

Void 451

Chapter 451 Grievance [7]

Ruyue's spear cut through the air like paper, creating a harsh screeching noise as it burst toward the 12th Elder's face.

Although the 12th Elder was still flabbergasted at what Rose had done to her Ice Lotus, the encroaching sense of death emanating from the incoming spear managed to wake her up.

She hurriedly waved her hand, creating a large ice wall made up of countless hexagonal pieces. Of course, this wall was infused with the power of Ice Laws, so even though it was clumsily put together, its strength couldn't be underestimated.

SCREEEEEEEEEECH!

Ruyue's spear rotated on its own axis as it moved, and what impacted the wall was a rapidly spinning disc emanating white and black light, when the two forces came into contact, an array of sparks rained down on the ground below.

Out of nowhere, a large fire started. Seeing this, Rose flicked her wrist, utilizing her illusion affinity to banish it before it could spread and cause too much collateral damage.

They were still outside the Empyrean Dragon Realm, after all. Even if they had retreated far away, there was still a chance that the present uninvolved parties could be implicated if they fought recklessly.

Perhaps it was this thought in the back of everyone's minds that made sure the scale of this battle didn't reach a level they couldn't come back from. Even if they were fighting in life or death, they didn't use large-scale area attacks very often.

Rose shook her head and returned her attention to the fight at hand. She couldn't get distracted while supporting her dear little sister.

The clash between the spear and ice wall didn't just create sparks. The heat generated by the spear's motion interacted with the chill of the ice wall, creating a cloud of steam that impaired both Ruyue and the 12th Elder's vision.

But could Ruyue be held back by mere steam? Her eyes glowed golden, allowing her to see the outlines of those in her surroundings.

The 12th Elder, her spear, the ice wall, even Rose, who left for a second to talk to Damien, they were all clear in her eyes.

"Watch...!" Ruyue almost yelled out, but stopped herself.

A massive boulder had appeared above Rose's head while she was distracted. Surprisingly, it wasn't even an attack from the 12th Elder. Rather, it was collateral damage from one of the other fights taking place.

But before she could even be worried, Rose had already dealt with the danger in front of her. Ruyue smiled wryly and returned her focus to her own battle.

'Now, while she's distracted.' Ruyue's figure flashed away. The Blood Moon in the sky behind her rotated, sending out beams of light that showered her body and empowered her.

Within a second, she was behind the 12th Elder, her aura hidden as far as she could do so.

But the 12th Elder wasn't a fool either. Listening to her instincts, she turned around and slashed her arm at Ruyue, threatening to cut the latter in two.

But she was already too late. Ruyue held her hand out, causing a formless essence that radiated an aura of extinction to shoot out from her fingertips.

'Erasure.'

The attack was never meant to be aimed at the 12th Elder. The second she cast Erasure, Ruyue backed away, using Iceflames to propel her and evade the 12th Elder's attack.

At the same time, a flurry of lunar energy beams and iceflames barraged the 12th Elder. And it was at that moment that Erasure found its target.

The negative aspect of Yin, and most likely its most powerful effect, the ability to erase anything from existence. It was a move that Ruyue created long ago, but needed stringent conditions to use.

Plus, even when used, there wasn't a high chance of success. After all, it was far too powerful of a concept for her to be using wantonly at her power level. It was only her monstrous talent that allowed her to discover it so early.

But this time, when Erasure impacted the ice wall, its effect rang true. Within seconds, the entire ice wall was banished from existence. Even though it was powered by Ice Laws, it couldn't resist the strong persuasion of such disastrous yin.

BANG!

Ruyue's spear charged through the now-empty space like a raging bull. The effects of Drifting Moon turned it into a deadly weapon with far more cutting power than it would have normally.

And while the 12th Elder was busy fending off the barrage of beam attacks Ruyue sent out earlier...

Spurt!

The rotating spear cleanly cut through her shoulder and returned to Ruyue's hands. A fountain of blood sprayed from the wound as the 12th Elder's arm fell to the floor.

Whoosh!

A sudden wind picked up out of nowhere. It gathered around the severed arm and sliced it into pieces. A few tens of meters away from Ruyue and the 12th Elder, Rose smiled mischievously.

'Can't let that arm get reattached now, can we?'

Seeing her expression, Ruyue smiled too. She truly was a trusty support. However, before she could exchange words with Rose, she was forced to twist her body as an overwhelming sense of danger encroached on her.

"Y-YOU SLUT! HOW DARE YOU?!"

A sword of ice appeared above the 12th Elder's palm and shot at Ruyue. Despite her grand words, the size of the sword wasn't large at all.

But perhaps that's what made it even more frightening. Due to its small size and rapid movement, Ruyue couldn't track it with her senses at all.

Although she managed to dodge in instinct, the sword still managed to graze her side, leaving a cold blueish-purple gash that didn't seem like it would heal any time soon.

"Keuk..." Ruyue gritted her teeth in pain. This attack wasn't like her previous injury at all. She could clearly feel the foreign mana invading her body and trying to freeze her from the inside.

'I need to end this quick.'

She gripped her spear tightly and moved. Rose appeared behind her, green and colorless manas raging around her as she prepared to handle any unforeseen circumstances.

Ruyue charged without worry. She lifted her spear and unknowingly entered a state of extreme concentration. Unconsciously, she approached the 12th Elder with awkward and unpredictable movements.

Seeing her rush in even though she was being obviously corroded from the inside, the 12th Elder's face turned green.

Why was this bitch so powerful at such a low level?! Why was her beauty so much greater than my own?! Why was she able to escape the horrible fate of a woman from the Xue Clan, while I was forced to embrace it for the sake of power?!

The 12th Elder's fury and envy melded into a flurry of emotions that could no longer be held back. Her mouth opened and she let out something akin to a roar.

"YOU ARE COURTING DEATH!"

"Ooooh! She said it! She said the thing!"

With Ruyue in a state of extreme concentration and the 12th Elder consumed by her negative emotions, only Rose was still in a mental state to notice Damien's excited interruption, but even she wasn't in a position to respond.

Ruyue's eyes were blank. Her golden irises seemed to have disappeared in a sea of white. Inside her mind, a spear movement was repeating over and over again in an endless cycle.

As she approached the 12th Elder in the real world, her mouth opened subconsciously.

"Moon Goddess Spear Art Sixth Form: Distorted Moonlight."

Chapter 452 Grievance [8]

Slash!

Whether it be Damien, Rose, or the 12th Elder, not a single one of them understood what just happened.

The black and white light around Ruyue's spear was distorted and melded together into a disgusting yet oddly pleasing grey color that stunned the senses. Her spear moved like a snake, her wrists seemingly becoming boneless and more flexible than the limits of the human body allowed.

Her figure zipped by the 12th Elder's side while performing these strange movements. She didn't even look like she struck the 12th Elder when she did so.

But the results spoke for themselves.

A thin red line appeared on the 12th Elder's torso. It spread until it made a full circle around her body and reconnected with its origin.

The 12th Elder's face turned pale. Her voice came out as more of a whimper than anything else.

"H-how...?"

She didn't even feel herself being struck. By all logic, there was no way for Ruyue's attack to hit her, considering the direction and power put into it.

But, she couldn't deny the thin red line on her body that was leaking a small trace of blood. The wound didn't look like much, but she knew...that this would be her final thought.

"Haa..." Ruyue let out a cold breath. As if waiting for this moment, the 12th Elder's body horizontally split into two pieces.

Ruyue's irises returned to her eyes, those weary golden orbs looking at the scene she had just caused.

A relieved smile formed on her lips. "I...did it."

Her body fell from the air, unable to sustain itself any longer. All her mana had been used up in that attack.

Damien's figure flashed away from the chair he was sitting in, deftly catching Ruyue before she could fall too far. Of course, he made sure to utilize vector control so that he wouldn't aggravate her body condition when he did so.

"Tch...so stupid." He gritted his teeth so hard that he drew blood as he looked at Ruyue's current state. Even saying that she was on death's door wasn't an over-exaggeration.

