

Void 191

Chapter 191 - Auction [3]

Although the question about Rose and Elena's prowess, and even his own prowess, attempted to plague his mind, he decided not to linger on it for too long.

This was the kind of mystery he knew he couldn't solve no matter how deep he thought about it. He simply didn't have the worldly knowledge to do so. Perhaps, all his questions could be answered as he climbed up the stages of power.

Still, the difference in power between 3rd class existences on the different planets or even continents that he had been to had been duly noted in his mind. He had to make sure he didn't take his experiences in one world's power scale to define his universal power.

Who knows, there might even be a world where their normal 3rd classes were comparable to the 4th class existences he'd met so far.

Well, besides Tian Yang. The feeling of pressure and fear he felt from only a portion of Tian Yang's aura that day still haunted his mind. It was a clear wall he could see. A denominator between him and true power.

But no matter how high the wall seemed, it didn't seem impossible. He was glad he was given a goal to surpass.

As Damien submerged himself in his thoughts, the seats of the pavilion were completely filled and light whispers of conversation were spread throughout its area.

At this time, the lights in the pavilion dimmed, highlighting the stage that was still brightly lit.

A young woman entered the stage, her every step exuding grace with a slight touch of seduction. Her long blue hair flowed down her waist and her emerald green eyes were calm as a spring breeze. This sort of ethereal presence immediately captured the audience's attention.

"Isn't that Fairy Lin?"

"Indeed, it has to be her. There is none other who can match her beauty."

"What bullshit are you spouting? Fairy Tang is much more beautiful than her!"

"Hah? You dare insult my goddess?"

All sorts of murmurs were spread through the crowd as this Fairy Lin sauntered up to the podium in the middle of the stage.

Even Damien's eyes were attracted to her demeanor. Although it wasn't the same idolization the men from the crowd were feeling, he was still interested. He truly had to commend her ability to command attention.

Still, he made sure not to stare too hard and to make his honest intentions clear, since he could clearly feel the piercing cold gaze coming from his side, sending waves of shivers down his spine."

“Welcome, esteemed guests, to this humble auction. Although this one cannot guarantee her experience as an auctioneer, she can guarantee the veracity and quality of items up for auction today.” Fairy Lin started, panning her gaze across the crowd.

“I hope the honored guests will enjoy the proceedings today. Without further ado, I shall present the first item.”

Two female attendants entered the stage carrying a small tray covered in cloth. Damien sent his awareness towards it to see the item hidden underneath, only to find himself blocked.

‘They truly have their guards raised high for this event.’

Even if it was merely this piece of cloth that concealed the item before it was revealed for bidding, it was enchanted with the ability to block anyone’s senses trying to intrude. It was clear how much preparation was put into the auction.

When the attendants finally reached Fairy Lin, they took the cloth off, revealing a sleek black pair of throwing knives, shaped similarly to kunai.

“These throwing knives are called Shadow Edge. Make no mistake from their stature, these are peak SSS grade artifacts, capable of sneakily penetrating the defense of even an experienced Core Formation realm cultivator if they are caught off guard. The bidding will start at 10,000 spirit stones.”

“10,000 spirit stones!”

“12,000 spirit stones!”

“15,000!”

The audience in the normal seats went crazy. There were many present who were at the early stages of 3rd class, and even some still within the boundaries of 2nd class. This kind of weapon was a huge boon for them.

However, the bidding didn't last too long. Not many were interested in such an item, but were more intrigued about its significance to the auction. If the very first item was an SSS rank artifact, they could only imagine what would come late.

The bidding soon finished at 30,000 spirit stones before the auction continued. And as expected, Chaos rank artifacts began to show themselves after the 5th item.

Damien didn't pay too much attention to the auction, knowing he had to save money for the final item. Instead, he immersed himself in thought about the discoveries they made in the last month.

Besides the things he already knew, Damien actually didn't end up learning much. The actions of these devil worshippers almost marched the actions of the dark imps on earth to the T.

The experiments weren't even that different, with the same black substance being injected into victims and similar harrowing results in the end. Even after an entire month, Damien hadn't witnessed a single successful injection.

He was also able to learn that rather than a direct connection to the Nox like Niflheim had, these devil worshippers were even lower.

They were subordinates of the subordinates. Most low-rank devil worshippers even assumed that those at Niflheim were the so-called Lords everyone kept praising.

He could only disdain the foolishness of some of these people. Well, then being foolish was a given considering that they succumbed to their thirst for power and traded their home world in return.

Still, to not even know the source of their power? To not even understand the murky and tumultuous waters they were willingly jumping into? Contempt and disdain were all Damien could feel no matter how much of an open mind he tried to keep.

If there was one thing he gained during this time, it was knowledge of the item termed as the Death Seed.

This seed...it wasn't necessarily correct to call it as such. Rather, its name had been altered to appeal to those who didn't know any better. Specifically, those who were now occupying the private rooms.

From what he gathered, this Death Seed was actually a living being. It was something that devil worshippers who gained Inheritor status would gain access to, granting them a stronger connection to the Nox.

However, he couldn't glean much else. The level of those attending this convention openly naturally wasn't high in the hierarchy. Otherwise, they wouldn't even have reason to be here.

The reason he and Ruyue attended the auction was also for the Death Seed. Regardless of what it was, they couldn't allow it to fall into the hands of any of those Sect Masters of the wicked sects.

Imagining a figure with such power and influence becoming the dog of the Nox made Damien shudder. That kind of development would surely spell the downfall of the world.

Anyway, the auction continued without a hitch, with rarer items coming out one by one. Even Damien couldn't completely hold himself back and decided to buy some things.

They were 3 Chaos Rank artifacts. A shimmering crystalline bracelet, a pair of beautiful sapphire-esque earrings, and a jewel-encrusted ring with a magnificent ruby-colored stone adorning it.

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These three items, although they looked like accessories worn for vanity's sake, were anything but. They were just as functional as they were beautiful.

All three of these items were defensive treasures at the upper levels of Chaos Rank, meaning that they even had the potential to withstand blows from 4th class existences.

Well, their ability was largely subjective. There was a caveat to Chaos rank artifacts, a sort of drawback that made it so possessing them wouldn't make a lower-class existence immune to the attacks of their greater.

In their base form, these artifacts had the ability to block a single attack from a 4th class existence, however, that was under the condition that the 4th class wasn't using all the strength in their body.

Still, a relatively powerful blow could be blocked completely, essentially giving the user a second life, or at least a chance to escape.

The true power of these artifacts could only be shown when mana was injected into them. At that time, they could block many consecutive attacks and be used as more than just a protective treasure, but as a true piece of defensive equipment.

The problem was, Chaos rank artifacts were meant for 4th class existences. They were made as such. The mana drain to use the artifacts correctly was too great for any normal 3rd class to find bearable. Even if they used all their mana, it would at most last them a few minutes.

For Damien, who now had access to an even greater mana pool after binding earth, the mana drain was slightly less of a problem. Still, he could at most grant himself 15 minutes of continuous use if he was being bombarded.

The boost he received in his mana capacity was additive. This meant that regardless of how much more powerful he got, the amount of extra mana he got from earth wouldn't increase.

There would come a time when the added mana capacity would be next to useless. That is, unless earth became a greater existence. If earth raised itself in power, Damien would also receive the benefits.

Suppose earth at the moment gave him 2000 extra points of mana. If it reached the level of Apeiron, he'd receive around 5000 points and if it reached the level of the Cloud Plane, he'd receive anywhere from 8000 to 10,000 points of extra mana capacity.

These numbers were just approximations he made using his current bond with earth, but he felt they were more or less accurate.

However, the artifacts he bought at the auction weren't for him. Even if he had all the money in the world, he wouldn't use millions of spirit stones to buy himself armor.

He could reach the point where these armors were useless to him through evolution. That was one of his main strengths. It was for this reason that besides the earring artifact he received as a prize in Apeiron and his sword, Damien never put much thought into buying artifacts.

He already knew who these specific artifacts were meant for. He had bought them with those people in mind. A fine jade, sapphire, and ruby. Just from the color scheme alone, it was clear who the recipients would be.

And although Ruyue was slightly irked that he was spending their money on artifacts instead of waiting for the final item, she didn't say anything. There was a faint hope budding in her heart that she did her best to suppress, but in the end, it got the best of her.

