

# Void 371

## Chapter 371 Ruins [5]

As Damien's body slowly healed on the 400th step, the blood that had pooled on the floor began behaving strangely.

It didn't freeze over in the cold. Instead, it wriggled around on the floor like it was alive. Slowly, it seeped into the cracks between the bricks in the floor and snaked through the ground, splitting into various strands and arriving under the floating torches lining the steps.

Whether it be the 400 torches that were already lit, or the 100 that had yet to be, they all had a drop of blood hovering below them.

Soon enough, Damien finished healing his torso as well and looked around. But by that time, the blood had already merged with the torches and disappeared.

'Hmm...' He frowned inwardly. He'd be an idiot not to notice that the pool of blood below his feet was gone, but he couldn't tell where it went. Even his All-Seeing Eyes could only feel that something dangerous had happened.

'I have to stay on my guard.'

The cold mana had already started invading his new skin and muscles again. And considering that he was on the 400th step already, it was much worse than it was in the beginning.

It was disadvantageous to waste time on a single step. Before anything, though, he quickly moved his Void Essence and expelled the frost that had invaded his spiritual world as well.

With his thought process and body back to normal, he rushed up the stairs with reckless abandon.

He didn't think about the freezing nor the consequences of expending energy in this environment, he just wanted to reach the top and get rid of this invading mana as soon as possible.

425...450...475...

He climbed up the steps rapidly. With his current pace, he was moving in equilibrium with the rate at which he froze.

480...490...498...

With only two steps left, the level of cold mana had exponentially increased. It felt like he was being barraged by a subzero blizzard on all sides. It wasn't just gradual freezing anymore, but brutal and violent gusts of mana that attempted to kill him instantly.

'But that won't work a second time.'

He already knew this trick. From the start, he had been prepared for it.

Boom!

A torrent of Void Essence burst forth from his body, forming a miniature tornado around him. The pitch black tornado sucked the cold mana into it and devoured it, turning it into pure essence for Damien's benefit.

499...500!

With the Void Essence fending off the cold, he was finally able to climb all the steps. And at that moment, all 500 torches erupted in splendor.

Voom!

Bloody red light mixed with icy blue mana formed clouds atop the shrine. It all coagulated into a mass of energy that Damien felt immense danger from.

'That's...my blood?!'

He immediately felt the connection to his blood, but the fact that it was his didn't change anything. The blood and mana continued to coalesce to form a massive construct that was hidden in a blizzard veil.

A frightening aura began to radiate.

It was bloodthirsty and mad, while also being cool and indifferent. This strange aura permeated the entire shrine as if trying to blaspheme the presence within.

“The hell is that?” Damien muttered. But just as he planned to spread his awareness, he felt a piercing gaze scan his body.

Shiver!

It was an uncontrollable reaction. Blood reacting to blood, and danger causing his hair to stand up on end.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

Curt rumbling footsteps rang out. The being that had been formed inside that blizzard veil began moving. And of course, it was heading towards Damien.

But sensing what was about to come, Damien only grinned. “Good! It’s been a while since I’ve had a good fight. Let’s see what this thing can do.”

His eyes gleamed with blood-red light. His aura flared wildly.

Something had changed within him after the Trial of Self. It wasn't a huge change, but it was noticeable enough for people who knew him well.

His fighting spirit which had calmed as he matured was raging again. But it was different from before.

It was just as valiant and direct as before, but also contained an air of cautiousness within. He was no longer the kid who was fighting just for the sake of stimulation.

Without even waiting for the unknown being to arrive, Damien shot into the air like a rocket and charged into the blizzard veil. Unexpectedly, there was no obstruction from the veil itself.

He was soon able to see the form of the beast. It was a 20-meter tall giant made entirely of ice. It looked like a suit of armor, but was a translucent red in color.

"Taking my blood to make a golem. How vile of you." Damien muttered.

His charge didn't stop. Flames erupted from the balms of his feet and propelled him with heightened speed.

The concept of distance was twisted by his spatial mana. Within a single second, he had traveled hundreds of meters.

Boom!

His fist shot forward and heavily impacted the helmet of the golem. Its massive body was forced to rock back from the immense force contained in the punch.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

But he didn't stop there. Nor did he give the golem any opportunity to retaliate. He teleported from place to place, striking every inch of the golem with a flurry of fists. Although it wasn't injured, its balance was heavily disrupted, forcing it on the defensive.

But Damien's goal had never been to injure it in the first place.

"Come. Let's see if you're worthy of the name you've been given. Mirage!"

An almost transparent sword appeared in his hand, vibrating in excitement for its first battle. If it wasn't for the bending of light after it passed through the sword, it would've been invisible.

"Hahaha! I see you're excited. Well, you see that big punching bag over there? I'll use it as a dummy to let you witness your master's greatness."

Damien grinned wildly and shot forward again.

‘Void Sword Art First Step: Bladeless’

It wasn’t just a single iteration of bladeless. Tens of massive gashes were formed in space, taking chunks of the golem into the void while also forcing its movements to be limited to a specific area.

‘Void Sword Art Second Step: Dance Of The Void’

His figure flashed into the array of space cracks and flickered in and out of existence. Even when compared to normal teleportation, his movements were faster.

The golem didn’t have of its own, but bloody gashes still began appearing on its surface. The blood it stole from Damien was being forced out of its body by the spatial light of Damien’s sword dance. With every slash, spatial mana invaded the golem’s body. wreaking havoc within.

Damien flashed away, appearing a hundred meters away from the golem.

‘Void Sword Art Third Step: Horizon Break’

It was a killing move. His body bent like a bow and his sword was angled parallel to the ground. The kinetic energy he built up was transferred into the blade along with torrents of mana.

He struck out. Slow and smooth, but faster than the eye could see.

BOOM!

The impact wasn't in front of him. Even the air in his surroundings was untouched by the momentum of the blade.

Instead, that momentum ignored distance and arrived in the middle of the golem's forehead. A massive explosion rang out as even the extremely thick ice the golem was made from wasn't able to sustain itself.

A massive hole opened in the golem's forehead. Within the span of a few seconds, it had been barraged so much that its body looked no different from a heap of ice.

Crash!

The ice slowly began to collapse.

As an earthling, Damien was well aware of the weakness of most golems. That is, their forehead. Of course, this wasn't an end-all-be-all weakness, but it was something to try regardless.

In reality, a golem's weakness was the same as a formation's. Their core. They weren't living beings, after all. They needed a source of energy to draw from.

It was just that the forehead or the center of the chest were the best places to put the core for equal energy distribution throughout the golem's body.

As Damien watched the ice collapse, he still didn't feel right. It would be too stupid for the weakness of a golem to be its forehead even when that weakness was widespread knowledge even on an underdeveloped world like Earth.

'There must be a trick. A second form or something. Even if there isn't, it's better to be safe.'

With a wide grin on his face, Damien primed Mirage above his head. Gravity increased dozenfold through vector control, spatial mana raged in the atmosphere and caused small space cracks to fill the air.

"Watch this one. This is your master's crowning achievement." Damien said lightly.

And in the next instant, he concentrated all the power in his body on his sword and swung down.

'Void Sword Art Fourth Step: Spatial Collapse'

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Destruction rang free.

Space itself was crushed under the pressure of his sword and collapsed in on itself, causing a massive black hole to manifest. It furiously rotated, creating a suction force that dragged in everything in the vicinity.

The black hole went beyond what Damien usually created through Spatial Collapse. His previous sword only amplified his attack power, but Mirage was on a whole different level. It was equivalent to a spatial practitioner on its own.

So when its spatial manipulation was paired with Damien and harmonized, it created a black hole of untold proportions and power.

Naturally, the icy remains of the golem, which had just started repairing itself, succumbed to the irresistible force.

Roar!

Mirage let out a joyful cry that sounded like a roar. It was extremely pleased with the destruction it was able to cause.

