

# Dimensional Descent

## Chapter 2601: Language and Chemicals

She was still swinging her ax with a single hand, carrying its mountain-sized weight as though it was nothing at all.

Suddenly, she imagined that it was a thin sword and her casual swing seemed to become even faster and more agile.

She imagined a spear and it became rigid and territorial, forming a Domain that others couldn't cross into without fear of death.

She imagined a silk scarf and the pole arm seemed to lose all sense of rigidity it had just gained. It was nothing more than an illusion, and yet it was undeniable that the pole arm moved with greatest fluidity, attacking at angles that shouldn't have been possible.

Aina didn't seem to realize that there were others watching her at all. Her Battle Ax Force surged, climbing to the Middle Life State and then the Higher Life State.

She had come to understand the same thing Leonel had, but on an even deeper level.

Weapon Forces were just the extensions of the people who created them. What she wanted her ax to be... it would be.

Blade marks erupted and covered the room, and yet didn't leave even a single mark anywhere to be seen.

She slammed the butt of her Battle Ax into the ground, a gentle smile on her face.

## Chapter 2601: Language and Chemicals

Leonel tossed a piece of ore to the side, feeling a hint frustrated.

It was all completely contradictory. How could you change the molecular structure of an object, and yet have it work in the same exact way? It didn't even make sense.

Oftentimes, when things took certain shapes, it was because it was the most optimal. Pulling it out of said shape would destabilize it or weaken it. It made otherwise strong materials brittle.

When Force was taken into account, the matter was even worse than just that. That was because one wrong move and an otherwise inner metal could, quite literally, blow up in your face, taking a hand and a layer of your skull with it.

Leonel realized that there was something that he was missing, but he couldn't find what it was immediately. All the explanations in the world couldn't substitute a certain feel a Crafter had to have for his Craft, and he wasn't quite getting it.

He felt that a portion of the reason was actually his education on Earth. His understanding of chemical bones, atoms and the like were built and shaped on Earth. Even when he learned about Force later, he just kind of retrofitted it into the things he already knew and understood.

Now, it was hard to unsee it. It was like an optical illusion casting a shadow over his mind, and it was also a feeling that he was completely... unused to.

With his Ability Index, he had perfect control of his mind. Something like casting a thought away or shifting his perspective was easy.

For others, saying "think outside the box" was easier said than done, but Leonel could, quite literally, do it.

Except in this case for some reason.

Every time he tried to cast away his foundational knowledge about atoms and their interactions with one another, he would begin tinkering with the Ores and he would end up deducing it again.

It was almost like he was using a Forgetful Orb and reaffirming the same comprehension again and again rather than learning something new.

And that could only mean one thing... Earth's approach to chemical theory and the atom was correct. There was nothing else to deduce to because the foundation was mostly correct.

But then how could these two things be true?

How could he both be expected to change the chemical structure of something and yet have it maintain the same properties?

'That doesn't even make sense... even when changing phases, there's a difference. Ice has a lattice structure that water simply does not. Even if they share the same molecule, they don't have the same structure. Carbon is the same, it's still carbon, but how could you say that graphite and diamond are that same?' Leonel's eyes narrowed.

Was it that simple? Was that what he was missing?

'No... that should only be part of it... But it is an important part...'

The other portion was the actual Force Art. It was the main root of Leonel's troubles.

To draw a Force Art into an ore's chemical structure was like completely rewiring a house to fit a flowery picture instead of what was practical. None of the lights and appliances would work properly.

But then he remembered something else. Force Arts came in all shapes and sizes, there were probably a million different languages. Each of these languages was good at something different and there didn't seem to be any one that was universally perfect at completing all tasks.

It was then that Leonel's first thoughts and this one came together.

Maybe his views of Force Arts were just too rigid. He was using the Morales Force Arts much like he usually did when he was Crafting, but why was that?

Depending on the complexity of the Force Art, he had always been able to take a casual glance at it and understand what it did-and that was regardless of whether he had ever seen the language before or not.

It was a lot like actual language, the kind people used to speak. With his Dream Force, he could feel the intention of the speaker and translate whatever words came out with ease. He no longer needed to take his time and observe a language for a while before he could translate it like he could in the past.

In that case... why did he restrict himself to a Force Art language at all? In fact, he bet his father didn't use the Morales Force Art language either, at least not as it was constructed.

It could be the case that a large part of his slow progress in this world was because he was restricted to an Incomplete World's Force Art Language. Or, more accurately, he had restricted himself to it.

What if he could change his Force Art language depending on the material he was working with?

And a step further than that, he was so obsessed with chemical structures, but he had missed the forest for the trees.

What decided the outward appearance of Ores wasn't just the structure...

What decided whether Carbon atoms formed graphite versus diamond? Wasn't it just temperature and pressure?

In wider Existence, the added element of Force meant that there were other material forces outside of the norm that could influence the structure of a bond.

If he fused these two concepts together...

'I can master Complexity in less than three days...' Leonel's eyes blazed with a light of excitement. At this level, he would be able to crush King.

...

Aina's victories came in continuous avalanches. She didn't find an opponent that intrigued her like the Luck of the Draw Ability Index user had, so she always ended her battles in a single strike, and oftentimes her opponent wouldn't even have the luxury of surviving. In fact, she never even pulled out her Battle Ax again.

Very quickly, her long, flowing black hair and piercing golden eyes seemed to be ingrained within the hearts of all those spectating.

She was on a level all her own.

## **Chapter 2602: Method**

"What is the meaning of this?" Minerva sat on her throne. Her face didn't have the same peaceful cadence it usually had. Instead, it had pulled back into a mask of tempered indifference and coldness.

Every time Aina battled, she would find herself becoming more and more annoyed. The obvious death that should have happened wasn't happening at all. In fact, Aina had started off as the center of attention, and was only becoming more so.

Not a single person she had faced seemed capable of lasting more than a single exchange against her. The only exception was the Luck of the Draw Ability Index user, who probably should have become the center of attention himself. And yet, even in this case, it was quite clear to everyone that she hadn't truly been on the edge of life and death.

They thought that she was just interested in a good battle, but even after running into more opponents with quirky abilities that even seemed to counter her directly, it didn't seem to matter.

Those that led with strength were ruthlessly crushed, and even those that seemed to have greater skill or finesse were ruthlessly crushed much the same. There simply didn't seem to be a method of stopping her because they couldn't even find what her bottom line was.

It didn't make any sense. For the humans to produce one Leonel, it was already exaggerated enough. Why was there now a second Aina? And what were the odds that they were also a couple?

If it wasn't for the sake of her face and maintaining her dignified aura, let alone asking this question, she would have long since erupted.

Octavia and Seraphina stood down below, their eyes glued to the ground. However, there was something off about them immediately. Whether it was Octavia or Seraphina... both only had a single wing.

Before the two could answer, the doors to the Dream Pavilion were suddenly opened and a man strolled in with bold strides. He flashed Minerva a grin and even gave both Octavia and Seraphina crisp slaps on the ass. He didn't seem to care for their reactions at all.

Minerva's gaze sharpened and her barely controlled rage almost bubbled over.

"Elrik, this isn't the place for the likes of you," Minerva said in a low tone.

"Is that a way to speak to your husband?"

"Did I ever agree to such a thing?" Minerva practically bared her teeth, gripping her throne's armrests so hard that they cracked. Her wings flared out to her back, forming a wind so strong that Octavia and Seraphina were both sent flying back.

Elrik, however, seemed unfazed.

"The role of a woman is in her man's bed," Elrik said. "I've let you stroll around here, playing goddess for long enough. Now, news of my woman being looked down upon and ignored by other men is spreading. How do you think that makes me look?"

"The only reason I'm still ALLOWING you to call me husband instead of just master is because of the Race's matters. If it was up to me, you would no longer be worthy of being my wife."

The smiling Elrik suddenly became akin to a savage beast. His face was just as astoundingly handsome, and yet he exuded a darkness that chilled the air.

BANG! Minerva stood to her feet with such speed that the throne shattered to pieces.

"It seems you've forgotten the kind of power I wield in the Dream Pavilion."

Elrik suddenly sneered. "Please do. You can't stay holed up in here for a lifetime. Anything you dare to do now, I will repay you a hundredfold later. My wife will be obedient."

The devilish grin made Minerva tremble with rage, but Elrik only turned around and walked away, leaving his back completely exposed for an attack that would never come.

"The only thing we should be focused on is raising the Owlman race to Godhood. Forget the Minerva Race, forget this bullshit Dream Pavilion, and most importantly, forget your little dreams.

"Your job is to pop out babies. Nothing more, nothing less. You've trained enough to have a body capable of bearing my seed, and that's the end of it."

With those words, Elrik vanished.

Minerva's chest heaved, her radiant eyes turning a deeper and deeper shade of red.

She slowly calmed herself after a long while. If only she could have gotten her hands on that treasure of the Minerva Race.

They all thought that she was insane. Trying to evoke the name of a fallen God Race when her entire lineage wanted to distance themselves as much as possible from them made her that way.

The fall of the Minerva Race wasn't something to be proud of, and which of them didn't know that their enemies wouldn't allow them to easily rise again?

Elrik spoke of returning to Godhood, but he was doing nothing more than blowing hot air. None of them, no one of the Owlman Race really wanted that.

They were all cowards, all weak, self-important men who thought themselves greater than they were, but they lost out in courage to a "mere" woman like herself.

She clenched her fists.

Her gaze glanced over toward yet another Aina battle, her eyes transfixed on that finger sleeve. She practically craved it. She needed it.

Slowly, she calmed down and looked toward Octavia and Seraphina.

"Your Wings. Heal them." She said coldly.

The two women, still scrambling to their feet, looked up with excitement and then bowed several times. With just one wing, they felt so incomplete.

"The exact coordinates of the human world, have you found it?"

"It's difficult, Mistress. The Dream Pavilion protects it from the usual forms of detection and there's been a recent surge of activity consistent with the fusion of Bubble Worlds that have muddied the waters further."

"That's not what I asked," Minerva said coldly.

The two looked down.

"N-not yet."

"Then forget it. We will have to use another method."

Her eyes glinted with a sharp light.

## **Chapter 2603: Empress**

Minerva's expression seemed capable of burning even the fires of hell themselves. All of the Force in the surroundings was ripped into her control, and both Octavia and Seraphina found it impossible to even breathe. It was as though all the oxygen had been ripped out of their bodies, and to experts like this who entirely relied on Force to sustain themselves, it was exactly like that.

"We will issue a Challenge Sequence," Minerva declared.

Octavia and Seraphina looked toward one another. They had just undergone a Challenge Sequence, and it had not gone well. Plus, even if they issued one, it didn't mean that the Vast Dream Pavilion had to accept. They could just sit on their hands.

In addition, they had fallen to the 9999th rank, sharing that rank with two others. They didn't even have the points necessary to trigger one in the first place. Even the middling Dream Pavilions had more to give than they did.

