

## Void 231

### Chapter 231 - 231 Journey [1]

“Liu Bai, Ranked 10th in the 3000 Beast Record, estimated level in the 130s, his White Tiger transformation ability is said to boost his physical strength, allowing him to fight those above his level. Once, he defeated 2 combatants with estimated levels in the 140s at the same time.”

“Alekzi Michael, Ranked 8th in the 3000 Beast Record, estimated level in the 140s, his Golden Crow Flames are said to be as scorching as the sun. According to reports, he is incredibly shameless and rich, using his money to buy connections and resources. Due to this, he has never publicly fought, making his fighting prowess undetermined.”

“Entrails JI, Ranked 7th in the 3000 Beast Record, estimated level in the 140s, his real name is unknown, but his nickname was given due to his Tribulation Vulture bloodline, which grants him untold prowess with lightning. He has a similar personality to the 8th rank genius, Alekzi, and they are reported to constantly be at odds with each other. He has used similar means to the 8th rank genius to avoid publicly fighting, wantonly spending his riches, but it is said that the two engage in constant bouts of verbal sparring.”

“Qing Tan, Ranked 5th in the 3000 Beast Record, estimated level unknown, her shadow manipulation abilities make her unpredictable and untraceable. Once escaped the encirclement of multiple peak mid-level 3rd class beasts unharmed, leaving her opponents crippled or dead. If not for her secrecy, it is said that she would be ranked even higher on the list.”

Damien read through the top 10 on the 3000 Beast Record with rapt attention. These were the types of geniuses he'd be up against during the coming event.

But the information didn't seem as helpful as he originally expected. Although to normal people, this kind of information was enough to make a baseline assumption of the individuals' fighting prowess and danger, to him, it was nothing.

Even the 5th rank genius was only said to have crippled and killed an encirclement of 3rd class beings. Although this was an impressive feat, he didn't think it was something extremely hard to accomplish.

'Then again, I have spatial element so I guess it's a bit of a cheat.'

But with shadows, something similar to teleportation could still be achieved. He'd seen Zara do it plenty of times. The main thing he understood while reading through this list was that most of the higher-ranked geniuses were constantly hiding their true power.

Those ranked below roughly the top 20 had much more detailed information regarding them. Obviously, they did their best to flaunt their power to show contention for higher ranks.

At the lower ranks, it was a true battle, where one's rank could be snatched from them at any given time. In this kind of scenario, it was only natural that they didn't have the freedom to conceal themselves as deeply.

But Damien didn't focus on them. A rough skim of the ranks below the top 15 was enough to tell him that none of them would be a problem even if he took them on alone and without using his spatial abilities.

But he had Ruyue with him and there was no way he'd hold back, so only those ranked at the very top could interest him.

With this line of thought, he soon turned his focus to those ranked at the peak, the top 3 geniuses within the entire 3000 Beast Mountain Range.

“Flame Queen Feng Qing’er, Ranked 3rd in the 3000 Beast Record, estimated level in the 170s, a true descendant of the Fire Phoenix, her Phoenix Flames have been openly shown to dominate almost all flames existing in the mountain range. Her fighting prowess is said to be at the peak of 3rd class, but the truth of the statement is unknown.”

“Ice Queen Lunaria Snow, Ranked 2nd in the 3000 Beast Record, estimated level in the 170s, a true descendant of the Ice Phoenix, her Phoenix Flames diametrically oppose those of the 3rd ranked Flame Queen. The two have always been at odds, and rumors of their battles have spread, with neither of them apparently being able to gain the edge over the other. However, none have been able to personally witness these battles, so the veracity of the rumors remains uncertain.”

Damien raised his brow. Two Phoenix descendants actually took two of the top 3 spots in the genius ranking. And not only that, but they were also from opposing branches. From the information; it seemed that the ranking between the two would constantly fluctuate based on rumors of their battles, but their movesets remained unknown due to their secrecy.

Finally, Damien turned his eyes towards the glaring golden letters that shone at the top of the page.

“Spirit King, Hun Fang, Ranked 1st in the 3000 Beast Record, estimated level in the 170s. His origins, as well as fighting prowess, remain unknown, but his ranking has never been challenged even by the two Queens below him. According to reports, all those who challenged him were later found as soulless husks. Their bodies were alive, but seemed to contain no life at the same time.”

“Hisss...”

Even for the others at the top, there was at least a small amount of information. For the information on the first-ranked genius to be so little, Damien couldn’t imagine how mysterious the man’s means were.

His eyes sharpened. These three were genuine threats to him. From the looks of it, their fighting prowess was relatively similar, but none of them actually fought to prove the information true or false.

Along with the descriptions of the three, there was also a line of text that remained the same for all of them.

“Possesses the ability to flee from an entry-level Beast King unharmed.”

This was the line that truly made Damien take them seriously. He had firsthand experience of the true might of a Beast King. Although the entry-level ones were obviously going to be much weaker than the Incarnate Snow Beast King or the White Dragon King, it didn’t change the fact that they were true 4th class existences.

To be able to flee from them unharmed, perhaps he could do it because of his spatial abilities, and perhaps he could do it with ease if not for the spatial suppression on the mountains, but they didn’t matter.

From the looks of it, none of the three had spatial affinities. To achieve such a feat without such a cheat element for fleeing, it was truly admirable.

“Haa...” sighing lightly, Damien closed the 3000 Beast Record and stored it in his subspace.

“What do you think?” He asked Ruyue. He had been reading the entire thing out loud for her, as well as giving his opinions about it. But she hadn’t spoken yet.

“Hmm...it’s truly hard to come to any conclusions right now. Evidently, they are all powerful, and their levels vastly outstrip yours. Although I am at level 161, my ability to fight above my level isn’t as pronounced as yours or theirs.

“At most, perhaps I could contend against those at the 180s or if I fight with the intention to die together, the early 190s, but to flee from an entry-level Beast King unharmed? Such a thing is impossible for me.”

“However, you are different.”

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“Your ability to fight above your level is frankly insane.” Ruyue continued.

“What’s your level right now? 130? 140? After all the killing you’ve done in the past month, it should’ve increased significantly. Still, that doesn’t really matter.

“Even when you were still in the 120s, you were able to fight against people at the mid or high levels of 3rd class. It isn’t a simple jump in levels, it’s closer to a jump in rank.

“Whether it’s due to your comprehension of your elements or your insane physical body, or maybe a combination of both, the fact that your ability is higher than theirs is still obvious from the information we’ve received

“The only problem is, your level is too low. You haven’t had the chance to level up as rapidly or fight as constantly as them since you lived in the outside world instead of this kind of environment.

“In the end, whether you or them, I can’t decide who’s stronger until you actually fight. But even without experiencing their power, I have trust in your abilities. You should be able to defeat those two Phoenix Queens, even if it’d expend a lot of effort.

“As for the first rank...we don’t know anything about him and that’s the main problem. A known danger isn’t as threatening as an unknown danger, after all. Not only that, but even his title is in a different league than the rest.

“Spirit King, what could this mean? Combining this title with the corpses of his victims, I can at least infer that his ability is more spiritual and ethereal than a base element. Just like my yin affinity, he must also have some sort of rare affinity.”

Ruyue gave a lengthy explanation of her thoughts to Damien. He was a bit embarrassed by the massive amount of trust she seemingly had in him, but her words were true.

He also felt that he would be able to take the two Phoenix Queens one on one. In a group scenario, he couldn’t say for certain.

But what she said about the first rank was what concerned him the most. He was someone with a decent amount of creativity, so he could slightly infer what the Spirit King’s affinity was, but none of his guesses seemed probable.

They were simply too wild.

Shaking his head lightly, he spoke up. “Well, there’s no point in worrying too much about them. We will be able to get a more proper read on their abilities when we see them in person.”

Damien had trust in his eyes. Against someone in the same class as him, he was certain he'd be able to read their mana. With this, he should be able to gauge both their true power level as well as their affinities.

