

Descent 691

Chapter 691

What Leonel didn't know was that his action of holding Aina's hand alone was more than enough to be looked at in this way.

During her time on Hero Peak, Aina hadn't just been learning a new profession, she spent just as much time training her body as she always did. She completely engrossed herself in improving, which was why she actually didn't notice how much time had passed until she realized she had missed a call from Leonel.

In the span of that time, Aina broke no small number of freshmen records, even those Raylion had held had been obliterated. If it wasn't for the fact Hero Peak was such a closed off community of elites, Aina would have caused an uproar that swept through the entirety of Valiant Heart.

That said, an uproar did happen. It was just that this commotion was concentrated between the walls of Hero Peak.

The main issue was that Aina seemed to be completely closed off from everyone else, especially men. There were rumors that she had come to Valiant Heart with a boyfriend, but after observing her for a while, many of them had concluded that that was bullshit.

Now, though, running into Aina after she had disappeared for more than a week, only to find her holding the hand of a man they didn't even recognize... how could they not be shocked?

It seemed that Hero Peak was even more closed off than they knew. Even as freshmen, they actually had no idea about Leo the Cuck.

But, if one knew anything about the culture of ultra elite circles, this made sense.

In the past, white belt exams had to be taken within one's Peak. One can easily guess, then, that different Peaks had different standards. Becoming a white belt from Hero Peak was far more difficult.

Due to this, an intense competitive environment was brewed. Most freshmen of Hero Peak spent years keeping their head buried in their training before they could burst out with all their potential at once.

The freshmen of Hero Peak were much like the elders of Valiant Heart in that way, having no idea about such petty squabbles.

Leonel smiled and looked toward Aina. "Are these your friends?"

Aina opened her mouth to respond but didn't quite know how to. Friends? They were at most acquaintances.

The young woman with the odd nose contraption hopped forward and grabbed Aina's arm between her hands and breasts.

"Aina, why didn't you tell me you had a boyfriend? Are you hiding all the good men to yourself? This is too unfair!"

Aina was speechless. She couldn't even think of a response before the young lady continued.

"You wouldn't mind sharing right?" The young lady fluttered her lashes, taking long, sweeping glances at Leonel. "You can't keep such a boytoy to yourself."

Leonel didn't know whether he should laugh or not. Clearly, these few had misunderstood their relationship. But, in their minds, this was the only thing that made sense.

A member of Hero Peak picking someone who hadn't even joined a Peak yet was quite ridiculous. What else could Leonel be if not a boytoy to relieve some stress?

Though there was a stigma around it, there were no shortage of women who simply didn't care about the opinions of others, and this was especially so if these women were very strong. Aina happened to have both the uncaring personality and the strength, so this seemed like the logical conclusion.

Unfortunately...

“Yes. I mind.” Aina said coldly, slipping out of the young lady’s embrace and grabbing Leonel’s hand to walk away. ρ??(???????)

The group was stunned for a moment before one of the boys burst out into a fit of laughter.

“Gretta, it seems you won’t be getting a taste.”

Gretta’s expression warped. She hadn’t really wanted a taste of Leonel, she cared too much about her reputation. In truth, she only wanted to ingratiate herself with Aina a bit. Who wouldn’t want a relationship with such a genius?

But, she hadn’t expected it to backfire like this.

“Whatever. I would much rather focus on my strength than whoring myself out.” She ground her teeth in spite.

“It seems like he’s taking the white belt exam too?” One of the boys said curiously.

Upon hearing this, they froze for a moment. They had never heard of someone taking the white belt exam before even joining a Peak.

At that moment, a light ding noise sounded.

“The exam will begin now. All those who have registered, please proceed to room 2-A.”

Among the group of four, the young man who originally called out to Aina remained silent, his eyes never leaving Leonel’s back.

“Edmorn, snap out of it. If we’re late, it’ll count as a fail and we’ll have to wait another six months.”

The young man seemed to awaken at these words. “Right...”

Soon, the group had entered the spacious room. Looking around, aside from the six of them, there were about ten others, leaving the total number of participants at just under 20.

The room was bland. The floors, walls and ceiling were all covered by large one by one meter black grey tiles. There didn’t seem to be anything special about it to a layman. But, to one with sharp senses, it was possible to feel a subtle and unique flow of energy.

“The exam requirements are more stringent than they have been in the past.” A lazy voice suddenly played and completely filled their surroundings. “Now, more than ever, what is most important is your strength. In addition, the requirements for passing are no longer summarized into a single line. Rather, you will be graded on a curve. Of the 18 of you here, only four will be allowed to pass regardless of your performance.”

The crowd was stunned.

What Leonel and Aina didn’t know was that they had happened to stumble into just the third white belt exam that had taken place. These new rules had thus yet to become public knowledge.

It seemed that Valiant Heart was doing its best to increase the quality of its students.

“Now, we will begin the first round.”

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In the past, in order to become a white belt, one needed to reach a Tier 4 standard. But, judging by the words of the lazy, omnipresent voice, there was no longer such a clear dividing line. If they wanted to become white belts, they would have to place in the top four overall by the end of these rounds, or else they would have to wait for another half year.

“The first round will be a test of reflexes. Begin.”

The youths looked around in confusion. They had heard of this test of reflexes before – well, assuming it was still the same considering this generic name. But, from what they knew, this test should have taken place one at a time. Why was it that the voice didn’t pick out who should be going?

Before any of them could figure out what was going on, the large grey tiles that made up the room pulsed with a dull ray of white light. They didn’t have time to understand what this meant before several illusory balls appeared in the air, slowly growing solid.

<3... 2...>

Everyone’s pupils constricted at once.

A mechanical voice reached zero in its count and hell suddenly descended.

The now solid balls shot in every which direction. Two of the freshmen couldn’t even react before these ‘solid’ balls shot through their bodies.

Their expressions changed. In that moment, it felt as though a large chunk of their Force was suddenly ripped out of their bodies.

The good news was that they weren’t injured. But, the bad news was that their stamina had suddenly been sapped away.

Leonel took a casual step forward as a ball whizzed by his head.

‘So this was what they meant by a test of reflexes, huh?’

