

Paragon 271

Chapter 271 - 271: After five Years of cultivation

"Master, that will be the last round of lightning. It's the Lightning Tower containing nine levels, but at this stage, only the first level will be activated. Brace yourself, because it's going to be a dangerous one. After all, the heavens want you dead," Yuying warned.

Fruity, now standing with the Demon-Slaying Staff in his grip, looked up at the heavens, watching as the clouds churned and darkened.

He couldn't help but smirk as he watched the base of a tower, representing the first floor, slowly appear from the clouds. Suddenly, windows and doors littered around the first level swung open, and countless lightning monsters of different shapes and sizes began to pour out.

He wasn't scared in the least. After all, his last five years of intense training and tempering hadn't been for nothing.

Five years ago, he began his training with body tempering. Yuying had prepared all kinds of resources for him, so for months, he spent his time going from one medicinal bath to another.

He had tempered his body so much that after just seven months, he felt confident that with his bare hands alone, he could take on multiple Tier 7 devils.

After that, they moved on to the next phase of body cultivation, where he began climbing Griviy Mountain. His first trial was enough to prove that all the time spent enduring the medicinal burns on his skin and bones hadn't been in vain.

On his first attempt, he was able to climb ten steps before the pressure became unbearable. However, he didn't stop there. He adapted, using the pressure to temper his bones and muscles.

Within a few days, he advanced to the 15th step, and that became his training for another five months until he managed to climb the first 100 steps.

There were still 150 more to go before reaching the peak of the mountain, but he didn't have all the time in the world, so he moved on to the next phase: mental training.

He began by cultivating a secret technique called [Sage Mind]. According to Yuying, it would allow him to increase his mental capacity tenfold if he managed to overcome all the natural obstacles of the mind.

It took him just a month to break through these barriers, bringing his mental strength to a new level. Yuying then took him to the Hunting Cave. Fruity quickly entered, and for an entire year, he remained inside, pushing his mental capacity to its limit every single day.

After a year, he managed to advance 10 kilometers out of the 12-kilometer distance, an achievement that left Yuying both startled and pleased. Finally, she could see her past Master awakening within his current incarnation.

When he returned from the cave, his mental state was a bit unsettled, so Yuying gave him a break to rest and even taught him another technique called Unshakable Mind. This helped him develop mental fortitude that would be incredibly difficult to break.

With three years remaining, Fruity entered another cave called the Soul Breaking Abode, where he trained for a full year. Yuying gave him just one technique, the [Soul Mending Pagoda]. According to her, if Fruity managed to cultivate it to its peak, he would gain an incredibly powerful soul for both offense and defense.

The technique had nine levels, but even after a year of cultivation, Fruity only managed to reach level three. Still, it was more than enough to make him several times stronger when considering the synergy between the soul and mind.

With his body, mind, and soul tempered, Fruity moved on to the next stage: Qi cultivation. This stage required him to do two things: learn more techniques, skills, and spells, and choose from 69 different cultivation methods.

It was a difficult decision, knowing that if he chose the wrong one, he would be bound to it forever. But Yuying reassured him that he didn't need to worry. Unlike most people, he wasn't bound by fate with the heavens, meaning he could change cultivation methods whenever he wished—or even practice multiple methods simultaneously.

She even bragged about how valuable the techniques were. Of course, Fruity didn't ask where she got them from; he simply reviewed them all. After a full day of going through and memorizing everything, he made his choice.

He chose the ['Nine Star Ice Body Art.'] It resonated with his affinity for the ice element, so he selected it, and for the next year and a half, he focused on cultivating it.

By the end of the four and a half years, Fruity had become so powerful that he knew if he encountered the mysterious figure hidden within the domain of the Hellhounds, he would be able to take it down.

He had mastered many skills, techniques, and spells, and he was certain that in his next battle, whether against a monster or a human, he wouldn't need to worry.

Of course, his relationship with Yuying had also developed greatly over the years. When his soul became exceptionally powerful, Yuying suggested that he could house her within his soul sea, which he did. For some reason, Yuying preferred to remain there, guiding him as he progressed.

With all that knowledge and power, he spent the remaining months before the five-year mark focusing on increasing his cultivation and breaking through to the Sage Stage.

After just four months, he broke through, and now he was facing his tribulation, which wasn't difficult at all. From the start of the tribulation, all he did was sit down and cover himself with the Bell of Harrows.

Now, watching the lightning monsters escape from the tower, Fruity could only smile as he activated a technique he had mastered over the years.

"Ice Pillar: Dawn of a Thousand Arrows," he called out.

A large, towering pillar of ice appeared, and from its body, thousands of arrows shot forth, each one destroying a monster before they could even get close to the bell.

"I can feel my spiritual Qi becoming stronger," Fruity muttered.

"Of course it is. You are now sensing the Star Qi, which will fully unlock once you become a Great Sage," Yuying said from inside his soul sea.

"What is Star Qi?" Fruity asked.

"It's another form of energy, but incredibly powerful. It's from your core, the Paragon Star. It's the only energy that the heavens don't have control over," Yuying replied.

"Let me guess, I created that," Fruity said.

"Yes, Master. You haven't just created us; you've created many things, even a whole race of..." Before Yuying could continue, the heavens roared, and a red lightning bolt shot toward Fruity. He immediately stood up and jammed the staff into the ground.

"Eye of Despair: Void Eyes." The second face of the Pentaface Bead activated, and a huge dark eye snapped open just as the red lightning was about to hit Fruity.

Like a black hole, it swallowed the lightning, but Fruity coughed up a mouthful of blood.

"I'm sorry Master. I was so excited that I forgot about your situation with the heavens," Yuying said in a sad, guilty tone. She had accidentally triggered divine punishment by revealing too much, nearly costing Fruity his life.

"Don't sweat it, Yuying. It was my fault for asking," Fruity said, but deep down, he was happy to have learned something forbidden about himself. Unknowingly, he had just unlocked a trait within himself that would forever push him to rise above any obstacle set by the heavens or anyone else.

A short while later, he was done with the tribulation, finally forming a Sage Core. Yuying emerged from his soul sea and congratulated him. She then retrieved seven large cores, each exuding potent Ice Qi.

"It's now time to awaken the other four forbidden ice elements," she said with a smile.

Chapter 272 - 272: Awakening Four Forbidden Ice Elements

"Are those...?" Fruity raised an eyebrow, looking at the monster cores in her hands.

"Yes, these belong to the Seven Forbidden Monsters you needed to kill to awaken the four other elements," Yuying answered with a smug smile.

"I was bored in between your training, so I hunted them down and killed them. This will also make things faster for you," she added.

Fruity could only smile. "How strong were they, and what makes them forbidden?" he asked.

"Tier 9, and the reason they are forbidden is because they possess a type of ice the heavens don't approve of. You see, although this kind of ice isn't made by the heavens, it doesn't mean others can't awaken it. As long as it exists, it will eventually awaken in someone else," Yuying replied.

Fruity nodded. He already knew as much. The reason the Lightning Valley came after him was because they feared the kind of person he would become.

He was sure that, aside from them, other powerhouses would have made their move eventually; it was just that the Lightning Valley beat them to it.

But now that he had a sure way to awaken the elements, he knew for a fact he wouldn't be returning to the human world the same way he came.

This time, he planned to make sure that once he was finally done, nobody would ever raise a weapon against anyone who awakened a forbidden element. After all, he was the progenitor of all forbidden elementals.

"I'll reward you later, Yuying. For now, let me awaken the last four elements to make it a complete set," Fruity said, forming a series of hand seals.

A short while later, a circular, complex diagram appeared on the ground. He sat down and placed the seven cores in the circle. He had already awakened Annihilation, Chaos, and Devouring Ice, but that didn't mean he couldn't make them stronger.

He formed another set of hand seals, and the circle began to absorb the cores, transferring their energies into his body.

The Annihilation Ice is known for its deadly nature. As its name suggests, anything it touches—unless it's exceptionally powerful—will be destroyed. This means that as Fruity's control over it strengthens, his killing power will become several times more lethal.

Then there's the Chaotic Ice. This one deals more with the mind than with physical damage. Its main property is creating chaos, and what better way to create chaos than by messing with the brain? Fruity had seen firsthand what that was like.

Lastly, there was the Devouring Ice, which Fruity had realized had more properties than just devouring. After his battles, the ice had grown much stronger by absorbing the essence of everything he killed.

