

Dimensional Descent

Chapter 2581: Simulation

"What do you think you need?" Leonel asked Aina.

"For you, I-"

"Nah, I mean for you. If there's something you need to complete your first Reincarnation and I can't trade for it, it would be bad. There shouldn't be a problem, but better safe than sorry."

Aina blinked and suddenly smiled meaningfully.

"What?" Leonel asked, confused.

"You're underestimating me a little too much."

"What happened to 'you believe in me so much?'" Leonel said in the best Aina impression he could muster. Considering his Ability Index and Dream Force, he might as well have been her in those first few seconds.

Aina rolled her eyes. "My methods work on a higher level than that, I can even find unconventional paths where others wouldn't see them. I react to the resources that are on hand, not the other way around. So long as there's a decent enough selection, there won't be any roadblocks."

"Oh? So why did it sound like you had a perfect plan laid out for me already?"

"Because I do. But what's important isn't necessarily the resources themselves, but rather the steps. I can think of a hundred different ways to achieve the same goal."

Leonel's eyes brightened with understanding. It was an extremely powerful ability, the only drawback was that Aina needed to be in the moment.

She couldn't think of herself in a different state and then make plans based on it. She needed to be in that state first, only then could she make her plans. Which meant that she would need to trigger [Soul Reincarnation] first before they did anything.

But, Leonel had another idea.

What if she relied on his Simulation abilities? If Leonel could make a perfect simulation of an event, and Aina sensed it through him, wouldn't she be able to create a counter to any and all circumstances?

The idea lit his eyes up.

There was no one more intimate with Aina's body than himself. He even had a perfect clone of her in his mind from when the Metamorphosis first began on Earth. In fact, he had a perfect replica of her from even back when they were just students in Royal Blue Academy.

The beauty of Leonel's Dream Force was that he could retroactively go back into his memories and fill in details that he had originally missed. Much like how he suddenly remembered his mother after swapping his Soul Force for Dream Force, he could likewise do the same for Aina, except on a much deeper level.

Leonel suddenly grabbed Aina's shoulders and she was confused for a moment before she sensed an image with striking clarity slowly weeding its way into her mind.

Her eyes opened wide, but then she subconsciously began to focus on it, a flood of thoughts and deductions she hadn't considered before bombarding her from all sides. Then, it all suddenly clicked.

A long while later, her gaze slowly sharpened into focus once again and she looked at Leonel with hints of surprise still coloring her eyes.

She seemed to understand the weight of this just as much as Leonel did.

If Leonel could do this, not just for herself, but for everyone... just how powerful could they lead them to become?

Between Leonel's Simulations, Aina's Clairvoyance, and the Life Tablet, wouldn't they be able to create a stable of elites that could rival the Gods?

"Let's test it out," Leonel said. "Start on the path you think will work. Every Force Pill you concoct will be another that I add to the Simulation, allowing the virtual version of you to progress, and we'll see what happens."

"That way, you can use your current comprehension to concoct your Force Pills instead of having to rebuild them back up first. Let alone a few days, you could reforge your path in just a few hours."

Aina's eyes lit up.

Indeed, Force Pill Crafting was another discipline that required a large amount of comprehension. If she was relying on her comprehension as a Third Dimensional existence, it would take time and any number of variables could crop up.

However, with this method, she could use her current comprehension to elevate her much weaker self, lay out a perfect plan first, and only then would she Reincarnate.

By then, she'd have a perfect slate of pills waiting for her to pop into her mouth one after the other. The only variable of time at that point would be how long it took her to digest and integrate the pills into herself, and then how long it would take her to reforge her comprehensions.

However, the higher her Dimensions, the stronger her soul, and the sharper her Soul Clairvoyance would be. By the time she returned to the Seventh Dimension, it would only take her maybe minutes at worst to compile everything once again.

"No..." Aina said, almost talking to herself. "... if I infuse my Force Pills with my comprehensions, timing it with the perfect moments of enlightenment, then I won't need to waste even that bit of time."

Aina was already lost in her thoughts, and she had already thought of the first pill she needed.

She listed off some ingredients and Leonel found them quickly. She entered a state of meditation and then began to concoct, her Blood Force flying about like rippling tides in the air.

They didn't bother to stop as Aina finished off one pill after another, adjusting to Leonel's Simulations and taking the perfect step every single time.

After barely an hour, an array of Force Pills lay before them, a total of six. Each one seemed to contain a world of its own and the skill made Leonel shake his head. He really needed to get back into Force Crafting or else this little wife of his would leave him far behind.

After giving Leonel an excited look and a bright smile, Aina sunk into another state of meditation.

Soon, her aura began to plummet. From the Seventh Dimension to the Sixth, from the Sixth to the Fifth and then finally way down to the Third once more.

Chapter 2582: Blood Sovereign Path

Leonel watched as Aina took the first pill. He could practically feel her progress.

The locations of her Force Nodes stayed pretty similar, but with his senses he could feel that they were just a little skewed and their size was just a little bit bigger. It was a slight change, but there was no doubt that it would continue to roll forward.

What shocked him, though, was that when Aina entered the Fourth Dimension, something interesting happened. This was definitely something that she hadn't done during the first time around.

She didn't make new Nodal Pathways at all, or at least not in the normal sense. Instead, she hijacked her circulatory system, blood and all, then expanded it.

Her Innate Nodes became flooded with her rich blood and the two systems became one and the same.

Leonel's eyes widened. He could tell from the feelings that were coming off of Aina in waves that she had wanted to do this for a long while, it was a huge relief to her to take this step. Regrets she had harbored in the past disappeared into the wind and she truly relaxed, her Blood Force becoming even more potent.

At the same time, the strength of her body increased by leaps and bounds. With just a single pill, she had returned to the peak of the Fourth Dimension.

She reached forward without opening her eyes and popped the second one into her mouth.

BOOM.

Waves of pressure came from her as the Nodal Pathways, or Blood Vessels, or maybe just both, began to worm their way into her brain.

Thick veins and arteries began to take shape in her brain, but they were so cleverly folded and precisely controlled that rather than her actual brain matter shrinking, it actually multiplied several times over.

She popped a third pill in her mouth as the effects of the second were just beginning to calm.

BOOM!

Cracks began to appear along Aina's Ethereal Glabella. Leonel felt his heart lurch, but he stood in place. If there was anyone he should trust with understanding her own body, it was Aina...

And that she did.

He had already seen it all happen in the Simulation, but who could blame him for worrying about his wife?

Aina's blood flowed into her Ethereal Glabella, filling it was a lake of blood. At the same time, her blood vessels began to worm their way into the cracks, fusing and becoming one.

Soon, it didn't even look like the Ethereal Glabella had been cracked at all. Instead, rather than being a foreign object in an otherwise normal organ, it became part of the organ, the two becoming one and the same.

Oddly enough, Leonel could feel that rather than separating her soul from her body as seemed customary for power, Aina was actually doing the opposite. She was bringing her soul and body closer and closer together until they overlapped in the same place.

It seemed to make her more human, and yet something beyond human at the same time.

Leonel's eyes widened with hints of surprise and even more pride.

Everyone said that having your soul and body as one was nothing more than a detriment. His wife was probably the only one who took it in a completely different direction.

Compared to him, it could be said that she was a true champion of the Human Race. She was taking maybe the greatest weakness of the Human Race and forging it into a strength.

The Fifth Dimension was all about using the mind to release the last lingering constraints of mortality, and she was doing that and then some.

She reached for the fourth pill.

Leonel was probably the one that Leonel was most interested in seeing. The Sixth Dimension was where a Path would be set. The Dimensional Verse created the God Path, the most common path was still the Conventional even in wider Existence itself, the Oliidark family had their own unique charm Path or sorts, and Aina...

He would best describe it as the Blood Sovereign Path.

What distinguished the Convention Path and the God Path was that the latter relied heavily on comprehension. Leonel would say that what would decide the strength of the path most was how much it relied on comprehension versus everything else.

The ideal ratio seemed to be 50-50.

His father's [Final Destruction] was a perfect example. It required him to take in a large number of resources, much like the Conventional Path, but there was also a heavy emphasis on Comprehension.

From Leonel's views, it was actually harder to gather the resources he needed than to meet the comprehension marks. So the ratio of [Final Destruction] was probably like 25-75, with 25 being comprehension.

However, what closed in that gap was [Dimensional Cleanse], which was pretty much all Comprehension.

The two were made perfectly to be used with one another and reached a perfect balance.

Aina's path was extremely unique. It relied on the highest form of Comprehension, that being Sovereignty, but it also seemed to play fast and loose with the terms.

Blood Force was a unique Force in that its strength didn't necessarily come from itself, but rather the Life Force it interacted with. Blood Force was a vessel through which Life Force could exude a great amount of power and influence.

That was to say, to build a Path based on Blood Sovereignty was to both rely on comprehension, while also making yourself a vessel for resources at the same time.

The best way to describe it was like Aina took the Venn diagram for Comprehension and Resources and pushed them together until there was a perfect overlap between the two.

Aina popped the last two pills into her mouth.

Delicate runes of blood red began to etch themselves into her skin, giving her an ethereal temperament that radiated out in all directions.

She reached the peak of the Sixth Dimension and then broke through in a single bound.

BOOM.

Chapter 2583: Excited

Aina's hair fluttered, dancing in the wind.

The first time Leonel saw her break free of her curse, Aina's hair had grown to the point it was practically a river of its own, long to the point it graced the ground.

Quite frankly, Leonel really liked Aina's long hair, though she herself preferred it short mostly for maintaining peak efficiency in combat. Even so, she had always kept it long thanks to him, though not as long as previously.

Right now, her hair reached the small of her back, but that was still more than enough for it to be akin to a sea as it was carried around by the wind like that.

Soon, her aura settled down and she exhaled a breath. She opened her eyes and a blinding flash of gold rippled before it too settled down.

"How is it?" Leonel asked, observing Aina. Obviously, she had succeeded in the technique, but he wanted to know the details.

When Leonel first gained his ability to simulate, they weren't perfect. Sometimes, he would only have barely 50% accuracy, sometimes even less. Although it was still a great help to him even in those situations, he knew that it could be much better.

By this point, he was no longer the Leonel of the past, and as such, his Dream Simulations were truly top tier. It was even more so when all the variables in question were just the single person before him rather than some wide ranging event with countless variables.

However, it was truly impossible to form a Dream Simulation with 100% accuracy. Doing so would be akin to him reading the future or predicting it. Although Goggles could do some of that, it wasn't perfect either, and even if it was, it wasn't Leonel's ability anyway.

That said, there was definitely a higher than 99% accuracy, followed by a long string of 9's for this particular Simulation. However, those tiny errors on the edges could cause steamrolling effects if they weren't handled.

It could be said that the real reason Leonel was okay with taking this risk was because the Reincarnation wasn't meant to be perfect to begin with. In fact, its strength lay in the slightly different paths you'd take after each "reset". So, even if Aina's attempt was a little imperfect, it wouldn't ruin her.

After a long while, Aina nodded.

"It's good. There were tiny, insignificant changes I needed to make here and there, but I already accounted for that."

Leonel raised an eyebrow. "You did?"

Aina grinned. "What do you take me for?"

Leonel scoffed. "I took you for a woman who trusted me, but it seems like you went off and did your own thing. Now I'm hurt."

Aina laughed and explained.