Not only did they have to deal with these balls shooting toward them, but they would definitely have to keep an eye out for their fellow student as well. It was definitely not just out of the kindness of their hearts that that lazy voice had made it clear that only four would pass.

From the very beginning, they were pitted against each other.

Leonel raised his foot.

A solid ball shot beneath his sole, rebounding off of the ground and crashing toward the wall behind him.

'The room is a 20 by 20 by 20 meter cube. There are 18 of us in here and there are 100 moving balls the size of a head. They didn't set a timer and being hit doesn't seem to eliminate you... So I wonder what the grading criteria is...?'

Leonel sent a gaze toward Aina.

The control she had over her body was immaculate. Even though compared to Leonel, the time she was having was harder, it was still of incomparable ease if she was measured up against everyone else.

ρ??∫??????

There were only about four others who seemed to be taking this exam in stride.

The weird nose contraption wearing Gretta. The young man who had called out to Aina, Edmorn. And two other young men, one of which had a sword strapped to his back and the last of which insisted on dodging around with his hands in his pockets. Whether he wanted to look cool or if this was just his style, Leonel didn't particularly care.

Unlike the others, Leonel hardly moved from his spot. The balls could only be obstructed by each other and the wall. Even when they ran through an examinee, they simply turned illusory for a moment while continuing at the same speed. Quite frankly, this exam was too easy for Leonel.

With his ability, he could map out the trajectory for all hundred balls over the next several minutes. Then he could directly ignore the ones that wouldn't cross his path and mark out the ones that would. After that, it was a simple matter of knowing how the ball would attack him and dodging accordingly.

However, it was then that the walls flashed again.

The change was subtle, but Leonel's eyes narrowed.

'They increased the speed by 1%. My calculations are off.'

Leonel adjusted his simulations almost instantly.

He took a step forward, side stepped to the right, then went diagonally back to the left. In just a few breaths, he had dodged five balls and was back to standing exactly where he had been from the very beginning.

It was only a subtle increase to Leonel, but when these balls had already been travelling at over a hundred kilometers an hour, a 1% change was steep.

A Fourth Dimensional existence would only be able to reach such speeds in a Third Dimensional world. In a Fifth Dimensional world, however, even speed aces would struggle to touch such a level unless they were absolute geniuses.

As a result, everyone in this room had to read and react long before the ball reached them, or else they would have no chance whatsoever.

This 1% change cause enough of a shift that those that had been doing alright previously suddenly found themselves backed into a corner. The more they got hit, the greater the sap to their stamina was.

Beads of sweat fell from their brows, their faces paling.

As expected, once again, it was only those four aside from Leonel and Aina that seemed to be just fine with these changes. It was clear that Hero Peak was having an elite showing.

At that moment, a youth who felt he was on his last legs roared in despair. Shooting forward, he tackled another youth that was nearby, tumbling onto the floor with him.

In that instant, the youth and poor guy he tackled were run through by several of the balls, sapping all of their strength completely.

The expressions of everyone changed. They had all known in the back of their minds that such a thing would happen eventually, but no one had known who the first person to act would be.

Everyone looked around at each other warily, not wanting to be the next victim. But, this split consciousness caused some to lose the focus that had kept them in it to this point.

It was then that the lazy voice suddenly appeared once again.

“Round one completed.. Round two commencing.”

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Leonel’s brow raised. It was over? Just like that?

There didn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason. The balls only increased their speed just once. In addition, Leonel had started paying attention to who was getting hit and who was dodging after a while, but everyone other than the six of them seemed to have gotten hit at least two or three times.

That meant...

‘So it’s based on elimination.’

Leonel looked toward the two youths too tired to even stand up. Their Force had been completely run dry.

The young man who had been tackled wanted to vent out his rage and unwillingness, but he couldn’t do anything but glare and breathe heavily.



Eventually, a flash of light sent both out of the room.

As expected, they really were eliminated. This likely meant that these rounds would continue until there were just four remaining.

'If that's the case, depending on this next round, we can just end things early.'

"This next round will test your strength. Begin."

The walls flashed and all the balls suddenly vanished. With another subtle glow, numerous lights coalesced. This time, however, instead of forming balls, they began to form humanoid puppets.

Leonel found that his soles were stuck to the tiles beneath his feet. He tried to lift his leg and found that it was an enormous task.

'Gravity? Magnetism?' Leonel couldn't decide what it was.

He didn't think it was gravity because though moving his legs was hard, the other parts of his body didn't feel heavy. As for magnetism... He might have been a man of metal, but everyone else seemed to be experiencing the same thing. It couldn't be that they were all metal men and women too, right? How could there be such a coincidence?

'What a weird phenomenon...'

Leonel found the balls that could sap energy to be quite fascinating. He could imagine how overpowered such a thing could be if it was an ability.

But as broken as that ability seemed, if someone could make you suddenly magnetic to the ground beneath your feet mid battle without any warning, how devastating would that be.

Leonel couldn't help but wonder how these things worked. It made him realize that he should definitely be more eager to use Valiant Heart's training rooms.

The puppet before Leonel suddenly threw out a punch.

Reacting quickly, Leonel too threw out a punch, obliterating the puppet before him into motes of light.

Leonel felt the magnetism at his feet disappear. But, before he could be confused, another puppet began to form. This time, he felt as though all the air in his surroundings had vanished, not allowing him to breathe in the slightest.

The sudden change caught Leonel off guard, but it still took him just a single punch to eliminate the puppet before him.  $\rho\int$

On the third, he felt like his skin was being seared in a vat of lava. On the fourth, he felt a chill down to his very bone.

'Is this a strength test, or an adaptation test?'

Leonel was so wow'd by the changes that he completely forgot to end the exam early like he had wanted to. How this testing arena managed to cause so many changes in such a fine area was beyond Leonel.

It was all the more shocking because Leonel knew how poor this organization's standard of Force Crafting was. It was impossible for them to create something like this.

"Second round concluded. Third round commencing."

'Huh?' Leonel was caught off guard. Only then did he realize that he had gotten completely lost in his analysis. Maybe he liked Force Crafting for more than just defeating his father one day. He didn't even realize how ingrained it had become to his very being.

