

Descent 791

Chapter 791

Leonel and Aina left the restaurant not long later, their expressions not giving much of anything away until they were already back in the Segmented Cube.

“Why did you agree to help them?” Aina finally asked after the two were alone again.

“Why turn down free resources?” Leonel said with a laugh.

“But... If we help them protect their territory, wouldn't that make it more difficult for your plans?”

“No, it would actually help. You and I aren't representative of the younger generation of Valiant Heart. With how shaky their foundations are, isn't it best to leave it in their hands?”

“Well... Raylion actually isn't so weak.”

Leonel blinked, looking over at Aina who had seemingly begun to cook something.

“Should I be jealous?”

Aina looked up from the stove, blinking innocently, a sweet smile on her face.

“You left me for two years. Who knows, maybe I wavered.”

“Ah...”

Leonel looked like a wounded puppy some sick bastard punted across the room. Aina almost forgot it had just been a joke and nearly felt guilty. She really would have if Leonel didn't clench his chest and fall over in his chair, causing her to sputter with laughter.

"... Laughing at my pain... Who did I wrong in my last life to have such a cruel girlfriend?"

"Stop being so dramatic. I have fought him, he is indeed very powerful. If we had not lifted the curse, I would have lost to him without a doubt. There's a reason Valiant Heart had so much hope in him.

"Also, I'm not sure if I agree with you. From what Teacher Magnaril said, there are multiple organizations vying for their territory. Whatever land was ceded would definitely have numerous hands wanting a piece, especially since this world is so rich in ores.

"Chaos is an opportunity, no?"

"Usually, yes." Leonel nodded. "But, if there's one thing humans are good at doing, it's forming in-groups and out-groups.

"This is a predominantly human part of the universe. What would happen if several organizations of humans converged to split resources and there was a single race of people that didn't quite look like the others?"

Aina's hands paused. She looked over toward Leonel who was playing with Little Tolly. After two years of not bonding with the little guy, unlike with Little Blackstar who reaffirmed their connection practically instantaneously, Leonel had to put in some effort with Little Tolly.

That said, Aina wasn't looking toward Leonel because of this. Rather, she looked over because those seemingly simple words he just spoke carried a wisdom that shocked her.

After a while, she realized that maybe she shouldn't be so surprised. Leonel's understanding of human nature was so deep that he practically collapsed Valiant Heart Mountain with just a few casual moves...

Maybe the irony in all of this was that he still couldn't perfectly read her. But, that was less about him being unable to, and more about his love for her clouding his judgment. p??J??????

The Leonel that could so easily see what would happen to the Oryx should Valiant Heart lose, was the cold and calculating Leonel. No matter how he pretended, when it came to Aina, Leonel couldn't ever completely throw away all his emotions. At best, he could suppress them.

"Hm?" Leonel looked up from Little Tolly after realizing it had been a while since Aina said anything.

When their gazes met, he blinked in confusion for a moment before grinning.

"What is it? Am I very handsome?"

Aina subconsciously nodded before she registered what she was doing.

Leonel erupted into a fit of laughter when Aina froze. He hadn't laughed so hard in a long while.

He realized at that moment that he was very happy. These simple, peaceful moments, sharing a kitchen with Aina, helping her with simple tasks and teasing one another... it made him forget about the burden on his back, albeit for just a moment.

After hiding away her embarrassment, Aina couldn't help but agree with Leonel.

"If that's the way you're looking at it, then you're probably right. The clash between the Oryx and Valiant Heart is inevitable, though. Have you thought about Sael, Kaela and the others?"

Thinking of Sael, Leonel sighed.

Sael had worked very hard. Much like Raylion, she wanted to see Valiant Heart thrive, but neither one of them truly took the correct steps.

Still, if he was going to feel bad about crossing anyone, it wouldn't be Raylion. However, Sael was completely different. Though she had done a poor job, at the very least, she tried to help him.

The current Leonel, though, had come to an understanding that sometimes emotion couldn't always dictate his actions. The same way he would have chosen Elthor even if he could resurrect Rollan, was the same reason he would face off against Valiant Heart even if it meant slighting Sael.

Seeing the look on Leonel's face, Aina seemed to understand something.

“So, you've answered your grandfather's question?”

Aina had always avoided this question like the plague. She knew that Leonel was avoiding it, so she didn't want to be the one to bring up such horrible memories for him. But, for some reason, she felt supremely confident now that there wouldn't be an issue.

Leonel smiled. “He has his path, and I have my own.”

There was a reason that Leonel didn't want to be an Emperor. Despite the fact it sounded like the highest and most esteemed title, Leonel didn't believe it. To him, the title Emperor only represented detachment and coldness.

However, a King was different to Leonel. A King was a man of the people, he was a man who could make tough decision and bear the weight of a nation, but he could also joke and smile with his men, his laughter bringing brightness to his lands.

Leonel knew that one day he would have to clash with his grandfather. After awakening his Lineage Factor, he understood that the Fawkes family was inflicted with its own sort of curse.

A matchup of an Emperor versus a King. It would be a sight to behold, indeed.

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The next day, a large delivery of Star Core, Refractive Gold and Blazing Night Ores was delivered to Leonel.

By this point, Kaela and the others had already accumulated more than enough merits for Leonel to be able to trade for this much on his own. However, why spend it if he could save these merit points for something else?

Leonel felt that this was more than enough to push his body to Tier 9 of his Metal Body, something Leonel had to thank the tablet for allowing him to accomplish.

After sorting out the information the tablet had flooded him with, Leonel had come to a solid understanding of what it was and how it worked, though its origins were still a complete mystery to him.

Leonel's conclusion was quite simple, the tablet seemed to be especially tied to Life Elemental Force and Dream Elemental Force. If Leonel had to describe it, he might even say that it was a combination of the two Forces to create an even higher grade Force he couldn't fathom.

Unfortunately, this unnamed Force was too illusive. And, even if it wasn't, Leonel didn't have the Life Elemental Affinity that would be needed to control it.

This aside, Leonel felt that the Force itself was less important in this context. What was important was the fact the tablet could produce it and make of it to perform all sorts of amazing actions.

