sect had committed many wicked deeds. However, their cultivation technique remained unknown.

The sect itself was known for being reclusive, and even the officials from other wicked powers had never seen its Sect Master. For occasions like this one, a representative was always sent.

There were rumors that the Sect Master had been injured in a conflict with the Jade Heavenly Palace, while others believed he was in the middle of cultivating towards a major breakthrough, but nothing was made official.

Even the sect never confirmed nor denied the rumors, leaving most people puzzled. Yet, nobody could find out the truth. As previously mentioned, the Sect's power was always on an incline, and any spies that were planted within would be swiftly removed.

When he learned all this information, Damien felt that the world was always forcing him to see how nothing could be described in terms of black and white.

Although he was never one to separate between two categories like this, it was still something pushed onto him. Righteous or wicked, good or evil, it didn't matter. He had long since learned to view the world in grey.

And if he was to ask himself what he thought of the Twilight Blood Sect and the actions of the righteous sects? He couldn't come up with a concrete answer.

If he had to assign whether it was morally just or not, he'd objectively say it was wrong. But did that mean he opposed it? What would he do if he was in the same position as them?

Frankly, he wasn't adept enough at politics to answer such a question definitely, but if he had to weigh his opinion, he couldn't find fault with the righteous sects for their actions.

Even if the method was unorthodox or vile, it did what it was intended to do. The sect's existence was the reason why Damien and Ruyue were able to infiltrate without any hindrances.

It was properly living up to its purpose. And for this reason, Damien couldn't complain about it, not that he would've done so in the first place.

As he was immersed in his thoughts, he and Ruyue had already left the dueling stages and were once again traversing through the many pavilions within the underground space.

They had already fought 5 battles each, which was the limit of what they were allowed to do per day of the convention. And it wasn't like they went up there for fun.

"He should be approaching us any time soon" Damien muttered as he quietly looked around.

And as he expected, a man who looked to be in his late 20s arrived in front of them not even 10 minutes later.

“Ah! It’s good to see you again, Junior brother and Junior sister!” He exclaimed, drawing attention to himself with his loud attitude.

But when the crowd noticed the insignia on his chest, they quickly turned their gazes away and minded their own business.

It was a blood-red moon with three ravens flying diagonally in front of it, the symbol of the Twilight Blood Sect.

“Come, come! I know the two of you have been enjoying the festivities so far, but we have much to discuss!” The man continued with a wink.

The duo nodded curtly before following after him, soon arriving in front of an inn that looked slightly fancier than the rest.

Arriving within, the man led them up two flights of stairs before arriving at a room and entering it. The room itself was nothing special, having a single bed and a relatively decent amount of space, but its entirety was covered in a formation that revealed itself before Damien’s eyes.

Even without extensive knowledge of runes, he was able to figure out its purpose. It was a soundproofing formation, and a high-grade one at that.

“Now that we’re here, I can speak freely,” the man said, “my name is Xian Lin, and I am an Elder of the Jada Heavenly Palace. If I’m not mistaken, you two are from the Celestial Star Palace, are you not?”

Damien’s gaze sharpened at the man’s words. “Why would you suspect us to be from a righteous sect when we are clearly from the same power? Elder Hua would be immensely displeased with you.”

“Well, no need to worry about that. Elder Hua is my beloved and revered grandfather, after all.”

Hearing his words, Damien slightly relaxed bud guard. It was nothing more than a code he needed to confirm before revealing his identity to anyone. In a place where many important figures might gather, who knew what kind of tricks might be pulled?

Nodding his head, Damien decided to continue the conversation. The man’s identity had been verified, so even if he kept his guard up, there was no more reason to pretend.

“We are indeed the same as you, however, I won’t reveal anything else. Anyway, that isn’t the purpose of the meeting, is it? Let’s get on to business.”

Xian Lin nodded his head lightly. “I simply wanted to confirm, since I saw you making a fuss on the battle stage. I am the representative of the sect for this year’s convention.

“However, I’m aware that your reason for attending is different from mine, as we all have been assigned separate positions. I met with you two today to both verify your affiliation to any prying eyes and give you a bit of intel that might be useful to you.”

