

Descent 821

Chapter 821

“What is this supposed to mean?”

Joel stood as the core of the group, he knew that he had to. If he let anyone else lead the conversation, there would definitely be some words exchanged that couldn't be taken back. It was his duty to at least try to keep things as amicable as he could, but even he was on the verge of losing his temper.

They had all been worried about Leonel. This state of ignorance they were all in just made things a million times worse, especially since they were all forced to stay here without the ability to interfere.

It could be said that their nerves were fried, their tempers were short and their fuses were even shorter. It was a powder keg that was difficult to keep control of, even for Joel.

He could barely keep the edge of aggression from his voice, his tone even and calm. At that moment, he wished he could detach himself as easily as Leonel did.

At that moment, Yuri stood with several things in her hands.

One was the Segmented Cube that Leonel almost always left with Aina these days. It was one of his most important treasures, and it was the closest thing to home he had. His reasons, then, for leaving it with Aina so often was clear.


He wanted her to know that he would always return, that she was where his heart was and only with her could he truly unwind and relax.

The second was a talisman that lay on top of it. From time to time, the talisman would light up as though someone was trying to make use of it. But, Joel knew enough about the Dimensional Verse now to know that anyone who wasn't Aina that tried to use this would trigger something he wasn't sure if he was ready to handle just yet.

Joel was certain that this was a mechanism Leonel had left behind to protect Aina. If anyone other than her used it, it would begin recording and relaying the situation back. He knew that if Leonel knew what was happening now, regardless of the danger, he would cut a path back. But that would only end up harming himself.

Aina stood a step behind Yuri, her golden eyes reflecting the pulsing light of the talisman. Every time it happened, her gaze seemed to become more and more dead, the paleness of her skin reaching the point of sickliness.

She could almost see Leonel on the other side. He should have been focused on his escape, but once or twice a minute he would pour his Force into his own talisman, checking to see if Aina had 'left' the restrictions of the pillar.

The third thing was the necklace Aina always wore. Leonel had made it for her 19th birthday. Since that moment, she had never taken it off. 

The necklace was more than just a pretty gift. That day Leonel gave it to her was the day she was finally open about the feelings she had for him. She had almost forced herself onto Leonel for fear that if she hadn't done so, she would lose him forever.

Leonel had disappeared for months back then, working on the Crafts that helped them win the war against Terrain. Aina could still remember every feeling of horror, pain and anxiety she had experienced in those months. But that necklace was like a promise that he'd always protect her.

The last thing was her mask.

As sentimental as the other things were, Aina found this to be the second hardest to part with. Every item was like a piece of her soul she was giving away, but this one felt different for some reason.

A mask should have been worn in shame or when one wanted to hide. If any other man had given her such a thing, Aina might have assigned it with feelings of self loathing and hate.

And yet, when Leonel gave it to her, she could feel the care put behind it. He didn't give it to her because he was ashamed of her face, he hadn't given it to her because he wanted to help her hide either... He had only given it to her for the sake of helping her live in peace.

Everyday of her existence had been a constant torture. The pain, the itchiness, the constant reminder that her face was forever marred by the people she hated most in the world, that her mother had likely experienced far worse than just this...

Until she received this mask.

It was as though she had stepped into a new world, one that didn't always have to be filled with agony and remembrance of the worst memories of her life. Instead, whenever she woke up and didn't feel the discomfort she had long become used to, she instead felt the care and affection of the man who poured his heart and soul into making it for her.

Aina's eyes reddened, but no more tears fell. Even in her previous unconscious state, she had flooded her cheeks with more than her body could account for. At the moment, even if she wanted to cry more, she couldn't force anything else out.

So she stood there, her lips pressed into a line of silence, her skin paling with every passing moment, her eyes losing the golden glow they once had...

"What is this supposed to mean? I've said it already," Yuri spoke calmly, "Please pass on these things to Leonel. We have to leave now."

"What. Is. That. Supposed. To. Mean."

Joel emphasized his words one at a time, the edge of his voice being more and more difficult to hide almost like an ever sharpening blade.

"It can mean whatever you want it to mean. Aina has not met her father in over a decade and I plan on taking her to him. This is the most I will tell you. Now will you take these things or not?"

## Chapter 822

Joel felt like he might snap, and he wasn't the only one.

To his back, the towering walls that were Raj and Milan were like raging bulls wanting to go. Even the rookie, Drake, who was usually the most quiet and reserved of them was staring daggers at Yuri. If it wasn't for their being raised on Earth and being uniquely keen on the differences between men and women—something that was far less prevalent in the Dimensional Verse, at least in terms of strength—they would have most definitely lashed out already.

It was safe to say that had Yuri been a man, even Joel would have thrown the first punch already.

It was one thing for Yuri to be speaking so rudely to them, but it was something entirely different for Aina to not even try to speak at all. Even if it might not be the case, it felt like she was looking down on them.

While others might have been inclined to go easy on her because of her beauty, Leonel's teammates felt the exact opposite. They had never looked toward Aina as a potential partner to them. In their eyes, she could only be with Leonel and no one else. For all they cared, she could be a goddess and it would still be the same.

If anything, her beauty made them look at her with an even harsher light.

On the other side, it wasn't that Yuri wanted to be harsh, but if she wasn't, how would she move the spotlight from Aina to herself? With how fragile Aina was now, could she handle the scrutiny of these men?

