

R Cultivator 316

Chapter 316: To the Dark Horizon

The peaceful village, once a place of eerie stillness, was now bustling with activity. Men and women hurried about, gathering supplies, reinforcing homes, and ensuring that every last trace of warmth was preserved. The bitter cold of winter was fast approaching, and everyone seemed determined to prepare.

But inside Catherine's house, a small group was focused on something far more important than the changing seasons.

A faint golden glow lingered in the air, fading as the last of the Silver Honey Hard Candies dissolved on the tongue of an elderly man. His eyes, once clouded with confusion, cleared, and realization dawned upon him. Another Grandmaster, who had been trapped in the village's curse, had finally regained his memories.

Tyler exhaled, rubbing his temple as he leaned against the wooden wall. "So that makes five... I didn't expect that the others had already died three times and lost their souls completely." His voice was low, tinged with exhaustion.

Of the many who had been ensnared by the village's curse, only five had been saved. The rest—powerful grandmasters, who are capable of ruling an organisation in South—had perished, their souls consumed by the village and become complete illusion.

One of the Grandmasters placed a reassuring hand on Tyler's shoulder. "It's alright. This is the Abyss. We already expected death."

That did little to ease the weight in Tyler's heart, but he nodded anyway.

Another Grandmaster, still in awe of his restored clarity, turned to Mathilda with curiosity. "How did you make this... Silver Honey Hard Candy?"

Mathilda puffed out her chest proudly. "Hah! Simple alchemy stuff. I just concentrated the honey more and amplified its effects fivefold." She smirked. "Nothing too complicated."

The Grandmaster chuckled. "Simple, Madam says. You make it sound like it wasn't a miracle."

Mathilda grinned, clearly pleased with herself.

Tyler, however, was done waiting. He straightened and clapped his hands once. "Since we've got everyone, let's go."

No one argued. They had lingered in the cursed village long enough.

A small group departed from the village that day—Tyler, Mathilda, Astrid, Mana, Misra, and the five rescued Grandmasters.

Snow had already begun to fall, the first signs of winter blanketing the streets and rooftops in a thin, powdery white. The once-familiar warmth of the village was fading, replaced by an unsettling chill.

Tyler pulled out a small, compass from his coat. It trembled in his palm, the needle jerking toward the north.

He frowned. "The compass is pointing north... That's north, right?" He glanced at the sun to confirm.

The others nodded.

Misra's voice was quiet, almost a whisper. "The Dark Horizon."

A heavy silence settled over the group.

Tyler had heard of the Dark Horizon before- at least everyone has heard of it when they lost the memories. It was a place that few dared to approach. The Ancestors of this village lost their minds after seeing whatever that is inside. If the compass was leading them there, then their passage to another Floor must be somewhere within its depths.

Without hesitation, they pressed forward.

The snow intensified as they walked, falling in thick, heavy flakes. The cold gnawed at their skin, even though they are at master and Grandmaster level. The wind howled around them, carrying with it an eerie whisper, as though the land itself resented their intrusion.

Astrid pulled her cloak tighter around herself. "Will we encounter a Frost Silver Wolf?" she asked.

Misra didn't even hesitate. "No."

Astrid exhaled in relief—only for Misra to continue.

"We might not encounter just one," she said calmly. "But the whole pack."

Astrid's breath hitched.

Tyler sighed, already pulling out weapons from his storage device. He retrieved his trident, its once bright radiance now tainted with an abyssal black sheen. He could still feel its power, but something about it had undeniably changed.

He handed out weapons to the others, knowing they couldn't afford to face whatever lurked ahead unarmed.

One of the Grandmasters frowned as he accepted a sword from Tyler. "It's unfortunate... We couldn't retrieve our weapons because the mist in the well deepened." His grip tightened on the hilt, "But even without our powers, we can still handle the wolves I guess."

Tyler nodded grimly. They had taken the risk of diving into the well, hoping to recover their lost equipment—but the abyssal mist had grown stronger, devouring everything it touched.

Misra adjusted the straps on her dagger holster. "The village must have noticed something. But it won't be able to influence much than that."

Still, they all felt an invisible weight pressing down on them, as though unseen eyes were watching from the swirling snow.

They walked for what felt like hours, their boots crunching against the frost-covered ground. With each step, the mist thickened, curling around their legs like phantom fingers.

Then, without warning, the howling wind ceased.

Tyler stopped. "Not again."

Misra's eyes narrowed. "They're here."

A single growl echoed through the air, low and guttural.

Then another.

And another.

Shadows moved in the mist, barely visible, but their glowing silver eyes betrayed their presence.

Frost Silver Wolves.

Dozens of them.

Tyler raised his trident, its abyss-tainted trident glinting darkly. "Stay close."

The wolves didn't attack immediately. They circled, their breaths forming white clouds in the frigid air. They were intelligent creatures—hunters that knew when to strike.

