

## Void 201

### Chapter 201 - Death Seed [1]

With the duo being able to successfully establish communication with Tian Yang, albeit only for a short period of time, they were able to put down their worries about the outside world and focus wholeheartedly on the task in front of them.

However, there were still a few loose ends to be tied. The most important of them all...

“The Death Seed.”

Damien stared at the vial in his hand and the peculiar specimen within it with an inquisitive gaze. He wanted to find out the truth behind this product that had sent Zara into a frenzy.

Luckily for him, Zara was able to properly control herself after her original outburst, so although she still felt the overwhelming emotions from before, she didn't hinder him or try to pounce at the treasure in his hand.

At first glance, nothing seemed out of the ordinary about the item. It still maintained its appearance as a small black pill. In fact, it even bore a slight resemblance to some anti-toxin pills that already existed within the world.

But anyone with a working brain would be able to tell that it was anything but similar. For that Fairy Lin character to hype it up so much, there had to be something special about it.

Still, no amount of probing was able to elicit a response from the treasure. Damien's mana sense wasn't even able to penetrate the crystalline container it was kept in.

Such was the miracle brought to life by Star Jade. It wouldn't deserve its reputation otherwise.

"Should I take it out and examine it?" Damien questioned. He was glad he had someone to turn to for a second opinion at the moment.

"Hmm, taking it out would be the best way to inspect its characteristics and properties, but the risk that something could go wrong is also immense." Ruyue pointed out.

Indeed, that was Damien's worry as well. It was an unknown treasure passed down by the Nox. He had no intention to take it lightly.

"Does the risk outweigh the gain, though?"

"We haven't an inkling about what the treasure actually is, so I can't say for sure. However, I think we should do it. With the amount of trouble we went through to safely secure it, we at least deserve to know this much."

Truthfully, Damien wanted to open the vial and do a closer inspection from the beginning. His concern for Zara had already decided his answer. But he wasn't alone and he couldn't mindlessly make decisions at this point, so he decided to ask Ruyue.

Nevertheless, with her agreement, he also firmed his decision. He revolves his mana and prepared to quickly react to any unforeseen circumstances, and without hesitation, he opened the vial.

In that instance, he felt the threat of death encroaching upon him. It was as if countless skeletal arms were threatening to burst from the ground and consume him, dragging him down to hell with them.

But oddly enough, his danger sense didn't activate. Damien trusted this skill a great deal. It had been properly honed through a myriad of life and death encounters, becoming almost flawless.

The only time it didn't activate was when the threat was too strong for him to perceive, such as when he had been wounded and poisoned by the peak 3rd class cloaked figure from before.

But this time, he was sure it wasn't the same case. Regardless of the deathly feeling that washed over him, he could still properly gauge the aura of the treasure. It was illusory and vague, but it didn't seem to possess any attack power.

Damien hardened his heart and channeled mana into his eyes. The world was soon enveloped in a vast rainbow of colors. The ambient mana around him swirled and danced like fairies among nature, but in the center of his vision was a patch of abyssal darkness.

'As I thought. It's not that death itself is approaching me, rather it was solely the aura of death that surrounded me.'

The Death Seed was no longer in his vision, at least not its physical form. It was replaced by the coalescence of deathly mana that produced it, as well as the cloud of the same mana that had encircled him.

This cloud of mana was the source of his feeling. It was giving him the illusion that he was soon to die, instilling a guttural fear in his heart. If not for his eyes that could witness its true form, he might've ended up making a mistake.

Ruyue was too far away to feel the same effects as Damien, but she too could sense the eeriness that had suddenly emerged in the atmosphere. The vial had only been opened, the treasure inside hadn't even been taken out yet, but the burst of aura alone was frightening.

Just like Damien did previously, she revolved the mana within her body, putting up a resistance against the foreign feeling. Since it still didn't feel like enough, she brought out a trace of lunar energy and costed herself with it.

The negative nature of yin would have been the best ward, but she didn't use it. Instead, she opted for the purifying effects that she was granted as a sub ability of her moon affinity.

She had two moons under her dominion, with one supplying her icefire and the other being the main moon that decorated the Cloud Plane's night sky. The purifying effect came from the latter, which seemed to have a few extra abilities besides the use of lunar energy.

She was still slowly excavating them, but for now, she only needed this one. With the new layer of defense, she was able to properly view the situation without fear.

"This mana is likely of the death element," Damien commented once he realized she had stabilized.

"The death element...I didn't think such an element existed, but I guess anything is possible in this world."

"Mm, I have a companion who uses the Life element so I was never doubtful of its existence, I just didn't expect to see it here. Coupled with my previous observations, it's clear that the Nox mainly specialize in said element."

“But how does the concentration of death mana have anything to do with the effects that were promised when consuming the treasure?” Ruyue questioned. The reasoning made no sense, and although it could be said that Fairy Lin had simply lied about its effects, it was more plausible that she didn’t.

After all, there was no way she would be able to fool so many 4th class beings and be so confident if not for such a firm belief that her words were truth.

Damien also had this question, but there was still plenty they had to learn about the treasure. At this point, they couldn’t even say they had a preliminary understanding of it.

Knowing this, Damien decided to probe deeper. He expanded his awareness, focusing it within the vial and gently probing the spherical object within.

At first, it didn’t respond to his probing. At the Chaos Rank, treasures and artifacts would begin to gain a semblance of will, able to use mana to communicate their intentions.

For this reason, binding a Chaos rank artifact was much different than the process with its predecessors. One would have to establish communication and make the treasure accept them before they could use it.

There were many ways to go about this process, but the main two were bonding and domination.

Just like with everything else in the world, strength could always act as a backdoor. Anything with sentience would value its life, and threatening a treasure with pure strength was an easy way to gain its submission.

But many chose to bond with the treasures instead. If a treasure was willingly cooperating, much more strength could be drawn from it and the process would be much smoother.

But Damien didn't need to do either at this moment. He had no intention of using a treasure that had Nox origins. But he still had to establish some sort of communication so he could successfully probe.

He continued sending his awareness towards the treasure, being careful of the amount of force he used, before finally getting a reaction.

It was faint, but he felt something awaken within the seed. The small black ball became active, shining with a light glow. And then, it began wriggling around within the confines of the vial.

Chapter 202 - Death Seed [2]

“What the fuck...”

Damien could only curse under his breath at the sight. Sure, a treasure moving on its own wouldn't necessarily be anything new to him, especially when said treasure was supposed to be quasi-sentient, but this was different.

Even when a treasure moved, its status as an inanimate object would limit it. Its movements were destined to be rigid and unpracticed. But Damien could see none of that in the wriggling black sphere.

Instead, its movements were more like that of a caged worm trying to escape confinement. It moved as if it was alive.

‘Wait a minute...’

Damien sent his awareness into the vial once again, but he no longer cared for gentleness. He forcefully pierced into the Death Seed and scoured its contents.

“What the actual fuck is this...”

The death mana was expected, so were the various essences that seemed to be extracted from a variety of herbs. The thing that shocked him most was the presence of small, almost undetectable, signs of life.

The life aura was weaker than that of a dying man, but it was present nonetheless. As Damien continued his search, he found that the Death Seed’s form as a pill was anything but. Instead, it was like a curled-up creature disguising itself as a pill.

As if sensing that its secrets were being laid bare, the creature unfurled itself, revealing its true form. It was similar to a black centipede with a scaly and hard exoskeleton. It had countless squirming legs that pushed up against the side of the vial, attempting to gain traction.

And then, it braced itself and rapidly lunged upwards in a bid to escape.

“Shit!”

Damien hurriedly brought the cap down and sealed the vial, trapping it once more. The creature hissed and squirmed indignantly, smashing its body against the glass of the vial rabidly.

Damien and Ruyue watched on in shock, while Zara's expression was more leaned towards curiosity and interest. Who would've thought that this so-called treasure was actually nothing of the sort?

"What the hell are these bastards trying to do with this?"

"Isn't that obvious? We already assumed they were auctioning the Death Seed in an attempt to control the heads of the wicked path, we just didn't expect it to be in this form."

"Right..." Damien could only agree. That speculation was only geared in the sense that the devil worshippers wanted to gain the favor of the righteous path. But if this kind of creature was consumed...

"This has to be a parasite. The unsuspecting victim would consume it thinking of it as a pill, and it invades their mind. I don't know whether it turns them into a dog or a mindless slave, but either way, it's incredibly dangerous."

