

## Void 361

### Chapter 361 Trauma [2]

His attention soon turned back to the other version of himself. He was nowhere near done. Elena was merely one of the problems he had to address.

“Forced maturity. It was really the best way to describe what happened to me. The drastic change that my personality underwent, the change that pushed me from one extreme to the other.

“The time in the blood world was beneficial. It made it so that the pathetic me who could barely even raise his eyes to meet those of a beast could now boldly move forward in my descending of the dungeon. For that, I’m grateful.

“But while I was given courage and the will of a practitioner, the circumstances never gave me the chance to mature emotionally. Even though I came out of the dungeon at 19 years old, I still had the mind of a 17-year-old.

“No, I might’ve even mentally regressed a little. I pointed out anime references in everything I could just for the sake of grounding my situation in something I knew, but it was yet another coping mechanism. My personality wasn’t even my own. It was just me pretending to be other people for the sake of keeping my mental state intact.

“How old am I now? 23? 24? It’s something around there. I don’t think I properly developed into my own person until after I left Apeiron. And now, at this age, I’m finally able to stand here and say that I’ve accomplished it.

“But the fact that it took so many years just for me to act my age, it’s frustrating to think about. It’s why I have a slight grievance against the blood world.

“It drove me into insanity. That insanity was what I needed to survive the dungeon. But to reintegrate into society, even being my previous pathetic self would’ve been better.

“In all honesty, I can’t even say whether the dungeon was a good thing or a bad thing for me. Because of it, I was finally given the qualifications to become stronger. Because of it, I am who I am now. And I can say proudly that I like who I am now.

“But at the same time, it brought me so many problems that it took this many years to solve. Hell, if it wasn’t for this kind of unique circumstance, it would’ve taken even longer. The trauma that the dungeon gave me is equal to the level of strength I received from it. Perhaps it’s just another form of balance.

“But, regardless of whether it was good or bad, I am glad for that experience. Just as I am happy I was able to have this one.”

He sighed lightly. He had already said plenty, but there was still too much more he needed to say. But, as long as he knew it in his heart, there was no need to say it all out loud.

“If it wasn’t for the drastic increase in my mental strength because of the Primordial Undying Tree’s essence and those 5 plus years I spent fixing my spiritual world, having to experience that torture again most likely would’ve broken my mind.

“That was the objective of this trial, right? To dig up my worst trauma and present it to me in full force. To break my mind and trap me in this trauma for eternity. Even at my current level of mental strength, I almost gave into my desire to look away and ignore it.

“But instead, it’s been a huge boon to me. For that, I have to thank the Primordial Undying Tree.

“I feel like...having everything laid bare to me had helped me a lot. It helped me realize a great deal of problems that I didn’t even realize I had. Problems that probably would’ve only shown up again to hinder me when I go through my Universe Baptism in the future.

“Witnessing these problems, becoming aware of them, and even solving some of them...it’s just the beginning. It’s a new beginning, the start of a path where I can be the complete version of myself. I won’t waste it. I won’t commit the same mistakes again. I won’t hide away from my problems and trauma.”

I’m thankful.

He said a lot of words, but that was the key point of his message.

He closed his eyes.

“Son of Claire Watson, the future husband of Rose Adelaire, Elena Pierce, and Xue Ruyue, the bearer of the Void Physique, the enemy of the Nox, the strongest human from Earth...there are so many different things that can be used to describe me.”

But what was my name? The name that this version of me wanted to know so badly. The name that I can confidently declare in front of anyone and everyone. The name of the man who would shake the universe by its very foundation in the future....

“I am Damien Void. Whether it be the past, the present, or the future, I am, and always will be, Damien Void. A mere trial like this isn’t enough to shake my will. And by the wills of others, I will never forget who I am and what I represent. Now, Primordial Undying Tree, you should have your answer, no?”

The scenery of Apeiron began to fade. The version of himself from the past faded with it. He had a light smile on his face as he did so. His purpose had been achieved, and at the end, he received the answer he wanted.

Damien found himself inside yet another infinite void.

A blue holographic notification appeared in front of his eyes.

[The Primordial Undying Tree smiles.]

[The Primordial Undying Tree states that this was indeed the outcome it was hoping for.]

[The Primordial Undying Tree tells you that there is only a single trial left. In that trial, it hopes that you can become the one who claims its fruit.]

Damien smiled in response.

“Of course it’ll be me. Come on, you’ve been watching this entire time, do you really think anyone in here can beat me?”

Another notification immediately popped up.

[The Primordial Undying Tree warns you not to get too conceited.]

“Bah, I can’t even joke with you? So stiff. Trust me, I know I still have people to look out for. That Hun Fang guy is particularly mysterious, not to mention...ah forget it.

“Oi Demon God, you’re there too, right? How’s it feel to be trapped in this by an old ass tree? You know, I can’t speak for a Demigod, but if it were me...?”

“Me personally, I wouldn’t take that if I were you.”

[The Primordial Undying Tree bursts into laughter. It says it hasn’t had such a good laugh in many millennia.]

[A frightening aura pervades the realm. The Demon God is furious at your taunting. He is wondering why a mere mortal dares to blaspheme him.]

[The Primordial Undying Tree tells him to shut up. It says that the Demon God must be seething with embarrassment because he's being restricted by a mere tree.]

Damien laughed out loud. The back and forth between these two monsters was more entertaining than he expected it to be.

With a bright smile on his face, he stretched his tired body. He had been living as the version of himself from the dungeon for so long, after all. He had experienced those 2 years without any time displacement. It all happened in real-time.

'I've yet again become mentally older than my actual age. At this point, I'll become an old monster before in 30...' Damien lamented inwardly.

But outwardly, he was feeling incredibly refreshed. The benefits of this experience were far better than the ones he got from the Trial World, even if the results weren't as tangible.

He felt like he was reborn.

The trauma trial he had just passed was the second trial, and according to the Primordial Undying Tree, he would be able to acquire its fruits in the next and final trial.

He was motivated, and his mood was far better than it had ever been ever since the World Awakening first happened all those years ago.

“Yo, Primordial Undying Tree, send me off to the next trial!”

Chapter 362 Final Trial [1]

“Yo, Primordial Undying Tree, send me off to the next trial!”

The second the words left his mouth, Damien felt space distort around him. Almost all of the notifications that hovered in front of his face disappeared, leaving only a single one.

[You have passed the Trial of Self.]

Trial of Self. It was a really good way to describe the previous trial.

Although in those final moments, he had been watching everything from the void, it wasn't like that the entire time.

Unlike the one who set up the illusion trial in the Eternal Secret Realm, the Primordial Undying Tree was a being that had reached Godhood.

Damien's All-Seeing Eyes had been thoroughly suppressed.

When he was crying in the corner on his second day in the dungeon. When he tried to kill himself on the third, when he humiliated himself on the fourth, when he went insane on the fifth, he had been there.

He had experienced it all again firsthand.

Not as an outsider looking in, but as the one going through those situations himself.

But even with his All-Seeing Eyes suppressed, he didn't suddenly lose everything he had worked for over the years.

The spiritual intent that he had refined tirelessly while he was comatose was still fully present. And due to the strong mind he had now, he was able to watch those scenes without breaking.

But those two years were truly grueling.

It wasn't an entirely good thing that Damien had unlocked his repressed memories. In the first place, those memories had been subconsciously suppressed to protect him.

