

## Descent 1341

Chapter 1341 BANG!

Leonel coughed up another large mouthful of blood.

'Son of a bitch...'

He had gotten far too used to seeing this ceiling today. But, he hadn't expected to see it after saving a beauty. This wasn't how the script was supposed to go, who wrote this bullshit?

Unfortunately, it wasn't over. Leonel had hoped that a single strike would be enough to vent her rage, but he had hardly rebounded off of an opposing wall when he found another fist nearing his face.

Leonel reacted as quickly as he could, crossing his arms over his head. But, to his astonishment, it had been nothing more than a feint. What looked like a dainty hand, completely dwarfed by the size of Leonel's own, smashed a fist into his chest, sending Leonel into the wall again.

The pain wrecked Leonel's body, his partially healed ribs cracking cleanly once again with an audible snap. With how powerful Leonel's body was, every injury he suffered was like metal being snapped in two, even his muscles themselves were like intertwining steel cords, layered atop of one another with a strength that spoke for itself.

The second wave of pain seemed to snap Leonel awake, the helplessness in his gaze vanishing and leaving behind a hidden sharpness.

Leonel immediately entered a defensive position, tucking his elbows to the side of his body and raising his fists to opposing sides of his face. Like this, he could finally see the rampaging Aina before him. If it wasn't for the ridiculous situation he was in, he might have spared a thought for how much of a War Goddess she seemed to be right this moment.

Her tight beast skin clothing clung to her curves, her muscles pulsing with a vibrant power. She released a barrage of kicks and fists, entering a furious berserk state as though she wanted nothing more than to see Leonel beaten into minced meat.

Leonel couldn't seem to find a gap to counter attack. Aina's assault was seamless and even though she rarely used her fists and legs like this, her battle sense didn't seem to take even the slightest hint. In fact, after just a handful of exchange, a glow took hold of Aina's body and Leonel's brow furrowed.

Fist Force.

Suddenly, Aina's attacks became sharper.

Leonel realized he couldn't stay on his backfoot like this or else all he would be was a glorified punching bag. Even his metallic body was starting to feel as though it was being kneaded into a soft dough beneath this woman's relentless barrage.

He took a strong step forward, taking advantage of his powerful defenses and swinging a punch out that ignored everything. He just needed to break Aina's rhythm, just enough that he could find a chance to counter. However, he had only just opened up his defenses when Aina's figure seemed to flicker, her fist connecting with his chin as though there was a magnet connecting the two.

Leonel felt his head spin, his hook losing momentum. Without Dream Sense, he couldn't shake his mind awake fast enough and he quickly suffered a shin to his hip mere instants later.

'Dammit.'

Aina's violent barrage seemed to leave craters in Leonel's body. He bounced around like a pinball. Every time it seemed like he would escape, he'd find another fist or foot in his path, throwing him back from whence he came.

"THAT'S ENOUGH!"

Leonel's roar was like a clap of thunder, however it didn't waver Aina's assault in the slightest. It rolled off her shoulders as though it was never there but by then, Leonel's gaze had already become a frightening cold. The Aina reflected in his gaze became nothing more than a slab of meat, a simulation hovering within his Dream World.

Going from the difficulty in calculating a Rapax's next move to the ease of calculating a human's seemed to fuel Leonel with a sharper mind. It was like he had just spent years in a low oxygen environment, only to suddenly have all the air he could breathe at once. His body thrummed like it had been hit with a spike of dopamine, his movements suddenly becoming so sharp and calculated that Aina was forced to take her first step backward.

Fists and knees clashed as though cinderblocks. It didn't sound like the resonating echoes of flesh and bone. Rather, the two were like machines of war, commanding their mechs to leave devastation in their wakes.

What Leonel lacked in battle prowess, his mind made up for in spades. What Aina lacked in calculative ability, her innate senses and reflexes covered for several times over.

The two were like a whirlwind, twin cyclones rampaging about and only seeming to grow more and more violent with each passing moment. Their eyes locked across the short distance that separated them, their irises flickering with an undisguised coldness.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Elbows, knees, feet, even a headbutt or two when they seemed to have completely run out of methods to attack. They were absolutely relentless, seemingly holding nothing back.

Little Blackstar hopped in the air from side to side, completely agitated. It was like the poor little guy was watching his parents fight and didn't even know how to go about stopping it. The little mink could only let out exasperated 'yips' from time to time, making it seem like he was trying to get to them to stop but to no avail at all.

It was as though the two had completely forgotten that they were in enemy territory. In fact, with the way things looked now, maybe it was lucky the Rapax didn't come across them in such a state or else the first to be ripped apart would definitely be them.

BANG!

Their fists collided through the air, both being forced to skid back. Their arms hung in the air, their eyes still glaring at one another.

Hot air billowed out of both of their mouths, their lungs and limbs screaming. However, they didn't speak a single word.

#### Chapter 1342 Familiar Words

Little Blackstar was caught between relief and panic. Even though the constant barrage had finally come to a stop, the little guy was emotionally intelligent enough to know that things wouldn't just end with that. Maybe the two had only stopped at this point because past this was most definitely a state of no return. Their stamina already seemed to have taken a large hit, if they went any further, they really wouldn't be able to deal with any danger that came.

"I should have done this years ago." Aina spoke coldly. "You must think I'm really afraid of you. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, and clearly it's because I've been too easy on you."

Leonel's lip twitched. This woman seemed to have entered a demonic mode.

"I promise you this. Every time you do this to me, I will beat you until you're completely unrecognizable. Last time I just ran away and apparently that made you think me to be soft. It won't happen again."

Leonel suddenly got the impulse to touch his face, only to realize that his raised arm looked as though he had stuffed several balloons beneath his skin. His expression flickered and by the time he actually touched his face, he realized that it was completely swollen as well.

It was then that Aina's words about beating him until he was unrecognizable seemed to ring in his ears again. She wasn't just saying that, she had been serious. Her control of her strength was so great that her every punch, kick, knee and elbow managed to generate the greatest damage to his flesh, resulting in these exaggerated bruises all across his body.