None of them were Leonel, but they were the closest things to brothers that Leonel had in this life. It felt as though she was facing the derision of his family. The fact that she could even stand here right now was the strongest display she could muster. Anything else was too much.

"So." Joel took a long pause. "My Captain is out there risking his life for our sakes. But, your destination is so important to you that it's not even possible to wait for him to be safe? Is it really that this is so important? Or is it that you can't stand to look him in the eye?"

Aina's shoulders trembled, something that many might have missed due to its subtlety, but Yuri most definitely would not.

At that point, she snapped.

"Watch what you say." Yuri almost growled. "Or I'll watch it for you. Do you think I'm afraid of you?"

Joel's eyes narrowed, his body almost giving off a steamy mist. His blood had revved to such a high level of revolutions that his dark skin began to heat up. He was really just that close to snapping, but he wasn't the first to do so. ρ??∪???

"Fuck this! I swear to God if you stop me from talking I'll fight it out with you too, Joel. Who do you think you're talking to, tramp?! If I ate you, you wouldn't even fit between the gaps of my teeth!"

Raj was fuming, his big belly rumbling as he tried to step past Joel. If it wasn't for the latter holding him back, he really would have swung already.

"Stop holding me back, dammit! She really thinks she can just say whatever she wants without getting punched in the lip! Then there's the one behind her who's suddenly as timid as a mouse right now. What?! You're too noble to speak to us?!"

Raj was still subconsciously careful with his words when he spoke of Aina. He still felt that there were some line he shouldn't cross over. Even for a man who usually always spoke his mind without the hint of a filter, he had too much respect for Leonel to completely unleash all the things he wanted to, but he had already had it up to here.

Joel didn't let go of Raj, but he didn't stop him from speaking either.

"Fuck! Shit! I always said Captain wasted his time on her! She doesn't even have the courtesy to do it face to face!"

As though to add insult to injury, oblivious to what was happening, the talisman shone with a bright light once again, sending Raj into an even worse spiral of fury.

Even before they learned about Aina's scars, the team had always thought it was ridiculous that Leonel was so focused on one girl, they even teased him endlessly for it.

After they found out about her scars and that the face they had come to know was just a coverup by the high tech cosmetics of the 25th century, they had felt that it was even less worth it.

They were just teenage boys at the time, after all. All they could think with was their lower regions, they didn't understand why a star quarterback would ever waste so much effort on Aina when there were much better girls he could have.

Of course, they never said these things aloud, keeping it to themselves. They respected Leonel too much and while they might clown someone else among their brotherhood for banging an ugly duckling, it was clear that Leonel saw Aina as more than just a one night lay.

But now, all that pent up emotion, all those times they had bitten their tongues, had come bubbling forth in righteous indignation. They were far more angry for Leonel than they would ever be for themselves.

"FUCK! Every time I think about how many bitches Cap could have knocked down by now, I get pissed off! He could have a roster spot filled for everyday of the week, but he's wasting his time on this?!"

"He spent years chasing you! And fine, you don't owe him reciprocation just because he liked you, but you did it anyway! And now you've become beautiful now so you can't be bothered with Cap anymore?! Well fuck you too!"

Joel's initial reaction was that Raj's last words were too much. In fact, what was once subtle trembling on Aina's part had become obvious even to them. But, there was no sympathy in their eyes, nor did Joel make Raj apologize for what he said.

However, for Yuri, hearing these words, she saw red. Her arm raised with every intention of blasting Raj's head off.

## Chapter 823

“Don’t fight!”

These words didn’t come from Aina. She was in too much of a daze from Raj’s harsh words to even register what Yuri was about to do. If it wasn’t for this person calling out, they would have definitely crossed a line of no return.

Yuri might have only been trying to protect Aina, but killing one of Leonel’s brothers would have been as good as signing a death warrant. There was no way Leonel would ever forgive something like that. And, it was impossible to tell if Aina would ever be able to forgive Leonel for killing Yuri.

Luckily, at that moment, a cloaked figure flashed between the two groups, her speed beyond their expectations.

When she removed her cloak, they all immediately recognized her. This girl, Savahn, had always been the third in the group of Yuri and Aina. Though Yuri had known she was here and among the nine seeded geniuses, Savahn had been keeping her distance from Aina and Yuri ever since Conrad’s death.

Back then, when Aina did something no one ever expected her to do, it was probably Savahn who had been most jarred along with Leonel about that experience.

Of course, that moment was just yet another one of the reasons Leonel’s teammates felt that Aina wasn’t good enough for him. They knew their Captain well and could tell that the image he had built up of Aina until that point had all come crumbling down in a single instant.

As devastated as Leonel had been that day, Savahn was equally so, albeit for somewhat similar but mostly different reasons.

Savahn had always been the abrasive friend. When Leonel persisted in always asking Aina out, it was her who tried to draw a line between them. But, things hadn't always been that way. Savahn might have seemed to have a fiery and combative personality, but that was only because she had wanted to protect Aina.

She hadn't had very many friends in her youth. Much like Leonel and Aina, she had only been able to enter Royal Blue Academy because she was found to have a Five Star Profession. With how poor her family was, making friends in a school filled with noble children seem impossible... Until she met Aina.

Aina always had a shy and reserved smile, but she treated everyone the same. Savahn had long since forgotten the details, but by some miracle, she had managed to make her first friend.

Savahn had always been protective of that friendship, and it eventually translated toward always wanting to protect Aina...

But the image she had of the girl she always admired and respected crumbled that day. The result was her maintaining her distance, not quite knowing how to confront her emotions.

