

Death 2001

Death... and me

Chapter 2001: Preparing the Trap

There was one thing Rean and Roan didn't forget from the previous time they were in the Path of Reincarnation's periphery. That was the fact they couldn't attack others with the intention of causing damage due to the laws of this place. After all, their cultivation was too low for it. However, they could fight with Soul Guiding Power for dead souls, with the stronger one getting the souls.

"Since we can do that, why don't we just stay here near the entrance to the Path of Reincarnation's gate and wait for the other devils to bring the souls to us?" Rean asked Titia back.

Titia was taken aback when she heard that. She couldn't understand what the twins were up to. "Steal the dead souls the other participants bring? That's impossible! The souls they bring here to be released are locked inside their bracelets. Even if your Soul Guiding Power is stronger, you can't force them out of their bracelets."

Rean nodded in agreement. "Yeah, it is impossible."

"Eh?" Titia didn't know what to say anymore. "Then, what are you trying to do?"

Rean smiled in response before saying, "Just wait here and see. Hmm... we might as well sit and cultivate a little. It should take some time before the first guy appears to deliver his souls. Oh, right. Titia, come closer to Doan and me. We need the help of your Light Devil Clan's Light Element."

Titia still didn't like the twins, though she didn't know they were twins, only brothers. In any case, she had always kept some distance away from the two. "Why?"

Rean then brought out a white medallion with several inscriptions on it as he sat next to Roan. "Send your Light Element inside this thing. You need to touch it, though."

Titia narrowed her eyes while looking at Rean and Roan, who sat next to the boundary between the Path of Reincarnation's gate and the surrounding area. Could it be they were planning to throw her inside? If any devil went past that point, they wouldn't be able to come back. Their souls would be forcefully extracted and converted into Soul Energy, later becoming a new soul. Rean and Roan saw it

happen back when they were sent into the Path of Reincarnation. The system, obviously, was what prevented that conversion from happening and preserved their memories and souls.

"Stop wasting time and come closer already. If we wanted to do something to you, we wouldn't need to wait until now." Roan wasn't in the mood to wait for Titia to decide, though.

Titia gritted her teeth and did as Rean asked. In the end, she was ordered by Rui to help the twins as much as she could since Rui knew what they were capable of. For the Light Devil Clan as a whole, nothing was more important than winning this last contest and acquiring the Underworld Relic for the next thousand years. Especially since the war was about to happen during that time.

Back in the city, the High and Elder Devils were watching their participants as well as the others. Naturally, this contest wasn't just used for the Underworld Relic. Many other things for lower powers could be decided with it, so they made good use of this chance.

It went without saying that the Elder Devils' participants were the ones who got most of the attention. That being said, there wasn't a single second where these ones didn't have several eyes over them.

The moment Rean brought out that medallion, many of the devils watching the show noticed it. They also heard how Rean... or Gean... needed the help of Titia's Light Element. That made many of them look at Rui, who kept a stern expression. Poor Rui felt wronged at that point. Even he didn't know what that medallion was about. Not that he would show it on his face, of course.

Titia carefully touched the medallion and noticed that nothing had happened. She then took a deep breath and used her power as a Light Devil to gather the little Light Element available in the environment. With that, the Light Element quickly entered the medallion, making it shine with white light for a moment. In the next second, the light around the three of them bent around, causing the group to completely disappear from plain sight!

Many eyes looked at it in surprise. If they didn't have the formation to track every single participant, even the High and Elder Devils would have said that the twins' group had disappeared. Of course, they knew they were still there thanks to the formation, but no other devil in the Path of Reincarnation's periphery would be able to tell that.

Mephisto couldn't help but ask Rui at that point. "What are your devils planning to do?"

Rui bitterly smiled in response. He knew that everyone thought it was some plan he had come up with. Too bad he had no idea what the twins were planning to do. "Ahem... just wait and see."

Titia was just as surprised back there. She could tell that she was inside some kind of skill that made her invisible to the naked eye. "This medallion... where did you get such a thing?"

Rean laughed in response. "Hahaha! It was quite expensive, if I do say so myself."

Lie! Rean didn't pay a single cent for that thing. In fact, the medallion was completely useless! The inscriptions over it served no purpose whatsoever! Rean was basically using it as an excuse to activate his Light and Divine Sense bending skill. After all, he was supposed to be a normal devil. How could he use Light Element? That way, he could pretend that the one using Light Element was Titia, not him.

Divine Sense was already very limited in the Underworld. With the Divine Sense bending skill, as well as the Light bending skill, Rean's group was truly invisible to other participants. The only way someone could find them was if they got close enough to break through the Divine Sense bending skill's barrier. Naturally, the twins made sure that wouldn't happen.

Around an hour later, the first participant appeared near the Path of Reincarnation's gate. It was Casu from the Sin Clan.

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Chapter 2002: Knowing Dead Souls

Casu wasn't worried about anything in there. No fights could erupt due to the laws, after all. Not at his level of cultivation, at least. Now that he was in front of the Path of Reincarnation's entrance, all he had to do was release the souls he captured, and they would enter the Path of Reincarnation on their own.

However, everyone back in the Meeting Hall was closely watching the scene unfold. None of them could warn Casu that the twins were there even if they wanted to. Of course, it wasn't that they couldn't, but that it was part of the Elder Devils' agreement. Each Elder Devil had a close eye on every participant to prevent them from being helped by their elders outside. In any case, they wanted to see what the twins and Titia were planning.

Casu raised his bracelet, which was filled with dead souls, before using his Divine Energy to release them. Soon, the gems on his bracelet lit up, and many souls began to escape nonstop. Casu didn't need to do anything. The moment they felt the presence of the Path of Reincarnation's gate, they all rushed to it. It's just that they were still somewhat far away since no one could get too close to it if they were still alive.

Seeing the souls disappear in the distance, Casu also noticed the count of souls that he had guided increase. Eventually, the last soul left his bracelet, bringing his soul-guiding score to 137. With that, he faintly smiled and immediately took flight. His two companions were already somewhere else, looking for other places with a high concentration of dead souls to be captured.

Yet, little did Casu know that the souls didn't move even a tenth of the way to the Reincarnation Path when they suddenly stopped and began to struggle. The Elder and High Devils looked at that with wide-open eyes.

"Why did they stop?"

"The gate to the Path of Reincarnation should attract them all."

"But that's not what's happening."