However, after chatting with Yuying, who seemed to know more about this forbidden ice, Fruity learned that the Devouring Ice is the nucleus of all the other types of ice. It can devour energy from anything and convert it into ice energy.

At first, Fruity thought the energy devoured was only for the Devouring Ice, but now he knows that the energy can be distributed to the other ice elements. He can even stop the Devouring Ice from absorbing energy entirely and allocate it to the other elements instead.

However, to accomplish this, he must first awaken all seven ice elements. Now, he was working toward achieving that.

Five hours later, the cores were devoured by the diagram, and Fruity began radiating an intense, chilling aura that instantly froze everything within a 10-kilometer radius around him.

A while later, a diamond-shaped tattoo appeared on his forehead and began to shine. Within seconds, Fruity experienced seven powerful bursts of ice energy each erupting from his body. When everything finally settled, the entire area where he had been cultivating lay in ruins.

In front of him, seven diamond-shaped ice formations—each emanating a different type of ice energy and glowing in distinct colors—hovered before him.

The Annihilation Ice, with its dark hue; the red Chaotic Ice; the dark gold Devouring Ice—and now, four more. The dark red Abyssal Ice, the deep green Hypnotic Ice, the white Immortal Ice, and the smoke-like Soul Eater Ice.

"Congratulations, Master! You have finally awakened all the Ice elements. All that's left is training them to their peak," Yuying said, looking incredibly happy as she watched the seven different ice forms floating before her Master, Fruity.

"Thank you. But can you tell me more about these new additions? They didn't exactly come with a manual," Fruity asked.

"I can't say much because of our neighbors up there, but I can tell you a little about their true nature, and from there, you can come up with a way to use them."

Fruity nodded, knowing that understanding their nature would give him a solid foundation to work with. 'At least my past self left me with some techniques I can utilize for now as I work to unlock his memories,' he thought.

"The dark red one is Abyssal Ice, and as the name suggests, it has something to do with darkness and sinister forces. Essentially, it taps into a form of energy known as Abyssal Energy, which comes from a place called the Abyss. This energy has no healing properties, so any beam or attack that is used from this ice is demonic and serves only one purpose: destruction.

The deep green one is Hypnotic Ice. The reason I made you train your mind was because of this Ice. Yes, it's used for hypnosis and illusions, and yes, it grows with your mental strength. When I say it grows with your mind, I mean that it becomes stronger as your mind becomes stronger.

Basically, it amplifies your mental capacity many times over when in use. So, if you want to maximize its potential, you need to continue training your mind.

The white one is Immortal Ice. Even from its appearance, you can tell it's meant for healing. But you might wonder why something meant for healing is considered forbidden. The answer is simple: it's not called Immortal Ice for nothing.

If normal healing ice restores your health at a rate of 0.005% per second, Immortal Ice will do so at a rate of 0.5% per second. It's incredibly powerful, and though I can't explain why right now, it would be best to use Devouring Ice to strengthen it faster.

Finally, there's Soul Eater Ice. Among all your ice elements, this is the most dangerous. I won't say much, as everything about it is highly sensitive, but imagine a battlefield filled with smoky ice that does two things: it eats away at the souls of your enemies and feeds their soul strength directly to you."

"Now, that is what I call forbidden," Fruity said with a smile. He could only imagine the evil he could do with it.

'Inner peace,' he sighed, realizing he was becoming what Yuying had always described him as. He was a monk, yet in his mind, there was nothing peaceful. He remembered everything that happened when he, his mom, and Haniva fled from his kingdom.

The pain and all the heartbreaking feelings were eating away at his resolve every second. The current him was more than ready to go berserk when he could no longer hold on.

Almost half of the monks had died during their battle with the Lightning Valley. These monks were his uncles, so if anyone assumed he was too peaceful as a monk to seek revenge, they were mistaken.

The only thing more dangerous than a bloodthirsty maniac is a peaceful monk who is grieving. Inner peace or not, Fruity was in pain, but for now, he was barely keeping it down.

"So, what next, Master? Now that you've awakened the elements, what's next?" Yuying asked, excited for what was to come.

"What can you tell me about the Tormented Trial?" Fruity asked, and Yuying's smile died down.

Chapter 273 - 273: The Tormented Trial

From his past self, Fruity knew that awakening his bloodline—something Yuying said was necessary before becoming a Great Sage—was crucial. This, of course, meant walking the path set by his maniacal past self, which involved taking a mysterious trial. He only knew its name and the direction to find it.

However, after the incident with the mysterious map in his mind, which led him to the domain of the Hellhounds, he knew better than to trust it. Even if the map had been accurate, he would still have asked Yuying, who seemed to know everything about the Tormented World.

"Master, are you planning to enter the Tormented Trial? There are many—so which one do you want to enter?" Yuying asked instead of answering directly.

"I'm not really sure," Fruity replied. "But from what little I remember from my past self, I need to enter the Tormented Trial to awaken my bloodline. So, what can you tell me about it?"

"Oh, so it's the Tormented Bloodline Awakening Trial? That makes sense," Yuying said with a puzzled expression.

"You don't seem too pleased. Aren't you the one who was always pushing for me to awaken my bloodline before reaching the Great Sage level?" Fruity asked, sensing her hesitation.

"I know, Master, but of all the Tormented Trials in this world, the Bloodline Awakening Trial is the hardest to enter. You can easily access the others, but that one... it's just too difficult to get into."

"But don't worry Master, we can use other methods to help you awaken your bloodline," Yuying answered, though the look on her face made Fruity suspect she was hiding some worse details.

"Yuying, why don't you tell me what I need to know, and then I'll decide whether I want to follow through or explore the other alternatives that I know you'll be eager to explore with me," Fruity said with a reassuring smile.

It seemed to have worked, as Yuying sighed and decided to let the information flow.

"To be able to enter a Tormented Trial, you must first join a Witch Temple. But it's easier said than done. To join a Witch Temple, you must complete three impossible tasks, and even then, there's no guarantee they will select you.

Yes, after completing the three impossible tasks, there's still no guarantee you'll be selected. But if you're lucky enough to be chosen, then you'll have to work your way up from Witch Soldier to Witch General."

"Wait a minute—start by telling me what a Witch Temple is first," Fruity interrupted, starting to understand why Yuying said the trial was hard to enter. However, he wasn't dismissing the idea. So far, things had been relatively easy for him thanks to Yuying, so he felt like he needed a challenge.

"In this world, a Witch Temple is like an organization that oversees various regions and powers. They function like kingdoms. There are five Witch Temples in this world, and they're all located in the central region, which is the main continent of this world.

They're very powerful, and from what I know, they have ranks. For newly joined members, they start as Witch Soldiers.

Then, there are ranks like Witch Masters, Witch Captains, Witch Generals, Witch Saints, and finally, Witch Sage—the highest authority, at least among the ranks I'm aware of," Yuying explained, making Fruity nod in acceptance.

"Continue," he said.

"So, as I was saying, to join or be recognized by a Witch Temple, you must complete three impossible tasks. Well, at least one can be achieved relatively easily," Yuying said, making Fruity raise an eyebrow.

"Let me hear it," he said.

"First task: You must eradicate an entire race of demons from their domain and obtain the Witch Hunter mark. This is earned after killing the leader and every last one of its subordinates. This can be achieved since it doesn't specify the strength level of the monsters you have to face.

Second task: You must go to the northern part of this world and retrieve a treasure that can only be found in a region ruled by dragons known as the Dark Flame Chaos Dragons. This, of course, isn't easy, but if you're lucky, you won't get roasted before you even step into their territory.

For the last trial, you must seek out the Hunting Harrow, said to be from the darkest and hottest depths of the abyss. Your task is to pluck a single feather from its wings and present it at the Witch Temple.

Thousands, if not millions, have died at this stage. So, Master, do you think you can handle it? I won't be able to help you this time since it's forbidden."

"Sounds like fun," Fruity said, feeling excited for some unknown reason. Yuying looked at him and then decided to continue.

"So, if you manage to complete these tasks and join a Witch Temple, you'll have to complete more tasks to earn enough points to rank up. Once you become a Great Sage, you'll be eligible to enter the trial. However, this will require you to hold your cultivation base at the Sage Stage.

