

Dimensional Descent

Chapter 1891: Black Wood

"Oh? You recognize these?" Aina asked softly. "I guess you would, right?"

She took her time to stake the wooden pillars into the ground. Every time she touched it and another layer of her skin fell to the ground, rotten and sizzling, the Brazingers would flinch again. They couldn't even feel Aina's earlier rage, and yet this silence felt so much more oppressive, the heaviness of it all gripping at their throats and pressing down.

"They call this Black Wood, a simple name, quite short, succinct... I guess its history speaks for itself."

The calmness in Aina's voice was eerie. They had heard too much about this supposed Black Wood, enough to know that most wouldn't dare to even try to handle it without specialized equipment, and that went for experts that surpassed even the Seventh Dimension.

Just looking at the ground they were pierced into told a story of a thousand words. Black veins pulsed into the soil, drying and cracking the land as though a curse was slowly spreading through it. This didn't seem to stop until the phenomena had stretched over ten meters from the location of the pillars of Black Wood.

"Look at you all, already in the Sixth Dimension and yet so afraid of this wood. It doesn't move, it doesn't bite, and yet you mighty Brazingers can't look at it without shivering. I wonder how you'd react if you were in the Third Dimension like my mother?"

Raffyr felt his heart leapt into his throat. Not long ago, he had been planning on making Leonel pay for simply being associated with Aina, a "stain" on their family. And yet, now standing before the woman herself, he couldn't seem to even look her in the eye.

"Who knows," Aina continued, "maybe it wouldn't matter much? I heard that this wood had very unique properties. Regardless of who touches it, the

suffering is the exact same. It never speeds up or slows down, always moving at its own pace.

"I honestly planned on using this on the woman and the executioners who acted that day, but I think I've changed my mind. My man showed me a better way. Your entire family is rotten to the core, it would be better if you all rotted for an eternity together, don't you think?"

Aina lowered her hand from the tree, the rotting flesh on the palm of her hand not moving her in the slightest. This was a sort of pain that she had dealt with every moment of everyday, and let alone her hands, it had appeared on her face. Just to avoid having to deal with it, for much of her youth, she wore a thin mask over her face, masking much of it.

It wasn't until she gained Leonel's Cleansing Waters did that horrible, unbearable pain lessen, but by then it had already been almost two decades. To her, this was absolutely nothing, and seeing the fear on the faces of the so-called Brazinger geniuses before her, she only felt more disdain and disgust.

Her mother had been nothing more than a normal woman, a frail woman without any sort of special bloodlines or abilities... a common woman of the Third Dimension. And yet they had tied her to this pillar entirely in the nude.

Aina's father had never described how it had happened, but Aina had enough knowledge now to understand exactly what would have happened.

Beaten and ragged, humiliated and stripped, her mother was strapped to one of these pillars back first after her head was shaved entirely bald, leaving nothing between her and the Black Wood outside of a special cushion between her skull and the pillar.

The Black Wood's curse would slowly slip onto the fair skin of her back, eating away at it slowly. It would make it sizzle and crack, a sick burning sensation piercing into her very soul as it peeled away layer by layer.

By the time it got to her muscles and fat beneath, the curse would have already started eating away at the front of her body like a slowly burning flame, just taking off one layer at a time until she was nothing but a husk of bleeding flesh.

The Black Wood wouldn't sense this at all, only continuing to do its diligent work as it ate through her flesh, peeling away her muscles.

Any normal Third Dimensional existence would have already died by now. The shock would be too great and the mortal human body could die even to burns that were too severe, let alone having all of your skin systematically burned away by a cruel curse.

However, this was the truly sickening ability of the Black Wood, the scent it created from rotting flesh could force lucidity and force one to stay alive. At the same time, because the Black Wood didn't work on bone nor nerves, but only on unrelated flesh, even when there was no longer any flesh on Aina's mother's back, she was forced to continue suffering, her nerves and spin remaining perfectly intact.

With the cushion between her skull and the pillar, the last thing to disappear was the intricacies of one's expression and the sound of one's voice. Everything from the horrified screeches of pain to the twisting of one's expression when sounds could no longer be made were laid out for the entertainment of those watching.

When it was all finished, there would be nothing left but a skeleton, a bundle of nerves and an intact brain.

In that state, one couldn't see, nor touch, nor hear, nor smell... The only sense remaining was the eerie cold breeze passing over your exposed nerves, back and forth, again and again.

You were forced to endure in that state, trapped in your own mind, until the fumes of your own rotting flesh had dispersed enough that you could finally die. With fail, no matter what the strength of a person was, this would take exactly 99 days, no more, no less.

Then, as though to add insult to injury, your skeleton would be beheaded, your bones ground to ash and then stirred into the mortar that formed the execution platform.

While Aina stood there calmly, recalling all of these matters without the slightest expression on her face, these thoughts continued to run through her head.

She slowly picked up her battle ax, angling it forward toward the enemies before her.

"Come die. You four will be the first, and soon, I'll make the rest of you follow.

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Chapter 1892: Momentum

Raffyr trembled, his body quaking. But when he saw his sister take a step forward, he felt his body relax before he felt a deep hint of shame. He talked big, but he actually didn't have as much courage as his sister, let alone as much talent.

Sarathana shook her hand just once and a mighty crimson glaive appeared. When she took another step forward, her feet were decidedly heavier, and yet her movements were no less agile. By the time her foot raised for a third time, a momentum had begun to build up and she suddenly vanished, streaking across the battlefield.

BANG!

To Sarathana's shock, before her charge could reach its peak, Aina had already appeared before her, swinging down her battle ax. Seeing those expressionless golden irises, Sarathana felt her heart tremble.

In just a single exchange, Sarathana was forced to take a step back, her wrists and forearms trembling. Her eyes widened. She had lost in raw strength to a halfling?

Before she could think further about it, Aina's battle axe was already descending once again, the blade appearing by her neck as though it had teleported there.

Sarathana hurriedly ducked and blocked with the polearm of her glaive. She gave herself just enough room to succeed in the second maneuver, but the strength of Aina's attack seemed to have increased. With her knees already bent, she was driven directly into the ground.

