

Descent 601

Chapter 601

The youths were absolutely stunned.

A flying treasure? What kind of joke was this?

Of all the ways they expected things to end, this was the very last. This wasn't because they were too stupid to consider it a possibility but rather because wasting time considering such a thing would have been exactly that... a waste of time.

One had to understand that everything changed when one rose in the Dimensions. Just like there were some airplanes that couldn't rise above a certain altitude without stalling, the same logic applied to the flying treasures of the Dimensional Verse.

The flying treasures these youths were used to were only Tier 4 or 5 Black Grade treasures at best. These kind of flying treasures would hardly rise ten meters into the air in a Fifth Dimensional world.

Knowing this, why would they even consider this to be a problem? They had no way of knowing that Leonel had a Tier 9 Black Grade treasure. He was easily able to rise up 20 meters before he even began to feel some resistance.

The young man who headed their mission, a youth who went by the name of Emrel, was just as shocked as everyone else. But, he also reacted quickly.

"Shoot them down!"

Unfortunately, by the time the words had come out, Leonel and Aina were already 25 meters above the ground.

'Hm... Not enough...'

Using the trees as cover, Leonel weaved in and out of the foliage, making use of the terrain to protect both himself and Aina. However, in the back of his mind, he was already planning to improve this surfboard. He could feel that it was working hard just to keep him this high off the ground, any higher and it might collapse entirely.

Luckily, the forest landscape was in Leonel's favor. Getting out of range of the youths below was a simple matter of planning a path and following suit.

Not only was Leonel able to pick out those with long ranged abilities, he was also able to project their lines of sight in his mind as well. After that, avoiding them was as easy as breathing.

Not having expected such a result, Emrel hadn't even prepared a large core of ranged units. He could only watch as Leonel shot through the skies and disappeared.

"Dammit!" Emrel stomped punched a thick tree hard. Yet, despite his strength, barely a dent was made. He looked no different from a mortal of the Third Dimension completing the same exact action.

Henorin's eyes narrowed as Leonel disappeared over the horizon. But, she didn't pursue. She could tell that these matters were already as good as over.

... PANDA NOVEL

Aina wheezed and dry heaved under the chorus of Leonel's laughter.

"Karma is a beautiful thing."

Aina glared at him through her mask, but dry heaved again just as she was about to come back with a smart reply.

"You know, you should probably take your mask off if you want to vomit, just saying." Leonel grinned. But in response, he only got another glare.

The two landed in the same mountain pass they had been in when they were first teleported to this planet. Truthfully, Leonel had just wanted to teleport to Valiant Heart Mountain immediately, but Aina insisted that being baptized by the pressure of the pillars was good training.

...

The elder of Valiant Heart Mountain had been in a good mood. Though he had said that he wouldn't accept any youths who could cross these gates and that they would have three years to do so or be kicked out... The truth was that he said that every year.

These pillars were actually a portal to Valiant Heart Mountain's Sacred Land and only disciples of the highest standing even had a chance to enter that place. $\rho \int$

Of course, at the moment, this portal wasn't active. So, even if these youths managed to cross it, it wouldn't be much more than a symbolic victory. But, the elder was also aware that the earlier these youths crossed this trial, the more benefit they would gain from it in the future.

So, during every acceptance ceremony, he would tease the youths in this exact way, forcing them to walk up the mountains. Those who were able to make it even half way were rewarded by him. Not only would they gain his favor, but he would personally kill the beasts the held the golden tags and hand them over as a reward.

The truth was that the beasts were just a bait, especially the golden tag ones.

For one, amongst the beasts, there were many without tags at all. The smart youths who were more confident in their strength would think of targeting the more powerful beasts. It made sense, the more powerful a beast, the more likely it would have a golden tag.

Though this might be true, the reality was much harsher. Though the elder had followed these rules, he had also left behind several dummies. Some of these dummies didn't have tags at all, while most only had normal tags.

The elder thought himself to be quite clever. He believed that only youths with the greatest courage would choose to challenge the mountain pass while the others weren't worth considering at all.

Of course, he didn't even consider the fact that battling beasts and putting your life on the line against the most powerful of them was also a form of courage.

But, given his age, he had long since been set in his ways. And, it especially didn't help in changing his mind that the youths from this year seemed to be far more talented than the norm, it couldn't help but bring a bright smile to his face.

Ingkath had crossed the 80% mark already and was just 60 or so meters from the pillar.

Ironla was not far behind, being less than five meters from the back of the hulking giant. And, this was most likely due to the fact she had started a step later.

Balthorn was struggling the worst of the four of them. Droplets of sweats beaded down her pretty face and blood leaked from her lips as her every step seemed to cause her no small amount of damage. But, she continued to trudge forward.

“... Just be my girlfriend and I'll carry you up! Come on!”

Radlis almost seemed unaffected. If it wasn't for the fact his back was hunched just a little bit more, others would think he really was immune.

But, at the moment, Balthorn wanted nothing more than to cut off his tongue.

“Hm?”

The elder suddenly looked up to find Leonel and Aina landing in the opening, his brow furrowed with confusion.

“You stay here, you're still injured.” Aina said strictly. “I'll go. This isn't very important to you anyway.”

“You just want to get away from the stink, don’t you?”

“Yes.” Aina held nothing back.

“... No love in this world.”

Aina felt glad she was wearing a mask at that moment. If not for it, she wouldn’t be able to hide her smile.

“Alright, I’m going.”

Under the stunned gazes of everyone, Aina suddenly began to sprint up the mountain pass.

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Leonel’s lip curled into a smile, but he didn’t chase after Aina. She was right, his body really was in no condition to deal with such pressure. Though the other youths couldn’t sense it by standing where he was now, Leonel’s senses were too sharp not to.

Those pillars made Brave City look like nothing more than a joke. And, Leonel was absolutely certain that this was only a fraction of the strength these pillars could display.

It seemed like nothing more than a coincidence that the elders were standing before them like that... But Leonel had a feeling that if they were to move away, let alone traveling up so far as those four had already done, they might not even make it 10% of the way through.

That said, as long as those elders kept nerfing the mountain pass’s oppression... Leonel had the utmost confidence in Aina.

As though blazing a trail, Aina shot up the mountain, making it from Leonel's side to the 300 meter mark in the blink of an eye.

She seemed to embody the perfect form of a sprinter with her every movement. There was no wasted energy, no unnecessary movements, she almost felt no different from a machine designed to kill.

Though Leonel could replicate this feat by undergoing several calculations before deciding just which form of running suited him best, Aina was different. She needed to rely on nothing other than her talent and intuition, leaving her in a realm all to her own.

The elders thought that Aina was clearly overestimating herself. To have little to no regard for the mountain pass in such a way, even sprinting up as though it was a race rather than what it truly was – a fight to the death – they could only conclude that much.