"Look, they changed direction!"

Sure enough, the souls Casu had brought there ignored the Path of Reincarnation's gate and rushed in the direction of the twins' group. Inside the Light and Divine Sense bending area, Rean and Roan were using their Soul Guiding Power and fusing it together!

"Impossible!" The first one to notice it was Eisheta. After all, that was exactly what her group was doing. They were joining their Soul Guiding Powers to create a much stronger one. Her Flata Clan was supposed to be the only one who knew that method. Not only that, it was the first time they even tried it, so how did the twins know that as well?

Rui's mouth twitched a bit, not expecting the twins to be able to do that. Nevertheless, what really surprised him was that the twins could generate a Soul Guiding Power stronger than the power created

by the Path of Reincarnation's entrance. 'No... it's not that they can generate a stronger soul-guiding power. Even an Elder Devil wouldn't be able to do it. Instead, they're much closer to the dead souls Casu released. Since they're so much closer, the dead souls still think their soul-guiding power is stronger. However... they're so close to the Path of Reincarnation's entrance, but they can still generate a soul-guiding power strong enough to trick the souls released there. If I didn't know their cultivation levels, I wouldn't believe that.'

Naturally, since Rui noticed that, so did the other Elder and High Devils. They all looked in Rui's direction, wondering where he had found those two Devils.

Rui, on the other hand, noticed their eyes and brightly smiled at them. "Did you like them? I had to spend a lot to get them to this level, so I'm happy it's paying off now." Naturally, that was a complete lie. He didn't even spend a single Divine Stone on the twins. Though, he wouldn't tell them that.

Back on the twins' side, the souls Casu released quickly entered Roan's bracelet. Only the highest soul count would be valid, so there was no need for Rean to share them with Roan. Soon, Roan's bracelet quickly filled with souls, lighting up the gems around it. Following that, Roan activated his bracelet and released all the souls back. Seeing that the twins' soul-guiding power had disappeared, the souls quickly turned their attention to the Path of Reincarnation's entrance and vanished in the distance.

Roan then looked at his bracelet and saw the count rise to 103. In the end, the twins' soul-guiding power had a limit. 34 of the released souls still decided to go to the Path of Reincarnation instead of flying to the twins' side. Not that it was a problem, of course. There would be many more of them coming in the next three days.

"It's unfortunate that we can't just repeat this process," Rean couldn't help but sigh.

Roan nodded in agreement. "The bracelets can remember which souls had been inside before. That makes sense since each soul, even if dead, is different. There's no such thing as identical souls in this Universe. That prevents any of the participants, as well as the normal devils, from breaking the rules. It's just that probably no one expected us to re-guide the souls released in this area, so we can at least do that once for each participant."

Titia was still shocked, especially how the brothers in front of her talked as if they didn't do anything impressive. 'Just who are you two? How did you do that?' She obviously used a Divine Sense to talk to make sure others couldn't hear.

Rean smiled back in response. 'Oh, that's a secret.'

Titia's expression turned dark in response. She obviously didn't like that answer.

Roan, on the other hand, gave her a clue. 'How well do you know the dead souls?'

'Eh?' Titia was taken aback for a moment. 'They're souls of those who died all around the Universe, that's it.'

Roan shook his head after hearing that. 'If you don't try to understand the souls of the dead, you'll never be able to do what we did. Think about that.'

Rean's eyes lit up as he looked in another direction. 'Hey, another prey has just arrived!'

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Chapter 2003: Why Three Days?

While Titia thought about Roan's words, a newcomer approached from another side. Timboa was the one to come this time with her companions. As mentioned before, her group was the only one other than the twins to be able to fuse their Soul Guiding Power together for a stronger effect. With that said, Timboa's bracelet had many more dead souls, which she quickly released near the Path of Reincarnation's entrance.

Seeing the souls move away, Timboa noticed her own count of gathered souls went up by 216 in a single go. She and her companions brightly smiled and quickly turned around to leave. They could feel they had a huge chance of winning the fifth contest, so they had to be quick.

That was the main reason no one else other than the elders in the meeting hall noticed the twins. That's because the bracelet from those who the twins got the souls from would still count the souls released there. For them, there was simply nothing wrong at all. Everyone 'knew' that once you released the souls in this place, the souls could 'only' go to the Path of Reincarnation... well, not really.

Rean and Roan once again used their Soul Guiding Power together, which surpassed any other devil in the competition, causing 178 dead souls from those 216 to change direction. They all entered Roan's bracelet before Roan released them back. Thanks to that, his bracelet's count also increased. It went without saying that Roan had the highest count now by a huge margin.

Back in the meeting hall, everyone could only pretend that they couldn't see Rui's happy expression. He made sure to show everyone how they had lost... although even he didn't expect it to be that easy. The rules only said that the highest score in the bracelets would count. There was nothing about using other devil's souls. First of all, soul-guiding battles happened every now and then, so what the twins were doing wasn't that much different to start with.

Mephisto obviously had the worst expression. That's because it wouldn't matter how much better Glanvi could be at guiding souls to the Path of Reincarnation. Once he arrived to release them, the twins would capture most of those souls, and Glanvi wouldn't see a thing.

Still, none of them wanted to just give up there and then. They kept watching, hoping that the twins might be using too much strength and wouldn't be able to keep it for long. However, after an entire day of reusing the other participants' dead souls without them knowing, the twins didn't show any signs of fatigue. If anything, they used every free time they had to cultivate. It was obvious they were having a very easy time out there.

"Enough!" Eventually, the first elder devil lost his patience. It was Eisheta of the Flata Clan. "Staying here for three whole days is simply meaningless. Those freaks from the Light Devil Clan have already scored more than enough points, to the point any of our clan members wouldn't be able to reach it in the next two days."

Moloch looked at Fiz through the formation. In his case, it wasn't that bad. That's because, after an entire day, Fiz wasn't anywhere near Timboa, who was second. Let alone the twins. Regardless of what the twins were doing to win the contest, the fact was that Fiz wouldn't win this thing anyway. "I agree. I would rather head back to the Realm of Gods to keep an eye out for the other races there."

Rui obviously had no complaints about it whatsoever. "Suit yourselves. If everyone agrees with you, then I don't mind calling it here. Of course, that will mean my Light Devil Clan has acquired two victories. The Underworld Relic will be in my Light Devil Clan's hand for the next thousand years."

