

R Cultivator 186

Chapter 186: Offshoot Tales

Chapter 1 : Isadora Nightkiss Escape

This happened after Isadora pushed Lily. She had betrayed Lily on the Pensore stairs, leaving her tumbling down as Isadora snatched the Orion Cube. Now, she was deep in the labyrinth, running further into its winding corridors.

Captain Silver Eye rushed after Lily, leaving Vice Captain Burgess to chase Isadora through the shifting, dangerous paths of the labyrinth.

Isadora cast a glance over her shoulder. Pirates from Silver Eye's crew were dropping down from all directions, blocking Burgess and buying her more time. Each one lunged at the vice-captain, their bodies moved by Isadora's irresistible charm.

"Stop getting in my way!" Burgess growled, annoyed as he shoved yet another charmed pirate aside. "Damn it! How far does her charm extend?"

He clicked his tongue, ordering the crew to stand down. "Forget it! I'll handle this alone." His frustration mounted, his eyes narrowing as he bolted after Isadora.

A sharp click echoed through the labyrinth as Isadora activated a charm. In an instant, she vanished, leaving nothing but an empty hall in her wake.

"Damn you, Isadora!" Burgess punched the stone wall next to him, his frustration boiling over. He looked around helplessly, but there was no trace of the seductive pirate. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a shadowed figure approaching through the labyrinth's foggy corridors. A man with a cigar in his mouth, exhaling thick, curling smoke.

It was a Federation Lieutenant, and next to him stood a silent Ensign, his eyes cold and focused.

"Finding that Manhunter isn't easy once you lose sight of her," the Lieutenant said casually, blowing a cloud of smoke that drifted lazily into the air. The smoke coiled into a delicate shape, forming the silhouette of a woman.

Burgess's eyes widened as the figure coalesced in the smoke. It was unmistakable: Isadora.

With a bitter sneer, Isadora stepped out of her concealment. "Tsk... Federation dogs..." she muttered under her breath, her lips curling into a scowl. Her eyes flicked toward the Ensign, and in an instant, her charm began to work, her gaze smoldering with an alluring intensity.

The Ensign faltered, but the Lieutenant snapped his fingers, and thick smoke immediately clouded the Ensign's vision, cutting off Isadora's power.

The Lieutenant took another puff of his cigar, unbothered. "Seems like someone got the Orion Cube. I suppose your wish is to gather the Orion fragments as well?"

"The cube belongs to us," Vice Captain Burgess growled, stepping forward, his eyes sharp and deadly.

"I don't have the cube," Isadora said, lying without hesitation. "My partner, Temptress, has it." Her voice was smooth, convincing, but the Lieutenant's face remained impassive.

"Doesn't matter," the Lieutenant said coolly, exhaling another ring of smoke. "Capturing you is just as high a priority."

Suddenly, his body dissolved into smoke, surging forward in a swift, shadowy rush toward Isadora.

Reacting instantly, she activated another charm. This time, her body shimmered with energy as she sped away, darting through the labyrinth's maze-like walls.

"Damn it!" Burgess cursed under his breath, watching her disappear again. He hesitated for a moment, unsure whether Isadora truly had the cube or if she was bluffing.

Just then, a voice echoed in his mind through the labyrinth's communication charm. "That B!tch Manhunter has the cube... Don't let her get away..."

It was Captain Silver Eye.

Without another word, Burgess's body began to grow, swelling into his full form—now towering over seven feet tall. His massive strides propelled him forward, faster than ever, as he resumed the chase.

Deep within the desert region of the labyrinth, Isadora found temporary refuge. She stood in a barren expanse of golden sand, surrounded by the still figures of sand monsters. They were large and menacing, but under her charm, they stood watch, guarding her with empty, obedient eyes.

For the moment, she was safe.

"Now... just need a plan," she muttered, her hands gripping the Orion Cube tightly.

Suddenly, a low rumble shook the ground beneath her feet. Isadora's eyes widened. She looked up just in time to see four figures closing in from different directions—Captain Silver Eye, Vice Captain Burgess, the Federation Lieutenant, and the Ensign, all converging on her position at once.

"Damn..."

Before anyone could make a move, the entire labyrinth shook violently. The walls and floor began to glow, and in an instant, everything around them dissolved into light. They were being transported outside, their surroundings shifting from the labyrinth's treacherous interior to the open sea.

The sun blazed down on the ocean, where debris from the destroyed labyrinth floated across the water's surface. Survivors—citizens, pirates, and Federation soldiers alike—were scattered across the

sea and nearby land, disoriented and dazed. Several soldiers from the White Crown Army swooped in, flying in from above to assist the survivors, pulling them from the water and ferrying them to safety on Rosefall's ex-Capital Island.

The Federation Lieutenant floated on the water's surface, his legs encased in a cloud of smoke that kept him aloft. Nearby, the Ensign swam calmly, his eyes scanning their new surroundings.

"The labyrinth... it's closed," the Lieutenant said grimly, his voice carrying across the water.

The Ensign narrowed his eyes. "She slipped away... again."

