

R Cultivator 166

Chapter 166: The Rising Labyrinth

"Astrid!" Tyler shouted. He rushed towards her, only to be stopped by Lutz, who stood between him and the princess.

"Don't worry, she's not dead... yet," Lutz said, his tone eerily calm. The crystal-clear knife protruding from Astrid's chest shimmered faintly, its unnatural glow confirming Lutz's words. There was no blood, but she lay there as if frozen in time, her body motionless, her eyes shut.

Lutz gently laid her down on the ground, turning to face Tyler with an unreadable expression. "How did you figure out it was me?" he asked, his voice filled with genuine curiosity.

Tyler didn't answer. His gaze remained locked on Astrid's still form. To confirm whether she was really alive or dead.

Seeing Tyler's silence, Lutz sighed. "Very well, then. A trade for information." He smirked, his eyes gleaming with malice. "The only way to save her is to find her... inside the Labyrinth."

Before Tyler could react, Lutz paused and tilted his head, as if listening to something distant. "Looks like my time is up," he murmured, a wicked smile playing on his lips. "I'll be waiting for your answer... inside."

Suddenly, the ground beneath them rumbled violently. The entire castle shook, followed by the unmistakable roar of stone grinding against stone. Tyler's eyes widened as the quake intensified, sending people running in panic. The shaking wasn't limited to the castle; it spread across the entire island, growing in intensity.

Outside, the world began to shift. The once calm sea churned violently, massive waves rising higher and higher, crashing against the shores. Buildings crumbled, warriors and mages alike scrambling to protect each other amidst the chaos. The ground splintered, and from deep within the earth, something ancient stirred.

Towering walls, colossal in size, began to rise from the earth, encircling the entire capital. The labyrinth wasn't just surfacing—it was enveloping everything, from the castle to the surrounding seas.

"The Labyrinth is surfacing!" Captain Silver Eye shouted, standing on the deck of his ship, his eyes wide with excitement. His crew, along with other pirate ships scattered across the water, could only watch in disbelief as the massive structure, bigger than any they had ever seen, rose from the depths.

The labyrinth was unlike anything they had imagined. Its walls, the size of mountains, stretched upwards, casting dark shadows over the entire capital. The very sky seemed to be swallowed by its emergence. It was a maze of ancient stone, with paths and corridors winding up and down, trapping the kingdom within its grasp.

Tyler felt the weight of the air change. The sky, once open, was now enclosed, sealed off by the rising labyrinth walls. The capital and its people were imprisoned within this colossal maze, and somewhere deep inside, Astrid's life was slipping away.

The Labyrinth had surfaced. The game had begun.

The world blurred around Tyler, his vision distorting as the violent shaking of the ground ceased all at once. When his surroundings solidified, he found himself standing alone in a narrow stone corridor. The walls of the labyrinth stretched up high, blocking out any view of the sky, while twisted vines and eerie symbols etched into the stone radiated an ominous energy.

Tyler immediately activated the Phantom mask. As the familiar sensation of power surged through him, he transformed into the infamous Phantom Blackwood. His movements became lighter, his senses sharpened, and the shadows around him seemed to cling to his figure like a second skin. The labyrinth itself felt more suffocating now, but Tyler felt he was one with darkness.

He scanned the walls. There was no clear path, and the winding corridors all looked the same. His mind raced, remembering Lutz's cryptic words: *"Find her inside the Labyrinth."*

Meanwhile, in the very heart of the labyrinth, Lutz strode confidently through a grand chamber as if he had walked its paths many times before. The room was vast, its walls inscribed with ancient runes that pulsed with a strange light. At its center, two figures floated—one unconscious, the other barely clinging to life.

Astrid's body hovered in mid-air, the crystal knife still embedded in her chest. Her face was pale, her breathing faint. On the opposite side, the King of Rosefall floated as well, bound by invisible chains, his face contorted in a mixture of pain and fear.

Lutz smirked as he approached. He held his staff aloft, the tip glowing with a faint blue light. He muttered something under his breath, and the runes on the walls responded, lighting up brighter. A strange hum filled the air as if the labyrinth itself was coming alive.

Suddenly, a group of pirates, who had also been teleported into the labyrinth, stumbled into the chamber. Their eyes widened as they saw Lutz standing there, unguarded, with a staff that glowed with immense power. Greed lit up their faces, and without a word, they charged at him, weapons drawn, ready to rob him of whatever treasures he might carry.

Lutz didn't even turn his head. With a casual flick of his wrist, water splashed out of thin air, enveloping the pirates in large, swirling bubbles. Trapped inside, the pirates clawed at the surface of the bubbles, their eyes wide with panic as they struggled to breathe. Their weapons dropped, and they flailed helplessly, their movements growing weaker with each passing second.

"Fools," Lutz muttered, watching as life drained from their eyes. With another wave of his staff, the bubbles burst, and the pirates collapsed to the ground, their bodies lifeless.