"Mm, the only reason the creature showed itself is because it was being continuously probed without consumption. If it was given to a greedy individual or someone too prideful to believe any schemes could work on them, it'd spell their demise."

"We should destroy it here and now. I don't feel comfortable keeping this kind of thing on me while I travel."

"But what about master? We should at least wait until he inspects it before we make that decision."



“Sure he can inspect it, but can he come up with anything other than what we’ve already figured out? Even with further probing, we’d only be able to figure out the composition of the creature, not its abilities. The only way to get true results is to have someone consume it. But obviously, that isn’t a viable choice.”

“I can at least agree on that part, but I still believe it’s better to let Master take a look at it.”

Ruyue’s stance was clear and her belief was firm. Seeing the look in her eyes, he knew she wouldn’t bend no matter how hard he tried to convince her.

Perhaps it was just paranoia speaking, but Damien felt it’d be more dangerous to carry around such a thing. He even felt repulsed by the idea. And his subspace would be the best place to keep it if they decided to do so, since it couldn’t be penetrated by outside forces like a spatial ring.

“Sigh, fine. I’ll listen to you this once since I know I can’t change your decision. Master is much more powerful than us anyway, so he might find something that we couldn’t see.”

Damien begrudgingly agreed, moving to put the vial back in his subspace. However, he was met with unexpected interference.

“Wait!”

Damien looked over at the speaker in surprise. “What is it, Zara?”

“Can you...Can you let me consume it?” Zara asked hesitantly.

“What?!” Damien exclaimed. “Absolutely not. I won’t allow whatever parasite this is to invade your body.”

“But I don’t think it’ll do anything! Something in my bloodline is resonating with that creature! I believe that I will get much stronger if I just have the chance to consume it!”

Once again, it was her bloodline. There was almost no reason to question it now, Zara’s bloodline had a connection to the Nox.

Usually, beasts with Godbeast bloodline like Zara would have long since awakened their inherited memories from their ancestors, even if it was a partial awakening or just a portion of memories.

But no such thing took place with Zara. No matter how strong she grew, she was never given a clue about her heritage. The first and only one they had found so far was made clear now.

As for the relation between Zara’s bloodline and the Nox, that was still to be found, but for her bloodline to resonate with such strong feelings, it couldn’t have been only a small relation.

Damien felt conflicted. With access to her mind, he could clearly feel how desperate she was. Not only for the strength she was sure she’d receive, but also to find any lead she could on this clue.

Heritage was incredibly important to beasts, more so than Damien had ever imagined.

Every beast had a trace of Godbeast bloodline, such was fact. However, for most beasts, this trace was so minuscule that it could barely even be counted.

Of the countless number of beasts in existence, there weren't many that could actually awaken their slumbering bloodline. There were even fewer that had a potent enough bloodline to be considered as true inheritors.

But Zara was one of them. Not only did she have the potent bloodline, but it had also been awakened within her from the moment she was born. Such was the uniqueness of the so-called First Dungeon, as the spatial grandmaster Kurt had named it.

He had also written in passing about how the Godbeast bloodlines within the dungeon were much more potent, but Damien hadn't paid it much thought until now.

On one hand, he didn't want any harm to befall Zara. Letting something as dangerous as the Death Seed enter her body was out of the question. But on the other hand, he found it difficult to turn down her earnest plea.

"Can I at least try and erase its consciousness before giving it to you?" He asked in defeat.

But she wouldn't even give him this much. "No. I want it as it is right now. Damien, you've known me for so long, so you know I'm not the weak little cub I once was. Please, just trust me this once."

Damien laughed helplessly. He couldn't help but be reminded of the way Ruyue had pleaded to Tian Yang earlier.

When did their relationship become one where she had to beg him like this? He had never considered himself her master. His feelings stemmed from a different place. To him, Zara had always been like an innocent and cheerful little sister.

When did she grow up so much? When did she lose her naivety? He felt incredibly guilty that such things happened without his notice.

In the end, he couldn't stop himself from obliging her. He had immense trust in her from the start, he was just incredibly afraid of seeing her get hurt.

Turning to Ruyue, he gave her the same helpless look.

Ruyue felt complicated seeing this. It wasn't his plan nor was it hers, but just like how she had been previously, she knew she wouldn't be able to convince him otherwise.

"Sigh, fine fine. I understand already. I won't say anything about the matter, and if she can successfully consume it, we'll have another powerful ally by our side."

Damien beamed at her response. "Truly thank you. I promise I'll repay you for this in the future."

Ruyue was a bit dazed by his smile, but she quickly snapped out of it. "I didn't ask for any repayment, you fool." She muttered lightly, hiding the slight smile on her face.

But Damien had already moved over to Zara, so he wasn't able to witness it.

“If you feel anything odd, immediately contact me. I will expel everything from your body whether you like it or not. Understand?”

“Mm!”

Damien sighed lightly as he once again removed the lid from the vial. And as predicted, the Death Seed creature jumped out, attempting escape.

But there was no way Zara would allow that to happen. In one fell swoop, she grabbed it in her mouth and devoured it whole.

Chapter 203 - Death Seed [3]

The cave was wrapped in silence as Damien and Ruyue intently watched Zara, trying to glean any changes that occurred within her body after she ate the Death Seed.

However, to their dismay, there was nothing. Zara simply stood still with her eyes closed and savored the taste of the creature she had just ingested.

“Hm? Shouldn’t there be some sort of wild gust of mana or something right now?” Damien questioned.

“I’m not sure about any of that, but I’m certain there should at least be some changes.” Ruyue was also doubtful about the lack of reaction. Even the rapid stat boost that Zara was supposed to be experiencing would have some sort of physical manifestation.

The system relayed their physical abilities as stats, so that’s how they were usually referred to. But they weren’t simply status points in a game. Every time one received a boost in their stats, their body would experience a change, no matter how minute it was.

That was half of the reason Damien always went through horrendous pain whenever he evolved. Not only was the essence he devoured being sent through his body to temper it, but the drastic rise in stats would also remold him at a cellular level.

The system wasn't a simple thing at all, and neither was the quest and rise to power that all beings under its influence would partake in. They were always doing their best to raise their level, raise their skill, and in the end, raise their state of existence.

The term 'league' that the system always used was referring to this. An individual's league was their state of existence. Every time it rose, said individual was essentially being reborn as a higher being. It was just that before 4th class and 5th class when one was preparing for and entering the realm of Godhood, these changes weren't as prominent.

So they were more or less attributed to growth in stats.

For Zara right now, such an immediate and inconsequential increase in stats should have been reflected in her body. Whether she would be in pain or grow in size, whatever it was it should have been something Damien and Ruyue could witness.

So why was she acting like she had done nothing more than eat a sumptuous meal?

As if to answer these questions, a sudden change emerged in Zara. Her previous pleasurable expression contorted into a grimace and her eyes shot open.

Rather than the bright golden pupils that were usually contained within, there was only an endless amount of blackness. Even the whites of her eyes were dyed in black.

Her mouth opened, showcasing rows of blade-like teeth as she began to growl seemingly at nothing. From Damien's connection with her, he could clearly feel her erratic emotional state.

It was a mixture of pain, anguish, unwillingness, euphoria, and an indomitable fighting spirit. Such a mixture of emotions would have been confusing in any other situation, but Damien knew exactly what was going on.

‘That thing is trying to possess her.’

Not just possess her, it was trying to completely eradicate her soul and become her. Within Zara's mind, a fierce battle was taking place.

On one side was a winged black wolf, the original owner of the body, and on the other side was a ghastly black dragon. With every second that passed in the outside world, the two traded hundreds of blows, but neither was able to gain the upper hand.

But Zara knew she was losing this battle. With every second that passed, more and more of her memories were being eroded and devoured by the being facing her. The only way for her to regain them was to defeat it.

Spreading her wings. She charged at the dragon like a black comet, brandishing her claws and fangs. She reached her target in an instant, slashing down while dodging the dragon's tail which whipped towards her like a mace.

With her every movement, bone-chilling ice spread through the floor of the mental world. Although her ice was only a manifestation of her will, it wasn't entirely useless. Even if it couldn't injure the

dragon, it was able to freeze the progress of memory erosion that was taking place in the background.

