

Descent 1271

Chapter 1271 Reason

The young man had no idea when Leonel's hand had appeared above his head. And yet, despite the fact there was no actual physical touch between them, he could still feel an undeniable pressure squeezing down, making his eyes feel as though they might pop out of their sockets at any moment.

The pressure was palpable, his knees shaking and bending, a cold sweat coating his back and forehead, and veins popping up across his body. He didn't even dare to take a step forward or back, in fear that any such action might lead to his inevitable death.

"Oh?" Leonel spoke again. "No response?"

A smile crept across Leonel's face, but the coldness that remained in his eyes made it feel like the call of a devil. The young man didn't dare to shift his gaze away, and yet he was praying and hoping that he could look at something else, anything else.

The impact on his psyche was even more damning than the impact on his body. He felt all the bits and pieces of his cobbled together confidence crumbling one after another.

Leonel shrugged. "You saw it for yourself, right? The only rules our supposed Overseer let us know of is the fact that I have to build cabins for myself. But, she never said what would happen if I just killed one of you and took it for myself. If my hand slipped and I made a mistake, could it really be blamed on me?"

Once again, Leonel's words were met with nothing more than silence. However, his smile only became brighter, morphing into a toothy grin as flickers of crimson danced within his eyes.

An oppressive fog of violet and red began to rise, his short hair dancing about ever so slightly in the upswing of Force.

"It seems that no one cares if you die. Goodbye."

Leonel's forearm bulged, veins dancing with power manifesting as he clamped downward.

The horrid screech of the boy came next. It was the kind of pained cry that sent shivers down one's spine. In many ways, it only made it worse that he was facing away from the few spectators that remained. Their own imaginations filled in the blanks for what kind of horrible expressions he was making with his head under that kind of pressure.

"That's enough."

The voice was calm and unhurried, and yet enveloped the whole of the surroundings.

Leonel's strength was snuffed out with a slight breeze, vanishing as though it had never been there. Even he couldn't help but be surprised. To eliminate someone's strength like that without hurting them in the slightest was definitely a shocking feat of skill. Leonel was very much impressed.

The young man collapsed to the ground, holding onto his head as he bled from his eyes, nose, ears and mouth. He looked as though he had been tortured for a millennia and no longer had the strength to pull himself back together.

However, Leonel wasn't paying attention to him in the slightest. Instead, he had turned a gaze toward the sky. Though the man was still much too far away to be seen by the likes of them, Leonel could finally make out his presence.

"The Void Palace has a strict mandate against killing. Its foundation is built upon creating the future leaders and protectors of the human race. You can push one another and battle for supremacy, but death will not be tolerated."

The voice and the man's presence vanished after this.

In truth, Cornelius really thought about letting Leonel kill the young man. If that happened, even though they wouldn't be able to punish Leonel the way they normally would due to the circumstances surrounding this matter, they could still expel him. That much would save them a great amount of headache in the future.

But in the end, Cornelius chose against this line of action. Petty tricks like this only worked against those with backing they could ignore, and only further with those who actually cared about semantics and curving around the rules. That man, though...

Didn't give a damn.

Cornelius' gaze shifted toward a certain direction, landing in an inconspicuous place. It was only for the briefest of moments but Ossenna felt as though her head had been dunked into a vat of dry ice. Her body tensed up, and even long after Cornelius had turned his gaze away, she still didn't dare to make any sudden movements.

'That brat actually dared to use me in this way. Just give me one slip up, just a single one, and I'll make sure to spank you well in your father's stead.'

Cornelius hadn't had such an immature thought decades and didn't even realize there was anything wrong with it until several days later. Unfortunately, over time, he would soon learn that this was just the kind of effect Leonel had on people.

Leonel smiled brightly on the ground. This time, the coldness that had suffused it was nowhere to be seen. However, the fact there was a young man writhing in pain on the ground before him didn't help his image very much at all.

"Thank you for your guidance."

Leonel respectfully thanked the invisible man above him and stepped over the young man who was still clinging to his head.

'That's one minor problem dealt with, but I still didn't end up getting an explanation for everything else. It seems I'll still have to find out for myself...' Leonel's gaze quickly swept the village and he entered.

He noticed a sign to the side that read: 'Village 0012'. It was likely, then, that this was just one of many. However, whether that meant that the True Selection would only encompass this one alone, or incorporate the others as well, was a relative unknown to him.

'I guess I should check the smithy first? I don't think there's much of a point in building cabins now at least from my current understanding. What good is a house you can only use for three hours? But, if there's a reason I should, then that answer would be found there...

'It's too odd that a culmination of geniuses from across the Human Domain, most of whom come from wealthy and well off families, would need the services of a smithy at all... There's got to be a reason for that.'

Chapter 1272 Odd Behavior

When Leonel entered the village, he felt a shift in the Force. He could feel its density and its heaviness, but he could also feel the difficulty in grasping and forcing this Force to bend to your will. It was yet another great change from the region he had just been in.

The realization made Leonel wonder a few things. Could it be that the Void Palace was split into tiers like this with ever progressing density of energy? If that was the case, how far did it go? It was very possible that Leonel hadn't truly experienced the truth bulk of strength a world at the Pinnacle of the Seventh Dimension could exude.

Many still silently observe Leonel as he walked through the village and the density of people only grew as he got closer to the village center. Leonel stuck out not only because of what he had done to the previous young man, but also because he was the only one who seemed to be walking alone.

Likely as a sign of caution, most of the youths here moved in pairs at a minimum, but many more walked in groups of three or four, with four seeming to be the cap. There was a tense quiet that hung over the village and Leonel could imagine that it had been like this for a long while. None of these people would relax until they had confirmed their entry into the Void Palace.

Little did they know, though, that the true nightmare only began once this threshold was crossed.

Of course, Leonel was oblivious to all of this as well, but he could understand these people. 99% of them were Nominal disciples who had barely been able to scrape by and gain a position. There was only one Amethyst Token and three Golden Tokens to be given out, and even if you were the top four strongest in your Sector, you weren't guaranteed any one of them if you didn't meet a certain standard.

