

Last System 297

Chapter 297 Wandering Royal

The sky above the Skyladder's sect was filled with dark smoke.

The city itself was the source of those dark clouds.

Once rich trade area now turned into smoldering ruins, constantly releasing intense puffs of smoke. Down the former road laid a housing district now reduced into just a massive pile of rubble.

'I'm tired,' Vaner thought, rubbing his hands together to fight off the cold.

Sadly, this gesture did nothing. While capable of warding off a little cold, it could do nothing about the chill coming from the depth of the man's heart.

The area around the man was devastated way more than the other plots of land. But after several hours long of fights, it was only given.

"And if this place ended looking like that..." Vaner muttered to himself as he raised his head to scan the area above his head. He then rapidly shook his head before looking away in the distance.

'No, there is no point,' Vaner stopped before his initial feeling forced him to rush ahead just in hopes of survivors left in the wake of those few monsters that landed on this side of the barrier.

'Knowing my luck, only two other wanderers are on this side,' Vaner thought as he finally bowed his head lightly before the lifeless corpse that hid within the mass of the monster's mana just a moment ago.

Just a few moments before, that corpse was still a man. Yet, after Vaner's attempt at saving said man from the mass of the violet energy, his movements proved to be too quick and drastic for the people.

Vaner moved forward...

Only to end up taking a short break, barely a few steps further.

Because that was a place housing a corpse of another of the monster's hosts. A few meters further down the path, a pile of several corpses awaited to be pillaged.

The streets of the Skyladder city ended up washed by a stream of blood.

Blood of those that Vaner attempted to separate from their mana for the sake of interrogating them!

The devastation of the town wasn't a monster's fault. The most it could be called guilty of was starting the fight with Vaner a bit too close to the city.

And once said fight concluded with yet another corpse hanging by its throat from Vaner's hand, the city was no more.

'Just who the hell are they?' Vaner asked himself, shaking his head before picking up the pace and moving down the path.

Once outside of the city, he was no longer tormented by the scores of corpses that he left in his wake.

For every second that Vaner existed on this side of the barrier, the world itself attempted to corrupt him.

The energy that fresh cultivators would use to grow stronger now was nothing but a handicap for the man, given how it was less dense than his very own mana.

Instead of cultivating like anyone else who was weak enough to remain on this side of the barrier, Vaner would simply lose his strength by absorbing the local energy!

Vaner then looked down at a small, golden bead that he held tightly in his left hand.

'It's still here,' he thought after opening up his palm and sending down a quick stare.

It was the same kind of beam that Ackhart once used to call forth Royal authority. Yet, compared to Ackhart's stone, Vaner's bead was both ways smaller, but also...

Of visibly greater quality.

Another corpse blocked Vaner's path, forcing him to raise his hand and pull a piece of his robe over his nose.

The stench coming from the corpse was unbearable, proving that it had been left to its own devices for quite a while already.

'Even in those small sects, vile things do happen, don't they?' Vaner thought, raising his eyes and then looking behind.

His eyes were both drawn towards a particular point within the city. Just a small, relatively open area, where no rubble of the nearby buildings could be seen.

'Looking at it from here, it looks like the world itself refused to allow anything into that scorched ground,' Vaner thought, turning thoughtful as he thought about this particular place.

It was the same place that Arthur burned down when his cultivation nearly went berserk. It was the place that died to Arthur's flames, flames that were so powerful and primordial they prevented any energy from entering it, even later on.

Vaner tightened his hands as a group of memories instantly flooded his brain.

The day when all the shit went down.

The day when he finally learned the true version of what happened caused Arthur to act the way he did.

The day when he understood just where his little ploy took Arthur.

"I do not deserve forgiveness for that," Vaner muttered to himself, so immersed in self-guilt that he wouldn't notice an enemy even if it stood right before his nose.

Yet, the world wasn't about to give Vaner any time to sort his thoughts out. Before he could even turn around and continue his escape from the massive battlefield, another monster suddenly came crashing down, only to land right into the area of the scorched ground.

'Not good,' Vaner flared up instantly.

Even to this day, no one learned the secrets of this place. That scorched land turned into yet another grey zone that could potentially kill anyone involving themselves with it.

And even a wandering royal-like Vaner wasn't an exception from this rule.

'Fuck,' he cursed under his breath as he cast his stare down towards the place where the monster landed.

And just like always, it quickly started to turn its raw form of energy into the shape of some kind of monstrous figure. And then, the second its phantom body formed, it attacked.

But the attack never connected.

The second the monster's arm broke through the confines of the scorched earth, its entire body suddenly stood in flames.

The mana that constructed the monstrous phantom quickly whizzed away, directly burned away by the wild flames of the danger zone left after Arthur's rampage.

'Wait, now is my chance!' Vaner realized, lowering the center of his mass before lunging forward.

The grey zone was a place potentially even dangerous to royals like him. Yet, this was also his best shot at solving the one problem that plagued him the most.

Expecting the worst, Vaner plunged right into the burned-out death, forcing himself right through the center of the mass of the monster.

And for the first time since he started his hunt, Vaner succeeded.

He flew right through the monster. The condensed spiritual energy of Vaner's acted like a drill that forced all the violet energy away, allowing the man to grab the monster's host and force him out.

"SAFE!" Vaner shouted with clear relief. He then raised his hands and took a quick look at himself.

Just this momentary time that he spent within the scorched earth was enough to burn down a considerable part of his clothes.

Yet, what was even more surprising, was how Vaner's potential to hold the spiritual energy...

Somehow ended up decreasing by a fair bit as well.

"Finally," Vaner released a deep breath, barely stopping himself from openly celebrating his small victory.

Because for the first time since he started his hunt, he managed to obtain a witness without actually killing him!

"I will have a lot of questions for you later," Vaner announced to the unconscious man before raising his eyes and throwing a quick glance behind.

The burned-out lands were still there, awaiting a gullible prey to step into their sphere of influence.

"If only I knew..." Vaner thought, looking at the cursed land. He then bit down his bottom lip. "I knew something was coming, so I was eager to force you out into the greater world," he muttered to himself as he stared blankly at the soot-covered ground.

"It wasn't worth the cost," Vaner told himself as his rationality took over and pulled him away from the danger zone. "How could it be?" a series of flashes appeared before the man's eyes, reminding him of what his naivete brought one of his former students to.

Yet, as Vaner continued to move, he couldn't help but look around.

At the lands, once rich, now laid all to waste. In the city, that was no more. At the formerly fertile grounds, now fertilized by the corpses of the monsters.

He looked at all the foreign mana that contaminated the local flow of energy and threatened to destroy the entire zone.

'Was it really not worth it?' Vaner suddenly asked himself.

His wish for redemption was so desperate it would make anyone disgusted.

"What would be worse for him," Vaner thought, blinking a few times to chase away the tears from his eyes. "The rape he went through, or dying without knowing any better to those damned monsters?"

The answer should be obvious. But with the current state of the world around him, Vaner could no longer be so sure.

He then looked down, right at the golden bead in his hand once again.

The very reason for the current plight of the man. The reason why he had to shoulder the moral consequences of actions that he never wanted to commit in the first place.

The golden seal of royalty. It connected Vaner directly to the royals of the Barhan Kingdom.

The golden seal proved he was nothing more but a royal slave. Someone who reached the peak, only to remain chained to the bottom.

"I won't get my answers just by hoping for them," Vaner muttered to himself after taking a deep breath to calm himself down.

In this now monster-infested world, he had no free room in his mind to think about the past.

'Hate me or love me,' he thought, recalling Arthur's face right behind his eyes. 'But I can at least hope that my actions saved you from the certain death!'