

Descent 911

Chapter 911

The temperature around Leonel dropped by several measures, a shocking feat considering tongues of fire were still nipping around the battlefield and him. But, this was simply the representation of how much rage he was feeling.

Leonel had never truly gotten a chance to vent out what had happened to him almost three years ago now, but that didn't mean that he had gotten over it. He usually wore a charismatic smile and had a carefree attitude, but that only hid a deep rooted pride that he didn't often show, a pride that had been encroached upon in this way once before, and a pride he refused to allow to be encroached upon again in this very same way.

The moment Leonel sensed the change, he react, shooting backward as his gaze became frightening. He didn't need to think very much to understand what was going on.

With all the prayers that the Head of Misty Woods had been so pious in chanting, it didn't take a genius to understand that he was a very religiously devout man, it also wasn't that much of a leap for Leonel to conclude that his strength and that odd, mysterious Force also came from his worship.

For someone like Leonel, he might not have believed in a God back when he was on Third Dimensional Earth. But, he was also a person who was very flexible when presented with new information. He wasn't stubborn to a fault. In fact, he could very easily accept new theories with solid proof behind them.

Since he was aware that there was higher Dimensional beings far greater than himself and he could see how the Head's prayer led to an increase in his strength, was it that great of a leap to accept that Gods and Goddesses, or at least what lower Dimensional beings would perceive as Gods and Goddesses, did exist?

And, in the case that such a being existed, it also wouldn't be too large of a leap to believe that they got something out of people worshipping them, not much different from how Leonel's King's Might grew stronger the more subordinates he had... In fact, it was quite eerily similar in that way.

Having reached a conclusion up to here, what would a God that lost a devout follower do? Shouldn't there be some sort of punishment so that no one dared to casually target their people?

By this point, everything made sense. Clearly, Leonel was being targeted for having killed a follower of this Evergreen Goddess. In fact, he was precisely being punished because the man in question—Ossan Jovyre—was deeply involved to the religion to the point where he had become a Titled Member. PANDA NOVEL

This so-call 'Title' differed depending on the religion. But, the label of Titled Member was the same across all of them. Simply put, they were individuals who had enough belief to gain some small favor from their God or Goddess.

However, understanding this didn't lessen Leonel's fury in the slightest. In fact, it only made his rage all the more palpable.

What was the underlying meaning of this action? Wasn't it that the followers of this religion could kill as they pleased and those without a 'God' or 'Goddess' to protect them could only accept whatever punishment such a person deemed them deserving of? What kind of bullshit was that?

Leonel's pupils flickered with red. ρ??∫??????

If this seal was on the same level as the one Shield Cross Stars had put on him, it would have only been a matter of a thought to obliterate it. After all, the current Leonel was so far beyond that previous Sael in strength that it would be child's play. But, clearly this one was on a completely different level. Leonel could tell that not only would it brand him, but it would even weaken him like a curse.

The sight of Leonel shooting back and dodging air was a shocking one for many to behold. Most here weren't even qualified to sense what was chasing Leonel. In fact, any member of the Evergreen Religion or Church would be shocked at Leonel's mere reaction to it, let alone the fact he was actually still dodging it.

"FUCK OFF!"

Leonel's roar shook the skies. He pointed his finger forward at what seemed like empty air, his gaze alight with a furious crimson.

At that moment, a beautiful light of twisting golden red appeared. Those that saw it initially felt it was among the most gorgeous colors they had ever seen. Something about it seemed otherworldly and transcendental. But, in the blink of an eye, that fascination turned to horror.

A fear the likes of which rose up from the very depths of their hearts took hold. It was a kind of instinctual fear... Like one a child would have to the dark or prey would have toward its predator... This energy felt like it was meant to take hold and destroy the world.

Everything in its path turned to ash.

BANG!

The energy exploded, clashing with the air before blasting through in the next moment. It tore into the ground and incinerated a line down the army of the three organizations. Anyone touched by this Force was left without a body. Anyone even near it burst from the inside out, every ounce of liquid in their body vaporizing in an instant.

The world fell into silence. A moment later, all that was left was a certain young man heaving out deep breaths, his gasps radiating out with a black fog that seemed to originate from his inner organs.

Leonel had suddenly gone from a man who finished a battle with three Fifth Dimensional existences without breaking a sweat to a mortal man who looked like he had just finished running a marathon... If marathons also charred your inner organs black, that is.

It was safe to say that Leonel was furious, even now. He shouldn't have been pushed so far just to deal with something like this.

Planet Valiant began to rumble. The line Leonel had cut through the earth bubbled forth with waves of lava that seemed to originate from its core. The destruction such a small beam of energy was beyond their wildest imagination. They could only look toward Leonel as though he was some sort of monster.

It was at that moment that several cloaked figures descended from the skies, seemingly not worried about the planet's state in the slightest. All of their gazes locked onto Leonel.

Chapter 912

The destruction Leonel had just caused was enough to, ironically, put the fear of god in anyone. It was just an instinctual, ingrained fear that one would find it hard even to face this Force, let alone fight against it.

The truth was that as Leonel's body grew through the Dimensions, so too did his Scarlet Star Force. To have a Force known to cause the greatest destruction in his body made it a miracle that Leonel was even alive at this point. But, that was the benefit he gained for having been born with such an Innate Force Node.

One might wonder, then... Did this mean that Leonel would never be capable of using his Scarlet Star Force? If it increased in difficulty to use every time he broke through, then what was the point of being born with such a Force Node to begin with?

The reality, though, didn't quite work like this. It could be said that rather than Scarlet Star Force shackling Leonel, it was actually the other way around.

For a Force to be ranked amongst the top ten of a powerful Force like Star Force, one could imagine that this wouldn't just be for lower Dimensions, but especially so for higher Dimensions. In fact, the ranking system was based on the highest Dimension said Force could reach.

Scarlet Star Force was essentially a high Dimensional Force, forced to restrain itself in Leonel's body to an artificially lower Dimension. This meant that every time Leonel broke through, Scarlet Star Force was actually just undoing chains Leonel placed on it.