Even Ingkath had slowly crossed this line of demarcation before slowly building up momentum. But, Aina didn't even take a deep breath before crossing over the line.

Of course, one reason for this was because Aina's senses were considerably dulled due to her curse. In fact, if it wasn't for her sight and hearing being so abnormal, her sensory perception would be no better than a normal human's. So, truthfully, she didn't sense the line of division as clearly as everyone else did.

But, on the other hand... PANDA NOVEL

It hardly mattered.

Aina shot through the line. Her first step sunk her body so low that it seemed as though she might trip over and fall, the pressure bearing down on her shoulders relentlessly.

But, she recovered quickly, her thigh bulging with strength as she sprung upward.

As though a blade cutting through a curtain of falling water, she sliced through, leaping forward ten meters in a single bound.

Leonel's lip curled more prominently. One would have thought that it was him accomplishing such a feat rather than Aina. But, in his mind, there was little difference between the two. ρ??√???????

The elder's eyes widened.

To recover so quickly after a change in gravity without faltering, and even more importantly, without hurting oneself, was... Well, the elder could only say that it should have been impossible.

In that instant, he was certain that Aina should have, at least, broken her planting leg. But, her muscles recovered and protected the bones they surrounded as though they had a mind of their own.

The time they had to react? It was none other than the split moment between Aina raising her foot and it landing on the ground. It simply didn't make sense for a young girl at the beginning stages of the Fourth Dimension to have such fast reaction time, and it was even more impossible for her to have honed such instincts so quickly.

But, even as the elder was lost in his shock, Aina had already barreled through another 40 meters, crossing the 50 meter mark with no sign of slowing down.

Her body crackled and popped, her bones threatening to fracture and break. But, to Aina, this sort of trial was nothing.

She was a woman who trained herself by breaking her own bones, rending her inner organs, and sweating until what came out was nothing less than streams of her own blood.

Such tortures, such horrors, they meant nothing.

She faced the howling beasts in her mind as though she had something to prove, as though there was nothing more important to her at this very moment than to face them boldly and confidently.

The fear she felt when facing the Puppet Master was a blemish she had long since seared into her heart. It wasn't a humiliation in the way a man might feel it. Aina just felt as though she had let herself down.

That was the first time she had ever faced true death, the first time she had realized that her talent wasn't enough to leap over the final hurdle.

While Leonel had to deal with such a feeling upon entering his first Zone, Aina most definitely did not. She had been training ever since she was a youth. To her, her first Zone was nothing more than a formality.

It could be said that this was the first time she had had to face the fear of not being strong enough, of being inadequate. It was quite the feeling indeed.

Because she had lost control of her body and had been unable to move, she had no way of telling herself that she had faced the trial bravely. As such, the feeling of helplessness and self-blame only seemed to cycle and grow.

Leonel watched Aina tear her way up the mountain, a light smile still on his face.

He knew well that the scared little girl he saw that day wasn't his Aina. Unfortunately, unable to move, she hadn't been able to prove that clearly to herself.

This time, Leonel was content to take a backseat and allow the limelight to shine on her.

His smile suddenly spread into a grin.

'If my girlfriend is so amazing, doesn't that mean I get bonus points?'

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"Huh?"

Radlis and Balthorn looked back in confusion.

In truth, none of the four youthful geniuses had been paying attention. Or, rather, they simply didn't have the luxury to do so. Walking up the mountain pass was difficult enough, how could they have time to waste on looking back?

But, at a certain point, it simply couldn't be ignored any longer.

The rushing winds, the trembling grounds, the second oppressive aura that seemed to be bearing down on them from the back... They simply couldn't continue to pay attention to the path before them any longer.

When they did finally look back and see what was happening, their eyes couldn't help but widen in shock.

By now, Aina was already no more than ten meters behind them. But, just as quickly as they gazed back, they were level just as fast. And, even faster than that, they were surpassed.

Radlis and Balthorn stumbled. Their loss of concentration made them feel as though the pressure on their bodies had been multiplied several times over and in the end, they all but fell to their knees.

Aina blazed a trail by them. To an outside observer, she was only sprinting as fast as a normal human, a speed that was less than impressive for a Fourth Dimensional existence. However, in the face of these youths, she might as well have been flying.

A gaze of determination lit Aina's every step forward. Even though her speed was continuously slowing, she seemed to show no intention of stopping. She pushed harder and harder, her steps eventually becoming so heavy that miniature cracks began to appear beneath her feet.

At some unknown time, Leonel had crossed his arms, his fingernails digging into his biceps. But, at the same time, the smile on his face didn't fade, almost as though to keep up a strong front just in case she looked back.

Aina entered a 50 meter distance from Ingkath. Then 40. Then 30.

Her arms and legs moved in unison as though swimming through a tide of heavy water. Though her face was blocked by a mask, the weight of her determination alone painted a broader picture than what her expression alone could bring across.

Even Leonel had underestimated just how much this matter meant. He had only come here for Aina's sake, but it wasn't until this moment that he truly grasped the kind of determination it took for a young woman to send herself across the universe alone and without backers.

Aina had never thought of coming to Valiant Heart Mountain with Leonel. In fact, maybe she thought that after being sent to Terrain, she would never see Leonel again. PANDA NOVEL

It might have been cruel, especially since at the time she hadn't even been aware of if Leonel managed to survive or not. But, Leonel couldn't find it within himself to blame her for this.

The relationship between he and Aina was still nothing more than a teenage infatuation. However, the weight Aina carried on her shoulders was far more than just this.

She carried the betrayal of her family. She carried the scars of a little girl. She carried the death of a parent.

Leonel couldn't blame her if she placed these things ahead of him in importance. It would be nothing short of selfish of him to not understand.

Maybe in a way, to Aina, the act of ignoring her feelings for him was just another form of sacrifice, another hardship she had to face to reach the day she could lay down these burdens.

That drive, that will to reach a goal no matter what you had to sacrifice... Though Leonel couldn't understand it, he respected it down to the depths of his heart.

He couldn't help but wonder if he'd ever have such great drive. Would there ever be something he was willing to give up everything for...? p??J??????

The thought made him shudder.

Did he really have to give up the things that he loved for the sake of such a goal?

Leonel looked up into the skies.

‘Even if there comes a day where I have such a goal... I would never be able to do that. No...’

Leonel shook his head. He didn’t feel as though he was expressing his own thoughts properly. He had emotions deep within him, emotions he knew existed but couldn’t quite place a label on.

At that moment, Leonel suddenly smiled.

‘Aina said it best. We men are selfish and always want more. And, the man I want to be doesn’t just want more, he wants everything.

