

Descent 101

Chapter 101

[Bonus chapter for 350 ps, next at 700 😊 see? I can smile through the pain]

[*Ping*]

Leonel stood in confusion. Usually, the dictionary would respond right away, and even if it didn't, it would tell him that the information was omitted. So, what was going on?

PANDA-NOVEL A moment later, the hologram of his father gained life to it once more, causing Leonel's eyes to light up. It seemed his father had left more than one recording behind. Since this one activated now, it must mean that this was quite important.

"You finally activated this, little cry baby?" Leonel's father shook his head. "It's about time."

Leonel bit his teeth and remained silent, he refused to fall for the same trick twice. His father had gotten him once, but if he got him a second time, he would never live this down. So, he only silently watched as his father picked at his ears.

Luckily, it seemed that his father was already satisfied after tricking him once.

"I'm not certain which Familiar you've managed to get your hands on, but if it's a Metal Spirit, good. If it's not, it's still good. Regardless of how useful a Familiar is to you, remember to treat it like a partner and a friend. If I find out one day that you've treated it as a tool, I'll peel a layer off your ass with my palm."

"| So vulgar' |' Leonel almost couldn't refrain from rolling his eyes. PANDA-NOVEL.COM

“If you’re smart, you’ve probably understood from my words that the most important part of a relationship between a Familiar and a Force Crafter is friendship and intimacy. The more in sync your hearts are, the better the results will be.

“If you’ve managed to find a Metal Spirit, just say ‘Yes’ and the dictionary will direct you to that recording.”

“Yes.” Leonel replied

Leonel’s father smiled, pushing up his glasses.

“Lucky, lucky. Metal Spirits are fairly weak in the infancy stages. In fact, before our Morales Clan took them to be our favorites, they were quite looked down upon by the Force Crafter world. Most other Force Crafters prefer Flame Spirits.

“Before one even gets to the Metal Spirit, there are a whole host of Familiars one might think of first. Wind Spirits are especially beloved by those who focus on the Force Art aspect of Force Crafting. Natural Intelligence Spirits have calculative minds far beyond that of us humanoid creatures. The list goes on and on’!

“However, a Metal Spirit, especially when combined with our Metal Synergy Lineage Factor, has been widely recognized as one of the best. Those with Metal Spirits are the best at crafting small and intricate parts. This may sound like a meaningless thing, but everything starts with a foundation.

“Nothing large and complex can be created without the small and simple. Thanks to this, our Morales Clan has a reputation in craftsmanship that puts dwarves to shame. One day, when you’re confident, take a look at the mechanisms of that dictionary I left you. That day, you’ll be able to see the prowess of our Morales Clan.” PANDA NOVEL

Leonel’s father laughed heartily.

“Anyway, I will get to the point. The simple answer to your question is that you can’t. Making a Familiar your official companion is a long process. There’s no such thing as making it submit. Well’! there is, but I

would never allow you to do such a thing. In fact, if you ever come across someone who has, you should directly kill them.”

The coldness in his father’s voice made Leonel shiver. His father had never said something even remotely close to this. In fact, much of the reason Leonel’s moral code was like it was, was due to his father’s guidance. It was his old man that taught him his kindness. To abruptly say such a thing was too jarring.

Leonel’s father shook his head as though feeling he had said something he shouldn’t have. He hesitated for a moment. Leonel felt like his father was trying to decide whether or not to delete the recording and start again. But, in the end, he decided to press forward and leave things as is.

“All you can do to make a Familiar accept you is treat them well. There will come a time where you two become inseparable. Take it to nice environments, treat it to nice food, and don’t keep it imprisoned for too long. Let it roam free, it won’t easily leave the side of a person it’s familiar with. After all, in the beginning stages of its evolution, it’s not much more than a child.”

Leonel nodded in understanding.

“The last thing to do is to give it a name and train by its side. Metal Spirits, in comparison to other spirits, have a very high demand on the dexterity of their partner. I’ve left a step by step training plan for you in the dictionary to be used alongside blueprints that were in my office.

“Remember, the most important thing is your personal strength. Do not spend too long on Force Crafting. Your old man has made this mistake before. If I wasn’t so fascinated with it in my youth, I would be ten times more powerful than I am now. But, I had to give others a chance, if I really was any more powerful, the universe might not be able to accept my existence anymore, HAHA!”

Leonel smiled and shook his head. If he knew that his old man really wasn’t joking, then maybe his reaction would have been a bit different.

After the message ended, Leonel took a deep breath and walked to the Metal Spirit. It was still bouncing around crazily.

When it noticed Leonel had appeared above it, it plopped down and formed a little puddle as though pouting. Leonel really couldn't help but think that it was quite adorable.

“Well' ¦ Be free little guy.”

As soon as Leonel opened the lid of the transparent cube, the Metal Spirit shot up like a spring and hit the ceiling. Then, without a pause, it rebounded across the room.

Leonel smiled as he watched it. He thought the little guy might have some resentment toward him for keeping him locked up for so long, but it really was like a child. Its memory was short and the only feelings it seemed to have for Leonel were those of gratitude for setting it free. It didn't seem to remember that it was only locked up to begin with because of Leonel.

After a long while, the Metal Spirit grew tired of its new environment and settled down onto the table. Force began to whizz around it, disappearing into its little body like a typhoon.

Leonel watched on silently and allowed it to do as it pleased.

‘It seems that the Force the lab can sterilize at once is limited. I can already faintly feel it dissipating. That probably means that I'll need to wait for the lab to replenish itself every time I finish using [Dimensional Cleanse]' ¦ That's fine, it's still better than not being able to practice at all.’

“Alright, what's the first lesson that old man left behind for me?”

Leonel decided not to bother the Metal Spirit for now. Since Leonel himself couldn't use the Force in his current state, he might as well leave it to the little guy.

[*Ping*]

[Book One: The Basics]

[Lesson One: Hazards]

Leonel nodded. At least his old man was serious when it came to this sort of stuff. The dangers should be the first things he learns about, lest he almost kill himself again like the time he foolishly modified a Force technique.

[1. Metal Spirits]

Leonel frowned. 'Metal Spirits are dangerous? Then why did dad say to let it free. Don't tell me this old man is trying to get me killed'!

[Metal Spirits are highly corrosive lifeforms. Their instinct is to devour. In order to evolve, they need to consume large amounts of Force and high level minerals. Unfortunately, Evolvers happen to have high concentrations of both. It is advised to never allow skin to skin contact with a Metal Spirit. Even veterans who have been by their partner's side for many years can still suffer at the hands of their Metal Spirit Familiars.]

[Whenever you are handling a Metal Spirit, be sure to wear the proper defensive gear. The minimum requirement is a pair of Force Skin Gloves. However, for a beginner, a full Force Skin Suit is more appropriate.]

Leonel looked up at the ceiling above his head, the grief evident in his eyes. His old man really was trying to get him killed.

The good news was that he now knew what those gloves Montez gave him were.

The bad news was that those gloves were a mere minimum requirement, yet they were all he had. To make things worse, he had set them on the table when he brought the Metal Spirit out. And now! The Metal Spirit was swallowing Force from right on top of them.

Leonel suddenly felt that the little guy had become much less adorable.

Chapter 102

[One of you guys mentioned that you might like to vote on the little guy's (Metal Spirit's) name, so I thought sure, why not? Feel free to comment your suggestions, I'll pick the one with the most likes 😊 don't be dirty, think of the children :<]

After this slip up, Leonel realized that he was most definitely not in the best state to continue pushing himself. He didn't know what he was thinking. He still hadn't slept a wink since the matters with the weremen and his body was collapsing on him. It was best that he set this aside and come back when his mind was fresh.