He turned back to Astrid and the King, a satisfied smile on his face. "It won't be long now..."

Lily, now transformed into *Temptress Blackwood*, grinned beneath her mask as she assessed the situation. The labyrinth around her seemed almost alive with its thick canopy of twisted branches and towering trees. The temple in the distance loomed large, its ancient stone walls half-covered in moss and vines. The only way across was through the trees, but before she could plan her next move, the familiar sultry voice of Isadora Nightkiss cut through the air.

"Wow, wow... Look who's here."

Lily turned, her eyes narrowing beneath the mask. The *Manhunter* herself, Isadora, stood confidently with her hand on her hip, exuding danger and beauty in equal measure.

"Looks like you've got company," Lily remarked with an amused smirk, her gaze drifting toward the approaching Federation soldiers, their dark uniforms standing out starkly against the lush greenery of the labyrinth's forest.

Isadora glanced back and let out a frustrated sigh. "Tsk. Bugs..." She said in irritation, clearly unimpressed with the sudden appearance of the soldiers.

Lily, on the other hand, was not eager to stick around. "Well, good luck with that." She waved casually, turning as if she were about to make her escape through the trees. After all, this wasn't her fight.

But before either of them could make another move, one of the Federation soldiers called out, "Look, it's *Manhunter* and *Temptress*! Looks like the rumours are true—they're working together! Capture them!"

The moment the words left his mouth, several soldiers raised their weapons, ready to attack.

Lily's playful demeanour evaporated in an instant. "Tsk..." She clicked her tongue in annoyance. It seemed the Federation had drawn the wrong conclusions, and now she was being lumped in with Isadora.

"Great. Just what I needed."

Beside her, Isadora scoffed, her irritation deepening. "These pests just don't know when to give up." Isadora readied herself, her fingers brushing the hilts of her twin daggers.

With a quick flick of her wrist, Lily summoned a black whip, the long tendrils crackling with energy. "Looks like we'll have to work together, whether we like it or not." She shot a glance at Isadora.

"Heh. Just stay out of my way, *Temptress*," Isadora retorted, already preparing to engage the soldiers.

The Federation soldiers charged, but before they could get close, Lily sprang into action, her form a blur of motion as she dashed toward the nearest tree. In one fluid movement, she scaled the trunk, using the branches to her advantage.

Isadora quickly disappeared and appeared near a soldier she whispered something in his ear. The man sliced his own throat.

Meanwhile, in another section of the labyrinth, Mathilda found herself standing in the center of what appeared to be an ancient church. The stone walls were covered in faded murals, but it was the statues that caught her attention. They were everywhere—life-sized, carved from marble, and radiating an eerie aura.

Her eyes widened as she took in the sight. The statues depicted profane scenes — naked figures locked in suggestive poses, their expressions frozen in pleasure or agony. Some were human, others...less so.

Mathilda blinked, then quickly wiped a bit of drool from the corner of her mouth. "Whoa..." she muttered, her voice echoing in the eerie silence of the church.

As she walked forward, her curiosity grew. "What is this place...?" she whispered to herself. The statues seemed to beckon her, pulling her deeper into the strange chamber.

Chapter 167: Inside the Labyrinth

Tyler stood inside the labyrinth, the towering walls surrounding him like a massive sand castle, though they were anything but fragile. He pressed his hand against the sandy surface, then punched it with all his strength. To his surprise, not even a speck of dust fell. It was solid, an unnatural structure, despite its delicate appearance.

Taking a deep breath, he recalled the chaotic moments before the labyrinth had surfaced. The tremors had started without warning, shaking the very foundations of the castle and the surrounding island. The ground had split open, and massive stone walls erupted from beneath the earth, forming an enormous maze that engulfed the entire capital, trapping everyone within. Tyler had barely had time to react.

He recalled the instruction he gave to Mana.

As the tremors grew worse, Tyler had shouted to Mana, "Mana, I think the Labyrinth is going to surface. You take care of Silvia. I'll be back." His voice had been urgent, full of concern.

Mana nodded as she disappeared.

Tyler looked around and murmuring under his breath, "Hope she didn't get trapped in this"

He scanned his surroundings, observing the labyrinth's eerie stillness. It felt like a desert—hot, silent, and stretching endlessly in all directions. Far ahead, he could see figures moving, though it was hard to tell if they were real or just mirages created by the heat. "Are those citizens of Rosefall?" he wondered aloud, watching the distant shapes stumble through the sand. They looked lost, disoriented.

He knew immediately what had happened: the labyrinth hadn't just trapped him and the pirates. It had pulled in everyone from the capital—innocent civilians who had no idea how dangerous this place was.

He started walking, his boots sinking slightly into the soft sand as he navigated the narrow passageways. The maze was designed to confuse, to disorient, but Tyler's mind remained sharp.

Even though Tyler's boots sank into the soft sand, it wasn't deep enough to hinder him completely. He could still feel solid ground beneath his feet, but the constant resistance made it difficult to walk at his usual speed. Every step felt like a struggle against the shifting terrain.