Speaking this far, Xian Lin's expression became more serious. "In the past 2 days that I have been present here, I have discovered that there isn't just a single convention taking place here."

"Hmm? Isn't this a gathering for wicked sects? What other powers would dare to hold an event in the same place?" Ruyue questioned.

"Well, even I'm not sure about that. From what I've seen, it's a variety of people from different powers that are entering this convention. I haven't been able to find a link between them quite yet.

"However, if I had to make an educated guess, I would say they are all part of a separate organization that works within the wicked powers or uses it as a front. There's no way the leaders and Sect Masters are unaware of this hidden convention, so at least a few of them must be involved as well."

Hearing Xian Lin's conjecture, there was only a single group Damien could think to be responsible.

'Devil worshippers.'

Although his knowledge was shallow and he wasn't sure if there were other similar organizations, he firmly believed that his guess was right.

Call it intuition, or call it jumping to conclusions, but he felt that this time there was no other possibility.

And besides, wasn't their goal at this convention to monitor the devil worshippers? There were plenty of others like Xian Lin who could infiltrate the wicked sect convention.

Thinking this far, Damien sent a transmission to Ruyue to get her approval. And it didn't take her much thought to arrive at a similar conclusion.

Looking at Xian Lin, Damien felt no hesitation. He wanted to act fast, even if this mission itself was more of a long game.

“Very well. Take us to the hidden convention so we can investigate it further.”

Chapter 187 - Hidden Convention [1]

Xian Lin was a smart man, and seeing the attitude the two had towards him, he felt it better if he didn't delay.

Although they were technically allies working towards the same goal, they obviously didn't treat him as such. And frankly, he felt that this was the proper attitude they should have.

If this duo, who hadn't even told him their names, had been more open, he would've doubted their credibility.

After all, regardless of how many cautionary measures and codes they created, there was never a situation where they could be 100% sure of each other's identities.

Nevertheless, he didn't dwell on the matter too much. The group stayed in the inn until what would've been nightfall if they could see the sky before departing back through the convention.

As they walked, Damien and Ruyue once again had time to admire the sights around them, but it didn't seem like that was all they were doing.

If Damien had to be honest, ever since that night in the unnamed forest where Ruyue had cried on his chest, their relationship had become awkward at best.

Even with how they joked around on their way to the mountain range, he still noticed a wall she was trying to erect between them.

But he couldn't really say anything about it. From what he could figure out, she was in the process of healing. Although the village massacre hadn't been a big deal to him, it was different for her, who had ended up falling victim to the trap.

If what she needed now was time to come out of her shell again, he could only give it to her. They weren't close enough for him to be of any more help.

He chose to put the matter aside for now since they were currently on a mission. It'd be weird if she acted too cheerful in the serious atmosphere they had around them since arriving.

While the group was in their own thoughts, they arrived at an unassuming wall at the far end of the convention. This wall was the end of this massive cavern, meaning they could go no further.

Or at least, that's how it should've been.

The main strength of Damien's eyes so far had been their ability to see through illusions, and once again they lived up to this purpose.

Directly in front of them, there was an illusion around 3 meters in height resembling a door. Past this door, he could feel plenty of life auras as if there was another hidden meeting going on there.

“This wall is where I’ve seen the people I mentioned disappearing into. I don’t know exactly where they’re going, but I’m sure it’s somewhere around here.” Xian Lin said.

“Yeah, I see it as well. Thanks for your help so far, but we can take it from here. I’m sure you have your own duties to attend to.” Damien responded curtly.

Although it came off arrogant, Xian Lin was well aware that it was simply their wariness towards him that elicited such an attitude. Because of this, he could only wryly smile and bid his farewells.

“As you said, I am here as the Sect’s representative, so I have many duties to attend to. I hope the two of you find what you are looking for.”

After Xian Lin left, Damien and Ruyue didn’t immediately enter the premises of the hidden convention, instead opting to watch out for other entrants beforehand.

And it only took a single group for Damien to confirm his suspicions. As the group of individuals passed the illusion, he ended up finding something interesting.