"I will give the two of you until the penultimate round starts. I want you to complete enough missions to return to the top 1000. Immediately.

"By the end of the Gathering of Kingdoms, we will be entering the top 100. We've done enough time biding.

"With the status of the top 100, I will be able to project my soul directly into their Pavilion and find their general location."

The two women bit their tongues. Hadn't Minerva heard about how Leonel booted everyone out before? They would have a better chance of just asking one of the top 100 Dream Pavilions for that general location... but even that would be a gamble.

It was doubtful that those Pavilions were paying attention that closely. If the top 100 was capable of this, and yet the Human Bubbles were still fine, the reason for that was obvious: they couldn't, or rather, wouldn't act so willfully.

The humans were an insignificant remnant to them, and it wasn't worth pissing off the Gods of the neutral factions, a faction that made up the majority to begin with.

Minerva was playing with fire by doing this. Not only would she be making an enemy out of the 100th ranked Pavilion, but she was potentially going to become a thorn in the side of the Gods.

But it was a calculated risk on her part at the same time.

One Leonel was already enough to raise eyebrows, but now there was Aina. It was hard to say who was shining more brightly right now, and that was something some were bound to find issue with.

There was a gray line in there that Minerva could most definitely toe, and if she wanted to break free from this life, she would have to take such risks.

She had no intention of wiping the rest of the human population from Existence, though she very much had the strength to do so. All she wanted was the Minerva treasure. In fact, if she got it, she wouldn't even care about leaving both Leonel and Aina alive as well... after she taught them a very valuable lesson about not slighting a Demi-Goddess.

"Go," Minerva said coldly.

"Yes, Mistress!" The two women bowed hurriedly.

With their strength, accumulating merits to reach the top 1000 again really wouldn't take long. Aside from the Gem Dream Pavilion that had lost all of their members, the Breeze Dream Pavilion had already made strong headway into returning to their former glory.



As the two women left, the last of Minerva's rage slowly dissipated.

She realized why it was she had lost; she had been too arrogant. She felt that she deserved to be arrogant, but she had pushed it too far.

It was because she was stuck in a cycle of trying to regain the glory that Elrik had sullied again and again through asserting her dominance over lesser beings, but that would never get her anywhere.

Hearing Elrik's words about ascending to Godhood twisted her gut with disgust because she knew that it was nothing more than empty boasting.

She wondered to herself, had she sounded like that to Leonel's ears?

He was arrogant as well... no, he was something beyond arrogant, a controlled balance between self-assurance and self-awareness.

She could feel his Dream Force very clearly back then. It had started off as a perfect reflection of her own, and then it changed.

The disgust welled up in her heart again. Was she really taking the success of a mere human as a template to be used?

However, that disgust was quickly suppressed by an even greater rage, one that painted the picture of Elrik's visage.

Her chest began to heave again before she could slowly rein it in.

She was above it, she was above it all. A mere human couldn't stop her steps.

However, the likes of Elrik had no right to make her act like this.

She was a Queen. No, she was an Empress that should be indifferent to the world around her. She could take things in calmly, observe them in silence, and then act decisively.

She was free to look toward her enemies with disdain, but only after she understood them thoroughly.

That was her balance, her own unique perspective on the world.

When she reached that conclusion, she felt a calmness overwhelm her... a tranquility.

Her Dream Force shimmered and rose. From the Higher Life State, it rose to the Quasi Creation State and even took a peek into the true Creation State before rebounding back.

However, from start to end, much like the Regal Empress that she was, the fluctuations were subtle and imperceptible.

Her temperament became more refined, and her grace returned. Her previous demeanor, calm and soothing, came back on another level entirely.

Even so, she only basked in the change for but a moment. This was what she deserved; it was only a matter of course that she would have such a breakthrough.

Her mind turned to the remnants of the Gem Dream Pavilion.

"They can be used," she said lightly, a smile tugging at her pink lips.

## **- Chapter 2604: More**

### **Chapter 2604: More**

"Success..." A smile spread across Leonel's face. It had been a long time since he felt such a sense of accomplishment. It was funny to say so, considering he had had so many breakthroughs recently. But there was just something about Crafting that he liked more than most other things.

And now, he felt that that feeling would only grow all the more. With this new view of Crafting, it felt like every Crafting project was another puzzle to sort out. Not only would he need to think about which Ores to use-something that he would normally need to do anyway-but he would have to think about not only how they interacted with one another, but also what Force Arts he would use and how said Force Art would change the way they interacted with one another. On top of that, he would need to think of a method of conveying his thoughts through said Force Art, essentially creating a new Force Art language every time he Crafted something, maybe even a new language multiple times for a given Craft.

It just felt so mentally stimulating.

He realized now how silly it was that it had taken him so long to realize he was a Wise Star Order. It was so obvious now thinking retrospectively.

Most things he did in his life until he learned about Crafting were purely out of his competitive instinct. Even Crafting had somewhat started like that; he just wanted to one-up his dad.

But it quickly became something different; it was like an endless well of knowledge he could constantly be curious about. Even when he thought he reached the end of it, there would always be more.

And he loved that.

Leonel was already eager to move on from Complexity to Simplicity, but he took a step back.

He had already been in the Lab Setting for a while and he hadn't seen anyone for a long time. The old him would have gotten lost in this feeling for even longer, likely not coming out until he had already grasped the Self Path.

Who knows how long that would have taken? By his calculations, probably a few months at least, between three months to half a year.

All things considered, that was a very short amount of time, and it was a testament to the current strength of his Dream Force and Dream Sovereignty.

But he had other things to do.

He crossed into the Abode Setting. He then stumbled across a couple he had basically forgotten about.

In the distance, Simona and Eduardo sat shoulder to shoulder, leaning against one another. Sensing the fluctuations of their souls, they felt quite a bit of peace, but also a lot of trepidation for the future.

Leonel's chuckle caught them off guard and they immediately spun back as though they were ready for battle.

Leonel didn't seem fazed. Eduardo was a danger to him in the past, but even then, while they were in Anastasia's world, he had complete control over them.

Honestly, anything that he would have needed these two for had already long since passed. He didn't think that the Godlens were a threat to him anymore... though, their movements as of lately were odd.

Giving them a smile, Leonel turned and walked and vanished; he hadn't come here for them.

"Wait!" Simona called out, but Leonel was already gone.

Of course, Leonel could hear her just as well from anywhere within the world; he just didn't care to return.

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"You seem to be progressing well," Leonel gave Goggles a grin.

"Ah, yes," Goggles spoke as he quickly scrambled to his feet, a hint of subservience in his eyes, as well as hints of eagerness as he hoped that Leonel would give him another opportunity to improve.

Leonel sighed. He missed the old relationship he had with Goggles, but it seemed that that would no longer be possible.

'No, it's still possible... I just have to give it time and more effort than I am...'

Leonel had given Goggles [Dimensional Cleanse] to practice, and he had managed to form two Stars.

Honestly, Leonel had been expecting more out of Goggles, but when he thought about it, he really didn't know anyone who had managed to form as many as him. Maybe this was just normal.

"Alright, I won't disturb you for too long. Be sure to check on the others for me. I heard that Normand's and Rollan's families are both expecting children."

Goggles smiled and nodded.

With that, Leonel turned and left once again. As much as he wanted to check on Rollan, that former good friend of his, he felt that they weren't close enough after the resurrection to do so.

Leonel could remember spending long periods of time with Rollan and his wife, even living under the same roof.

But now, they were practically strangers.

The best he could do was try to be there for them when he could. He would help them grow more powerful, and hopefully, they would grow close again one day.

At the very least... he wasn't alone. He had a wife of his own now, and he also had his brothers.

Leonel took another step and vanished, appearing before a group of sparring men.

He plopped down between Joel and Allan, wrapping his arms around their shoulders.

"Hey Joel, guess who I found."

"Hm?" Joel was stunned by Leonel's sudden appearance but immediately drawn in by the question.

Leonel's grin widened. "A certain sandy-haired blond."

Joel froze. "Did you? Did you really?"

Leonel's laughter boomed.

"I didn't just find a sandy-haired blond, but I also found a certain sadistic Half-Spiritual too."

Raj, who was taking his turn at wrestling Arnold, was instantly swept off his feet, hitting the ground so hard he saw stars.

Leonel's laughter continued to echo. He couldn't even believe that he didn't come to tell them this immediately. It felt good to change his ways.

"Since we're going to do this, we might as well do it right," Leonel said with a grin. "This world needs more little babies crawling around."

## **Chapter 2605: Brighter**

Leonel spent some time with his brothers before returning to the Lab Setting. He didn't establish a connection with the outside world because that could lead to some issues, which was why he had taken so long to break the news to them and also why he hadn't really been communicating with Aina either.

The Force Arts the Gathering of Kingdoms worked on were far beyond what level King had been on, and before his recent breakthrough, King had practically been a suffocating influence to Leonel.

So, it wasn't Leonel's place to make large deductions about how everything worked. For all he knew, if he projected his voice to the outside world, then it would register Anastasia's world as part of the Gathering of Kingdoms and try to take hold of it.

While the Segmented Cube was the greatest treasure ever created by the best Crafting Race to ever exist, the Gathering of Kingdoms was literally created by the God Beasts of Creation. They still couldn't be compared.

This was to say that there was no guarantee that the Gathering of Kingdoms Stele couldn't integrate Anastasia if it wanted to. So Leonel had to tiptoe around the topic, at least for now.

As for Aina, he wasn't worried about her in the slightest. He didn't need to watch her battles to know that she was absolutely crushing it.

And crushing it Aina was. She made it into the Penultimate round without even breaking a sweat. This was a round if 100 of your world's people made it into, your world would survive.

To go from such a large percentage of a population of tens of billions at worst, to just 100 to meet a quota, one could imagine just how difficult it was to make it to this stage.

Now, there was just this final hurdle between Aina and the final round.

The Penultimate Round was scored differently from the others.

Everyone would fight ten battles. This battle would be scored on how long it took to finish and then weighted against how well your opponent did against others.

The number of desperate people in this round were far fewer, because the odds that one could make the Penultimate Round and not have a world strong enough to reach the percentage threshold in the Preliminaries was slim to none.

However, that didn't mean that they were all in the clear. Just looking around the city, one could feel a sense of anxiety setting in for a minority.

And for the majority, there was a different type of anxiety taking hold, one that read much more like anticipation.

Reaching the Finals was a huge threshold. Many were working based not on an existential dread, but rather their desire to be rewarded by their worlds for reaching that stage.

It was also said that there was a small chance of something greater...

It had been a long while since the Gathering of Kingdoms Stele rewarded anyone. Many believed that the treasures had run out and without the God Beasts of Creation to create more, it was useless to hope for more.

However, there were others that thought that the Stele was just waiting, biding its time for someone worthy. There were a limited number of resources remaining, so its standards just kept increasing year over year.

So on the one hand, there were those fighting for that last sliver of survival and on the other, there were those fighting for treasures.