It seemed that she had baked in a hint of leeway in her Force Crafting Pills that allowed her to adjust the amount and mount their effects in differing locations depending on the changes that happened in the moment.

She had made the same conclusion that Leonel had and realized that her Reincarnation didn't need to be perfect.

"So how much more powerful do you feel?" Leonel asked.

Aina looked down at her palms. "... A lot," she finally replied. "I don't think the past me would last a few moves. I planned to take years to get to this point. Reforging my foundation while in the Seventh Heaven was very, very difficult. But I already fixed everything I wanted to fix already."

"What do you think, do you want to do a second Reincarnation right now?"

Aina shook her head, quite decisive this time.

"I think it would be a waste."

"Oh?"

"I think what I got out of doing just one is probably far more than most people, and that's because I really took time to study myself. Although I have Clairvoyance for my body and soul, it's all still relative. I can see exactly what I need to do to reach the Ninth Dimension, but I don't see the perfect way yet."

Aina looked toward Leonel, hoping that he would understand. And of course, he did.

This was why Aina had to create one Force Pill, wait for Leonel to adjust the simulation, and then create the next.

It was very easy for her Clairvoyance to see one step ahead, two steps even, but the further she got from her baseline, the fuzzier the lines became.

At the same time, the further ahead she moved, the better she was able to recontextualize all the efforts she had made until then.

The reason Aina wanted to wait was because the changes she had made to her Path just now were all things it had taken her years to gather up and deduce. While a second Reincarnation would benefit her, without those years of momentum behind it she would be wasting her potential.

It was better to allow her current strength to sit and stew for a while longer as she continued to improve herself at the margins. Then, when she felt a sudden flash of inspiration about a next step to take, then she could jump in with both feet.

Leonel nodded. "Your Path is very interesting. I'm not sure if you can think of something that tops it or matches it in the future, but at least for now I agree with you. I already felt that you were strong enough to reach the top 100, by this point it's already overkill but that's not bad either."

Aina smiled. "I think there's some potential for keeping your soul fused with your body. Evolution does make mistakes, though. So we'll see how far I can take it. It feels good for now."

Leonel supported it, honestly. Who knew, maybe one day Aina's methods would become something the entire Human Race could use to rise again.

"It's your turn now, right?" Aina said, rubbing her hands together.

"... Why do you look so excited?"

"Can't a wife want to help her husband?"

Soon, Leonel's screams filled the Pavilion.

Chapter 2584: Head

"Son of a bitch-" Leonel cursed, looking up at the skies. Aina had mentioned that she had a plan for him, but she said nothing about it hurting like hell.

Most of his screaming was just for the theatrics; he had gotten used to pain like this, but that didn't change the fact it really did hurt like hell.

"That was just to 30%?" Leonel asked, huffing out a breath.

"Yup," Aina said, a little too cheerily.

Aina had said that he could only bring out 10% of his Northern Star Lineage Factor's strength because the way he wanted to use it wasn't really compatible with what it was designed to do.

Essentially, the Northern Star Lineage Factor was designed to elevate the mind and grant affinity for powerful Forces. The amplification of the body was secondary to those effects, so the fact that Leonel was trying to use it to purely do that was like trying to ask the sun to cool something down.

Technically it could just by moving away further, but that wasn't what it was really designed to do.

Either way, Leonel had managed to triple the strength of his body in a short time. Well... somewhat. He still needed to absorb the resources he would need to fill in those gaps. He had only absorbed enough for 10%, now he needed enough for 30%.

That was fine, though. With Aina's strength and his own, they didn't even have to trade for the resources from the Dream Pavilion. Whether it was the Human Bubbles or the Demon Bubbles, they assaulted them all until Leonel was filled to the brim with Fourth Dimensional Mine Cores once again.

The two bounced ideas off of one another and improved by leaps and bounds for what felt like every second. While the world was practically imploding around them, they moved about without a care.

Then, the two returned to the Segmented Cube and broke the news to everyone. There was an eruption of cheers and celebration, and they seemed to forget about their own training for the sake of hanging around and partying.

None of them knew that the world was practically ending, but even if they did, it was hard to claim that anything would really change. Ultimately, they were used to it by this point.

First the world was ending for Earth, then it was ending for the Human Domain, then it was ending for the Dimensional Verse... what difference was there now?

They had already all grown into calloused, seasoned warriors who had seen everything and been through everything. Even though their talents were lacking compared to Leonel and Aina, their hearts and wills had already been forged in iron.

Compared to most of the human population that seemed to be running around like a group of headless chickens, they were strong in their convictions.

Looking toward everyone, happily drinking and celebrating, forgetting their worries and drowning out their sorrows, Leonel smiled a genuine smile.

He felt that he didn't get to spend much time with his brothers these days, even after promising himself for the millionth time that he would, it seemed that there was always another world-ending event that needed his attention.

But hopefully this time, with Aina and his methods brought together, they could truly change their lives until it wasn't just he who stood at the frontier protecting all of them, but it slowly became something that they could all do together.

The next few days were ones of peace until it finally seemed that the humans... or maybe it was the Demons had finally gotten themselves together.

Their plan, though, was something that Leonel had already thought of. In fact, he couldn't even say it was a bad one with how the Human Race had reacted to this...

And that plan was obviously complete genocide.

Since success was based on percentages, they would skew that percentage as best they could in their favor. They started to march onto human cities, slaughtering every human they could find.

Leonel shook his head and sighed when Anastasia informed him about what was happening. Honestly, he couldn't even drum up the motivation to be enraged.

Even the so-called human alliance was entirely silent on this matter. Maybe they had expected this to happen as well and had just holed themselves up in their protective little barriers, hoping that the Demons would do all the dirty work for them.

'Genocide, huh... I would call you all cowards, but at this point even the Gods themselves are cowards, so how can the mortals be blamed?'

Leonel looked up into the skies lost in thought while Aina reclined in his arms. They both wore white like a true pair of newlyweds, basking in everyone's happiness as they did their own.

"Hey, wife. What do you say to killing a few demons as a warm-up?"

Aina, who didn't even open her eyes, grinned.

"I thought you'd never ask."

Leonel didn't react as Aina suddenly vanished. He kept leaning on the tree, looking up at the beautiful blue skies and listening to the jokes and jeers of his brothers.

In a pit of mud not too far away, Milan and Arnold were locked in a very tight skinship... well, they called it wrestling but if you closed your eyes and listened to the grunting, it sounded like something very much different.

Leonel laughed to himself. "Kiss already!"

"Fuck you, cap!" Milan grunted as he was suddenly swept off his feet and his back careened into the muddied ground.

The laughing and jeering continued without a word until a beauty suddenly returned, descending from the skies not much unlike a fairy would. The only difference was that she held a bloodied head in her hand.

Somehow, that head, even within how grotesque it was outside of the dripping blood, didn't take away from her grace at all.

She just threw it to the side and returned to her husband's arms.

As for the head... it was none other than Urlgan's... The Sun Demon Emperor.

Chapter 2585: The Best

Leonel stretched as he and Aina stepped out of the Segmented Cube. Up above, a ticking timer was already about to hit zero, and the chaos of the world had suddenly become an eerie silence as people just looked up at it.

After Aina killed Urlgan, Leonel hadn't really bothered to check on the situation, and since Anastasia hadn't said anything about it, he assumed that nothing of real importance had happened either.

And honestly, what could they do? They probably sat there, despairing their outcome.

Aina had killed Urlgan quite publicly, or else it would have never stopped the tirade of the demons. Most didn't even know who she was as Leonel had been at the forefront of pretty much everything until now.

As for the humans, they hadn't even been present at the time, so all they knew was that an extremely powerful woman suddenly descended and put a stop to the chaos.

At that point, they could only sit there and hope that things would be different.

The timer continued to tick down while Leonel and Aina rose into the skies. From the looks of it, it really did seem that they were the only group with any intention of entering while everyone else was hoping for a miracle.

Or so it seemed.

At the very least, one ship came flying in from a distance, stopping not too far away. Out from within it, a familiar old woman stepped out.

Mo"Lexi.

Her gaze landed on Leonel, a flicker of emotion dancing through her old eyes.

Leonel himself raised an eyebrow. There was an age limit for the Gathering of Kingdoms, and she certainly didn't meet it. If she tried, she could end up getting minced to pieces as she stepped through the portal, so he didn't really understand why she had come at all.

"So it was you..." she looked at Leonel, and then shifted her gaze to Aina. "... And you didn't die."

Seeing how the two were standing high in the skies, wearing white, holding one another's hands and looking as though they didn't have a care in the world, Mo"Lexi felt that she had truly been missing something.

"You..."

Mo"Lexi's eyes widened. "It was you... you did all of this..."

The realization came tumbling out from her.

If Aina survived, that meant that she could have only been bait to lure her attention away from Leonel. And if that was the case, it couldn't be a coincidence that everything that happened following that occurred.

He had destroyed everything. From the very beginning, it was him.

"You... destroyed... everything..."

The old woman seemed to have aged considerably. Although she looked old before, she never really acted her age. Her eyes were bright, her personality was somewhat sharp and oddly cheery despite her murderous streak, and she always had a pep in her step even though it came mostly from pissing off everyone around her.

But now, she truly looked old. She felt like life had passed her by and her era was long gone.

"... They said that your father was the greatest danger to us and that he had to be eliminated... Maybe we should have listened and treated you the same..."

Leonel looked at her, then his lips slightly parted.

"Whether you did or not wouldn't have changed anything."

Mo"Lexi felt her heart shudder and almost give way. She could sense the confidence in those words... no, it was something deeper than confidence. It was one, an acknowledgment of their strength, and two, a conviction to blow by any obstacles they might have put in his way regardless of what it was.

And indeed... she didn't know if she could even refute it.

He had fooled her, a supposed Dream Force expert, preying on her emotions as though she was a child. He had run circles around the Godlens, leaving Vivak in such a manic state that the entire city was plunged into a seclusion, cutting themselves off from the outside world. And since he was standing here... didn't that mean that the Dream Pavilion was already his own?

She looked toward Aina somewhat weakly, remembering those reports of what happened to Urgan.

It was her greatest shame, but it was something that she had swallowed and accepted because she felt that there was no other way. If there weren't enough deaths before that timer hit zero, there would be no chance of them surviving this culling. So, she turned a blind eye, hoping that the Demons would do the dirty work for them...

Until a woman wearing a dress of white appeared and decapitated him in a single blow before his vast armies.

By now, she was fairly certain that that woman was Aina.

She lowered her head as the two began to float away. Long after they entered the portal above, she still just stood there, her eyes somewhat lost.

The weight of everything was crashing down around her, and she couldn't even manage to be happy that they actually had a chance to survive.

Just what was the point of everything she had done?

She thought of her name, the sheer carnage she carried around with herself all the time. That heaviness played on her soul and threatened to rip out her heart.

Her body subconsciously drifted upward, and by the time she realized what she was doing, she was already hovering within arm's reach of the portal.

'I guess this is for the best...' she thought to herself. 'I have no more role to play in this world.'

She drifted into the portal and in a single instant of time, she was shredded to pieces.

Her ship fell out of the skies and not even a single rag or drop of blood remained from her.

However, there was a familiar Black Tablet that was suddenly spit out, falling through the skies like a meteor and yet crashing down below with hardly a hiss.

The world fell into an eerie silence until a shadowy figure swept by and picked it up, looking around before vanishing into the night.