The Lieutenant nodded. "Tell the Federation to raise the bounty on Isadora Nightkiss."

On other place,

Burgess's massive form slowly shrunk back to normal as he, too, surveyed the scene. His eyes darted around, searching for Isadora, but there was no sign of her.

"She's gone..." he muttered, his fists clenching in frustration.

Meanwhile, one of the White Crown Army Soldier who is in daze led Isadora Nightkiss in a boat. He ignored every survivor. Isadora used her charm again.

"All this trouble for you," she whispered, a mischievous grin forming on her lips. "I hope you're worth it."

With one final glance at the fading figures in the distance, Isadora Nightkiss left the old Rosefall Kingdom.

Here's a proofread version of your side story with some added details to enhance the narrative:

****Chapter 2: White Crown City****

Mana, Tyler's Ghost Spirit, had escaped before the Labyrinth enveloped the island. Hovering above, she gazed down at the colossal walls that now encased both the island and the surrounding sea. The Labyrinth was vast, its intricate design forming an impenetrable barrier that stretched endlessly in all directions.

Determined to find a way in, Mana ascended, soaring to the highest point. But even the top was sealed—no one could enter or leave.

Mana sighed softly. "Be safe..." she whispered, her voice barely audible in the empty sky. With a final glance at the labyrinth, she flew toward the port city.

The White Crown Galleria, a grand structure Tyler once frequented, stood abandoned, its usual hustle and bustle replaced by an eerie stillness. Mana, now responsible for the Galleria, had assumed the role of head. As Tyler's assistant, she had learned the intricacies of management and commerce, and she was more than capable of handling the responsibilities he left behind. Silvia, still young but eager, joined Mana to help.

They waited for Tyler. One year passed. Then two.

Twelve-year-old Silvia often stood before the labyrinth, her face a mask of worry. The people of the city had begun to treat the Labyrinth as a grave, leaving flowers at its entrance to honor those lost inside. Yet Silvia and Mana never wavered in their belief that Tyler and the others would return.

"They'll come back," Silvia whispered to herself, the determination in her voice defying her youth. "I know they will."

Silvia had also started her journey as an Immortal Practitioner. She had chosen the Mage Path, dedicating herself to mastering the arcane arts, her determination fueled by the hope that one day, she would aid in Tyler's return.

During this time, the Rosefall Kingdom underwent significant political changes. With the Royal Family, along with the capital, buried within the Labyrinth, a power vacuum was created. Amidst the chaos, the White Crown Galleria rose to prominence, taking control of the port city. Though young, Silvia was named the White Crown Princess, a title that held weight and responsibility. Behind the scenes, it was Mana who orchestrated much of this, ensuring that the Galleria remained a powerful force despite the kingdom's instability.

Mana, ever resourceful, recruited and trained an army in preparation for the day the Labyrinth would open again. She formed alliances, strengthened the city's defenses, and carefully managed the Galleria's vast resources. Every decision was made with one goal in mind: to be ready when the time came.

Despite the growing number of people who treated the Labyrinth as a tomb, Mana and Silvia remained steadfast, waiting for the moment when everything would change.

Five years after the Labyrinth's emergence, a rumble shook the island.

As the labyrinth continued to shake, the city below stirred to life. People rushed to the edge of the port, their eyes wide with disbelief and hope. For the first time in years, there was movement from within the labyrinth.

Chapter 187: A New Beginning

After the Labyrinth emerged, the old port city underwent a complete transformation. It became a thriving hub, filled with adventurers, merchants, and even pirates in disguise. The heart of this bustling activity was the White Crown Galleria, now the largest and most important castle in the city.

With the Royal Family and the entire capital mysteriously vanishing into the Labyrinth, there was no one left to manage the other four islands of the Rosefall Kingdom. In the absence of the monarchy, the governors of each city began monopolizing power, each seeking to control their territories for personal gain. The governor of the port city was no different. His eyes were firmly set on the White Crown Galleria, and he made various attempts to seize it.

However, his efforts were in vain. Mana, Tyler's Ghost Spirit, had no intention of letting him succeed. Using her ethereal abilities, she simply possessed him and made him write an agreement that dictated

his resignation. According to the agreement, the governor would step down, and a new head would be nominated for the city.

When the announcement was made, everyone was dumbfounded—the new head was none other than Silvia, a young elf. The idea of such a young girl ruling the city left many in shock, but no one dared to oppose it. Oddly enough, those who initially voiced their disapproval mysteriously changed their stance the following day, suddenly becoming Silvia's strongest supporters. This strange phenomenon made everyone cautious, but no one dared question it openly. In reality, Mana had been behind it all, using her ability to possess key figures and manipulate events in Silvia's favor.

Soon, the people of the city began to refer to Silvia as "Princess." Under her leadership, she gained control of more than half the businesses on the island. Through Mana's influence, neighboring cities slowly began to merge with the port city, increasing Silvia's power. All it took was for Mana to possess a few influential figures, and the rest followed suit. Before long, the entire island was under the control of the White Crown Galleria.