The earth splintered and a crater was formed. Just the first impact formed a crater as wide as three meters from edge to edge and three quarters of a

meter deep on a Seventh Dimensional world. But right then, with their blades still connected, Aina's eyes flashed and the veins along her forearms bulged.

BANG!

The crater expanded, the surge almost forcing Sarathana onto her back.

"Sister!"

Raffyr and the others couldn't stand idly any longer. They didn't even bother to look toward the other three family geniuses for help, they would only get ridiculed. Their family had kicked out a halfling and couldn't even properly control her, this was nothing short of a stain and humiliation on them. They would be lucky if the others didn't kick them while they were down, let alone help them.

Aina casually kicked out, nailing Sarathana right in the chest and sending her flying into the distance.

She came out like a speeding bullet, colliding with Barrion before he could even get into a proper attack stance. The latter's forearm bones snapped on impact and he coughed up a mouthful of blood, falling into a pile a distance away along with Sarathana.

Aina could have killed Sarathan right then and there. A genius? She didn't even feel like Sarathana, who was supposedly just a step away from the Seventh Dimension, was even worth more than a single exchange with her.

All Aina wanted to do was bury them, to force them into submission, and then to force them to experience the same things her mother had experienced all those years ago. She would make sure every Brazinger she got her hands on experienced the same thing.

Raffyr and Thedan appeared to her left and right with a fierce momentum. They knew that their lives were on the line, so they didn't hold anything back, crimson auras flourishing around the both of them.

Aina's stance only shifted slightly, causing their blades to slip by the front and back of her. With one hand she tapped two fingers upon Raffyr's wrist, with her other hand, she twirled her battle ax, causing the butt to bypass Thedan's defenses and uppercot him squarely on the chin.

Theedan's jaw shattered into countless pieces on contact.

Raffyr's sword wielding hand plowed into the ground under Aina's touch and he seemed to get off easy... Until Aina finished the twirl of her polearm, landing a hit on his shoulder blade from above that not only drove him further into the ground, but also shattered the bone into an even worse state than Theedan's jaw.

In the distance, Sarathana unleashed a roar. Of them all, her injuries were the lightest only because of the armor that covered her chest. Her aura flourished and her crimson aura quickly formed the silhouette and a valiant warrior.

It grew and grew until it stood at over ten meters tall and solidified into a mighty mass. Every move Sarathana made, it too made, boosting her strength to a great degree as she dashed forward.

Aina looked at this ability expressionlessly. She tilted her head to just one side, seemingly not noticing Sarathana's rapid approach. The ability was somewhat interesting to her, and she felt that it wasn't an Ability Index, instead, it should be a technique that stemmed from the Berserk God Lineage Factor.

'It should work like...

Aina observed it for what must have been only fractions of a second before her own crimson aura flourished, growing taller and taller until the point Sarathana felt so much despair she slowed her dead sprint, her feet dragging until they came to a stop with her looking straight up at a valiant Valkyrie.

"... I think I made it too big," Aina said lightly, words that made Sarathana's heart drop to the pits of her stomach.

Even so, Aina's construct reached down, wrapping Sarathana's ten meter tall construct into a palm and squeezing.

Sarathana shuddered, coughing up several mouthfuls of blood as her construct was shattered into pieces.

She fell to her knees, her vision swimming.

She realized then that she couldn't fight back, it was impossible. This woman was too strong.

When she looked up she found that Aina was already standing over her expressionlessly. Even when Aina pulled her up by the hair, there was nothing Sarathana could do, her entire body having reached its limits in a pathetic few exchanges.

Aina pierced her battle ax into the ground, lifting Sarathana up by the hair with one hand, and reaching for her armor with the other.

Expressionlessly, Aina pulled, ignoring the injuries it caused Sarathana and ripping her armor off of her purposely.

Sarathana grit her teeth in embarrassment, her chest being completely exposed to the world.

"Stop! Stop! That's too much!"

The naive and delicate voice of Nana called out. Even while being pinned down by Galaeron, she couldn't seem to hold it in any longer.

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Chapter 1893: Superiority and Greatness

Aina didn't seem to hear the words at all as she lifted Sarathana to eye level, almost as though she was picking up a chicken. She looked her right in the eyes as she gripped the waist of her pants, ripping them off as well.

Sarathana closed her eyes, tears welling up within them. Even in the cruel environment of the Brazinger family, she had never experienced such humiliation.

She felt herself be lowered, only to be dragged along the ground.

Aina couldn't be bothered to waste the strength to keep her upright, pulling her along the graveled and bloodied grounds of the battlefield and toward the Black Wood pillars.

Nana felt both flustered and aimless. On the one hand, Sarathana wasn't a member of her family and she also didn't know why Aina was so angry, though she had mentioned her mother. But on the other hand, she couldn't stand to see such a thing.

But regardless of her feelings on the matter, she was worried about action Galaeron might take without her here. Galaeron also called Aina his niece-in-law, which must mean that Aina was Leonel's wife, and that only added another layer of complication. Nana really didn't want to have any conflict with Leonel.

If Maia attacked, Nana might have a chance to take action, but the current state of things was actually positive in Maia's eyes. Right now, the greatest killing machine was occupied with a personal grudge, and although Aina's blood roses were still rotating on the battlefield, they were clearly less effective and weaker, some had even been managed to be destroyed with some teamwork. Plus, she trusted her sons to defeat their enemies soon, and it didn't look like Noah and his helpers could hold out against Elorin for much longer.

The more Aina focused on this grudge of hers, the better chance they would stand. In the grand scheme, these few geniuses of the four Great Families were inconsequential. This was a battle of tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, while someone of Aina's caliber or Nana's may be able to sway it, the others could not.

Aina didn't seem to care about any of this at all as she lifted Sarathana up and began to tie her to the pillar. The moment her naked body touched the wood, a tragic scream left Sarathana's lips. It echoed over the battlefield and her strength was very clear and apparent from its resonance. But Aina didn't even flinch in the face of it.

With calm movements, she tied her back to it and placed a cushion behind her head with a gentleness that made it look as though she was laying her to bed.