Luckily, after this, Leonel learned some useful things about the lab.

Firstly, the state of the lab was dependent on the amount of Force it had access to. Since this was only a Pseudo Fourth Dimensional World still in the process of completing its Metamorphosis, the lab could only enter what the dictionary called: Phase One.

Secondly, each Phase had two settings. One was the Lab Setting and the other was the Abode Setting. The Lab Setting was self explanatory, but the Abode Setting was geared toward resting and recovery.

Leonel was so happy he almost shed real tears. After entering the Abode Setting, the Metal Spirit was left in the Lab Setting, allowing him to breathe a sigh of relief.

The Abode Setting of Phase One had one main attraction. It was a pool that was eerily similar to the one Montez allowed Leonel to bathe in. According to the dictionary, it was filled with Black Grade Soothing Waters. Leonel assumed that it could be improved by entering Phase Two.

The Black Grade Soothing Waters weren't very beneficial to increasing his strength any longer. But, it was perfect for speeding up his recovery.

That said, what Leonel loved the most about the Abode Setting wasn't the pool, but, rather, the bed. He wasn't sure if it was simply because of how tired he was, but he swore it was softer than a cloud. Without a doubt the best bed he had ever slept on.

Like this, Leonel did nothing in the next three days but sleep, eat octopus meat, and recover in the Soothing Water pool.

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On the fourth day, Leonel dressed head to toe in the tactical gear he had stolen from the Fort and cautiously entered the Lab Setting to find the Metal Spirit still snoring away on top of the Force Skin Gloves.

Though Leonel inwardly cursed, he still resolved himself. He was already about 80% recovered by this point, so he felt his mind was much clearer.

Maybe the smartest thing to do would be to use the cube that had imprisoned it before to move it away, but Leonel took his father's words to heart. This little guy was meant to be his friend, his companion. Clearly, he didn't like being imprisoned. In that case, Leonel didn't want to antagonize him. PANDA-NOVEL.COM

The rest of the process went surprisingly smoothly. The Metal Spirit, maybe due to having absorbed so much Force, was quite languid and just slipped right off the black gloves. If it wasn't for the little bubble it formed and popped on its surface to greet Leonel, the latter would have thought it hadn't noticed at all.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Leonel slipped the gloves on and left the little guy alone. For now, he still didn't know enough to interact with it. Then, he began his studies in earnest.

PANDA-NOVEL [*Ping*]

[Book One: The Basics]

[Lesson One: Hazards]

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[4. Finger Strain]

[To a Force Crafter, your most important treasure isn't your partner, but, rather, your fingers. It is important not to execute complex movements before you're ready or else you can cause irreparable, hidden and lingering injuries to your hands. These injuries can often build artificial bottlenecks to your progress. Refer to Book One: The Basics – Lesson Two: Stretches and Strengthening' ;]

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[9. Force Art Reactions]

[Force Arts are an incredibly complex subject matter, even the most accomplished Force Artists would never dare to say they know everything. This is why it's important to blueprint your ideas and test their feasibility. If two Force Arts clash and react violently, you may die before you know what happened. Refer to Book One: The Basics – Lesson Five: Force Art]

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[17. Reactive Metals] PANDA NOVEL

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[23. Third Dimensional Electrical Engineering]

[24. Fourth Dimensional Electrical Engineering]

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[37. Overfeeding and Metal Spirit Potential]

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Someone else might have been overwhelmed, but Leonel soaked in everything he saw as though he was a sponge. He didn't seem to get bored or tired. In fact, a very familiar aura began to spread from him the moment he began learning in earnest.

To Leonel, it had never mattered whether he loved to do something or not, he always took it with the utmost seriousness. In fact, compared to other things, since his father loved Force Crafting so much, he had a better opinion of it as well. So, of course he would try his best.

Before he knew it, he had already cleared the first Lesson of Book One and moved on to Lesson Two.

[*Ping*]

[Book One: The Basics]

[Lesson Two: Stretches and Strengthening]

Unlike Lesson One which listed a seemingly endless barrage of hazards, Lesson Two focused entirely on what Leonel's father claimed was his most important tool. Instead of learning Force Crafting skills, Lesson Two was all about exercises' ; for his fingers? ρ???(?????)

[1. Flexibility]

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[2. Speed]

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[3. Strength]

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[4. Dexterity]

[4.1 Precision]

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[4.2 Acceleration]

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[4.3 Deceleration]

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[5. Force and Your Hands]

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[6. Recovery]

[6.1 Stretches]

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[6.2 Herbs]

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[6.3 Natural Treasures]

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[6.4 Force Circulation]

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[*Ping*]

[Lesson Two: Completed.]

[Lesson Three: You and Your Metal Spirit – Locked]

[Unlock Condition: Seed's hands must reach a Grade One designation.]

Leonel blinked awake from his focused state.

'Grade One designation'! If I recall correctly, a pair of Grade One hands can complete all Grade One exercises to a Tier 7 Black level, or the S-grade'!

Leonel smiled bitterly. His dad was really asking for too much.

Usually, one could begin the first applications of Force Crafting as long as you reached the Tier 1 Black level in all Grade One exercises. But, Leonel's dad was asking him to reach a level of hand and finger strength only those on the verge of becoming Bronze Grade Force Crafters would have.

To put this matter in perspective, not all Force Crafters would even reach Grade One designation before beginning to work on Bronze Grade crafts. Most would only complete all Grade One exercises to a Tier 6 Black level before moving on.

However, thinking of his father's smug face, Leonel grinned. That old man was so proud of his Force Crafting. What kind of face would he have if Leonel surpassed his requirements?

Above the Grade One designation there was the Advanced Grade One designation and the Superior Grade One designation, each for the SS-grade and SSS-grade level respectively.

Usually, only those who had Force Nodes in their hands could reach the Superior Grade One designation. But, Leonel already knew where his next Force Nodes would go and knew his hands weren't appropriate locations for them.

'In that case, Advanced Grade One designation it is. First, the flexibility exercises'!

Leonel's eyes shone brightly as he began to move his fingers according to the exercises his father left behind. If there was one thing he loved to do, it was win. And now, he was competing against the phantom of his father.

A competition across generations.

Chapter 103

Leonel completely lost himself in a new world. Though he wasn't sure about why he had to do all of these hand exercises just yet, Leonel had already completely forgotten about that curiosity. His mind was entirely focused on the target he had set for himself.

PANDA-NOVEL According to his father's training program, flexibility was the very first step to training the fingers of a Force Crafter. Without flexibility as a foundation, everything else would come harder. The flexibility exercises were almost like a mechanic diligently oiling even the smallest components of their machines, building it up so that even the smallest corners were in top working condition.

Only after laying a foundation of flexibility would Leonel turn his attention to strength and speed. Upon reaching this step, Leonel would begin working in dexterity exercises which would teach him how to use his newfound strength and speed.

Of course, everything would once again circle back to flexibility. Every training day began with and ended with stretches. At the end of it all, there would be a cycle of recovery.

After about two weeks, Leonel felt that he should heed his father's advice. Focusing too much on Force Crafting would be detrimental to him, especially since it wouldn't help him take down Miles and Simeon.

'I've been here for a while, yet no one has come.' Leonel narrowed his eyes, looking down at the wrist watch still strapped to his arm.

This thing was his greatest worry. He always felt that it was only a matter of time before it was used to track his location.

Before, Leonel could only take the risk of staying in the same place. After all, if he could be tracked, whether he moved or not wouldn't make much of a difference. In fact, moving when he was heavily injured would only negatively impact him. PANDA-NOVEL.COM

But after so long, nothing had happened. He had even almost forgotten about it.