She closed off and shut down, just the same way she always had before she ever met Aina and Yuri.

In the past few years, she had dealt with a lot on her own.

The death of her parents. The difficulty of a young girl living alone in such a cruel world. She had even survived a war and managed to make it this far. Having done all of this on her own, she had more than just a little to be proud of.

In truth, she hadn't planned on interfering in this situation. She didn't have all the information, she had no idea who was in the right or who was in the wrong, or even if there was such a clear line between the two at all.

But, as the argument became more heated, it became too difficult for her to ignore. The final straw was when she saw Aina on the verge of collapse.



For a moment, she flashed back to the same shy girl who had reached out a helping hand to a younger her without a single friend. Right then, she felt that maybe the Aina she had known wasn't as much of an act as she thought. p??U??????

“Don't fight.” Savahn repeated. “Whatever disagreements you have, even if they can't be fixed through words, just give it time to breathe. Don't say or do something you'll regret for your lifetime.”

Yuri's hand trembled in the air before she clenched it into a fist.

She held all of Leonel's things in a single hand before pushing it forward to Savahn.

“Can you please give this to them? They won't accept it.”

Savahn opened her mouth to respond, still feeling slightly uncomfortable. But, before she could say anything, it was Aina who finally stepped forward, her gait somewhat uncoordinated and shaky.

She reached for the things in Yuri's hand, not allowing the latter to stop them as she took them and stepped past Savahn. Her arms trembled and her head lowered as she stretched the items toward Joel.

In his mind, Joel had every intention of still refusing, but his arms almost moved on their own. Though the anger within him was still bubbling forth, it somehow felt suffocated.

Unable to control her mental coercion, Aina's feelings were practically painted all over her sleeve. For a moment, Joel, Raj, Milan and Drake felt like those feelings were theirs.

Joel took hold of the items, clenching them just a bit too tightly. But, considering the quality of them, they were hardly affected in the slightest.

“... I'm sorry...” Aina said softly.

The trembling of her voice almost making Joel feel some sympathy. But, he managed to keep it down.

He had dealt with his fair share of women in his life. They had always been good at turning on the waterworks when it suited them before going off and doing whatever hurtful thing they wanted forgiveness for anyway. Even if they were in the wrong, somehow they would make you feel bad for it.

Joel had no intention of allowing such a thing to slide so easily. He didn't know if these were Aina's real emotions or not, or if it was just a façade. But, it didn't matter to him.

The talisman lit again, filling the silence that hung in the air with the soft whirring of energy.

Joel looked down at it, his anger threatening to bubble back up again.

“These aren't words you should be saying to me.” He responded coldly.

Joel turned and led the boys away.

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Leonel dashed through the cave pathways, making use of blind spots in the monitoring system to quickly gather up the materials he needed. His ship only needed to accommodate a single person, so he didn't need much. Even if he had to pull his knees to his chest, he would do it.

He had no idea about the clash between Aina and his teammates, nor did he know that a group of four was stalking toward his location, led by a woman who seemed to have the nose of a hound.

Chapter 824

Leonel dashed down tunnel after tunnel. He had already lost count of the number of miners he had come across. In fact, he had to give up on some valuable deposits for exactly this reason, realizing that it wasn't worth the risk.

It shouldn't have been too difficult to accumulate how much material he needed, especially since it was a ship only meant to carry himself, but the task ended up being more difficult than he gave it credit for. It seemed that he would either have to buy a ship in the future that he could modify to his standards, or he would just have to build one completely from scratch with more time on his hands.

As Leonel went from location to location, being forced to abandon what seemed like half of them due to too much activity, he grilled the dictionary on the danger of space.

Once his head cooled down from the adrenaline, he realized just how crazy his own idea was. Jumping out into space just because he felt like it was the move of a maniac. Who knew what kind of dangers were out there?

Unfortunately, this adrenaline didn't come from escaping as one might think. It was instead due to the creeping feeling at the back of his mind that only seemed to get worse every time he sent a string of Force into his talisman.

Leonel shook his head, dodging around a corner and pressing himself flat against a wall.

Two miners walked past him with light steps, neither realizing that they had just been less than half an arm's reach from a criminal their entire organization was scouring Planet Vincero for.

Leonel had an advantage right now. Though he had been forced to reveal some of his skill as a Force Crafter in order to activate the deactivated teleportation formations, there was no way they could guess he would have the skill to build his own ship.

The question remained, then... What did they think he was doing? Did they believe that he was waiting to die?

It was more likely than not that they believed he was waiting to be rescued. In that case, what course of action would they take?

Obviously, anyone confident in saving him would be a true rival of the Milky Way Guild. That means that the Guild would definitely turn most of their resources toward preparing for this enemy.



Peak Fourth Dimensional at best, was comparable to the Fifth Dimension already. The fact he could use it at all was a miracle.

The good news was that as Leonel grew, he wouldn't need to replace his Divine Armor so quickly. And, once he broke through, his Spatial affinity would sky rocket.

The bad news, however, was that he needed to deal with it being an extraordinarily heavy weight to him for now.

'This is enough. I just need to find a quiet place.'

Leonel had already collected enough ores to fill his five by five by five meter spatial ring to the brim. Luckily, he had some snowglobes he always kept on hand to give him some breathing room in this regard, or else he might not have had enough.

Using the dictionary, Leonel found a location with plenty of escape routes and not a single soul within 200 meters worth of tunnels. After deploying numerous detection throughout all tunnels, he immediately got to work, pulling out all the ores he needed.

