

D. Diver 561

Chapter 561

The higher we float upward, the fewer birds there are circling here.

Once we make it to a certain point, they stop soaring higher.

We approach the slowly swaying chains, and I watch one of the highest-flying awakened birds glide peacefully through the sky between two of the massive metal links.

As it flaps its long graceful wings glowing red with ethereal threads, another creature comes rocketing toward it, jumping with strong dark green armored insect legs.

It's almost a blur in the sky how fast it moves.

Two sets of transparent wings unfold from its exoskeleton as its powerful jump pushes it forward, and it cuts through the air with a bright orange aura trailing behind it.

Its long antennae and beady black eyes sense the air around it while a sharp outstretched limb cuts the scavenger bird's head clean off before it even knows what hit it.

The insect, with the body of what seems to be a cricket mixed with a praying mantis, rockets through the air, perfectly landing on the chain across from it.

The creature's body is far smaller than the bird it just killed. Possibly 3 to 4 meters from its antennae tips down to its feet, but the strength and speed it just showed outclassed anything I've seen inside this construct.

It turns to jump back, pointed straight at the falling bird while it dissolves and crunches through its red core with powerful fangs, absorbing its essence in seconds and climbing higher up the vine-covered chains.

Its green outer shell blends in with the lush plant life on the rusted metal chains, but its bright orange aura stands out to me as bright as day.

It looks back my way while hopping up higher and further away, chain to chain, as I approach.

More and more of the mutant locust creatures come into my view as Ember and I start to soar up through the twisting chains.

The further in we travel, the more chains become visible to me, deeper into the endless sky and sea.

Once deep enough in, I sense the fast-moving orange masses jumping around me on all sides, picking off the remaining scavenger birds that dare to fly this high.

Eventually, one jumps close enough and attempts the same maneuver on me.

"Finally," I whisper while preparing for a new monster type to battle.

To my surprise, out of the corner of my eye, I watch Ember transform into his hybrid human-dragon form, growing in size and giving himself scaled armor, a long spiked tail, and clawed hands and feet.

In reaction, I take out my flame emperor's sword and activate my greater form.

If Ember is showing this much strength right now, it's better not to hold back. His words right after my transformation confirm my thoughts.

"Don't take our orange-cored guests so lightly. Their strength may surprise you."

The blur of orange comes my way while the red strands of energy intertwine themselves with my dark greater form.

I take a moment to concentrate and focus, channeling mana into my blade, creating an attack powerful enough to subjugate many double-ranked-up opponents over level 2000 I've faced in the past. The divine energy coursing through me increases this power's attacking force drastically, but the closer my opponent gets, the more its power becomes clear to me.

My greater form's blade collides with the insect's front leg, and the resulting clash sends ripples of red and orange thread-like energy waves to scatter from our point of contact.

I'm surprised when our strength is almost matched.

My brute force, powered by my fully unleashed mana control, pushes the insect backward, but an incredibly tough outer layer of its exoskeleton is coursing with dense orange threads and completely nullifies my attack.

My eyes widen as the creature is sent flying backward, but not a scratch is left on the impact point once the energy fades.

The only thing I held back during this exchange was not using soul energy...

My vision shifts to my left as another massive cricket comes soaring Ember's way and he doesn't hesitate to cover his body in soul energy-imbued flames to thrust a clawed fist forward and shatter the creature's orange thread-imbued shell.

There are rippling waves of gravity that hit me even from hundreds of meters away.

Ember thrusts his other clawed hand forward and tears off the insect's head, trailing millions of orange tendrils of energy behind in its wake.

His eyes are laser-focused on his enemy, and he doesn't hold back, tearing the creature to shreds with everything he has.

My gaze moves back to the monster that attacked me, and it has already recovered from the blow I gave it.

Its antennae move back and forth, and its orange aura retracts, making the outer orange layer on its green shell even denser, then it flaps its wings while kicking itself off the air to fly forward again with the same speed it did before when using the chains as a backboard.

I smirk while letting hot qi and mana that have been infused and waiting in my core trickle down my arms and into my blade.

I see the divine threads taking root in this hot energy as it makes the blade in my hand heavier than it has ever been before.

At the same time, it courses through my entire body, making the swing and speed I charge forward at the strongest and fastest I've ever felt myself travel as well.

Every step through the air I take leaves behind red footprints where I've impacted this construct and when my crimson soul energy attack makes contact with the outer barrier of the insect's attacking arm again, it shatters with little to no resistance.

The dense tendrils of orange energy are overwhelmed by the weight of the soul energy attack woven into the red core's power.

After its arm is shattered, its head and main body are obliterated in the follow-through of my slash as well.

Insect parts rain through the sky as my dense soul energy attack collides with one of the heavy metal chains far off in the distance.

There's a rattling clanging sound as a chunk of metal is broken off one of the links and the chain continues to sway in the heavy winds.

I let out a satisfied sigh while floating down with the bulk of the insect parts and collecting the orange core that drops with it once it dissolves.

The core falls into my item storage, and at the same time, I hear a rattling of chains far off behind me as another orange-cored locust comes flying my way.

I turn to face it and use the same attack as I did just moments ago.

Ember and I continue to weave through the chains, traveling upward, and slicing through the jumping critters one by one.

While I'm pretty much going all out in every attack, these monsters still don't give me an actual fight.

However, considering the massive jump in power from the scavenger birds up to these insects, my mind races to think what we're really moving up this construct to find.

Another half a day passes, and the chains only grow more in number, reaching out further and further than my senses can see.

The conversation of stopping on one of the massive links to rest and absorb the dozens of orange fragments we've collected so far comes up, but Ember is certain we'll find solid land to rest on instead soon.

No matter how far I look, all I see is endless chains, clouds, and locusts for hundreds of kilometers.

It becomes a mental guessing game where these chains are even going, what they're possibly attached to, and why there are so many.

After mindlessly killing more and more insects, there's finally a change in the atmosphere.

For the first time since we entered this place, the sky starts to change color. It becomes slightly darker high above us.

One of the tightest chains near me shudders, and all of the orange-cored monsters in its vines jump off and begin hopping and flying away as fast as they can.

I hear a loud echoing cracking sound, like rock splintering against rock high up in the sky.

Then, the tightened chain less than a kilometer away starts to bend.

It's like whatever was holding it so straight has loosened its grip.

The sky gets darker and darker as the massive chain bends and starts to look like many of the other slack chains I've passed while traveling upward.

Then, I see why.

An impossibly large rock looks like it's falling from the sky with the end of the chain attached to its center.

The longer I stare up at it, the more massive it becomes.

It looks like an entire mountain is being pulled down from the sky.

Ember and I both look at each other with surprised expressions, then start air-stepping away as fast as possible.

There's an end in sight at the edges of this enormous falling rock, but the closer it falls, the further away these edges become.

More cracked and grinding sounds fill the air as more and more locusts scatter away, screeching and chirping as they do.

None even try to attack us as they pass, sensing that whatever is falling toward us is a far greater threat.

Chapter 562

The impossibly large mass of stone connected to the top of the nearest chain turns the entire sky dark as it falls toward us at a speed impossible to measure correctly.

The closer it gets, the larger the stone mass seems to become.

What I assumed to be a few kilometers wide stone turns into a few dozen, then even larger, reaching too far out of the depths of my perception skill to even see.

Ember and I airstep toward the outer edges at first, but as the huge mass of earth gets closer, we change our trajectory to head back down toward the sea where we came from.

Our soul energy-powered air steps push us through the sky much faster than any of the other creatures trying to get away.

As they fall far behind us, the rock mass keeps getting closer, catching stragglers and pinning them against its mass as it continues to fall toward us.

The winds pick up, the echoing cracks of rock breaking and shifting fill the air, and the dangling chain sways and clanks together now that its links are far looser.

The sky turns dark blue, and fragments of smaller stone fill the air.

I pull two teleport crystals leading back to the shoreline where we left from my item storage and throw one to Ember with my telekinesis skill, speaking through our link to tell him we'll use them as a last resort as the landmass above us gets so close I finally feel its true mass and shape.

The air pressure shifts as everything below this falling rock is getting pushed with it. However, even while following the current to push toward its edge, our speed isn't going to be enough to make it.

One moment we're gliding up into the sky, killing insects without a problem in the world, and the next; we're about to be crushed by a city-sized rock falling from the sky.

I grit my teeth and prepare to crush the transport crystal in my hand, but another series of noises and chain of events hit my senses that make me stop.

As if the entire construct is bending to something's will, a massive purple ripple in space forms beneath the falling stone, and it stops like all time itself has been paused.

The chain beneath, connected to the rock, continues to sway and jingle from the slack and downward momentum it still has, making loud echoing metallic clangs ring through the air.

Hundreds of orange-cored insects are crushed to bits from both the air pressure against the rock from moments ago and colliding with the purple ripple of space that appeared to catch the massive stone from falling any further.

I don't take this moment to stop and stare.

Even as the purple fabric of space fades away to leave nothing but open sky, and the huge stone above us still continues to float for reasons unknown, I keep airstepping down and away from the monstrous rock in the sky with everything I have.

Ember stays in his hybrid form, and I'm in my Greater Form, using soul energy and the red threads that power my movements to get away from the boulder in the sky.

Even at these speeds, it still takes over 3 minutes to reach its outer edge.

Only then, when I finally see light blue sky above me, do I let out a long sigh and power down to rest.

"What was that...?!" I yell out loud as Ember has the same look of shock on his face as well.

We float upward past the point where the purple forcefield stopped this island from falling, and we pass through it like it was never here.

Still, moving away from the rock mass, I finally turn to see what's on the other side. It isn't what I expected at all...