'Hm, maybe it's jammed just like all the other technology? I remember that after the Paradise Islands fell, it went completely silent. It wasn't until I entered the Mayan Tomb that it showed signs of life again' | Maybe I only have to worry about it inside of a Zone then?'

Leonel could only accept this line of thought. Regardless, he wasn't afraid.

His body had recovered completely by now and he even felt that it was stronger than it had been in the past. He felt that this might be because more of the residual effects of his dad's vomit brew were being released again.

He wanted to know more about that, actually. He even asked the dictionary about it. Unfortunately, he got an *Information Omitted* response in return.

'I guess I should enter the Spear Domain again.'

Leonel took a deep breath and got up to leave the Lab Setting. PANDA NOVEL

Before he could, the little guy jumped up from the table and landed in his palms, snaking around his fingers and hands as though saying goodbye.

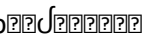
Leonel smiled. Since he had the Force Skin Gloves on, he wasn't worried.

"I'll be back tomorrow."

A bubble formed on the Metal Spirit and popped with a *Boop* sound before the little guy hopped back onto the odd table with wells.

He still hadn't given the Metal Spirit a name. He wanted to listen through Lesson Three first since it seemed to be important in understanding the relationship between a Metal Spirit and a Force Crafter. He didn't want to make another stupid mistake that could be avoided.

Soon, Leonel had made his way to his bedroom after going through Grade One recovery treatments for his hands. Then, he laid down comfortably, not wanting to bash his head on the floor again, and stretched his Internal Sight toward the Spear Domain ring.

WHOOSH 

Leonel felt his body go light again as though his consciousness had been forcefully sucked out from his mind.

When his vision cleared, he was once again in that hellish spear graveyard.

Dark reddish black skies hung above his head, spears of all shapes and sizes were dotted around him, and a heavy pressure that might crush him at any moment rested on his shoulders.

This time, Leonel understood a lot more and didn't blindly begin to walk around. He had questioned the dictionary thoroughly before coming here and had learned a great many things.

First, this wasn't his real body, it was a manifestation of his self formed of his Soul Force or spirit, as Leonel preferred to call it. Second, there was a constant pressure being exerted on him not by the world, but by the spears themselves.

Each spear was connected the consciousness of the owner it had previously. These consciousnesses were the equivalent of the state Leonel was currently in. As such, they exerted pressure on Leonel's spirit form.

The closer a spear was to that massive mountain peak that pierced the skies ahead, the more powerful the consciousness and thus the harder it was to walk forward.

At Leonel's current strength, it was already a miracle that he could survive in this place. Usually, it would only be possible after grasping Spear Force. Only then would one be able to resist the pressure of the spears here. However, Leonel's ability gave him a great buff to his spirit that allowed him to circumvent this.

Regardless, Leonel could only take a single step and touch a single spear before his spirit gave out. So, he had to be more selective this time.

He had gotten great gains from the primitive spear he took out last time, but he didn't want to take up a spear like that again. In order to make full use of the primitive man's combat ability, Leonel had to sink his mind into the same state. However, Leonel wasn't a blood thirsty, battle hungry kind of person. He preferred to be calm.

Without sinking into that primitive mindstate, Leonel could at best use about 70% of the primitive man's abilities. This wasn't bad, actually, as it taught him a lot. But, it could be better.

'I'm not good enough in the spear to use his abilities without just copying him, which is why I need to sink into that mind state' | But, if I learn more and build a solid foundation for myself first, I'll be able to use 100% without changing my demeanor.

‘For now, I need to find a spear that meshes with my personality better. Something calm and calculating, but filled with a firm resolve’

Leonel took his time, quietly scanning each spear in range of a single step of him by turning his head. He didn’t dare to reach out with his Internal Sight, or else he’d be blown away without even being able to choose.

After a while, Leonel smiled bitterly. Without his internal sight, he really couldn’t make a decision. It was because of his Internal Sight that he had been able to pick out [Dimensional Cleanse] before. But now, he could only rely on his eyes. He didn’t know enough about spearmanship to make judgments like this.

Leonel took a deep breath. ‘I guess I can only choose randomly, then.’

After a while, he made a choice and reached forward.

The spear had a wooden shaft as well, much like many of the spears in this starting line, but it wasn’t crudely made like the primitive spear. It was made of a flexible, light wood that was about 1.8 meters in length. Its blade was just as thin as the shaft and was formed with four sides like a prism. The shade and tip were separated by a golden colored wrap which the feathers of a colorful bird hung from.

It was quite a beautiful spear. Though it was made of cheap materials, it was clear the craftsman cared about his or her work, which was why Leonel chose it.

But, it was a decision he instantly regretted.

Once again, he found himself in an all new world, but he didn’t even have the mind to take a look around because’ when he looked down he found that his chest had suddenly grown two massive, soft mounds. And, as though that wasn’t bad enough, there was a distinct cold draft of wind sweeping through his legs.

Why was he wearing a dress’?

Leonel could only keep his tears to himself. Since he wasn't able to control himself when he entered the consciousness of the spear owner, he could only be a passive observer.

The world itself was nothing special. It didn't have the exotic feel that the jungle of the primitive man had. Instead, it seemed to be a small village, not much different from the first village Leonel and Aina landed in the France Zone.

The woman was currently practicing her spearmanship on a few wooden targets. The moment Leonel set his sights on her movements, he completely forgot how aggrieved he was just moments before.

Each of her strikes carried a blinding speed with them. The slight whistling of the wind that came when it reached the end of its acceleration made Leonel internally shiver. It was perfectly timed every time. Her spear would always reach the peak of its speed just before it hit the target and would leave a hole so perfect that the four sides of the spear's blade could be clearly seen.

It reminded Leonel of a venomous snake. Her spear would lull one to sleep then suddenly accelerate, only biting down when it had reached its optimal potential. Though she wasn't as savage as the primitive man, Leonel could still sense her underlying venom. She held an ideology no less vindictive and blood thirsty than the primitive man had.

A loud whistle caught the attention of both Leonel and the woman whose body he was in.

The lady was soon approached by a group of three led by a young man with a bare chest rippling with muscles that seemed carved of steel. They immediately began speaking in a language Leonel couldn't understand, but, quite frankly, he didn't need to understand to see the leering and lewd gazes they looked at him, or rather, her, with.

It was only now that Leonel was no longer distracted by the woman's spearmanship that he got a good look at exactly what kind of beauty he was in the body of. If she were to be described in just a few words, Leonel would choose: stimulating to an impossible degree.

Leonel realized now that if there was no guarantee that the spear would have a male owner, then there was probably no guarantee that the spearman would be human either. This woman was definitely not

human. Even if he was beaten to death, Leonel wouldn't believe that she was anything other than a succubus. PANDA NOVEL

She wore nothing but two pieces of beast skin clothing. One was a strapless wrap that banded her chest, and the other was a short skirt that didn't even make it midway down her thighs. And, as though that wasn't enough, there was a slit on one side, exposing even more of her legs.

Her skin was dark, soft and flawless. Her every movement seemed to emphasize the flexibility of her body—the way her hips wended like a pendulum, the way her breasts bounced with her every slight movement, even the way her hair waved in the wind.

If Leonel wasn't fused with her body, he would likely appreciate the view even if he didn't react much to it. But, since he was, he felt jittery and uncomfortable. This feeling only got worse when the woman seemed to start flirting with the three men as though she would take them back to her home for a round far more wild than anything Xinghai had tattooed to his body.

'Please, for the love of all that's holy! Don't do this to me!'

Unfortunately, the woman didn't seem to hear Leonel's screams. Or rather, this world was never designed for her to be able to.

She continued to flirt with the three men, making suggestive comments and displaying her tantalizing figure without restraint or embarrassment.