A familiar black aura that smelled of death radiated from each and every one of them. He had seen it once before on the Northern Continent, but he didn’t pay it much attention back then since the enemies had proudly declared themselves as devil worshippers.

The curious thing was that the strength of these auras was abysmal. There was one among them that had slightly more aura than the rest, but it still didn’t amount to much.

Remembering the leader that the Shen clan head had fought, he realized there must be ranks among even the devil worshippers.

It might've been stupid of him to think otherwise, but the fact of the matter was that he never necessarily considered it. They were all the same to him anyway, they were enemies.

Still, since the fact that the hidden convention was for devil worshippers had been confirmed after he watched a few more groups enter, he and Ruyue decided to enter as well.

The main preparations they had to make before embarking on this trip were all related to identity. From their new names and relationships to their affiliation with the Twilight Blood Sect, and finally...

Damien looked down at his own body, which was radiating a similar black aura to those he had watched previously.

This was yet another reason for Damien to praise Tian Yang's seemingly endless capabilities. The two of them only had to take a simple pill, but now they were radiating the aura of a Nox follower.

What was the secret behind this? Damien didn't bother to ask. Back then, there was a clear look in Tian Yang's eyes that forbid questioning. But he was sure that the top experts of the world had done some...not so righteous experiments to create such things.

But there was no use in complaining. Such inventions were the reason he could successfully infiltrate as he was doing today. It was the same case as what he felt with the Twilight Blood Sect.

If it was anyone else, perhaps their opinions and view on the righteous sects would have been shattered, but for Damien and Ruyue it wasn't that big of a deal.

While Damien was an outsider and had never really taken the "righteous" title seriously, Ruyue was a core member of a major clan regardless of how terribly they treated her. She was well aware that the powers that coined themselves as good were anything but.

Maybe that was part of the reason the two of them had been given this mission. Besides the fact that they could keep their mouths shut, they weren't going to be disillusioned so there was no worry about defection or anything of the sort.

Thinking these kinds of useless things, Damien led Ruyue through the illusory area of the rock wall that functioned as a door.

There was no tedious procedure for them to prove themselves, but there was a guard radiating the aura of a peak 3rd class existence waiting at the door.

On his face were a pair of glasses, and considering how nigh impossible it was to have bad vision as one's body evolved through ranking up, Damien was sure they were an artifact.

Most likely, they were used to see the black aura that surrounded Devil worshippers. Anyone who had such an aura would gain entry into the hidden convention.

Yet, as Damien looked around the new area he had just entered, he no longer knew whether "convention" was the proper word to describe it.

No, rather than a convention, it was more a combination of a trading post, an exchange fair, and an auction.

Chapter 188 - Hidden Convention [2]

Well, although he said it like that his description wasn't entirely accurate.

The floor plan of this new area was much smaller than that of the main convention, and it was separated into three different areas.

The first, as he said, resembled an auction house. There was a large stage with rows of seats lined up in front of it, as well as VIP boxes with tinted glass that even Damien couldn't see through with his eyes.

Noticing this, he mused that it must be the material of the glass that gave it its one-way feature rather than any formation.

Anyway, the auction house didn't necessarily matter at this point since there was no actual auction going on. Instead, it looked like the area was currently in the process of being fleshed out for an auction that would take place in the future.

Rather than that, his focus was drawn towards the other two areas. A trading post and an exchange fair.

While they were the same in essence, the difference was the product. While the trading area was for material goods, the exchange fair was more of a science fair, where knowledge was being exchanged.

But none of it was innocent. In fact, the main good being sold in the trade area was slaves. Slaves of all different races, but for the most part, they were bipedal and humanoid.

And that wasn't to say that there was nothing wrong with the exchange fair. It was to be expected, though, considering that this was a den of devil worshippers.

They worked for the Nox, so their agenda would reflect that. Seeing the proceedings, Damien was reminded of the Niflheim base he and the girls had raided back on earth.

He remembered when Rose and Elena had told him about their discoveries, where scientists were experimenting on humanoids and injecting them with a mysterious serum that tried to transform them but ended up driving them insane.