His worry turned into fury as he thought about it. If he had just intervened in her battle, she would've never turned out like this. It was the same for Rose.

But he wasn't going to take his rage out on Rose, nor was he going to blame himself. He wasn't a child anymore.

This battle was imperative to Ruyue's growth. It was the reason why he didn't interfere at all, and even while watching her get injured, he tried to keep his attitude light-hearted so he wouldn't distract her.

Because he knew it. If he or Rose had done anything too extra in aiding her, Ruyue never would have discovered the spear technique she used to kill the 12th Elder.

Pah!

Damien slapped himself in the face. It was a crisp slap that woke him up from the dark thoughts that kept plaguing his mind.

He knew it from the start. This was the nature of the world. For him to reach his current level of power, he was forced to fight death countless times and endure untold amounts of torture.

Was he so special that only he would be forced to go through such trials to become stronger? Was he going to force his wives to just be trophies for him while he went and did all the dirty work?

No. The answer to both questions was no.

"[Heal.]"

Damien activated the [Heal] trait he received from the Primordial Undying Tree. A greenish-white cocoon formed around Ruyue's injured body.

In the future, there would be plenty of times when he was separated from his women. Even if he wanted to keep them by his side, he knew it wasn't possible to tie them down like that.

He was their man, not their owner. It was his job to support them in achieving their dreams while standing by their side to experience both despair and happiness together.

It was for this reason why he never pressed Elena about the dilemma plaguing her mind. Perhaps even she didn't know how clearly he could see her feelings, considering how he spent most of their lives together pretending to be dense.

'I need to have a proper talk with her. I won't allow our new relationship to be built on a foundation of sex.'

He looked over at Rose. Her remark during the previous battle, no matter how light-hearted it had been, was an obvious show of her anger at his actions.

He was really not doing a good job of being a proper husband to them.

But it couldn't be helped. It was his first time in such a situation. How was he supposed to know how to perfectly handle it?

Rose was his first ever experience with a relationship, but before they could properly progress, he fell in love with Ruyue as well. And then, out of nowhere, he had sex with Elena.

The thought of being unrestrained, having permission from his women to form a harem, made him too complacent with his situation.

Even if he was allowed to have multiple women, it was still necessary for him to make sure he didn't bite off more than he could chew.

And at the moment, for an inexperienced guy like him, he had already done so with the three women he already had.

But he had no thoughts of running away or putting a hold on his relationship with any of them. Now that they had all come together for the first time, it was time for him to make reparations and build the relationship that the four of them shared until it was sturdy and without problems.

'Haa...at first I was just worried about Ruyue getting hurt, but I ended up thinking way too deeply about it.'

It wasn't like the two issues were completely unrelated, but it was still irresponsible of him to think of such things while in the situation they were currently in.

'Perhaps I've become desensitized to this kind of thing.'

It was a problem he never expected to appear. After all, nobody could prepare him for it.

Even though it hurt him to see Ruyue get injured, he wanted it to hurt him more. Frankly, it just stung a little, nothing more than that.

Because he had been through far worse to gain power. He had his arm severed, he had his entire left half burned to cinders by dragon's breath, he had jumped into a pit of molten lava for the sake of tempering his body, he had been impacted by a God's True Voice and came out more powerful.

The injuries on Ruyue's body might've seemed heavy, but they weren't something he couldn't heal through his newfound Trait.

So, subconsciously, he wasn't as worried as he felt he should've been when he saw his woman get fatally injured in battle.

'My emotions...haven't returned to humanity quite yet. Perhaps they never will. Do I learn to cope with it, or do I find a way to fix it?'

He didn't know which was the better option. For now, at least, he didn't have time to worry about it. Maybe this would be another situation where he only realized the severity of the problem after he personally felt the consequences.

But before he could delve deeper into his thoughts, the cocoon that encased Ruyue's body cracked open.

Ruyue's sleeping figure emerged from within, her eyes fluttering open. Seeing Damien's worried eyes looking down at her the second she woke up, she smiled.

"How'd I do?"

And her casual words seemed to clear some of Damien's confusion as well.

'That's right. No matter how much my emotions are dulled, it doesn't change the depth of my love for her.'

With a bright smile on his face, he replied in an equally casual tone. "It was great! Sigh, if only I had some popcorn, it would've been way better."

Ruyue scoffed. "I've heard of this popcorn stuff from Rose. When we get some time, you need to let me try it."

"No problem. I'll even take you to meet my mom while we're at it. Actually—"

Damien's words were suddenly cut off.

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

A massive explosion rang out. The Xue Clan's palace abode was turned into fine dust particles floating in the air.

What remained in its place was a frightening aura that far outstripped that of any elder that fought only a moment prior.

Xue Yebai was finally making his move.

Chapter 453 Fall [1]

Short, pristine white hair that signified his status as a member of the Xue Clan, eyes like shining golden orbs that looked down on everything in contempt, and a body like a steel mountain. Everything about the man's appearance practically screamed the word "imposing."

Coupled with the massive aura that was being released from his body, Xue Yebai truly gave a first impression that dominated one's mind.

"Who is it?" His voice came out just as cold as the air around him, sending shivers down the spines of all who heard it. Even if their bodies wanted to drip cold sweat, it was impossible, as that sweat would freeze the second it was formed.

"Who is it that dares to provoke my Xue Clan?"

His piercing golden eyes scanned the scene in front of him. The corpses of the 12 Elders who were pillars of the Xue Clan until this day were the first thing that entered his vision.

And after them were the faces of those who killed them.

But Xue Yebai's eyes remained passive. He didn't show a hint of rage or sorrow at the deaths of his clan members. In fact, the only emotion in his eyes was a trace of disdain.

"Just you? Has our clan fallen to the point where even ants have become brave enough to challenge us?"

Xue Yebai completely ignored Damien's 4th class subordinates. His eyes were trained on the body of Ruyue in Damien's arms.

"After all the years I spent raising you, this is how you choose to repay me. What a pathetic daughter."

Ruyue's body shivered uncontrollably. Seeing Xue Yebai's face again after so many years, she was overwhelmed by the lingering emotions she thought she had buried.

Sadness, anger, hatred, vengeance...the thoughts in her heart were colored in a ghastly black. Yet, Xue Yebai's presence alone was enough to cause her to freeze.

It wasn't a matter of power. She had always been aware that Xue Yebai had reached a level she couldn't even see with her current strength. Rather, it was about his identity in general.

Ruyue's mind was in chaos. She wanted to face him, she wanted to stand up and look at him in disdain like the frog he was, but she wasn't able to even move her fingers under his gaze.

She thought she overcame her trauma in the Trial of Self, but it seemed that her trauma ran far deeper than she thought it did. Perhaps, this scar in her heart wouldn't vanish until Xue Yebai was dead in front of her.

Damien's eyes hardened as he saw Ruyue's mental state. The fury he had been containing until this moment threatened to burst forth once again. And for someone like Xue Yebai, he didn't have any intention of keeping said fury hidden.

Damien's gaze was equally indifferent as he matched Xue Yebai's. "Hmm, I always imagined you as a pathetic dog with nothing to show for himself. It seems my mental image was on point."

Xue Yebai's eyes turned to Damien. "You are the one who led my daughter on this futile path? I have yet to decide whether to praise your courage or mock your foolishness."

"It's funny to me that you still have the nerve to call her your daughter after all the bullshit you've pulled. Or is thick skin just a genetic trait of the Xue Clan? I haven't decided whether you should die here today or if I should have you tortured endlessly for your sins."

"Sins? A mere child like you dares to label my actions as sin? In this world, power is everything. And because I have power, I have no sin."

Traceless mana coagulated in Xue Yebai's gaze and shot toward Damien at immeasurable speeds. As for Damien, he wasn't even aware that a deadly threat was currently approaching him.

"Then that means, if I kill you right now, it'll be because you were weak, right?"

A new voice interrupted their conversation. Tian Yang's figure appeared in the air between Damien and Xue Yebai, casually blocking the formless attack that had just been fired.

Damien suddenly whipped to attention. The stench of death had filled his senses for a brief instant when Tian Yang appeared in front of him, but it was already too late for him to block it.