PANDA-NOVEL However, by the grace of some god up above, when the three men extended what Leonel interpreted as an invitation, the lady turned them down. Then, she said something that must have been an insult because the leading man turned red with rage.

These men probably thought it would be simple to vent their rage, but what happened next left Leonel, who wasn't even the target of the succubus-like woman, shivering.

Her spear was like the stinger of a murderous wasp. Due to the design of her blade, her array of attacks were all variations of a piercing motion. Yet, even with the lack of variability provided by hacks, chops and slashes, her moves seemed impossible to deal with.

No matter how Leonel simulated, no matter what tricks he used, no matter how hard he tried, he realized that there would only be one conclusion if he were to battle this woman' |

Death.

She toyed with her enemies, a seductive smile curling her soft lips as she stabbed toward them again and again.

The three men tried to run away after their pride had been crushed, but the succubus' speed was too dazzling. She fluttered around like a butterfly, cutting off the escape of three of them with ease and a beautiful smile on her face.

At some point, other people of their village converged to watch the good show. It wasn't long before Leonel realized that this wasn't 'their' village at all. Rather, it seemed like these three men were outsiders who had been completely ignorant of this woman's power, and now they were paying the price for it.

Leonel lost count of the number of bloody holes that filled their bodies. They screamed in agony, wanting to die, but the woman didn't seem intent on letting go of her playthings.

A long while later, the screams of the men finally died down.

Blood marred the practice grounds, but not a single drop had touched the seductive beauty. In fact, that same smile was still on her face, looking toward the three dead bodies as though they were a masterpiece rather than the corpses of three men who had just been living and breathing.

In that moment, the woman's consciousness seemed to turn toward Leonel, something that shocked him greatly. He felt a cold sweat cover his back as her eyes seemed to invite him to play as well.

He startled awake, shooting up from his bed. The heaviness of his breath hung in the air as he tried to breathe, his chest heaving.

A long while later, he looked at the spear in his hand, his calmness returning to him. A cold gleam was sparked in his eyes. This wasn't exactly the consciousness he was looking for, but Leonel felt that it suited him quite well.Â

Chapter 105

[Bonus Chapter for 700 powerstones 😊 The chapter for 1050 coming soon]

The location was a bustling harbor.

Half a dozen ships were docked parallel to the shore, each of them with a large ramp coming out from their sides. It was possible to see many crewmen rushing up and down these ramps. Some of them were pulling large pieces of cargo, others were casually chatting, and a small few were barking out orders from on high.

The ships themselves were quite an odd sight to behold, especially in the 25th century. Instead of being magnificent steel behemoths, they were all ordinary wooden ships. In fact, they all had sails and a lower level that seemed to have slits for long armed oars.

The dozen ships weren't very large at just about 40 to 50 meters in length. However, off the shore, a distance away, it was possible to see a large mother ship at almost 200 meters in size. It seemed to be overlooking the operation.

At that moment, a young man made his way from the distance toward the harbor with slow steps.

His hair was messy and long, colored with a brownish gold. It swayed in the wind, occasionally covering the glow of his pale green eyes. His face had a hint of a slowly maturing immaturity to it. The start of a youthful and unkempt beard was beginning to line his jaw, giving him a gruff but handsome appearance.PANDA-NOVEL.COM

He was dressed simply. A pair of sweatpants and sneakers graced his lower half while his torso was fitted by a tight long-sleeved and black compression shirt that shimmered with hexagonal patterns. There was even a silver chain with an almost imperceptible crack hanging from his neck.

He was the kind of existence that was all too rare after the Metamorphosis descended. If it wasn't for the exquisite spear on his back, one would think he was nothing more than an ordinary teenage boy.

But the oddity still remained obvious. The boy was too... clean. How was it possible for a lone traveler to cross the Province so casually? He even looked like he was having a nice stroll.

His face didn't carry the heaviness one who had just put their life on the line should carry. In fact, he seemed carefree. If it wasn't for the calculating flicker that passed his eyes every so often, one would think he was naive.

Of course, those tasked with guarding the perimeter of the harbor immediately noticed this young man. After all, he didn't try to hide his presence at all. But they were left at a complete loss. How were they supposed to handle this situation?

Obviously, their task was to repel weak Invalids and report strong ones. But, there wasn't exactly a protocol for handling a lone human boy... PANDA NOVEL

"Hello."

The boy's voice snapped them out of their shock. They couldn't help but feel embarrassed that he was the one to speak first. Any hope they had had of establishing who was in charge was thrown out the window.

It really wasn't their fault though. Who walks through a city of Invalids so casually, even to the point of wearing a smile on his face?

The scouts on duty looked at each other.

"Who are you? State your name and purpose."

Someone of the team of three finally stepped out and said this. Though he was trying to reclaim some face for his scouting squad, the slight tinge of red on his face showed that he was better at hiding his embarrassment and thickening his skin compared to others. That was about all. PANDA NOVEL

The young man smiled and took a card out from his pocket.

“My name is Leonel Morales, I’m here to join the Slayer Legion.”

The eyes of the three men sharpened. Their unprofessional attitude vanished and their backs became as straight as javelins. Leonel could tell by their stats that they were much weaker than he was, but their auras alone showed that their experience in battle was far beyond his own.

The scout who had stepped forward first looked Leonel up and down. The more he looked, the more suspicious Leonel became to him.

How else could a teenage boy come out from that death trap alone without a scratch on his body? Even his clothes were immaculate. The only explanation seemed to be that he was a spy.

‘... It can’t be that the Empire would send such an incompetent spy, right?’ The scout’s brow furrowed in confusion.

In the end, he shook his head. He was a scout, not a commander. He would leave this decision to the bigwigs. At this point, if Leonel really wasn’t a spy, that meant he was powerful enough to travel alone unscathed. Their Slayer Legion was always in need of helpers.

PANDA-NOVEL Plus... That was an invitation card in his hand. An invitation card likely meant he had already been scouted and chosen by their leaders. In that case, he had even more reason to bring Leonel in.

“You two stay here.” The lead scout said. “I’ll bring him in.”

The two remaining scouts watched Leonel disappear with their partner with deep apprehension.

‘They’re cautious, but still not as cautious as I thought they’d be...’ Leonel thought to himself. ‘... If the Slayer Legion is run by anyone with half a brain cell, they’ve most definitely taken advantage of the

Metamorphosis to infiltrate the Fort. In that case, it's very likely that they've heard of me before, this should make things easier on me.'

Leonel was well aware that he would be seen as a suspicious entity if he came here so openly. But, he was banking on his being a fugitive to make things smoother. It was unlikely that they'd conclude he was a spy like this.

Soon, Leonel was brought over to one of the smaller ships. He followed the lead scout beneath the deck and down a well lit corridor with a much wider width than he was expecting.

Everywhere he passed, odd gazes fell onto him. It was obvious that everyone here was quite familiar with one another, so the sudden appearance of a stranger had them all putting their guards up.

The knocking of a knuckle onto hardwood woke Leonel from his thoughts.

"What is it?"

A rough voice entered Leonel's ears. But, he could faintly tell that it had a feminine quality to it.

"Captain Sela, I've brought a ... defector."

The lower deck seemed to freeze. Many who had been walking around, going about their business, stopped and looked toward Leonel in unison.

Chapter 106

PANDA-NOVEL [Bonus chapter for 1050... pray for me]

Leonel scratched the back of his head a bit awkwardly, but that was about all. He wasn't the type of person to get stage fright, he only wished their gazes would be a little less intense.

That said, Leonel didn't blame them. After all, it was indeed true that he wasn't very sincere in joining them. He only wanted to make use of them in order to take down Royal Blue Fort. As for the future? Leonel really hadn't thought much about it.