Such was the level of battle within a mental world. The only limit on ability was imagination, since there was no physical form to manifest and no real mana being consumed. If one had a conceptual understanding, anything was possible.

Zara could freeze even time itself within this mental world if she wanted, but there was no point in doing so. The dragon would be able to escape just as easily.

So while she used her ice to freeze the concept of erosion that the dragon was using to consume her memories and soul, she used her shadows to create a clone of herself.

The clone was entirely black with none of the features a living being would have, but that didn't matter, its physical strength was on par with hers.

Together, the two circled the dragon, attacking its blind spots in perfect unison. The dragon thrashed around, using its tail and fangs as its main weapon as well.

Just like Zara, it couldn't harm its opponent with elemental attacks. Only physical attacks within this plane would be effective, since they were essentially battling with their souls.

As the battle within the mental world continued, Zara's body fell to the floor, convulsing. Her muscles were wriggling beneath her skin as if they were alive, causing awkward protrusions to occasionally rise from her fur. Blood soon began to exit her orifices as she continuously growled into the air.



The commotion she caused was significant, and her deathly howls attracted the attention of numerous beasts that had been wandering in the vicinity.

From the tone of her howls alone, they were aware that whatever beast was making those sounds was in pain. And an injured opponent was the easiest prey.

Damien and Ruyue's expressions were grave.

"This isn't good. We've been surrounded." Damien peered through the cave walls with his awareness and noticed an ever-increasing crowd of beasts eyeing the semi-hidden cave with greed.

"Those beasts are too ferocious. Regardless of whether or not we leave the cave, they will attack. We have no choice but to fight."

Damien gritted his teeth in frustration as he glanced at Zara. He hated seeing her in this much pain, but the situation didn't allow him to help at all. If they didn't protect the cave, all three of them would be in trouble.

"I'm trusting you this once. Don't let me down." Whispering those words, he nodded towards Ruyue.

The two of them soon exited the cave with their heads held high, refusing to be intimidated by the threatening convergence of auras they were subject to.

Although the pressure was weighty, it was nothing to the two of them, who had endured Tian Yang's aura suppression with nothing but their bare bodies.

“So? Do we fight together or separate?”

“Together would be nice, but there’s too many of them right now. How about you take the left and I take the right, and we meet up in the middle.”

“Hmm, a good plan but let’s make it more interesting. Whoever finished last has to be the other person’s servant for an entire week!”

“What? You’re dreaming if you think I’ll ever be your servant.”

“Wow, are you that certain you’re going to lose? Don’t tell me you’re scared of a little bet like this.”

“Scared? As if. But these stakes are too dull. How about the winner gets a single favor from the loser, no matter what it is.”

Looking at Ruyue’s shining eyes, he got the sudden urge to tease her. His eyes unabashedly roamed her exquisite body and his mouth curled into a sly smile. “Whatever it is, you say?”

His blatant gaze seared into her skin. She felt like even though she was fully clothed, she was naked in front of his gaze. A blush inadvertently crept up her face, but she quickly turned away.

“I said whatever, so I mean whatever! Are you really so confident that you think you’ll get a taste of this princess?”

Damien's eyes widened both at her meaning and the way she addressed herself. The unexpected retort was too much for him. Unable to hold himself back, he broke into a boisterous fit of laughter.

Wiping the slight tears that formed at the side of his eyes, he replied back. "Fine fine, whatever you say, miss princess. These beasts don't look like they can wait much longer anyway, so shall we start our contest."

"Hmph! Shake on it to seal the deal."

The two glanced at each other and grinned, strongly shaking hands. Truthfully, a few bolder beasts had already charged forth during their conversation, but had been either burned to cinders or crushed to meatpaste in the process.

The rest of the smarter beasts were eyeing them warily. They knew that with such a large congregation, most of them would end up dead trying to get to whichever beast was within the cave, whether by the hands of their fellow beasts or the two humans in front of them.

But none of them ran away. The prospect of evolution was too enticing for them to do so, and the aura of the injured beast within the cave was powerful enough to guarantee their progression. Even if it meant risking death, they would take the chance.

The two sides stared each other down, their auras clashing in the air between them.

And then, it was pandemonium.

Chapter 204 - Death Seed [4]

Arcs of black lightning and blue fire streaked through the air, combining with various other elemental forces to create massive explosions. The sound of roars filled with killing intent and agony filled the surroundings.

Damien raced through the battlefield surrounded by an amethyst aura dyed with red. His nails had long since elongated into claws, and his teeth into fangs.

A hazy field surrounded him like the air during a heat wave, repelling any sort of elemental attack that shot towards him. Each of these attacks was returned directly to their casters, causing a larger influx of anguished howls.

There were no teams on the battlefield and no distinguishing between enemies and allies. Even while Damien and Ruyue fought valiantly among the beasts, the beasts fought each other as well.

After all, there wasn't even one among them that would be willing to share their spoils with the rest. Only one would survive and consume the beast within the cave.

Damien's figure was illusory, flashing between existence and nonexistence. He would appear in one spot, pummeling the beasts around him before disappearing and reappearing in a completely different area.

It had been a long time since he abused his teleportation, but in a chaotic battlefield like this, it was almost a cheat code. His awareness was spread within a 1-kilometer radius around him. Even though it was reigned in, he could see the proceedings much more clearly.

Every time he saw a beast being overpowered, he would teleport over and crush it. The air was filled with spatial fluctuations and distortions, painting a canvas of bloody swirls.

The beasts were frenzied in their fighting as well, perhaps even more so than Damien. None of them were weak, with even the weakest being at the peak of 2nd class. Any that didn't reach this level had long since fled after seeing the number of powerful beings that had congregated.

The only reason Damien was able to crush his enemies like they were ants was because he was aiming for the weakest among them, as well as those who were being weakened. He had no time to be held up by those stronger opponents.

Suddenly, he jumped into the air and spread his arms, calling forth his mana. In the next instant, rumbling storm clouds gathered around him.

The clouds thundered and boomed, the natural yellow lightning within them being dyed black with Damien's signature style. Their aura was elevated immensely in this process, bearing down on those beneath like heavenly punishment.

The crackling black lightning was especially vicious today, carrying an unbridled killing intent. But no beast present would be intimidated by the bloody aura.

Unlike the pack leader Damien had met previously, these beasts lived in an environment similar to the dungeon. Killing intent was engraved in their bones and battle was their life.

Once the formation of the storm clouds was complete, Damien once again dropped to the ground, using his vector control to increase the surrounding gravity and speed up his fall.

His landing caused the earth to shatter and tens of beasts to be momentarily flattened, giving an opening to those who survived to quickly kill them off.

But even they wouldn't survive long. The brewing storm clouds finally began to move, dropping bolts of lightning thicker than a man's arm onto the battlefield and causing widespread destruction.

It didn't matter whether a beast was present in the strike zone or not, the lightning would still strike true. Craters upon craters began littering the packed dirt of the ground and many beasts were struck, becoming paralyzed by the destructive electricity that entered their bodies.

But the storm clouds were completely under Damien's control. If this was all they could do, they would be much more worthless than his other traits.

In Damien's hands, this trait could show off much more of its capabilities than a measly sea dragon could ever hope for.

The lightning within the clouds began to coalesce, gathering their combined heat to become something new, something deadlier.

Soon enough, pillars of plasma also began to shoot down from the sky. No matter how one saw it, it was a scene of judgement.

As beasts continuously fell from the combined onslaught of his trait and their fellow beasts, Damien continued to flash around the battlefields, distorting and collapsing space to reap as many lives as possible.

The feeling was exhilarating. He had almost forgotten what it felt like within the dungeon when he was no better than a mindless beast himself. He had almost forgotten the thrill of such heaven-shaking battles.

This was his environment. This was where he thrived. This was what he needed. He had priorities, sure, but he knew that this was the kind of place where he would grow the fastest.

If it wasn't for the fact that there was plenty to do in the outside world, as well as people he cared about, he would probably move back and forth between the danger zones of the world as he continuously fought such battles.

But no matter. Such thoughts were nothing more than fleeting desire.

Since he wasn't being actively targeted by any large groups of beasts, and with the general chaos of the battle itself, Damien felt like he had everything under control. And so, he took a second to glance over at Ruyue.

'Wow, she might be a natural at this.'

It was a surprising sight indeed. He thought he was in total control over his side of the battlefield, but she wasn't doing any worse.