She could only sigh lightly and let it go, refocusing her attention on the auction.

Many hours had already passed by and countless rare materials, extraordinary pills, and Chaos rank artifacts had shown themselves. These items had mostly been snatched away by those in the crowd, but few of them managed to catch the attention of those in the private rooms as well.

Still, these people were all similar to Damien and Ruyue. No matter how much the other items called to them, they made sure they wouldn't be spending too much. Their focus lay elsewhere.

And finally, after what seemed like an eternity of holding back their greed, those in the private rooms were given the show they came for.

Fairy Lin, who had been standing on the stage with a light smile on her face the entire time, suddenly became grave.

“This next item is extremely important. For this reason, the bidding has only been opened to those who have been given the honor to sit in the private rooms during this auction.”

Hushed murmurs spread through the crowd as people speculated the identity of the final item. Even though many were annoyed that they were being excluded, there wasn't much they could do about it.

They were well aware of how powerful those in the private rooms were. They were the people who lorded over the ones sitting in the normal seats. They had no right to compete with those personages even if they wanted to. Such a move was simply courting death.

Seeing that there weren't any fools who decided to act up after her declaration, Fairy Lin continued.

“The item that is about to be presented was passed down by the Lords themselves. Those persons that we cannot even fathom have graced us with such a gift. And since us lowly beings are unable to properly comprehend the words of our Lords, we have given this item a more digestible name.”

A single person came onto the stage as Fairy Lin talked. Unlike the previous attendants, this person radiated an aura of undeniable might. However, even with such power, the individual was acting extremely cautious towards the vial in his hand.

“The Death Seed. This is the name we have given this item. Even the vial that holds it was specially made to contain its power. The material of the vial alone is Star Jade.”

Once again, the crowd burst in fervor. Star Jade, who didn't know the name of this material? It was one of the strongest, if not the strongest, materials existing on the Cloud Plane.

And such a rare and desirable material was used solely for the sake of containing the power of the Death Seed.

As the man made his way to the center of the stage, he entered the spotlight that had been shining and those in the crowd could finally witness the appearance of this treasure.

It was a small and circular item colored in an eerie darkness. With its shape and size, one could mistake it for a marble or a pill. However, nobody doubted its identity.

The devil-worshippers may be full of various people with different goals and personalities, but there was one thing they had in common. They never used their Lords' names in vain.

If Fairy Lin said the Death Seed was given to them by the Lords, there was no need to further verify its legitimacy.

"Now, I'm sure all of you are curious about the effects of this treasure, so allow this humble one to explain. The Death Seed is a peerless treasure that can permanently raise one's stats.

"For 3rd class beings, every stat will receive at least a 100 point boost and for 4th class beings, their stats will gain at least 800 points each. And these are simply the base values. Depending on one's compatibility with the Death Seed, these numbers could very well increase dramatically."

Fairy Lin continued to ramble about the greatness of the Lords and the treasure they provided, but Damien was no longer of the mind to listen.

After all, Zara, who had been silently residing in his shadow during the journey and convention, was letting out a low and bestial growl that only he could hear.

He could feel her emotions and he could see it in her eyes. Emotions she had rarely ever shown before.

Hatred and Greed.

Chapter 193 - Auction [5]

In the few months Damien had been in the Cloud Plane, Zara had once again been forced to realize how little help she actually was. Sure, she could act as a mount and help him travel, but was that really enough?

Back when they first met in that lonely dungeon she used to call home, they were practically inseparable. Even though she had the ability, she would rarely enter his shadow.

She was his partner, fighting by his side and helping him overcome any obstacle he couldn't handle alone.

Even after they left the dungeon, it was still similar. At least, relatively,

As time went on, she found herself becoming useless. She was becoming nothing more than a typical mount that she saw every random cultivator using.

And this realization hurt her more than she could ever imagine.

She knew very well that Damien had no intention of treating her as such. Whenever he had free time, he would call her out and enjoy her company, telling her about various things. She loved these conversations.

But, it still wasn't enough. When was the last time she was able to properly help him in a fight? When was the last time she could truly show off her power?

It had been years.

Zara had been fretting over this problem for a long time, but she didn't want to burden Damien with her feelings. For this, she slightly disturbed the connection they held and hid some of her crucial thoughts from him.

They signed an equals contract, after all. This was well within her right.

As such, Damien had continued on his journey while being none the wiser.

Naturally, just because she hid her complex emotions from him didn't mean she was content with her current life. She had been fretting over how to change constantly, trying to find a solution to her problem.

But, it was all to no avail. The only way for a beast to gain strength was to kill, eat, and evolve. It was common knowledge.

At least, that's what she thought. Until that day when Tian Yang lectured Damien about the truth behind 3rd and 4th class, that was her belief.

But all the while, she had been watching what went on in the outside world while she stayed within his shadow. Regardless of how useless she felt, she was always prepared to jump in front of Damien in case there was any danger he couldn't handle.

And since she was always watching, she was also able to digest the lecture that Tian Yang had given.

The power of comprehension. A new way to gain strength.

It was a light that shone in the endless darkness Zara had submerged herself in, a path forward. So, she ardently strived towards success.

She sunk deep into her consciousness and put all her effort into gaining a true understanding of her elements. Shadow, ice, the only way she had been using them was the most basic methods allowed to her race.

And slowly but surely, she was starting to see a true improvement as she pondered on these two affinities of hers. She couldn't test anything with her ice while she remained in Damien's shadow, but the shadow element was something she could easily test.

And when she awoke from her meditative state once again, she looked around to grasp the situation, realizing that Damien was in a room alone with the new woman he had been accompanying for the past few months.

Although this was no surprise to her, she soon turned her attention to the rest of the setting, the area beyond the glass in front of Damien.

And that's when she saw it.

A small pale marble that seemed inconsequential in appearance, but held an insurmountable power within it.

The second she laid eyes on it, all other thoughts immediately vanished from her head. Even her sanity started to dissipate at a rapid pace, as if her intelligence was devolving.

She felt an unadulterated fear, a burning hatred, and also endless greed that conflicted with the prior two emotions.

She had no idea what was going on inside her own mind. She had no idea why this random object was eliciting such a major reaction from her. But it wasn't under her control.

In fact, she was using every sliver of sanity she had left to hold herself back from jumping through that glass and snatching the black marble she had set her sights on.

Her whole world was crumbling apart, when suddenly, she felt a gentle hand land on her head.

Without her knowledge, she had already left the shadow and was standing next to Damien, who was slowly running his hand through her fur.

And oddly enough, the small action alone was enough to pour a bucket of cold water on her head. As he continued to silently console her, she felt herself regaining control over her body.

And finally, by the time Fairy Lin had finished her rant about the greatness of her Lords, Zara managed to calm down and come back to herself.

“Haa...haa...”

She closed her eyes, taking a few deep breaths before once again opening them.

“Is everything okay now?” Damien’s soothing voice entered her ears.

She nodded lightly in response. It was all thanks to him that she was back to her senses. Once again, he had saved her and once again, she had almost become a burden.

Damien shook his head with a light sigh when he saw her state. With her mind still confused, he was naturally able to read the emotions she had been hiding from him all this time.

He immediately felt a pang of guilt in his chest. He might have been doing his best to not neglect her, but had he ever once considered how she felt this entire time? He had almost forgotten how prideful and battle-hungry the little Zara he once knew was.

“Did something happen?”

He felt obligated to ask. The emotions he was reading were a problem that could be solved at any time. Now that he knew of them, he could make a conscious effort to remedy his past mistakes. What was more important was the outburst she just had.

“I...I don’t know.” Zara replied meekly. “The second I saw that little black marble, my mind blanked. All I could feel was an indescribable urge to consume that item.”

She could’ve said more, but now that her mind was completely open to him, there was no need. He understood everything she had just gone through.

‘The Death Seed is what caused this reaction?’

The Death Seed was still a mystery. Even with all the boasting Fairy Lin had done, the only real effect she had described was the permanent stat increase. As for everything else she said, it was just flowery speech indicating that one would become incredibly powerful after consumption.

It was odd enough that something from the Nox had made Zara react like this, especially since she was born and raised within a dark dungeon that had never come in contact with the alien race.