Without a word, Aina continued with the other three. Raffyr tried to struggle, but it was completely useless. One after another, they were all put up, their tragic screams continuing to echo.

As the screams continued, the morale of the Cloud Race army began to slowly plummet, an entirely unforeseen outcome by Maia. She began to regret her inaction, but it was much too late for that now, far too late. Aina had already finished tying them up, the damage was done.

However, just when it seemed that Aina was finished, she stretched a hand out and all of the blood within their four bodies surged out. They could hardly

keep a clear mind under the excruciating pain, let alone stop their Blood Force from being snatched.

Taking so much blood from them would normally kill them, but the aroma coming from their rotting flesh matched with the Black Wood pillars kept them alive. After being tied to these pillars, there was simply no escaping. Unless you had perfect control over your own soul and could force it to disperse, suicide was impossible.

If they had been smart, they would have done everything to kill themselves before they were tied to the pillar, but they still held out hope. They hoped that if they endured, Aina and her allies would lose this battle and then they would be freed. However, they never expected Aina to take such a cruel measure. Now, no matter what, they would have to die.

What they didn't realize, though, was that this wasn't the purpose of Aina snatching their blood.

Slowly, and diligently, Aina began to draw four Force Arts into the ground using their blood.

"I'm not very good with Force Arts," Aina said lightly. "I never invested much time into them and only have minimal experience."

Aina's soothing voice sounded no different than the reaper to them at this point, but with their heads still intact and her ability to penetrate through their screaming still at an all time high, they had no choice but to listen to her words.

"However, when it comes to simple Force Arts with simple mechanisms, so long as I take my time, given the control I have over my body, they're actually quite easy to draw. Did you know that Blood Force is actually a very effective medium for Force Art drawing, just like Soul and Dream Force?"

Aina continued to speak as though she wanted the last voice these people heard to be her own.

"This one isn't too complex either. Its only job is to release a little bit of your blood on a day. Exactly 99 days from now, it will release the first batch, and then again, once per day, for example 900 more days."

Aina looked up from her Force Art drawing.

"99 days is a bit too short, don't you think? You're all so strong and superior due to your bloodlines. Since my mother was forced to endure 99 days as a common woman, it shouldn't be a problem for you superior existences to withstand ten times that, right?"

Hearing Aina's words, the four began to fight harder and harder to get off the pillar as their skin was slowly eaten away at, but it was a completely useless endeavor.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure the world knows how superior you all are to the rest of us. Every time your blood hits the pillar, more rotten fumes will form and your existence will be lengthened by another day. This way, you can definitely flex your boldness and greatness."

Aina smiled lightly.

It was objectively gorgeous, and yet it was the scariest thing those four youths had ever seen.

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Chapter 1894: Hard Life

Aina clapped her hands once, a resonant sound echoing over the battlefield. At that moment, the rotting flesh on her hands seemed to have been smashed out of existence, fair and soft skin replacing them in the blink of an eye.

Grabbed her battle ax, Aina rested it on her shoulders, looking toward the rest of the Great Family members. At the moment, the smile on her face was radiant, almost as though the cries of Sarathana, Raffy, Berrion and Thedan were her favorite kind of music.

With a step she crossed a large distance, catching the remaining youth off guard. But by the time they reacted, it was already too late.

With the sky piercing construct behind her, Aina's strength seemed to have increased tenfold. She hadn't even realized just how much strength she had been missing out on until this moment.

In the distance, her blood roses grew explosively in strength, expanding by tenfold. Even the ones that were on the verge of destruction suddenly condensed once more, flourishing.

If Aina had to describe it, it felt like she had accessed something similar to Universal Force, but it came directly from her body. In fact, she felt like she could make it so much stronger than it was currently, every attack she made seemed to prove that all the more.

Maia's expression changed.

In the distance, Elorin, who was pressing down on his three enemies frowned, looking over.

Noah's saber swung down, passing right through his body as though he wasn't there.

Elorin appeared a distance away, his gaze still locked onto Aina as a tortoise half the size of a city descended from above, smashing down from above with Jessica on its back.

He was about to dodge again when Tyrron appeared to his side, a glistening sword ray flashing across his glasses as he pierced forward.

Elorin suddenly felt annoyed. These three were so weak, but they covered for each other well. He was trying to conserve his strength for what he felt would be an inevitable battle against Emperor Fawkes, so he hadn't expected to be stalled here for so long.

His allies were truly too useless, not able to deal with one woman. It was ridiculous.

Elron's pupils constricted once more as Aina's strength seemed to continue skyrocketing. He had been certain that no one could match his speed of improvement, but Aina was improving by leaps and bounds. The youth couldn't seem to withstand even a single strike before, let alone now.

"Stop! Stop!" Nana's agitation was growing, she couldn't just watch her own family members die like that. Even though she didn't know them personally, they still shared blood.

"Young miss, I would suggest you calm down. She doesn't have the same reservations you do. If you stand in her way, she will kill you," Galaeron said lightly.

"Stop blocking me!" Nana shrieked. She was in the Seventh Dimension, there was no way Aina could even think of killing her. She might be naive, but she wasn't stupid. It was clear that Galaeron just had no intention of letting her go.

Galaeron remained silent. He could tell that this young girl had never experienced any setbacks in her life. To scream at an enemy like this as though it would work, this was beyond naivete, it was also laced with a heavy amount of entitlement. It was good that this young girl also seemed to have a kind heart, because if not, the result of that entitlement would probably be bad news for everyone around her.

Tears welled up in Nana's eyes when it became clear that Galaeron had no intention of letting her go.

Red faced and agitated, Nana's Force seemed to almost spiral out of control, a radiant sapphire construct beginning to form to her back. It grew taller and taller, reaching a point where it matched even Aina's in size.

"BIND!" She screamed, slamming out a palm toward Galaeron.

Galaeron's eyes narrowed. He was about to move when his senses flashed. He had been paying attention to Maia all this time, how could he miss her movement? The issue was that she had timed it perfectly with Nana's outburst.