‘What the hell are these damn aliens planning?’

He still couldn't figure it out. Artificial Nox? What was the point of that? Devil worshippers? Didn't they already have those in droves?

So what was the point of all this experimentation? If the Nox served to gain nothing from it, then it wouldn't be taking place at all.

Damien found himself cursing his lack of information. It wasn't just him, but everyone he knew lacked information, be it those on Apeiron or the Cloud Plane.

He knew a single person who had more information that he could use, but that person had already died. Even when they met for the first time, he was nothing more than a soul fragment.

Sighing lightly, Damien once again found himself suppressing his thoughts. It was annoying, but it had to be done as there were much more important things to do.

“Hey, did you hear about what’s going to happen at the auction in a month?”

“What?”

“No, I told you to guess!”

“Bastard! Just tell me already! Stop playing these stupid games!”

As they walked, Damien and Ruyue began overhearing many conversations taking place in the surroundings. Of them, the most prevalent were those about the auction.

“There are many crazy items being auctioned in a month. Things that even those Sect Masters would covet.”

“Really? Those guys who are always acting high and mighty?”

“Yeah, I heard there will be artifacts that are even at Chaos rank. And those are just the starters.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I heard the main item is a gift provided by the Lords themselves!”

“Sigh, I wanted to take part in the auction and maybe win myself something good, but it looks like it’s too high profile for me.”

“No shit! What could someone like you do at an auction? You’re more broke than even a beggar!”

“Hey, don’t talk to me like that! I’m going to become a Priest one day, and I’ll be sure to punish you at that time.”

“Priest? You’re just trash. Fuck being a Priest, I’ll become an Inheritor and rule over everyone!”

“Hah? You called me trash? As if someone like you could become an Inheritor. You should know that only those crazy talented people who follow our Lords even have a chance at the position.”

“Hey, can’t you just let a man dream?”

“Hahahaha! As if!”

More than just information on the auction, Damien was given another pleasant surprise. Worshipper, Priest, Inheritor. Judging by the way they talked about them, these were the ranks given to devil worshippers to enforce hierarchy.

And more than just rank, there seemed to be Ake thing else involved as well. The inheritor title in particular interested Damien, as the word alone was dangerous when related to the Nox.

‘Damien, I think we should attend the auction.’ Ruyue suddenly transmitted.

Damien raised his brow. Ruyue had been especially silent ever since they entered the underground, leaving everything to him, but she finally spoke up. And knowing her personality, the words couldn’t be empty.’

Thinking it over, he nodded his head in agreement. Attending the auction would be a great way to gain more information, especially considering what the main item was.

Plus, Tian Yang had given them such an enormous mountain of spirit stones to use on this trip that he almost felt bad for not spending any money.

It was a mountain so big that Damien felt he was currently carrying more wealth than some smaller sects.

A devious grin crept up Damien’s face as he thought of this point.

‘I can’t physically pay that old man back for beating me up, but maybe I can make his pockets hurt enough to make him shed a tear.’

Far away from the convention, at the Celestial Star Palace, a familiar old man was peacefully meditating within his residence before a sudden ominous feeling began to creep up his spine.

He was already at a point where he didn't think he could grow in power more unless he decided to leave the planet, so there was no use in meditating for comprehension purposes.

Instead, he was using the arts the Celestial Star Palace became known for, divination. Regardless of the reason, he wasn't a fan of sending young kids to do missions that their seniors should be taking on.

But no matter how hard he tried to divine things related to them, or even if he tried finding out their current progress, he could only see bits and pieces. It was as if something was interfering with his divinations.

Considering his strength, he felt that it was impossible for that to happen, but the truth was in front of his eyes, disallowing him from denying it.

He couldn't do anything about the interference, but from the bits and pieces he could see, his disciples seemed to be doing fine. In fact, they had gotten even closer in this time that they were away.

What startled him, however, was the final vision he saw. It was Damien wearing a smile that screamed mischief. And for some odd reason, he was 100% sure that smile was directed towards him, even though Damien wasn't aware he was watching.