Or at least, that’s what Damien thought until now. The most surprising part of it all was something Zara had only subconsciously realized.

‘This reaction...was caused by her bloodline.’

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Zara's bloodline had been a mystery since their very first meeting. Just the fact that the Damien at that time had no desire to devour her was a miracle in itself:

But even after all these years, Damien had found no clues regarding it. It's not that he didn't look, since he had actually done an ample amount of research while on Apeiron, it was just that he was legitimately unable to find any information regarding it.

He had seen characteristics of all the wolf bloodlines the Adelaire Empire had documented during the 6 months he spent there before leaving to earth, but none of them matched Zara's.

He was of the mind to go visit the Beast Empress to maybe glean something off of her, since she showed some kind of understanding and even said she felt a connection to Zara when they first met, but the constraints of time never allowed that meeting to happen.

It was all but guaranteed that he had to make a trip back to Apeiron at some point. There were many events lined up in the near future that prevented him from doing so immediately, but he swore he'd find the time.

Plus, he still had to bind Apeiron's world core. It was an imperative task that he had idiotically forgotten about. And by the time he realized it, he was too far away to do anything about it.

Perhaps he could warp to Apeiron to do what he needed to do, but as he figured before, there was simply no time at the moment. He just had to remember the importance of doing so and hope there'd be an opening in the future.

'Sigh, I really need to learn how to not be led around by my emotions.'

While he was in his thoughts, the bidding for the Death Seed had already begun. And it had to be said, the battle was much fiercer than any of the other items.

It seemed the flowery words and empty compliments Fairy Lin had given it beforehand had truly spurred the crowd. Even with the base price of the treasure being five million spirit stones, there were very few who didn't participate in the bidding.

Even those in the normal seats pooled their money together to get their hands on the treasure. It was as if they no longer cared to give face to those powerhouses occupying the private rooms.

"10 million spirit stones from me!"

"Old ghost, don't try to steal away my treasures! 11 million!"

"Hah? Wan Luo, do you think I wouldn't recognize you? First, check if you have the qualifications to compete with me! 15 million!"

These two were occupying adjacent private rooms, and seemed to have turned the bidding war into their own personal show. Everyone even stopped their objections just to watch it unfold.

After all, they didn't need to constantly bid to win the treasure. They could simply bide their time until these two finished their fiasco and then continue.

"Old ghost, give me some face here. I'll be sure to compensate you handsomely. 16 million."

"Wan Luo, you still have a world of potential in front of you. Don't lead yourself to an early death. 17 million."

"Are you threatening me?" Wan Luo growled.

"Hmph, if you can't even tell that much, then maybe you should give up your position as Head Elder."

"Damn Old ghost!" Wan Luo cursed. It wasn't that he didn't have the money to continue, but he was well aware of the power difference between the two of them. He had lived for hundreds of years already. He had long since learned when to advance and retreat.

"30 million."

Suddenly, a deep voice pervaded the auction hall. Even if it came from one of the private rooms, it rang in the ears of everyone present as if the speaker was standing directly next to them.

"Hey, isn't that..."

"Yeah, there's no way we could mistake him for anyone else..."

"That terrifying aura can truly only belong to him..."

The attention of all present was directed towards the private room that sat in the middle of all the rest, the one with the best view in the entire house. Even if the person occupying it hadn't consciously released his aura, just the power in his words alone was enough to strike fear into the hearts of those who heard it.

"Sigh, Fellow Daoist can take this one. There are plenty of other ways for me to gain strength. The Burning River Sect concedes."

"It's the same for me. Our sect has a firm foundation and plentiful resources. The loss of a single treasure isn't that big of a deal. The Autumn Wind Abode concedes!"

"Same to me, the Crimson Cathedral concedes."

"The Lustful Fairy Sect concedes..."

Many of the guests in the private room have up the auction one by one. They harbored endless grievances in their hearts, but there was no way they could voice them out. That was the level of influence the Eclipsing Shadow Sect Leader held.

"The bid of 30 million spirit stones comes from the guest in private room #1! Is there anyone willing to raise the price?" Fairy Lin asked, though it was evident she expected the auction to end here.

"Very well then, if there are no new bids, the Death Seed goes to—"

"40 million."

A new voice came from one of the private rooms on the outer edge. Judging from the tone alone, it was clear that it was a youngster who had spoken.

"What? Someone dares to compete with something the Sect Master wants?"

"That guy is simply courting death!"

Damien naturally overheard all their voices, but he said nothing else. His attention was entirely focused in the direction of the first private room.

"50 million." A reply came softly. Still, the slight hint of rage in the voice couldn't be hidden.

But Damien didn't care at all. Without hesitation, he doubled the price.

"100 million spirit stones."

With the amount of money he received from Tian Yang, he could still double the price once more and have a good amount remaining, so he had no fear of losing here.

"Young lad, are you sure you want to do this?" The opposing side questioned. The voice was contemptuous, and it was evident he was warning Damien.

Yet, Damien once again paid it no mind. "This is an auction, isn't it? If I want something, I will naturally bid on it."

"..."

"Very well. If that is the path you chose to take, so be it. You can blame nobody but yourself for the consequences of your actions."

The Eclipsing Shadow Sect Leader was a man who didn't take any disrespect, let alone a blatant slap to his face such as this one.

But he wasn't an idiot. Who didn't know that he was the most powerful person present here? Who didn't know that he was someone who could commit atrocities without batting an eye?

This wasn't the righteous path. Regardless of his status, regardless of his power level, he had no qualms with crushing an ant if it slighted him.

And what need was there to waste money? If the other party wanted to grab the Death Seed, he'd allow them to take it. The only question was how long they could hold onto it before it inevitably fell into his hands.

"T-then, that settles it! The Death Seed goes to esteemed guest in private room #16 for 100 million spirit stones!"

There was no raucous applause or excitement within the audience, only mockery towards the idiot who offended such a massive figure.

Without suspense, an attendant entered Damien's room with the vial holding the Death Seed in hand, and judging by Zara's barely controlled reaction, he was sure it was authentic.

"Honored guest, please submit your payment before I give you your item."

Damien nodded and tossed over a spatial ring containing the entire 100 million spirit stones. The attendant quickly grabbed it and did a sweep with his consciousness, confirming the contents within.

"Thank you for your patronage, esteemed guest. Please be careful with the item, as you can never be too sure about what will happen in the future." The attendant cast a meaningful look towards Damien, handing him the vial before exiting the room.

"So this is the Death Seed, huh." He murmured. He was well aware of the connotation of the attendant's words. Even the man he had offended hinted at what he would do, so only a dunce wouldn't understand.

Nevertheless, Damien was still fearless. It wasn't groundless confidence, it wasn't even confidence in himself. There was no way for Damien to resist even a normal 4th class, so how would he resist the strongest one present?

Damien's confidence stemmed from his master, and the talismans he had given them before they set out. With them, he was assured of his escape.

He was assured of his escape, so why was it that no matter how much mana he and Ruyue injected into the talismans, they wouldn't activate?

Chapter 195 - Fleeing [1]

Damien stared at the talisman in his hand as a sense of trepidation entered his heart and took root. Every time he tried to inject it with mana, it would flash and spark, but show no result in the end.

What was the cause of this? What was going on? There was no way Tian Yang would give him a faulty talisman, and even if he did, there's no way he'd do the same with Ruyue.

Panic had already begun to set in even though it had only been a few seconds since he first started fiddling with the talismans and a terrifying idea sprouted in his mind.

There wasn't time, he had to test it. Grabbing Ruyue's arm, Damien spread his awareness until he could feel the surface and willed the mana around him to invoke teleportation.

And soon, they disappeared from where they stood.

And reappeared only 5 meters away, still within the confines of the private room. Damien gritted his teeth, a flash of worry flashing through his eyes.

"Damien, what is happening?" Ruyue asked as she pulled her arm away. She was naturally perturbed by the talismans failing as well, but she didn't feel the same dread he did.

Well, it wasn't her fault since she didn't have any insights on space. That was the exact reason Damien was panicking right now. The situation itself hadn't reached that level, but the implications were much larger.

Although he hadn't yet touched upon this particular aspect, he was well aware of the possibility. He had even been planning to incorporate it into his sword art soon.

Grinding his teeth, Damien muttered an answer to Ruyue's question.

“Spatial Lock.”