Knowing this, it was no wonder so many of them were nervous and on guard.

This year seemed to have far more participants than usual and that meant far more enemies. They all had to keep their heads on a swivel, especially when it came to new comers and unknown variables like Leonel and the others.

Leonel, though, was observing them for a vastly different reason. He wanted to see which of them were actually threats and which weren't. He also wanted to see which of them were just hiding themselves and playing the long con and which of them were truly wary of him.

His interaction with the young man previously told him that just an outward showing of confidence wasn't enough to show strength. But, that also meant that the vice versa was true as well.

Tier level had suddenly become an absolutely useless metric for Leonel. Everyone here was either Tier 8 or Tier 9 of the Fifth Dimension. This was the case across the board. However, the strength level and variations among those who shared these Tier levels was astronomical.

At this point, Leonel almost felt that the lower Tier a person was in this place, the stronger they were overall, something that was completely counter intuitive anywhere else.

But, this was the result you got when you gathered so many geniuses together. Leonel's own mother was still in the Sixth Dimension, just like the Luxnix family elders were, but wasn't the gap between them all still ridiculously enormous? And these were the very same Sixth Dimensional elders that had wiped the floor with the elders of the Viola family just days earlier.

In the beginning of Leonel's journey, he had had a nice and succinct power level calculator. But, he had been forced to abandon it long ago... Now, though, he almost felt he would have to bring it back in some form or fashion or else he would really be going into all of these interactions blind.

Leonel shook his head. He had already gone down that rabbit hole once before and it was nothing more than a headache. There were simply too many variables to account for, it was better to rely on an instinctual feeling, ironically enough.

'What do you think, old man? How do you tell how much power a person wields?'

'Isn't that simple? Just look at their souls.'

Leonel's expression became weird. 'There's a huge taboo around using Internal Sight to just probe people like that and mine is no longer strong enough to just get away with it. Aren't you asking me to form enemies everywhere I went?'

'It's not my fault you're unskilled. I've already given you the answer you wanted, now leave me alone. I have to care for my real disciples.'

Leonel shook his head before completely ignoring the old man's request.

'Would that really work?'

'Obviously. People say eyes are the window to the soul, but the soul is literally the soul itself, it can't get anymore important. Humans can't even sense and manipulate their own, so they have no ability to hide its secrets from those more skilled than them outside of using special treasures.

'Observing a soul won't give you a direct number you can translate to strength output, but reading the disposition of a soul will tell you a lot about a person. How much confidence they have, if it's false bravado or real, how much work they put in to earn such a thing, so on and so forth.

'A soul can't lie.'

Leonel laughed inwardly. 'You could have fooled me.'

Wise Star Order snorted and proceeded to ignore Leonel. The latter didn't have time to mind this, though, as he had made it to the very doors of the Smithy he had been aiming for.

Unsurprisingly, there were many who could be found here as well, but the atmosphere was even more tense.

Despite there only being three hours until the trial began, many huddled near the counters of the Smithy or corners all to their own, silently clutching something within their palms they didn't want to allow anyone else to see.

The opening of the door caused several to shoot glances toward Leonel, their gazes becoming more serious when they realized they couldn't recognize him at all.

Chapter 1273 Decency

The more Leonel saw of this tense atmosphere, the more put off he was. He could even feel some of these reservations beginning to press upon himself as well. It was simply human nature to follow along with a crowd. But, the oddity of it all was that a genius didn't usually fall into such things so easily.

Leonel couldn't help but wonder what could have happened to such a large group of geniuses for the blades to dull to this extent. What had he missed in these last few months?

The Smithy had three main counters, none of which seemed to be markedly different from the others. Behind each of them, one stoic individual stood. All three were men and completely shirtless.

Whenever someone came forward, an odd looking spatial ring would be handed over, the man would then disappear behind the curtains to their back, only to return several minutes later with the very same odd spatial ring.

The 'client' in this case, would hurriedly take the spatial ring away and rush out of the Smithy with their heads lowered.

The truth was that the only reason Leonel was able to tell this was a Smithy as all was because he was quite sensitive to such things. Though the curtains were embedded with Force Arts that muffled sounds and blocked Force, Leonel could practically smell it in the air.

But that once again left him baffled. Do they really need weapons to this extent...? Unless...

Leonel's gaze narrowed. With a thought, he flipped a palm and a weapon appeared within it. This wasn't a weapon that came out of the Spear Domain. Rather, it was one of the prototypes he had formed to prepare for practicing with his Scarlet Star Force Arts.

There wasn't anything special about the material other than the fact it was Sixth Dimensional. It was only a material of this level that could withstand Destruction characteristics for a long enough period of time for Leonel to make use of it.

For a long while, nothing happened. Several flickering gazes landed on Leonel right then, but each of them turned away just as quickly as though they were scared that others would get the wrong idea.

Even after several minutes passed, nothing happened. But, Leonel's expression only became more serious.

He reached forward with his other hand. With a slight bend of his wrists...

SNAP!

Just like that, a perfectly primed and ready Sixth Dimensional Metal snapped like a twig. Nothing seemed wrong with it initially, and yet it had already crumbled from the inside out.

Those who had been silently observing Leonel snarled. It was obvious that he had figured it out without being told anything. Their efforts at keeping this matter a secret had clearly fallen through.

Without hesitation, Leonel immediately transferred everything within his spatial ring into the Segmented Cube and then brought the cube itself out. He didn't care about the gazes that fell onto it as he forced the Segmented Cube to change its form.

The Segmented Cube was unable to become a spatial ring as it couldn't shrink past a certain point, but Leonel still managed to get it to become a finger sleeve that wrapped around his forefinger in miniature jigsaw pieces.

Leonel gazed upon his original spatial ring, but unsurprisingly, with a light squeeze of his hand, it crumbled to dust.

'It seems that Anarchic Force isn't a joke... Will the necklace be fine...?'