From the moment he awakened his ego, he could feel a level of bloodlust he hadn't felt in years churning inside of him.



But even then, he was glad to feel this bloodlust.

Because he had never controlled it properly before. It had been hidden in the recesses of his mind with the rest of his experiences in the dungeon.

Now that it was back, he could use his current strength to properly control and make it a part of himself.

He never wanted to abandon his bestial side entirely.

He never wanted to abandon his experiences in the dungeon.

Those experiences, that bestial instinct, it was all a core part of his personality. Abandoning them was actually more harmful to his sense of identity than it was good.

So controlling and integrating was the best course of action. To take his current self and evolve into something better. Wasn't that the path he had walked so far?

There was no hesitation in his thoughts. In fact, they moved so fast that he had already finished pondering by the time his body finished transporting to the next area.

And when he felt the cool sensation of earth under his feet again, he immediately spread his awareness.

“Gotcha.”

He heavily stomped the ground, infusing vector control into his movements to increase the gravity around him. The earth cracked with a bang.

A pool of blood leaked from below. Although the beast never had a chance to surface, Damien had already seen its appearance.

It was a massive groundworm several kilometers in length. Its mouth was filled with razor-sharp teeth, and opened like the petals of a flower.

Now, its head had been thoroughly crushed under the pressure of Damien’s stomp. It was killed before it even had the opportunity to do anything.

“What else is around here?”

Damien ignored the groundworm and refocused his attention on the surroundings. All around him were sand dunes of varying sizes.

“A desert, huh. Come to think of it, I haven’t really been in a desert before.”

It was odd considering the number of different places he'd visited, but he really hadn't seen a desert before in person. Most of the locations he visited were filled with lush greenery and vitality.

"Enough of that. What am I supposed to do here? There's no trial description yet again..."

Actually, was that accurate? The Primordial Undying Tree had already told him what he had to do.

Reach the Primordial Undying Tree and claim its fruit. That was the objective of this trial.

"Haha, so rather than a trial, it's more like this is the finale. If it's like that, then I should be able to meet up with them soon, right?"

Instead of focusing on the outside, he sent his attention into his own body. There, within his heart, he could feel a second heartbeat that wasn't his.

"I can't feel her location...and with her heartbeat so chaotic, she should still be in the Trial of Self."

Although Ruyue's trauma wasn't the same as his, she was still a person with a complicated past of her own.

But he wasn't worried. Just like him, she had grown immensely ever since their first meeting. The trauma that would've broken her a few months ago wouldn't be able to do the same now.

“Instead of worrying about her, I should figure out where to go from here. Even if I don’t find her now, she’ll definitely find me once she gets here.”

Thinking such, he began moving.

Even within his massive awareness range, he wasn’t able to sense anything besides the ever-expanding desert. The beasts within also weren’t worth much of his attention.

As he began to move, he noticed that the restrictions on his teleportation had been largely lifted. He could now freely move anywhere within a 100-kilometer range.

“How nice...though it’s nothing compared to my full range, it’s ten times more than even the distance I was able to teleport within the 3000 Beast Mountain Range.”

With such a speed, he shouldn’t take long to find a new environment. In his opinion, there was no way for the Primordial Undying Tree to be anywhere close to his current location.

Even if it was a Divine Tree that could live endlessly, he figured that it would still prefer an environment filled with vitality. And considering that this was a realm it designed personally, there was no way it’d just ignore those preferences.

But to find an oasis within the desert, that too the specific oasis that the Primordial Undying Tree was in, it was even more tiring than trying to find a needle in a haystack.

“If there was any change to the scenery at all, it’d be nice. Even if it wasn’t related to the oasis I’m looking for, at least it’d be related to something.”

His awareness was still fully spread. His vector shield was erected and constantly enforcing a gravity domain around him.

The earthworms that tunneled through the sand below had no chance of even getting near him.

He traveled like this for hours on end. In that time, he managed to find a single oasis, but it wasn’t anything special. There wasn’t even any treasure within.

And so, hours passed once more. He teleported through the seemingly endless desert without pause. Even when his mana ran low, he devoured the ambient mana to quickly replenish it.

And finally, he noticed an oddity.

“Hm? Isn’t that...?”

In the distance, his awareness locked onto a life aura. Although it wasn’t totally familiar, there were some traits he recognized.

He immediately flashed away in that direction. And upon arrival, he noticed a familiar face.

A cold beauty with light blue hair and eyes. The area around her was freezing even though the temperature in the atmosphere was the opposite.

“Lunaria Snow. I guess I have some fate with phoenixes.” Damien commented lightly.

Since she was someone with such a close relationship with Feng Qing’er, he had no reason not to trust her.

Therefore, he boldly revealed his presence.

“Miss Snow, fancy meeting you here!”

Chapter 363 Final Trial [2]

“Miss Snow, fancy meeting you here!”

When his voice rang out, Lunaria Snow’s head snapped in his direction, her aura flaring. But when she saw who it was, her momentum waned.

“Hm? You are...”

“Ah, I guess we’ve only met once before. My name is Damien Void.”

Lunaria shook her head. “No, I’m well aware of your identity. That lass Ruyue spoke very highly of you.”

Damien’s eyes widened. “You know Ruyue? Were the two of you in the same trial world?”

“Trial World? Mm, an apt name. Indeed, she was in the same space as I was. We spent the year traveling together. It’s a shame we were separated afterward.”

“Ah, that’s just how the rest of the trials are. She hasn’t arrived here yet. Have you met anyone else?”

Lunaria shook her head. “You are the first person I’ve seen. This desert is too expansive. Even if there are others, it wouldn’t be surprising if we never meet.”

Damien nodded his head. For him to meet someone he was somewhat familiar with, even if it was many hours after his first entry into the desert, it must’ve been the Primordial Undying Tree pulling the strings.

‘That old tree really favors me...’ he thought inwardly. ‘I wonder what he wants from me. There’s no way he’s just letting me have a free lunch.’

It was a little troubling to owe so many favors to a Demigod-level existence, but he couldn't help it anymore. The old tree had already given him a life-saving grace. If he didn't pay back that gratitude, he'd be no different than scum.

He quickly turned his attention back to Lunaria. "How about we travel together? We can be considered mutual acquaintances, since you're close to Ruyue and I've become friends with Feng Qing'er. I think it's better to stick together."

Lunaria mulled over his proposal for a bit before agreeing. "Very well. I still do not know much about this place, so having a helping hand wouldn't hurt."

With that, the two of them soon began traveling together. Though, not much changed from before. They wandered the endless desert aimlessly and looked for anything special, but most of the time they ended up striking out.

Damien was feeling a little troubled. Not just by the situation, but also by Lunaria Snow herself. Compared to Feng Qing'er, it was a lot harder to get along with her.

Whenever he tried to strike up a conversation, he was always met with the flattest and most blunt responses. He felt that there was no way he could get closer to her.

Therefore, he also shut his mouth and stopped embarrassing himself. Unless it was necessary, he didn't try to talk to her.

Their situation continued for hours on end, but they still had yet to find anything special.



Damien lamented in his heart. 'This is going to be an arduous journey indeed.'

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With the passing of time, day and night interchanged. The sun gave way to the moon, cooling the blazing heat that enveloped the desert.

With an entire day being used fruitlessly searching for something new, the Damien and Lunaria duo were tired of moving.

And so, they decided to set up camp and wait out the night, resting for a bit before continuing their journey.