Chapter 2586: Blood and Gore

Leonel's vision cleared and he found himself in a bustling city. Though... describing it like this felt a bit odd because it wasn't what one would expect from such a bustling environment.

People were concentrated in certain areas and they weren't really interacting with the city much at all. It was more like they had all been randomly spawned here and were instead trying to reconfigure their bearings. The result was a "bustling" city that was instead filled with people looking around and observing one another.

It seemed that this made sense. After all, they were indeed randomly spawned here. Leonel still found the choice a bit weird, though.

There was no separation from people of different realms and such, they were just thrown into a hodgepodge and forced to co-mingle, something that was highly dangerous given the circumstances.

Aside from those Demi-God Worlds that were pretty much certain to pass, everyone else was on edge. Unless you had a good margin against reaching that 10% number, there was no way that you could be relaxed in this sort of environment. Even those that felt like they had a great chance were still on edge because things weren't entirely under your control.

The only way to guarantee that there would be no issues was to have a genius capable of reaching the top 100, something most of the worlds did not have considering the concentration of strength in the hands of a minority of worlds.

And, of course... Leonel and Aina were pretty much the only humans here. At the very least, whether it was with his eyes or his Internal Sight, he didn't catch a whiff of any of them.

Of course, that made sense. There were definitely humans outside of the human alliance, spread out across Existence. But these people likely lived ignoble existences

that Leonel wouldn't wish on anyone. Slavery was probably the pinnacle of what they could hope for.

This, though, likewise made Leonel and Aina stick out like a sore thumb. In the midst of this sea of Nomads, Spirituals, Demons, Clouds, and even Beast Race members, they were particularly...

Ordinary.

A growl came from Leonel's back. He sent a glance to find that it was a lion Beast. Its fur was a bright gold, and its mane, as well as the tip of its tail, flickered with flames so dense that they really did look like thick matts of fur as well.

Though it sounded like a growl, it was actually speaking in a language as it raised a paw and pressed it down toward Leonel's head.

The paw didn't have any force behind it and looked harmless. In fact, it moved down like a normal pat on the head, almost as though the Beast found Leonel cute.

However, it stood at least five meters tall, and though it wasn't nearly so exaggerated, its paw felt like a house was falling down on him.

Then Leonel's Dream Force latched onto the language and retroactively translated everything from the start.

"Hoho, cute little humans. I didn't think we'd find some so early on, brothers. Look at the beauty, I'll definitely take her. Little man, I can take you in too. I've grown tired of pleasing my concubines, I need something fresh and new. I don't know if her little body can withstand me, though-Hohoho."

Leonel raised a hand and stopped the paw from touching his head.

Even without being Dream Force experts themselves, there was no doubt that these people all had their own methods of translating language. It was clear they understood what the Beast was saying as well as flashes of regret flashed in their eyes.

With his senses, Leonel could tell quite immediately that these people weren't lamenting because they felt sympathy, but rather because the lion Beast was the strongest existence in this little corner of the city and they felt it was a shame they weren't strong enough to fight over their "ownership".

Leonel's usual and immediate reaction to such stuff was rage. Even the slightest hint of crude language toward Aina was always met with death. However, his reaction this time didn't seem to be so vengeful.

Holding Aina's hand in his own, and the lion's paw in his other, his expression didn't seem to change in the slightest.

"Hoho, little human, you're stronger than you seem. This is good. If you're not, then you'll probably be torn to pieces by my concubines. They hate weak men."

Leonel flicked his wrist and the lion Beast suddenly found an uncontrollable force pushing its paw up.

It stumbled backward, its three other limbs stabilizing it as its paw remained in the air.

Leonel turned back as he lowered his hand. His palm reached forward, facing the ground as he seemed to make a reverse come here motion, his fingers tapping toward the ground.

The lion Beast was somewhat confused as it stumbled back and couldn't even react to the change.

Suddenly, the fire that made up its mane flared up and became as heavy as a mountain.

BOOM.

The head of the lion Beast crashed into the ground. It would have been a truly comical sight in any other situation, its ass still waving in the air while it roared, trying to wring its hand free. But maybe it was too stupid to realize just yet that freeing itself would be shredding apart its own head.

The eyes of many of the spectators widened, not sure what exactly they were seeing. However, they didn't have long to react before the roars of the lion Beast were muffled as its flames covered its entire head, covering it in a smooth surface of red that was barely transparent... just enough to allow one to see its expression of roaring agony.

At that moment, Leonel's fingers flickered across the air again and the flame on the beast's tail flared up, becoming solid as well as it grew into a tower at least a meter tall and a half meter thick.

Then, everyone looked away as the tail rushed down, driving into the lion's back side.

Blood and gore filled the skies.

Chapter 2587: Weakness

Leonel's indifference from start to end painted an indelible mark on all of their hearts. He didn't even hesitate for a moment, giving the lion beast a taste of its own medicine.

Beast Races didn't have human forms, at least not in the normal sense. Though they could take human form, it was more like an avatar. It could exude some of their strength, but only a fraction of it. While executing more complex tasks, like... copulating, for example, was impossible while in such a form.

The image didn't really need to be painted, then. One could imagine what would happen to the human female slaves that this lion beast took in.

The most disgusting part to Leonel was that the Beast didn't even seem to be particularly sinister. It was still trying to act chummy with him as though what it was doing was just a natural course of nature, not something to get mad about.

And maybe that was truly the case. Ever since he had left Earth, he had learned more and more everyday of how much of a dog eat dog world he was in. There would be no one coming to save you... no one coming to save the Human Race.

So as the lion Beast lay there suffocating, a heart rending pain tearing through its body while most of its backside was nothing more than a rain of blood, Leonel had no remorse to give in his heart.

What made the situation worse was that as he listened to the fear-induced murmurings of those in the surroundings, none of them believed that he and Aina were human. Instead, they believed that they must have sensed something wrong, that the couple they were seeing were actually a pair of Half-Spirituals. They were certainly beautiful and handsome enough.

Leonel's ability to steal control over a flame the lion Beast had been nurturing since its youth only solidified this. Who could have more control of the elements than the Spirituals?

Leonel waved a hand and relinquished his control over the flames, prepared to walk away.

"Halt!"

A booming voice came from a separate location.

When they all spawned, the "bustling" city had been mostly silent as they all became accustomed to their surroundings. By the time the lion Beast started talking and then eventually roaring in agony, there had been some noise beginning to build up, but not enough that these sounds didn't still travel quite far.

Two men who seemed to have halos hovering above their heads made their way in from the distance. These weren't real halos, but rather a gathering of Elemental Force so strong that it formed a perpetual halo around them.

It was due to the appearance of these two men that most didn't think Aina and Leonel were Half-Spirituals at first. And judging by how fiercely they were reacting, it seemed that their assumptions about Leonel and Aina were probably wrong. There was no way they'd be so fierce with their own kind.

"What is going on here?"

Leonel looked between the two for a moment before ignoring them and turning to leave.

He knew what this was.

There were no "adults" in this place. The culling was just how Leonel described this Gathering, and it was more of an open secret than an outright truth. On the surface, the Gathering of Kingdoms still used the original guise proposed by the God Beasts of Creation, and that was to build camaraderie between the powers of Existence.

As such, the "rules" of this place were actually decided by the youths themselves. Or, more accurately, the most powerful of them. And, without fail, that council was under the control of Demi-God level Bubbles.

Technically, the council had yet to be formed for this particular iteration of the Gathering of Kingdoms, and as such the rules weren't firmly in place either. This starting period was a free for all, and even if Leonel started indiscriminately killing everyone in sight, they couldn't do anything about it.

That was, unless they felt themselves so entitled that they tried to carry over authority they had from previous Gathering of Kingdoms.

The two were smarter than Leonel gave them credit for. When they saw Leonel directly ignore them as though they were air, despite the fact their gazes flashed with rage, they seemed to realize that they didn't have the authority to do anything either.

They could only let their anger stoke as Leonel and Aina disappeared into the crowd.

"What happened here?" One of them growled toward another lion Beast.

The lion Beast's eyes narrowed in clear rage. Just because they didn't get their way, didn't mean that they would be so free with how they talked to everyone.

If they were so mad, they should have just directly attacked Leonel. There were no rules, after all.

But, obviously, since they didn't see the proceedings, they didn't dare to. Somehow, between the sound of the first roar and by the time they got here, the lion Beast genius had fallen.

Although he wasn't strong enough to enter the Finals, how many of them were? There were trillions of them and only a hundred would make it.

However, they could see enough to know that the lion Beast was of decent strength. It would at least make it past the preliminaries.

In the end, the two Half Spirituals got their answers as not everyone dared to be so flippant in responding to their inquiries.

"We'll report this matter," one of the Half Spirituals said. "It was said that there would be a powerful Human, we should have just run into him."

"And the woman by his side?"

"It was said he had a wife."

The two both had a flash of rage spark in their eyes. That was because they were privy to their higher echelons trying to marry the best of their Race to this human. How could they not be infuriated?

"Since he brought her, then that means he brought a weakness. He'll only be easier to deal with."

Chapter 2588: Me?

Leonel hadn't expected to be annoyed so quickly after coming to this place, but honestly speaking it wasn't too unexpected either.

Humans getting bullied was probably the norm. In fact, calling it "bullying" was too much of a disservice to what the Human Race had suffered since the fall of the God Beasts.

But he had plenty of rage to go around if these people kept wanting to test him, council or not. He had his own methods of dealing with these things.

A giggle suddenly came from Aina.

"What's so funny?"

Aina laughed harder, causing Leonel to smile and shake his head. He could guess what she was laughing about. What he had just to the lion Beast was eerily similar to what Aina had joked about doing to him. The difference was that he had actually done it.

But only this woman could laugh about such a gory scene. This was, indeed, his wife. Cute, adorable, and a little too bloodthirsty.

Leonel was about to make a joke when his head suddenly snapped up.

"Hm?"

Aina noticed a moment after him and her eyes widened.

"Yuri! Savahn!"

Aina's eyes reddened with excitement as she flashed forward, practically hopping onto the two women. She was so fast that those two couldn't even react. They didn't even realize who was hugging them until they saw the familiar Leonel and it clicked for them.

Inwardly, watching this scene of the three women hugging and crying in each other's arms, Leonel actually sighed out a breath of relief.

There was only so much that Leonel could do as Aina's husband. Although they were also each other's best friends, there were sometimes Aina might want to spend some time with someone other than him.

Unfortunately, he had no idea what happened to Yuri and Savahn. He just made the assumption that they were swept up in whatever plans his grandfather had. But it seems that they got swept up in Miel's plans instead.

By Yuri and Savahn, there were two men that Aina had directly ignored. Leonel doubted she did it on purpose, but honestly, even if she had noticed them she still wouldn't have cared very much.

Yuri was practically balling her eyes out. She was certain that Aina was dead after her near fall out with Leonel. She hadn't expected that she would end up randomly running into her like this.

The women sniffled and finally pulled back from their bear hugs. However, one wave of tears was soon replaced by another as Aina held out her left hand and wiggled around her fingers.

Yuri and Savahn's eyes widened before the waterworks started again.

Leonel had been about to interject, but he chose to hang back again. He compared the difference between his brothers and Aina's sisters and couldn't help but laugh. One had ended up in a wrestling pile, and this one had ended up with more tears.

However, it brought a smile to his face when he saw the pride in Aina's side profile. It made him feel guilty that he hadn't just done this earlier, how much happier could he have made her already?