Silvia, under Mana's guidance, renamed the island White Crown City. It became a bustling center of commerce and authority, with its own distinct leadership structure. Mana also took the initiative to recruit a private army, which soon became known as the White Crown Army. With this growing force, the island resembled a mini-kingdom, ruled under the banner of the White Crown Galleria.

Five years passed in the outside world, though to Tyler and his crew, only one month had passed while they were trapped inside the Labyrinth. Upon their return, they were shocked to discover the sweeping changes that had taken place. They could hardly believe that so much had happened in what felt like a mere month to them.

White Crown City was now a thriving metropolis, with a strong economy and a powerful army. Merchants and adventurers traveled from afar to do business there, while its strategic location made it a popular stop for both legitimate traders and pirates looking to avoid attention. The city had grown far beyond the port they had once known.

Tyler sat in the artificial hot spring, casually blowing bubbles as he listened to the story of everything that had happened while they were trapped in the Labyrinth. His body was mostly obscured by the mist, and despite the seriousness of the conversation, he seemed to be enjoying the warm waters without much care. Beside him, Lily, Mana, Mathilda, and Silvia also soaked in the spring, their bodies bare but mostly hidden by the steam.

Silvia, now 15, couldn't resist stealing glances at Tyler. Though she tried to be subtle, it was clear she was trying to show off her own beauty, perhaps hoping for a reaction. The others noticed her behavior but pretended not to see, silently laughing to themselves. Despite her efforts, Tyler, who now appeared as an 12-year-old and was rather cute in his new form, seemed not understand what Silvia is doing. He was more focused on the story than the suggestive atmosphere around him.

Suddenly, Tyler opened his eyes, breaking the lighthearted tension with a serious question. "What about the other islands?" he asked.

Mana, appeared next to Tyler, replied, "They aren't as united as we are. Each city is still governed by its own governor. Most of them aren't bad, but a few cities have been trying to follow our path and have started waging war against their neighbors. We've made sure none of the citizens are harmed, though. After all, this is Astrid's kingdom."

Tyler nodded thoughtfully. "Since the royal family is back, we should help Astrid ascend the throne."

"No need." The voice came from the entrance, where Astrid stood hesitantly, wrapped in a towel. After a moment's pause, she stepped forward and removed the towel, revealing her young and slender form. Before Tyler could react, Silvia quickly covered his eyes with her hand, making him chuckle softly.

Astrid blushed deeply, realizing her boldness. She quickly slipped into the water, hiding behind the girls. A mischievous pair of hands suddenly grabbed her from behind. It was Mathilda, giggling as she playfully teased Astrid.

"Aww... so soft... and big... even though we've regressed in age," Mathilda remarked while staring at Astrid's chest.

"Stop..." Astrid blushed harder, trying to fend off Mathilda's hands.

Tyler, ever the captain, brought the conversation back to the topic at hand. "What do you mean by 'no need'?" he asked, his voice curious but calm.

Astrid, gathering her composure, sighed. "I remember my father's dying words, even though I was trapped by Evergreen. He told me that my mother is still alive. She's probably in the Highlands,

somewhere up north. I've had enough of the kingdom's politics. Evergreen manipulated the prime minister, but even so, he's still a good man and will lead the country back to its former glory. My younger brothers and sisters can take the throne if they want to. I'm leaving... I'm going to find my mother."

The air around them grew quiet as Astrid spoke. Her words were filled with a sense of finality, but also freedom. It was clear that her heart no longer lay with the responsibilities of the throne.

Mathilda, ever supportive, grinned and spoke up. "Then if you want to leave, leave with us."

Astrid turned, her eyes locking onto Tyler. Her gaze was full of hope, yet she hesitated, waiting for his approval.

Tyler, knowing the unspoken bond between them all, nodded without hesitation. "You're always welcome to sail with us."

Astrid's face lit up with a warm smile, grateful for Tyler's understanding. The future was uncertain, but for now, she knew where she belonged—on Tyler's ship, seeking the truth about her mother and leaving the burdens of the throne behind.

Three months had passed since the turbulent events that reshaped the kingdom. With the support of the White Crown Army and the Royal faction, the once-chaotic White Crown City had transformed into the new capital, marking the dawn of a new era. Astrid's younger brother, now seated on the throne, was beginning to guide the kingdom into a time of peace and prosperity. The prime minister, burdened by guilt after learning the truth about Evergreen's manipulation, had resigned and knelt before Astrid, seeking forgiveness.

True to her kind nature, Astrid forgave him and even requested that he continue as prime minister, trusting in his experience to help lead the country. The White Crown Galleria resumed its business, its grandeur undiminished, but the city itself had been relinquished. Silvia, however, didn't mind—the only thing that mattered to her was that Tyler was back, and she was ready to continue their adventures alongside him.

The long-awaited announcement from the White Merchant Group finally came, signaling their departure. For the Royal Family and the nobles, it was a bittersweet relief. The presence of the powerful

group had been a protective barrier, but with their departure, the kingdom could truly reclaim its independence. Yet, no one dared challenge the White Crown Galleria, now securely in the hands of some of the best managers in the region. The income from the Galleria would continue to flow into the Bank of Atlantis.