At the same time, the over 500 split minds he had assigned toward designing the blue print of the ship had already formulated several iterations and tested them all using the information about space the dictionary had given.

'Let's go Little Tolly.'

Leonel's gaze suddenly became ice cold. He threw every distracting thought from his mind, turning all of his thinking power, aside from what he reserved for Dream Counter, toward the task at hand. Not only would this be his most difficult Craft to date, but he had to complete it within a day, preferably a half day.

'Three hours. I give myself three hours.'

Leonel opened his arms wide. Suddenly, Little Tolly, who could fit neatly around his wrist, became a large blanket of liquid, silver metal. If the little guy, or rather, not so little anymore, wanted to swallow Leonel whole, it was more than possible.

In two years without Leonel, Little Tolly had grown stagnant. But, even before that, the Metal Spirit had long since entered the Fourth Dimension and was well on his way to the Fifth. If not for Leonel stalling his progress, he would have already entered such a state.

Luckily, despite still being in the Fourth Dimension, Little Tolly didn't seem to have many problems swallowing and molding Fifth Dimensional metals. But, this only made sense. After all, in order to step into the next level, a Metal Spirit would need to be capable of devouring on step above it.

That said, there was less ease to it. Leonel had to be more forceful and deliberate with his control. The difference was akin to filling a cup with water versus filling one with wax.

In the first case, the water would easily take the shape of the vessel. In the latter case, though, the wax would have to first be melted. And, in the case that it wasn't melted, one would have to struggle to mold it by hand and press it into the shape you wanted.

Given this analogy, molding Fourth Dimensional metals was like water, while molding Fifth Dimensional one was like wax.

Even with this being the case, though, Leonel's skill didn't seem to miss a beat. His mind had split so many ways that he could control every minor little detail with a level of comfort that made it seem as though it was no more difficult than it had ever been.

The design Leonel had decided upon would be centered around the dictionary. It would be his navigator and his trusted AI. Leonel had reached a point in his skill where he was confident enough to do this, and he also realized that it would make much of the rest of the process easier on him.

With the internals figured out, all he needed to focus on were the defenses of the spacecraft and its propulsion system.



The hours blazed by one after another, Leonel's hands never pausing for even a moment. In fact, he only seemed to quicken his pace as though he was only becoming more and more comfortable.

“Since you're already here, is there a need for you to continue to hide?”

Leonel's voice came suddenly, his hands never stopping.

Bits and piece of ship seemed to come together like fusing tides. But, Leonel knew he wasn't quite finished yet. Of the three hours he had given himself, only two and a half of them had passed. It seemed that even his worse case scenario wasn't as worse case as it should have been. It could only mean that those looking for him were indeed quite skilled.

Leonel believed that best shot at finding him would be some sort of tracking ability or a minor level of omniscience similar to Goggles. But, the latter ability would require a lot of information that Leonel had been sure not to leave, while the former should have been very difficult given the climate.

How would you follow someone's scent with so many winds whipping about so viciously, for example?

By the time those experts found his trail, whatever smell he had left behind would have been scattered to the other side of the planet. And, if they instead chose to observe Leonel's actions instead, he had left behind enough subterfuge to delay them for three hours.

But it seemed that even he wasn't perfect.

Now he had an incomplete ship and four experts walking out from the shadows to face him.

Of course, it only made things better that this mountain happened to be filled with miners as well. All in all, this was an excellent situation indeed.

Leonel sent a glance toward Manson and the others, scattered pieces of his ship laying about.



## Chapter 826

Little Blackstar gripped onto the ends of Leonel's hair, baring his little teeth toward the coming enemies. If it wasn't for the sturdiness of Leonel's skin, his scalp might have begun to bleed already.

Leonel reached a hand up and gave the little mink a pat on the head, trying to calm him down. The instincts of beasts were usually beyond that of humans, so it was quite clear that Blackstar felt that both he and Leonel were in quite some danger. But, this only seemed to be the tip of the iceberg, Little Blackstar's attention had definitely been caught by something else as well.

Manson's gaze wasn't on Leonel. Rather, from beginning to end, she had never taken her eyes off of the scrap metal, or what seemed to be scrap metal, before them. Even now, she couldn't be certain of what Leonel was building and didn't even know if it was one step away from completion or if it was a hundred steps.

This was why she had chosen to be cautious from the very beginning, whatever hint of drunkardness she had had having vanished a long while ago. She had been hoping that she could observe in silence for long enough to figure out what it is that Leonel was building, but she hadn't expected to be called out like this ahead of time.

With Shadow Rat's abilities, being found out before they wanted to be found out almost never happened. It was safe to say, then, that the one who was most shocked was the short man with the flapping wig. In fact, he forgot to hold it down for a moment, causing it to almost flip off his head entirely.

Manson finally took her eyes off of the pieces that lay around Leonel. She wasn't a Force Crafter, so though she might be able to recognize an Ore in its raw or purified form, after it was processed like this, she was at a loss.

Still, she couldn't help but look toward Leonel with an eye of curiosity.

Even if she couldn't name these metals, what she could do was tell with absolute certainty that they were metals of the Fifth Dimension, each and every last one of them. Yet, not only was this child able to mold and manipulate them, he was clearly building something.

She was a layman, but at least she understood that this meant what ever Leonel was building... Had to be of the Bronze Grade at worse, right?

Manson's heart skipped a beat.