“The Primordial Undying Realm and the Primordial Undying Tree within...”

He had to say, each and every new piece of information he received about the coming event made his blood boil with excitement.

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The entire 3000 Beast Mountain Range was in a state of upheaval over a piece of news that recently made itself known.

The opening of the Primordial Undying Realm.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime event for most people since a lifespan of tens of thousands of years wasn't achievable to them through ordinary means.

The only ones who were alive at that time were the Beast Kings who ruled over them.

Countless people made their way to the World Tree for this event. After all, such a massive competition was something everyone wanted to witness.

But they had all heard the rumors. They wouldn't be able to actually see what happened within the realm, they'd only be able to see the final victors once they emerged.

Yet, the fact didn't hinder them from making their journeys. The opening of the Primordial Undying Realm was simply too big of an event to miss. Not to mention, there would be plenty of festivities that would surround the World Tree within the event's duration, keeping them occupied and excited until the final victor emerged before them.

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Within a massive mountain that was bathed in constant blistering heat that could even melt a regular 2nd class beings, there was a mighty and grandiose palace that overlooked it all.

The palace was made of an elegant red metal that was covered in flames from dusk till dawn.

Those that lived within this palace all exudes an air of majesty and elegance, their heads held high in pride.

Not to mention, each and every one of them was a soul-stirring beautiful woman.

"Qing'er, this time, you must obtain one of the fruits of the Primordial Undying Tree. It is imperative for your evolution. Perhaps, if you can truly succeed, our Clan will rise to become the peak power within the entire mountain range.

A beautiful mature woman with flowing red hair and similarly colored eyes spoke. Her expression that was usually covered in frosty indifference was now incredibly doting. This woman was the Matriarch of the Fire Phoenix Clan.

“Yes, mother. I promise. Me and Luna already promised to work together this time to secure ourselves the green fruits. As for the purple one, we’ll take it and fight for who gets it after we return back to the clans.”

The beautiful girl that replied to her looked almost exactly the same as her, besides the fact that her hair was a glimmering blonde color.

“Sheesh, you and that Luna lass, aren’t you a little too close? If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you were planning to tie our two Phoenix clans together through marriage.” The Fire Phoenix Matriarch teased.

“Mother!” Feng Qing’er cried out with a healthy blush covering her face. “You know that we’re not like that, don’t tease me!”

Her relationship with the girl from the Ice Phoenix clan who shared the same social position with her was indeed considered by some a little too close. It made the two’s mothers endlessly sigh at the fortune of their clans.

These two clans that were constantly at odds seemed to have been pulled together as friends by their next-generation heirs.

“Haha, Mother is just playing with you. With how many times you’ve had to clarify yourself to our clansmen, how could I not know how you feel?”

Feng Qing'er blushed further. "Let's not talk about this anymore, Mother. With me and Luna working together, even that Hun Fang bastard won't be able to stop us. This time, we'll truly dethrone him from his number one spot."

"Mm, Mother believes in you." The Fire Phoenix Matriarch replied. Though, she couldn't stop the flash of worry from streaking through her eyes.

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The Endless Snow and Endless Flame mountains were polar opposites of each other. One contained the heat of the sun while the other contained the chill of the night.

In an area of the Endless Snow Mountain far away from the areas Damien was near, there was an ice palace that, oddly enough, mirrored the flaming palace on the Endless Flame Mountain.

Even the inhabitants of this palace were similar, all of them being jaw-dropping beauties that could destroy continents with their looks.

However, if there was one difference, it was the temperaments between the two. In the Endless Flame Mountain's palace, those beauties all held flaming pride, showcasing it for all to see. Their behavior was blatant, as if daring others to challenge their majesty.

Whereas the beauties in this ice palace were different. They were cold and aloof, their pride also evident, but seemingly reserved at the same time. With such opposing temperaments and positions, it was clear why the two powers had been at odds for many millennia.

“Luna, this time is imperative. I understand the agreement you have with that Qing’er lass, but I still feel the need to warn you. Don’t let anything get in your way.”

The woman speaking carried an inexplicable mature charm, with a temperament similar to the Fire Phoenix Matriarch. Naturally, she was the Ice Phoenix Matriarch.

These two had a close relationship as well, though not as close as that of their daughters, merely, they were already old and experienced. They put their clans above personal feelings and maintained the age-old grudge between them.

They always counted themselves lucky to have such daughters, as with them, they were finally able to find an excuse to lay down all pretenses and hostility.

“I’m aware of the circumstances, Mother, there’s no need for all these warnings.”

The beautiful girl with light blue hair and eyes spoke to her mother lightly. There was no change in the expression on her face, remaining cold and aloof, but her mother could clearly feel the warmth in her words. As the person who raised her, how could she not understand how to read this daughter of hers?

“Confidence is good, but don’t let it breed arrogance. In fact, I heard a rumor that the White Dragon King is sending two new talents this time instead of someone from the True Dragon Troops. Although their strength hasn’t been verified, to earn the favor of that old monster isn’t easy. Maintain your caution around them.”

“Yes, Mother.” A hint of curiosity swirled through Lunaria Snow’s eyes for an instant before disappearing entirely. Her gaze then shifted to the towering tree that could be faintly seen in the distance.

‘It looks like this year, the competition between geniuses will be much more fierce.’

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Similar conversations took place in many corners of the 3000 Beast Mountain Range as geniuses began to leave the safety of their residences to embark towards the grand World Tree.

Among them were Damien and Ruyue, who were currently speeding towards the World Tree while wrapped in the White Dragon King’s mana.

‘Finally, it’s almost time to begin.’

Chapter 233 - Taesi [1]

The distance between the Endless Snow Mountain and the World Tree was truly massive.

After all, the Endless Snow Mountain was still considered to be around the periphery of the 3000 Beast Mountain Range while the World Tree was the direct center.

But its distance from the center by no means meant that it was weak. The hierarchy between the mountains was much more complicated than that.

With powers like the White Dragon Grotto and the Ice Phoenix Palace situated on the Endless Snow Mountain, the mountain itself could be ranked among the peak powers between mountains.

But the way powers took root within the mountains had nothing to do with camaraderie. It was usually because the environment was best suited for their own practice that they chose specific mountains to set up their homes.

Due to this, there was never a true ranking of power between the mountains. Since the forces within them weren't actually allied, there was no real point in having something like that.

Individual power was always more valued, and this rule stayed true for the powers in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range. Rather than allying with outside powers to become stronger, they'd rather compete for the hierarchy among individual powers.

Anyway, with the distance between the mountain and the World Tree being so large, even with the White Dragon King's insane speed, they had already been traveling for a week without arriving.

Although Damien wanted to look at the passing scenery and the other mountains within the mountain range as they flew, the White Dragon King was no longer taking his time to fly like the first time they had done so.

Instead, he was using his full speed as a true Beast King, reaching a level where Damien couldn't even infer what the scenery outside was due to the sheer speed at which they moved.

All he saw was a mash of colors that sped by in a flash. This kind of speed was insane. Even amongst 3rd class beings, Damien's eyes were special. For him to be in such a predicament was testament to this fact.

But since Damien and Ruyue were covered in the White Dragon King's mana, they didn't have to worry about the dangers that come with them traveling so fast without the proper strength.

In this kind of situation, a second week passed before the White Dragon King finally decided to slow down. It was then that Damien was finally able to witness the world once more.

“...Woah.”

It was the only sound he could make out when he saw the scene in front of him. Ruyue wasn't much better.

If the vitality they felt from the World Tree when they first entered the 3000 Beast Mountain Range could be considered a 5, then what they felt now was a 100.

That was the sheer level of difference between the two. The billowing vitality rushed into their bodies, refreshing and nourishing them passively by just being in its presence.

The World Tree was towering from the outskirts, but only now was its true size visible.

