

Last System 429

Chapter 429 Vaner's Enlightenment

"This disciple greets the patriarch!"

The sound of this one, uniform shout coming out of nearly a hundred throats at once accompanied Vaner as he retreated from the excavation site.

"The disciples are really thankful for your help, patriarch," the escorting elder whispered. "No, we all are," he then added, changing his message a bit.

"I only did what I should," Vaner muttered in response, still struggling with an impostor syndrome running rampant in his soul.

"Be it as it may, the former patriarch wouldn't bother to come forth and personally help with this kind of ordinary job," the elder disagreed. He then raised his fist to his lips, hiding the small chuckle that followed. "In fact, he would admonish me for merely disagreeing with him just like I did with you right now, Patriarch," the middle-aged elder added.

"Long years of sitting at the top of the sect made him grow arrogant and blind to the truths of the world," Vaner muttered in a mysterious voice. "There is no shame for cultivators to do menial work if that's what's necessary. And there is no shame in challenging beliefs that people grew comfortable with either," he added.

"What do you mean, Patriarch?" the elder asked, leaning his head over his shoulder in confusion.

"Do you remember the day I came back?" Vaner asked while raising his chin and locking his hands behind his back. "Or rather, what was the topic of the discussion at the sect's hall when I stepped inside?"

"It's only been a week since then, how could I forget?" The elder shook his head. "You've returned only a few moments after the former patriarch lashed out against those who wished to follow the tradition and challenge the patriarch's seat by climbing the ladder steps," he reminded.

"It's a pity I couldn't return even a little earlier," Vaner muttered. "We wouldn't have to mourn five of our brothers, then," he added while averting his eyes to the side.

'If only I knew, I wouldn't waste time trying to uncover the secrets of what's inside the sect's structure,' he thought, gritting his teeth. 'And what's even worse, even if I will have to look for ways to learn more about those things, it's not something I can easily share with others.'

"Their sacrifice is pitiful but it was also necessary," Vaner's escort stated. "If they didn't take a stance about your predecessor, you would never know about his wish to occupy the sect's patriarchal seat, even if it went against the tradition," he pointed out.

"Are you aware that you are actually wrong?" Vaner muttered while squinting his eyes a little.

"Patriarch?" the elder hesitated. "What could you mean by that?"

"It's exactly what I meant before," Vaner heaved a long sigh. "Blindly following tradition just for tradition's sake..." he shook his head. "In fact, the patriarch had all the right to stay in power in a time of turmoil like the one we are in right now," Vaner stated.

"Patriarch...?"

"That is, until I came down to the very top of the sect with the sect's ancestral spirit's blessing," Vaner then added with a small smile. "But were I to find a different way to the sect, one that didn't require me to get over the crown of the mountain..." Vaner deliberately put a pause on his words.

"The blessing of the sect's ancestral spiritual guardian is the source of the ultimate authority within the sect. It proves access to a direct lineage to the chief of the ancestors who settled this sect in the first place..." Vaner revealed with a small smile while doing nothing but reciting the excerpts from the sect chronicles that he used to read in his spare time.

And then he froze.

"Patriarch?" the escorting elder asked, puzzled by Vaner's sudden stop.

"Direct lineage to the chief of the ancestors who settled this place," Vaner muttered, lowering his head. His eyes lost their focus as the man sank deep into his thoughts.

'There was no ancestral spirit at all, just some sort of a mechanism that used a language that I never even heard about,' Vaner thought, his mind going into overdrive.

This seemingly random excerpt from the book became a seedling that strived to sprout into a plant of knowledge. Yet, for it to happen, it had to be watered with other information that would allow Vaner to connect all the points within the picture.

'This entire sect is nothing else but some sort of an ancient structure. And a massive undertaking of this scale had to come with some sort of purpose.'

Vaner reached out with his hand and rested in on the elder's arm. He then rested his entire weight on the poor elder's shoulder, giving up on everything that didn't directly contribute to his current process of enlightenment.

'I can't tell what purpose it was, but I can tell that even after several millennia, some sort of power still lingers within this structure. And that means...'

Vaner's legs became unsteady. His eyes turned cloudy.

'No, I won't figure out anything like that!' the middle-aged man suddenly screamed from the bottom of his mind, clenching his jaws in desperation to keep his shout behind the barrier of his lips.

'I need to find out more, learn more,' Vaner thought, his eyes opening up wide and turning towards the very crown of the mountain that surrounded and locked the entire sect within the ancient structure. 'And if I want to learn more...'

Vaner gulped down his saliva. He then blinked his eyes a few times only for his eyes to track down all the paths that he could take to ascend through the terraces.

'The skyladder sect,' Vaner thought. 'A ladder that leads to the skies,' he thought, raising his head even further, looking beyond the mountain and towards the bright yet cloudy sky.

"It's no use," Vaner whispered, too dazed to even notice the terrified expressions on his escort's face. "If I want to find out more, I need to climb the ladder to reach the skies!"