Third Dimension. 21 years old. Escaped an encirclement of Fifth Dimensional existences... And a Bronze Crafter?

What the hell was this?

Out of habit, Manson began to lick her lips and teeth again, but the distinct lack of an alcohol taste left her feeling slightly frustrated. However, she was filled with a different sort of intoxication when she looked toward Leonel, and it definitely wasn't because of his handsome looks.

She could almost feel it already. What kind of high would she experience snuffing out such a genius? How good would it feel?

Manson's bare toes curled along the cold stone ground, her legs squeezing.

Ten short claw marks were left in their path, filling the quiet atmosphere with the sound of scraping and cracking stone. ρ???(???)???

Manson's entire body quivered, a gentle gasp leaving her lips. Her breath was so hot that despite the temperatures not being near freezing, a steamy fog left her.

Her face flushed red and her pupils dilated. She looked as though she had entered a drunk state once again, except this one seemed even less innocent than the one from before.

Sparks flew within Leonel's Dreamscape, but he frowned when he noticed where they came from. That region of his Dreamscape only lit up when Aina reached a less than holy peak. The fact it was lighting up now for a woman he didn't even know filled him with an irrational rage.

Leonel didn't know why he was reacting this way. Maybe it was because his talisman still wasn't connecting, maybe it was because he felt he had done something wrong, or maybe it was purely because this woman was encroaching on something she should have never touched.

But whatever it was...

He was pissed.

Leonel's pale violet eyes suddenly gained a flash of red.

BANG!

The tunnels quaked, a surge of violet-red energies emitted from Leonel's body. In one instant, he had been a calm young man unperturbed by all. In the next, he felt like blasting his fist through someone's chest.

Manson shot forward, using the ground she had scraped as an anchor to propel herself. She seemed to have every intention of destroying everything before her, including Leonel's Crafts. No matter what it was, it wouldn't matter if it was all in pieces, right?

She rose her leg up high, performing a perfect vertical split.

Winds and Forces swirled around her bare heel as she ax kicked it downward. Just the momentum of her planted leg was enough to destroy everything. As for the strength of her actual kick... Did it even need to be explained?

Leonel coldly watched on, his senses reached out and grasping at each one of the pieces of his Craft. With a thought, they all shot backward under his control, floating as though he had a telekinetic ability to manipulate them.

Leonel dodged out of the way of Manson's kick, trying to store away the pieces of his Craft one by one. It was just unfortunate that doing so required touching his hand to them.

The result was Leonel dodging around the wide cave expanse, jumping, hopping and leaping toward the pieces he purposely hung in the air out of the way of danger.

He had expected Manson to target the pieces of the Craft after a while, but she was so enamored by the prospect of crushing him that none of it mattered to her.

If Leonel was dead, would he even get the chance to use his Craft in the first place? So why not focus on ripping his head off?!

## Chapter 827

The seething rage pumped through Leonel's veins. He tried to rationalize it, but after a moment he was too pissed to do even that. Every time Manson felt like she was close to bursting his head like a watermelon, her body would be rocked by a wave of pleasure and spark yet another connection in Leonel Dreamscape.

After the third time, Leonel cut himself off from that bundle of connections entirely, his thoughts fuming. And yet, every time it happened, Manson's face would only become more flushed and her actions more drunk.

Even as this happened, her kicking speed seemed to increase and her body became more limber. Leonel was suddenly having a tougher and tougher time predicting her next attack because they simply had no logic to them. This forced him to go from using his predictive model toward his muscle analysis model.

Leonel was under no illusions about his strength versus Manson's no matter how pissed he was. As far as he could tell, Manson was Tier 2 of the Fifth Dimension while the rest of her companions were Tier 1.

Leonel wasn't able to dodge her attacks because he was strong enough, he was completely relying on his ability to do so and that was quickly becoming almost impossible.

As though Manson was just stretching her limbs and only just getting into a rhythm, the whistling of her kicks became sharper and sharper, trailing Leonel by a hair's breadth.

“The kid’s survived quite a while.” Double Shot spoke, his hands itching.

“She just likes playing with her food. Just enjoy the show, she’s getting more perky.” Shadow Rat responded.

As usual, Panda didn’t say a word, taking a snap shot of every wardrobe malfunction he could catch a glimpse of.

‘This is some good material. It’ll last me at least a week. This is good, really good...’

“It’s been about half a minute, don’t you think the miners should have heard something by now?” Shadow Rat asked.

“If they know what’s good for them, they’ll stay out of Manson’s way. I doubt she’ll go as easy on them as she’s going on this kid.”

“It might also be that they’re just used to it and know to mind their own business,” Shadow Rat replied, “I used to work the mines too. Everyone is trying to meet and surpass their quotas for an extra bit of cash. Stealing someone else’s deposits isn’t very rare, fights like this happen all the time.”

“Ah, I forgot you were a sewer rat before.”

“Go fuck yourself, you think it’s easy being here? I made more money doing this than you’ve seen in your lifetime.”

“Maybe if you had made less money, and had gotten more sun, you’d be less bald.”

“I hope your gun jams, son of a bitch.”

“I hope your wig glue dries like dandruff, baldy.”



But, every time he hesitated about whether to proceed, Manson's brow would twitch and her actions would shift. It was as though she subconsciously felt that something was about to happen and reacted accordingly.

The more drunk her mind became, the sharper her instincts were.