Damien smiled lightly and descended from the air. As he watched on, the black hole slowly shrunk into a small point and disappeared as space repaired itself.

Rumble!

But before he had time to catch his breath, the entire shrine began to tremble. The debris on the ground vibrated and jumped around as the ground itself roared in fury.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

“Fuck! What is it this time?!” Damien mumbled. The situation was extremely similar to the golden summoning, except the intense rumbling seemed to come from the shrine itself this time.

Cracks spread through the ground. And soon enough, the entire area of the shrine imploded, collapsing in on itself.

Damien fell into the abyss that was left in its wake.

“Has...not this again...”

He thought he was going to be falling endlessly like he did within the Ancient Temple, but luckily the situation was different this time.

It was only a short drop of a few hundred meters. Of course, he could've flown out, but he didn't think it was necessary.

For there to be such a large underground space beneath the shrine, there must've been something important there.

Damien cut away the debris around him and spread his awareness through the dark space. At first, he thought it was a vast empty area, but he felt a prickling sensation in his awareness whenever it spread through the darkness.

"Is this...?"

He waved his arm in front of him randomly, and found that the sensation he felt was true. The darkness was tangible. It wasn't merely caused by the lack of light in the area.

'This thing can control darkness too? Is it a dual element seed?'

He manifested his Void Flames to test the waters, letting them do as they pleased once they emerged in reality.

The Void Flames flickered curiously, seemingly looking around at the surrounding space. And then, they hopped away from Damien's body and began burning madly.

The darkness in his vicinity began to clear up. The Void Flames were actually devouring it.

‘Devouring darkness? Or is it just devouring mana? If it’s the latter, then things become much simpler.’

Damien tried using his own devour ability as well, since devouring mana was something he could do, but he found that it was ineffective.

‘Hmm...I don’t think the Void Flames are capable of devouring something conceptual like darkness. But it isn’t just pure mana either. There must be something else that I’m missing.’

Without being able to understand the surrounding darkness, Damien didn’t want to move recklessly and get himself in trouble. But at the same time, he felt like moving forward was the only way to solve the current problem.

‘Fuck it. It doesn’t look like my teleportation is being blocked, so in the worst case I can still warp out and be safe.’

Thinking such, he immediately began moving. As he ran through the darkness, the prickling sensation on his skin increased.

‘What is it trying to do?’

Curious, he made a bold decision. Since the darkness was tangible, he wanted to see what effects it had on his body. And without thinking, he opened his mouth and swallowed a portion of it.

A corrosive aura immediately spread through his esophagus and tried to melt through his neck. He mobilized his Void Essence instantly to neutralize it.

‘Phew...that was a stupid decision...but at least I know what’s happening now.’

The prickling sensation on his skin must’ve been the corrosive force that he just felt. Only, it wasn’t able to penetrate his body.

‘Has my body become so strong? If so, why was the cold aura able to penetrate my defenses?’

Perhaps the elemental seed was more proficient in its ice element than its darkness. Or maybe the darkness wasn’t even an ability of the elemental seed in the first place. Regardless, it was still reality that the darkness couldn’t affect him.

The fact that he felt the same prickling sensation on his awareness, though, was his main concern.

‘The frost aura also affected my mind. It was actually able to slow my thought process to the point where it took 400 steps for me to realize my body was being frozen. I can’t make the same mistake this time and ignore this sensation.’

Even if it didn't feel dangerous, he wasn't planning to take the same risk again. When comparing his mind and body, the former was far weaker.

Even with the strengthening he got from refining the Primordial Undying Tree's essence, his mind still didn't match up to his body which had been refined over and over again over the course of many years.

He withdrew his awareness. With his eyes, he didn't need to use it to see. But his bodily senses weren't as prone to danger, so he upped his cautiousness to the max.

Like this, he continued walking through the darkness. Behind him, the Void Flame continued devouring it as he moved.

He suddenly got an idea. Instead of moving in a single direction, he altered his path and walked in a zig-zag pattern for a bit. All the while, he kept a part of his attention on the movement of the Void Flame.

And as he expected, when he turned once more, the Void Flame's excitement spiked.

'I see. So the source must be over there somewhere.'

If there was one thing the Void Flame would want to devour more than the darkness, it'd be the source of the darkness. This was the logic he used to determine his direction.

And once he figured it out, he increased his speed and bolted towards the source.

The corrosive effect of the darkness became fiercer as he moved. No, it was more like it was actively targeting him.

Waves upon waves of corrosive darkness fell onto his position like tsunamis. It got to the point where he had to erect his vector field and use a barrier of Void Essence to ward it off.

And as he drew closer to the source, a feral growling sound began permeating through the atmosphere.

But it was odd.

It was like two voices stacked on top of each other. One was bestial, while the other seemed extremely young.

‘Something isn’t right about this.’

Damien wreathed his body in lightning and shot forward with even faster speed, and not even ten minutes later, he reached the source of the growling sound.

His eyes widened in shock.

On the floor was a small child no older than ten years old. She was crouched in a fetal position with her hands covering her ears.

And behind her, a massive black mass with thousands of closed eyes that blanketed the darkness like an aura.

As if responding to the sound of Damien's approach, the girl raised her head. She opened her eyes and looked at him.

And in that same instant, the eyes in the darkness opened as well.

Chapter 373 Spirit [1]

"This...what is this?" Damien muttered in shock.

Shining silver hair that draped down to the floor, crystalline skin like glass, and a white dress that seemed to accentuate her innocence. That was the girl's appearance.

At least, on the right side of her body.

The left side of her body was a horror to look at. Rotting red skin that oozed puss and what looked like blue blood that stained her dress, inky black hair, and a face covered in scar marks and horrendous holes.

Even her mana was split into two parts. One side was the same as the domain and ice mana Damien had been assailed with since he entered the ruins, while the other was connected to the black aura filled with countless eyes that floated behind her.

“What the hell is this? Is it them again?”

Damien’s first instinct upon seeing the black mana was to connect it to the Nox, but he didn’t hastily make that judgement.

‘Even if it looks similar to their mana, it’s something entirely different.’

He realized it after observing closer. The black mana reeked with the scent of death, but it wasn’t the same inky and impure substance that the Nox used. It seemed to be derived from a different source.

‘What happened to this girl? Why is she down here below the shrine? No, why is she here in this ruin at all?’

The questions kept piling up. And as Damien observed the girl, she did the same to him.

“W-who are you?”

Her voice was feeble but filled with malice. Her eyes were locked on his face, but he could feel her awareness darting around and constantly checking the surroundings.

“Ah...” Damien didn’t really know how to answer the question. He couldn’t just say he was a tomb raider that came here for treasures. In the end, he just decided to introduce himself normally.

“My name is Damien. What about you?” He tried to speak gently, but even he couldn’t keep his voice from trembling when he saw the left side of her face.

“You...not from here...hiding things...everybody is hiding things...” The girl muttered to herself.

Out of nowhere, a malevolent aura burst from her body and tried to latch onto Damien. She lashed out, jumping into the air as if pouncing on him.

Clang!

But her movements stopped short. It was only then that Damien noticed the thick metal chains that bound the girl to a place deeper into the darkness.

Clang! Crash!

The girl whipped her limbs furiously as the chains dragged her back to where she once was. She tried to break them with all her might, even pouring frightening amounts of mana into them, but nothing seemed to work.

“You...do you want me to let you out?” Damien asked lightly.

It didn’t seem like a good idea to do so. There must’ve been a reason she was sealed under the shrine, but he still offered. He needed to understand more about the situation.

Especially since this little girl might be the elemental spirit he had been looking for since the beginning.

“Grrr...!” The girl snarled at him. As her malice became directed at him, the thousands of asura-like eyes behind her also focused their gaze there.

Roar!

An incoherent roar left her mouth. As soon as it happened, the aura of those eyes congregated and blasted a reddish-black beam of energy at Damien.

‘Dodge!’