Two more youths who couldn't survive the round were suddenly teleported out. No, it wasn't two, it was actually six.

Leonel raised his brows. It seemed that they had all fallen at the same stage so they were taken out together. Some of them were convulsing, obviously still stuck in whatever harsh environment they had been feeling.

Just like that, only ten remained.

“This round will test your speed. Begin.”

Leonel's eyes flashed, his body instantly flickering to the side.

A sharp silver dagger whizzed by him.

‘Another dodging test?’ Leonel raised an eyebrow.

But, he had hardly finished the thought when the dagger suddenly stopped midair, flipped backward, and headed for him again.

‘Oh...’

Leonel rolled out of the way, narrowly dodging the dagger again.

But, some others weren't lucky. This time, not only did they feel a piercing pain, freezing their nervous system for a moment, but their stamina and Force was snatched away once again.

The corners the dagger took to stab toward Leonel grew sharper and sharper. Eventually, it reacted so fast that Leonel didn't even have the option to stay in the same place.

He swiftly dodged backward, the dagger bearing down on the tip of his nose. Leonel almost became cross-eyed trying to keep his gaze locked onto it.

‘What a test. They want us to display this level of speed in a 20 by 20 meter room with nine other competitors amongst us? The worst part is that they didn’t even make any effort to separate out allies from one another, so there are most definitely people who will work together. Unless...?’

If this was done on purpose, Leonel could see it having a potentially good effect. Teamwork was good for the sake of building the foundation of an organization. But, Leonel felt it would be better to promote this teamwork against their enemies, not their fellow students.

The more Leonel thought about it, the more likely he felt it wasn’t a coincidence that Hero Peak had sent exactly four to participate in this test. And, it was most definitely not a coincidence that they had all come together at the very last minute, even later than he and Aina.

Leonel sent a gaze over toward Aina. Considering her speed, he wasn’t worried about her. What he was worried about though was...

Leonel’s eyes narrowed.. Even without turning, he could feel that someone had targeted him from the back.

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To Leonel’s back, a lanky youth ran with all his might. He most definitely hadn’t expected for the speed round to start at such a level. If things were like this, what would he do if the speed increased again like it had during the first round?

It was already impressive enough for a Fourth Dimensional existence like him to be able to walk around and run in a Fifth Dimensional world like this one. But now they were most definitely asking for too much.

‘I can’t wait six months! I can’t wait!’

The more pressure Valiant Heart was under, the more resources and opportunities they brought out for everyone.

Leonel and Aina weren't aware of this yet since they had just come back, but even the tournament for entry into the Valiant Heart Zone had moved up. Not only this, but they were allowing far more students in now than they ever had in the past.

But, the minimum requirement for entry into this tournament was to have a white belt. If he failed this time, there was no way he'd be able to join because by then, the tournament would have already passed!

Due to all this mental pressure, the moment this youth saw Leonel's back flying toward him, a mad light radiated from his eyes.

He didn't just need to survive. It was fine as long as he just outlasted everyone else. How could he pass up a chance to attack at someone's back?

Unfortunately for this young man...

Leonel's feet suddenly became wrapped in a beautiful golden sheen, causing his speed to grow explosively. In the blink of an eye, the dagger that had been at the tip of his nose was over a meter away from him.

Leonel, as though he had eyes at the back of his head, flipped into the air, soaring over the head of the examinee aiming for his back.

The young man suddenly found himself pincered from both sides. His own dagger was still chasing him from behind while Leonel's own dagger bore down on him from the front.

It was too late to dodge.

The youth felt a sharp pain rip through his chest, causing his speed to falter. Just that small split moment allowed his own dagger to slice through his back, leaving him completely paralyzed.

The twin spikes of pain left his body trembling. Even after the daggers became illusory and flew out of his body, he had still collapsed to the ground, only to be pierced through again by his own dagger as Leonel's chased after him.

That third strike was the final straw, laying him out completely. His vision went dark, his dreams fading along with it.

Leonel shot a glance over toward Aina. She seemed to have been targeted as well, but dealt with her pursuer much more straight forwardly. Unfortunately for the poor young man who targeted her, he was probably the only one to take on a true injury since the start of this competition.

And just like that, there were eight remaining. But... The round didn't stop.

The walls flashed.  $\rho \int$

'1% increase in speed.'

Leonel slowed down his own speed. After activating his Lineage Factor, even this 1% increase couldn't make a difference to him. It was also more convenient for future moves if his dagger was closer to him. It would allow this farse to end quicker.

"He's still here?" Gretta frowned.

When the exam began, Gretta and the other four had completely focused on themselves. Though they had entered together and planned to pass together, they knew that the entry of Aina had thrown a wrench into their plans.

Because of this, the four became slightly wary of one another, knowing that one of them would likely had to be sacrificed so that Aina could pass. But, obviously, none of them wanted to take the fall.

As a result, an exam that should have been easy left them walking on the tips of their toes, bringing out everything they had to be among the final four. In such a situation, they didn't even care to pay attention to exactly who had survived as long as they weren't being targeted.

It wasn't until yet another fell, leaving just seven remaining, that Gretta realized that Leonel, who she thought would have already fallen long ago, was still here. In fact, he seemed to be having an easy time as well.

If this was an exam where it was possible for Aina to help him, she would be more accepting of this. But, this was obviously impossible. Even though they took all the tests together, everything had been pretty individual. Without a certain level of strength you could call your own, it would have been impossible to make it to this stage.

Gretta's frown deepened.

Just one Aina was already enough of a headache, making their carefully planned alliance crumble before it could even start. But who the hell was this guy?!

Gretta swept a glance toward her three 'partners' turned ambiguous enemies.

At that moment, the young man who always had his hands in his pockets, Arnid, swept a kick toward the seventh participant.

BANG!

The youth slammed against the large tiled wall.

With his head spinning and his body practically pinned by the force, the slight acceleration he received from Arnid didn't help him to escape his dagger for long.

Just like that, there were six.

Aina and Leonel stood on opposite sides of the room, each focused on escaping their daggers. As though they couldn't sense the subtle change in the atmosphere, they remained stuck in their own worlds, not showing any sign of trying to come together.