Mephisto held the relic in his hand while he kept a pensive expression. He obviously didn't want to lose the relic at a time like this. But then again, the Underworld Relic couldn't leave the Underworld. It would

be useless to whatever was happening in the Realm of Gods. His clan had benefited quite a lot from it by now as well. What he was more interested in at the moment was the twins themselves. Or, to be more specific, the twins' relation to the Underworld Relic. Only he knew that the twins and the relic Resonated somehow, and he truly wanted to understand why.

Ligren, a High Devil Clan Leader, raised his hand to ask permission to talk. With the Elder Devils there, the High Devils had to be respectful. "Our High Devil Clans are using the contest to decide other matters as well. Is it fine if we continue the contest for the whole three days?"

Mavis nodded at him. "You guys can continue to do whatever you want. I'm going to call Doyis's group back and leave on my own. They wouldn't be able to surpass those two devils anymore, even if they didn't capture a single extra soul."

The High Devils sighed in relief as they focused back on the formation. For them, whatever happened with the Underworld Relic was none of their concern.

Rui then looked at Mephisto. After all, that was the Elder Devil with the Underworld Relic. "So, what do you say? Will you accept that? I can wait all three days to be over if you want."

Mephisto pondered over it for a bit. "I don't mind admitting defeat. However, I want those two devils of yours."

"Ha!" Rui snorted in response. "There's no way I would give them to you. With their talent, they're the future of my Light Devil Clan."

Eisheta couldn't help but intervene. "They're good, but I won't accept this contest anymore if they're here. Unless we change the rules. No, even if they weren't reusing our participants' souls, their Soul Guiding Power alone would definitely give them the victory anyway."

Rui didn't seem too worried. "Don't worry, they won't take part in this anymore. The next contest will start 200 years from now. By then, they would have already surpassed the Void Tempering Realm. They won't be eligible to start with."

"Then I'm fine with whatever." Eisheta was relieved to hear that.

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Chapter 2004: Sharing Information

Mephisto couldn't help but ask. "Where did you find those two?"

"Find?" Rui didn't fall for that. "I told you I had invested a lot in them. There was no such thing as me finding anyone here." It wasn't a total lie. To be more specific, it would be better to say that the twins fell on his lap by sheer coincidence.

Mephisto continued to ponder the issue and finally made a decision. "Alright, continuing with this shit will only waste everyone's time. The High Devils can continue the competition as they see fit. I'm calling Glanvi back. Rui, let's make the transfer."

Rui looked at the other Elder Devils and saw that they also agreed with it. Well, they had to. After all, this contest had been ongoing for countless years. They all knew what would happen if they started to refuse the results. In the past, there had been no lack of strange circumstances that gave victory to some specific clan in specific contests, and this was just one more of those.

Rui approached Mephisto and extended his hand. In exchange, Mephisto did the same thing while holding the Underworld Relic. The two Elder Devils then seemed to create some kind of connection between themselves and the Underworld Relic. After that, the golden light of the Underworld Relic began to intensify, enveloping Rui. At the same time, some golden specks of light came out of Mephisto's body, entering the relic.

The other Elder Devils looked at that with obvious jealousy in their eyes. Some of them had the opportunity to keep the Underworld Relic in the past, so they knew how good it was.

Eventually, the golden light of the Underworld Relic came back to normal as the relic rested on Rui's palm this time. The transfer was complete, with Rui being its new holder. "I can feel its connection with my Devil Core. No wonder everyone wants to be its holder, even if it's for only a thousand years. I feel like I could beat anyone at my level now."

Mephisto nodded in response. "The Underworld Relic attracts the laws of the Underworld to increase its holder's strength. That's something no other item can copy. Well, at least no other item here in the Underworld." Nevertheless, Mephisto warned Rui. "Don't forget. You might become hard to deal with,

but that doesn't mean you can fight all the other Elder Devils on your own. You better not entertain the idea of breaking the rules."

"Hmph!" Rui obviously knew that. "Everyone who tried that is now gone. Not even their souls remained. Not to mention their clans were destroyed in the process as well. Just so you know, I still value my and my clan's lives more than this thing. Of course, I'll use it to increase my clan's power for the next thousand years. Not to mention that I'll also participate in the next five contests to see if I can keep it for another thousand years again."

Mephisto shrugged his shoulders after that. "I did the same, and so did everyone else who held it before. Some succeeded, but most didn't. I simply failed this time, that's all. I'll definitely try again during the next five contests."

Eisheta, Mavis, and the other Elder Devils agreed with Mephisto. They would have done exactly the same thing.

Back in the Path of Reincarnation's periphery, the participants were approached by other devils from their clans, who told them that the competition was over. Most of them were taken aback, not understanding why it ended in just a single day. It was supposed to be three, after all. It was even harder to believe that it was because the winner had already been decided.

Of course, the twins' group was the only exception. Rui's subordinate told them that Roan had won the competition. That was obvious since they would reuse most of the souls being brought to be released. After all, it would have been weird if they didn't. "Well, at least they ended it earlier."

The twins quickly made their way back with everyone. Since they had won, Rui could finally allow them to enter the Swamp of No Return.

While they did that, Mephisto had a Divine Sense conversation with Rui. To be more specific, he decided to talk about the resonance he felt between the relic and the brothers. It's not that he wanted to. Instead, Rui would notice it straight away once he brought the relic in front of the twins, so hiding this information would be useless. He didn't know if Rui already knew about it, but he had to try.

Rui looked back at Mephisto with surprise in his eyes. 'What do you mean resonance? It was you who used it to attack them.'

Mephisto shook his head. 'I didn't. Sure, I went a bit too far in keeping the Underworld Relic, but I paid you back for that attack. However, the thing you saw earlier truly had nothing to do with me. The relic really resonated with those two devils of yours. Only I was able to feel it because I was the holder at that moment. Now that you've become the new holder, you'll definitely be able to feel it as well. I'll ask once again, where did you find those two?'

Rui pondered a bit, not knowing if Mephisto was telling the truth or not. After a moment of thought, he decided to give it a try himself. 'Wait for them to return. If this resonance you told me about really happens, then we can talk about it a bit more.'

Mephisto was satisfied that Rui at least considered that option, especially after he attacked Rui's participants back then. 'Good. Let's keep quiet about it for the moment. We might be up to something here.'

Rui nodded and waited with the other Elder Devils for their participants to return.