He immediately attempted to teleport, but found that he wasn’t able to do so. It wasn’t a problem with space, rather it was his mana that didn’t obey him.

It moved sluggishly, and whenever it left his body it froze into crystalline snowflakes that fell to the ground and shattered.

‘Damn! She’s using the domain!’

Using his spatial affinity became meaningless the second it happened. In fact, any mana-based attack lost its value. In the last moment before the beam hit him, Damien rolled to the side, using his Void Flames to propel him away.

“Argh!”

Even though he saved his vitals, his arm was still caught in the blast. Within seconds, it turned into a corroded mass similar to the left side of the girl’s body.

‘Damn! I can’t endure that darkness power with my body alone. Luckily, the Void Flames still work.’

But even that was limited. The Void Flames could still be used since they drew mana directly from his Mana Heart and didn’t need externally deployed mana to function, but at the same time, they grew and flourished by devouring mana.

Their full potential would be limited when mana itself was a resource that he couldn’t use.

Roar!

Another roar rang out. The thousand eyes glowed red, and in response, the darkness around Damien began to move.

Tendrils were formed out of thin air, attacking him from all sides. Meanwhile, the cold aura of the elemental domain invaded his body and tried to force him to halt.

‘Dammit!’

It was a situation that seemed hopeless, but he was lucky to still have his main trump card.

Pitch black Void Essence burst from his body and formed a barrier around him, shredding those darkness tendrils into nothingness. Using the time he had gained, he immediately roused his Demonic bloodline, undergoing transformation.

‘Attack!’

The runes on his body moved into formation, making his power rise exponentially. He heavily stomped the ground, blasting forward with his entire bodily strength to reach the girl.

‘I don’t know if she’s the elemental seed or whatever, but as things are now, she needs to die.’

This frightening power that could both freeze mana and corrode flesh as powerful as him was too dangerous. And this was while the girl was still sealed. He couldn't even imagine how much more powerful she'd be if she was given free rein.

Tendrils and beams of darkness tried to stop his charge, but he tore them to pieces using Void Essence.

The darkness around him accumulated above his head and formed a massive palm that struck down with astonishing speed, but Damien wouldn't allow it to hit him.

'Speed!'

He changed the configuration of his body runes to prioritize his speed. His body vanished and reappeared many meters away in an instant, narrowly escaping the surface area of that palm.

And after that, he reached her body within seconds. Void Essence coagulated around his hand as it shot forward like a blade aimed at her throat.

"The same as the rest...want to kill me...but why...? What did I do...?!"

"Keuk..."

Damien's nails abruptly stopped right before piercing her neck. The aftershock of halting his momentum caused a few bones in his arm to break, but they healed soon enough.

It wasn't like her words were enough to stop him. He wasn't as merciful as that. It was just...

It was the first time that he was able to see her eyes. Those crystal clear eyes that still held a tinge of innocence completely contradicted the malice he felt from her aura and actions.

'But why did I stop?'

That shouldn't have been enough. Even if it was like that, she was still trying to kill him.

She was, right?

But as Damien continued to look into those eyes, he didn't feel killing intent nor malice. There was only a single thing that translated to him bright as day.

A call for help.

The girl in front of him was desperately begging him for help even while actively trying to kill him.

Chapter 374 Spirit [2]

Damien stood in front of the girl with only a few inches separating them. From here, he could clearly see the sheer contradiction that existed within her.

Everything about her contradicted. Whether it be her aura, her actions and feelings, or her appearance, from the start it was a strange thing.

But with the abruptness of the following battle, Damien didn't take too much time to think about it. He couldn't just say that something was wrong because of appearance alone.

But now, he had looked deeply into her with his All-Seeing Eyes at a distance where any slight movement of hers would be caught in his sight. And now, he could confidently say that something was wrong.

The girl's mouth suddenly opened unnaturally wide, spitting out a torrent of acid. Damien hurriedly retreated back to a distance where her chains wouldn't let her reach.

He needed a second to think and figure out what was going on.

The first thing he thought of was body possession, but the girl's spiritual intent was still fully intact when he checked it. Even if she had been possessed, it wouldn't lead to this kind of incomplete look.

As for the second thought...he really didn't know. All he knew was that the girl wanted his help with something. And that something seemed to be dealing with the force that was attacking him at the moment.

If he considered that this girl was truly the owner of the elemental domain that eclipsed the entire ruin, he could make some guesses.

In the first place, for him to find this shrine instead of Lunaria was strange. She was the one with a close affinity towards ice and the one who would likely be chosen as the master of the elemental seed if it met her.

But instead, it led him here instead.

If the ruins were truly under this girl's control, there was no other explanation for how he found the area that only had the shrine and nothing else, while Lunaria was sent somewhere else.

If so, then why? Why would it be him instead of the one more deserving? What set him apart?

There were a few things. The first that came to mind was his spatial affinity, but that thought was immediately crossed out. Anything he had that needed external mana to function wouldn't be the deciding factor.

It so, there was really only one option left. And it was the most special thing about him.

Void Essence.

The trace of Void Essence he had left when touching the frozen coffins was sensed by this girl, and due to that, he was chosen.

'I see. It was never a matter of inheriting her power or becoming her new master. It was never because of my talent or charisma that I was chosen over Lunaria. It was simply because only I possess the means to fight this thing.'

This girl wanted to be saved. Saved from whatever had consumed the left side of her body and produced the aura that stayed behind her.

And she had judged that only his Void Essence would be able to do so.

'If it really is how I'm thinking of it to be, then my approach is all wrong. From the start, I shouldn't have been fighting like this.'

He had an idea of what he had to do, but it was just a concept based on his understanding of Void Essence. He didn't even know if it was possible in reality or not.

'But it can't hurt to try it, right?'

If he continued fighting, those chains that restrained her would eventually break and lead to an even fiercer battle. He needed to end this quickly and efficiently.

'Let's go then. In the worst case, she dies. In the best case, I get an elemental spirit. The odds are pretty good, aren't they?'

Even as he inwardly joked, he was shooting back towards the girl's body. The thousand eyes behind her stared at him furiously, emitting strange fluctuations.

'This is...!'

He hurriedly mobilized his spiritual intent to create another barrier. One as thick as he could make.

Crrrack!

A wave of spiritual pressure impacted his barrier in the next second, causing it to make unnatural crunching sounds. He wasn't nearly powerful enough to completely block the spiritual pressure of those eyes.

But he gritted his teeth and kept moving. He had to preserve his Void Essence now so that he could use it when he reached the girl, so he poured copious amounts of spiritual energy into his barrier just to barely sustain it without collapsing.

"Urgh..."

The strain on his mind caused blood to leak from his seven orifices, but the damage wasn't as bad as it looked on the outside.

Especially since he had reached the girl by the time he took enough damage for it to matter.

"Listen here. I don't know if you can hear or understand me, but don't resist what I'm going to do next or else you'll just hurt yourself. No matter what happens, fight that thing and make sure I don't get distracted. If you can do that, I can save you."

Damien thought he saw the girl's eyes widen as he spoke, but he had no time to focus on that. He closed his eyes and grabbed the top of the girl's head, injecting his Void Essence into her body without reservation.

"KYAAA!"

A horrific screech rang out. Accompanying it, though, was a barrier of frost energy that coated his body and protected him.

Damien smiled to himself. 'I see. So it was really like that.'

Damien's attention refocused inside the girl's body. As his Void Essence spread, he could clearly feel two differentiating elements and auras constantly clashing at every juncture.

'It's not just that her aura is contradicting. It's like there are two people inside her body fighting for dominance. But...her spiritual intent is whole, so how is that possible?'

He didn't have time to ponder too much. As the girl actively resisted the reddish-black death mana and the thousand eyes, her body was being forced into a terrible condition.

Each clash would rupture her organs, break her bones, and cause untold pain that a child should never be forced to endure. But she endured it without a word as she waited for him to save her.