The four Hero Peak members sent a gaze toward one another. Sparks flew, a silent communication whizzing through the air.

In a split moment, they all came to the same conclusion. If they wanted to give themselves a chance, there was only one logical path to take.

Anrid, Gretta, Edmorn and the last, Fox, stamped their feet down in unison, sending a resounding boom throughout the room as they shot toward Leonel as one.

Their plan was obvious. Take down Leonel first and as quickly as possible.. Then take down Aina.

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Leonel's lip curled into a smile. 'Dream Model.'

Leonel's gaze radiated a blinding light. He had been mapping out simulations of this room for the past three rounds, how could he not have accumulated data on the other participants?

The truth was that he had no need to use Dream Model on these enemies. Not only were they much weaker than him, they had no single attribute that surpassed him. Whether it was in speed, strength, dexterity, agility, he blew them out of the water.

However, in that moment, Leonel halved his physical attributes. Then, still thinking it wasn't enough, he halved them again. He just barely maintained enough speed to stay ahead of his dagger.

Anrid was the first to make it to Leonel, his leg raising high into the air and slamming down for a vicious axe kick.



Leonel's eyes suddenly dimmed down, becoming cold and calculating. The four felt as though a beast had locked onto them all.

Anrid's kick missed Leonel's shoulder by a hair, causing his eyes to widen. He had missed? How? He didn't even see Leonel dodge and he had already accounted for his trajectory.

At that moment, Leonel slipped by Anrid, only to find Gretta having morphed into a bird with an almost two meter wing span. The odd nose contraption she always wore suddenly became a sharp blade at the end of her beak.

With a single flap, her speed increased explosively.

'Mm... Dream Model.'

Leonel shifted and rebuilt his model for Gretta. His subtle action caused Fox's sword to just barely miss him.

He slipped through the pincer of three, only to find the silent Ermond waiting with a fist he put his all into.

'His strength is beyond these three, but he still chose to attack me. Seems he's really afraid of my lovely girlfriend.'

Unfortunately for Ermond, Leonel slipped by his strike just as quickly and with just as much ease.

Leonel was like the wind, weaving in and out of their attacks as though he was taking a stroll. Often times, the youths couldn't even see how he dodged, not knowing that he had planned out his steps several moments ago, to slip by their predicted attacks.

To them, it didn't look like he dodged, but that was only because he already knew where they would attack and chose not to be there.

Leonel's dagger followed him around like a ghost, but couldn't even touch his shadow.

At that moment, the walls flashed again.

'Another 1%. Perfect.'

Leonel lithely dodged another round of attacks.

'When I begin to build up my Metal Body after this, I'll need to make sure I don't lose my flexibility. I feel a bit stiff.' Leonel absentmindedly noted something he should have noticed long ago, seeming not realizing that he had been backed into a corner.

With a shocking call, Gretta swept down from above, looking to pierce him through the head.

The three remaining youths shot toward him. A fist, a leg and a sword, all sweeping toward him with perfect precision, not to mention. There really was no place left to dodge.

Leonel's cold eyes regained their light, a smile spreading across his face.

'It's been fun, I guess.'

Leonel took a step forward, his body sliding to the side.

In a perfectly timed movement, he slipped between Anrid's leg and Ermond's fist.

PUCHI! ρ??∪??????

"Round three has concluded. End of exam."

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“You couldn’t lend me a helping hand?” Leonel had a hurt expression on his face.

With the handicaps he placed on himself, it took him three minutes of dodging to defeat those four without attacking. Yet, his Aina hadn’t even tried to help, how cruel.

“You know I’m still in the Third Dimension. Just one hit from those daggers would have sucked me dry, then what would you have done?”

Aina shook her head and ignored Leonel’s nonsense. If anything, she should have helped those four. They probably didn’t know how they lost even near the end. By all rights, Leonel should have been down and out. Even Aina almost made a move in that final moment.

The couple made their way to the receptionist of the second floor again to find the same man with a dead look. However, at that moment, the men seemed to be completely focused on the screen before him, looking intently toward something.

From their angle, Leonel could just barely see the last moments of his battle, how he slipped through and caused each of the four to be attacked by another’s dagger. Even Ermond who managed to dodge was somehow assaulted by Leonel’s dagger near the end just as the latter slipped by his fist.

Just like that, all four were eliminated at the same time, causing this round to only have two passers.

Leonel cleared his throat slightly.

The man slowly looked up and gazed deeply at Leonel before throwing a white belt over to the both of them. He didn’t seem intent on saying anything else after this, just going back to what he was watching on the screen as though Leonel and Aina couldn’t see him.

The couple looked toward one another and could only leave in the end.

Leonel suddenly grinned as they left Valiant Hall.

“Want to go piss off a few seniors?”

Aina rolled her eyes. “I still have to train you know. All I’ve been doing is following you around, I haven’t even gotten a challenge in the past few days.”

“That’s not true, what about the Titan Hyena?” Leonel rebutted.

“Not enough.” Aina replied straight forwardly.

“Fine, fine. You go off and leave me all alone again for another few months.”

Aina’s eyes flashed with a hint of guilt. “I’ll come see you at least once a week.”

“Good.” Leonel nodded.

“Don’t cause too much trouble.” Aina said sternly. “And you can always come to Hero Peak, you know.”

“How can you ask me not to cause trouble, then say that?”

Aina giggled. “Well, Valiant Hall’s training facilities aren’t any worse than Hero Peaks. Use them.”

“Mm.” Leonel nodded, seeing Aina off.

After watching her disappear into the distance, Leonel turned his gaze toward the distant freshmen quarters. It seemed he would have to piss off some seniors on his own.

For the next step of his plan, he would need a store.. Then, he’d really be able to take advantage of his haul, courtesy of the King of Ores.

## Chapter 696

Leonel pushed the broken doors aside, walking into the familiar dilapidated bar with a smile on his face.

When the white belted senior saw Leonel, he froze. He had only planned to give a casual look over to see who had come. But, what he hadn't expected was for this demon to suddenly appear again.

"Hey!" Leonel grinned, sitting at the bar. "Long time no see!"