Eventually, the meeting hall door opened as the participants entered. Naturally, the twins and Titia were there as well.

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Chapter 2005: Isolated

With everyone there, the Elder Devils finally announced the results. "The Light Devil Clan has won the contest."

Glanvi, Timboa, and the other participants were still puzzled, so they had to ask. "How's that possible? Only one day has passed so far. We can't just accept losing like that. This is ridiculous!"

In response, they all received Divine Sense Messages from their clans, showing everything that happened during the first day of competition. In the end, they all looked at Rean and Roan, feeling like the two had cheated. But then again, it would be a lie if they said they wouldn't have done the same thing if they had the power to. The twins' Soul Guiding Power was just too strong. Even if they didn't stay put at the entrance to the Path of Reincarnation and reused the dead souls, they still would have most likely won anyway.

In any case, the Elder Devils had already accepted the results. Not to mention that Rui guaranteed the twins wouldn't be back for the next competition. After all, Void Tempering Realm experts could live up to 9000 years, so if they simply stopped cultivating at all, they could be present for the next eight ones at least.

Rui and Mephisto weren't focusing too much on that, though. Mephisto had already passed the Underworld Relic to Rui, so what remained now was for Rui to confirm his suspicions about the two brothers. 'Gean and Doan are here, bring the Relic out and check it yourself.'

With that, Rui nodded and pulled the Underworld Relic out of his own Pocket Dimensional Realm. If Mephisto was right, the twins should experience the same thing as before. Above all, he should be able to feel the resonance between the twins and the Relic that Mephisto talked about. However...

"Oh! So Elder Rui has already received the Underworld Relic, huh?" Rean suddenly asked Rui with a smile on his face.

Roan, on the other hand, just sent Rui a Divine Sene Message. 'We kept our part of the deal, so we want to enter the Swamp of No Return.'

Rui looked at the twins, who didn't seem to be feeling any pain at all. Let alone that, the Underworld Relic didn't seem to have any reaction to the twins' presence. Whatever happened before was definitely not happening now.

Rui then looked at Mephisto with a dark expression. 'So it was really you who attacked them with the Relic's power, huh?'

Naturally, Mephisto was taken aback by that. Although he passed the Relic to Rui, remnants of the connection he had to it still remained. Although this connection would disappear after a few days, it was enough to tell that the Relic really wasn't reacting to the twins' presence at all. That only made it look like the previous event was caused by him. 'No, that's not right! They must have done something while they were in the Path of Reincarnation's periphery.'

'Is that so?' Rui asked back, not believing Mephisto's words at all. 'That sounds awfully convenient, don't you think?'

Mephisto insisted. 'Think about it! I had no reason to tell you the truth about the resonance. Nevertheless, I willingly did so to find out why a connection exists between the Relic and those two guys. The Relic is in your hands already, right?'

Rui shrugged his shoulders. 'Perhaps that was simply you trying to make sure I wouldn't bring these two brothers to the Soul Guiding Contest anymore. Whatever! Since I can't verify your words, I'll end the matter here. You better not try to lay your hands on my clan's pupils anymore. I'm pretty sure no one will complain if I use the Relic's power to beat you up if you try to pull something like that again.'

Unsurprisingly, Mephisto was fuming inside. Unfortunately, he couldn't do anything about it at the moment. At the very least, not with all the Elder Devils present. Even if Rui had the Relic, it was his first time keeping ownership of it. Mephisto was pretty confident that he could deal with Rui if he acted quickly. But then again, that would only cause the other Elder Devils to turn against him.

At the same time, Rean and Roan were checking things with Sister Orb. 'How is it, Sister Orb? Is everything okay?'

[Don't worry. After the previous system problem, the system created a blockage that isolated the empty section of the system that caused the error.]

"That's to say that the Underworld Relic is truly part of the Soul Gem System, right?" Celis asked from inside the Dimensional Realm.

Sister Orb agreed. [Correct. Even I didn't know about it before the error. But now we do know the system isn't complete. Gem's Soul is still sleeping, so I can't ask him either. All the system can do for now is separate the lacking area from the system itself.]

"That pretty much confirms it," said Luan, who was obviously there as well. "Father, Uncle, that Underworld Relic has to be another one of the fourteen fragments of the Universe's Foundation. Sister Orb herself is most likely another one."

Rean, Roan, Celis, and Kentucky nodded in response. Of course, none of them had any intention of trying to get it from Rui. The Underworld Relic was literally the Underworld's most desired treasure. Not to mention that all Elder Devils were able to tell where it was at all times. Without a proper plan or the

necessary strength to enact their plan, taking it away from Rui was simply impossible. First of all, by the time they got strong enough to contest for it, Rui probably wouldn't be its holder anymore.

Roan decided to change their focus. 'Let's leave it at that. We now know the location of twelve of the fourteen fragments. That's enough for the moment. What we need to do now is see if Rui will bring us to the Swamp of No Return or not.'

The Elder Devils didn't stay in the meeting hall for much longer. After all, since the contest was over, none of them wanted to be there anymore. Only the High Devils stayed behind as they had their own things to decide using the contest. Naturally, Rui also took his clan members and left, heading straight back to the Light Devil Clan.

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Chapter 2006: Very Well

As Rui returned to the clan estate with his clan members, he couldn't help but glance at the twins. Sure, he was certain that what happened in the meeting hall was something Mephisto did. However, he would be lying if he said Mephisto's words didn't bother him. After all, the brothers had been a mystery to him ever since they first appeared. The only thing that made him relax was the fact that he knew the whole story of how they ended up in his clan.

The journey didn't last long with Rui's cultivation. Before they knew it, space opened once again, and Rui brought everyone into the Light Devil Clan. There, all the elders were waiting in the hall with excited expressions. They had received the Thoughts Transmission Talisman with the results, and all of them wanted to see the Underworld Relic that would be with the clan for the next thousand years, perhaps more if they won the majority of the contests again.

"Rui!"

"Clan Master!"

"Congratulations!"

"Titia, you did great!"

"Our Light Devil Clan's power will rise!"

Rui nodded at everyone as he walked through the hall with the twins' group. Eventually, he sat once more on the Clan Master's seat before bringing out the Underworld Relic for everyone to see. Immediately, everyone who was part of the Light Devil Clan felt a connection with the item. To them, it was as if it was directly supporting their very beings.