The sun was still high in the sky, but two massive moons were hanging over the battlefield, each being many kilometers in diameter.

While one was relatively normal, the other was like a massive ball of blue fire. He didn't know why his mind automatically classified it as a moon when it looked more like a star, but he didn't pay much attention to that.

Ruyue's fight was much more graceful than his. Instead of getting into the thick of the battle like he did, she oversaw it from the sky like an immovable mountain, a battle-hardened general.

The two moons flanking her on each side were continuously pouring out their own unique energies, and a deep grey fog was spreading through the atmosphere.

While Damien used his storm trait to rain down projectiles on the masses, Ruyue's two moons did the same. Blue beams that radiated both heat and cold shot down rapidly and burned through the beasts and waves of gentle essence followed suit, turning their bodies into ash.

It was a smart strategy. Any beast that got its claws on the corpses would inevitably grow stronger in the midst of battle, so destroying them was the best move. Damien didn't do it because, well, he wanted to devour them himself.

While the two moons complemented each other, Ruyue stood between them, waving her hands like a conductor. Evidently, the eerie fog had originated from her.

The elemental attacks that were being used by the beasts miraculously never aimed at her. Or rather, the beasts that aimed at her inadvertently shot their attacks in unintended directions.

‘Mental attacks?’

If there was one thing that could be considered as the main weakness of beasts, it was their minds. Until they reached 4th class, they would never prioritize mental defense, with their power system being focused on physical improvement.

Until that point, any mental growth they had went towards sprouting consciousness and maturing.



The system was fair. It maintained balance in its own way. Beasts could grow and strengthen at speeds that humans could never even fathom as long as they were surrounded by their own kind.

Kill, eat, evolve. Such a system would be far too broken if it was allowed to be just that. Perhaps that was why beasts were born mindless and grew into their wits.

As for Ruyue's attack, even Damien didn't understand the exact nature of it.

But Ruyue wasn't paying attention to him right now. The yin element in her body was more active than it had ever been, fusing into her mana and being guided by her graceful movements.

With each swing of her hand, she released another wave of essence into the crowd of unsuspecting beasts. The essence melded into the fog and infected the minds of those it surrounded, causing utter mayhem within the ranks.

As mentioned before, the yin element was structured on all things negative. Negative emotions were not excluded from such classification. When she was a child, Ruyue had many times run into problems where she was unable to control her yin element, causing strife and conflict in her wake.

She would unconsciously affect their emotions simply with her presence, amplifying the ugliness they hid behind conscientious exteriors and causing them to burst. When she started studying under Tian Yang, this was the first ability she had mastered.

But she rarely ended up using it. It was a tool for incitement and a tool that could reveal a person's true colors, but she was never a fan of manipulation. But against a crowd of beasts, or when her life was truly on the line, she would never hesitate to pull out all her cards.

Sure, Damien's side had the most unbridled chaos with the myriad of flashing abilities and bloody head-on battles painting its surface, but Ruyue's was much more gruesome in its own way.

Suddenly, she felt a gaze on her. Gazing back fearlessly, she once again grinned at the man who was both her closest friend and opponent.

Since they were in control of their own battlefields, all that was left was a race to the center.

Chapter 205 - Next Movie [1]

The anguished cries of beasts only became more and more prominent as time went on. Countless beams of various colored lights as well as waves of formless essence infiltrated their ranks and reaped their lives.

The pristine scenery of the jungle in a 1,000-meter radius had become dyed in blood and estranged body parts. In fact, the commotion had grown large enough to attract even more beasts over, but seeing the proceedings they quickly left the area.

Zara's agonizing howls had also ceased at some point during the battle, but neither the beasts nor Damien and Ruyue noticed this. There were simply too many thunderous sounds that collided against each other in the surroundings, drowning out the once-piercing cries.

Damien once again looked at the destruction being wrought and smiled. He knew there were more methods he could use to handle the situation, but none seemed as feasible as the one he was using now.

For instance, he had yet to use Starfall and rain hell in that way, but there was a reason for this. He simply didn't want to attract too much attention.

While it may have sounded contradictory considering that the current situation was already calling plenty of attention towards them, his thoughts were on a different matter.

Starfall required him to summon an astral body from space, and he most of the time chose random debris instead of any significant objects. But no matter what he called, its origin would be the same.

Even if he used his Celestial Authority to influence the summoning, for it to do proper wife scale damage it had to gain a significant amount of momentum, meaning the actual summoning would take place hundreds if not thousands of kilometers in the air.

Such a scene would obviously be in plain view even from the far reaches of the mountain range, and rather than the 3rd class beasts that noticed the commotion at this point, it'd be the various experts who lived in the mountains who took note.

And this was what Damien wanted to avoid.

If it was 3rd class beasts, even if he and Ruyue couldn't slaughter them all, he at least had confidence to flee. But if any of those Beast Kings were attracted, it'd be game over.

His storm trait was different in this regard. Although it was similarly eye-catching, it would only raise interest of those within a 10,000-kilometer radius at best, and those experts on the mountains wouldn't sense it.

Even if they did, he doubted they'd take serious interest after seeing it. After all, it was a trait. Traits, while not entirely common, aren't necessarily rare enough to stand out. Even if a Beast King noticed that the trait was in use, they most likely wouldn't care.

His storm trait, while definitely being among the more destructive traits he's seen, wasn't unique enough to belong to only a single beast type.

This particular iteration of it belonged to the sea dragon, but many other variations of it could exist in other beasts, especially in locations such as the 3000 Beast Mountain Range where talent was congregated.

Plus, those Beast Kings weren't like Damien with his devour ability, so there was no way for them to take it for themselves. The only thing Damien was concerned about was whether those Beast Kings would be interested in recruiting the user of the trait as one of their own.

It was impossible for factions not to exist within the mountain range, and through Damien's brief interactions with the Beast Emperor and Empress on Apeiron, he was well aware that those Beast Kings didn't distinguish between races of beast when it came to recruitment.

Luckily, even for this kind of recruitment, the physical presence of a Beast King was too much. Instead, those who noticed would only send envoys.

Still, even with all this he knew there was no guarantee of complete safety, so he proposed a bet to motivate both himself and Ruyue to clean up shop as fast as possible.

And now, that bet was slowly coming to an end.

Most of the crowd had already been dealt with, and the only thing left was the central area that they left untouched. At that place, it was still only beast on beast battle taking place.

With the two of them working together, it wouldn't take long to wipe out these few hundred remaining beasts, but the competition would end based on who arrived at that point first, not who was able to wipe the central area the fastest.

And seeing the excited glint in Ruyue's eyes, Damien could only shake his head wryly.

'Ah, whatever. I can't dampen her mood when she's looking so excited, can I?'

He could've teleported over immediately if he really wanted to, but he had long since developed a soft spot for this outwardly cold yet inwardly soft-hearted woman.

The fact that he was able to see her cheerful and exuberant side while others were faced with a massive wall was enough satisfaction for him.

Turning his attention away from her, he teleported over to the last few remaining beasts on his side, opting to fight them head-on instead of bombarding him as he did before. Though, he still left his storm trait active to keep up the image that he was trying his best.

And only a few minutes later, he saw Ruyue dashing towards the center at top speed.

He quickly wrapped up the battle, grabbing and crushing the last beast's head with a spatial distortion before teleporting over.

When he arrived, he saw a smug-looking Ruyue gazing at him in amusement.

“Weren’t you so confident that you were going to win? What happened to that?”

“Hmph, whatever. You were only a hair faster than me anyway, so why do you look so proud?”

“You can teleport, duh! I beat someone who can teleport in a competition of speed, why shouldn’t I be happy?”

“Okay, you’re definitely twisting the events now. Since when was this a foot race?”

“It is what I say it is! Don’t you know? The winner gets to make the story while the loser can only sigh in despair.”

Damien once again shook his head wryly. It seems he couldn’t let her win too often, lest she become too arrogant for him to handle.

As the two conversed, their respective area of effect moves migrated onto the crowd of beasts in front of them and brought judgement upon their enemies. Even without doing too much physical work themselves, they quickly razed the beasts until none remained.

“Alright, now that that’s over, what did you want for your favor?” Damien asked with a slight smile on his face. He had developed enough trust in this senior sister of his that he knew she wouldn’t cause him too much trouble. That was part of the reason why he didn’t mind giving her the win.