Seriously, Master, you can forget about this trial. Let's hunt some stronger monsters and take their blood essence instead. We could even hunt down a few Angel Demons who are said to possess some of the strongest bloodlines," Yuying suggested.

Fruity smiled upon hearing her suggestions. He was curious to know more about the Angels, but he figured that could wait. For now, he wanted to understand why his past self had been so determined to join something that seemed nearly impossible.

"Another question: how long would it take me to travel from my current location to the Northern Region?" Fruity asked, needing to know before making any further plans.

"With your current speed, it would take you about 12 years. But if I were to take you, it would take a little over 2 years," Yuying answered, making Fruity smile.

"And I suppose the last task is in the Central Region?" he asked.

"Yes, it will take us another couple of months to get from the Northern Region to the Central Region. So, if you want to continue, you'll have to keep your cultivation base at the Sage Stage for the next 10 years," Yuying explained.

"But I suppose there's a reason behind this heavy task. This trial wouldn't just be some scam, right?" Fruity asked.

"Of course not," Yuying replied. "Bloodlines are unique to everyone. Even two people with the same bloodline won't necessarily have the same bloodline talents. So, people are particular about how they awaken their bloodlines.

While some people naturally awaken their bloodlines, especially female cultivators when they awaken their constitutions, this trial is designed to awaken the latent bloodlines of a person or beast and elevate it to the highest grade."

"What are these grades, and why are they important?" Fruity inquired.

"In the bloodline system, there are different grades, starting from Common, Noble, Royal, King, Ancient, Divine, Immortal, and God. It's similar to how there are different grades for weapons and techniques—the higher the grade, the more powerful it becomes.

For example, someone with a Noble-grade bloodline, even if they're a realm lower than someone with a Common-grade bloodline, will be able to suppress them easily just with their bloodline pressure. But that's not all. Bloodlines bestow many abilities to a wielder, so awakening a higher-grade bloodline means gaining more and stronger abilities," Yuying explained.

"So, this trial ensures you awaken your dormant bloodline and upgrade it, correct?" Fruity asked, and Yuying nodded.

"But there are other ways to awaken your dormant bloodline and even strengthen it using other bloodlines. You don't really have to go through all the trouble of joining this trial," Yuying said, not wanting Fruity to waste his time. But the violet-haired monk had other plans.

"I'll use the trial to awaken my bloodline, and then we'll use your method to make it even stronger. After all, my past self wanted this for me, so who am I to question myself... ha!" Fruity said, making Yuying smile slightly. Whether she liked it or not, her master had made up his mind, and she could only guide him through every step of the way.

"Let me train for a few months, and then we can head to Illusion Mountain for the items I need there. But while we're at it, what can you tell me about the Hellhounds?" Fruity asked with an evil smile.

Chapter 274 - 274: Eradicating The Hellhounds

Two months after Fruity became a Sage, he finally ended his training arc with satisfactory results. The last two months were spent pushing his mind to the limit, trying to walk the entire 12km inside the hunting cave. But no matter how hard he pushed, he only managed to cover 10.5km.

Still, it was a monstrous achievement for someone of his strength level. From what Yuying had told him, he should have only been able to walk 5km, and that was if he were a prodigy. So, 10.5km was more than enough for someone like him, someone said to defy the heavens—a true paragon.

Yet, Fruity still wanted to complete the full 12km, but he couldn't waste all his time training. He needed to go to Illusion Mountain to retrieve the item left behind by his past self. To do that, he first had to pass through the Wailing Forest and cross the Black River using the Bone Bridge.

However, before doing any of that, there was something else he needed to accomplish—something that, if successful, would bring him one step closer to joining a Witch Temple, which was also a step closer to entering the Tormented Bloodline Awakening Trial.

"We can just leave now and look for a weaker domain to subjugate, Master," Yuying said.

Fruity had already told her he planned to eradicate the Hellhounds, which, according to his reasoning, would earn him the Witch Mark—one of the three tasks he needed to complete to join a Witch Temple.

"Yuying, you were the one constantly telling me how weak I was, or rather, how weak I am compared to my past incarnation. Well, I'm not weak anymore. I literally have seven forbidden ice elements at my fingertips, along with a boatload of techniques, skills, and spells to choose from.

Even if that weren't enough, you've made sure I've mastered combat using the staff, sword, and bow. I'm sure that's enough to complete the task," Fruity said.

"I know, Master, but the strongest monster in that place is a Pseudo-Deimos—a peak Rank 8 Tyrant on the verge of becoming a Deimos. That means it's practically a Beast now, making it several times stronger," Yuying said, her expression filled with concern.

"Still, I don't know if I can kill it without fighting it. We can only hope it's not a monster among monsters. But even if it's stronger than me, you can always step in and kill it, making the task null. I can always try again later.

But I believe in my abilities, so there's no need to worry. And since we'll be traveling together to complete even more dangerous tasks, I should get familiar with the danger level so we can cooperate better in the future."

Fruity could sense that Yuying had become overprotective of his safety, which he knew was linked to something from his past self. Of course, he didn't ask, since he knew she wouldn't say anything that would add to his already boatload of Karma for just existing.

Yuying nodded, and with everything in order, they left for the domain of the Hellhounds. Last time, Fruity had managed to kill many of their Tier 5 and 6 subordinates and even took down a Tier 7 devil. This time, he was going for the whole deal.

With Yuying's assistance, they reached the domain within the hour, showing just how powerful she truly was. Fruity didn't waste a second announcing his presence.

As expected, within moments, he was swarmed by thousands of Hellhounds charging at him. But this time, Fruity didn't run. Instead, he stood his ground, waiting for them to get within 2km of him.

When they were within range, he jammed his staff into the ground. With a cold tone that matched the aura exuding from him, he muttered:

"Devour."

This time, the ice mist that appeared was thicker and darker than before, drowning them in a way that not a single sound escaped from the Tier 5 and 6 monsters as they were enveloped within the icy domain.

Within minutes, all the monsters charging at him had been devoured. Fruity wasted no time directing all the absorbed energy into the Immortal Ice. He knew that if the odds were stacked against him, he would need his healing ice more than anything.

"Human, you dare return?" Suddenly, four powerful presences appeared on the battlefield, each glaring coldly at Fruity. Last time, he had left them alive, failing to kill them.

"Yes, I have returned to finish what I started the last time," Fruity said with a smile before turning toward a specific direction. "I know you're watching, so why don't you come out and see how I kill your four subordinates without even raising my staff?" he added.

However, perhaps out of annoyance or because Fruity ignored them, the four Devils decided to attack—something they shouldn't have done.

"Soul Eater Ice," Fruity muttered coldly. The four were only moments away when they suddenly felt their senses cut off, and then everything went black. Their souls were extinguished in a split second.

"Told you," he said with a smirk, turning toward the same spot.

At that moment, Fruity sensed a powerful presence speeding toward him, a terrifying attack locked onto him.

"Devour," Fruity muttered, feeling his mobility restricted. He used the Devouring Ice to absorb the pressure—a technique he had learned while climbing the Gravity Mountain. It allowed him to break free just in time to dodge the powerful spear attack.

Looking up, Fruity saw a three-meter-tall demi-human, a twisted fusion of Hellhound and demon. Its appearance aside, the energy it radiated was overwhelming—so powerful that Fruity knew he was in for a real fight.

However, just as he was about to assume a battle stance, he noticed something on the monster's chest.

'That crystal... why is my Abyssal Ice reacting to it?' Fruity wondered. Not knowing the full extent of the rules involved in these things, he decided not to risk asking Yuying. Instead, he trusted his gut instinct.

He tapped into the connection between his Abyssal Ice and the crystal, and within seconds, he managed to discern its nature. A slight grin appeared on his face.

'I just need to hold it off for two minutes, and it'll be over,' Fruity thought. With that, he surrounded himself with Chaotic Ice, creating a 3 km-wide domain.

Boom!

His Demon Slaying staff clashed with the monster's spear, creating a sonic boom that caused the entire space around them to shake. Fruity smiled, realizing he was no match physically against the evolving monster.

But that wasn't something he needed to dwell on. He wanted to test his power, but he wasn't going to go in recklessly. Using the Chaotic Ice element, he disrupted the monster's concentration.

He could have used Hypnotic Ice, which would have had a more potent effect, but he didn't want to rely on too much of a handicap. Instead, he opted for the one that would only give him a slight edge. For the next two minutes, he and the pseudo-beast exchanged hundreds of attacks.