Leonel turned his attention to the necklace that held Wise Star Order and then the necklace that held the golden scaled koi fish. After a few checks, he realized that they still managed to maintain their structural integrity, at least for now. He would have to pay attention to this.

The chain that held the golden scaled koi fish up snapped under a pull from Leonel before crumbling to dust. However, the Ocean Drop Vial was perfectly fine. It seemed that only materials that had a certain standard would be able to survive in this environment. It was likely that even clothing wasn't safe.

Leonel cast another glance and realized that everyone was wearing the same uniform. He hadn't thought about it much because this was an organization after all, of course they would have the same uniforms. But, if he allowed things to continue like this, he would end up naked very quickly.

'The Anarchic Force seems to work slower on normal fabrics because there's no Force to feed off of. But, it'll only be a matter of time before all our clothes crumble to ash.'

Leonel thought back to all those men who were still eyeing everyone he had brought and suddenly understood that maybe their intentions were more... perverted than sinister.

'Seems I'll either need to find a method to gain uniforms or at least build cabins so that everyone can maintain their dignity.'

Leonel had a feeling that the Void Palace wouldn't be giving out these uniforms free of charge.

When one thought about it, what better way would there be to make such a large population of geniuses feel so timid and reserved...?

'These sadistic bastards...'

Leonel almost couldn't refrain from laughing.

They wanted to cut everyone down a peg so they stripped them of their clothing and made them fight for scraps. Leonel had been able to figure out the problem quickly, but what about the others?

There had probably been a time here where everyone was forced to use rocks and planks of wood to cover their decency. How could you continue to be arrogant, prideful and haughty under such circumstances?

It was even worse that Leonel and the others were only given three hours. At this pace, their clothes would be nothing more than ash by the time the True Selections started, and then what? They were meant to participate naked?

Leonel's amused gaze flickered with a cold light. He didn't actually care about being naked or not, but for some reason, this still made him angry.

At the village entrance, a certain little mink's long whiskers twitched, taking an even more defensive stance around Aina as he freely interpreted Leonel's thoughts.

Chapter 1274 Black Wall

Leonel closed his eyes, taking a small breath. When he opened them once more, he had regained his focus.

He was at least 90% certain now that one of the main tasks he had to accomplish in Village 0012 was to earn a uniform. But, he not only had to do this for himself, but also another more than dozen individuals. However, if there was one hidden pitfall, Leonel would be foolish to believe that there wouldn't be another, especially after spending so much time with Wise Star Order.

With a sharp eye, Leonel proceeded to visit every shop. Soon, he found out just how correct he was. There were pitfalls to be found in every one of them.

The second and most obvious issue was water and food in general. The food stores were clearly the only way to guarantee healthy sources of nutrition. Much the same way geniuses brought resources to the smithy in exchange for what Leonel assumed was clothing or weapons, so too did they bring resources to the storefronts in exchange for what Leonel assumed was food and water.

Then there were the herb shops. This store, in Leonel's estimation, was probably a bit different. It wasn't just about nutrition or clothing, it was about finding a path to strengthen yourself and slow the deterioration of your strength. Spending such a long time in this environment ate away at not only one's psyche, but also, in a much more literal sense, one's Force.

The process was once more unchanged. A secret exchange between worker and disciple followed by a dash away by the latter.

Finally, there was the final storefront, the healer. By the time Leonel got here, there was a familiar young man barely holding himself together as he dragged himself in. But, even outside of him, the line here was even longer than all the other lines combined.

Leonel had gotten quite used to seeing gruesome injuries, but this was truly on another level entirely. Promising youths had entire arms and legs lost, some had their guts spilling out of their stomachs, and

Leonel even saw one with a bite taken out of their skull, just barely sparing the tender flesh of their now exposed brain.

When Leonel was finished, he realized a few things.

First, there was nothing on the outside of these buildings that described what their function was. There were no signs, no exchange rates, no friendly smile waiting to explain, nothing.

Leonel realized that the only reason he had been able to tell what purpose these buildings served was by observing, process of elimination and deduction. It was something that all humans could do, but something he most definitely did on a far higher level than most. Of course, it was also a great help that everyone else had already figured these things out in his stead. Even if he wasn't even a tenth as intelligent, he would be able to guess.

The second thing he realized was that all of these matters were practically the bare minimum an organization should provide. A treasury, health, food and healing... If an organization couldn't provide these things, then there was really no need for its existence. And yet, it was precisely these foundational things that the Void Palace forced them all to scratch and claw for.

Leonel could easily imagine a scene where these geniuses came to this place, feeling high and mighty about their acceptance into the Human Domain's greatest power, only to get slapped in the face repeatedly by a cruel reality.

They didn't end up being treated like kings and queens like they hoped. Instead, they were stripped of their clothing, forced to find that the treasures and resources they had brought with them to flaunt their wealth was useless, and then humiliated to the point they could only scurry around like rats and mice in the place they should have held their heads up the highest.

Leonel could even imagine situations where food they had brought was poisoned by the Anarchic Force, their water becoming laced with impurities that forced them to rush to these healers, only for them to come to the understanding that nothing in this place was free.

They had probably begged and pleaded, some of them had probably even thrown a fit and become enraged, only to realize that the 'store workers' were behemoths with strength capable of crushing them all with nothing more than a single finger.

A Dream Simulation of what must have happened formulated in Leonel's mind, becoming clearer and clearer until it all snapped into place, filling him with understanding.

'So what do I do about it...?' Leonel's mind flashed. He already deduced the answer.

With a spin of his heel, his body flashed, appearing to the outskirts of the village on the direct opposing side of where he had entered. While the front of the village had nothing, the back was walled off by a wall of thick black logs connected as one.

There were no doorways or gates, something that left Leonel confused for a moment, until he spotted a poor soul leaping over from the other side and falling nearly a hundred meters in a frantic getaway.

Despite their best efforts, a tendril of what looked like a beast Leonel had simply never seen before lashed out, slapping against the leg of the falling victim before they could get all the way over.

A cry of pain resounded as the individual found their leg bursting into a misty rain of crimson. Their body spiraled off to the side, causing their fall to accelerate at a downward angle.