Leonel had been so certain that his aches and pains were from his battle with the Runed Rapax that he didn't even notice that he was being turned into a charity case.

'...'

Leonel was speechless.

'Every time you do this to me, I will beat you until you're completely unrecognizable.'

He could see by the fire lit in her eyes that she really meant it. It didn't matter if they were in the middle of a Rapax Nest, if they were deep within enemy territory, maybe even if they were in the middle of fighting a war, she would truly drop everything to beat him up. What kind of nonsense was this?

The worst part was that even though it felt like a joke, Leonel could feel how livid Aina was. The fact she had only gone so far was actually an outward showing of restraint for her. If she really unleashed everything, it wouldn't be her fists cutting into his body, but rather a bloody ax.

Aina was right. Last time he did this to her, she had just left everything and disappeared. This time, however, it seemed she had taken a different approach. But, this sort of approach wasn't something that Leonel cared for at all, especially not when he had just cracked his ribcage open to ensure they could both get to safety.

Rather than being thankful for that or showing any appreciation, he was actually greeted with more pain.

Fine. He had already been prepared for the backlash his actions would come with. But, wasn't this too far? If she wasn't...

Leonel's brow furrowed when his thoughts reached this point. He never usually cared if an enemy was female or not. Had anyone else done this to him, he would have definitely did far more in revenge. He didn't like this weight hanging around his every action when it came to this woman. It was like he couldn't be his true self.

Leonel lowered his fist, his expression only becoming colder. And yet, Aina stood right across from him, her expression not softening in the slightest at all. Her demeanor seemed to scream that no matter what Leonel said, she would meet him from lower ground, even if that lower ground required a fist.

"If you can't understand why I do things the way I do, what's the point? My mom said something very important to me a few months ago. When someone shows you who they are, believe them. Trying to change a person will never work. You're doing nothing but wasting your time. Every time this situation happens, I will take the same course of action. No amount of tantrums you throw will change that.

"And, if there ever comes a day where this tantrum of yours really compromises our ability to survive, while you've made a promise yourself, I can promise that in such a situation, I'll disregard any mental blocks I have toward harming you entirely.

"Trust me. If there's one thing I'm good at, it's getting rid of mental blocks. I hope you'll show some propriety and not allow things to get that far."

Aina stared at Leonel deeply, her own oppressive aura still rising. Even the earth seemed to rumble beneath her.

"I can promise you if that day really does come, I won't hold back either. If you think you're the only one holding back, you have another thing coming. My ax won't show mercy."

Leonel's brows furrowed, his frown deepening. After a moment, though, his expression completely relaxed, a detached sort of appearance being all that was left.

"If that's how things are, then it's better for us to go our separate ways. I can't have a liability who can't understand how I see things by my side. You'll be nothing more than a ticking timebomb."

Aina sneered. "Understand how you view things? What about how I view things?"

"The only thing that matters is my final decision. If you can't trust me to make it, then you might as well go call someone else King!"

Leonel's voice boomed, a wild violet aura raging around him. The oppression of his mind's coercion seemed to stream forward like a raging tide, a tsunami that only seemed to grow taller with every passing moment.

However, Aina's rage somehow still seemed more palpable. Her hair fluttered wildly, her canines seeming to grow a measure as her irises sparkled like drops of ambrosia.

"A King also knows when to listen! You keep talking about trust this and trust that, but all you really want are blind followers that will both do everything you ask them to do on a whim, and yet also allow you to take control of everything at the same time!

"You keep asking me to have trust in you, but where's your trust in me! What's the point of building a Kingdom if all you want to do is fight on your own?! Do I look like a fragile flower to you?!

"You're a hypocrite! A fucking Sociopathic Hypocrite!"

Leonel froze.

#### Chapter 1343 Northern Magnet

A hollow sound rang in Leonel's ears, almost as though an enormous explosion had gone off in his surroundings and now only an eerie sharpness of what remained of his hearing was left. Even with all the sensory perception and infallible memory in the world, in just those few seconds, it was as though his mind was blank. He couldn't see or hear anything, nor could he remember what kind of thoughts he was having.

Leonel never hid anything from Aina. There were secrets he probably should have kept from everyone around him that would have probably made it easier to protect their safety that he had still chosen to tell to her. And, there were secrets that weren't so important, but were far more personal, that he had still decided to tell her as well.

But, there were two things Leonel had never told Aina. Whether consciously or subconsciously, he never even began to express them. It was hard to tell if he had done it on purpose or if it was a sheer coincidence that he never got around to doing so. But... one was hard pressed to believe that two such important things just happened to be matters that Leonel didn't get around to telling someone he usually told everything about...

The first was Leonel's true status as a Dark Prisoner. He never explained anything about his evaluation as a child, how this had estranged him from the Fawkes family when he might otherwise have grown up with a fine relationship with the royal family, or how Lionel had taken his place...

The second though... Was related to the specifics of that night after Aina was forcefully teleported to Terrain... And how that night... The words Aina had just spoken were the exact words James had said to him that day...

These were two memories that Leonel had long since buried deep within him, and with his control over his mind, he never thought about them. Unlike a normal individual who might stumble onto such thoughts from time to time and suddenly find themselves flashing back to that day, Leonel was completely different. It could be said that since those events happened... This was maybe only the first or second time he had thought of them.

In that moment, he couldn't seem to escape it. Without access to Tier 4 of his Ability Index, he couldn't control the facets and knobs of his mind as easily as he could before, resulting in a relentless flood that bombarded his thoughts and threatened to turn his brain to mush.

He could suddenly remember everything about that day. The devastation of the artillery shells that had fallen around them, the screams of women and children who were caught in the crossfire, and even the light reflected in James' eyes when he said those words, his father's gun still held to his temple.

"Are. You. Sure. That. You. Want. Me. To. Kill. Him."

Leonel could remember looking deeply at James, still very much wanting his deductions to be wrong. Maybe it was a coincidence that the man holding a gun to James' head was so tall. Maybe the resemblance they shared was overblown by him. Maybe he had overestimated the strength of James' A-grade Energy Shield Ability and underestimated the power of a bullet.