'How can you have so much trust in someone you only just met, you foolish girl?' Damien berated inwardly. 'But then again, I have no intention of betraying that trust.'

Damien separated his Void Essence into multiple strands. Some went into her internal body and helped her fend off against the rampaging mana, while the other cracked a hole in her mind space and entered inside.

When that happened, Damien was able to manifest in her mind space as a spiritual avatar.

'Holy shit. This is so much worse than I imagined.'

The girl had a completed spiritual continent that was even greater in size than his own, but it was split into two parts.

A blizzard-filled tundra occupied around 20% of the space, while the other 80% had been usurped by a scene that looked like hell incarnate.

And on both sides stood a different version of the girl. One was a demon, while the other was pure and untainted.

Damien watched from the side as the battle between these two continued.

“Why?! Why can’t we just live how we used to?! We are one person!” The girl in white cried. She begged the other version of herself to cease this madness.

“Kakakaka! Why would I want to share a body with someone as vile as you?! The heavens gave us one body and two spirits, so obviously they wanted us to fight!”

Two different outlooks that matched their appearances and auras. Damien slowly got an understanding of what was happening as he listened to more of their conversation.

‘Two spirits but one body. This wasn’t due to outside interference, she was just born this way. And as those two spirits headed in different paths, their personalities began to differ and clash as well. Only, why is it so bad?’

They were one body but two minds. Even if they clashed harshly, the power they drew on came from the same source.

'Unless...'

Unless they were like Ruyue.

Yin was a vast law. It embodied gentleness and cold, while also embodying darkness and evil.

Ruyue only had a single spirit, so a situation like this never occurred. As long as she could comprehend the connected concept, she could control the attribute of yin that she desired.

But this girl was different. In the separation and differentiation between these two spirits, her yin element got affected too.

The gentleness, coldness, and flexibility of yin were embodied in the pure version of the girl. And the vile, evil, darkness of yin was embodied in the demon.

Due to the fact that both of them were only half of a whole spirit, they were influenced by their elements far more than the average person.

And the situation became like this.

A pure, gentle girl who wanted to return to peace and a vile demon who wanted to destroy and subjugate fighting each other endlessly while sealed under the shrine.

## Chapter 375 Spirit [3]

"Why won't it end?! Why must we live like this?!"

"Because fate is cruel. And this cruel fate is one I should destroy with my own hands. So give up your futile resistance and hand our body over to me!"

"I don't want to die! I don't want to die!"

"Shut up!"

It was a little pathetic. That was what Damien thought as he watched them continue to struggle against each other with both words and fists.

In the end, the girl was just a child. Even when she was being influenced by her element like this, her motivations and outlook were still incredibly childish. So when Damien watched it happen in real time, it looked more like a quarrel between children than a life-or-death struggle.

It might've seemed like a strong person was bullying a weak one, but it wasn't like that at all. The two of them were equal in every way.

The only reason the evil version was winning was because the pure version didn't resist. If she resisted, they'd maintain a constant state of equilibrium as it was meant to be.

He hadn't been in her spiritual world for long, but Damien was already able to figure out this much about the girl and her two personas.

Their path was one of mutual destruction. Maybe they themselves couldn't see it because they were too embroiled in their conflict, but as an outsider, Damien could see it clearly.

From the start, they were one being. Whether it be the pure version or the evil version, they were two sides of the same coin. If one of them was destroyed, the other wouldn't be able to last long either.

Even if they tried to absorb each other, their conflicting natures would still collide and make it impossible. Once he realized this, Damien understood that his original approach wouldn't work at all.

He couldn't destroy the evil version. That wouldn't save the little girl but instead, kill her. He needed to help them regain equilibrium.

But with their personalities, he didn't think it would be easy to do that. No, he could probably do it but he would have to keep the girl on a tight leash so that she wouldn't fall back into this kind of circumstance again.

'But that's only until I find Ruyue. If Ruyue, who can properly control the dual nature of yin, was able to bond with or contract with this girl, she would be able to permanently solve her problem unlike me.'

It was really a convenient thing for him, since he didn't want to have to deal with a volatile bomb like this little girl. And since he always planned to give the elemental seed to Ruyue, it was even better.

'But the approach has to change. She's not an elemental seed, but a full-blown spirit. Since it's like this, forcing a contract or treating her like an object is no longer an option. I guess Ruyue is also going to end up adopting a little sister in this secret realm.'

Damien grinned at his own thoughts before moving into action.

First, he exited the girl's spiritual world and turned his focus to her body.

He then changed the intent of the Void Essence within the girl's body. Instead of trying to destroy the reddish-black mana, it moved to tame it.

With Void Essence being what it was, the reddish-black mana was quickly tamed. But as Damien was about to start fusing the two different energies, a problem arose.

The mana struggled against the control of the Void Essence. And even as it did, new strains of reddish-black mana emerged and tried to battle the second energy in the girl's body.

'This won't do.' He thought inwardly. 'It'll take too much time to complete this process. My arrival seems to have accelerated the rate at which she destroyed herself, and if I continue like this, her body will totally break down before I finish.'

'Even if I temporarily solve the situation in her body, it'll never stop completely until her mind has been settled. For now, I should just confine the two energies in their own parts of her body.'

He changed his intention again. He used Void Essence to draw a clear divide within the girl's body, splitting it vertically. Any nonconforming energy on either side was swiftly tamed and dragged to its true home.

As he did this, the action of those thousand eyes also became less violent. They were never a separate entity, but a manifestation of power. With his Void Essence trying to tame the reddish-black mana, the eyes were also influenced.

'Haa...alright. Since that's more or less dealt with, I can focus on the task at hand.'

It was a stopgap measure, but it was enough. He swiftly returned to the girl's spiritual world, only to find two pairs of eyes staring at him when he did.

"Um...hi?" He greeted awkwardly.

The two versions of the girl continued staring at him like he was some kind of strange specimen.

'Ah, it must've been too long since they've seen another person.'

Damien smiled lightly. He then split his spiritual avatar into two and sent one towards each girl.

Splitting his consciousness was something he learned to do proficiently when he was reconnecting the floating continents in his mindspace, but this was the first time he actually put that ability into use.

'But to think it was for something like this...' he smiled wryly.

Once his two avatars reached the two girls, he waved his hands in front of their faces.

"Hello? Is there something on my face?"

""Ah!""

They both yelped and retreated. It seemed like his appearance had put a temporary stop to their power struggle.

"You...you are the man from outside..." the pure version was the first to speak. As she was the one who called him here, she naturally recognized him first.

"Mm. That's me. I guess I'm here to save you." He responded.

"Are...are you going to kill her?" The girl looked at her other self who was warily staring at the two Damiens. Being inside her spiritual world, Damien could feel her unwillingness incredibly clearly.

But he just shook his head in response. "No. How could I kill you? If I'm not wrong, aren't the two of you the same person?"

The two versions of the girl looked away as if not accepting his words, but at the same time, they didn't refute.

"Haa...you two. Why are you fighting like this? You should know better than anyone else the state of your body right now."

"Hmph! Why else should we fight?! It's for control! I want this body, and she can't have it! I— ow!"

Damien flicked the evil version's head as she spoke. "You stupid. Why would killing her even solve your problem? Did you even take a second to think things over before you acted? How can you be so reckless!"

The evil version held her forehead with tears forming in her eyes. It was too unfair. Why was she the only one getting hit when both of them were fighting?

But Damien wasn't done berating the two of them. They might have been children, but their idiocy really ticked him off. Especially seeing how their circumstance hadn't helped them mature at all.

"Don't think you're safe either," Damien said to the pure version. "How can you sit here and cower? Don't you know that your behavior is only spurring her to keep acting out? How can you let your other self become like that without even trying to help? You keep saying things about not wanting to fight, but have you ever actually tried to have a constructive conversation with her about things?"