‘Even if there comes a day where I have such a goal, even if it forces me at an impasse where I must choose between the things that I love, I’ll cut a path down the middle and take both.

‘I don’t like to lose, after all...’

Leonel’s aura shifted, a breeze kicking up around him. For a moment, the elder atop the mountain pass took his eyes off of the blazing Aina and couldn’t help but gaze upon the inconspicuous youth standing amidst a vast nothingness.

Even with his years of experience, he didn’t understand why he had looked at Leonel in that moment. In fact, even if he asked Leonel why, the young man wouldn’t be able to answer either.

Leonel’s thoughts seemed to have been formulated into words and coherent thought, but the truth was that he didn’t think those phrases and sentences just now. In fact, his mind was quite blank at the moment, not exuding anything close to a coherent stream of consciousness.

The current Leonel was still not able to put these emotions into words. Rather, those words represented nothing more than a raw, unrefined ambition.... The first budding of a sprout yet to be properly watered.

Maybe even Leonel didn't realize it at that moment, but he suddenly felt free and unbothered. He was content to bide his time and wait... wait for the moment that small bud bloomed forth.

Aina gave a resounding cry into the skies, her ax appearing in her seemingly delicate hands as she slashed downward with all her might.

She tore into the ground beneath her feet, hooking her blade into the soil and using it as an anchor to shoot forward.

She leapt through the air, landing three meters ahead before swinging her ax downward once more and repeating.

Her momentum was relentless, her mind blank of all thoughts but the image of the pillars before her.

Under the stunned gazes of all those that could witness it, she crossed the final line, her long black hair whipping about beneath a furious aura.

The whites of her eyes rolled forth as she roared into the skies, the carvings of the pillars suddenly beginning to glow.

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Aina's roar caused a shockwave to tear a path across the mountain pass.

For a moment, the illusion of a woman much taller than her seemed to envelop her small figure. However, this lasted for but a moment before a strong surge of Force fell from the glowing pillars, enveloping her body in a rain of light.

Leonel snapped out of his thoughts, the strength of his fingers digging into his forearm growing to the point he nearly drew blood.

He had no idea what was happening and if it wasn't for the fact he wasn't sure what he'd do even if he stormed his way up, there was no way that he'd be able to sit idle for so long.

The elders standing amidst the pillars suddenly all sported frozen expressions. Whatever shocked looks they had just had seemed to be ramped up several fold.

The four geniuses who had been surpassed by Aina suddenly found that continuing forward had become impossible.

One after another, they fell to their knees, a look of abject horror on their face. Even Ingkath, a man who didn't seem to understand anything that could be solved without brawn, felt his heart trembling.

However, though these geniuses fell, each and every one of them kept their eyes level. It was as though each was holding onto the last bit of their pride, unable to allow themselves to fall to the point of not even daring to look.

Aina's body had completely disappeared within the lights. The pulsing of the twin pillars grew more heated, reaching a level where even the elders could no longer think of holding back the pressure themselves.

Unable to hold back his thoughts any longer, Leonel flipped a palm, causing a familiar silver disk to appear in his hand.

...

Valiant Heart Mountain was a place maybe more fanciful than even Leonel expected.

Beyond the mountain range, there sat an all new world, the kind the people of Earth could have maybe only dreamed about.

Valiant Heart Mountain was split into seven peaks, each of which seemed to thrum with a heartbeat of its own.

These peaks were all surrounded by floating islands. But, compared to the Paradise Islands of Earth, these islands exuded an air of oneness with nature rather than capitalistic greed.

They had lush greenery viewable even from the ground below, a land that shone a faint sheen of gold, and hovered in place without the slightest hint of technology. But, what was maybe the most awe inspiring were the waterfalls that fell from their edges.

These waterfalls fell in steady streams, sparkling with and refracting the light of a high violet colored sun that hung in the air. This refraction gave the water a gorgeous purple hue that played on the fantasies of all.

But, this wasn't all.

These waters fell from the skies and into long, rushing rivers along the peaks they orbited. The seamless transition between the waterfalls in the clouds to the rivers running along the earth made everything look as though it was crafted by the hands of a mighty deity.

Still, as beautiful as this scenery might be, those that were here had long since gotten used to it. The hustle and bustle of Valiant Heart Mountain didn't seem to stop even in the face of such sights.

But, maybe, this was the human condition. Even in higher Dimensional worlds, ignoring the miracles of nature seemed to be ingrained into our very souls. PANDA NOVEL

At that moment, though, among one of the peaks of Valiant Heart Mountain, all things seemed to have come to a stop.

As with many other powers, Valiant Heart Mountain was divided into several factions. But, this particular peak, known as Founding Peak, was a location not of a particular one of these factions, but rather the gathering place of the most powerful members of Valiant Heart.

In recent days, this location had been rife with debates, each speaking over the other about the direction the organization should go in. But, at this moment, they had suddenly fallen into an eerie silence. In fact, not a single soul seemed to be speaking.

They all stopped what they were doing, simultaneously looking in a singular direction.

At the base of this mountain, there was a section reserved for the future leaders of Valiant Heart Mountain.

In truth, they only spent time here as a symbol of their superiority and used it to organize members of their faction. If this location was to be strictly compared to their normal training locations, it was severely lacking. The base of Founding Peak simply couldn't compare to the peaks of the other six Peaks despite the fact the peak of Founding Peak was unmatched.

"Someone activated the Founding Pillars?"

It was unknown who spoke these words, nor did it particularly matter.

All these youths who had gained the right to set up camp at the base of Founding Mountain were all preparing to accept the new influx of talents into their factions at this exact moment. However, not one had ever expected this particular outcome.

Though these youths were separated by several hundred meters, even kilometers in some cases, not a single one hesitated. Without regard for the rules, or even the overseeing elders, they all sent their most trusted subordinate out. ρ??(???????)

They all only had a singular goal: to recruit.

...

At the peak of Founding Peak, there was a single core group that stood above all the rest. It was a group of three men and three women, each that had been in silent meditation all to their own.

At the core of this group, though, there was one more man. It was this man who sat upon the tallest floating island, not moving even while thick white clouds past through him, causing fine sprits of water droplets to drizzle across his bronzed skin.

He opened his eyes somewhat lazily, staring into the distance as though he could peer through the mountains and the thick forests to gaze upon the pillars directly.

When the man saw what was happening, his apathetic expression became one of pleasant surprise.

The reason he hadn't cared initially was because he was certain that the one to activate the pillars would have been that child he had been warned about all those months ago. But seeing as it wasn't him...

A pleasant surprise indeed.

...

It was only after the lights began to dim that Leonel breathed a sigh of relief. At the very least, it didn't seem as though there was anything seriously wrong with Aina. At least... not initially.

The moment Leonel thought Aina would be fine, she fell to the ground on all fours, unable to hold onto her battle ax anymore.