Shivering slightly, he opened his eyes. 'What the hell is that kid planning to do?'

Chapter 189 - Auction [1]

A month quickly passed by as Damien and Ruyue continued attending the hidden convention of devil worshippers, attempting to glean any information they could.

Meanwhile, in another hidden area connected to the main convention, a meeting of grandiose figures was taking place.

There were many people filling the room, numbering 32, but most of these people were merely standing on the outer edges of the area.

At the main table, there were 8 personages that all others in the room looked at with immense respect. Clearly, their status couldn't match up to these 8 in the slightest.

“Those trashes who betrayed their homeland are getting bolder and bolder recently. If they hadn't even given us any benefit from their activities, I might have gone to eradicate them myself.”

The speaker was a familiar face, yet his tone was vastly different. Xian Lin who seemed friendly and overly open with Damien and Ruyue was now sitting at this table of esteemed persons with a haughty and aloof attitude.

“That's true. Even if I don't care about this planet, it's still my home for now.”

“As if they'd dare do anything so slick right under our noses. Those fools only know how to dance in the palm of their masters.”

“Still, their so-called Lords are definitely grandiose and ambitious. Even I'm not stupid enough to claim such wide-scale domination.”

“Well, at least they presented an opportunity to leave this dying planet. Those damn righteous sects have always pissed me off.”

A variety of complaints and opinions filled the room, mostly spoken by 6 others at the main table. Their every word was wrought with disdain and malice towards those other than themselves.

“Enough.”

However, a single word was enough to silence all of them. Although there was no grand standing or ranking between those highest powers in the wicked sects, there was one undisputed fact. That was, the most powerful of them all.

The Eclipsing Shadows Sect.

It was an existence that could rival even the main Palaces of the Central Continent. A power that even Tian Yang and those on his level had to be wary of.

Similar to the Twilight Blood Sect, many of their proceedings and even their cultivation techniques were largely kept secret. Even when their disciples went out into the world, they would never leave anyone who learned these secrets alive.

The disciples of this sect had the firmest wills and tightest lips, bearing a kind of loyalty that one would be hard-pressed to find in the wicked sects, where personal gains were prioritized above all else.

And the leader of such a sect had just spoken. Perhaps it was an unspoken law that the Eclipsing Shadow Sect was number one, but that didn't mean anyone had the gall to go against it.

The man in question sat at the head of this grand table, and a single word from him commanded the attention of all those present.

"There is no need for this pointless drivel. We are here to discuss business, so business is all that shall be discussed. Now tell me, what have you all learned within the last month of this convention?"

The other participants of the meeting looked at each other in hesitation, not knowing for sure who should speak first, when Xian Lin stood up.

"Since everyone is so busy being a wuss, I shall speak first. I took the time to wander the roads of the convention as an average cultivator, and although I still brandished my affiliation, I did not compromise my position. Through this, I have spotted numerous people I suspect to be spies from the righteous powers."

"As we thought, they sent their men here."

"What else should be expected from those low lives?"

"Silence." The Eclipsing Shadow Sect Leader shushed them once again.

"It is only natural that they sent spies, but from your words, it seems like the number is greater this time around. They must be wary of the dogs of those aliens."

Everyone else couldn't help but agree. That was the only difference between this convention and all others that had taken place.

"Still, the illusion formation those dogs have employed is at a level where their spies will not be able to penetrate. We need not worry about such pointless matters. Now, onto the important topic. What news has come about the auction taking place?"

"Ah, that auction. Those dogs actually have good heads on their shoulders when it comes to survival instinct. It seems they know they can't gain a foothold without our powers, so they've already sent us invitations."

"I heard that the items on auction are going to be quite interesting. Many Chaos rank artifacts and rare materials are on the list they handed out. Yet, the most intriguing part is the final item."

"That thing? Has its identity been revealed?"

"No news yet, but it's sure to be something interesting. They say their 'Lords' are the ones who provided it, after all."

"Hmm." The Eclipsing Shadow Sect Leader listened in on these conversations with a pondering look on his face.