As for White Crown Army, some boarded the ship to join Tyler's crew, while others opted to remain, pledging their loyalty to the newly formed government. The kingdom, once known as the Rosefall Kingdom, had been reborn as the New Rose Kingdom—a name that symbolized the fresh start and the promise of a brighter future.

The colossal ship, gleaming in the sunlight, set sail from the kingdom. Even though five years had passed since Tyler last sailed on it, the ship still looked as new as ever, its magical arrays preserving its integrity. Astrid stood at the ship's railing, watching her homeland shrink into the distance, her emotions swirling inside her. The kingdom that had once been her burden was now in safe hands, and she could finally pursue her own path, free from the chains of duty.

With a deep breath, she turned away from the horizon, feeling both a sense of loss and liberation. Ahead lay the unknown, filled with new adventures and the promise of discovery. With Tyler at the helm, and her friends by her side, she knew that no matter where they sailed, they would face it together.

Chapter 188: The Forgotten Dragon

Little Mathilda was struggling with her new body. She had been checking herself out against the mirror when the ship shook, and in a rare moment of clumsiness, knocked her head on the mirror's frame, causing a bump to appear on her forehead. Rubbing her injury, she saw stars in her eyes, but quickly steadied herself, her curiosity piqued.

"Why did the ship shake?" Little Mathilda asked a nearby servant.

"A dragon..." the servant replied, his voice filled with admiration.

Mathilda's eyes lit up. A dragon? Could this be the pet that Tyler always mentioned? She recalled how he always bragged about having a little, cute dragon sealed in his right arm, saying it was in a deep slumber. But if it was waking up now, this could be her chance to finally meet it.

With excitement bubbling inside her, Mathilda hurried outside. As she stepped onto the deck, her breath caught in her throat.

There, towering before her, was a massive dragon.

"How is that a little cute dragon?" She was baffled, staring at the enormous creature.

The dragon had an impressive, fearsome appearance. Its sleek black scales gleamed like polished obsidian, catching the light as they reflected back the ship's surroundings, giving it an almost ethereal quality. But underneath its powerful exterior, faint red lines pulsed beneath the surface, glowing like veins filled with molten lava. Its massive body radiated strength, yet the way it carried itself had a peculiar playfulness, as though it didn't quite realize the extent of its own power.

The dragon sat on the deck like an enormous cat, tilting its head with curiosity as it lifted a claw to scratch behind one of its long, curved horns. The sight, adorable and out of place for such a fearsome beast, made Mathilda blink in disbelief. Its glowing red eyes softened when it turned toward Tyler, lowering its head to nuzzle him affectionately with its snout.

Tyler, trying to keep his balance as the enormous creature leaned into him, muttered, "You're too big..." He stepped back, gently pushing the dragon's massive head away.

The dragon blinked in confusion, tilting its head at Tyler as though trying to understand. Then its eyes lit up, as if an idea had suddenly clicked. A swirl of crimson light enveloped its form, and in a matter of seconds, the enormous dragon shrank.

When the light cleared, standing in front of Tyler was not the fearsome creature from moments ago, but a small girl. She had long black hair, emerald green eyes that sparkled with mischief, and a pair of delicate black horns on her head. Tiny, bat-like wings fluttered at her back. She stood there, a grin on her face, looking up at Tyler with innocent curiosity.

"Huh..." Tyler stared at the girl, stunned. She was now about the same height as him. Quickly realizing she wasn't dressed, he grabbed a cloak from nearby and wrapped it around her. "Zuzia?" he asked, his voice filled with surprise.

"Huh... Your dragon can transform?" Mathilda was wide-eyed as she approached the scene, her curiosity overtaking her astonishment.

Tyler nodded, though he was just as surprised. "Isn't that normal?" he asked, playing it cool, though this was the first time he had seen Zuzia transform. He recalled the Fallen Immortal Dragon who gave Zuzia to him as an egg. That dragon can take human form so Tyler thought it was normal.

Lily, who had just walked onto the deck, froze when she saw Zuzia. "Tyler, is she under Mysterious Mask effect?" she asked, her voice laced with suspicion.

"Nope."

Lily's eyes narrowed as she tried to sense Zuzia's power, but came up with nothing. "Why can't I feel her Level? I'm a 5-star Master Level, and yet... she's probably Grandmaster level."

Tyler's jaw dropped. "What the heck... All she did was sleep for months."

"She's a newly hatched dragon," Lily explained. "She's likely inheriting her powers. That's why she was in such a deep slumber. But now it seems like she's absorbed them. I doubt she'll go back into a deep sleep for at least another hundred years."

Tyler nodded, absorbing the information. "You sure know a lot about dragons," he said, impressed.

"Mana taught me," Lily replied, nonchalant. "Her father was obsessed with finding the Ancient Dragon Nest, so their adventure group did a lot of research."

The focus shifted back to Zuzia, who was now fluttering her wings and looking around the deck like a curious child.