Neither of them had used any techniques or skills, but the chaotic exchange allowed them to gauge each other's strength. Of course, this was a deliberate misdirection on Fruity's part, who knew exactly what he was doing.

With the monster being both arrogant and prideful, Fruity knew it wouldn't take him seriously—its first mistake.

"You shouldn't underestimate your opponents in your next life," Fruity said after being pushed back a few meters.

"What do you know..." the monster growled, preparing to pounce again. But before it could move, it sensed something amiss.

Looking toward the spot where Fruity had pointed, the monster panicked. But it was too late.

"I know this... Explode," Fruity snapped his fingers, and like fireworks, the crystal on the monster's chest exploded, killing it instantly.

"Easy enough," Fruity said with a smile.

Chapter 275 - 275: The Wailing Forest

"Congratulations, Master," Yuying immediately said after exiting his soul sea. Fruity had learned how to create a space for her, so the Fox Lady had been resting there whenever she wasn't assisting him.

Since she couldn't interfere in Fruity's task of killing every last hellhound in their domain, she entered his soul sea as soon as they stepped foot inside the domain.

Now, looking at the triangular mark that appeared like a tattoo on the back of his left arm, Fruity could only smile. "I was lucky this time," he said.

"Luck is also a kind of your strength," Yuying replied, gazing at the monstrous body of the Peak Tier 8 Hellhound, which had reverted to its true form after death.

"Still, I got lucky," Fruity insisted. The crystal on the monster's chest was a result of its evolution to a Tier 9 monster. When a monster reaches Tier 8, it begins evolving into a Beast.

Beasts are different from monsters. Monsters don't resonate with the heavens, so they are much weaker than Beasts, who are recognized by the heavens and bestowed with unique skills and abilities. Beasts evolve into creatures more in tune with the heavens than monsters.

Some creatures are even born as Beasts, with awakened bloodlines and constitutions, but monsters must rise to Tier 9 before they can be recognized as True Beasts.

However, the evolution phase from Tier 8 to Tier 9 is a critical stage for them. It is during this phase that their bloodlines begin to awaken, determining the kind of energy they will harness—or more precisely, the kind of energy they will resonate with.

In the case of the Hellhound, it was awakening Abyssal Energy, which Fruity had some affinity for, thanks to his abyssal ice energy. So, he tapped into the crystal core, which, after evolving, would become a Beast core. He injected his ice abyssal Qi into it, and once it was filled up and under his control, he detonated it.

So, while it was indeed luck on his side this time like he said, Yuying was also right said, that luck is also part of one's strength. This time, thanks to his abyssal energy, he killed a peak Tier 8 Tyrant in less than three minutes.

Something he wouldn't have been able to do if it was the other way around.

"Devour," he said, consuming the dead bodies of the monsters lying on the ground. Once he allocated the absorbed energy to the Immortal Ice, he turned toward the direction he needed to go.

Yuying, who had been waiting as his guide and transport, quickly wrapped her energy around him. Before long, they were gone from the now unclaimed domain of the Hellhound, which would likely be claimed within the next 12 hours, as it hadn't truly belonged to the Hellhounds in the first place.

"In front is the Wailing Forest. From its name, you can get a fair idea of what goes on within those woods," Yuying said, making Fruity nod.

"But I think you shouldn't worry. Your mental capacity is stronger than most Sages, so you'll be fine. The mental attacks won't have much of an effect on you," Yuying added.

The Wailing Forest is nothing like a normal forest. It's home to a strange type of tree monster known as the Wailing Demon Plants. They don't attack like other tree monsters that use their branches and leaves. Instead, these monsters only attack mentally through the constant wailing one hears the moment they step inside the forest.

The deeper you go, the more intense their mental attacks become.

"I guess this will show me how much I've improved, and whether or not the months of mental torture were worth it," Fruity said with a smile.

"If you can't endure anymore, just let me know so I can teleport us away," Yuying said before entering her Master's soul sea. Being beside him might provoke some powerful demon plants to attack, which would be bad for Fruity.

He stepped into the forest, and the moment his foot touched the ground in the Wailing Forest, a torturous sound erupted in his mind.

Fruity paused for a few seconds before nodding to himself. He could hear the wailing, but it wasn't affecting him.

With his mind bolstered by his intense training in the Sage Mind and Unshakable Mind techniques, he moved as if he were taking a stroll through a small garden.

As he ventured deeper, the intensity of the wailing increased.

"Master, you can use this time to further train your mind. Slowly lower the defenses around your mind and let the sounds affect you," Yuying said from within his soul sea.

"Okay," Fruity replied. He did as she instructed, and immediately, he felt his mind being assaulted by different kinds of mental attacks.

However, it wasn't strong enough to overwhelm him. Still, he knew not to get ahead of himself by completely lowering all his defenses. While his mind was stronger, enduring hundreds of mental attacks was not something he could handle easily—if at all.

For twelve hours, Fruity moved steadily through the forest, enduring the wailing that was strong enough to shatter the mind of any Sage. But thanks to his intense training, he was able to endure it, even increasing his mental strength to another level.

"Alright, suckers, why don't you pay back for all the torture you put me through," Fruity said with an evil grin as he emerged on the other side of the forest.

Knowing that 99% of living things in this world were evil, Fruity didn't care much about their survival. So, upon seeing such a thick forest brimming with soul energy, he knew what had to be done.

Naturally, mind cultivators have stronger souls, and since he didn't possess any ice techniques that could steal mental strength or energy, he went for the best option: the Soul Eater.

'I guess he never changes,' Yuying thought inwardly, standing beside Fruity as he set his evil plan in motion, a small smile playing on her lips.

Fruity's Soul Eater eyes spread across the forest, and like a massacre, the tree monsters began wailing again. But this time, it wasn't due to mental attacks—it was a cry of agony from deep within their souls. Fruity was devouring their souls to strengthen his own, which had already begun growing more powerful.

"Human, what are you doing?" A thunderous voice suddenly boomed across the forest, hitting Fruity hard in the mind. But he just smiled, feeling his Sage Mind and Unshakable Mind techniques block a significant portion of the mental attack aimed at him.

"What does it look like I'm doing?" Fruity responded, smiling at the clearly infuriated Plant Demon that growled at him.

Without a verbal reply from the monster, Fruity sensed another mental attack strike his mind. But just like before, his mental defenses blocked it, making him smile. Using a skill he had learned thanks to Yuying's meticulous preparations, he launched his own mental attack.

"Mind Shatter." Somewhere deep within the forest, a towering dark plant shuddered, and almost half of its leaves instantly began falling from its branches.

At the same time, a powerful presence erupted from within the forest. Fruity, standing just outside, devouring the plants, instantly realized he was out of his league the moment that presence descended.

"Yuying, we can leave now," Fruity said calmly. The Fox Lady smiled, and without a second thought, they were gone.

The presence that had appeared was one even Yuying recognized—a Deimos Monster, a Tier 9 being, specializing in mental cultivation. While Yuying herself was a Tier 10 existence, she knew that when it came to mental attacks, this creature excelled beyond her abilities. As the saying goes, a master of one skill is better than a jack of all trades.

Facing off against it would have been unwise. So, the best plan was to run, and that was exactly what Master and Servant did.

Soon, they appeared in front of the Dark River, which could only be crossed using the Bone Bridge. However, Fruity had no intention of crossing it peacefully.

Chapter 276 - 276: Devouring The Dark River

The map Fruity got from his past self showed that he would have to cross the Dark River before reaching Illusion Mountain. The river was a mystery, even to Yuying, who had no concrete description of it.

All she said was that the river had a guardian that lived within its depths, and from what she knew 50 years ago, it had been a Beginner Tyrant (Tier 8) back then.

And 50 years was a long time, so she estimated it had likely become a Deimos (Tier 9) by now. Aside from that, there were river monsters that attacked using the water element.

Fruity, of course, was prepared for a huge fight, knowing that the guardian wouldn't attack unless provoked, according to Yuying. He planned to cross the bridge quickly since flying wasn't an option there.

The place had some strange law governing it, making it impossible to fly over the river. Fruity knew taking the bridge was his only option, but he didn't expect that as soon as he appeared within the range of the river, not one but two of his ice elements would react excitedly to it.