Galaeron sighed inwardly. It seemed that he was actually going to have to work a bit this time.

Holding out his palms, Galaeron suddenly began moving to an odd rhythm. It looked as though he was completing a routine of Tai Chi, his face the picture of peace.

BANG! BANG!

Maia and Nana's palms descended at the same time, colliding with Galaeron's own. Both women felt as though they had rammed into a steel wall. Even though Galaeron's sleeves fluttered wildly, he didn't move even a single inch. In fact, his elbows didn't even bend.

"Ouch," Galaeron sighed.

Maia's brows twitched unhappily. She felt like Galaeron was making fun of her. She had thought that this was an excellent opportunity. Only for her to end unentirely stifled.

Suddenly, Galaeron moved. Maia tried to pull back, but as though her palm was stuck to Galaerons, she found her body moving along with the arc of his palms. On the other side, Nana couldn't escape the same fate, her petite body being led like a horse to water.

Galaeron spun once, causing both women to be spun out. They soared into the air out of their control.

With elegant movements, Galaeron fluidly flowed into pressing his palms together once more. With a light exhale, he raised his right palm just slightly before pressing it toward the ground so slowly that it was almost agonizing.

However, in response, the air seemed to compress above the flying women. As though the world itself was resonating with Galaeron's movements, a concentrated and transparent pillar of air pressed down.

Maia and Nana both coughed up a thick mouthful of blood as they were smashed to the ground below.

Galaeron sighed, smoothing out the slight wrinkles on his clothing. This was why he didn't like to battle, his clothing would be entirely ruined. Although he could shed some layers, that would be entirely unsightly. He was a gentleman, not a rogue, how could he fight without a shirt on?

He had considered just wearing fashionable armor in the past, but he found the bulkiness and the flash of metal to be gaudy.

He truly lived a hard life.

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Chapter 1895: Crimson Red

Maia coughed up a mouthful of blood, her eyes opened wide with astonishment. She had no idea what ability Galaeron was using, she couldn't tell whether it was a unique ability, a technique, or maybe a known Ability Index being used in an unconventional way.

At first she thought it was telekinesis. It made sense, that was why he could move so slowly and yet output so much power, it should also be the reason why her and that little girl's palms got stuck to one another. He should have been using telekinesis to make up for his lack of movement speed and momentum.

However, just now, she felt an odd fluctuation of energy in the air, almost as though he was truly gathering up Force to act on his behalf, but this was very different from the feeling that telekinesis should give.

In addition, there was something unique about the movement of his body. Though he was moving slowly, he was gathering up momentum in his own way, as though it was a technique of some sort, or more accurately, a Style.

But if he was using the Style to gather momentum, then that contradicted the fact he was using telekinesis. In addition, she had never seen someone so adept in using telekinesis to the point they could apply such force without emitting any fluctuations. If telekinesis left no traces at all, how would you even fight such a person? Wouldn't they be invincible so long as they had the strength to harm you and could cast perfectly invisible attacks?

The worse problem though was that a technique should have left some sort of fluctuation as well, but the attack had come suddenly and without warning. The Cloud Race was well known for their senses and only fell short of the Spirituals in this regard. If Maia couldn't sense it, then didn't that mean that he was entirely impossible to deal with?!

Across the battlefield, Aina's ax fell for the final time and she took a deep breath, the light smile still on her face even though blood fell like rain around her. If even the likes of Sarathana couldn't last a single exchange with her, the rest stood even less of a chance.

The chorus of hoarse cries continued behind her like a symphony to her mother.

Aina turned back to the rest of the battlefield, the tides very clearly turning in favor of Earth. Whether it was morale or strength, they had a step up in both regards. It felt like the Cloud Race was entirely unprepared for the level of power they would face, and that much was all too expected.

The moment Maia was exposed, her planned surprise attack had failed. She had thought that it wouldn't matter much, but what she hadn't taken into

consideration was the fact that in an upfront battle, the Cloud Race was actually inferior.

The only true geniuses of the Cloud Race present here were her sons and herself. But her sons, who she had so much faith in, were still stuck in stalemates, while she herself hadn't lasted even a single exchange. Was this really the supposedly weak Human Domain?

None of this made any sense. The presence of a world with Eighth Dimensional potential was irrelevant, Maia herself came from a true Eighth Dimensional world, not just one with the potential to become one. There was no way she should have lost like this!

Suddenly, Maia had flashbacks to something that happened almost three decades ago.

"The plan has failed, Emperor Fawkes is far too ruthless. He preferred to slaughter billions of citizens to avoid an Invalid infestation than risk it. Retreat, Maia."

"So what?" A disdainful female voice came from the other side.

The male voice sighed. "Maia, think. Without an Invalid infestation, the Ascension Empire will solidify incredibly quickly, making it far more difficult to infiltrate. Secondly, without the potential use of Invalids and Variant Invalids as a spearhead, you'll be too short handed. How are you going to take them down while suppressed under their world's laws and alone?"

"I have my methods. Aren't you taking these humans too seriously? Watch well, Jorrym."

"Maia! You are my wife and you're carrying two of my children. Don't risk their lives and yours because of your pride. Retreat to the Chaotic Water Sector with me. Together we'll sweep through Earth with much greater assurance!"

"Our children will be fine, watch well."

She still remembered hanging up that call. Now, her Jorrym's fate was unknown and she and their sons were in danger of dying here.

Maia grit her teeth, standing slowly to her feet.

Because of their control over their Cloud Figure, Cloud Race experts were able to shut themselves away much like Jorrym had, but this was only the tip of the iceberg. It could be used to do things like slow and manipulate their aging and had been a key part to Maia's plans until now. Even now, she was still considered a member of the Cloud Race's younger generation.

While it seemed that she had experienced decades on Earth, in reality it was no more than a handful of years to her. It was also thanks to this ability that her sons had managed to remain embryos until she was prepared to use them.

However, this age lock came with a double-edged sword, and that was the ability to store the skipped time.

If that time was never touched, everything would be fine and the Cloud Race individual would age as they had intended. However, in the case that this time was unleashed, the Cloud Race member would enter a state of accelerated evolution where they would experience all the years they had "skipped" at once.