None of her actions actually countered Leonel's intentions. However, the fact she reacted at all sent alarm bells off in Leonel's mind. If she could adapt with nothing to go off of now, then the more information he gave her, the better her adaptation response would be, and the less chance he would have at succeeding.

If it wasn't because he was infuriated, Leonel would find this ability of Manson's to be fascinating. But, the fact she seemed to need to be inebriated to use it was a huge negative... Unless she could fight someone she wanted to kill as much as Leonel.

'In that case...'

Leonel's foot planted, his body attempting to slide by Manson's kick.

It shot down from above, barely missing his chest by a centimeter. Yet, before it even had, in a feat of shocking flexibility, Manson's back arched backward, planting her palms to the ground as she aimed her once planted leg for Leonel's chin.

Usually, Leonel would dodge. But, a kick from Manson's currently bridged body position was likely amongst the weakest in her arsenal. It was still enough to tear the head off a Fourth Dimensional existence nine out of ten times, but Leonel happened to be the one.

Bronze Runes flickered to life beneath the grime and sweat on Leonel's skin, fingers from both his hands intertwining as he went to block Manson's kick.

Shadow Rat, Double Shot and Panda's eyes glowed. A blow was finally about to connect. It was a nice run but it seemed the kid was at the end of his rope.

However, what happened next shocked them. It wasn't because of the result of the kick, but rather because of what happened before it even landed.

Manson shouted out, calling to her team members.

“Shoot now!”

Her words slurred, but the meaning was clear enough. She wanted them to interfere?

Despite his confusion, Double Shot reacted on instinct.

His gun flipped out of its holster with an unconscious speed, his palm sliding back across its barrel twice in quick succession as he shot from his hip.

The world slowed in his eyes. He could already see the bullets piercing Leonel whose hands were still prepared to block Manson's kick. One through his throat, the other through his skull.

As slow as the world was for Double Shot, though, it was even slower for Leonel. But, this wasn't the happy tale one would have thought it was.

‘... This shameless bitch...’ Was just the first of Leonel's thoughts.

## Chapter 828

Leonel's mind accelerated to the point he could almost see the movement of the bullets through the air on a frame by frame basis.

As old and dated as Double Shot's pistols looked, they shot with a speed beyond anything an old western movie could match. In fact, if those two shots were fired off in a Third Dimensional world, even space itself would be torn apart to carve a path out for them.



With that speed came a lack of responses Leonel could make. He was at most 50 meters from Double Shot and the speed of the bullets wouldn't allow him to tilt his head and neck out the way in time. Or... Rather it wouldn't have had Leonel reacted to the two shots as opposed to Manson's words.

Leonel's ability had been entirely focused on Manson, and more specifically the movement of her muscles, from the very beginning. The moment her throat prepped to speak, he had already picked up on it.

For a woman who hadn't spoken a word since she entered, what could she possibly be preparing to say? Obviously it wasn't for idle chitchat or smack talking, so she could only have been calling for her teammates to take action.

Assigning a probability of over 90% to this, Leonel had already been prepared.

The earth beneath one of Leonel's planted feet shot up at an angle, sending him flying to the side.

The upward swing of Manson's kick reached him long before the bullets would and even as the earth rocketed him to the left. One would have thought that Manson's toes would be fragile and delicate like most everyone else's, but just a slight graze against what was just Leonel's prepared defenses tore a bloody gash through his wrist.

Leonel's jaw clenched as he rolled out of the way, sending one of his minds to inspect his injury.

It was luckily only skin deep, but it had only been a small measure away from damaging his muscle and ligaments. Had that happened, he didn't know if it would still be possible to complete his Craft. His hands were too important.

Leonel thought he had accounted for the upward swing of Manson's kick. Yet she somehow managed to change her trajectory just enough that he was both nicked and was unable to react at the same time. To make matters worse, she actually tore through his Bronze Rune activated defenses so easily.

As surprised as Leonel was, Manson was even more so. She had been certain that she would at least lop Leonel's wrist off with that kick, but she found more resistance than she expected. How did he have such a strong body?

Manson made use of the momentum of her kick to flip herself back to her feet, her movements looking as agile as a cat's. If it wasn't for her drunkard appearance, she would definitely be capable of playing the role of feared assassin. But the light gasps that left her lips and the flush to her face ruined that entirely.

"Get in formation." Manson's words slurred again.

As much as Manson's previous words shocked her team, this was like a nuke going off in their minds. Even though they always set out as a team, the reality was that they rarely, if ever, actually used their formation. Usually, it would just be one of the three of them dealing with the target, as for Manson, she only participated if the mission was interesting enough... Like if there was a Spark involved.

But, the four of them all taking action at once...? That only happened if...  $\rho \tau \omega \phi \chi \psi \zeta \eta \theta$

'How annoying.' Leonel's gaze grew colder.

It seemed that they truly wanted to take things seriously. He had yet to ask the dictionary what Manson's ability was because he hadn't gotten any breathing room to do so, but he could piece together most of it himself.

Manson had an Intuition Ability Type. This Ability Type was split into: Alert, Foreshadowing, Instinct, Prediction, and Foresight. Once again, the fifth, in this case Foresight, was reserved for Savants.

From what Leonel could tell, Manson was usually in the mid to high level of the second stage, Foreshadowing. She could gain an inkling of what was happening and react to it, but the image wasn't clear nor obvious. Often those at this stage had to rely on many decades of experience and training to make good use of Foreshadowing.

Manson, though, seemed to be quite unique. She had learned to dull her senses to an extreme to simulate a higher level of her Intuition Ability Type, crossing over into high levels of Instinct, bordering on Prediction.