Ember responds while looking up at the sky, eyeing all of the other chains far off in the distance.

"Well, you can't say I was wrong. We did find some solid land..."

I nod while taking in the landscape of thick forest filled with massive obsidian-black trees stretching high into the air. Their bases are dozens of meters thick, and as I look upward I cannot even see their tops.

Every few hundred meters, branches sprout from the jet-black wood and some of the leaves that grow from these trees are larger than my entire body.

The black glossy plants shimmer and shine like they're chiseled out of volcanic stone, reflecting the orange light of the insect monsters that hurriedly jump into the forest.

Many chirp and click as they fly by us from all of the nearby chains.

It's like they're swarming in as if this is a usual occurrence.

My gaze follows their flight and jumping paths as they propel themselves from sturdy trunk to trunk up higher into the obsidian forest.

Then, I see exactly what they're so eager to find.

High up in a tree, over 500 meters from where Ember and I float and watch, a round yellow fruit dangles from one of the black branches high in the sky.

From here, it looks like the fruit is about a meter in diameter, and from what I can see at this distance, a dazzling golden aura shines off of it.

Threads of yellow divine energy radiate off this fruit as dozens of locusts jump and fly toward it.

They slash at each other, breaking through the swarm to try and get to the front like their lives depend on it.

Seconds later, one of them manages to get a hold of the yellow fruit and all-out war follows.

Clashing of orange-armored insect arms and legs collide, and many of the creatures are ripped to shreds while trying to get a single bite.

Some manage to sink their fangs into the round golden fruit, and bursts of extreme yellow radiance flow through them.

Unfortunately, I can't see the full extent of this power because every time one of them gets even a little taste, they're ganged up on and torn to shreds by the rest of the swarm before they can show off.

I can predict this will go on until there's only one remaining, but something else entirely happens.

The size of the branch where this golden fruit grew begins to glow bright yellow, making the outline of a massive lizard on the side of the tree appear.

It has the body of a chameleon, but sharp eyes like a snake, and claws on its hands and legs like a wild beast.

The creature was completely invisible moments ago, and now its rows of sharp teeth wrap around all 40 or so of the swarming orange-cored insects.

I hear the crunching of exoskeletons from here as it kills every last one of them in a fraction of a second and swallows the yellow fruit for itself along with the dozens of orange cores, not bothering to chew any more than it has to.

The monstrosity's head turns toward Ember and me, and a pulse of yellow threads of light explodes from its forehead between its eyes.

Everything in its general vicinity turns yellow and golden, painting the surrounding trees with its shimmering yellow threads in an instant.

An eerily familiar feeling hits me that I've only felt one time before when the golden eyes stared down at me from the Apex Region's black box during the 4th Stage of these exams.

I feel its waves of intense gravity ripple through me, and it's like some kind of intimidation skill has hit me all of a sudden, I'm frozen in place for a split second.

If it used this maneuver at a far closer range, I would have been wide open for an attack for almost half a second before I realized what's going on.

Its serpent-like eyes dig into my soul, then it turns its head away from us and its skin turns jet black, blending into the branch it's perched on.

The blinding yellow aura it threw our way retracts, and before I can even take a gasp of breath, any sign of the lizard creature has completely left my senses.

"Yellow core... That was the power of a yellow core..." I whisper to myself while scanning the forest even more.

At this realization, Ember and I continue to airstep away from the island covered in black trees, getting far away from the dangerous creatures that lurk there.

We backpedal far away, letting the floating island of death fade away in the distance while approaching the nearest chain to stop and rest for a moment.

There is still a massive ominous outline of hundreds of black trees reaching up into the sky once we both float down to stand on the inside link of a rusted chain.

Swarms of insects continue to jump and fly from surrounding chains toward the black island, and I picture them all being eaten alive in a single bite.

Ember pulls out an orange fragment, then sits down in a comfortable position on the metal ground as the clouds float by and the chain we're on slowly sways in the wind.

"Well, if we want any chance of killing that thing, we better get started on awakening our orange cores. Listen carefully, this isn't going to be easy."

I nod, then sit down next to him while staring ahead at the obsidian forest. My item storage opens and I take out an orange fragment of my own.

Chapter 563

"Instead of letting the energy flow through you, control the threads from the orange core to create a barrier around your body. While the red core boosted your perception and innate abilities, this experience will reinforce your strength, defense, and consolidate itself as an impenetrable barrier."

I picture the orange threads intertwining with the insects' limbs earlier, making them so tough that I had to use my full power to break through them.

The threads of orange light permeated from their cores and consolidated around their exoskeletons to create a barrier around the creatures.

"So, like a Qi barrier?"

Ember nods and throws the fragment he's holding into his mouth, swallows it, then replies.

"Kind of. Watch me, then try to replicate what you see. This is going to be a far slower process, and a lot more painful too."

His eyes light up with orange light, then slow-moving orange threads of divine energy start to move from his chest to permeate throughout his body.

They slowly begin to wrap around his arms and legs, creating a thin layer of dense orange gravity surrounding his body, moving over his skin like a very viscous liquid.

My gaze tracks his vitals while his MP and HP spike up and down as his body heals at a much more rapid rate than it did when consuming the red cores.

It takes almost 5 whole minutes before the orange energy surrounds his entire being, then another 5 for it to dissolve away and fade into the air.

A tiny layer of orange light is left behind inside his crimson aura when he looks up at me with a grin.

"Remember, the first half is the hard part. Make it through that and the rest is easy."

I take a deep breath while staring off into the endless sky and swallow an orange fragment of my own.

At first, it feels just like the reds.

A surge of heat ripples through me, and momentarily, my vision even turns bright orange as well.

I counteract it with my all-seeing eye and multiple buffs to stay fully conscious, but it doesn't matter much once the orange threads of energy begin to spread throughout my body.

They're extremely hot, giving the perception of millions of molten slithering serpents digging through my flesh beneath my skin.

Instead of the evenly spread, fast-moving energy of the red cores, this one gives an entirely different feeling.

Coarse, slow-moving threads of heavy reality-bending energy intertwine themselves with my muscles, blood, and bones while spreading to the tips of my fingers and the bottom of my toes.

Watching this process take place from an outsider's perspective on Ember's body was a totally different experience than having it happen to myself.

What took just 5 minutes or so for him feels like hours are slowly passing by.

My entire body glows with a bright orange light, and dozens of mana crystals are being plundered to provide for the massive amount of regeneration being done on a cellular level to every square centimeter of my body.

I want to yell out and scream through the pain, but that would break my concentration. The only thing I can do is stare off into the clouds, keeping the faint black outline of obsidian trees in my consciousness while the heavy chain below me swings in the wind.

My skin is melted as an impossibly dense, slow-moving layer of orange divine energy sets itself around my skin, eyes, and even hair.

It feels as if I weigh ten times more than I did moments ago. Gravity is pushing me down much harder than it was before I ate this fragment, and an immense pressure is pounding down on not only my body but my mind as well.

It feels as if days have passed before the pressure begins to go away, but in reality it's only been a few minutes.

Once it does, it feels as if I can finally breathe. The 5 minutes as the pressure subsides and the orange shell dissolves into the air, watching the threads fade away, is one of the most relieving feelings I've ever felt.

I let out a long satisfied sigh and fall to my back once the process is done.

Small threads of orange light still shimmer in my skin and make a small shell-like aura around me, burning my flesh and tearing me apart from the inside out; however, the minuscule pain now compared to what it was moments ago is nothing.

It feels relaxing to only have to regenerate at this slow rate.

I lay on my back for almost half a minute, breathing heavily, then let out a laugh and sit back up.

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"You weren't kidding! That was a lot more difficult than I thought it would be..."

Ember grins, then sits back as well.

"We'll do another round in a few hours. It's going to take a while for the excess to leave our bodies, and we both need time to recover."

He's right.

Despite my mythic grade self-regeneration skill working at its maximum capacity, there is still fatigue leftover from that excruciating experience.

After just one stone, it feels like my entire aura has changed. I feel much more rooted in reality. The threads of energy close to my body feel much thicker and heavier. On top of all of that, looking down into my chest I can already see shimmering orange threads slowly floating in and out of my red core.

Despite this, I feel a bit frail. If I ate another stone right now, the experience would be far worse than what I just experienced.

It takes a full 5 hours for me to fully recover and feel like my mind and body are back to 100% again.

While I rest, occasional swarms of insects fly by headed toward the island in the distance, and Ember picks off the stragglers to collect more orange cores.

Then, we repeat the process again.

My skin, muscles, and bones are slowly melted by millions of orange microscopic threads and regrown to harden and reinforce my body from the inside out, leaving me sweating and out of breath with a smile on my face when it's all over once again.

I feel heavier, denser, and stronger once I get a few minutes to recover.

This time, it takes just under 4 hours before I'm ready to go again.

If there was a sun in the sky, it would be rising and setting multiple times while the insect creatures completely ignore us, flying by to flock into the obsidian death trap of a forest.

The time-gap between orange fragment consumption becomes less and less.

The excruciating slow-moving pain that comes with each one becomes far more bearable.

So much so, that I don't have to use my full concentration when the orange threads stay behind more and more, intertwined inside my flesh after every cycle.

My skin, muscles, and bones harden to the point where they feel like they're not even organic tissue anymore.

My rate of self-regeneration increases even when I'm not consuming stones, and the heavy presence that ripples like gravity waves while consuming fragments starts to lag behind to be present even when all of the excess energy has faded away.

My core and aura fade from a deep crimson to slowly shift toward a bright orange.

Over 5 full days pass before I'm capable of consuming fragments without having to wait any extra time in between.

Orange threads still slowly fade off my body each time, but the amount is almost none compared to the amount of energy I would lose on the first couple stones.

