

Void 99

Chapter 99

When the elevator stopped on the 90th floor, Zara seamlessly attached her shadow to the researchers so they could enter the facility uninhibited.

Zara's shadow worked similarly to a subspace in that it could both hold living beings and was concealed from most people's perception. This subspace used shadows as a base and like such could latch to shadows and be carried by them.

In such a dimly lit area like the underground bunker, Zara's ability was extremely useful.

And so, Damien and Zara were carried by the researcher as she walked through the facility. Similar to the 60th floor, there were hundreds of different researchers at their workstations handling separate matters. The difference was the subject of experimentation.

The 90th floor was much more technologically advanced, with holographic screens prevalent throughout its area that showcased many large numbers that Damien couldn't even hope to understand. Besides these, there were many machines he had never seen before, most likely not originating from earth.

Damien was surprised by the sheer number of people that were working in this area and assuming that there were similar numbers on the 25 floors above it, it was truly obscene. But at the same time, not all these people had to be from earth.

And even if they were all from earth, a population of several billion still had the capability to support such a large group.

Shaking off any useless thoughts, Damien continued to watch the proceedings around him as the researcher he was following met up with a few others.

P A N D A N O V E L

“Lynn, how is the progress on the extraction mission?” One of them asked the woman.

“It’s proceeding as expected, however, we are still unable to find the source of the recently established connection. Its nature is too ethereal for us to study using the equipment provided for this lower world. Not to mention, the core itself rejects our presence.”

“It’s been long theorized that the core of a world has the capability to gain sentience and form a will, but there’s been no proof. Even if we fail our original goal, if we can prove the existence of a world’s sentience, it would be a common-sense shattering discovery.”

“Indeed, it’s already proven that plant life forms can gain sentience with prolonged absorption of mana. The carnivorous ones can even utilize the Records to level up. There have been a few cases on our own world where plant life-forms gained humanoid form after gaining enough power.”

The researchers began discussing in a fervor. Whether it was their original task or not, they didn’t care. They moved in the pursuit of science and truth, and any discovery that correlated with this would earn their blind devotion until they had solved its mysteries.

But it didn’t take long for them to be forced back to reality. Lynn, the researcher who Damien had been following, spoke up.

“Silence. Regardless of what we want to study, it isn’t our choice this time. If we don’t complete the mission that the higher-ups have given us, you know the consequences. Don’t get too comfortable with the atmosphere here. Niflheim is not a forgiving world, and even your families will suffer if you make a mistake.”

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At the mention of family, a gloomy atmosphere descended on the researchers. It was true that none of them wanted to do what they were being tasked to. None of them were inhumane to the point where the loss of billions of lives wouldn’t weigh on their shoulders.

Still, for the sake of their love of science, well-being, and most importantly the well-being of those they cared for, they forged on.

p AN da n ov el The group of scientists moved together as they passed the less important researchers that surrounded them and entered a structure that constituted the center of the floor. Unlike the abyss of the normal floors, there was no hole in the center of this one.

Instead, it was another facility that was even more heavily guarded than the ones on the 65th floor. Damien watched from the shadows as the scientists went through 5 different bolted doors of varying density and performed tests to prove their identity.

At the most basic layer, there was a retina scan and fingerprint scan, but as they progressed, things got more complicated. Aside from a separate keycard needed for entry, they also went through an area that tested their mana signature, blood, and many more facets that made up one’s identity.

It was truly rigorous, and there was even a test to see if any foreign mana lingered on the scientists’ bodies.

Damien was slightly stressed during this one, as Zara's shadow was qualified as foreign mana, but they passed without a problem. It seemed the equipment here was meant to deal with a lower world, so none of it exceeded S rank in quality. Zara's concealment wouldn't be ousted by a mere S rank artifact.

Once they entered the facility, Damien was greeted by pristine white walls and tens of researchers in hazmat suits. Compared to the outside, the amount in here was minuscule.

Each of them was in front of a holographic screen as they tested numerous equations, trying to find the correct path to complete their tasks.

Lynn ignored all of this and went to the center of the room, where a large circular platform was located. Stepping on this platform with her colleagues, she was promptly teleported to the very bottom of the bunker.

Here, there were no signs of civilization nor were there other researchers. The only ones allowed access to this area were the big bosses of the organization and this group of 5 researchers.

It was a massive cavern filled with gnawing darkness. Not even a single lamp or even torch was used to light up the area. Still, the scientists paid this no mind and continued walking in a straight line.

As they walked, Damien began to see a blueish glow emerge from the distance. At first, it was simply enough to illuminate the shadows within the cavern, but as they drew closer, the light became blinding.

The scientists were already prepared for this and had the appropriate equipment to circumvent the problem, but Damien wasn't. The blinding light corroded any shadow present in the vicinity, forcing him and Zara out of their concealment.

Luckily, the scientists were occupied and the two made no noise. Damien was able to cast light refraction before any changes were noticed. And due to his earring artifact, no trace of his presence was left in the area.

Still, something reacted to him. The source of the blinding light slightly thumped as if acknowledging his presence, but it was so slight that it went unnoticed by everyone in the area.

The scientists continued to walk towards the bright light, and the entire cavern was filled with a wondrous blue color. When Damien followed them, he felt a sensation like none other. It was mystical and enchanting, yet grounded in reality.

A sudden memory flashed into his head. A river filled with starlight of a similar color. Even if its properties were entirely different, the image of the river wouldn't leave his head.

Damien was forced to crouch down due to pain and clutch his head. Something within him was forcing that memory to allay dormant, trying to force him into forgetting it.

When the memory resurged, whatever that thing was caused immense waves of pain to crash through his head until he stopped attempting to recall it.

Damien truly wanted to know what it was that he saw and why it was so dangerous to remember it, but now wasn't the time.

He caught back up to the scientists, who had reached the source of the glow. It was a massive empty space that looked similar to a quarry, but there was nothing inside.

Well, almost nothing.

In the middle of the empty space, floating with no support, was a huge ball of blue light. The ball was at least the size of the moon as a whole, maybe even larger. Especially with its expansive diameter, it genuinely looked like a celestial body.

Damien stared at this massive ball of light. He felt like if he really tried, he could reach out and touch it, but another part of him felt that he'd be immediately incinerated if he did so.

The strangest part was that the huge object didn't give off any aura or waves of power, even though the entire area around it was filled with that same mystical sensation Damien felt earlier. He was enthralled by the sight.

"The core of this small world called earth. It's a marvelous scene no matter how many times I see it."

"It's confusing how a world recently introduced to mana could have such a magnificent core."

"Indeed, the universe is filled with countless wonders. It's a shame that we are forced to rob one of them of its majesty."

"Still, it must be done."

“Commence trial 127 for project title: Core Extraction.”