

Last System 255

Chapter 255 - Burning Alive

'It burns!'

This single thought permeated through my mind, filling every last thinking cell of my brain.

When I first pushed my hand into a flame, it felt like resting it on the overheated radiator heater, stinging but bearable. Yet, after just a few moments, a certain truth became apparent.

My cultivation reinforced my body, making it more resilient. But it didn't decrease the pain nature could inflict on me by any degree!

The little hair that I had on my hand was long gone, sizzled away in flames. My skin was on fire, ready to evaporate and turn into ashes at any time, exposing my red flesh to the boiling heat.

'I need to toughen it through,' I forced this thought on myself, gnashing my teeth as I continued my desperate attempts to uncover the truth of the fire.

I could feel the energy within the blaze. It was there, within reach of my hand...

But there was something wrong with it, a strange, weird feeling that I got whenever I attempted to suck this energy away.

It felt as if some kind of force was stopping me from absorbing this energy, just as if my personal mana was incompatible with the mana that nature invoked.

'The fire is full of energy,' I thought, trying my best to pull out the surefire statements that I couldn't be mistaken about. 'But it's not the free mana that I absorb through formations. It's wild,' I continued to analyze the situation.

Even though each of my discoveries could appear shallow, simple, and entirely useless, I continued my attempts without stopping. By deconstructing the situation into the things that I understood and the things that I wasn't sure about, I could at least build up on what I knew rather than hoping for a flash of enlightenment.

'Maybe that's where the name of my cultivation stage comes from,' I thought, holding back a chuckle. 'From people doing their best to figure something out about the world's inner-workings.'

Yet, just as I was about to go through every last thing that I was certain of again, a sudden thought appeared in my mind.

A single question that forced me to look at the matter from a different angle.

'How can energy be wild in the first place?'

Even though I was fully focused on my private thoughts, I could tell that my display of madness brought a lot of attention. Even though I didn't look behind me, my spatial awareness alerted me about the crowd that continued to gather just a few steps to the back.

'There is free mana that a cultivator can absorb, and there is personal mana that's already etched with someone's consciousness,' I thought, ignoring the gathering behind my back and staring deeply into the flames.

The dancing red and orange, the physical manifestation of the chemical reaction, appeared to have no order at all. It would peak in one place, only to suddenly retreat, turning into a valley surrounded by several other peaks.

Despite staring into the dance of flames for quite some time, I couldn't see any rule, any greater sense behind its moves.

Free energy was calm, only following the greater trend influencing it. Personal energy was orderly, strictly abiding by the flow of one's inner drive. But the energy that this fire contained...

It was different.

'There is free and personal mana that I know of,' I thought, 'but how does this wild energy fit into the equation?' I asked myself while doing my absolute best to ignore the intense pain in my left hand.

"What is he doing?!" someone from the crowd shouted, making my body flinch.

After all the time that this crowd silently stared at the display of my craziness, having someone shout was pretty distracting.

But what was even worse, once the first person raised their voice, others followed.

"Is he mad?" someone questioned the sanity of my mind.

"Please, pull him away!" some girl cried out in desperation, unable to look at my plight.

I closed my eyes for a second, cutting all those distractions off. Soon, all the voices turned into nothing more but background noise for me, something that I was finally capable of fully ignoring.

"Nobody dares to touch him!" Ackhart ordered as he made his way to the front of the crowd.

The long-haired formation master stared at Artur's back, refusing to show his own confusion to the crowd around him.

'He didn't appear to be a crazy person the last time I saw him,' he thought, using his domineering presence to hold everyone in their place.

Ackhart then crossed his arms over his chest and took a step forward before driving his aura a little.

No one was going to make it past him; no one was going to bother Arthur in this clearly important moment of his.

'Wait,' I suddenly shook my head, the question that appeared in my mind shocking me to the point where I forgot about the pain all over my hand. 'How could there be different forms of energy?'

From the classes that I obligatory took back on earth, I knew about all sorts of energies. There were two main kinds of energies, potential and kinetic ones. And while potential energies described systems that had... well, the potential to produce and output energy, kinetic energy was just a form in which potential energy was released.

The only type of energy that didn't fit this classification was obviously the one type of energy that earth lacked.

The mana.

'But I can clearly feel it within the flames!' I protested in my mind.

The fire was nothing more but a process of turning potential energy into kinetic energy. Yet, I wasn't so sure whether I could classify mana as a kinetic, as released energy.

'Wait, what if the mana doesn't fit this equation?' I suddenly asked myself, my eyes opening up wide.

'Free mana is potential energy. Personal mana is energy in-between those two states, still just a potential but ready to be released at a thought. And mana used in techniques or spells is a kinetic form of energy!'

This was the only way in which I could fit the physics of this world into the framework bestowed upon me by the schools of earth. And seeing how this world seemed to operate under the same principles that earth did, this framework still had a good chance of accurately describing the natural laws!

'The real question should be, why did I put my hand into the flame before thinking it all through?' I asked myself, despairing over my own stupidity.

If only I gave myself some time to think things through before, I would save my hand several minutes worth of torture!

Still, even with the realization that I arrived at, I couldn't understand why I wasn't able to absorb the energy contained within the flame.

If I could feel it, it existed for sure. Yet, it remained locked from my influence...

'Wait, locked?' I asked myself, my eyes widening up once again. 'Isn't it just like with mana used by others?'

That was it.

That was the most likely reason behind why I struggled so hard to absorb the energy of the flames!

'If it's already etched with nature's intent, then all I need to do to absorb it...' I thought, a smile appearing on my lips.

It was impossible to absorb mana used by someone else to attack you. It would be locked away from my own intent as it was already etched with it. Yet, by all means, it was possible to use one's own mana to erase the intent contained with the mana of someone else!

The corners of my lips moved up as I finally reached the point where I could ditch all that heavy thinking and start doing something about the situation!

"Sir, the fires are taking over!" one of the auction hall clerks shouted, unable to watch Arthur's plight any longer.

Yet, Ackhart remained frozen in place, refusing anyone to as much as take a single step towards the struggling man in front.

"What's going on?" Andrea asked the second she arrived on the scene, only to watch how flames suddenly exploded, covering Arthur's entire body.

Her eyes widened when she realized just what the hell was going on. She turned her eyes to Ackhart, only to notice the focused look in the man's eyes.

"What's going on?" she asked again, this time making sure to make herself sound composed.

"Don't you dare interrupt him," Ackhart said, refusing to move his eyes even for an inch.

Even though he was Andrea's servant, he couldn't care less about formalities right now.

Not when Arthur, his master, was clearly on the verge of breakthrough!

"What do you mean?" Andrea asked, shocked by the unexpected change to her old friend. "He is about to burn to his death!" she protested, raising her arm and pointing it at Arthur's back.

"No," Ackhart shook his head. "He is about to discover something," he corrected the woman as he refocused on the situation just a few paces ahead.

My face was tense.

I could no longer ignore the burning pain over my hand, currently spreading through my entire body.

What started as me putting my hand into flames turned into flames, putting my entire self into their domain.

Yet, I wasn't worried for a simple reason.

I finally figured this shit out!

'Now!' I thought when the flux of the energy reached its periodical low.

It was time to put my theory to the test!