The pure version of the girl turned her head away in shame. Meanwhile, the evil version smirked in satisfaction. That is, until Damien shot her a pointed glare.

"Haa...that's it. If I don't teach the two of you today, then my name isn't Damien Void!"

And as he said, his berating session continued.

Chapter 376 Spirit [4]

It was strange for a quarrel between children to become something so life-threatening, but such was the reality of a world where power was so accessible.

Damien had never expected for the situation to take this kind of turn. He came into this girl's spiritual world with every intention to kill. But here he was.

Two different versions of the same girl sat on their knees in front of him with their heads hanging low while he endlessly berated them about how idiotic they were.

Even when the evil version's destructive nature acted up, Damien simply flashed a hint of his Void Essence and it immediately calmed down.

"Sigh...at least tell me your circumstances so I can help you solve this problem." He tiredly said.

"Yes..." the girl responded. She then began telling her story.

The Ice Spirit Tribe. They were a tribe that was originally formed by an elemental seed that evolved into a spirit, but over time bloomed into a full-blown spirit tribe.

By the time they reached the girl's generation, they were closer to faeries than they were to elemental seeds, even though their origins were different.

As for how they ended up living underground in the secret realm, the girl wasn't privy to that kind of information. All she knew was that they had been living in peace.

Until she was born.

She was an outlier within the tribe. With her ruined appearance and occasional outbursts, there were many that became wary of her.

From the moment she was born, there were two of her. It was something they called the Twin Spirit Body. Under normal circumstances, this kind of constitution would be a heavenly gift, but her case was different.

It was because of the complexity of her element. Under the influence of the Twin Spirit Body, her yin element was also segregated into two parts. And after that, things went generally similar to what Damien had already guessed.

The two grew up differently and never acknowledged each other as the same person. At the same time, they fought to control their body.

And with how destructive their battles got, the Ice Spirit Tribe was eventually caught as collateral damage.

It made sense why Damien hadn't seen any traces of life. That tribe had been accidentally exterminated by one of their own, not an outside influence. And as a final struggle, the tribe sealed this girl under the shrine so that she could no longer hurt anyone else.

But her isolation didn't leave any adverse effect on her. She spent most of her time in her spiritual world without paying attention to what was happening outside, and since the two of them could keep each other company, they never felt the terrible effects that isolation could have on their mental state.

There was no way this girl was the same age as her body and mind implied. Damien could at least tell this much from her story. But he couldn't explain why her physical state never changed.

It didn't matter either.

It was a tragic story, sure, but Damien didn't think that even this little girl understood the actual results of her actions.

She didn't understand that she had destroyed the Ice Spirit Tribe with her own hands.

But he didn't think she'd care either.

From the way she told it, it seemed like she was isolated and seen as a monster by them, who emphasized purity. Their destruction could partially be attributed to how poorly they treated the girl without trying to actually save her.

But Damien didn't really sympathize. Looking at how lively this girl was, he didn't think there was a need to. And judging by the stability of her spiritual world, he didn't think her attitude was the result of some mental damage or regression.

'But the Twin Spirit Body is really an interesting thing. It basically grants double the comprehension speed and thinking power, as well as the ability to dual-wield elements without any strain. Not to mention all the other benefits that come with having parallel minds.'

If the two spirits could attain harmony, the synergistic effect would be immeasurable. In fact, Damien was excited to see it.

But subduing this little girl came much easier than he expected. Or maybe it was just because he had been so strict in his lecturing.

'Did she just want attention and affection? Or is it something else? Either way, a kid will be a kid regardless, huh. With the two of them being so cooperative, solving their problem will be much easier.'

"Oh, right. I don't even know your name yet. How should I call you?"

"I'm Crystal!"

"And I'm Kuro!"

"..."

Damien stared at them blankly.

"Ow!"

"Ow!"

Two strong flicks landed on their foreheads.

"Seriously? What's with your naming sense? Crystal because your body is crystalline? And you, Kuro? Because of what? Your mana? Really? Wait, isn't that Japanese? How the hell do you know Japanese?"

Damien exploded. He understood that these girls never had someone name or take care of them, but this was too much!

Crystal! Kuro! Ignoring the extremely suspicious fact that they somehow came up with a Japanese name, their naming sense was so bad that it was even worse than his own!

"I can't accept this. I refuse to accept this. How about I give you new names?"

"You will?"

"New ones?"

The two girls' reactions were surprisingly positive. But when he thought about it, it somewhat made sense. They had only chosen their names because nobody else had bothered giving them proper ones.

He was already saving them and showing them care, so it seemed they had grown somewhat attached. Being named by him wasn't something they rejected at all.

Damien thought hard about it. 'There's no way I'll let my poor naming sense leak here! I can't lose face in front of them after everything I've said!'

"Alright, I got it. From now on, you will be Lily and Mei."

Short and sweet, and he also followed their naming scheme. It was perfect! Damien grinned in satisfaction.

"Lily!"

"Mei!"

The girls also seemed happy with their new names, as they kept repeating them over and over again. Although they were simple names, they were names given to them by someone they cared about. That's what mattered most to them.

Damien smiled wryly. These kids were at each other's throats only a few minutes ago, yet now they were happily celebrating their new names together.

'I'll have to help them increase their attention span too.' Damien thought wryly.

But that was a future matter. Now that these two had been properly disciplined, it was time for him to help them control their spiritual world. After that, they'd finally be able to regain stability and achieve the full potential of what their Twin Spirit Body could offer.

"Alright. If the two of you work together, then achieving equilibrium won't be hard. Mei, stop trying to devour Lily's territory. And Lily, expand your territory until it takes up half the space along with Mei's."

The two girls obediently listened to his instructions and began working. Although their personalities were that of children, their actual control over their power far exceeded their age.

The process soon started. The pure white land of snow and ice expanded to take up exactly half of the spiritual world. Meanwhile, the hellscape retreated to accommodate it.

"The two of you are sisters who share the same body. Even if you fight, you can't harm yourselves. If I see you doing it, then I'll punish you. Okay?" Damien said strictly as he watched over the process.

The two girls nodded in response. After the first scolding they got, as well as the harrowing feeling that Void Essence gave them, they had no thoughts of being disobedient.

Even the raging emotions brought by their elemental influence had been quelled.

Void Essence ruled over all other forms of mana, so it wasn't a surprise. Only, Damien never expected for things to be so easy.

But he wasn't complaining. Although the two girls hadn't completely made up yet and they hadn't actually begun seeing each other as sisters, he had planted the seed in their head.

Now, all they needed was proper time and nurturing to become a powerful existence under his and Ruyue's care.

As the process began to reach its end, Damien nodded his head in satisfaction.

'It seems like my help isn't needed here anymore. Let's exit the spiritual world and wait for them outside.'

And with that, the unexpected situation had finally reached a temporary close.

Chapter 377 Arrival [1]

While Damien was within Lily and Mei's spiritual world, the situation on the outside had also calmed down.

Since the girls weren't fighting, their mana also stopped responding. That's how it should've been since the beginning.

And as they worked together to balance their spiritual world, Damien put in the work to help them balance their body.

His Void Essence wall split into countless threads that went forth and enveloped all the mana within Lily and Mei's body. Considering how much vaster his capacity was compared to hers, it wasn't too hard.

And then, he used a property of Void Essence that he had never used on someone other than himself. He brought the two different forms of mana together and used Void Essence as a bridge to fuse them.

The reddish-black and blueish-white mana wrapped around either other like a yin-yang symbol, but there was still a wall of Void Essence in between.

After all, trying to act too fast might be detrimental to the girls' growth.

Damien carefully concentrated his awareness on the process and took utmost care in slowly merging parts of the energy together. With his pace, he would finish completely within the day.

Hours passed like this. The process was going smoothly since Lily and Mei were so cooperative, and next to the sphere of dual-energy types, there was a separate sphere of grey mana.

'This mana looks impure simply in appearance, but it's actually insanely pure and dense. The power within also can't be underestimated.'