A violent fit of coughing took hold of her.

Leonel's gaze sharpened. He immediately understood that something had aggravated Aina's curse again. He could even see the mask he had crafted her begin to bulge as her scars became more aggravated.

But, just when things seemed as though they would get out of hand, Aina's mask began to glow. A strong pulse of cool Cleansing Waters was sprayed over her face again and again.

Aina gripped at the earth with her fingers, leaving small trails as she balled her hands into fists.

Soon, the pain she was racked by slowly ebbed, her ragged breathing becoming more even.

Leonel took a deep breath. He could only be relieved that the contingency plans he had left in place worked.

Leonel's gaze suddenly shifted from Aina's back to the distance. Beyond the pillars, several auras converging at speeds he couldn't hope to keep up with under normal circumstances were coming. Leonel felt that there were some of them that were even more powerful than the elders who had come to preside over this entrance ceremony, a fact that gave him no small measure of pause.

It didn't take much thought for Leonel to connect their appearance with the commotion Aina had caused.

Just as Aina was picking herself up, the six auras had already come into range.

The elder who had led this event from the beginning looked back and frowned.

"You all aren't allowed to be here."

“Hehe, Elder Tobis, there’s no need to be so uptight.”

The young man who spoke was almost eight feet tall. He was easily the tallest individual Leonel had ever laid eyes on.

His posture was terrible, his back arching forward to the point he appeared to be a foot shorter than he truly was. But, his exposed torso was filled with an unprecedented amount of power.

Leonel thought that he was in good shape, as he had been all his life, but this man had muscles bulging out of places he never thought possible.

His limbs were long and lanky, his legs almost taking up a third of his body and his reaching past his knees, though that was likely in part due to the fact his posture was so terrible.

Elder Tobis glared at the youth and the few that had come with him. He knew exactly who these youths were. In any other situation, he would be grinning ear to ear that his Valiant Heart Mountain had such talent. But here... They were clearly stepping over a line.

“Aphestus ...!”

Unfortunately, before Tobis could reprimand the young man any more, Aphestus had already turned his attention to Aina who had long since picked herself up.

“Ooo, a little girly. Hey, little chick, what do you say to joining my Hero Peak?”

[Important announcement below, be sure to read it!!!]

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Aina stood somewhat weakly. Her body had hardly gained its bearings when she was suddenly asked this question.

She sent a look toward Apehestus, her gaze placid.

The truth was that Aina had heard about Valiant Heart Mountain from Yuri. As a result, she had a small understanding of it. If not for this, why else would she prepare a ticket to Terrain to come here.

That said, it could also be said that Aina had no choice but to choose this place. Valiant Heart Mountain was the overlord of this quadrant and several other quadrants. Only the most well established worlds with the strongest foundations could afford to send their youths to other organizations outside of their jurisdiction.

For Earth, a place where even a ticket to a world considered to be relatively close by – like Terrain – cost a Tier 9 Black Grade treasure, it was obviously an impossible dream to think of traveling so far.

With their foundation, Aina didn't even want to think about what it would cost to go to a place other than Valiant Heart Mountain.

This was all to say that Aina had heard of Hero Peak before. In fact, she had heard of all seven Peaks of Valiant Heart.

Founding Peak. Hero Peak. Brave Peak. Justice Peak. Honor Peak. Loyal Peak. Respect Peak.

One wouldn't be surprised to find out, then, that the Brave City Leonel and Aina took their trial in was constructed by Brave Peak. Other various Peaks would have their own testing means.

That said, just because they were tested by Brave City, didn't mean that they couldn't choose to join another Peak. The various city establishments were just a way of parsing the burden of recruitment. In the end, Valiant Heart Mountain was still a singular entity.

The youths who had come with Apehestus immediately wanted to say something to cut him off. How could they just allow him to say and do as he pleased? They didn't want to make their trip a worthless one.

But, before they could, Aina spoke.

“Are you the strongest?” PANDA NOVEL

It was a simple sentence. Spoken in four words, it seemed to speak a thousand.

There was no other question Aina wanted answered, no other that was more important to her. This and this alone was all that mattered.

Aphestus was stunned by the question for a moment before he began to laugh uproariously.

“You hear that, you bastards? This little girly will be joining Hero Peak. You weaklings can all take a step back.”

The expressions of the others youths soured immediately, but they said nothing to refute.

There was no doubting Hero Peak’s strength. In the last 20 years, there had been no singular Peak able to supplant their rule. ρ??∪???????

Aphestus turned his attention back to Aina. Though his posture was terrible, his body exuded a bestial strength that made his bones pop and crackle with his every movement.

“Not only is Hero Peak the strongest, we have been the strongest for the last quarter century. We have the strongest warriors, the best facilities and the most resources. On top of that, our leader, The Hero Raylion, is the strongest of the six leaders.

“If even that isn’t enough for you, even me, as a mere little vice leader, could wipe the floor with some of these other so-called leaders.”

Aphestus grinned from ear to ear, towering over the petite Aina.

“There’s no better choice than us.”

Aina looked up at Apestus, her gaze somewhat distant and emotionless. She didn’t seem moved by his display. Apestus felt smaller in comparison to the Puppet Master. But, with her poor senses, Aina couldn’t tell whether this was an illusion or not.

“Okay.” Aina said plainly.

Apestus scanned Aina up and down, sending a curious look toward her mask. But, he seemed even more shocked by her demeanor. Even that old fogie Tobis wouldn’t feel so comfortable before him.

“You heard her, old man.” Apestus turned toward Elder Tobis. “She made her own decision, you saw that I didn’t force her, right?”

Apestus’ toothy grin made it hard for Tobis to refrain from rolling his eyes.

The reason these brats weren’t supposed to be allowed to interfere at this juncture was because it was too easy for them to influence the decisions of these youths by underhanded means. And, even in the case that didn’t happen, there was precedent for fights breaking out during recruitment.

As such, it was usual policy to allow the youths a few days to soak in the atmosphere of Valiant Heart for themselves and then choose a Peak that was right for them. In such a situation, the youths would have to pass an exam of sorts, far different from Aina who seemed capable of joining without such a thing. But, it was thanks to these rules that a relative peace was able to be kept in what would have otherwise been a violent few weeks.

Since Aina had made her own decision and didn’t seem to be pressured in any way, though, there was no reason for him to interfere. From what he could see, whether he stopped her here or not, Aina would end up joining Hero Peak regardless.

Though there were many rules in Valiant Heart, there was one ultimate rule that ruled all others: Strength. Since Apestus and Aina had the capital, they could do as they pleased.

At that moment, Aina looked back to meet Leonel's gaze.