Currently, the two sat around a small campfire. Well, campfire was one way to describe it. But since there was no wood in the surroundings, it was really just Damien's Void Flames burning on the sand between them, granting them a bit of light in the night.

"How is Qing'er?"

Damien was surprised to see Lunaria taking the initiative to speak. After all, she hadn't done so even once in the past day.

But he ended up smiling. The information about them in the 3000 Beast Record was apparently the complete opposite of their actual relationship. This indifferent woman was actually deeply worried about her friend.

“She was doing great the last time I saw her. It’s surprising to see someone who can be so lively without end.”

“Mm. That’s what she’s been like since young. A fiery personality even for a Fire Phoenix. She gave her mother no small amount of trouble.”

Lunaria had a soft smile on her face. It was so small it was barely perceptible, but it was a smile nonetheless.

Seeing this, Damien couldn’t help himself. He ended up telling her all the stories of what happened in the Trial World. Of course, mainly those that involved Feng Qing’er.

For the first time, Damien was able to show off his abilities as a storyteller. His recollections were so vivid that it almost felt like one was transported into those scenes themselves, experiencing them firsthand.

And Lunaria listened intently as he spoke. When she heard about Feng Qing’er unlocking the Reincarnation Flames, she was shocked to the point where even her ice-cold exterior cracked.

When he finally finished his stories, Lunaria sighed. "As expected, she is thriving in an environment like this. Her love of adventure has always propelled her forward, so this is just another situation like that."

Damien also nodded. That love of adventure wasn't really something he had seen, but he could definitely feel that Feng Qing'er was someone who grew stronger through hardship.

Suddenly, he became curious about what happened in the other Trial Worlds.

They had demons in theirs, and plots that seemed greater than mere trials. Was that something unique to his Trial World, or something happening everywhere?

According to Lunaria, it was the latter. They too had to deal with something similar.

Except, instead of demons, it was a Nether Spirit Tribe.

A tribe of beings that came from a Nether Realm, beings that were heavily related to yin. In a Trial World of blizzards and endless snow, they were thriving.

But Ruyue and Lunaria Snow were both extremely suitable for that environment. Even compared to the Nether Spirit Tribe, they were thriving.

And unlike Damien, who had two helpers with him, Ruyue and Lunaria were the only ones capable enough to fight the Nether Spirit Tribe within their Trial World.

‘Haa...so in the end it’s like that. That Demon God fellow enslaved multiple races under his command for whatever purpose he’s trying to achieve. To just expand the Nox’s influence? I doubt it’s so simple. Escape would be an even simpler goal, but is that really it?’

He deeply pondered it, but he couldn’t figure anything out. Of the available conclusions he could make, escape seemed like the most likely.

But for the sake of escaping, what was the use of those other races? And why were they set up in such a way? He still lacked too much general knowledge to even make an educated guess.

‘But, at least it looks like Ruyue reaped some benefits.’

According to what Lunaria had said, Ruyue’s control over yin had increased by a large margin. She was able to absorb those yin spirits and refine them to increase her own power and comprehension. In a realm like her Trial World, she truly had no opponents.

‘It’s a shame she couldn’t get a yin elemental spirit or something like the Void Flames, though. I guess Nether Spirits harbor too much resentment to be tamed.’

As he spoke to Lunaria about the various plots and hidden dangers in the Primordial Undying Realm, his thoughts kept drifting to Ruyue.

He trusted her and he was confident in her ability to survive, but he couldn’t help but be worried.

‘Sigh, I just hope you’re okay.’

Soon, daylight once again flooded the desert. It was time for them to start moving again.

Chapter 364 Final Trial [3]

As soon as dawn arrived in the desert, the duo once again set off on their journey. And as expected, it was another day filled with fruitless travel.

“To have such an expansive desert that serves no purpose at all...are we looking at things the wrong way?”

Damien muttered to himself. He had begun feeling like he was doing something wrong after that night they took rest. When he started looking at things from a fresh perspective, the fact that such a desert existed without any direction was odd in the first place.

According to what he had gathered so far, the Primordial Undying Tree wasn’t one to act without reason. For the setting of this trial to be a desert, it must mean something.

The only thing left to figure out was “what”.

Suddenly, Damien had a thought. ‘The beasts we’ve encountered so far have been one of two types. Either they attack from the sky or beneath the ground. Isn’t it strange that there are no beasts living above ground at all? There isn’t even a single sign of vitality.’

When he started following this thought process, he found it more and more strange. He had been looking for an oasis in the desert where the Primordial Undying Tree might be growing, but what if it wasn't like that at all?

He didn't have much experience with underground caves, if the dungeon wasn't counted, but he was well aware that the environment below the surface could also nurture flourishing vitality for different species of flora.

As for the sky, it was a bit different. He had personally seen floating mountains before in the Eternal Secret Realm. Who was to say that there couldn't be any here?

When his thoughts reached this point, he voiced them out to Lunaria to hear her opinion as well.

"Mm." Lunaria immediately nodded her head in understanding. "My thinking has been too shallow. It is indeed very possible that what you've guessed is the truth. The question is, to go up or to go down?"

Searching both would be ideal, but both the sky and the underground were vast areas that would take years on end to fully explore. It was impossible to not choose between them.

"Logically speaking, I feel that the sky is the better choice. The Primordial Undying Tree is known for its vitality, so I don't think it'd be underground. But we can't rule out that possibility either. After all, we don't have enough information on the tree itself besides the things that could benefit us." Damien pondered out loud.

“Then let’s do this. One of us takes the sky and the other goes underground. We’ll meet back up at this spot when 24 hours have passed. Whichever one of us has found more notable things, we’ll go in that direction.”

Even if it wasn’t the Primordial Undying Tree, finding anything at all was better than their current predicament. As such, they should explore any notable locations they come across.

Maybe basing which direction they took on this kind of thing was heavily reliant on luck as well, but they didn’t have any other choice. Unless they wanted to keep wandering aimlessly, this was the best course of action.

Lunaria agreed as well after mulling over it for a bit. “Very well. If it is so, then I shall take the sky. In 24 hours, I will come back to this spot and await your discoveries.”

With that, she immediately took off into the air. Damien smiled wryly at her attitude.

‘Not even giving me a chance to say anything and just deciding on your own...isn’t it a bit too cruel?’

But he didn’t really mind it. Of the two choices, he was much more familiar with being underground.

But first and foremost, he had to actually check whether the underground space he was imagining actually existed.

When he sent his awareness into the ground, the only thing he found was sand and the tunnels formed by the groundworms. With this alone, it seemed like there actually wasn't any underground ecosystem.

But he didn't believe it so easily.

Damien's awareness soon caught sight of a portion of the groundworms' funnel network. Arriving at the location of that connection point, he used his spatial mana to carve aside the sand and tunnel down.

He dropped quickly. Since he was separating space itself to move the sand, it didn't pile back into the hole he created either.

'Maybe I should take up a career as a miner.'

The sand soon became harder and thicker. It was evidence that he was getting closer to his destination. And not long after, he finally fell into a 10-foot-tall tunnel.

There were tens of connecting tunnels going in every direction. There were even a few that led down deeper into the underground.

'I should probably take one of those. This is still relatively close to the surface, so I doubt I'll find anything substantial if I keep traveling at this level.'



With that thought, he immediately chose a tunnel. By following its path, he could feel his altitude gradually decreasing as he headed deeper underground.