Five massive mountains encircled it in a star-shaped formation, piercing the clouds above and seemingly even reaching into space.

But even these mountains were dwarfed under the size of the World Tree. Perhaps it didn't have their girth, but it wasn't losing out by much.

The tree trunk was so massive that it could probably cover the entirety of some smaller countries on Earth with room left to spare. Its height, if laid down on its side, could most likely connect the Americas to Europe with ease, spanning the entire Atlantic Ocean.

They were still thousands of kilometers away from the trunk of the tree, but the sun wasn't visible even at this distance. Instead, there was a wide and all-encompassing canopy of branches and leaves that painted a beautiful mosaic.

The density was such that proper sunlight couldn't travel through, but the few rays that made their way served to add even more ethereal presence to the atmosphere.

It was like a fairy garden.

It took many minutes for the duo to snap out of their reverie, and by the time they did, the White Dragon King had already landed on the ground.

They weren't much closer to the trunk of the World Tree, but in front of them, there was a massive city that was situated there. It spanned those thousands of kilometers that connected their current location to the tree trunk.

"What the hell? People actually live here?"

"Hahaha, I know it seems inconceivable, but yes, there are truly people living here. This environment can be considered one of the best within the entire mountain range, but this group of people has actually managed to monopolize it."

As they spoke, they started walking towards the city. The darkness brought by the lack of sunlight was slowly illuminated by a green glow, and when Damien looked up into the air, he noticed many floating green specks of light that decorated the atmosphere.

“These things are something akin to fairies, but they don’t have the intelligence that the fairy race possesses. They just wander and float, bringing light to the darkness as well as nourishing the environment. The tree dwellers seem to love them, though.” The White Dragon King said.

As they arrived closer to the city, Damien was finally able to make out the silhouettes of people walking around and going about their daily lives.

They were oddly humanoid, but the auras they radiated obviously weren’t at the 4th class. They aren’t beasts? Damien was immensely confused.

But as he continued observing them, he noticed a curious detail that almost sent him into a state of shock.

“Those are...!”

“Haha, they aren’t humans, if that’s what you’re thinking.” The White Dragon King said, misunderstanding the reason for Damien’s shock.

But no, he never thought they were human. After all; there was a distinctive feature that set them apart from the human race.

They had long pointy ears that Damien was incredibly familiar with due to his time on Apeiron.

‘Elves! There are actually elves here! What the fuck, isn’t this supposed to be an Eastern Fantasy setting?!’

That’s right. The citizens of the city that the White Dragon King had been calling “tree dwellers” were actually elves. And it wasn’t just a small group of them, there were millions of them that made up the population of the city.

‘How can this be?’

Damien was flabbergasted. Even if he knew it was stupid to think of the real world as something he could gauge using fictional knowledge, he knew that there were still some truths behind it.

The fiction on earth was definitely motivated by true world travel, and the settings depicted were only slightly tweaked. Adding elves to a cultivation world, though, that was a total mixing of genres.

He began to have doubts. Although elves weren’t a rare race in the wider universe, they were still extremely particular about the type of world they lived in.

Perhaps, this group of elves was attracted to the World Tree and decided to migrate? But with the restrictions placed around the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, this seemed impossible.

Yet, this was a land of beasts. There was no way for elves to be naturally born or even for an elf-esque species to naturally evolve from the population present here.

The entire matter made Damien’s brain hurt.

## Chapter 234 - Taesi [2]

Whoosh!

While Damien was still enamored by the fact that there were elves in this world, the winds in the area kicked up and several figures suddenly emerged from thin air.

“Fire Phoenix clan, Ice Phoenix clan, Tribulation Vulture clan, Golden Crow clan...”

A myriad of top clans arrived at the same time, landing in the area near the White Dragon King. Seeing these fellow Beast Kings, he smiled.

“It seems you guys couldn’t miss out on this event either, huh.”

“Of course not! What kind of idiot would choose to skip the opening of the Primordial Undying Realm?!” A hook-nosed old man sneered.

“Ha! Aren’t you that kind of idiot, Old Vulture? When the realm opened 10,000 years ago, you were nowhere to be found!” An old man with crimson gold hair jeered back.

“What do you know?! I was in the middle of a serious cultivation bottleneck at the time. Don’t fart without knowing anything, Old Crow.”

The two old men glared at each other in contempt.

“Those two are just as lively as always, aren’t they?” A crimson-haired woman wryly smiled.

“Indeed. Those two will never give up the opportunity to jab at each other.” A woman with light blue hair responded.

These were naturally the Tribulation Vulture and Golden Crow Patriarchs as well as the two Phoenix Matriarchs.

“Old Bai, I trust you’ve been well?” A white-haired man greeted.

“Haha, Brother White Tiger, I’ve naturally been well. As for you, it looks like you’ve become an old man already.”

“As if. Between us, you know it’s you who’ll lose every time.”

“Oh? I’d like to test that theory.”

“Right here, right now? You know I’m always ready for a bout.”

“Kuhum.” The Ice Phoenix Matriarch let out a light cough. “What happened to your roles as dignified elders? Did you forget that the juniors are still around?”

The four men suddenly came back to their senses, awkwardly coughing. While the Tribulation Vulture and Golden Crow clans were always at each other's necks for unknown reasons, the White Dragon King and White Tiger King were different.

Their relationship was more of a healthy rivalry, something fueled by their bloodlines. Dragons were the kings of the sea while tigers were kings of the mountains. Although neither of them had truly reached the level of their ancestral beasts, the rivalry of their bloodlines was still plentiful.

Whenever they met, they tended to get lost in their desire to fight one another.

"Old Bai, I heard you brought two new kids as your representatives this time, but I didn't expect for them to be humans!" The Fire Phoenix Matriarch suddenly pointed out, looking inquisitively at Damien and Ruyue.

Her gaze was scorching as if trying to burn away the layers and find the truth. Frankly, Damien was feeling extremely awkward under her gaze.

'I mean, can I really be blamed in this sort of situation?'

The Fire Phoenix Matriarch may have been over 10,000 years old, but her face and body didn't look a day older than 30. Damien couldn't help but think of a certain 4 letter word from earth that starts with an m when he saw her.

But he didn't let her beauty affect him too much. In the next second, he turned his gaze towards the woman to his side and sighed in satisfaction.

Those sharp golden eyes and flowing white hair, coupled with her voluptuous body, Ruyue didn't lose out to those phoenixes at all. Besides, he could look at her as long as he wanted, unlike with them.

'Ah, I've been cleansed.'

Ruyue, who sensed his scorching gaze that was not one bit weaker than the Fire Phoenix Matriarch's, wanted to pinch him, but a second later, she managed to understand the situation and stopped herself.

She even unconsciously pushed her chest out in pride. 'That's right, no matter how beautiful you are, he still chose to look at me!'

It was a sense of triumph that she suppressed as soon as she discovered it, but Damien was watching her intently, so he didn't miss her slight actions.

Realizing once again how cute she could be sometimes, he turned his gaze back towards the crowd in front of him. Rather than focusing on those Beast Kings, who had already moved in with their conversation, he turned his gaze towards the younger generation behind them.

Two heavenly maidens on the same level as Ruyue, two men who smelled like richness, and another man who was constantly emanating fighting spirit.

'What an interesting crowd.' Damien thought inwardly. He quickly poured mana into his eyes, his true purpose from the beginning.

In that instant, a myriad of colors showed themselves to him, as well as tangible auras that seemed to demonstrate many things.

For a second, Damien was shocked. He was receiving much more information from his eyes than he usually did when he put mana into them. Although he wanted to check his status and see if there were any changes, he still decided to wait until later. The more important task was to glean as much as he could before the others noticed the power of his gaze.

But it wasn't like he had much time. In only a few seconds, Feng Qing'er, Lunaria Snow, and the rest snapped their heads in his direction.

When they saw those swirling amethyst red pupils, their eyes sharpened and their mana revolved, creating screens that disallowed Damien from seeing as much as he wished.