But, all she found was a young man grinning with two thumbs up by the sides of his cheeks. He looked so happy, almost as though it was his own achievement rather than hers.

Aina couldn't help but think that he looked quite goofy, a sight that made her sputter with laughter.

Aphestus and Elder Tobis were taken off guard by the sudden change in the valiant young lady. They didn't even know a person with such a demeanor could laugh in such a way.

Aphestus raised an eyebrow as he looked toward where Aina was looking.

In the end, he chose to not bother with the exchange as he swept a glance over the four geniuses kneeling along the mountain pass.

“Hero Peak has no need for losers. This will be our only recruit during this recruitment cycle.”

Aphestus' disposition completely changed. It felt as though the mountain above had fused with him, his lofty air looking down with an undying arrogance.

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Hearing these words, Aina frowned. She had expected Hero Peak to be relatively exclusive, but she hadn't worried about it. With Leonel's talent, was there really anything exclusive enough to keep him out?

If there was a test, there would be no issue. But, from what Aphestus said, there would no longer be a recruitment test.

In truth, Aphestus' actions weren't exactly wrong. Over the past few years, having even one person pass Hero Peak's exam was already a blessing. He was already content with having found Aina, so he didn't feel that there was even a need to waste resources testing any more.

Every exam took up a sum of wealth from Hero Peak and there were no shortage of people who would come despite knowing they had no chance of passing. This would result in Hero Peak's expenses being far greater than they would otherwise be.

Usually, this could be solved with a simple screening process, but this took resources to build up as well. This was especially so since Hero Peak emphasized not base power, but rather potential. This was exactly why a comprehensive exam was more appropriate than having a screening process.

But now that Apestus had found a recruit, and especially with the precarious situation Valiant Heart was in currently, why waste these resources? It would be much easier to reach their goals if they saved as much as they could and reinvested it into the talents that actually mattered.

Even if Aina could guess much of these things, though, she didn't want to leave Leonel behind. At least for now, she didn't feel like making such a decision was necessary. She had yet to reach such a crossroads.

And, even if this wasn't about her feelings and she could shed them all away to think about this as logically as possible... The resources Leonel had access to were likely impossible to find in Valiant Heart. Just his Cleansing Waters alone, which could keep her curse under control, was a rarity impossible to explain.

Every time she tried to tell Leonel just how valuable Cleansing Waters were, he would point to the toilet bowl in his Abode Setting. It was mildly infuriating.

Of course, Aina didn't think of Leonel in terms of the resources he could provide. She had gotten used to being by his side over the past near year... She didn't want to leave him so soon even if they would technically be in the same place.

"Can't you hold one more test?" Aina suddenly asked.

Apestus frowned when he heard these words.

Instead of his gaze shifting to lock onto Aina, it instead swept over her briefly before locking onto Leonel in the distance. He had ignored Leonel previously for obvious reasons. PANDA NOVEL

If he looked down on a young man and woman like Ingkath and Irolana who had made it more than 80% of the way up, why would he even deem to speak to someone who didn't even start?

This young lady might have been talented, but she didn't understand the weight of an expert's words. Since he had already said that they wouldn't be accepting anyone else, wouldn't he be a joke if he suddenly took those words back not even a few seconds after he had stated them?

"Listen, little chick. You might be a bit talented, but it seems you haven't understood something.

"Now that you've joined Hero Peak, you are at the bottom of the totem pole. Even the servants that sweep the floors are above you.

"What makes you think you can ask something like this of me?"

From start to finish, Apesthus didn't look at Aina. Rather, he had his eyes locked onto Leonel as though he was giving a silent warning. PANDA NOVEL

Aina's brows furrowed. She most definitely didn't like being spoken to like that. She couldn't be considered to have a temper, nor was she as prideful as Leonel, but that didn't mean everyone didn't have their own bottom line.

"He could have walked up the mountain pass just like I did. It's just that our world was in the middle of a war and he got heavily injured during it. His body isn't in any condition to withstand such pressure."

Apesthus' aura sharpened. This little girl actually still dared to talk back to him?

"A man who backs away from a challenge just because he's a little hurt? You think that this is enough of an excuse? Hero Peak has no need for such weak willed trash."

Aphestus' gaze swept back toward Aina.

“Since you don't seem to know your place, that's fine too. From now on, even if your little boyfriend recovers and has some strength, he won't be allowed to join my Hero Peak.”

It seemed that this little girl didn't understand the meaning of hierarchy. Just because he was here to personally recruit her, didn't mean that her standing was suddenly the equivalent of his.

In addition, according to the rules of Valiant Heart, the transfer from one Peak to another was considered an 'internal' dispute. The unsaid truth was that now that Hero Peak had laid claim to Aina, there was no other Peak that would dare take her now lest they want to become more acquainted with what 'internal dispute' might mean in this context.

Aina's gaze flashed with fury when she heard these words.

Seeing the situation going south, Leonel began to walk up the mountain pass. Unfortunately, since the pillars had recently given a large blessing to Aina, it would take some weeks before they could recover to their original strength.

At the moment, walking up the mountain pass was only slightly more difficult than walking anywhere else within this Fifth Dimensional world. It was akin to a 5% boost to gravity.

It wasn't long before Aina felt a hand on her shoulder, stopping her from gripping at her ax which was nailed into the ground beside her.

Leonel smiled. “It's not a big deal. As long as this vice leader doesn't use underhanded tricks to make your stay at Hero Peak more difficult than it needs to be, it's the best place for you.”

Aphestus almost laughed at these words. How many brats were going to challenge him today? Did they want to die?!

Bulging veins suddenly popped across Aphestus' right hand. It seemed like with a thought, he'd pierce Leonel's heart through completely.

But, at that moment, he felt Elder Tobis' aura lock onto him, causing him to slowly calm himself.

Aphestus sneered. "Everything on Hero Peak is earned through merit."

"Good." Leonel said plainly.

Somehow, this answer only infuriated Aphestus more.

"Le -."

Leonel shook his head, cutting Aina off and taking out ten golden tags.

"Take them."

Chapter 607

"You..." Aina didn't know how to respond. "... Keep half of them."

Leonel shook his head. "I don't really need anything from their vaults, honestly. There's nothing they can provide that I can't build. Especially considering the best weapon the vice leader of the strongest Peak has is only Tier 7 Black.

"If you don't find anything you want, just trade the tags in for some ores you like an I'll build something better."

Aina was speechless when she heard Leonel say these words.

In truth, the Leonel she knew very rarely got angry. Even when she teased him to oblivion, he only retaliated in the most benign of ways. The only time she had ever seen him truly enraged was with the Puppet Master and the Raynred, Pisces situation. But those things, in her opinion, were warranted.

This was all to say that Aina didn't know that Leonel could actually be so petty.