What was the difference between this and Scarlet Star Force growing with Leonel? The difference was that eventually, the Scarlet Star Force would return to its original state and stop outgrowing Leonel. When that day came, Leonel would finally be able to use the gift he was born with without reserve.

For now, though... Even in the Fifth Dimension, Leonel felt like he was on the verge of dying after having used it for just a small moment. Still, the result shock even Leonel himself.

Leonel had been racking his brain, trying to figure a way out of this. But, he knew that even his current Dream Force wasn't enough to counter that seal. In the end, he had no choice but to bring out one of his greatest trump cards.

What he hadn't expected, though... Was to almost cause the destruction of the planet.

Leonel had felt it. Had he been able to hold out for about ten more seconds, he could have caused the entire planet to implode. PANDA NOVEL

Of course... asking for ten more seconds when he had barely just held it for a split moment just now was far too much to ask. But, the reality was shocking nonetheless. And, it happened to be a reality that these cloaked figures had all witnessed.

Even as lava overflowed from the split in the earth, they only had eyes for Leonel himself.

"Innate Force Node, and a very powerful one at that. I have a feeling that you can't use that attack more than once, right? I wonder what kind of state your body is in right now." The man chuckled. "Who asked you to blaspheme a Three-Layer Hand of the Evergreen Goddess. I would take a step back and let them hunt you down to the death, but they won't mind if I present your corpse to them with a small piece missing... right?"

The lead cloaked figure stared at Leonel as though he was looking at a priceless treasure.

Leonel paused practically mid cough. PANDA NOVEL

"What did you just say?"

His tone was icy to an extreme. As ridiculous as it had been for the temperature to drop previously, it was even more ridiculous now.

The heat of Scarlet Star Force still hung in the air. Even now, the foliage of the trees in the surroundings would spontaneously combust from time to time, erupting in a new rain of fire that would only make the situation worse.

As though that wasn't enough, lava continuously pooled out from the split in the earth, forcing the youths in the surroundings to scatter and run, breaking the formation of the three organizations with absolute ease.

And yet, the temperature still plummeted.

Leonel's gaze locked onto the man before him, his fury from before still not having faded before this man dared to poke at the flames.

When Leonel had learned that something of his had been taken out of his body when he was too young to do anything about it, he had already been furious. That anger wasn't satiated by his father helping him to regrow his Innate Force Node. Rather, it was simply stored away.

Leonel didn't care about the Innate Force Node in all reality. After all, he hardly got to use it and had been living life just fine without knowing it existed. However, the principle of it all infuriated him to an extreme.

He had a feeling that if he hadn't had such a powerful father, wouldn't he be dead right now? Wasn't this yet another example of the people of the Dimensional Verse doing as they pleased to the weak? Prattling on about survival of the fittest, etc etc.

Leonel had no idea whether his parents had already made those who did this to him pay or not, nor did he care. Even if they had, this anger wouldn't fade because it was rooted in something deeper than just himself. And yet, this cloaked bastard, come from nowhere, had actually thought to poke at that open wound.

It was difficult to see the face of the cloaked figure, but Leonel could almost feel his smile spread out into a wide grin. His chest puffed out, his gaze flared with derision, his contempt was so palpable that it hung in the air like a foul odor.

“I said...”

“Forget it. Just die.” Leonel said coldly.

An enormous sniper rifle appeared in Leonel’s hands. Before anyone could react, a beam of blinding golden light cut through the air.

The cloaked man didn’t even get a chance to finish his words before his head was eviscerated into nothing, his headless corpse teetering back and forth before failing to maintain its balance and plopping to the ground.

Chapter 913

The cloaked figures that had been standing around the leading man stood in shock. Though he had a big mouth, that man was still a Tier 4 expert.

One had to understand that not all Tier 4 experts were of the same strength. Just like Leonel could battle them with ease despite not having firmly stepped into Tier 1, there were many Tier 4 experts stronger than what the Head of Misty Woods had displayed.

The truth was that the Head of Misty Woods had a large weakness: He needed to be in a state of prayer to display such strength. However, the cloaked man Leonel had just killed could display the same strength without needing to rely on a God or Goddess. And yet, just like that, he had been killed.

To make matters worse, they were standing almost half a kilometer from Leonel. They had thought to probe him to see if he really could use that attack again or not. And yet, the result was absolutely devastating. In the blink of an eye, one of theirs had been killed.

Leonel didn’t even react to this. Standing within 500 meters of a sniper even back on Third Dimensional Earth was a death sentence. To the current Leonel, they would have to stand more than ten kilometers away to have a chance at dodging.

Leonel had wanted to use this battlefield as a chance to gain some battlefield experience and maybe hone himself a bit. The fact he wasn't taking this seriously was almost too obvious.

He hadn't activated his Bronze Runes nor his Spear Domain. He was using a wooden spear and he had initially not even wanted to use the spear techniques he had learned previously.

Unfortunately, his nonchalance almost caused him to suffer. Of course, there wasn't much he could do about being targeted by a God's seal, but it still pissed him off. Then, these cloaked figures—obviously being the 'hidden' experts the Milky Way Guild had sent—pissed him off even more.

Clearly, this wasn't going to be the battlefield he got to practice on. In that case, he might as well just end this all as quickly as he could have before.

With a slight shift of his barrel, Leonel's sniper rifle whirred to life again. It was unlike anything those around had ever seen.

The moment it jumped to life, the barrel began to radiate with a beautiful golden light, following the pattern of Force Arts etched directly onto it. Before the light could make it to the end, though, several hovering disks of precious metals appeared before the barrel of the rifle, each with a slight curve of their own. PANDA NOVEL

BANG!

The instant the rifle fired, the light charged out, coursing through these hovering disks of gold. If one looked closely, with every one it passed through, the beam of light only became more concentrated and faster. By the time it exited the last of the disks, it had a speed so fast that it was almost impossible to react to at all.

In the blink of an eye, another head imploded.

"RUN!"

The rest of the cloaked figures didn't dare to stay around any longer. Their hair stood on end and fear gripped their hearts. But... What would running now do? ρ??∪???????

With cold precision, Leonel sniped them down one after another. The last one that fell had already managed to make it more than seven kilometers away despite how fast Leonel was shooting, and yet it didn't matter at all. He fell just the same.