For all normal cultivators, a spatial lock was simple. It was a method used to prevent escape using escape talismans while at the same time limiting their movement. The latter worked similarly to the concept of gravity, while the former was even more simple to explain.

If the spatial lock that was cast was directed solely at Damien, he'd know. He'd just have to peer into the layers of space and he'd find out. But even when he had done so, he found no indication of spatial nodes or outside interference.

This could only mean one thing. The entire area was locked.

And while whoever cast this lock had most likely done so to trap all those present in this convention, he was the one who was affected the worst.

Spatial lock was a concept that was most useful against other practitioners using the space element. Damien was well aware from the fact that he could barely even teleport that the person who cast this lock was above him in comprehension of the space element. This meant his abilities in battle would be supremely hindered.

His Void Sword Art, Vector Control, and many other arts would become largely unusable with the other party locking down space. Especially vector control, which dealt with points in space, would become virtually useless in such a situation.

Still, he wasn't out of options. Just as his combat capabilities were restricted, his evasion capabilities could still be used. As long as he could properly wade through the spatial layers, escaping was still viable, even if it became infinitely harder to do so.

Damien's gaze became grim as he explained all this to Ruyue, and her expression soon followed. They both knew it wouldn't be long before all hell broke loose.

And as if answering their call, such events began immediately.

BOOM!

With none the wiser within the convention besides those 4th class existences in the private rooms, a storm came crashing down.

The ceiling of the massive cavern they were occupying came crashing in, large pieces of rubble fell everywhere and clouds of dust obscured everyone's vision.

"W-what?!"

"What's happening?!"

The light of day shone brightly in the cavern as a swarm of people descended from the sky. Each and every one of them was wearing uniforms of pure white and gold, with similarly colored masks adorning their faces.

"Hear my call, vile miscreants hiding in the shadows. Today is a day of inquisition! Today is a day of Judgement! None shall leave here alive! In the name of Justice!"

“”In the name of Justice!!!!”

The figure at the head of the crowd started and all those behind him followed, chanting incessantly as they gazed upon those below them.

They cared not for the hundreds of people that had been crushed by the rocky fragments of the cavern ceiling due to their domineering entrance, and they cared not for distinctions between man, woman, and child.

There was only scorn in their eyes, and without wasting another breath, they charged. Those white-cloaked figures spread out within the large cavern and began a mass slaughter, with no respect whatsoever.

From their auras alone, it was clear these people were all high-level 3rd class and even 4th class beings, but they slaughtered those 1st and 2nd class beings like pigs.

A rain of blood descended on the convention, accompanied by ghastly screams filled with fear and unwillingness.

Heads and limbs became scattered across the floor, not a single person being spared. Hell, even those innocent victims being sold in the slave market were cut down without being given the chance to resist.

Damien watched it all happen. Oddly enough, those so-called inquisitors made no move on those within the private rooms. And throughout the entire ordeal, all he could feel was disgust.

Who were these people to decide justice? They were just cowards who only knew how to bully the weak and fear the strong. If not, how was it that those in important positions were still safe while tens of 4th classes slaughtered their juniors for no reason?

And even worse still, he was well aware of this massive farce. Regardless of how angelic they dressed themselves and regardless of how many passionate speeches they made about slaying the wicked, could they hide from him?

No matter the words that come from one's mouth, their aura tells no lies. This was a lesson Damien had learned long ago.

And the auras of these fools?

Black and putrid. They held the same stench as those devil worshippers, only much stronger and to a much higher degree. There was no mistaking it, these people were those so-called Priests and Inheritors that the Nox appointed.

Damien narrows his eyes as he shifted his gaze away from the atrocities being committed down below, his gaze centering on a certain private room.

And even though he was sure that the glass partition was still doing its job to conceal him within it, he was almost certain he could feel a cold stare gazing directly back at him.

'There's no other choice. If anything, this is the only way we can escape with the talismans being ineffective.'

He felt like a hypocrite. Wasn't he the one who had said he wouldn't allow any injustice as long as it was happening in front of him? Wasn't he the one who said he couldn't bear the suffering of innocents in large conflicts like this one?

But it wasn't something he could change. When emperors fought, it was the common people that suffered.

Damien took one last look at those white robes figured. He stared daggers into their angelic forms. Only their eyes were visible behind their masks, but even then he could clearly see their glee. They were feeling ecstasy while being soaked in the blood of those weaker.

He seared their auras into his memory.

'These atrocities...I will remember them.'

And then, the space around him twisted once again, as he and Ruyue vanished from their prior position.

Chapter 196 - Feeling [2]

Within a separate private room, a large man sat calmly as his gaze panned across the chaos that had descended on the convention.

Even with the pandemonium and festival of blood taking place, his expression didn't change. Instead, he focused his gaze on a private room far removed from his current location.

Even with his strength, he couldn't see through the glass wall, but that didn't mean he wasn't aware of the happenings within. There were 3 strong life auras that he had been keeping track of ever since the auction ended.

Once again turning his attention to the slaughter taking place below, he let out a light snort.

‘Those idiots. Did they truly think such gaudy tactics were enough to mask their identities?’

He knew very clearly who they were, but he said nothing. They had even approached him before beginning their act, so he had no reason to be surprised. Still, he didn’t expect that there would be someone bold enough to oppose him previously.

And with the start of the show he was forced to take part in, he had no time to retrieve his possessions with his own hands.

As he was thinking, he noticed the life auras he had been tracking vanish, reappearing a few meters away.

‘It seems he’s trying to run.’

“First shadow.” He called, seemingly speaking to empty air.

The shadows on the walls behind him danced and transformed, coalescing into a hooded figure.
“You called, my Lord?”

“Mm. Tell the 5th through 12th shadow to move out. Their goal is to reclaim the treasure someone dared take from me.”

“As you command, my Lord. Would you like that person to be brought back?”

“No need. Just kill him and be done with.”

First Shadow voiced his confirmation before retreating once more. Without looking back, the large man stood up from his seat. It was time for him to put on a performance.

He had received a hefty offer in return, so he figured he should play along. Besides, it was a good way to waste time before he inevitably got his hands on the Death Seed.

The man’s aura billowed, attracting the attention of the 4th class beings among the inquisitors. And without further ado, he entered the stage.

Damien spared no effort in fleeing. At the moment, he had no thoughts other than maneuvering through the complex maze of spatial layers in front of him.

Ever since he was in the dungeon, he had been able to easily sense and even physically see the spatial layers, but he had never done such in-depth combing of them before today.

For the most part, his moveset was based on wider-scale destruction. It was crude and with a singular motive. This kind of action was much more methodical and graceful than anything else he had put his mind to.

He weaved through the fabric of space with his hand grabbing Ruyue's arm, pulling her along with him. There was nothing else he could do at this juncture, he couldn't even alert her of his plan.

His entire attention was focused on the task ahead of him. As such, he slowly forgot his surroundings. He waded through the intricately spaced layers like a snake, reveling in the feeling of spatial fluctuations around him. And by the time he snapped out of his trance, he had effectively dragged Ruyue to the cavern of the main convention.

The scenes of slaughter hadn't spread here, but he was still within range of the spatial lock. Due to this, he decided the best course of action was to make a run for it.

There was a sinking feeling in his chest that he couldn't get rid of. It had been a long time since his danger sense and intuition had rung alarm bells like this. This was the feeling of true life-threatening danger.

In his hurry, he finally made it out of the main convention, using the same route he used to enter. And seeing the light of day and the thick fog that befuddled even his senses around him, he was hoping to feel comfort.

But even still, he was unable to do so. Abruptly, his facial expression changed. He grabbed Ruyue by her waist and twisted his body, narrowly evading a projectile that flew past.

It impacted the trunk of a nearby tree, instantly corroding it until it became a withered husk. Ruyue's face paled at the sight, but she was quick to regain her bearings.

The entire time so far, she had been too confused to act herself. She had just let herself be caught in the momentum. But seeing them be targeted in such a way, she was able to come back to her senses.

What the hell was she doing? Perhaps it was the scenes of slaughter from before that left her in such a state, but it was no excuse. Damien had gotten them this far with her only acting as a burden, so there was no more room for her to sit still.

She made her way out of his grasp, vigilantly scanning the surroundings for the perpetrator.

Swoosh!