The first and most obvious was resurrection. However, from Leonel's understanding, this wasn't an all encompassing resurrection. Only 'spirits' the tablet had accepted into itself could be allowed to be rebirthed. And, even then, it would only be once.

Leonel wasn't sure how this worked or why the tablet had such rules to begin with. It almost seemed too arbitrary and lacking in sense. Why would someone be able to be resurrected once but not a second time? And if Rollan, Elthor and the others were real people, then why was it that the tablet could only resurrect them but not others?

After some thinking, Leonel couldn't think of an answer to the first question. But, he felt that he had a good guess for the second.

A Zone was essentially an instance of time folding in on itself. If left alone, it could cause a collapse of the present. However, there were a whole host of time loop problems that were introduced with this.

For example, if Leonel went back in time like he did in the Joan Zone, which timeline was real? Was it that one he learned about in school? Or was the real version of events the one where his actions killed her?

Using logic to try to explain these things was near impossible and it was simply easier to accept that time in the Dimensional Verse was not linear. However, since it wasn't linear... what did that represent?

If Leonel had to make a somewhat educated guess, he would pinpoint that the difference between people like Rollan and Joan, versus say himself or Aina, was that the former two had been plucked out of the normal laws of causality, whereas the latter two, although travellers to these past and future eras, were still fundamentally in the presence and thus still bound by it.

Leonel wasn't certain if he had properly wrapped his mind around it. For instance, it might be better described as a twist or shift in causality rather than a dismissal of it.

But, the fundamental truth was that whatever laws of causality that applied to them did not apply to others. And, it was this fundamental shift in causality that the tablet was able to take advantage of a loophole in to resurrect people. $\rho \int \sqrt{\dots}$

Having accepted this, Leonel found that it was easier to wrap his mind around and gave him a deeper appreciation for the other abilities of the tablet.

This led to the second ability, which was tied to loosening and undoing bottlenecks.

Using this higher level Force, the tablet was able to clear away obstacles usually presented by a body's lack of maturity or slow adaptation. In exchange for the energies it liked to absorb, the tablet could open up bottlenecks for Leonel, thus making his future progress much quicker.

It was the third ability, though, that made Leonel feel like the stars were aligning for him.

Truthfully, this wasn't an actual ability of the tablet in the meaning that it was created for this purpose. Rather, it was Leonel's Dreamscape that sparked and suddenly made a connection to another problem he hadn't had a solution to for years.

Long ago, Leonel had learned about Little Blackstar's fantastic ability to steal the powers of those he killed. The only shame about it was that the little guy could only take on one ability at a time for himself.

The bright side of this had been the fact that Little Blackstar could allow others to absorb these abilities as well. But, with that came two severe downsides...

The first was more manageable. Not every ability would result in an increase in strength. For example, if Leonel tried to absorb the ability of someone else with a Dream Force affinity, the likelihood was that he would get weaker and not stronger.

Absorbing an ability required it to be compatible, for it to be of equal or higher strength, and for it to have a synergizing effect with your own. If not, it would be more of a detriment than anything else.

The second downside, though, was crippling, so crippling that Leonel hadn't even considered using Little Blackstar's ability in this way until now...

When one absorbed the ability of the dead, a lingering personality or soul would remain behind, permanently changing one's disposition for a lifetime!

However... The tablet was able to absorb this lingering soul, leaving behind nothing but the pure ability!

Leonel exhaled a long breath, flames crackling between his teeth and lips.

His eyes opened, a calm light within them as he stood and entered the Lab Setting.

Not long later, he stood before two snowglobes he had kept under lock and key, unwilling to take any risk with them at all.

Within these snowglobes, there were none other than Candle and Vice, the two Savants that remained of Earth.

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When Candle and Vice appeared, it was no surprise that both were shaken. The last time they had been in the world, they had been on the verge of dying and even now, both were still severely wounded.

Everything within the snowglobe was frozen, even their thoughts. The good news was that they didn't experience any time passing so they hadn't felt confined. But, the bad news was that the moment they saw Leonel's face, they panicked and almost unleashed their strength once again.

Fortunately, though, they had obviously had no improvement in the last three or so years, while Leonel himself was on a completely different level. Just a flicker of Leonel's pale violet eyes made the pair freeze, their bodies trembling beneath his presence.

Leonel wasn't sure of the name of his fourth Lineage Factor, but he chose to call it King's Might. He didn't feel particularly bad picking out a name for himself either because he was certain that his current Lineage Factor was a mutation and not the same as any one of the originals it merged from.

This lockdown effect was easy to use when there was a large difference between himself and his opponent. It was most effective when there was direct eye contact, though his released aura had a similar, albeit weaker effect.

The main ability of this King's Might Lineage Factor was in its coercion. It seemed to add a mysterious Force to Leonel's attacks, defenses, and actions that made them harder to deal with. It was almost like a universal boost similar to Universal Force, but this one was reliant on his King's Path.

As expected, the greatest change Leonel experienced was in his Domains, but he had yet to try this out in battle.

Soon, realizing they couldn't move, Candle and Vice sat what they must have thought was still. But, their bodies trembled uncontrollably, their lips quivering.

Seeing them in such a state, Leonel sighed.

When he came here, he had every intention of killing these two. In fact, he knew well that the smartest thing to do would be to do exactly this and hand their abilities over to someone he could value and trust. However... Seeing them in such a state made his heart waver.

Ultimately, much of Candle and Vice's issues weren't their fault. From a young age, they had been trapped in a cage all alone, unable to see or experience the outside world, not for anything they had done, but rather for the small chance of what they might do in the future.

Leonel couldn't imagine the loneliness they had experienced, the hardship and heartache they couldn't even explain without the experience or references to do so.

Leonel could suddenly feel their fear almost innately as though they were bearing their souls to him.

He could see the cold, harsh nights they had suffered. He could see the timidity they cultured within themselves as whatever semblance of personality they had was snuffed out. He could see them wondering if there even was an outside world to experience... thinking if this really was all there was to life.

'This must be... a hidden ability of King's Might...'

The moment Leonel saw such scenes, he knew he couldn't kill them anymore. ρ??∫??????

It was his own grandfather who had chosen to lock these children away, likely wanting to find away to rear and control them in the future. If he took such a path, how different would he be from him?