Leonel swept a gaze over the scattered remains of the three organizations' army.

“Are you all going to run? Or would you like me to kill you too?”

The army, which had already been scattered, didn't need to hear this twice. Without hesitation, they all dashed off, returning to the platform they had used to descend to the planet in the first place.

They raged and jostled for position as they fought to be the first ones to leave. In the end, they ended up using far more time than they needed to eventually completely evacuate.

Leonel's gaze on their backs was like the sigh of a reaper weighing down on them with a scythe. None of them even dared to look back as they rushed forward, unwilling to stay even a moment longer.

Moments later, the battlefield was silent. Right then, there were several pairs of eyes on Leonel's back which seemed all too ridiculous considering the sight of lava still gushing forth before them all. And yet, Leonel seemed far more fascinating than it all.

Aphestus clutched his daggers. Raylion didn't seem to have much of an expression at all, but something within his eye told a different story. As for Sael, she felt a whirl of complicated emotions.

Just two years ago, she was powerful enough even to extend favors to Leonel. But now, the difference between them was so great that she almost felt embarrassed.

Was this the benefit of being born from such a large family? Even if Leonel didn't benefit from their resources, was just having a portion of their genes enough to warrant such an enormous gap between the two of them?

Unfortunately, that seemed to be the way of the world.

Leonel coughed lightly, another clump of black fog flying from his mouth. Luckily, the passive healing of his Snowy Star Owl Lineage Factor had increased. Unluckily, so had his Scarlet Star Force's ability to cause trouble.

Leonel didn't even bother to cast [Grand Heal]. He knew that at his current level, it was absolutely meaningless. It wouldn't even heal a paper cut for him right now, he needed to research stronger spells. Luckily, his run-in with Goddess Evergreen had given him some ideas.

Finally, Leonel looked up into the skies, his gaze narrowing. Without looking back, he spoke.

"I'm sure you all are smart enough to understand. From this day forth, Valiant Heart Mountain can no longer exist. For your own safety, I hope that none of you are stubborn about this."

Chapter 914

Sael's heart sunk when she heard these words. At that moment, it all clicked. She understood exactly why Leonel had apologized to her before the battle even began. From the very beginning, he had already planned to say these exact words. This was his goal from the very beginning.

"You... You..."

Sael's voice trembled.

She had tried so very hard, giving everything she had for the sake of keeping the organization she had been born in together. She owed Valiant Heart and her master everything she had. She had scratched and clawed, working herself to the bone so that she would never have to watch it crumble in her life time.

The result of her hard work resulted in her neglecting her training. She had been so caught up in the politics that she forgot to raise her own strength. The result was her losing to Apestus and that reality slipping even further from her.

After that, she had reapplied herself, nearly entirely forgetting politics just for the sake of gaining a larger fist. In fact, even now, she had finally stepped into the Quasi Fifth Dimension. It was just unfortunate that this breakthrough often took decades, sometimes even more for those born in this region of the Dimensional Verse to complete.

But once again... All of that was meaningless.

Now she was being told the home she had done her all to protect was finished... And it would mostly be by the hands of the young man she brought here.

Emotions of guild, fury, unwillingness... All of it bubbled up within her. She didn't know whether she should cry, shriek, or rain down all the curses she could think of onto Leonel. She wanted him to both vanish from her sight and somehow repay Valiant Heart for all the harm he had caused at the same time.

The result of all of this was her body trembling beside herself. She clenched her fists so tightly that even the blood that began to pool on her palm couldn't find a path out. It only seemed to make her skin more crimson, her emotions slowly spiraling out of control.

All the while, Leonel didn't even look at her as though he couldn't be bothered to. PANDA NOVEL

Just as Sael was about to implode, she found a wrinkled hand suddenly find its place on her shoulder. When Sael looked over out of reflex, she was stunned to see that it was actually her master.

It only took a moment for Leonel to recognize this old man as one of the four mysterious experts who had moved out with all of them that day. His aura seemed to be particularly weak, as though he had been injured some time before. However, it was still just as strong as anyone else within Tier 4 that Leonel had ever met. This made Leonel believe that he might have even actually been Tier 5 or maybe even Tier 6, maybe even stronger.

Leonel's mind instantly flashed with a thought.

'Case 793: Teacher Ingsan, guilty of gross negligence. In a Campaign against our sworn enemy, the Oryx Tribe, his decisions led to the death of 14 geniuses of our Valiant Heart Mountain. The only survivor has been bribed into silence and has suffered through untold humiliation, Sael Liers.'

Those were the exact words Raylion had said back then. p??J??????

Clearly, Ingsan was more than just a 'teacher'. In addition, the price he had paid to allow Sael to be the 'only survivor' wasn't small in the slightest. The old man was practically on his death bed.

Beyond this, Leonel had a feeling that those 14 geniuses weren't just any geniuses either. They might have even been beyond Raylion in talent if they could go on a mission with Ingsan... The question was, then, why was Sael there?

Of course, this was all just speculation. Leonel had no way of knowing these things.

"Thank you." Ingsan spoke lightly. "From this day forth, Valiant Heart Mountain will be no more."

"But—!"

"That's enough, Sael. You're not a little girl anymore. If you want Valiant Heart to be revived one day... You just need to be strong enough that no one would dare to stop you."

Sael opened her mouth to speak but all that came out was a sob. She finally couldn't hold it in any longer and dove into her master's arms.

"It's my fault. It's all my fault..."

Ingsan sighed, stroking Sael's hair.

“It’s not your fault. This is the fault of us old men... We lost our edge and let our enemies eat away at us until there was nothing left...”

Ingsan knew how Sael felt. She thought that everything she tried to do to help only ended in disaster. Ingsan even had a feeling that if it wasn’t for the fact she was so weighed down by the matters of the past, she would have long since entered the Fifth Dimension. Let alone Raylion and Apestus, Sael was probably the most talented disciple Valiant Heart Mountain had ever produced, including their founder who managed to gain the favor of a Morales family Heir.

Back then, Sael was too eager, wanting to skip steps and grow more powerful, more quickly. She ended up sneaking her way onto a mission she had no business taking part in. The result was the death of 14 of her seniors and her own master being heavily injured to the point of near death.