'Strange. I can feel the slight tremors of movement, but there are no life auras in the surroundings. Where is it coming from?'

As he moved deeper and deeper underground, the tremors only became more prevalent. But he still couldn't feel any life aura.

It was as if there was a constant earthquake taking place somewhere nearby.

'The temperature has been constantly dropping as well. It's getting hard to think of this place as a desert at this point.'

Instead of following the tunnel, Damien started tracking the source of the tremor instead. His instincts were telling him that he'd find something good there.

His path soon diverged from what was already dug out. He had to use his own mana to pave a new path to walk. However, he wasn't able to maintain the structural stability of a tunnel below so much sand.

Due to this, he could only displace space a little so that the sand wouldn't actually concave on him. Instead, the existing sand filled the gap he made back in after he passed through. Essentially, he was creating a path he couldn't return through.

'This better be worth it. It's harder to spread my awareness through solid ground like this without interference, especially when there are so many granules of sand in the way. If I want to leave, my only option is to go back to the surface or find a new path.'

Even as he complained, he kept moving forward. The tremors were getting even fiercer as he grew closer. It was to the point where the sand around him was in a constant state of vibration.

'Almost there.'

He pushed through the last barrier, and finally found himself in an open cavern.

"This is...!"

He couldn't help but exclaim out loud. When he was moving this way, he expected to find some sort of natural treasure or powerful beast. But the sight in front of him was neither.

Instead, he found a man-made construct. It was a set of ruins that was constantly sending out pulses of mana, causing the tremors he felt earlier.

Countless life auras of beasts were present within the ruins. Although he couldn't see them, he could estimate that all of them were at the peak of 3rd class.

And perhaps the most surprising fact of all was the temperature. Calling it cold was an understatement.

It was like a subzero blizzard. This cavern alone was filled with snow and ice completely unlike everything around it. Even with his resistance and powerful body, Damien could feel a biting chill enveloping him.

‘This can’t be natural. Something in that ruin is influencing the environment like this. But it isn’t a living being since the mana signature coming from this blizzard doesn’t match any of the beast auras I sense. If so...what is it?’

He was curious to find out. He wanted to dive into the ruin right away.

But he had a companion to meet up with later today. Not to mention, that companion would be a great help in an environment like this one.

Damien let his mana loose and allowed his unique spatial mana to imprint on the surroundings. This way, he’d be able to find this place even if he left far away and had to come back.

‘I have many hours left before I have to meet up with Lunaria. Until then, I’ll keep exploring. But after we meet, we definitely have to come back here first.’

Although he knew there was nothing here that could benefit him, he had realized as soon as he entered that there was something he could give Ruyue.

‘Good. Let’s see how she likes my present when we finally meet up. Ah, right. I wonder if she’s cleared the Trial of Self yet? I guess I’ll find out soon enough.’

With that thought, Damien left the icy cavern and continued exploring the underground.

Chapter 365 Ruyue [1]

Her face never changed.

Regardless of what they said to her, her face never changed.

She stood unmoving like a block of ice. Her behavior made them even more furious than they already were.

“Filth. That’s all you are. How selfish can you be?”

“You were born for the sake of the clan, so you should live for its sake as well. How dare you act so willfully?”

“Look at this pathetic bitch. Is she even the Patriarch’s daughter? She should just die so that she doesn’t humiliate the clan more.”

“Idiot! Why should she die? If we sell her body to an elder of some great force, we can get even more benefits!”

“You’re right!”

It was how they thought of her. She knew it from the start, and there was no way it’d change now.

But regardless of what they said, she never let it get to her. She was indifferent to it all.

Scum.

What do the words of scum have to do with her?

Why should she let it affect her?

That’s how she wanted to think. That’s the ideal she was looking for.

But she was never that cold and indifferent person. She could fool others, but she couldn’t fool herself.

They told her that even if she was getting raped in a back alley, it would be better than what she was doing now.

They told her that if she killed herself, they'd let her corpse get desecrated by orcs.

She was only 16.

How was she supposed to remain cold and indifferent?

It was impossible.

She cried. Even as they jeered at her, she cried. But she couldn't let them see her tears or else their attitudes would only become even worse.

So when those tears threatened to spill out of her eyes, she froze them. She froze them and shattered them into specks of frost so minuscule that the others couldn't even perceive them.

"The only way to make them shut their mouths is with strength. Yue'er, you must never let them believe they've won against you."

The clan didn't care for her. She was given an ill maid and a guard who was just as weak as she was. But those two were her family. The words they said held meaning in her heart.

That guard had told her this. To gain strength. Otherwise, she would never have any say in what others thought. She would never have any control over her own fate.

Her maid berated him for speaking such cruel words, but she didn't mind. He told her a fundamental truth that she needed to understand. For that, she was grateful.

And he wasn't wrong.

From that day onward, she began to sneak out of the Clan Manor. She went into nearby forests with a shabby steel spear and killed anything that moved.

And slowly, she gained strength.

The clan that didn't pay attention to her, the members who prayed on her downfall, they began to look at her with a hint of fear in their gazes.

At least, they did at first.

Soon, a piece of news traveled through the clan.

The Third Elder of the Jade Heavenly Palace was to take Xue Ruyue as his 347th concubine.

347th.

That prized gem of the Xue Clan wasn't even given the status of an official wife or even an important concubine. She was to be reduced to a position no greater than a dog's.

But in return for acquiring the Young Miss of the Xue Clan as his sex slave, the Third Elder of the Jade Heavenly Palace would grant the Xue Clan unprecedented status.

Status that would allow them to outshine the other three great clans.

She was horrified upon hearing the news. She felt like the hope she'd built up over the years had crumbled in an instant.

She wanted to run. She wanted to leave and never look back. However...

"Tonight, the Third Elder will be coming to see you. If you can't serve him well, don't expect that pathetic maid of yours to live."

Those were the words she was given. Rather than threatening her life, they threatened the lives of some of the only people she cared about.



So she resigned herself to fate.

That night, she laid on the bed defenseless. She was prepared to offer no resistance. Her heart had frozen over.

But fate had other plans in store for her.

That guard broke into her room before the Third Elder arrived at the clan.

He forcefully dragged her away.

Even though his strength was now nothing in front of her, she couldn't bear to hurt even a strand of hair on the head of the person who had raised her with care since she was young.

So she allowed herself to be pulled away.

On that silent night, the Xue Clan was sent into an uproar.

Two mere servants had rebelled.

Using an unknown poison, they killed dozens of guards that were monitoring the little princess.

And they sent her out of the clan.

On that night, Xue Ruyue ran with all her might.

She didn't look back. She didn't hesitate. Because she knew that if she did, she wouldn't be able to control herself. She wouldn't be able to leave her parents in such a terrible situation.

On that night, the guard and the housemaid, the two who had raised Xue Ruyue like their own child, committed suicide in front of the clan gates.

Their fates would've only been worse if they didn't.

The housemaid would've been raped and humiliated until she was a shell of her former self.

The guard would've been tortured brutally until he was unrecognizable.

They knew this.

So they acted decisively.

Xue Ruyue only found out later what had happened to them.

When she did, she swore revenge. She would tear down the Xue Clan even if it took her hundreds of years to do so.

Meanwhile, the Xue Clan was in an uproar. Not only did they have nobody to punish for the events that occurred that night, they had also incurred the ire of the Third Elder.