It feels exactly like the breakthrough point I hit with my red core.

I just need a few more, and there will be a monumental change.

"Almost there..."

I stare off into the endless sky that looks exactly the same as it always has with black trees stretching up into the unknown while eating another fragment.

The process is soothing now.

Another thick orange layer of shielding is added to my body to make it denser and stronger than before.

I take deep breaths while this fragment dissolves and the last remnants of my red core are overwhelmed by the thick orange threads.

My heart beats in my ears loudly while a bright orange aura envelops my entire body and I stand from my seated position while a gravity wave of orange energy pulses from my chest.

I grin while staring down at my hands, then up at the sky again.

A small group of insects flies by, soaring through the air on their way to the floating island.

I count 7 of them, then jump off the swaying chain I'm on to follow them.

My strides filled with wind magic leave behind orange footprint shaped dents in the air. They begin to fade once I'm far enough away.

I pull out my sword from my item storage and orange threads slowly creep up it once my grasp tightens around it.

I fill the blade with Soul Energy. The dark mana and Qi are reinforced with millions of orange threads on the outside of the sword, and its weight feels as if it's been multiplied many times over.

This feeling of strength is far greater than the intensity I felt while wielding this same soul energy in my greater form days ago with nothing but a red core.

I could activate that buff now to increase my strength even further, but it doesn't seem worth the hassle.

I grin while slashing through 6 of the insects in just two swings of my blade.

Their outer shells are obliterated by the weight of the hot Soul Energy in my blade.

My speed is still similar to theirs, so one of the bugs manages to escape my second swing.

It charges in to avenge its fallen allies, attacking my unguarded back, but its entire arm shatters to pieces as it makes contact with my new skin-tight unbreakable defense.

Its antennae move rapidly and its beady black eyes widen while I turn to slice it in half.

While the insects fall, dissolve, and I collect their cores, I do some tests with my blade.

As long as I keep it connected to my grasp, the orange threads stay intertwined to strengthen it from the inside and create an orange barrier around it.

However, when I let go, the threads retract and fade away to leave it in its natural state.

I place it back into my item storage with the newly collected cores and float back over to Ember to wait for his orange core to awaken as well.

While my sole focus these past few days was absorbing fragments, he farmed many more stones for us, leaving hundreds of excess in my item storage.

It takes about 6 more hours for his core to awaken; in the meantime, I practice on the insects that pass by.

I thought that by now, after awakening my orange core too, I'd understand why they're so eager to send themselves into that death trap of an island, but their infatuation still is a mystery to me.

Ember tests out his new powers too on some of the nearby monsters, punching through the tough outer layers of exoskeletons with nothing but a soul energy-powered fist, not even in his hybrid form.

I join in the fun as well.

His fists and my sword break through the tough outer shells of these insects, and the image of that yellow-cored lizard crunching through dozens of them in a single bite flashes through my mind with every kill.

We slowly make our way back toward the island filled with obsidian trees.

A battle strategy slowly begins to form in my mind of how we'll take on one of those lizard creatures together, but my concentration is broken once I see the purple barrier beneath the floating island appear out of thin air again and ripple with waves of gravity just like it did when it stopped the island from falling down into the depths of the sea before.

It feels and looks different this time.

Instead of stopping the island from falling, it looks as if it's exerting force to push it upward instead.

A loud echoing creek, and the jingling of a long chain below the island hits my ears.

I have to make a split-second decision and change my plans once I see the island of black trees and golden fruit start to move upward again toward the endless sky above where it came from.

Chapter 564

"The island... it's moving again!"

Ember and I watch from a safe distance as the rippling purple barrier pushes the enormous mass of stone upward again.

Its upward momentum is far slower than when it initially fell, but every moment that passes, the speed increases.

Now, more than ever, more insects flock to the island as if the chance they're getting now is a life-or-death situation.

Hundreds of orange-cored locusts fly above me, deep into the trees, and I airstep forward to do the same.

"Come on, let's see what they're so eager to find..."

Ember and I run forward through the air and make it onto the edge of the island, touching down on flat rock with the edge of the massive black treeline less than half a kilometer away.

The wind is moving by us at high speeds now, and as the seconds pass, even the air pressure pushing down on us from above gets more intense.

The creaking sounds and rippling of purple fabric beneath the island make reality tremble as it pushes harder and our speed toward the sky increases.

Fewer and fewer insects are able to swarm into the trees as our speed gets too fast for them to catch up to the island moving up into the sky.

At this realization, I lie with my back down on the flat stone with my arms and legs outstretched, and Ember does the same.

Standing up with this downward air pressure would be far too difficult.

The clouds whiz by us, and we're both pushed deep into the earth we lie on by the wind alone.

Every passing second gets more intense.

I hear cracking sounds and even see insects falling from the trees to hit the ground and break apart, making huge craters in the rock from the speed of their falls.

I expect to see leaves or branches from the massive trees fall too, but none of them do.

My head turns to the side one more time to get a look up at the trees, and I see that not even a single leaf is bent downward.

I can't believe my eyes.

The pressure I feel on every centimeter of my whole body is like nothing I've ever felt before; it's like the entire weight of a mountain is being pressed down on me and only increasing with every fraction of a second that passes.

I struggle to turn my head back to the front-facing position and grit my teeth.

If I didn't have the added strength of these orange threads hardening my body and making a thick layer around me, my bones would be crushed to bits by now.

I can feel the divine fabric being compressed more and more, and it gets to the point where everything in my peripherals is a blur.

The only thing I see is the tunnel vision of the sky above.

I can't even move a single finger, as it feels like weights the size of cities are pressed down on each one.

My blood doesn't even flow, and I can't open my mouth to take a breath.

Time feels as if it's stopped, but I can still see the clouds moving in the sky above me in the back of my conscious mind.

I focus on them and continue to endure.

It's hard to tell how much time has passed.

It feels just like when I was counting the fractions of a second pass while consuming orange fragments. The only difference is, this time it isn't painful, it's more of a suffocating feeling.

Before the pressure reaches a climax where it's too much to bear, I feel the ground shudder, and the loud clang of a chain below me being pulled tight rings in my ears.

The next thing I know, the pressure begins to fade, and the feeling of weightlessness takes over.

The outer edges of my vision come back, yet I still see the clouds above getting closer and closer.

I turn to my side, feeling air push against my face while the black trees appear to be moving down.

However, once I shake myself out of it and activate my wind magic to stabilize myself, I realize just because the island in the sky was stopped by the chain connecting it below, doesn't mean I was.

The ground is over a kilometer away as my body kept the upward momentum of the enormous push.

I take a gasp of fresh air and slow myself down over the next few seconds before taking a look around.

My eyes widen as everywhere I look, there are more and more black trees.

The chains that all flew by in my vision on the way up here all connect to other islands, and every single island is packed with an obsidian forest.

Flashes of yellow light appear in my mind's eye as hundreds of orange insects are killed by predators all around me.

They swarm in and out of the forests, jumping island to island, trying to sink their fangs into just one of the golden fruits that grow in these trees.

My gaze turns up to see the bottoms of even more islands high in the sky, while when I look down below, countless others are here too, spreading off in every direction.

Slowly, I float down to the two human-shaped holes in the rock where I just flew up from, and Ember is sitting on the edge of the island, enjoying the view and waiting for me.

He turns around once I get close enough and stretches out his arm like he's just woken up from a nap.

"I have to admit, that was more painful than it had to be. We could have just flown up by ourselves; I doubt it would have taken more than a day..."

I look down at the two holes in the hard ground and shrug.

"Sure, but we're here now. It wasn't that bad. Eating my first orange stone was worse."

We both laugh, and at the same time, I do a quick scan of the forest to see if there are any enemies nearby or swarms of insects that need to be dealt with.

The first thing I spot is a large golden fruit glowing yellow, dangling from the same branch where I saw it eaten along with 40 orange-cored insects the last time I ventured in this close to the treeline.

My gaze tightens on it, and I try to boost my perception further to look for any enemies nearby, but nothing comes up.

The eerie sensation of being watched washes over me as I continue to stare into the forest, and I'm almost positive the lizard creature is staring right back at me from behind this golden fruit, even though I can't sense it.

The longer I stare at the unmoving glossy black branch, the more the round golden fruit's yellow aura grows with luminosity and the juicier it appears to be.

Waves of very light yellow light are pushing off the fruit, similar to the incredibly dense wave of yellow intimidation I felt before.

The more I watch it, the larger the fruit grows. It may be just by a few centimeters in the minutes I wait, but I'm sure it's increasing in size. Every pulse it makes grows brighter and stronger until the incredibly faint outline of an invisible lizard shows up in my mind's eye next to it on the tree's branch.

From afar, I never would have noticed, but from watching the constant waves of light, and analyzing them change in intensity, I notice it's there because it absorbs the yellow threads at a different rate than the tree branch it rests on.

I open my link with Ember and speak while staring forward.

"I can see it. It's all alone, and we're both at maximum strength. I don't see a better time to try and take it on..."

I hold up two teleport crystals again, just like when we were running from being crushed by this same falling island in the sky.

"If it's too strong to kill, I'm going to steal its fruit. If we're not even capable of that, we run away and come up with a new plan. We'll crush the crystals as a last resort. This is the only way I'll get to measure what its true abilities are like."

I let out a pulse of enemy detection that stretches out through this full island and a few of the neighboring ones, not getting a reading on any of these stealthy creatures unless they're intentionally making themselves known to attack swarms of orange-cored insects.

It solidifies a conclusion in my mind. "There's no other way for us to get our hands on a yellow fragment. It's either we do this or stay stuck in the same class as those fruit-obsessed bugs."