BANG!

A hundred meter fall in a Seventh Dimensional world was no joke, especially for a Fifth Dimensional existence, no matter how much of a genius you were. Just from his vantage point, Leonel could tell that the young man had broken practically every bone in his body just now.

'I guess that answers where they're all going to get hurt.'

Leonel looked up. Just scaling this hundred-meter wall of logs was a feat. After all, they were planted vertically, not horizontally. To have to do so while being chased by something that could kill you with a single slap...

Well, Leonel had a feeling that there were a ton of corpses on the other side of this wall.

'... No time to waste.'

Leonel activated the Second Awakening of his Snowy Star Owl Lineage Factor's Speed Branch. A road of white-gold appeared beneath his feet.

With a step, he shot into the skies with a deft control, his toes stamping down hard on the log wall and jetting himself upward.

Soon, he vanished over its height.

Chapter 1275 Wood

"He left? Already? Is he an idiot?"

"They only have three hours left, what choice did he have?" A laughing voice responded.

The location was Village 0012 within a cabin built much larger than most of the others around it. Though, the craftsmanship was shoddy. It was clear that the original cabin had been built much smaller before its owner grew more confident and began to put in additional add-ons.

"There's no use in rushing if you're just going off to your death. At this point, we might as well not even waste our time. He'll get himself killed. I don't know how he accustomed himself to the Anarchic Force so quickly, but the concentration here and the concentration in the forest are on two completely different levels."

Within the cabin, two young men sat. They seemed like oddly matched mirror images of one another. The look might have been absolutely perfect had it not been for the fact they wore the exact same uniform everyone else did.

One had a head of white hair and black eyes while the other had a head of black hair and white eyes. The former had skin as dark as night while the latter had skin as bright as day. However, maybe the most interesting thing about them was that their features were identical down to the individual strands of hair on their head and up to the slight slant of their smiles.

These two were from a very prominent family of the Seventh Dimension, the Libra family. If this family were to be put on a scale of one to ten, where one would be the weakest families of the Seventh Dimension and ten would be the strongest, they would likely fall between seven and eight. Simply put, having disciples enter the Void Palace wasn't rare for them in the slightest, and this was especially so with a pair like these two.

The white haired and dark skinned brother, Huon. The black haired and light skinned brother, Droet.

The two had obviously planned to do something to Leonel if for nothing other than to whittle down the competition a bit more. However, it was also clear that they felt that Leonel was unworthy of the emphasis they were going to give him judging by his choices alone.

The truth was that the only ones still scrambling around and trying to drudge up Void Points now were those who were at the bottom of the totem pole to begin with. Those who were confident in themselves were resting and waiting for the three hour limit to be completed.

Knowing that, if Leonel wasn't a threat, why would they waste their time risking their peak condition for the coming True Selection. It was best if they save their resources and strength.

At that moment, though, an unexpected knock came from the door.

The two brothers met each other's gaze before putting up their guards. Just because they didn't see Leonel as a threat, didn't mean that there would be other threats to watch out for.

When they finally did open the door, though, the person they found was Orinik. And, when they heard what he had to say, the sly and slanted smiles of the two brothers only deepened.

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Leonel had already deduced what he had to do. As annoying as Ossenna was, she had still managed to leave him behind a clue: build your own cabin.

The obvious question to ask to such a task was how? Obviously, this 'how' didn't refer to the logistics of the actual matter, but rather in the more auxiliary matters. For example, where would he build it? Was anywhere fine? And then, the most important of the auxiliary questions... Where would he find the wood to do so?

Leonel didn't know for certain, but he had an educated guess as to two places. The first was the most obvious, and that was beyond the wall of black logs. The second was more subtle but still required going beyond the walls regardless, and that was to exchange Void Points for the wood he needed.

As Leonel fell from the top of the walls, he realized that his conjectures were correct. Or, at the very least, the first was.

The first thing he saw was a vast cloud of fog. As far as the eye could see, this fog covered everything.

The second thing Leonel saw were the tree tops and tree canopies that just barely managed to peek out above the dome of fog. The trees closer to the village were much smaller than the hundred meter tall longs used to construct the walls, but those further only became taller and taller to the point they rivaled mountains all to their own.

These trees, though, were all made of greatly resistant materials and were likely the very wood that made up so many of the cabins.

With a WHOOSH! Leonel shot through the dome of fog, leaving behind a small hole that was quickly enveloped from all sides. But, the moment he did so, his pupils constricted.

Right then, Leonel's clothing burst into a cloud of ash. The concentration of Anarchic Force was at least double here, and though that still left it in the parts per several billion range, it was more than enough to leave Leonel streaking naked in the nude.

With a heavy stomp, Leonel landed on the ground below, his knees instantly suffering from a severe jolt. The ground gave him no leeway whatsoever, causing all the shock to transfer up his bones. If it wasn't for the sturdiness of his body, he would have probably suffered a fracture or two.

'... Have to adjust to this world. Should have used a movement technique to slow myself down.'

Leonel made a mental note and calculated everything in his mind. After a moment, he felt he understood his limits, at least in this form.

Leonel took a step forward after the jolt of shock waned and pressed a palm to the nearest tree. That creature that had attacked earlier was likely still close by, so he didn't want to stay in a single spot for too long. But, he needed to understand this before he moved on.

'This tree is...'

Leonel understood at that point that he was definitely correct, there had to be another method to trade for this wood. Let alone the difficulty in cutting a tree like this down, just the idea of trying to hoist it over the hundred meter tall wall was a daunting task even for him.

At that moment, Leonel's gaze suddenly narrowed.

'It's coming, it's already locked onto me?'

Chapter 1276 Tendrils

Leonel gaze sharpened, his eyes quickly scanning the region.

In this dense fog, his Internal Sight could only stretch out about five meters which was barely beyond his line of sight, which was about two meters in this environment. The trouble was that though it was theoretically better than relying on his eyes, the impact on his stamina was to great.