Maybe, just maybe, his best friend of over a decade wasn't trying to drag him toward his death. Just maybe... Just maybe he was wrong, for once.

However, his mind was too sharp. He could see that change in James' expression immediately, he could feel his best friend's heart skip a beat even under the influence of all the noise. At that moment, he knew... He knew that the friend he had come to know was gone.

"I'm disappointed... I really... took you as my closest friend."

Leonel had meant those words more than anything. James was his closest friend, his best friend, his brother. Their personalities were hardly anything alike, but they were inseparable. It was the kind of relationship that Leonel couldn't explain even if he tried.

If he was honest with himself, maybe James had just as much to do with his moral code than any of his father's teachings had. Being drilled again with the importance of Respect and Persistence was nice, but there were so many ways to interpret those two words. Who deserved respect? What kind of goals were worth being persistent in the face of? The answers to these questions was probably more important than the mantra themselves.

If Leonel's father had been his compass, James had been the magnetic pole that wrenched him northward. This wasn't because James was so morally superior. In fact, James was an asshole, not much unlike how Leonel's father had been in his youth.

He used women like rags, he didn't care enough to pay much attention in school, he put no effort into anything because his family was rich and famous, and he hadn't hesitated to attempt to betray the hopes of dreams of a team filled with his brothers for his own selfish goals.

There was nothing about James that screamed moral direction. But, that was ironically the very reason why he was so profoundly important to Leonel.

Despite his flaws, despite how seemingly worthless he was, despite how by every observable metric that decided human value according to society labeling him a net negative...

Leonel had always loved him. James had always been his brother. The first person he told about Aina, the only person who knew how much he hated playing quarterback, the only person who knew what was hidden behind his perpetual charismatic smile.

To most others, James was worthless scum. And yet to Leonel, he was invaluable in a way that was just impossible to explain. And if even someone like James could hold such supreme value to him... Then who was he to cast judgment upon the worth of anyone else?

But...

"Bullshit!" James suddenly roared. "You pretend to care about so many things, you pretend to be kind hearted, but all you really care about are things ending up exactly like you want them! You don't like killing only because you don't want to deal with the guilt! You don't like playing football only because you didn't get to choose it! You only want to do things your way and nothing else matters!"

Chapter 1344 A Betrayal Long Ago

Remembering back now, Leonel could understand why James had reacted that way. When he spoke his truth, saying that James was his closest friend, remembering the details of how it had happened now hit him like a ton of bricks.

His voice had been so cold... So detached... So emotionless... It was as though he had said it all perfunctorily, as though he was shaking his head toward a child that had disappointed him rather than been heartbroken at the betrayal of a friend.

By that point, he had already disassociated, ripping that part of himself out and ignoring it like he always had. Even when he knew that James had betrayed them during the biggest game of the year, Leonel hadn't said a word, just silently finding a method to win anyway... Just like he always did.

He didn't approach James, he didn't ask him what was wrong, he just did things as he pleased, finding a solution that could 'please' everyone. James got to appease whoever had commanded him to lose by making it obvious he had done his best, and Leonel got what he wanted: another victory.

When the two met in the locker room, Leonel could remember how livid James had been.

"... You knew you get the unnecessary roughness call, right?"

"I know you too well. You don't like to lose, but you're too soft-hearted to call me out on my bullshit too. So you'd find a way to protect our friendship and ignore it, all while winning the big game anyway. Am I right?"

"If you knew I needed your help, why couldn't you lose this one time?! This is just a game, isn't it?! You've already won it three times, did you really need to win a fourth?! You don't even want to be a quarterback!"

The words still rung in Leonel's head, even down to James eventually apologizing. At least then Leonel had still been able to lace his words with some sort of emotion, some sort of understanding and sympathy. But, afterward... he seemed to have completely lost that ability.

While he stood there months later, Aina gone from his side, his body beaten and tired, an entire Fortress of enemies eagerly waiting to take his head... Leonel hadn't truly felt the weight of the events.

He had been confused by James' words. He even remembered thinking them to be a jumbled mess of nonsense. He had even somewhat arrogantly thought that this was just another case of James not being

quite eloquent enough to say what he needed to say, another example of his imperfect best friend displaying his lack of value to the world.

But could Leonel still love him now? Even after such a betrayal? Was that even possible?

"You're a fucking sociopathic hypocrite!"

The world seemed to go white for Leonel. Leonel remembered that he said many more words after that, words that had even left James as white as a sheet and as silent as a mouse. But, in his ears now, those words seemed to ring hollow.

Leaving James speechless wasn't a feat. Hadn't he arrogantly proclaimed that his so-called best friend wasn't very good with words to begin with?

It was ironic. He loved James like a brother, and James could be said to be the very reason he didn't become the sort of person who could treat human lives like weeds. And yet... in order to come to that conclusion to begin with... hadn't he needed to assign some value to James? Didn't he need to mark him down as someone worthy or unworthy? Make a list of his deficiencies before deciding whether or not he was still worth loving or not? Whether he was still worthy of being his friend?

When you thought about what that truly meant, it was sick... As though Leonel thought of James like a little pet project of his, a poor little boy who no one else wanted but that was okay because Leonel would take him under his wings anyway.

Maybe James, in all his simplicity, could actually feel Leonel's true intent. While everyone else only saw Leonel for what he showed to the world, James saw Leonel for what he was... In all his flaws, some far more tragic than others.

It couldn't be said that James was a good person. It was the direct opposite, in fact. He had put his own selfish desires above even the safety of Leonel's life. Maybe he had told himself that he would be able to use his influence over his father to ensure that Leonel would live even after being caught. But, that would have been nothing more than a coping mechanism for his own cowardice in being unable to stand up to his own father.

However, this had only made it easier for Leonel to ignore his own flaws.

James was the only person who knew him so intimately, the only person who understood how his brain worked and how he saw the world. Even if James couldn't put it into words, how would he have felt knowing that he was just another calculation to Leonel? An odd quirk in an otherwise logical world that Leonel was so fascinated by that he just had to keep him by his side?