"Can you speak?" Tyler asked, kneeling in front of her. Zuzia tilted her head at him but didn't respond. Instead, she leapt at Tyler, wrapping her arms around his neck and licking his face affectionately, much like she had done in her dragon form.

Tyler laughed as he patted her head. "She's still just a kid..." he said, smiling warmly.

After a moment, Tyler brought Zuzia into his cabin, gesturing for Mathilda to follow. "Mathilda, can you dress her up properly?"

Mathilda, always up for a challenge, eagerly took on the task. However, it turned out to be more difficult than expected. Zuzia kept pulling off whatever clothes Mathilda dressed her in, giggling as if it were a game. After a good amount of chasing and a few stern words from Mathilda, the dragon girl was finally dressed and ready.

Tyler, waiting patiently, smiled as the two finally emerged. He produced a small glowing orb from his pocket. Zuzia's eyes lit up, and without hesitation, she grabbed the orb and swallowed it whole.

Mathilda, watching the exchange, raised an eyebrow. "What was that for?"

"Nothing special," Tyler replied with a shrug. "It was a Life Orb. Dragons have long lifespans, but it doesn't hurt to give her a little boost."

Mathilda's eyes gleamed with excitement. "Can I get one of those to experiment with? Maybe I can extract the energy and make pills or something unique." She was already thinking of how she could use it for alchemy.

Tyler chuckled and handed her another orb. "Sure, try it out. If you can come up with something unique, we could sell it exclusively in the Northern Seas."

Mathilda was ecstatic. She quickly took the orb and dashed off toward her lab, leaving Tyler and Zuzia behind.

Tyler turned to Lily, who had been quietly observing the scene. "Did Silvia take the Life Orb I gave her?" he asked.

Lily shook her head. "Nope. She doesn't want to take it because she thinks it'll make her small again."

Tyler nearly stumbled. "What?" He couldn't help but laugh. Silvia, now fifteen, was taller than Tyler, who had reverted to a twelve-year-old form. He realized Silvia probably liked the idea of being the "big sister" and didn't want to give that up. He remembered how Mathilda always teased Silvia, calling her "Elder Sister," which made Silvia blush and puff out her chest with pride.

As Tyler's laughter echoed on the deck, Zuzia tugged at his sleeve, her bright emerald eyes filled with a sense of playful innocence. Tyler glanced at her, grinning.

"You're going to be a handful, aren't you?"

Zuzia only responded by jumping onto his back, her wings fluttering as she clung to him like a mischievous little dragon-child.

Tyler sighed but couldn't help smiling.

"I am curious what are Dragon and sea Beast power level are called?" Tyler asked Lily.

An Immortal Practitioner is divided into two. Warrior and Mage. And their power levels are described as Novice, Elite, Master, Grandmaster and so on.

"Beasts and other are not classified as Mage or Warrior. Because they have strong body can also use magic. We just call them Novice level Beast or Grandmaster level Beast or something like that. But their power levels are more than that." Lily explained.

"What does that mean?" Tyler asked.

"Hmmm... It's like this a novice level Monster is powerful than a Novice Level Warrior or Novice Level Mage. So even though Zuzia is Grandmaster Level Dragon, she is definitely powerful than a Grandmaster Level Warrior or Mage," Lily said.

It's very simple. If a mortal man fights a mortal bull, he won't be able to win. And even though they are both mortal, the bull is definitely stronger than a man. The same logic applies with monsters and beasts.

Tyler learned something new.

"Boss, there is an island... " Mana suddenly popped out and said.

Mana looked at Zuzia.

Zuzia looked back at Mana.

Mana had devil-like wings on her waist with a devil's tail. She also had cat ears on her head, and her height matched Zuzia's.

Zuzia had black wings with a red, lava-like pattern on her back. She also had horns on her head.

Both looked at each other and blinked.

"Who is this little cutie?" Mana asked.

Zuzia simply jumped on her and began to lick her. Mana couldn't recognize Zuzia, but Zuzia remembered Mana.

"Boss help.... She is trying to Lick Mana to death." Mana who was pushed down asked.

"Aww... If only they are Older, this scene would be incredibly Hot." Lily said.

Tyler who was watching them with amusement, turned around to Lily and seriously said, "You should stop get influenced by Mathilda."

Chapter 189: Triangle Islands

It's been a more than a month since Tyler Crew left the New Rose Kingdom.

Tyler stood at the bow of the ship, gazing out at the horizon. His eyes widened as the sight of several islands came into view. Each one was distinct, yet eerily similar, forming a chain of land masses that dotted the ocean like giant stepping stones. The sun hung low in the sky, casting a golden glow over the water, reflecting the triangular shape of the islands.

"Is that... a bunch of islands?" Mathilda asked, leaning over the railing beside him.

Lily nodded, standing nearby, arms folded across her chest as she studied the formation. "Yep. Those are the Triangle Islands."

"Triangle Islands?" Tyler repeated, raising an eyebrow. "Is there a reason for that name?"

Lily turned, her sharp eyes glittering with a hint of amusement. "The islands are shaped like triangles. There are a total of twenty, according to the old maps."