“Hmm, I can’t decide right now,” Ruyue said as she brought her finger up to her lip, seemingly deep in thought. “I’ll keep this favor on hold until I really know what I want.”

Damien let out an exasperated sigh at her “pretending to be mysterious” attitude that mirrored a certain senior he knew.

“Fine, keep that favor on hold then. But since we’re done with this, I think it’s better if we move.”

Ruyue’s expression became serious at his words as she nodded. “Right, our position has been exposed. Even if the massacre will ward off beasts for a bit, it’s not a permanent solution.”

Damien turned his attention back to the cave as they spoke.

He was only able to joke as he did since he hadn’t felt anything notable from his mental connection with Zara, but he could tell that her mental state was slightly jumbled. It wasn’t a problem, per se, but he wasn’t able to feel comfortable until he saw her condition for himself.

Arriving back inside, he immediately went over to Zara’s side. By the looks of it, she had collapsed from exhaustion or something of the sort, but she was still fine and breathing. None of her previous painful expressions or bodily changes were present anymore.

However, he noticed that her fur was much sleeker than it was before, and her wings had experienced a slight change too. Now, along with their massive wingspan and speed, he could see the feathers had taken on a razor-sharp component. They were able to cut through his finger with ease when he ran it along their edges.

He injected his mana into his eyes, trying to sense any abnormalities in her aura, but once again there was nothing out of the ordinary. Still, it was clear that she was experiencing some sort of evolutionary process, since her aura kept fluctuating and expanding.

Signing lightly, he brought Zara into his shadow. The process she was going through seemed extremely gradual, and he couldn't be sure when she was going to wake up.

Shaking off his concern, he turned to Ruyue. It was time for them to decide their next move.

“For our primary goals in the future, we have two options that seem most viable to me.”

Chapter 206 - Next Move [2]

“For our primary goals in the future, we have two options that seem most viable to me.”

“Our goal here is strength. Regardless of whether it comes from plain and simple leveling or comprehension and experience, in the end, we are pursuing strength.

“And to this end, our options become limited. We can either ascend a mountain or make our way to the massive tree in the center of the mountain range.”

Ruyue had a pondering look on her face. Damien, who usually didn't seem that knowledgeable, had suddenly become an expert. Still, his words carried certainty and confidence that made it hard to doubt him.

“Why are these our only options? Can't we just stay within this ground-level jungle and gain levels through fights like we did just now?”



But Damien shook his head in denial. “That’s not possible. There are two points we need to go over to explain the reason. For simplicity’s sake, I’ll start with the easier one. Have you opened your status since the last fight? Also, did you not notice anything while fighting those beasts?”

Ruyue checked her status before abruptly falling into contemplation. It was as he said, something was strange. “With the number of beasts we killed, I should have gained a significant amount of experience, but I’ve barely advanced a single level.”

“It’s the same for me. I can’t say for certain what’s causing this phenomenon, but I’m sure of a few things. Experience in itself is another form of essence, it’s just that we don’t have the capabilities to truly witness its form or control it. If we continue down this line of thought, we can infer that something is either blocking that essence from coming to us or sending it somewhere else for unknown purposes.”

“But why would it be like that?”

Damien could only smile wryly at this question. Ruyue had obviously become caught up in his momentum and just asked whatever questions came to her without trying to find the answer for herself. But he didn’t mind it much, so he let it be.

“We aren’t qualified to know the answer to that question. Some truths aren’t accessible until we gain the power to find them out for ourselves. Anyway, let’s move on: did you realize what I was talking about in my second question?”

Ruyue once again fell into thought, ruminating on the previous battle. “Ah! Isn’t the power of a 3rd class beast supposed to be much more robust than what we saw?”

Damien nodded with a smile. “Not only that, but their intelligence was also heavily lacking. I mean, look at Zara. Even if her intelligence is cut above the rest, she’s still a good example. Most 3rd class

beasts I have met until this point have learned to converse in the universal language, but these beasts don't seem to be capable of it.

“And besides communication, they also don't have the same mental capacity as the beasts we met outside. Just compare them to that pack leader from before and use it as an example.”

Ruyue nodded in understanding. Indeed, even if the pack leader was barely strong enough to be considered a 3rd class, its intelligence and thought process were complex enough to rival a human adult. These beasts weren't even close to such capabilities, being consumed by primal instincts.

“This leads me to my second point. This one is a bit more involved, as it concerns beast society in general. Beasts are creatures who heavily prioritize two things, heritage and hierarchy.

“In this case, we are focusing on the hierarchy aspect. The beasts that live on this ground level are, to be blunt, the utter trash of this beast society. Their strength and intelligence are simply unable to match up, so they are forced to stay on the ground and attempt to evolve.

“However, it'll be different for those on the mountain. The higher we go on the mountain, the more powerful beasts we will encounter. Above ground, the higher one lives, the more status they have, while below ground, it's the opposite.

“Basically, if we climb the mountain we will face true opponents and beasts who are capable of thought that can rival our own. That is where we will find challenges.

“However, there are cons to this as well, the various Beast Kings that reside in this mountain range will inevitably be on those mountains. We have no means of knowing when or where we will run into them or the types of personalities they have.

“If they are on the more cordial side; we may be able to somehow scrape by with our lives intact, but if they aren’t, we’re essentially doomed.”

Ruyue intently listened to his lecture, soaking up all the information he provided. Although she had been around the world a fair amount of times for sect missions and the like, she had never truly taken the time to understand beasts to such an extent.

Even most of the missions she took had to do with human problems rather than beast hunting.

“Hmm, risk and reward truly go hand in hand,” she commented. At face value, the risk seemed to outweigh the rewards, but in reality, it was hard to say. They didn’t know whether their experience gains would be hindered the same on the mountain, and they didn’t know the layout of society there either.

But if the experience block coincided with the hierarchy Damien had mentioned, they might make some truly splendid gains on the mountain. There was also the possibility of befriending a Beast King powerhouse, as well as gaining proper combat experience.

Aside from all that, there was another point that Damien didn’t end up mentioning since it was too obvious. The mana here wasn’t as simple as it was outside. While there was nothing out of the ordinary about the pure mana in the atmosphere, the concentration of elemental mana was much denser.

And with how environmental factors usually affected mana density, the concentration of elemental mana as they climbed the mountain would increase exponentially.

Neither Damien nor Ruyue practiced any ‘normal’ elements as their main fighting strength, but that wasn’t a problem. Yin and Yang together are something akin to creation forces, so Ruyue could absorb any yin-natured elemental mana in lieu of pure yin mana and still be fine.

In fact, this is what she usually did in comprehension since actual yin element mana was rare to find in nature. If the elemental mana concentration spiked, she would naturally benefit.

As for Damien, his case wasn’t as special. Lightning mana was easy to find, and as for space, it was everywhere. Spatial mana was ever present, it was just hard to actually draw out. Only when one’s comprehension of spatial element reached a certain level would it be possible.

But that wasn’t a problem for Damien, and if the concentration of such mana was heightened, it’d be even less burdensome.

All in all, the plan to climb the mountain didn’t seem as bad as it sounded on the surface. But Ruyue suddenly remembered that Damien offered a second path they could take.

“And the second option?”

“Ah, to be honest, that one is more of a gamble,” Damien replied sheepishly.

“That tree obviously holds some sort of importance, even if we just judge by its size. The fact that it is the direct center of the mountain range also alludes to this fact. Something tells me that we’ll meet an opportunity if we go there.”

“Hmm...” Ruyue hummed. This kind of intuition wasn’t something that could be ignored once they reached the level they were at. Evidently, there was something special about the tree that was drawing Damien towards it.

“But, it’s still too much of a risk to take right now. It’s an unknown factor. Also, it is so far away that it’ll take at least a month of constant travel for us to reach that point if we factor in all the beasts and whatnot that we’ll have to deal with during our travels.”

“And the aura of that tree is immense. Even from so far away, its life aura seeps into the atmosphere and fosters the growth of the fauna. Such a tree is guaranteed to be conscious, and it might also be hostile. We can never be too careful.”

“You’re right. That’s why I presented the previous option first. Still, I believe that we should at least check it out to see if there’s anything special over there. I mean, if we actually gain some sort of heavenly treasure or opportunity, all the pain and travel would be worth it.”