This was the greatest ability of the Cloud Race, an ability that could only be used by them with gold rune Cloud Figures, those with the greatest bloodlines of their Race.

There was, of course, a drawback. The consequences would always be tenfold. In order to experience all of the decades she had been on Earth for at once and gain the insights and strength that came with it, she would need to experience the equivalent of centuries.

Even so, now that things had reached this point, Maia used the one trump card she never thought she'd have to.

Maia raised her head to the skies, a screech that echoed over Earth billowing from her chest.

The golden runes that floated within her Cloud Figure began to vibrate wildly, quickly becoming a crimson red.

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Chapter 1896: Anomaly

Leonel took deep, heaving breaths. It had been a while since he needed to breathe so heavily to get something done.

His battle with Coldar lasted almost an entire week. Leonel wasn't sure if time in the tribulation and the time outside were the same or not, but regardless, a week here still very much felt like an entire week.

Even when he clearly had the upperhand, the Fiend Demon had refused to give up, forcing them to continue the battle again and again. To make things worse, the Fiend Demon's regenerative abilities were simply off the charts, it didn't seem like Leonel could cause it a single injury that could actually harm it.

Leonel continued to breathe hard, standing over Coldar's body. Finally, the demon couldn't seem to move anymore and simply looked up at Leonel expressionlessly. If it wasn't for the fact he too was also breathing hard, Leonel would have had a hard time believing that this demon was actually a living being, well that and the fact that he was basically immobilized not, his healing factor finally losing the ability to keep up.

Even now, Coldar hadn't given up. Leonel could see his muscles twitching as though he was still trying to stand. Leonel couldn't imagine what the battle would have been like if Coldar had absorbed as many Beast Crystals as he had.

Ironically, by now the advantage he had in terms of Beast Crystals was probably gone now than to this battle and he probably didn't get much else outside of whatever treasures were on him and a couple hundred territories. In the grand scheme, it wasn't worth it, but he also didn't have the ability to choose to retreat.

Theoretically, he could have used the orb Pririna had left behind, but because of one part pride, and another part because he felt that the reward would be worth it, he held on. Plus, he knew he had to defeat Coldar no matter what. If Leonel had to guess, he was definitely the strongest genius here, the rest should be a cake walk.

"What is your name?" Leonel asked.

Coldar's gaze flickered.

There were a lot of race enemies, but maybe the one with the most division were humans and demons, their cultures were strikingly different. It felt weird that a human was asking him such a question, especially since this was the first attempt at true communication.

Coldar didn't seem like he was going to answer for a long while, staring at Leonel with the same placid expression. When his mouth finally opened, though, the answer that came out wasn't an answer at all.

"Why are you asking me that?"

Coldar's voice was cold and gruff. Oddly enough, it reminded Leonel of a soothing clap of thunder, a completely contradictory description. It was as though he had managed to incorporate the rumble into his vocal cords.

"Can't I ask out of curiosity?" Leonel asked with a laugh.

"...I don't like the way your eyes look. It makes me feel like you're trying to court me."

"Ah..." Leonel choked on his laugh. Did this big three-meter tall demon think that he wanted to take him out on a date? How had the conversation taken such a turn?

"I like women, you do not need to know my name. Just kill me and finish your task."

Leonel's mouth opened and closed several times, but no sound came out. He assumed that what Coldar was feeling was his Emperor's Charm, though that should definitely be suppressed in this place.

In the end, Leonel shook his head, completely rendered speechless.

He bent down and snatched Coldar's spear away and turned to leave as the latter began to fade.

Coldar sighed. "I still do not like men. This will not help you in your pursuit of me."

Leonel nearly tripped and fell, but by the time he turned back to say something, Coldar had vanished.

"... What... .."

Leonel still had no idea what to say, he could only turn back and trudge away, taking deep breaths to try and quickly recover to his peak. He had to hurry and get out of this place.

'Hold on.'

Leonel shook his head, he was so flustered that he almost made a stupid mistake. He turned and rushed back, looking at the location Coldar's corpse had vanished, but he was instantly disappointed. There was nothing there. It seemed that Coldar hadn't gotten as lucky as himself or Pririna.

Shaking his head again, Leonel shot off into the distance as he fused the two spears together.

"Tch... still short...!"

Leonel felt that he was still missing around 50 or so territories to reach the Gold Grade. Coldar had definitely had a ton, but it wasn't quite enough.

In another territory, an unknown distance away, two geniuses faced off against one another.

Edrym chuckled. "Well, this is unexpected. I thought it would take us some more time before we had our final battle, but for some reason I can't find any other worthy opponents. I have a feeling that there's an anomaly this time around."

Edrym's carefreeness was just as grating to Enul as it always was, but this time rather than responding with annoyance, his expression remained solemn. He too had felt that there was something odd about this tribulation... the lack of treasure territories, the fact it was so hard to find worthy opponents, he hadn't come across any one of the other six outside of Edrym in all this time as well, and the only reason he had run into Edrym at all was because their territories had started off quite close.

"I guess we'll have to find out which one of us gets to meet this mysterious variable between us, no?" Edrym raised his spear with a smile on his face. "It's unfortunate, though, one of us won't be able to reach the Gold Grade evaluation."

Enul's expression became callous, his size pairs of hands raising up, each with their own spear. With a thought, he vanished appearing before Edrym with a deathly momentum.

Dimensional Descent

Chapter 1897: Who Else?

1897 Who Else?

Maia aura continued to rise as she stood to her feet. Rage colored her features, but there was also a hint of helplessness within. In her lifetime, this would probably be the only time she could use this ability, and she was actually wasting it on humans. She had never felt so humiliated in her life.

Faint wrinkles began to gather at the corner of Maia's eyes and lips, however it wasn't to an exaggerated extent. Although she had clearly aged, she wasn't quite yet a middle-aged woman and just seem to have entered the deeper parts of her 30's according to Third Dimensional standards.

Even so, for a young beauty like her, this was a huge blow. Even birthing two children hadn't placed such a load on her body, how could she not be infuriated?