A thin arc of blue fire left her fingertips, aimed at the air in front of her. And surprisingly, a set of needles was caught and melted.

But was that the end? Multiple concealed attacks followed, barraging the duo from all sides. They evaded ceaselessly, but it was evident they were at a disadvantage.

They had no opportunity to counterattack.

Blades flew through the air and the smell of poison wafted into the atmosphere. The sheer amount of projectiles being dispatched was enough to terrify any normal cultivator.

But just as suddenly as it had started, the onslaught slowed to a halt.

From the murky atmosphere of the forest around them, eight figures emerged. Since the two targets obviously weren't susceptible to sneak attacks, a head-on approach was the best move.

“Who are you?” Damien growled. He already had his speculations and didn’t really expect them to answer, but he needed to stall for time somehow.

Their auras were entirely concealed, but they couldn’t hide from his sight. Six of the eight figures were high-level 3rd class beings, while the foremost two were at the peak of the class, perhaps even on the cusp of ranking up. And from the density of the mana surrounding them, Damien was sure they weren’t weaklings.

Perhaps if he was on Apeiron, he had a slight chance against this number of opponents but it was different here. He had just recently realized the difference in strength between the two worlds, so he was in his utmost cautious state right now.

He was sure he had no chance to beat them.

“Make no mistake. A dead person has no need to know too much. I shall only say one thing, it will be your eternal regret that you have offended our master.” An altered voice came from the cloaked figure in the middle.

Damien was surprised that he had actually elicited a response, but there was nothing more. He had already made his decision on how to act.

He looked over at Ruyue and noticed her gaze on him as well. He didn’t need to do too much for her to understand his intentions.

There was no hesitation in their actions. Turning swiftly, they dashed along the Bloodstone River, hoping to make distance from their opponents.

Damien first thought to flee out of the forest, but it currently wasn't a viable option. If anything, the Myriad Illusion Veil was something that could help him in this situation.

However, there wasn't much room to run. They could only follow the river in one direction or the other, since the distance between the river and the edge of the forest wasn't large enough.

The 8 shadows glanced at each other and smiled. Although their Lord had given them the order to kill, he hadn't made any comments on the speed at which they did so.

And knowing their Lord, he was quite meticulous about even the smallest details. He would never leave out something that needed to be said.

There was only one conclusion they drew at this point. Their Lord wanted the target to suffer. Watching the target turn and flee, they thought this was the perfect situation.

With only a single glance, the shadows were able to hatch their plan. Their figures turned into streaks of darkness and spread out, melding into the shadows and chasing their prey.

The situation was eerily similar to Damien's encounter with a certain wolf many years back, however, this time the danger had multiplied by many times.

Chapter 197 - Feeling [3]

A sea of darkness.

That was all Damien could see behind him and on both sides as he rushed through the maze of trees that lined the side of the Bloodstone River.

Six black-cloaked figures constantly trailed after him, expanding their influence on the surroundings.

He could only grit his teeth and push forward, constantly making sure Ruyue was following his pace. And luckily for him, she didn't seem to be lacking in the speed department.

He had no idea how long they had been running for, but regardless of time, they had been unable to escape the clutches of those hooded figures.

The sea of darkness that was gradually encroaching on him was proof of that.

'Dammit!'

The spatial lock that had been placed on the surrounding area was still in effect. No matter how far he got from the original location of the convention, his main strength remained impeded.

It was evident that this wasn't the work of a single person. Rather, a formation must've been at play.

But none of this mattered. The only point he could focus on was the fact that teleportation wasn't an option.

Lightning cracked and trails of flame decorated the path they left in their wake as Damien and Ruyue burst forward at full speed.

The only indication they had of direction was the river adjacent to them.

Thousands of black tendrils emerged from the surrounding darkness, shooting towards the duo at speeds untraceable by the naked eye.

The trees they touched were withered into dust, the ground was cracked on impact.

Lightning burst forth from Damien's body as he continuously attempted to evade the tendrils charging at him. It burned everything in its surroundings, but he wasn't able to block them all.

Luckily, he wasn't alone.

Blazing blue flames ignited even the air it touched, driving back the encroaching shadows.

In any other situation, the duo would have had no problem in escaping.

However, this time, they were heavily outnumbered.

For every tendril of darkness that was destroyed, ten more would emerge and charge at them. And for every ten, another hundred.

Still, they pushed forward.

If there was one thing Damien could be thankful for in this situation, it was the Myriad Illusion Veil that perpetually decorated the jungle.

The veil heavily limited one's awareness and even slightly disturbed their thoughts, leaving the duo some slight leeway. Otherwise, their pursuers would have caught up to them long ago.

However, slight leeway wasn't enough. The darkness soon caught up and passed them, painting the grassy ground black.

The tendrils of darkness multiplied exponentially, soon becoming accompanied by other constructs that attempted to corrode them.

A rain of black spheres showered the area around the duo, once again forcing them to go on the defensive.

Their momentum was rapidly slowed until they could no longer move forward. Every route of escape was blocked.

Damien's eyes narrowed as he tried his best to peer into his surroundings, hoping to glean even the slightest chance, but there was none.

His eyes were powerful, but they were almost useless in this situation. He could see through illusions, but there were none at play.

He was hoping to find traces of the enemy's aura within the encroaching shadows, but it was also futile. Every bit of the darkness was created from their own mana, and they had melded with it perfectly. It was virtually impossible to single them out.

He might've been able to pinpoint something if he was able to calmly analyze, but the enemy didn't give him the time.

His attention was occupied by the constant barrage of attacks that fell on him. Swords, spears, tendrils, bullets, and many other coalesced forms of darkness charged without pause.

He took a quick glance to his side and realized Ruyue wasn't any better than him. Waves of blue flame continuously surged from her person, clashing with the waves of darkness that surrounded them.

A blood-red moon had already manifested behind her back, empowering her flames and distributing lunar energy into the atmosphere.

It was incredibly frustrating. No matter how much those cloaked figures attacked, they never used their full power. There's no way the combined power of 6 high-level 3rd class beings only amounted to this much.

'They're toying with us.'

It was the only explanation he could come up with.

'How the hell am I supposed to get out of this situation?!'

It had been too long since he had faced such a hopeless situation. Or was it better to say that it had never happened at all?

He had become too conceited, wholeheartedly believing that he would always be able to escape danger as long as he had his spatial affinity.

This was the kind of mindset that a skill like Warp had instilled in him. Yet, now that the skill and many of his other abilities were locked, he had become nothing more than a lamb waiting for slaughter.

It was unacceptable.

What had he been training for all this time if he was just going to become prey for someone else's convenience? What was the point of power if he was unable to use it?

His fury burned so brightly that it was almost tangible.

Was there no hope? No, as long as the enemy was underestimating them, they had a chance.

He slashed his sword wantonly, no longer caring for style or grace. The black lightning coating his body lashed out, constantly strengthening itself.

He increased the intensity of his attack, superheating the lightning and causing massive beams of plasma to impact the ground. He had to melt the shadows around him.

“ARGH!”

A sudden cry of pain echoed through the silent jungle. Looking down at his own body, Damien realized that he had been pierced by a blade without his knowledge.

His danger sense didn't activate, nor did he sense movement around him.

Before he could react, tens of slashes landed on his body, causing his blood to spurt out in every direction.

‘What the hell?’

If it was an ordinary blade that had been harming him, he would have already healed with his regeneration. But strangely enough, it didn't activate.

He did a quick sweep of his internals, and his face immediately paled. A foreign substance had entered his bloodstream and was corroding his system.

That was when he realized. Six pursuers? That wasn't right. There were eight cloaked figures that he first saw when he exited the convention.

Where had the other two gone?

He hadn't had the time to think about it before. But being put in such a predicament, his mind slowly cleared.

'I let my guard down.'

Not only did he let his guard down, but he had also become too narrow-minded to realize how faulty his thought process was.

Spatial lock? Sure it could hinder his abilities, but was he completely cut off?

The poison in his body burned. It felt like he was being branded from the inside. But this pain had cleared his muddled head.

The Myriad Illusion Veil. Why was it called that? Its main purpose, the reason many people had lost their lives to a mere fog, wasn't it because of how it messed with their minds?

'I'm an idiot.'