"With this, I want everyone in the Light Devil Clan to focus on cultivation and training for the next thousand years. The help it gives to one's cultivation progress is tremendous, and you know that from the Mephisto Clan's power," said Rui. "Let's be honest. The chances of winning most of the contests during the next thousand years are extremely low. So, don't let this opportunity fall under your grasp. I'm basically the only one here who can't do the same since I'm already at the peak of the realm. Nevertheless, it will also serve as a great item to help protect the clan."

Hearing those words, everyone cheered in excitement until someone finally looked back at Titia and the twins. "Clan Master, they did a huge service to our Light Devil Clan. They must be rewarded!"

Titia felt somewhat unworthy of all that praise. Other than using her Light Element in that item Rean was holding, she did basically nothing during the contest.

Rean noticed that, though. 'You are a devil, so take everything you can while you can. I don't know if you feel you were lucky to have been with us there or not. In any case, luck is also part of one's strength. Don't throw the opportunity away.'

Titia looked at Rean, or Gean... who wasn't really looking at her. A moment later, she steeled her resolve and nodded. Only an idiot would let this chance go by.

Rui, in the midst of all the clamor, stood up from his chair to talk. "Alright, alright! These three will be properly rewarded for their efforts."

Roan didn't seem to care about all of that. "There is only one thing Gean and I want, and you know what it is."

In response, the devils in the hall immediately went silent. After all, they were there when Fagund brought the twins with him. They made it clear they wanted to enter the Swamp of No Return if they won the Soul Guiding Contest for the Light Devil Clan. However, was it really fine? They all saw through the Clan Master's Divine Sense message how the twins performed in the competition. They were talented to the point that no one in the clan could match them at their cultivation level. To simply let them go like that...

Tapir, surprisingly, was the first one to raise his voice. Everyone knew how much Tapir hated the normal devils, after all. "You should stay. If you truly join the Light Devil Clan, you will also benefit from the Underworld Relic. Forget about entering that place. You will only be throwing your lives away."

Losferu looked at Tapir in shock. "Weren't you the one who wanted them to be gone the most? You know, if they're this talented, that means they've devoured quite a lot of living souls."

Tapir sighed in response. "Even if I don't like it, I can't deny the advantages they could bring to the Light Devil Clan in the future. More than my feelings, I will always consider the clan's needs first."

Rean and Roan looked at each other but shook their heads. "Thank you for the offer, but we have already made our choice."

Rui was still thinking about what Mephisto talked about. Eventually, he decided to ask it directly in front of everyone. "Do you have any connection with the Underworld Relic?"

Such a question took everyone aback. Nevertheless, Rui raised his hand, showing that he would talk about it later.

Rean crossed his arms for a moment while he discussed that with Roan. 'So he couldn't hold his curiosity back in the end, huh?'

Roan nodded. 'Mephisto lost the Underworld Relic, so it's to be expected that he would try something else. Seems like he told Rui a few things. However, it doesn't seem like Rui believes his words completely, or he wouldn't even try to ask. He would simply capture us straight away and lock us down.'

'That's how important the Underworld Relic is for the Underworld Realm, after all,' Rean added.

With that, Rean looked back at Rui. "That's not a real question, is it?"

"What do you mean?" Rui asked back. "I think the question was pretty straightforward."

In response, Rean shook his head. "That's not the problem. The problem is whether you believe us or not. Very well, let's give it a shot. We have nothing to do with the Underworld Relic. What do you think? Do you believe my words?"

While everyone had puzzled expressions, Rui narrowed his eyes. Hearing Rean's words, he had to admit his question was useless. It all depended on what he believed at that moment. "Sigh... Swamp of No Return, right? Very well..."

Death... and me

Chapter 2007: Who Are You?

"Really?!" Rean was taken aback for a moment. After hearing Rui's inquiry about their connection to the Underworld Relic, he thought Rui would try to hold them captive until he was satisfied. "That was way simpler than I thought."

"Why?" Rui glanced back at Rean.

Rean shrugged his shoulders in response. "Well, the Underworld Relic is such an important item for our devil races, no? If you thought we had some connection with it, then it wouldn't have been strange if you kept us locked or something like that."

Tapir, who was listening to everything so far, couldn't help but ask the question in everyone's minds. "Clan Master, what is he talking about?"

Rui thought for a moment as he looked at the elders in the room. After a bit of pondering, he eventually decided to tell them. "After Mephisto passed the Underworld Relic to me, he also told me that the Relic had reacted to these brothers. Some kind of resonance, according to him. At that time, I didn't believe it since Gean and Doan had been attacked by Mephisto in the first place. Seeing the pain they had gone through, I thought it was just Mephisto's doing once again."

Rui then narrated the rest of the story, telling them how nothing happened the second time the twins saw the Relic. It's just that at that time, Rui was the owner, not Mephisto.

"This..." Tapir narrowed his eyes for a moment. "They only suffered when Mephisto was the owner. Now that Clan Master has it, nothing happened. It does sound like an attack made by Mephisto using the Underworld Relic."

Fagund agreed with him. "I think so too. He tries to kill our members when he finds out their soul-guiding strength. Then, that thing happens. It feels a lot like he's messing around with us."

Rui nodded. "That's the conclusion I reached as well. But then again, I don't see what he had to gain from this resonance story."

Roan decided that it was better to hurry things up. "Whether you guys believe Mephisto or not doesn't matter. The point here is that we upheld our part of the deal. Can we go to the Swamp of No Return already?"

Hearing that, the meeting hall went silent. Rui began to receive quite a few Divine Sense messages, asking him to try and find a reason to keep the twins. But then again, forcing them to join the Light Devil Clan wouldn't be an option. After all, what would they have to gain if they couldn't use their strength and talent? That's why Rui had decided to keep a good relationship with the twins instead. Their Light Devil Clan had always been different than the other devils, after all.

"Are you sure you don't want to join our Light Devil Clan? You truly have a lot to gain from it. Our resources aren't that much different from the other Elder Devil clans in the Underworld, you know?" With that, he asked one more time.

Fagund, who had known the twins since the Realm of Gods, also insisted. "He is right, Gean, Doan. You know I'm the next Light Devil Clan leader. I can say with certainty that we'll treat you very well, even when Clan Master steps down for me."

"You brat, that will still take many years." Rui got a little angry as Fagund's words made him feel old.