Maybe James wouldn't have been able to express exactly that in words, but he would have felt it... That sort of lingering inferiority... The kind that cast the mind into a perpetual, endless darkness... The very same kind of darkness he couldn't escape from in his own family and father...

It probably would have felt to James that the friend he thought would always have his back had betrayed him long ago... That what they had built their friendship upon was nothing but a bed of lies that Leonel had concocted...



Everything seemed to hit Leonel all at once. Like a rushing tsunami, it crashed into him, burying him deep.

He suddenly found that he couldn't breathe, his face turning blue and his body suddenly not functioning properly anymore. Everything wanted to shut down around him.

Chapter 1345 Semantics

How long had it been since he had access to Tier 4 of his Ability Index?

Leonel only had a very vague understanding of Abilities when he began his journey. However, by the time he had been able to comprehend, he had already entered Tier 4. It could be said that from the very beginning, he had always been in such a state.

What did that mean? It meant that since the very moment Leonel had awakened his Ability, he had gained with it a perfect sort of control over his body that extended to his mind. This sounded like a great thing, but when he was completely ignorant to what he was doing, he was essentially digging himself into a larger and larger hole every time.

Whenever Leonel believed that he was able to easily cut off his emotions because that was just the kind of person he was, naively believing that this would have no impact on him since he could so naturally do it, the reality of it all was that this was just an example of his Ability at work.

It had to be understood that Leonel wasn't like the people of Earth. He had been born with his Ability Index and he didn't have to wait for the Metamorphosis. The only reason it didn't manifest in full force until after the Metamorphosis was because of actions his father had taken.

Now, however, Leonel's Ability Index had suddenly been suppressed back down to Tier 3 for the first time and Leonel had no method of dealing with it.

Aina, though, had no idea what she had just triggered within Leonel. Though it felt like a long time and that going through such a long list of memories had taken forever, the reality was that even after dropping down to Tier 3, his thinking speed was well beyond the imagination of most. It was to the point where Aina was still in the middle of speaking even after his body seemed to have hit a wall.

"... I don't know why it's so difficult for you to understand! I know I was wrong in the past to make you want to stay away from danger, but can't we at least compromise?! Is it so impossible to meet in the middle for you?! Why can't we just fight together?!"

"That's not even the point. I wouldn't even mind if you had a plan that I couldn't be a part of, a plan that you know I'd be detrimental to. But would it be impossible for you to communicate that?! Why are you so stubborn?!"

"Do you really see everything you go off and do on your own as heroic and protective?! I don't see it that way at all! It's demeaning! It's like you can't be bothered to trust no one other than yourself because no one could possibly touch your lofty existence!"

Aina's chest heaved, her gaze a furious shade of gold. But, it was right then that Leonel's figure stumbled, his hand involuntarily reaching for his chest and his face becoming a ghastly shade of blue.

In order to maximize his efficiency, after learning the full extent of what being in Tier 4 meant, Leonel began to push himself past normal limits. Normally, even something most allowed their bodies to regulate like the cadence of their heart or the flow of their digestion was entirely controlled by Leonel. This allowed him to put his energy toward the best things imaginable.

After his Ability Index fell down to Tier 3, these functions obviously shut off and were handed back to Leonel's body to regulate. The change was seamless as everyone's body was designed to handle this matter regardless.

However, Aina's words seemed to have shocked Leonel and his mind was now in a state of fighting against itself.

He wanted to wrest the control he had lost back to make these feelings go away, but the trouble was that he was no longer in Tier 4.

If a normal person wanted to accomplish the impossible, they would just be finished. They would try to tap into abilities they didn't have and they would fail, end of story. But, the trouble was that Leonel had a Lineage Factor that quite literally gave his will strength... King's Might.

Now, Leonel's mind was in a furious state, wanting his ability to evolve and transcend its limits, but the Anarchic Force in the surroundings was simply too potent to allow such a thing.

This sort of tug of war caused Leonel's body to completely shut down. His blood stopped flowing, his heart stopped beating, even his brain itself seemed to want to close up shop.

"Leonel? Leonel!"

Aina's expression warped wildly as she dove forward, catching Leonel's head just before it smashed against an opposing stone wall. But, she was immediately shaken when she felt just how cold his skin was.

If there was one thing that Leonel was perpetually, it was hot. His Fire affinity was so high that this was undeniably the case, there was simply no escaping it.

Leonel's body went rigid before everything suddenly loosened. His skin and face went completely blue, his lips following soon even as the whites of his eyes bulged with red blood vessels behind their lids.

"Leonel!"

To Aina's horror, Leonel's heart actually wasn't beating at all. She immediately used everything she had learned as a Five Star Medical Professional of Earth, laying him down and beginning CPR, but it felt that no matter what she did, it wouldn't matter.

Aina's face was filled with panic. She could have never drawn the conclusion that her words had caused this, so she immediately thought that it was because she had fought Leonel. The Runed Rapax must have left behind more severe wounds than she thought and her subsequent fight with Leonel must have triggered them.

The guilt was enough to overshadow her world entirely, tears beginning to stream down her face completely outside of her control.

"Yip! Yip!"

An anxious Little Blackstar dove down from the air, pulling at Leonel's hair in hopes of waking him up before furiously licking at his cheek.

Right then, something within Leonel snapped, his body convulsing.

Leonel's eyes suddenly shot open, a blinding light beaming out from them as a Force Art more complex than words could describe began to revolve within them.

...

In an unknown corner of the Dimensional Verse, a handsome middle-aged man yawned, shifting his glasses upward as he scratched his ass.

At that moment, he looked upward, his mouth still open in mid-yawn form before he shook his head.

"Aiya, that brat of mine is always ruining my plans. What is that, twice now? Why can't you just follow the normal schedule I so painstakingly drew out. You're going to make this old man seem incompetent.

"Ah, whatever. I have an excuse to see my beautiful wife again so soon. Hopefully she doesn't make a fuss about it being an avatar again, I'm trying to save the world here, it can't be that such small semantics is going to make a hero like me go without sex, right?"