Suddenly, he saw the sand nearby begin to rise and shift, swirling into a massive form. A sand monster began to take shape, towering and menacing. Thankfully, it wasn't near him—yet.

Tyler paused, assessing the situation. Fighting the creature would only waste time, and he couldn't afford that right now. Instead, he reached into his bag and pulled out a small, hand-sized boat. With a flick of his wrist, he tossed it into the air, watching as it expanded into a full-sized vessel. Tyler wasted no time in activating the boat's flight mechanism, hoping to escape the dragging sands.

The boat lifted off the ground and began to hover, but after only a few moments, it stopped abruptly. Tyler frowned and checked the fuel compartment. The aura stones, which were typically long-lasting, had been consumed at an alarming rate. He replaced them with a fresh one, but it too burned out almost instantly.

"This place drains energy faster than normal," he muttered to himself, realizing the labyrinth was designed to hinder progress, not just through its physical structure but by draining magical resources.

His eyes drifted toward a nearby area where the citizens of Rosefall Kingdom were gathered. They appeared to be safe, huddled within a zone surrounded by a faint shimmering barrier. There was a small water source, and some were rationing food. It seemed the labyrinth had spared them from the harsher elements, even from the sand monsters.

"Looks like they're in a protected area," Tyler murmured, watching them from a distance. "Either they got lucky, or the labyrinth itself doesn't want them involved in the trials."

Regardless of the reason, it wasn't his concern. His mission was to find Astrid, not to babysit a bunch of terrified civilians. He refocused his attention on the task at hand, examining the boat. The small vessel wasn't going to cut it. Not in this draining environment.

Switching gears, Tyler retrieved a larger boat from his storage ring, this one capable of holding more power. He filled the fuel compartment with both Aura Stones and Prana Stones, resources he had in limited supply but necessary for the situation.

Then, as an extra precaution, he pulled out his trusty copper pot. This artifact had proven invaluable to him countless times, allowing him to copy materials. He quickly duplicated more Aura Stones and Prana Stones, ensuring he had enough fuel for the journey ahead.

"That should do it," Tyler said to himself, stepping onto the boat and activating the controls. The larger vessel hummed with power, lifting off the ground and soaring into the air. This time, the energy consumption seemed more stable.

In a dimly lit cave, shadows flickered across the jagged walls. Isadora Nightkiss, the infamous 'Manhunter,' was sprawled out on the ground, her long legs spread seductively, though the situation was far from romantic. Between her legs a figure adjusted her hair and moved her head between them.

"Aan..." Isadora moaned, her sultry voice echoing in the enclosed space.

"Stop making weird noises," Lily muttered, her voice filled with irritation. She was focused on the task at hand, and Isadora's dramatics weren't helping.

Lily, still under the effects of her Phantom Mask, had altered her appearance slightly to ensure that Isadora wouldn't recognize her. After their earlier skirmish with the Federation soldiers, the two had found themselves in this cave, searching the temple for answers. But before they could delve deeper, they were ambushed by a horde of snake monsters.

The creatures had attacked in overwhelming numbers, slithering from every crevice. Despite their best efforts, both women were bitten—Isadora on her thigh and Lily on her hand. The poison coursing through their bodies was rapidly depleting their strength, forcing them to rely on an old, crude method of extraction.

Lily had managed to suck the poison from the back of her hand, spitting it out to the side. The bite hadn't been deep, and she had dealt with it quickly. Isadora's wound, however, was far more problematic.

"Stop squirming," Lily snapped as she knelt between Isadora's legs, her mouth hovering over the bite on Isadora's thigh.

Isadora's eyes fluttered, but this time she stayed quiet, understanding the gravity of the situation. The poison had spread dangerously close to a major artery, and if Lily didn't extract it, Isadora's life would be in danger.

Lily's lips pressed against the wound, and she began to suck out the venom, her concentration unbroken. Isadora bit her lip, trying not to make another sound, though her body involuntarily reacted to the sensation.

After several tense moments, Lily pulled away, spitting the last of the poison onto the ground. "There," she said, wiping her mouth. "That should hold off the worst of it."

Isadora sat up, her usual confident smirk returning as she gingerly touched her thigh. "You're better at that than I expected, 'Temptress.'" She winked.

"Don't push your luck," Lily retorted, rolling her eyes. Despite the tension, the two women had formed an unspoken truce, at least for now.

But even as the immediate danger passed, the labyrinth's atmosphere weighed heavily on them. The walls seemed to shift, and the air felt thick with malice.

"Let's not stick around any longer," Lily said, standing up. "We need to keep moving."

Isadora nodded, her playful demeanor fading as the seriousness of their situation set in. "Agreed. The labyrinth is far from finished with us."