The freshmen bar was quite full at the moment. Usually, most would be out on missions right now with the new rules that had been implemented. However, with the sudden danger of the Oryx now being common knowledge, few freshmen still dared to venture out.

Without a thing to do, and with even the most common of training centers now requiring merit points to operate, the freshmen only really had three options: risk their lives, go sleep in their dorms, or hang out here.

It was unsurprising, then, that most chose to come here.

By now, news of Leonel had spread amongst the freshmen and though many couldn't pick him out by his looks, there were still a good few that could. As such, it was no surprise, then, that his appearance caught no small amount of attention.

The bartender shivered under Leonel's gaze but did his best to regain his composure. Seeing how innocent Leonel looked now and comparing him to the monster he had seen before, it was really like night and day. He really had no idea who the true Leonel was.

"What's your name?" Leonel asked politely.

"My... I'm called Mernik."

Leonel nodded. “Mernik, I’m about to do something that will probably cause you a lot of trouble. But, in return, I’m willing to extend you protection should you need it. In addition, if you don’t mind, I wouldn’t have a problem if you continued to work here.”

Mernik gulped down hard, his pupils trembling. At that moment, he had a hard time maintaining eye contact with Leonel.

“This... What do you want to do...”

Leonel sighed, he really did feel a bit bad. But, he also needed this place.

“This store, I need it. I’m officially issuing a challenge. Your boss can come here to defend this place, or I’ll take it for myself.”

“Ah...”

Mernik really wanted to shed tears at this moment.

Why would a white belt come be a bartender at this place filled with freshmen? The answer was obvious, it was him who was tasked with maintaining order and rebuffing these challenges.

The owner of this store only casually used it to make some passive income, but it was still a store that had been passed down through several generations of their family. It might be shabby, but enough ants could even kill an elephant. The freshmen didn’t spend a lot in this place, but there were so many freshmen and so few places for them to gather that this place made quite a sum even though it wasn’t comparable to the best bars and restaurants Valiant City had to offer.

Mernik, thanks to his position, was able to greatly benefit from this. But, with these benefits came harsh requirements as well.

With his strength, Mernik was actually above average amongst white belts. But, when compared to Leonel, he felt like a frog at the bottom of a well, and that was over a month ago.

The current Leonel felt even sharper and more powerful despite the fact he wasn't enraged like he had been last time. ρ??U??????

"I... I... Alright..."

Mernik didn't even raise his hand to battle. His palm flipped over, revealing a plaque. With a pained look on his face, he erased a Force mark and handed it over to Leonel.

Leonel raised his brows, grabbing onto the plaque. After a quick sweep of his senses, he realized it was an ownership plaque that seemed to have the unique ability of reading one's Force signature.

'Interesting concept.'

Leonel nodded and chose to use his Star Force to leave behind a mark, using the unique pulses of his Three Star Constitution that had yet to display its true might.

In that moment, a hidden formation beneath the store rumbled.

DONG! DONG!

A pillar of light shot into the air, forming a beautiful pink-red emblem.

The light form a budding rose with two horns crossed in the back. It was quite an elegant emblem and even seemed someone feminine. Or, rather it would if not for the roaring black bear that took up its background.

Leonel raised his brows. "So much fanfare for such a small shop?"

Mernik's lip twitched. Did this person not do any research before he chose to take this action? Were all strong people like this? Acting first then thinking later?

This shop might look run down, but that was a testament to its age, not its quality. The past few owners of this shop just couldn't bother to take care of it. But, even then, it took hundreds of years for its state to become like this.

This spot was one of the oldest in Valiant City and also happened to have been in the hands of a senior whose family had one of the longest tenures in shop ownership as well.

Due to this, the Union this shop was under wasn't a small one either. In fact, this Union was under the jurisdiction of one of Valiant Heart Mountain's three most powerful factions: The Bear Rose Faction.

In terms of most powerful factions on Valiant Heart, there were three. One was Raylion's Hero Faction, practically taking the entirety of Hero Peak as its stomping grounds. The second was the Severed Heart Faction which was headed by one of the few geniuses outside of Hero Peak that could stand amongst Apestus and Raylion. And the third... Was the Bear Rose Faction, formed by the preeminent genius of Honor Peak.

It was the existence of Severed Heart and Bear Rose that made many think that Raylion was levying a challenge toward either Honor or Brave Peak when he called for his meeting.

But at this moment, Leonel had just done something that hadn't occurred in over a century.

He dared to snatch a store under the protection of a Union and had kicked a bees nest.

In the skies above, the emblem of the Bear Rose Faction crumbled into motes of light, leaving nothing but a pillar of white.

Chapter 697

"So it's like that?" Leonel smiled. "No big deal."

Leonel turned back toward the freshmen who were sitting in a bit of an awkward situation. They weren't sure if they should all be leaving now or not. After all, this shop was no longer under the ownership of its original owner.



“No worries everyone, drink and chat to your heart’s content. Everything is on me tonight. Tomorrow, I’ll close this place down for some renovations and will open it back up the day after so you’ll only miss out on a day.

“After that, it will be business as usual plus some added perks.”

The freshmen were stunned for a moment before they cheered. Free drinks and food? Which of them wouldn’t be excited about such a thing?

Plus, this place was actually finally getting some renovations? Who knows how long they had been waiting for such a thing? Their only worry was that prices might go up along with them.

“Give me something mild, Mernik. I’m not a big drinker.” Leonel said.

Leonel had never really understood the fascination with alcohol. Though he had been underage on Earth, considering his track record, there were plenty of ways for him to break the law. The issue was that alcohol wasn’t something he found worthwhile to break the law for.

It was gross and harsh on the throat. Plus, Leonel could never seem to get drunk in the past, so there wasn’t even a reward or buzz at the end waiting for him.

By now, Leonel knew that that was likely because of the vomit brew his dad had fed him for years. But, he had already missed his window to join the ‘cool kids’.

At this moment, he was content with sipping on something a middle aged wine mom would love the taste of. He could almost hear his teammates jeering him in the back. Even Mernik was giving him weird looks.

But, as far as Leonel was concerned, this was only to pass the time until the inevitable storm came.