"It seems we should prepare for a fight soon. My Devouring and Abyssal Ice seem to have a liking for the river, so I'll be devouring it," Fruity said, making Yuying nod with a smile.

Finally, she would get to fight alongside the latest incarnation of her master—a great honor and privilege she planned to use to tease her comrades when they awakened and found their way to them.

"How do you want to go about it, Master?" Yuying asked, taking out an elegant, thin sword from her space ring. Once again, Fruity was struck with yet another surprise.

'It seems this world is more than just a monster's abode,' he thought.

From what he had seen so far, there was more to this Tormented World than anyone might think. Yuying had already shown him enough for him to realize that the world he had entered was civilized in some way.

Of course, the monsters he had encountered so far were just bloodthirsty idiots, but seeing what Yuying was capable of, he knew there was a whole world out there waiting for him to explore.

For one, he wanted to explore as many places as possible and learn as much as he could before returning to his own world. He had never had the chance to explore his own world, so he would use this opportunity to do so.

The only downside was that, no matter where he went, he would have to be extra careful. According to Yuying, it was rare to meet a peaceful demon in this world. Every monster and beast would try to kill and devour him, so Fruity had started to live his life with that mindset. It would only make things easier for him in the long run.

"Let me start devouring. I'm sure they'll attack the moment they sense something is wrong. You won't have to worry about the small fry—just be on the lookout for the Guardian you mentioned." Yuying nodded and spread her senses, covering the entire river.

Fruity did the same, and with a gesture, the Devouring Ice and Abyssal Ice covered the entire river. Fruity instantly felt a surge of energy enter his body, making him smile.

His focus was also drawn to what the Abyssal Ice was doing, and from what he could tell, there seemed to be traces of Abyssal energy within the water, which it was absorbing.

"Here they come," Fruity said as soon as he sensed Tier 6 and above monsters charging toward the surface. He did not attempt to draw his weapons; instead, he activated his Hypnotic Ice, creating an illusion of calm for the monsters.

He had learned a few tricks before leaving, so the illusion he crafted was of a serene Waterland where life was peaceful, instantly drawing the water-dwelling monsters into it.

Fruity's mental capacity and soul strength were formidable, so even though the illusion was just a basic smokescreen, it was enough to penetrate the minds of thousands of monsters.

He then moved to the next logical step—activating the Soul Eater Ice. In that instant, the entire river began to churn. The monsters trapped in the illusion had their souls devoured, but that wasn't all; the Abyssal energy within them was also being absorbed. To make matters worse for them, their bodies were being devoured as well.

Fruity knew he had to act decisively, so all the energy being devoured was fueling the Devouring Ice this time, making it stronger by the second.

His soul was also growing stronger, allowing him to maintain control over the four Ice elements for as long as possible. Thousands of monsters appeared, but when they got within reach of the Hypnotic Ice, their minds became foggy, and they slipped into the unconscious domain of illusion.

"Looks like Tier 7 monsters have stronger minds and souls," Fruity muttered, noticing some of the Tier 7 water devils struggling to break free. His mental strength was formidable, but not strong enough to trap hundreds, if not thousands, of Tier 7 devils.

"But I came prepared," Fruity said, and with a flick, a red ice mist began to spread across the river.

Since the Hypnotic Ice was struggling to hold the monsters, why not give them something else to resist?

In an instant, chaotic thoughts spread into the monsters' minds splitting their resistance and causing them to instantly succumb to the illusion.

"Looks like the Chaotic Ice copied the wailing of the tree monsters," Fruity remarked, clearly amazed. He hadn't expected that improvement.

He had been searching for ways to make the Chaotic Ice more powerful, but it seemed his worries were unnecessary. The Ice seemed to copy anything chaotic on its own. This also meant that to gain more skills for it, he had to be around chaotic things—more specifically, things that possessed mind attacks.

"I told you, Master, all you had to do was understand the nature of the element, and you could come up with ways to use it," Yuying said with a smile. But deep down, she was shocked to her core by the sheer chaos her master was unleashing on the Dark River and its inhabitants.

"I guess the Ice elements are stronger than we thought. I'll have to get more creative next time. After retrieving the item from Illusion Mountain, on the way to the Northern Region, I'll make a few quick stops to train and synchronize them properly so I can use them more effectively in combat," Fruity said with a smile.

"That's a great idea, Master," Yuying said, clearly excited. Knowing they would be leaving a trail of destruction, she was more than happy to go along with her master's plan.

Although Fruity didn't remember his past, he was getting closer, and soon, with the sheer destruction and power he would gain, he'd be a step closer to uncovering who he was and what he needed to do in his current incarnation.

"Who dares intrude in my domain?" A powerful voice suddenly erupted from deep within the Dark River, sending shockwaves all around.

The moment this presence emerged, the devouring of the river halted, freeing the monsters trapped in the illusions and chaotic thoughts.

"Yuying, why do they always say that? They could just come straight at us and attack," Fruity asked, half-amused, recalling similar declarations from the Hellhounds and the Tree Monsters.

"It's to make their presence known before they attack," Yuying replied with a straight face, unaware that Fruity was being sarcastic.

Just as Fruity was about to respond, a powerful water spear shot up from the depths of the river, heading straight toward them.

"Ice Cage!" Fruity quickly raised an ice barrier around himself and Yuying, defending against the water attack. Once the attack settled and he lowered the defense, they sensed two powerful presences appear in front of them.

"Two guardians, and they're Peak Tyrants," Fruity muttered with a slight grin.

"I can take them both, Master," Yuying said, stepping forward.

"I know, Yuying, you're the best, the strongest. But why don't we share? There are two of them and two of us," Fruity said, spinning the staff in his hand.

Yuying nodded and, with a single step, she vanished. At the same time, the presence that had attacked also disappeared, reappearing 10 kilometers away from Fruity.

"Looks like it's just me and you now," Fruity said, pointing his Demon Slaying Staff at the demi-human-looking Fishman.

"Want to attack first, or should I?" he asked.

In response, the fishman charged forward, razor-sharp arm swinging. Fruity smirked and dashed forward to meet it.

Chapter 277 - 277: The Bridge Guardians Attacked

Fruity and the Fishman clashed, creating a loud explosion that instantly sent shockwaves all around. The Fishman had thick arms, ashy blue skin, a large shark-like head, and razor-sharp arms that could easily cut through the thickest defense.

The clash was intense. Despite his body tempering, Fruity felt his arms go numb when their weapons met.

"Water Slash!" The Fishman immediately activated its first skill, slashing its blade-like arm. A powerful arc of water cut straight at Fruity, who spun his staff and raised a thick ice spear.

The two attacks collided, exploding instantly. Fruity was pushed back, but so was the Fishman. It was strong, almost at the level of a Deimos, but Fruity wasn't weak either. Five years ago, he might have struggled, but now, after learning hundreds of skills, techniques, and spells, he was no longer weak.

"Ice Pillar: Dawn of a Thousand Arrows!" Fruity instantly activated his second technique. A tall ice pillar rose from the ground, towering behind him. From the large pillar, thousands of ice arrows rained down on the Fishman.

The Fishman immediately raised a water shield. This was easy for it, as they were fighting in its domain. It has an affinity for the water element so fighting beside a water body was an advantage for it.

Fruity, seeing how his arrows bounced off the water shield, smirked. Placing two fingers on his forehead, a powerful soul attack erupted, hitting the Fishman heavily.

The shield shattered when the soul attack landed on the Fishman, but Fruity didn't celebrate. He had only broken its defense—the true attack was yet to come. First, he needed to ensure the Fishman wouldn't be able to defend itself.

The soul attack was just the beginning, and from the result, Fruity knew he couldn't drain its soul energy yet. He could only create more chaos and hope for the best.

"Ice Pillar: Doom's Arrow," Fruity muttered, seeing the Fishman was about to activate an offensive skill. It was enraged by the sudden soul attack.

The pillar behind Fruity rose and transformed into a 30-meter-long, thick, and pointed arrow made of ice. One thing Fruity noticed was that he could naturally use the ice element—not any specific type, just normal ice. People would only recognize that he possessed Forbidden Ice once he activated them.

For now, he was simply testing how well he could fare without using his special elements, and so far, he had exceeded his own expectations by a huge margin.

"Go!"