Hearing his words, even Elder Tobis couldn't help but frown despite the fact he had practically just saved Leonel's life.

Did someone kick this kid in the head? A Tier 7 Black Grade treasure was about the best one could expect a Fourth Dimensional entity to wield. Only Fifth Dimensional existences might begin to wield Tier 8 and 9 Black Grade treasures. At least this was the case in this part of the universe.

Only Sixth Dimensional worlds had a large number of Bronze Grade treasures. Likewise, only Seventh Dimensional worlds had a large number of Silver Grade treasures.

No matter how you sliced it, it looked as though Leonel was making an immature comment about something he hardly understood. The words alone made whatever impact gathering ten golden tags might have fall flat.

Of those here, maybe it was only Aina who understood how truthful Leonel was being. Let alone a Tier 7 Black Grade treasure, Leonel could already begin constructing Tier 1 Bronze Grade treasures, each of which would be exponentially more powerful than even a Quasi Bronze Grade treasure, of which he had no small number of.

Leonel simply didn't care about what Apehstus or Elder Tobis thought of him because he never cared to join this organization in the first place.

If Leonel had to pick out one reason he didn't try to convince Aina of taking a different path, it would have to be because of the Segmented Cube.

This was the first time Leonel had stepped foot into a Fourth Dimensional world, so this was also the first time the Segmented Cube could begin to absorb Fifth Dimensional Force.

Albeit slowly, the Segmented Cube was working its way toward entering Phase 3. Once it did so, Leonel would be able to heal Aina. PANDA NOVEL

Leonel slid the tags into Aina's hand.

"Oh, also." Leonel suddenly thought of something. "Take this with you too."

The tags were sucked into the jigsaw-like cube. Soon, all that was left on Aina's palm was the Segmented Cube itself.

"Alright, off you go."

Seeing that Aina didn't seem apt to leave, Leonel laughed. He leaned into her ear and spoke softly. Even if the others tried, they wouldn't be able to hear what he was saying. But, that didn't stop Aina's neck from flushing red.

"Do you think that there's any barrier in this place that can stop me?"

The words were simple, no more complex than Aina's question for Apehestus. But, they reverberated with Aina deeply. ρ??∪???????

"Okay." Aina said lightly, taking the cube.

Apehestus didn't say anything. He simply turned and walked away.

What only he and Leonel seemed to be aware of was the fact there was a strong killing intent locked onto the latter from start to finish. Yet, Leonel had hardly reacted.

The cause of this matter was clear. This wasn't about how strong Leonel was or wasn't, it was simply about a man deeming his word as more important than the word of any other. Apehestus didn't care what reasoning Leonel had, since he had spoken his word, he wouldn't take it back. This was exactly the same reason why he hadn't booted Aina out from Hero Peak.

Leonel smiled and waved as Aina disappeared into the distance. It was only after she was gone that his gaze became cold and the atmosphere seemed to become frozen.

‘When did I become so murderous?’ Leonel thought to himself.

If it wasn’t for the sake of Aina, he really might have killed Apestus just then.

Leonel felt as though his inhibitions against killing were loosening each and every day. Would there really come a time where he reaped lives like cutting weeds? He didn’t really like the feeling.

If he killed Apestus, what then? Wouldn’t he be cutting off Aina’s path? And where would he find another Fifth Dimensional world to station himself in?

Leonel had learned a lot about the Dimensional Verse in recent times, more than enough to understand that traveling up a Dimension was no simple task. At the very least, with Earth’s current infrastructure, the price would likely near a Silver Grade treasure. This was obviously something Leonel couldn’t afford.

If he was forced to leave this place too soon, he didn’t know when he’d be able to cure Aina.

“Brat, you’re too impulsive.”

Leonel, who was lost in his own thoughts as though there weren’t others around him, was suddenly startled awake.

“Hm?” Leonel raised an eyebrow.

He was impulsive? If the old man knew what was going on in his mind, he’d realize just how much prudence Leonel had shown just now.

Whether or not Leonel could actually defeat Apestus was unknown even to him. But, what Leonel was sure of was that Apestus would suffer greatly if he had to battle him.

Elder Tobis shook his head and looked back toward the other faction vice leaders. But, it was clear that none of them were very interested in the youths that remained. If they wanted to join, they could take the exam like everyone else.

And while they would allow this for the four geniuses to Leonel's back, it was unlikely that they'd make room for Leonel himself after what they just saw.

"Youths should learn to bide their time. What good does your killing intent do you now?"

Leonel raised an eyebrow at these words. But, he didn't say much as he made his way up the mountain pass.

His killing intent? Apestus should be happy that he restrained it.

Chapter 608

"Hey, hey, hey! Wait up!"

Leonel looked back with a partially confused look, only to find a lanky and pale man following after him. This was none other than Radlis. As for why he had quit chasing after Balthorn for the sake of catching up to Leonel, maybe only he knew the answer to that.

"Yes?"

"Aiya, no need to be so glum. I know your girlfriend just got snatched, but there are plenty of women in the sea."

Leonel's lip curled. "She didn't get snatched."

“Mmhm, mmhm.” Radlis caught up, slowing down to walk beside Leonel. “They say denial is the first form of acceptance. Just don’t stay bogged down in it for too long. It’s alright, with your looks and my humor, we have the chance to be the lady killers of the freshman class.

“Just look at that sexy lady over there.” Radlis hooked his chin over his shoulder, sending lewd looks toward Balthorn. “She’s already infatuated with you, just forget about that girl.”

Leonel shook his head. How was he even supposed to respond to this exactly?

Ingkath, Irolana and Balthorn lagged behind. Since they couldn’t join any factions, they had no choice but to wait a few days until the exams were opened up. Only then would they be able to pick a Peak a join.

The atmosphere around them was clearly much less enthusiastic than Radlis. In fact, they were quite downcast. Who would feel great after being looked down upon in that fashion?

They had all come here with great aspirations, only to feel as though it had been dashed. By now, it was clear to them that they’d just be playing background for Aina in the future. Such a reality left them feeling down.

The one with especially complex feelings about this was Balthorn, especially after the words she had spoken about Aina. Who cared what Aina looked like if she had strength?

In fact, in this world, all beauty got you was constant harassment and the right to be used as a pawn by your family. Not only did Aina had strength, but she was also never have to worry about such a thing.

PANDA NOVEL

It felt like Balthorn was still scorning Aina for her scars at the moment, but the truth was that she was jealous... Jealous she didn’t have such strength, jealous that she didn’t have such freedom.

“Ah, it seems you still don’t get it. You’re a little slow, so let this more intelligent brother of yours explain.”

Radlis wrapped an arm around Leonel's shoulders, standing to the tip of his toes.

Leonel raised another eyebrow. "I'm slow?"

Radlis coughed lightly.