"I didn't see the one I saw before." Tyler said.

"That one is Probably got seperated from the Pack." Mathilda said.

"Can we really handle it?" Misra asked.

"Can you change into that form and kill them all?" Mathilda asked.

"I can take two ..." Misra replied.

"In a fight, right?" Mathilda asked.

One of the wolves suddenly collapsed, impaled by a trident that had pierced clean through its neck. Blood pooled beneath its twitching body as its life faded.

"Huh?"

Everyone—both humans and wolves—froze in shock, turning to look at Tyler. He was still gripping his trident, yet the weapon that had slain the wolf was its manifested projection.

Tyler sighed in relief. "Looks like the trident's ability is still working."

That moment of surprise quickly passed. The remaining wolves let out furious howls, their silver eyes glowing with rage as they lunged at the group.

Misra's body flickered, her form shifting as tendrils of darkness spread across her limbs. Half of her figure took on an abyssal appearance before she vanished into the mist. A second later, two wolves yelped as she dragged them into the shadows. Their howls were cut short.

The five Grandmasters each engaged a wolf, their weapons flashing in the pale light. Steel clashed against fangs as they fought in synchronized precision, their battle experience evident in every movement.

Mathilda, standing near Astrid, pulled out a small vial of liquid from her pouch. Without hesitation, she hurled it at an approaching wolf. The glass shattered against its thick fur, and an eerie sizzling sound followed as its skin began to melt like wax under the acid. The wolf howled in agony, staggering backward.

Astrid raised her hands, divine energy crackling around her fingers. With a flick of her wrist, she sent a burst of holy light surging forward, burning away the mist and forcing the wolves to recoil.

Meanwhile, Tyler reached into his storage device, pulling out several charms. He activated one, but the moment it touched the outside air, it corroded instantly, dissolving into nothing.

"Tch... the charms are not Anti-Abyss Coated." Tyler cursed under his breath.

Still, he didn't hesitate. If charms wouldn't work, then brute force would. Tightening his grip, he threw his trident with sheer strength. The weapon blurred through the air, impaling another wolf.

Far away, near a riverbank, a massive wolf lay curled up, its fur marked by a deep scar across one eye. It had remained still, seemingly asleep—until a strange, blue mist drifted toward it. The mist slithered into its nose, and in an instant, the wolf's body convulsed.

Its eyes snapped open. It tried to howl—but no sound emerged. Instead, its body trembled as it rapidly grew in size. Its fur darkened, twisting as abyssal energy pulsed through its veins.

The once-sleeping wolf had transformed. Half of its body had taken on an abyssal form, its shape monstrous and unrecognizable.

It didn't howl. It didn't hesitate.

With terrifying speed, it turned toward the direction of Tyler and the others. Then, with a single bound, it charged forward, destroying everything in its path. Trees splintered and crashed to the ground as the monstrous beast closed the distance.

Tyler and the others had no idea what was coming.

Chapter 317: Fighting the Abyss Wolf

"Okay, why are there so many wolves?" Tyler sighed as he threw another projection of his trident, the weapon piercing through the thick hide of yet another charging beast. The wolf let out a pained yelp before collapsing lifelessly onto the snowy ground.

"Winter draws them out," Misra replied, her voice calm despite the battle raging around them. "But wolves aren't the only things you should be worried about. There are worse creatures that roam during this season."

Tyler narrowed his eyes. "Great. Just what we needed—more surprises."

A piercing howl echoed through the icy forest, followed by another, then another. The surrounding mist rippled with movement as more glowing eyes emerged from the darkness. The pack was much larger than they had expected.

"Then we need to finish this fast." Tyler reached into his storage device. "Block them for now. I'll check if I have anything that can deal with these wolves quickly."

"Roger—"

Before Misra could finish her sentence, a wolf suddenly spoke.

"Roger that."

Tyler turned, blinking in surprise.

One of the wolves pounced—not on them, but on another wolf, biting into its throat with deadly precision.

"Oh, right," Tyler muttered. "Mana took control of that one."

Mana, his Ghost Spirit who had popped out of thin air earlier, had possessed one of the wolves using her unique ability. The wolf she controlled fought alongside them, tearing through its own kind with ruthless efficiency.

Mathilda and Astrid worked together as well, hurling alchemical explosives and holy light made by some potion reactions to keep the beasts at bay. The five Grandmasters, despite being weaponless until earlier, were holding their own with the weapons Tyler had given them.

Tyler quickly rummaged through his storage device, his fingers gliding over various items. Then, his eyes lit up as he pulled out a small, metallic object resembling a grenade.

"Here we go," he muttered before throwing it toward one of the wolves.

The device landed perfectly, rolling beneath the wolf's legs before activating. A loud hissing noise filled the air as the grenade released a pressurized explosion—

But instead of killing the wolf, the grenade itself started to corrode. The abyssal atmosphere in the area quickly tainted it, breaking it down into nothing before it could even detonate.