Damien nodded in satisfaction. Not only was this powerful mana something the girls would be able to use proficiently, they would also be able to separate it into its two different parts and harmonize it for an exponential increase in power.

'Actually, maybe I should let them meet Xue'er? Hmm, that lass will definitely help them recover with her magical charisma and charm, but it isn't the time yet. I have to make sure that Mei learns to control her destructive urges first.'

VOOM!

As Damien was thinking, he suddenly felt a massive wave of power emanate from a place far deeper in the subterranean world.

VOOM!

Once the first wave passed, a second came. And after the second, a third. It was like the ringing of a bell when the clock struck midnight.

As the waves passed through the atmosphere, an air of vitality spread through the realm uncontrollably.

Even in the dark space under the shrine where Damien was, countless flowers and trees bloomed out of nowhere, filling the space with the air of nature.

'That old tree...it's announcing its presence!' Damien realized in shock.

"Dammit! So what was the point of all that shit you said in the Trial of Self?! This damn old tree is playing with me!"

[The Primordial Undying Tree smirks.]

"Damn old man! Don't just randomly send notifications and come fight me!"

[The Primordial Undying Tree asks if you have time to fight a 'damn old tree' like him when the geniuses are already congregating at his location.]

"Fuck! See how I deal with you after I get those fruits!"

Damien hurriedly turned back to Lily and Mei. The process of fixing their body was already nearing its end. But now that such a situation had appeared, he had to speed up.

But it wasn't a problem. With the intense waves of vitality that had just rushed through the space, a large portion of the girls' internal damage had been healed, granting Damien the freedom to move with more force.

Within an hour, Damien had completely fixed her physical body, and the two girls had also sorted out their spiritual world.

Their appearance suddenly began to change. Mei's side of the body began to crack and splinter. Pieces of her skin fell to the floor, and underneath, a new layer of skin was revealed.

Her skin was still red in color, contrasting Lily's blue, but it had taken on other properties. It was no longer scarred and horrendous. Mei's skin had also become crystalline and pure like Lily's.

The two sides of her body had an odd dichotomy that seemed to work perfectly together. But only a moment later, the red skin symbolizing Mei vanished entirely.

She finally opened her eyes. When she saw Damien standing in front of her, a bright smile appeared on her face.

"Big brother!"

She leaped into his arms and rubbed her head against his chest with reckless abandon, as if trying to soak up all of his warmth.

"Eh?!"

Damien gasped in surprise. Big brother? Again? It wasn't supposed to go like this, though?

"Um...Lily? Why am I big brother?"

"Hmm..because you saved me!"

"Eh? That's enough?"

"Yep! Mei said yes too!"

Damien furrowed his brows. This was going to be a problem.

He knew Xue'er's personality best. Although she was always a happy-go-lucky kid, she was also incredibly possessive.

Whenever he entered the Sanctuary, she would immediately find him and cling onto him. He didn't even know how many times Elitra had been blocked by Little Xue when they were competing for affection.

If he showed up with another little sister...no, two of them...he shuddered thinking about what that girl's reaction would be.

'But I can't just tell them I can't be their big brother. Especially since they're going to be Ruyue's in the future, I'll technically still be their big brother, just in-law...'

He decided to leave it as is. He could figure out how to appease Little Xue's anger once these three girls actually met each other.

'But that's not important right now. I have to move, and fast.'

"Okay. For now, big brother will take you to a safe place, okay? I need to do something dangerous now so I can't take you with me."

Lily frowned. Her skin soon turned red, and a pouting Mei appeared as well.

The two girls glared at him using the same face, causing him to sweat a bit. But it couldn't be helped.

"Don't worry. You won't be bored in there since there are a lot of friends for you. Also, big brother will come there as well in a little bit."

Damien patted their head and brushed his fingers through their hair. The girls' face showed a contented smile as he did so, and their anger seemed to be slightly dealt with.

In the end, Damien finally managed to get them to enter the Sanctuary after a great deal of convincing.

'If they meet Little Xue it's going to cause a headache...damn that old tree! It's all his fault!'

As he cursed the Primordial Undying Tree, Damien flashed away from the space. With Lily's disappearance, the ice domain that froze his mana had also been released.

He soon arrived at the entrance, where Lunaria was also waiting for him.

"Did you feel that mana wave?" She asked.

"I did. And we need to find it as soon as possible. The others are already congregating there. The final struggle for the Primordial Undying Fruit is about to begin. Oh, also, I apologize in advance."

"Wha—!"

Damien didn't even stop to hear her answer. He grabbed her shoulder and teleported, causing the two of them to appear ten kilometers below their original position, in another underground tunnel.

"You...!"

Lunaria wasn't even given a chance to gather her breath before he teleported again.

The Primordial Undying Tree had called. There was no time for anything else.

Chapter 378 Arrival [2]

Damien dragged Lunaria through the underground as fast as he could, but it wasn't an easy thing.

In the first place, the tunnel system was far too complicated. Even if he wanted to just teleport straight down continuously, it was impossible.

His awareness was concentrated below him as far as he could reach, scanning the area. If he could, he would directly teleport to a tunnel in that area. But most of the time, there simply wasn't one there.

He had to rush through the tunnel system on foot and search for viable locations to teleport to, while also keeping the location of the Primordial Undying Tree in mind so he didn't stray too far away.

He couldn't even use the maximum range of his teleportation, since long-distance spatial travel would negatively impact those without an affinity for it. He needed Lunaria to stay in peak shape for the upcoming struggle.

'Even if everyone is an enemy, that's only once we reach the fruits. Around 20 survived from our Trial World, and even if I cut that number by half because of the Trial of Self, I still don't know the total amount of Trial Worlds there were, so I can't accurately gauge how much competition we'll have. At the very least, I expect a few hundred to be there.'

In a place where hundreds of people were competing for a total of 16 fruits, he couldn't burn the bridges he had already crossed. At least, not until they had eliminated the rest of their competition.

'That old tree had told me not to get too conceited, and he probably wasn't just telling me to be wary of all the people I've already met. There must be solid competition among those that have survived.'

In particular, Damien was curious about the first-ranked genius, Hun Fang. He had only seen the man once, but that guy was simply too mysterious, even evading the probing of his All-Seeing Eyes.

'I've gained so much from this realm already...compared to everyone else I've met so far, I've definitely reaped the most benefits. But still, I can't expect that to stay true with so many variables around.'

Damien was wary of a few people, but that wasn't important yet. He and Lunaria had already traveled hundreds of kilometers through the vast network of tunnels in the subterranean world, but they weren't even halfway to the location of the tree yet.

'That damn bastard...how the hell are the others going to reach his body if he hides so deep underground? Wait...don't tell me...'

If, perhaps, the others were given easy access to the location in one way or another...wasn't it possible that the battle for the fruits had already begun without including him?

'No, I would've felt the fluctuations if that was the case. But it doesn't mean that others haven't reached the location yet. I need to speed up.'

Without warning, he increased his teleportation distance to 20 kilometers. With this much, it shouldn't be a burden to Lunaria yet.

As he went deeper and deeper underground, the number of tunnels and complexities within the subterranean world decreased as well. And it soon reached a point where Damien could actually see the patterns within those tunnels.

They snaked about and connected to various different locations, but in the end, they all congregated in a single place. That place was too far down for him to see, but he didn't need to see it to know what it was.

'Almost there...'

He increased his speed once again in excitement. It was finally time to get the treasure he had been lusting over for so long.

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While Damien was busy rampantly teleporting to reach the Primordial Undying Tree, more and more people began to appear in the desert above the tree's location.

"Was it here?"

"I felt an extremely strong fluctuation from this location, so why is it empty?"

"Hmm, so this must be everyone that survived. I can't believe our numbers were cut down so much."

There were at least 200 people congregated in the area, and among them were a few familiar faces.