Only after Tian Yang had done it for him did he realize how close he was to dying in that moment.

Damien's gaze hardened. 'This level of power...isn't something I can match up to yet. Even acting cheeky in front of a man like him is courting death.'

Damien gritted his teeth in frustration. No matter how fast he grew, there would always be someone with the power to kill him with a single look. Even if he didn't run into these people often, he engraved this fact into his bones so that he would never forget it.

Tian Yang looked at Damien with a smile. 'This kid has grown far more than I expected him to in this short amount of time. Then, as his master, shouldn't I give him a small present?'

He turned his attention back to Xue Yebai. "Xue Yebai, are you aware of the crimes you have committed?"

Xue Yebai glared at Tian Yang. For the first time since his appearance, he showed true emotion.

Hatred.

If it wasn't for Tian Yang's timely appearance, would Ruyue's fate have been subverted as it was? If it wasn't for him, would Xue Yebai's plans for his first daughter have been so thoroughly ruined?

From the start, Xue Yebai had always been looking for an opportunity to kill Tian Yang. But that opportunity never came. The backing of the Celestial Star Palace wasn't something his Xue Clan could handle alone, and Tian Yang had never been one to show off his power.

With so many unknown variables, Xue Yebai was forced to take a step back and let his hatred fester and grow.

Until today.

Today, Tian Yang stood in front of him alone. And with the current state of the Xue Clan, it would only be able to rise again if Tian Yang was defeated by his hands.

'Destroying the clan and rebuilding it from its roots has always been the final goal. Since my precious little treasure has taken care of the dismantling for me, I only have to prove our strength and start rebuilding. Ah, wouldn't she feel honored to be my Queen when that time comes?'

Xue Yebai smiled at his thoughts and finally decided to reply to Tian Yang's words. "Sin? What sin have I committed for the honorable Grand Elder of the Celestial Star Palace to personally come for me?"

Tian Yang's brow twitched. Even if he wasn't one to fall for such cheap provocation, hearing someone as disgusting as Xue Yebai mocking him still felt unpleasant.

But that was beside the point. Tian Yang's aura slowly billowed out like a formless fog, his words becoming colder and colder as he spoke.

"Xue Yebai, for the sin of colluding with traitors to cause the fall of our glorious Plane, the punishment...is death!"

Tian Yang's aura suddenly surged into a massive tide, clashing with and dispersing the domineering aura that Xue Yebai had been flaunting all this time.

Hearing his death declaration, though, Xue Yebai's lips curved into a cold smile.

"Good. Since you have found a reason to act against me, any more talk is unnecessary. Come, allow me to show you the true power of the Xue Clan."

Chapter 454 Fall [2]

In the time it took for Tian Yang and Xue Yebai to converse before they battled, all those present had already retreated thousands of kilometers away, including Damien and his companions.

Because they all knew. The scale of the last fight wasn't going to be even close to comparable to this one. If they were careless and didn't retreat, they would die without even knowing how.

The instant the clash of their auras subsided, Xue Yebai immediately moved into action. Massive constructs of ice filled his vicinity, creating a scene far more majestic than the palace that once stood there.

"Our Xue Clan is at the pinnacle of ice techniques. Even if you're a spatial cultivator, your only advantage over me is speed. Allow me to take that away from you."

The air around his body froze. No, space itself was frozen and crystallized. Such a move was tantamount to crippling someone who used space as their main element.

But Tian Yang wasn't fazed by it. In fact, he scoffed at Xue Yebai's naive actions.

"Is this how people who have never faced a spatial cultivator think? Did you really think it'd be so easy?"

Tian Yang's figure flashed away, appearing behind Xue Yebai. The crystallized space around them shattered the instant Tian Yang's body reappeared.

"Space is far too profound for you who does not cultivate it to understand. Freeze space? This kind of superficial freezing means nothing in front of me."

Tian Yang flicked his finger. Following his motion, the space in front of him bent into a bullet and shot at Xue Yebai.

Xue Yebai casually dodged the attack. The ice pillars he formed previously circled around him, creating a sort of airtight defense.

"You can talk as much as you want, but only in battle will your abilities prove themselves. Tian Yang, stop spouting nonsense and come at me."

Xue Yebai's ice pillars opened like doors. From within, a large array of different weaponry appeared.

"Space might be profound, but the attack power of a spatial cultivator has always been their weak point. Even if you can defend against me, can you kill me?"

An ice sword flew into the air and bolted at Tian Yang with immense speed. It was to the point where Damien couldn't even follow it with his eyes.

But Tian Yang simply tapped the air again. In that instant, the ice sword vanished, reappearing behind Xue Yebai's head while carrying the same forward momentum.

Bang!

It heavily impacted the ice pillar that moved to protect Xue Yebai, shattering it in an instant. As for the man himself, Xue Yebai waved his arm and recollected all the shattered ice shards, recreating the ice pillar without difficulty.

At the same time, countless weapons followed the previous sword's movements. Thousands upon thousands of ice constructs charged at Tian Yang as if they had minds of their own.

They circled his body and attacked randomly. With their current pattern, there wasn't even a single area for Tian Yang to retreat to even if he wanted to.

Although Tian Yang was a spatial cultivator and could easily escape the encirclement by teleporting, he didn't do so.

After all, weren't his disciples watching him? If he was going to fight, he was going to do it like a badass.

Tian Yang's arms waved through the air as if he was conducting a symphony. With every movement he made, tens of ice constructs vanished from the air and reappeared around Xue Yebai, attacking him.

But if this was the entire show Tian Yang was planning to put on, he'd be disappointed in his own abilities.

As if on cue, every weapon around Tian Yang came to a halt at the same time.

No, rather than halting, it was more accurate to say that they were moving at an infinitesimally slow speed.

"Hahaha! How fun! I haven't had the chance to play around with my combat abilities in hundreds of years. Xue Yebai, I hope you can entertain me more than this!"

Boom!

There was no sudden pressure or any outside stimulation. The weapons around Tian Yang shattered into snowflakes seemingly on their own.

At the same time, Tian Yang teleported away. Appearing in front of Xue Yebai, he grinned in a way unbecoming of the sage-like image he usually gave off.

"Boom."

Space exploded. Without prior warning or any sort of fluctuation, space around Xue Yebai caved in, throwing him into the void.

Tian Yang followed him in without hesitation. He waved his hands through the air, sending countless spatial blades at Xue Yebai every second.

And while barraging him like so, he kept calling out.

"Boom."

The void itself exploded. Infinite blackness caved in on itself and created a heavy suppression that bore down on Xue Yebai's body.

Every movement he made was slowed by this pressure. But as if that wasn't enough, Tian Yang proceeded to cast the same ability he had on the weapons before.

Xue Yebai felt like he was moving through muddied water. No matter how many steps he took forward, he was unable to move an inch from his spot.

"Tian. YANG!"

He roared in frustration. Waves of icy mana emanated from his body, immediately repelling the spatial blades that were barraging him.

"BREAK!"

Space shattered with his words. Even though he wasn't a spatial cultivator, he was able to pull off such a move with sheer power.

Xue Yebai let out another roar. His mana raged, and an icy hell formed within the void. Behind Xue Yebai's back, a mirage of an Ice Palace slowly took shape.

"So you're finally taking this seriously, are you? Couldn't afford to hold back anymore? It's a shame that a mere spatial cultivator without much attacking capability was able to push you to this point."

Tian Yang's mocking words didn't end. While he spoke, he threw a heavy punch into thin air.

Bang!

Xue Yebai felt like his internal organs were rearranged with a single hit. The steel body he had trained so hard was no use against Tian Yang. His attacks ignored all barriers and physical defense to hit their desired target.

His face turned red with rage. The Ice Palace finally finished taking shape. With this, Xue Yebai was ready to make his counterattack.

Outside of the Empyrean Dragon Realm, thousands of kilometers away from the ongoing battle, the crowd attempted to watch in a stupor.

After all, one could easily gain life-changing insights from witnessing a clash between Laws at such a level.