Tyler clicked his tongue in frustration. "Tsk... it's not Anti-abyss Coated. Damn it."

Misra, still half-submerged in her abyss-like form, reappeared from the shadows. "Most of your standard weapons and tools are useless here unless they have anti-abyss coating. You should've learned that by now. I heard it from outsiders"

Tyler exhaled, regaining his composure. "Yeah, yeah. I know. I was just hoping that one would last a little longer."

A sudden, loud thud interrupted their conversation.

A new presence entered the battlefield.

The ground trembled beneath their feet. Snow scattered into the air as a massive figure crashed into the clearing.

Everyone—including the wolves—froze.

A monstrous wolf stood before them, much larger than the rest. It was at least three times the size of these silverfrost wolf, with thick, matted fur that was blackened by abyssal corruption. Deep scars lined its body, and its glowing silver eyes burned with intelligence.

But the most terrifying part was the eerie blue mist swirling around it.

Misra's expression darkened. "This... is bad."

The corrupted wolf let out a low, guttural growl. Unlike the others, it did not howl. It did not bare its fangs in blind rage. Instead, it simply stared at them—as if calculating its next move.

"Isn't that the same wolf?" Tyler noticed its scar and said.

Then, without warning, it attacked.

It moved with unnatural speed, closing the distance in an instant.

The other silverfrost wolves instantly died.

"Ah.. it's our ally?" Mathilda tilted her head.

Then it lunged at Mathilda, but she quickly threw a flask which exploded and Mathilda and Astrid escaped.

"Nah... I spoke too soon..." She muttered.

Tyler barely had time to react before the beast lunged straight for him. He threw himself to the side, narrowly dodging as the wolf's massive claws tore through the air where he had stood a moment ago.

The impact alone created a small shockwave, scattering snow and debris.

Mana in her wolf form let out a howl, where everything was frozen. The beast struck, its claws clashing against the frost mist slicing it apart.

Mana gritted her teeth and growled. "This thing is strong!"

Mathilda was already moving, pulling out another alchemical bomb. "Let's see how you like this!" She hurled the explosive, aiming for the wolf's exposed side.

The bomb detonated on contact, releasing a thick, viscous liquid that clung to the creature's fur. The substance began to sizzle, eating away at the corrupted flesh beneath.

The wolf let out a soundless roar—its vocal cords seemingly stripped away by abyssal mutation. Its body trembled, but instead of retreating, it adapted.

Before their eyes, the abyssal energy within it shifted, neutralizing the effects of the acid. The burnt flesh regenerated almost instantly.

Tyler clenched his jaw. "It's evolving."

Mathilda reappeared beside him, her expression serious. "We need to kill it fast, or it'll keep adapting."

Tyler nodded, gripping his trident tightly. "Then let's go all out."

With a burst of movement, he dashed toward the creature, summoning multiple projections of his trident in rapid succession. Each one struck the wolf from a different angle, piercing through its corrupted flesh.

The beast staggered but didn't fall. It turned its gaze toward Tyler, recognizing him as the biggest threat.

Misra took advantage of its distraction, shifting fully into her abyssal form. Shadow-like tendrils shot out from her body, wrapping around the wolf's legs and restricting its movement.

"Now!" she shouted.

Tyler didn't hesitate.

Channeling all his strength, he hurled his trident directly at the beast's skull. The weapon spun through the air, glowing with abyss-resistant energy.

The moment it struck, a shockwave erupted from the point of impact.

For a second, everything was silent.

Then, the corrupted wolf didn't collapse instead a metal hitting metal sound was resonated.

Tyler exhaled, sweat dripping down his forehead, "Fuc-..."

He was thrown away by the wolf. His chest almost got ripped off.

Suddenly, a wolf fang projection shot forward, piercing through the corrupted wolf's eye. The beast let out a silent yet agonized snarl, its massive body flinching at the unexpected attack.

Mana, still in her wolf form, had used one of the wolves' own abilities against it. She let out a triumphant growl, but her victory was short-lived. The corrupted wolf, now blind in one eye, turned its fury toward her.

With terrifying speed, it lunged, its abyssal claws slicing through the air like blades.

Mana barely had time to react. She leaped away, but the force of the attack sent her rolling across the snow.

Misra, reverted back to her normal form. She shook off the remnants of the abyssal mist clinging to her skin and rushed toward Tyler. "Are you alright?"

Tyler groaned, "That thing is still a wolf, right?"

Misra nodded grimly. "Barely. It seems like the village itself is feeding it power—just to stop us."

Tyler turned to Misra "I have a crazy idea, but I don't know if it'll work. Before that, How exactly do you use your power?"

Misra hesitated before answering. "It's something I figured out after being trapped here. Since I don't have a soul anymore, I've become part of the village in a way. That means I can tap into its power—just a little."

Tyler's eyes lit up. "Could I use that power too?"