Under normal circumstances, he could continuously use his Internal Sight passively without much issue. But, in this world, not only had a Seventh Dimensional pressure restricted his range to an extreme, but the Anarchic Force also ate away at him rapidly.

The only reason Leonel was able to sense the creature was because his instincts had called out to him. He could feel a slimy and slippery Internal Sight latching onto his body. In fact, he could even read some of the creature's emotions.

There was nothing but an endless thirst and hunger. It wanted nothing more than to eat and satiate itself. The feeling was so overwhelming that it leaked into its internal sight, even beginning to affect Leonel's own psyche somewhat.

In a moment of distraction, a wild tendril appeared to Leonel's side, whipping down with a force that that dispersed the fog for several meters.

Leonel regained his bearing, jumping back.

The tendril slammed against the ground heavily. After seeing what had happened to that youth's leg earlier, Leonel was certain that the ground would shatter and erupt out in all directions with countless spiderweb-like cracks, but the reality was very much different.

The tendril was sent rebounding backward, a cry that sounded somewhat like a pained shout resonating through the forest.

Leonel got another wakeup call about just how sturdy the world around him was. That same tendril had blasted a person's leg into a bloody mist seconds ago, but it couldn't even cause a crack in the ground. The disparity was glaring.

Leonel didn't get much of a chance to think about this, though, as the tendril suddenly gained several companions. One line of black became six, snaking toward Leonel with blinding speed that left after images in the air.

The wind refused to give way, giving each tendril a chorus of wind pressure that assaulted Leonel long before the attack itself landed.

'Don't have time to play around here...'

With a tap of his foot, Leonel activated the Second Awakening of his Speed Branch once again, slipping by the first two tendrils and drawing closer toward the source.

The tendrils reacted quickly, one portion sweeping for Leonel's knees and the other for his neck.

Leonel jumped into the air, his body flipping horizontally and slipping out the combined high and low attack. The instant he felt his feet hit earth once more, he exploded forward.

In that moment, Leonel's Force surged throughout his body, a faint red-gold pulsing beneath his bronzed skin. The feeling was so soothing and relaxing, but the resulting speed was only all the more exaggerated. As though Leonel's Blood and Force had only just finally circulated properly for the first time, the wind before him burst, shattering as he leapt across the final distance.

What Leonel saw when he closed in was quite surprising.

It looked like nothing more than a normal wolf. It had gruff grey fur and a sharp snout, not to mention a pair of yellow eyes that reflected something half carnal and half intelligent. However, what felt like a normal beast very quickly became a horror story.

With another look, Leonel spotted several pulsing veins of black hidden beneath the wolf's tough exterior fur, something that only just barely caught his attention due to the light reflected in its yellow eyes.

To make matters worse, its belly was the worst of it.

The stomach of the wolf had burst open, revealing what looked like leaking intestines. Any yet, instead of that, what they were instead were the very origin of the tendrils that had been attacking Leonel. It was a sight grotesque beyond words and it almost made Leonel freeze completely.

If it was an odd ability mutation, Leonel could barely accept it. But, something told Leonel that this mutation had almost nothing to do with such a thing at all. Whatever had happened to this wolf had likely occurred to the environment around it.

The real question was how?

Were all the beasts here like this? Was it because they had ingested something? Or was this simply what happened when you spent too long in this environment? Or was it a different unknown Leonel couldn't even begin to speculate on?

Despite all these thoughts running through Leonel's brain, his steps only faltered for a moment before they accelerated once again. He entered the close range, the tendrils that surrounded him from all sides being rendered useless for the immediate while.

The wolf was only a meter and a half tall and it seemed to have lost much of its agility thanks to its new status. Leonel took full advantage, his spear appearing in his hands and piercing forward. A flicker of gold touched its blade, his Spear Force having seemingly evolved once more.

PCHU!

The head of the wolf was precisely split in two. In fact, the Range of Leonel's spear was so pure that the Force sliced through its entire body even after Leonel came to a grinding halt, bisecting the beast entirely.

Leonel immediately checked his spear. If even his Spear Domain spears were affected, it would be a problem. The Spear Domain Heirloom could probably fix them before they crumbled to ash, but it would be troublesome in a long, drawn out battle to have to constantly switch between spears.

Surprisingly, though, Leonel found that his Quasi Silver Spear was doing just fine, something that made him raise an eyebrow.

Leonel was about to turn his back when his heart suddenly twitched.

He shot backward explosively as the belly of the beast erupted, a violent surge of tendrils that looked like a wall of tentacles shooting toward him.

Chapter 1277 Pieces

Leonel's expression turned cold. He thought of many possibilities, most of which centered around a parasitic organism of some sort. Regardless, he would probably have to narrow down exactly what was going on here later. But first...

SHIING!

Leonel's spear shifted to one hand as he fell backward and activated . In the next moment, his arm's speed flourished, leaving nothing but a blur in the air as it crisscrossed through the dispersing fog.

Five lines were drawn in quick succession, forming the image of a star that shot forward.

The wall of tendrils was minced to pieces, sliced apart until nothing but half dead wiggling worms of black danced about the forest floor.

Leonel retreat slowed, his mind still on full alert. That technique was technically a sword technique and he could only execute it with the proper nimbleness if he used a single hand, but it had most definitely done the job. When he had the time, he had to see if the Bronze Tablet had spear techniques within it that he could use. But for now, this would have to do.

After a few moments, Leonel felt confident in the fact there wasn't a next attack coming. The increase to his Spear Force's strength was far beyond his expectations, but this was definitely a good thing. It felt like his was infinitesimally close to Level Three despite only having recently grasped Level Two.

Leonel leapt forward, dancing around to avoid touching the tendrils and landing by the corpse of the wolf. He inspected everything from head to toe, but the conclusions he came to were each more baffling than the last.

Firstly, this wolf was only at the Tier 1 level of the Fifth Dimension. The fact it had such strength at such a low level made Leonel several points more serious. It had looked easy for him to defeat, and it was, but when framed to the power level of this wolf, Leonel could be said to have 'struggled'.