Of course, Ingsan had told her many times that it wasn’t her fault. Even if she hadn’t been there, the casualties would have been terrible. It was a mistake on his part, not hers that had caused such a thing. But, the little girl had already internalized her guilt.

And now she felt like she had done it again. It wasn’t hard to point toward Leonel as the reason they would collapse now. He was, at the very least, a catalyst if not the cause. Without him, maybe they could have survived a few more centuries and found a chance to turn it all around. But with his appearance, they were finished.

It was her fault again... It was her fault Valiant Heart lost 14 geniuses that would have been their chance to turn things around... It was her fault Valiant Heart’s most powerful expert was so severely injured that they were no longer feared anymore... It was her fault that Leonel had been able to come here and quicken their destruction.

It was all her fault. All her fault.

Chapter 915

Leonel sighed inwardly. It wasn’t in his heart to do things like this but he had no choice in the matter. The moment he had decided to take the side of the Oryx, the fate of Valiant Heart had already been sealed.

He couldn't help but shake his head to himself. Was he very much different from those people he hated so much?

Why was it that he chose the Oryx over Valiant Heart? Wasn't it because he felt that their talent was greater? In their state of Hyper Evolution, they even had a chance at becoming monsters that could rival talents from Dimensions far higher than this one. Due to this, Leonel had felt that if he was going to invest in a group, the Oryx would be the very best.

He could tell himself now that he was just doing this out of necessity, that after he accomplished his goals he would treat everyone equally, but would things really work out that way?

History told tales of absolute power corrupting absolutely. Leonel wouldn't deem himself to be the perfect human being and, no matter how logical he was, he would often find himself fighting against that side of his being. Often, Leonel felt that he only leaned into his own 'morality' so much because he was scared that if he didn't follow archetype of good person to the final point, he would be giving himself up to that darkness within him.

Leonel had always said that he didn't fear losing his life to save someone others would deem worthless... What he feared was the day he would convince himself that his life was worth more than others... if that day ever came, even he was scared of the monster he would become.

Despite thinking and being aware of all of this, though, there was one reason Leonel didn't label himself a hypocrite, at least not completely: ...

Valiant Heart had never wanted to help itself.

During the time Leonel had spent with this organization, they were always fighting against progress, always gripped by a fear that not only stopped them from moving forward, but even forced them to regress.

Despite knowing that he was a member of the Morales family, rather than taking this opportunity to soar into the skies once more, they cowered from it, worried about the consequences choosing to place their hopes in Leonel might cause.

These simply weren't people that Leonel could take under his wing, at least not with how they were presently constructed. Unless they could change their mentality, this would be as far as any of them went. PANDA NOVEL

Leonel knew that he had a very fine line to toe. He both acknowledged that talent was necessary to make it in this world while simultaneously believing that it didn't make one person worth more than another. If he wanted to stick to such ideals, it would be difficult to keep his head straight.

The good news was that he had been blessed with opportunity. He had Little Blackstar's ability steal powers on his side and he had the silver tablet to wipe the consciousnesses away from them. This combination of treasures was almost perfect to deal with this moral dilemma, but it also made Leonel realize just how much luck was involved in this thing he called life...

He had done all he could do for Valiant Heart. What was left was up to them.

"Young Heir," Ingsan called out once again to Leonel, trying to comfort Sael at the same time, "please take the pillars with you. They were the treasures of the Morales family to begin with and we're in no position to continue protecting them."

Leonel, who was still facing away from the group and monitoring the air above frowned. ρ??∫???????

Those pillars? They had the ability to keep Zones from permanently closing, thus allowing them to be repeatedly used as training grounds. It was a valuable set of equipment to have, especially if you managed to use them on a Variant Zone designed to bestow treasures to begin with.

As good as this sounded, though, to the current Leonel... They were useless.

Leonel's Dreamscape suddenly flashed.

Well, not completely useless, actually. With the new path of Mage Arts he was thinking up in his mind currently, the pillars would be a valuable asset and might even allow him to create an extremely powerful Earth-Space Elemental Art.

However, Leonel couldn't help but feel disappointed. The fact that Ingsan was trying to give these pillars to me signified that he truly had given up.

'Maybe it's wrong of me to judge him for this. He's been injured for several decades now and probably feels he's at the end of his rope with no chance to progress forward or even just heal himself back to his original height. Blaming him for this decision is cruel...'

Leonel took a deep breath, not responding immediately. After a while, he nodded.

"I will hold them for you. If anyone of Valiant Heart decides that they are ready in the future, they can come to find me."

A light of gratitude lit in Ingsan's eyes. But, he couldn't help but sigh when he looked down at the young girl in his arms.

She had just been starting to cast the previous shadow on her heart away, finally allowing her to continue progressing... Would she ever manage to get rid of this one?

"Everyone, you've heard it well. This is no longer our home. You have half an hour to pack your belongings. The Organization will send you all to a safe place as a final thank you for your service. Go!"

With heavy hearts, the students of Valiant Heart followed their orders. Those who had stayed behind so long despite the danger their lives were in were already the most loyal members of Valiant Heart to begin with. It was clear that none of them were willing.

'I guess they're not going to attack anymore?' Leonel concluded.

Just as Leonel was about to make a move to stop the flow of lava and dig up the pillars to his back, he heard an unexpected voice.

"Too cowardly to face what you've done, huh?"

Chapter 916

Leonel didn't need to look back to recognize the voice of Apestus, of all people.

Of course, Leonel knew why Apestus was saying these words. Leonel hadn't looked back from start to finish, so it wasn't too hard to guess that he was feeling guilty. However, it was still a bit of a surprise that Apestus would be the one to come to speak with him.

From what Leonel could tell, everyone else had already rushed up the mountain, there wasn't even another line of defense here. It was clear that Ingsan had trusted Leonel with protecting them while they went off to evacuate. But, Apestus didn't seem to care much about this so-called evacuation.

"Cowardly? No. Guilty? I guess you can argue that." Leonel replied.

Apestus snorted. "Semantics."

"That's a pretty big word for a muscle brain like you."

Apestus' lip twitched. Wasn't this bastard supposed to be feeling guilty? Where did he find the face to quibble like this?