Although they couldn't completely block his eyes, he didn't feel the need to let them know that. Besides, a few seconds was more than enough time to figure out what he needed.

His pupils stopped their unnatural swirling and returned to their original calm. At that moment, he lightly smiled at those other geniuses.

"Oho, it seems your candidates this time are truly interesting." The White Tiger King commented. These Beast Kings had naturally seen through the small commotion taking place behind them.

"Hahaha, aren't they? I have high hopes for what these two can accomplish." The White Dragon King grinned back.

"Old Bai, didn't you teach your disciples that it isn't good to peek on others without their consent?"

“Of course, of course I would teach them such common manners, however, as they say, all is fair in love and war.”

“Tch.”

The group continued towards the city as if nothing happened, completely ignoring the tension that was coming from the atmosphere behind them.

‘Damien, what did you see?’ Ruyue asked curiously through mental transmission.

Damien thought for a second before answering. He had truly seen much more than he expected. Rather than just their mana and a rough gauge of their aura, he instead saw...

It was faint, extremely faint, but he was sure of it. Within his gaze, there was a small holographic screen in front of each and every person he looked at. A screen that he was very familiar with.

It was their status sheets.

Sadly, he wasn’t able to clearly see them nor the information written on them, but he was sure that the evolution of his eyes would grant him an extremely useful ability.

Shaking his head, he decided to reply to Ruyue.

‘They’re strong, very strong, and it doesn’t seem like everything on the 3000 Beast Record is as truthful as we thought. However, with the two of us together, it should be doable.’

Imperceptible nodding her head, Ruyue continued walking as if nothing happened. And in no time, their small yet attention-grabbing group had entered the elven city under the World Tree.

Chapter 235 - Taesi [3]

The elven city of Taesi wasn’t extremely technologically advanced, but regardless of its massive size, it had a homely feeling that one usually wouldn’t find within the 3000 Beast Mountain Range.

The citizens were relatively friendly to outsiders as long as their rules were respected, and the atmosphere granted by the rich vitality emitting from the World Tree had everyone feeling a constant feeling of relaxation.

Obviously, the sharpness that those who arrived here honed through many years of training wouldn’t diminish just due to the atmosphere, but it did indeed compel them to take a few days’ rest, especially the younger generation who knew they’d be fighting with their lives on the line in only a week’s time.

Within an inn in the city, two heaven-toppling beauties sat on the bed and conversed.

“Argh! I can’t believe that guy! He actually dared to probe us so openly! Does he even know who we are?! Did Senior White Dragon choose an idiot to represent him this time?!” A fiery red-haired beauty shouted. She was so angry that even her fair white skin was tinged with a shade of red.

The small group that had arrived together at Taesi had split up not long after they entered the city, with each going their own way to prepare for the upcoming event.

“Calm down. We already knew everyone here would be an opponent from the second we met. It’s only natural that a new face would want to judge our capabilities.” A blue-haired beauty next to her responded. Still, there was a trace of displeasure in her eyes.

“Y-yeah, but still! Hmph! If we meet in the Primordial Undying Realm, I’ll be sure to teach him a lesson! Luna, you have to help me too!”

“You want to gang up on him with our strength? Qing’er, we have a clear goal this time and we cannot spare time to play around. The fate of our clans depends on this.”

“I-I know, but that doesn’t mean I’ll just take this offense laying down. I don’t want people to see me as a pushover.” Feng Qing’er pouted.

“Oh? And since when were you someone to care about face? Or rather, even if the same situation happened at any other time, you’d have directly pummeled the person who tried something. For you to be acting like this...”

“That’s right,” Feng Qing’er’s face became solemn. “He’s an outlier that we don’t have any information on. There’s no point thinking that he’ll be weak, especially since it was Senior White Dragon who chose him as his representative. No matter how much I want to punch him in the face, I’ll act with caution. I also know how mother our mothers are depending on us.”

“Mm, this is the correct choice. However, do not discount the girl at his side either. There was something about her aura that made my Ice Phoenix flames feel challenged. These newcomers truly aren’t simple.

“Oh, that girl?” Feng Qing’er fell into thought as she recalled Ruyue. “Ah! That girl! She reminded me of you a little bit now that I think about it!”

“You! What are you saying!” Lunaria Snow said, pinching her ear.

“Ow ow ow! Okay Luna I’m sorry! Forgive me!”

As these two girls conversed in their room, the rest of the participants of the coming event slowly arrived.

Currently, Damien and Ruyue had already separated from the White Dragon King, touring the city that they had just arrived in.

“This atmosphere is really nice. It seems like a good place to settle down in.” Ruyue commented as she looked at the floating green specs in the air.

“Oh? You’re already thinking about settling down?” Damien asked with a smile.

“Hmm, settling down does sound nice, but even if we did so, I feel it’d get boring very soon. I still want to explore the wider universe like you did.”

Damien’s smile became wry. “Don’t give me too much credit. Including this world and my homeworld, I’ve only been to 3. Compared to the boundless cosmos, this is nothing.”

“But it only seems like nothing to you, who has at least done this much. Meanwhile, I was becoming haughty even though I had rarely ever left the Celestial Star Palace, let alone the Central Continent as a whole.”

“Sigh, the universe is simply too insanely large. Did you know? Even before my homeworld was introduced to mana, the portion of the universe that became observable due to our technological advancements was insane. It was to the point that even if a human was sent into space to travel for several thousands of years, they wouldn’t even be close to exploring it.

“It truly makes me wonder how things actually work. Beginner worlds, middle worlds, higher worlds, the distance between them, what is it like? It took 7 months to travel from my homeworld to this one even on a Heaven Grade flying sword, but even that seems short in comparison. How many worlds are there that we will have the chance to truly explore? How long will that take? Ah, just thinking about it makes my blood boil.”

Ruyue smiled lightly as she listened to Damien’s tangent. Her eyes held a slightly distant look to them. Indeed, how long would it take to explore the boundless cosmos? The sheer amount of time could probably drive one insane if they were to go about it alone.

But what if they were with the people they cared most about in the world? Wouldn’t such a vast period of time adventuring be exhilarating?

A trace of an idea took root in Ruyue’s mind, but she didn’t entertain it for long. These future events shouldn’t be thought about in a crucial time like this.

The duo spent until nighttime perusing the various amenities of the city before finally returning to their in. Damien had a refreshed smile on his face the entire time. It had been a while since he had been on a calming date like this one.

It made him miss Rose even more, but he pushed those thoughts down. Just like Ruyue, he chose to focus on the coming event for now. At this moment, even reaching Rose was impossible, so those sorts of missing sentiments would only serve to pain his heart

There was nothing much for the two of them to do while they waited. Even if they wanted to probe the other geniuses more, they were all keeping low profiles.

Even the ones who made their way into the city like Damien and Ruyue would constantly have their guards up. Since they were no longer in the presence of their respective Beast Kings, the competition had basically already started.

The undercurrents within the city of Taesi were churning. Even the usually calm and peaceful ordinary citizens were beginning to get excited.

7 days. There were only 7 days left before the festivities began. Who would come out on top? That person would undoubtedly become a prominent figure among the 3000 Beast Mountain Range. Which of these geniuses would rise and fall?

Such thoughts plagued the minds of all that were present. But they knew that only time would tell in the end. And so, they patiently waited for that day to come.

Chapter 236 - Taesi [4]

The atmosphere of the city of Taesi was benevolent and kind, but it was a location within the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, after all. It was impossible for it to maintain such peace at all times and in all places.

The city was simply too large for it to do so, and there wasn't a genuine Law Enforcement group that would keep order, at least, not on the surface. But without a group like that, even the outwardly peaceful atmosphere would be impossible to maintain.

There were many shadowy corners and alleyways within Taesi, especially due to the lack of sunlight. Usually, these corners would remain unpopulated, but at the moment, they seemed to be brimming with activity.