"I'll make you pay for this."

Maia's voice was as cold as ice as she stepped out of the crater she had been forced into.

On the other side, Nana tried to get up, but it ended in a whimper. She wasn't very used to getting injured and her pain tolerance was especially low. But even if it hadn't been, that strike from Galaeron had left her with little to no combat prowess remaining.

Galaeron frowned as he looked toward Maia, looking a bit troubled. But it was hard to tell if this was because she had truly become so much more powerful, or if it was because he realized that he would probably have to deal with more wrinkles in his clothing now.

"Little girl," Galaeron looked toward Aina. "I will deal with her, but I'm not sure how much longer that son of mine can last."

Aina's gaze flickered. She had realized this as well, but Elorin was not only a great talent, but he was also in the Seventh Dimension. He was beyond her currently. Let alone him, she couldn't defeat even one of the three he was fighting right now.

However, Aina could tell that Galaeron didn't mean for her to fight Elorin. Rather, he was hoping that Leonel had some kind of countermeasure to deal with the situation.

And of course, how could the answer be anything other than yes? Let alone the results of the tentacle womb, there were still...

Just as Aina was about to respond, she sensed something.

Quickly, Aina flipped a palm over and took out a small mirror object, the image reflected upon it, however, wasn't her own face. Rather, it was a familiar young man raining down fists toward a white-gold barrier. This young man was none other than James.

The image flickered and Aina saw an image of several Cloud Race corpses lying dead.

Aina sighed. 'I can't tell if he's just getting all of these lucky guesses or if he's actually a god of some sort... well, he is definitely a god in some aspects...'

Aina shook her head, clearing her thoughts. Apparently the cries of the Brazingers had put her in too much of a good mood. The gloominess that she had felt when she thought they had already been destroyed vanished into thin air.

With a slight movement, Aina tapped the screen and James suddenly fell through the barrier. But rather than appearing on the other side of the location he had been at, he instead appeared on the battlefield by Aina, nearly falling over entirely.

James popped up and snapped his neck around, seemingly ready for battle.

He blinked when he realized that while everyone seemed to be embroiled in battle around him, there wasn't anyone actually attacking him. He couldn't help but frown when he saw the sheer number of Cloud Race members, though, and when he saw the screaming Brazingers, he felt a shiver warp up his spine.

"Finished?" Aina asked.

James jumped, seemingly only now realizing that there was a woman right next to him. When he saw Aina, his eyes opened wide. Did Earth make beauties like this now?

Wait...

"Oh! Sister-in-l—!"

James froze. He had seen this version of Aina once before, though it was only from afar and only for a fleeting moment. Last time he had met Leonel, ironically enough, he and Aina had broken up. It was only because of a coincidence and an encounter with the Void Palace that he recognized her.

He was glad that he had caught himself from saying something stupid, but he also didn't feel like it was right to call her sister-in-law although he had called her that for almost half a decade while they attended Royal Blue Academy.

BOOM!

James jumped, his head snapping toward the sudden collision between Galaeron and Maia.

"Focus," Aina said seriously, "this is war. Are you ready to fight, or not?"

"I..."

James shook his head, why was he hesitating? He had been trying to make his way here to fight in the first place.

"Of course I am, that's what I came here for."

"Well, you see him?" Aina pointed to Elorin who was practically running circles around his three enemies.

James frowned. He recognized Elorin, they had had a few clashes in the past, mostly fighting over resources. It had never been anything serious, but he could feel that this person always had more than they showed.

"Right now, you're basically the only person on this battlefield who can deal with him. Good luck," Aina said with a smile.

This wasn't even remotely true. Emna still hadn't made a move, and the remainder of Leonel's brothers were still playing lowkey, supporting roles across the battlefield, hiding their true strength for an opportune moment. There was no telling how many trump cards the Cloud Race had... It was just that they had no idea that this was truly the last trick Maia had.

James' mouth opened and closed. "... Why does it sound like you expected me?"

"Of course we expected you. Who else would Leonel believe in if not you?"

James froze before his eyes suddenly reddened, a lump forming in his throat.

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Chapter 1898: Ultimate Security Blanket

James' clenched his jaw, taking a strong gulp as though he was forcing his heart back down.

"... He's still the same, directing everyone around like he already knows what they'll do," James mumbled.

Aina smiled in understanding. Let alone James and the others, there were too many things that Leonel didn't explain even to her. If James took offense to this, there wasn't really much she could do, she would just have to reveal their other trump cards ahead of time. The trouble with that, though, was that it would make the Heir Wars far more difficult.

However, at that moment, James smiled.

"Do you know what they call a quarterback's tight end in football?" James looked Aina in the eyes, his tears somewhat glistening but quickly evaporating away beneath a fiery blaze.

Aina blinked before her smile brightened. "The ultimate safety blanket."

She had been following Leonel's games for years and had never missed a single one. Not only did she know all the rules of the game, when it came to the intricacies and the culture around it, she probably dwarfed even some of the players themselves.

When James heard this his head raised to the skies and he erupted with a laughter that drowned out even the cries of the Brazingers. It boomed with a vibrant carefreeness, surging like a rising ocean tide and drowning out everything.

With a leap, he soared into the skies, his foot landing on an energy shield platform that he shot like a canon off of, soaring over the battle between Maia and Galaeron with the confidence of a man who felt he could have participated in it if he so chose.

Aina watched this with a smile. It was a little white lie, and considering how well James knew Leonel, he probably knew this as well. But as Leonel's Queen, there were some things that she felt she had to do for him.

Leonel had many brothers, but he had only ever had one best friend, and there was a reason for that. Some relationships couldn't be forced, and some were too perfect to need to be.

Leonel had set the probability of James making an appearance at 30%. He felt that the Cloud Race would be a bar that he wouldn't allow himself to cross, and he was correct about that.

But Aina felt like he wanted that percentage to be much higher, not for any other reason than that was what he wanted for the man who he had once called friend.

Aina could feel that Leonel was becoming more distant from the world, more detached, more indifferent. Even when his brothers had returned to his side, they had been separated for so many years that it was difficult to reaffirm that connection to the same level, and that was honestly because they were missing the glue that had kept them together in the first place.