"What the hell is that supposed to be? A tattoo in place of a ring?"

One of the Half Spirituals seemed a bit ticked off for whatever reason. He didn't speak very loudly, but Aina's eyes had already flashed with murderous intent so potent that the skies shuddered with sparks of red cracks.

However, neither she nor Leonel got to do much of anything before he was slapped in the back of the head by the other Half Spiritual.

"Idiot. Do you not recognize a Soul Bind when you see one? What wedding ring is more valuable than it?"

The irritated Half Spiritual grabbed the back of his head, rubbing it.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Stopping you from doing something stupid. If you see a woman with a Soul Bind, give up. There's no point in being jealous, she would rather die than be with you. Get over it."

"What are you talking" €" ?"

The Half Spiritual gave him a knowing glare as though he could see right through him, causing the one who started it to blush with some hints of shame and unwillingness.

"Anyway, it's nice to meet you two. My name is Zephyr. This is my idiot kid brother, Silvanus. Don't mind him, he hasn't seen much of the world and his mouth speaks before his brain thinks."

Aina gave him a glance before turning back to Yuri and Savahn. Clearly, she was a bit irritated. She would have probably preferred to kill Silvanus, but now she couldn't. He could consider himself lucky.

Leonel smiled in her stead, shaking the man's hand.

"Leonel Morales."

Zephyr's eyes widened. "You...!?"

"Me?" Leonel laughed.

Zephyr looked back toward the two women, the astonishment still clear in his eyes. They had mentioned a chance that Leonel might be someone they knew, but how vast was Existence? The odds of two people sharing the same name wasn't just common, it was practically a certainty.

The only people who could get away with this were those who had names in Ancient Languages like those of the Gods, or those like Mo"Lexi who had Dream Force strong enough to give their name real character that couldn't easily be replicated.

Leonel had obviously done no such thing to his name. There were probably all kinds of Leonel Morales out there, whether the same literally or at least phonetically.

Toward Zephyr's gaze, Yuri just gave a bitter smile. She had been somewhat expecting this, but she was still surprised as well.

Then, her happiness was hit by waves of worry. Weren't Leonel and Aina still humans? Didn't that mean if they didn't enter the Finals, their lives would end up in the hands of others?

"Aina, we need to do something about this immediately, we can't let you two-

GONG! GONG!

Their expressions changed. Wasn't that the council bell? Why was it ringing so early?

Chapter 2589: Council Keys

"Let's go," Leonel said, his eyes narrowed. He focused in on the distance, his feet beginning to move.

Aina followed after him, and Savahn and Yuri kept up as well, leaving the pair of Zephyr and Silvanus lagging behind.

"What the hell was that supposed to be?" Silvanus snapped at his elder brother with a deep hiss. "What happened to a united front? Am I even your brother? What are you choosing outsiders over me for? I didn't even say anything that bad?"

Zephyr pinched his brows. "Nothing that bad? If someone had said that about you and your woman, what would you have done?"

"So what? Can't men fight?"

"You're so naive. Fight? Some people would prefer to kill over words."

"Who would do something that ridiculous?!"

"People who've gotten used to having to scratch and claw for everything, instead of being born a pompous little prince like a certain someone."

Zephyr gave his brother a pointed glare.

Silvanus snarled. "And so what if he had the intention to kill? Would it make much of a difference? Don't tell me you actually believe all those rumors."

"You think Demi-Gods make up lies just for the heck of it?" Zephyr raised an eyebrow.

"Even then, it was in a world they could only use Dream Force in, their talents were useless. You can't seriously believe that he's a threat in the outside world. He's only here because he has no other choice, and if he wants to survive, he's going to have to rely on one of our families to do so.

"Do you think they're going to allow his wife to just strut around by his side?"

Silvanus didn't even consider the idea that Aina wouldn't be accepting of it in the first place. In his mind, she didn't have much of a choice, so the one being rejected was Aina, not who they thought would be Leonel's soon-to-be wife.

Zephyr fell into silence. He knew his little brother well, the man definitely hadn't thought so far before he went out and ran his mouth. But even so, Zephyr had to admit that he had a point.

If those families found out Leonel had a Soul Bond, they would definitely react fiercely to it and Aina would definitely have to at least be out of the picture if not dead. At that point, maybe any seeds Silvanus laid now would bear fruit in the future when Aina went from a newly wed to a freshly minted divorcee.

Even so, the Soul Bond wasn't a one-sided affair. It was impossible to form unless both parties had a certain level of trust and affection for the other.

Even if Leonel was forced to give up Aina for his survival, that didn't mean that he'd allow another man to touch her. His brother was playing with fire.

"Making an enemy out of a Dream Force Sovereign might be the last thing you do in your life, Silvanus. Think with this," he poked his brother's forehead, "instead of that thing."

Silvanus jumped out of the way of a kick to the nuts.

"Hey!"

Zephyr laughed, beginning to walk away.

"You're doing a lot of talking for a man pining after her sisters," Silvanus muttered.

Zephyr laughed. "Unlike Aina, Yuri and Savahn are single women."

Silvanus snarled again.

Of course, Zephyr had no idea that this wasn't true at all. Unfortunately, Raj didn't have nearly the strength necessary to fight for Yuri the same way Leonel could fight for Aina...

At least not for now.

Leonel's attention wasn't on the two brothers to his back. All things considered, they weren't terrible people, if his scale was this twisted world.

But that was to be expected. There was no way Miel would send his daughter and adoptive daughter to a place that wasn't mostly safe.

Either way, Leonel was more interested in those GONGs.

Soon, they have come to a public square, filled to the brim with all sorts of people and races. Some even sat atop of buildings, and it was quite clear that those people above had a level of status above those below.

Some who tried to casually stand on a building themselves found themselves kicked down.

Usually, Leonel would probably immediately start fighting for a spot himself, but he found that his temperament was much more mellow these days... not that his run-in with the lion Beast was any indication.

More than these people reclining and lounging atop of buildings, though, Leonel's gaze landed on ten figures who were all standing atop of ten pillars that took up the center of the public square.

In their hands, each held out a key as though they were unlocking an invisible lock. Their wrists twisted as Leonel's disdain deepened.

Ten portals opened up in front of them before rushing forward and fusing with one another. Then a huge almost water-like bubble took shape, opening up and expanding to reveal what looked like a senate house within.

"The council has been formed, the rules will now be decided upon. So long as you are within the bounds of this city, these rules must always be followed. The punishment for failing to meet this criteria will be banishment from participating in the Gathering of Kingdoms."

Shocked gasps spread through the crowd. There was no way a council of brats would have that much authority, right? Things definitely didn't work this way in previous years.

At worst, the council could enforce their rules with jail time, but even then a person would have to be released for the sake of participating in their matches.

Something like being able to banish people for not following the rules was like putting the life and death of countless worlds at the whims of a few. That was unacceptable.

Technically, there were no limits on what kind of rules the council could enforce so long as they were unanimously decided upon.

What if they decided that no men could be in the city and got rid of half of everyone immediately?!

And then the rules began.

Chapter 2590: Rules

They started off extremely benign to the point that many relaxed. Maybe they were overthinking things and this sudden rule change was only really a method of making sure they stayed in line.

In the past, even with rules there, with the only real punishment being confinement, many terrible people would flout them and accept the jail time. Considering they would be released for their matches, and would obviously be released after the Gathering ended, why should they care?

There were a fair share of the weak that had been directly killed for offending the wrong people or even looking at them the wrong way. The worst part was that often the people they had offended wouldn't even act themselves. Instead, they would pay someone else to do it and take the jail time for them. Sometimes it was life-changing money on the table, so who wouldn't jump at the chance if the only punishment was staring at four walls for a bit?

By the time they got to their level of strength, something like solitary confinement wasn't worth too much in the grand scheme.

By the time most of the rules had been read, the crowd actually relaxed and began to feel that this was a good thing. The only people that didn't really like it were those who were looking forward to flouting these very rules.

No combat outside of designated areas. No killing regardless of region. Property damage wouldn't be tolerated, and unless one could pay the fee for repair, they would find themselves banished. Coercion or attempts at it were strictly prohibited. Grudges couldn't be taken outside of the arena....

They were all normal rules... and yet Leonel could hardly stop himself from sneering as he listened to them. Even before the other foot dropped, he could find a million loopholes to these rules.

"Property Damage" had to be paid for? If two people were fighting, who would decide who had damaged what?

Coercion was banned? Who was looking? What kind of case could you even bring forward in such a case? Or if you did bring forward a good case, would you be accused of "taking grudges outside the arena"? What a vague and mind-numbingly useless rule. It could be applied so broadly and it was based almost entirely on the personal judgment of whoever was doing the judging.

But this was to be expected. It had all been a farce from the very beginning, right from the moment they took out those keys.

Those keys were what gave them the right to become members of the council. They were supposed to be so well hidden that it should have taken weeks for them all to be found. Leonel hadn't even thought to look for them because the moment he appeared, he was beset by that damned lion, and then they met Yuri and Savahn seconds later. Then the GONGs went off. There wasn't any time to do a thing even if he wanted to.

It was all too amusing. He felt the urge to laugh again.

He had known that this would happen, which was why he never had the intention of participating himself.

While he could control his temper and keep himself calm, swallowing the insults until he could beat the shit out of whoever slighted him in the arena... why even bother?

He didn't have patience for it, and quite frankly he didn't want to have the patience for it.

Then the other shoe dropped.

"... Housing is limited in the city. In past years, the first few weeks, especially while the Council Keys were being sought after, would be utter mayhem as people fought and vied for position.

"We want harmony, so housing will be decided based on strength. And since the point is to avoid pointless fighting, this strength will be decided by one's Dimension and Force output.

"If you want to apply for housing for more than one person, your performance will be divided based on the number of people you are applying for.

"If you do not meet a certain standard of Dimension, we will have to ask you to leave and camp outside of the city. There will be tents and accommodations ready and waiting for you."

The woman speaking had illusory wings behind her back. But rather than being real, they were most definitely a treasure. Not that most could tell at a glance.

If she wasn't a descendant of the Owlans, Leonel probably wouldn't believe it. But her gene pool was definitely much thinner than that of the others. It was no wonder she was participating in this event.

She was known as Lumina.

As she finished speaking, another began to. He was a Nomad with a familiar turban wrapped around his head, only providing space for his bulging Ethereal Glabella to shine through.

"As you all know, the need for privacy is a must in the city as there will often be much improvement between rounds as participants are forced to their very limits.

"As a proud user of Dream Force, I will willfully take a step back and allow a universal suppression of Dream Force within city limits."

He was known as Caspian.

When he was finished, yet another spoke. This man was clearly a Spiritual, one that radiated a wild and boundless might. He also happened to be a man that Leonel had seen but couldn't be bothered to give a second glance. In Leonel's eyes, since he had appeared here, he was as good as dead.

He was the very Spiritual that stole his own father's Innate Node.

Rhangyl.

"For the sake of more fairness," Rhangyl began, "wagers will be removed. No longer will one be able to exchange for items and such from the outside world to do trade within the city.

"Instead, we will be implementing a social currency based on your merit and your merit alone. Everything will be decided on this form of credit.

"Starting from the first Tier of the Sixth Dimension, one will receive one credit, doubling until the peak of the Seventh Dimension.

"If you want to increase your credit, or gain them, simply wager your current credits, betting on yourself, others, testing yourselves against the various training facilities of the city, so on and so forth.