The truth was, unlike these people, he had a vague idea of what the final item was set to be. He was someone who kept a firm grasp over his sect, never letting betrayal go unpunished.

And even if they didn't defect to the righteous path, siding with those aliens was still a form of defection. Any time one of those rats managed to sneak in, he would make sure they were thoroughly wrung for all the information they had.

And he had plenty of satisfactory means to do so.

Only recently, he had caught a big fish trying to enter his net. During interrogation, he learned this man was what they considered as an "Inheritor". Through this, he was able to learn the identity of the final item.

'Death Seed'

It was such a simple name, yet he knew its use had to be anything but. There was undoubtedly some sort of scheme behind this auction. It was most likely a way to bring the sect heads over to their side.

Whether it was through civility or force? He wasn't sure yet. That was something he'd find out once he saw the Death Seed in person.

Still, he hadn't brought much wealth with him this time, not bothering to empty the sect's coffers for such an auction. He was well aware that none of these fools would dare compete with him if he truly wanted something.

Concluding his thoughts, the Eclipsing Shadow Sect Leader returned his focus to the ongoing conversation, where the other Sect heads and representatives were still speculating about the auction.

“Let us end this topic here,” he said, “the auction starts in but a day and a half. We shall find out everything we need to know at that time.”

Meanwhile, back at the hidden convention, Damien and Ruyue exited an inn with refreshed looks on their faces.

The past month had been generally taxing on them, not physically but mentally.

They had witnessed a great deal of generally unsavory things, and it wasn't a pleasant experience.

Well, for Ruyue, that is. Damien's mental stress mainly came from holding her back and making sure she didn't fly into a rage and burn everyone to cinders.

“Sigh, although it was a tough time, at least we managed to get some information.” He said wearily. However, it didn't take long for his eyes to brighten once again.

The time for the auction to start had finally arrived.

Chapter 190 - Auction [2]

Damien and Ruyue made their way past the crowds of people lining the stone roads of the underground cavern as they headed to the auction site.

Unlike when they first arrived at this hidden convention, the site had been fully erected, and the pavilion could be seen from many meters away, even with the hubbub of people crowding the streets.

When they arrived in front of the building, they were greeted by a line so long they couldn't see the end of it. Only then did they realize that the crowds they had waded past were all waiting in said line.

However, they didn't have to pay attention to such details. Xian Lin had contacted them a day ago and had given them an invitation to the auction meant for the Twilight Blood Sect. Although they normally should have gotten only one of these, Xian Lin had pulled his weight to make sure the duo also got a spot.

As such, they swiftly bypassed the line and found one of the many attendants on the first floor of the two-story building that had been built in this area.

"Hello, if you are planning to participate in the auction, you must wait in the line you saw on your way here." The attendant said with a slight hint of contempt in his expression.

Evidently, there were plenty of people who had tried to bypass the line and bribe their way in, and the attendant made it clear he believed Damien and Ruyue fell in this category.

After all, their looks with their disguises on were generally average, perfectly middle of the pack. There was nothing in particular that stood out about the duo as even the aura of their elemental affinities was hidden.

The only detail that could raise a brow was the logo of the Twilight Blood Sect that was patched onto their robes, but obviously, the attendant didn't care for any of these things.

Or rather, he didn't even bother to check. His identity was that of a devil worshipper, regardless of the politeness he showed for the sake of the event. He had long since stopped caring about affiliations to sects that would be destroyed as soon as his Lords took control of the world.

Damien was well acquainted with the so-called "auction house" scenario, where plenty of trouble and unneeded attention could follow him, but he had no desire to partake in such annoyances.

Rather than face slap this attendant who was probably sick of the shit the many idiots wandering these halls had put him through, Damien chose to be civil.

He silently withdrew a thin sheet of parchment from his spatial ring. It was coarse to the touch and had a sort of aura that no ordinary paper could contain. This material was specially constructed for the sake of this event so that nobody could force their way in with fake invitations.

The attendant swiftly grabbed the paper that Damien handed to him and perused its contents before a slight smile crept up his face.