Unfortunately, their clash had moved to a location where the common eye could never see. When they fought in the void, only the occasional sparks and collapsing space in the area remained as proof of their battle.

But Damien was different. Even without straining his eyes, he could clearly see into the void. Only, their movements were far too fast.

Nevertheless, he still kept his eyes trained on the figures of those two men. He didn't even dare to blink, remembering the words that Tian Yang told him before the fight began.

'Brat, watch closely. I'll show you how a true spatial practitioner fights.'

That sound transmission had obviously piqued Damien's interest. From the start, he could tell that Tian Yang's comprehension of Spatial Laws was unfathomable.

But seeing it in front of his eyes was completely different than just hearing or feeling it.

Redirecting attacks back to their sender, mere spatial blades with the same amount of attack power as Damien's most heavy-hitting moves, the strange ability to manipulate distance and ignore barriers, there was so much for Damien to learn that his brain felt like it was on the verge of exploding.

But at the same time, his insights on space principles skyrocketed at a blinding pace.

Even if Damien had to choose between witnessing the battle between Demigods in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range and this one, he'd choose this one without hesitation.

An admiration that he had never felt before rose in his heart as he continued to watch Tian Yang barrage Xue Yebai.

'Old man, your mouth is far dirtier than you let on. You're just like me for real.'

Such a thought...perhaps it led to Damien finally and truly recognizing Tian Yang as his master.

Chapter 455 Fall [3]

The fight between Tian Yang and Xue Yebai continued to rage on.

As soon as Xue Yebai's ice palace finished forming, he let out a guttural roar. The mana imbued in his voice scattered the ambient mana around him, repelling most of Tian Yang's attacks.

At the same time, a wave of power emanated from the ice palace.

Voom!

Thousands of kilometers of the area around the two men were frozen solid. It wasn't just a layer of frost covering it, no, the molecular structure of the material that was frozen was changed into the purest of ice itself.

Pillars rose from the earth, a crystalline ceiling formed above their heads, and jagged stalactites dripped down from above as well.

Xue Yebai established his territory. All mana other than pure ice elemental essence was driven out. In this kind of situation, any practitioner that didn't use ice as their main form of attack would be severely disadvantaged.

After all, they could no longer replenish mana, and they could no longer command ambient mana to do their bidding. This kind of move was essentially crippling all opponents caught in its grasp.

Xue Yebai raised his arm into the air as his face twisted into a cold smile. "Tian Yang, I'd like to see how you escape this time."

His arm fell rapidly. On his command, the ice surrounding the two men came to life.

Frightening tides formed on both sides and entrenched Tian Yang, forcing him to defend against them. The stalactites on the ceiling fell in quick succession to prevent him from escaping into the sky. As for the ground, it was frozen so solid that even someone at Tian Yang's level would have to put in genuine effort to break it.

From what it seemed, Tian Yang was left with no option other than to hopelessly defend. Seeing this, Xue Yebai's cold smile became wider.

A shimmering crystalline sword mirroring Damien's Mirage appeared in his hand. Except, this one was entirely made of ice.

"Tian Yang, the ice I have curated over all my years of life, my Hallowed Emperor Ice, is ranked at the very peak of ice elements. Even if you try to attack it, you will not be able to damage it as you please."

Xue Yebai took his stance and probed his sword. His mana agglomerated around the blade, forming something akin to a sheath of ice.

"Since it is you that I'm dealing with, I shall give it my all. Taste my pinnacle sword art. Absolute Ice Art: Ice Coffin."

His sword slashed diagonally through the air, leaving a clean line in space that could be seen with the naked eye. The slash of Sword Intent took form into a massive ice coffin that swallowed Tian Yang, entrapping him within.

"Hahahahaha! The space around you has long been frozen by my Territory! Let's see how you escape this time!"

The attacks coming from all sides finally converged. Even a layman could see that if Tian Yang truly couldn't defend, he'd be gravely injured, if not killed.

Tian Yang's voice suddenly rang out from within the ice coffin. Even with all the madness raging around him, it could be clearly heard as if he was roaring at the top of his lungs.

But his tone was oddly calm.

"Xue Yebai, even after so many years that you've spent bitterly preparing to kill me, this is all you amount to? If so, you should've just fallen into the temptation of those traitors."

He waved his hand lightly. In that instant, the ice coffin around his body vanished as if it never existed in the first place.

"There's a reason spatial cultivators are so feared in society, and a reason why the Heavens rarely grant talent in Spatial Laws unto the beings residing under it. Puny tricks like these...are meaningless in front of me."

BOOM!

Tian Yang spread his arms to his sides. The two tsunamis of ice that were about to crush him flat were caught in his grasp.

"Shoo."

An abnormal pulsation occurred in space. The sound of cracks spreading through glass overtook all other sounds around the battlefield.

And then, space shattered once more.

The layers of ice that Xue Yebai used to freeze the spatial layers were cracked in an instant. As for space itself, it coiled in on itself like a spring under Tian Yang's command.

Voom!

The spring burst. The ice tsunamis, the falling stalactites, every attack Xue Yebai had thrown at Tian Yang...they all began moving in reverse.

It was a strange effect. It didn't look like they were being pushed back, rather, it looked like time had rewound. But Tian Yang didn't use any time elemental essence at all. He had achieved a seemingly impossible feat using Spatial Laws alone.

"Elemental essence?" Tian Yang scoffed. "Perhaps for others, this kind of substance is of utmost importance. But for us spatial cultivators, why should we rely on it?"

He flicked his finger, causing thousands of spatial blades to appear in the air and revolve around his body like a protective halo.

"Space is omnipresent. Even if you wish to declare your Territory, there must be a space for you to occupy. You see, the concept of space is far vaster than you could ever imagine with your puny brain."

The spatial blades around Tian Yang shot out. They teleported all over the place without any sort of predetermined pattern, laying waste to everything Xue Yebai had put effort into building to fight Tian Yang.

Once again, the two of them were back to square one. At least, when it came to their environmental advantages.

Tian Yang looked at Xue Yebai placidly and spoke. "So let me ask again, why should I care about the lack of spatial essence around me when I could just bend space itself to follow my will instead?"

BOOOM!

Space shattered into countless mirror fragments floating in the air. Xue Yebai was inevitably sucked into this new spatial phenomenon with no time to react.

"Tian Yang, you bastard!" Xue Yebai roared. Like a mad beast, he charged recklessly while pushing his mana to the limit.

Tian Yang sighed. "It seems you still don't understand. Very well, I shall allow you to experience it with your body so you can no longer find a reason to question it."

Xue Yebai ignored Tian Yang's words and kept charging. But, the fact that he still hadn't reached his desired location after so much effort suddenly began to nag at the back of his mind.

'Where?!'

Xue Yebai felt a sudden threat and stopped abruptly. When he looked around, he found himself in a completely random location, standing in front of a spatial rift that would've sliced his body into countless pieces if he had been even a single step too late in stopping.

He spread his awareness rapidly in confusion. Only then did he realize something strange.

When he started his charge, he was in a direct line to Tian Yang. However, now, he was thousands of kilometers to the right of him, standing in the sky.

'How...?!'

Xue Yebai gritted his teeth in denial and tried again. He put up a barrier of mana around his body to stop himself from being influenced by the surroundings, charging at Tian Yang.

But Tian Yang didn't even acknowledge his efforts. He simply stood there and watched Xue Yebai make a fool of himself with a condescending look in his eyes.

Xue Yebai continued to madly charge. He would move through space laterally and longitudinally at random, ending up in completely unpredictable locations every time he forced himself to stop.

If it was only this, it'd just be shame that he experienced. The problem lay in the fact that countless spatial rifts littered the Territory Tian Yang had set up, each having the power to kill him if he ran into them.

Xue Yebai was vexed to say the least. No matter what he tried, it would only end in him losing face without any gain. He even thought about turning traitor in that moment and embracing the Nox to escape, but he realized that such a choice wasn't available to him.

"Haa...Xue Yebai, your filthy personality has always been something I abhorred, but I allowed you to live because we humans need to preserve as much strength as possible for the coming war. But, you have crossed the line."