Misra's expression darkened. "There's a way... but I can only lend it to you for a few seconds. Any longer, and the village will fight back."

"A few seconds is all I need," Tyler said, a confident smirk forming on his lips.

Then Tyler turned to Mana and the others. "Hold on for a minute—I have a plan."

Mana, still catching her breath, gave a quick nod.

Without wasting any more time, Tyler began rummaging through his storage device, pulling out something that made Misra jaw drop.

A few moments later, Misra leaned over, watching Tyler's action with confusion.

"Do you really think this will work?" she asked.

Tyler shrugged. "We're about to find out. Now, lend me some power."

Misra let out a resigned sigh. "Alright..."

Without another word, she stepped forward and suddenly kissed him.

The moment their lips met, a strange energy surged through Tyler's body. His half-frozen face distorted slightly as the abyssal power seeped into him. The sensation was overwhelming—his veins burned, his mind filled with fragmented whispers, but he endured it.

Meanwhile, the corrupted wolf continued its rampage.

It had seized a Silverfrost Wolf—the very one Mana had possessed earlier—by the neck. She has no chance to resist.

A horrible cracking sound echoed through the clearing as the Silverfrost Wolf's body was suddenly encased in ice. A moment later, it shattered into thousands of frozen shards.

Mana barely managed to escape at the last second, appearing beside Tyler with wide, alarmed eyes.

Tyler, now radiating abyssal energy, stepped forward. His expression was different. There was a predatory gleam in his eyes.

"Hey," he called out to the beast. "Try someone your own size."

The corrupted wolf turned toward him. It recognized the change in Tyler.

For the first time, it hesitated.

Then, it let out a guttural howl.

A powerful energy wave erupted from its body, creating an icy breeze that instantly froze the air itself.

The wave struck Tyler head-on.

Ice crawled up his limbs, rapidly encasing him in a solid layer of frost. Before anyone could react, the wolf lunged forward, its massive jaws snapping shut around Tyler's frozen body.

Crunch.

The ice shattered.

Chapter 318: Entering the Dark Horizon

"Is he dead?" Misra asked in surprise, her gaze fixed on the shattered remains of ice.

"Nah... it's just his Ice Escape Art or whatever it's called," Mathilda said, shaking her head.

As if on cue, Tyler reappeared near the girls. The distorted energy surrounding him dissipated, and his form slowly returned to normal.

"I feel like throwing up..." he muttered, rubbing his temple. His stomach churned, and his head felt light. The aftereffects of using abyssal energy were hitting him hard.

"Oh? I didn't feel anything like that," Misra shrugged.

"That's because I can feel the nausea in my soul..." Tyler groaned. Then, smirking slightly, he added, "Oh wait... you don't have a—Ouch!"

Before he could finish his sentence, Mathilda stomped on his foot.

"Less talking, more explaining," she huffed.

Meanwhile, the corrupted wolf that had attacked Tyler was still standing. It had devoured the ice statue that had been left in his place. Its remaining eye flickered as it turned its attention back to them.

Then, it let out a low growl before lunging forward.

Tyler and the others tensed.

"Do you think it will work?" Misra asked again, glancing at Tyler.

Tyler exhaled. "Not sure... I hope it does."

He gripped his trident tightly and dashed forward to meet the beast.

The battle was quick but intense. Tyler fought fiercely, dodging the wolf's massive claws and counterattacking with his weapon. The wolf snapped at him, its enormous fangs nearly grazing his arm. But Tyler was faster.

With each exchange, the beast became slower, its movements sluggish.

Then, without warning, it wobbled...

And fell.

The corrupted wolf collapsed onto the ground with a loud thud. Its abyssal energy flickered weakly before vanishing completely.

"It actually worked?!" Misra asked, her voice filled with disbelief.

Tyler stood over the fallen beast, breathing heavily. "Yeah... looks like it."

"What did you do?" Mana asked, tilting her head in curiosity.

Tyler scratched the back of his head, looking a little sheepish. "Well... it might sound silly..."

The girls stared at him expectantly.

"When I used Ice Escape Art, I filled that ice statue with... chocolate."

Silence.

"...Chocolate?" Astrid blinked in confusion.

"You see..." Tyler began, gesturing with his hands, "chocolate is toxic to many animals, including dogs, cats, rodents, wolves, horses, pigs, and chickens." He paused, watching their reactions. "So, I filled that ice statue with rings of chocolate and a few other poisons... just in case. I didn't know if the wolf had resistance to poison, so I wasn't sure if it would work."

The group fell silent for a moment.

Misra broke the silence first. "You're telling me... you defeated an abyss-corrupted wolf with chocolate?"

Tyler shrugged. "Yep."

"...I don't know whether to be impressed or insulted on behalf of the wolf," Mathilda muttered.

Misra tilted her head. "That actually makes sense. But where did you even get chocolate?"