By the time they caught wind of their little princess again, she had gained the backing of the Grand Elder of the Celestial Star Palace.

They could no longer touch her.

But Xue Ruyue wasn't in the slightest bit proud of her achievement.

In the end, the people she cared about died because of her weakness.

The clan she hated most was still standing strong.

Under their influence, news of the incident never leaked. In the eyes of the public, the Xue Clan was honorable and just.

They were incredibly shameless too.

Even with Xue Ruyue abandoning the clan, they acted like she was still their property.

Even after the deal with the Third Elder was snuffed, they engaged her in another marriage agreement.

Not even with a force that was greater than them, but with the Wang Clan, which was a mere subsidiary clan.

She was infuriated.

But there was nothing she could do.

It was the fate of the weak.

She was born to be a tool for the Xue Clan, and even after she escaped, this fate still tried to follow her.

Ruyue woke up with a start.

The rage she felt, the humiliation, it was all fresh in her mind.

But she wasn't the same helpless and sheltered princess anymore.

The feelings and struggles of her past self couldn't bog her down.

She was different from Damien. From start to finish, she never repressed her memories.

She made sure those memories burned bright in her head. She made sure she'd never forget what had transpired.

It was her motivation. It was the reason she became strong.

So that one day, she could put the Xue Clan under her foot.

And then exterminate it for what it did to her and her family.

Chapter 366 Ruyue [2]

For Ruyue, passing the Trial of Self didn't hold the same meaning as it did for Damien.

Instead, it served to reaffirm her determination.

Back then, the Xue Clan was a behemoth she couldn't hope to resist. She was simply a sheep waiting to be hunted.

But looking back at it now, it didn't feel the same at all. She thought about the Xue Clan from her current perspective, and it didn't look like a mountain.

It was within reach.

All she had to do was continue walking her path as she did. Continue working hard. And one day not so far in the future, she'd be able to achieve her goal.

She smiled when she thought about it.

If someone had told her things would end up like this, her past self wouldn't believe it.

But fate was a strange thing.

She, who had been neglected and stepped on for so long, had gained people who treated her with value. People who genuinely cared about her.

She had friends and allies, even someone she was willing to die for. She had people who would help her in revenge.

She was no longer alone and pathetic.

Ruyue stood in the infinite void. Her Trial of Self had already been passed.

In fact, she could've chosen to break out from the beginning, but she didn't. She endured those years of suffering for a second time. Because she wanted to see those scenes again. She wanted the flames of vengeance in her heart to burn bright again.

The sins of the Xue Clan were unforgivable.

And she had always been taught to pay back any grievance tenfold.

Ruyue looked up into the nothingness around her. Her gaze was hazy and unfocused.

"Do you see it? Father, Mother, do you see me now? I won't let those scum who caused your death live freely. That old dog Xue Yebai...I'll allow him to feel the same pain he forced you to feel."

Xue Yebai, her biological father. He didn't deserve such a position. He was a dog and nothing more.

Ruyue clenched her fists. She could feel the ice-cold yin power coursing through her veins.

"It isn't enough yet. If it's him, he's probably already surpassed me by miles. If I can't even match him, how can I think of revenge?"

Her thoughts were on a certain man. A man who she had been yearning for for over a year now.

He was both the target of her affection and the target of her rivalry. He was the most talented genius she had ever met.

To match his pace wasn't an easy feat. For most, it was utterly impossible. Thinking about his growth rate would only cause them to doubt themselves.

But that was exactly what made him so special. That was exactly what made him the perfect goal to look up to.

Ruyue knew. If she could even follow his growth rate at a pace where she could see his back, it wouldn't take more than a few years for her to get her revenge.



If she could match him? The Xue Clan's doom was already a guarantee.

She smiled. It was a smile filled with tender love and affection.

"You bastard...even when I want to think of my revenge, you still manage to appear in my thoughts. You made me like this, so how are you going to take responsibility?"

She was speaking to herself, but her hand was resting over her heart. There, she could feel a heartbeat that wasn't hers.

It was calm and steady, beating with power and vitality. Every time she felt it, she felt an unknown sense of comfort wash over her.

She had given him her soul. Not even in a metaphorical sense, but a literal fragment of her soul.

She had suffered injury for doing so, but she didn't regret it.

Even if he already had a woman, she had seen his attitude. She knew that she already had a place in his heart.

If it was like that, then why hesitate? Ever since she decided to stop running away from her problems, it had already been decided.

Her mind, her body, her soul...everything would belong to him.

And in return, she wanted his everything too.

Whether he was prepared to give it to her or not, she couldn't control. But she would do everything she could to claim it.

She smiled once again.

How did her thoughts reach this point?

It turned out that he had become just as important to her as her revenge.

It was a mind-boggling thing to discover, but she didn't mind. It was nice to have some warmth to combat the icy ferocity she held in her heart.

"Ah, I'm thinking too much again. The trial is already over, so I should be transported to the next one now, right?"

Although she said the words, she didn't feel the nauseating feeling of spatial transportation enveloping her. Instead, a string of blue holographic text appeared in front of her eyes.

[The Primordial Undying Tree watches you with interest.]

[The Primordial Undying Tree says it notices a strange connection between you and that person.]

[The Primordial Undying Tree is expecting great things from that person, so it decides to give you a small gift.]

[The Primordial Undying Tree tells you to assist him well.]

A crack opened within the infinite void. From within it, a greenish-white essence exuding a divine aura leaked out.

Soon, it shot forward and flowed into Ruyue's mouth. It tasted like a clear and refreshing spring filled with heavenly dew water.

Ruyue was forced to shut her eyes and concentrate on the powerful mana flooding into her body, but her thoughts were still active.

‘That person? From the words I saw, it can only be a single person. The great Primordial Undying Tree is personally helping me for his sake? Geez, what the hell has he been up to?’

A small smile decorated her face. A feeling of pride welled up inside of her. How could she not be proud? The man she chose was being acknowledged by a Demigod-level existence. It was an utmost honor for those at their meager level of strength.

A translucent green cocoon enveloped her not long after the essence entered her body. At this point, her thoughts were cut off. She had to focus internally rather than think of unnecessary things.

A gentle stream of energy seemed to be purifying her from within. Her meridians, her flesh and bones, and even her internal organs were purged of anything that could be considered as impurity.

Her mana capacity expanded rapidly. As it turned out, even her mana was getting purified.

Ruyue was focused on the feeling of this mana as it moved through her body. It worked on its own, with her not needing to control the process, but she still didn’t take her attention off of it.

After all, she could never know whether there would be mishaps or not. This was a mana on a level that far exceeded her own.

She was being transformed.

Within the infinite void, a solitary green cocoon floated aimlessly. How long it would take for the cocoon to shatter? That was unknown.

#### Chapter 367 Ruins [1]

24 hours soon passed within the endless desert of the final trial. Damien broke through the sand and arrived on the surface once more, quickly moving towards the rendezvous point.

‘The underground is far more expansive than I originally expected. Even after I found that ruin, there were still so many interesting things down there.’

Damien looked into his subspace with a smile. There, he saw a collection of assorted herbs and fruits that radiated unique mana signatures.

These were some of his finds during his time in the underground. Along with plenty of subterranean beasts, there were areas that were filled with vitality and unique plants just as he had expected.

But none of these areas were anywhere near as dangerous as the ruins he found first. That place, even if he could clear it alone, it would take a few days to do so.