"Fair warning, though. Social credit cannot be traded amongst individuals. Once your credit hits zero, you will be out of luck and be forced to live off of what the city provides for free."

It was a cute little rule that left Leonel with exactly zero credits and apparently no way out of it.

Chapter 2591: Finished?

Rhangyl's gaze seemed to fall on Leonel, however all he saw was a pair of tranquil eyes. He planned to look away, but Leonel suddenly smiled.

"Finished?"

The sudden voice that wasn't amongst the ten Council Members caught many off guard. It wasn't like there was a rule against speaking, but at this point, the only people that they weren't allowed to offend were these ten, or else they would be playing with the lives of not just themselves, but their families, their friends, their entire worlds...

"Good." Leonel nodded when he didn't receive a response aside from sneers and gazes of derision.

Then, he suddenly vanished.

The ten Council Members couldn't react before Rhangyl's throat was suddenly in Leonel's palms.

BOOM!

Leonel drove the Spiritual Prince back with such speed and ferocity that lines of buildings were destroyed and a deep trench was dug into the hard, cobblestoned roads.

The eyes of several individuals widened considerably, but at this point, the only thing most could see was Leonel's tall back as he ripped something out of Rhangyl's hands.

Rhangyl's expression was entirely ice-cold. If Leonel could hand the man anything, it was the man's calmness. However, if it was a competition of stoicism, he was far outside his depth. And nothing in that cold gaze was able to stop Leonel from taking the key from his hands.

Leonel had simply moved too fast. It wasn't just that he moved so quickly, but also that his Dream Force warped their senses, making them think he was still standing still when he very much wasn't.

The rule on the restriction of Dream Force had just been explained and had yet to be enforced, and it had cost them.

"Taking the key will do nothing for you," Rhangyl said coldly as he stood to his feet.

Leonel twirled the key in his fingers.

"I think you've misunderstood something. I didn't come here to partake in your little games. I came to kill you."

The key vanished and Leonel pulled out his spear, pressing his hands together and pulling them apart until a gorgeous shaft of red, gold, and silver took shape. His aura flaring to the point it shrouded the entire city. There wasn't a single soul that couldn't feel his Quasi Life State Spear Force.

Rhangyl's eyes only had time to sharpen for only a moment before the spear suddenly appeared before him.

The elements swirled around him and formed a shield of rainbow as Leonel's spear descended.

BANG!

Rhangyl slid backward, a slight grunt coming from his lips as he barely managed to stop himself after crashing into the side of a building.

Leonel's wrist flickered, his spear streaking like silver meteors through the air as he attacked Rhangyl from all sides. The Spiritual Prince could only barely manage to defend, and yet he was doing so.

Leonel had felt the toughness of his neck when he grabbed it, and had he held onto it for any longer, he had felt like his hand would be minced to pieces.

Rhangyl was an archer, Leonel knew that. But this archer seemed to have also gained the body of a person who was nothing short of a pure berserker.

And yet Leonel didn't care.

Suddenly, Leonel swung an arm backward and a spurt of Force in the shape of a soaring bird was cut in two.

Without missing a beat, his assault on Rhangyl continued until suddenly...

BOOM!

The shield of Force Rhangyl was using to defend himself suddenly exploded, the Fire Force within rampaging and being torn out of his control as he was sent flying backward once again.

This time, a spurt of blood came from his mouth, his upper robes being burnt to ash as he crashed into another building.

"Show me something more," Leonel said calmly. "You were so strong and mighty when I wasn't there, what is the mighty Spiritual Prince going to do now?"

Despite the blow to his gut, Rhangyl's body reacted much more like metal than flesh and bone. His fair skin, radiating hints of gold, looked far more like a metal that had just been tempered by steel than flesh that had just been burnt.

Rhangyl coughed again, slowly standing.

He looked back toward the Council Members who had only sent out a superficial attack until just now and didn't seem eager to do much of anything else.

The reason he had said that Leonel could do nothing was that the rules were already set in stone the moment they had spoken them. In order to change any rules, you needed the same stamp of approval that the rule itself had initially gotten. Meaning... unanimous.

So, unless Leonel was planning on fighting ten of the strongest geniuses beneath the Demi-God level all alone, it was a pipe dream.

Even if he had the strength, whether he could actually accomplish it was up in the air because there was no way he'd have to just fight the ten of them, not to mention the variable of the keys itself.

He knew why Leonel had taken the Key. Without the resonance of all ten, the enforcement of the rules was impossible. So, despite the fact he had clearly already broken several rules, they still couldn't kick him out yet.

This left them in a stalemate, one that could easily be fixed by a few orders from each one of them.

And yet they didn't do it.

Rhangyl obviously didn't have the same level of station as the others, and even Leonel seemed to be more toying with him than taking him seriously. Leonel wanted him to be steeped in humiliation and die with shame, much the same as he had once done to the Morales.

With a look of indifference, Rhangyl met Leonel's tranquil gaze. Despite being targeted by so many large powers, the man didn't seem moved in the slightest. Against the entire world, he was equally as unmoved.

"I'm going to enjoy killing you," Rhangyl finally said something different from his usual indifference, the elements in the sky shaking as though in reverence of someone...

That someone being Rhangyl himself.

Ten points of light shone from beneath his skin.

Chapter 2592: Faster

Leonel pointed his spear toward the ground, a calm expression on his face. As Rhangyl's aura whipped about in the air, causing his white robes and pale violet hair to flutter about wildly, he stood in the midst of the storm without the slightest change to his expression.

Rhangyl was an anomaly. The man had ten Innate Nodes, and that alone was enough to put him into a class all his own, especially since he was naturally born with them and didn't have to manufacture them or form them after birth.

He had two Fire, three Wind, two Water, and three Earth Force Innate Nodes. They formed a perfect balance in his body.

In truth, the fact that he had once had three Wind Force Innate Nodes and just two of everything else had thrown off his progress and actually slowed him down. The moment he gained the balance he was looking for, allowing Wind to counter Earth and Fire to counter Water, his strength had soared by leaps and bounds.

By the time he had been taken in by the Spirituals and acclimated to these worlds with far more complete Forces, he improved by leaps and bounds in single instants.

Rather than being like Leonel and Aina who had to slowly rebuild their foundations, he was a Spiritual. He directly abandoned his old body, allowed his Innate Nodes to swap in far more powerful Forces, and then rebuilt this new body.

He would show Leonel the power of a true Spiritual.

His Forces roared and he pulled out his body. They coalesced into a single point and formed a rainbow arrow that sparkled beneath the sun. Then, he released the winding metallic bowstring with a TWANG!

BOOM!

The air exploded and shattered as though space had become as fragile as glass. The arrow appeared before Leonel in an instant of time, but he didn't even move, watching as it pierced through his chest.

Rhangyl's pupils constricted.

"I would suggest you bring out another weapon," Leonel said lightly.

In that moment, his Dream Sovereignty, Spear Sovereignty, and Bow Sovereignty suddenly took shape.

His white robes were covered in flowing fog of gold and silver and barely emitted the faint wisps of ancient runes.

At the same time, a crown took shape above his head, causing the world to go still.

[Domain].

[Universe].

Universe Force sparkled as it descended through the air, a suffocating [Domain] suppressing all things.

At the same time, Leonel's Spear Force and Bow Force took a Quasi step forward, giving them the shape and feeling of a Life State Force as his Dream Force bloomed even more fiercely.

Rhangyl's Fire Force blinked out instantly, and his Earth Force followed suit. His Water and Wind Force were all that was left, but the balance was suddenly skewed to one side, causing his Force to nearly enter a frenzied state within him.

Leonel's wrist moved almost delicately.

SHIING!

The sound of metal scraping against metal resounded. Before [Universe]'s effect, his spear was so fast that it felt like he was wielding a light sword. In an instant, a slash was cut across Rhangyl's chest, leaving a white mark that just barely began to gather up droplets of blood from beneath his skin.

Leonel didn't seem to mind, his cool indifference still on his face as his spear flickered again.

Another cut appeared, this time across Rhangyl's cheek. It was yet another white mark, one barely drawing droplets of blood.

Then again, and then again.

Streaks of invisible spear light filled the surroundings in a storm. Every time Leonel just barely moved, another scar would appear on Rhangyl's body, then another.

"Not going to do anything?" Leonel asked.

Rhangyl had clenched his jaw so hard that he was practically spitting daggers. He had just circulated his Forces at full force before losing connection to half of them. He couldn't move not just because of [Universe], but also because he had to force it to calm down first, something that was exceptionally difficult to do when your opponent was tugging at you every which way.

By this point, the Council Members were frowning. They obviously didn't care about Rhangyl, but the longer this dragged out, the closer the association between this failure and them would become.

However, Leonel treated them like air. His wrist flickered again and again until Rhangyl suddenly roared, finally regaining control of himself and bursting forward.

Leonel was even faster.

Rhangyl didn't even know when the fist appeared at his gut, driving into his steel-hard skin as though it was a puff of clouds instead.

His eyes bulged and spittle flew from his mouth as he rocketed backward, his body crashing through building after building.

"Without your bow, you're kind of weak," Leonel's voice echoed again. "It can't be that a human is better with the bow than the mighty Spiritual Prince, right? Come, use it again. Maybe it'll work this time."

By this point, many had locked auras onto Leonel. They could see plain as day that he was only in the Fifth Dimension, and many of them were able to put two and two together after sensing this.

Every time Rhangyl got up, Leonel would swing his spear down again, and then again.

Everything was slow and methodical, almost as though he was taking a stroll through a park.

His blade flickered three times and three silver streaks arced through the air, pinching around Rhangyl before driving through the same point in his stomach.

PCHU!

Blood flew from Rhangyl's lips as his lower belly was nearly cut in two, almost bisecting him at the waist.

"Enough!" Rhangyl roared, his composure vanishing as a bloodthirsty light pooled out from him.

His soul seemed like it was on fire, pools of Force forming around him into whirlpools of rainbow in the skies. They began to rain down with arrows, each one swirling with massive amounts of power.

PCHU!

Rhangyl's eyes widened, suddenly finding his stomach skewered on the end of Leonel's blade. His feet lifted from the ground and his hands flailed, barely grabbing onto the pole arm with a weak grip.

At that moment, someone suddenly appeared by Leonel's side, grabbing his arm.

Chapter 2593: Unwarranted Confidence

Leonel sent a casual glance over. There was no one capable of sneaking up on him, not among these people. He had already seen through them long ago.

It was a man-a Demon, rather. But he looked quite human aside from the purple scale on his forehead and the horns on his head. Even with this, though, he looked absolutely immaculate, reminding Leonel a lot of Elthor in that way. Neither were human, but both seemed to meet the aesthetic in ways human men could not.

Leonel looked down at the slender fingers grabbing his arm. The grip was light if it could be called a grip at all. It was more like a pat.

"Do you need something?" Leonel asked.

The Demon smiled, "my name is Thorne."

"You didn't answer my question," Leonel replied.

Thorne chuckled. "I think this has gone on for long enough, don't you think? You've already vented your anger."

"Have I?" Leonel asked, a smile spreading across his face.

"You know, in the world I come from, they always said Demons were vicious creatures without morality. I didn't think I'd meet such a soft one."

Thorne laughed even louder. "Don't all Races have their lessers? I've always heard that Humans are weak and fragile, are you the same?"