Ember grins and turns my way, altering his body into his hybrid form layered with orange threads.

"I was thinking the same thing."

I nod and step forward too, moving toward the treeline while keeping my eyes locked on the golden fruit and its deadly guardian.

Chapter 565

We approach the dark treeline, and it's not only the lingering gaze of the golden lizard that makes me shiver.

The trees themselves give off an aura of danger that I can't quite figure out.

All I know is it's best if I don't touch their trunks. Every time my gaze falls on them at this close distance, I get the instant reflexive feedback to stay away.

Even so, we enter the dark forest.

I activate my stealth skill along with my greater form.

The orange threads that flow from my core wrap around my large form while I pull out my sword, intertwining and amplifying my stealth skill as well, making me completely vanish.

The only thing left behind are the heavy orange footsteps that bend space behind me. Once they've made it far enough from my core, the stealth skill deactivates and the threads are visible to the naked eye.

Even so, I still have a window of time where I'm invisible and can catch it off guard.

This small time-lag and a bit of misdirection are what I'm counting on.

I've witnessed its raw power. I'm making no assumptions that I can outclass this shifty creature in a one-on-one fight of pure strength or speed.

We creep through the forest further, splitting up and wrapping around the creature on two opposite sides.

I can still make out the faint outline of its presence, and Ember can too.

Its gaze switches back and forth to Ember as he's not using stealth, and back to my footsteps as they trail behind me.

Using telepathy, I relay the plan I thought of when we were going to face this creature before the island rose into the sky.

He nods and his body grows even larger, shifting from his hybrid form into a full-fledged dragon.

Ember's black scales shimmer with an even darker glossy shine than the leaves on these trees.

Orange light permeates from his core and covers his entire being as he flaps his wings and I dart forward while charging my greater form's blade with as much Soul Energy as possible.

Instead of moving straight, I take a sharp left and airstep to spin around a large trunk of an obsidian tree.

The path of least resistance would be to charge right toward the lizard, and the footsteps that slowly appear in my prior path make this the predictable logical maneuver.

I'm counting on it to be aware of this while I take the unnecessarily long path around a trunk in full stealth while aiming my gaze right toward the creature's back. I've positioned myself on the completely opposite side from where I approached, putting it between the golden fruit and myself.

As the gap closes, another factor is added to the scene as Ember bursts through the trees on the opposite side, glowing with flames and leaving a trail of his corroding Soul Energy behind in his wake.

It covers the black leaves of the trees and lights up the dark forest as he nosedives downward to be the obvious distraction.

The lizard lunges forward toward Ember while I rocket toward it down the backside of the branch it's perched on.

At my high speeds, it takes less than a tenth of a second to swing my blade, but the tension and dangerous aura coming off both the invisible chameleon and the black tree beside me make my mind scream to run away the closer I get.

Regardless, I've made a plan and I'll follow through. My blade makes contact with the bottom of the lizard's neck while it lunges forward, keeping its full attention on Ember.

I release my full-powered slash upward, aiming to slice its head clean off before it realizes I'm here.

However, it feels as if my blade is colliding with a hardened wall made of tough sandpaper-like scales when my greater form's blade makes contact.

I use all my strength to thrust upward, but my sword hardly budes. I feel a few scales give way, and the strongest point of my blade pushes through a few centimeters, but no more than a few threads of orange energy make their way through its thick scaly flesh.

The majority of the attack is deflected and the dense crescent of reinforced Soul Energy that erupts from my blade wraps around the creature's neck like it's hitting a force field. It explodes and disperses to either side without leaving any extra damage.

I fly past, following through with my strike, but soon realize it's all been for nothing.

The same pulse of yellow light comes surging out from the lizard's forehead, spreading throughout the nearby trees and painting everything bright golden.

Its full appearance is clear as day to me now, and it shifts its head toward me instead of Ember.

Despite my stealth skill still being activated, its yellow aura wraps around me and shows a real-time outline of exactly where I am like echo-location.

The only damage I see done to it is a few scales missing from the underside of its neck and at the apex of my slice, I managed to make it through the first layer of its flesh to leave a small meter-long scrape and some orange leftover residue. My attack didn't even pierce through its neck to hit any vitals like I'd hoped, but seeing that this monstrosity isn't invincible still gives me the necessary adrenaline rush to come up with a new plan on the spot.

My eyes dart around and I consider breaking a teleport crystal to retreat, but another idea comes to mind as I take in the situation as a whole.

It may see me now, but its momentum is still moving away from me.

I'm closer to its golden fruit than it is to me, and Ember is not its primary threat anymore so his movements are far less noticeable.

I send out a new telepathy message while swinging my sword again to slice through the small stem of the fruit keeping it connected to the upper branch of the tree.

Ember swoops down beneath the thick branch while I open up my item storage and let the fruit fall inside.

The enormous lizard's long spiked tail uncurls and shoots backward to grab onto the black branch and shift its forward momentum and swing toward me instead of keeping its forward lunge.

The torque created by the sudden change in direction is far more powerful than I predicted, and its rows of teeth and open maw come rocketing toward me much faster than I was initially expecting.

Even so, I still see many possible escape options I can take before having to use my teleport crystal.

In my greater form, its open mouth is almost half the length of my body.

The sight is still hideous, but it isn't as intimidating as it was when I witnessed it kill 40 insects in the blink of an eye while I was still a red core.

Crimson blood drips from its neck where I managed to slice it earlier; this even adds to the full picture that this too is just another beast that can be killed. It may have been a full-powered cheap shot, but I never planned to have a fair fight in the first place.

I smirk and continue to airstep forward, putting my sword away into my item storage to increase my aerodynamics and fly through the air faster.

It gains on me quicker than I travel forward, but in my peripherals, I see Ember emerge from below the branch of the tree about 20 meters away flying even faster than the lizard.

If I try to change direction in mid-air, I'll only be leading this creature toward both of us.

Its tail is about to unwrap from the branch to propel itself in my direction even faster, and I need to make sure its momentum is pointed in a direction that helps me get away with my prize.

I take a deep breath and whisper to myself. "This is going to hurt a lot..."

Then, I grit my teeth and shift my weight, putting out my greater form's unguarded arm right in front of the jumping lizard's jaws as it clamps down.

All the same pain and crushing pressure of its teeth piercing through my flesh translate from my greater form to my actual body on the inside. My HP and MP both drop drastically while I feel orange threads being ripped from my being as well.

I let out a yell while separating with half of my arm and kicking off the trunk of the tree at the base of the branch to change my direction entirely.

As my foot makes contact with the black tree, another dangerous sensation hits my body and psyche. For the split second I kick off the tree, even more orange tendrils of divine energy are

ripped away from me and disappear into an indescribable greedy depthless hunger of the obsidian tree.

I let out a gasp while I push myself away from the tree and the lizard tears off a large chunk of my greater form's energy and leaves tendrils of yellow threads behind in every single tooth mark.

It flies one way, and I fly the other toward Ember.

I don't dare look back to see if it's satisfied with its energy-dense meal while I power down my greater form and land on Ember's back.

My rings and gauntlets float in front of me where my arm is missing.

It regenerates back instantly to fill the empty space, however, the slow-moving orange threads that flow from my core take a few seconds to fully intertwine with my arms again.

Ember flaps his wings and twists his body through the deadly trees and we burst out of the forest seconds later.

Once the view of the clouds and open sky hit my vision it feels as if an immense pressure has lifted from me.

We escape the yellow observation domain of the lizard in the same instance, and its presence disappears from my senses as Ember flies away from the island.

I stare down at where my arm was bitten off and still feel the pain of every single toothmark it left behind.

After a few more seconds pass and my HP rises back up to full, the pain fades away.

The blood gushing from its neck replays in the back of my mind, and I reactivate my greater form while standing on Ember's back while speaking to him through our link.

"Even with just an orange core, I made it bleed. That beast isn't indestructible."

I smile as Ember's flight path turns in the air, slowly pointing us back toward the forest while I pull my sword and the glowing yellow fruit from my item storage.

"It has a weak point, we can take advantage of that and can kill it before it heals. I just need to give it a taste of its own power."

As I channel Soul Energy into my blade, I activate stealth again, and begin examining the yellow fruit closely.

Chapter 566

Millions of hot yellow tendrils of divine energy flow through the enormous fruit in my Greater form's hand.

It looks like a meter-tall peach that glows with a golden radiance, vibrating and humming, bending reality around it, making it seem heavier than my entire orange core.

However, at the same time, it feels as if it's as light as a feather, almost trying to float above my greater form's hand.

Ember's voice echoes through my mind in our link.

"That fruit has an absurd amount of higher frequency threads coursing through it. I wouldn't be surprised if it was just as potent as an entire yellow core..."

We approach the treeline again, and I widen my scope of perception to try and locate the lizard we just fought, but nothing comes back into my senses. The forest before me seems as if it's empty.

"What exactly are you implying? It will give me power... but is it safe to consume?"

There's a moment of silence, and I think back to the extreme surges of power and energy the insect creatures gained when they took a single bite of this fruit.

They grew in perceived strength and speed for fractions of a second, and it would take multiple other insects to subdue them.

If I were to consume a great deal more than a single bite, I'm almost certain I can land a finishing blow on the monster that lurks in these woods.

Ember replies as Soul Energy envelops his entire body, and I even feel a slight pull of his plunderer skill activate, draining mana and a small amount of orange divine threads from my aura.

"Yes, you'll be able to handle it... Stay focused, and don't stray far from me. I'll take care of the excess energy residue and keep you stable. You'll know exactly what I mean in a moment. Just focus on taking the shot, don't jump off my back, and I'll handle the rest."

I nod and take a deep breath in and out as we soar between the trunks of two impossibly tall jet-black trees, then bring the golden fruit to my Greater form's mouth.