"I have almost everything in my storage device," Tyler said casually. "And quantity was never a problem for me "

Mana chuckled. "That has to be the weirdest way Mana have seen a monster go down."

"Well, whatever works," Misra sighed. "At least it's dealt with."

Now that the wolf was no longer a threat, Tyler pulled out his compass. It flickered slightly before pointing in a specific direction.

"Alright, let's keep moving," he said, taking the lead.

As they walked, they encountered a few more creatures along the way. However, compared to the Silverfrost Wolves, these enemies were significantly weaker. The group dispatched them with ease, barely breaking a sweat.

Soon, the dense forest began to thin. The eerie atmosphere that had loomed over them seemed to fade as well.

And then—

They stepped out of the forest and froze.

What lay before them was something none of them had ever seen before.

A colossal black screen stretched endlessly toward the sky, towering over everything in sight. It was unlike anything natural. There were no stars, no reflections—just pure, infinite darkness. It was as if the edge of the world.

At least the real edge of the world had stars and planets scattered in the distance. This?

This was just an endless abyss.

"What... is this?" Mathilda whispered, her voice barely above a breath.

Misra's expression darkened. "We've reached the boundary, The Dark Horizon."

Tyler stepped forward, his eyes narrowing as he observed the massive structure before them. He placed a hand against the surface. It was cold—colder than anything he had felt before. A shiver ran down his spine.

"This doesn't feel like a Barrier" he muttered. "It's just a pathway without light?"

Misra then replied, "More like Pathway without colour. According to the records it's not dark inside, just only white , black and gray exist."

Tyler didn't answer immediately. He took a deep breath and focused. The compass in his hand flickered again, this time pointing directly at the Dark Horizon.

"...Looks like we don't have a choice," he finally said "We came this far. If we turn back now, we might not get another chance."

The girls nodded.

With a final glance at the others, he took a deep breath—

And stepped forward.

The moment his body touched the dark barrier, everything changed.

A wave of dizziness washed over him as his vision blurred. The weight of the abyss pressed against his very soul, and for a brief moment, he felt as if he were being pulled into an endless void.

Then—

A flash of light.

And suddenly, the world around them was no longer the same.

The group found themselves standing on solid ground, but the sky above them twisted. The air felt heavy, charged with an unknown energy. The land was vast yet empty, as if it had been abandoned for eons. Gray snows began to fall on them.

"...It's really black and white?" Mathilda whispered, her voice laced with unease.

Everything around them was devoid of color.

Tyler scanned his surroundings, his eyes narrowing as he took in the eerie landscape. The trees stood tall but lifeless, their skeletal branches stretching toward the sky like grasping fingers. The ground was cracked and barren, with no sign of vegetation or life. Even the air itself felt unnatural, carrying a strange weight that pressed against their chests.

The pathways they walked on were not made of stone or dirt but of bones—massive, fossilized remains that crunched under their feet. As they stepped carefully forward, Tyler noticed the bones belonged to various creatures, some unrecognizable, others resembling monstrous fish with gaping jaws frozen in silent screams.

The gloomy atmosphere was suffocating.

Tyler pulled out his compass. The golden needle wavered for a moment before locking onto a single direction.

"There," he said, pointing ahead.

The group exchanged uneasy glances, but they pressed on, following the compass's guidance.

As they continued down the path, their unease grew.

The skeletal remains beneath their feet gradually became larger. Soon, they were walking on the bones of what seemed to be a colossal sea creature. Jagged ribs jutted out like the remains of a sunken ship, stretching so high that they cast long, twisted shadows across the land.

And then—

They froze.

Even Misra, who had remained relatively calm until now, went rigid with shock.

Tyler's breath caught in his throat.

"...Impossible," Misra whispered, her voice trembling.

Before them stood something that should not exist.

It was their village.

The Village of Vale.

Or at least... a version of it.

The same structures, the same buildings—they were all there. But unlike the village they knew, this one was different. It was empty.

Devoid of life.

And completely colorless.

It was as if the entire place had been drained of its soul.

The wind howled through the silent streets, carrying no warmth, only an eerie whisper that sent chills down their spines. Windows stood open, revealing dark, empty rooms. There were no signs of people—no villagers, no children playing.

It was a ghost town.

A heavy silence fell over them.

Then, Misra took a deep breath. "Shall we take a diversion? I have a bad feeling about this."

Tyler didn't respond immediately. Instead, he glanced at the compass.

The needle was pointing directly at the village.

He turned the compass toward Misra, showing her the unwavering direction.

She sighed, rubbing her temples. "Why am I not surprised?"

"Wait..." Tyler muttered, his gaze fixed on the village. Something about it felt off.

A strange realization crept into his mind, and he turned toward Mana.

She had already sensed his thoughts. Without a word, she flew high above the village, scanning it from the sky.

Moments later, she landed beside him.

"It does look like a face," she confirmed.

"Face?" Mathilda frowned.

Before anyone could react, the ground trembled.