As for Aina, who should have been on the former side, she was extremely relaxed as continued into the round.

A familiar ticker appeared before her and she vanished soon after.

When her vision cleared, before her, there was a familiar demon.

Thorne stood, his eyes blinking with surprise before he smiled. He shook his head and chuckled.

The seeding from the Preliminaries was still in effect, so technically, with so few left, it was only a matter of time before Aina was put up against one of them ahead of time.

Even though she would have ten chances to fight, losing the first round and potentially ending up heavily injured would end up impacting the rest.

Despite seeing Aina's performance until now, Thorne wasn't very moved because the victories of he and the other Council Members were just as overbearing.

Of course, there was a slight difference...

Their seeding had been excellent from the very beginning, while Aina's had been near the bottom of the barrel. As the rest of the competition was weeded out, she had slowly gained the worst seeding among them all.

Thorne slowly pulled out an elegant thin sword. He pulled a hand before his back, standing like a handsome prince. This wasn't a sign of disrespect, but rather the exact opposite. It was just that his sword was a one-handed sword, so this was his usual fighting stance.

Aina, though... didn't bother to pull out her battle ax.

Thorne's smile didn't fade. In fact, it became brighter.

To him, teaching this woman a lesson would be as good as getting Leonel back for his arrogant words.

He suddenly moved, his sword flickering through the air and appearing before Aina's throat in an instant.

CLANG!

Thorne's eyes widened as he took a step back. His hair fluttered, pieces of it slowly falling to the ground as he looked at Aina.

She had a single finger held up, one wrapped in strong Forces. She stood there without even taking a single step back.

Thorne's wrist twisted and he shot out with several attacks in quick succession, but one after another, Aina deflected them with nothing more than a finger.

Suddenly, her feet moved for the first time and she pressed a finger to Thorne's chest best he could react.

**BANG!**

It started as a small hole, smaller than even the thickness of her finger. But when the Forces came out the back of Thorne's back, it erupted into a rushing dome of energy, drawing a long, wide, and deep trench in the arena.

## **Chapter 2606: Beyond**

Thorne stumbled back, coughing up a large mouthful of blood. His eyes were opened wide with shock.

It was hard to understand Aina's level of skill when you were just watching another person do battle with her. Nothing she did felt special and she was often so bland and... human.

But facing her now, she was like an unshakeable mountain. Her moves felt bland and simple only because she seemed capable of cutting to the root of a battle in an instant. She found his weakness and shredded it apart in an instant. She didn't need to couch her battle style in a rain of fancy movements and the like, and her Forces were often concentrated into her body so her actual power was deceptive and hard to gauge without standing across from her.

Thorne coughed again and blood fell from his lips in a stream, but he still managed to stay on his feet despite the fact there was a huge gaping hole in his back. If one looked at him from that vantage point, it wouldn't have been a stretch to assume that he was already dead.

However, right then, his flesh began to wiggle about and slowly mend itself, and the blood he was coughing up dried up as well.

From start to finish, Aina didn't press her advantage. She was observing him silently, her eyes filled with a certain light that was hard to read.

Thorne definitely wasn't as vulnerable as he had just seemed. But that was only part of the reason she didn't attack.

This man had angered her husband, and that was enough for her to teach him a lesson that he would remember.



A quick victory was nice. A dominating victory would be better.

Thorne took a breath and stabilized himself.

"You're going to regret that," he said lightly.

His body began to morph and change. Violet scales erupted across his body and his shallow horn became larger and more prominent.

A heartbeat that sounded like the roar of a violent beast spread out into the surroundings and another energy took shape in the air... 'Dream Force?' Aina thought. Even so, she remained entirely unmoved.

Thorne began to walk as his body slowly grew to three meters tall. He circled around Aina, every step he took separating out another clone of him, each one seemingly just as physically real and substantial as the last.

Suddenly, they all moved.

Looking at the swords slicing through the air, Aina actually realized that they were all real, and each one was more than twice as powerful as Thorne had been. He was clearly hiding a great deal of strength, and might even be hiding more.

Aina raised her finger again and this time, she gently drew a line through the skies and then pointed down.

A circle of raging Battle Ax Force took shape, spiraling almost out of control and shredding all of the clones apart.

She took a step and vanished, grabbing one of Thorne's horns and pulling him down to the ground.

The demon's face smashed into the earth as Aina kneeled over him.

"Anything more?" She asked.

Thorne felt his heart freeze over.

He was a calm man, truly. Even after those things Leonel said to him, aside from a hint of disappointment, he didn't really feel much else.

But right now, he was filled with so much rage that-

**ROAR!**

His heartbeat raged out of control, his Sword Force and Dream Force rising into a formation in the skies and was formed of dozens of swords.

Aina took a step back as Thorne erupted from the ground.

She looked up into the skies and shook her head. It seemed that this was all the demon had to offer.

She pointed a finger upward and a beam of light streaked through it. After hitting that single point, the entire formation seemed to have lost its strength, wilting away before it could even make a single attack.

Thorne rushed Aina like a savage, his thin sword being replaced by a heavy sword that made Aina reminisce about something.

She wondered where Myghelle was. He, too, used a thin sword until he was pushed to the edge by Leonel, only to swap to a great sword.

They hadn't heard any word of him in a while and she knew that Leonel had taken a liking to them.

She shook her head and punched out.

**BANG!**

Thorne froze, his great sword pausing in the air until he fell over, slowly.

Another eruption of blood came out his back, but this time, there was no slow progress. There was just a barrel-sized hole, and though his body was already attempting to mend itself, his consciousness had fallen into darkness.

The arena flashed and Aina's victory was set in stone.

She looked up as she stepped out of the arena, a smile on her face. Making it to the Finals now was pretty much guaranteed, though there had never really been a doubt.

She gazed at Savahn and Yuri who were looking at her with their mouths open. Of them all, the only two that had made it to the Penultimate Round were Aina and Zephyr, whether it was Savahn, Yuri, or Silvanus, all of them had failed to make it to this stage.

But looking at it now, it seemed that they were all shocked by this outcome as well.

"Didn't I tell you that there was nothing to worry about?"

Savahn and Yuri looked toward one another and smiled bitterly.

This couple, both Leonel and Aina, that was... why couldn't they be normal? This didn't even make any sense. How could she grow so powerful, so quickly?

By this point, Silvanus didn't even dare to look Aina in the eye. Let alone being scared of Leonel, he should be scared of this woman.

How a woman could be so beautiful and yet so... savage was beyond him.

At that moment, the door to their common room suddenly opened and a Spiritual walked in.

## **Chapter 2607: Desperation**

The Spiritual was a man they recognized immediately. With the numbers of participants going down, those left were beginning to get more and more of a spotlight placed on them. This man was among the number almost certainly guaranteed to be among the finalists although he, himself, was not part of the Council Members.

He was known as Rowan Frostwind, a Pure Blooded Spiritual.

In truth, his talent and strength were beyond that of Lyra Emberheart. As for why Lyra was given the rights to become a Council Member while he was not, this was more related to Leonel than it was to any internal strife or unfairness.

According to the original plan, the Council was going to put pressure on Leonel and that was something the Spirituals alone couldn't fix. But Lyra was going to become the lynchpin for relieving some of the pressure on Leonel, giving him a path to survival.

That plan, though, was obviously tossed out the moment Leonel acted and killed one of the Council Members. There was nothing Lyra could even do at that point to change things, making her key effectively useless.

Rowan swept a gaze through the surroundings before his gaze landed on Aina.

"I've come to warn you about something."

Aina raised an eyebrow, but her indifference remained. She already knew what this was about, for Leonel predicting this sort of outcome was as easy as breathing.

"They're already getting antsy it seems," she spoke more to herself than anyone else.

Rowan fell into silence. Considering Aina wasn't eager to ask what was happening, it seemed that the couple had already thought of this.

For them to go through all of this and come out on top at every turn, it meant that these two weren't fools. They had an understanding of what was happening around them and acted accordingly.

Aina met Rowan's eyes after organizing her thoughts.

"I understand. But I'm more concerned with why the Spirituals are so eager to help me and my husband out so much?"

Rowan shook his head. "Don't think of the Spirituals as a monolith. We are not the Spirituals, we are the Ma'at Spiritual Bubble, the way we do things is different from others."

Aina nodded. "But that still doesn't answer my question."

"We are one of the few who haven't forgotten the value of a Wise Star Order," Rowan responded plainly.

"The value of a Wise Star Order? Or the value of a Life Tablet?"

"Wise Star Order." Rowan said plainly, understanding her point, but not acknowledging it.

"And how can we be certain of that?"

"Anyone who wants the Life Tablet is a fool. It can't be used by anyone who isn't a Wise Star Order to begin with. At the very least, its truly useful abilities can't be unlocked without one, and the abilities it has without being a Wise Star Order are things that any world powerful enough to snatch it away would have through other means."

"And you want my husband to marry into your world."

"That would be ideal-"

A dangerous aura erupted almost immediately, but Aina hadn't moved at all.

"-but doesn't seem to be realistic any longer."

A silence fell. It ticked on for a long while before the ground began to rumble.

"They're coming," Rowan said softly. "They can't match you with quality, so they will do so with quantity. They'll make certain that you're either too tired or too injured to perform well, and if they can, they'll kill you."

"There are plenty here that are desperate enough to try it. They'll die anyway when they return to their worlds. Don't underestimate them."

Rowan turned to Zephyr and the others. "We're going. Now."

With that, he turned to leave.

"She's my sister!" Yuri suddenly said, refuting Rowan's order.

"Go." Aina said, smiling.

"Aina, there are too many," Yuri replied stubbornly.

"So then you know that one or two more people won't make much of a difference."

"Even so-"

"It's fine. Unless they organize into an army, the numbers are irrelevant. There's only so many attacks that can flood in at once, most will counter and clash against one another, they'll be forced to attack in smaller numbers. By then, they'll just be trying to tire me out, and we both know how that will go."

"But..."

Tears began to form in Yuri's eyes.

Under normal circumstances, this was true. More enemies just meant more blood for Aina to make use of and her well of stamina would be endless.

But Aina was purposely leaving out something Yuri had already noticed.

She couldn't use her Blood Sovereignty. It was the one thing Leonel had told her she couldn't use. The trouble it would cause would far outweigh any benefit they could get.

If things went the way Aina said, then she would probably spend every waking moment in battle. How could she face off against trillions on her own without a simple method of replenishing herself?

Aina smiled. "Didn't I tell you before not to worry? Wasn't I right before? I'll be right this time too. Hurry and go before you two are caught up in this mess too."

Aina eventually coaxed Yuri and Savahn into leaving before her gaze became frighteningly cold. She sat in the empty home in silence, a deep mask of indifference on her expression.

**BOOM!**

The home shattered into countless pieces. Volatile Force rushed about in a torrent, but not a single piece got within three meters of Aina without crumbling to ash and falling helplessly to the ground.

The walls collapsed and Aina's sitting form, akin to an Empress on a Throne, was revealed before swaths of people.