It was part of the reason he wanted to meet up with Lunaria before exploring. A few days wasn’t a long time, but when he was racing against others to find the Primordial Undying Tree, it was time he couldn’t afford to waste.

Therefore, meeting up with Lunaria and clearing it together within a few hours or at most a day was the most solid option.

As for the fruits and herbs in his subspace, even he didn't have the necessary knowledge to say what they did yet. All he knew was that they all had interesting mana radiating from them, so he picked them up.

While he sorted his gains, he arrived at the point of rendezvous, where Lunaria was already waiting.

"Found anything?" He asked curiously.

Although the underground was packed with interesting stuff, it didn't mean the sky would be void of it. He wanted to know just how much treasure was packed into this endless desert realm.

Lunaria looked at him with a hint of annoyance in her gaze. After all, he had arrived an hour later than the promised time. However, she still answered his question.

"Nothing of note. While I did find some traces of floating constructs, there was nothing special on them. Either they had already been looted at some point, or they were barren from the start."

Damien's attention was piqued. "So the possibility of there being good stuff in the sky isn't nil. As for the location of the Primordial Undying Tree, I don't think it's there."

There was another discovery Damien had made when he was in the underground. He felt like something was calling to him from below.

At first, he didn't know where this feeling originated from, but as time passed, a conjecture began to form in his mind.

Of the things he had relation to within the Primordial Undying Realm as a whole, there were only two that could give him such a calling.

The Void Flames and the Primordial Undying Tree itself.

But the difference was in the source. If the Void Flames had found a flame it wanted to devour, it would fall out from within him. He would feel it within his body.

But the Primordial Undying Tree wasn't the same. He had refined its Essence, but the main body was still separate. Therefore, the calling would be external.

He surmised that this was the most likely situation. Unless it was something completely out of his thought process, the Primordial Undying Tree should be within the subterranean world.

Except, it was so incredibly deep that it would probably take at least a week to reach it.

Damien shook off his thoughts. First, he told Lunaria about the things he had discovered in the subterranean world.

“Besides the ruins, there were various pockets with different treasures within. Most of them are natural treasures that have grown and flourished over time like fruits and herbs, but there are also some rare ores and even man-made constructs.”

As he continued explaining, even Lunaria couldn't hide her interest. Unexpectedly, he had found so much within the span of a day.

But it couldn't be helped. Damien could follow the tunnels and pathways already present in the underground from the movement of beasts that lived there. That way, he could maneuver much faster and with a clearer purpose.

Lunaria's situation was different. The sky was just as vast and expansive, but there was no way to leave a specific pathway in the sky unless one used mana or built sky-reaching constructs.

Since the flying beasts didn't need mana pathways to maneuver the sky, those didn't exist. And nothing needed to be said about the constructs.

In the end, all Lunaria could do was fly aimlessly in hopes of finding something. The fact that she had found anything at all, even if it was something useless, could be considered good luck.

But she stopped thinking about such trivial things quickly. Her attention was drawn to the icy ruins that Damien had mentioned.

“Why didn't you excavate the ruins yourself?” She asked. It was what any sane person would do.



Damien thought about answering with some benevolent bullshit, but he decided against it. He and Lunaria didn't know each other at all, and they still needed to build trust before he could act like his usual self. Otherwise, he'd just strain their already fragile relationship.

"It's a matter of time." He answered her honestly. "Clearing it with you means that I can finish faster, which in turn means I have more time to look for my main purpose of coming here."

Lunaria nodded. Although the treasures that littered the subterranean world were interesting, they couldn't compare to the Primordial Undying Fruits at all.

"Very well. Since it's like that, I shall help clear the ruins. However, I also want some of the treasures within."

"Sure." Damien immediately agreed. "As long as you let me have the main treasure, you can have everything else."

He had already felt it before. Perhaps because of the strange connection he had with Ruyue, he could instinctively feel that whatever the main treasure of that ruins was would be massively beneficial to her.

As for everything else? Even if they had extreme value, he was never a material person.

And perhaps him being like that was the reason he had avoided so many useless conflicts. After all, treasures make an innocent man guilty.

After mulling it over, Lunaria accepted his proposition. Despite the fact that she was curious about what kind of treasure the crowning treasure of the ruins was, she wasn't the type to be too greedy.

Since she was being given so much in return, it was only natural for her to agree.

The two soon departed and began traveling to the area Damien had found before. However, instead of taking the tedious path underground, Damien followed the trace of his space imprint to find the same area by traveling on the surface.

This way, he could easily and rapidly fly across the desert and reach that position within an hour instead of wasting more time digging.

When they reached the location, Damien used the same method to part the sand using space. And without delay, they dropped into the frozen cavern that he had found earlier.

"This...!"

Sensing the heavy frost aura, Lunaria lightly commented in surprise. She could now understand why Damien wanted her help to clear the ruins.

Meanwhile, Damien was frowning. 'The number of life auras I sensed has rapidly increased. It seems it won't be simple to get our hands on this cake.'

But it was still something he had to do. Turning to Lunaria, he nodded his head.

“Well then, let’s go.”

Chapter 368 Ruins [2]

Lunaria hesitated slightly. Wouldn’t it be best to go into an unknown location like this with a plan? She wanted to ask, but by the time she tried to do so, Damien had already rushed into the entrance of the ruins.

“You...sigh.”

In the end, she could only follow. Seeing his seemingly reckless behavior, she began to understand how he became good friends with Qing’er.

The entrance to the ruins was a large broken Japanese-style gate. Walking through it, the two were met with a spread of land covered in ice and snow.

Damien spread his awareness with a frown. ‘That’s odd. I could’ve sworn there were dozens of life auras in this place, so why is it empty now?’

Since his awareness couldn’t find anything off, he immediately put mana into his eyes to check as well. And as he expected, the scenery in front of him changed.

The layout of the area was still the same, but there had been certain things hidden inside what seemed to be a bewildering formation.

'These are...' Damien muttered in surprise. He had found the source of the life auras he sensed, but their state wasn't anything like he expected.

Each and every beast he saw was frozen in a coffin of ice. From the looks of it, a single touch could shatter their bodies. But their life auras were still filled with vitality, so he knew they hadn't been injured.

'Not injured but frozen so thoroughly that they can't escape...this ice isn't simple.'

He looked over at Lunaria. If she could see the beasts trapped in ice, it would be much simpler to identify it. She was an Ice Phoenix after all.

But truth be told, Ice Phoenixes were much closer to Life than they were to yin. Their ice flames would evolve into Life Flames just like how Feng Qing'er's flames evolved into Reincarnation Flames.

But that didn't mean they were helpless. In the end, they were still Ice Phoenixes.

Thinking this far, Damien began looking further into the bewildering formation. He wanted to find the formation core and break it as he did in Acier.

“What are you doing?” Lunaria asked. He had been looking around and walking aimlessly ever since they entered, but she was still clueless as to what was happening.

Damien explained to her about the bewildering formation and the strange ice that he had found. Hearing it, Lunaria’s brows furrowed.

“Taking care of the formation shouldn’t be too hard. Allow me to try.”

Lunaria manifested her flames. They were ice blue in color and gave off an aura of cold that didn’t match their status as flames at all. Soon after, she began molding her flames into specific patterns

‘Isn’t this the same as how Qing’er was using her flames after they evolved? No, it’s slightly different.’

Although the runic patterns were similar, they didn’t seem to carry the same purpose or aura.