The question was rhetorical.

"A temporary ailment," Leonel replied without missing a beat.

Thorne's eyes narrowed. "The implications of those words are quite dangerous, you know."

"Are they? I was just trying to exist, and yet trash keeps trying to get in my way. What's the difference between whether I speak or not? Are you going to reach out and pat the arms of some fragile Demi-Gods too?"

A hushed silence spread, even Thorne didn't dare to speak, at least not immediately.

Leonel's lip curled.

"You're playing a dangerous game," Thorne finally said.

"Yeah, I am. So how about you get your hand the fuck off of me before I skewer you like him? I've killed three Owlans, maybe not officially, but I've definitely done so. Do you think this kiddie pool is deep enough for me?"

Wisps of smoke suddenly began to come out from the soles of Leonel's feet and the edges of his eyes.

The pain of heat and Destruction caused Thorne to pull his hand back reflexively, feeling that he might lose his hand if he didn't.

A shriek suddenly came from Rhangyl as he was burned from the inside out. He was still struggling to hold onto the spear, but the flame was so strong that his metallic skin seemed to melt beneath their might.

Rhangyl turned red and his body began to break down beneath all their eyes. And yet, Leonel just stood there, gazing forward, his pale violet irises flickering with the reflection of the dancing flames.

No one could get close to Leonel, the ring of flames around him was so caustic and hot that it felt like he was emitting heat from the very surface of a star. Even the clothing of

people far off into the distance seemed to spontaneously combust, the Fire Force in the air multiplying to the point there didn't seem to be room for any other Forces at all.

The casual indifference on Leonel's face as the flames danced across it seemed to be marked into their very souls, a moment that they would be unlikely to ever forget.

BANG.

Rhangyl fell to the floor, the heat of the blade having been so great that he was sliced in two, the blade falling out after it ran through his head.

He was a mess of flesh, blood, and melted metal, writhing on the ground as his screams of agony echoed. By this point, his self-forged body was nothing more than a weakness to be exploited. Maybe if he had a weaker body, he would have already died by now.

Leonel looked down, his spear flickering and cutting out an Innate Node. He tossed it in his palms as though it was as hot as the core of a planet. His skin still seemed just as smooth and just as unbothered.

Then he cut out another, then another. By the time he was finished, Rhangyl wasn't even recognizable. He was more a pile of goop and metal than a humanoid of any kind.

His soul seemed trapped within his body. Without a real death, he couldn't separate easily, especially not while his pain receptors were firing so wildly.

"I hope it was worth it," Thorne said lightly. "The world isn't a place you can be as willful as you please. You've cost your entire Race."

Leonel looked over. "You're an annoyance. Piss off."

His spear slashed down and Rhangyl's voice suddenly came to a frightening stop as his body, or what was left of it, fell into two pieces.

Leonel turned and walked back without a word, passing through the square and appearing before his wife and the others. He gave Silvanus a glance, but the man seemed to have lost all blood, his face a ghostly sheen of white.

Leonel didn't give the man another glance before he gave Aina a kiss on the forehead and handed the Council Key to her.

"I'm gonna go take a nap," Leonel yawned then vanished into the Segmented Cube.

Aina shook her head, catching the finger sleeve before it fell to the ground and slipping it on one of hers.

At that moment, the Council Key trembled and they finally enforced the rules.

[Participant Leonel Morales has been banished due to violation of the rules]

The words appeared high in the skies and everyone looked toward Aina to see if there would be some sort of reaction. But she didn't seem to care in the slightest.

This made their eyes narrow. Just what was going on here and where was their confidence coming from?

Also, had Leonel been vanquished? But why were the words still high in the skies then? The only explanation was that he had yet to be caught...

But how was that possible?

Chapter 2594: The Self (1)

Leonel felt that his annoyance had yet to fade, but he still ended up exhaling a breath. He would much prefer to be the one fighting, but unfortunately, that wasn't in the cards for him this time around.

He made his way to the lab setting and sat at his workbench, his hands mindlessly roaming through its pits and valleys. Although he had a plan, he was still a little reckless today. He hadn't exactly ruined that plan, but he didn't help it much either.

At this point, though, his patience was very limited for such things. Seeing a man who had wiped out the Morales family made him feel that such a person shouldn't have the right to continue living, so he killed him. It was really that simple.

In truth, he really had no intention of wasting time bending to their whims, sleeping outside the city in tents, and being unable to trade even for his own food... as "great" as that sounded.

His honeymoon just ended and he was already annoyed with the world, fantastic.

*Bloop

Little Tolly flashed around Leonel's arm, pulsing with a gentle light that seemed to make him feel better.

"Yeah, we should Craft..."

Since he was feeling annoyed, why not focus on something that could help? The fact his Crafting was falling so far behind everything he was running into these days was another source of annoyance. If he could catch up and get rid of those bits of annoyance, then maybe he would feel better at least by a small margin.

Understanding Crafting better would also allow him to conjure up a stronger spear. Right now, he was relying too much on the strength of Scarlet Star Force and not enough on his own comprehension. Well, at least no comprehension of Crafting itself, that is.

The creation abilities of his Scarlet Star Force and Emulation Spatial Force were only as good as the projections from his mind. Given the strengths of his Ability Index, he could pretty much easily replicate his best Crafting with ease. The trouble was how good his best Crafting was.

He thought that he was pretty good. In fact, he was probably excellent even by the standards of wider Existence... if his age was taken into consideration.

Unfortunately, even the likes of King had been far better than he was.

There was good news, though. Now that his Dream Force was in the Life State, the road he had ahead of him was much clearer and wider than it had been in the past. Now it was just a matter of finishing the rest of his father's lessons.

He took out the dictionary, rubbing his fingers over it.

Maybe he was just a bit reluctant. The videos that were left were the last messages he had from his father. Real messages. Not the cobbled-together words of an AI, but ones carefully selected by Velasco Morales himself.

Ryu took out a pair of crystal-framed glasses and put them on the desk. He hadn't worn them since his mother forced him to do so, but something made him take them out this time.

He was a married man now. Soon, maybe, he would have his own family.

Was it smart to have a child in this sort of situation, probably not. But Leonel had honestly given up on trying to make the world perfect before he could finally settle down. His honeymoon with Aina was a testament to that.

How could the world ever be "perfect" if they were constantly speed running toward its end? There was nothing that could change the fact that Existence was heading toward a reset.

He thought about what it would feel like to have a child, and he wondered if he should do something similar to what his father had done for him, recording every waking moment just in case the worst... or maybe even the inevitable occurred.

His fingers ran over the crystal frames before he took out a silk cloth and carefully wiped them down.

He placed the glasses down where they could see his hands and then he turned back to the dictionary. Finally, his mind looked toward the final three lessons.

[The Value of Complexity]

[The Value of Simplicity]

[The Value of the Self]

He listened to each one of these lessons carefully, taking his time to meet the requirements they asked of him, checking every box, before finally moving on to the next.

He moved through them quickly, almost too quickly. Or rather, he felt that it was much too quick because he would have preferred to listen for just a little longer. It wasn't that the lessons would disappear, they would still be there. It was instead that with his mind, the moment he went over something, it would practically cease to be.

It would become a perfect memory in his mind, one that was identical to the original in every way, shape, and form.

After he was finished, he would no longer be able to form new memories about his father. Unlike a normal human, he couldn't just wait until enough time passed, hoping that he would forget enough of it that watching it again would feel new.

This was it. This was all that there would be left of his father in this world. The last impact he could make.

Leonel listened and watched as his father cracked jokes and doled out knowledge, alternating between a quirky man and an iron-fisted general seamlessly and without losing the slightest hint of his dignity all the while.

"... I only faintly touched this level, but I believe it exists as a whole all to itself. If the Life Grade represents giving a treasure life, then the Self Grade represents giving a treasure life rooted in not itself, but you.

"It sounds like a regression, but life is unpredictable. You cannot control what something you've created can become or what it chooses to be. What was once created can never truly be recreated, it can only exist as its own thing..."

Chapter 2595: The Self (2)

What was once created can never truly be recreated.

It was a set of words, a phrase, a sentence... a knife through Leonel's heart.

He could vaguely feel what his father was trying to say. The path of Self Crafting might be as much his father's enlightenment as it was a lesson.

Maybe if his Dream Force was just the same he might have dismissed it. But right now, it felt like a final nail was being driven into a coffin. Whether it was his own or his father's, Leonel barely had the wherewithal to tell the difference.

Did the difference even matter?

It shouldn't be true.

How could life not be reproducible? Couldn't Anastasia copy his methods and remake perfect treasures based on his template every time? Couldn't he do the same with just an extra bit of effort?

But he knew it was bullshit. He knew his own thoughts were ridiculous.

Every time he picked up an ore, it would have a different set of characteristics. Part of the skill of a Life Crafter was that they could read and react to any materials they had, breathing life into them.

But no two Life Grade treasures could ever be identical. Every time one was created, it would have its own unique existence, its own unique path to follow. Even if it was just a minor deviation, it was a deviation nonetheless.

His father took a new route, diverting from the usual path of Life and creating the path of Self Crafting, one where the Crafter imposed their Will onto a treasure and forced it to mold into their chosen path.

It was a stroke of genius, one no less fantastic than the creation of [Final Destruction]. And yet, Leonel could hardly see the beauty in it.

He stared at a wall opposing him, his eyes somewhat vacant. His pale violet irises had lost so much of their color that they looked like streaks of different grays instead of their usual almost pink color.

It was funny. Leonel had felt a great amount of existential dread when he saw how flippantly the lives of others could be used and wasted. The Silver Tablet, or the Life Tablet now, was like something that constantly weighed on his soul.

Why was it that he could bring all those people from the Valiant Heart Zone back? Why could he bring his brothers back? He bet he could even use this tablet to resurrect Ninth Dimensional experts on a whim if he wanted to. In fact, if it wasn't for the fact Clarence's

soul had scattered, he could have probably brought him back too just in exchange for some resources.

Technically it made sense. When everyone was around, playing god, what was so hard about recreating human life? Even the people of the Dimensional Verse like Heira had been able to create perfect clones of the human body, so what could people who called themselves Gods do?

In fact, Ninth Dimensional existences were almost quite literally immortal. Why wouldn't life be a flippant matter to them?

And yet, somehow... life also felt so very fragile. He was growing so powerful, and yet he couldn't even bring his own father back to life. He had to watch as his wife sobbed about her mother, completely unable to bring her back either. His entire Morales family was wiped out, and yet he had no method of resurrecting them.

It was all a big joke.

Leonel closed his eyes. He hated this feeling, he really did.

Subconsciously, he reached out, touching his father's glasses. They emitted a familiar warmth, even a familiar scent.

What was the point of life?

His thoughts ran back to words he had spoken to Aina. He told her that the only morality she was beholden to were those tied to the people she loved and nothing else.

Everything else was too complicated to decipher, too troublesome to parse.

There was probably no grand answer. He would probably never find an answer that could satisfy his mind, not with the way it worked.

But he was still very much human... so why not be human?

Leonel's eyes opened, slightly red, but more focused.

'The Self... imposing your Will onto the world... I quite like that. However, that's a matter for another day. First, complexity...'

Leonel's mind shifted from thoughts of dread toward a focus on making his father's path shine. If he wanted to truly grasp The Self, then he would first have to understand the extremities of Complexity.