"Twenty?" Mathilda whistled, her gaze shifting back to the horizon. "That's a lot."

Tyler's eyes traced the outline of each island in the distance, now clearly visible. True to their name, every island was shaped like a perfect triangle, with sharp edges and jagged coastlines. They all seemed uniform in size, stretching out into the distance in neat rows.

"We're docking at that one," Tyler said, pointing to one of the islands slightly larger than the others. Its coastline appeared less jagged, offering a more welcoming place to anchor.

As they approached, Lily continued, "Each island is identical because, according to legend, an ancient warrior split a massive landmass into twenty islands using nothing but his sword."

Tyler glanced at her, intrigued. "That must have been some sword."

Lily smirked. "It was more than just a sword. The warrior was said to be one of the most powerful in his era, capable of splitting not just land, but even the sky. His attack left the islands in a perfect triangular shape, and as the years passed, the islands slowly drifted apart from each other."

"The same attack created all of this?" Mathilda asked in awe. "And now they're just... floating apart?"

Lily nodded. "Pretty much. The islands were once connected, but over time, natural forces caused them to drift. Now, they look like they were always meant to be separate."

As the ship drew closer to the shore, the full scale of the island became apparent. The entire place was lined with stone houses, their roofs slanted and angular, mimicking the island's shape. The architecture was ancient, with each house built from the same gray stone.

As soon as the ship docked, a crowd gathered at the shore. The sight of a foreign ship arriving seemed to stir excitement among the islanders, their faces lighting up with curiosity and interest. Tyler's sharp eyes scanned the gathering, his instincts telling him to remain cautious.

"Stay alert, everyone," Tyler muttered under his breath.

The crew silently nodded in agreement. It's the rules of the sea. Never trust strangers. But also never abandon strangers. But Tyler had already thought ahead.

"Tuman," Tyler called out, catching the attention of the man standing at the ready. Tuman, the son of the former captain of the White Crown Army and now the chief guard of the White Merchant Group, stepped forward. His sharp features and disciplined posture made him stand out even among warriors.

"Yes, Captain?" Tuman asked, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword.

"Get with Situ and bring out the goods to sell. We'll start by making it clear we're merchants," Tyler ordered. He then added, "But don't let your guard down. We don't know what to expect here."

Tuman nodded, his face serious as he turned to carry out the task. Situ, the ship's steward, followed closely behind, organizing the goods with precision. Despite their casual demeanor, one is a veteran in combat and could spring into action at any sign of trouble. And another is the one who manages the servants in the ship.

"Darla, You take incharge." Tyler said, pointing toward one of the chief cooks, who blinked in surprise.

"Me?" Darla responded, her eyes widening as she looked down at Tyler's small hands pointing her way.

"We all look like kids now," Tyler explained, glancing over at the rest of the crew. Their children appearance is due to accident happened in the Labyrinth. That's what everyone thinks. It could be a disadvantage of kids acts like Merchants. "People on this island might not take us seriously if we they know that kids are the head of this group. So, yeah... I'm putting you in charge of the negotiations. You've got this."

Darla's expression shifted to one of determination. "I won't let you down, Captain."

Tyler smirked. "Good. Now go show them how it's done."

As Darla readied herself for the task, Tyler glanced around, noticing someone was missing. "Where's Mana?"

Lily, standing beside him, sighed and shook her head. "Mana took Zuzia and left, said something about fishing."

Tyler raised an eyebrow but shrugged. "Alright, let her have her fun."

Meanwhile, in the open sea, Mana rode atop Zuzia, who was soaring above the water like a black streak across the sky. Below them, a massive fish lurked, eyeing a smaller fish as its prey. Just as it was about to strike, Zuzia's jaws snapped shut around the larger fish, pulling it from the water.

"Good girl!" Mana cheered, patting Zuzia's massive head. "You've definitely improved."

Zuzia let out a satisfied growl, her wings beating rhythmically as she circled back, ready to continue their hunt.

Back on the island, Tyler's group moved through the stone streets, their guards following a few paces behind. Even though they could easily handle themselves, Tyler had instructed them to bring a small squad of guards just in case. It was better to appear cautious than to invite unnecessary trouble.

"You girls can go and look around. Also, find out what's special here. See if we can trade with them," Tyler said.

Lily and the others nodded, leaving with the guards. Tyler went off separately.

Astrid, however, stayed behind on the ship. She wasn't in the mood for sightseeing, her mind too preoccupied with the recent events. Despite the invitation, she preferred to remain in the quiet space of her quarters, gathering her thoughts.

As Tyler ventured further into the island, he noticed a small jungle ahead. The dense trees and vegetation provided a sharp contrast to the stony buildings by the shore.

Swoosh.

Suddenly, something flew behind him. Tyler stopped and turned around, scanning the area but didn't see anyone. What he didn't realize was that something had flown right back into his blind spot, moving with such speed it seemed to vanish whenever he tried to locate it.

He turned again, but the flying object mirrored his movements, staying just out of sight.

"Hmmm... déjà vu," Tyler murmured, feeling a presence behind him.