The village itself shifted. Houses, streets, and the land beneath them began to move, reshaping and twisting unnaturally.

The entire village rose, forming into an enormous, towering face.

Then—

The eyes opened.

Hollow. Empty.

And yet, undeniably alive.

A deep, rumbling yawn echoed through the air.

"Who... woke... me up?" a slow, ancient voice rumbled.

Its massive, vacant eyes scanned the group.

Then—

Recognition.

"Oh... my... cute... villagers..." the colossal entity murmured.

Chapter 319: Lost its Memories?

"You... What are you?" Tyler asked cautiously, gripping his trident.

The massive face of the village stretched and shifted, as if smiling.

"Ahh... you can call me Vale," it rumbled.

"Like the Village of Vale?" Tyler frowned.

The ground shook violently. Tyler and the others barely managed to keep their footing.

"What was that?!" Mathilda yelled, bracing herself.

"Oh... I just nodded," the village said, its voice slow and unbothered. "But since my face is literally the village, it caused an earthquake."

Tyler and his companions exchanged awkward glances.

This was beyond strange.

"So... why thou you seek me?" the Village of Vale muttered. Then it tried to correct itself, "No... Thou Art Why you found me?"

Tyler narrowed his eyes. "What are you saying now?"

The massive entity sighed. "Oh, I was just trying to sound ancient... you know, to give ancient vibes."

Tyler blinked.

"Nah... just speak normally," he said flatly.

"Okay, dude," Vale responded.

Another earthquake followed.

Tyler groaned. "Ahhh—did you just nod again?!"

"...Yes," the village admitted.

The ground rumbled again, but before it could fully shake them off balance, Tyler shouted—

"DON'T NOD! JUST ANSWER!"

The earth stilled.

Vale let out a low chuckle. "Got it."

Tyler sighed in relief. "Good."

"Are you lost?" the Village asked in a deep, resonant voice that seemed to echo from every stone and shadow. Its tone was calm yet imposing, as if the very land were questioning their presence.

"Why the sudden tone change?" Tyler asked.

"I mean... Isn't this Ancient and Imposing?" The village of Vale spoke again in its normal voice.

"You normal voice is already Imposing." Tyler said.

Tyler glanced around, his eyes lingering on the strange, huge face which is formed by the Village. He pulled out his compass—a delicate instrument that, strangely enough, always pointed toward the village itself—and held it up for everyone to see.

"The answer for the previous question is..." Tyler then Continued, "The Compass points toward the Village."

Misra, standing close by, stepped forward and explained, "There is a passage to another Abyss floor inside this village. We need to get in so we can move on. The passage is our only way out." Her tone was steady, though her eyes betrayed a hint of desperation.

Before anyone could respond, a sudden burst of laughter echoed followed by the earthquake. "This is the first time someone asked me to eat them... Hahahah..." The laughter was followed by a violent tremor—a powerful earthquake that shook the ground beneath their feet. Tyler and the others stumbled as the earth rumbled, and in the chaos, they could feel the very dirt rising and shifting.

"Yeah... sorry about that," the Village of Vale apologized, its tone almost apologetic as Tyler and the others emerged from the swirling dust, trying to regain their balance.

Vale's eyes are hollow and huge... But everyone can feel that these eyes are seemed to fixate on Misra. "First of all," the voice intoned, "not everyone can leave here. This one is still alive because she is living here..." The words hung in the air, the meaning elusive yet ominous.

"Ah... is there any way to get her soul back?" Tyler asked.

Misra looked toward the Vale's face with a glimmer of forlorn hope, as if recalling someone she had lost many years ago.

"Soul... Oh, so her soul is—" Vale was about to say something, but then the voice of the Village abruptly fell silent.

Tyler cleared his throat, forcing himself to speak up. "Hello, Mr. Vale?" he called out, his tone tentative. He waited, but no reply came.

Finally, Misra's voice broke the silence once more. "I have seen this before..." she said slowly.

Tyler's brow furrowed. "We turned into a soulless state when we talked about the death of those girls... Something is also erasing Vale's memory? So it's not the one responsible for this...?" He trailed off, his mind racing to piece together the fragments of what they had experienced.

The voice of the Village of Vale remained silent for a long moment, then it shifted back into its original form—a calm, indistinct presence that filled the vast, colorless landscape.

Tyler and the others exchanged uneasy looks. "Let's go inside," Tyler said firmly, his voice steady despite the swirling confusion in his mind. The group nodded in unison, and together they stepped forward into the heart of the village, leaving behind the chaotic questions that now haunted them.

Inside the entrance, the atmosphere was heavy with an eerie quiet. The walls of the passage were also filled with many bones. Some of them looked like Human bones.

Tyler clutched his compass as they moved slowly down the narrow corridor, each step echoing in the vast, empty space.

Lost in thought, he murmured under his breath, "I wonder if there is another entity that controls everything." His words hung in the air, heavy with uncertainty and a trace of desperation.