'I don't always have to choose the least palatable decision...'

Leonel sighed. "I'm sorry."

Candle and Vice's gazes darted about. For a moment it seemed like they were trying to find out who Leonel was talking to, but their ability to read and pick up on social cues was too poor. Despite the fact Leonel was still gazing at them, it was like they were letting the logic of it being impossible for him to say such a thing override the reality that he had.

Leonel smiled bitterly, releasing his hold on the two.

Suddenly finding the invisible chains around their bodies loosened, the two Savants weren't sure how to react. The result was them naively sitting in place, too afraid to move in case they were punished for it.

Leonel gazed at them for a moment. He really wasn't sure what to do. He had come here with a purpose, but now he almost felt like it would be best if he simply put both back into the snowglobes.

"... When you chose to follow Lionel, what did he promise you?" Leonel finally spoke these words.

The two Savants were taken off guard by the question and began to fidget. They were too worried to answer, not wanting to say the wrong thing.

However, Leonel patiently waited, not saying a single word. He didn't want to influence them one way or another.

Candle clasped her hands together, erratically rubbing her thumbs and biting at the inside of her cheeks.

She kept throwing glances at Leonel as though she expected him to lash out. But, after several moments, she realized that Leonel was simply waiting for them.

She didn't know why, but Leonel's expression seemed pleasant. There was no harsh coldness in his eye, his lip was lightly curled, and his disposition was patient.

Was that a smile? Her vocabulary wasn't very deep. The only reason she knew how to speak at all was due to the time before she was locked away and from overhearing the guards speak.

How long had it been since she saw a smile...?

Before she realized what was happening, Candle's gaze began to turn blurry with tears. She couldn't control them before they came out in an onslaught, drenching her cheeks and the grey prisoner uniform she still wore.

Her breathing hiccupped, her chest heaving as she tried to fill her lungs with air to no avail.

The harder she pushed, the harder she seemed to cry.

"He said... He said..." Candle's breathing hitched. "... He said ... we could ... see the outside world..."

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Leonel's heart softened even more so than usual.

Candle was just a teenage girl. After having her age frozen, she was even younger than Leonel in comparison to before. At that moment, Leonel couldn't see her as anything other than a little girl. And likewise for Vice, he was just a little boy.

Just their age alone made it difficult for Leonel to work up the courage to harm them. But, their backstory made it even more difficult.

"Is that all you want? To see the outside world?"

Candle nodded up and down, her forearm trying to wipe her falling tears away.

Vice's eyes turned red, seemingly caught up in Candle's emotions. But, he simultaneously seemed quite detached from it all, almost as though he was just copying Candle rather than truly feeling the emotions she was.

Leonel took note of all of this. He couldn't possibly expect that his pity would suddenly turn around and cause these two Savants to become normal people. As cruel as his grandfather was, there was a reason they were locked up to begin with.

Some psychopaths were good at imitating the emotions they saw around them but lacked the empathy that came with it. Unfortunately for Vice, having been locked away since he was a child, he never properly built up his skill. Coupling that with how sharp Leonel's perception was to begin with and he never really stood a chance of hiding it.

Usually, this imitation ability of psychopaths didn't come naturally. It would be a lengthy process of being called out for their behavior that would eventually have them realize they needed to fit in more. Some would become so good at it that they would lean into their narcissistic traits and even begin to manipulate the people around them.

At least this was the surface level understanding Leonel had. He wasn't an expert by any stretch of the imagination. However, he did find that King's Might allowed him to almost take a peek into a person's psyche.

Leonel sighed internally. It seemed that Candle was still relatively normal, maybe with some increased sensitivity compared to normal people. But, that could only be expected with her experiences. Vice, though, was a different story entirely.

That said... not all psychopaths were evil mass murderers. In fact, the majority were not and could function in everyday society just fine despite the stigma attached to them. As for which one Vice was – the majority or the minority – only time would tell.

Leonel made a decision.

"Alright, I will let you see the outside world. But, we have to make a deal first. Is that okay?"

Candle blinked away tears, looking up toward Leonel from her position on the floor beside Vice.

"...A ... Deal?" ρ???(???????)

Leonel smiled lightly, but he still felt that he was taking advantage of a child. Whether it was Candle or Vice, both had too little understanding of the world and the kind of life they were living. Having them make such a life altering deal themselves wasn't the most ethical. But, he had no choice.

“I will be honest with the two of you... With your power, you are very dangerous, maybe even more dangerous than any other existences in this world. Do you understand what I am saying?”

Candle's eyes dimmed. She felt that she had heard something like this before.

“However, I do not want to lock you up like others have. Though the likelihood that you will cross me is very high, I am willing to give you a chance to prove me and everyone else wrong.”

Candle blinked, a small light of hope brightening her gaze.

“I need two bodyguards.” Leonel continued. “With your power and talent, I have no doubt that you two would be an excellent choice.

“If you accept, you will be able to travel the world with me and see what the outside looks like. You'll grow by my side and eventually there'll come a time where there won't be a single place you won't be able to step into.

“I'll protect the both of you like I would my own brother and sister, that I can promise you. What do you say?”

As expected, the two Savants accepted Leonel's proposal. The truth was that Leonel had never expected them to say no. The power imbalance between the two parties was too large. And, though they were a bit naïve and slow, they weren't stupid.

Leonel had purposely not mentioned what would happen had they rejected, but that didn't mean they couldn't piece two and two together. Even if Leonel didn't kill them, they might very well spend the next however long within the snowglobe.

Still, Leonel was greatly satisfied. If there were two people one had to choose to be body guards, two Savants was already beyond anything most could match, but the combination of Candle and Vice was almost impossibly great.

Vice had an exceptionally high spatial affinity. He had the ability to lock down space even to the point of freezing the movement of those several times more powerful than himself without much effort.

At the moment, his ability was still within the Fourth Dimension both due to a combination of him having barely gotten any chance to improve it and having been sealed away for so long. Yet, it was already so powerful that even the current Leonel didn't dare to underestimate it.

If it wasn't for his Domain, Leonel would have died to Vice's hands long ago.

Then there was Candle. Vice's ability alone was excellent. But, when paired with Candle's, once they reached a certain level Leonel would have a hard time believing that he could ever get hurt.