Velasco tossed an odd ball of Force casually, and yet it shot off into the distance, disappearing over the horizon near instantly.

Chapter 1346 Worse Than Changing Diapers

"Leonel! LEONEL!"

Aina had done everything she could, even pressing down so forcefully that the ribs Leonel hadn't broken yet snapped cleanly. But, she was well aware that when a medical professional had to choose between a few broken ribs and restarting a heart, there was almost no decision to be made. Bones could heal, but a dead heart would never come back.

The sudden flash of Leonel's eyes gave Aina hope, but the sudden and dense cloud of Auspicious Air that began to grow in the surroundings almost made her suffocate. This was the first time she was experiencing Auspicious Air personally, but she somewhat knew what it was. The trouble was that she didn't understand why it was suddenly coming out of Leonel's body in droves like this.

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At that moment, a certain beam of light ripped through the cosmos, appearing on the outskirts of the Void Battlefield and diving through its barriers. In a blink, it had appeared above a familiar hive and in another, it had already flashed into the Segmented Cube without even Aina's knowledge.

The ball of Force appeared in Leonel's room, a region he had begun to use to keep things meticulously organized. It could be said that his room had become his functional spatial ring. As usual, it was spotless and clean, not that Leonel used it very often to begin with.

Tucked into a corner, a familiar silver disk sat. Without much hesitation, the Force buzzed and entered the dictionary, causing the mechanisms within to snap into a different configuration, its gears dancing and complex Runes beginning to form along its surface.

In the next moment, the disk began to hover, leaving the shelf it was tucked upon as a looming shadow began to envelop it. In the blink of an eye, that shadow took form, becoming the outline and eventual real body of a man Leonel was all too familiar with.

Velasco held the dictionary in his hands, flipping it in the air and letting it land onto his palms as he strolled out of the room.

"A Rapax Nest? It seems someone is getting greedy."

The moment Val stepped outside of Leonel's room, he raised an eyebrow, looking off in a certain direction. But, in the end, he completely ignored it. With a step, he vanished, appearing in the dense black fog of Anarchic Force alongside Aina and his brat of a son.

Truthfully, it almost instantly became an awkward situation for Val. Aina was a mess, her tears coming out in a torrent. She alternated between using what felt like almost way too much force compressing Leonel's chest and kissing him with her, well... very snotty face.

Val couldn't help but feel like he had walked into a melodramatic scene. But, when he looked at Aina again, he clicked his tongue.

"Not bad, at least this useless brat of mine gained at least a small bit of my skill."

Despite the fact Anarchic Force was an excellent sound insulator, Val was simply too close and his presence even as an avatar... Well, it could be said that he had certain piercing qualities that made this concentration of Anarchic Force not too big of a deal.

"WHO?!"

Aina spun around, her ax leading her turn. Despite the state she had been in, she hadn't forgotten the kind of dangerous region they were in. From the very beginning, her senses had been primed.

"Oh my, is this how you greet your in-laws? Well, I can't say you're very different from my wife..."

Val flicked a finger upward just before Aina's ax could bury itself into his shoulder.

DING!

The ax arched through the air and over his head, swinging in a long semi circle before just barely gliding over Leonel's nose and crashing into the ground.

Aina's face turned completely pale for two reasons. The first was because she had no method of fighting back at all. And, the second was because she had almost taken Leonel's head off, just an extra centimeter downward and he would have been left with only a part of his nose. The worst part was that after being placed on its trajectory, Aina seemed to have completely lost the ability to alter its path.

She ended up spinning completely around, her ax just barely slicing into the ground enough to stop. But, the issue was that she knew that she didn't have nearly enough strength to cut into this stone.

The strength difference was so enormous that she couldn't even fathom it. Even with her ability, she couldn't begin to make a plan on how she would get so strong. The peak was simply too tall.

Aina was so dazed and worried that she didn't even register the words Val had spoken until several moments later. By the time she had, she had thought of all sorts of methods she could use to run away with Leonel. When it clicked, though, she froze.

"... What?"

Aina, whose hands had already found their grips latched onto Leonel's clothing, ready to leave her ax behind to rip him away, suddenly couldn't move.

Val had already appeared on the other side of Leonel. He ignored Aina, shaking his head.

Though he seemed unperturbed, this really was already the second time one of his plans didn't go as expected. Well, maybe it was to be expected considering what his actual goal was. Maybe even for him everything going too smoothly was too much to expect.

"... Troublesome kid... This is worse than changing diapers..."

Val pressed a finger to Leonel's forehead. Almost the instant he did, half of the density of Auspicious Air vanished.

"Sealing it too much will probably have a contrary effect... I guess I should let it free itself a bit..."

The momentum of Val's press lessened somewhat but the Auspicious Air continued to recede.

"It's not time yet, brat. Try to do things on a schedule for once."

The complex Force Arts rotating within Leonel's eyes slowed, many portions of them vanishing until a far less complex Force Art remained. However, even that eventually vanished, its presence remaining barely a lingering thought.

Chapter 1347 At Best

Slowly, the odd aura around Leonel seemed to recede. Eventually, even the natural color of his skin returned. It was obvious at a glance that this wasn't because his issues had been resolved, but rather because, for some odd reason, his Ability Index had returned to Tier 4, allowing him control over his body again.

Val stood up and stretched. With a flick of his finger, he sent the dictionary back into the Segmented Cube and yawned.

"Welp, I'm going to go and see my wife now. Ba-bye."

Val began to stroll away without a care in the world. But, such casual actions left Aina baffled. That was it? He was just going to leave just like that?

"W-wait!"

"Hm?"

Val turned back, looking down curiously.

"Leonel... What's wrong with him?"

Val blinked, looking toward his son. "His mind is imbalanced. It's not entirely his fault, it could be said to be mostly mine. But, due to certain reasons, things need to stay this way for now or else the consequences will be even worse."

Aina's expression sank. "Then... Nothing's changed?"

From what Val said, it sounded like it was Aina's words and not her actions that had caused this. This didn't change the guilt she felt much at all. If it wasn't for Val's appearance, Leonel would have very likely died here and she was having a hard time reconciling with that fact.