Plus, looking at Leonel now, even though it was hidden beneath his clothing, Apestus could tell that somehow this brat had come back with a physique even better than his own. So, who was the muscle brain exactly?

"... Were you serious about keeping the pillars for us?"

"Yes. Anyone who feels ready can come and get them from me. Even if I disagree that you are. It's not mine to begin with, I won't police which of you can take it. To be honest, it's not very useful to me now. Or, rather, it will be in the short term, but not in the long term."

“So you’re just going to wipe your hands clean of it all, hm? Don’t you think you hold a bit of responsibility?” PANDA NOVEL

Leonel shook his head and sighed, finally looking back toward Apestus. He was a bit surprised to find the abrasive young man to be red eyed. He seemed caught between tears and rage despite how calm his voice had sounded previously.

Apestus seemed as though he might eat Leonel alive. Who knows, maybe his ability would kick in and he would gain Leonel’s ability as well. Who cared if he became a cannibal if he could accomplish what he and Raylion had always hoped to accomplish?

However, he didn’t move. He knew that he was no match for Leonel two years ago, let alone now. He would just be setting himself up for death.

Unlike Sael, he still hadn’t given up. Raylion was too prideful to ask anything of Leonel. But he, as Raylion’s right hand man, would scratch and claw for anything he thought could help his brother rise to the very top.

Leonel stared into Apestus’ eyes for a long time. Despite the bestial aura radiating out from the latter, he seemed completely unmoved. ρ??∫???????

“Aren’t you the one who’s very cowardly now?” Leonel spoke. “Why are you beating around the bush? Just say what you want to say. What’s there to be scared of?”

Apestus’ jaw clenched. If a gaze could murder, Leonel would probably have died ten times over.

“... It’s impossible for us to progress on our own. We’ll always be labeled as the disciples of Valiant Heart. The other students might be fine, but those like Sael, myself and Raylion are too famous, we’ll never be able to escape that label. No one would let us join their organization, and that would just be the bright side. The more likely scenario is that they’d offer us up to the three organizations or the Milky Way Guild to curry favor.”

“Stop beating around the bush.” Leonel repeated.

Aphestus' eyes were practically spewing fire at this point.

“Take responsibility. We will fight for you and even help in your Heir Wars. We just want resources to help us grow. If we're left like this, we'll never be able to reach a point where we can take those pillars back.”

Aphestus had expected Leonel to pause for a moment and think about it. After all, even if they couldn't compare to Leonel, they were still great talents, right...? Even ignoring Sael and Raylion, he, himself, was mostly limited by the caliber of beast he got the chance to eat.

Aphestus was slotted into the Swallower Ability Index which was also separated into five stages. Speed, Efficient, Blackbody, Steal, and Dimensional Gut.

Speed allowed one to digest at impossibly fast speeds. Such a person could consume far more energy than another and thus recover far faster as well.

Efficient allowed one to not only have the abilities of Speed, but allowed them to eat with less wastage. Blackbody allowed one to consume 100% of the energy of their food and even directly convert it into power. It could be considered the pinnacle of Efficient.

Finally, there was Steal. The next step from converting food directly into power was snatching the powers their food had had back when they were alive.

As usual, the fifth, Dimensional Gut, was reserved for Savants. Such existences were practically Void Beasts in human form. The things they swallowed no longer had to be living and some could even digest entire worlds with a single bite.

By this, Aphestus' talent was clear. He was actually at the fourth Steal level. Even Raylion was only at the third stage of his Telekinesis Ability Index!

Of course, this was the case when Aphestus was swallowing Fourth Dimensional beasts. But, who was to say he couldn't do the same with Fifth Dimensional ones as well? After all, he had never had the chance to try!

This was all to say that Apestus thought Leonel would at least think about it. But, Leonel didn't hesitate in his reply. Not only did he not hesitate, it was sharp, incisive, and left no room for rebuttal.

After hearing it, Apestus was stuck in limbo, forgetting even the fact that he should have been enraged. He almost couldn't believe what it was that he was hearing to begin with, he was that close from asking Leonel to repeat himself.

“Absolutely not. I will not accept murderers into my people. As far as I'm concerned, you deserve to die.”

Chapter 917

Leonel didn't understand these people. Did they just expect him to forget?

What happened to those three disciples that he had hung from a tree? What happened to those disciples that had died testing his apparently 'faulty' products? Was he just supposed to ignore the fact that ever happened? In fact, maybe the fact he wasn't cutting Apestus and Raylion down where they stood was him failing those victims.

Apestus blinked and shook his head before he truly registered what had just happened. The rage in Leonel's voice was hidden under a layer of coldness and just listening to it made him feel as though a bell was ringing in his ears.

What Apestus didn't know was that this was Leonel's King's Might seeping outward. If Leonel had been more intentional with his actions, Apestus' head might have already imploded just from his words alone.

At this point, the coercion in Leonel's voice was such that he could almost manifest his will into existence. Since Apestus was a Dimension below him, he wouldn't even have the chance to fight back before his body listened to Leonel's will almost as though these events were a story and Apestus was a character Leonel was writing.

This was the difference between Dimensions.

A talent like Leonel might be able to rely on his Lineage to fight above. But, when a talent like Leonel was above a lesser talent like Apestus, the true difference between Dimensions was as clear as day. The current Leonel might as well have been a God to Apestus. He could die to a single one of Leonel's thoughts.

It took a long while for Apestus to finally regain his bearings, but he felt as though his IQ had dropped by several points, like his brain had turned to mush. He completely forgot that he should have been enraged.

When his vision cleared, he found Leonel still looking at him expressionlessly. But, at that moment, he felt a deep rooted fear in his heart that seemed birthed from something intangible to become a heavy representation of his reality.

"I..." Apestus shook his head. "... They're not dead. We just sent them away. They didn't have much talent as disciples anyway so we just staged some stuff, gave them some money, and shipped them off. To enjoy the rest of their lives."

The moment Apestus finished saying these words, he suddenly snapped.

"FUCK YOU!" Apestus regained his fiery edge, his canines extending and his pupils becoming slits.