Candle had the ability to reflect and multiply an attack back with her mirror ability. It was the ultimate defensive ability and even the best Leonel had ever seen. He had even wanted to kill Candle and give this ability to one of his teammates who shared a strong defensive ability as well.

As long as the two didn't betray him, Leonel would be almost impossible to kill by someone within range of their skills.

But... That was only as long as.

Chapter 795

"Coach?"

With a hint of grogginess, an older man with a thick mustache awoke, looking around with calm, narrowed eyes.

When Coach Owen saw Leonel looking over him, he blinked.

“Son of a bitch. You died too, kid? And what the hell is with that hairdo, you look like a dyke.”

Leonel pinched the bridge of his nose. Whenever his coach had a sip to drink, all his political correctness went out the window. It was as though he didn't know you weren't allowed to say that kind of stuff. And, apparently, his almost dying had the same effect as a shot of whisky.

Leonel slapped his coach's chest, knocking a bit of wind out of his sails.

“Hey, hey! What the hell are you doing, brat?! Can't you see I'm lying here?! If you're mad, go dye it black like a real man!”

Aina sputtered with laughter, unable to hold it back anymore.

“Huh?” Coach Owen looked over. “... Well, at least the angels are beautiful.”

Leonel's expression darkened. Had this old man gone senile?

“Stop ogling my girlfriend, coach, or else I'll throw you back in the snowglobe!”

“Hm?”

Coach Owen blinked, touching his chest. He seemed to finally register that though Leonel's slap had stung, for a man who should have been pierced through the chest, it hadn't hurt nearly enough.

At first he thought that heaven just healed injuries, that made sense, right? But, he felt as though his body was very much in the present and didn't feel any different at all. It was only then he understood that he must somehow still be alive.

Though he couldn't understand how, he was a military man. Spending too much time harping on details wasn't his style. Instead, he looked over toward Aina.

"Hey, little girl. I just thought you should know that before you, this ungrateful brat spent at least four years pining over another little girl. He wouldn't shut up about it, truly ridiculous. Make sure you protect yourself from his grubby hands, never fall for a man with another woman on his mind."

Leonel was speechless while Aina's laughter only grew. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stop her bell-like laughter from resonating across the room.

"What are you laughing about? Gramps here is only trying to give you some advice. This little twerp actually asked the same woman out more than 500 times and still had the face to continue, going on about some 'Persistence' nonsense. I almost sent him to the school board to be reviewed for sexual harassment."

Aina finally couldn't take it anymore, she clenched her stomach, her abs aching from laughing so hard. There didn't seem to be enough air in the room for her to breathe.

"Have you said enough yet, old man?!" Leonel snapped.

"Hey, what are you getting mad at me for? She's too beautiful for you anyway, brat. At the very least, she deserves a man with a better haircut. I thought I taught you better than this."

"That's Aina, dammit!"

"Huh?"

Coach Owen blinked, looking toward the laughing Aina once again.

"You met a girl by the same name?" ρ??∪??????

Leonel almost fainted.

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After a long while, Coach Owen finally dropped the senile act. Though it was a bit hard to accept that these Ainas were the same person, his ability to brush off the details of how things worked was still immaculate.

“... Ah, so you healed me... What a busybody, I was looking forward to finally having some rest.”

“...”

Leonel didn't know how to respond to this. This old man was really ungrateful. Who could possibly want to miss out on this era?

“Spit it out already, brat. You've been tiptoeing around something ever since I woke up. You know I don't like it when people can't get to the point.”

Leonel's expression turned serious.

“I need you to betray the Ascension Empire.”

Coach Owen froze before slowly looking up toward Leonel.

“... Okay, maybe that was a little too to the point. I take it back.”

Leonel gaze met his coach's eyes, but he didn't back down.

Coach Owen rubbed his forehead, grumbling. “You leave a brat to their own devices and suddenly they've become a little monster... You know, when I asked you to gain your own goals, I didn't also say to become suicidal.”

Though he said this, Coach Owen was inwardly grinning from ear to ear. This wasn't because he had some tragic backstory that made him want to harm the Ascension Empire. In fact, the Empire had always treated him well. What he was grinning about was the look in Leonel's eye.

It was finally there. That fire that had been nothing but smoldering embers before.

"Do you need to do this?" Coach Owen asked.

"Yes."

"You could likely inherit the throne naturally if you just make your intentions known." Coach Owen replied seriously. "Your grandfather isn't as ramrod as you think he is. In a lot of ways, he is very flexible and progressive."

"It won't be the same." Leonel didn't hesitate in his response. "And... If I understand that man well enough, then there is no way he will give up the Throne because now he doesn't have to.

"His goal... Is the same as mine."

Aina listened without breathing a word. She could feel how serious this was and the fact that Leonel was speaking of this with her and Coach Owen here clearly illustrated that the two of them were the people he likely trusted the most in this world.

Coach Owen met Leonel's eyes and released a puff of air.

"Alright. But, I'm not suicidal, brat. If you don't have a solid plan of approach, I won't act and I will leave you hanging. I have a beautiful life to enjoy still, many women I have yet to taste, sights I've yet to see. I'm not dying for you."

Leonel's lip twitched. Wasn't this old man just complaining about being revived? How had it suddenly gone from that to him not being suicidal?

Chapter 796

“It won’t be anytime soon, Coach. It’s just that your Province is without a doubt the best launching point. The only trouble is I don’t really understand my grandfather’s ability. If he has the World Spirit, taking Earth from him will be difficult.”

At first Leonel thought that his grandfather was able to display such strength because of the World Spirit. But now, he wasn’t so sure. In fact, he was almost certain that during the attack that wiped out the entire fleet of Shield Cross Stars members, not a single ounce of World Force had been used.

Leonel could be certain of this now because he had experienced real World Force during his battle against Alexandre the Apex. After comparing and contrasting that strength, Leonel had come to understand that the energy he had felt that day wasn’t like World Force at all and was much more like the energy of his King’s Might Lineage Factor with some obvious differences.

Still, it was similar enough that Leonel was able to recognize it.