Surprisingly, Rean and Roan still shook their heads. "We have our reasons to go. However, it is a fact that the Light Devil Clan treated us well. If there comes a day you need our help, we don't mind coming to your aid. That's the most we can do for now." That wasn't a lie. Until this point, the Light Devil Clan did everything they said they would.

Seeing that the twins were adamant, Rui finally decided to leave with them. "Okay. Only the Elder Devils will be able to bring you inside the barrier surrounding the Swamp of No Return, so I'll bring you there myself. As I mentioned before, there's a formation stopping the swamp from expanding, so it isn't easy to get inside. I still think you two are just asking for your deaths, though."

The other elders tried to convince Rui once again, but he just raised his hand. "I've made up my mind. We're different from the other devil clans. As the connection between Heaven and the Underworld, our clan must stay true to our words. They got us the Underworld Relic, so I will get them to the swamp. That's all."

Soon after, Rui used his Spatial Powers to grab the twins once again. "I don't want to waste my time anymore, so we're leaving straight away. Is that fine with you two?"

Rean and Roan couldn't ask for more. "Of course! Let's go there!"

Fagund sighed in response before bidding his farewells. "I hope to see you again. Thanks for everything."

The twins nodded, and finally, Rui opened a breach in space, disappearing inside with the twins.

The elders in the hall began to discuss what had just happened straight away. As for Fagund, he just shook his head and decided to leave. However, it was then that he saw that Titia was still there. Not only that, she seemed to be deeply pondering over something. "Is everything okay?" Yet, it didn't seem she heard Fagund's words. Without much choice, Fagund touched her shoulder, catching her attention.

"Ah!" Titia jolted for a moment. Only then did she notice Fagund there. It's just that Rean and Roan were now gone. "W-Where are those brothers?"

Fagund looked at her with a weird expression. "They just left with the Clan Master. It happened right in front of your eyes. Didn't you see it?"

"I..." Titia truly didn't. That's because all her focus was on her hand.

Fagund noticed that she held a medallion in her hand. "This... Isn't this that medallion that hid your group in the competition? The one that can make you invisible to the eye and Divine Sense?"

Titia nodded in response. "Yes... Gean gave it to me while you were talking. He said it was a gift."

Fagund, obviously, became very interested in it. After all, it could use their Light Element, which they were good at. "Nice, perhaps we can reproduce it here in the clan. It would be of great use during the next competitions to decide the following Underworld Relic holder."

Titia bitterly smiled after hearing that. "I don't think it'll be of much use, though."

"Why is that?" Naturally, Fagund found her words strange.

Titia then passed the medallion to Fagund. "Try to infuse your Light Element in it."

Fagund nodded and did as Titia asked. In theory, it should generate concealment just like the one that happened in the competition. However... "This..."

The thing was, nothing happened at all. No, to be more precise, something did happen. The medallion lit up... and that was basically it. "What's the meaning of this?"

Titia finally told Fagund what she had been thinking all this time. "I'm absolutely sure this is the medallion Rean used in the competition. However, it has no concealment abilities at all."

"That's impossible!" Fagund refused to believe it. "I saw how the Light Element creat-" It was then that Fagund understood what Titia was trying to say. "The one who used Light Element was not the medallion..."

Titia nodded. "Indeed. The one who used that Light Element ability was Gean. Gean and Doan can also use Light Element, just like us, Light Devils. Or so I think..."

After that, Fagund looked back at where the twins had disappeared with Rui. "Just... who are you?"

Death... and me

Chapter 2008: The Swamp

As Rui traveled through the space with the twins, Roan used their Soul Connection to complain. 'What if that girl had opened her mouth?'

'Don't worry.' Rean didn't seem too worried. 'She'll definitely understand that the Light Element used for the concealment came from me. However, she won't cause us any trouble. She'll probably spend a lot more time thinking about what you said about souls. Anyway, that's about it.'

Roan glanced at him for a moment but didn't say anything else. Just the fact that Rui kept his word and brought them to the Swamp of No Return was already a testament to the Light Devil Clan's trust.

Suddenly, another breach in space opened ahead of them as they stepped out. The twins looked around but couldn't see anything. In front of them was nothing more than an endless patch of black and dark land, which was very common in the Underworld. "Where is the swamp?"

Rui faintly smiled and flew forward. It was then that he stopped and made a motion with his hand. Right in front of the twins, an invisible barrier split apart, causing a huge amount of Dark Element to blast against their faces.

However, it wasn't just the Dark Element. Roan could feel that the decaying properties of the Dark Element were much, much more intense. It was to the point that even some weaker devils wouldn't be able to resist it. Of course, Roan was the epitome of Dark Element, and Rean could use it, so it didn't affect them.

Rui jumped inside the breach, which closed behind it a few seconds later. From the looks of it, it had an auto-recovery feature that repaired any breaches made to it. Rui ignored that, though. "Look, that's what you've been looking for."

In response, Rean and Roan paid attention to the front once again and were finally able to see the swamp. It was obvious that the barrier impeding it from expanding also had some concealment abilities. This time, however, what they saw was the swamp that extended as far as their eyes could see.

'How is it, Sister Orb?' Rean asked her straight away. 'Can you feel the fragment?'

Sister Orb checked as Rean asked. [Not really, unfortunately.]

'Does that mean the swamp doesn't have one of the fragments?' Roan asked back.

[That's not it. I definitely believe what causes the swamp to expand is the power of the fragment. But because of that, that means we're probably incredibly far away from it. We're so far that the system can't detect it from this distance. One thing is sure, though. I can feel the power of space acting weirdly in this place. It seems to have been mixed with the Dark Element and its higher decaying power.]

'Mixed?' Rean was surprised to hear that. 'You mean like what experts at the Elemental Space Realm can do?' That thought reminded Rean of the first being they met capable of doing it, the Salamander back in the Lost Star Realm. They had met a few others after that too. However, this place was doing the fusion on its own instead of someone doing it with their cultivation.

[More or less. It's just that since a Fragment of the Universe is involved, it's causing the expansion of this swamp. In other words, you could say that what the fragment is doing isn't exactly the same as those at the Elemental Space Realm and above do. Of course, I might be wrong here. Also... I can feel that there's something more, but I can't understand it yet. I'll tell you when I find out.]

'That's enough for a start,' Roan replied.

Rui obviously didn't know that the twins were talking to Sister Orb. Instead, he tried to convince them not to head in. "This is as far as I will carry you. If I go further than this, there's a chance that even I will be lost in this place. It wasn't a joke when I said that even an Elder Devil was lost in this swamp. I recommend you give up on the idea and come back with me instead."