He spun around, but again, there was no one in sight. Tyler had been in situations like this before—he knew the person had to be behind him. Turning again, he finally caught sight of a goggle-wearing face right in front of him.

"Ahhh!" The person in goggles, hovering in mid-air, let out a startled cry.

Tyler remained unfazed, keeping a neutral expression despite the unexpected encounter. However, his eyes couldn't help but focus on the hoverboard beneath her feet. It was sleek, futuristic. This is the technology that Tyler was eager to learn.

"Ahhh... That was awkward. Hi, you can call me Hawk... So it's 'Hawkward.' Hahaha..." the girl joked, her beautiful voice laughing at her own pun as if she found herself endlessly amusing.

Tyler shook his head. This girl said the exact same thing the last time they met. It was like she hadn't changed at all.

It was the same girl he had encountered at the Kun Peng Ruins.

She was dressed in an outfit that still seemed out of place, even in this world. Her half-sized T-shirt-like top paired with a short leather jacket gave her a rebellious, futuristic vibe. Her shorts left much of her toned thighs exposed, giving her an appearance both bold and confident. A glowing light-blue energy shield surrounded her body, protecting her from the elements and possible attacks. Hovering on a board with thrusters, she carried a strange gun that was connected by a tube to a high-tech backpack.

"You look familiar... Have we met before?" Hawk asked, leaning in closer to Tyler, her face barely inches away. He could feel her warm breath against his skin, making him a little uneasy.

"You're so cute... Big sister has some candy. Wanna come with me?" she teased, her voice growing quicker, as if excited by the interaction.

Tyler recognized that expression—it was the same perverted look Mathilda got whenever she spotted a pretty girl she liked. The resemblance in their behavior was uncanny, and it only made him sigh internally, wondering how he managed to attract yet another strange woman.

Chapter 190: Hawk's Invitation

At this moment, looking at the frenzied young girl with a puddle of saliva forming beneath her, Tyler knew that he was facing a big crisis.

"Small cutie... No, I mean, little friend, do you want to see goldfish with Big Sister? Big Sister's home has many cute little animals." The girl named Hawk wiped the drool from the corner of her mouth. Her eyes sparkled with a mischievous glint as she jumped off her hoverboard, her boots hitting the ground with a soft thud. She started walking toward Tyler, her movements quick and deliberate.

Tyler's heart raced. Though he was no stranger to strange encounters, this girl had a look in her eyes that sent a shiver down his spine. Her relentless approach forced him into action. Before she could get too close, he instinctively cast an ice spell, bounding her legs to the ground. For a split second, he thought he'd succeeded in stopping her.

But to his surprise, the ice cracked instantly as Hawk stepped forward, breaking through the magical bind as if it were nothing more than fragile glass.

"Chant-less magic? You're a mage... and a talented one!" Hawk exclaimed, her admiration shining through. Her goggled eyes studied Tyler closely. Despite her growing interest in him, she hadn't yet realized who she was dealing with. She hadn't linked him to the mysterious man she had met once at the Kun Peng Ruins, where Tyler had worn a mask and had yet to fully recover his powers. Now that he looked much younger, she didn't even consider it was the same person.

"What do you want?" Tyler asked, his voice calm but wary. He didn't trust her enthusiasm or her strange, hyperactive demeanor.

"I want you to join my academy, of course!" Hawk announced brightly, stepping even closer. "My Elite Academy of Magic and Science. You've got potential, kid, and Big Sister Hawk can give you a special gift if you come with me."

Tyler raised an eyebrow. "A gift?" He wasn't particularly interested in gifts, but his curiosity was piqued by the mention of an academy.

Hawk smirked, sensing his slight interest. "Oh, I noticed you like my hoverboard." She gestured at the sleek board still hovering just a few feet above the ground. "I'll get you one of your own. A cool hoverboard, just like mine. It'll be yours if you join."

Now Tyler was intrigued. "Is this academy famous?"

Hawk puffed up her chest proudly. "Cough Yes, of course! It's a branch of Starfire Academy. Ever heard of Starfire Academy? It's one of the top ten academies in the North. Starfire Academy is so big, it has many smaller branches under it, like ours. Getting into Starfire Academy isn't easy, but through our department, you could eventually earn your way into the main academy."

Tyler nodded, thinking. "I've heard of it."

"See? Even a country bumpk-..." Hawk caught herself mid-sentence and quickly corrected, "Even remote side people like you have heard about it. It's that famous. But let me tell you, it's not easy to join Starfire Academy directly."

"Even with a recommendation?" Tyler asked nonchalantly.

Hawk frowned and folded her arms across her chest. "You'd need a special Recommendation Medal from the higher-ups in Starfire Academy. Those medals are rare, and only those who have caught the attention of a powerful figure in the academy can get one."

Tyler casually reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, intricately designed medal, showing it to Hawk. "Like this?"