The Complexity referred to an incredible depth of Crafting, one where one controlled the parameters of their Craft even down to the very molecular structure. Rather than relying on the macro, one would get very micro.

This was the level the key to the Dimensional Cleanse Verse had been on. However, even that key had just been a small inkling into this world of complexity.

From the start of Crafting, Leonel had learned the more parts a Craft had, the better it was. This was just taking this philosophy and stretching it to the extreme.

Reaching a deep level of understanding in this phase would allow him to create the Divine Armor he had in mind, but only in part.

However, The Self was something that struck Leonel with awe. That was because it matched with his thoughts so incredibly well that he felt like his father was even reading his mind.

The Divine Armor he wanted to create was something he wanted to feel much more like an extension of himself, it was living, breathing. But the Life Grade alone wasn't enough to accomplish this. He needed something deeper.

And now the answer was right before him.

Leonel started with a piece of what looked like brushed steel. He closed his eyes and his fingers began to move with lightning quickness as Tolliver moved to envelop it.

If one could see the molecular structure of the piece of metal, they would be greatly awed. That was because Leonel was using atoms themselves to draw Force Arts.

Chapter 2596: Trust

Aina was suddenly the center of attention. Just the act of handing her the key was enough to cause this, let alone the fact that Leonel had kissed her on the forehead. This action seemed to be like Leonel making it quite clear the kind of relationship they had.

There were very few here in the know about what happened in the True Dream Plane. However, those that did understood who Aina was immediately. The trouble was that... they still didn't understand why.

Leonel wasn't a fool, or at the very least, he shouldn't be. Could his success in the True Dream Plane really be luck? No one would believe that. Could it be, then, that some of their other hypotheses were actually correct?

Many thought that there was simply no way for Leonel to succeed the way he did. They watched the event from start to end, but something felt off. Leonel had too much control over the situation, he seemed to get too lucky, his decision making was too perfect.

They wondered if there were some hidden mechanisms of the Life Tablet that they weren't aware of, or maybe if Leonel had brought in a long forgotten treasure of the Creation God Beasts from the Pavilion to ensure their win.

These possibilities were very much possible, and they were much more willing to believe this than anything else.

Looking at Aina now, she was truly extraordinarily beautiful, on the same level as the best of the Pure Blooded Spirituals. In fact, they could even faintly see what Leonel was so boldly snubbing an Owlman for her.

However, nothing else seemed to be special. She was in the Seventh Dimension, but so was pretty much everyone here. In fact, from what they could sense, given the special fluctuations she was giving off, her soul was even tethered to her body.

This wasn't a surprise, this was the case for all humans. The problem was that the humans that managed to break free of that mold all managed to separate the two at some point or another. Even Leonel clearly had, but his wife hadn't?

Would she even be able to make it through the Preliminaries?

The more they observed her, the more confused they became... until they saw the tattoo around her finger and they suddenly understood...

Leonel had lost his mind.

The perfect explanation was right before them and they hadn't even noticed it. It explained everything.

Soul Binds were exceptionally rare, but everyone knew what they represented. They could only form when two people had perfect and unblemished trust in one another. There was more than just one tragedy surrounding the fates of those with Soul Binds.

Those with them couldn't be objective about one another. By definition, they were so in love that everything was sunshine and rainbows. There was almost no room for logic at all when it came to the other person's existence.

The fact that Leonel would snub the Owlmen so fiercely only made more sense now, and the fact he would do all of this, seemingly taking such foolish actions one after another almost made sense.

Lumina suddenly snorted. "Nothing but trash."

Her illusory wings spread and she suddenly vanished, moving so quickly that most couldn't even see what direction she went in. No one noticed, though, that Aina's pupils calmly followed her into the distance before snapping back as though they had never moved at all.

Aina felt a tug on her arm and Yuri began to pull her away, a worried Savahn trailing after them.

The two brothers looked toward one another, Zephyr wearing a knowing look.

"I hope you get it now. Don't do anything stupid."

"Okay, I get it. They're crazy. But that only makes the situation worse for them!"

Zephyr didn't respond to his brother's words. All he could remember was Leonel's movement and the devastation he left in his wake...

How could a Fifth Dimensional existence exhibit that level of strength...

Unless he was a Demi-God?

...

"What is going on?!" Yuri was doing everything she could not to panic, but she felt like her hair was on fire.

It would have been fairly easy to slip Leonel and Aina under their umbrella before-or so she thought-but now there was simply no way. It was like they had thrown themselves into a fire pit.

Aina smiled. "You don't need to worry so much. Have you ever seen Leonel fail?"

Yuri opened her mouth to respond, but then she frowned. A part of her wanted to say that that was the Dimensional Verse, but this was the real world... However, she didn't have the stomach to do it.

Back then, she had thought the things he did were just as impossible. The Dimensional Verse she looked down on now was her whole world back then. Even if she had a new frame of reference now, that didn't make the things of back then any less impressive.

"But Aina... you died..." Yuri said, holding onto Aina's hands so tightly they might lose all blood circulation.

Aina smiled both a bit bitterly and understandingly.

"I died... because I didn't listen to him," she said softly.

Aina could still remember the sheer fury in Leonel's eyes back then. He told her to come back but she didn't listen. She could feel that back then, he had almost said words that he might have regretted for an entire lifetime, that was how enraged he had been about her decision.

Leonel and her had gone through many ups and downs, but he had never truly been mad at her. Even after their breakup, his cruel words hadn't been out of spite, they had been out of indifference.

But that day, he had truly been mad at her.

She could feel it almost viscerally. It wasn't her decision that enraged him, but the reason why... because she thought she could protect him, but on a deeper level than that...

Because she didn't trust him.

Right now... She chose to trust.

Chapter 2597: Two Forfeits

No one bothered to try and get the key back from Aina.

They were all aware that Leonel was still here in some capacity, and whatever method he was using to avoid being banished would definitely work again on the key. As for those that felt they were powerful enough to face Leonel, they didn't care about whose hands the tenth key was in. As far as they were concerned, the Council was just a glorified paper tiger and they had already accomplished the wishes of their various families, empires and powers. The rest would sort itself out very shortly as the Preliminaries were already soon to be underway.

When the day came, the teleportations began in batches.

The tournament would be projected in the skies of the city, as well as from the large Stele that teleported them all here in the first place. The participants wouldn't have to go anywhere and they would be plucked out of the city on a whim. When it was their turn to go, they would be alerted and a few seconds would pass before they were forcefully teleported to the arena.

As it was the preliminaries and there were quite literally trillions of participants, there would be many battles going on at once.

As much as these powers would like it to be different, the Gathering of Kingdoms remained as objective as possible. Rather than matches with convoluted rules and things of the like, there would instead be simple battles.

In the preliminaries, one would have three battles. It was only necessary to win one to make it through to the next round.

Those that won on their first or second battle would have no need for a second or third battle and would be considered to have successfully passed.

Even by this point, Yuri had yet to calm down. To her, Aina's words about how she had only died because she didn't listen to Leonel sounded borderline psychotic. However, when Aina told her she was going to lose her first two matches on purpose, she almost fainted.

"Why would you do that?!"

"Because it decides seeding," Aina said as though it was only a matter of course.

"That's why you should try to win as soon as possible!"

"But then I'll face opponents that are too weak. What would be the fun in that?"

Yuri almost pulled her hair out. This was a tournament that would decide which worlds were effectively genocided, this wasn't a time for leisure and fun.

"Savahn, please try!" Yuri felt like she was losing her mind.

"Aina, you..." Savahn started.

Aina only smiled, causing Savahn to sigh.

"I tried explaining already," Aina shrugged eventually. "Since you don't believe me, why not just watch?"

"Aina!"

"Yuri," Savahn pulled her back, shaking her head, "haven't you noticed already?"

Yuri was too busy worrying for Aina that she didn't even understand what Savahn was saying. She even thought for a moment that Savahn was referring to Aina going crazy.

"Notice what?"

"That there are no other humans here," Savahn said pointedly.

Yuri's eyes widened, then she looked at Aina.

There were only two ways to survive. The first was to have 10% of your genius population pass the preliminaries, and the second...

"You want to reach the Finals?" Yuri said. "But... but..."

Her blood was rushing to her head. The problem wasn't just reaching the Finals, but if Aina wanted the best shot at it, why was she making her path harder? There was only one chance at this, and Leonel had already gotten himself removed. Just what were these two thinking?

At that moment, a ticker appeared before them all.

"Seems like it's our turn soon," Aina said.

Then, they vanished.

Just like she said, Aina directly forfeited both the first and second rounds, not even lifting up a finger to fight.

Those that were paying special attention to what was happening were completely floored.

The Gathering of Kingdoms was originally meant to be a friendly gathering, so it was, of course, the case that there were many rules for mercy and things of the like baked in.

One could forfeit simply by saying that they wanted to, and if one was pushed out of the arena, the match would also end. Though, the arena for battles of this scale was measured on the order of hundreds of kilometers.

Even so, none of this made what Aina was doing make any more sense. The higher ups were even more confused. Why do all of this just to forfeit?

And then Aina's third match came.

She stood on the arena grounds, the large white tiles that made it up making her look particularly dainty and small despite the fact she was a woman who stood at over six feet tall.

Across from her, an opponent appeared. It was a member of the Beast Race. In fact, it was coincidentally a lion as well.

It was smaller than the one Leonel had killed, standing at only around three meters tall or so. But it looked more slender and much faster.

The lion Beast thought that maybe it was in luck. Everyone had seen by now that Aina had forfeited not just once but twice. Its world was one where should they get a little unlucky, they might be a hair or two beneath the 10% mark. He would definitely take an easy victory if he could get one.

But even after an illusory judge gave the signal for the match to begin, Aina didn't move, neither did she say anything. She just stood there, seemingly waiting for something.

The lion Beast realized then that there would be no easy victory. For some reason, this woman had suddenly decided that she wanted to fight.

He crouched and a low growl came from his maw as he bared his teeth.

BANG.

He suddenly accelerated forward, lightning streaks roaring as he appeared before Aina in an instant.

The battle seemed over, and yet Aina suddenly reached out a hand, grabbing the snout of the lion Beast and suddenly driving him right into the ground.

BOOM.

The indestructible tiles cracked and the lion's skull was blended into a pile of mush.

Chapter 2598: Hm?

Aina walked out from a portal that appeared. Her hair didn't even seem to be ruffled by the encounter, and her calmness was unmatched.

There was a dense sort of silence that took hold of those that were watching. They had somewhat expected that such a thing would have to happen, but they didn't expect it to end up like this.

There were a fair share of weak participants as there would have to be in this sort of situation. The trouble was that the lion Beasts were most definitely not one of them.

The one that Aina fought in particular was only on his second battle after running into a particularly tough opponent the first time around. Although he probably wouldn't have made it much further than the second round, there was no doubt that he had the strength to pass the Preliminaries at the very least.

And yet, it took just a single strike. It was hard to even call it a strike. It had looked more like a pat on the head, a single swift downward slant of the palm... and then the battle was over.

There were other battles that had ended in just a single strike as well. But the fact Aina had forfeited twice, seemingly on purpose, only to now erupt with such strength.

It felt like a message. No, it was yet another message, one that layered atop of what Leonel had already done as though they had come here not to bow and scrape for the hope of saving the last bastion of the Human Race, but rather to be that last bastion themselves.

Someone with a soul fused with their body was able to deal with someone with a separated soul with nothing more than overwhelming force.