Rean shook his head in response. "It's fine, Senior Rui. This is exactly the place we wanted to come to. There's no better place to test our abilities. If we can't escape in the end, then that's it."

Rui looked at him, not believing his words at all. "You don't really think I buy your 'testing our abilities' bullshit, right? You're definitely here for some other reason."

Rean shrugged his shoulders in response. "That's up for senior Rui to decide, not us. We'll still head inside unless senior decides to stop us here by force."

Rui narrowed his eyes for a moment but shook his head in the end. "I'm not a babysitter. If you want to die, then, by all means, go ahead. In the end, this payment of yours cost me nothing, and you got me the Underworld Relic, so it was worth it." Rui then turned around but stopped a second later. "Here, take this."

It was then that Rean and Roan received a glowing Golden Thoughts Transmission Talisman. Seeing that they caught the talismans, Rui continued. "Tch... in the end, I truly don't like the idea of receiving something for such a low price. In the future, you can use the talisman to contact the Light Devil Clan. As long as your request isn't anything absurd, I'll have the clan help you with it."

With that, Rean and Roan immediately sent the talismans into the Soul Gem Dimensional Realm. As long as the talisman was there, it couldn't be used for tracking. Just to be on the safe side.

Lastly, Rui explained something else. "As for how you can come out, just walk through the barrier. It was made to stop the swamp's expansion, but it won't stop you from coming out."

With that, Rui moved in the barrier's direction and passed right through it. The wall truly did nothing to him.

Rean smiled and looked back in the swamp's direction. "Well then, shall we go?"

Roan nodded in agreement. "It was about time already."

Vup, vup...

And just like that, the twins dashed into the Swamp of No Return.

Death... and me

Chapter 2009: Frog

The twins looked behind as the barrier separating the swamp and the outside faded in the distance. They were planning to simply fly far away enough from the barrier until they were sure that no one was watching them.

'How is it?' Roan asked Rean. 'Can you feel anything?'

Rean shook his head in response. 'No. After Rui left the swamp through the barrier, his Divine Sense completely disappeared.' He also took the chance to ask Sister Orb. 'Can you feel any kind of tracker in those talismans or on our body, Sister Orb?'

[It doesn't seem like it. These Long Distance Thoughts Transmission Talismans are truly just that. As for any other kind of formation capable of tracking you two, I can't feel any.]

Roan nodded and continued to move. 'Let's fly a little further, and then we can discuss what t-'

However, before he could finish his words, the twins felt the power of space contract around them. To be more specific, it began to turn dense. Because of that, the twins were forced to lose altitude as they couldn't fight against it.

Thud, thud...

Eventually, they landed on the top of one of the many old trees in the swamp, trying to avoid falling into the water. Only then did the space around them loosen up, although it was still very present. "Seems like flying is out of the question..."

Roan tried to use his own Spatial Power to counteract the effects of the denser space above him. Unfortunately, when he tried to do it, the area around the location he focused on seemed to receive the help of the surroundings, fighting against what he was doing. A few moments later, Roan gave up as he was starting to feel tired. "Can't say I'm surprised that flight is restricted. Then again, I didn't expect it would be the space itself that would force us into this condition."

[Indeed. So far, all the areas you entered that prevented flight just happened to be that way due to formations. This time, however, I can't feel the presence of any formation whatsoever. It's just how this place works.]

With that, the twins stayed on the top of the tree, gazing into the distance.

blub, blub, blub...

Little did they notice, but the water below the tree began to bubble. It was completely dark under its surface, so it wasn't something easy to notice anyway.

Shua!

It was then that the water split apart as a huge creature pounced at Rean, who was closer among the two.

"What?!" Rean was taken aback by that. He didn't stop using his Divine Sense even for a moment, but he still didn't notice something that big was so close to him.

In response, Rean immediately jumped away from the branch he was standing on, trying to open some distance from the creature. With that, he got a better look at the creature. It was something similar to a frog, although it had scales on its back and five eyes. Seeing that Rean tried to escape, it opened its mouth as its tongue soon shot in Rean's direction.

Rean, naturally, dodged straight away... or so he tried. Unfortunately, the frog seemed to be able to control space as well. Surprisingly, it contracted the space around Rean, which made it difficult for Rean to change direction.

'Life Style, Enhancement!'

'Death Style, Shadow Bind!'

Rean then used the strength of his Star Body in conjunction with his Enhancement ability to forcefully break away from that situation. At the same time, he used Roan's Shadow Bind to latch around the frog's tongue, reducing its speed.

Unfortunately, the frog used the current situation to its advantage. Since Shadow Bind firmly held onto its tongue, the frog tried to retract the tongue, which instead launched its body even faster in Rean's direction. As soon as its mouth reached the point where its tongue was being held, the frog bit on it, breaking Shadow Bind while keeping the speed earned by its action.

However, Rean wouldn't just look at it as the frog flew in his direction. His Black Star was already in his hand as he retaliated against the frog.

'Life Fire, First Form, Flame Emperor Slash!'

Light and Fire Element fused together as Rean's sword released a wave of burning white fire in the frog's direction.

The frog's eyes, which seemed so determined a moment ago, showed a hint of fear as it immediately tried to dodge the attack. Unfortunately for it, its momentum was too great that not even its control over space was faster enough to avoid being hit.

Swish!

Croaaaaaaa!

The frog let out a scream of pain after Rean's attack hit the back of its body. Although it didn't have enough time to completely avoid the attack, its power over space wasn't small, so it still succeeded in rotating its body so that it was hit on the scales on its back.

The Dark Element inside the frog's body was even thicker than the Dark Element in the surroundings. It would usually be a good thing as the environment would give it a huge advantage. Unfortunately, it met one of the almost nonexistent Light Element users in the entire Underworld. It went without saying that

Rean's Light Element rampaged against the frog's Dark Element, only exacerbating the damage of the attack.

Rean didn't simply watch as the frog screamed. Taking advantage of the frog's plight, he changed direction and immediately attacked the frog from the side, using the trees' branches to move.

'Life Fire, Fourth Form, Light Piercing Bomb!'

Soon, a piercing ray of light and fire hit the frog from below, where there were no scales. From inside, the energy of the attack grew, exploding right after.

Boom!