He pointed his staff forward, and like a bullet, the massive arrow sped toward the Fishman, bringing immense pressure with it. However, instead of raising a solid defense, the Fishman simply swung its hand, sending a sharp slash that instantly obliterated the large arrow.

"What the..." Before Fruity could finish his sentence, the Fishman appeared right in front of him, stabbing its sharp arm toward his heart.

Fruity quickly tapped into a technique he had learned, switching his position by using the ice as a conduit. Although he managed to dodge, the technique required a great deal of stamina, and he immediately felt his body growing tired.

"That was one strange movement technique," Fruity thought, recognizing the movement the Fishman had used. He had learned a similar technique himself but hadn't given it much thought when Yuying made him study it. In fact, he had learned dozens of such techniques but hadn't taken the time to master them.

Just as he freed himself from the sudden attack, he saw the Fishman stabbing a long spear made of water toward him. He wanted to ask how that was even possible, but before he could react, he felt a sudden attack from behind.

He quickly raised an ice wall, then kicked back while thrusting his staff forward. The two attacks collided, creating an explosion.

'I can't underestimate this Fishman, and since I didn't bother to master the movement technique, I'll have to use another method without resorting to the forbidden ice just yet. I have to kill it without using any of my trump cards,' Fruity thought inwardly, knowing this was no time to joke.

However, he also wanted to test himself. Having such powerful ice elements seemed great, but without them, he wanted to see what kind of person he truly was.

"Round two," Fruity muttered, his staff transforming into a longsword.

"Moon Slash!" He swung the sword dozens of times, each swing sending sharp arcs of ice shaped like crescent moons.

The Fishman raised its defenses, but the sudden consecutive attacks were too strong, breaking through its defense. Some of the ice arcs even landed on its body, dealing with ice damage.

"One with the Sword: Moon Epic Slash!" Fruity, having gained some advantage and momentarily disrupted the Fishman's momentum, followed up with a new form of Moon Slash. He raised his sword high, and like a current, Ice Qi surged into the blade.

He slashed the sword diagonally, and like a flash, a sword light made of ice shot out, pulling the pressure around it and directing it toward the Fishman.

In response, the Fishman's blade arms morphed into a pair of large hands. It brought them together as if about to pray, but after muttering something, a large shark—about 30 meters long and made entirely of water—appeared and surged toward the ice arc coming from Fruity.

Boom!

The two attacks connected, creating a liquid explosion.

"Waterfall!" the Fishman said immediately after regaining its footing from the explosion. Instantly, a tsunami of water surged behind it.

Pointing forward, the massive wave rose above the Fishman and started rushing toward Fruity.

"Ice with Sword: Moon Slash Kill!" Fruity, in response to the destructive attack, raised his sword again. This time, a wave of ice surged from all around him entering the sword in his hands. His eyes were closed as if sensing the incoming attack.

As expected, just when the tsunami was only a few meters from him, his sword fell in a vertical slash. A powerful ice arc cut forward, slicing the tsunami in half. But it didn't stop there—it moved forward, striking the Fishman and sending it flying like a ragdoll.

The Fishman slammed hard into the soft ground.

Fruity, realizing he had underestimated the Fishman, immediately followed up with another attack. However, just as the attack was about to connect, a powerful, bloodthirsty aura erupted from the Fishman, instantly slowing him down.

'This power...' Fruity was startled, feeling his strength drop—or more accurately, feeling his body fail him, as though he were scared. But he knew he wasn't afraid, not in the slightest. Yet, for some reason, that sensation lingered.

To confirm his suspicion, the Fishman clapped its hands together again, and another large water shark surged forward. The fish surged forward with a terrifying pressure.

Fruity, in the process of preparing another sword slash, immediately felt his reaction speed slow down, and worse, the rate at which he was channeling his ice Qi also faltered.

"Devouring Ice: Absolute Wall," Instead of continuing with the sword attack, he muttered instead, raising a wall of Dark Gold Ice. The water shark slammed into it, creating an explosion that shattered the wall. However, the attack was also devoured.

Fruity quickly started exuding his Devouring Ice over himself, instantly absorbing the pressure that was affecting him.

'I need to ask Yuying what that was, but first, I need to get payback,' Fruity thought, immediately activating three more Ice Elements.

"Hypnotic Ice."

"Abyssal Ice."

"Annihilation Ice."

At once, three more types of ice joined with the Devouring Ice, creating a 2-kilometer domain of ice that instantly trapped the Monster Fishman within.

"One with the Sword: Moon Epic Slash!" Fruity didn't waste a second, unleashing a powerful sword attack that slammed into the Fishman, who was struggling to defend its mind.

"Abyssal Ice: Unbreakable Chains!" The Fishman, sent flying, was immediately ensnared in the air by thick, dark red ice chains. As soon as the chains locked onto it, the Fishman's screams filled the space.

"Mighty Cauldron Descent!" Fruity didn't let up. He conjured a large cauldron made of thick Dark Annihilation Ice. It hurtled forward, and before the Fishman could recover, the massive cauldron slammed into its head, exploding it instantly.

Its huge body dropped to the ground cementing his kill. He had just killed a Tyrant while just a Sage.

But Fruity wasn't happy for someone who had just killed a Peak Tyrant, not even in the slightest.

Chapter 278 - 278: The Illusion Mountain

From the moment Yuying vanished to face off against the other Fishman, it took her just two exchanges to chop off her opponent's head.

Without even bothering to collect its core, she turned her attention back to Fruity, who was facing the other Peach Tyrant—the second bridge guardian.

At first, she was shocked by how Fruity was handling his opponent, not using any of his ice elements.

However, she quickly calmed down when she saw how he was managing the fight. It took only a few exchanges for her to notice some discrepancies in her master's attack patterns.

She would tell him about them later, so he could fix them before his next battle. As long as her master hadn't regained his memories, she would continue to be his teacher.

Intrigued by the exchanges, she watched closely. Near the end of the battle, she noticed a change in Fruity's expression. She wanted to step in and help, but before she could move, she saw Fruity get serious and activate his ice elements, killing the monster within seconds.

Immediately, she moved and appeared beside her master.

"That was its Aura." Yuying said "Just like soul, mind, qi, and body cultivation, there are other forms of cultivation, and one of them is Aura cultivation," she explained before Fruity could ask.

"What is it?" Fruity asked.

"It's a form of pressure that, if cultivated to its peak, can be used to suppress your opponents or even kill them without raising a weapon.

There are different forms of it. For example, there's sword aura, which is achieved through sword mastery—most call it sword qi," Yuying explained as she drew her thin sword.

As soon as she did, it began to glow golden. "This energy around the sword is sword qi. Using it amplifies any attack I unleash with this sword."

Fruity nodded, examining the aura around the sword. He could sense something powerful behind it, but he didn't fully understand it yet.

"Of course, if you continue to cultivate it to the highest levels, you'll be able to project just the sword aura and even craft weapons from it.

At that stage, you'll become nearly invincible as a swordsman," Yuying added, causing Fruity to raise an eyebrow.

"So, was that what the Fishman used?" Fruity asked. "I feel like its aura was different somehow—it didn't look sharp like yours."

"No," Yuying replied, "the Fishman cultivates a different form of aura. Its aura is one of slaughter. Most people call it Death Aura, but its true name is Asura. It's perhaps the strongest of all the auras known so far," she added with a small smile.

Fruity, on the other hand, wore a shocked expression. "Aren't you exaggerating a bit? The aura it unleashed wasn't that strong—I easily devoured it," Fruity said.

His devouring ice could absorb almost anything, from cultivation pressure to bloodline suppression, so Fruity knew how powerful the aura was, but it hadn't been strong enough to harm him. It was easily consumed.

"That Fishman's aura was a far cry from what true killing aura looks like," Yuying said, her tone carrying a hint of disdain as if she was irritated by the Fishman that Fruity had killed.

"There are many types of auras, Master. True Killing Aura can be born from constant slaughter and absorbing the blood essence of your opponents.

That Fishman's aura was born from slaughter, but it seems it never learned how to absorb the blood essence of its targets—or perhaps it didn't know the right monsters to target to awaken its True Killing Aura or Asura Aura," Yuying explained.

"Are you saying there are specific monsters that can awaken one's Killing Aura?" Fruity asked.

"Yes," Yuying nodded. "I once met a demon who possessed True Ice Killing Aura. From what I learned, it only hunted Ice-type monsters. Asura Aura requires a distinct race of monsters."