Tian Yang raised his hand into the air. For the first time since the fight started, his killing intent leaked from his body.

"Today, I declare your death. Live better in your next life if you don't wish to die so fruitlessly."

Tian Yang dropped his arm. The space in his Territory began to shrink and fold in on itself like a blanket. And within the folds of that blanket was the helplessly flailing Xue Yebai.

"TIAN YANG! EVEN IF YOU KILL ME TODAY, I WILL HAUNT YOU FOR ETERNITY! DO NOT THINK THIS IS THE END!"

He roared like a madman. His eyes were bloodshot, his teeth gashing maddeningly as he spoke.

But his roars held no substance. They were the final wails of a dying man. As space continued to compress with him inside of it, his body was slowly crushed along with it until he became nothing more than a large meatball.

Just like that, Xue Yebai, Head of the Xue Clan, had perished.

Chapter 456 Fall [4]

Tian Yang sighed and cracked his neck. His fingers danced in the air in front of him. As he did so, space was rapidly repaired until it returned to its normal stability.

He looked around at the destruction that was caused. Although thousands of kilometers had been razed by the two of them, it was surprisingly less damage than expected.

But that was a given. Minimizing environmental damage was another benefit of being a spatial cultivator, since they had the ability to shatter space and bring their battles into the void.

Damien also used this strategy often. Though, he never cared about environmental damage, he just did it because a large majority of his destructive spells constituted shattering space.

Tian Yang patted his hands clean and flashed away, appearing in front of Damien and Ruyue, who were still looking at the battlefield in awe.

"So? What'd you think? Your master is a badass, isn't he?"

Damien snapped out of his trance in an instant and rolled his eyes. "You would've been more badass if you had kept your mouth shut in the end."

Tian Yang's brow twitched. He grabbed Damien's ear and pinched hard. "Is that how you should welcome back your master who just fought a hard battle for your sake? What an ungrateful disciple!"

Damien winced in pain and tried to teleport away, but Tian Yang locked space and forced him to stay, pulling his ear even harder as punishment.

Damien raged. "Dammit, you old bastard! Let go of me! If you want to make me believe you struggled then at least play the part! Look at you, completely uninjured and spreading your aura wantonly like you have mana for days! Anyone in their right mind wouldn't believe a word you say!"

Tian Yang looked around and noticed the crowd around him sweating profusely. It was only after Damien's words that he realized how he was still flaring his aura.

He coughed awkwardly and let go of Damien's ear. "I'll forgive you this time."

"Tch." Damien clicked his tongue. Whether in terms of strength or shamelessness, he completely lost to the old man. In this situation, it was better to just back down.

"Ruyue, you need to help me get back at this old man in the future. I must have my revenge!" Damien spoke indignantly, but Ruyue wasn't paying any attention at all.

Her eyes were still glued to the battlefield. Everything else around her faded away.

Just a few moments ago, she was stunned into a stupor. Even though she couldn't watch the entire fight clearly, she could at least somewhat understand what was happening by using the abilities of her eyes.

But the reality of it all didn't set in until she saw the crumpled pile of meat that used to be Xue Yebai laying on the cracked ground.

Silent tears threatened to fall from her eyes. A feeling of relief spread through her cold body, giving her an unprecedented sense of comfort.

How many years had she been waiting for this day to come? How many years was her hatred forced to seethe and marinate because she didn't have the strength to fight back?

She had been dreaming of the day when Xue Yebai died for so long, but when it finally appeared before her, it was too surreal for her to accept right away.

Her revenge...was completed. The Xue Clan would be removed from the 4 Great Clans from this day forth. Even though she didn't achieve revenge with her own hands, it felt like she had done exactly that.

After all, it wasn't a stranger that killed Xue Yebai. It wasn't a stranger that helped her get rid of all the Elders.

Those were the master that had taken her in and provided her safety and warmth at her lowest point, and the man who taught her how to feel again. They were the two most important people in her life.

So even though the majority of the work was done by them and those affiliated with them, Ruyue didn't feel the slightest sense of loss at not having contributed enough.

The tears that were threatening to spill from her eyes could no longer be controlled.

Seeing her state, Damien and Tian Yang stopped their argument. As if they had agreed on it beforehand, they teleported away to a secluded location.

And Ruyue burst out crying. She cried like a little girl for the second time in the span of the past few years, which was more than she had ever done prior.

Damien and Tian Yang smiled warmly as they watched her. Because they knew. These were tears of joy, tears of fulfillment. They couldn't be happier seeing that Ruyue was finally able to release the tears she had been holding back for twenty-something years.

'Old man, you finally did something good.' Damien sent a sound transmission so as to not disturb Ruyue.

Tian Yang rolled his eyes. 'Brat, I've been taking care of her for way longer than you have. If anything, you're the one that finally did something good.'

'Just because you looked after her for longer doesn't mean you're better than me. In fact, I dare say she likes me more than you.'

'Ha! I've always treated her like my own granddaughter! There's no way she'd be so unfilial as to forget me after falling in love for such a short time!'

'You're just saying that because you're a lonely old man without a wife of your own. She was so cold when I first met her, it was only after meeting me that her shell finally cracked. Admit it, I'm simply better than you.'

'Tch! As if I'd ever admit it! Brat, since little Yue'er is like my own granddaughter, that makes you my grandson-in-law. If you can't get my blessing, don't think about marrying her.'

'Hah?! You're saying this now?! You damn salty old man!'

'If I'm a salty old man, then you're a pretentious brat!'

'Hah?!'

'What? Want to fight?'

'Tch. A little victory over a bitch like Xue Yebai must've made you conceited. If it's a fight you want, then I'll entertain you whenever!'

'Brat, you speak as if you aren't leagues weaker than me. If this isn't asking for death, I don't know what is.'

'Oho? But you wouldn't dare to hurt your precious granddaughter's husband, would you? Imagine how distraught she would be!'

'Keuk...!'

The two might've been arguing soundlessly, but the way they were postured begged to differ. Their auras silently clashed in the air between them, their fiery gazes locked as if battle would break out any second.

That is, until Ruyue's voice cleanly cut through the atmosphere they created.

"What are you two doing?" She asked naively. One second she had been crying immersed in old memories, the next, she felt fierce battle intent filling the air around her. She really had no clue what had happened in the past few minutes for there to be a drastic change.

As if on cue, Damien and Tian Yang turned in different directions and coughed awkwardly.

,m "W-what are you talking about? We're just having a casual conversation between master and disciple."

"Y-yeah, little Yue'er, no need to be mad. I would never beat up your future husband."

"I never said anything about that though?" Ruyue tilted her head, glaring at Tian Yang in suspicion.

"Cough! Cough! Wow, I seem to have got something stuck in my throat!" Tian Yang replied hurriedly. His figure flashed, disappearing from the empty meadow where they stood.

Damien's brow twitched in annoyance. "Damn old man! How dare you snitch and then abandon me! I'm coming for your ass!"

Damien's figure disappeared as well. The two of them flashed around the meadow, reappearing occasionally in various comedic poses as they fought like children without mana.

Watching their antics, Ruyue burst into a fit of giggles. Soon, her giggles turned into a full-on bout of uncontrollable laughter.

That's right. From now on, she would be able to experience warmth like this unhindered. This fact alone was enough to keep her content for eternity.

Chapter 457 Break [1]

With the death of Xue Yebai, the Empyrean Dragon Realm expedition and all the unexpected events that took place around it finally came to a conclusion.

The event wasn't private by any means. Countless major powers and rogue cultivators from all over the Cloud Plane had come to participate in it. As such, news about what happened couldn't be hidden for long.

The Xue Clan and the Wang Clan were both annihilated, traitors of the human race had appeared on the Cloud Plane, and new geniuses emerged in waves as if in response to the tumultuous times ahead.

Of course, news about Damien didn't escape this effect.

Whether it be the Central Continent where he resided or any of the four surrounding continents, the name Damien Void became a heated subject for all those in the Cloud Plane.