Feng Qing’er’s flame runes were filled with an air of domineering and power, but Lunaria’s were reserved and silent. Not to mention, the runic patterns were completely different.

After the runes were created, Lunaria spread her arms, causing them to float into the surroundings. They spread out evenly like a net.

“There.”

Lunaria only spoke a single word, and the runes all congregated on a single location. They congealed together and formed a massive ice needle that pierced into the ground.

Crack!

A distinct crack was heard, and the bewildering formation crumbled entirely. The true scenery of the area was revealed.

“Impressive,” Damien commented.

“It’s nothing at all. This is but a basic use of Ice Phoenix Patterns.” Lunaria replied nonchalantly.

She wasn’t lying. Ice Phoenix Patterns were geared towards support capability. To find a formation core was extremely basic in her book.

Damien just shrugged it off. He really didn’t have enough knowledge about the Phoenix race to say anything else.

Instead, he moved towards the ice statues.

“As I thought, this ice isn’t anything simple. Even by standing near it, I can feel danger.”

It was as if one touch would turn him into an ice statue like the rest of these beasts. With this feeling enveloping him, it was obvious his surprise when he saw Lunaria casually touch the ice.

“What are you doing?!”

“Hm? I’m touching the ice.”

“Yeah I know you’re— wait, you’re fine?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Lunaria tilted her head as if his concern confused her.

Seeing this, Damien felt a headache coming on. Of course he could explain what he felt from the ice, but would that even change anything?

With him closing his mouth, Lunaria turned her attention back to the ice. She injected her mana into it, circulating it through the ice and testing it.

“This ice indeed carries some unique properties. Not only can it leave someone in a state of suspended animation, it can also shatter and control their life at will. But this doesn’t seem to be an effect caused by a single attack...it’s more like the work of a domain.”

“A domain!”

It was a word Damien hadn't heard in a while. The only two people he had met who utilized domains were Rose and Qing Tan.

On Apeiron, it was said that reaching a certain level of control would allow one to form a domain, but as Damien traveled, he felt like this theory was wrong.

There was no way the number of people who had reached such control would be so little. After all, to properly reach 4th class, one needed extreme comprehension and control of their element so they could harness laws upon ranking up.

So logically speaking, every peak 3rd class existence he had met should've been able to use a domain.

But they couldn't.

Perhaps control was one factor, but there were definitely other things needed to achieve the feat. Talent was definitely one of them.

As for Damien, he could definitely form a domain with his space element if he wanted, but he was waiting to unlock his time element first to form a dual-element domain instead.



The strange thing was for a domain to appear in a place like this. Even if a remnant soul was in charge of this ruin, they wouldn't be able to make use of a domain without a physical body to control mana with.

Which means, this domain was the ability of something else.

Damien suddenly became excited.

He had read a lot of records on Apeiron. Although their information was limited due to the aftereffects of the war with the Nox, they still had a great deal of knowledge within their libraries.

And there was one thing that came to mind when he thought of the current situation.

A ruin, a mysterious domain, and an object that controlled and erected it. With these three facts alone, he could pretty much guess what the crowning treasure of this ruin was.

It was only a legend on Apeiron, but who was to say it was the same everywhere else?

It was an extremely rare sentient treasure. Formed from the amalgamation of attributed mana over tens of thousands of years and eventually developing a will due to the sheer amount of both time and mana, it was the kind of treasure every practitioner would kill to get their hands on.

An elemental seed.

Chapter 369 Ruins [3]

An Elemental Seed, also known as an Elemental Spirit

They were extremely rare. No, even calling it like that was an understatement. For an elemental seed to form, it wasn't just a matter of time and effort. There was a good amount of luck involved as well.

After all, even with so much time and condensed mana, gaining sentience wasn't something logically possible. Elemental seeds weren't living beings.

Their sentience could be considered similar to an artifact spirit's. As for the reason they formed? It was still unknown.

They were wonders of nature. To see one now, Damien was incredibly pleased.

'It's a shame that it isn't a compatible attribute for me. I could use a lightning elemental seed to raise my lightning to the same level as my Void Flames.'

But even then, it was an elemental seed that'd benefit Ruyue, so it wasn't much of a loss. He already had so much, after all.

'But is it just an ice elemental seed or is it full-blown yin? Maybe something in between? I can only find out once I see it with my own eyes.'

Damien soon snapped out of his thoughts, only to see that Lunaria was still observing the ice coffins. Looking at her, he hesitated.

Morally speaking, telling her would be the best thing to do. Especially since he was trying to build trust between them.

But he couldn't do it.

Lunaria may be a relatively upright person, but anyone would get greedy in the face of an elemental seed. Not to mention an elemental seed that aligned with their affinities.

It was best to hold the information back for the small possibility that Lunaria would go back on their agreement.

"So? What should we do now?" He asked. From what he could see, there was nothing in this area besides these ice coffins. He couldn't even see an exit.

Lunaria thought for a second before responding. "Although I've been studying it, I'm not sure about the full capabilities of this ice yet. Whether or not it can freeze mana is still up in the air. And even if I want to try it, it's too risky to do so."

Damien nodded. But it was important for them to know whether it could or couldn't. It would hurt them immensely later on if they were caught by surprise.

Damien moved further away from Lunaria and found an ice coffin. Then, without hesitation, he poured a wisp of mana into the ice.

Crackle!

It was a strange sound to hear. But as soon as it happened, Damien jolted back and withdrew his mana. Small blue snowflakes drifted down to the floor in front of him.

“This...it looks like you were right. Ice that can even freeze mana...how terrifying.”

Damien sighed. Since it was like that, it would be impossible for him to kill and devour these beasts. He didn't think Void Essence would be frozen by the ice, but that wasn't something he could casually reveal to others.

Lunaria's eyes shone with a glint of curiosity. “Indeed. Since there isn't anything else we can do here, we should move on. This is just the entrance, after all.”

Damien made a sound of affirmation and began walking towards the other end of the icy area. Although he couldn't see the end, he felt it was the best way to go.

And as he expected, there was another gate present there. Or rather, there were two.

“Split up or go together?” He asked Lunaria.

“I should be fine alone, but I can’t say the same for you. You can’t use physical force nor mana against this ice?” She responded.

“Worried about me?” He asked with perked eyebrows.

Lunaria shook her head. “You are a friend of Qing’er’s. If you die, she will most likely be sad, and that is something I cannot allow.”

Damien smiled wryly. This girl was too blunt. He couldn’t even joke properly with her.

“If it’s my survival that concerns you, you don’t need to worry about it. I’m confident I can stay alive at least. And if necessary, I can easily escape.”

Lunaria looked at him closely as if she was trying to find any lies in his statement. Soon after, she shook her head.

“If you think you can survive, then that is your choice. I will not interfere. Which door will you choose?”

“Hmm...” Damien fell into thought.

He used his awareness to check both doors, but there was nothing special about either. Even when he poured mana into his eyes, he couldn't come to a decision.

His expression became wry. 'It seems I'm not fated with this treasure at all. I can only rely on luck and hope I find it first.'

Thinking such, he randomly picked the door on the right.

Lunaria nodded. "Good. I was going to choose the left door anyway. Well then, I will see you when we exit the ruin."

After she spoke, she immediately rushed into the left door. Damien frowned at how hastily she departed.

'Did I make the wrong choice? With her affinity, she should have a better feeling for this place than I do. Well, nothing I can do about it.'