Such a reality was indeed a scary prospect. How powerful, then, was his grandfather really? And how had he managed to grow to such a point?

Leonel realized that his grandfather wasn’t simple long ago. After all, he had known for a very long time that his grandfather, despite not knowing who he was, had had his mother with a woman from the Luxnix family. This family had a Sixth Dimension Lineage Factor and was, as such, most definitely at least in that Realm.

But, now that he knew who his grandfather was, it only raised more questions. How had his grandfather managed to interact with such a person as a human of the Third Dimension? Was this related to why his own father was on Earth? And what about his mother? Was her disappearance related to matters of this story?

“Hm? Your grandfather doesn’t have the World Spirit. Your mother does.”

Leonel, who had practically been mumbling to himself, suddenly snapped his head upward.

“What?”

At first Leonel was shocked by the news, then the fact Coach Owen knew this at all.

Then, Leonel remembered how much Coach Owen knew about himself, even down to the true origins of his father. If Leonel recalled correctly, Coach Owen had even commented on his father’s vomit brew more than once before, clearly pointing toward something quite important about it in hindsight.

In a lot of ways, knowing these things was just as if not more impressive than knowing his mother had the World Spirit. Clearly, Coach Owen’s standing on Earth was not small. Or, it could be that his relationship with his father was truly very close.

Now Leonel realized he truly never had a chance at it. If his mother gained the World Spirit even before he was born, how could he ever had had a chance at a piece of it? And, he was definitely not going to snatch it from the woman who gave birth to him.

Leonel took a deep breath and organized his thoughts. It was fine, it just meant that he had no fate with Earth’s World Spirit. It didn’t matter. He didn’t need it.

When Leonel recollected his focus, he spoke to his Coach for an hour more before finally sending him back to Earth.

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“You’re insane.”

Leonel listened with a smile as Aina practically talked his ear off. Ever since he had revealed his plans to her, she had reacted like this.

He didn’t blame her. After all, they had gone from having the Abode Setting all to themselves to suddenly having to share it with two not particularly mentally stable people.

At that moment, the couple walked hand in hand, soon reaching the depths of Founding Peak. Today was the day they were meant to set off for the Gathering. Yet, while everyone else seemed tense, the two of them were still chatting as though the world wasn't collapsing around them.

"It's just called a calculated risk." p[?][?][?][?][?][?][?][?]

Aina rolled her eyes. "Candle and Vice were helping me in the kitchen yesterday and do you know what happened?"

Leonel coughed awkwardly. "The meal came out ... great?"

It did indeed come out great. He practically inhaled it all like he always did with Aina's cooking. She was simply too good and was even getting better everyday, something he hadn't thought would be possible.

Aina gave him a sidelong glare.

"Candle was shocked by the beast corpse and ended up stabbing it with a knife a few dozen times before we even got a chance to clean the carcass. There was blood and guts everywhere."

Leonel blinked innocently. "Sounds like she did a good job tenderizing the meat."

Aina's glare became sharper.

"That's just the start of it. I told Vice to boil some water, I even told him how much water to use, which pot to pick, and what temperature to put it on. But, the moment the water started bubbling, he panicked and froze everything."

"No harm, no foul... right?" Leonel forced a grin, unfortunately, Aina's glare only became more intense.

"I shattered the spatial lock around myself on instinct, but that only made him panic more. He ended up sending the boiling water flying toward Candle."

“And of course, Candle reflected it back, making the scolding water go everywhere.”

Leonel coughed. He had been focusing on training and hadn't been anywhere near the kitchen. He knew that if something went wrong, Aina was more than strong enough to handle it especially since the two Savants had yet to properly mature.

Usually, boiling water wouldn't be an issue. After all, it was just a hundred degrees Celsius. But... That was only in the Third Dimension.

The kind of water Aina was talking about now was the Cleansing Waters that ran all throughout the Segmented Cube. If it had been brought to boiling, it was practically bubbling lava.

“... Did the steel table survive...?” Leonel asked.

“No.” Aina replied shortly. “All the food that had been on it fell to the ground too.”

“... You want a foot massage?”

Aina's harsh gaze vanished into a brilliant smile that seemed to illuminate the world around them.

“At least you know.”

“Yes ma'am!”

The two laughed, oblivious to the heavy atmosphere around them.

Soon, they entered a clearing. Before them, the familiar youths they had gone into the Valiant Zone with came into view alongside a cohort of five elders, of which... Leonel only recognized one, Head Hutchin.

The others tried to hide it, but Leonel's senses were too sharp. Each and every one of them was more powerful than Head Hutchin by a large margin.

It seemed that Valiant Heart Mountain was going all out. For them, this was a matter of life and death.

Chapter 797

Leonel sat in silent meditation, his legs crossed. To his side, Aina rested her cheek on his shoulder, her eyes in a peaceful state of closure.

The ship they both sat within moved silently through the depths of space, but not a single person seemed apt to say a word. The silence weighed heavily and seemed to be anchored by the four elders that followed after Head Hutchin.

Of course, there was another hidden layer beneath this. The youths that followed couldn't help but steal glances at Aina. But, this time, it only had a small part to do with her beauty, especially since she wore her mask, covering her enchanting expression.

Rather, the true reason behind their sporadic glances was because of a deeply ingrained inferiority that had been marked into their soul during their Zone entry. Shockingly enough, though, there were even some youths who hadn't participated that had this same look in their eye.

Valiant Heart had brought along a bit over two dozen youths. The number that would survive this was unknown, but they all seemed to look toward Aina as though she was their light of hope.

The truth of it all made Leonel's lip curl into a smile. It seemed that he had made an excellent choice in Queen.

Though she tried to hide it, it had taken Aina a long recovery period to feel as though she could battle again. Maybe even now, she wasn't quite back to 100%. But, with Leonel's support, and help from her resources, she was quickly recovering.

Unfortunately, Valiant Heart didn't have the luxury of pushing back the date any further. The result was a lot of their geniuses being stuck at about 70-80% recovered.

In this sort of ironic situation, while all the youths looked toward Aina as their light of hope, Head Hutchin and the four mysterious elders who followed after him kept looking toward Leonel.

...

The next three days seemed to be a constant state of silence. Other than food apparently prepared ahead of time by Magnaril personally, there was no other break in it. Everyone seemed to be priming themselves for a life and death battle.