From the beginning of his journey to now, he had constantly improved himself. But he had always neglected training his mind. He figured that the will he forged so far was enough.

But the events of the village prior, and the events taking place now, had shown him clearly that there was something he lacked.

He didn't have the wits to engage in a strategy. He didn't have the brain to quickly innovate. Instead, he had been backed into a corner and confused until he ended up in this situation.

'No more.'

He wouldn't allow himself to be beaten so one-sidedly any longer.

He closed his eyes, ignoring everything around him. He called Zara out of his shadow to protect him.

Up until this point, he had thought her shadow affinity would be suppressed by the enemies. He had thought she would only become a burden.

But who was he kidding? That was the stupidest thought he could have had. If there was one advantage he possessed against these enemies, it was Zara.

With her protection, he was able to properly concentrate. The burning feeling in his veins slowly faded. The only thing he could perceive was the light thumping of his own heartbeat.

"Celestial Authority."

His mind was flooded with feedback. Flames danced, the ground froze over, lightning crackled and the winds roared. But this was nothing more than an illusion. Only Damien could see such scenes.

He ended up grinning. When was the last time he had used this move? Even though he was so excited when he created it, he had almost forgotten about it until now.

His eyes opened once more, blazing with fighting spirit and killing intent. And without any suspense, he opened his mouth.

[Starfall]

Chapter 198 - Fleeing [4]

The same move he had once used to slaughter Jin had once again made itself known.

However, it wasn't the same as it was before. This time, Damien had coupled the attack with his Celestial Authority, vastly boosting its prowess.

Boom!

Hundreds of kilometers above the ongoing battle, the atmosphere shattered like glass and caved in, leaving only an infinite void in its place.

And from that void, a massive meteor shot down toward the ground, its velocity not being impeded the slightest bit by the new environment.

Even though the friction led flames to encase the meteor, it only served to increase the destructive power.

The surroundings were subjected to the immense heat of the flaming rock.

Even though the Myriad Illusion Veil still hid the incoming danger from their sight, any sane cultivator would be well aware that something wasn't right.

And even the Myriad Illusion Veil couldn't stand the pressure of the oncoming meteor for very long.

After all, they were still on the outskirts of the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, where the strength of the veil wasn't up to par.

The perpetual fog that blanketed the jungle was burned into nothingness along with the air, giving way to a bright sun and the streak of light that was charging towards their location.

The sun itself was a major weakness to any element dealing with shadow, as it encroached upon the area of influence that had been laid down.

Those cloaked figures could no longer stay still. Their attention was refocused on the new danger, charging volatile spheres of darkness and shooting them towards the meteor.

But even with all the power that attacked it and threatened to break it apart, the meteor held strong,

It wasn't its inherent defensive capability or even Damien's work that did this. Instead, there was external help at play.

"Moon Goddess's Blessing."

Ruyue's murmur went unheard by those around her, but its effects still stood.

The massive blood moon that stood at her back was compressed into heavy rivers of lunar energy that charged towards the meteor and merged with it.

Its density was increased by a large margin, the flames surrounding its body were tinted blue, and it gained a defensive property that allowed it to withstand the assault of the cloaked figures.

On the ground, Zara was continuously barraging the tendrils of darkness with her own shadow element, not allowing them to gain any ground. Meanwhile, she used ice to freeze the ground and prevent the enemy from setting a new domain.

Damien didn't sit idly either. Now that his mind was clear, he was well prepared to make a counterattack.

Sunfire blazed on his palm and arced through the air, setting the vegetation ablaze. Heavy beams of plasma penetrated any shadow that dared arrive near him, disallowing their encroachment.

His sword art and vector control were still unusable, but he didn't mind it much. He had a vast arsenal that he had rarely taken the time to tap into, only ever displaying the crudest methods he could.

His comprehension of space had reached a magnificent level. Otherwise, how could he possess such a thing as dimensional magic? It's just that his horizons were never broad enough to make full use of everything he learned.

But he was in a rage right now. He was venting his frustrations by returning to the enemy a greater bombardment than they could have ever expected.

His Celestial Aura encased his body, and his awareness spread unimpeded through the portion of jungle where the Myriad Illusion Veil was burned away.

He exerted his will on the surrounding space, using his consciousness in an attempt to both comprehend the properties of Spatial Locking as well as impose his own authority unto the atmosphere.

With all the interference taking place, the enemies were no longer able to focus on their targets, this time being forced on the defensive.

However, even through all this, Damien wasn't safe. The poison racking his body continued attempting to spread, but it was being combatted by his regeneration.

Still, it wasn't able to completely stop it, only suppressing it. And with his regeneration focused on defending his internal body, his external wounds were forced to fester.

“Argh!”

Gritting his teeth, he allowed his lightning to once again take form, using it to sear his wounds and artificially close them, temporarily solving the problem.

The only obstacle left were two unseen opponents that were still hidden in the shadows. It had become evident how much greater their prowess was in comparison to their peers.

But Damien didn't need to focus on them right now. The opportunity to escape was directly in front of him.

"Zara!"

The wolf could read his thoughts clear as day, so he didn't need to say more. Her body shifted positions, abruptly arriving under him and placing him on her back. In the next instant, Ruyue was transferred there as well.

Seeing her condition pained Damien a bit. He was the one in possession of the Death Seed, so he was forced to bear the brunt of the force against them, but that didn't mean she was entirely out of harm's way.

Numerous cuts and gashes covered her body, and many areas of her clothes had become ripped and bloodied.

"Don't worry about me, I'm fine. Focus on the battle ahead." She said when she noticed Damien's gaze, but her pale and weary face betrayed the conviction in her eyes.

Her condition only caused Damien's fury to burn forth ever brighter.

Zara didn't dally after catching the two of them on her back. She immediately spread her wings and took off, speeding through the jungle.

They were still in harm's way. Exiting the jungle through the sky was never a viable option, as the Myriad Illusion Veil was continuously attempting to repair itself.

Zara streaked through the maze of trees like a comet of darkness, dexterously evading all obstacles, she moved forward without destination, but there was no need for one.

As long as they got far enough from their original position, they'd eventually make it out of the Spatial Lock. And at that point, it'd be smooth sailing.

Boom!

A loud explosion and dust cloud could be seen from behind them, as the meteor finally landed on their previous location. The prior events had happened too fast, leading to such a late reaction.

They had already retreated far into the veil,

Damien turned his head halfway, attempting to peer through the veil, 'I wonder if that did any damage... Well, it doesn't matter.'

Regardless of their survival, he wouldn't forget the debt from today. This grudge would be paid back a hundred fold.

'The Eclipsing Shadow Sect. I vow here and now that one day, I will raze it to the ground.'

Surveilling the rapidly changing scenery, Damien suddenly noticed that the Bloodstone River was no longer in sight. And with the restrictions on his awareness, he had no way of telling how far from it they had gone.

Luckily enough, he saw a glimmer of hope. Rather, it was a shimmering translucent wall that marked the edge of the barrier.

This formation was meant exclusively for locking space. There was no way for it to have a multitude of effects if it was able to carry out a spatial lock on such a grand proportion and to such a frightening degree as well, so he was sure of it. This meant they would face no obstruction in leaving its area now that they had found its end.

Zara streaked forward without hesitation when Damien gave her the command. The second they passed that wall, they would activate their escape talismans and transport directly back to the Celestial Star Palace.

However, fate seemed to have other plans for them. Mere meters away from their destination, a powerful aura sprung out before a world of shadows once again descended.

But there was something intrinsically different about it this time.

“This is a domain,” Ruyue commented as she wearily glanced around.

Damien’s eyes widened at the revelation. To date, the only domain he had seen was Rose’s Illusory Throne, but he was well aware of their power.

But, the base concept for creating domain wasn't unfamiliar to him as they also manifested when the caster imposed their will upon space. But if the enemy was able to do this, didn't that mean...

Damien grinned. He couldn't ask for a better feeling than what he felt right now.

He ignored the festering wounds on his flesh and the poison seeping through his body.

He ignored the sense of danger that hadn't left no matter how close he was to safety.

"Charge forward." He commanded. Zara didn't need to be told twice, furiously increasing her speed with reckless abandon.

Damien raised his hand into the air, and as if commanding an army, dropped it down once more.

"Spatial Collapse."