In a single bite, the fruit disappears inside my energy form's mouth, and a burning hot sensation forms in my real body's heart.

I hear Ember's wings fly in the air, and my heartbeat syncs up with this motion.

My gaze spreads out through the seemingly empty forest again, then what feels like a hot spark of electricity surges through my body. It flows up through my chest, into my brain, and out through my eyes, blinding my vision with a yellow light. The yellow light instantly disperses and gives me a new burst of advanced perception similar to my enemy detection skill, however it can see everything including the trees, rocks, and even individual divine threads floating through the air.

A pulse of golden yellow energy flows from my forehead and spreads through the forest as we glide into it.

Everything that lurks in these trees becomes visible to me.

There are hundreds of buzzing insects and dozens of mutant chameleons stalking their prey.

The yellow light in my chest, brain, and eyes continues to expand and it gets hotter and hotter, making my body glow like a sun.

My self-regeneration skill works at full power as the yellow tendrils of energy wrap around every fiber of my greater form, however, it's clear this energy is far too intense for my body and orange core to fully contain if it keeps growing in intensity like that.

A line that Ember spoke earlier when we first entered this construct comes to mind when he warned Dane that if he were to eat a red fragment, he would be burned from the inside out and explode on the spot.

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The rate of growing fire in my chest and overwhelming growing heat intensity throughout my body and greater form makes me believe that exactly that is about to happen.

However, Ember said to focus on the task at hand and he'd handle keeping everything under control.

I take another deep breath as the golden thread wraps around my greater form's sword.

Then, I pinpoint exactly where the creature we left lurks. Its tail is wrapped around a branch on the opposite side of the tree we left it on, and I still see a slit in its throat where I managed to attack it last.

Its eyes are closed, and it seems to believe it's fully camouflaged behind this tree.

In my temporarily enhanced vision, I watch streams of golden thread flow from the lizard at a steady rate and disappear into the darkness of the branch it rests on.

At the same time, the heat that courses through my own body hits a point of discomfort that leads me to want to let out a scream.

However, right before I do blow our cover, the sensation of Ember's plunder ability kicks in.

The overflow of golden threads that my greater form can't handle is being siphoned out and entering Ember's body instead of corrupting mine.

Out of the corner of my eye, I expect to see his aura wrapped in the bright orange threads of his divine energy aiding this phenomenon, but what is really happening is quite different.

My gaze is subverted the moment my subconscious realizes what it is.

The same silver and golden sparkling energy from the center of his core is absorbing the excess threads through my feet.

The mental block kicks in again and my mind is pushed away, almost forgetting it in the moment to focus on the task at hand.

A wave of refreshing clarity washes over my mind as the immense heat and pressure are lifted from my body, only leaving enough that I can handle.

We whiz past the base of the tree, and finally, the chameleon's snake-like eyes open and lock onto us both glowing, covered in the same yellow tendrils of divine energy as it is.

The lizard monster immediately bursts with its yellow aura and swings its body up from its resting position while showing us its claws and rows of jagged teeth, however, it doesn't seem as frightening and deadly as it did before.

We have the element of surprise on our side, and I have more energy surging through me than I've ever felt in my life.

It lunges forward, and at the same time, Ember curves his flight trajectory to put me in the perfect position to land a hit.

Even with this timing and enhanced precision, the monster I'm attacking isn't going to give up easily. It protects its weak point on its neck with its outstretched two front claws.

My glowing yellow sword collides with its yellow claws and a shockwave of golden divine energy shutters through the forest.

The lizard's maw opens wide and its tongue shoots out while it releases a distorted screech and pushes its jaw forward to try and get a bite out of me again.

I use all my strength to push against its claws that push against my sword with equal force.

We're stuck in a standstill in the air for a fraction of a second while the intense pulse of energy ripples through the obsidian trees.

Even now, I can feel I'm at the peak of my strength. If any more time passes, the surge of power from this yellow fruit will be wasted and I'll lose my chance.

Ember knows this too and turns his entire body to the side to reach out his own claws using our forward momentum to make contact with the lizard's exposed side.

Another pulse of yellow energy ripples through the forest as its protective barrier degrades and long claw marks are left in its flesh.

At the same time, its shriek gets louder and the deadlock between its claws and my sword loosens while it's pushed to the side and behind to squirm with pain from Ember's blow.

This leaves me with a single opening, and Ember leans into it while I lunge forward to thrust my gold-coated blade into the slit I created when we attacked it the first time.

As the beast flails backward from the pain of Ember's scratch, my sword pierces through the underside of its neck and through its head, leaving a bloody blade visible in its open maw of jagged teeth.

I finally let out a yell while Ember stops absorbing my excess energy runoff.

Instead, I let it all course through my blade and let the force blow an even larger hole in its skull while we continue to soar past the branch it jumped from.

By the time Ember curves our flight downward, the sharpness in the creature's eyes fades, and its constant thrashing slows down.

Ember swoops beneath the branch and we take the same path through the trees and out into the open air to see the clouds again.

The deceased lizard's body dissolves on my sword as the intensity of the yellow fruit's energy fades and is left behind as a trail of golden threads in our flight path.

Both Ember and I now have a small percentage of our bodies and orange cores flowing with these shimmering yellow threads. The large yellow stone that falls from the monster's disappearing corpse marks our first kill and major step of progress toward conquering these dark forests and seeing where they lead to even higher above in this construct.

Now that I know how they operate within their territories, and have successfully managed to safely consume one of their fruits, I'm confident I can do it again. The only real unknown danger that lurks in the back of my mind is the infinite darkness that resides within each of these glossy obsidian trees.

Chapter 567

Ember doesn't stop flying through the air for almost half a minute as the final bursts of the yellow fruit wear off.

He powers down his full dragon form and we both float in the open air in our base forms while staring back at the black forest.

My body and mind feel many times sharper than they did just minutes ago, before eating this fruit, but at the same time, I feel a massive wave of exhaustion come over me as my body isn't used to exerting that amount of mental and physical force.

It feels like the withdrawal symptoms of the red and orange core. All of my raw unfiltered senses scream at me to eat the yellow stone resting in my hand that dropped from the lizards' corpse, but I can tell my mind is playing tricks on me.

I grit my teeth and let it fall into my item storage and boost my self-regeneration skill as the feeling of exhaustion and yearning for more yellow energy grows stronger and stronger.

A noticeable amount of the perception boost remains in my system even after the majority of the yellow power flows out.

I can still sense the weak presence of all of the lizards who try to hide their presence in the trees nearby.

I take deep breaths and focus on them lurking in the trees waiting for more orange-cored insects to fly by.

Far off in the distance, I hear the rattling of chains and rock breaking and shifting.

Islands are falling down to the ocean below while others are coming back up to this far more populated area.

More insects come swarming in, more fruits grow in the trees, clouds float by, and the wind whistles throughout the endless black forests on each of the islands that grow to reach high into the endless sky.

My mind wanders through my surroundings while my physical functions basically pause, only focusing on a small amount of wind magic to keep me in the air while the rest of my mana and physical functions are being consumed to constantly heal and regrow my rapidly deteriorating flesh and bones.

The insects buzz by, and the lizards never leave their islands.

The first hour is the worst, but my energy begins to come back and my fatigue fades soon after, becoming more like a calming meditation.

Over 8 hours go by before I feel as if I'm at 100% again, and when I open my eyes to look down at my body, it is still filled with traces of yellow tendrils of energy.

Ember still floats in the air about 5 meters away beside me, and it seems for the first time, I've finished my recovery process before him.

Absorbing the excess energy must have taken a lot more out of him than wielding a lesser amount did to me.

I pull out the yellow fragment from my item storage to take a look at it, and the bright glow and extreme weight on reality it gives off forces me to throw it back into my item storage the next second.

It was far less intense when I had it in my hand while still under the influence of that yellow fruit.

If I had to guess, it is equal to, if not even more potent than all of the energy I consumed just 8 hours ago.

It wouldn't be wise for me to eat this without Ember's help in controlling the runoff. Plus, the most efficient use for a surge in power would be to challenge another lizard creature while I'm at my maximum strength.

Even with these leftover threads coursing through my muscles and bloodstream, I'm still unsure if I could take out one of those monsters in a single blow again without taking advantage of a power surge.

Ember wakes up about 4 hours later and voices exactly the same idea.

"Of course, we'll simulate the strategy we just pulled off. Consuming this stone should be easier now that your body is already somewhat accustomed to the yellow threads. I won't have to absorb as much of the runoff either, maybe this time we can share it equally."

This confirms he did in fact take the majority of the burden, but a faint memory in the back of my mind of silver and golden sparkling energy helping from the most inner part of his core flashes in my mind for a moment. I get the suspicion that this added to his longer recovery time too.

He begins to shift into his full dragon form and eyes the forest, so I don't bother to pry more. We have a more important task at hand right now.

I pull my sword from my item box and we enter the forest again in search of another chameleon.

Once we find one nearby, guarding its golden fruit, I eat the yellow gem from our last kill and a surge of power that feels almost identical pulses through me.

This time, I'm capable of holding even more energy in my body and far less is siphoned out through my feet.

This creates an even denser concentration of threads in my greater form, boosting the power in my sword, and heightening my perception even further to reach far out into many more nearby islands.

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My Soul Energy imbued greater form glows golden and slices through the tough outer scales of the lizard we ambush, leaving a deep wound in its side and tearing off two of its arms. Ember's claws tear through its neck as well, and the creature shrieks and falls from the tree.

We swoop back in to finish the job with a single strike of my blade to collect its stone and the golden fruit it was protecting.