It was on the fourth day that Leonel sensed the ship slow. It was only a fraction and was imperceptible to most. But, it was more than enough for him to open his eyes, a dull glow shimmering within.

Leonel suddenly felt his primitive instincts tingling at his nerves.

'It seems that this matter won't be as simple as I thought it would be.'

After awakening King's Might, Leonel was more sensitive in several facets, including this one. He immediately put up his guard, his heart pounding with a faint excitement.

This was it. This would be the first of his steps toward his true goal. ρ??∫??????

All his life, everyone had always told him that the moment he truly gained something he wanted to fight for, he would become a monster. It was about time he found out if this was true.

...

With a flash, the ship appeared above a large planet. At a glance, Leonel could tell that it was easily a thousandfold larger than Earth. Usually, within the Third Dimension, such a planet would be gaseous.

But, in what seemed to be the Fifth Dimension, its state was likely even a greater state of solid than even Earth itself.

The planet was quite beautiful. From their vantage point, it was possible to see a swirl of several cloud formations, a radiant green and blue making it shine like a polished marble.

However, beauty didn't always equate to safety. Those gorgeous swirls of clouds were all hurricane formations. The planet, despite its large size, was completely covered in just a handful of these massive storms, making one wonder just how violent they were.

As expected, when the ship broke into the atmosphere, the harsh winds and natural death traps began to make their presence known. The vessel, which had been steady up until this point, began to rattle and quake, threatening to break apart into its many pieces.

“This is Planet Vincero.”

Head Hutchin's voice was like a sudden gunshot amidst an endlessly silent night. Though it was nowhere near as abrasive as a true fired shot, and was even quite soothing, after so many days of silence, it felt just as jarring.

“It is a world with a Disaster Rating of Two Stars.”

Leonel's eyes narrowed. He had learned about Disaster Ratings during his Force Crafting studies. This was because planets with great Disaster Ratings had difficult to reach resources and were thus also great sources of food for Metal Spirits.

Of course, Disaster Rating worlds were also mentioned by the Overeating Hazard chapter his father had left behind. Metal Spirits that had lost their rationality were even known to swallow entire planets of this caliber, causing catastrophic events.

This aside, a Disaster Rating of One Star had death traps that could even swallow someone a half-step into the Fifth Dimension. A Disaster of Two Stars could destroy someone even a half-step into the Sixth Dimension...

It was safe to say that such a world wasn't just a little bit dangerous. The fact that the Gathering was being held here...

“This world is the property of the neutral Third Party overseeing this event and was chosen as a neutral site. There are some marked safe zones, one of which we will be landing on. Do not stray from these Zones unless you want to forfeit your life.”

The ship continued to descend. Leonel's senses latched onto the hull, following its trajectory like a hawk. He very quickly realized that there was a planned route of descent, almost like how rockets back during Earth's 21st century had to re-enter the atmosphere at a specific angle to avoid burning up. But, this technique was clearly most complex.

The turbulence reached near disaster levels, but the vessel seemed to hold up well, not wavering.

“I will now explain how this Gathering will work. Stay sharp, understanding will decide your life and death.”

Chapter 798

“Your battle over the next few days will be against both the terrain and the geniuses of other Bronze Organizations. The more victories you claim, the more protection Valiant Heart will gain.

“The first round will be a battle for placement. It will require your teamwork and strength. As for the details of this, it is unimportant for now. It will be best if you take in the terrain and circumstances yourselves over the next few hours.

“However, what I will explain is which enemies you will face.”

Head Hutchin didn't look toward the group of youths. From beginning to end, his eyes remained closed as though he was visualizing everything in his mind. It was difficult to tell just what he was thinking.

“There are three other Bronze Organizations competing in this Gathering – Misty Woods, Rusted Blade, and Crimson Hall.

“Of these three, Crimson Hall is the most murderous, Rusted Blade has the most offensive strength, and Misty Woods has the most mysterious and unpredictable methods.

“The Head Student of Misty Woods is known as Wissan Shathana. His ability is classified under the Energy Shield Ability Index and has reached the Misdirection Stage.

“The Head Student of Rusted Blade is known as Raffhin Valeth. His ability is classified under the Physical Strength Ability Index and has reached the Explosion Stage.

“The Head Student of Crimson Hall is known as Emna Beiceran. Her ability is classified under the Blade Affinity Ability Index and has reached the Body as Blade Stage.”

Leonel listened to all of this silently, slotting in these individuals into certain positions within his mind.

The Energy Shield Ability Index was separated into Partiality, Misdirection, Nullification, Reflection, and Amplification. This Wissan was at the second stage of five. This allowed him to change the direction of attacks aimed for him, which was a step above Partiality which allowed for a percentage based blocking of an attack and a step below Nullification which negated attacks entirely.

The Physical Strength Ability Index was among the most straight forward. It was separated into Power, Explosion, and Pull. Though there were only three stages as far as Leonel knew, the separation between each was quite large. Those at Explosion were quite rare and were separated from those at the Power Stage by being able to implement their strength in an instant without any build up.

Finally, the Blade Affinity Ability Index was probably the most interesting. It was split into Sense, Feel, Body as Blade, Union and Transcendence. Much like most fifth stages, Transcendence could only be reached by Savants. But, Body as Blade allowed one to use close combat techniques as though their every body part was another blade.

Though Head Hutchin hadn't explained what Star Level these abilities were at, even if they were all at Three Stars within their individual stages Leonel couldn't help but come to one conclusion...

Weak.

The abilities weren't very unique or enigmatic. Sael's ability alone seemed to blow them out of the water. When Apestus and Raylion were added into the mix, such a group shouldn't stand a single chance. This realization made it difficult for Leonel to wrap his mind around where all this worry was coming from. Until, that is, Head Hutchin spoke again.

"This information I have given you is what we've been able to gather over the last two decades. But, everything seems to point toward it being outdated. There is also a good chance that these three have become nothing but puppet Student Heads while the true powerhouses are covertly hidden within their shadows.

"All I can say is to remain alert... We are here."

The rattling of the ship came to a sudden halt. ρ???(???????)

