

Last System 22

Chapter 22 - Dealing With The Elder

"At least you know your manners!" the middle-aged man flung his robes to the back as he stepped into the clearing. "Yet, that doesn't answer my question. How dare you desecrate the holy training grounds by cooking here?!" he threw me an angry look, going on to the offensive.

'Do I even know you?' I thought, using all my willpower to stop myself from overreacting. But I wasn't a creator of several RPG campaigns for nothing.

"Respectable elder, it's my fault," I replied, turning my back to the training pillar and bowing my head to the man once again. "I was too infatuated with my training. It's because of this reason that I decided to move the food-making process to the place where I train," I said, keeping my head low to prevent the man from noticing my amused expression.

"And what does training have to do with cooking?" the elder asked, leaning his head to the side and raising his eyebrow.

Good. Now that I managed to quell his initial fury, it was time to push him a bit.

"Since the sect failed to secure the sanctity of the training, I dared not to look into the matter. I have no wish to potentially discover schemes that caused my distrust in the first place" I said, straightening my back only to look straight into the elder's face. "Since there were people who dared to invade those grounds during my training once, I assumed that no one would be daring enough to do so... without active encouragement from the higher charges.

"That's why, instead of prying into the matters that could bring shame to the sect, I decided to seclude myself from other candidates. And what's the better way to do it if not the barrier that protects one during the training?" I explained.

I took a peek at the elder, only to notice him rubbing his beard. I always thought I was good at discerning what others think from their expression, this man's face posed a great challenge for me to do so.

"How do you even know about the barrier?" the elder asked, sending me a strange look.

"This humble disciple will now answer," I said before unveiling the single wrap of cloth from my hands.

Ever since I maltreated my hands during my first training, Mia forced me into wearing those. Not because they could offer any protection whatsoever, but because she wanted to see any signs of blood were they to appear on my hands.

"Oh, so you are the one," the elder muttered, instantly connecting the dots. "Still, to make you believe that the sect won't protect its disciples... You are actually right to do so," he smiled only to lower his hands and lock them behind his back.

"Minor strife, mutual challenges, and battles on this level are actually encouraged. They are the most efficient way for one to spot his own faults and drawbacks," the man said before pointing his hand at the pillar behind me. "But please, humor me and strike that pillar for me. I want to see how hard did you train over the past two weeks!"

For a moment, a look of satisfaction flashed through the elder's face. Sadly, I couldn't tell whether he was happy with my answers or if he found a way he could use to find fault with me.

"This disciple will follow Elder's wish!" I instantly cupped my hands and bent my back. When dealing with people of higher ranks, respect, genuine or fake, was the easiest way to placate them.

Moving back to the pillar, I took a deep breath. Even if it was something that could come to bite me in the back later on, I still had to do my best. After all, I had no way of comparing myself to the other sect disciples, given how I distanced myself from everyone else!

I dropped all the thoughts about the elder. I ignored the anxious stare of Mia, who dared not to say a word ever since the man appeared. I focused all my attention on the pillar, just like I would when trying to max my core purification state.

I struck the pillar. As soon as my right fist touched the stone, I used the energy of the rebound to retract my right arm, turning this movement into the swing of my upper body. I then converted this energy into the swing of my left arm, mirroring the attack.

Yet, this wasn't the end of my combo.

As soon as my left arm rebounded from the stone, I used the swinging momentum to execute a right-leg kick.

I dared not to continue it with a left-sided one. With the momentum of each strike adding on to the next, by the time I would raise my left leg, my body would lose all its stability. As such, rather than stacking the momentum to continue the combination, I would likely fall down on my ass.

This last part of this simple combination was something I still had to work on.

"That was..." the elder spoke up, only to cut his sentence short. "Good, but bad at the same time," he said as he released a deep sigh. "While you have a good basis, you are too keen to strike the same spot. In other words, instead of focusing on the attack itself, you try too hard to turn it into a battle technique," he said, giving me the first pointer towards my growth since I entered the sect.

"This disciple gratefully accepts the lesson!" I said, instantly turning myself back to the elder and bowing.

For the first time, rather than considering the man as an imminent threat, I infused my words with actual respect and gratefulness.

"Still, I can't allow this disrespect to keep going," the elder shook his head as his expression soured. "What are you even cooking here? I never saw someone be so wasteful with the precious oil before!" he exclaimed.

"Elder, if I may..." I dared to raise my head a little.

"Speak."

"This is a recipe passed down to me by a man who saved me when I was left stranded after the massacre of my family," I said, freely revealing the details of my body's backstory. After all, it wasn't my own history. As such, I had no qualms about using it to my own advantage. "I have nothing but respect to offer for your pointers. Nothing but respect... and this meal," I said, pointing my hand at where Mia kowtowed.

"A meal?" the elder asked, surprised by the way in which I spun the situation.

"If that wouldn't be too much," I asked, "would the respectable elder care to enjoy the dish that no other in the sect knows how to prepare?"