But, if nothing had changed and Leonel had only gone back to his baseline, that made things even worse. That meant that he had suffered like that for nothing. Even though Val's previous words seemed to imply that he would grow stronger, that wasn't something Aina cared about. She was more worried about Leonel's mind and his psyche from here on. What would she do?

"Mm..." Val hummed. "... That would depend. Anyway, try not to die."

Val tried to leave again but he was once again stopped by words Aina spoke. Given his usual temperament, he would have likely dashed away and pretended not to hear anything. But, given Aina's unique status, he guessed that he should probably be a bit more patient. He had heard his son talk about this girl for years and this was the first time he was meeting her.

"Why... If you're so powerful... Why put him through this..."

"..."

Val scratched his chin, pursing his lips a bit. Truthfully, he wasn't very much of a fan of explaining himself. He was usually right anyway, what was the point in getting the opinions of other people? Well, there was one woman who always forced him to explain himself anyway, would he really get a daughter-in-law like that too? How much had he sinned in a previous life to deserve this?

"The world isn't as simple as you think it is, little girl. My real body isn't so free to do as it pleases. Though, I wasted 17 years raising this brat who keeps giving me more trouble every other day it seems.

"You know, that's not how the script is supposed to go. I was supposed to be the father that vanished after his birth but a certain annoying family actually deemed to... Forget it, there's no point in talking about all this.

"All you need to know is that these matters aren't so simple and if I don't do certain things, you two wouldn't get the chance to be two snotty nosed brats making out in a Rapax Nest."

Aina's face turned a furious shade of red. Making out? She had been clearly performing CPR, how had it been twisted under the words of this man like this?

Thinking back to all the things Leonel had told her about his father, Aina realized that he hadn't exaggerated at all. This man really didn't act his age, and apparently, he also didn't act in line with the power he had.

Still, seeing that he was being so vague and not answering much of anything, Aina also understood that there wasn't much of a point in pressing. If Val had wanted to explain, he would have.

Seeing Aina lower her head and fall into silence, Val sighed. He had grown soft it seemed, feeling bad about such meaningless things. This was what happened when you had a wife and kids, your edge vanished. Eventually, this would come back to bite him.

"Alright, alright."

Val waved his hand and a strong suction force formed.

The Segmented Cube, still in its finger-wrap form, flew into his hands.

"I know you're awake, stop throwing a temper tantrum."

"Leave me alone. You son and father pair are just the same."

"Me? The same as this brat? Can't you see how much more handsome and suave I am? If he gained 10% of my skill it would be his blessing."

Aina's lip twitched.

"Bah! Leave me alone! I need to rest!"

"Yes, yes. You can rest, just give me a run down of what's been happening. Skip anything too unseemly, I don't want images of my son's poor performance in bed running through my mind. I have enough bullshit to deal with."

Aina suddenly wanted to find a hole to bury herself in. Couldn't this man be more subtle?! Where was the sense of propriety!?

Her face became like a shimmering lantern of red. She fixed her gaze to the floor, biting her lip.

Val's gaze went blank for a moment as a subtle pulse of energy wafted out from the Segmented Cube. But, just as quickly he snapped back to reality.

"I see. Alright, easy fix then. Anastasia, siphon away some of my strength. Make a barrier of about... Level 2 strength around Lab 1."

"Fine."

Val flicked a finger and the Segmented Cube zipped back onto Leonel's finger. Finally, he looked at Aina.

"You want to fix him, right? Simple. When he wakes up, tell him that he can forget about his little King roleplaying game until he can break that barrier. Oh, and tell him that I have enough power in a single cell to shatter that barrier ten times over."

Val waved a hand and strode away, his laughter causing the Rapax Nest to quake.

"A King? What a joke! Your old man's still alive. At best, you can be a little Prince."

Chapter 1348 Just Like...

Leonel shot up, his forehead almost banging against Aina's. But, in a final moment, he managed to come to a grinding halt, suddenly finding that the control he had over his body had reached a truly exaggerated degree.

For a moment, their noses were barely a millimeter apart, their gazes locking. Even with the terrible scent hanging in the air, Leonel almost became too keenly aware of Aina's own delicate fragrance by contrast. He had no idea how she managed to not latch onto the stink the rest of this place had, but maybe he should never challenge a woman's ability to remain clean.

Leonel's expression flickered, his mind suddenly running through everything it had been through in just the last several minutes. His brows furrowed. He had more control over himself now, but he didn't quite know how he should be reacting. His instinct was just to shut it all down again.

Seeing Leonel's expression growing colder, Aina suddenly spoke.

"Your father said...!"

Aina repeated everything Val had said verbatim, not holding back. She thought about taking the edge off of the words, but in the end, she decided against it. She thought that with the relationship Leonel had with his father, maybe the rawest form of what he had said was exactly what Leonel needed to hear.

Leonel was astonished, not knowing what to say for a long time.

"... My dad was here?"

Leonel blinked as Aina nodded. He sent his mind into the Segmented Cube and he did indeed find that Lab 1 was surrounded from all sides by a barrier. Even without trying, he knew that he didn't have a single chance at even cracking it, a calculation that he was surprised his mind could even accomplish, let alone complete so quickly.

Leonel seemed to get the message loud and clear. This was how large the gap between him and the peak of the Dimensional Verse was. No, this couldn't even be considered the peak of the Verse at all. At best, it could be considered the pinnacle of the middle tiers.

In truth, Leonel didn't need to hear this at all. Just the information that his dad had been here was enough to paint the picture. To be able to so casually enter a Rapax Nest then leave as he pleased without a word... Well, it all spoke for itself.

Leonel suddenly smiled, his gaze lighting up.

Aina was completely caught off guard by this. She couldn't truly understand. The words Leonel's father had spoken might seem benign from a certain perspective, but from another... They were the kind of words Leonel would hate to hear the most.

She had come to learn of what her mistakes were in the past. She didn't give Leonel the support he needed even though he had always been there for her. This was why she had resolved that no matter what happened between now and the future, she would always be here.