"Ah! I see the esteemed guests have been invited by our leaders to attend this auction. Forgive my insolence earlier, but it is necessary to stay on guard in case anyone tries anything funny. Anyway, ignore my pointless drivel, I'll show you to your private room."

Even the way the attendant addressed the duo had become more formal, but neither of them cared. Rather, Damien was focused on another detail.

Yes, a private room. Each sect that was invited was given its own private room to use during the auction. It would both conceal their identities and show their standing to the average cultivators that took up the ten thousand normal seats in the pavilion.

But to Damien, the former condition was most important. He didn't know exactly how much money he'd spend today, but he guaranteed it'd be in the millions of spirit stones.

This kind of wealth was something even he wasn't used to carrying around, as even his total wealth in Apeiron only amounted to several hundred thousand.

He didn't even trust himself to hold such wealth, which is why Ruyue had been in charge of the money during the trip.

While he was shuddering at the thought of throwing away what was essentially millions or even billions of dollars, the attendant had led the duo to their private room.

"If there is anything esteemed guests need, please be sure to press the button on the left side to call an attendant to the room. They will be sure to fulfill your requests. As for the button on the right, you may use it when you are ready to bid."

The attendant retreated while closing the door to the private room, and Damien and Ruyue were able to take a glance at the space they were given.

Similar to the hotel room Xian Lin had taken them to a month ago, this room was also equipped with many formations.

From what Damien could gather, there was one for soundproofing and another to conceal what was happening in the room. It seemed the latter formation would work in tandem with the glass he saw previously to totally isolate the space.

Now that he thought about it, Damien realized that he hadn't really put much thought into formations or runic arts at all. He hadn't encountered any during his stay in Apeiron, so he never bothered to learn.

However, they seemed overly abundant on the Cloud Plane. Damien had plenty of books collecting dust in his subspace inventory that he got way back when he was in the dungeon.

When he left Kurt's subspace, he took almost everything with him. He was sure there were books about formations within the pile since even alchemy seemed to have a small section.

Making up his mind to at least gain basic knowledge of runic arts, Damien made his way to the two-seated sofa in front of the glass looking down on the auction stage.

Without saying a word, Ruyue joined him.

The two of them watched in awkward silence as the guests continued to pile in, quickly filling out the seats of the action.

Damien was feeling especially constricted in the weird atmosphere. Witnessing the kinds of activities the devil worshippers were partaking in seemed to take a hit on Ruyue's psyche.

She had been mostly silent ever since they entered the convention; but her aura had become noticeably frosty over the past month.

Truth be told, Damien would have been similar if it was his first time witnessing such things. But, they were doing the same thing on earth.

Experimentation, human trafficking, killing of innocents, these kinds of sins were just a part of the tally Damien could make in his head.

And the fact that they were happening on multiple planets was even worse. He didn't like it at all, but it wasn't his place to say anything.

He was a 3rd class, in this world's terms a Core Formation realm expert. If he went to earth, he could dominate as a god. If he went to Apeiron, he could become a premier existence just under the level of an emperor.

But here? Here he was merely a spec of dust. One of many.

He had come to realize that not all beings were created equal, regardless of strength. He remembered his days on Apeiron when he was just a 2nd class who hadn't even ascended to this level, but he could still kill mid-level 3rd classes:

He remembered the old men from the Burning Sun Sect that he had met. Even if they were a cut above the rest, they weren't anything he couldn't handle with his level of strength.

But here in the Central Continent, he would always come across beings that changed his perception. Long Chen, Ruyue, Tian Yang, even Xian Lin. Time and time again, he was forced to realize that his genius wasn't as insane as he originally thought it was.

Perhaps he was indeed a genius worth celebrating. He was most definitely at the head of the pack, but it wasn't by much. He wasn't anything heaven-defying.

In his observation, he realized how much environment could affect strength regardless of level. He realized that with the purity of mana on the Central Continent and the vast amount of fortuitous encounters one could have here, the 3rd class existences of Apeiron wouldn't be able to match up.

And as he thought this far, there was one question that took precedence above the rest.

How were Rose and Elena able to match this level even though they hadn't had access to the same benefits as the rest?