Mernik diligently cleaned Leonel's glass, spending more time on it than he ever had before. He might have been caught in a struggle between behemoths, but now his only option was to rely on Leonel's protection. Without it, he was finished. So, he could only make Leonel as happy as possible.

...

Valiant City was in an uproar. The sign of a shop falling hadn't been seen in decade, let alone one that carried the Bear Rose emblem.

It was safe to say that this news spread quickly. But, due to another mind blowing event happening nearly in conjunction, it didn't grab the attention of the people as sharply as one might expect.

Just before the Bear Rose events began, news of the King of Ores faction and their being responsible in the deaths of almost 20 freshmen spread like wildfire. But, this news wasn't even nearly as big as the fact that the culprits would be put on trial for their crimes. Of them, the prime culprit, Hallis, a young man with the earth ability that ended all of these lives freshmen would be tried for expulsion and even the death penalty.

The news was shocking enough to rock Valiant Heart to its core. Punishment on this level had not been levied in a very long while and showed everyone just how serious Valiant Heart was about maintaining unity.

Almost immediately, the whispers began to grow more fervent.

There was such swift and exact punishment for this, but what about those seven youths who died at the hands of that unnamed man? What about those three seniors before them?

It was clear that someone was still trying to control the overarching narrative, bending it so that the focus of the people would change. But, unfortunately for these individuals, there was a difference this time.

Almost just as swiftly as these 'whispers' began to be spread, it was snuffed out by the heart warming story of a freshman leading his fellow freshmen to safety even under the oppression of his seniors.

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In the blink of an eye, the half constructed narrative crumbled while Leonel continued to sip at his fruity drink.

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BANG! BANG! BANG!

“Explain this shit to me! Where are the tunnels?! Where are the Ores?! Why can’t I see shit down here anymore?!”

Nigmir roared, venting his rage on the new crew that had come to rotate in place of Miya, Hallis and the others. However, before they could even get to work on their shift, they almost immediately sent word back to the faction that there was something wrong.

The instant Nigmir got the report, he felt a sinking feeling in his gut.

This network of mines was among their most important. No, it was the most important.

If there was one thing the Valiant Heart World had, it was an endless supply of Ores, especially Ores within the Fourth Dimension. However, among these, there were definitely differences and strength and weaknesses among them.

This Ore Network, on top of being relatively close to the mountain pass and thus much easier to defend compared to others, it carried two of these precious Ores.

The first was Twice Refined Diamond. This Ore was known for its hardness just like normal Diamond. But, its chemical structure was several times more robust to the point where only someone with strength nearing the Fifth Dimension could use it in metal work.

Mining this Ore was important for two reasons. First, to keep it out of the hands of the Oryx who loved to use this heavy and hard Ore in their armors. And, second to sell to large metal working merchants and organizations for a hefty profit.

The second Ore was Twice Refined Steel. If Twice Refined Diamond made the perfect armor for those on the stronger side of spectrum, Twice Refined Steel was perfect for the formation of heavy weapons. However, it was also good for forming the foundation of exceptionally heavy machinery and fortifications.

Both of these Ores were favorites of the Oryx and important to keep away from them. But, they were simultaneously among the most lucrative.

How lucky had they been to find a network of tunnels that connected both such resources?

Yet now, it was all over. It was all gone.

The tunnels that they could reach had all been cleaned out to the point where the walls didn't even shine anymore, leaving the underground space completely dark.

And, to make matters worse, the other paths were completely blocked by collapsed tunnels. Without several months of work, maybe even years, it would be impossible to clear them all. This mind had suddenly become useless to them, slashing down the King of Ores faction earning potential by more than half.

Who else could they blame if not the Oryx? Even if they wanted to suspect Leonel, he was allowed to keep all the profit he made to himself as a black belted freshmen...

But would they even have the mind to suspect him? That was all fine, though.. He planned to make it quite obvious very soon.

Chapter 698

Leonel sat silently, sipping at a sweet drink. In his fingers, he rolled what looked like a silver ring, sliding it between his digits with a deft flexibility. His hands seemed capable of performing tasks that would otherwise be impossible.

'This ring... what is it?'

Leonel found it hard to believe that someone like Senior Lu could be holding onto something so valuable. But, when it came to random events of the universe, who was Leonel to say that he could perfectly understand them all?

Leonel had already been trying to Dream Sculpt this ring for the better part of the last half an hour, but he was still only half of the way there.

To put this matter into perspective, after Leonel reached the Peak of the Fifth Dimension with his Calculative Mind ability, completing a Dream Sculpt for even one of his Quasi Bronze Spears would take a few minutes at worst, and that was a treasure at the very peak of the Fourth Dimension.

Leonel had never tried to Dream Sculpt his Quasi Silver Spear before, but he really wasn't sure if even it would take so long. If he had to guess, the times would be fairly close.

If Leonel used this to deduce the value of the ring, it would at least be of the Fifth Dimension.

Once he broke things down like this, it wasn't impossible to believe that Lu could get his hands on such a thing. After all, as a student of Valiant Heart, he had the potential to one day become a Fifth Dimensional existence even though the probability was smaller than running into this ring in the first place.

Intuition told Leonel that maybe even Lu didn't know what this ring was but he kept it close understanding that it had to be special. Considering the sly nature of that Senior Lu, this did indeed sound like something he would do.

Leonel sighed. He couldn't help but think of nights Lu probably stayed up dreaming of what kind of treasure this ring would bring him to, hoping that he would shoot into the stars in one sweep the moment he learned of its secret.

And yet now, those dreams had been stamped out and the final light of his hopes was now rolling between Leonel's fingers so casually.

'This world is a cruel place...' Leonel thought to himself.

Ultimately, Leonel decided that he would need to ask the dictionary about this. But, before that, he would need to find a quiet place.

BANG!

The small shop suddenly shook, a violent force flinging the doors from their handles. A few shrieks sounded amidst the freshmen as they scurried out of the way. But, with their talent, such a flimsy, half rotten door couldn't cause any severe harm to even the weakest of them.

What could cause harm, though, was the force that had sent it flying.

