

Last System 276

Chapter 276 Turning Point (1.1)

"Dang it," Mia cursed under her nose. She rested her chin in her cupped hands with both of her elbows firmly lodged on her knees.

'I stepped out of the line to draw my lot to be the first one fighting,' she thought, on the verge of going over to the elders to complain. 'But I guess getting put as one of the closing fights isn't bad either,' she thought, raising her eyes to scan the entire area.

Like all the other times, the intersect tournament would take place in the same arena that Mia fought in the past. It's changing zones, different landscapes in different parts...

'I think the fights will mostly happen in the middle,' Mia thought, observing how the situation developed.

"Isn't it for the best?" Sander asked, bringing up the topic that Mia hoped to drop. "You will get to observe how others fight!" he shouted happily, clearly satisfied with how the things developed.

And the reason behind that was simple.

This tournament didn't have any deeper meaning for Sander and the rest of their group.

Now that they no longer required the sect to provide for them, they had no interest in either losing or winning it.

But for Mia, it was different. Even though she didn't really share it with them, her teammates were willing to use their own ends to support Mia's needs.

Someone skeptical could say that they were simply returning the favor. After all the nurturing that Mia offered to them, it appeared to be a given.

Yet, the truth was fairly simpler.

The ambitions of their sect would rest on the last few fights. It would be those duels that would leave the lasting memory of the tournament.

"Right," Veila suddenly popped out of her chair, leaning on Sander's knees as she got closer to Mia. "I wanted to ask for a while already," she announced before taking a deep breath and whispering, "but when are you going to aim for a breakthrough?"

Veila's question was pretty valid.

Despite having a scheduled fight in the near future, Mia was still stuck at her old cultivation level!

It was a sensitive question... But Mia happily took the chance to divert her thoughts from her worries.

"Right the moment I step on that platform," Mia said, pointing with her chin towards the flat arena in the middle of the massive compound. Surrounded by various landscapes, it was the only place where a proper duel could take place.

Soon, the ceremonial trumpets announced the proper opening of the event.

Assisted with the cheerful music, the first two participants stepped out of the opposing ends of the arena before slowly making their way towards the middle of it.

'If that's how every fight is going to happen,' Mia thought, gripping the armrest of her seat, 'won't it last forever?' she realized, instantly flooded with annoyance.

What a big waste of time - would be the name of her expression if someone painted it right on the spot.

Waiting for the participants to reach the middle ground of the whole arena, Mia raised her eyes.

And there it was, the platform on which all the Elders stood, overseeing the tournament seemingly from the skies.

Their platform was supported by four impressive pillars extending from the four corners of the arena compound.

'No matter how many times I see it, it's always taking me aback,' Mia thought, gulping down a mouthful of saliva.

The sight was that magnificent. Staring at it only to feel how small she was, was the greatest praise she could give to whoever built it in the past.

Yet, the second Mia's eyes fell on the platform itself, her mood instantly soured.

Even now, Elders bickered amongst themselves rather than watching the event. They were clearly too busy with each other to pay any attention to what was happening below their privileged spot.

'This is going to make my life way harder,' Mia thought, analyzing the situation.

With elders distracted right that, she could hardly hope to pull everyone's attention to her. And this was the only reason why she agreed to participate in this tournament in the first place!

"I wonder what disturbed them like that," Mia whispered to herself, her eyes locked at the Elders' lodge.

'Still,' Mia lowered her eyes, looking over the massive tribune, now filled nearly to the brim. 'I wonder if he is here, somewhere... Wait to watch and cheer on me...' Mia thought, pressing her knees together when a familiar itch shook her body.

Before Mia could lose herself in her urge, the trumpets finally cut off, leaving everyone in anticipation for the event to start.

Mia looked down, only to recognize two silhouettes standing on the opposite ends of the flat, round arena in the middle.

"May the better win!" the herald of the even announced.

Both of the participants rushed forward as if there was no tomorrow. The two of them closed the space that separated them in a flash, clashing their weapons together right in the middle of the fighting ground.

'Woah.' Mia's eyes widened a little when she saw the combat.

It was the first time for her to see how others utilized their strengths and spiritual energy.

As someone who focused on just a single set of moves and then her cultivation, she lacked any real insight into the art of fighting. And now, she was forced to realize just how bad it was.