They filled the streets, the skies, the ground. As far as the eye could see, red-eyed individuals with only one purpose in mind appeared.

Then, Aina spotted him. That familiar cloaked figure.

He hid himself well, but Aina spotted him with ease.

Her eyes narrowed. If Luck of the Draw was fused with this crowd of people...

Roars filled the skies as they gave themselves courage to charge.

Then all hell broke loose.

## **Chapter 2608: Empress and Her Peasants**

Aina continued to sit, her expression settling down into a usual indifference. Facing off against this army of people, she didn't feel fear... She felt excitement.

It had been a very long time since she experienced this sort of thing. Even with all the danger they had been in during recent months to even years, Leonel usually took the brunt of it. For better or for worse, he was always her shield.

Recently, though, Leonel had undergone a huge change, and it might very well be the reason he had decided to trust her with this.

And she would prove his trust to be placed correctly.

The skies rumbled as Aina crossed one leg over the other. A light smile tugged at her soft, pink lips. With her back straight, her chest proud, and her hair gently laying around her, she looked dignified and untouchable in her regality.

The roar of the crowd seemed to be considerably dulled at this moment. Like peasants before an Empress, they felt each one of their hearts constrict, their momentum akin to a doused flame.

Even as they continued to charge forward, their feet faltered, their Force winking in and out of existence.

Each Sovereignty had their own kernel of truth, their own refined presence crafted by the hand of their owner.

Leonel's Spear and Bow Forces carried an air of Creation. His Destruction Sovereignty carried an air of the exact opposite. As for his Dream Sovereignty, it was now a dichotomy of Respect and Persistence.

As for Aina's...

A dense Battle Lust filled the skies. It was suffocating and all-pervading that it seemed to form very real and tangible tendrils of Will in the skies. At the same time, her mental coercion, something she usually kept under lock and key, spread out with even more fervor.

She continued to sit there, her legs crossed and her chest tall. Her curves were proudly on display, and yet not a single person seemed capable of looking her in the eye, let alone observing such a thing.

The charge came to a grinding halt. They stumbled atop one another, falling and grappling for position as they skidded to a stop. Many were trampled beneath the feet of one another, and there was no hope for a quick death. Their bodies were simply too sturdy.

They could feel every one of those heavy feet stomping above them, crushing their fingers, flexing their skulls, shattering their rib cages.

The world became a chaotic mess. It became akin to entertainment for an Empress, peasants scratching and clawing for a hope at survival, until it all suddenly came to a stop.

The city fell into silence, the slight swing of Aina's leg the only real sign of movement.

"Is that all?"

Her voice was the most beautiful voice they had ever heard. Their hearts ached at the three words, so much so that they hardly felt the disdain behind it.

Their eyes turned red and they looked at Aina with longing. Some who were exceptionally weak of heart and spirit fell to their knees, slamming their heads against the ground so hard in a kowtow that they shattered their own skulls.

Aina seemed unfazed by the scenes of murder and carnage, the same light smile tugging at her lips.

It was pretty much as expected. There were many in the back that weren't affected by Aina's coercion, mostly because she didn't even bother to spread it out that far.

But because of those before them, they couldn't get into position to attack even if they wanted to.

Defenses? The people they sent became their own form of defense.

A ticker suddenly appeared before Aina. It seemed that her next battle was set.

Soon, she vanished. And when she appeared again, there was a Nomad she recognized standing before her.

Caspian of the Council.

She smiled, taking out her Battle Ax. She didn't need to, not by any stretch of the imagination. But she wanted to.

"What? Are you going to surrender?" Aina asked, her coercion filling the air.

She began to walk forward with light steps.

The current Aina was wearing what she loved to wear the most. It was a thick, black, military uniform filled with pockets. Her feet had thick-soled boots on that made the gentleness of her steps make little to zero sense... and yet, it was hard to look at her as anything other than an untainted Fairy.

Caspian was the one who set the rule against Dream Force usage in the city limits. If not for the subtle restrictions that likewise put on Soul Force, Aina's coercion would be even more powerful than what was displayed there.

But here... in the midst of battle... there were no limits.

"I understand," Aina said lightly. "You and your people are all cowards. You thought that if you sent those poor people at me, you could tire me out, injure me, and even if it didn't work out, that when you came to face me here, you could just give up. Is that right?"

Caspian tried to speak again, but his throat seemed to be clamped. Aina soothing and gorgeous voice taking hold of his heart and refusing to let go.

For a moment, he thought he had fallen in love, his face flushing. He shook it off quickly because he was a master of Dream Force, but he couldn't help but shudder when he thought about how others wouldn't be able to do what he just did so easily.

Suddenly, he looked up and Aina was a mere three meters from him.

Fear struck him like a piano's chord.

And then the Battle Ax moved.



Caspian hardly felt any pain at all as his arm flew away. But that only made him feel more fear. She had coopted his mind so thoroughly that he couldn't even feel pain the way he should.

It flickered again and his other arm flew away.

And again... and he lost a leg.

He fell to a bloody stump of a knee, his eyes filled with despair. Even now, he couldn't speak. The coercion was far too strong. It was like he had forgotten how to speak entirely.

And being forced to watch his body collapse like this without pain distracting his thoughts was almost worse than experiencing the pain itself. It was almost like he was watching with a clear mind as his death date approached, almost like there was a constant ticker to his inevitable death right in front of him.

It was horrifying.

Soon, he was nothing more than a stump, his chin pressed against the ground as he tried to look up toward the woman that occupied his heart. And yet, he was entirely unable to.

He suddenly felt the weight of Aina's ax on the back of his neck.

"When do you think you'll die?" She asked.

The words drifted into his ears as though they were dripping with ambrosia.

The weight of the ax slowly increased, soon reaching the point the chin he was trying to prop himself up with shattered beneath the pressure.

Blood pooled from his lips as shards of bone dug into his skin. And yet, once again...

He felt nothing.

It was mortifying. Step by step, he felt his skull break into fragments, his spine snapping before it began to crumble to dust as well.

And yet, the only thing he had in his mind was praise for Aina. How could such a delicate woman carry such a heavy weapon?

He was certain that Aina was pressing down, she wasn't even putting in any effort. If anything, she was only slowly releasing her grip. And it filled him with awe... Until he died.

Aina pulled back her ax, resting it on her shoulder. She could almost feel the world's silence as her hair danced in the wind. Then she flashed and vanished, returning to the city.

Almost the instant she appeared, the skies were filled with attacks. Arrows, blades, balls of flame, bolts of lightning. They didn't take any more chances, erupting with their full strength instantly.

At the same time, there was a jerkiness to their movement as their strength quickly increased and just as quickly fell. Aina took silent note of this as she slowly sat back down on her throne, crossing her legs and straightening her back as she gazed toward her subjects. Then, the attacks descended and battle erupted.

...

Leonel's connection to Aina was fainter when it had to travel across worlds, but he could still feel some of what was happening.

Sitting in his lab, his gaze was frighteningly cold, but he took a hold of himself so that he wouldn't go out. This was something he had left up to Aina and he felt that she was more than equipped to handle it.

What fuelled him right now wasn't worry, it was fury.

"The only way I can truly make them pay is by focusing on this."

He turned his attention back to the of his father's teachings.

The Penultimate chapter.

## **Chapter 2609: Simplicity**

After the path Complexity, there was the path of Simplicity. Leonel felt that it was less accurate to say that there were striations between these concepts... at least not totally. While Complexity was seen as the lesser form in this case, there were times that layers of Simplicity could be used in conjunction, ultimately returning to Simplicity. It could be said that they were interchangeable at a certain level.

The silver disk dictionary was a good example of Simplicity in action. It was a simple, smooth disk. And its internal components didn't look much different from a watch's internal construction.

"To a mortal, a watch might seem excessively complicated, especially when more complex movements were taken into account. However, on the scale of the

Dimensional Verse, even watches that could track time, date and orbits couldn't compare to the most complicated Craft even a mere Bronze Crafter could accomplish, let alone at Leonel's current level."

Considering the things the dictionary could do, the mere fact that it was made up of such a simple and straightforward setup with barely a few dozen components, could be considered the very pinnacle of Simplicity. And that was what Leonel was chasing after now. The trouble was that it wasn't so simple at all.

"In order to grasp Complexity, Leonel was working on the level of atoms themselves. But what was odd here was that, technically speaking, weren't the components of the silver dictionary also made up of countless atoms as well?"

"So what made the former Complexity and the latter Simplicity? This was where the lines blurred considerably."

"Complexity didn't necessarily have to deal with molecules and their structures, it was just that this was the hardest application of it. If one could succeed on that stage, then on larger scales, it wasn't a problem to do the same."

"In regard to Simplicity, the difference lay in the fact Complexity required Leonel to make active changes on the smallest of scales if he wanted to have a device with so few components. However, with Simplicity, the changes on the smallest scales could be triggered even without Leonel's active participation."

"The simplest analogy was boiling water."

"There were two ways Leonel could create gaseous water vapor. He could go in and personally separate the water molecules, adding energy to them and allowing them to dissipate into the air."

"Or... he could light a fire that evaporated them instantly."

"This was the difference between his current application of Complexity and what it would take for him to reach Simplicity."

"Essentially, his father's dictionary was working on a molecular level, but the enclosure of the silver disk allowed those molecular changes to flow naturally from an influence of the atmosphere without needing manual input."

"Just the explanation of this difference was enough for Leonel to spend quite some time just making sure he grasped the different nuances of everything..."

"But now he had to actually do it, and that was a whole other can of worms."

"If he used the silver disk as a case study, there was something about the combination of materials used, the enclosures, and even the sentence Leonel and it could speak that triggered its very specific responses. Essentially, it was like a trained language model, except it was in physical form and there was no obvious 'program'."

"Simplicity my ass..."

Leonel shook his head. This didn't even seem like Simplicity at all. It felt like Complexity pushed to such an extreme they needed another name for it.

"To an extreme, huh..."

That was how a lot of things worked.

"The Cobra Demon that he fought had been on the verge of reaching the Impetus State back then, and because of that, its frosty Force was being bolstered by a completely opposing comprehension, that being a superheated sort of energy."

"It seemed that this was the natural progression of things, to push so far in one direction that you could suddenly see the light for the completely opposite."

"Scarlet Star Force was exactly the same way. Except it was at such an extreme of Fire Force that it had been mistaken for a Force of pure Destruction when from the very beginning, it had been a Force of pure Creation..."

"It was just that much like its fire, its Creation abilities were so strong that it spilled over into Destruction."

"But these are all just symbolic... syllogisms rather than real, tangible changes. Creation is still the root of Scarlet Star Force, even if it's at such an extreme that it destroys instead, much like the Cobra Demon never actually used Fire Force either, it just wanted to use my Fire Force to bolster its cold Forces..."

"Then does that mean that Simplicity is still, at its core, just a higher form of Complexity...?"