"Who was it?! Which bastard dares provoke Bear Rose?!"

The members of Bear Rose had come here with fires in their bellies. No matter how they thought of it, they were certain that Hero Peak had begun making their move again.

What bullshit abolition of the Peak system? Anyone with half a brain knew that Peaks still existed, they just hid behind the label of factions all the more now. This rule change only gave Hero Peak more freedom to snatch resources. p???(???????)

However, the cohort of Hero Peak dogs they expected to find here weren't here at all. Rather, a singular young man walked out from the now broken doorway, standing before them all.

Bear Rose had come prepared for an all out war. Not knowing that they had been challenged by a brat who had barely been here for two months, they brought a full entourage of several white belts and even sent a blue belt to lead them all. Their lineup consisted of one of their most talented upper mid-level teams and totaled nine.

They almost opened their mouths to tell Leonel to get the hell out of the way until they all froze seeing the plaque in his hands.

Leonel scanned the nine before him. Eight white belts and one blue belt. Each of them wore the emblem of Bear Rose on the belt fabric that hung between their legs, making their affiliations quite clear.

“This shop.” Leonel pointed over his shoulder. “I’m taking ownership of it.”

The members of Bear Rose were stunned. The spectators who had come here for a good show, hoping to see a clash between Bear Rose and Hero were also stunned.

By this point, Leonel hadn’t even switched off his black belt for his white belt yet. But, even if he had, the reaction wouldn’t be any less speechless. It only made it all worse that Leonel was wearing no emblems to speak of.

The blue belt who led the group narrowed his eyes. His arms crossed over his broad chest, pressing down the dense patches of hair that covered his torso almost like coarse fur.

Even with his arms crossed, he still held two massive hammers connected by a single thick chain. He looked toward Leonel deeply, his spine tingling.

This young man before him was too calm.

“You, a freshman, decided to challenge my Bear Rose faction?”

“Well, I didn’t choose to challenge you specifically. I just happen to need this store.” Leonel replied.

“Are you aware of who owns this store?”

“I am not.”

The frown of the blue belt grew deeper and deeper.

“Fril. Bane. Take him down.”

Losing his patience, the commander coolly commanded. Since this freshman didn't know what was good for him, it was best that they deal with this quickly. The more time they spent here, the longer Bear Rose's name would be dragged through the mud. Even Hero didn't dare to provoke them so casually.

Without a word, two white belts shot forward. As though by prior agreement, they weaved in and out of each other's paths, appearing before Leonel in a flash.

Their legs whipped out like vipers, each aiming for a side of Leonel's head.

## Chapter 699

Leonel's eyes never left the blue belt. Up to now, he had only fought the most elite of white belts, but he was truly curious to see how big the gap between a white belt and a blue belt was.

As far as he knew, the process for becoming a blue belt was far more complex. In fact, part of the reason he even got involved with Sarrieth in the first place was because the latter was trying to complete his requirements to be promoted.

'I guess I'll find out today...'

Leonel hopped back, feeling the wind pressure of their kicks send his hair flying.

A golden light enveloped his legs, explosively increasing his speed. In the blink of an eye, he managed to close the distance he had created again, slamming a fist into the chest of Bane.

Fril reacted quickly, trying to use the opening of Leonel's attack to counter. But, he found his leg slipping through air again.

His planted foot suddenly felt a sharp pain at the joint of his knees. He could only intake a sharp breath, his vision spinning under the unholy amount of agony.



His knee bent backward under the pressure of Leonel's sole. The worst part was that Leonel didn't even seem to be applying much pressure. He simply stood there, his head just under the range of Fril's attack and his foot resting on the latter's knee cap.

In the blink of an eye, two white belts fell to the ground, leaving Leonel practically unscathed. Even after a few moments, it was difficult for the youths around Leonel to put into words what they had just seen. It almost felt like they were watching two men trying their best to harm themselves. They practically walked into their injuries.

"A sensory type?" The blue belt's spoke evenly.

Leonel was quite surprised when he heard this. This was the first time someone had ever guessed his ability. Most thought it was one of his Lineage Factors.

However, the combat experience of a blue belt couldn't compare to those Leonel had battled in the past. They had seen too much. Rather than being flustered by Leonel's display, this blue belt only came to the only logical conclusion. It was simple deduction.

But, this only made Leonel more curious.

With a grin, Leonel flipped his palm, causing a massive spear to appear.

BANG!

The spearhead crashed into the ground, its weight so great that a wild array of cobweb-like cracks spread in every direction.

"Back away." The blue belt said coolly.

"But, captain...!"

"He's mine."

The blue belt stepped forward, his heavy step causing the ground to quake almost as much as Leonel's heavy spear.

He stretched out his two massive hammers to his sides, holding them out as though to display the strength of his arms.

The chain that hung between the hammers jingled and sparkled, glistening with cracked and dried blood. ρ??∪??????

Leonel rose his heavy spear from the ground, pointing it forward in a feat of strength that was no less impressive. The massive three-dimensional head of the spear was double the size of his head, probably carrying at least 60% of the spear's entire weight. Yet, the polearm didn't so much as bend the slightest bit while being held this way.

“My name is Arte.”

“My name is Leonel.”

BANG!

The two shot forward, appearing before one another in a blink.

Leonel's body embodied the spirit of his spear. His figure became larger than life, his every movement imposing and grandiose. For just a moment, he seemed to even dwarf Arte in size despite them being about the same height.

Arte didn't seem fazed. His hammers swung down simultaneously, his back flexing madly beneath the carpet of hair they hid under.

Leonel swung his spear out to the side, slashing in a wide arc upward and toward Arte's head.

Arte smashed his hammers downward as one, looking to shatter Leonel's spear into countless little pieces.

BANG! BANG!

A shockwave of wind shot in every direction. As though walking through hurricane force winds, several spectators covered their eyes with their forearms, leaning forward to not be blown back.

The freshmen within the bar to Leonel's back especially found themselves in a precarious situation. The front wall of the shop bent and wheezed, seemingly about to cave in at any moment.

Leonel's arm creaked. He felt a pressure the likes of which he had never experienced before even despite using the Four Seasons Realm to support his spear.