Her fighting it out with Leonel didn't mean she had already given up on this. It was just her way of showing that she had no intention of giving up on him. Maybe it wasn't the perfect method, but they



were ultimately still young and she had spent most of her life without a normal range of emotion... it had been the only way she could think of to force Leonel to see her perspective.

Ironically, though, it had ended up being her words that triggered all of this, but that only made it all the more baffling.

Everything about Val's words had been a culmination of everything Leonel hated. His father's words had doubted him, belittled him, and even put him in his place without care or reserve for his face. So, why was it that Leonel was grinning and laughing?

Aina hadn't been nearly as harsh when she said similar things, she had only warned Leonel that the Dimensional Verse wasn't the kind of place that could be underestimated... She didn't want him to put his life on the line just for the sake of saving people he didn't even know... She wanted him to stay by her side, safe.

It was then that it seemed to click for Aina.

The love that Leonel had for his father made what he might feel for her feel small and meaningless. There was maybe no one in his life and Leonel respected and adored more than his father. She had thought that because of how Leonel had practically worshipped the ground she walked on, that she could speak more freely than 99% of people in his life while in his presence...

In a certain respect, she wasn't wrong. But, it was always a matter of relativity. The things that Val could say to Leonel weren't the sort of things that she could get away with saying.

At that moment, Aina came to understand. Leonel had put a lot of effort into winning her heart, years, even. By this point, she would be lying if she said that she cared for anyone more than she cared for him. In fact, Leonel and her father held equal weight in her heart.

Maybe that was because her relationship with her father wasn't nearly as good as the one Leonel shared with his own, but... There was a certain level of love that blood ties could form that other forms of love otherwise couldn't... And yet, Leonel had managed to reach that level for her, while she...

She had yet to reach that level for him.

The truth was very simple. Despite his smile and charisma, Leonel was arrogant to his very bones. He had a relentless drive to win, he felt his opinion was more likely than not the right way to go, and he felt that questioning and doubting him were things most people simply didn't have the right to do...

Even Aina, herself.

However, his father was very different. If there was one man that was his better, that had the right to question him, to doubt him, that might very well have an opinion that was superior to his own...

It was Velasco Morales.

A challenge from anyone else made Leonel turn his nose up. A challenge from his father, though, stoked the flames in his heart and made his gaze light up with ruthless ambition. Much like the day Leonel began to learn to Craft, this time was not much different.

'Just a Prince? Okay, for now I'll just be a Prince until I can kick your ass, old man.'

Leonel's skin reddened, his veins pulsing with a dense reddish gold. A singular Rune floated within each one of his irises, his blood rushing throughout his body.

In that moment, he became keenly aware of just how close Aina's nose was to his own. His fiery gaze met hers, his elevated heartbeat seeming to resonate between them.

Aina's skin flushed red, looking away and pulling back slightly. Something about Leonel's eyes made her feel like a deer in headlights.

But, it was precisely because she did this that she didn't react in time to a pair of lips pressing onto her own. Somehow, it felt just like the first time.

#### Chapter 1349 Explain in Words

An explosion went off in Aina's mind. Of all the things she thought would happen today, this was the very last. For a moment, she couldn't sense anything else but the sensation on her lips. Her heart fluttered, her blood ran hot, and her lower belly pulsed with an odd feeling she would have trouble putting into words.

Her weight subconsciously fell onto Leonel, her palm pressing to his chest and her lips weighing heavier on his as though to fuse with him. With how Leonel had sat up and how she kneeled on both legs, the shift in balance wasn't a lot, but it was usually more than enough to force someone else to waver. And yet, Leonel's body was like a sturdy wall, not shifting in the slightest even as Aina leaned into him.

Little Blackstar, who had fallen into complete silence the moment Velasco had appeared, tilted his little head to the side. Even with all the emotional intelligence in the world, the little mink was ultimately still a child and this situation was confusing nonetheless.

They had gone from Leonel playing the part of valiant hero, to Aina unleashing a barrage of punches and kicks at his expense, to Leonel nearly dying, then to Aina meeting a man she was incredibly nervous around, then to Leonel being insulted maybe worse than he ever had in his entire life, all to end in...

A kiss?

When Aina's foggy mind cleared and the reality of it all snapped into place, she pulled back quickly, her palm leaving Leonel's chest and becoming a fist that pressed into her own. She breathed heavily and erratically, her mind all over the place and her body flushed red.

Aina didn't seem to want to look Leonel in the eye. There was something about this that felt wrong. She was one part happy, another part apprehensive, and a large part confused about how she should be feeling.

It felt good. It felt really good. Even if she had never experienced it with someone else, something in her intuition told her that Leonel was the only one who could possibly make her body feel like this with what amounted to a simple peck on the lip.

He hadn't touched her body, he hadn't used his tongue, he hadn't even used any great pressure or coercion. In fact, it was she who had found herself leaning heavily into him as though wanting for more. And yet, she felt like she had flown to another world for a moment.

"... Why did you do that?" Aina asked softly.

The happiness came too quickly. In one moment, she was made keenly aware that she lacked true stature in Leonel's heart, and in the next... He was making her feel as though she was riding on a cloud. She felt that in one part she should be angry, and she even somewhat felt used, but she still couldn't bring herself to feel that way.

"Because I really wanted to." Leonel said as though it was just a matter of fact. And, maybe it was to him, but that didn't answer any of Aina's question.

"... That's not an answer."

"Isn't it?" Leonel smiled.

Aina's heart began to beat wildly again. Leonel's words were definitely not always like this. At the very least, he couldn't always make her hang onto his every word like this. The Leonel she remembered was charming, but he also had a streak of boyish innocence and naivete to him. This Leonel felt more forceful and determined.

Was this the change brought about by his goal? If Aina was honest, she hadn't spent enough time with Leonel post his decision to pick up on this change. It might have also been because she had spent most of that time trying to get him to change his mind about said goal.

However, there was no denying that this Leonel held an even more lethal attraction to her, one that was far more difficult to ignore. It awoke a bit of her masochistic tendencies, something the previous Leonel had entirely failed to pick up on, but this Leonel would likely be far more in tune to.