"Kill the men and capture the women," one pirate had shouted earlier, but their bravado quickly dissipated when they crossed the barrier. Those who dared to enter immediately collapsed, their weapons clattering uselessly to the ground. A few of the kingdom's citizens cautiously approached, inspecting the fallen pirates.

"Looks like they lost their energy the moment they entered," one man inside the barrier said, his voice low but filled with authority. "Tie them up."

The remaining pirates outside the barrier hesitated, unsure of what to do. One of them, desperate to assert dominance, notched an arrow in his bow and aimed at the citizens within. The moment the arrow passed through the barrier, however, it dropped harmlessly to the ground, losing all its momentum.

Frustration and irritation were written across the pirates' faces, but before they could turn back, their attention was drawn upwards. Their eyes lit up with greed and hunger as they spotted a flying boat hovering above them.

As Tyler navigated his flying boat through the twisting paths of the labyrinth, his gaze fell upon a group of pirates standing outside a shimmering barrier. Inside, citizens of the Rosefall Kingdom huddled in fear, their faces pale as they watched the pirates debate their next move. The pirates seemed frustrated, their attempts to breach the barrier having failed miserably.

Tyler, observing the scene below, couldn't help but smirk. "Ah, I need some slaves," he muttered to himself, his tone casual despite the chaotic scene. "It's tiring to fill the fuel and also concentrate on riding the boat."

As he assessed the situation, an idea struck him. His eyes gleamed as he realized the pirates could be of use.

Chapter 168: Finding Clues

As the sand monsters rose from the desert floor, towering over eight feet tall, Tyler was quick to react. Suddenly a Trident appeared and pierced the Sand Monster. The monster looked like a humanoid monster made of sand. The creature instantly disintegrated into a cloud of sand, scattering into the wind. Tyler's flying boat cut through the airborne debris, gliding over the maze-like structure.

On the deck, Tyler stood tall, his phantom mask concealing his identity, the trident still glowing faintly in his hand.

"Captain Blackwood! The ruins we spotted earlier are close. We should arrive there soon!" a pirate called out from the helm. His voice was strained, and his body bore the marks of recent battles. He, like

the others aboard, was one of the many pirates Tyler had subdued with his overwhelming strength. Now, they served him out of fear and, perhaps, awe.

"Good. Keep going," Tyler responded, his voice steady and calm, as he turned and walked back toward the small cabin at the rear of the boat.

Casually, he tossed a storage ring filled with aura stones to the pirate responsible for refueling the ship. The man caught it, his eyes widening slightly at the sight of so many precious stones. By now, he had grown numb to the staggering wealth of the Phantom Pirates. Still, a small part of him couldn't help but hope that one day Tyler might offer him a permanent place in the crew.

Three pirates had been chosen for the essential tasks—one to navigate, one to refuel, and one to stand guard. Each of them knew better than to cross Tyler, his power and mysterious demeanor making even the bravest of them wary.

As Tyler sat in the cabin, he leaned back, idly copying aura stones in his copper pot, keeping a steady supply for the journey ahead. At the same time, he remained watchful, his senses attuned to the slightest movements outside the cabin. Though the pirates aboard were subdued for now, Tyler knew better than to let his guard down. Pirates were opportunistic by nature, and he wouldn't give them the chance to act on any funny ideas.

Tyler's boat glided smoothly through the sandy maze, but his eyes were drawn to something unusual in the distance. In the middle of the barren labyrinth, a shrine stood—isolated, ancient, and worn by the ravages of time. Its structure was simple, and the broken remains of a statue at its entrance seemed to hold something that had long since vanished.

He narrowed his eyes, observing the scene before deciding to put away the boat. The pirates he had taken with him looked at each other in confusion as they saw their captain stepping toward the shrine, leaving the boat behind.

"Where is he going?" one of the pirates muttered.

"Do we follow?" another whispered, but none of them dared to move without orders. As they hesitated, Tyler, without a word, walked past the arc of the shrine and vanished from their sight. Panic gripped the pirates for a moment.

"Let's get out of here before something else happens," one of them finally suggested. They didn't need to be told twice; they abandoned their post and scattered into the maze, each fleeing in a different direction.

Tyler, however, had entered the shrine with a different mindset. He had no idea where the labyrinth's path would lead him, and in this confusing puzzle of desert and ruins, he needed to take every opportunity to find answers. The shrine, though small and unremarkable, might hold some clue. His instincts, honed from years of archeology adventure urged him to explore it further.

Inside the shrine, the air was cooler, filled with a quiet, almost reverent energy. The broken statue at the entrance had intrigued him for a moment—a figure seemingly holding a box—but without much left intact, it was impossible to discern what it had once been. He moved further inside, disappearing from view, hoping that the interior might offer more guidance.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the labyrinth, Lily Gomes and Isadora Nightkiss were making their way through an ancient temple. Unlike Tyler's desert shrine, this temple was more expansive, its architecture grand, though decayed with age. As they walked, the air around them seemed to thrum with an ominous energy, warning them that danger lay ahead.