“Commander, the outsiders haven’t been stirring up too much trouble yet, but this is only temporary. The ones who have arrived so far are all from peak forces and will act in accordance with our laws to maintain face.”

“Indeed, once the common populace begins to arrive for the coming festivities, our jobs will become much harder. Sigh, it’s quite annoying, but it’s necessary.”

“That’s right. To protect the peaceful lives of our people, anything is fair game. I refuse to cower in a situation like last time.”

“You! Don’t you dare mention that! If you make the same mistake, your head will roll.”

“I’m sorry. I made a mistake, Commander.”

“Haa...it’s fine, but you’re lucky only the two of us are here. As you know, not everyone shares your sentiments. There are cowards in our midst.” The commander growled.

His subordinate could only stand silently to the side, not knowing what to say. Most of their people hadn’t been alive at that time. It was many millennia ago, after all. But they were elves, their lifespans were extremely long. Many of their upper echelons and older men were present at that time, and the sentiments were split.

There were cowards and there were warriors. As for which side was more prevalent, nobody could say.

While these two had their silent conversation, the rest of their squad also moved out, ensuring that their city would stay peaceful. For the lives of their people, they would do anything.

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“Do you understand what you are meant to do?” A hoarse voice rang out in an unknown location within the city of Taesi. However, if one looked for the source of the voice, they would only be searching in vain.

“I understand, Master.” The one who responded was a young man with coarse grey hair and red eyes. His body emitted a gloomy and sinister aura that made all those who gazed at him shiver in fear.

“Good. If the rest of us were able to easily manifest, things would be much simpler. But we only have you as our anchor point. If you don’t accomplish what you were tasked with, you should know the consequences, right?”

“I understand, Master.” The young man’s monotone voice quivered slightly, but soon regained its calm. He once again uttered the same three words.

“Good. The time has finally come. 10,000 years of planning and hiding, 10,000 years of enduring. It is finally time for us to strike. That damn Primordial Undying Tree, does it truly think we have not discovered its machinations? Make it understand that our kind will not be fooled so easily.”

“...”

“I understand, Master.”

The sinister aura emanating from the young man’s body slightly lessened, and the second presence in the room seemed to have vanished.

The young man gritted his teeth, his eyes flashing with anger. His hands were clenched so hard that the armrests of his chair were reduced to dust.

Many moments later, he let out a quiet sigh. His hand moved to a locket that hung on a chain around his neck. It was a sword encircled by a miniature fox.

“Tan’er, I know you can’t hear me, and I know you probably hate me already for all that I have done. But I promise, I swear to the heavens, nothing will be able to harm you. Even if the world is engulfed in the flames of purgatory, I shall ensure that you remain happy.”

His eyes became distant and slightly watery as he thought of the past. Those were the days when he did not have to be like this, the days when he wasn’t a mere puppet acting on the will of others.

“Vengeance...is impossible. So I shall do what I can do. This is my only option.” The tears that were forming in his eyes vanished without a trace, and any signs of weariness on his face were hidden with perfection.

3 days. In 3 days, he would enter that realm. And 6 months later...

‘I’m sorry, Tan’er, but this is all I can do.’

With a sharp gaze and a familiarly sinister aura, he closed his eyes and entered meditation.

Everything he did, he did it for her safety. This thought was the only thing allowing him to maintain his sanity.

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Time flowed quickly in the fervent atmosphere that covered the city of Taesi, and the original population of millions had multiplied.

Many people, humanoid and beast, had gathered in this location, eagerly awaiting the coming event. And today, it was finally time for it to begin.

The area hundreds of kilometers around the World Tree were sectioned off and restricted to everyone, even the elves who lived their lives in the city, but today, the space in front of the restricted area was crowded with people.

Within that area, there were precisely 1,050 youths, all with human forms.

To his embarrassment, it took a few days for him to realize that the geniuses he had met before entering the city were all in human form, but once he realized it, he naturally got curious.

Asking the White Dragon King, he learned of such a thing as the Beast Transformation Art. It was an art that had circulated through the 3000 Beast Mountain Range at an unknown time, and it allowed those under the Beast King rank to achieve their human forms.

Of course, it wasn't the same. When a Beast King gained a human form, it was due to the baptism of the universe, allowing them to freely compact their power into a humanoid form.

This kind of transformation would explosively compress their strength and make their output exponentially greater.

Besides that, the true body of a beast that achieved its 4th class would be massive, to say the least. It was simply inconvenient to stay in such a body when they had the option not to.

However, the Beast Transformation Art didn't have such benefits. It didn't have any side effects or cons either, but it was a relatively simple art.

It was just a matter of convenience. They would gain human forms that were only for appearance-sake. Their power levels would remain the same whether they were in beast form or not.

When such an art was learned, the Beast form would become a trump card that they would only use when the situation became incredibly dire.

It was an interesting fact, and Damien wondered what would happen if he gave Zara the art. He even asked the White Dragon King for it, but he said he'd only give it to them after they had succeeded within the Primordial Undying Realm.

Still, Damien was fine with this. Zara was still slumbering in his shadow to this day, showing no signs of waking up any time soon. He would've been worried by this, but since over a month had already passed, he had been able to feel the subtle strengthening of her aura.

If her slumber was due to a rapid increase in strength, or if it was a manner of training, there's no way he'd selfishly interrupt it.

Anyway, Damien stood within the crowd of 1,050 geniuses and looked around, noticing a few familiar faces and many unfamiliar ones. But most of them were present on the 3000 Beast Record, so he was able to roughly understand who was who.

He even noticed the unconcealed glare of the woman named Feng Qing'er, but he only returned a slight smile before looking away.

There were more important things to see right now than any jade beauties.

After all, on a platform in front of their group, tens of Beast Kings lined up along with a beautiful jade-haired elf with solemn auras surrounding them.

Without wasting any time, the elven woman spoke in a crystal clear voice.

“Young Geniuses of the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, the time has finally come for you to enter the fabled Primordial Undying Realm.”

Chapter 237 - Primordial Undying Realm [1]

The day had finally come, the Primordial Undying Realm would be opening at any moment.

From all across the vast city of Taesi, young geniuses, as well as ordinary citizens, congregated towards the base of the World Tree.

None of them had lived long enough to have seen the first opening of the Primordial Undying Realm, so everything they knew about it was from legends and folk tales. This kind of thing only served to heighten the excitement and anticipation they felt for being able to witness it in person.

When the common populace finally congregated, they were able to see the vast crowd of geniuses that had already arrived in front of the World Tree.

“Wow, the twin Phoenix Queens are even more heavenly than I expected!”

“Now that I’ve seen them in person, I can die happy!”

“Kyaaa! Isn’t that Alekzi?! He looks so humble and modest!”

“Oh god, he’s so handsome, that Entrails guy who competes with him is nothing in comparison!”

“What do you know?! Entrails is valiant and brave! Unlike that Alekzi guy, he is nothing but a shameless femboy!”

“What’s a femboy?”

“Ow! Honey, I’m sorry, I won’t ask about femboys again, forgive me!”

The conversations of the spectating crowd had completely skimmed over most of the 1,050 geniuses lined up in the square, instead choosing to focus on the 10 geniuses that stood at the very forefront.

“Hey, who is that guy?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never seen him before. What qualifications does he have to stand next to our top 10 geniuses?!”

“Didn’t you hear? That’s the genius Senior White Dragon King chose as his representative this time!”

“The beauty by his side isn’t bad either! I heard that their prowess isn’t any weaker than the top 10!”

“Hmph, what do you know. They’re just newbies, there’s no way those bloated rumors are true.”

Damien and Ruyue were particularly eye-catching. Not only were they a handsome and beautiful man and woman, they were also wild cards without any reputation. Yet, they still dared to stand in the forefront of the crowd of geniuses.