Arte felt his shoulders about to collapse, the resonating ring of metal colliding against metal shaking his body to its core. But, maybe the most shocking thing was that there wasn't a single scratch on Leonel's spear. In fact, Arte faintly felt his own hammers giving way, cracking as though they might collapse into a pile of ash at any moment.

Arte was in shock. His two hammers were both Tier 6 treasures. It took him decades of saving every penny to finally be able to commission them to his specifications. But now they couldn't even last a single blow...?

Arte's expression changed. He realized that going head on with Leonel would only result in him losing his precious babies. He couldn't let this continue.

Arte shot backward. Deep inside he felt embarrassed. He knew the moment Leonel took out such a heavy spear that he had met a fellow man who wanted to fight a battle of strength. But, he couldn't afford to do this now.

With deft movements, Arte's style completely changed. Leonel almost took a step forward to pursue, but his instincts suddenly flashed with danger warnings.

Arte's chains sprung to life. Leonel could see a subtle fluctuation of Force coursing through them with a level of control he rarely if ever saw.

Before Leonel could react, Arte whipped his hammers across his body.

At that moment, Leonel found a chain loop closing in around his neck.. At that level of force, he just might lose his head even with his Metal Body.

## Chapter 700

Leonel's eyes flashed.

With quick movements, his heavy spear disappeared, replaced by a twin set of spears he immediately speared into the ground on either side of himself.

CLANG!

The chains rang out, clashing against the polearm of the spears.

Leonel leapt into the air, balancing the tips of his toes on both spears and pushing against them to stop the chains from closing in any more.

Arte felt a strong repulsive force, stopping him from tightening the chains any further. He was shocked by Leonel's response, but his lip couldn't help but twitch when he saw the quality of the spears Leonel was using as foot rests. Where the hell was this freshmen getting all of these weapons from?!

Unfortunately for Arte, Leonel's unconventional response had a purpose.

Leonel's palm flipped over, revealing a tall, sleek black bow. In the blink of an eye, he had released three arrows. They streaked across the slowly setting sky of dusk, reflecting the gorgeous violent and deep red hues of the sun above.

Arte reacted quickly, releasing his grip on one hammer and pulling back on the other hard.

The chains were finally free.

A hammer shot out like a cannonball. Arte pulled back so hard that Leonel felt his footing quake.

Sparks flew as the chains slid across the polearm of the two spears. The hammer wrapped around one edge, changing trajectory and shooting for Leonel's head as though it had a mind of its own.

At that same instant, Arte roared. He raised his remaining hammer, continuously pulling back to give the other more and more speed. When he reached his peak, his arm flexed, swinging downward with all his might.

**BANG! BANG! BANG!**

At the exact moment Arte countered Leonel's three arrows, sliding back further and further with every strike, the hammer had accelerated toward Leonel's head, having every intention of decapitating him.

'How clever...' Leonel's eyes flashed.

His own attack ended up giving Arte even more momentum. As he pulled back further, the hammer, linked to the chain, shot toward Leonel even faster.

Leonel's gaze suddenly glowed with something other than coldness or surprise... It was excitement.

He felt his blood boil. The whistling wind of the hammer shooting toward him making his nerves scream.

Calculations ran threw Leonel's mind at a speed that was inconceivable to most. As clever as Arte's attack was, it had one fatal flaw.

Leonel's feet shifted. The spears he balanced upon shook, pulling against the chains still sparking against them.

The trajectory of the hammer shifted, flying over Leonel's head by barely an inch at the very last instant.  
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It wrapped around the two spears, shooting back toward Arte. However, it was then that Leonel suddenly grabbed at the flying hammer.

At that moment, it was flying at several hundred kilometers an hour, being just shy of the speed of sound. Trying to grab onto such a thing at that moment, even if you succeed, felt no different from courting death. And if you failed, the best that you could hope for was a lost hand.

However, as though it was the most normal thing, Leonel completed it all in a single motion.

Runes flickered to life across his skin, a surge of bronze violet hanging around him as a halo manifested above his head. He looked like a Roman God, his eyes filled with a confidence that could topple worlds. At that moment, his image was imprinted into the minds of all those present.

The instant Leonel grabbed onto the hammer his body shot forward. His reached out his free hand, causing one of the spears to shoot out of the ground and slam into his palm.

Arte's expression changed, suddenly finding Leonel flying toward him at impossible speeds.

Give up his hammers? That was impossible. Control it as he had been previously to change Leonel's trajectory? That seemed like the best choice, but at that moment, Arte found that his weapon wasn't responding to him. All the Force he tried to pour into it was blocked, countered by an opposing force that could have only come from Leonel.

Arte's eyes widened, unable to wrap his brain around what was happening.

But, Leonel didn't allow him to think for very long. The spear he grabbed didn't remain with him for long while.

Using his momentum, Leonel's arm became like a canon, shooting his spear out like a harpoon. It flew toward Arte as though a star streaking across the skies.

Arte's eyes lit with panic. The distance was too close and his hammer wasn't responding to him. Even if it was, considering the quality of Leonel's weapons, could he even block such a thing safely?

Arte roared. "Absolute Control!"

His Force erupted, his hand stretching outward. He poured all his strength into his free hand, reaching out for the spear streaking through the skies.

BANG!

Arte's arm ripped backward at an awkward angle, his shoulder popping out of its socket. He grimaced, his face turning pale. However, it was at that moment that Leonel reached him.

A heavy spear appeared in Leonel's hand again. But, at that moment, Arte felt like falling to his knees. A heavy air suddenly wrapped around him, making it feel as though his own weight had multiplied by several times over.

One arm held onto Leonel's spear, unable to produce any strength after its dislocation. The other was prepared to raise his hammer up and stop Leonel's charge. But, now, it felt heavier than ever, as though the weight of the world had fallen onto him.

His timing was thrown completely off, he couldn't even counter when Leonel reached his range.

Leonel shifted the blade of his heavy spear, streaking through the skies, he slammed the flat of it against Arte's chest.

Arte felt his ribs cave in, all the air in his lungs shooting out at once.

He shot backward like an arrow from a bowstring, crashing over a hundred meters away, unable to stand.