Once we leave the trees and power down to conserve energy and undergo the healing and withdrawal process again, it only takes me 5 hours to recover this time.

To my surprise, even though I'm positive I took on the bulk of the divine energy this time, Ember still takes a few hours longer.

Far more tendrils of yellow energy course through both of our bodies now, and his response when he wakes up is an interesting one.

"We're ready. Both of us will be enhanced this next run. You eat the fragment, I'll take the fruit. You won't have to make contact with me, we can fight the enemy with a more dynamic approach."

When we fly back into the forest, I jump off Ember's back before we near the next lizard's branch and we fly in separate directions to ambush the creature from both sides.

I slice a gaping hole through its neck while Ember tears long claw marks through its torso from the opposite direction. The combination of our forceful attacks tears the lizard in half and we claim its crystal and fruit as a bounty.

Once we leave the forest for safety again, it takes less than 3 hours for both of us to recover.

My vision gets clearer, my senses are sharper, and the orange aura around me is now tinted yellow.

Even without turning on any of my buffs or perception skills, I feel all of the enemies within dozens of kilometers around me.

My air steps through this construct feel so light and easy, yet powerful and destructive.

Days pass as we continue to farm lizards, completely annihilating every single one that lurks in the bottom few kilometers of the forest on this island.

Ember and I manage over 30 kills and absorb every one of their fruits and stones before targeting the next one.

The resting time we need in between fights falls to less than 15 minutes, and my aura has turned almost completely yellow-golden.

As we fly upward to reach one of the nearby islands to go hunting again, it feels like the full power of the aura that surged out of me during my first fruit consumption is active at all times.

I feel as if I'm aware of everything within the yellow domain filled with threads that pulse from my body.

Although every time I use this power to become stronger and boost my perception, some of the yellow threads that could be aiding the growth of my core are expelled, it's such a minimal amount compared to the gains I get from killing the next lizard.

By the time the lower layer of the next island is completely cleared out, the surges of yellow energy stay in my system long enough that I can store fragments and fruits in my item storage for later while taking out my yellow-cored prey in a single slice.

Ember and I even split up and farm the islands separately as more days pass.

My strength grows more and more, and my aura of perception does too, reaching out hundreds of kilometers in my greater form now, showing me many more islands both above me and off in every direction.

Both of us eat hundreds of yellow fragments and fruits, and I store far more in my item storage as I end up speeding through entire islands before a surge runs out.

Eventually, it gets to the point where eating a fragment hardly changes anything. There's just a tiny feeling of progress that I get every time, so I continue to push through.

My core still remains orange, and every moment that I'm not eating fragments or fruits, I'm losing small amounts of yellow threads. My entire body, mind, and being is saturated with the energy.

This is far more than I ever had to do for the orange or red awakening, but I can tell there is a very rewarding end in sight.

Not only is the amount of energy needed to complete this process alarming, the amount of time it's taking is too.

I've spent over a week working on my yellow core, meaning my time in this construct is about three-fourths of the way over.

Ember and I both know this, so we clear out the densest populations of lizards in the bases of islands and multitask by continuing to absorb energy and climb upward.

The further up we climb, the more densely packed the islands get and there are even some obsidian forests that merge together and their black branches and trees combine to push higher into the sky.

Whenever I get close to the branches or their trunks, the feeling of extreme danger still rushes through my psyche. Even with my recent increases in strength, my intuition still screams at me not to touch the trees.

Not only this, but the temperature of the construct gets hotter the further up we travel too.

More stray threads of orange and yellow divine energy float through the air, making it easier to siphon extra energy just by breathing, but it also makes me wonder where it's coming from...

Every once in a while, it appears like there is a glimmer of a bright green thread intertwined with some of the yellow stray tendrils. However, every time I fly over to try and look at them up close, they always fade out of existence, making me wonder if it's just my mind playing tricks.

The lizards glow brighter yellow in these higher trees, and their overall strength and speed increases slightly, however, my own power has been rising too so I hardly notice.

Eventually, the pressure in my body from absorbing the yellow cores hits its breaking point, and both Ember and I float down to the outer edge of a nearby island to allow it to take place.

We absorb even more fragments and fruits, and let the energy flow through us while solely focusing on regenerating our bodies and staying conscious.

It is similar to the red core awakening that enhanced my senses and base stats to a great degree, intertwining with my skills, and it is also similar to the orange core awakening, weaving itself into my muscles and bones to make my body unbreakable.

However, it pushes everything to a much more extreme level. It intertwines me with the threads themselves, making my mind one with the environment around me.

My body becomes even heavier, bending the space that I interact with, but also gives my muscles a surge of strength to counteract this and make me feel as light as a feather on my feet. My mind evolves too, grasping the capability to touch, perceive, and manipulate matter a great distance away as long as the divine energy is part of my aura.

A pulse of yellow energy comes from my forehead as I open my glowing yellow eyes and I finally see this construct through the gaze of a fully awakened yellow core.

I take in a gasp of fresh air and stand to my feet, then look up toward the sky.

My gaze spreads out through my new reality, seeing the lizards and the floating islands with much more depth.

However, I freeze when I notice what is making the air so dense with excess divine threads, and the environment so hot up here...

In the furthest point of my newest enhanced senses, I finally feel where the tops of the obsidian trees end. Above them, a pair of enormous green eyes stare down at me filled with no malice, but pure curiosity.

Chapter 568

Two bright green eyes, larger than the islands themselves, look down at me from the sky.

They're in the far corners of my perception, so it's hard to see the entire picture, but it looks as if an enormous serpent floats high in the sky, unmoving and unblinking.

Its body trails off higher than I can perceive, and the part that I can see stretches for kilometers and looks to be semi-transparent, made entirely out of green tendrils of divine energy.

It looks like I'm staring up at a massive hologram of a monster, but the extreme pressure and heat that radiate off of it tell me this is certainly not an illusion.

Seconds pass, turning into minutes as I continue to stare upward, and the massive green eyes just curiously watch back.

I assume whatever this is, it's always been here; just now, my perception has grown enough to see it. Ember stares up at it too, then speaks up.

"It won't attack. Higher life forms with green cores awakened don't fear beings with physical bodies. We can climb to get a closer view, but don't expect it to even interact with us at our current strength."

The longer I stare up at its unmoving gaze, Ember's words make more and more sense.

I eventually reply while we both fly up to the next island to continue our lizard farming to collect as many cores and fruits as we can on our way up, even though now we aren't eating any more as our yellow cores are fully saturated.

"Even if it won't reply, I still want to get a closer look..."

We continue upward, killing hundreds more lizards, hopping island to island over the next few hours.

Some of the black forests on nearby islands finally stop growing into the sky, and we can see their tops.

Taking this into account, I come to realize the black forests were actually absorbing stray red, orange, and yellow divine threads, filtering the air and making it far easier to combat the growing pressure.

The air gets thicker and hotter, packed far more densely with yellow threads of divine energy. More and more green threads fill the air too, but no matter what I do, whenever I try to reach out to touch one, it just phases through my fingers.

As I fly through the air, any green threads that touch me just flow through me as well, not showing any signs of being manipulated by my aura.

The sheer number of islands thins out more and more too as we get higher until eventually there is only a single one left.

It stands high in the sky above all the others, and its obsidian forest is the thickest and densest of them all. With no other trees on nearby islands to compete for energy, this forest has bloomed and grown the highest into the sky.

All of the lizards on this island are glowing bright yellow; it's as if they're saturated with far more energy, and their auras stretch out much further than the monsters on the islands below.

Even so, we cut them down all the same and continue the climb upward.

Continuing to consume fragments isn't necessary at all now, as my saturated core continuously collects yellow threads from the air inside my aura to regenerate anything it's lost, but every few kills up at this height, I still swallow a fragment whenever I get the chance.

It gives me a slight surge of power that counteracts the pressure and heat that are starting to take a toll on my body and mind.

It feels like the gravity up here has increased by a noticeable amount. The heat feels like it could easily boil water too.

More and more threads of green divine energy fill the air as we climb higher and higher.

It feels like an intimidation skill is being sent out from the creature in the sky at a constant rate, and there's nothing I can do but push forward and bear it.

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Even though since the first time I saw its bright green eyes, we've traveled upward over a hundred kilometers higher into the sky, it feels like we've gotten even further away because of the intense mental and physical pressure it's pushing on us now. Even if we've physically cleared half the distance between us, it feels as though we've hardly even taken the first step.

Finally, the end of the final black forest approaches, and both Ember and I float in the air in our Greater and Dragon forms above the blooming branch that absorbs all of the energy in the atmosphere around it and slowly grows a new leaf before my eyes while slowly reaching higher into the sky at a rate of a few centimeters per minute.

My yellow aura is exceptionally dense from oversaturating my core with extra stones, so even though I float about a dozen meters away from the top of the tree, it begins to absorb some of the residual yellow threads that leak off of me.

Instead of the plain stray threads, the tree gets an energy-packed dose of air.

Its speed of growth increases for a moment, and out from the new leaves that grow in seconds before my eyes, a tiny golden fruit starts to form.

I notice it immediately but don't move away, letting it absorb more of my aura's residue out of curiosity.

The longer I wait, the more the tree grows higher into the sky and the larger the golden fruit becomes.

Once a full minute has passed and the tree grows multiple meters higher into the sky, I airstep back while I come to the conclusion that a large amount of the energy that I just lost is stored inside the golden fruit that continues to grow even now while I think about it.

It only grew to about the size of my real body's palm, but if I made close-up contact with the black leaves or branch that grows higher now, I'm sure it would take my energy at a much faster rate.

These black trees are like parasites, leeching off the energy in their environment and luring new things nearby with a large percentage of the energy captured from their previous prey.