The main point that people focused on was this. Not just anyone could obtain such a place. In fact, if any random person tried, they’d be put in their place by the other geniuses present. The odd thing

was, not a single genius stepped forward to contest Damien and Ruyue's positions in the front of the crowd.

As a matter of fact, some of them even looked at the duo in fear. How could they not? Naturally, some attention-seeking geniuses had sought trouble with the duo during the few days prior, but not a single one had even managed to gauge their strength.

Damien had used pure physical strength to deal with most of them, while Ruyue flicked her finger and caused their limbs to fall limply to the floor. This kind of prowess was terrifying for those under the top 20, while those in the top 20 were smarter than to reveal themselves before such an important event.

The element of surprise was important, especially in a setting where a portion of their abilities was already common knowledge due to the 3000 Beast Record. Even if they wanted to probe the new and mysterious duo, they could only do so by sending lower-ranked geniuses to do it for them.

But the results of that were obvious. Some of the geniuses who came from weaker clans still had missing hands or fingers, or broken bones. They weren't able to find high enough tier healing in time for the opening of the realm.

And this was fatal. They were essentially half crippled before even entering the glorified death trap of the Primordial Undying Realm. Their fates were already sealed, causing some of the other similarly ranked geniuses to sigh in pity and relief. Luckily, it wasn't them that had been chosen to prove that monstrous duo.

In the front of the crowd, the 12 geniuses that stood at the peak were silently eyeing each other and conversing.

“Hey, Alekzi. Your money won’t be able to get you out of this situation! Why don’t you bark and be my dog and maybe I’ll lend you a helping hand in the secret realm.”

“Hmph, Entrails you’ve gotten bold over these past few months. Who was it that was begging to lick my feet for a few more spirit stones not too long ago?”

“You?! How shameless can you be? As expected of you, nobody can compete with the God of Shamelessness.”

“The God of Shamelessness is obviously you! Don’t go staining my humble and modest name with your filthy tongue.”

The loudest of them were Alekzi and Entrails, the two who constantly were at each other’s throats just like their Clan Leaders.

Damien watched the show in amusement, thinking about how the two actually seemed to be great friends when he noticed two beauties approaching him.

“Hey, guy! You better hope that we don’t meet in the secret realm if you want to keep all your hair!” Feng Qing’er growled.

“Hm? What hair are you talking about?”

“All of it! I’ll burn it all and leave you crying like a bald monkey!”

“Ah! You can’t! My little brother doesn’t deserve to be harassed like this!”

“Who is your little brother?! The only one being harassed is you!”

“Ah?!”

Suddenly, Feng Qing’er felt Lunaria Snow pinch her side. “Qing’er, stop. You’re embarrassing yourself.”

When Feng Qing’er tried to rebut, she tightened her grip on her. Looking coldly at Damien, she spoke. “You have a big mouth, but I hope your power can back up your words.”

Without saying anything else, she firmly grabbed Feng Qing’er and dragged her away.

“Luna, I don’t get it. Why did he suddenly mention his younger brother? Was he trying to make me pity him?”

Lunaria Snow looked at her with a hint of exasperation on her cold face. “Qing’er, no matter how bold you are, you are still so innocent inside.”

“Huh? Luna, now I’m curious! Tell me what it means! Tell me!”

Lunaria Snow stared at her and then back at Damien. For an instant, a mischievous light shone in her eyes. “Alright, fine. I’ll tell you.”

While they were walking away, Damien went back to surveilling the geniuses around him. He was also silently pretending as if he couldn't see Ruyue's fierce glare penetrating his skin from his side.

"Did you have to make such crude jokes? Oh, I get it. You just couldn't resist teasing a beauty."

"Hm? I have no idea what you're talking about. What beauty? The only beauty I see here is you." He responded with a smile.

"Tch. Shameless!"

"No, no, you must be mistaken. The shameless ones are those two birds over there. Why are you so mad? Don't tell me, are you jealous?"

Ruyue's face heated up slightly. "Who is jealous of you? Merely, I don't think it's wise to be getting too close to your enemies." She had a slight pout on her face, but she turned her head away so he wouldn't notice.

Damien smiled at her cute actions. No matter if she was cold enough to chop off limbs because a genius decided to provoke her, she would always be like this around him. It was gratifying, even though he didn't want to admit it.

While teasing Ruyue, he didn't stop checking out the geniuses around the area. Rather; there was a single genius he was paying more attention to. It was a hooded man with a black half mask covering his face. Even his eyes were covered, making one wonder how he was able to see.

“He must be Han Fang, Rank One on the 3000 Beast Record.”

Although there were plenty of hooded figures within the crowd, Damien was able to clearly see through their shabby concealment. Most of those hooded figures were beautiful elves, one of which stood out in particular, but he didn't pay them any mind.

They were strong, especially that one girl, she was probably strong enough to rival the two Phoenix Queens. But even this was nothing compared to the man he had his attention on.

Even in the sociable atmosphere that had enveloped the area, not a single person dared to get within a 5-meter radius of him. Even the ones outside of that range were glancing at him occasionally in wariness and fear.

Damien smirked. ‘Truly deserving of his reputation.’

Even when he used his All-Seeing Eyes, Han Fang didn't even spare him a glance. It was as if he had complete confidence he wouldn't be seen through, or that even if he was seen through it wouldn't matter.

This kind of attitude was interesting. Damien felt his blood boil as the urge to fight a strong opponent once again made itself known within his body.

But before he could take any action, a stifling pressure descended on the area, silencing the lively atmosphere in an instant.

When he looked up, he saw the familiar faces of the White Dragon King and the two Phoenix Matriarchs, as well as a plethora of other Beast Kings. And in front of them all was a jade-haired blue-eyed woman and whose beauty transcended even the two Phoenix Matriarchs.

As everyone's attention focused on her, a crystal clear voice left her mouth. It was cold yet gentle, elegant yet fierce, it was entrancing.

"Young Geniuses of the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, the time has finally come for you to enter the fabled Primordial Undying Realm."

Chapter 238 - Primordial Undying Realm [2]

Hearing the Elf Queen's words, the fervent atmosphere immediately returned, but it was naturally much quieter than before in respect for her authority.

Seeing this, she smiled lightly and continued. Though, that smile was enough to make it so some young men and even women had a hard time concentrating on her words.

"As you all know, the opening of the Primordial Undying Realm is a once every 10,000-year opportunity. It isn't something just anyone can be a part of. But, I am obligated to warn you that the risks are just as bountiful as the rewards.

"It is almost a guarantee that most of you will die in this realm, but the ones who survive will obtain the potential to surpass even us peak existences within the 3000 Beast Mountain Range. I'm warning you all now, if you can't bear the risks, this is the time to retreat."

She stood silently and watched the crowd of geniuses, but as expected, not a single one moved. Which of them hadn't been aware of the risks when they signed up for this? Which of them was a coward who'd let such things bar their path forward? None! That was the answer!

The Elf Queen let out another light smile. "As expected, this isn't enough to stop any of you. Very well, I shall admire your courage as true geniuses, even if you fall in this excursion, know that you have proven yourselves.

"The Primordial Undying Realm is a land of trials. The fruits of the Primordial Undying Tree aren't the only rewards that you can obtain within, so do not be disheartened if you cannot obtain one in the end.

"Although I do not wish to see any promising seedlings die, I am unable to stop you from entering. Remember, the calamities that may come in the future will require your strength, so be courageous and push forth, no matter the obstacle."

Damien's eyes sharpened at her words. Coming calamity? There was only one that was of large enough scale that he could think of. It was the same one that had been following him around no matter where he went.

But how could the Elf Queen know about it? Wasn't she trapped within the 3000 Beast Mountain Range? Even the White Dragon King, who had been from the outside world, hadn't mentioned anything of the sort.

'As I thought, the presence of the elves in this world is unnatural.'

His eyes gained a hint of solemnity. He had no way to ascertain whether the calamity the Elf Queen mentioned was indeed the Nox, but his instincts were telling him that his guess was on the mark.