The two women found themselves staring at a peculiar section of the temple: large blocks were floating in the air, suspended by some unseen force. Beneath them, a dark pit yawned, filled with writhing snake monsters—an ever-present reminder of the consequences of a wrong move.

"What's the point of all this?" Lily muttered under her breath, eyeing the floating blocks.

"Why are we even exploring this temple?" Lily asked, her tone exasperated.

Isadora, walking a few steps ahead, glanced back at her with a small smirk. "You really don't know, do you? The temple, shrine, church—whatever these places are—they're all part of the labyrinth. They might hold clues to the center."

They both turned their attention back to the floating blocks. At the beginning of the section, a series of ancient symbols and text had been etched into the stone, offering a clue to the puzzle ahead.

"These Language." Isadora analysed it .

"Its just the same language but from like 500 years ago? I think I have read this somewhere." Lily said.

"So... what happens if we step on the wrong block?" Lily asked, though she already knew the answer.

Isadora pointed to the pit below, where snakes slithered ominously. "More of those come out."

Lily groaned. "Great."

"Let's get this over with," Lily muttered, eyeing the blocks carefully, mentally preparing herself for whatever awaited them next.

Mathilda stood in the dimly lit church-like room, surrounded by statues so vulgar that they made even her pause. As her eyes scanned the eerie sculptures, she found an old, weathered book resting near one of the grotesque figures. The book's pages were torn, and the strange symbols scribbled across them were impossible to decipher. She flipped through the book with curiosity but quickly gave up, slipping it into her pouch.

"I'll just ask Silvia to translate this later," she muttered to herself, continuing forward with cautious steps.

Just as she rounded a corner, she heard the unmistakable sound of boots scuffling on the stone floor. A group of pirates emerged from the shadows, their eyes lighting up as they caught sight of her.

"Hey, look at that," one of them sneered, pointing in Mathilda's direction. "There's a chick over there."

"She's wearing a mask, but even with that, her body looks... enchanting," another pirate added, his tone dripping with sleaze. They exchanged nasty grins and started to approach her, their eyes gleaming with sinister intent.

Mathilda stood her ground, her frown deepening. Without a word, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a handful of small marbles, tossing them effortlessly towards the pirates. The marbles rolled silently across the floor, stopping near their feet.

The pirates glanced down, momentarily wary, but quickly dismissed the small spheres. One of the men smirked, his voice thick with mockery. "What, playing with balls? Why don't you come play with our balls."

Before he could finish his lewd remark, the marbles detonated with a thunderous roar.

Screams of agony filled the air as the explosion ripped through the pirates' ranks, sending them sprawling to the ground, limbs twisted and bloodied. Smoke curled in the air as their bodies lay motionless, their earlier bravado reduced to ashes.

Mathilda didn't even turn back and left.

Isadora glanced at the first clue with a smirk, her eyes narrowing as she read the bizarre riddle aloud.

"A flying sword is flying at the speed of a young phoenix. The person riding on the flying sword weighs 300 pounds. Calculate the mass of the sun above your head."

She raised an eyebrow. "What the...?"

Lily, standing beside her, sighed. "That doesn't make any sense. Everything except the last part is just fluff. The actual question is about the mass of the sun, but I have no idea what that is."

Without missing a beat, Isadora grinned and stepped forward, leaping onto one of the blocks that was labeled with a zero.

Lily gasped, shocked at Isadora's impulsiveness. Her heart skipped a beat, fully expecting the block to collapse beneath her companion's feet and send her plummeting into the snake-filled pit below. But to her surprise, the block held firm.

"The mass of the sun above us is zero?" Lily asked, clearly baffled. "Is that because we're indoors, so there's no sun above us?"

Isadora chuckled, shaking her head. "Nope, it's not about being inside. This is something most Northerners know... The sun above us is weightless."

Lily tilted her head in confusion. "Why? I mean, how?"

Isadora stepped closer, leaning in until her lips were almost touching Lily's ear. "I'll tell you if you reveal your identity, *Temptress*."

Lily's face reddened, but she quickly composed herself, waving her hand dismissively. "Never mind... We're heading north anyway. I'll figure it out myself."

With a playful smirk, Isadora shrugged and moved to the next riddle, her teasing laughter lingering in the air.

Lily looked down at the stone and read aloud, but her voice quickly trailed off "How does a pair of panties smell like when a cucumber is inserted insi—"

Chapter 169: Doors of Fortune

Tyler stood in the heart of the labyrinth, staring at the shrine he had stumbled upon in the middle of the green field. The transformation from the desert maze outside to this lush, almost serene environment puzzled him. The ruin had appeared abandoned from the outside, with sand and time eroding its walls. Yet now, standing in front of it, the structure looked pristine, untouched by age or decay.

"Okay... The shrine is definitely not in the desert anymore," Tyler muttered to himself, cautiously stepping forward.