James seemed like an unruly, wild card with barely half a brain in him, but he was probably the person who understood Leonel the most outside of Aina herself, and maybe even in comparison to Aina, he knew more.

At the same time, James and Leonel were more similar than it seemed. Just considering their fathers... with how much Leonel loved his own, if Velasco had the same approach to life that Governor Duke Bennett had, how far would Leonel be from just being a second James?

The two of them were the most similar in the things that meant the most, the more dissimilar in, ironically, what was also the most important.

Since these two brutes wouldn't take the steps to fix their relationship on their own, it would just have to be up to her.

Aina smiled to herself, watching James dive into the battle and almost immediately force Elorin into a retreat.

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Leonel had no idea what Aina had done, but at the moment he was too frustrated to care.

He felt like he had traveled everywhere possible, but he couldn't seem to gather up enough territories. No random treasure or beast territories were spawning, and even after a lot of walking, there didn't seem to be any other participants waiting.

He had come across one barrier, but it blocked him from entry. He had come across such a thing before, so he just assumed correctly that there was likely a battle going on within.

Now, he had finally found another, and it was once again blocked.

There seemed to only be one conclusion: there were just three contestants left, while he had been fighting Coldar everyone else but them had been wiped out.

Leonel shook his head. 'How unlucky...

If things were like this that meant that he would have to go into this final confrontation while stuck at the Silver Grade, and given the fact there were only two contestants left, whoever came out victorious would almost certainly have a Gold Grade spear.

Taking a breath and exhaling, Leonel retreated to his territory then used the orb to lock his barriers down. If he was going to enter this final battle at a disadvantage he would definitely do it at 100%.

What Leonel didn't realize was how truly unlucky he was.

Of the six strongest competitors, he had actually fought four of them and would now be fighting the fifth.

However, due to his actions, everyone else was unlucky as well.

Because he had sped up the timeline of the tribulation so greatly, less territories had spawned, and as a result whereas in the past there would be multiple with Gold Grade evaluations, this time around, there would only be one if Leonel lost this battle, and only two if he did manage to gain victory.

Leonel collapsed into a pile of soft grass and closed his eyes, taking the first sleep he had in as long as he could remember. He wasn't even sure exactly how long he had been in this tribulation.

This sleep would turn out to be invaluable. They say the sleep consolidated everything one had learned during the day, and now... Leonel was consolidating weeks of training while entering a single deep sleep.

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Chapter 1899: Elorin's Ability Index

Elorin reacted quickly to James' appearance, slide out of the way.

James seemed to form his body into a cannonball, wrapping himself in a spherical energy shield as he fell from the skies. The air rushed around him with such speed that it sparked, a rush of fire and explosive Force forming as he descended with a faster and faster speed.

BOOM!

Elorin crossed an arm and his machete across his face, gliding back effortlessly as a wall of concentrated air collided against him. Although he was unhurt, he couldn't help but frown.

The addition of yet another variable was annoying. The more this happened, the less he would be able to hold back. What was the Cloud Race doing exactly?!

Elorin glanced toward the battlefield and a spark of annoyance sparked in his pupils. This was the supposed Cloud Race? Weren't they supposed to be

powerful and unmatched? Why were there so many who seemed capable of fighting them just fine?

With another step, Elorin glided back further, avoiding pursuit with an ease akin to breathing. His gaze darted across the battlefield until he seemed to understand something.

Under normal circumstances, the humans of Earth would stand no chance whatsoever. However, in concentrated pockets, scattered across the battlefield, there were small groups led by unconventional figures that seemed to subtly turn the tide.

There was a young man with telekinetic abilities, a young woman wreathed in vines and flower, there were eight young men whose power output was clearly a step above and they didn't seem to be going all out either, there was another subtle white haired beauty to the side, and finally, the most obvious of them all, there was the vicious golden-eyed woman who controlled Blood Force.

This didn't even mention the two battling Maia's sons to a standstill, stopping them from becoming the anchors they should have been for the Cloud Race, or the obvious elephant in the room: Galaeron.

These people acted like anchors on the battlefield, and there was a subtle funneling action that took place, making it difficult for the Cloud Race to gather up momentum or target weaker warriors. In fact, it felt as though they were all being directed by something or someone to move all too seamlessly.

If Wise Star Order could hear Elorin's thoughts he would have nodded to himself with that very familiar smug smile on his face. Without Leonel here, who better to direct the flow of the battlefield if not Wise Star Order?

It was just that as a monster of the Seventh Dimension, these children couldn't compare to him at all. His influence could hardly be sensed at all. In fact, the only reason Elorin could sense anything was because of the specialty of his Ability Index.

'..." Elorin fell into silence. He had concluded already, he had made the wrong bet.

Suddenly, James appeared before Elorin. Elorin planned to dodge again, but his eyes narrowed when he realized that his paths of exit were all blocked by energy shields, very sturdy ones at that.

James appeared with fist and Elorin had no choice but to respond with his own blade.

BANG!

James didn't retreat. With his Ability Index, his entire body was a weapon and he didn't fear meeting blades head on. At least, that was what he was used to, he didn't even usually feel pain in battle because no one could force him to that extent.

However, when Elorin's blade descended, danger senses alerted James instantly.

James' fist opened up and the angle of the energy shield protecting him shifted. Elorin's blades slipped by, meeting slight resistance as it was parried to the side, but even so, a small layer of skin was peeling down James' knuckle.

Elorin expected James to back off after suffering a small loss, but to his surprise James pressed forward with an even fiercer punch.

Without a choice, Elorin could only meet it with a fist of his own. His hand left afterimages in the air, stacking three, then four times.

BANG!

Elorin took a heavy step back as James did the same.

"Your Ability Index is actually Time Manipulation..." James said with surprise.

Noah, Jessica and Tyrron were all shocked when they heard this. In between their heavy breaths, they overheard James' mumble and found it difficult to believe. Was there really such an Ability Index?

Elorin's gaze narrowed.

