

Last System 383

Chapter 383 Mutual Confusion

"Your Royal Highness."

The atmosphere tensed out the very second this title left my mouth.

I watched with satisfaction how the man's face turned stale at first, then twisted in shock only for his eyes to end up squinting when he looked at me again.

This time, however, rather than throwing a casual glance, he truly looked at me.

Not as some random cultivator he chanced upon. But as someone who could potentially be a threat to him.

In other words, a little bit less than an equal, but way more than a stray cultivator below him.

"That's quite brave of you to use that title," the man said, his eyes zeroed in on my face. "But if you knew who I am, I can't say whether it was courage or stupidity that made you utter it."

The spiritual energy of the man, formerly confined all to his body, now started to move. And as soon as the royal allowed his cultivation to flow, his casual persona vanished without a trace.

The air physically tensed up due to how my mana fought with the royal energy for dominance. And while the space right around the man ended up succumbing to his control...

He was still well within the range of my sphere of influence.

'It's weak,' I thought. Yet, something within me disallowed me from hastily deciding on such a favorable scenario. 'Weak... or extremely condensed.'

The man's sphere of influence became an enclave, a space fully confined within the area of effect of my mage's tower. Rather than cutting the projection of my energy in the direction the man stood, it simply passed around it.

With me at the center, my formations and how they interacted with each other projected my zone of absolute control outwards. Just like a star would shine in every possible direction.

Yet, the man's aura didn't create a shadow of sorts over the area that it cut off. And that means...

'Fuck, it's just as I thought.' I gulped down my saliva.

By analyzing the picture as a two-dimensional blueprint, the current manner in which mana behaved made no sense whatsoever. Yet, as soon as I added the third dimension...

"Brave, stupid..." I muttered with my eyes stuck right on the man's face. "Only a thin line separates the two."

We continued to stare at each other. If the intensity of sight could kill, then the world would already have turned into one big cemetery.

And yet, the stalemate continued.

"Okay, let's stop it," the royal said, taking a step back and calming down the circulation of his spiritual energy.

He didn't stop it, just brought it down a notch, massively decreasing the intensity of the aura that his power projected.

I looked at the man for a little longer.

Contrary to him, I couldn't manipulate the flow of my mana as fast as he did. Just like there were many advantages to my tactical mage's skills, their deployment time came at a disadvantage.

And yet, if I didn't reply in kind to the man's gesture of peace, he could very well take it as a provocation.

'Or the entire thing is just a bait for me to drop my guard,' I thought, gritting my teeth.

We didn't exchange a single punch. We didn't trade a single technique or spell.

And yet, this fucker somehow managed to get ahead of me, even if only by a tiny, little bit.

"Fighting a royal..." I muttered, squinting my eyes even further. I then took a deep breath before taking a step back while pushing my arm to the side to pull Mia along.

She was the one and only reason why I couldn't risk lowering my guard. Because while her innate ability might be effectively the best anti-cultivator constitution one could ever hope for...

She has yet to unleash it out of her own free will even once.

"It's a tempting idea. But in the current world, we can no longer afford meaningless battles," I finally said, artificially slowing down the flow of mana in my formations.

Contrary to how the man simply had to relax and stop pumping his mana through his internal circuits, I had to extend an active effort to do the same.

"May I ask why you want to meet local pathfinder, then?" the royal asked, taking another step as a show of goodwill towards the proposed truce.

"He is my benefactor," I replied shortly, regulating my breath to reduce the amount of adrenaline in my body that skyrocketed during the encounter.

"I don't really see what that has to do with anything, though?" the royal replied, the tension on his face giving way to what appeared like a genuine surprise.

"You really are detached from the reality of us, common folk," I said, shaking my head. "Or wait, maybe I'm just a precious snowflake whose experience with pathfinder was different from others?" I quickly added a self-mocking possibility that only then appeared in my mind.

After all, I didn't know what relationship others had with their pathfinders. I couldn't even know what relationship my pathfinder had with other cultivators that he helped pass through the borderlands.

As such, assuming that what I went through applied to everyone...

"I'm sorry," I said, causing both the royal and Mia to look at me with their eyes wide open. "Now that I thought about it, it's possible I was just special," I said, only for a huge smirk to appear on my face as my soul filled with a cringe.

"You could say, I'm just built different!"

This time, the royal looked at me with surprise mixed with confusion. Mia's eyes, on the other hand, opened up wide, only for her to instantly avert them before bringing her face to her mouth.

"Seeing how you can stand in face of a royal while not being one yourself... I'm tempted to agree," the man said. He then shook his head. "I don't really understand why you think I'm detached from reality, though," he then pointed out while raising one of his eyebrows.

"Huh?" I uttered a small moan, taken aback by the man's statement. "Did you really miss all the devastation? All the corpses and monsters roaming around?"

This time, it was the royal's turn to be taken aback.

"Monsters?" he said, raising both of his eyebrows before giving me a look of disbelief. "Wait, how can someone so sheltered not to know that the world is full of them ever reach the heights that you did?!"