He didn't spare any effort this time. He poured all his mana into the skill, and instead of creating a massive black hole like the last time he overclocked it, he took a different approach.

One, two, five, ten, a total of fifteen vortexes manifested in the shadow domain, throwing the ambient mana into chaos.

The space twisted apart and shattered, leaving countless swirling entrances to the void that threatened to consume everything. Before the caster of the domain even had a chance to attack, his entire authority was thrown into oblivion.

The domain shattered without suspense, and Zara triumphantly charged past the cloaked figure that had been revealed in its wake.

Ruyue raised her arm and pointed it at the exposed figure with hatred in her eyes.

“Erase.”

Yin was an interesting element. Darkness, cold, and any negatives were classified as yin-natured forces. Due to this, the main strength of the Yin element, and its most prominent characteristic, was the ability to negate.

Such an ability would usually be used to negate attacks or force, but Ruyue decided to try something she’d never done before. Today, she was going to erase existence itself.

The essence of erasure left her body and impacted the cloaked figure, who was still in a stunned state due to the destruction of his domain. And without even having the ability to scream, the figure vanished, his existence denied by the very person he was tasked to destroy.

With no more obstacles in the way, the trio successfully charged past the shimmering barrier. And soon enough, they were greeted by simmering and blinding rays of sunlight. Whether by coincidence or design, their escape from the formation was their escape from the Myriad Illusion Veil.

But they were in no way pleased with this development. After all, directly in front of them was a beautiful mountain range that stretched as far as the eye could see.

It was a mountain range that no human had ever been able to leave with their lives.

They had somehow been thrust into the 3000 Beast Mountain Range itself.

Chapter 199 - 3000 Beast Mountain Range [1]

Towering mountains broke through the clouds and threatened to challenge even the heavens with their breadth. There were only 5 mountains out of the 50 total that could be seen at the moment, but any of these 5 could be considered unrivaled in the outside world.

Each mountain seemed to carry its own habitat and ecosystem, completely varying depending on the location. Some areas were scorching deserts, while others were raging tundras. It all seemed unpredictable, but had a certain balance to it that could only be admired.

Beautiful trees with trunks thicker than the combined width of several men stood proud among the everlasting scenery, radiating an aura of ancientness and wisdom.

The ground was covered in various flora, ranging from beautiful iridescent flowers to the most common of grasses, but for some reason, even these seemed to carry a weighty presence.

An unruly jungle spanned as far as the eye could see, adding an air of untamed savagery to the ethereal environment.

And encasing it all was a massive wall of fog that blotted out the sky, the Myriad Illusion Veil. Strangely enough, the veil didn't impede on the internal environment in the slightest, stopping at the edge of the surrounding jungle as if it was a defensive mechanism set up by the heavens themselves.

It was faint, but there was one final piece of notable scenery that Damien could see. On the horizon, there was a massive tree incomparable to those in the immediate vicinity.

Its branches alone spanned several kilometers, its canopy cast an unseen amount of space in perpetual shadow, and the aura of life it gave off could be felt even at the outskirts of the environment where Damien and Ruyue were currently standing.

But none of these features could be called the crowning achievement of the tree. That award was reserved for its mountainous size. Indeed, mountainous was the only word that could be used to describe the breadth and height of the massive tree that competed with the surrounding mountains in their bid to challenge the heavens.

“So this is the 3000 Beast Mountain Range,” Damien commented in awe.

Ruyue nodded her head absentmindedly, too focused on taking in the scenery to fully concentrate on his words.

Even Zara, who usually didn’t care much about such novelties, was stunned. This kind of scene wasn’t something she had ever seen. Even though her travels with Damien had taken her far and wide, such pure natural beauty was still new.

Her feelings now reminded her of a time back when she was still naive and unable to converse, when she first exited the dungeon with Damien. At that time, they landed in an ordinary forest, but it seemed to be an immortal spring to them.

But this time, they were truly in a place magnificent enough to be described as such.

At least, the environment itself seemed to suggest it.

But it didn't take long for Damien to come out of his reverie. The second he spread his awareness, a bucket of cold water was poured on his head.

He shuddered at what he was seeing. His awareness, no matter how large its reach had grown, could only cover a bare minimum of the surroundings.

Hell, he couldn't even reach a single one of the nearby mountains, a testament to the sheer size of the area. But, he didn't need to do so to understand the true nature of the mountain range.

He couldn't comment on its entirety, since even now he could only see 1/10th of its total size, but it was enough to form a preliminary impression.

Countless thousands of beasts swarmed the ground level, filling in the unruly jungle with their presence. Among those thousands, there were hundreds, if not more, 3rd class beasts. Evidently, they were quite common in the mountain range.

Though, it could be said that it was to be expected. The reputation of the mountain range stemmed from the 3000 Beast Kings that were rumored to reside within it. There was no way such a vast number of powerful entities could rise without this kind of competition.

These beasts were at each other's throats at all times. Even now, there were numerous battles and skirmishes taking place within the range of Damien's awareness.

'Beauty and savagery coexisting in harmony to create a stable ecosystem. It's like a natural embodiment of balance or yin and yang.'

He could only count himself lucky that there were so many beasts present, as if the amount of activity was any smaller, such a large scan of the terrain would have been easily pinpointed and traced back to him.

Neither he nor Ruyue was in any condition to battle these beasts. He still had to find time to deal with the poison inside his bloodstream, as well as recover the mana he used in his final attack. As for Ruyue, although her injuries weren't as severe, she didn't have his insane regeneration and needed time to inject healing pills and recuperate.

The only one with proper strength at the moment was Zara, and although this kind of place was perfect for her, it wasn't somewhere she could strut around without caution.

The first thing the trio needed to do was find a safe spot to set up residence. Until then, they were out in the open and completely susceptible to the hostile environment and raging beasts. Any one of the three would be great nutrition for a beast aiming for 4th class.

Zara immediately set off. She concealed their presence as best as she could, but refrained from using mana otherwise. Such a move would only attract attention. Instead, she used the natural power of her body and wings to silently propel them forward, streaking through the terrain.

Damien and Ruyue remained silent throughout. There were plenty of things to discuss, from the prior battle to the Death Seed to a plan for escape, but neither was in any condition to do so.

With the immediate danger subverted, their adrenaline was slowly waning, allowing them to feel the true pain their injuries had brought.

Luckily enough, it didn't take more than a few hours for Zara to find a secluded cave for them to set up camp. The cave itself was partially covered by dense vines and shrubbery, making it nigh invisible to the eye.

It was only through other forms of detection that one would be able to locate it, but it was enough for a temporary solution.

Arriving within the cave, Damien and Ruyue dismounted Zara's back and sat against the wall, using their own means to begin healing.

Damien focused his attention within himself. The spread of the poison hadn't been too fast, but it had still happened since his regeneration was being curbed by outside factors.

He sighed lightly at the scene. Until this point, any foreign invasion within his body had been swiftly taken care of by his Void Physique. This left him with the subconscious notion that his internal body would always be safe from this kind of attack.

But he now knew that it was just wishful thinking. It wasn't actually hard to figure out the theory behind it. Every foreign invasion so far had been energy-based. Whether through evolution or even the foreign mana from Elder Baba's residence on the way to the convention.

It was always a matter of mana.

However, the poison in his body now was different. He could tell that much by scouring it with his awareness. This poison was entirely natural, created through herbs and plants in a similar vein to alchemy.

Such a poison wouldn't alert his Void Physique at all, since it didn't use foreign mana to attack him.

Since his regeneration had been passively fighting off the poison all this time, it had been stuck in a stalemate, unable to advance and unwilling to retreat. But with his conscious effort, it was relatively easy to expel.

He had expert control over his body after all these years of evolution, so separating the poison from his bloodstream wasn't a problem. He guided it all to one point in his hand and coagulated it.

The next step was the simplest but most excruciating. Taking the coagulated mass of liquid, he pushed it through his skin, attempting to excrete it through his pores.

"Shit." He cursed, gritting his teeth in an attempt to stop himself from screaming.

Perhaps his idea was stupid, but he was a reckless person to begin with. This was the quickest and most efficient method, so he would endure the pain and finish the job.

Slowly but surely, the poison exited the skin on his palm. However, in the process, his skin, muscles, and even a bit of his bones ended up being corroded and melted by the vicious poison.