"How do I put this delicately...? Well, anyone who thinks Tier 7 treasures can drop like pies from the skies is definitely a little bit slow. Anyway...!"

The truth was that everyone assumed that Leonel must have made a massive mistake. Maybe his world had a different ranking system for weapons. This wasn't rare in primitive worlds who had only just evolved. So, it was possible that Tier 7 in Leonel's mind was maybe a Tier 3 or 4 weapon. In fact, in some cases, there were worlds so misinformed that they gave Third Dimensional weapons the ranking system for Fourth Dimensional Black Grade weapons.

Radlis believed that Leonel was likely from a latter world, or else it was impossible that he would say such a thing about a Tier 7 treasure. That was the only possible justification.

Anyone who could treat real Tier 7 Black treasures in such a way wouldn't even bother to come to a place like this. They'd be from a Sixth Dimensional world, or at the very least, a world close to it.

Radlis continued on quickly as though not wanting Leonel to respond. He definitely had an odd way of trying to spare feelings.

"Listen man, you can't trust women too much. They're vindictive little demonesses. Your girlfriend likes you now, but when she sees all those tall, handsome men from Hero Peak, all of which will be stronger than you, by the way... Well, it's in their nature to be swayed."

Leonel was speechless. Why did he feel like he was talking to James again?

Leonel sighed when he thought of that name for the first time in a long while. He hadn't really spent a lot of time at Royal Blue Fort during the war, so he had only had an idea of who was on the battlefield.

Thanks to that, he knew that his teammates were fine. But, James hadn't been on the battlefield, so he had no idea where he was.

Though Leonel had promised his coach to James another chance... Truthfully, he didn't know if he wanted to.

“Ai, I know what you're thinking. Your girlfriend isn't exactly... Let me not speak on another man's affections. But, you should know that there are no shortage of powerful and handsome men from Hero Peak who also happen to be very rich. They can probably afford certain... treatments that you cannot.”

Hearing Radlis' endless rambling, Leonel was at a complete loss.

Not speak on another man's affections? What exactly had he been doing, then, for the last ten minutes? He had talked so much that they managed to reach the top of the mountain, only to cross a curtain of Force and be greeted by an entirely new world.

Leonel took it all in with a single glance. If he was in the mood, he might have been quite impressed by what he was seeing. But at the moment, it could be said that if it wasn't for his usually easy going personality, he would have kicked even Radlis far away by now.

“... Listen man, it'll all be fine. There are plenty of fish in the sea...”

Leonel tuned Radlis out.

Was he worried about Aina? Not even a little bit. He didn't have to put up a false sense of bravado about it either.

All he knew was that if it took even him five years and the world almost ending in order to get her to open up to him... Well, he could only say good luck to those who deemed to try.

That said, after their attempts failed, he wouldn't mind teaching them their place.

Not long after the group crossed into Valiant Heart Mountain and took in the city around them, they were met by another group who seemed to have been waiting especially for them.

“That should be him. The one with the long goldish bronze hair.”

As soon as one of them confirmed, the group of five all converged at once.

Their target? Leonel without a doubt.

Chapter 609

Aphestus continued on in a good mood, leading Aina toward Hero Peak.

Aina suddenly looked back, as though she could sense that something was wrong, but she continued to move forward as though nothing had happened.

Aphestus seemed to sense this small action, causing his lip to curl. But, it was then that Aina said something that made his eyes narrow.

“Next time, send stronger lackies.” She said, seemingly to no one.

“Hoho, didn’t you say your little boyfriend was injured? But now I should be worried?”

In truth, with how arrogant Aphestus was, something like sending lackies to deal with a junior was beneath him. However, what was even more beneath him was personally taking action. So, he chose the path that would best soothe his currently seething rage.

If not for getting caught red-handed, he would have never even bothered to respond to Aina at all especially considering the entire reason this began was due to his authority being questioned.

“He could be ten times more injured and you would have still needed to send someone stronger.” Aina replied blandly.

At the moment, Aina was feeling quite guilty. She knew Leonel well. If it wasn't for her telling him to stay put because he was injured, he wouldn't have even cared about his body's state in order to climb the mountain pass. This wasn't because he felt the need to prove something to Valiant Heart, an organization he put not stock in, but rather because that was just the kind of person that he was.

But now, there was already no taking the things that happened back.

Hearing such words, Apestus suddenly began to laugh uproariously.

“They say love is blind, but this must be a worse case of foolish love. That's fine though, I'd really like to see how long you can continue to love a weakling after I'm done with him.

“Since you want to be smart, I'll make certain he can never raise his head high in my Valiant Heart Mountain.”

There was no doubt that Apestus was repeating the same words Radlis had spoken but not as blatantly. And, it was even more obvious that Aina's words had once more provoked Apestus.

That said... This time, Aina didn't seem to react with the same guilt at all. Rather, her face, hidden beneath her mask, had gone back to being expressionless. PANDA NOVEL

'Go ahead and vent.' She thought to herself.

“Yip! Yip!” The little mink jumped out from the Segmented Cube and into Aina's arms, bearing his little fangs at Apestus.

It was only after Aina soothed him that he finally began to calm down.

...

Leonel stood in opposition to a group of three, his eyes lazily scanning them. It was obvious by their words that he was their target and toward such a thing, he could only say that the vice leader of Hero Peak was maybe even more petty than himself.

This Apestus didn't even wait an hour, let alone the few days someone else might have, before sending his goons after him.

But, Leonel truly didn't mind. In fact, behind his apathetic expression, he was holding back a grin that could have gone from one ear to the other. ρ???(???????)

“I don't know how fresh meat like you managed to offend the bigwigs, but how do you plan on settling this?”

The leader of this gang of three seemed almost too lazy to deal with Leonel. He held no personal animosity toward Leonel, and he even felt that dealing with a freshman was far beneath him.

It wasn't until one entered Valiant Heart that they truly understood the distance that separated those who had joined quadrant ruling organizations and those from small worlds who could at best call a corner of a quadrant their home.

Just in terms of taxes collected, Valiant Heart had a number of resources that could drown out any world in their wealth alone.

With these resources came millennia of foundation building, an endless store of knowledge and techniques beyond anything someone from a smaller world could possibly understand.

If Valiant Heart Mountain were to be ranked using the official metrics of the Dimensional Verse, as an organization overseeing number quadrants, they were a Bronze Grade Organization at worst. If Earth was put on this same scale, they wouldn't even qualify to be known as Black Grade.

“Are you from Hero Peak?”

“Don’t...!”

Balthorn tried to speak out before Leonel could finish his sentence, but it was already too late. She took a sharp intake of breath before looking at Leonel’s side profile.

‘Is he really that slow? Even if he got beat up to the point of having half a foot in the coffin, that’s the one question he should have never asked!’