The caveat, though, was that she had to be drunk off alcohol... or orgasms.

If Leonel wasn't so enraged with Manson encroaching on something she shouldn't have, he would have been impressed by her ingenuity.

In a Third Dimensional world, Manson would practically be an oracle, at least when it came to one on one combat. In a Fifth Dimensional world, though, her ability could almost be classified as useless to most, yet she managed to find a way to make it so powerful. It felt like the methods of the Dimensional Verse were endless.

But this was no time to be praising Manson. With her words, Shadow Rat, Double Shot and Panda came forward, encircling Leonel as though he was some sort of demon war lord.

One would have thought that with their personalities, they would crack a few jokes or tease Leonel a bit, but they seemed to have thrown all of that out of the window. It was either that they were consummate professionals—men who understood when it was time to play and when it was time to work—or... they had an almost blind confidence in Manson's Intuition.

If it was the former, Leonel would still have some wiggle room. Even as professionals, there was a chance they might still believe him to be beneath them.

But... If it was the latter, that would mean that right this moment, they saw him to be just as dangerous as Manson believed him to be... And that was a problem.

The blood from Leonel's nicked wrist rolled down his forearm and pooled at his elbow, culminating into a drop that fell toward the cracked stone floors.

As though a cue, the instant it rebounded against the ground, Panda's aura surged as the entire hollowed cave was plunged into darkness.

Chapter 829

Leonel's pupils constricted.

In that moment, it wasn't just about sight. If it was that and that alone, he could take this ability to be nothing more than a parlor trick. With his Internal Sight, why would he care about a little darkness? This cave wasn't exactly well lit to begin with, especially given the sheer size of the space.

However, it wasn't just that.

Leonel felt his senses get cut off one after another. First it was sight, then hearing, then even his touch went. As a final cherry to top it all off, his proprioception was completely cut off.

Leonel's first instinct was to release his Domain, but he restrained himself. This sort of uncomfortable feeling where he wasn't even sure of the relation of his limbs to the other parts of his body even left him suffocating.

Proprioception was such a fundamental sense to the human body that those who lost it wouldn't even be able to walk without watching their feet move.

It was the ability for one to subconsciously know where your body parts were in relation to one another. Even if one closed their eyes, they would be able to touch a finger to their nose without much difficulty or thought. Someone who had lost their proprioception would be completely unable to do such a thing.

Just living day to day life without proprioception was enough to drive someone mad, let alone having lost it in the middle of a battle. For Leonel, who was used to controlling each and every aspect of his movements, it was no wonder he felt so stifled and almost reacted on instinct rather than logic.

He couldn't reveal his Domain so easily. While they should already have information on his Chain Domain, as far as they were concerned, all it could do was help restrain people, and if used a bit cleverly, it could give him some flexibility to his movements.

But, they wouldn't understand the suppressive abilities of his Domain, nor would they know that it would mostly give him control of his body back. He had to save this for the perfect moment.

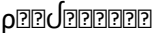
'My senses are cut off, my proprioception is gone, and my Internal Sight has been restricted to an extreme... I can't monitor the detection arrays I left behind anymore, but I have just enough range to cover this entire cave space.'

There was no way that the four teammates would guess that Leonel would still have such a long range and Leonel immediately made countermeasures to ensure that Manson couldn't learn this through intuition.

'I'll lock onto the three men... Simulate where the woman will be and avoid allowing my Internal Sight to touch her... Only lock onto her when she enters a 10 meter range... That will be cutting it close, but it should be just enough to react....'

Leonel's Internal Sight sprung into action. He wrapped it around his own body, replacing his lost senses with it. He locked onto Double Shot, Shadow Rat and Panda. And finally, he began to simulate Manson's movements, using the shifts in the ground to avoid accidentally passing her by with his Internal Sight.

Leonel made all these decisions in a split moment. His drop of blood hadn't even completely settled onto the ground when he finished.

"10 meters." 

The voice wasn't meant for Leonel to hear, but he knew it was Manson's. The moment it descended, he knew his plan had worked.

Manson's voice traveled through this odd dark domain in such a way that made Leonel realize that it was meant to be a covert form a communication built into Panda's ability. This was a huge plus, it made it even easier for Leonel to pinpoint Manson's location, he just had to pay attention to these strings of conversation.

At that moment, Shadow Rat vanished. He seemed to sink into the ground, his short body disappearing without a trace. And yet, even after another split moment, he didn't appear anywhere. However, that didn't stop Double Shot from suddenly letting off another two rounds.

Leonel's body shifted slightly to the side.

He thought about letting the rounds hit him, just so that he could continue to leave Manson in the dark. But in the end, he decided to test something. It was a calculated risk.

He realized that when he intercepted Manson's voice, she hadn't seemed to notice. At the very least, her Intuition hadn't gone off.

There was a chance that Manson had realized and was simply hiding this fact, but Leonel believed that there was a 70% likelihood that she hadn't noticed at all. If that was the case, that meant that the less involved with Manson herself the action was, the less likely it was that her ability would pick up on something odd.

Not only had her voice left her body, but it was being carried by an ability that wasn't her own. This made it difficult for her to read Leonel.

'Perfect.'

Leonel's eyes narrowed. The more things he could take advantage of, the better. However, what he heard next made him realize that things would be difficult.