Leonel sat in thought, not immediately trying to brute force his way to an explanation. He felt that his thought process wasn't quite right.

"Those things were Forces, but this was a discipline of sorts..."

"A discipline? Is that even the right way to think about it...? Hm, maybe it is. Dad's lessons haven't taught me exactly how to Craft since the very first lessons. Those techniques on exactly how to process materials, how to fuse ores, how to communicate with your Metal Spirit... I haven't used them so strictly since I was 18, I deviated from

them a long time ago. I can't remember the last time I actually named one of the Crafting techniques I used."

"Crafting feels more like a philosophy you follow... and now, even the strictness of which Force Art Language to use has been loosened to the point I have to create a new language every time I Craft..."

The thoughts churned in Leonel's head and he felt that he was close to something.

"Then it suddenly clicked."

"This Simplicity... it's the pinnacle of the Life Grade, that's what it means. Evolution, the world... life itself is so endlessly complicated, but does it ever look complicated? It's Complexity couched in Simplicity..."

## **Chapter 2610: Exhilarating**

The understanding made Leonel's eyes glow brightly. That was right, that was what the Life Grade was always meant to represent. It was meant to be a living being's attempt to create something with a life of its own, a single item formed of many that somehow worked as though it had always just been one item.

That was the beauty of the Life Grade, a seamless creation... one that reflected real life itself.

That was also how he had to think of Simplicity. He had been so close, and yet so far at the same time.

"This is why how you comprehend something is more important than that you've comprehended it... I was already aware that the dictionary used something about the environment to elicit changes to its structure and deliver its responses, but it never really slid into place until now..."

The dictionary was akin to a world. This world had the influence of evolution pressing it down from all sides.

"The way evolution works is that the weak fall to the wayside and the stronger, or rather, stronger, survive and continue to breed, passing down their mutations until it's ubiquitous among a population and the population becomes strong as a whole..."

"A similar principle is being applied here. The Craft is structured and enclosed within an atmosphere that has certain parameters dialed in to force certain responses.

"Evolution is very flexible. The kind of evolution that occurs is entirely dependent on the atmosphere in question. Cold-blooded animals wouldn't survive in the cold. White creatures wouldn't survive in dense forests of green and brown..."

"I have to essentially create an environment with my ore choices, my Force Art choices, and my Force choices in general that elicit a specific response in my Crafts."

"But that's just the first part. The core layer, the "creature" that's responding to the environment itself, also has to be carefully chosen."

"Even if I wanted to create a creature capable of handling the pressure of the oceans thousands of kilometers below, it would be stupid of me to throw a leopard down there, no amount of evolution is going to turn a big cat into a fish..."

Leonel's thoughts churned and he slotted in his new understanding piece by piece.

The deeper his understanding became, the brighter his thoughts became. And for the first time, he could see a narrow path toward Crafting the dictionary he had relied on all this time.

"It was still far beyond him, and he was certain that it had many applications of the Self Path in it. But he already had thoughts on how he might even go about creating an AI of his own."

The feeling was better than he thought it would be, mostly because he also felt that there was hope in helping Anastasia through this path as well.

"So long as he kept pressing, he would be able to reverse the stupidity of the Minerva Race."

Leonel delved into a practice session.

"To him, with the way his mind worked, theory was often just as good as actual practical application. He usually didn't have issues and was able to perfectly replicate the thoughts in his mind to action."

"But in this case, he wanted to see it in action."

"To truly test the limits, he made a weapon he wasn't too familiar with: a sword."

"He only used three ores for it, and it was a hiltless weapon. He forged it into a single piece of sleek silver metal. It was so simple that it looked like something forged in the Middle Ages... except for the fact its body was so perfect and without flaw or imperfection upon second expectation that it couldn't be tied to that era at all."

Leonel smiled and retracted Little Tolly and let the little guy wrap around his arm.

"With a thought, he raised the sword with his Earth Force. Then, he released it."

SHIIING!

"The sword buried itself into the floor. The simple sword flashed with Forces and then dimmed as though it had run out of energy. Then, it crumbled to ash."

"Leonel whistled."

"He wasn't disappointed by the outcome at all. In fact, he was in shock."

"He had only used Fourth Dimensional materials, and it had torn through the floor of the Lab Setting."

"Although Anastasia was a home and not a fortress, everything around here still had the air of the Ninth Dimension. In addition, this Lab Setting was designed to at least be able to withstand some backlash and potential explosions from experiments. For a sword formed of Fourth Dimensional materials Leonel had casually created out of thin air himself to pierce into it... and from a simple fall at that..."

"Leonel grinned."

"It worked."

"It was hard to see the 'environment' when it was a sword and not an enclosed mechanism like the dictionary was. But that was the beauty of Simplicity."

"The environment or atmosphere didn't have to be so elaborate. Just something as simple as the interaction between the Forces and Force Arts he chose could have this sort of effect."

"Just now, he designed the sword with Ores with strong repellent Forces. Then, he formed Force Arts that contained the repulsion, rebounding it and forcing the Ores to repel it again."

"This feedback loop would continue until the sword pierced through what it was trying to repel away or it collapsed like it just did."

"The Complexity came in the obvious pitfalls of this sort of path. If the Ores were designed to repel everything, then why didn't it just bounce off the floor instead of piercing through it and repelling the sides instead?"

"That was where Leonel's creativity and flexibility came into play. How he diverted the Forces, how he forced the sword to 'adapt' and 'evolve' with the environment around it, was all now part of his Crafting process."

"And it felt... Exhilarating."

"He gripped his fists, his eyes glowing with a fierce light."

"Aina took a breath and exhaled slowly. The number of corpses around her could pile into a mountain while her face had a slight hint of paleness to it."

"A ticker appeared before her for the fourth time. It seemed that it was time to battle again."

"As Forces rose into the skies to launch an attack at her again, she vanished."

"When she appeared, a familiar lazy Cloud Race youth was standing 20 meters from her."

"Yet another Council Member."

## **Chapter 2611: Tough**

Aina took a deep breath in and exhaled. The wind whipped around her, but there didn't seem to be enough to fill her lungs.

Across from her, Orion stretched. He had just awoken from a nap, and though he was a bit surprised to see Aina here, it wasn't too much. It was bound to happen.

His lip curled into a smile as he watched her trying to catch her breath.

"Unfortunate. I asked them not to put such a beauty through hardship, but there was only so much I could do," he shrugged his shoulders. "Those guys are pretty heartless. Well, I think one of them is just acting out of jealousy. Maybe you'll meet her, though it seems unlikely at this point. Lumina is her name. No need to thank me."

As Orion spoke, he suddenly moved.

In truth, he wasn't too worried about wasting enough time for Aina to completely recover. An expert on Aina's level, to be tired to the point she was heaving for breath, needed to have been pushed far beyond the point a few seconds of rest would be helpful.

That was the way of the world. The stronger your body was, the harder it was to injure it, but when you injured, it was also far harder to heal it with external items.

And in this case, when you were tired...



Orion appeared before Aina, a bright smile on his face, a strong punch suddenly coming from him. Aina almost didn't get a chance to react where it was coming from. Orion didn't seem to be using Dream Force, and yet his ability to obscure vision and trick the mind was on a level that Aina had only seen from Leonel.

Aina reacted quickly, smashing her polearm into the ground in the path of Orion's fist.

Just as the two, fist and polearm, were about to collide, Orion's arm suddenly came to a grinding halt.

He laughed, gliding backward. The sudden burst of action made Aina's breathing even heavier. Even such a subtle action seemed to have pushed her over an edge.

"A shame, a shame."

The Penultimate Round gave everyone far more leeway and battles were more spread out, allowing time for rest. Although this was only Aina's fourth fight, it had already been over a week since all of this started.

Everyone liked the feeling of having more time to rest, but this "good news" was the exact opposite for Aina.

"She was already so tired and it was just the fourth battle of ten. And what about the Finals after this?"

"The Finals would have only 100 people, but it would also have the most battles. Every single finalist would fight the 99 others in order to form a perfect and comprehensive ranking."

"Of course, it seemed likely that once Aina made it to the Finals, she would just directly give up. After all, she would have reached her objective."

"However, would she make it there given how things were going?"

Orion's face suddenly morphed, the flood of clouds coming out from the back of his head disappeared. Soon, he was a handsome young man with pale violet hair and irises. He stood taller and he flashed a bright smile.

Aina's gaze turned cold.

"Aiya, what's with that reaction? Did I not do your hubby justice? I thought I did a pretty good job."

Orion reached out a hand and a spear appeared.

"Better? No?"

He shook his head, seemingly lamenting something.

"Oh, I got it," his eyes lit up and his expression turned colder and different. "This is it, right? I was too cheery. Why a woman like yourself would want to marry a man who's nothing but ice cold all the time is beyond me, but to each their own, right?"

Saying such words while wearing the face of some who looked ready to commit murder felt out of place. Even his voice itself was laced with the same coldness, suddenly mimicking Leonel's to perfection.

Orion moved again and spear shadows filled the skies. But they quickly lost their form, becoming akin to slithering snakes and lashing whips.

Aina raised her ax to block, withstanding the barrage with the smallest movements possible. Some lashed against her body and cut like a flexible blade.

"Hoho, your skin is tough. No, that's only part of it, huh? That weird outfit you're wearing is pretty sturdy."

Leonel's voice echoed as Orion continued to mimic him. He could also feel Aina's rage, and the palpable pulsing of it was like the greatest tonic.

"The fabric of Aina's military outfit was, indeed, tough. It had been personally woven by Leonel himself. But the skill of Leonel's Crafting wasn't at his current level back then, and compared to his usual Crafting, his familiarity with weaving and disciplines of the like was comparatively weaker."

"It was clear to Aina that Orion was a master of the whip. If he wasn't restricting himself to a spear to keep up this fun little game of his, the situation would be much worse."

"Tears began to appear across her shoulders and legs, but her defense was tight, protecting her vital organs perfectly. Behind her spinning blade and heavy breaths, her gaze was only becoming colder and colder."

"Every time Orion laughed in Leonel's voice, spoke in Leonel's voice, quipped in Leonel's voice, she felt a deeper and deeper rage bubbling up inside of her."

"'Alright, I think that's enough fun,' Orion suddenly said in Leonel's voice. 'You can either die, or you can give up. But you should probably think about it reeeaaally carefully. You're the last human and you can't really afford to not make the Finals. Who knows if this one loss will keep you out, right?'"

"His laughter echoed as the spear in his hand disappeared, becoming a metallic whip linked like the scales of a silver dragon."

"He cracked it once, causing a booming thunder that suddenly shattered the entire arena."

"BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!"

## Chapter 2612: Stead

Aina suffered the first strike, blocking with a swing of her ax. But the strength was so great that it blew her hands up, almost knocking the weapon out of her hands entirely.

The second came even faster, slashing against an opening in her stomach.

Battle Ax Force bloomed and spiraled, forming a protective barrier. But that just sapped at more of Aina's stores, both her Force and her mind and focus.