"If you don't mind, we can stop at a place on our way to the Central Continent. If we're lucky, we may be able to obtain the Aura Codex."

"I assume we'll have to kill the owner for it?" Fruity asked, and Yuying nodded with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"That thieving lion won it after an intense auction battle 47 years ago. I promised to get it back, but I got occupied. Now that you want to learn more about Aura cultivation, I will help you obtain the complete codex on aura awakening," Yuying said, making Fruity nod.

"So, aside from sword aura, what other aura are you cultivating?" Fruity asked.

"Chaotic Soul Aura. It's essentially a soul cultivation method, but instead of using spiritual energy to unleash soul attacks, my aura can do that," Yuying replied. "And one thing about auras—with enough mastery, you can merge them in combat. So, imagine getting hit with soul attacks even after defending against a sword aura."

"That does sound awesome. I guess there's still a lot more for me to learn," Fruity said with a sigh. "We'd better get moving fast, then."

Fruity spent the next 12 hours devouring the entire dark river and its inhabitants before crossing the bridge with Yuying. He wasn't sure if the river would ever recover, but he didn't care. After all, his elements had grown stronger by devouring everything, eradicating yet another race of water monster Demons.

They spent the next few days traveling several miles before, on the 10th day, a very tall mountain came into view. As soon as they saw it, Fruity knew that was where he was meant to go.

"That place looks like a nightmare," Yuying said. "Even from three miles away, I can already feel the hypnotic effect hitting me."

"I don't feel anything, but my Hypnotic Ice is getting excited for some reason," Fruity said, gazing at the mountain, which seemed to touch the clouds.

Of course, he knew it was merely an illusion. The mountain was called Illusion Mountain due to its bizarre effects on the mind. Many might not regard illusionists as true opponents, but a true illusionist is a very terrifying foe.

Losing control of your senses and body while wandering in a fantasy world in the middle of combat is something nobody wants to experience.

There was a saying: a true team-up is one with a Soul Master and an Illusionist. In a dire situation, they can create miracles.

Fruity knew the next task would require stronger mental and soul strength, but he also realized he needed to understand his Hypnotic Ice better before making any sudden moves.

In truth, the mountain ahead wasn't something he had enough confidence to climb, but based on what his past self had left him, he knew he had to take the next step, ready or not.

"I assumed you'd be resting inside my soul space, seeing as you're already feeling the effects," Fruity said, and Yuying didn't hesitate to accept the offer. Though she was stronger in terms of cultivation, Fruity's mind cultivation was superior.

He quickly placed her in his soul space, and with sturdy steps, Fruity began making his way toward the strange mountain.

"Master, if you feel like you can't handle it, don't force yourself. We can go back, train more, and return stronger later," Yuying said from inside his soul sea, clearly worried.

Fruity just smiled and kept walking toward the mountain. When he got within 2 kilometers of the mountain's base, his mind was struck by an illusion, but like a titanium wall, the Sage Mind and Unshakable Mind techniques he had cultivated shielded him from it.

Fruity snorted and kept moving. Soon, he arrived at the base of the mountain and began climbing. As he ascended, his mind was repeatedly attacked by various illusions, but he continued onward.

A while later, after reaching nearly halfway up the mountain, he stopped and extended his hand. Immediately, green ice burst from his body, enveloping the entire mountain.

Chapter 279 - 279: Hypnotic Ice Upgraded

"Master, what is going on?" Yuying's voice echoed from within Fruity's Soul Sea as the energy burst out of him.

"I don't really know, but my Hypnotic Ice seems to be reacting to the illusions covering this mountain," Fruity replied, watching as the green ice continued to spread across the mountain. The more it spread, the more he sensed his Hypnotic Ice growing stronger.

"This is interesting. It's like the ice is absorbing the illusion surrounding the mountain," Yuying observed. "Have you located where the illusion is coming from?"

"No, but the ice hasn't fully enveloped the mountain yet, so let's wait," Fruity said. They resumed waiting as the ice slowly turned the mountain green.

So far, the Hypnotic Ice hadn't shown Fruity anything too impressive. Sure, it had helped him take down thousands of monsters, but compared to the Devouring Ice or the Soul Eater, it paled in comparison.

From his observation, the ice could only trap Tier 6 creatures and below. But Fruity didn't have time to hunt such weak monsters; he needed to deal with the big guns. He needed to be using the hypnotic ice more actively.

However, he didn't know how to make it stronger. Sure, devouring monsters and treasures would allow him to add some energy to the Hypnotic Ice, but the progress would be slow. He needed something immediate.

Something that could rival the wailing power of the Chaotic Ice. So when he sensed his Hypnotic Ice reacting to the mountain from miles away, he knew something great was about to happen. To his surprise, it was happening.

The green ice continued to spread, and with every small advance, the ice grew stronger. Fruity, the owner of the ice, could also feel his strength rising—or more specifically, his mental strength increasing.

"Master, can I come out?" Yuying suddenly asked. Fruity didn't respond immediately. He slowly lowered his mental defenses, checking to see if the illusion would retaliate. After a while, he sighed.

"Come out," he said, and Yuying appeared. As soon as she materialized, she began spreading her senses. After confirming there was no immediate danger, she sighed in relief.

"This is going better than I expected," she said with a small smile.

"Yuying, you're traveling with someone wielding seven forbidden ice elements. Of course, things will unfold in unexpected ways," Fruity replied with a grin.

After everything he'd seen, Fruity now understood why the seven ice elements he wielded were forbidden. Although he did not know what was creating the illusion on the mountain, he knew it wasn't meant to be traversed the way he was doing it.

The illusion was intended to temper the minds of those brave enough to climb it. However, Fruity wasn't just resisting it—he was absorbing it.

This wasn't something normal ice should be able to do. But who was he if not someone with a huge grudge against the heavens? Yuying had already told him that his very existence was like a slap in the face of the heavens, and they would do everything they could to limit his growth.

Because of this, Fruity had not only become power-hungry, but he had also stopped caring about things that others might consider bad. Of course, he wouldn't harm innocents.

But being surrounded by thousands of different races of demons who knew only one thing—destruction—he knew not to hesitate when it came down to doing what was necessary to grow stronger.

The mountain was just an obstacle on his path to greatness, so naturally, he couldn't resist when his ice started devouring its power.

"It's almost done absorbing everything," Yuying said, using her senses to follow the devouring process. She did not know what would happen if her senses went beyond the Hypnotic Ice, so she kept her pace slow, carefully watching the illusion get consumed.

After 12 hours, the entire mountain turned green, signaling that the absorption was complete. Fruity, sensing that his ice had absorbed everything, immediately deactivated it, revealing the mountain's true form.

It looked like the jagged remains of a colossal bone—a very large bone, given its size and height. Although the illusion had made it appear even bigger and taller, after being devoured, the mountain still stood towering, though not quite as imposing as before.

"It looks like the head of a very powerful beast," Yuying remarked, then asked, "Do you sense what you're here for?"

"Not yet, but I think my Hypnotic Ice is upgrading," Fruity replied, sitting down. "Guard the surroundings. I want to see what's happening." He closed his eyes, and as if entering an illusion, his mind slipped into another space.

As soon as he appeared in this new space, he was taken aback. "This is the monastery," Fruity said, looking at the familiar surroundings. He quickly began spreading his senses, and it didn't take long for him to detect something.

Before he could act, the presence he sensed appeared before him.

"These are runic cards," Fruity immediately recognized the objects that appeared before him.

"But why is there a place like this? I don't feel the same connection with the other elements." Just being in that space, he could sense his mind-expanding and slowly growing stronger.

"I'll have to ask Yuying once I'm out, but first, let's see what these cards are about." Twelve cards hovered before him, each one blank. He reached out and touched the first one. As soon as he did, the card began to glow green, and before Fruity could blink, it transformed from blank into a card with patterns inscribed on it.

"Illusion Domain." There was writing on it in the runic language, which he immediately recognized. As soon as he spoke the words, the runic text moved from the card and entered his forehead. Fruity blinked once or twice before sighing.

"It's a technique—an illusion-type technique. How awesome." He smiled and then reached out to touch the second card. It, too, transformed, and once it settled into a card with a series of patterns on it, Fruity quickly read its name.

"Giant Bone Mountain Descent." His mind filled with another technique, making him grin.