Hawk barely glanced at the medal, already continuing her explanation. "Yeah, yeah... Only with a medal like that can you directly join the Starfire Academy—"

Her words trailed off as the full realization hit her. Her eyes widened in shock as she snapped her gaze back to the medal in Tyler's hand. "M-m-medal?" she stuttered, stepping back in disbelief. She nearly tripped over her own feet before catching herself on her hoverboard, her usual confidence shattered.

"Why do you have a recommendation medal?" she gasped, her expression filled with astonishment.

Tyler smirked but didn't bother explaining how he got it. The truth was, he had obtained it from Elowen, the powerful witch from the South who had helped him form a contract with Mathilda. He didn't feel the need to disclose that detail to Hawk.

"Well," Tyler said, glancing at the medal, "with this, I can join directly, right?"

Hawk's shoulders slumped, her energetic demeanor deflating like a balloon. "Y-yeah," she muttered dejectedly. "You can join directly..."

"I see," Tyler replied, slipping the medal back into his pocket. "And here I thought I'd have to go through all the trouble of joining your department."

Hawk's lips quivered, and she sighed deeply. "I was hoping you'd join my department. If we manage to bring in a genius like you, we'd get more credits and research funds... It's a big deal for us."

Tyler raised an eyebrow. "Oh? And what would I get if I joined your department instead of just going straight to the main academy?"

Hawk perked up slightly, seeing an opportunity to make a deal. "Well... for starters, I could get you access to all sorts of advanced equipment. You'd get top-tier training in both magic and science. And you'd be a big fish in a small pond—everyone in the department would give you special treatment. Plus, you'd have me as your mentor." She flashed a smile, trying to win him over.

Tyler's expression didn't change. "Special treatment, huh?"

"Absolutely!" Hawk said, her voice gaining some of its previous energy. "And we'd get to work on cool projects together. You'd have access to stuff that even the main academy students don't get to touch. We're talking cutting-edge tech, magical artifacts, and more."

Tyler crossed his arms, considering the offer. He didn't doubt that the resources Hawk was offering were valuable. But he also didn't trust her completely—there was something off about the way she presented herself. She was too eager, too desperate to recruit him.

"And what if I decide to go to the main academy without joining your department?" Tyler asked, testing her.

Hawk pouted, clearly not fond of that option. "Well... if you do that, you'll be just another face in the crowd. Sure, you'll have your recommendation medal, but you'll have to compete with all the other geniuses there. It won't be easy to stand out."

Tyler gave a small smile. "I don't mind a little competition."

Hawk sighed, her shoulders slumping again. "Fine, fine. You win. Actually, it's better if you join the main academy. Everyone's racing toward it. It would be a waste if you don't use the medal you've got." For a moment, her usual energetic persona faded, replaced by a more honest expression. She knew when to admit defeat, and Tyler's potential was undeniable. If he had that medal, there was no reason for him to limit himself to her department.

"Oh..." Tyler nodded, his expression unreadable. He was still evaluating her, as he had done with countless others, weighing her motives and sincerity.

"Actually, you can also choose to join our department after joining the main aca—" Hawk started to say but quickly cut herself off. She knew better. There were plenty of side branches at Starfire Academy more prestigious and better resourced than hers. Why would someone like Tyler choose her department when he could aim for a higher branch, one with better facilities and greater recognition?

Tyler didn't seem to notice her hesitation, but she could feel it gnawing at her. He had the opportunity to surpass her expectations by far, and she could see it clearly now. Hawk quickly pivoted to change the subject. "What's your name, by the way?"

"Tyler... Tyler White," he replied evenly. His voice was calm, but Hawk could tell he was always thinking, always calculating.

"Alright, Mr. White," Hawk said with a playful grin, "I'll talk to my big sis—I mean, the Head of Department—and see if we can offer anything that'll pique your interest." Before Tyler could respond, she activated her hoverboard, leaping onto it effortlessly. The board hummed to life, and in seconds, she was already soaring into the air.

Tyler watched her fly off, her figure rapidly disappearing into the horizon. The cool, distant sky was an odd contrast to the energy she had brought with her, but he felt a lingering curiosity toward the eccentric girl.

He wasn't foolish; he knew there was more to Hawk's sudden interest in him than just his abilities. She clearly had her own motives, and whether it was genuine admiration or simply a desire to use him to gain more credit for her department, he couldn't yet determine. But Tyler wasn't new to manipulation—he'd been navigating similar encounters for a long time.

"Why are you so interested in me?" Tyler called out just before she had gone too far.

Hawk's mind raced for a second, her thoughts instantly going to what she'd inwardly considered: Because you're cute. But, of course, she couldn't say that out loud.

Instead, she turned slightly and shouted back, "It's rare to see a 12-year-old elite mage!" The words flew out casually, but she knew that wasn't the real reason. She was curious about more than just his talent. But admitting that now was far too soon.

Before Tyler could respond, Hawk's voice trailed off into the distance, leaving Tyler standing alone, staring up at the sky.

Hawk, however, had already turned her attention back to more pressing matters. With a flick of her wrist, she summoned a small floating projection window, glowing softly at her side. "Star AI, call Big Sis," she commanded.

The projection blinked to life, flashing a message: Call Connecting...