“True. No matter how I want to play it safe, it doesn’t seem like that’s really an option right now considering our location. But the known danger is safer than the unknown, so I opt that we go to the mountain first. After we gain some strength, we can head towards the tree.”

Damien nodded in agreement. This was the path that he wanted to take as well.

As they talked, the two had traveled countless kilometers away from their previous cave. Even in these new surroundings, they hadn’t been able to find another temporary residence to return to their peak state before they challenged the mountain.

Damien had also tried to devour the beasts he had killed before they left, but due to the experience blockage that he had learned about earlier, he didn’t gain as much as he hoped.

It wasn't that his Void Physique's functions were being interfered with, but instead, the experience had already left the beast carcasses at the moment they died instead of being transferred to him, leaving them useless.

And with those beasts being trashes among this society, they didn't even give him any noticeable changes in his physical stats.

Sighing lightly at his predicament, he turned his attention back to the boundless mountains on the horizon.

His blood was already boiling at the prospect of what they would find there.

Chapter 207 - First Mountain [1]

An entire week had passed by since the big battle, and Damien and Ruyue were making haste towards the mountains they saw in the distance.

There were 50 mountains total in this mountain range, but from their starting point, they only had 5 they could choose from. With their time in this danger zone limited to 7 months maximum, it'd be difficult to fully explore more than two of these behemoths, and that's if they completely abandoned their plans to visit the massive tree in the center.

At first, the two of them considered moving towards the central area and choosing a mountain among those there to climb, but they quickly discarded the thought. Just like human society, the central region would be where the most powerhouses were gathered.

Although it was rumored that there were 3000 Beast Kings residing in the mountain range, their positions were never mentioned. While it would've been nice if they were evenly spread out among the mountains, with 60 of them on each, that was nothing more than a dream.

With these thoughts in mind, the two headed towards the farthest mountain within their perception range. The decision wasn't random though. They were able to at least get a baseline read on the terrain of each mountain from the ecosystems they could see at a glance.

The 5th mountain happened to be covered in ice and snow, creating a beautiful scenery. Damien didn't have a strict elemental requirement for his training, while Ruyue would benefit immensely from the frosty atmosphere, so it ended up being the best choice.

As they traveled, they were constantly besieged by beasts from all sides, though the battles never reached the scale of their very first one within the mountain range. Instead, it was mainly just small groups of beasts that saw them as easy prey and ended up being demolished.

The duo did their best to use as little mana as possible as they fought, knowing that they had to constantly be wary. No matter how inferior these beasts were, they were still at 3rd class. Even if the ones they had run into so far had been trash, there was no saying that every single beast would be the same.

Their cautiousness didn't seem to be necessary though, as even by the time they finally reached the base of the mountain, they had met not a single worthy beast.

Now, however, it'd be different. The massive mountain in front of them was filled with icy trees that seemed to be made of glass and plants of the same nature. The flora seemed like it would shatter at a mere touch. But when Damien actually pushed his hand against it, he realized it was a facade.

In reality, the trunks of these trees were incredibly dense, and the second his hand touched its surface, a layer of permafrost began to cover it. If he had been any weaker, he might've been forced to amputate his entire hand from his careless action.

“Damn, even the environment is so ruthless,” Damien commented with a wary tone.

“Why are you speaking as if you’re scared while smiling like an idiot? It’s creepy.” Ruyue quipped back.

“Eh?” Damien brought his hand up to his face and touched his lips. He truly had been smiling.

“You didn’t know? It’s not just right now, you’ve had a smile on your face since you found out that Zara was okay.”

Damien furrowed his brows at her words. Why had he been smiling like that for no reason? ‘Well, it’s not like it really matters. If I smile, I smile. I have no worries so it’s only natural, right?’

He tried to convince himself inwardly, but even he didn’t believe such a lame excuse. Truthfully, he just didn’t want to admit to himself the reason.

‘No. I have to stay true to myself. If I keep acting like a wuss and running away from my problems, I’ll never change for the better.

He knew the reason behind his smile. He had known ever since that massive battle what the reason for his giddiness was.



He had lost his edge over the years. It had started on Apeiron, but became even more pronounced after he healed his mother successfully. He had lost that certain feeling that made him the person he was.

Whenever he thought back on the dungeon, he would always do so in the context of “wow, that was a shitty time compared to now” and he reveled in the fact that he escaped.

But it only took a single battle to bring him back to reality.

This environment was a lot like the dungeon. It was more expansive and definitely more mysterious, but the atmosphere was entirely similar. This kind of ruthless killing environment where it was every man for himself, if he was being completely honest, he missed it.

But many of his memories from the dungeon had been repressed. He knew of it, but didn't try to pry open that side of himself because he was mildly afraid of what would happen.

It wasn't the personality he developed back then that left a spot, but rather the experience he had in the blood world.

When he was trapped in his own consciousness while his body was being controlled by his bestial instinct, he was terrified. He was forced to mature in some ways, but remained the boy he was in others.

This kind of change was extremely disconcerting for his mind, making him unable to properly establish a sense of self, so when he recovered from that state, the memories became blurry.

That wasn't to say he didn't remember it, he remembered it clearly. Instead, it was as if the negativity tied to those memories had been dispersed and sealed away.

And even now he feared his bestial instincts. But at the same time, he missed them. His metaphorical blade had been dulled through his travels that weren't wrought with true danger. Even when he fought intense battles, they were usually against people who weren't enemies.

But now, he was left in such a situation as he was in now. And he ended up smiling. Smiling at the prospect of regaining his former self, his true self. The self that had been untouched by the niceties of the outside world.

He hoped he could regain some of those qualities, but he knew he couldn't keep all of them.

After all, he didn't want to go back to being socially inept and pretending to be a cultivation novel main character. That was extremely embarrassing in hindsight. Also, he had true relationships that he wanted to keep.

It was for similar reasons that he had neglected the Void Heart Sword Law. His travels with Ruyue had helped him clear some emotional burdens that had been weighing down on him. Now, becoming emotionless didn't have the same appeal as it did a few months ago.

He had already decided to stop running away under the soft moonlight of that night in the forest, and he was planning to stick to that promise.

His power would not be influenced by his instability. And it wasn't a prison that would accomplish that, but his own efforts.

Now that he had thought about all of this, he figured that having Ruyue here with him was a sort of blessing in disguise. Perhaps, her presence would mean he could gain an equilibrium in his shifty personality and become the person he truly wanted to be.

His contemplation didn't last that long, as he and Ruyue were still at the base of the mountain, but it had been enough. It cleared away some doubts that he had been having and allowed his thoughts to once again roam free.

Looking at Ruyue, his smile became a bit gentler. "Shall we head up the mountain now?"

Although she was surprised by his suddenness, she didn't pay it much thought. She was also itching to see what was in store for them.

Chapter 208 - First Mountain [2]

The trek up the mountain turned out to be a much more arduous task than what either of them had expected.

Even if they weren't peak existences, they still had a great deal of strength, and their resistance was something they prided themselves on. This went especially for Ruyue, who had a natural resistance to any and all yin-natured elements.

However, the mountain seemed to ignore any sort of resistance as it pummeled them with its natural forces. Biting cold seeped into their bones and forced them to revolve their mana in order to resist it, fierce blizzards wrapped around the entire mountain seemingly without end, not giving them a moment of respite.

Until this point, they had yet to run into any beasts, but their fight against the environment was fiercer than any true battle they could have been fighting.

“How far up the mountain have we come?” Ruyue yelled. It was difficult to hear each other’s voices even when they were standing so close.

“We haven’t even made it a fourth of the way up the visible area! We have a ways to go before we can be considered to have made good progress!” Damien yelled back.

If they turned around, they’d clearly be able to see the base of the mountain from which they came, even with the tumultuous weather around them, which heavily lowered their visibility.

Suddenly, Damien grabbed Ruyue’s arm and yanked her back towards him. “Watch your step!”

There were no obvious signs that indicated towards Damien’s sudden movements, but it didn’t take long for that doubt to be cleared. Damien picked up a small rock on the ground next to him and lightly threw it in the area to their front.

And from the light impact of that rock alone, the snow began to rumble. Slowly but surely, cracks began to spread on the ground, splintering and spreading until a massive web over 10 kilometers long was formed. And soon enough, that web began to shatter.