"It seems the Hypnotic Ice has evolved to another stage," he said, looking at the remaining ten blank cards. He reached out and touched the third card, but nothing happened. It remained blank. He tried the others, but none of them changed.

"Two out of twelve, huh? That's more than enough." Since he was connected to the Ice, he knew just how powerful it had become. And now, with two new techniques, he had grown exponentially stronger. He took a moment to absorb the place before snapping his fingers.

The space shifted into a green cloud, and within that cloud, the twelve cards hovered in front of an ice chair. Fruity admired his creation with a smile before leaving the space and returning to the real world.

"What just happened?" Fruity was immediately greeted with Yuying's direct question as he opened his eyes. She looked incredibly pale.

"What happened to you?" Fruity asked, concerned.

"You tell me, Master. Why did you punish me by sending me into an illusion?" Yuying asked, pouting.

"Say what?" Fruity replied, confused.

"When did I do that? All I did was enter this strange space connected to the Hypnotic Ice and received—well, more like activated—two techniques."

"Wait, you entered an elemental space?" Yuying's pale face immediately lit up with eagerness, a stark contrast to her earlier expression.

"You knew what that was?" Fruity asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Of course, Master! Every element has its own space, but you shouldn't have been able to access it—not this early," Yuying said, her hand brushing her lips thoughtfully.

"Unless... your element has already reached the Realm rank," she added suddenly.

"And what's that?" Fruity asked, clearly clueless about the concept. He knew he had to listen closely to his teacher for yet another crucial piece of information.

"Condense the Hypnotic Ice let me see" She requested and Fruity promptly obeyed.

"You... you really have upgraded your element to that rank," Yuying said, her eyes widening as she gazed at the crystallized green ice suspended in Fruity's hands.

This time, just from a mere gaze, she could start to feel the illusions affecting her mind.

"It seems so, but what is this rank you keep mentioning?" Fruity asked. Although he had anticipated something like this happening sooner or later, he still wanted to know if he had made significant progress. Yuying tended to exaggerate at times, so he wanted a more in-depth explanation.

"Basically, just like there are ranks and stages for realm cultivation, anything that can be cultivated also has ranks, stages, or levels. The elements are no different. However, cultivating an element isn't something that can be accomplished easily.

The first stage, which all your other elements are currently in, is known as 'Common Rank.' It's the initial stage for all elements. The second stage is called 'Refined.' It's when you begin to understand the laws that govern the elements.

The third is 'Realm Rank.' After comprehending the laws of the elements to a certain extent, you can open a space within the element, known as an elemental space or realm.

This space will later help you to easily comprehend the laws and further increase their power output." Yuying was trying her best not to go full-on bookworm, but Fruity was rather intrigued.

"You once said the laws govern many things and that they are the same thing that restricts a paragon. So, if that's the case, would the same laws apply to a forbidden element?"

"Yes and no. Yes, because everything has laws governing it, and no, because if it's forbidden, then you're dealing with something entirely different," Yuying explained.

"I don't get it. Do the heavens determine my forbidden elements or not?" Fruity asked.

"They don't, but that doesn't mean nothing is enforcing these laws. The reason you don't feel restricted is because you have some level of supremacy over these elements," Yuying replied, trying her best to answer without invoking another heavenly punishment.

"So, is there another heaven that determines what is forbidden?" Fruity pressed.

"Yes and no," Yuying answered again.

"Then what is yes, and what is no? I just jumped a whole rank to unlock an entirely new realm. I feel like there's something here I need to understand," Fruity said, forgetting about Karma for a moment.

"When I was inside the elemental space, I sensed something... something important, something I feel like I should know."

"That will invoke Karma if I say something, Master," Yuying said in a light tone.

"Come on Yuying, I need to know this" Fruity asked making Yuying sigh helplessly. She knew what was about to happen but she didn't have the confidence to say no to her master.

"Forbidden Heavens," Yuying said just two worlds, but it was enough to make the heavens roar and dark clouds form. The entire bone mountain shook and from within the clouds, a thick spear made of red lightning shot out, aimed directly at Yuying who immediately turned pale.

"Abyssal Ice: Ice Wall"

"Eye of Despair: Void Eyes"

"Bell of Harrows: Divine Bell"

Fruity spared no effort, sacrificing 80 percent of his spiritual energy to raise three powerful defenses, covering both him and Yuying.

BOOM

The spear pierced the dark, huge eye, shattering it instantly. It then struck the massive dark-red wall, which crumbled after a few seconds. With a resounding bang that shook the entire Bone Mountain, the spear finally collided with the bell.

It was a powerful impact, but the bell held, only cracking with a few lines before the spear dissipated. As the dust settled, Fruity collapsed on his back, gasping.

"That was close," he muttered, a small smile forming on his face. The smile came because when he heard those two words, another wave of memories from his third incarnation flooded into his mind. He now had a bit more clarity on things.

"So that bastard hid part of his memories in the realm of an element. What if I hadn't been able to awaken that element?" Fruity muttered, reaching for the pale Yuying to help him sit up.

Despite not being struck by the heavenly punishment, Yuying was still traumatized by the mental pressure she had received. It felt as if the heavens had looked down on her and spat in her face.

"Sorry about that, Yuying. I'll make it up to you later by helping you kill the Nine-Tail Fox to awaken your bloodline," Fruity said with a small smile, glancing at the Fox Lady who was trying to seem okay but failing miserably.

Fruity sighed, He walked closer and cupped her cheeks in his hands. Looking right into her eyes, he said, "I am sorry Yuying, I never knew the heavens would react that aggressively."

Yuying nodded but was still pale. Fruity planted a kiss on her forehead and then he let go.

With a wave of his hand, a mist of green ice appeared, enveloping her. "Maybe a few hours inside this illusion will help," he said, feeling guilty for pressuring her into that situation.

But he had no choice. The thing he sensed required her to say those words, so even though he knew what was coming, he had to know. Yuying, ever the good guide and servant, had decided to sacrifice something.

Saying those words had surely been reason enough for the heavens to target her, but Fruity had anticipated that and was prepared. The heavens hated his existence but couldn't outright kill him, so they were always listening for when he slipped up, ready to set him straight.

Now, Fruity had once again unlocked part of his memories from his third incarnation. Although he still didn't know exactly who he had been back then, he had more than enough now to know he had been someone very brilliant.

"Hiding memories inside an elemental space—that was genius," Fruity thought, sitting in lotus posture as his Immortal Ice started healing his fatigue.

The memories he received were more like pieces of information: cultivation techniques and locations of some treasures in the Tormented World. Fruity knew better than to fully trust the information.

It wasn't that he didn't trust his past self. After all, that would be ridiculous. He trusted his past self, but he also knew that the information wasn't safe to follow blindly.

He had already tried that once and ended up in a den of Hellhounds.

So he knew better than to charge in headfirst. With Yuying's guidance, he would enter a witch's temple and get the chance to partake in the Tormented Bloodline Awakening Trial. Once he awakened his bloodline, he could pursue those treasures—after all, he needed them for what was to come.

After a few hours, Fruity had recovered 80% of his spiritual qi, so he stood up and began climbing to the peak of the mountain. Yuying still hadn't woken from the illusion yet, so all he could do was go find what he had come for.

At first, he wasn't sure what that was, but after unlocking another section of his memory, he knew where to go. Even without the memories, though, he wouldn't have wandered aimlessly for long.

Upon reaching the peak of Bone Mountain, Fruity quickly moved to a particular spot where a stone statue stood. Without wasting any time, he jammed his staff into the statue, shattering it.

The moment the statue broke apart, a palm-sized cylindrical object fell and hovered before him. Even though he knew what to do and where to go, he had no idea what the object in front of him was. Nevertheless, he grabbed it, stored it in his space ring, and began his descent down the mountain.

A while later, Yuying woke up from the illusion, looking much healthier.

"Thank you, Master," she said with a small smile, but Fruity could tell she was pretending. She was still shaken, but not wanting to make her lose confidence, he simply nodded and retrieved the disc-shaped item he had gotten from the peak of the mountain.

"Do you know what this is?" Fruity asked, showing the disc to Yuying.

Yuying's eyes widened. "This... this is a soul item, but not just any soul item. It's one of the Nine Forbidden Ancient Relics, the Seven Star Forbidden Diagram!"