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As Liam posed his question, Vogel smiled. He said, "Many have embarked on their trials through the neural interfaces. The group you had seen sought the Shadow Flower. Ultimately, what you gain is determined by the deepest desires of your heart. So, I'll ask you this: what do you truly desire?"

Liam's determination shone through as he spoke. "I yearn for strength, the kind that knows no bounds. I'm willing to employ any means necessary to get that."

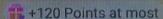
Vogel's countenance shifted momentarily, a hint of solemnity creeping in. "There's wisdom in the adage, 'More haste, less speed.' Rapid growth isn't always the optimal path. Hastening too swiftly may compromise your foundation."

Despite understanding Vogel's caution, Liam's resolve remained unyielding. With unwavering determination, he declared, "I seek strength to rescue the people dear to me. Without formidable power, I am unable to save them. I'd rather risk destabilizing my foundation than endure the agony of helplessness. This decision is one I'll never regret."

Expressing gratitude for Vogel's counsel, Liam leaned forward, his gaze unwavering. "Now, Vogel, can you guide me towards a path within the Shadow Palace that leads to greater strength?"

Witnessing Liam's unyielding resolve, Vogel abandoned attempts to dissuade him. Meeting Liam's gaze, he spoke

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with assurance. "Once you enter the trial's illusion, avenues to augment your strength will unveil themselves. The Shadow Palace exists precisely to identify worthy successors for its treasures."

Suddenly, Vogel manifested an ancient sword, seemingly from thin air.

He placed the sword in the center of the great hall, and instantly, a cold, eerie aura filled the air.

Liam approached the sword cautiously, noting its worn blade but not underestimating its power.

The moment the sword appeared, Liam felt a potent, dangerous aura radiating from it as if the sword itself were a dormant beast.

Catching the wary look in Liam's eyes, Vogel let out a light chuckle and began to explain, "This is the Shadow Sword, once my trusted sidearm. It is among the many rewards offered by the Shadow Palace. The trial is tough, and only those who prove their mettle may attempt to wield it. The sword is choosy; it does not yield easily to just anyone. Only those whom the Shadow Sword acknowledges can draw it from its sheath. If you manage to do so, it's yours to keep. Why not give it a try? I believe you might be the one it chooses."

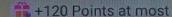
Liam's gaze was fixed on the Shadow Sword as Vogel spoke.

The more he heard, the stronger his desire to wield the formidable weapon.

Liam turned to Vogel and nodded decisively. "Okay. Put me in the Dream Capsule. I'm ready for the trial!"

His eyes gleamed with the anticipation of claiming the sword as his own. The thought of the sword recognizing

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him as its master and boosting his power fueled his determination.

Vogel responded with a nod, a smile of approval flickering across his face. "Come with me," he said, leading Liam to an unused Dream Capsule. He let Liam get into the capsule and connected the neural interface.

Vogel's encouraging voice reached Liam one last time as he closed the lid. "I believe in you!"

As Vogel's voice faded into silence, the world around Liam began to dissolve into a blur, spiraling into a haze of colors and sounds.

When the disorientation subsided, Liam opened his eyes, but the grand hall of the Shadow Palace was gone.

Instead, he found himself in the middle of a battlefield, strewn with debris and the lifeless forms of fallen Primogem Warriors.

Liam's heart skipped a beat as he took in the sight around him.