'What's the use of one's strength if it can't be applied properly?' Mia asked herself, suddenly putting all her efforts so far under the scrutiny of a massive doubt.

But before she could immerse herself in the sudden source of desperation, her eyes were drawn right back to the fight.

The girl from the Dastria sect was making full use of the techniques she learned back at her sect. Her moves were nimble and graceful, making her look as if she was dancing rather than actively combating her partner.

'Those attacks are strong,' Mia thought when she noticed a weird way in which the girl appeared to snap at the air, right in front of the places she would then attack.

On the other hand, the man from the Oloan clan would coat himself with his energy, condensing it to the point where it would absorb the power of the attacks.

'He won't last long,' Mia noticed the flaw of this kind of reckless usage of spiritual energy right away.

While the girl was using small amounts of her energy for every attack, the man was already going at his maximum right off the bat. And there was only so long that he could keep going in this way.

Soon though, the Oloan guy proved not to be a stupid pushover.

Instead of keeping his shield up, he started to gradually reduce it as he got used to the rhythm and patterns in the girl's attack.

'Now it's even,' Mia commented, deeply immersed into spectating the fight.

It was a single and short event, so fast that it was hard to follow the movements with a bare eye.

But at the same time, Mia was actively learning a whole lot, just by observing and noting the worthy ideas in her mind.

Soon, though, both of the duelists reached their limit. While the man appeared to run out of spiritual energy, the girl clearly had barely any strength left to move her body around.

'Is this some kind of drawback of her technique?' Mia asked herself, raising her hand to rub her chin. 'Still,' she snapped herself out of her idea, only to look at the girl again. 'The way she moved...'

Mia's thoughts emptied for a moment as she thought about a certain idea that invaded her head.

'I wonder if I could learn it,' she thought, already picturing herself performing the same enticing dance as that Dastria Sect cultivator. 'I think he would like it,' she thought, her mood rising up a little.

"The match's finished!" the announced screamed out.

Mia looked down at the platform, only to see the former opponents gracefully bowing to each other.

The blue color of the fog that covered the arena indicated the game ended as a tie.

"That was one hell of a fight," Mia muttered, deeply impressed by what she had just watched.

Then, she accidentally noticed just how intense was the stare that the two opponents exchanged.

'Right,' Mia thought, recalling certain information. 'Dastria, it's that dual cultivation sect, isn't it?' she thought, her mood worsening as she realized what she just wanted to learn. She then thought about the man currently leaving the arena.

"To fight despite being charmed through the entire fight..." Mia muttered, shaking her head in silent awe. "Impressive," she whispered before moving her eyes back on the arena again.

This time, the trumpets didn't bother to accompany the participants. And this time, the viewers of the tournament were quite disappointed to see no female in the fight.

Mia even noticed a look of slight disgust on the face of the man approaching from the southern end of the arena.

"Galivard of the Urbi sect!" the announcer shouted, pointing his hand at the man to the bottom of the arena before moving his hand in the opposite direction. "Nunay from the Dastria sect!"

The look on the face of the Dastria disciple was the opposite of his opponent. He approached the fight with a small smile, ready to partake in the duel.

Mia looked up towards the elders' platform.

The men continued to bicker. What was even worse, their dispute only appeared to grow!

'Just what are they all arguing about?' Mia asked herself, puzzled by the strange situation.

"Begin!" the announcer shouted, retreating from the open ground.

Once again, the two disciples clashed. And once again, Mia got to experience a new fighting style represented by the Oloan clan.

But surprisingly enough, Nunay's way of fighting was as different as it could get from how his female colleague conducted her own duel before.

And soon, his swift and unpredictable movement gave the man an edge.

Then, against all odds, Galivard suddenly pressed forward.

'No, it was all planned!' Mia thought, noticing the small hints to her new idea.

The Oloan sect disciple preserved his strength throughout the fight, learning Nunay's moves. Yet, once he opened his stance for an attack, he quickly overwhelmed his opponent.

'It's over,' Mia thought, already seeing the path that Galivard's sword would take to end the duel.

The sky suddenly turned violet.

'Huh?' Mia shrugged, unable to process the new information for a second.

In this single second, she managed to blink once in an attempt to let her eyes rest a moment.