"Qing'er, didn't you say that he passed the trial with you guys? Why haven't I seen him yet?"

A beauty with white hair and golden eyes asked worriedly. Even amongst this large crowd, she stood out like a glimmering moon in the midst of the night sky.

Next to her, another fiery beauty stood with her arms crossed, scanning the area. "Hmph! That bastard won't die so easily. If I had to guess, he's probably a lot farther along than we are."

"Hmm..." Ruyue hesitated, but ended up nodding in agreement. The Damien she knew wouldn't be left behind by anyone. If anything, he would be the one leaving people behind.

"But...where did that girl Qing Tan go? I could've sworn I saw her, but she disappeared as soon as I tried to greet her. What happened to camaraderie?" Feng Qing'er muttered to herself.

It was true that she had seen Qing Tan a few moments after she had been sent to this desert realm, but that girl disappeared like the wind upon seeing her.

If Feng Qing'er didn't know any better, she'd think that Qing Tan was purposefully avoiding her.

"Ah, you are talking about the girl that was with you and Damien in your Trial World? If you want to ask about her, then shouldn't you ask about your dear sister as well? I haven't seen Luna ever since entering this realm either." Ruyue teased.

"That's right!"

Feng Qing'er gasped in shame. She had been too focused on the fact that Qing Tan ignored her, she had almost forgotten about her very own sister.

Now that she thought about it, many powerful people were missing from this place. Whether it be Hun Fang, Qing Tan, Lunaria, or others in the top 10 of the 3000 Beast Record.

"But they should be fine. In fact, them not being here should worry us for another reason. If they perhaps got a head start..."

Ruyue furrowed her brows. At this juncture, time was of the essence. They needed to reach the location of that fluctuation as soon as possible, but instead, they were simply dallying around.

'I know we need to go, but for this many people to be summoned here couldn't be a coincidence. My instincts are telling me that waiting would be more beneficial.'

As Ruyue was thinking about what to do, a trio of men sauntered in her direction.

"Beauty! I have been enamored with your grace and elegance since the moment I laid eyes on you! Please accept my greetings!"

The one who led the three lowered his head and tried to gently grab Ruyue's hand.

'Is that...spatial fluctuations? It doesn't have Damien's mana signature, so something else must be happening. Hm, what is this?'

As she was in thought, Ruyue felt an irritating presence in front of her and halfheartedly swatted her hand.

But a halfhearted swat from Ruyue wasn't something that could be taken lightly anymore. The blessing of the Primordial Undying Tree wasn't just for show, after all.

Swoosh!

Her hand sliced through the air, only feeling a slight resistance. Feeling that she had gotten rid of a bug near her, Ruyue nodded in satisfaction before continuing with her thinking.

"Ahhhhh!"

That is, until she heard the piercing shriek that sounded near her. When she looked over, she saw a man whose arm had been freshly severed rolling across the ground.

"Hm?"

Her senses became alert. For someone to be crippled without anyone noticing, there must've been a powerful enemy in the vicinity.

She spread her awareness and circulated her mana in preparation for battle. Only then did she notice that most of the gazes were congregated on her rather than the poor man on the floor.

"Huh?" She tilted her head curiously. "Why is everyone looking at me?"

Chapter 379 Arrival [3]

"Pfft...!"

Feng Qing'er let out a crisp peel of laughter upon seeing Ruyue's confusion. To think that she hadn't even noticed the man who she had crippled before doing so, it was comedic to think about.

But before she could say anything else, strong spatial fluctuations eclipsed the area they were standing in, enveloping all the geniuses that had gathered.

"What is this?!"

“Again?!”

Some panicked, while others simply watched how things progressed. But the thing they all had in common was that they knew something important was happening.

The spatial fluctuations soon became extremely strong, and people began vanishing one by one.

Ruyue narrowed her eyes as this happened, directing her gaze towards the ground. ‘They are being teleported...down there?’

She didn’t know when it started, but her perception towards space had become incredibly keen. Of course, it could never compare to an actual spatial practitioner, but it was still far above what others could do.

This could be seen by how she noticed the faint spatial fluctuations long before the rest had done the same.

Although she couldn’t gauge the exact location to which they were being teleported, she could at least understand the direction. And seeing that they were being taken underground, there was only one thing she could think of.

‘I see. As expected, we were summoned here. To think that we’d be teleported down to the location of the Tree Senior without having to go through any more trials...it feels a bit strange.’

But it wasn't like she could do anything about it, and it wasn't like she preferred being hindered at every step.

The light of spatial transmission soon reached Ruyue and turned her surroundings black. When she opened her eyes again, she was in an expansive underground space.

The ceiling of this space was so high above her head that Ruyue almost doubted whether the space could actually sustain itself without collapsing.

In fact, the only reason she could even see the ceiling was because of the small floating motes of light that inhabited the space.

Unlike what one would expect from an underground area, the place was extremely rich in vitality.

Various flora gathered and flourished throughout the space, with towering trees and uniquely patterned flowers being common. And the plants weren't normal at all. Besides the immense aura of vitality they gave off, they also had other special fluctuations.

'All of these are valuable herbs and materials...' Ruyue realized as she glanced around.

This place was like a heaven filled with treasures. Even a random stalk of grass one picked up off the floor would have astonishing regenerative properties.

‘But for a place like this to have no lifeforms is too strange.’

Ruyue began walking forward while ignoring the crowd around her. The expansiveness of the space didn’t just constitute of its high ceilings, the distance it covered horizontally was also immense.

As Ruyue moved, the others also regained their senses. The smell of greed clouded the atmosphere.

“Hahaha! It’s all mine! This trip was totally worth it!”

“Fuck off! I got my hands on it first!”

“Hmph! Let’s see if you have the power to keep it.”

Tens of geniuses ran wantonly about the cave trying to get to the treasure herbs that surrounded them. Clashes of weapons and the light of mana filled the air as they fought over the goods.

Ruyue sighed in disdain. ‘They’re so focused on what’s in front of them that they can’t see anything else...how did people like this even pass the previous trials?’

But then again, even she was feeling greed upon seeing so much treasure in one place. Could she really fault them? It was the nature of man to die for treasure.

But she quickly suppressed her greed. Rather than aiming for the small things, shouldn't she go for the big fish?

She could clearly feel a massive aura of vitality emanating from a place she assumed was the center of the realm. There, she was sure she'd find the treasure she had been looking for since the beginning.

And not just that...

'He should also be there. Damn, I hate how much I miss his stupid face...'

Ruyue shook her head and rushed forward, ignoring the commotion around her.

"Hey! Wait for me!"

A crisp voice rang out from behind. Feng Qing'er soon caught up to Ruyue and moved alongside her.

"Haa...it's such a shame! I'm so tempted to go after these treasures, but thanks to you I was able to regain my senses."

Ruyue glanced at the sighing Feng Qing'er. She could definitely understand the other girl's feelings.

"It can't be helped. There's no way we are the only group to arrive here. We can't say whether or not others have reached the Primordial Undying Tree yet."

Feng Qing'er's eyes widened. "It's really here?! You're sure, right?"

Ruyue looked in the direction she felt that aura from and nodded. "It's here. I'm sure of it."

She, like Damien, had received the baptism of the Primordial Undying Tree, although to a lesser extent. Just as he could feel its calling, she could as well.

"Tch! If it's really like that, then I'll just follow along with you. You don't mind, right? I promise I won't leech."

"When did I ever say you would be a leech? If Damien has befriended you, then you are definitely a strong person. That guy...only geniuses congregate around him."

"H-hmph! Although I don't really like that bastard, I'll take the compliment. Anyway, why haven't we been attacked yet? Should the race to the Primordial Undying Tree be so simple?"

Ruyue furrowed her brows. She was thinking the same thing. The fact that there weren't any beasts in this area was strange enough. For there to not be any traps either...

Ruyue opened her eyes wide, causing them to shine in resplendent gold. As she looked around, she suddenly shuddered in fear.