The Dark Element inside the frog's body only helped Rean's Light Element cause even more damage, which gave the frog a nearly fatal injury.

With that, the frog immediately gave up on the idea of continuing its assault. It knew it had selected the wrong target and dove into the swamp once again to flee.

Rean looked at that but didn't try to stop it.

Splash!

The frog then disappeared under the swamp water, making the surroundings quiet once more.

"Hey, couldn't you give me a hand?" Rean then looked at Roan, slightly angry.

"I wanted to, but there was another guy eager to take action the moment I let my guard down," said Roan as he looked at a specific point in the water.

Blub, blub...

Only then did Rean see a pair of red eyes poking out of the water a few tens of meters away.

Seeing that both Rean and Roan knew about its existence, the eyes dove back into the dark swamp water. It gave up on its idea of attacking the twins after seeing what happened to the frog a moment earlier.

Rean sighed after seeing that. "We're still on the outskirts of the swamp, but that frog was already as strong as an average Middle Stage Void Tempering Realm cultivator."

Roan came down and landed on the same branch as Rean. "It's not like we didn't expect it to be a walk in the park anyway."

"That's true." Rean knew that. "So, what now?"

Vup!

A second later, Luan appeared on Rean and Roan's side. "What else? Luan, we're counting on your eyes from now on."

Luan couldn't hold his excitement. "Leave it to me, father!"

Death... and me

Chapter 2010: Warp

Luan immediately used his eyes' ability to look around the region, only to be surprised by what he saw. "Impressive... this is the first time I've seen this." In front of him, space flowed outwards like a stream. As long as no one was manipulating it, the space Luan's eyes saw was usually static. Yet, space here kept moving nonstop.

"Wait!" Luan narrowed his eyes, trying to see the flow of space better. Eventually, he noticed something strange. "Father, throw something as far as you can. Use a Divine Stone, if possible. Also, throw it in that direction, please." With that, Luan pointed his finger in the direction the flow of space was coming from.

Roan looked at him for a second. "Throw the Divine Stone back from where we came?"

Luan looked at Roan and shook his head. "No. You might think that way, but in fact, you didn't come from there. That direction is further inside the swamp."

Roan was taken aback for a moment but quickly understood. Simply put, this place confused one's sense of direction. That was probably another reason why no one came back from this place, although it was not the only one. In the end, he nodded his head. He quickly took out a Rank Three Divine Stone from the Dimensional Realm before throwing it out using all his strength. The stone shot into the distance like a shooting star, creating a streaking sound on its way.

Luan observed it very closely and confirmed his suspicions. "I knew it... Father, the space in this place is affecting time."

"Affecting time?" Rean and Roan had puzzled expressions. "Were your eyes able to see time as well?"

In response, Luan quickly shook his head. "Time isn't something you can see. Even my eyes aren't capable of such a thing. However, I can see how it affects space."

[So that's what it was!] Sister Orb's voice quickly echoed outside in response. [I told you something was different in this place, but I couldn't put my hand on it. The time here is warped.]

Luan nodded in agreement. "I can't tell if it's the space that's causing time to change or if it's the time that causes space to flow. Nonetheless, I can guarantee that time is being affected. When father threw the stone, I checked its surroundings as it traveled through the flow of space. The change was pretty much unnoticeable. Definitely not something one would notice with the normal naked eye. However, it was different in front of my eyes. The further the Divine Stone went, the faster it reached its maximum velocity before falling far away."

Roan immediately understood what that meant. "You're saying that the stone ended up falling into the swamp before it should have, right? Are you sure it wasn't due to the environment, like the wind or something else?"

Luan nodded. "Father knows that my eyes can see the elements. If such a thing was the reason for it, I would have already seen it. But that wasn't the case. The elements around the Divine Stone were acting as normally as they could. It's just that Dark Element is very, very concentrated. Though, it should have no implication on how fast the Divine Stone reached its final momentum. I'm certain about it, father. If we keep moving forward, time will accelerate around us."

[He's correct.] Sister Orb agreed with Luan. [It's not like you haven't seen this kind of effect before. If a simple natural formation can cause such a change, why wouldn't a fragment of the Universe's foundation? Of course, I'm not sure if it's the fragment that's causing it, but you get the idea.]

Roan crossed his arms and closed his eyes for a moment to ponder over it. "So, the further we move, the slower the time outside the swamp will seem to us."

Luan nodded in response. "Yes, father."

"Can you tell how much the difference is at the moment?" Rean took the opportunity to ask.

Luan pondered about the normal environment outside and the place they were in at the moment. "It's very hard to say since the change is minute, even over great distances. At the moment, I would say that the time in where we are at that moment is no more than a thousandth faster compared to outside."

"Just a thousandth?" Rean was surprised to hear that. "If so, the change won't be anything scary."

[That's not it.] Sister Orb intervened. [Now that Luan dispelled my doubts, I can tell you that the effect will only multiply from now on.]

Luan confirmed Sister Orb's words. "That's correct. At least, that's how it felt when I looked at the Divine Stone father threw a moment ago. It's pretty much meaningless at the moment, but it won't be for much longer. Also, the further we go, the harder it'll be for me to tell how much faster we move through time. I won't be able to tell if we're two, three, ten, or a hundred times faster. I just know that it will happen."

"Forget it." In the end, Roan decided to take the opportunity. "Since that's the case, we might as well make good use of it. Regardless of the time warp, we need to go in to retrieve the fragment. At least things wouldn't have changed much by the time we come out of the swamp."

Rean shrugged his shoulders in response. "And here I thought that the Floating Island of Time would be the place where something like this would happen." They knew that the Floating Island of Time had a fragment as well. It was also the place where Kentucky's race lived.

"Now that I think about it, Senior Rui said that no one that went further into the swamp had ever returned, didn't he?" Rean remembered Rui's words. "Even an Elder Devil had disappeared. Could it be that they didn't really disappear? Perhaps the time difference was so different that those who went further inside didn't feel like they spent that much time."

"That's a possibility." Roan agreed with Rean. "But we also saw that this isn't exactly a walk in the park either, so they might be dead as well. Though, they could also be lost."

Luan nodded. "Indeed. Without something like my eyes to guide us, I wouldn't be surprised if others simply couldn't find the way back."

Roan then covered Luan with his Divine Energy and pulled him to his side. "Alright, Luan. We need to reach the source of this phenomenon. Lead the way."

"Yes, father!"