Head Hutchin's eyes finally opened as he stood to his full height. He moved to the hull of the ship, his aura suddenly flashing.

With a BANG! the large doors of the ship suddenly swung open.

The influx of wind threatened to throw them all from their seats. Even with Leonel's hair barely being about two to three inches in length now, it still whipped about furiously.

The sound of blades sharpening resounded as the winds lashed out across Leonel's skin. He couldn't help but look down at himself, only to find shallow white marks being left all across his chest and torso.

Since he was representing Valiant Heart, both he and Aina had no choice but to wear their official uniform so his upper body was almost completely bare. And, unlike everyone else who reacted with their Force Skin, he had been confident in his body's defenses.

Yet, even then, this wind was still leaving marks as though he was being whipped. Plus, if he let things keep going like this, even if he would be fine, his pants would be torn to shreds.

Leonel's eyes glowed a faint violet. At that moment, a subtle and imperceptible sheen spread across his body.

The next blade of wind that whipped against him shattered and scattered into the air.

Aina awoke, her cheek rising from Leonel's shoulder.

"Student Aina Brazinger." Head Hutchin's voice suddenly spoke out. "From this moment on, you will be the Head Student of Valiant Hall."

Whether by coincidence or design, everyone seemed to turn their attention toward Raylion. Yet, they found nothing but indifference. There was not even a sign of a clenched fist or jaw. He simply rose from his seat.

Aina blinked but didn't react with much more than a nod.

Head Hutch and the four mysterious elders took the lead with every expectation that their new Head Student would take the lead of the others.

Leonel smiled and bowed magnanimously toward Aina.

"My esteemed Head Student, I will cross into the fires of hell to follow your lead!"

Aina rolled her eyes and blinked toward the hull's doors.

Down below, an expanse of white fog was all that could be seen. If one was sharp, though, it was possible to make out that the ground was about 50 meters below. Unfortunately, in such an environment, the takeoff of a ship couldn't be guaranteed, so it could only be docked in the air where it was easier to maintain its lift.

Without much hesitation, Aina leapt after the five elders.

Chapter 799

Leonel fell from the skies rapidly, falling through the clouds at a gradually increasing pace.

It should have probably felt quite refreshing to plunge through what was effectively a plume of mist like this. However, for most of the geniuses, it was impossible to enjoy this sensation with the whipping winds threatening to throw them off into the distance.

Leonel, however, didn't seem to have this problem. The winds hardly tickled him and he found the sprits of water quite invigorating. However, he didn't bask in this sensation for long as he had already focused on the figures below.

BANG!

Leonel landed heavily on the ground, his body causing no small amount of commotion. He didn't seem to care about breaking his fall in the slightest. And, aside from a slight bending of his knees, he didn't seem to be affected by it at all.

Aina descended to Leonel's side. She held the polearm of her battle ax in one hand, placing a foot in the hook of its blade at the same time. Controlled by some mysterious force, her descent was as gentle as a feather's and as graceful as a swan's. It would have been easy to believe that she was a delicate young lady if not for the size of her weapon.

One after another, the youths descended from the skies. Sael used her petals, Raylion used his telekinesis, and Apestus rolled the moment he hit the ground, dispelling the impact with the deftness of a prowling creature.

The five elders looked back toward Leonel, taking keen notice of the cracked stone beneath his feet. Even a strength based ability user shouldn't have been able to do that. 50 meters in a Third Dimensional world and a Fifth Dimensional one were most definitely not created equal, and neither was stone capable of withstanding this sort of perpetual storm.

Leonel didn't seem to notice their looks as a particularly naughty little mink hopped out from his spatial ring and onto his shoulders.

Little Blackstar jumped to Leonel's head, his little nose wrinkling. Clearly, he hadn't taken a liking to the atmosphere. Though his body glowed with the dark green of the ability he had stolen, he eventually abandoned using it entirely and simply entered his incorporeal form.

Leonel smiled, scratching the little guy's head. It seemed that Little Blackstar had outgrown the wind affinity ability he had snatched from the Puppet Master's lacky. In this sort of environment, it wasn't very helpful at all despite this being a wind-based Disaster Rated world.

"It seems that the mighty Valiant Heart has finally decided to appear."

Leonel looked up, only to find a man wearing a blade twice the height of his body on his back.

The blade was almost three feet thick and had not a single spot on it that wasn't covered by a rustic, brownish-red rust. Though it had some taper to it, the blade edge itself was most definitely blunt, or at least it seemed to be.

In any other setting, especially if it was set up alone, this would be quite a dignified weapon, albeit old and more of an antique. However, on the back of a man clearly two meters too short to be wielding it, it looked more comical than anything else.

Leonel couldn't hold back a small laugh. Even though he rolled his lips over each other, holding the rest of it back, how could a Fifth Dimensional existence miss such a thing?

The man who was clearly from the Rusted Blade Organization frowned, looking toward Leonel. But, he couldn't quite figure out what was so funny. Still, he somehow felt irritated by the way Leonel avoided his gaze.

Usually, a brat like that would dodge his eyes out of fear. But, this was clearly something much different from that.

In an atmosphere that had fallen silent after the man's taunt, Leonel's snicker was all too obvious. Several eyes all fell toward him at once. Even through the partial fog, who here wasn't an expert capable of dealing with such a minor matter? p??J??????

Leonel cleared his throat. "Sorry, sorry. You were saying?"

Aina, who understood Leonel quite well, smiled beneath her mask. With his near obsession with 'cool' outfits and uniforms, he was especially in tune with what was very much not cool. Carrying around a four meter long sword that made you look like a walking crucifix? Definitely not cool.

However, this was only the surface level. In a single action, Leonel seemed to dispel all the tension in the air. Whether on purpose or by coincidence of his charm, the youths following behind them all let out a collective breath, their backs standing just a bit straighter.

Head Hutchin gave Leonel a deep look.

They had been late on purpose. The ship had been filled to the brim with a healing agent that could be inhaled. They wanted to delay for as long as possible so their youths could heal up as much as possible. Toward that end, they were willing to withstand just a bit more pressure.

However, what Hutchin hadn't expected was for Leonel to deal with it all for them.

Without a word, Hutchin turned toward the other groups.