Secondly, the tendrils didn't really seem to be a parasite, it and the wolf were one entity. No matter how much Leonel looked, he couldn't find a separation between the two. That last attack must have just been a final desperate attempt by the wolf to feed itself, but it only quickened its death.

And that led to the third shocking realization. Even after bisecting the wolf in two, it had actually not died. In fact, if Leonel was correct, that last burst attack did more to push it toward death than his spear strike had.

'... What a weird beast. Hey old man, you probably know something about this right?'

'Asking me? You know this is cheating, right?'

'Nonsense. This is called using the resources you have at hand. They didn't come and take the Segmented Cube away from me even though it can survive in this environment, so clearly there are some not so fair rules at play here.'

'Whatever helps you sleep at night, criminal. These are Cursed Beasts, they're very common in regions with dense Anarchic Force.'

'Why's that? I thought Anarchic Force swallowed things. How could it lead to such mutations?'

'The main issue stems from how it reacts with materials and the environment. Within a certain threshold, Anarchic Force can be resisted, that's why you're not all dead just yet. However, at these concentrations, all sorts of imbalances of Force can be created.'

'When you take a higher Dimensional herb with fantastical abilities, and you strip away just a portion of the Forces that allow it to create those magical effects, then those magical effects can mutate into something completely different. It can make a medicinal herb poisonous, it could make a strengthening herb give you an extra limb, it could even do the opposite sometimes and make a bad thing good.

'Beasts tend to strengthen themselves by feeding off nature so they'll suffer from this far more than humans would. It takes expert Craftsmen to be able to use materials infected by Anarchic Force to produce wanted results.'

Leonel nodded, thinking back to the storefronts of Village 0012. These matters were definitely related. Those weren't just workers, they were skilled Crafters, all specialized in working around Anarchic Force.

'However, this isn't the sole reason for these Mutations. The way beasts strengthen themselves is different from how humans do so. They rely much more on their instincts and the balance of Force in their environment is very important. In a lot of ways, they're like the herbs they consume, relying on very precise measurements of Force that Anarchic Force can easily throw off.

'With enough time, most end up killing themselves. But, those that survive will be far deviated from the creatures they started off as and... They'll also tend to be far more powerful as well.'

Leonel's brows shot up. 'Little Blackstar...!'

'You probably don't have to worry about that Little Mink. I don't know how you did it, but it's been evolved with a large amount of Void Beast blood and has even experienced a perfect integration.

'There are only two beasts to have ever existed that could be considered to be immune to Anarchic Force. And one of them is the Void Beast...'

'What's the other?' Leonel asked curiously.

'...'

Wise Star Order didn't answer immediately, but ended up shaking his head.

'Aren't you on a time crunch brat, why are you standing here asking about irrelevant things far above your paygrade?'

Those words seemed to jolt Leonel awake. For once, the old man was right.

He dashed forward, but came to a grinding halt again after hearing the old man speak once more.

'Are you an idiot? Why are you leaving the corpse behind? I'm fairly certain this is one of the many materials you can trade in.'

'You can trade that in?' Leonel felt his stomach lurch.

'What other kind of food do you think you're going to find here?'

Leonel grit his teeth, realizing that the old man was probably right. He really wanted to go and find something more appetizing, but on such a time crunch, he couldn't afford to be so picky.

After a moment, he had taken the corpse into a snowglobe and moved deeper into the forest. Soon, though, he spotted something very familiar.

On an oddly shaped plant just ahead, numerous oddly shaped ring objects hung upon it like ornaments.

Leonel recognized them immediately. These oddly shaped rings were the very same weird spatial rings he had seen everyone using back at the village.

For some reason, though, the air felt particularly dangerous in this region. The pull of Spatial Force was especially strong as though one wrong step could tear him to pieces.

Chapter 1278 Warrior Second

'So this is where their spatial rings are coming from, how fascinating. I've never come across something like this...'

To the people of Earth, taking inspiration from nature wasn't something new. There were countless examples of engineers using evolutionary traits of animals and plants in their inventions. But, it seemed that things might not be so different in the wider Dimensional Verse.

Leonel wasn't sure what came first between this mysterious bush and spatial rings, but he wouldn't be surprised if the latter required inspiration from the former. Forming a spatial ring was such a complex process and one of the rare crafts where affinity for the element was almost intrinsically important, so the deduction made sense.

'This bush is very dangerous, though. To warp space in a Seventh Dimensional world is no joking matter. It's hard to tell if it'll just shift me through some distance, or if it'll tear my body apart. Even the former could be dangerous if it was pulling different parts of my body at different rates.'

Leonel observed the bush for a moment before stepping forward. His hips swiveled to the side and his body pushed through as though he was pressed up against two walls. He pulled through, hopping onto one leg and ducking his head in the next moment.

If others were observing him, he would look as though he was doing some sort of ridiculous ritualistic dance. However, those with a sharp eye for spatial fluctuations would see something very different, something much more akin to a young man walking a tight rope between life and death. And yet, Leonel didn't seem to be flustered in the slightest.

After observing the bush for some time, Leonel realized that there were no sudden changes related to this plant. Every influence on space was like a steady flow of water, and any obstructions and snap decisions could be observed.

Soon, Leonel was within arm's reach of the bush, but he didn't hurry to pick at any of the odd spatial ring constructs. Instead, he continued to flicker around the bush, dodging the changes and fluctuations in space.

'If I'm correct, I could probably gain a nice amount of merit trading in all the spatial rings of this bush. But, judging by this... If I take one, the bush will retaliate.'

All things considered, making it this close to the bush wasn't much of an issue for Leonel. After all, his current spatial affinity stacked up well to most things within the Sixth Dimension thanks to the Evolution Ore he had fused his Divine Armor with.

However, this bush was clearly far beyond his capabilities. Though Leonel hadn't tested it, in this world, he could probably only teleport a meter or two at most, and he wouldn't even be surprised if it was just half a meter. But, this bush had a passive area of effect of at least ten meters and this was obviously not its full effort.