Without knowing exactly what kind of association the Slayer Legion was, he wouldn't casually put all his eggs in a single basket. And, even though Earth was his home, the matters revolving around James, not to mention the Brazinger Clan, was making it seem less and less homely to him.

It was obvious to him by now that his father wasn't from Earth. In that case, didn't that mean he had a home somewhere else?

The only use Earth had to him right now were the Zones it produced. He needed to either clear the first SS-grade Zone or clear an SSS-grade Zone so that he could exchange a Tier 9 Black reward for a ticket to Terrain. This was all he wanted.

"... Come in."

"Go on." The lead scout ushered toward the door.PANDA-NOVEL.COM

Leonel raised an eyebrow. "Aren't you going to follow me in?"

The lead scout and the others who had been staring at him had weird expressions on after hearing his question.

After a while, Leonel understood their intentions. It seemed that they had quite a bit of belief in this captain of theirs. Clearly, they didn't believe he had the ability to harm her on his own. They were confident to the point of not even caring to enter along with him.

To such a thing, Leonel could only shrug. He pushed the cabin door open and entered. What he saw, though, left him a bit speechless.

Leonel never thought that he would ever have to use the word 'burly' to describe a woman, but there really was no better descriptor for Captain Sela.

She was a large woman of almost seven feet tall. She was shaped like a round tank with towering breasts that still somehow managed to be smaller than her large gut.

One might call her fat, but when Leonel looked toward her, he didn't have that thought. The reason was simple. Though she could be described in such a way, her body was still brimming with power. Leonel even saw through that her speed and agility weren't low at all, even approaching 1.00. PANDA NOVEL

Captain Sela stood from a chair she seemed to trust far too much and walked over toward Leonel. She was silent, but her steps made Leonel feel as though she alone was causing the ship to sway.

When she was just half a meter from Leonel, she stopped, towering over him.

'Despite how she looks, she actually smells quite nice... Why is this scent so familiar, though?' Leonel's brow furrowed slightly.

Captain Sela looked Leonel up and down. She seemed curious about him. The boy didn't fear her and even allowed her to get so close without flinching. There were very few people within the Slayer Legion who could do such a thing. It was either that this boy possessed some real strength or that he was simply ignorant to the point of stupidity.

It was a full minute before Captain Sela felt that she had observed Leonel for long enough. Someone else might have felt too embarrassed to continue on for so long, but it seemed that this Captain didn't care.

"What's your name?"

"Leonel Morales." p??J???????

"Is that so? I'm aware of the names of all those the Slayer Legion reaches out toward, but your name has never been mentioned. In that case, why shouldn't I execute you as a spy right now?"

Leonel inwardly cocked an eyebrow. He had only told the lead scout that he had come here with an invitation card, but he had yet to tell Captain Sela this. However, after a moment, he realized that the card was still in his hands. After observing him for so long, it would be quite negligent of the captain to miss something like that.

‘She remembers all of the names...? I doubt that. As an organization that wants to take down the Ascension Empire, they’re definitely extremely cautious. Someone I could meet so easily definitely doesn’t have high security clearance so there’s no way she would have access to so much information.

‘Even beyond that, let’s say that I’m wrong and am simply overestimating this Slayer Legion. An organization like them would definitely need to send out tens of thousands of invitations at worst. If they didn’t, they would never have the manpower they needed to match up against a behemoth.

‘There are some risks that come with recruiting on such a large scale, but I doubt the Legion cares about the Empire finding out. Most of the invitations are likely smokescreens. With so many invitations likely sent, it’s impossible for her to remember all of the names.

‘In that case, there’s another reason she’s sure this invitation isn’t my own. The first possibility is that invitations come with tiers of their own, this might be a high level invitation. If it is, there are probably less people who receive it, so it might indeed be possible for her to know that my name isn’t on the list.

‘The other possibility is my age. I’m too young. There are too many loopholes to exploit here. The Legion might not send invitations to those as young as me. It’s also possible that young recruits are on a short list as well, making them easier to remember.

‘Of course... The last possibility is that she’s just guessing.’

Leonel found his mind running like this all the time these days. He had always been a calculating person, but his ability had amplified it several times over.

In just a split second, he had already nailed down several theories, one of which was correct. But in Leonel’s mind, it simply didn’t matter which was the truth. All he needed to know was that Captain Sela was trying to play mind games with him. And, in that case, he could play some games of his own as well.

Leonel smiled. "If I took this invitation from someone else and was worried about how you might react to this, why would I tell you my real name? The truth is that this invitation isn't mine, I just happened to pick it up. But, my sincerity is true."

Captain Sela's eyes narrowed. Leonel wasn't wrong. If he was a spy, he would be the most incompetent spy in history.

"... You'll be given probationary status. All Shackled members will retain this status. In the meantime, I'll take you to get your ability and strength registered."

When Captain Sela said 'Shackled', Leonel could feel her gaze shift over to his wrist watch as though it was a plague. However, toward this, he could only smile bitterly.

'Does this mean that they have a method of removing this thing?' Leonel's eyes narrowed. 'In that case, it's even more worth it to stay if for nothing else than this.'

With that, Captain Sela took Leonel to be registered, but it seemed that Leonel was destined to be unlucky.

When he wanted his abilities to be underestimated so he could fly under the radar, he was suddenly exposed as a legendary Variant. But, now that he wanted the Slayer Legion to approve of his abilities as quickly as possible so he could move up the ranks...

[*Beep*]

[Subject: Leonel Morales]

[Ability: *Name Unassigned*]

[Ability Type: Sensory]

[Ability Grade: D]

[Margin of Error: Critical]

Chapter 107

Leonel felt a headache coming along. He had forgotten to take into consideration that the technology the Empire had access to versus the technology the rebels had access practically belonged to two wholly different worlds.

When Leonel first entered the Mayan Tomb, he had thought that his ability was D-grade because of his wrist watch. It wasn't until later that he realized his ability's potential was too great for such an evaluation. In fact, according to his father's dictionary, his ability was graded as a Quasi Bronze Grade ability, meaning it was on the verge of surpassing Earth's current limits. Simply put, his ability was already a half-step beyond the SSS-grade.

Unfortunately, the parts of his ability technology on this level could comprehend was too limited. It only sensed a small increase to his perception, but not much else. Other than acknowledging that there was a high amount of error, the machine didn't respond to Leonel's tears.

"D-grade, huh? Not the best, but not too horrible, I guess. As a sensory type, you'll be pretty good for scouting. We've been planning on expanding our perimeter units anyway."

Captain Sela casually spoke, not noticing Leonel's darkened expression.

"I was wondering how you managed to get here unscathed. It seems that your sensory ability should be good even amongst D-grade abilities, hm? A critical ranked margin of error, though? I've never seen this display before..."PANDA-NOVEL.COM

Leonel sighed. There was nothing much he could do about this. He really hadn't used his sensory abilities to make it here. Well, he had, but not in the way Sela thought. He had even sought out opponents. The only reason he looked so clean was because of the self-cleaning function of his silver chain necklace.

Seeing that Leonel was just an average talent, the curiosity the other crewmen had toward him lessened. D-grade talents? They had too many of them. Still, it was a bit of a relief that he wasn't an F-grade talent.

It was widely known that F-grade talents were of little use. In addition, since Leonel's ability type wasn't physical, he was more useful than a usual D-grade talent as well. Overall, he was a decent addition, but nothing worthy enough for them to take time out of their busy schedules to inquire about.

"Alright." Captain Sela clapped her meaty hands together. "I'll assign you to Scout Leader Zhang. You've come at a good time, we still have a bit more things to do before we set off, so this is a good time to train new recruits."