His feats in the secret realm weren't mentioned anywhere, as nobody had seen him within, but that didn't matter much in the grand scheme of things. After all, he made his grand entrance on the scene by destroying a major clan before entering the secret realm, and as if that wasn't enough, he did it once more after he exited.

Nobody could tell whether the advent of such a genius was a signal for prosperity or calamity. But anyone with a little bit of strength could tell. A storm was brewing not only in the Cloud Plane, but in the universe as a whole.

And just like that, a week passed swiftly.

The Celestial Star Palace had been in an uproar for the past week. An unknown genius in their sect had become a rising star in an instant, while the more famous Long Chen became the inheritor of the Empyrean Dragon Sword. From the looks of it, their sect would surpass the Jade Heavenly Palace with just a bit more time and effort.

Actually, many people were rushing around the Celestial Star Palace in hopes of catching a glimpse of the renowned geniuses of their sect, but both of them seemed to have vanished into thin air after returning from the secret realm.

The frenzied disciples even bombarded Elder Xiao Xun, Long Chen's master, to the point where she was forced to move from her residence to a higher location on Celestial Mountain which normal disciples couldn't easily reach.

The pandemonium continued on, but with the lack of response from the people in question, the commotion soon died down, allowing those involved to finally find a bit of peace.

In a certain courtyard near Tian Yang's residence at the peak of the Celestial Mountain, two men sat across from each other at a table.

"Fuck, this is why I always try to keep a low profile. Being famous is such a difficult thing for a poor man like me to handle." A man in black robes lamented. But betraying his tone of voice, his eyes carried a barely hidden twinkle of pleasure.

"You? Low profile? If a shameless bastard like you can be called low profile, then I might as well be a Demigod in disguise." The man across from him rolled his eyes and replied.

Naturally, these two were Damien and Long Chen. With the fame they had within the sect at the moment, hiding in Tian Yang's residence was the only course of action they could take.

Not that either of them minded. With how much they had been through in recent times, it was nice to take a short break before delving into the chaos once more.

"Say, what happened with Xiao Xun? I heard she was forced to move?"

"Don't mention it. Xun'er has been pestering me to move in here with us for a while now, but due to her status, that kind of thing has become impossible." Long Chen sighed. Having a so-called forbidden relationship like this one was truly troublesome.

Damien scoffed at his words. "How sad for you. If only you didn't seduce a Sect Elder, how easy would life be?"

"Shut up." Long Chen growled in annoyance. "Do you think I was actively trying to seduce her? How was I supposed to know that my Master would be so cute?"

Damien rolled his eyes. "Stop bragging. If you want to see cuteness, I can bring Ruyue over here and show you what real cuteness is."

"Tch, the Xue Clan princess? I heard that she's a block of ice, how can you call that cute?"

"Oi, don't be insulting my Ruyue. Let me give you some sage advice as a man with far more experience than you. The fact that she's a block of ice to others makes her cute moments infinitely cuter when they happen."

Long Chen squinted his eyes in suspicion. "Since when did you have more experience than me? Last I checked, you only lost your innocence—"

Long Chen's words were suddenly cut off as he was forced to abruptly dodge to the right. A boulder appeared in the space above where he was seated, crushing his chair to bits.

"Brat, don't get cheeky with me. If you really wish for it, I'll beat some sense into you again." Damien growled, hiding his reddened cheeks.

In fact, Long Chen had "become a man" far earlier than Damien had. In the romantic department, at least, Long Chen had a clear advantage.

Long Chen shuddered lightly at Damien's threat. Remembering their spar from a few days ago, he shut his mouth instead of trying to provoke the latter further.

Even if his mind didn't want to admit defeat, his body remembered the pain. The fact that he was forced to call this bastard "Boss" from now on was still too infuriating.

Seeing Long Chen's frustrated expression, Damien grinned. He took a new chair out of his subspace and placed it down for Long Chen to sit.

"Well, it's whatever. As for that Xiao Xun, if you want to bring her just do it. It's not like the old man doesn't know about your relationship already."

"Hm?!" Long Chen's eyes widened in surprise.

Damien looked at him with a dumb expression on his face. "Don't tell me you actually thought you were hiding it well? Bro, the old man is probably at the peak of 4th class and uses Divination Techniques frequently. If he couldn't even guess your relationship with his qualifications, I'd be too disappointed in him to call him my master."

"You don't call him your master even now, though."

"Shut up. You get the point."

Long Chen smiled. The peaceful days had indeed been a good stress relief for him, but he always felt something was missing. If his Xun'er was allowed to accompany him in his retreat, there'd be nothing better in the world.

"Thank you, Boss." Long Chen said sincerely. Even if it annoyed him that Damien got to be the oldest brother, he was still grateful to have a considerate friend like him.

It wasn't something Long Chen was used to, being a child from a major clan where betrayal was the norm.

But when he looked up, he saw Damien looking at him with disgust.

Long Chen's brow twitched endlessly. "What? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Damien didn't answer. Instead, he glared at Long Chen suspiciously for many moments before speaking.

"You know, it's kind of gross when you act so sincere. Since when were you like that?"

Long Chen's face turned red with shame. "Fuck! I was going to be nice just this once, but a bastard like you doesn't deserve my gratitude."

"Yeah, yeah. You're Long Chen, the classic cultivation novel protagonist! You clearly delineate gratitude and grudge! Hearing words of sincerity from you should be my utmost honor!" Damien replied sarcastically.

Long Chen gritted his teeth. "This isn't the first time you've said something about these cultivation novels. Although I don't know what they are, I feel like you're insulting me."

"Very much so."

"At least pretend like you aren't!"

Long Chen stood up and flared his aura. "Come to the training area right now. I want a rematch."

Damien raised his brow. "Oho? Are you sure you want to do that? Aren't you afraid of getting beaten...little Chen Chen?"

"Fuck! I don't care anymore!"

Long Chen thrust his hand to the side, the Emyrean Dragon Sword manifested in his grasp.

As he did so, Damien stood up as well. Mirage appeared as if responding to Long Chen's provocation.

But just as it looked like a fight would break out, a man appeared between them.

"You two, do you ever stop fighting? Put the swords down for now. Brother Damien, your master is calling for you."

Chapter 458 Break [2]

The man who appeared had striking white hair and blue eyes. Unexpectedly, Xue Feng was residing in the Celestial Star Palace.

Since the Xue Clan was no more, both he and Xue Yue, who had received Ruyue's mercy, were allowed to stay in the sect until they found somewhere better. Though, it didn't look like the duo had any plans of leaving.

"Xue Feng, tell that old man I'll come later. Let me discipline this brat first." Damien said.

"Brother Xue, don't mind his crass speech. I'll finish him off quickly and send him to Senior Tian with haste." Long Chen said almost immediately after.

Xue Feng rubbed his temples in frustration. "Why are the two of you like this every time you get together? Brother Long, I don't wish to be the one to tell you, but you're not a match for him right now. As for you, Brother Damien, Senior Tian said that if you do not show up within 5 minutes, he'd personally come to teach you a lesson."

The competitive atmosphere immediately deflated. Long Chen lamented inwardly at the truth of Xue Feng's words. As for Damien, he flashed away the instant he heard the last sentence.

"Haa...I can't stand this bastard's arrogance, but I guess I can let him go this time." Long Chen sighed.

Xue Feng smiled lightly. "Thank you for your consideration, Brother Long. However, if you are still in the mood to compete, how about giving me a chance?"

Long Chen looked up and grinned. "Good. Let's see how much you've improved since our last spar."

Xue Feng took out his sword and did the same. "That's what I was going to say to you!"

Bang!

The sound of their collision was so loud that even Damien heard it from many kilometers away. When he did, he gritted his teeth in frustration.

"Damn old man, can't even let me have my fun. I wonder what he wants this time?"

He took out his disciple token and poured mana into it. A small holographic display appeared, showing him the location where Tian Yang had summoned him.

"Tch, and he's not even home right now. Where the hell is he making me go?"

As Damien moved closer and closer to the very peak of Celestial Mountain, he thought back to the events of the past week.

Even though he was outwardly relaxing, he had been extremely busy.