And when had his instincts failed him? When he was pushed into the dungeon; when he met Zara, when he discovered the Ancient Temple on Godspark Mountain, each and every time his instincts had led him on the correct path. It would be stupid to start doubting them now.

'I need to find some way to get into contact with the Elf Queen once I exit the secret realm. If she actually has information about the Nox, it is imperative that I get my hands on it.'

Suddenly, the elven participants in the trial seemed a lot more interesting to Damien.

'They are the key. Perhaps, if I can forge a connection with them, I'll be able to gain an audience with the Queen.'

Shaking his head, he refocused his attention. First, he needed to survive the coming dangers. Only then would such plans be able to be set forth into motion.

While he was in thought, the Elf Queen had already finished her speech. At this moment, she had her back facing the crowd, her attention focused on the World Tree in front of her.

Raising her hands, a jade green mana that matched the tone of her hair began emanating from her body.

'Life element. Or rather, Life Laws.'

It was familiar. After all, Elena possessed the same element.

Paying no heed to the speechless crowd behind her, the Elf Queen began to chant in a low voice.

"By the Grace of the Almighty Protector, with the Authority bestowed upon me by the seeds of Yggdrasil, I call upon the World Tree. Open the gates between Heaven and Hell. The Primordial Spirit of Immortality, hear my call. The future beckons your release once again."

With every word she said, the jade green mana surrounding her became even denser. At some point, the heaven-piercing World Tree in front of her began to glow with the same light.

Its seemingly indestructible trunk began to crack lightly, creating a spiderweb that spanned several miles. The Primordial Spirit of Immortality heard her call, causing a juxtaposing black and white aura to leak from the cracks in the World Tree's trunk.

And then, that portion of the World Tree turned into motes of light that floated into the all-encompassing canopy and were absorbed.

In their place, there was a swirling mass of black and white that looked like a yin-yang symbol. Its light was beckoning, almost entrancing the geniuses present and making them move towards it without their volition.

Crack! Boom!

The ground beneath the 1,050 geniuses was torn apart as countless roots exited it. These roots then went on to wrap those geniuses within them. Pulling them towards the swirling mass in the center of the World Tree.

Naturally, the geniuses that came together were separated by this sudden change.

"Ruyue!" Damien yelled as he noticed her getting pulled apart from him.

Gritting his teeth, he reached out and tried to grab her hand. But the roots seemed to dislike his action, pulling them apart even further.

Glancing around, Ruyue noticed that everyone else was going through the same predicament. Even those two Phoenix Queens who seemed inseparable made no move to reach out to each other.

Ruyue gently bit her lip and sighed. "We will meet within the Primordial Undying Realm! If you die before that time, I swear, I will find a way to revive you and kill you myself!"

Gritting her teeth in pain, she used a technique she never thought she'd ever have use for. From her body, a blue light shot out and entered Damien's forehead.

"Wha-?" Although Damien didn't know what had just happened, seeing Ruyue's watery gaze, he shut his mouth.

"From now on, we are forever connected. If you die, then I shall be crippled near death as well. So don't die! Unless you want me to suffer a fate worse than death!"

It was as if the roots had been waiting for them to finish their interaction. The second Ruyue finished her words, she was dragged into that black and white portal and flung into the secret realm.

"That girl..." Damien smiled gently. "Well, I guess dying isn't an option anymore."

With that thought, he entered the portal as well.

Damien had never been the hoarder type. He never even saw much value in artifacts and treasures, since he had an array of skills that could always match or outclass them.

But at this moment, there was a certain feeling bubbling in his chest.

The boons of the Primordial Undying Tree, the myriad treasures he could obtain, the fruits and sap that were his main goal...

He would get his hands on them all. What belonged to him, not a single person would be able to take it from his grasp.

Chapter 239 - Primordial Undying Realm [3]

There was a land of waste where no life could grow. The ground was cracked and dry and painted red but the sun didn't shine in the sky.

No matter which direction one gazed in, they would only see this exact same bland scenery continuing endlessly.

This was the land Damien saw around him at this moment.

'Wasn't I supposed to be in the Primordial Undying Realm?'

For a secret realm that was managed by the so-called "Primordial Spirit of Immortality", it seemed a little too...mortal.

The land was, by all intents and purposes, dead. There were no signs of vitality coming from it at all.

'Is this one of those trials?'

He had heard plenty of times that there'd be trials in the secret realm to judge the worthiness of those entering, but he never really visualized what that'd be like.

Perhaps it would be like the Legacy Tombs he found in the Eternal Secret Realm on Apeiron, or perhaps it would be something else. Either way, when he imagined secret realms, he always thought of expansive worlds filled with treasure.

It was a misconception that was born from experience. Not every secret realm would be like the one on Apeiron, where an entire small world was literally compressed into a realm for future use.

While Damien was questioning his surroundings, the ground began to rumble.

What seemed like an earthquake shook the earth and sunless sky for many moments, but with his abilities, Damien wasn't fazed at all. Instead, he watched with interest.

Suddenly...

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Explosive sounds thundered from the ground as it was split open and blasted to pieces. Torrents of red liquid shot out from beneath like bloody geysers.

"This is...magma?"

Regular magma wouldn't be able to hurt Damien anymore. This was the benefit of coating his body with the mana of a 3rd class being.

And this is exactly what he tried to do as he backed away from the torrents of magma that began to fill the land.

"...huh?"

But soon enough, he realized it was impossible. His feet wouldn't budge from their position as if he was glued to the ground and his mana wouldn't respond to his call. Even the space around him seemed to thicken at that moment.

"Not good."

His facial expression became ugly. He could probably survive the magma with his physical body and regeneration if it was only for a small period of time, but the magma filling the area at the moment didn't seem to be the kind that would only last for a moment.

Boom! Boom!

Two more torrents of magma shot out from behind him, flowing into the previous streams and enclosing Damien's location. Now, unless he teleported or flew, there was no way to escape.

But how could he do either with his body trapped and his mana sealed?

Oddly enough, the magma didn't spread outwards, instead forming a cage around Damien. As more and more lava flew from underground, it filled that cage until its height reached an unimaginable point.

And then, it began to flow inwards.

"Fuck!" Damien shouted. He desperately tried to control his muscles and tendons to move, even by a little, but it was futile. Soon enough, the magma reached the center of the cube it had formed and made contact with the soles of Damien's feet.

Tsss!

It was a sound similar to pouring cold water into a heated pan. A low hiss that signified the burning of the shoes on his feet.

Somehow, the second the magma touched him, its flow seemed to rapidly increase. Damien could only watch helplessly in those first few minutes as the cage was formed around him, but now it seemed that he'd be completely enveloped in magma within the next minute.

"Argh!"

Even if his physical body was powerful, even if he'd heal from the wounds he received until his mana was drained, he could still vividly feel the pain of his flesh melting.

It didn't take long for a minute to pass, but it felt like an eternity to Damien. And finally...

Splash!

The last of the magma had covered his body and the original free-flowing geysers had paused. It was as if time in the outside world had come to a standstill to allow Damien to suffer for as long as possible.

The way things were now, there was no way he'd be able to escape torment any time soon.

"Aggg!"

His body instinctively tried to scream, but all that did was allow the magma into his throat, burning it to cinders.

Luckily, he was regenerating. But Damien, who was still conscious, was sure that this wasn't the work of his own regeneration.

Why? Obviously because if it was his own skill, he would've regenerated much faster. But no. Instead of immediately healing the damages to his body, he was regenerating slow enough to perfectly match the speed at which he burned.

Once again, a mechanism seemed to activate to keep him burning for as long as possible.

His skin melted first, leaving a layer of muscle and skeletal tissue. But those melted soon after. His mana heart and true heart, as well as his rib cage and bones, came into view.