Any plant or living thing had an innate instinct to protect itself. Obviously, a bush wouldn't have the intelligence of beasts or humans, and its thoughts and senses wouldn't be as flexible, so it had still managed to allow Leonel to get this close. But, it would be a different matter entirely if Leonel actually plucked a part of it away.

While Leonel was confident in taking one as most other people had, he would have to retreat immediately. If he got greedy and tried to take a second, he would be putting his own life at risk.

However, Leonel had also deduced something else in the moments he observed the bush.

Firstly, these spatial rings were an integral part of how business was done in the Void Palace. There wasn't a single transaction he witnessed that didn't involve at least one of them.

Secondly, after testing it, Leonel realized that even Seventh Dimensional spatial rings stood no chance in this environment. From the treasure trove of Wise Star Order, there were three spatial devices of that caliber. He had tested his theory on the weakest of them with the smallest space and watched it almost crumble beneath his eyes.

This meant that there was a good chance that unless you had a treasure on the level of the Segmented Cube, these spatial devices would be all you could use in this place.

Thirdly, one could never have enough spatial devices. It was too easy to run out of space and if it wasn't for the fact he had the Segmented Cube, Leonel would carry around at least four or five like everyone else did.

And fourthly, and maybe one of the more important points, Leonel could tell that the spaces within most of these natural space rings were incredibly small.

'This branch is divided into three main categories, with each surpassing tier, the spatial fluctuations around them only grows. The weakest rings only have a one cubic meter space. The middle tier only have an eight cubic meter space. The largest only have a 27 cubic meter space...'

If experience hadn't told Leonel that he should hide the Segmented Cube previously, this most definitely did. In a place where spatial devices were so greatly restricted, Leonel, who had almost unlimited space would be seen as a prime target.

When Leonel thought of this, he chuckled. Why was he even wasting his time thinking about this? Keeping a low profile, was that even possible anymore? By the time he returned to Village 0012, he was certain that he would have already become public enemy number one.

'If I'm going to be a villain for now, I might as well profit.'

Leonel's gaze turned a frightening shade of cold, his palm flipping over to reveal his trident spear.

In the moment, his muscles bulged and veins coursed all throughout his body. In the next instant, he became nothing more than a blur, moving about so quickly that booms of compressed air ricocheted into the surroundings.

Every place he passed by, another sharp line would be cut into the ground before it quickly froze, a radiant foggy blue frost wafting from the ground.

Leonel's figure flickered and came to a grinding halt outside the range of the spatial bush.

'I guess in the Void Palace, I'll be a warrior second... And a Force Crafter first.'

Leonel grinned.

BANG!

Spatial rings began to rain from the skies, falling into a neat pile before Leonel.

Chapter 1279 Weird Shift

Leonel focused entirely on hunting the spatial bushes, or what he soon learned were called Spatial Bristle Bushes.

Spatial Bristle Bushes were known for their thorn-like protrusions forming bony structures around its tender leaves and branches. These bony structures would form into tight circles enveloped by sharp spikes. When connected to the Spatial Bristle Bush, these spikes would be very sharp, slicing through flesh as though it was nothing more than butter. In addition, when the bush sensed danger, these invisible spikes would lengthen, skewering everything in its surroundings.

Once the defenses of the Spatial Bristle Bush were activated, it would take several days to weeks for it to calm. In fact, as Leonel rushed around, many of the bushes he came across he had no choice but to leave be and abandon because they had already been harassed once, making it more difficult for him to do what he needed to do.

However, this didn't deter Leonel very much. These bushes weren't very rare and due to his spatial affinity, he could sense them from further away than his Internal Sight and eyes could. Just rushing around for a few hours, Leonel found four bushes in a relaxed state. Though, he was obstructed by almost ten that were very much not relaxed.

If others saw what Leonel was doing, they would be shocked. Most had to scratch and claw for just a single spatial device, but Leonel had almost 150 now, each of various degrees of rarity. However, to Leonel, his process was quite simple, especially with the increase to computational ability.

The first thing he had done was form an Artistic Conception around the Spatial Bristle Bush using Camelot's Magic System. This sort of formation was a step deeper than even a Dream Sculpt would be as it dove into the very foundation of the bush's being.

Once this construct was finished, Leonel had a practically infallible representation of how the bush would read and react in any sort of situation. With this in mind, he formed a perfect counter, relying on his Dark Ice Divine Armor to draw the Force Art around it.

Leonel was very much used to using clashing concepts of space to get what he wanted. Back when he fought the Puppet Master, he had used the teleportation formations of White City and Kaefir City. By using the push and pull effect of both teleportation formations working against and with one another, he had been able to freeze the region between the two cities and even kept White City suspended in the air long enough for him to stroll out as he pleased.

Leonel had accomplished that feat with less spatial affinity, less experience and far less intelligence and computational ability than he had now, not to mention all while fighting an existence that was far beyond himself in strength...

So what could he accomplish now?

The answer was quite simple: A lot more.

Leonel used the strength of the Spatial Bristle Bush against itself. His own spatial affinity was far less than that of the bush so he couldn't possibly expect to do anything outstanding. But, what he could do was slow it down just a little bit.

In its lulled state, the bushes were in enough of a calm that Leonel's petty tricks worked on it. Using a Force Art, he slowed the movement of space around the bush just to the point where it practically froze over, causing cracks of glass to appear in the air.

The bush would immediately recognize this as a threat to its safety. But, due to the fact it was reacting on instinct and not intelligence, it wouldn't realize that it was actually pushing and pulling against itself.

This would set off an enormous chain reaction that would overextend the Spatial Bristle Bush, causing its more fragile leaves and branches to be torn apart by its own strength.

In an irony of all ironies, the only part of it that would survive the destruction were the only parts of its designed to be its defenses in the first place: the spatial bristles.

Without its core and essentially losing its life, the spatial bristles would become harmless, looking like bone shards fashioned into makeshift rings like some sort of arts and crafts project result.