The snow slowly crumbled and fell, creating a mini avalanche. But instead of charging down the mountainside, it fell directly downward. The snow was already many feet deep, and with the large radius that had become unhinged, it looked like the sky was falling into the abyss below.

It took an entire 10 minutes for the phenomenon to end, and at its end, there were no signs of the snow remaining. Only a deep darkness whose depth was unknown.

“What the...” Ruyue muttered. What kind of environment was this? There was no way for the snow to stay suspended over such a massive chasm without land to support it, but from the way it collapsed she was sure this was the truth.

“A danger zone is indeed a danger zone. These kinds of places can’t be explained with normal logic.” Damien commented under his breath. He had only been able to sense a discrepancy in the ground ahead, which he thought might be some sort of natural trap or hidden monster.

Even he didn’t expect such a scene to take place in front of them.

“Hold on to me, let’s teleport across.” Damien swiftly took hold of Ruyue’s arm once again and entered the spatial layers, vanishing from his spot.

“Strange...” he muttered. He was being extremely careful. Instead of using the easy method of simply connecting the spatial layers and jumping across, he slowly waded through them.

There was no way of knowing when another situation like this would pop up, especially when Damien barely sensed the first one. However, that wasn’t what he found strange.

As he navigated the spatial layers, he glanced at the abyss down below and realized that there were faint traces of life aura within the darkness. But the feeling was similar to that of the massive tree, a life aura so massive that it was transmitted even at a large distance.

Damien sped up his movements at the realization. Just being above such a thing wasn’t something he wanted. In an instant, he arrived at the other end of the chasm with Ruyue.

And at that moment, a deep groan was heard echoing through the chasm. The walls of the chasm and even the ground of the mountain rumbled violently as this ancient growl sounded out.

In the distance, a chorus of similar groans resounded, as if multiple of these creatures decided to howl in tandem.

Countless areas in the mountain witnessed rapidly dislodging areas of snow, which soon caused an even larger avalanche than the one the duo saw previously.

“Shit!”

The cascading snow tumbled down the mountain and superimposed on itself, snowballing into a tide that eclipsed the sun.

Realizing that there was no way to move forward, Damien gritted his teeth and once again entered the spatial layers. He spread his awareness as far as he could and connected the spatial layers, creating a tunnel that connected hundreds of kilometers away, out of the avalanche’s reach.

Or at least, that’s what should have happened.

When Damien and Ruyue reappeared, they were only 10 kilometers to the left of their original position.

“My teleportation is being suppressed.” Damien realized, his face becoming grave.

Time slowed for no man, and the avalanche would reach their position in only a few seconds.

Damien continued teleporting, moving 10 kilometers at a time as he tried to take them as far away from the center of the wave as he could, but in the end, he couldn't do much.

No matter how many tens of kilometers he moved, there was still a massive tide rolling down the mountainside.

“What kind of insane beast can cause this kind of natural disaster with a mere groan?!”

Damien was aghast, his back drenched in a cold sweat that was even more pronounced in this chilly atmosphere. ‘Am I really going to have to fight against a damn avalanche?’

The only exit he saw was to carve a path forward with raw strength. Escape at this point seemed like an impossible dream.

Suddenly, Ruyue struggled out of his grip. With a similarly grave expression, she stared at the oncoming tide “Let me try something.”

Ruyue closed her eyes and raised her arm towards the avalanche, mana blasting out of her figure. The air around them chilled even further, becoming something Damien wasn't able to ignore.

“Split!”

Her eyes shot open ferociously and mana gushed towards the avalanche. A path of icy wind crashed forward and created a wave. Although it was unable to contend with the sheer size of the avalanche, its presence was still mighty.

Seeing her unreservedly pour out her mana reserves, Damien felt that he couldn't stay passive. Just like her, he gathered his mana and raised his arm, his sword soon appearing in his grasp.

'A sword without a blade.' This was the essence of the first sword skill he created. To superimpose upon space and banish anything within it into the void.

The majority of his mana reserves gushed into his blade as he swiftly brought it down. And without suspense, a massive gash was torn in the mountain in front of him.

The wave of snow was impacted heavily, dying down in the area ahead of them, and when Ruyue's attack landed as well, the wave split in two.

Damien wasn't going to miss this opportunity. Once again grabbing Ruyue, he sped forward until he was within range and teleported through the split in the wave, appearing on the other side.

No matter how he wanted to do so earlier, it was impossible without knowing the depths of the wave. If he teleported carelessly, they might've ended up trapped within the massive walls of snow.

But luckily, they had made it out. Turning around, he could see the wave crashing back down onto the mountain, once again causing it to rumble. And when he spread his awareness, he realized that the chasm they had previously opened was once again covered in snow.



When Damien turned back around, the first thing he saw was Ruyue with a stiff expression on her face.

He didn't want to acknowledge it, but as his head slowly and robotically turned to face the same direction as her, he saw tens of snow-white leopards charging towards them with their killing intent billowing.

Chapter 209 - First Mountain [3]

The approaching snow leopards glared at the duo with apprehension, but their ranks were firm and their steps were without pause. Their strength was uniformly at the mid-levels of 3rd class.

At the front of the pack was a single snow leopard that was cut above the rest. Its fur and eyes blended with the color of the snow beneath their feet so well that it was almost difficult to tell them apart. As for its level, from what Damien could see it was at the peak of 3rd class.

His eyes hardened at this thought. If things were as he guessed them to be, this pack was full of genuine 3rd class beings unlike those trashes on the ground level. And with the amount of mana that was expended when he and Ruyue were escaping the avalanche, it would be laughable to say they'd win in a fight.

The snow leopards soon approached the two of them and slowly surrounded them, creating a formation that made it impossible to escape. But neither Damien nor Ruyue was panicked by this revelation.

When they were completely encircled, the encirclement slightly parted and the snow leopard at the head of the pack approached them.

"Are you the ones who disturbed the sleep of the Heaven Swallowing Beasts?" A crisp female voice was transmitted into their ears.

The duo's eyes narrowed. As they expected, things on the mountain weren't so simple.

"Heaven Swallowing Beasts?" Damien responded innocently.

"Yes, the Ancient Beasts that slumber beneath this mountain. They are the Protector Kings of our Endless Snow Mountain. There is no need to play dumb with me."

"And if we were the ones to disturb them?" This time it was Ruyue who spoke.

The eyes of that snow leopard sharpened. "If so, then you must come with us. The rules of the mountain declare anyone who provoked the Ancient Ones to be sentenced to death with no mercy."

"Say, isn't that a bit too harsh? It isn't that hard to tell that we are new here, so it's not as if we understood the rules."

"Ignorance doesn't excuse your crimes. There is only one ending to this situation, however, I do not mind taking the more difficult route to reach that ending."

The auras of those snow leopards flared, painting the surroundings in a haze of icy blue colors.

The narrowed eyes of Damien and Ruyue sharpened as well, their auras being released with an equal amount of ferocity.

Killing intent brewed in the atmosphere as both groups faced off against each other. Damien and Ruyue glanced at each other out of the corner of their eyes.

‘We don’t have the ability to fight them head-on.’

‘It’s not a problem. We just need to stall long enough for me to regain a bit of mana and then I can teleport us away. The main problem is the space suppression.’

An exchange of mana transmissions flashed between them in an instant before their eyes hardened. Either way, they never planned to make their way up the mountain peacefully.

The snow leopard stared at their auras with a tinge of shock. “Humans?”

“What difference does it make?”

“Perhaps you are right, but it is truly rare for us to see humans. The few that have shown up...their fates do not need to be mentioned.”

“Well, human or beast it’s not like there’s much of a difference. Either way, you aren’t planning to let us off easy, right.”

“Mm, at least you have some sense. Therefore, obediently come with us to meet the chief. Perhaps you’ll be able to keep your lives if you pledge yourselves as slaves.”

“Hahaha, you truly know how to joke.”

Slaves? Since when had Damien ever lowered himself in front of anyone? Even when he accepted a teacher or a master in Douglas and Tian Yang, he never lowered himself in front of them. Even calling Tian Yang as master somewhat revolted him.

Damien's bestial aura surged forth. There was an inherent pride he developed within the dungeon. A pride that was built on the corpses of thousands of beasts.

He would never kneel to anyone other than his mother. Even if the heavens themselves forced him to kneel, he'd stand true.

The bestial aura became more and more pronounced as Damien became slightly infuriated. The mere thought of him becoming a slave to these beasts repulsed him.