For one, there was a need to eradicate the remaining forces of the Wang Clan and the Xue Clan. Although his help wasn't needed in the battles, his ability to distinguish Devil Worshipers from normal people was necessary at times, so he was forced to move back and forth through the Central Continent many times to provide his help.

Fortunately, his teleportation was no longer restrained. As such, the hassle was minimized to a manageable level.

As for his personal affairs, the last week had been spent stabilizing the situation in the Sanctuary.

In reality, although he had taken in those millions of people from the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, he only really interacted with their leaders.

Subordinating entire races through just this much was impossible. While the elves had undying loyalty towards him due to the Ancestral Seal, it wasn't the same for the Dragons and Phoenixes.

So, within the Sanctuary, there were two main things he was focused on. Firstly, helping with the creation of infrastructure and providing food, and secondly, battle.

That's right. He had been earnestly battling with the Dragon Troop from the White Dragon Grotto for the past week to gain their submission. Considering how the White Dragon King raised them, this method was the natural course of action.

As for the phoenixes, they were far more difficult to deal with. In fact, he had no idea how he was going to tame them.

But for now, it wasn't necessary. He could worry about it after dealing with the White Dragon Grotto.

Other than those kinds of troublesome tasks, the rest of his time had been solely dedicated to little Xue'er and the Lily/Mei duo. Since those kids had been bugging him for a while about how negligent he was, he was forced to entertain them for hours on end.

In short, he was busy to the point where he couldn't even have his talks with Rose and Elena, who had also returned to the Celestial Star Palace with him.

'Haa...thankfully they're understanding people.' Damien sighed inwardly. After wrapping up the ordeals of the Empyrean Dragon Realm, the first thing he did was make sure to make his intentions clear to the two of them.

The fact that he wanted to have serious conversations with them had been privately conveyed to both for a while now, but he never got the time to actually carry out on his promise.

But neither Rose nor Elena complained. Instead, they told him they were willing to wait until he had the time. For this, he was endlessly grateful.

'Today is a good day. Since I've caught up with Long Chen already, after I talk to the old man, I'll pay my visits to them.'

Damien finally arrived at the location specified on his disciple token. Unexpectedly, he found himself in front of a massive black palace.

'Isn't this...?'

Damien's eyes widened. 'Why the hell would the old man bring me to the Sect Master's residence?'

But before he could think about it for too long, Tian Yang's voice rang out in his ear.

"Brat, you've finally arrived. Come around to the back. We're all waiting for you."

Damien raised his brow and spread his awareness, finding the courtyard behind the palace. Without waiting any longer, he teleported over.

When his figure reappeared, he was immediately assaulted with a wave of suffocating aura. His eyes narrowed as he looked at the line-up in front of him.

Tian Yang sat nearest to where he was, at the foot of a long table. Other than him, there were only two figures present.

One was Shangguan Yu, the Sect Master of the Jade Heavenly Palace, and the other...

A beautiful woman with a razor-sharp presence. The cold and detached look in her eyes made it clear that she wasn't someone who could be trifled with. As for her identity, she was Bai Xieren, the Sect Master of the Celestial Star Palace.

Even though the three of them weren't consciously releasing their auras, just their passive presences alone combined into a fierce force that would cause most people to bow their heads in submission.

But Damien refused to do so. Ignoring the other two, he looked at Tian Yang defiantly and spoke as he usually did.

"Old man, you should know how busy I am. Quickly stop with the posturing and tell me what's up."

Tian Yang grinned, Shangguan Yu smiled imperceptibly, and Bai Xieren's eyes narrowed.

Tian Yang spoke first. "Brat, even in the presence of your own Sect Master, you still dare to act like this?"

Damien glanced over at Bai Xieren before turning his attention back to Tian Yang and rolling his eyes.

"Knowing you, these two have already been informed about my personality before I got here. Although I would pay my respects to the Sect Master during a public occasion, this is a private meeting of big shots so I doubt something like that matters. Plus, there are probably more important matters at hand, am I wrong?"

Tian Yang's grin widened. "Looks like you finally learned how to use that brain of yours in the past year. Indeed, formalities don't mean anything at the moment. Considering what you've achieved, during this meeting, you will be considered as our equal."

Damien raised his brow in interest. Although it was true that he was being arrogant because of his nature, he was also testing the waters a bit. He wanted to know how much leeway his status as Star Master would grant him in front of these experts.

But to be regarded as their equal? That kind of thing far surpassed his expectations.

Tian Yang didn't give him much time to be shocked, though. After the useless talk was out of the way, he cut straight to the point.

"Alright. It's time for you to tell us about your conversation with the World Core."

Chapter 459 Break [3]

"Alright. It's time for you to tell us about your conversation with the World Core."

Damien's gaze sharpened. He knew this day would come, but he didn't expect it to come so soon.

He sighed inwardly. 'I was hoping that the peaceful days would continue for a bit longer, but I guess this is it.'

Regardless of his lamentation, he still did as Tian Yang said and gave a rough description of what happened between him and the World Core.

Of course, the fact that the World Core had sentience was enough to shock both Shangguan Yu and Bai Xieren. After all, this wasn't a fact that was so easily known.

But the main point of conversation naturally revolved around what happened after. From the Nox corruption on the World Core to the number of traitors that were residing in the Cloud Plane, Damien didn't leave out even a speck of information about it.

Shangguan Yu furrowed his brows. "Even if I somewhat expected it, it's still a shock when it's verified. Ten million traitors...it seems we have our work cut out for us in the coming days."

Bai Xieren nodded in agreement. "We must begin our extermination plan as soon as possible. Luckily, we still have the ability to move secretly."

Damien agreed with her inwardly. Although the Wang Clan and Xue Clan were both implicated and slaughtered under the premise of betraying humanity, the fact that their side had information about the traitors was still not known to the enemy.

Since Wang Chen and Xue Yebai were both slain in public without getting taken in for interrogation, the other traitors in the Central Continent wouldn't suspect that they had been revealed quite yet. It was even more for those on the other continents, since the leaders of the two major clans might not have even known their identities to begin with.

'With our current upper hand, it is indeed best to move secretly. That way, we can cut the grass and pull the roots without alerting the remaining traitors. Though, even if they decide to go into hiding, there isn't a single place in the Cloud Plane that can escape my gaze anymore.'

Damien grinned. There was no need to worry about the success or failure of the extermination plan with his ability. For those who betrayed humanity, the only option was death.

As Damien was thinking, the three experts around him continued their conversation and devised strategies for how to move. However, he soon noticed a flaw.

"Oh, right. Since there are so many names, I totally forgot to give you guys the full list of traitors. Luckily enough, I had Yun compile the information in a more digestible format."

Damien took out a storage ring filled with jade slips and emptied it onto the table. As he spoke, he began organizing the jade slips into separate sections.

"Here's accurate information on both the identities and strengths of the traitors. It's currently organized by sects and families, from most powerful to least. As for rogue cultivators, they are included on their own separate jade slip, though there aren't many of them since the Nox Worshipers have a tendency to gather together."

Damien finished arranging the jade slips and looked up, immediately being confronted by the shocked gazes of the three experts.

"What? Why are you staring at me like that?"

Tian Yang shook his head wryly. "It's nothing. It looks like you've prepared thoroughly for the coming operation even though you didn't have knowledge of it beforehand."

Damien shrugged nonchalantly. "I mean, ever since I told you what I knew before we confronted the Xue Clan, I was expecting this day to come. What, did you think I was such an idiot that I wouldn't understand even this much?"

"Yes. Yes, I did." Tian Yang replied matter-of-factly, earning him a death glare from Damien.

Tian Yang coughed awkwardly and picked up a random jade slip to read from. The second he did so, his shock heightened to another level.

"Oho, this is far worse than what I was expecting. To think I would happen upon the Jade Heavenly Palace's information first."

Shangguan Yu's eyes hardened when he heard Tian Yang's words. Although he was itching to see the jade slip himself, he knew he would get his turn eventually. Instead, he turned his attention to the other slips on the table.

"The Peng Family, Yu Family, Twisted Mountain Sect, even the Empire's religion has been influenced by these demons..." Shangguan Yu gritted his teeth in anger.