If it wasn't for the strange force that was keeping him alive right now, he'd have undoubtedly died. He was just a normal person who was thrown into lava at this time.

Damien felt like he was going insane. His body was in constant pain even when his pain receptors had been melted into nothingness whenever his muscles bones and skin were burnt to their last shred, they were healed back to peak condition.

But even this healing only brought pain instead of pleasure.

'AHHHH!'

He had learned from his first accident not to scream out loud. His screams reverberated in his brain as he endured the suffering he was put through.

But he couldn't die. He couldn't lose his sanity. He wouldn't allow that to happen.

Within the dark mindscape that he had discovered when he created his Mind Prison, Damien could see two things.

One was the aforementioned Mind Prison, but he felt nothing towards it. After resolving himself to face his problems head-on, he had never used it again.

What his mind focused on was the other object. It was faintly shining with a blue hue and took the shape of a feminine humanoid.

When Damien moved closer to inspect it, he realized why he felt a sense of familiarity towards it.

'Ruyue.'

Before they were separated, he saw a blue light shoot out from her body and into his forehead. It had just happened after all, so it was still extremely vivid in his mind.

The faint blush that flushed her cheeks in a rosy color, the way she softly bit her bottom lip, the emotion in those piercing golden eyes when she looked at him. The utterly embarrassing words that flowed so smoothly from her lips.

'From now on, we are forever connected. If you die, then I shall be crippled near death as well. So don't die! Unless you want me to suffer a fate worse than death!'

Although his eyes were the first thing to be melted after he was submerged in magma, if they were still present, they'd be burning in determination.

'Right. With this small amount of pain, I was going crazy? I've seriously gone soft over the years.'

Remember those days. Those days in the dungeon. When not a single thing mattered besides survival.

Endure. Endure. Endure.

Survive. Survive. Survive.

'Remember. When you stood in front of that wyvern that was so terrifying back then. When you allowed its breath to burn half your body to cinders just for the fun of it. Remember. When you were enveloped in a world of blood, sustaining and surviving in a state of constant injury.'

'Remember. That feeling when fighting the very first wolf. A wolf that could now be erased at a flick of your finger. Back then, remember that burning and insane will to survive. Even if it cost an arm, even if it cost everything, as long as you brought down that wolf, it was worth it.'

When Damien's thoughts flew through his time in the dungeon, when he remembered his insanity back then, the feeling of being burned alive like this...

It was oddly disappointing.

'I was being put into such a miserable situation by just this much?'

How much had he endured so far? How much had he survived? Something like this...

Something like this wasn't nearly enough to break him.

Chapter 240 Primordial Undying Realm[4]

It was as if the surrounding magma was waiting for his change in mindset.

The second he reaffirmed his determination, a change took place in the surrounding magma sea.

The still magma that had been simply burning him constantly for the past unknown amount of time was now actively surging towards his body.

But strangely enough, the impact brought no pain. Or rather, this particular sensation of pain no longer registered as pain in his mind.

It was actually slightly pleasurable instead.

The magma once again burned away his skin, but this time it didn't regenerate. Instead, the magma charged into his bones and was absorbed by it.

With every passing second, more and more magma entered his skeleton, causing his bones themselves to turn the same red as the ground.

"Ngh!"

A slight groan of pain echoed in the surroundings, even though Damien had no vocal cords to groan with at the moment. It was another odd phenomenon.

His red bones showed signs of melting as the amount of magma contained in them reached the peak, but they didn't melt. They compacted and grew at the same time, maintaining their shape but becoming much denser than they were previously.

The magma within his bones churned and whistled, turning into solid matter that substituted the extra material his bones needed to continue their transformation.

After all, there was no way to maintain their shape while becoming denser if there was no material to use to do so. The magma was acting as a stand-in for such material, and becoming his bones themselves.

This process lasted for what felt like hours before all the magma had solidified, becoming one with him. But the quantity of magma encasing his body was still large. Evidently, this was a multiple-step strengthening process.

Damien smiled when he realized this. It was a horrifying smile made by a skeleton with only two hearts and a brain other than its burning red bones.

'So there were rewards for the suffering I was put through, huh. In that case, it can be considered worth it.'

Soon enough, his muscles, tendons, and ligaments were reformed. Along with this, his internal organs once again took their rightful places within his body.

And after the partial regeneration was complete, another surging of magma entered his body. His internal organs had previously been strengthened by the devouring of the Sea Dragon, but that was incomparable to the current progress.

It was like the rebirth ability of a Phoenix, but for his physical body only. This level of strengthening was a true boon.

'If it's this good from just the first trial alone, how good is the true strengthening of the fruits of the Primordial Undying Tree?'

It was exciting to think about. The level of power he might reach within this realm... it was truly something to look forward to.

But Damien's thoughts hardened at that moment. 'There's no way it's only me being strengthened here.'

Similar things were most likely happening to all the others who entered. Or at least, those that were able to maintain their sanity within the burning magma.

As for the rest, there was no doubt in his mind that there wasn't even a corpse left of them.

He suddenly felt extremely worried for Ruyue. She was still an innocent girl in his eyes, no matter what kind of cold front she put up.

He remembered the way she cried for those villagers months ago, and he remembered the way she explained her determination to Tian Yang when they first entered the mountain range.

The difference between the girl he knew at both times was vast, but she was still the same person. He was afraid that she didn't have enough time to become someone who could handle a trial like this.

Luckily, Ruyue had pulled such a stupid yet sweet move before they were dropped into the secret realm. Whatever this thing within his mindscape was, it was his assurance that she was still alive and well.

When Damien's muscles and internal organs finished their strengthening, his skin soon followed. A fully intact Damien was now seated in an egg made from crystallized magma.

With nothing to worry about, Damien happily sat and received the baptism of magma that he was currently drowned in.

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All throughout the secret realm, similar scenes to what Damien experienced were taking place. But naturally, not all of them went through the same thing.

A portion of them were drowned in magma like him, some were stuck in a flood and drowned in water the same way, some were trapped in unending blizzards or sandstorms.

No matter where the geniuses landed, they were always within some sort of disaster that tested their will.

And obviously, not all of them could survive. Damien wasn't truly oriented towards a particular element, so there wasn't an environment that would truly be of benefit or detriment to him.

But this wasn't the case for others. Those who were specialized in flames but were unfortunate enough to land in a flooded atmosphere were naturally at a disadvantage. The same with other examples.

Although their mana and abilities couldn't be used, the affinity of their body would still stay the same. It would be extra difficult for them to pass the trials they were given, and even if they passed, they wouldn't be able to maximize the benefits due to opposing natures.

As for others, they were simply too weak. No matter what the atmosphere of the 3000 Beast Mountain Range was like, all these geniuses had been fostered by their respective powers.

Some had naturally been pampered or raised differently. Even if they were harshly trained in preparation for the Primordial Undying Realm, the level of pain tolerance they had simply couldn't keep up with what they were being forced to endure.

Ruyue was almost part of the latter group. She had never experienced such extreme pain before in her life. That wasn't the environment she was raised in.

Even though she was dropped into a sub-zero blizzard that wouldn't be detrimental to her, she still almost gave up due to the intensity of pain.

But somehow, she had managed to survive. She thought of the man she had given her soul to, and the adventures she could have with him around the myriad worlds of the universe.

Such a prospect wasn't something she was willing to let go of so easily. Her determination wasn't like Damien's. It hadn't been forged in the depths of hell.

It could be said that her will was currently in the process of being formed. Through her adventures with Damien and the plethora of things they had experienced, a firm determination had been growing within her.

The current trial, the trial that tested that budding determination, it served as a grindstone for her. A way for her to completely and wholeheartedly commit to that determination and make the conscious decision to never waver.

As such, she passed with flying colors and received the baptism of ice the same way Damien did with magma.

But it was a truly hard thing to do. It was easy to describe for those like Damien and Ruyue, but not everyone was a monster.

During this trial alone, 250 geniuses had died.