The lizards that lurk within them seem to have a hunting relationship, allowing the trees to siphon some of their energy while using the fruits created to lure the orange-cored insects nearby to feed on them. They can catch hundreds of insects while eating their own fruits in the process, gaining large amounts of divine energy and only sacrificing some of the net gains to the trees they use as cover.

It's an interesting system, but even so, my enhanced senses, using my all-seeing eye intertwined with the energy of an oversaturated yellow core, can't even look into the depths of these trees.

There's still an unknown factor of how it all works that makes me shudder at the thought of touching it again.

Ember comments on the trees as we fly higher into the sky together.

"I've never seen an organism quite like it. Unlike the monsters and regular matter in this construct, I don't think this one is native... While it may be dangerous, it would be quite useful to have one of those back in the human world... You know divine energy is everywhere; it's just very hard to gather it all in one place."

Gears begin spinning in my head as we fly off into the open, empty sky above toward the mountain-sized snake head staring down at us.

I nod and reply as I realize what he means.

"You want to take a tree back with us...?"

He laughs as we soar further upward.

"If we get the chance after meeting the overseer, it wouldn't be the worst idea."

Without any of the natural air filtering perks of flying by the dense pockets of forest, the aura of the green snake in the sky hits us with its full force, getting hotter and thicker at a much faster rate than before.

It feels as if the gravity and heat are doubling every additional kilometer we move into the sky.

My airsteps are getting less powerful, and my breathing gets heavy.

I channel all of the yellow threads in my aura into my greater form and buffs, but the pressure that feels like a constant wave of green divine intimidation is more powerful than anything I've ever felt or believed was possible for a monster to produce.

It's like I'm fighting against a reversed magnet, and the pressure is on not only my body but my mind.

It feels like a fire is being lit in my psyche the closer I push.

It can be calmed by eating extra yellow fragments for a few seconds at a time, but the distance between myself and the serpent in the sky is still extremely vast.

The monstrosity doesn't react at all to my futile struggles.

It just looks down at me with curious eyes, unchanged from the first time I perceived it.

I have a mental battle with myself for another hour, barely making it through another kilometer into the sky, staring up at the beast until its unchanging expression is all I see in my mind whether my own eyes are closed or not.

I'm able to continue moving higher with Ember flapping his wings at the same rate by my side, but our speed has slowed significantly. We slow even more with every passing second.

I even try to send out pulses of my own intimidation aura and crescents of soul energy into the thick air to carve pathways through the atmosphere, but they also travel far slower in this immense pressure and heat.

None of my attempts at piercing through this suffocating aura make it even another kilometer into the air. They all disappear and fade into the thick aura of green divine energy that surrounds us.

It nullifies all of my futile attempts, and any physical contact I make with the threads don't register in my senses. Other than the intense gravity, heat, and mental pressure; this is seemingly all just an illusion.

Now that I've made it this far and closed the gap between us even further, the small distance I still have to travel seems like it is going to be nearly impossible. The difficulty of this last leg of the journey upward has become far more difficult than I first assumed.

Chapter 569

It feels like the harder I focus on staying conscious, the more my mind is forced to concentrate on less and less around me.

At the same time, the pure physical pressure of the air high up in this sky here forces my aura to shrink down the higher I climb.

My whole body inside my greater form is sweating and shaking to push onward, and I can see Ember's wing movements are severely slowing as well.

The pure gravity alone that pushes down on me feels almost 50 times heavier than it did in the atmosphere down near the top of the tree.

It's causing pain to move even a single meter forward.

However, we do, for multiple hours longer, nearly making it a few more kilometers and hitting a mental wall once we make it to roughly two dozen kilometers away.

The force pressing down on us is so great that even my telepathic link with Ember is taking longer than usual to bounce back and forth.

I continue to consume yellow fragments and fruits on our way up too, as it gives me an extra few seconds of less intense mental and physical attacks, but it just comes back even harder once the effects wear off.

It gets to the point where it feels like I'm making more progress by not eating extra gems because I have to constantly get used to the extra pressure once they wear off. Bearing the constant stress and pushing through feels more doable, and fewer excess fragments are wasted too.

Ember's voice comes through our link, giving his thoughts.

"This may be our limit. With less than a week remaining inside this construct, I don't believe it's possible for us to make it any further..."

I stare up at the unmoving expression of the green serpent and let out a frustrated yell just to make the pain on my mind and body lessen for a moment so I can concentrate to calmly reply back to Ember.

"We only have one chance to make it to the top, don't we? You said it yourself, opportunities like this are not common."

Even now, staring up at the eyes of a higher lifeform, there are seemingly infinite tendrils of purple energy even higher in the sky that make up this entire construct.

Before, I felt like its curious gaze was pointed right at me, but the longer I stare into the snake's enormous eyes, I realize it is just looking down at the entire construct as a whole. I'm as interesting to it as any of the other lizards in the forest, insects jumping on chains, or birds flying up cliffs in this small world.

I'm positive that this serpent isn't the end, but just a gatekeeper to hold back weaker beings like us.

Ember grins at my remark, takes a moment to pause and think, then replies again.

"I do have an idea that may get its attention... However, I cannot predict how it will react afterward."

I want to turn my head to look toward him, but the air pressure and strength used to do so would not be worth the hassle. So, I respond through our link again while airstepping forward another meter while absorbing the MP from handfuls of mana crystals.

"What is it? We either try it or give up... And I really don't want to have come all this way to just turn back now."

He responds as the pink gems dissolve in an instant and he flaps his wings again to match my air-step's travel distance.

"I'll have to use energy from my immortal core."

My eyes widen as all the vague images of him using silver and golden energy these last few weeks come rushing back to me.

Even now, as I try to expand my perception, Ember is within my aura but whenever my mind tries to comprehend what's in the center of his core, my attention floats away from it like an unknown invisible hand is pushing me away.

However, the fact that Ember verbally brought it to my attention keeps me focused on the topic for far longer.

I don't respond, but Ember continues.

"It's the same energy I used to create our limiters before entering the exams. Building up my new body's core from scratch these past few weeks has given me more of my power back, but to use enough to part the mental pressure of a higher lifeform in this body will not be an easy feat... I'll need to rest again afterward. It may take weeks or months, I'm not sure how long, but I do know I won't be able to continue fighting with you in this construct if we try to pull this off."

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I airstep upward again, eating another yellow fragment to temporarily relieve the mental and physical pressure on myself to respond.

"Are you sure about this? It's safe?"

The edges of his lips turn up, and I watch him give a slight shrug of his wings even though it's horribly wasteful to be using movements like that at these pressures.

"It will be safe, sure. I'll enter your item storage until we get back to a safe place to rest. And for you? Well, if a higher lifeform tries to kill you, there's nothing you can do about it. We'll be kicked from the construct if you die. If it decides not to kill you, the rewards will be worth the risk. The worst-case scenario here is you fail the B-Class exams for exiting the construct early. I wanted to talk with the creator myself, but it seems my wishes were a bit far-fetched."

As he finishes this remark, the effects of the gem I just ate already begin to wear off and the full force of this serpent's mental energy hits me again.

I grit my teeth and reply.

"Let's do it..."

Over the next few minutes, Ember outlines a concise plan while we stand in place in the sky.

He moves to position himself in front of me, and we start to travel upward again while consuming as many yellow fragments and fruits as we can handle.

While before, they were just being used as a mental and physical break, now we use them to continuously supercharge our auras, not letting the effects wear off at all before taking another one.

My mind starts to clear up and be less filled with pressure and fog, while my airsteps are getting quicker, and my aura is able to expand slightly too.

However, we've moved so much closer inward that the moment I stop eating fragments, the pressure all around me will collapse and I'm certain I won't be able to withstand it in my natural state.

Ember leads the charge, and we close the distance between us again, now floating less than 10km away from the serpent's nose.

Its gaze is unchanged, and the pressure that beats down on me now is unbearable.

Even while being boosted by a new yellow fragment every 30 to 60 seconds, it's even worse than it was before because we're at even closer range. It feels like I'm swimming upward in a pool of thick hardening cement.

It's difficult to even breathe, and the pressure now is making my ears ring and bleed.

Finally, Ember's voice echoes in my inner ear.

"We're close enough. It's happening now."

I pull my sword from my item storage and eat another yellow stone while focusing straight ahead to watch a burst of silver and golden light come from Ember's chest.

My vision is fuzzy, and it's hard to even perceive what is beyond my small aura because of the thickness of the green divine energy that surrounds me on all sides.

However, there is a burst of energy that erupts from Ember's mouth and in the same moment, I watch him revert to his human form after the energy is expelled.

I open my item storage to have him fall into my white spatial magic as he falls from the sky at rapid speeds being pushed by the green pressure.

Once he disappears into my storage, I continue pushing forward as instructed and begin to charge up my blade with all of the soul energy I have left in me.

I focus on the feeling I learned while putting up the barrier around the Crimson City to empty my entire body of energy, and every bit that is funneled through my arms into my greater form's blade is intertwined with the golden yellow threads that burst out of my core from being repeatedly oversaturated while we fly higher.

I finally airstep into the position where Ember was just moments ago and gasp for a breath as the pressure around me completely vanishes.

I can't believe what I'm feeling. My body feels light again, and my vision comes back to me.

There is a thin circular tunnel carved out into the green aura where Ember's attack from before was shot out.

It was too far away for me to perceive in the moment, but now that I'm looking at its aftermath, my eyes are open in awe.

A clean shot is open to me through the green divine aura.

It's not very wide, but it makes its way all the way to the nose of the serpent in the sky.

Every millisecond I wait admiring this pathway, the outer edges of the green threads are moving back together to meet each other to become one again.

