

Last System 430

Chapter 430 "Property Of Sigma Corporation"

"Patriarch, allow us to accompany you," both of the escorting elders took a knee and lowered their heads, requesting at the same time.

Vaner lowered his eyes and looked at his loyal followers.

'No, they are not loyal to me,' he thought, squinting his eyes a little bit. 'They are loyal to the sect.'

"I will allow it," he said before flinging the cloth of his robe to the back and heading directly to the stairs leading toward the first level of the terraces. "Follow me!"

The initial part of the task was as simple as it could get. The pressure on the first several levels was too little even for most of the disciples to notice. In fact, the only reason why people wished to obtain the right to have their lodging at the higher terraces of the lower levels came with the status that it granted.

Yet, as the trio continued to climb higher and higher, even Vaner himself could feel the pressure slowly mounting up.

'It's getting harder to breathe,' he thought once they reached the tenth level of the terraces. It was already near the highest most of the sect members could go, save for some of the strongest elders and the patriarch himself. 'Which is weird, given how I have a blessing of whatever it is believed to be the sect guardian spirit.'

So far, the climb was no different from just a field trip that the new sect disciples could enjoy as a reward for some minor accomplishment. Yet, as the small group moved beyond the area where the sect members constructed stairs and reached the point where one had to use the ladders to climb, Vaner could see his escorting elders quickly starting to lose their motivation.

Their foreheads were full of sweat, their breathing was rugged and heavy.

It was pretty damn obvious that they were straining themselves to keep up with Vaner's leisure pace, even though they have yet to cross the twentieth level!

'Just how far did this sect fall from grace,' Vaner thought to himself as he cast yet another glance upon his escort. He then heaved a deep sigh and shook his head.

"That's enough," Vaner said.

"P-patriarch?" the elder to Vaner's right muttered, raising his face. The elder to Vaner's other side couldn't even raise his head, making use of the stop to rest as much as he could, desperately trying to stabilize his breathing. "W-we can still go on!" the elder on Vaner's right claimed while gritting his teeth.

"I'm glad that you accompanied me so far," Vaner said, doing his utmost to dry his voice from all the irony that the other party was sure to look for in his words.

They were still on the eighteenth floor, a result that some of the inner sect disciples could easily break. The fact that the elders could climb only that far had to weigh heavily upon their consciousness.

"But from here and out, I need to make this trip on my own," Vaner stated in a kind voice. He even went as far as to reach out with his hands and place them on his escort's heads. "What I need right now are elders that know their limits and that are willing to do their best to break past them. Not elders who will force themselves to go further than it's possible for them, even if at the cost of their lives."

"Patriarch, I..." the elder to Vaner's right muttered before powerlessly hanging his head. "This junior understands," he then said, forcing his upper body up a little only to cup his hands together. Then, as if someone suddenly amped the gravity in the place, his body fell heavily to the ground.

'We are still not as high as to make this pressure threatening to their lives,' Vaner thought, turning around and walking across the terrace and towards a simple, old ladder that connected the floor to the higher level. 'It's best to leave them be. Trying to call for help would only hurt their pride.'

After abandoning his escorts, Vaner was forced to make the rest of his trip all on his own. And so, he continued to climb terrace after terrace, quickly reaching the thirty-seventh floor.

'That's as far as I ever went before,' Vaner thought, taking a short break at this particular floor.

Back when he visited it the last time, he could barely move his body by an inch after employing all the strength that he could muster. Even then, he failed to even reach half of the terrace's length.

'If I remember correctly, it was somewhere around here,' Vaner thought as he approached the edge of the terrace and looked down.

There was a drop of roughly twenty meters down before he could see another terrace below.

'If not for this terrace down there, I would've died on that day,' Vaner thought, allowing himself a short moment of recollection. Then, he shook his head and turned his eyes toward the ladder only a few meters away.

Back in the past, he couldn't reach it. Those few steps were an impassable distance for him, something that he would have to give his life to cross. But now...

Now, Vaner leisurely walked the few steps before grabbing the ladder and ascending to the higher floor. And then another. Then, the next one.

Bit by bit, Vaner kept on moving up the side of the mountain... yet, save for how it gradually turned harder to breathe, he couldn't feel any sort of pressure pushing him down to the ground.

'Now that I think about it, the force that I felt back then wasn't the same as what I noticed when inspecting these strange cables within the mountain,' Vaner noticed while leisurely climbing the ladder leading to the seventy-fifth floor. 'Does it mean, the ancients who made it mastered the power of gravity?' Vaner put forth a random guess.

'Still, if it was gravity, then wouldn't the pressure grow the lower one would get rather than raising as one climbed up?' Vaner thought a mere moment later as he stepped upon the eighty-third floor.

And a mere ten minutes later, he finally reached his destination. The ninety-eight floor, just two floors below the one terrace that allowed one to peek over the crown of the mountain, the terrace where he encountered whatever his colleagues claimed to be the sect's guardian spirit.

"There it is," Vaner muttered to himself before peeking down the mountain slope.

At this height, he could no longer see the details of the people moving around the sect grounds. Even the buildings turned into meaningless dots within the small pond of green at the bottom of the mountain. Then, the patriarch of the skyladder sect turned his eyes towards something that shouldn't be there.

An opening in the side of the mountain. Opening that allowed him to see the same, golden-brown cables that he first found when trying to dig through the mountainside a few days before.

'It's embedded into the ceiling,' Vaner thought as he approached the opening. Yet, as he stood by the entrance, he couldn't help but notice a plaque with some strange runes imprinted upon it.

'I wonder what it means,' Vaner thought, raising his hand above the edge of the entrance and running his fingers across the runes.

"XXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXX" a strange voice exploded in Vaner's head.

A massive outburst of pain followed instantly, making the man feel as if something was drying his brain while picking it apart, one strand after the other.

And then, it all came to an end, as if he never felt that pain in the first place.

"What the hell was that..." Vaner muttered, feeling a strange tightness press from the inside of his chest. Yet, as he attempted to use whatever was below his hand to support himself, the voice from before appeared in his head once again.

This time, however, not only was it free of pain, but it actually carried some sort of a message rather than a set of sharp, impossible-to-understand notes that only pretended to form some sort of human language.

"Technical Maintenance Shaft"

The voice said.

Vaner's hand slid down the plaque, only for his fingers to rub against a small dent below it.

"Authorized personnel only."

Vaner's fingers slid even further down as the shock took over Vaner's mind.

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