As though trying to shoo Leonel away, Captain Sela passed off her duty of leading him to someone else.

PANDA NOVEL

In truth, it was already a huge show of respect for her to lead Leonel to his assessment personally. She probably saw something special in him when he faced her without fear. But it seemed now that of the two options — him being powerful versus just being ignorant — the latter was the truer statement. In that case, she had no reason to stay around him as the Captain of her own ship.

**

"You're the new recruit? Leonel Morales, is it? A sensory ability? Good, good."

The Scout Leader was quite a skinny, willowy man of average height. His body wasn't very impressive especially since he seemed to be getting on in age, but his eyes were sharp and his tongue was fast. Leonel guessed he wouldn't only be good at scouting, but would be a great undercover agent as well.

Captain Zhang spoke quickly, not allowing Leonel the chance to get in a few words for himself. Originally, he had thought that the others just thrust the new recruit to him because they all looked down on scouts. But, seeing that Leonel had a sensory ability, his mood brightened. ρ???(???????)

PANDA-NOVEL “Usually, those bastards in upper management just throw the useless trash to me and expect them to come out like treasures. Why those useless idiots don’t understand just how good scouting can save lives is beyond me...”

Leonel was speechless. He thought that everyone was scared of Captain Sela, but this Scout Leader Zhang disparaged her without regard for even his own image.

It wasn’t like Leonel was the only one here either. Even the recruits he was taunting as useless trash weren’t all that far away.

As the scouting unit, they didn’t have a ship of their own. Rather, they were separated between the ships. So, it could be said the Scout Leader Zhang was the only Captain-level personnel without a ship to command on his own.

Since they were currently docked, the scouting units were given a large military tent to act as their temporary base. The tent alone was at least 10 meters tall and 20 in radius. So, it was safe to say that most, if not all, of the off-duty scouts were here. But, he didn’t hide his voice at all.

After ranting and praising Leonel for what seemed like hours, Captain Zhang finally passed him on to a man by the name of Malt.

“You’ll be placed in Scout Leader Malt’s squad. Ask him anything you want to know about. Depending on your performance, we can talk about your future prospects at a later date.”

Captain Zhang gestured toward a man almost a head and a half shorter than Leonel. He seemed quite young, not even 30, but he was already balding. Despite this, he had a wide smile on his face as he happily greeted Leonel.

‘... Scout Leader?’ Leonel had a weird expression on his face.

Captain Zhang was called Scout Leader by Captain Sela. But now, Captain Zhang was calling someone else Scout Leader?

Malt laughed heartily and put his arm around Leonel's shoulder. It was quite a comical scene since he had to stand on the tips of his toes, but he didn't seem to mind at all.

He began to whisper in Leonel's ears as though they were already close friends.

"I'll let you in on a secret, little brother. I heard through the grapevine that Captain Sela and Captain Zhang were once quite... close. It didn't end well, apparently. So now, they're always at each other's throats and never hesitate to take subtle jabs at each other.

"Captain Zhang's biggest insecurity is that he doesn't have a ship of his own to command. But, Captain Sela always pokes like this, dropping his Captain title and calling him Scout Leader."

Though Malt continued to speak as he led Leonel toward their destination, the latter was internally shivering.

He couldn't help but remember how big and burly Captain Sela was. Then he compared that to Captain Zhang's skinny figure and his graying hair...

'What an... interesting couple...'

It seemed love really was blind.

Chapter 108

[Bonus chapter for 1400 powerstones 😊]

"... 167 meters to the northeast." Leonel spoke with confidence.

"How many of them and what's their power like?" Squad Leader Malt asked.

“There are five of them. One of them seems to be a D-grade mind control type Invalid. The other four are F-grade Invalids under its control.”

Leonel’s Internal Sight focused on a group of five Invalids. Four of them had what looked like leeches at the base of their skulls. The Invalid that controlled them stood in the center with tentacles coming out of her head.

In the past, Leonel would have cringed at such a sight, but he had gotten used to it by now. Those who successfully awakened usually managed to avoid any weird mutations. But, Invalids — who were essentially the ones who failed to awaken their abilities and thus lost control of their minds — weren’t so lucky. Many of them had obvious deformities just like this.

Of course, those who were successful in awakening their abilities weren’t guaranteed to not have mutations. But, most could hide them until their ability was needed.

For example, the metal A-grade Invalid Leonel met long ago. Had he successfully awakened his ability and not become an Invalid, he wouldn’t have to walk around like a metal man all the time.

“Oof. Mind control types are the hardest to deal with. Luckily it’s just a D-grade one. Good job, little brother. We’ll handle it from here.”PANDA-NOVEL.COM

“HAHA!” A hard slap hit Leonel’s back. “Great job, rookie. I’ll go bash them up for you.”

Leonel could only bitterly smile as Malt led a group of three toward the Invalids.

It had already been two weeks since he came to the Slayer Legion, but this was about all he had done in that time. Other than the training he did in the Segmented Cube during his personal time, he was basically just a glorified compass.

‘Well... At least these guys treat me well.’

The big guy who just patted his bag went by the name Gerolt. He was part of a partnership program between the Scout Units and the Ground Combat Units. He was essentially in charge of their protection as they cleared out Invalids who got too close to the harbor.

Aside from him, the two others were an ordinary man and a young woman who looked like she was a teenager despite the fact she was apparently 30 years old. They went by Davy and Lisa respectively.

Those two were among the 'trash' Captain Zhang mentioned. They didn't have scout related abilities but were rather combat oriented. Because their abilities were relatively weak, they were slotted into the scout units.

Of course, things weren't exactly as simple as this. Before the Metamorphosis, many of the Slayer Legion's members were already present. As such, they had roles they were already very much used to. This was why even though Malt had awakened a sensory type ability, he still charged along with the others, leaving Leonel behind. PANDA NOVEL

Leonel sighed watching Gerolt pull a massive mace from his back and take the vanguard. A moment later, though, he caught himself.

'Since when was it that I would rather take part in a battle than take a backseat?'

Leonel's brow furrowed slightly. It was a fleeting thought he didn't have much of a chance to linger on because the battle was already over.

Gerolt beamed, laughing jovially. In the back, Malt caressed one of his guns in a silk cloth, caring for it as though it was his own child. He wasn't acting like a man who should have been their leader at all. At this point, even the stoic Davy and the quiet Lisa were smiling.

Their days had simply been too leisurely with Leonel around. Invalids never sneaked up on them anymore, they got great and detailed reports on them before even getting close, and they hadn't met any B-grade or above Invalids. He was practically their lucky star.

"Let's return. We'll be able to report some great gains this time. I think I'll finally be able to afford the extended clip." Malt's eyes glowed like a child on Christmas day.

“Rookie, you’re too good. How do you feel about joining the Ground Combat Unit?” Gerolt grinned.

“Are you trying to poach my talent? Don’t even think about it.” Malt growled. ρ??∫???????

Gerolt was even taller than Leonel, so there was no need to speak about just how much shorter Malt was than him. Yet, the latter didn’t back down, even tapping the nozzle of his gun against Gerolt’s chest.

“He’s wasted here. Your Scout Unit is lacking.” Gerolt didn’t seem disturbed by Malt at all.

“And your Ground Dog Unit is any better? Tell me the last time you mutts were of any use?”

Gerolt snorted. “Everyone knows the ground is the core strength of an army.”

“... W-we shouldn’t fight.” Lisa said softly.

PANDA-N0VEL Unfortunately, her words were completely drowned out by the roars of the two men.