Even then, it didn't work well.

The barrier shattered, slashing against her abs and leaving her military garb tattered and almost torn through entirely.

Her body flew out and she landed heavily on the ground, barely managing to resist falling to a knee as the third strike came.

"You can always give up, lady," a laughter echoed with an eerie coldness, "so long as you're willing to take the risk, that is."

If Aina lost a match, she would have to win the others in dominant fashion to have a chance. If she dragged out the battles like this, she would just have points deducted instead. By then, even if she managed to eke out nine total victories, there was no way the Stele would judge her as being worthy of the Finals.

Nothing outside of this arena would be taken into account. As far as Orion and everyone else was concerned...

This was over.

The third strike landed, and blood pooled at the edge of Aina's lip. Even with the arena entirely cracked, she could feel her heels reaching the very edge of it.

Suddenly, somehow standing in the air, Orion appeared before her.

"Haha, you didn't think I would just let you fall out, right?"

Orion's whip lashed out, and in that instant, Aina's aura flared.

She turned around like she was wrapped in lightning, reaching out with a hand and grabbing the whip out of the air.

Before Orion could react, Aina pulled down forcefully.

Whatever technique Orion was using to stay in the air shattered under her pure strength, and he was driven into the ground with such force that he was buried up to his hips.

Leonel's, or rather Orion's, eyes blinked in surprise, not quite understanding what just happened. How had her strength suddenly exploded?

Looking at Aina, still heaving for breath, her body radiating with murderous intent, Orion felt like he understood.

It wasn't that she was so tired that she couldn't display more strength; it was rather that her weakness was a form of rejuvenation. She was trying to use less strength than her body could recover, and he had slipped up.

A bit annoyed, Orion sneered. "You've already exposed yourself; the next person won't make the same mistake as I did."

Aina didn't seem to hear him.

"For what you've done today, you've already signed your death writ."

Despite her heavy breathing, those words rang loud and clear. A cold shiver ran up Orion's spine, however he hid it with an even deeper sneer.

"Survive first, then think about issuing threats."

Aina had already disappeared. Whether she even heard his words or not was unknown.

...

Aina appeared again amidst a mountain of corpses. It felt like she was staring at a field of treasure and yet she was unable to touch even a single hint of it.

She could feel a familiar rage pooling up inside her, a furious rage that came from her Berserk God Lineage Factor.

It had been a long time since she lost her mind in battle. In fact, the last time was the Joan Zone. It was something that she had gotten under control quite easily due to her Clairvoyance.

However, these people were really pushing her buttons. The fact she didn't get a chance to kill Orion was really pissing her off.

Her blood rumbled, and she felt something pulling inside of her.

There were multiple things that Aina could do to recover without using Blood Force. Well, at the very least, they would help her not be so tired.

There was Leonel's comprehension of Vital Star Force, for one. It would synergize with her as well.

But she also couldn't perform too well. If she looked like she was having an easy time, who knew what else they would pull out?

She had to force herself to toe the line, and not allow her emotions to dictate her actions.

A lot like Leonel, she had her own battles with the tug Forces put on her. Right now, she was stewing in that rage.

It was hard to tell exactly where her coercion abilities came from. Her Ability Index and Lineage Factors synergized too well. From an outsider's perspective, it was hard to tell what was what.

But she knew well.

Her coercion didn't come from her Ability Index, nor was it her Soul Clairvoyance or Blood Sovereignty, though both were a huge amplifier of it.

The root of the ability came from the Berserk War God Lineage Factor. That was why it had appeared only after she fully got rid of her curse, a curse that specifically targeted this Lineage Factor of hers to begin with, did she finally unleash it.

The coercion of Berserk War God was a display of mental superiority. However, with that came its own drawbacks.

It was rooted in an endless desire for battle, a fiendish pursuit of blood and carnage, a will forged through iron and war that affected not only those around you...

But yourself as well.

That was why Brazingers had many mental issues. Their coercion ate away at not only those around them, but themselves as well.

Aina had kept her coercion suppressed for all this time because she was well aware of this. But now that she had become a God Childe, she thought that she was in a better position to use it.

She didn't expect, though, that it would be strong enough to influence even her Clairvoyance.

However, as she felt this feeling... she realized that it wasn't entirely negative either.

She looked up, finding the skies had already long since filled with Force-fueled attacks.

'He could do it if he was in my place...' Aina thought to herself, her golden irises flashing with red that quickly blinked in and out of existence. '... I will do it in his stead.'

## **Chapter 2613: Necessary**

Leonel continued to tinker around, testing out several ideas. Each one worked about as well as he expected them to, but he felt that there was still much more to this Simplicity than he knew. It felt like there was no ceiling to it.

And by the same token, it didn't feel like there was a ceiling to Complexity either.

At some point, the two melded into one and he shifted from one discipline to the other depending on the circumstances. At the same time, his view of the world began to subtly change in unexpected ways, namely in the methods by which he used and applied Force.

Just in general, there was nothing about Crafting that shouldn't necessarily be applicable to combat. It was a bit harder to see those paths, but it wasn't impossible either.

It was trickier to, say, come up with the perfect Force Art to use in the middle of combat. When you were Crafting, you had essentially all the time in the world to think of little quirks and take into account several possible factors.

In battle, though, the situation changed many times a minute even if you were in the Third Dimension, let alone at Leonel's current Realm of strength.

By this point, Leonel's current opponents made the thinking speed he had one been extremely proud of back in the Dimensional Verse seem like nothing more than a joke.

Of course, he had likewise left that level behind long ago, but it was a fact that as of now, the situation of a battle could change hundreds, thousands of times a second, even.

Leonel was confident that most of the enemies on his level couldn't match his speed of thought, not even remotely.

The main issue was that he needed to be even faster than that if he wanted to use it in combat. Either that, or he would need to start applying his Simulation abilities in combat and reading what would likely happen instead of reacting to it.

Unfortunately, that was also easier said than done.

All that said, the matter of combat was actually quite far from Leonel's mind at the moment. He was completely immersed in the world of Crafting.

This was clearly something he had done on purpose. The less he spent thinking about other things, the less often his mind would drift to Aina and what she was likely going through right this moment.

He knew that this was the best choice, he even knew that Aina was probably enjoying herself right this moment-she had always been a battle maniac. But that didn't mean that he liked it.

The world needed to know that there wasn't just one Leonel of the Human Race, and they needed to plant a flag for themselves that existed outside of the God Beasts.

Aina could do that with far greater ease than Leonel ever could.

Even though no one knew that he was a Fawkes, and they also didn't know that he had both halves of the Northern Star Lineage Factor within him, he had too many connections with them.

He was a Wise Star Order. He controlled the Vast Dream Pavilion. He was even a Destruction Sovereign.

If he was the face of the Human Race, it would only lead to more and more problems.

However, Aina was very much human, far more human than even Leonel who was technically also a quarter Demon.

Although she was a Brazinger, Leonel couldn't find any information on the Brazinger family in the wider world, and that was even with the Vast Dream Pavilion and the Life Tablet as conduits for information.

All things considered, the Brazinger family, and the four Great Families in general, were unknown entities.

His wife was the perfect face for the Human Race and he had to allow her to be that, letting her stand where he most definitely could not.

There was also another problem with him being too grand as well... he hadn't forgotten about the Demoness.

The further up in the world he moved, the closer he got to that woman.

Even though he was trying to avoid the topic, Leonel's mind couldn't help but drift toward Thorne.

The fact he used Dream Force... the fact he had violet scales, and those horns...

If he was completely unrelated to that Race, he wouldn't believe it.

But the worst part was that Thorne was just an ant. Leonel could tell that his bloodline was incredibly thin, and yet he could stand near the very pinnacle of this tournament.

That only really meant one thing... Thorne was a lot like Lumina who was an Owlman, but so distant from their main bloodlines that she couldn't even count as a Demi-God.

And that meant that, quite clearly, the Demoness was a Demi-God at worst.

And in the worst case scenario for him, she might very well be a God.

Unlike the Brazingers, Leonel didn't dare to try and learn too much information about that Race. He had broken free from the woman, but if he learned too much about her, gathering up too much information, deduced too well... that connection between them could very well be re-established.

And this time, he wouldn't be a world away, he wouldn't be able to hide behind the shield of an Incomplete World and an angry Regulator.

This time he would be directly in her line of fire.

The matter of the True Dream Plane was something he couldn't change. He had to act or else the Human Bubbles would be finished. In all likelihood, she was already aware of him.

However, being aware wasn't the problem. She had likely been alerted the moment he broke their connection.

What he couldn't allow was another connection to be formed. By then, he wouldn't be able to do anything without a pair of eyes looming over his shoulder.

CRACK.

A Craft shattered in Leonel's hand, the fragile glass falling into fragments that were unable to pierce his skin.



He took a breath and exhaled.

## Chapter 2614: Stimulating

He vaguely knew what this feeling was. It was anxiety, an emotion that, quite frankly, he rarely felt.

He didn't feel it when he first stepped onto a battlefield, he didn't feel it when he was thrust into the Dimensional Verse for the first time, he didn't even feel it when half a dozen Races invaded the Human Domain with thoughts of murder.

In fact, when he entered his first Sub-Dimensional Zone, he never feared the Mayans. His thoughts were entirely consumed by the guilt of killing. He never really feared the event itself. He hadn't even hesitated to jump into that unknown Zone on his own.

Now, though, it seemed he actually had to deal with those emotions. And quite frankly... he found it to be highly annoying.

He took a few moments to calm his thoughts and exhale a few breaths.

The Respect aspect of his Dream Force Sovereignty forced him to look at this objectively from the perspective of a mere Fourth Dimensional expert. In his current position, he had no right to face off against such an enemy, and it kept drilling that into his mind again and again, and again.

"If the Demoness was really some sort of God, then in her eyes the current Leonel was just a little plaything. Even if she was 'only' a Demi-God, he had seen the kind of power Minerva wielded. If not for her personality, Leonel would have had no path to survival in that battle."

His mind was so good at analyzing things, and now it was holding up a mirror to his nose, forcing him to look at his inferiority right in the face.

He hated it.

It felt like he was deviating from a path designed for him in favor of one that wasn't very compatible with him at all.

'Is that even true...?'

Leonel really sat and thought about it, the glass object in his hands began to reform as the pieces were pulled into his control.

"Was it that the path wasn't compatible with him? Or that he was resisting change, resisting improvement?"

He had a feeling that it was the latter.

"Even when people realized there was a problem with their demeanor, it didn't mean they would necessarily change it. Often, it just felt better to keep doing what you were doing, enjoying your own flaws because it satisfied your vanity."

"And for Leonel, he made it a long way more than most."

"Even with his arrogance, even when he didn't put much of anything in his eyes, disregarding all forms of Respect for those that were clearly far above himself... he still succeeded."

"By the time he left the Dimensional Verse, the entire Incomplete World was playing to his tune. The moment he stepped into a wider world, he had all but crushed a system of oppression set up by an alliance of Human powers far beyond himself. He had stepped into a True Martial World, faced off against three Demi-Gods, and sent them home with their wings clipped."