But in the end, he succeeded. He gently maneuvered the floating blob of liquid in his hand and stored it in a jade flask he had lying around in his subspace.

'This poison is truly vile. Still, it might come in handy in the future.'

With that out of the way, the rest was smooth sailing. All he needed to do was recover his mana and allow his passive regeneration to do its job.

Chapter 200 - 3000 Beast Mountain Range [2]

Two hours later, Damien finally reopened his eyes. With the help of his mana circuits, he was able to rapidly refill his mana capacity, fueling his regeneration and recovering from his injuries.

His skin had been scanned and burned by his own lightning previously in his quick bid to close his wounds, but the scars left behind in their wake were nothing major, so he didn't fret too much.

In actuality, he didn't mind the scars. It reminded him of the old days when he was weak and helpless in the dungeon. Back then, his body was riddled with scars head to toe, and he was even missing an arm.

Over time as his regeneration skill continuously evolved, his scars faded and left his skin pristine again, but it would've been a lie to say he didn't miss them.

Battle scars were mementos. They were proof of struggle. They held a slight bit of sentimental value in his heart.

Shaking off useless thoughts, he surveilled the interior of the cave once more to check on Ruyue and Zara. The former was still in deep meditation, but the wounds on her body didn't seem bad anymore. She would be healed soon.

As for Zara, she was dutifully watching the cave entrance for any potential threats. They hadn't been in this ecosystem for long, so it was unknown whether the cave had an owner.

Damien decided to think about their future plans as he waited for Ruyue to heal. Taking the escape talisman out of his subspace, he injected a trace of mana into it to see if he could get a reaction.

However, to his chagrin, it was still unsuccessful.

‘Well, I guess I shouldn’t have expected much. Even if we’re out of the spatial locking formation, it doesn’t mean we’re in a better situation.’

Logically speaking, it’d be more of a surprise if the talisman was actually able to properly carry out its function. The 3000 Beast Mountain Range had been a danger zone for thousands of years, and in that time it was only natural that countless cultivators would have entered to try their luck.

If such things as escape talismans were functioning within the mountain range, the stories and rumors surrounding it wouldn’t be nearly as overblown. Cultivators were beings prone to danger, but they equally feared death.

Nobody wanted to die a meaningless death before they were able to flesh out their potential.

So it wasn’t uncommon for a cultivator to carry around talismans or other escape treasures on their persons. The degree and quality of treasure would obviously differ, but it was impossible to think that nobody with a treasure able to teleport them back outside the mountain range would have come to the danger zone.

“The Myriad Illusion Veil must have some sort of property preventing long-distance spatial travel,” Ruyue commented. At some point while Damien was thinking, she must’ve finished recuperating.

And it wasn’t difficult to guess his thoughts after seeing the talisman in his hand.

“Mm, that’s the only explanation. Perhaps the spatial locking formation was only necessary on the outskirts of the jungle, where the veil isn’t as powerful.”

“Most likely, we had already left the effects of the formation while fleeing, but we didn’t notice it.”

“If that’s the case, the question remains as to what the ethereal wall we passed through before arriving in the mountain range was.”

If they had already left the formation, then the wall they had assumed was the edge of the formation was an entirely different mechanism.

Was it another formation? If so, it was of a terrifyingly large scale. Whatever that wall was, it was easy to infer that it was the reason the Myriad Illusion Veil didn’t encroach upon the true 3000 Beast Mountain Range.

“An easy way out was never viable, huh,” Damien muttered in resignation.

“It doesn’t matter. I, for one, refuse to spend the rest of my life secluded in this mountain range.” Ruyue responded. Her tone was firm, leaving no room for questioning.

Damien nodded in agreement. “No matter how beautiful this place is, it isn’t somewhere I’m willing to spend the entirety of my life.”

Damien was someone who yearned to explore the universe and see the myriad worlds it held. There was no way he'd disagree with Ruyue.

"The convention was cut short after a month by those idiotic self-righteous inquisitors, so we have roughly 8 months left before the secret realm opens. Leaving aside 2 months for travel, we have 6 months to find a way to escape."

"No, there's no need for that," Ruyue interjected, "the location of the secret realm is common knowledge to those within the sects. And with your ability, you should be able to teleport us there as long as you know the location, right?"

Noticing the hint of provocation in her tone, Damien grinned. "Of course. There's no way something as easy as that is outside of my capabilities."

"Then it's settled. Have you tried using the messaging talisman to contact Master yet?"

"Ah..." Truthfully, Damien had completely forgotten about it. The escape talisman was the more valuable of the bunch, so he placed more importance on that one.

Taking out the second talisman, Damien injected his mana. Surprisingly, he elicited a positive response.

The talisman crackled and alarmed as if it was having trouble operating, but in the end, a startled voice was projected through it, albeit slightly jarred by interference.

"Damien? I didn't expect you to contact me this early."

“Master, the situation isn’t good. I don’t think this talisman will last long so allow me to speak before anything else.”

Damien didn’t waste any time. He immediately summarized the events leading up to this point, from the month they spent at the convention to the chase that left them stranded.

“What?! Those Eclipsing Shadow Sect bastards dared?! Alright, I’ve heard your story. I’ll arrive there in a few weeks and take you both out of that damn danger zone!”

“Wait.”

Damien looked at Ruyue in surprise. She had let him take the reins for so long that he didn’t actually expect her to speak at this time. Still, he didn’t really mind it, handing her the talisman and allowing her to say her piece.

“Ruyue?”

“It’s me, Master. I know it might be presumptuous of me to ask, but please allow us time to figure things out for ourselves before you charge in here.”

Damien’s eyes widened in shock as he looked at her, noticing her staring back at him. Her eyes were filled with a sort of conviction he’d never seen from her before.

“Can I ask why?” Tian Yang replied. His voice was oddly calm, unlike what one would expect from someone who had just heard something so absurd.

“The reason is simple. As it is now, we are too weak.”

Damien furrowed his brows at the overarching statement, but in the end, he couldn't help but agree. Indeed, they were far too weak in the grand scheme of things.

If they had been besieged by those cloaked figures in any other circumstance, without the outside help from the veil and other natural factors, it was unknown whether they would have been able to escape relatively unharmed as they did.

“The 3000 Beast Mountain Range is an incredibly dangerous zone, I'm aware of that, but such a zone is precisely what we need to foster our growth. This environment is perfect for practical combat experience and continuous leveling.

“I may be cutting it close, but allow us 7 months to do as we please within the mountain range. If we haven't contacted you after the allotted time, you can take it as failure on our part and come save us.

“I have never asked for too much or been too willful since you started training me, but just this once I'd like to truly experience the harshness and cruelty of reality. I want to temper myself in flames and be reborn as a being with true strength.”

Tian Yang was silent for an entire minute before responding.

“Okay. I can sense your determination even through the talisman. I would be a fool of a master to refuse you. All who desire strength must test themselves in true combat, and it's the one thing I've refrained from allowing you all these years.

“Perhaps it’s my old age getting to me, making me so overprotective. Since you’ve spoken as such, I’m sure that both of you are in agreement. Just remember, if I don’t receive any update after 7 months, I will charge in there without hesitation and drag the two of you out, whether you like it or not.”

The talisman erupted in sparks once again as it died out, leaving the conversation unfinished. Luckily, they had been able to convey what they wanted and get a positive response.

Damien had been silently listening to the conversation between master and disciple. Although he also counted as Tian Yang’s disciple, he never placed emphasis on such formalities. It could be said that the bond between the two was still relatively weak.

However, it was different for Ruyue. She had been more or less raised by Tian Yang for many years, and their bond was clear as day. From Tian Yang’s tone, he could even infer that their connection was borderline familial.

He saw no reason to interject in such a relationship or conversation. Besides, he agreed with everything she said. This was indeed a perfect environment for continuous leveling, and it might even grant him a new trait if he was lucky.

Unlike her, he had already been tempered by countless battles, but he still had things he needed to improve. If not his strength, his mind needed heavy improvement.

He has always been a brute. He accepted that and truly had no way to deny it. He was the kind of person who charged with overwhelming force and achieved domineering victory.

But recent times told him this wasn't enough. He needed to learn how to use his wits and be clever in battle. He needed to learn how to strategize.

These 7 months, they would be his first step on that path.