“The ground is the core of an army’s strength? Do you think this is the 17th century? I can name tons of units more valuable than yours without much effort! The Air Combat Unit, the Navy Combat Unit, the Research and Technology Unit, the Space Combat Unit, the —”

“You think I won’t bounce my mace off that balding head of yours? Why don’t you just shave it all off?” Gerolt growled.

Even if he looked a bit simple, he wouldn’t just sit here and let Malt list all the units of the Slayer Legion. The fact he wanted to try was insulting enough.

“Oh, I’m so scared. Gerolt the Mace, the man who was so useless to even the shitty Ground Combat Unit wants to harm little old me. How are ground units useful in this day and age? If you tried to march to the Empire’s capital, you’d get blown to smithereens before you took your second step!”

Leonel and Davy looked up at each other at the same time and shook their heads. With Lisa scurrying around like a little mouse, trying to stop the both of them, and Gerolt and Malt at each other's throats again, it seemed that only the two of them were even somewhat normal.

Suddenly, Leonel looked off toward a particular direction. His brows furrowed slightly.

'It's only an A-grade Invalid, but without knowing its ability, I can't guarantee that I can keep them safe. I had a feeling that things were going a bit too smoothly recently.'

The A-grade Invalid Leonel sensed was out of the range of his sharp Internal Sight and was within the foggy region. He could just vaguely tell its strength from this distance but nothing else. However, it was most definitely headed in this direction.

'I doubt that it's locked onto us specifically... This direction also happens to be the direction of the harbor. This is a good opportunity.'

At first, Leonel felt that it was unfortunate that he was being underestimated as this would slow his plans. But, after some more thinking, he realized that this wasn't as bad as he thought.

If he was too powerful, the Slayer Legion would always put their best foot forward in his presence. It would be easier to judge a person's character by how they treated those weaker than them.

'From what I've seen, the strongest amongst them only has a B-grade ability. An A-grade Invalid is definitely a huge threat to them, potentially catastrophic. I'll observe for a bit...'

Leonel knew by now that this was just a small portion of the Slayer Legion. They were actually here to scour the wreckage of Royal Blue Province and harvest raw materials from the collapsed structures. One could imagine that the materials used to build a city of elites were invaluable.

However, this was just the nice way to put it. They were basically just scavengers.

‘Let’s see how they pass this test...’

Leonel’s expression returned to normal as though nothing had happened. Soon, they had returned to the harbor. It hadn’t even been a minute upon their return when the warning signals began to blare.

< “Alert! Alert! A-grade Threat Detected!” >

Chapter 109

Gerolt and Malt, who had still been at each other’s throats, froze on the spot.

“A-grade?”

They mumbled these words together, the fear in their eyes evident. At the same time, they felt quite lucky that they had managed to return to the harbor.

At that moment, the six Captains rushed out from their ships while the seventh, Captain Zhang, left his tent. Each began barking out orders, but it became very obvious, very quickly, that there simply wasn’t much time to prepare.

“Come on, we’re under Captain Sela’s charge.” Malt finally began acting like a Squad Leader again.

Leonel frowned. “Not Captain Zhang?”

“No. The Scouting Unit has always been separated between the ships not much unlike the Research and Technology Unit. Our squad is under Captain Sela.”

Though Malt said this and they even joined up with the burly captain’s group, they were pretty much no different than background characters. Malt might have been disparaging the Ground Combat Unit earlier, but they were the ones who took charge this time around.

“Hoho, is that Bear Mace Gerolt I see? Come back to seek our protection?”

A man no smaller than Gerolt seemed to have locked onto their group as they passed by. Their movements were simply too conspicuous. After all, they were rushing from the front of the harbor to the backline since they had just returned. Many eyes had been on them from the beginning. But, realizing that they were just a scouting squad, many directly ignored them.PANDA-NOVEL.COM

Gerolt cast this man a glance but said nothing else. It was quite a surprise for Leonel who had just watched this man argue with Malt for the last half month. He hadn't known that this large man had the ability to not respond.

Unfortunately, the man who spoke didn't seem to take this very seriously as his hearty laughter only grew.

“Don't worry, Bear Mace. We'll take the front line for you. Wouldn't want another squad wipeout on our hands, it's best that you observe from a safe distance.”

Gerolt's steps paused for a moment, his eyes narrowing. But once again, he said nothing.

The man's laughter was chorused by his squad around them, but no one else said anything. The moment was too tense. Honestly speaking, they took this as a reprieve from the looming danger. Even Captain Sela, who was present for the entire matter, didn't say anything.

Leonel frowned.

“There's a battle that's going to be happening here soon. I think it's better you focus on that rather than getting some meaningless jabs in.”

For Captain Sela's troop, hearing Leonel's voice was probably the last thing they expected at this point. Many eyes couldn't help but turn toward him. However, what they saw left them furrowing their eyebrows.

PANDA-N0VEL He was too young. He looked too fragile. No matter how they looked at it, he was just a rookie who was getting involved in something he shouldn't have. But, at the same time, they found it hard to directly refute his words. PANDA N0VEL

"... Ha, I didn't know Bear Mace had fallen so low that he needed a kid to protect him now. Boy, you should stay away from this one. He's a blight wherever he goes. There's a reason we call him —"

"I get it. Haha, very funny. Bear Mace is quite a clever nickname. Since you're clever enough to think of it, you should be clever enough to know when you should and shouldn't be saying certain things. You're a grown man, why are you acting like a petulant child?"

"Leonel."

The sudden voice of interjection made Leonel frown. All this time, Captain Sela hadn't said a word, but she was suddenly speaking now?

To the man who was the target of Leonel's barrage of words, though, she was like his saving grace. If it wasn't for the possibility of him losing too much face, he would probably bow his head and thank her at this very moment.

Leonel's gaze met hers but he didn't respond.

"That's enough." Captain Sela continued with furrowed brows.

Leonel's expression didn't have much of a change, but he was inwardly disappointed.

"I see." He said plainly. "Let's go, then." p??J??????

The second part of his words were aimed toward his squad. There really wasn't much time left, they didn't have the luxury of lurking around here any longer. He had had a good impression of Captain Sela, but he didn't think that she'd be this kind of person.

He had an idea of why she had done it. To the coming battle, the ground units were too important and their mental states were even more important. Though the man's words were cruel, it also had the effect of alleviating the tension of the troops. But, after Leonel berated him, they had become high strung once more.

If Captain Sela didn't step out to protect the leader of her vanguard and show them that she was on their side, it would be difficult to calm them down again. Plus, wasn't it a small price to pay?

The man was known as Aitken was the leader of her strongest ground combat squad. As for Leonel, he was just a scout who had made a small name for himself in recent days. Who she would pick was obvious. If she could trade a tense relationship with Leonel for a stronger vanguard, why would she hesitate?

Leonel was intelligent enough to understand this. He seemed like an immature kid, but he had been leading his peers all his life. He understood the importance of mental state.

However, what he had never done was allow the disparagement of one of his own just for some cheap points. That was the sign of a terrible leader. If the upper echelon of the Slayer Legion was all like this, they were doomed from the very beginning.

"Hold on." Captain Sela's frown deepened. "I heard from Squad Leader Zhang that —"

"I don't know a Squad Leader Zhang." Leonel responded. "Could it be that you're referring to Captain Zhang?"

Captain Sela's expression grew dark.

"Kid, you should watch your mouth." Aitken growled.

"Did I say something wrong?" Leonel put on a confused expression. If it wasn't for the fact he was clearly at odds with Captain Sela now, others would really believe that he had no idea what he was saying.

“... I’ve heard from Captain Zhang that your scouting ability is the best we have.” Captain Sela stopped Aitken from speaking anymore. “The greatest danger we face now isn’t just the A-grade Invalid, but the other Invalids that might be attracted by the battle. I will need you to stay here with me to point out approaching dangers.”