Inside, the air was cool and still. Shadows clung to the corners, but a faint light illuminated the massive Buddha-like statue at the far end of the room. Its face, however, was obscured. Tyler frowned, feeling a strange dissonance. He could sense the presence of a face on the statue, but no matter how hard he looked, his mind refused to comprehend it. It was as though the face existed in a different realm, beyond his perception.

The walls of the shrine were adorned with murals of people and creatures, all bowing in reverence to the statue. Some were kneeling, others praying, their postures expressing deep devotion. Tyler felt a twinge of unease as he stepped closer to the statue. The atmosphere in the room was thick with an ancient, reverent energy. Was this place meant for worship? Or was it guarding something more sinister?

Tyler tried bowing to the statue, half out of respect, half out of curiosity. Nothing happened. He knelt, mimicking the gestures of the figures in the murals, hoping to trigger some hidden mechanism. Still, nothing.

"Sigh... Well, that was pointless," he muttered, getting back on his feet.

His eyes caught on a faint crack running along the right hand of the statue. The hand, though damaged, appeared to be pointing toward the ground. Tyler crouched, following the direction of the gesture, and noticed a small, hidden door at the base of the statue.

"Interesting..." Tyler whispered. Without hesitation, he pried the door open, revealing a ladder that led down into darkness. He peered into the void, but it was impossible to see how deep the shaft went.

Shrugging off any lingering doubts, Tyler gripped the ladder and began his descent. Halfway down, the ladder abruptly ended, leaving him suspended above a seemingly bottomless pit of blackness.

"Well, here goes nothing," Tyler said, letting go and dropping into the abyss.

He fell for what seemed like an eternity before his feet hit solid ground with a soft thud. Tyler straightened, brushing off his clothes. He summoned his ****Angel Ring****, which floated above his head, bathing the room in soft light. He dialed up the brightness, illuminating his surroundings.

The room was entirely sealed off, except for a wall at the far end that held nine doors arranged in a 3x3 grid. Each door was identical, made of solid stone, with intricate engravings that Tyler couldn't immediately decipher. In the center of the room stood a stone slate, covered in ancient symbols and arrays.

"This is cool..." Tyler mumbled, his curiosity piqued. He knelt beside the slate and began examining the engravings more closely. It was a complex array, but it became clearer as he focused on it. He poured ****Aura**** into the slate, and one side of the engravings flickered to life, glowing softly before dimming again.

"Hmm... It needs more than just Aura," Tyler mused. He decided to pour ****Prana**** into the slate as well, and this time, the other side of the engravings lit up.

The entire slate glowed with power, and a flood of information poured into Tyler's mind:

****"9 doors – 3 Fortunes. Don't be greedy and choose wisely. Hope the luck is on your side."****

The mention of 'luck' made Tyler shudder. His luck had always been... unpredictable. It had saved him from certain death before, but it also had a nasty habit of leading him into complicated situations. And yet, here he was, in a shrine where luck seemed to play a pivotal role.

"Great, just great," Tyler muttered sarcastically.

He stood up, taking in the sight of the nine doors again. Each door seemed to whisper of both promise and peril. Tyler approached the first door cautiously, placing his hand against the cold stone.

As soon as his hand touched the door, more information flashed in his mind:

****[Behind this door is water. If you open it, the room will fill with water.]****

Tyler frowned. "Water? Why would I want to flood the room?"

He moved to the second door.

[This door contains an ancient beast. It has been trapped here for more than a thousand years. The only way to defeat it is by using the water from the first door.]

Tyler narrowed his eyes. The doors were clearly interconnected, each one tied to the next. He checked the third door:

[This door houses a sealed hive of bees that produce Moon Honey. The seal will break once the door is opened.]

Moon Honey? That sounded like a valuable resource, but it also came with the risk of unleashing a horde of angry bees.

Tyler moved to the fourth door, high up on the wall, and tried to pull out a paper crane from his storage to fly up to it. But nothing happened.

"Storage treasures are blocked, huh? Guess I'll have to do this the old-fashioned way," Tyler muttered.

Tyler jumped up, effortlessly reaching for the fourth door. As his hand brushed against the cold stone, more information flooded into his mind.

[The 4th door contains poison gas that can paralyze the Moon Honey Bees.]

Tyler nodded thoughtfully. "Useful, but only if I want to deal with those bees." He shrugged and moved on, leaping to the fifth door.

As his fingers grazed the stone, the familiar rush of knowledge filled his mind.

****[The 5th door has a treasure that can make you Immortal, but you will be locked inside with it. You have to wait until your loved one opens it.]****

"A trap disguised as a treasure," Tyler muttered. The allure of immortality was tempting, but being trapped for an eternity was a cruel twist. He had no desire to become a prisoner of time, even for the promise of endless life.

Ignoring the temptation, he hopped to the sixth door, eager to see what it held.