He soon entered the right door as well. Truthfully, he was glad they separated.

Staying with Lunaria was too awkward for him. Having to restrain his personality so much to just stay cordial with someone was a new experience for him.

But it wasn't only that.

"Now that I'm alone, I can finally use it..." he muttered.

A pitch black essence surfaced on his palm. When it appeared, even the cold aura in the surroundings retreated in fear.

"Hmph. Even if you're an elemental spirit, you're nothing in front of Void Essence. Now, let's see how you hide from me."

He shot forward. Whenever he came across a frozen coffin, he engulfed it in his Void Essence, causing it to quickly dissolve into nothingness.

Beyond the right door, the scenery didn't change much. It was still an icy tundra-like flatland. But there were a few signs of dilapidated buildings that had existed in the past.

'This ruin is much vaster than it looks from the outside. But even then, these buildings are too worn down. I doubt anything within them could survive.'

He checked with his awareness just to make sure, but as he expected most of the buildings were empty.

In some, though, he could see extremely ancient traces of human activity. Rusted weapons and torn pages from books that no longer existed, even tea cups and other kitchenware that had been eroded with time.

‘Was this a city? Underground? Wait, that’s beside the point. There were people living here?’

It wasn’t the same as the situation with the demons. He had heard their story and their origin. In the end, they were still outsiders who entered the Trial World a long time ago.

But the endless desert was different. It was the place where the Primordial Undying Tree’s main body was situated. There was no way such a being would allow those corrupted by the Demon God so close to it.

If so, who were the ones that once lived here? And what happened to them? They must’ve been extremely adept at using ice element, or else they couldn’t have survived in this environment.

If it was like that, then the desert environment would’ve been hard-pressed to kill them. Starvation and thirst weren’t problems they would’ve had to deal with.

So what killed them?

Chapter 370 Ruins [4]

It was pointless to think about it.



To chalk it up to the Nox would be the easiest and most direct solution, and judging by their track rate, it wouldn't be surprising either, but he couldn't just make that conclusion without any evidence.

Besides, the reason for these peoples' extinction didn't matter to him. The only thing he cared about was the elemental seed.

'Did Lunaria find something similar on her side? I should ask her once we meet again.'

Thinking so, he continued teleporting through the ruin. The difficulty wasn't anything like what he imagined it would be. From start to finish, he didn't get attacked at all.

Until finally, he arrived at a building that had held itself in pristine condition unlike any of the rest.

It was something that looked like a shrine, with hundreds of steps leading up to the actual floor of the building. The steps were lined with torches in a strange pattern. Every time he climbed another step, a corresponding torch would be lit aflame.

But the flames were ice blue in color just like Lunaria's Ice Phoenix Flames. Only, they lacked the same gentleness.

Clack! Clack! Clack!

Each step he took created a resounding sound that seemed to echo through the area. With each torch that was lit, the temperature dropped significantly.

It was already extremely cold. The domain conjured by the elemental seed had submerged the entire ruin in an ice age. When the temperature continued to drop on top of that, it reached a point where even Damien couldn't simply bear it.

Clack! Clack! Clack!

He soon climbed up 100 steps. His Void Flame encased his body like a fiery robe that expelled the cold mana from his system and prevented it from coming close.

But the Void Flame was still in its growth phase. There was no way it would be able to hold up entirely. By the time he hit 150 steps, the flame's protection began to wane.

Clack! Clack! Clack!

The torches that hovered in the air began emitting a strange resonance as more and more were lit up. However, Damien didn't have the time to pay attention to them. The cold had penetrated his Void Flames and entered his body.

He immediately moved his Void Essence into action, which prevented his internals from being immediately frozen over, but his exterior condition couldn't be helped. And the cold mana kept invading his system without pause, making it so he couldn't use his Void Essence for any other purpose besides defending his internal body.

Clack!

His steps began to slow. Frost gathered on his hair and eyebrows, painting them white. His skin began to take on a blueish hue as well.

He had reached 300 steps up the shrine, but there were still 200 to go. Judging by his current pace, he wouldn't be able to make it.

'I could just teleport...no. I can't do that.'

He wanted to teleport, but his instincts were adamantly telling him not to. It was as if he would fail the ongoing trial if he did.

So, he kept climbing. Putting one foot in front of the other over and over again. His mind was slowly emptied of all thoughts other than continuing the climb, because thinking of anything else felt like he was expending too much energy.

Fshhh!

It was a sound like boiling water meeting ice. As the sound got louder, Damien's thought process began to slow. Even thinking about climbing became a chore.

If he had the spare energy to look inside his spiritual world, he'd be able to see a layer of frost spreading within. His spiritual continent was being frozen over by this frost, limiting his mental power a great deal.

Clack! Clack!

He kept climbing. He eventually reached the 400th step. But when he tried to continue, he found that his legs would no longer move.

Krrrr!

He dragged his legs forward, causing them to scrape against the rock-hard floor. He strained his neck to look down, only to realize how poor of a state his body was in.

He was freezing. Literally freezing into a block of ice like those beasts from before. And the worst part was, he didn't even realize what was happening until his legs had already become chunks of ice.

'N-no...I can't let this happen.'

Even his thoughts were chattering while being affected by cold. It was insane to even think about. He tried to think of a solution, but his current prowess and circumstance didn't allow any easy way out.

He had the ability to spatially displace the ice, but the problem was that the ice was becoming one with his body. Displacing it meant ripping himself apart.

'N-no...if I do it now...i-it should be possible...'

It wasn't too late yet. Things hadn't become irreversible. His mana was sluggish, but still responded to his command.

He wrapped his mana around his body like a thick coat. The process that should've been instant took many minutes to complete. The freezing had already gotten worse.

But his bone structure and muscles still hadn't been totally affected yet.

Realizing what he was about to do, he cringed. He really didn't want to take this route, but since teleportation seemed to be illegal, he could only move forward with what he planned.

'F-fuck...this is...really going to hurt...'

It was his last thought of hesitation. Immediately after, he circulated his mana in a rage. Spatial mana coated his frozen legs and freezing upper body like a veil. It infused into the ice and deep into his skin and muscle.

And then, he displaced everything his mana had encased.

Rrrrip!

“ARGH!”

He screamed in pain. Laying on the ground a few meters away from him was a lump of flesh and skin.

All of the skin and a part of the muscles on his legs had been flayed from his body. Luckily, only the skin of his upper body had been affected, or else the pain would’ve been multiple times worse.

Copious amounts of blood spilled to the ground from his body. From the neck down, his muscles were entirely exposed to the outside world, looking like the models he used to study in health class.

“AHHH!”

The pain was unbearable. Flaying of skin was a commonly used torture method, but he never thought he’d be the first one to do it to himself.

But just as rapidly as his skin and muscles were torn from his body, new skin and muscles began to grow. His High-Level Regeneration worked its full effect, slowly bringing his body back to peak condition.

High-Level Regeneration was a good skill. He was incredibly thankful to have it. As long as he didn't lose any limbs and as long as he had enough mana, it could heal him entirely.

But the pain didn't go away. Along with the pain brought by the forceful healing of so much of his body, the phantom pain of him ripping off all his skin continued to impact him.

His legs were first to heal. His regeneration had been focused there first before moving on to his torso.

But as he focused on regulating his body while healing, he failed to notice the odd movements of the blood that had spilled to the floor.