I have a single shot at this, so without thinking about it any further, I release every drop of energy I can into a crescent of Soul Energy intertwined with the Divine energy excess of dozens of yellow fragments.

I let out a yell that echoes through the small tunnel in space that reaches the serpent.

The instant the attack and a mythic-grade screech-empowered scream leave my body, I feel a rush of cold Qi, mana, and Divine Energy withdrawal hit me all at once.

My Qi stores have hit 0 again, my mana is dangerously low, and the excess divine energy has all been expelled too.

The crescent rockets through the open air, untouched by the green aura that slowly collapses toward it.

The yellow crescent grows in size as it rockets upward far faster than I can airstep.

In the back of my mind, I already feel the green aura closing in behind me.

I've done my job.

That was the strongest attack I could have thrown, and the loudest yell I had in my lungs.

Ember created the opening, and now the attack is set to hit its target.

If I turn back to try and re-enter the green energy around me, it will simply be too strong for me to withstand.

I'll either be crushed, torn to shreds by the pressure, or thrown downward into the endless sky.

Whatever the case may be, I don't want it to happen until I see if the monster reacts to my strike.

The faster I airstep into the sky, the quicker it seems to be collapsing in on itself behind me and the sides too.

I have to retract my aura more and more because the portions of it that touch the green walls that close in on me are being absorbed and destroyed on contact.

I even have to revert back into my human form as the tunnel of open air gets too small.

I cover my body in the thickest condensed aura of yellow divine energy I can muster just around my core, head, and heart.

Then, finally, I watch the attack I threw make contact with the tip of the creature's nose.

My eyes widen as it passes right through like it's hitting nothing, and dissolves into the enormous massive energy form of the overseer.

It doesn't make a sound or disrupt the creature's endless curious gaze at all.

I'm swallowed by the dense green divine threads on all sides in the next second, disappearing into its aura just like my attack.

Chapter 570

The last image that is etched into the back of my mind as the green divine energy completely covers my body is the enormous mouth of the serpent before me, open wide.

I can't tell if it's the mental and physical pressure from the green aura around me that rattles my mind, or the ear-piercing hiss that comes out of the creature's mouth.

It feels like a dream.

My body is pressed inward by the pressure as if mountain-sized anvils are pushing toward me on every surface of my body.

The vibrating hissing noise in my mind increases in intensity every millisecond that passes.

The feeling of being repelled by a planet-sized magnet comes back, and I'm forcefully expelled downward as my skin and muscles are compressed, torn, melted, and shredded at a microscopic level from every side.

I allow a constant flow of mana crystals to surround me, falling out of my item storage, and have to rely on the intuitive properties of my skills intertwining with the yellow divine energy that covers my vitals.

It is intertwined with my plunderer skill to keep my MP stores from hitting 0 like my Qi, allowing me to continue regenerating my body where the pressure destroys it. However, the intrinsic properties of my absorption skill are activated as well.

My brain is functioning on autopilot to survive the pressures, and it reverts back to what is the most natural state for the highest rate of survival in this scenario.

It is similar to the process I used while flying over the battlefield to defeat the Dark One's Army, absorbing everything around me in order to withstand this dire situation. All of the abilities I have at my fingertips meld together to create a thick yellow glowing aura around my body.

Regardless of all my attempts to push it away, green divine energy flows through me and tears me apart, but with every passing moment, I'm pushed further down and the pressure lifts more and more.

That instance of pure autopilot is the worst it will get.

I let out a distorted half-conscious laugh the moment the pressure lifts enough for me to realize I survived and my vocal cords are regenerated enough to even form a noise.

The weight of what feels like hundreds of hours of high-intensity mental attacks all washes over my psyche once my brain realizes it's safe enough to let up.

The moment my echoing laugh ceases, I fall into a deep sleep while my body continues to plummet through the endless sky.

The large mass of mana crystals I released floats around me and I continue to subconsciously absorb their energy to heal my body as I plummet down out of the densest portion of the green divine aura.

The image of the serpent hissing is the only thing left plastered in my mind even now as I'm unconscious, falling through the sky.

It's impossible to know for sure if it was all an illusion or not in my current mental state.

—

As my body slowly falls through the sky, the serpent's hiss echoes throughout the entire construct.

All of the floating islands in the sky shake, their chains rattle, the endless ocean the metal chains fall into creates massive waves, and even the cliffside and lush forest below shake lightly similar to a small earthquake.

In a fluid motion, the serpent's eyes point downward to focus on the object that just interrupted its peace, then it closes its mouth and turns its head.

The entire length of the creature is visible in the sky as it turns around and shows the hundreds of kilometers of shimmering green scales.

The sky is just slightly visible behind it, as the monster is transparent, completely made of densely packed green divine threads.

It slithers upward in a graceful manner and disappears into the sky as my body continues to fall.

Not being propelled by any external factors, and with the natural wind pressure still pushing up on me despite the intense push from the serpent's aura, it still takes several hours to fall back down to where the obsidian forest of the highest island in the sky comes into view.

By now, healing the flesh of my body from the external forces and the natural decay from even my yellow divine energy use isn't too tough of a task. I'm far out of the danger zone, and my passive use of my skills is more than enough to keep me alive.

However, there is a different unforeseen issue that's made itself known.

From the use of mythic-grade plunderer, and activation of absorption's raw traits intertwined with my yellow core while my entire body was fully saturated by green divine energy, an odd phenomenon has occurred.

The green tendrils of seemingly holographic divine energy are now intertwined in my flesh, and have even seeped into my yellow core.

Instead of disappearing from existence the moment I touch the tendrils, my aura and body have started to react with the material.

This could be perceived as a good sign, giving me a pathway to the new core evolution, however, my body is rejecting the divine threads at a cellular level.

All of the flesh that is attached to these tendrils has a much harder time regenerating quickly, and some portions of my flesh have stopped almost entirely leaving open holes with nothing but a green aura in its place.

By the time I fall into the jet-black forest, the effects from the green tendrils that are slowly collecting and taking over my body have reached a critical stage.

It looks as if all of the threads are deteriorating my arms, legs, and abdomen while slowly flowing toward my core.

Meanwhile, I'm still fast asleep, mentally recovering from the shock of the creature's hiss, and peacefully dissolving cell by cell while falling through the branches of the obsidian forest, not hitting a single one.

—

I wake up from a loud crashing sound as my body hits the rocky ground of the island in the heart of the obsidian forest full of hungry trees.

The physical pain of falling dozens of kilometers down to hit the ground isn't as bad as the burning sensation that fills my mind and body as the realization of what's happening to me all floods into my mind.

My entire aura is glowing bright green, and I can see through my skin and bones as they're constantly trying to regenerate but the foreign green tendrils of energy that surround me make it harder and harder to do so each time.

Millions of MP worth of mana crystals fall all around me like it's raining as they were what I last pulled from my item storage and my mind starts to think of as many ideas as I can to solve this problem.

I consider using a teleportation crystal to bring myself back to the start of the construct to try and escape, but I can't think of any way that would help my situation at all. It would just put me in more danger than I'm in now.

The only one capable of giving me advice in this scenario is also out cold.

Less than a second has passed in Ember's perception as he's still held in my item storage in suspended animation. However, he too is already fast asleep and will need months inside an isolation pod to recover.

I pull out handfuls of yellow fragments and fruits that I have leftover, eating a few, feeling a surge of energy, but nothing stops the green tendrils from spreading further and further.

It gets to the point where I fall to my knees as the pain is becoming so unbearable as the threads try to overtake my entire body.

Instead of the empowering feeling I got from the red, orange, and yellow gems, this one feels much different.

It feels like it's going to take something away from me if I allow it to take control. Every moment I wait for it to complete its process is a moment that brings me closer to losing my body like the serpent in the sky.

Whatever immense power it may grant isn't worth giving up my body and possibly even my mind if I don't have the control to regenerate what it takes away.

I slow my breathing and continue to let my thoughts run wild, coming up with possible ideas and scenarios in my head, burning through MP, even restoring my Qi with a handful of pills and attempting to counteract the threads with soul energy, but nothing works.

Every time I use any portion of power, it actually speeds up the process. More portions of my physical body fade away and a green aura is all that's left in its place, showing a version of myself as a pure energy being that I am not ready to convert to on a whim.

I'm covered in sweat, breathing heavily, and lying face down in the dirt after another failed experiment with only one option left on my mental list.

I let out a groggy whisper while dragging myself closer to the nearest trunk of an obsidian tree.

"This is my only choice. I wanted to control this power, but maybe I'm just not capable of wielding it yet..."

I smirk and place my deteriorated open palm on the base of the tree to feel an endless black hungry void reply to my whisper.

The cold feeling, like losing a large amount of blood, washes over me instantly.

I want to take my hand off, but the visual of the green tendrils being ripped from my flesh and drained into the darkness of the tree keeps me from doing so.

I take a gasp of air as the pull from the endless void gets stronger and stronger, I watch more green threads be torn from my body.

It feels both painful and satisfying at the same time.

While I'm positive I'm losing access to an indescribable power of a higher lifeform, vitality rushes back into my body and mind as my self-regeneration skill finally activates to its full potential again and begins mending my muscles and bones where the green energy is removed.

I can't tell if the entire process takes a single second or a full hour; all I know is when I rip my hand away from the tree and fall on my back to let out a groan, my entire body feels as good as new, and there isn't a single drop of green energy left in my core or flesh.

While I recollect my thoughts, activate enemy detection, and try to figure out where I am and what's going on now that I have a clear mind; a new low-hanging branch grows from the base of the tree near where my hand pressed a moment ago.

On the very end of it, an enormous green fruit forms, holding nearly all of the compressed divine energy that was forcefully ripped out of me.