

Last System 388

Chapter 388 Why Didn't You Break Your Shackles Earlier?

"So you've never broken past the hurdle of reaching the rank of a royal," I summarised Levi's story.

We were jogging through the open plains of the westernmost part of the first zone of the world.

To an average mortal from the earth, our jog would be akin to a sprint that would put even world-level athletes to shame. Yet, for us, it was nothing more but a form of travel at a relative leisure speed.

"That's right," Levi confirmed my paraphrase, proving I got his words correctly. "The bead that you saw me dissolve was something they forcibly imprinted on my palm after defeating me," he explained.

"But what did that bead do?" I asked, unable to pull the image of the small item from my mind.

Not because it was a tool used by the royals who we were likely to go against sometime in the future. But because I could draw a connection between it and the items Mia described when we talked about our experiences while apart from each other.

"It had two purposes. From one end, it served to gently disturb the flow of our mana, making it impossible to achieve a stable flow between spiritual energy and the world's energy," Levi explained. Then, his face soured a little.

"If that was all, it would only be a matter of time before someone would find a way to overcome this obstacle. But the actual reason why no one did so far..."

"Because once the mana would properly flow through the bead, it would inform the royals and summon them, right?" I suggested, basing my guess on what Mia told me about the events where a similar item was used by people of lower rank.

"That's certainly a possibility," Levi nodded his head. "But it's actually something else. You see, the technique used to inform and potentially summon royals... is extremely crude, akin to all their other techniques," he pointed out.

"But? And?" I muttered, unable to see a point.

For a technique to earn the moniker of crude from Levi, it had to suck at one of the three possible aspects. Power, efficiency, or speed.

The power didn't matter much as it was a utility technique, not a fighting one. Speed couldn't be the case either as it would work in overascenders favor, giving them more time to prepare for the arrival of the royals.

The only possible factor left was efficiency. Yet, even after thinking about it for a while, I couldn't figure out how this would be a problem.

'Maybe it would sap one's entire power as soon as it would activate, depriving them of their cultivation in the process? A sort of a suicide device?' I thought, attempting to put out an educated guess.

I shook my head.

'No, there is no point trying to figure it out on my own,' I thought, turning my head to the side and taking a look at Levi's face.

If he was going to explain it anyway, all I had to reach the answer was to wait for him to gather his thoughts.

"Back until a few days prior, there was only one place where one could gather the world's mana of purity high enough to push for the breakthrough to a royal rank," Levi finally revealed what I believed to be a massive secret...

But as it turned out, it was something that was so damn obvious I never could've guessed it mattered at all.

"Damn!" I cursed under my breath.

Now that Levi brought this point up, I couldn't believe how stupid I was not to notice it myself.

Back when I encountered that young royal I realized that he used both mana and antimana, or as Levi would call it, spiritual energy and world's energy. And before the descent of all those monsters made out of antimana, the only place where I ever noticed its presence...

The only place where it existed prior to the disaster was a narrow strip of land separating the zero zone from the first zone and then the second zone.

An area of land called borderlands.

"You couldn't push for a breakthrough because the only place where you could do it was the borderlands," I muttered, the dots connecting in my mind. "And with how you forbade me from using any sort of techniques or even driving my cultivation back there, activating that bead would be akin to spreading a delicious bait for all the monsters within the borderlands."

Now I understood how a lack of efficiency could be problematic.

The more efficient the technique was, the greater degree of the power used for it would be turned into the effect desired. And just like it happened with electric-powered circuits some energy would be lost by heating the wires, and techniques would always radiate the energy that wasn't directly turned into the desired effect.

Or, in simpler terms, using an ineffective technique would be akin to burning one's mana like a flashlight for all the beings around to notice.

"Attempting to break through would call all the beasts around you. And with how you needed to venture pretty deep into the borderlands to push for the breakthrough, not even overascenders would be capable of repelling all the magical beasts that would come swarming. And to top it all off..."

"The royals would soon arrive to mop up whatever was left after the swarm," I finished Levi's sentence, realizing the full scale of just how ingenious in its deviousness the royal shackle was.

"But ever since the world's energy came to this world in the form of those mana monsters, we suddenly found ourselves capable of breaking the shackle pretty much anywhere," Levi finished his explanation.

"Wait, why didn't you become a royal already?" I asked, suddenly curious about the point. "No, why didn't you break the shackle earlier, before meeting up with that royal," I asked.

Levi approached his shack from the west, the direction opposite to the borderlands. And if he was roaming the plains to the west... No, if he was capable of breaking the shackles on the spot when he saw the royal, he had to be able to do it for quite some time already!

"Ah..." Levi twitched only to turn his head away and avert his eyes.

And a creepy feeling appeared at the bottom of my soul.

"Could it be..." I muttered, gulping down my saliva before opening my eyes wide and staring intensely into the side of Levi's averted head. "Was it all just for a dramatic moment during the encounter?"