"To think they dare to act out while knowing full well about our power. Or do they think we won't do anything just because of our status? It seems our Jade Heavenly Palace needs to show our strength to the public once more so that they lose any thoughts of rebellion."

His tone was extremely cold, but nobody could blame him for his anger. After all, they were all feeling the same.

Especially Bai Xieren. The second she saw the list of names from the Celestial Star Palace, she wanted to move and slaughter them all. But for the sake of the greater plan, she forced herself to calm down.

Damien's tone became abnormally serious as he began speaking once more. "Even though this number might look drastic, it's actually the Cloud Plane's good fate that there are so few traitors. When compared to the total population of the world, a mere ten million is nothing.

"There are worlds out there in the universe that have been completely corrupted. Worlds where billions upon billions of Nox Worshipers lie in wait for the day of war to come. Although I'm aware that all three of you have lived far longer than I have and have experienced far more, I feel the need to inform you of this.

"Never underestimate the temptation that the Nox bring to ordinary people. No matter how humble any of us try to be, the fact that we have the power to sit here and decide the fates of others so easily is because we have both talent and strength. Look at the elders of the Xue Clan, for example. Even though they had some strength, they were lacking in talent and were killed off by someone on a far lower level than them.

"The universe is fair if you look at it from above, but as someone living within it, its unfairness is as clear as day. For those who have toiled away endlessly but were never able to see the boundary of 4th class due to their lacking talent, the devil's whispers of the Nox are like words of god. It's even more so for those who have tasted the bitterness and unfairness of life.

"Although I've spoken so much, my meaning remains simple. The rallying power that the Nox possess is insane. In the coming war, rather than facing a horde of Nox, we should expect to face our own people until our spirits become dull from betrayal. This is our fate for opposing their regime."

The courtyard was enveloped in a cold silence after Damien's words finished. Even though everyone present was already aware of this fact, hearing it said so explicitly still forced reality to sink in.

But none of the four were weak-willed people. Three of them had faced themselves and even the Universe itself to achieve acknowledgment. It was impossible for them to falter here.

Damien nodded in satisfaction after seeing their response.

"Although I am far weaker than you at the moment, I have no doubt that I'll reach your level if I'm given time. Therefore, I hope you can forgive me for being presumptuous. On the battlefield, we will all be comrades, so I have no plans of being tied down to unimportant things like status.

"Even if you are the Sect Masters of the most powerful sects in the Cloud Plane, in the future, you will just be part of the many 4th class existences that participate in the war.

"So from now on, please include me in future meetings about these kinds of important topics. I have no desire to take a backseat in this war while being pushed around at the whims of others."

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Tian Yang grinned in satisfaction. Damien's final words and overall attitude were extremely arrogant considering who he was facing, but with his current position, this kind of arrogance was necessary if he didn't want to become a tool in the future.

Belief in his own strength and potential, problem-solving ability that wasn't perfect, but growing at a steady pace, and a cool head that could view the situation objectively, Damien was slowly beginning to embody the traits that an expert should have.

'His cheeky attitude will probably never disappear though.' Tian Yang thought to himself.

"Brat, your final demand might sound reasonable, but words don't mean anything if there's no substance behind them. Although I can acknowledge you like this, for others, you must prove your value through strength.

"Your contributions thus far cannot be spread, because if the fact that you are a Star Master were to become public knowledge, you'd be walking with a target on your back at all times. Therefore, even if the three of us agree with you, we can only support you secretly."

Damien nodded. He expected this much. He didn't want to use a meeting like this, where more important matters were being discussed, to secure personal benefit, but he didn't have a choice. It wasn't a common thing for him to be in the presence of so many world leaders.

Until now, his journey had been incredibly smooth because he was never on the Nox's radar. After all, he was far too weak for them to take notice of him. However, it was mainly because he hadn't encountered many true-blooded Nox before. The two that he had met were both dead, therefore his information wouldn't spread.

'It would be terrible if they had some sort of mental link skill that allowed them to glean information from their fallen soldiers, but even then I should be fine. Since 3rd class Nox have limited sentience, the one I killed shouldn't apply to that kind of skill. As for the Demigod, I wasn't present during his death, and Alaric died along with him, so there should be nothing from that encounter as well.'

Damien's thoughts suddenly drifted towards a certain sibling duo.

'Although I'm aware that they aren't working for the Nox out of their own free will, that's what makes it more dangerous. There's no way a conniving race like the Nox would only use hostages to guarantee the submission of those they use. If there's some sort of technique to forcefully extract information from the two...'

He might've already become a target unknowingly. Even if he didn't play a pivotal role in what happened in the 3000 Beast Mountain Range, his role was still an important one.

'On the Cloud Plane, I'm safe. But I don't know what kind of dangers await me in the wider universe. From now on, I can no longer move with the goal of adventuring. But I can no longer stay on the Cloud Plane either.'

Damien furrowed his brows as he fell into thought. But before he could think too deeply, he was interrupted by Tian Yang's voice.

"With the extermination plan coming into effect, it seems the other plan must be put on hold for a bit. We can't afford to divert our attention from either matter."

Bai Xieren nodded. "6 months should be enough to finish off the traitors without alerting too much suspicion. What matters is how we deal with the situation once we finish. There's no way the Nox won't be alerted after so many of their forces are wiped."

"According to the information, there are two 4th class Nox beings currently residing here. One is on the Central Continent while the other is on the Western Continent. Both of these Nox must be eliminated simultaneously in case they share some sort of connection that will alert them." Shangguan Yu continued.

"Even then, killing them might alert the Nox that we are aware of their plans. Will we still be able to carry out the attack plan under this kind of suspicion?" Bai Xieren questioned.

Tian Yang shook his head. "Even if it is so, we don't have another choice. Interference from their side is becoming more and more frequent. The large number of Nox Worshipers in the world is most likely due to their involvement as well. Destroying them down to the roots will play a pivotal part in the coming war."

Shangguan Yu rubbed his chin in thought. "How have our communications with other worlds been? An alliance needs to be formed soon if we want to properly fight against the Nox."

"There have been both positive and negative responses. From what we've gathered so far, it doesn't look like a conclusion will be reached any time soon. An assembly will be called sometime within the next 2 years for all of our powers to meet in person and speak of these important matters. Until then, we must work on our own."

Damien felt like his brain would melt from all the information he was second-handedly receiving. As it turned out, his extended help was unnecessary.

He smiled wryly. 'Perhaps I was looking down on them too much. After all, they are the leaders of the Cloud Plane as a whole, along with being prominent sect masters. It seems that plans for the war have already been in formation for a while now.'

The fact that an alliance was forming interested him the most. He had already experienced the alliance of races during the Forgotten War, so he was somewhat aware of their structure.

From what he gathered based on the tidbits of information that seeped through the conversation of the other three, talks of the alliance were most likely being stalled due to politics between these world leaders.

Damien sighed inwardly. 'Politics and personal gain...human greed is really a disgusting thing.'

He shook his head. There was a reason he stayed away from leadership positions and political matters. He abhorred the whole idea of it, even though he knew it was necessary.

Because politics without corruption was such a rare concept that it wasn't even ironic anymore.

'Still, I must attend the assembly they were speaking about. Being present for the donation of the alliance is of incredible importance. Since the next 6 months will be spent on the extermination plan, I'll need to plan my steps for what to do after that.'

Damien shifted his attention away from the alliance after having this thought. He had at least the next 6 months to secure himself a spot in that assembly. For now, he should focus on the more pressing matters.

And after he finished thinking about the alliance, his attention shifted to the other matter that the three experts were speaking about.

"Old man, what is this attack plan you mentioned?" He questioned. Since they were on equal standing at the moment, there was no reason for information to be hidden from him.

And as he expected, Tian Yang readily answered his question. "Oh? You're curious, are you? Well, since you were to be included in the mission anyway, there's no harm in telling you."

Tian Yang looked toward the other two leaders for confirmation. Only after receiving their consent did he continue.

"Brat, how much do you know about the force called Niflheim?"