After Damien devoured the sea dragon, his bloodline had already begun to lean more towards dragons, and his aura and demeanor were also partially influenced.

Even if it was slight, the sliver of draconic aura that escaped Damien caused the expressions of those snow leopards to shift.

"Human, what relationship do you have to the dragon tribes?"

A grin slowly crept up Damien's face. "Dragons? Oh, we have a very deep relationship. They attack me, and I devour them."

“Devour?”

The snow leopard secretly let out a sigh of relief. “If that’s the case, then there’s no more need for talk. Attack!”

The encirclement of leopards pounced forward, razor-sharp teeth and claw phantoms were aimed at Damien and Ruyue. From the edges of their ranks, tens of ice projectiles pierced towards them.

But Damien and Ruyue simply grinned at the incoming attacks.

“You done yet?”

“Ah, more than just done. I think I can even get us to the other side of the mountain if I felt like it.”

A black fog seeped out of the earth below their feet and gathered around Damien. Throughout the entire conversation, he had been devouring the mana of the land in order to satiate himself.

“Then, shall we go?”

Grinning, Damien grabbed Ruyue’s waist and responded. “We shall.”

And then, the flurry of attacks landed on their position, causing massive clouds of snow to burst into the air.

“Did they die just like that?” The snow leopard leader watched their position with doubt clouding her expression. Wasn’t this too simple? Weren’t they planning on fighting back?

But when the snow finally cleared, there wasn’t even a trace of them left in the area.

The snow leopard’s face turned black at the sight. She wasn’t stupid enough to think they were blown apart without even leaving a trace of their existence.

“Dammit! Spread out! The chief took interest in those humans, so we must bring them back!”

The snow leopards roared in affirmation before speeding into the surroundings, their eyes blazing with fervor. If the chief wanted something, he would get it. There was no other course of action.

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Far from the location Damien and Ruyue met the snow leopards, there was a massive citadel overlooking a large portion of the mountain. The massive structure that one would believe to be heavily populated actually lacked the liveliness that was present within densely packed areas.

Instead, only the quiet footsteps of a few servants could be heard walking back and forth through the hallways.

In the main square of this citadel, a man sat in meditation, unmoving like an old monk.

The mana around him churned and rotated, forming a vortex above his head that compressed upon itself continuously until small drops of blue liquid fell into his body and were absorbed.

Suddenly, his eyes flashed open, his gaze piercing through the walls of the structure and even the mountain itself.

“Was I mistaken?”

Chapter 210 - First Mountain [4]

The ecosystem of the mountain was extremely calm and serene, leaving one wishing it was immortalized in a painting.

The verdant green grasses grew surprisingly well in the snow-covered ground, the various shrubbery swayed gently in the wind, and those crystal clear trees that looked as if they were a sculpted out of ice stood proudly amongst it all.

Within this serene atmosphere, brief flashes of light could occasionally be seen. They would appear in one place before reappearing almost 10 kilometers away, creating a mystical scene within the snow.

After hundreds of kilometers, these flashes finally paused and two figures were revealed in their midst. Naturally, they were Damien and Ruyue.

“Hmm, I think this should be far enough for now,” Damien said, his gaze on the new surroundings they had arrived in.

“Yeah, they shouldn’t be able to catch up any time soon.”

“This mountain is seriously massive though. Even after hundreds of kilometers of teleporting, it only feels as if we’ve moved a few meters.”

Indeed, the new scenery wasn’t actually all that different from what they had seen before. In fact, there was almost no way of noticing they had actually moved if not for the fact that they themselves had been the ones teleporting.

It was a truly majestic mountain that Damien couldn’t even begin to fathom. Even after so much traveling and seeing so many new things, the sheer magnitude of some of these locations still managed to surprise him.

He had seen plenty of massive mountains of scale he couldn’t even imagine, take Godspark Mountain in Apeiron for example, but he never truly had the chance to understand their gait.

After all, he had a clear objective at that time. He had wasted no time actually exploring the mountain, using teleportation to directly climb to its peak and find the ancient temple.

But now, his teleportation was suppressed. Or rather, the suppression was from space itself. He hadn’t understood it at first, and since he was busy narrowly escaping danger he didn’t put much thought into it, but now that he had taken the time to observe, he had realized the truth.

It wasn’t that his abilities were being actively suppressed, nor was there some sort of elaborate formation at play. Instead, space on this mountain was much thicker than it was outside.

If he had to compare, space elsewhere was like walking for him. It didn’t take any effort and he felt no resistance during his movement. But space within the mountain was as if he was underwater. It was murky and viscous, forcing him to expend much more effort to accomplish the same feats.



But he didn't particularly mind. Actually, this kind of environment could be considered as a perfect training ground for him. Back on Apeiron, his rush to return to earth left him unable to properly make use of the sub spaces that the Spatial Grandmaster Kurt Galloway had left for his successors.

Hell, he didn't even end up using the spatial training ground at Zenith Academy even after receiving Malcolm's promise. There were probably plenty of ample training grounds for him on that peaceful planet, but he had wasted them all.

Perhaps he would get a chance to return there in the future and make use of them, but he doubted they would be of any help at that point. Besides, the peace on that planet really wasn't good for him. It didn't promote growth the way this kind of ruthless killing environment did.

So Damien was glad this mountain ended up suppressing his abilities.

It was a similar concept to wearing heavy weights constantly until one was able to go about day-to-day actions normally, and then taking them off to reap the benefits. One's speed and dexterity, as well as their strength, would naturally increase with this kind of intensive training.

He expected similar improvements to transfer to his spatial abilities if he managed to adapt to this new atmosphere. The prospect was frankly incredibly exciting.

"Ah!"

Suddenly, he felt a sharp pain on his waist that forced him to cry out. Looking down, he noticed Ruyue glaring at him while blushing furiously.

“When do you plan on letting go?”

It was only then that he realized that the hand he had placed on her waist during teleportation had yet to be removed. He had sunken into thought the moment they exited, so he ended up forgetting.

“Hm, what are you talking about?”

Though he still decided to act ignorant. He was a man, after all, and the soft sensation on his hand and chest was naturally something he enjoyed.

“You...!” Ruyue exclaimed, her glare intensifying. It was the first time she had ever been held by a man in such a manner, and the spot where his hand made contact with her body felt like it was burning. It was as if the layers of clothes separating them had disappeared.

Also, Ruyue seemed to have forgotten about the fact that she quite literally fell asleep in his arms while hugging him a few months back, but Damien thickened his skin and didn’t bring it up.

“Let me go...” Although she spoke words of resistance, she made no move to actually leave his embrace.

Damien continued watching her in amusement. This was a side of her that would never get old. Thinking back to how they were completely at odds during their first meeting, he couldn’t help but smile.

Wasn’t the change in their relationship too drastic?

Sometimes even he wondered how such a cold and aloof woman ended up warming up to him so much in a short period of time. In fact, he suspected her change in attitude happened while he was gone on his mission with Long Chen.

In that case, how did it even come to be? Did she magically remove the prejudice and pride she had built up over the years?

It couldn't be true.

But he had never inquired about it too much. Occasionally, a complicated light would flash through her eyes when she thought nobody was looking. But he had always seen it. Perhaps, she would tell him when she was comfortable enough.

And that was enough for him. Even Rose still had some secrets she didn't tell him about, and he had some he kept from her, such as his Void Physique or his suspicions about his origins. These were things that would naturally be revealed with time, so there was no point getting too absorbed in them.

Soon enough, Ruyue managed to wriggle her body out of his embrace, but even then she continued to glare at him hatefully. This fellow truly knew how to take advantage of others.

Even her body...!

When she thought up to this point, the redness on her face increased to the point where it looked like she was on the verge of exploding. A trace of shyness flashed in her eyes.

Biting her lip gently, she sighed. “Anyway, now that we have escaped from that encirclement, what do you plan on doing?”

Damien had been enjoying the constantly changing expressions on Ruyue’s face, but he ended up grinning at her question.

“Is there any need to think about it? We needed prey once we arrived on this mountain, and it happened to deliver itself right onto our doorstep!”

“You don’t mean...” Ruyue muttered with widened eyes, but a grin ended up creeping up her face as well.

“They wanted to take us as slaves right? Well, let’s make them understand that they can’t bear the cost of such actions.”