“Captain Sela...!”

Gerolt finally couldn’t take it anymore. Leonel had stepped out for him in the first place and he had already wanted to say something earlier. But now Captain Sela wanted Leonel, who was just a little scout, to stay with the vanguard? Wasn’t that just forcing him to his death?

Leonel’s gaze narrowed as well.

“Are you disobeying a direct order from a Captain?” Captain Sela didn’t seem to hear Gerolt at all and only continued to look toward Leonel.

“No, where would a little scout like me get such guts? I’ll be counting on Captain to protect me well.” Leonel said with a smile.

“Ignorance is bliss.” Aitken said with a sneer.

Captain Sela gave Leonel a profound look, but said no more.

“I won’t stand for this!”

Just when they all thought it was over, Gerolt swung his mace out from his back and slammed it down, causing a loud boom that finally caught the attention of the other Captains and their squads.

“Gerolt.” Leonel patted him on the shoulder. “It’s fine.”

Others might think that Captain Sela was just targeting him, but Leonel could see through the logical flow of how things had gotten here. Maybe had he not corrected her about Captain Zhang's title, she wouldn't have reacted this way.

But, regardless, it didn't matter much to him.

An A-grade Invalid? He had killed seven even before forming a single Force Node. Plus, there wasn't any time left to argue about it.

"I'll be fine, Captain Sela will protect me. Get to the back quickly."

In the distance, the Invalid was already approaching. But, what Leonel saw made him frown slightly.

'That's not an Invalid...'

A gorilla-like creature which was two meters tall even when walking on its fists slowly approached.

Chapter 110

[Bonus chapter for 1750. If I was in Leonel's world, I'd hope for a doppelganger ability. Even if I couldn't get that... I'd settle for some extra fingers ...]

Leonel frowned. He had just assumed it was an Invalid previously. There was something about this creature that reminded him of one.

PANDA-NOVEL He had originally sensed the creature with the foggy range of his Internal Sight. Due to this, he had made an error in judgment.

'Is this another beast like the octopus?'

Leonel's frown deepened. As ridiculous as it was, the appearance of the octopus was still something he could accept. After all, the Royal Blue Province was located on the coast. It wasn't impossible for such a thing to happen even if the likelihood was low.

However, a gorilla? They were too far away from their natural habitats. The chances of one appearing here should be even lower than an octopus having attacked him in the city.

"Did Captain Sela ask for you four?! Move to the back and don't ruin my formation!" Aitken roared to Malt and the rest.

"You..." Gerolt almost imploded once again.

"Soldier, get to the backline now." Captain Sela stared daggers at the scouting squad who seemed reluctant to leave Leonel's side. PANDA-NOVEL.COM

Gerolt was brimming with anger. It seemed that he really might swing his mace any moment now. However, Captain Sela's next words were like a bucket of cold water being poured over his emotions.

"Are you trying to be court-martialed?"

Compared to the real army of the Empire, those of the Slayer Legion feared these words even more. They were already fugitives. If they were rejected from the rebels as well, just where would they go? What could they do with their lives? They'd basically be finished.

In a way, joining the rebel army was like giving the key to your life to another. There was no longer a way out.

Gerolt and the rest of Malt's squad became drenched in sweat. With pale faces, they could only cast guilty looks toward Leonel and slowly disappear toward the back of the formation.

"Form up!" Captain Sela roared.

At this point, the gorilla was still leisurely strolling toward their direction as though it hadn't sensed their hostility at all. It looked toward the six units of the Slayer Legion as though observing fun toys. It didn't seem to take their formations seriously at all.

Each of the six units was led by a Captain. The only one without a troop to lead of his own was Captain Zhang, but he stood beside another Captain who was a handsome man with eyes as black as his hair.

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The number of warriors under each Captain didn't surpass 30 by much. But, this still meant that the gorilla was facing almost 200 alone.

The more it acted like this, the weirder Leonel felt it was. What was going on?

"Fire!"

The roar came from a woman that went by Captain Gelen. She was considered an arms specialist amongst the seven captains. In fact, Malt had once been a part of her unit before he awakened his ability and was pushed to the scouting units.

A rain of bullets came down toward the gorilla.

If it was any normal primate, their death would be sealed. However, at that moment, the carefree beast suddenly roared, standing on its hind legs and beating its chest.

A silver glow instantly coated its massive body, forming just before the bullets reached it.

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! 

The bullets rebounded as though meeting a steel wall.

Solemn expressions coated the faces of the rebels. Those were the strongest arsenal of weapons they had. Their group wasn't provided enough funds by the Legion to build Force disrupting towers. In fact, their mere existence was top secret, or else it wouldn't only be the inner city of the Fort that benefited.

Since bullets were useless, their only option was to rely on the treasures they gained from entering Zones.

“Charge!”

This time, it was Captain Sela who roared. Not giving the troops time to lose their morale, she ordered her vanguard to take the initiative.

Leonel shook his head. ‘This isn't going to work. Their organization is terrible. This creature is large, but still scales well to a normal human. Attacking it with so many when its defense is so sturdy is foolish. Captain Sela sending a small vanguard forward is the smartest decision, but... they're too weak.’

Aitken took the head of the charge, a tall tower shield strapped to his left arm and a trident piercing forward in his right.

The gorilla retaliated fiercely, another roar leaving its lips as it lashed out at the tower shield with two hammer fists.

Aitken lowered his stance, bending his knees and exploding forward with all his strength to meet the blow.

A roar left his lips, but the subsequent sound left his ears ringing.

Aitken slid back against the ground, crashing into his squadmates and knocking them off their feet. Their forward momentum was completely thrown off and half of them lost the ability to attack in the blink of an eye.

Captain Sela's expression changed. It wasn't just her either. Even Leonel's own expression changed, albeit for different reasons.

First, this gorilla was no normal A-grade threat. It was most definitely infinitely close to the S-grade. And second... The activation of that silver barrier had caught the attention of several Invalids.

‘That’s impossible! The dictionary said that Invalids ignore threats from other species. What the hell is going on?’

Captain Sela and the other Captains grit their teeth to join, but Leonel stopped them.

“Captain Gelen! Captain Remon! There are three groups of Invalids coming from 2 O’Clock! The strongest of them is of the B-grade! Captain Patrice! Captain Sayer! Captain Girard! There are two groups of Invalids coming from 11 O’Clock! There are two B-grade Invalids with them!”

The voice was one many of the Captains and rebels didn’t recognize. But there was something about its confidence and fullness that made them believe the words.

However, just when they were about to move according to his words, Captain Sela interrupted.

“Boy, know your place! You’re sending off five squads to deal with B-grade threats and leaving just one for an A-grade threat? Are your words even trust worthy?! Charge!”

Captain Sela led a support unit toward Aitken’s squad that had nearly been completely wiped out. Her words seemed to snap the other Captains awake. Those who had seen Captain Sela’s conflict with Leonel earlier even thought he had done this on purpose in order to push her toward her death.

Several unsatisfied gazes landed on Leonel, leaving him shaking his head. But, before he could say anything else, Sela had stepped onto a chariot that shot out a chain toward him.

Leonel blinked toward the incredulous scene. ‘What the he —’

He couldn’t even finish the thought before his wrists were bound and Sela’s chariot shot forward, leaving him running with all his might to keep up lest he be dragged along the ground.

Rage swelled up in Leonel's chest.

He had sent five squads away because he was confident in handling this A-grade threat on his own. Let alone using someone else's hand to kill Sela, he could do it himself with absolute ease. But now he was being accused in this way? And chained to a chariot like some sort of prisoner, no less?

Even a man with ten times the kind disposition Leonel had would feel endless fury at this point.