"Even more shocking than any of that, he had personally killed an Envoy of Destruction, a creature feared even by the Gods, with nothing more than the schemes of a mere Human."

"In a lot of ways, he was rightfully arrogant, and that fueled him all the more..."

"But to every story there were two sides."

"The entire Morales family was wiped out. He was forced to watch his father die in front of him and his mother try to keep it together. His own wife had been shredded to pieces until nothing but strewn flesh and blood was left behind."

"His brothers had died not just once, but twice while he still lived and breathed. For a third time, they had been turned into animals and reared like cattle just because of him."

"The people he had once called friend, people that he had fought side by side with in the Valiant Heart Zone, didn't even recognize him anymore. He could only watch them grow from afar, hoping that he could make their lives a little better."

"Elthor didn't say anything, but he knew that it wasn't just the Morales family that died that day. The Oryx who had put their trust in him, a small race of beings with barely a few thousand to their heritage, had been entirely wiped out, leaving just a single Elthor behind."

"It was easy for him to focus on the success, easy for him to shield himself from his failure and inject that endless pride into his blood, using it to fuel his next tirade."

"But then what would be left?"

"Would he be that soul, left all alone staring at a star that could neither kill him, nor could he kill it? Would he be alone, his brothers gone, his parents gone, his wife gone?"

Leonel found himself having these same exact thoughts more and more often.

"But they were what kept him sane, what reminded him of the reason he chose this path instead of sticking with the one he was on."

"He didn't just want to read and react to situations anymore. He didn't want to be the pawn in someone else's game."

"He wanted to be ready for anything that might happen long before it did. He wanted to be prepared."

'Ready for anything that might happen long before it did...'

As the pieces of glass began to float, Leonel's gaze became brighter and sharper. He seemed to have understood something and his perspective shifted somewhat-not a perspective toward his Dream Force, but rather his Crafting.

"It was funny, he had just had thoughts of Simulating battles so that he could read and react to the changes faster rather than waiting for them to happen first, but he had completely glossed over that thought... until now."

"Why wasn't he incorporating his Simulation abilities into his Crafts? How much better would he grasp Simplicity if he did so?"

The thought was so stimulating that it felt as though his mind had imploded.

## **Chapter 2615: Cut**

This wasn't like battle, at least not in the same way.

While it was true that most of his Crafts would be used in battle, and as such have to read and react to numerous variables that he maybe wouldn't otherwise think of, the beauty of a Craft was that he didn't have to account for all possibilities.

He didn't need to break down whether two blades met at 20 degree angles or 30. He didn't need to make a guess as to whether the enemy was using Water or Fire Force, or

whether they were at the Lower Impetus State or the Higher, or whether they were using 10% of their abilities over a wide range or 80% over a concentrated range.

No, he could simplify it greatly.

"The first sword I created was the perfect example. It didn't care what angle it hit the ground. All it knew was that anything it came in contact with, it would repel. That was it, that was all... In that case..."

Leonel didn't need to worry about every case, he could just impose his will onto the battle.

His mind drifted to the Evolution Ore mine he had stumbled into, and how the moment one stepped into it, you could feel its greed, its desire for improvement, its will to evolve.

"That's it..."

The thoughts hit Leonel like an endless stream and he made one connection after another.

It was a fusion of two paths. On the one hand, there was Simulation, accounting for very specific outcomes and creating predictable results. This would limit the number of variables his Craft had to deal with. And on the other, there was the truest essence of the Life Grade, a level whereupon you could begin to change the environment.

"What was the Life Grade if not creating items that already existed in nature? The only reason you didn't call Evolution Ores Life Grade materials was because it was redundant."

The glass shards suddenly came together beneath Leonel's glowing eyes. A small strand of Little Tolly danced between them, quickly forming a new Craft in the form of a small flying knife.

Without even looking, Leonel flicked a finger off to the side.

The dagger didn't even fly particularly fast, but its will was almost palpable as it rushed through the air.

Cut. Cut. Cut. Cut. Cut.

The words echoed again and again, perfectly translated beneath Leonel's Dream Force as though it was a real person speaking a real language.

It tore through the wall of the Lab Setting as though it was slicing through partially melted butter, but when it didn't seem satisfied, it actually cut into space itself, tearing a

path out of the Lab Setting and into the Abode Setting, and then out from the Abode Setting and into the real world.

Leonel grinned. This was the pinnacle of the Life Grade, he was certain of it.

"Leonel! I swear if you ruin my world one more time!"

Leonel raised his head to the skies and laughed as Anastasia's fury fell down like a torrent.

Aina swung her ax, a mighty arc cutting down another several dozen.

Hurricane force winds filled the atmosphere, but they weren't coming from any technique or anything of the like. Instead, it was coming from Aina's own heaving chest.

Blood drenched her black military outfit, both that of her own and her enemies. By this point, her golden irises had gone completely red, an insatiable aura of death and destruction swirling around her, not in their tangible forms, but rather from her mind.

It was as though the crowd of raging lunatics was being constantly assaulted by Mo"Lexi's painting as Aina's coercion swirled more and more out of control.

"Should we step in?" A member of the Beast Race growled.

This beast had the body of a white tiger, but his black stripes were outlined with dancing runes of gold and his tail was a mixture of black scale and white fur. Every time this tail whipped about, space itself was split in two for a moment before returning to normal.

This was a race of elite Beasts, a descendant of the Demi-God Beast, White Spectral Tiger.

"You're free to go," Orion sneered.

"She should be on her last legs," Lumina said coldly.

"You've been saying that for the last month," the White Spectral Tiger, Silvan, said coldly. "You humans are all cowards."

"What did you just call me?" Lumina growled.

"A coward." Silvan said coldly.

Orion chuckled. "I don't think that's what she was referring to. Plus, she's right. That woman is eating herself up from the inside out, her entire body is practically undergoing autophagy."

"Call me a human again and I'll cut your tail off."

Silvan reacted as though someone had stepped onto that very tail. The tail of the White Spectral Tiger race, even though he was just the dregs of their bloodline, was their greatest pride. He would rather sever his teeth than give up his tail.

"Watch your mouth, human."

Lumina's illusory wings flared up and the hurricane force winds seemed to triple in speed.

Silvan snorted. "Since you cowardly humans won't do anything, I will go."

Silvan roared and space shook and cracked. With a step, he had already vanished, appearing in the midst of the battlefield without a care for Aina's rage-filled eyes.

Aina suddenly coughed up a mouthful of blood, her internal injuries worsening beneath the sudden pressure. Silvan had bent and twisted space so much that even gravity was affected, making her feel like her body weight had just increased by tens of thousands of times.

Aina suddenly roared, pulling in more of her reserves. Her cheeks sunk in further and her body seemed to be sapped of strength.

She was ready to face the tail that was coming right for her when a dagger suddenly manifested from her finger.

The instant it appeared, everything seemed to cut through. Their Forces, the wind, even space itself.

Silvan couldn't even react before his tail was cut in two.

ROAR!

A ticker appeared before them both and they soon vanished... only to appear on the same arena.

Silvan's enraged roars continued to echo like claps of thunder, he couldn't quite understand how this had just happened.

But Aina's ax was already descending.

As for the outside world... the appearance of the dagger brought nothing but carnage.

## Chapter 2616: Growl

The world was split in two. The small, seemingly insignificant dagger couldn't seem to be stopped, slicing through everything it came in contact with. A long tail of split space and void fluctuated in its wake, the split in reality so clean and real that it couldn't seem to immediately mend itself. No, it was more like the dagger itself had imposed its reality onto the world, leaving echoes of "cut" in its path that bent and twisted the laws of physics.

Large swaths of the surrounding army died. They thought themselves to have just gained some reprieve from Aina, only to be thrown toward another hellish nightmare.

Fear and inferiority colored their hearts as they rushed to get out of the way, until...

**BANG!**

The dagger collided with one of the pillars of the Council, its tail wagging so hard that it seemed like it might break it as well.

A clash of epic proportions was unveiled. Space and time seemed to fissure like glass, rippling outside like strikes of dispersing lightning.

The dagger seemed truly about to pierce even through this pillar until its body gave way beneath the pressure, shattering and falling to the wayside.

The Council Members in the distance watched on with constricted pupils.

They had seen it for themselves. As much as Silvan loved to be overprotective of his tail was just about as strong as it was. That thing was wrapped in so many layers of space that if you were too weak, just trying to grab it would probably kill you.

And yet, it was severed as though it wasn't even there, sliced apart and strewn onto the ground as though it was any other useless, hacked off limb.

But what shocked them even more than that was the clash of the pillars.

The Gathering of Kingdoms had many facilities that hadn't been tended to by the God Beasts of Creation in countless generations. They were all too young to even know the number of Gatherings that had taken place since the last God Beast died.

Due to this, the various treasures and facilities in this region had long since fallen from their pinnacle standards, and many had fallen even below Demi-God standards as well.

However, among these treasures, the pillars happened to one of the few that were in relatively good condition. Aside from the Gathering Stele that was still firmly on a level all its own, the pillars were undoubtedly the strongest remaining, having a level that was infinitesimally close to the standards of a Demi-God Life Grade treasure.

And yet, just now, it had almost been pierced by that casually thrown dagger.

They had no idea how Aina even had such a weapon on hand. Wasn't it said that the Vast Dream Pavilion had already been gutted of anything of value?

If Aina had been in a life or death situation, it would have almost been more acceptable. At the very least, it would have felt like a last ditch effort. But Aina hadn't quite been there either, and the clash could have gone either way.

Did that mean she had more of those weapons?

"This is already her ninth battle," Orion said somberly. "If she wins one more time, they will survive."

Silence fell. Had they already waited for too long? Should they risk their lives in a final attempt to take her down?

Aina's red gaze met Silvan's similarly furious gaze. He kept looking back toward the stump that was now his tail, cracked waves of space and spurting blood flying out from the wound.

ROAR!

He lost his rationality entirely, rushing toward Aina like a maddened beast. He had no idea that this was Leonel's doing, all he knew was that the dagger had come from Aina. And even if he did know, it would change nothing.

He wanted to make them pay, make them bleed.

How dare they profane his tail?!

The White Spectral Tiger appeared before Aina in a blur. This race of beasts was too well known for their speed and attack power. He was like a whirlwind of space, cutting through like a drilling bit and cutting across the large distance as though it was nothing more than a single step.

Aina swung her ax to meet the wild charge and her arms trembled the moment they did. Her blade couldn't reach the creature and her swing was stopped by a formless air.



She used the momentum to glide back, but the tiger suddenly accelerated again the moment her feet left the ground, closing in with such speed that she could hardly react as it bit down on her leg.

Aina should have screamed out in pain and horror, but she didn't seem to feel the jaws around her thigh at all. Her gaze was filled with a blood thirsty light as the spatial storm began twisting and raging through her defenses, trying to break free of the final lines of Force she had up on her body.