Aina was both frightened and excited by this prospect. But, after a moment, she took a deep breath and calmed. After a second deep breath, she had returned to her baseline, her flushed skin receding and her gaze finally meeting Leonel's.

"Explain it to me, in real words." Aina said gently.

Leonel blinked and thought for a moment.

"You're a distraction. I can't focus on the task at hand or make harsh and necessary decisions when you're around. In the time we weren't together, my progress was far faster than anything I've ever experienced.

"However, it's become more difficult to ignore you than I thought. My mind ends up wasting its potential power output by diverting some of its attention to suppressing and locking away emotions I would otherwise feel.

"But, I've gotten way too ahead of myself. My dad is right, if he's alive, at best I can be a prince. There are certain burdens I shouldn't be taking on right now, burdens that would ultimately have the opposing effect to what I want. Instead of helping me in the future, it will instead slow my progress now.

"Since that's the case, there are certain things that aren't worth it. Treating you like a subordinate instead of my Queen, for example, is one. It's objectively a foolish waste of time that would, theoretically, help me to stay focused and keep an eye on the future. But, in the short term, it strains our relationship unnecessarily, while in the long term, no human has an infinite amount of patience.

"Even if you are determined to stay by my side now, it's impossible to tell if you'll still feel that way in 10 years, or 20 years, or more time than even that. And, if I keep you by my side during all that time, while insisting to not cross certain barriers, it only makes the day you eventually snap and give up all the more devastating because you would have been such an important and ingrained foundational pillar of all I had built until that point.

"Given that—"

"Just shut up and kiss me again."

Aina's lips stifled what would have been the rest of Leonel's explanation.

#### Chapter 1350 Weird Mind

Aina had realized something very important. The weight of Velasco's words, to Leonel, weighed more than anything else. If Aina had known what Velasco had said to Leonel months ago, she would have realized even more so how true those words were.

'Listen kid, I always told you women were complicated. You spent four years chasing after that little girl, she probably thinks you'll always be there for her whenever it is she wants to come back...'

They were a sprawl of words randomly thrown into what was assuredly another prank, but Leonel seemed to have latched onto them. It made it far easier for him to draw a line in the sand and maybe was part of the reason he had been so callous to Aina's words that day.

It could be said that if there was anything Aina was certain of now, it was that Leonel wouldn't always be waiting for her. He hadn't come to stop her wedding, he hadn't been the catalyst who saved her, he hadn't even checked up on her afterward, and it all culminated in maybe the greatest heartbreak she had ever experienced in her lifetime.

However, Aina was very determined about one thing. She didn't know how long it would take, she didn't know what she would have to do, but she would definitely one day be able to say words to Leonel that weighed just as heavily as his father's did.

To her, this wasn't a matter of competition, but rather a reminder that she still had efforts to be made.

The reality was that she didn't like Leonel bluntly breaking down their relationship into gains and losses, benefits and pitfalls. She hated it so much that while Leonel had been following her request to explain it in clear words, she had to fight back the will to punch him in the face... again.

This was the reason why she had stopped him despite him doing exactly what she had asked for.

However, she understood that this was truly how Leonel saw things even if she couldn't quite understand. Maybe his method of courting her in the past, his perpetual smile, his following her every step and action, had never really been him... That Leonel was always the version of himself he had thought she would want.

It was the very same naïve stage every young man went through, chasing after the woman of their dreams. They made the very false assumption that the best course of action to take was to simply comply with all of her wishes, she would definitely like you then... Unfortunately, this couldn't have been further from the truth.

Of course, Leonel hadn't taken such action to an exaggerated degree. But, he had most definitely let Aina mold many of his thoughts and tendencies, even to the point it only took him a few days by her side to ignore how much he hated the way she viewed killing.

As Leonel grew, though, his own thoughts and opinions solidified and the way he viewed the world had subtly changed. He was still the same Leonel, but he was far more assertive. It was hard to say that he had truly matured, but he was definitely more of an adult.

Aina thus understood that much of Leonel's infatuation had only been surface level and she could only be said to have a place in his heart... but she didn't own it.

Everyone had a small bit of selfishness in their heart. Aina simply wanted Leonel to love her as much as she loved him... Nothing more, nothing less.

"Yip! Yip!"

Little Blackstar happily chirped, but also seemed to remind the two that they were still deep within enemy territory.

Aina had already found herself straddling Leonel when Blackstar's call made her blush. The little mink was right, they were technically in a very dangerous situation right now. She had been a small measure away from asking Leonel if he had a condom again. But, with her better judgment, she decided that she definitely didn't want to have her first time in this place.

"Hm?"

Leonel's head turned in a certain direction. It took several moments, so long, in fact, that Aina thought that he was mistaken. But, after about half a minute, her gaze, too, sharpened.

"It's fine." Leonel said. "They're humans."

As soon as Leonel said these words, a group of three rushed out of the dense black fog.

They all looked to be in terrible shape, not a single one being without a devastating injury of some sort. In fact, it could be said that they would have already died if not for a certain event causing the Rapax they had been fighting to rush off.

There didn't seem to be a decisive leader amongst the three while one was a woman and the other two were men. Leonel couldn't recognize them, so it was likely that their foggy lake hadn't been the only one. But, he had to think, just how big was the Rapax Nest for them to send them all in here? With all the Sectors there were, and there being at least three Golden Tokens to each, there had to be many that qualified for this trial...

When they three spotted Leonel and Aina, though, their lips couldn't help but twitch.

Leonel's back was reclined against a wall as he sat on the ground. Aina, though, had straddled his waist, placing both palms on his chest. Even though they both had serious expressions on now, there was no doubt about what they must have been doing before, especially since Aina's short beast skin skirt threatened to roll up her thigh and past her bottom.

The two young men couldn't help but gulp, causing Leonel to raise an eyebrow.

Seeing this, Aina almost couldn't help but giggle. Like the flip of a switch, Leonel had gone from not caring to if she got married to someone else to suddenly being pricked by looks that ultimately couldn't see anything anyway.

She was suddenly fascinated by how Leonel's mind worked.