Along the way, Leonel ran into many more beasts. But, as he hadn't traveled very far into the forest, they remained relatively weak and easy to handle. After just two hours, he returned to the wall of black logs, exhaling an even breath.

'320 spatial bristle rings. This should be enough to trade for what I need.'

Leonel didn't like the idea of relying on just a single plan, though. He had invested two hours into this and could have invested more, but putting your eggs in one basket was foolhardy no matter how certain he was. Plus, he was sure there would be more opportunities to exploit those bushes in the future.

Leonel once again placed a palm on the trees that lined the outer reaches of the forest. The ones here were the shortest and weakest of them all. If one wanted to cut any of them down, this would definitely be the best choice.

There were only two options Leonel thought he had here. One was to use something sharper than this tree could withstand. Two was to rely on his Scarlet Star Force.

The issue was that he didn't know if either was viable. First, he didn't have a weapon sharp enough. Even if he took the risk to claim a Quasi Gold Peak Spear right now, it probably still wouldn't be enough alone. And second, if he was only planning on using a passive comprehension of Destruction, it wouldn't nearly be enough either, and he had no intention of injuring himself so severely by using it actively.

'It seems like the only option is a combination of both... There's an hour left, let's see how far these spatial bristle rings get me first.'

Leonel's figure flickered, a road of white gold appearing beneath his feet as he shot into the skies, running up the side of the black log.

When he got to the other side, though, landing much more softly after learning his lesson, he immediately felt the weird shift in the atmosphere.

Chapter 1280 Next In Line

Leonel could easily feel the gazes on him. There weren't many who were still leaping the black log wall at this point and it could even be said that he was the only one. It was far too easy to spot him.

The moment he landed on the ground, he could feel several Internal Sight's surge toward him, causing his brow to raise. These people were quite brazen. He had gone out of his way not to antagonize anyone with his own Internal Sight, but it was clear they had no intention of showing him the same courtesy.

"Piss off."

BANG!

A muffled and invisible surge whipped about the surroundings. Leonel manipulated his Internal Sight with the Artistic Conception of the imploded Spatial Bristle Bush and laced it with concepts of Destruction.

The instant the wall of surging Internal Sights entered his range, they coiled back reflexively, a pained sort of retreat one would expect from touching a stove that was too hot ensuing.

Leonel swept a gaze through the village, his eyes suffused with a hardly hidden coldness. The perpetrators were nowhere to be found, but this was to be expected. They probably thought they didn't even have to step outside their cabins in order to probe him.

Still, if it had been just a normal, casual prod, Leonel wouldn't have cared so much. However, there was a very intentional sort of brazenness to it.

Ever since Wise Star Order had mentioned how good the soul was at revealing things the eyes otherwise couldn't, Leonel had been paying more attention to these things. It was also much easier for him to do so considering the fact that he had managed to sense and awaken his own soul in a sense thanks to the Spirituals.

When he had fought with the Cursed wolf, he had been able to sense its overwhelming hunger. In fact, every Cursed Beast he had come across seemed to have a certain emotion amplified to an extreme degree as well. And now, when faced with all of those Internal Sights, he had grasped their emotions as well.

Disdain. Disregard. Contempt. Indifference. There was even some righteous indignation and real anger mixed in.

Leonel already had a few guesses as to why that was, but that didn't mean he would just allow people to trample all over him because they felt like it. If he had allowed them to probe him, not only would he come off weak, but it would also reveal his gains from the last two hours. He had no intention of doing anything of the sort.

He began to walk forward, his expression not giving anything away. With a thought, he reached out to Little Blackstar and saw that the situation over there was basically the same. But, it also seemed that their clothing wouldn't hold out for much longer either.

The current Leonel had used some of the tailoring skills he had learned from his father's training program to weave together a beast skin skirt for himself. The beasts had survived just fine in this region, so their fur and coats were greatly resistant as well.

He looked out of place walking through the village like this, as anyone who could kill and defeat the beasts out there had long since traded for their own uniforms, but he didn't care.

The first thing Leonel did was head to one of the storefronts. This place sold both beast meat and doubled as tailoring shop, likely because the materials that made up their uniforms came from the beast skins to begin with. It was also possible that they relied on some herbs as well, but Leonel didn't really care about what the process was.

He found himself a place in line and fell into silence. Several gazes shifted toward him, but as usual, the store was most silent aside from shuffling and the occasional whisper. Everyone in this village seemed to take their words as golden and even the exchanges happened in silence. It could only be said that the Void Palace did almost too good of a job in knocking these geniuses down a peg.

Leonel remembered reading in a work of fiction that most armies worked this way, whittling down one's sense of individuality and sense of self until all you dared to do was obediently follow orders. He had always thought that this was an exaggeration and that no good army could possibly be raised that way.

In his mind, the foundation of an army was a good leader and cool uniforms. But, there was clearly no leader here and even the uniforms they as rookies were left with were nowhere near as amazing as the ones those Sector Ranked disciples had worn. Instead, everyone looked like they were walking around in shirt and pants little better than rags.

If you removed context and told Leonel that this was a slave encampment, he would believe it.

The line continued to move slowly. Despite Leonel believing that the crafters were actually working quite quickly, it still took a minute or two per person. By the time it was finally Leonel's turn, a little over ten minutes had passed, leaving him with 50 until his deadline.

Though everyone else hadn't spoken, Leonel didn't really have much of a choice but to speak. After all, he still didn't know anything about the exchange rates or what he could even trade for here. That said, he was still fairly confident that he had enough to get what he needed, especially after seeing the poverty of everyone else.

"Hello, I have some resources to exchange. Might I know of what the rates are?"

Leonel smiled lightly, looking toward the young lady behind the counter. She looked like she was in her mid twenties and was only tall enough to come up to Leonel's chest. Her hair was done up in a serious pony tail without a single strand out of place and she had piercing grey eyes that met Leonel's own indifferently.

Leonel's smile couldn't help but fade a bit when he realized the young woman didn't answer him.

She looked toward him for only a moment more before looking past him entirely, her gaze landing on the person to Leonel's back.

Obviously, she was asking for the next in line.