****[A sound transmission charm that can send a message to anyone in the Labyrinth. Can be used only once.]****

Tyler's eyes lit up at the description. This charm was undoubtedly connected to the fifth door, probably meant to help someone trapped inside the Immortality Room. But Tyler had no intention of touching that door. Instead, he was excited about the potential of this charm. It could help him find his crew.

"This is definitely useful," Tyler thought, already making plans to claim the charm once he'd explored the other doors.

He leaped higher to the seventh door, his curiosity still driving him. As his hand pressed against the door, the message appeared again.

****[Exit this Shrine.]****

"Straightforward," Tyler mused. "But why leave now when I'm just getting started?"

He jumped again, reaching for the eighth door.

****[Exit this Labyrinth.]****

His brows furrowed. "So there is a way out."

Finally, he ascended to the ninth and highest door. As he touched it, a message appeared that stopped him cold.

****[Exit this Planet.]****

Tyler's jaw dropped. "What the heck?"

Tyler touched his chin, deep in thought. He could only choose three doors, and he wasn't sure what would happen if he opened more than that. He didn't want to take any unnecessary risks in this strange place. The rules were clear—he could open up to three doors, gain one treasure, and then use the 7th, 8th, or 9th door to escape. But beyond that, the consequences were unknown.

The ninth door, in particular, intrigued him. ****Exit this Planet.**** Would that really throw him into space? The curiosity gnawed at him, but it was too dangerous to test. He'd much rather avoid such a fate.

His mind began to race, considering his options. He needed to choose wisely, as greed could easily lead him into a trap. Tyler was confident in his decision-making, but even he knew when to be cautious

He then decided to proceed his plan.

With all the doors surveyed, Tyler turned his attention back to the sixth door. The sound transmission charm was still the most practical choice, especially in this maze-like labyrinth. He could worry about exiting later. For now, it was more important to gather useful tools and see what else this place had to offer.

He approached the sixth door once more and, with a firm press of his palm, opened it. Inside was a simple pedestal, and sitting atop it was a glowing charm. Tyler stepped forward, gingerly picking up the charm and examining it closely.

"Perfect," he whispered. It allowed him to communicate with anyone within the labyrinth—but only once. Tyler smirked at the simplicity of the problem.

Quantity is never an issue for Tyler.

He took out his copper pot hanging on his waist.

Chapter 170: Leaving the Shrine

Tyler looked at the ten sound transmission charms in his hand with a mischievous glint in his eyes. A fleeting thought crossed his mind, and he smirked.

"Let's just call it 'Labyrinth Communication Charms' from now on," Tyler murmured to himself, giving the charms a quick, approving nod. He took one and was about to send a message to Lily, but paused.

A thought occurred to him. **Lily's too clever to be wandering around aimlessly.** She would definitely be using her Phantom Mask to blend in and move swiftly through this labyrinth.

Instead of directly calling her by name, Tyler decided to be more discreet. He switched to his Phantom Blackwood voice, his tone deep and commanding, a persona Lily would immediately recognize.

"Darling? Are you there?" Tyler said with a smirk, imagining her reaction. "It seems like I'm inside a shrine near a desert. I'm heading towards the center. Meet me there."

Satisfied with the message, he closed his eyes and thought about Temptress Blackwood. The charm vanished from his hand, off to deliver his voice to Lily.

Tyler wasn't entirely sure if it had worked, but the system seemed simple enough. A sudden idea hit him, and his eyes lit up with amusement.

He grabbed another charm and said, "Potato Tomato," just to test something. He thought about himself this time, sending the message to his own location. Sure enough, the charm disappeared. Moments later, it reappeared, and he heard his own voice echo back at him, "Potato Tomato."

Tyler laughed at the absurdity of it. "So that's how it works," he muttered. He rolled his eyes at the fact that he had addressed Lily as "darling" in the first message, when he could have just used a more straightforward approach.

Shaking his head in amusement, Tyler turned his attention back to the remaining doors. There were still two doors he could open, and they could hold important treasures or dangerous traps. He had to choose carefully.

Walking past the first few doors he'd already investigated, Tyler paused in front of the fifth door again—the one offering immortality at the cost of being locked inside forever. His mind lingered on the possibilities. What if he had opened it earlier? Would the communication charm have allowed him to bypass the trap? He shuddered at the thought of testing that theory.

Instead, he focused on something more practical. He'd already opened the sixth door, getting the sound transmission charm, but what else could be useful?

His eyes landed on the fourth door. Poison gas. It could be handy if he ran into those Moon Honey Bees or other creatures later in the labyrinth. He thought about how to handle the situation. Perhaps the gas could give him an advantage when dealing with certain traps or enemies.

Tyler carefully considered his choices. "Three doors, three chances." He repeated the warning in his mind. He was aware that if he exceeded that limit, the consequences could be severe, maybe even fatal.