At the moment, they all stood on a tall stone pillar that was easily 500 meters across. There seemed to be ancient patterns etched into it that caused even the cracks Leonel had created with his fall to quickly mend.

This pillar was the roof of one of the few bases the Third Party the four Organizations had contracted had on this planet. However, it was very clear that no one was intent on entering this base. It seemed that the first round would start now.

“I think we can drop the pleasantries, correct?” Hutchin said coolly.

The man with the crucifix sword still felt irritated for reasons he couldn't even explain. It was clear that no one had ever laughed at his sword before, so how could he possibly guess that that was what Leonel found to be so ridiculous?

Before he realized what was happening, Hutchin had already taken control of the narrative and was forcing things forward.

The man's expression darkened, but he could only let it slide after sweeping a dark glance toward Leonel.

“The rules for the first round will be as we've agreed upon. As for the later rounds, they will be handled by our trusted Third Party.” An older woman who seemed to already have a foot in the grave spoke up from the side of Misty Woods. “The youths who cannot pass this round won't be allowed to participate when it really counts. You can each choose three seeded geniuses to skip this.”

Hutchin didn't flinch at these requirements.

“Aina. Raylion. Sael. You three will be Seeded.”

Hutchin waited for the other three organizations to call out their own seeded geniuses, but none of them spoke a single word.

The elders of Valiant Heart all narrowed their eyes. They could all see the Head Students Hutchin had mentioned earlier amongst their crowd of geniuses. Yet, none of them were called out.

The wrinkled older woman smiled. “You do not need to worry, our Seeded Geniuses have already been chosen and set aside.”

At this point, there was nothing that Hutchin could do. The three Organizations hadn't broken any of the rules, there was nothing that said they couldn't hide their seeded geniuses. Valiant Heart would have tried to do the same thing if it wasn't for the fact the last two years exposed all of their cards to their enemies. It could be said that right now, the only true trump card they had was Leonel.

"Ai, how embarrassing. I'm not even seeded."

Leonel chuckled lightly, his expression still carefree.

Stretching out his back, Leonel's bare toes curled along the stone floor. For a moment, it even seemed as though he would tip over and fall. Yet, he was able to snap back up like a rubber band, his body feeling light and springy.

In these two years, Leonel had never stopped training his flexibility. But now that he had reached Tier 9 of his Metal Body, it was likely that he would need a new yoga-like technique quite soon.

Head Hutchin turned back to the group. Seeing Leonel's casual appearance, he somehow felt a bit of worry drop from his heart.

"You all have to be careful." Hutchin spoke, his tone solemn. "We won't be able to interfere in this round, even if you should lose your lives, so you must take care of yourselves and each other."

"This round will be both a race and a competition. Do you see those thinner pillars in the distance?"

Everyone looked off toward Hutchin's gaze. There, through the harsh winds and dense fog they could see a number of thin pillars that were exceptionally tall, some even taller than this roof they stood upon, but only about two feet across.

In these hurricane force winds, these tall pillars waved back and forth. Given their height, it was only an incremental movement relatively speaking, showing off a level of great engineering. However, due to their narrow thickness, it felt like a great distance nonetheless.


The sturdiest of the pillars had a movement radius of one meter for a full range of two meters in any of the cardinal directions. The most 'flimsy' though, had a movement radius of upwards of five meters for a full range of ten.

The pillars bounced back and forth from their limits so quickly that they left blurry afterimages in the air. It was a speed even someone nearing the Fifth Dimension wouldn't be easily able to deal with.

Seeing such a scene, the youths suddenly got a bad feeling.

"Those pillars are the best transportation option Planet Vincero has outside of flying shuttles. They're structured with several valuable ores, so it isn't necessary to worry about them snapping. But, their movement is an inevitable part of their design. If they were too rigid, they would snap...

"Your task is to use those pillars toward a destination marked ten kilometers from here. There is both a time limit and a ranking requirement.

"Only 20 of you will be allowed to move on to the next round and you must reach the end destination within an hour. Do you understand?" 

Hutchin gave the youths all a deep look. But, not a single one of them didn't have a serious expression on. It was clear that they weren't failing to take this seriously. They had already seen through the unwritten rules. This was most definitely not a simple 'race'.

Leonel took in Hutchin's words and looked back toward the waving pillars.

'What a fascinating Craft... Usually, if a construction was oscillating so quickly it would only be a matter of time before it reached its limit. It's clear that these pillars aren't simple. But, I guess a Two Star Disaster World is worth the investment.'

The participating youths began to gather. It was then that the unfairness of it all became quite obvious.

With so many participating youths from the other organizations, many of whom were clearly here just to fill in the numbers, the problem of jostling for position became very obvious, very quickly.

Though there were more than enough pillars, the real question was whether there was enough in the particular direction they needed to go. And, the answer to that was obviously no.

This was the headquarters of the Third Party they had enlisted the help of, so of course there would be plenty of pillars in the immediate surroundings. But, they would definitely split off into numerous paths and become sparse very quickly.

And yet... There were over 200 youths participating and only about 20 of them were from Valiant Hall. The bloodthirst in the air was practically palpable.

“Milady! Please give me the honor of introducing myself!”

At that moment, the somber atmosphere filled with mostly murmurings was cut by a booming voice.

A young man with a tall rusted blade on his back, just one meter short of his Head's, practically glided over to Aina's position on a single knee.

He had a hand placed over his heart and the other rose off to the side and into the skies as though he was bearing his heart and soul. He truly looked as though he had been copied and pasted out of a romantic comedy.

His looks weren't bad either and could even be considered to be quite handsome. He had a strong jaw, partially wet jet black hair and sparkling green eyes. On top of that, his body was well built. Given his strength, he definitely had many suitors amongst women.

Having seen Aina's figure from a distance, even with the mask she wore, he had long since decided that he would have to have a chat with her. But, waiting until the race was over would be too boring. He had to make his confidence known.

Leonel, who was watching this scene from beside Aina raised an eyebrow. However, the amused light in his eye didn't fade.

“I am Rafthin! Head Student of the esteemed Rusted Blade! I would like to dedicate this race to this lovely lady for all to see! I will claim first place as a professing of my heart and soul!”