As they turned a corner on a narrow, cobblestone street, the entire group suddenly froze in shock. Before them, in stark contrast to the dark, foreboding landscape around them, a cluster of villagers was moving as if caught in an endless, rhythmic routine. These villagers walked with casual ease, seemingly unaware of the eerie transformations that plagued the rest of the settlement. Their movements were deliberate, their expressions blank, as if they were mere puppets following an unseen script.

"Huh? What is happening?" Tyler asked, his voice laced with alarm as he stared at the procession of villagers.

The villagers, with ghostly pallor, moved silently. They did not acknowledge the presence of the outsiders at all. As Tyler watched, he realized that these people weren't even solid—they phased through each other like apparitions, their forms flickering in and out of existence as if they were nothing more than echoes of life.

One of the Grandmasters voice trembled, he stepped forward and shuddered. "It's like the first time we saw the village," he said slowly, his voice barely above a whisper. "Everything was an illusion then when we first saw the village."

Tyler frowned, his mind racing to reconcile the strange spectacle before him with what he had experienced before. "Huh... It's more like it's a live fragment projection from the village," he observed, his eyes narrowing as he studied them.

"Even though the villagers express lot of emotions. This is how they actually looks like.." Tyler said.

"Projection of some projection?," Mana added, the words echoing in the stillness of the street.

"There's someone—or something—behind all of this," Tyler said, his tone thoughtful yet resolute. "If we can understand what controls this place, maybe we can finally break free."

The ground suddenly shook. Tyler and the others were thrown out of the village by an overwhelming surge, their bodies slamming outside.

In an instant, the familiar landscape of the Village of Vale began to twist and contort. Houses, streets, and even the land beneath their feet moved unnaturally, reshaping into the familiar massive face.

Then, as if on cue, the eyes of this vast entity slowly opened. They were hollow and empty, just as before.

A moment of eerie calm followed before the massive visage spoke, its voice gave different vibe. "Thu-thu... How did you guys get into my mouth?" it asked, the sound echoing through the shifting landscape.

The colossal face, now fully formed from the village itself, continued, "Who are you creatures? What are you doing inside my body?" The question reverberated through the air as the entity's hollow eyes scanned the group with an intensity that made everyone freeze in place.

For a long moment, silence reigned. Then, with a slow, almost imperceptible sigh, the great face seemed to pause before muttering, "Oh wait..." Its voice softened slightly, as though it was reconsidering its own words. A deep, rumbling yawn then echoed through the land—a sound that seemed to shake the very foundations of the transformed village.

"Who... woke... me up?" the ancient voice rumbled, carrying the weight of countless years and secrets. The eyes of the colossal face, now fully alert and fixed on the group. There was a moment of recognition—a subtle shift in its tone—as if the entity remembered something long forgotten.

After a prolonged pause, the great, hollow eyes softened. "Oh... my... cute... villagers..." the colossal voice murmured.

"The village lost its memories?" Tyler realised.

Chapter 320: 320. Vale needs White Stuff

The village itself had transformed into a giant face, they seemed to be getting closer to some hidden truth—only for Vale to lose its memory.

Tyler crossed his arms, narrowing his eyes at the colossal face before him.

"You can call me Vale..." the massive entity said in a deep, echoing voice.

"Nope," Tyler cut him off. "We had this conversation before."

Vale seemed to pause, as if processing Tyler's words. "Oh..." The massive face furrowed—if that was even possible—before appearing to enter deep thought. Then, just as it was about to nod, Tyler quickly raised a hand.

"Don't nod or shake your head! We don't want to experience another earthquake," he warned.

Vale let out a long sigh, the ground beneath them trembling slightly. "Hmmm... So my memories have been wiped out again," it muttered.

Tyler exchanged glances with his companions before explaining what had just happened.

When Tyler finished, the massive entity let out another deep sigh. "Oh... That probably means I was about to reveal something important," Vale admitted, "and 'that thing' must have wiped my memories."

Tyler immediately latched onto the word. "That thing?" he asked, his grip tightening around his trident.

Vale remained silent for a moment before responding carefully, "Hmmm... Well, let's not talk about it. Otherwise, my memories might get erased again."

Whoever—or whatever—was erasing Vale's memory was powerful enough to manipulate reality itself. Even the entity like Vale is afraid of 'that thing' which controlled the very foundation of this place.

"How about trying these Silver Honey Hard Candies?" Mathilda suddenly suggested, holding out a handful of glimmering, silver-coated sweets. "They can bring back lost memories."

Vale let out a rumbling chuckle, the sound vibrating through the ground. "Oh... Haha... How the hell can I even eat that?" its booming voice echoed.

Tyler and the others braced themselves as the laughter shook the earth beneath them.

"Well..." Vale continued, sounding somewhat amused, "I suppose it might work if you filled the entire village with those candies." There was a brief pause before it added, more seriously, "But where are you going to get that many? You could... if you came back in a million years."