As expected, the moment the leader of lackies heard this, he froze for a moment before a sinister smile crept onto his face.

“You have a lot of guts, calling out Hero Peak’s name in vain like that. Do you think the likes of Hero Peak has the time to deal with bottom feeders like you?”

“You seem quite offended for someone who isn’t from Hero Peak.” Leonel replied evenly.

The lacky’s jaw clenched, the murderous intent in his gaze deepening.

If others really found out that Hero Peak was stooping to such lows, it would be a blight on their prestige. Though the words were unspoken, the burden for such a rumor spreading would definitely be on his head. Not only was this Leonel a fool enough to offend Aphestus before even stepping into Valiant Heart, but he was even trying to drag him down with him.

If Leonel insisted on this narrative, this small scuffle that would have likely ended after a small beating would grow to the point of the entire Peak pitting themselves against him.

“Ahaha, hey, buddy, pal...” Radlis patted Leonel’s shoulder. “... It’s been nice knowing you. I think I see a beauty over there.”

Radlis dashed away, hiding into the accumulating crowd.

Ingkath, Irolana and Balthorn frowned, but they too didn’t want anything to do with this situation.

Though there was no chance in joining Hero Peak now, there were no shortage of individuals who had defected from their own Peaks to join them later.

“Still not saying anything?” Leonel continued as though he didn’t notice these youths distancing themselves from him. He hardly knew them, so why would he care?

“Wielor, we need to shut him up.” One of the three called out to the leading lacky. They couldn’t allow Leonel to say anything more.

“Agreed.” Wielor nodded. “We’ll see if he still has the cheek to say such things after we’re done with him.”

As though by tacit agreement, the two behind Wielor shot forward.

Chapter 610

Leonel’s gaze flashed, sliding into a boxing stance with incomparable ease. He became as light as a feather on his toes, his breathing syncing with his actions.

His bronzed hair fluttered with his movement, rebounding into the air as he hopped to and froe. The instant it fell back down to his back, he shot forward, his speed blazing.

Despite the fact that he was pincerred by two, Leonel protected the side of his face with his right and sent a straight left forward.

A whipping kick shot for Leonel’s right hip even as the young man on the left seemed content with simply blocking his straight. From the perspective of the lackies, this would be over quickly. Just one of them was more than enough to deal with a freshman. The only reason they had even chosen to send two was due to the accumulating crowd.

Leonel had shown that he wasn't intelligent enough to not speak what shouldn't be spoken. So, when dealing with such people who didn't understand fear, the best course of action was teaching them exactly that.

BANG!

The kick was fast and sturdy. Without wasted movements, it perfectly made use of the young man's torque. Even his planted leg tore a rotating hole into the ground, a sharp wind following the trail of his assault.

However... When his leg actually came into contact with Leonel's right arm, it felt as though he had just kicked at a steel wall.

Leonel winced slightly, feeling his fractured ribs rattling upon impact. But, his straight left never stopped.

With perfect form, his fist blew past the guard of the young man's forearms, connecting with his nose with a speed too fast to react to.

Leonel could feel a satisfying crunch beneath his knuckles, a bloody spray launching into the air. What was a face of soft and fragile skin and bone worth in the face of Leonel's fist which might as well have been a steel brick?

The instant Leonel connected, he turned his attention toward the kicker, his hips shifting. His speed was so fast that he had already closed the distance between them before his leg even lowered.

Unbalanced and unable to protect himself, the young man could only watch as Leonel retracted his left hand and landed a right hook right into his rib cage. PANDA NOVEL

It felt as though all the air within his body was expelled at once. An audible snapping noise sounded, followed by a muffled cry.

With muted thuds, two seniors fell at once. One clutching their chest and the other their face.

As though completely unsatisfied, Leonel had already shot by them, not minding their reaction in the slightest. While they looked down on him, in his mind, one punch was already more than they deserved in the first place.

Leonel closed the distance between him and Wielor. Though shocked, the latter reacted quickly, his expression turning solemn.

Leonel shot a fist forward, only for it to be met by Wielor's. Having learned his lesson, Wielor coated his own in as much Force as he could muster, bearing down on Leonel with absolute strength and power.

Leonel reacted calmly. His mind drifted to the times he had utilized the incomplete Four Seasons Realm for his fists. He imagined the way the Force had flowed around him, the way it melded with his attacks with perfection, without him even thinking about it. $\rho\omega\sigma\tau$

His Force matched the flow in his mind, his simulations so perfect that one would almost think that he had begun to use Universal Force if it wasn't for the fact it was very clearly just of the Third Dimension.

BANG!

Both Leonel and Wielor took a single step back. But, whereas the latter was stunned, Leonel had already shot forward, closing the distance once more.

In the blink of an eye, the two exchanged a flurry of blows, Wielor using whatever means he had while Leonel used nothing but his fists.

Leonel's movements were sharp and focused. If he only had to throw a single punch to neutralize a combination, he would do so. It almost felt that everyone was watching a combat puppet battle, his style was that immaculate.

However, while Leonel was growing more and more focused, Wielor felt as though his arms and legs might just shatter at any moment. Fighting Leonel may have looked like fighting a combat puppet to the people outside, but to him, it felt exactly like that. It was as though Leonel's limbs were made and formed of the universe's most precious materials.

Wielor roared. The longer this fight went on, the more people who would accumulate and the more humiliated he would be.

The truth was that hardly anyone knew his face. He was nothing more than a glorified janitor of Hero Peak. Apestus wasn't exaggerating when he said that Aina's standing was now below even the floor sweepers.

However, if this blew up too much, the more resourceful youths would definitely find a way to connect this back to Hero Peak.

Spikes began to grow off Wielor's arms, enlarging to the point they arched over his fists and protected his knuckles.

A strong corrosive energy hung in the air, bearing down on Leonel.

To Wielor, it didn't matter how strong Leonel's defenses were. Before his corrosive Force, it was all meaningless.

However, what Wielor didn't expect was that Leonel hadn't gone all out either.

The instant it seemed as though Wielor didn't want to be humiliated any longer, illusory golden wings seemed to appear to Leonel's back for just a split moment. It was so brief that the vast majority of the crowd didn't even notice.

With a flick of his palm, a spear appeared.

It was bland, even having a wooden pole. If it wasn't for the feathers strapped to its polearm, it wouldn't have any character whatsoever.

This was none other than the primitive woman's spear.

Wielor went stiff as he suddenly felt something sharp pierce through his leg.

After a moment of lag, he roared out in pain, stumbling and falling to his knees.

Leonel's piercing motion was too fast, too swift. Before anyone could react, all four of Wielor's limbs were rendered useless.

He stood amidst three collapsed seniors, his visage expressionless.