He suddenly realized that he had fallen under Leonel's coercion. His rebuttal should have been a 'gotcha moment'. But, instead, it came out weak as though he was pleading with Leonel to understand his plight. How could he not be seething? PANDA NOVEL

Ingsan might have let them slander him, but he would have never allowed them to start killing disciples. For proof of this, one only needed to look at what happened to the seniors that tried to block Leonel, Aina and the other freshmen from entering the ore mines.

Those seniors, for causing the potential deaths of their juniors, had been punished swiftly, harshly and without mercy.

How could the seniors of Valiant Heart have reacted like that then, but suddenly let Raylion do as he pleased?

Of course, Raylion was talented, so one might think he would get a bit of extra leeway. But, even in his injured state, Ingsan was still the most powerful individual in Valiant Heart Mountain. He could have done as he pleased, especially to a disciple that was blaspheming his name.

“Oh? So it’s like that?” Leonel’s coldness vanished and he smiled lightly. “Didn’t you still try to kill me though? That’s hard to forgive.”

“Fuck you! You think I’m going to grovel at your feet?! DIE!” p??∫??????

Aphestus attacked as swiftly and viciously as he could, his aura climbing to the point that the ground beneath his feet shattered, quite a decent feat for someone in the Fourth Dimension to accomplish on a Fifth Dimensional world.

However, Leonel only chuckled and caught his wrist.

“Alright, alright. There’s no need to throw a temper tantrum, right? I was just joking around.”

Leonel had used a bit of his coercion to force down Aphestus’ barriers and get him to tell the truth. But, surprisingly, the truth was different from what he thought it would be. It could be considered to be a pleasant surprise, actually.

Aphestus kept attacking furiously, even trying with his legs and feet, but it was all to no avail.

Leonel knocked him out and threw him over his shoulder, casually strolling to the pillars with a grown man hanging from his side. He placed a palm on the pillars, feeling the ancient carvings dance across his fingers.

‘Yes... This could definitely work... Definitely...’

“Ah, gross. Stop drooling, will you?”

...

In the spaceship above Planet Valiant, it was safe to say that Gretta was seething. But, at the same time, she didn't dare to go down.

Contrary to what one might expect, this wasn't because she was afraid of Leonel, but rather that she didn't dare to show her face. If she did, things would only become even worse for the Milky Way Guild which was already experiencing some trouble.

At that moment, a welling up of dread filled her heart. She had already taken a risk by okaying this operation. Now, not only had the three organizations suffered great losses, but among them, three Fifth Dimensional existences fell.

As though that wasn't bad enough, she had lost five Fifth Dimensional subordinates that she had worked hard to groom over the last several decades. There was no way that she could make up for such a loss to herself in a short time.

None of this even mentioned the kind of punishment she would receive this time. Gretta even began to think of running away. Maybe this time, if she dared to go back to the Guild, she would really be finished. Was there any coming back from this?

However, where would she go? To another galaxy? Traveling between galaxies required at least a Sixth Dimensional ship, though. How would she procure such a thing? She definitely couldn't stay in the Milky Way... If she did, there wasn't a single corner she could hide in where she wouldn't be found...

Fear began to flood Gretta's heart, more and more crazed thoughts forcing her scar to tremble and wiggle about as though it had a mind of its own.

She had to kill Leonel. That was the only way to survive. It was the only way to survive.

It was exactly at that moment that Gretta received a call. But when she heard the voice on the other side, she couldn't help but be frozen solid.

“Hello, little sister, your big sis is here to save you. How about we make a deal?”

Chapter 918

Sael stood in a training room, her expression quite blank. Dried streaks of tears left trails of salt down her cheeks, but she didn't seem to notice.

She had lost count of how much time she had spent in this training room. It was quite funny, she had made so little progress despite how much time she had put it. At the same time, as much as she would miss Valiant Heart Mountain, she probably had the most memories in this place as opposed to any other... this bland, grey walled, vacuous space.

As for packing her things up, Sael realized that there really wasn't much to take. When it came to the resources, she decided to let those lesser than herself have those things. When it came to her personal things... All of the most important items were in her storage ring anyway.

She just wanted to stand here.

Sael forgot about the half an hour time limit and just stood without a word for a length even she wasn't aware of. It wasn't until there was a sudden click at the door that she snapped away, turning her head over. But, when she saw who it was, she simply looked away, her gaze remaining blank.

“What do you want?” She asked.

In her mind, she thought her voice would come off colder. But, the reality was just that it sounded quite broken and hollow. She didn't have enough energy to put up a tough front. She just turned away, not facing the person.

This person was, surprisingly, Raylion.

“Are you done?” He asked.

The words in context sounded like he was asking about Sael's state of packing. But, both of them knew quite well that Raylion was actually referring to something far deeper than just this.

"Isn't that exactly what you wanted?" Sael replied. "For me to give up and hand everything to you? Well now you've gotten your wish. Congratulations. Enjoy these empty walls none of us can protect."

Raylion didn't answer for a long while as the two stood in silence.

"You aren't the woman I've been chasing after." PANDA NOVEL

The words were like a stone thrown into a still lake. They seemed to be layered with two meanings that made Sael tremble.

"All those years ago, Teacher Ingsan chose you as his 15th disciple. I didn't say anything and just accepted it, even after he said that he would never take another.

"I've always been jealous of you. You are more talented than I am. You have more support than I do. And even though we are both without family, you at least have a little brother left while I have nothing.

"As much as you love Valiant Heart Mountain, I love it ten times more. As much as this might pain you, it pains me a hundred times more. As much as you want to give up, I want to give up a thousand times more.

"But, I haven't."

Raylion turned to walk away. "I really look down on you, Sael." PANDA NOVEL

Sael's shoulders shuddered, her eyes reddening as her dried tears threatened to burst forth once again.

**

Leonel stood at the mountain pass, continuously drawing in the air with a finger. Every swipe he made seemed to carry a unique air to it. If it wasn't for the fact he was carrying a grown man over his shoulder, he might have even looked to be quite enigmatic.

An odd Force began to follow the flow of Leonel's finger. It was an extremely pale violet that was difficult to spot with the high sun above their heads like this and it didn't seem intent on growing any brighter. Even Leonel himself could only gain a faint glimpse of it. To others, it might not seem to be there at all.