She didn't use Forces, she didn't use a technique, she didn't even seem to have gone all out.

It was just a single, overwhelming, and crushing victory.

In a secluded room, a group of nine gathered. It wasn't too hard to guess that these nine were those that remained of the original ten Council Members.

They looked up into the skies, watching the battle with narrowed eyes.

"Is this supposed to be the plan? Are they saying that she's guaranteed to reach the top 100? Is that supposed to be a joke?" Lumina was speechless.

It was an idea they had thought of, but it was so ridiculous that they had directly dismissed it.

Even for the ten, or rather, nine of them, should things go a little wrong, it was still possible for them to miss out on the top 100. If they ran into an unlucky slate of enemies, if they were caught in a battle against an enemy that perfectly countered them, or even if they were suddenly caught off guard and pushed off the platform... all of these things were possible.

Although they still have a better than 90% chance of reaching the top 100, none of them were so bold as to say that it was a 100% certainty.

But not only was Aina basically saying so, but she had purposely lost twice in a row, making her path to the top 100 several times more difficult. It was hard to quantify exactly by how much, but her seeding now was objectively terrible.

"An overestimation of their abilities," Caspian said lightly, his eyes half closed. He seemed completely uninterested, the flashing lights of his Ethereal Glabella making it seem like he was stuck in a completely different dream of his own.

In a corner, a familiar Pure Blooded Spiritual sat. She was none other than Lyra Emberheart. While the others talked, her eyes were still stuck on Aina.

She hadn't really thought about who Leonel's wife would be, but seeing her now, for some reason... she felt inferior.

It wasn't an emotion that made any sense. Aina had won in great fashion, but so had she.

"... There's no point in caring about this. I don't know why you're all wasting your time," a yawn came from the side.

A Cloud Race young man reclined on a chair. His face kept changing from one aspect to another, the clouds coming from the back of his head billowing like rune-filled steam.

"It's not like we can rig the outcome, we've already done all the rigging we can. No one can change the rules of the Gathering of Kingdoms Stele. Go sleep, or fuck, or practice or something. The constant droning is annoying me."

Orion leaned back and many had a flash of rage toward his words. However, they were reasonable and there was little they could say as a rebuttal.

And so, the conversation was dropped and the days began to tick by... until the next round began.

Aina stretched, raising her hands to the skies. Although Yuri and Savahn's worry hadn't faded, they had at least settled down somewhat. At the very least, Aina's victory had given them some hope to latch onto.

A ticker appeared before her and she smiled. It seemed that she would get to battle again. Hopefully, whoever this was, would be able to give her a better battle.

Aina vanished and appeared within an arena. Across from her, there was a hooded figure, practically dripping in black. They were lanky and tall, standing at over seven feet tall. Hidden within the hood of their cloak, one could sometimes catch the faint glare of two sparkling green eyes.

The figure suddenly swayed and seemed to vanish.

'Hm?' Aina's brow raised.

Leonel sat over his workbench, beads of sweat falling down his brow as he focused on just a single piece of ore.

Changing an ore on a molecular level was easy. The trouble was having it maintain its form afterward.

Just logically, an object's chemical structure decided everything about its properties. Casually changing it without regard for maintaining its original integrity, or compensating for it somehow, was as good as destroying the materials he had on hand.

What was even more interesting than that was the fact it felt that there were actually two ways to approach this after learning his father's methods...

The Life Path and the Self Path.

Chapter 2599: Overwhelmed

The shadowy figure appeared before Aina, striking with a surprising amount of strength. His movements were oddly jerky, and his power spiked and then fell rapidly, making it feel like he was spinning a roulette every time he attacked, hoping he would land on something good.

Aina was immediately wary. She could feel an odd Force tugging at the air, and it felt like it was Fate itself being toyed with.

Time Force?

She had seen something similar from the likes of Hutch's grandson. This felt like a similar, yet different application all the same. This opponent was a dangerous one.

The existence of people like this were probably precisely why the Council Members didn't dare to guarantee a top 100 finish.

This was only the second Time Force user that Aina had met in her lifetime, and the first one that she was actually battling with herself.

Suddenly, just as the fist was about to land on Aina, she moved as it accelerated. She slipped out of its path, her golden irises flickering with an interesting light.

She was fascinated by the battle style. The strike just now was probably the third best the figure could do. During the jerky motion of his attack, Aina had distinctly sensed two more than were much stronger, each one double the strength of the last.

Aina's Soul Clairvoyance was tugging at her and she seemed to faintly grasp onto something.

...

"That figure," Caspian said, frowning. "That's the Luck of the Draw Ability Index. When's the last time that Ability Index appeared?"

"Who cares?" Lumina sneered, her beautiful features seemingly distorting more and more these days. "It looks like she's going to lose. I didn't expect this farce to come to an end so quickly. Maybe if she hadn't insisted on trying to be something greater than she was, she could have lasted a bit longer."

"Says who?"

"Did you not see her earlier battle? She's a brute. Against a brute, that sort of unpredictable Ability Index is the greatest counter."

...

Aina slipped away from punch after punch, but she was beginning to notice something. The longer they fought, the more unpredictable the figure's Ability Index became, but that wasn't because it was flickering between different modes more quickly, but rather that stronger and stronger possibilities were appearing.

If before the first strike Aina had slipped was the third best the figure could do, now it was only the fifth.

'Now the sixth...' She muttered to herself.

Aina thought about attacking, but there were two things holding her back right now.

The first was the curious tug from her Clairvoyance, but the second, though less important to her overall, was probably the more pressing matter given the battle.

The Ability Index worked on her as well.

Right now, she was using her Body Clairvoyance to time her dodges to match up to when her speed was the greatest. But as time passed and the man gained stronger possibilities, she seemed to improve in the reverse.

The intervals were becoming faster and harder to time, and at the same time, there were more and more possibilities where her strength suddenly plummeted—three more possibilities to be exact, the exact same number as the man.

The longer this went on, the more skewed it would become and harder it would be for her to actually find a path to victory.

'This is weird,' Aina thought to herself. 'Normally, I would have gotten it by now. Is this Ability Index affecting my own at the same time?'

She realized that that must be the case. 'What a strong ability...'

It seemed that there was a reason Time Force was so rare.

BOOM!

Aina's steps faltered for just a moment as a fist she barely dodged brushed by her cheek, carrying a great amount of momentum. This was, once again, the third strongest attack the man could levy, but it was also eight times stronger than the last.

The air split and rumbled beneath the fist.

"Oh..." Aina suddenly said, a glow appeared around her as strands of her hair danced in the wind, many of them breaking free like broken leaves.

A slightly red mark appeared on her cheek, but no blood was drawn... at least not immediately.

Aina held out a hand to her side and a battle ax appeared. It glistened with red and gold, causing space to bend and twist beneath its presence. It reacted to her Weapon Force, roaring with life.

Her wrist twisted and the battle ax spun, its pole arm bending beneath her might as she cut clean through the tiles beneath her feet and up toward the man's chin.

The speed was variable and jerky, shaking through the air much like the man's. It was hard to tell if this was Aina's own doing, or if it was the impact of the man's Ability Index.

The man arched his back, pulling away as fast as he could.

His chin was barely nicked and a spurt of blood flew into the air like a sharp line splitting the skies.

He recovered quickly, 'rolling the dice' again and using it to recover. Then, he unleashed an even more feverish assault.

The two fought back and forth with the man mostly dodging as best he could.

Aina seemed leisurely, wielding her ax with just a single hand. However, if one looked inside her body, her blood itself was pulsing like a heart, changing pressures on a whim

and shifting between degrees of Life Force. She controlled her body in more ways than just choosing a location to strike and then executing.

Slowly, the style became more and more fluid, moving at a faster and faster speed.

The man was completely overwhelmed. He pulled out all the stops, even maintaining a distance and firing his fists with nothing more than his peak powers.

Somehow, Aina was completely countering his Ability Index and her movements had lost the jerkiness entirely.

Suddenly, the man froze as he lost his footing.

He slipped, falling out of the arena.

Chapter 2600: Malleable

Aina stood in the middle, a bit annoyed. A Time Force practitioner was used to account for a million different things at once. Aside from Dream Force practitioners, they were probably the very best in this regard. In fact, it was probably closer than it seemed and there was a ton of overlap.

But this man actually forgot that they were in the middle of an arena. She had even just been using one hand in an attempt to prolong the fight as she had definitely just made years of progress in a few seconds just now. It would be hard to replicate these circumstances elsewhere.

She shook her head and vanished, leaving the world in silence.

...

The entire matter was recontextualized in their minds. They realized that Aina didn't seem to have struggled even from the very beginning. Other than a superficial use, she didn't really rely on her on Battle Ax Force either. In fact, it had only been barely enough for them to realize that she was a Sovereign.

The group looked toward one another. Even Orion, the Cloud Race youth, opened a single eye, taking a peek at what was happening above. Then, a hint of solemnness appeared between his brows.

That... was definitely not normal.

They were certain that the man's Ability Index was influencing Aina as well, so where was the jerkiness? Why did she seem unaffected? Was she a Time Force user as well? Had she used it to counter it?

A Sovereign of a Weapon Force and a Time Force user? And on top of that, carrying that absolutely ridiculous physical strength?

The silence somehow became deeper.

...

Aina appeared in the common room that she, Yuri and Savahn had been using, still swinging her ax absentmindedly.

Just now, she hadn't really been using Time Force. Those people lacked ingenuity, and also didn't know that she was a Blood Force user, so they couldn't see it.

The strength of her body was entirely dependent on how much Life Force she chose to pump into her Blood Force. The reason for her strong body was because of her nigh endless vitality, it was just a natural part of being a Blood Sovereign.

She had countered the man's Time Force from quickly changing the state of her body. The Time Force could only work on whatever the current version of hers was, so she had chosen to strengthen and weaken herself variably to regain her usual smoothness in combat.

However, she hadn't done all of that just to win.

With her Body Clairvoyance, she could feel the changes the Time Force was making to her clearly. She could react to exactly when she should attack even better than the man himself who was relying partially on a roll of the dice.

If she had wanted to just win, she would have chosen the exact moment where the Luck of the Draw Ability Index pumped untold power into her to swing her ax.

Obviously, she was chasing something different.

First, it was this new method of using Blood Force, but more importantly than that, this sort of variability in battle would be a huge deal.

She didn't like the jerkiness of the man's battle style. But she could smooth it out, she could vary the speed of her strike while her ax was already in the air just by controlling the ebb and flow of his Blood Force.

But this still felt like a surface level matter. She wanted something deeper, that deep thing was what she had been chasing before the battle abruptly came to an end. And

now she was a bit annoyed, unable to find that feeling again. Her Clairvoyance was great sometimes, but when it was triggered by an external item rather than her own self-reflection, it was harder to grasp.

Then it suddenly clicked.

All this time, her Clairvoyance had made her change from weapon to weapon, shifting her focus again and again just to shore up a weakness she might have had in her usual combat style.

She had used a sword, a spear, even a silk scarf as a weapon before. There probably wasn't a single weapon type that she hadn't tried out, some for longer periods of time than others.

Even so, it had been a while since the last time she had experienced such a compulsion. She thought it was because she had already gone past the limit through which other weapons could help her improve. After all, she had already used all of them.

Unless.... Her Clairvoyance wanted her to lean into that even more. Not just using her understanding of other weapons to shore up her weaknesses, but also making them strengths.