'What the hell?!' Mia jumped up at the same time as she opened her eyes.

Because the world around her turned violet as if someone put a massive sun's filter over the entire sky.

And then she felt it.

A distant echo of wilderness, a warning coded deep in her blood and bones. A primordial fear developed over thousand years of the struggle of her kind finally woke up.

And then, Mia finally noticed the violet dot in the sky. The second she did, a bundle of energy flew past her at a speed she could only dream of being able to follow.

A loud, cracking noise.

Still in shock, Mia raised her eyes to see the platform with the elders collapsing to the ground.

The intricate structure that held it in the sky... Was just as delicate as it was beautiful.

A single meteorite shattering one out of its four pillars was enough for the entire thing to break apart.

Mia was frozen at the moment, standing pointlessly on her spot and watching the impossible happen.

The meteor... Didn't crash into the ground.

Despite arriving at a speed nearly impossible to even imagine, it somehow slowed down right before the ground, as if the world itself refused its entry.

Mia's vision turned into a set of slow pictures, changing at a steady yet extremely slow rate.

She could see how every last piece of the rubble from the destroyed platform fell towards the ground. She could count the number of bodies powerlessly falling to their doom below.

And she could see the source of all this devastation... Bloating up.

Then, this foreign object exploded, instantly covering nearly three-quarters of the entire arena.

The building that housed five different, artificial biomes now lost half of its size to the invading force.

Yet, instead of spreading any further, the brightly-violet-colored cloud of condensed force started to converge all the way back to where it originated from.

Then, the ball of energy pulsed a few times, evening out the waves caused by all that energy returning at once.

First, bodies started to fall to the ground.

Some unlucky fellows on the tribunes got squashed like ants by the raining rubble.

Neither of the challengers remained on the arena when the disaster condensed back to its original shape of a wiggly ball. Or rather, everything that was left in the wake of this energy was now simply gone.

And then, the ball started to suddenly take a form of a strange, four-legged monster.

Some of the elders that fell down managed to somehow survive.

'Huh?' Mia simply stood in her place, powerlessly watching how the situation continued to develop.

The first move of the monster's leg stomped half of the surviving elders to their deaths. That alone showcased just how pointless Mia's struggle would be in a fight against this enemy.

Yet, those that survived refused to just give up.

The few elders that remained standing gathered up and formed a set of barriers, ready to repel the attack.

Mia shook her head before looking right and left.

To one side, Sander's corpse hung over his chair. Half of his head was gone, devastated by the stone lying nearby.

Small, wormy pieces of the man's brain still dirtied the piece of rubble.

Mia turned her head to the other side.

"Are you okay?!" she shouted, trying to get to force her team members out of their shocked state.

"Huh?" Veila looked into Mia's eyes, her own pupils devoid of any emotion. She stared blankly at her friend's face before repeating, "huh?"

Then, the monster started to move.

The counterattack of the elders proved to be futile. A single attack of the beast was all it took to shatter the massive barrier that they attempted to forge.

Then, the second stomp came. Or rather, in its rush to reach its opponents, the massive violet monster simply walked over. And a single step of it was enough to send tremors hurdling through the ground.

'What the hell is this?' Mia thought, losing her cool for a second.

More pieces of rubble started to fall all around. Mia's eyes moved, tracking a massive piece of ground torn by the sheer weight of the invader.

And it was on course right towards them!

Then, her eyes lowered. The time came to a grinding halt, allowing the girl to observe its intervals usually restricted for the human race.

And she could see a silhouette slowly descending towards the small part of the area that remained intact.

Then, the figure landed. Fixed its position and looked forward.

Mia couldn't tell any details. The space around the silhouette was distorted by an overwhelming amount of mana to the point where she could barely make out the outline of the newcomer.

All that Mia could tell was that this person wore a hood.

But despite how little Mia saw, she was certain about one feeling. One impression of how strikingly familiar this person was to her.

'It's him...' Mia thought, shocked beyond words.

She tried so hard to be of use for Arthur, yet if her guess was correct, then he was on an entirely different league already!

Mia then pursed her lips and tightly grasped the railing.

'It's him because...'

Mia swallowed a gulp of saliva.

"Because it has to be him," she muttered full of hope, watching through her weirdly slowed-down perspective how the shrouded being moved towards the monster ahead.