Leonel had spent a long time thinking about how to strengthen his Mage Arts. But, he realized that his thinking had been far too rigid in this regard.

Whenever he prepared to create a Mage Art, his first thought would be about the practicality of the Element and what it could accomplish. For example, the Light Element was good for healing, the Star Element was quite hefty and good for energy, etc etc.

But, after seeing the lotus of arms and hands, Leonel realized that his thinking was lacking.

He thought to himself, if he had the Wood Element as an affinity, how would he use it? Would he be able to create such a powerful result?

The answer to that was no. He probably wouldn't even consider using the Wood Element to attack. He would use it for area control and at most use it for 'life stealing'. However, he would never even consider the possibility that it could create such flexible, powerful attacks.

It was then that he realized what he was missing.

[Grand Bell Construct] had been one of the most powerful defensive spells Leonel had. But, why was its shape important? Why was it a bell and not a shield or a dome? Why was it that if Leonel tried to change its form, it would weaken?

Leonel's conclusion was that there was an underlying Natural Force to the substance of an object.

Wasn't this where Universal Force originated from? It was the comprehension of one of the most natural and ubiquitous Cycles of the Dimensional Verse. Reflecting the Four Season or Heavenly Bodies in one's comprehension gave a tangible boost to one's strength.

But who was to say that these Cycles were the only things that held such a power?

What if [Grand Bell Construct] was so powerful because it embodied the essence of an ancient bell? What if his Snowy Star Owl's Instant Recovery was so powerful because it embodied the essence of a mythical creature?

What if he started forming spells not from scratch, but rather using Natural Phenomena and powerful treasures of the Dimensional Verse instead?

The possibilities were endless when he thought of things this way. He could imagine Fire Arts created from powerful mythical creatures. He could imagine Star Arts formed by observing real stars. He could imagine using medicinal herbs to form recovery Arts. He could even imagine Space Arts created from observing Void Beasts... Just what kind of result would that have?

And right now, observing the Force Arts that formed this pillar, Leonel felt like he was on the verge of creating a spell so powerful it even made him shudder.

A world of Fifth Dimensional Mage Arts had been blasted wide open.

Chapter 919

Something within Leonel clicked. If one looked within his Dream World, it would be possible to find a partially complete Dream Sculpt of the Valiant Pillars.

The truth was that the Valiant Pillars weren't a simple treasure. They had aspects far above the Fifth Dimension to their design and obviously Leonel didn't have the time to Dream Sculpt all of it, nor would

there be a point to. After all, in his current state, the best Mage Arts he could use would be in the Fifth Dimension.

Luckily, Leonel's skill in Dream Sculpt had increased. He was able to 'lower the resolution' of portions that would slow his progress and Sculpt the parts he needed in the highest 'resolution' possible.

This technique not only allowed him to Dream Sculpt things with greater speed, but it also left him with just enough information to go back and complete the Dream Sculpt later should he need it, using the parts of 'lower resolution' to deduce a 'higher resolution' result.

This Dream Sculpt had been completed by Leonel long ago. In the past several minutes, he had been using it as the foundation for a new Mage Art, his finger continuously sweeping through the air.

'Fascinating... King's Might makes it easier for me to see through the essence of something and capture what makes it... it. Then these Mage Arts would probably benefit from having King's Might incorporated into them.'

Leonel took a deep breath. "[Valiant Seal]."

In that moment, all the wind of the world seemed to freeze as though time itself had come to a halt. The air itself solidified, compressing onto itself in layers and making it harder and harder to move.

Just then, the ground began to tremble. Something began to rise from beneath the surface forming a dome of earth at first and quickly refining itself into a polished cylindrical construct.

The moment this odd pillar began to manifest, the impact on the world it had accelerated. By this point, the green leaves of trees stopped swaying, the grass no longer rustled, and even the lava that had been flowing in the area came to a grinding halt, not moving forward a single inch more.

The pillar had only risen half a foot out of the ground when Leonel cut his Force off, forcing the spine tingling phenomena to come to a stop. PANDA NOVEL

Leonel coughed, his charred organs acting up again. Toward this, he could only shake his head.

If he was still in the Fourth Dimension of his Metal Body, he could probably try absorbing some Star Core, Refractive Gold or Blazing Night to heal himself. But, he had already broken into the Fifth. He wasn't sure if those Fourth Dimensional Ores would still have the impact he wanted.

The good news, though, was that those combination of ores had indeed helped his body to withstand his Scarlet Star Force a bit better. If not for this, his Metal Body which currently couldn't even truly be considered Tier 1 wouldn't stand a chance.

'I need to find Fifth Dimensional Ores very soon. I also need to heal myself... It seems that the Force Crafting Guild really is the place I have to go. But maybe...'

Leonel narrowed his eyes. His experience with creating [Valiant Seal] taught him a few things.

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First, with a reference to work with, creating new Mage Arts was far easier and tens of times faster. This was probably the inverse for someone else, but for Leonel who had his Dream Sculpt ability, it wasn't a problem in the slightest. In fact, it could be said that Leonel practically had a cheat code toward creating Mage Arts now.

The second thing he learned, which was a proxy to the first, was that these Mage Arts he created would be far more powerful, not to mention having far less drain on his stamina. This latter conclusion was a surprise to Leonel, but he came to understand after a moment.

When Leonel 'deduced' the creation of new Mage Arts, he was building something from the ground up. In addition, though he could streamline the process later, this would often weaken the effective result of the Mage Art.

Leonel's attempts at building Mage Arts from the ground up resulted in overly elaborate, though quite beautiful and intricate, constructs. Unfortunately, that made it so that they took time and effort to draw in battle.

To Leonel, it was still possible due to his abilities. But, just because he could do it didn't mean that he should, even if he could often quickly replenish the Dream Force he used thanks to his Stars.

However, now, with King's Might involved, Leonel only had to use half the Dream Force he would have to otherwise. Coupling that with a far less complex Mage Art overall and this resulted in an added ease that could be measured in tens of times.