Leonel had managed to jump the hurdle of his lost proprioception by coating his body in his Internal Sight. That way, he could 'watch' his every movement and control it at the same time. Thanks to this, he was able to sway out of the way of the bullet.

But...

"He dodged."

Panda's voice traveled to Double Shot and Manson, making Leonel's heart skip a beat. It seemed that he had still underestimated this ability. It could not only cut off his own senses, but despite being affected themselves, the four teammates had one of them who could 'see' just fine.

Panda might have not realized that he was listening in on their conversations, and he also couldn't tell the range of Leonel's Internal Sight, but he could still keep track of almost everything that happened within his ability's range.

Just when Leonel's mind was kicked into overdrive again, a shadow suddenly gained form to his back, melting into the darkness of Panda's domain seamlessly.

Shadow Rat had appeared again, a glistening dagger in his hand.

Chapter 830

Leonel's pupils constricted.

A Domain that cut off the senses. A sharpshooter that wasn't bothered by it. A leader that could ignore it all with intuition. And now a fourth team member that could make use of the all encompassing shadows to move where they pleased?

The composition of this team was enough to make anyone numb. But for Leonel, his eyes suddenly lit up. He had gotten the final piece of the puzzle he needed.

'Little Blackstar.'

"Yip! Yip!"

Shadow Rat suddenly found himself frozen, stuck in a state of corporeal and shadow. He couldn't retreat and he couldn't advance. It felt like some higher being had grasped onto his very soul.

PCHU.

In the darkness, a little mink flashed. When he appeared again, grasped between his little claws was a still beating heart. With just the smallest squeeze, it burst apart, falling in a rain of blood and gore.

Panda was the only one who could see this scene. The contrast between Blackstar's adorable little twitching whiskers and his bloody actions made even the apathetic veteran's heart seize.

To use a darkness domain and a shadow teleportation ability against a Sovereign of the Shadows... It was like leaping with both feet into an early grave.


Panda was at a loss for words. He didn't quite understand how to explain this. In the midst of battle, the greatest weakness of his ability was how long it took to communicate things. This was why it was so important to have Shadow Rat who was unaffected by the darkness, Double Shot who could mark his target ahead of time and aim accordingly, and Manson, who could move on instinct.

Together, they needed minimal communication even in the midst of such darkness. When Manson said 'ten meters', that was about the only communication that would come from others to himself. When it came to those with high level sensory abilities, Manson was the only one who could pinpoint their limits quickly.

Yet, not only had Leonel dodged two bullets that were shot from outside his range, Shadow Rat had picked the time just after Leonel dodged to attack as well. Usually, this was the perfect moment. But, in practice this time, he had walked right into a trap.

'That little mink?! Why wasn't there any information about that little mink?!'

The laziness of Panda's eyes vanished. He realized that he had to pull his domain down. This was the only way they would have a chance.

However, he realized right then that his movements became sluggish. A mental coercion dulled his reflexes. All he could see were two floating orbs of violet hovering within the darkness piercing into his soul. 

When time sped back up, he grabbed at his throat, the words he tried to speak coming out in a gurgle. He couldn't fathom how the old gentleman, a man known for his care and meticulousness, could possibly miss such an important detail. Not once had he mentioned this little mink... Not a single time...

As Panda's vision darkened, he felt that at least it was good that his domain would fade away... That would give Manson a chance.



Unfortunately... His last sight was of a little mink leaping down from his throat and tearing a hole through his chest, taking with him a shadow that somehow felt eerily familiar to him. He couldn't even think about what this meant before he collapsed completely, dead.

Leonel lightly tapped his foot, appearing before Double Shot in a flash.

The latter panicked. He couldn't see in the darkness like Panda or Shadow Rat could, but his ability was a Sensory Type under the category of Marksmanship. It allowed him to attach a marker to a given target that would give him information about their location and give him the ability to aim toward them even with his eyes closed.

Obviously, it was a low level marking ability because it didn't have a homing ability, but it was still enough to tell that Leonel had suddenly gone from 50 meters from him to less than five.

Knowing where Leonel was, he was still able to aim and shoot. But, how could Leonel be pinned down so easily?

Leonel sidestepped once, sliding out of the way of the bullet the instant Double Shot pulled the trigger. The latter however, was still a veteran.

Flipping the holster of his second gun he aimed and prepared to fire, only to feel a piercing pain to his back.

His hands trembled, his shot firing awry. Even though he couldn't see a thing, he didn't need to, to feel that gaping wound that now hung at his chest.

He died...? How...?

As had been said long ago... The best chance one would have at beating Leonel was on as neutral a ground as possible. The more variables you added, the more abilities you had, the greater advantage you thought you had grasped...

The more likely you were to end up dead.

Leonel turned toward Manson's location. All of this had occurred in just a few seconds, it seemed as though she was still waiting for Double Shot and Shadow Rat to finish their probing strikes before she took action again.

Those flashes of her death she had felt when she fought Leonel were firmly imprinted onto her heart. Even now, she was being as cautious as she could be, having no idea that three of her teammates had already died.

Leonel calmly took out his sniper rifle, resting it on his shoulder. Now that Little Blackstar had taken Panda's ability, he could feel Manson's presence with absolute ease, even without risking her sensing his Internal Sight.

But at that moment, Manson's hair all stood on end. She suddenly felt that danger that had been to just one direction was coming from everywhere. The suffocating feeling of her death bore down on her from all sides.

A bitter smile curled her lip. It seems that she was dead too.

Leonel pulled the trigger, sliding back a meter beneath the recoil.