"Oh no..." Tyler muttered under his breath, his brow furrowing with frustration as he studied the situation before him. The thought weighed heavily on his mind—he had already opened one of the doors, and now the consequences were starting to become clearer. Each door was intricately paired with another, designed in such a way that if he wanted to acquire a treasure, he would also have to endure its associated challenge. The last three doors were designated for escape, but since he had already chosen the sixth door, which granted him the Sound Transmission Charm, the next logical step would be to open the fifth door.

But the fifth door was a trap. A trap dressed as a treasure.

Sure, the fifth door promised the ultimate reward—immortality. But immortality at the cost of being locked away, forced to wait for someone else, some loved one, to open the door and free him. The risks,

in Tyler's mind, were far too high, despite the allure of eternal life. He didn't trust a situation where his fate would be entirely in the hands of someone else. After all, who knew how long it could take? He wasn't willing to be trapped, no matter how tempting the reward seemed.

He sighed deeply, feeling the weight of his options pressing down on him. "Now what?" Tyler mumbled as he paced in front of the nine doors. Even if he chose another door, either the one with poison gas or the one with water, he knew he'd eventually have to open a treasure door to claim a prize. But there was the catch—he could only open three doors in total. If he used up his remaining chances on treasures, then his escape routes would be cut off.

He glanced upward, hoping to see the way he had entered, but couldn't break through. He jumped, but he couldn't reach any higher than the 7th, 8th, and 9th doors...

He needed to think of something fast. Another sigh escaped his lips, but then, an idea began to form in the back of his mind. It wasn't a perfect plan, but it was better than staying stuck in the room forever. "Well, even though I want the Moon Honey, I don't think it's worth the trouble,"

There was a more straightforward option—water.

He quickly opened the door that has water.

Immediately, water gushed out, flooding the room. The force was overwhelming, and within moments, the entire room was submerged. The water filled every corner, rising quickly to Tyler's chest, then his neck, until the entire space was underwater.

Once the room was fully flooded, he swam toward the another door. This was the door that held the ancient beast, a creature that had been trapped for over a thousand years. Without hesitation, Tyler reached out and opened the door.

A burst of intense heat surged into the water, and for a brief moment, the creature tried to escape its prison. But the water, pouring from the first door, was relentless. It surged toward the creature, quenching its flames with a loud hiss. The fire flickered and sputtered as the beast struggled, but in the end, the water won. The creature's fiery form dissolved into the water, its life extinguished as its once-powerful body turned to ash, which scattered into the water.

Tyler, however, wasn't done. With swift, practiced movements, he swam toward the pile of ashes that had settled at the bottom of the flooded room. His eyes scanned the debris, searching for anything of value. And then, he found it—an ancient marrow bone, carved with intricate letters that seemed to glow faintly even in the dim light. The letters were unfamiliar to him, but he knew enough to recognize that this was no ordinary bone. It had to be important.

"Looks like I've got my treasure," Tyler murmured as he snatched the bone and tucked it safely.

Now, it was time to get out. The room was still submerged in water, but Tyler had anticipated that. Using his Kun Swimming Skills, he launched himself upward, propelling his body through the water with speed and precision. His muscles worked in perfect sync as he maneuvered toward the passageway he had come from. Just as he had hoped, the water level had risen high enough to allow him to reach the small opening in the ceiling.

He climbed out of the flooded room, his body dripping with water as he reached the same passage he had used to enter. With this, Tyler escaped the place easily.

Lily Gomes, still disguised as Temptress, stumbled into the next puzzle area with exaggerated movements, swaying like a drunken sailor. Her usually graceful demeanor was now replaced by an unsteady gait, adding to the illusion that she was inebriated. Isadora, on the other hand, was in a similarly disheveled state. She had discarded her dress and was left wearing only her innerwear. She clung closely to Temptress, her condition not much better. The two women looked as if they had been submerged in wine, their state a clear indication of the difficulty they had faced in the last trial.

"Hey, don't just ignore me," Isadora pleaded, her voice tinged with desperation. Her earlier composure was gone, replaced by a vulnerable tone that suggested the trial had taken a heavy toll on her.

Lily, maintaining her façade of drunkenness, smirked. "Why does a Manhunter need a woman?" she mocked, her words laced with playful sarcasm. Despite her teasing, there was a note of genuine curiosity in her tone.

Isadora stopped abruptly and fixed Lily with a serious gaze. The change in her expression was stark, her earlier frivolity replaced by a determined seriousness. She looked as if she was about to reveal something significant.

"Though I am called Manhunter," Isadora began, her voice low and earnest, "I am still a virgin." She covered her face with a mix of shame and embarrassment, her eyes peeking through her fingers as she confessed this personal detail.

"Poor girl," Lily sighed and moved closer, her lips almost reaching Isadora's.

"Darling? Are you there?" Lily suddenly stopped when she heard a voice. "It seems like I'm inside a shrine near a desert. I'm heading towards the center. Meet me there."

She looked around, but Tyler was nowhere to be seen. Her mind began to clear a bit.

Meanwhile, Isadora, with her eyes closed, was still waiting for her kiss in her drunken state.