Of course... This was only in comparison to if Leonel had to build up a Mage Art from scratch that accomplished the same goal. Just now, Leonel had felt that if he completed the cast of [Valiant Seal], it would have taken up 10% of his stamina, and that was just with the formation of one pillar.

He had already calculated that for the best, fool proof method of use, he would need to form four pillars. That meant a single cast of [Valiant Seal] would take almost half of his stamina up. And, that was the simplest form of [Valiant Seal] with much of its more complex portion drawn out in 'low resolution'.

On the other hand, if he used his original method, he would have needed to wait until he reached the peak of the Fifth Dimension to even dream of casting it at all.

If that was the case, what Leonel needed to think of wasn't new Mage Arts to use, but he rather needed valuable references that were worth him creating Mage Arts based off on.

With a thought, Leonel took out a special herb he had had with him for years. Back during the hive island event, he managed to plunder this herb... Three-Vein Mending Weed.

Leonel remembered his curiosity back then quite well. He wondered if he could incorporate the Natural Force Arts of this Quasi Black Grade Herb into his armor to give it self healing properties. Of course, back then, he hadn't known enough about his Divine Armor to know that it was naturally ingrained with such an ability to begin with.

Now that he thought about it... he had definitely been really close to using nature as his muse back then...

This was just a Quasi Black Grade Herb... But it was a good test to see just how powerful this new method of Force Art creation was.

Leonel didn't have to Dream Sculpt this herb. He had already done so back then and it took him an entire two days. Of course, it would only take him a split second now, but that hardly mattered.

Leonel closed his eyes for a moment before they flashed open.

"[Mending Light]."

Leonel's body suddenly began to glow as crisscross patterns of what looked like blade marks erupted across him. One could have thought that some sort of Light Elemental Swordsman had instantly cut him into a thousand pieces before retracting his blade.

Soon, the patterns solidified and sunk into Leonel's body like some sort of binding rope. Even Leonel couldn't help but be fascinated by the method the Mage Art took.

Usually, when he built Mage Arts from the ground up, he would know exactly how it would function before he cast it. But, this form of Mage Arts gave him little surprises from time to time.

'I wonder... No two herbs are identical. What would happen if I had used a different herb of this exact same species? Would the pattern be different?'

Leonel was completely intrigued. It took him a moment to actually begin analysing the results.

'The impact was minimal. But, the fact there was a slight change at all is shocking enough... That was a Third Dimensional Mage Art yet it still had some impact, though some of that is because it was created with Fifth Dimensional Light Force.

'There's a glaring problem, though. The Three-Vein Mending Weed is a Wood Elemental herb. Using it as the basis of a Light Elemental Art is already handicapping it.

'I not only need to find a stronger herb as a foundation, it also needs to be one that fits with the affinities I have.'

This was the third thing Leonel realized. He couldn't just use any reference.

Why was his [Valiant Seal] so powerful? It was because he had the appropriate Earth and Space Elemental affinities. In fact, because his Space affinity was reliant on his Divine Armor, if he ever chose to build a Divine Armor with a different Element, he likely would never be able to reach the full potential of [Valiant Seal]. That was something he needed to be aware of.

'This path... It's excellent.'

Leonel found himself to be quite excited about this. But at the same time, the dread of missing out crept back up again. PANDA NOVEL

If he hadn't run into the Head of Misty Woods and he hadn't been forced to use his religion in a bid against him, how long would it have taken Leonel to have this breakthrough? There was just so much of this world that he had no idea about.

'Holing myself up and thinking of ways to accelerate my strength will never work. I need to experience the world...'

"Mm..."

A groggy voice suddenly caught Leonel's attention.

"Hey? Hey?! Hey! What the hell is this?! Let me down! Let me down right—!"

Leonel let Apestus go, causing the latter to fall right onto his large nose.

It was safe to say that Apestus was furious. First he had been humiliated by Leonel. Then he had been easily defeated. Then, as though that wasn't bad enough, he was held up like a sack of potatoes then dropped to the ground like trash. ρ??√???????

He jumped to his feet. Though his nose wasn't broken as it would take far more than just that to harm his body, it still began to bleed, making his fury funnier than it should be.

Just when Apestus was going to implode, he and Leonel both noticed a figure descending from the skies.

Flying was a difficult thing to do unless you had an ability or a treasure that helped you. Clearly, this person was among the former group and had an ability. It didn't take long for Leonel to realize that it was Raylion.

Raylion touched down to the ground, standing exactly two meters from Leonel and the furious Apestus. He was just as apathetic as ever. This was the same expression he had worn even after Aina had beaten him all those months ago. He just seemed unmoved by most things.

“Let's go, Apestus.”

“Ah... But—!”

Apestus had gone through all that trouble to lower himself and ask Leonel to let them join all so that Raylion didn't have to do the same. But, clearly, Raylion still had no intention of staying like this.

Raylion didn't say anything to convince Apestus, he simply turned and walked away.

Apestus let out a deep sigh. He knew that there wasn't anyone more prideful than Raylion. Or maybe there was... But he had just yet to meet the person. Even against such odds, he had no intention of bending a knee.

Apestus swept a glance at Leonel, half pleading. But, it soon became obvious to him that Leonel had no intention of saying anything either.

He felt a flash of hatred for Leonel, but it was quickly overwhelmed by helplessness. Why would the potential Heir of such a powerful family care about them enough to lower his pride for their sake? He probably thought Raylion's so-called pride to be nothing more than a joke.

Aphestus clenched his fists and his canines nearly shattered as his jaw trembled.

They hadn't known previously that Leonel had such a strong background. Ingsan and Hutchin had only recently 'let it slip'... Their meaning had been clear, they hoped that some of them would be taken under Leonel's wing.

But, Sael was broken, Raylion was too prideful, and he... well he wanted to stay by Raylion's side. That was his brother, he couldn't leave him for greener grass now.

Aphestus turned and walked away, his poor posture straightening in a rare instance.

"I need information."

The voice came suddenly and out of nowhere. It was clearly from Leonel, but when Aphestus' head snapped back, Leonel was already no longer there.

"And I need a lot of it."

The voice rang again.

Raylion didn't seem to have stopped his steps for even a moment. But, if one could gaze into his eyes, it would be possible to witness a blazing fire.