"A million years?" Tyler echoed incredulously.

Vale nodded—or at least, the entire village shifted slightly, mimicking the motion. "Yes. You wouldn't age in this village, so you could try to collect as much as possible. It would take patience... but it might work."

Mana scoffed. "A million years trapped in this village? Mana would rather die."

Mathilda gave her an amused glance. "You're already dead, though."

Mana shot her a glare. "That's not the point."

Misra, who had remained silent up to this point, spoke in a grave tone. "If you die here, the village will absorb your soul little by little."

"I see..." Vale said. "So that's the cycle. People arrive, they lose their memories, and eventually, they become one with this place. Looks like I even forgot about that."

Vale's massive, hollow eyes seemed to darken at his own realisation. The air around them grew unnaturally still, as if the village itself was holding its breath.

"This place... it's like a living prison," Misra said quietly. "Or a feeding ground."

"No... Not a prison," Vale corrected. "Not a feeding ground." His voice carried an eerie certainty. "It doesn't just trap people—it..." The colossal face trembled, as if something unseen was pressing against it. "I can't say anything further... It's trying to stop me."

Tyler and the others exchanged wary glances. Whatever was controlling this place had the power to suppress even Vale's thoughts.

For a long moment, silence stretched between them.

Then Vale finally spoke again, his voice almost mournful. "I do not remember everything. Only fragments. But... if you wish to escape, I can help you. You just have to make sure my memories don't get wiped again."

Tyler met Vale's hollow gaze. "And how do we do that?"

Vale's enormous features twisted, as if struggling to hold onto something slipping through its grasp. "Just as I said before. Gather all types of Consciousness-Enhancing Ingredients and pour them inside me. Go and come back a million years after collecting it." His face contorted. "If you see souls inside, try to—"

His voice cut off abruptly.

A tense silence followed.

Vale let out a low, resigned sigh. "It seems I can't say that either..."

Then, just as suddenly as it had transformed, the village shifted back to normal. The buildings, the streets, and the very ground beneath them rearranged themselves as if nothing had ever happened.

Tyler and the others stood motionless, processing what had just transpired.

Misra shook her head. "Sorry, but it looks like this is impossible."

Before Tyler could respond, a series of wild roars echoed through the distance. His instincts sharpened as he turned toward the source of the sound. Large, lion-like creatures with jet-black fur and glowing golden eyes prowled at the edge of the village, their muscular bodies radiating a dark aura.

They weren't alone.

More creatures lurked in the shadows beyond, their glowing eyes peering at the group like hungry predators assessing their prey.

But Tyler wasn't fazed. Instead, he smirked.

"Actually, we do have a plan..." he said, ignoring the beasts entirely.

"What plan?" one of the grandmasters asked, keeping an eye on the approaching creatures.

"To make the village say everything before its memories get wiped out," Tyler explained. "But it'll take some time."

"And what do we have to do?" another grandmaster asked, shifting into a battle stance just in case the creatures got too close.

Tyler glanced at the horizon, where even more strange beasts seemed to be gathering. "Dark Horizon isn't as safe as it seems. There are too many creatures lurking around. Either we've been lucky so far, or the village's presence has kept them from attacking." He turned to the group. "Misra, Mathilda, Astrid,

and the grandmasters—you'll be on guard duty. If any of these creatures try to attack, you deal with them."

Misra cracked her knuckles. "Sounds easy enough."

Tyler continued, "Meanwhile, Mana and I will implement the plan."

The group understood that Tyler was about to use some secret technique or artifact he didn't want to share. No one questioned it. Mathilda and Astrid, however, already knew what he was planning. They shared a knowing glance but pretended to be clueless.

With their roles decided, they left the village entrance and walked a long distance away.

Then Tyler stopped.

He turned back toward the village and took a deep breath.

"Vale," he called out.

The air trembled. The ground rumbled.

Then, just as before, the village began to shift. The cobblestone streets twisted and lifted, the buildings warped and melted together, and the entire landscape transformed into the enormous face of Vale.

The hollow eyes opened.

"I brought the candies," Tyler announced.

He reached out and took some candies from Mana, and placed them into his copper pot. He then lifted the pot, showing it to Vale.

The massive face studied the offering.

"Huh?" Vale muttered, confused. "It's been a million years already?"

Tyler's mouth twitched. He resisted the urge to correct him.

To Vale, 'time' might be just another word.

"Doesn't matter," Tyler said, . "The thing is, You asked us to gather these, remember?"

Vale blinked. "...You got enough to fill the whole village?"

Tyler nodded. "Yeah."

Vale hummed, deep in thought. "Hmmm... I see. Then... COME INSIDE ME... POUR THOSE WHITE STUFFS INSIDE ME ... FILL ME ... DYE ME WITH YOUR WHITE STUFFS..... "