"Unfortunately, you have a very clear weakness, and that's the need for preparation, that's why your battle style is so evasive. The danger of your

Ability Index plummets when you don't have time to play your little chess moves."

The strength of Elorin's Ability Index started with his eyes. He was able to see timelines and the reverberating impact of causality. He could then gather these causalities and then use them to his benefit. For example, if he saw a future where he had crossed a distance of one kilometer, he could choose it and cross it instantly, skipping over the time it would have taken.

However, everything had a balance. If he wanted to choose a future where he had crossed one kilometer, he had to first observe himself crossing that kilometer in said future, and that would take time.

Of course, Elorin could accelerate this time, or else his Ability Index would be useless. However, no matter how fast he accelerated that observation time, it would never be instant. As such, there would always be a lag between him observing the future and enacting it. That was the weakness.

Somehow, James had seen through this in a single exchange despite having never fought someone with such an Ability Index before.

Time affinity was probably the rarest of all affinities in existence. To have a time related Ability Index was even rarer than that. Elorin could be said to be one of one, a rarer existence than even Savants. And yet it still took James just one exchange... It was shocking enough that Elorin spoke his first words.

"You... have innate battle instinct..."

Dimensional Descent

Chapter 1900

5X James picked at his ears. "I don't know what that means, but if you're going to fight, I hope you have something better than this. If taking you down is too easy, how am I going to have the face to see the guys again? I need you to make me nice and bloody, preferably half dead."

Aina was a long distance away from James' battlefield, supporting the others, but she was still paying keen attention in case anything went wrong. She wasn't entirely certain of how powerful James was although Leonel had said it would be fine. But hearing him speak like this her lip couldn't help but twitch.

He and Leonel were really too similar, too good at pissing people off, and had mouths that were too smart for their own good.

Elorin didn't say anything to James' words.

Innate battle instinct wasn't something that was tangible or even a widely accepted concept, it was something he had only heard his grandfather talk about. Old Hutch used to say that there were simply some people in existence who had talent in battle that didn't conform with common sense.

In truth, James' talent was bound to come out in one way or another. It was clear to everyone by now that the Gene Assessment wasn't a casual measure taken by the Ascension Empire, they knew that it could point them in the direction of talents that they could then preserve and save from the massacre.

Five Star Professions were especially rare, even in entertainment professions. On the entire Royal Blue Academy football team, only Leonel and James were Five Star.

However, what was confusing was that while Leonel received an S-Class evaluation after leaving the Mayan Tomb, James only received an A-Class evaluation. Of course, that was still far better than most of Leonel's other teammates that only received C and B-Class evaluations, but it was a hint disappointing for a Five Star.

By now, those evaluations were quite useless as many had evolved far beyond those original markers, but they were still a baseline foundation for denoting potential.

What no one could have expected was that the concentration of James talent wouldn't come from Ability Index alone, but rather a more amorphous, auxiliary talent that was difficult to pinpoint, a talent buried in his very soul and one that had been fully unearthed only after he created his own Lineage Factor, becoming a true Spark just like Emna.

Elorin took a breath and exhaled. It was a subtle action, but his demeanor shifted entirely. It seemed that holding back was not an option.

In truth, Elorin had no idea how powerful Emperor Fawkes was, he was only operating under a possible worst case scenario. But since things had reached this point, there was simply no avoiding it. He would make one final push.

Since the Cloud Race was useless, he would do it himself, and if he failed, there was no one better at escaping than he was.

For Elorin, with his current speed, crossing a kilometer didn't even take him a single second. In his base state, he could accelerate time by two times. Meaning, so long as he bought some time by evading in battle, he could witness the future at twice the speed anyone else experienced the present.

After observing the future, he could pick a causality, but things weren't so simple. At best, he could observe three causalities at the same time. So, if he wanted to layer a punch more than four times-one for his present, and three from addition causalities-he would need to reset and then observe again. And, of course, the causalities of others were very blurry to him unless he concentrated, which tied him down to observing only himself and things that acted directly on him.

That said...

This was just his baseline. This was a level of use that caused no damage to himself and took no energy whatsoever. He did this as easily as breathing and he could do it practically forever at no cost to him. And unfortunately for his enemies, this was nowhere near his limit.

"Let's see how you deal with four causalities then," Elorin said lightly.

Suddenly, Elorin moved and James moved at the same time, both reacting at once as they clashed. The four-layering of Elorin's strikes became five seamlessly. It was hardly more difficult, almost as though he had gone from sitting on a bench to a brisk walk.

James' eyes narrowed. This had already become a battle that Noah and the others couldn't participate in even if they wanted.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The two cross blades and fists, dancing across the ruins of the palace as they glided around pillars and hard marble stone.

"How about six?" Elorin asked softly.

The pressure increased once again. Seven Elorin's danced around James, each one just as real as the last.

James' grinned and ugly grin. He had asked for this and Elorin didn't seem to hesitate to deliver. His own aura flourished, pieces of solidified energy shields slamming into place as they formed a radiant white-gold armor dancing with complex runes.

He blasted out a punch, but what was shocking was that the very Force of the punch solidified a distance away, crumbling two of Elorin's causalities.

"How about ten?"

James felt several punches collide with him, rattling his inner organs.

Elorin danced, his machete leaving elegant, curved streaks in the air. He seemed like a completely different person, his fierce attacks carrying shades of his grandfather as he pressed forward with greater and greater ferocity.

James countered, but he quickly found himself on the backfoot. He didn't feel like he was fighting one person, it felt like he was fighting eleven, all of them just as powerful. Elorin's power seemed to have almost tripled in an instant.

Elorin, a man who didn't speak much to begin with, seemed to have been truly triggered by James' words. He saw this as a battle for his parents, but not only were his allies nothing more than walking clowns, this nobody wanted to crack jokes.

In that case, he would crack jokes too.

"How about 2.5x acceleration?"

The voice came in layers, echoing through the curtains of time of space. It seemed to touch on the past, present and future, linking them into one.

Elorin's blade left afterimages in the air, crossing into a causality that James could react to.

PCHU!

The machete seemed to pass through the plate armor on James' shoulder, ripping into his collarbone.