"Let's hurry. Also, no matter what happens, do not step on or aggregate any of the plants growing here."

"What do you mean by—"

"Ahhh!"

"Fuck! What's happening!"

"Go away, vile demons!"

Feng Qing'er's words were suddenly interrupted by a series of cries. Naturally, they came from the geniuses they left behind.

As Feng Qing'er turned to see what was happening, Ruyue immediately stopped her.

“Don’t look back, and don’t pay attention to them. I promise you, the only thing you’ll feel is regret if you do so.”

Feng Qing’er shuddered at the seriousness in her tone. In that second, it seemed that Ruyue’s entire aura went through a change.

And it had. She was no longer taking things lightly. To think that she had been inside of a tiger’s mouth without even noticing it...she couldn’t relax anymore.

Her eyes were a secret that even her family never knew. After all, she hadn’t awakened them until after she had left. Perhaps, if they knew about this feature of hers, they would’ve never allowed her to live peacefully in the Celestial Star Palace.

There was only a single person who knew her power, and that was Tian Yang.

‘No, Damien must’ve found out on our first meeting as well.’

He had blocked her probe before she could even get any valuable information. His eyes were most likely special as well.

‘Wait...I’m pretty sure anyone who’s seen his eyes would be able to tell that they’re special. What an unfortunate guy...’

She smirked a bit. But she soon cleared her thoughts again. Her awareness was spread within a closed area around her, monitoring all movement, and her steps were careful and thought out.

She couldn't get distracted. If she got distracted, she'd end up dead.

Chapter 380 Arrival [4]

In the area where Ruyue and Feng Qing'er had just left, a massacre was taking place.

Thousands of massive vines thicker than an average human body twisted and lashed through the air, smashing anyone they touched into blood mist.

A murky fog rapidly spread through the atmosphere, spreading poisonous spores that infected the geniuses' bodies. Those that were infected became mindless slaves that attacked the others around them.

Even the grass at the geniuses' feet was moving to hinder them, binding their legs at the split second before they dodged to make sure the attacks of the other plants hit true.

It was an uphill battle to say the least.

The poisonous mist could be dealt with using mana as a barrier, but the vines were a real problem.

They weren't too hard to cut through normally. The problem was that tree roots and branches would spread and reinforce the vines as they moved, creating an interwoven defense.

And combined with the speed at which ten vines moved, the defense became even more effective.

All the while, carnivorous plants moved in silence and devoured the dead, using their energy to empower the other plants around them.

They were like cogs in a machine. Every single one of them reinforced the others, creating a system that a group of 3rd classes could never escape from. Hell, even a 4th class might have trouble doing so.

The shrieks of those geniuses sounded off cave walls and echoed throughout as they faced their inevitable deaths, painting the entire area in an eerie vibe.

Feng Qing'er fought her curiosity to look back. She wanted to see what was causing such gruesome screams, but at the same time, she didn't.

It was due to Ruyue's warning that she held herself back and kept rushing forward.

Inwardly, she scoffed at herself. 'Of course things weren't so simple. Since when has anything in this secret realm been as it seems? It was stupid to let my guard down because of the peaceful appearance of this place.'

Just the fact that there were no beasts inhabiting such a vast jungle was enough to cause her to be wary.

What beast would logically pass up a treasure trove like this? It was basically a quick stop to getting powerful for them, who devour to grow stronger.

Even her own bestial instincts were craving the treasure herbs in the surroundings, so how would those unintelligent beasts resist?

Unless, of course, they could sense the danger of this place.

‘This place must be stained with the blood of countless beasts. Because of the precedent that had been set already, other beasts don’t dare come close. How could I not realize it?’

Perhaps she was too caught up in her greed, or perhaps it was something else. But she didn’t make any excuses to cover her inadequacy.

Instead, she focused her attention on Ruyue and carefully followed her steps. She had no desire to end up like the others.

‘Come to think of it, whether it was the spatial fluctuations from before or the dangers here, she noticed first. It’s as she said, nobody close to that bastard is simple.’

Considering how much Ruyue consciously and subconsciously spoke about Damien, Feng Qing'er knew that the relationship between the two wasn't simple.

But she actually didn't care much. What she was more worried about was Qing Tan.

'The atmosphere between her and Damien was awkward before we left the Trial World. Did something happen? But I was with them the entire time, how could something have happened that I wasn't aware of?'

She didn't see nor sense anything wrong until that final moment. Of course, she had no way of knowing whether it was just hidden until then or not.

'Haa...forget it. If something happens, it happens. Since I don't know the context of the situation, I can't intervene at all.'

She simply continued following Ruyue, since it was all she could do. Remaining focused on the prize in front of her eyes was the best decision she could make.

With the pace Ruyue and Feng Qing'er were moving at, they cleared the jungle extremely fast. Within the hour, they reached a point where the sheer amount of vitality in the atmosphere caused the air itself to contain a greenish hue.

Just breathing it in made them feel like closing their eyes and relaxing. Their drowsiness wasn't a bad feeling at all. Even if they had rested enough, it was good to be in peak condition before charging the Primordial Undying Tree.

The two of them immediately circulated their mana and shocked themselves awake.

“That was dangerous,” Ruyue muttered.

Feng Qing’er nodded in response.

That was all they said. They ceased conversation and focused on circulating their mana as they moved to stay unaffected by the atmosphere.

And soon, they arrived at a clearing. Within this vast expansive jungle where there was no empty space at all, this was the only clearing where no plants dared to grow.

Except one.

The tree wasn’t massive in size or domineering in appearance at all. If one simply looked at it with the eyes of a mortal, they’d think it was the same as any other tree on the side of the road. At least, until they looked up.

Its trunk was around 6 feet tall. It wasn’t short, necessarily, but compared to the trees around it, it might as well have been a dwarf.

But its crown was a real treat for the eyes.

Extending from the trunk were tens of thousands of branches that intertwined into a massive crown that vastly outstripped the size of the tree's trunk.

The branches were thick and sturdy, more than enough for battle to take place on them without them taking damage.

The leaves of the tree weren't green all the way through. They interchanged between three different colors.

In the lower levels were shades of red, which then formed a gradient into a green layer. And finally, at the very peak of the tree's crown was a small, almost imperceptible, layer of purple.

Ruyue and Feng Qing'er held their breaths as they looked at it.

16 fruits. 10 red, 5 green, and a single purple. They were shaped like apples and looked incredibly succulent. An irresistible urge to claim them and immediately devour them almost enslaved the two girls.

Those fruits that they had only heard about before today were hanging from the branches of the tree in front of them.

There was no doubt about it.

This tree was the Primordial Undying Tree. The legendary tree that had reached Godhood and formed this entire secret realm.

“We’re finally here,” Ruyue muttered under her breath.

“Indeed we are.”

The voice that replied wasn’t Feng Qing’er’s. It was hoarse and manly, giving off a gloomy feeling.

When the two girls looked over, they saw a cloaked figure standing not far from them. His attention was fully focused on the tree as well.

But soon, he turned his eyes to them. Two piercing red eyes that shone through the darkness of his hood.

“It is unexpected that I wasn’t the first to arrive. Then again, even if I was the first, it seems it wouldn’t have mattered much.”

As his words fell, the jungle around them rustled. Multiple figures emerged from within.

Liu Bai, the tenth-ranked genius on the 3000 Beast Record, the Shameless Duo that was ranked 7th and 8th, and even Qing Tan. The peak geniuses who has entered the secret realm, besides Damien and Lunaria, had all gathered.

Including the cloaked man who had spoken to Ruyue earlier.

First-ranked genius Hun Fang.

And after them, many more came as well. While the group that had entered with Ruyue and Feng Qing'er had succumbed to greed and been annihilated at the start, not everyone was the same.

Still, from the total thousand geniuses who had entered the realm, only around 100 had made it this far and congregated.

The final struggle was on the cusp of beginning.