The teeth tore into her leg, making it down to the bone. The beast gnawed and twisted its head, and tried to rip it off in one go.

Aina choked up on her Battle Ax, the savage light in her eyes growing as she began to madly punch it down. Her hands alternated, one driving down a fist and another the blade of her ax.

CRACK!

She made it through the layer of space protecting the beasts, her fist, wrists and forearm shredding to pieces.

But she didn't seem to feel it at all.

Her flesh nearly fell off the bone as she attacked again and again.

Silvan should have just driven her off the stage, he should have just tossed her out and claimed the victory if he could. But he was too consumed by fury.

He wanted her leg, he wanted to make her suffer the same fate he had, to lose a limb that was no different from life and death to her.

A guttural growl came from his throat as he bit into bone, wrenching to the side.

## **Chapter 2617: Reap**

Blood flew and splattered. Aina could feel her bone snap in two, just barely a few tendrils of muscle fiber and tendons holding it in place. But there was no doubt that for all intents and purposes, she had lost her leg. With just another wrench to the other side, the beast would be able to swallow it whole.

Even so, she didn't seem to notice at all, her fist suddenly smashing through the tiger beast's eye, grabbing and then pulling. Her other hand followed and drove the ax blade down, cutting into the other eye. By the time it retracted, a second fist was ready, driving even deeper into the crushed eye and pulling out more flesh and blood.

The skies were dyed red and Aina completely lost herself in the carnage.

The blade drove deeper into the first wound it created as her fist became a claw. She wrenched at the wound, using her ax as a lever and pulling them apart with all her might.

ROAR! ROAR! ROAR!

The pain it was suffering seemed to finally get through to the beast, it ripped its head to the side, taking Aina's leg and sending her flying into the distance.

The White Spectral Tiger writhed wildly, not just due to the pain, but also because Aina's blood seemed to have gained a mind of its own, rooting into the tiger's body and eating it alive from the inside out.

Aina landed on the ground with her one remaining foot and pressed off again so hard that the entire arena collapsed.

She moved so fast that she seemed even faster than the tiger itself.

Blinded and roaring with pain, the tiger beast couldn't even react as a bloody ax was driven through its gaping wounds, slicing the top off its head and shredding it to pieces beneath a whirlwind of Battle Ax Force.

Aina stood there, her gaze a fiery shade of red. Her hair danced and flickers of crimson took hold of their black strands.

Blood dripped from her severed legs, the droplets of blood falling so heavily that they BOOMED against the arena floor.

A shimmering mirage appeared to her back as she was teleported out. It stood so tall that its head was obscured by the clouds, not that its visage would have been clear anyway. The image was akin to one reflected in water, nothing about it was clear and concise.... But the bloody aura that it radiated.

Aina's self-healing capabilities had been pushed much too far. She no longer had the capability of even sealing her wound, let alone growing back her leg.

And yet, as she stood there, no one dared to move.

The savage aura was so thick that it felt like they were swimming through a river of blood. This gorgeous woman looked no different from an Asura in their eyes, a bloodthirsty creature who would let you rip her throat out if it meant that she could take a bite out of your heart.

Aina raised her head and a banshee-like shriek shook the skies. Many who heard it completely lost consciousness, their irises vanishing, leaving nothing but white balls of fear-induced trauma in their wake. They fell, never to awaken again.

It had already been months, but their unwillingness to face Aina seemed to finally boil over.

Many might think these people to be stupid, but in their eyes, it was either die here for a chance, or die when they returned to their own worlds.

However, right this moment, they seemed to see a fate worse than death.

In the far off distance, Savahn and Yuri stood with tears in her eyes. On more than one occasion, Rowan was forced to restrain them, but the latter had an incredibly solemn look in his eyes.

'What a woman...' he thought. There was a jealousy welling up in his heart that he pressed down. He wasn't such a shameless man that he would pine for the wife of another... even if that was really what he wanted to do.

He looked into the skies as the mirage seemed to solidify.

He stared at it solemnly, not sure if he was seeing correctly.

'That can't be...'

It was so far outside the realm of possibility that he believed that he was the only one to have such an outrageous thought.

Part of becoming a God was having an idol to worship. The Gods of the Dimensional Verse had never needed to raise a finger to spread their religion because just the manner of their existence imposed their will onto the world, allowing those with particularly sensitive proclivities to sense them and become their Apostles, spreading their word to others.

In order to form an Idol, one had to first form a Dharma, an accumulating form of one's being, one's moral code, one's beliefs.

When manifested, a Dharma was something that stood above even Sovereignties, a true manifestation of suffocating superiority.

It shouldn't be possible for a human to form a Dharma, and certainly not possible before reaching the Creation State.

But why... did that manifestation feel so much like one?

He shivered as the world collapsed and the clouds above dispersed to reveal an Aina with blazing red hair and eyes formed of orbs of ruby.

The Aina on the ground was still very much with-one-leg. However, the Aina that stood as tall as the skies themselves was perfection incarnate... and when she swung her hand, the entire world fell to destruction.

**BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!**

A savage glint lit in Aina's eyes, her blood boiling to the point of evaporating. The droplets from her legs became heavy mists of crimson in the air and her skin reddened considerably.

She jumped up, twisting her torso and unleashing a screeching swing that shattered space.

It tore across the ground, leveling the fleeing warriors one after another. It seemed unstoppable, untouchable.

Streaks of crimson painted the skies red.

As though a Goddess among mortals, she reaped their lives.

## **Chapter 2618: Happy**

Lumina and Orion trembled with fear, their bodies feeling as though they had been stripped out of their control and placed into the hands of another.

This wasn't a woman, this was a human-shaped monster.

Every time they thought that she was on her last legs, she would pull out something more, some deeper.

Her breaths were already heavy enough to disperse the clouds, the amount of blood she had lost was enough to fill an ocean, her wounds were ghastly, each one more severe than the last.

And yet, somehow, she was still standing.

The tenacity was an indelible mark on their hearts. The rest of Existence couldn't watch what was happening in the city, and for some reason, these two felt that it was almost a shame to miss the rise of such a legend.

And yet, the moment they had this thought, their hearts were stricken with fear.

They had made an enemy of this woman.

Suddenly, a ticker appeared before Lumina. Her heart fell like a weight to the bottom of the ocean when she saw that one appeared before Aina as well.

'Please no, please no...'

Her elegance as an Owlán descendent had been completely stripped away.

The two vanished at the same time.

When Lumina's eyes cleared, her heart dropped even further than before.

"I GIVE UP!"

She shrieked out these words instantly, the oppressive might calling her to fall backward before Aina could even move.

She fell to her ass, piss coming out in humiliating streams barely hidden by her long, thick and armored dress.

Even so, there was little she could do about the pools of it that fell to the ground, nor could she change the look of absolute horror on her face, something that was clear for all to see.

BANG!

The arena shattered to motes of ash, fluttering in the skies as though to tell Lumina that this was what would have happened to her had she been just a second slower.

Lumina shook out heavy breaths as though she had been the one battling for months on end. The humiliation set in along with the relief that she had kept her life, but then the situation changed.

The Gathering Stele began to tremble. The nearly unintelligible words on its side began to bloom with light and a portal was opened up on one of its sides.

BANG!

A beam of light descended and fell right on top of Aina, swallowing her whole.

Lumina wanted to laugh. Deep down inside, she really hoped that the bitch had just died in the most tragic and unfair way-maybe even because she had broken some unknown rule.

The fleeting thought brought her some comfort. It was easier to believe that Aina had cheated enough for the Stele to retaliate in this way than to believe that a mere human was truly so strong.

However, she knew that this was a foolish thought. The Stele would never do such a thing because it hadn't in all its history. The God Beasts of Creation were a benevolent race, there was a reason that of all the rules and punishments the Council had made, none of them used execution as a punishment... Because they couldn't.

When the light vanished, as she had expected, Aina was still there. In fact, she was doing better than ever.

Her leg had healed, revealing a slender, yet powerful form, something that was in large contrast to the rugged nature of the rest of her outfit.

Her eyes had returned to their bright golden color and her hair lost its slight hues of crimson.

Aina looked toward Lumina coldly before she disappeared, not saying a single word.

When she reappeared within the city, her Dharma had already vanished, but her body had recovered completely. She simply didn't need it.

Soon, there was a splash of Force in the air, but this time, it wasn't an attack.

High above, a list of those that had made the Finals appeared. And at the very top of the list, there was a bold name.

Aina Morales.

For the first time in months, she smiled. It was a gorgeous smile, akin to the blooming of flowers and carrying the sweetness of a spring breeze.

It wasn't because she had made the Finals, though. Her eyes turned a hint whimsical and there was a slight longing hidden deep within them.

This was the sight of a woman who wasn't used to seeing her husband's name by her own, but when she did see it, especially when it was acknowledged by another, it carried the same hints of surprise as an unexpected gift.

She wasn't smiling because she had made the Finals, she was already determined to do so, and she was likewise determined to win all 99 battles of it as well.

She was smiling because she was the wife of Leonel Morales.

When she first came here, no one knew her name. They took her to be a woman that just happened to be more beautiful than most other humans, but that was all. Some men might lust after her, but they would never take a woman as an official wife based on beauty alone, and certainly not a human.

The only value she gained from her Race was that she would be easier to corral, or so they thought.

But now, the situation had completely changed.

She wasn't just a beauty. She was Aina Morales, the woman who had fought all of the geniuses of the Gathering of Kingdoms for almost three months without falling.

She had lost a leg, nearly lost her head on several occasions, she had been continuously assaulted by individuals who weren't even worthy to carry her shoes.

In the end, it was she who stood victorious, she who stood as the last among them all.

And yet... her pride wasn't directed toward herself, nor was her happiness.

Never again would they say that she was unworthy of her husband.

And that made her happy.

## **Chapter 2619: A Bridge**

Leonel felt that a new world had opened up to him, one that felt bright and new. And yet, despite the progress he had made, he still felt like he was sitting on the edge of something amazing.

Oddly enough, he didn't really feel like he had learned anything new. Rather, it felt like he was just connecting things he never had before, binding them together in new and exciting ways.

And that shed light on something that he would need very soon... A Natural Force Art.

There was a great amount of overlap between creating a Force Art capable of triggering certain factors in the environment and one that could elicit Auspicious Air.

The only real bridge he had to form was turning the environments he was creating for his Crafts into a Craft that wasn't acting against the world, but instead... with it.

And honestly, that was easier said than done.

"What did it mean to create such a Force Art? Did he have to grasp all the Forces in the world? Did he only have to grasp one? And in the case that it was just one, how powerful would it have to be?"

"It felt like a Force Art of that level would have to at least be at the stage of the Creation State. How else would it force the creation of Auspicious Air?"

"But that also didn't make sense to Leonel."

"The first Natural Force Art he had come across had been in the Camelot Zone, created by a man named Merlin. It had been greatly beneficial to him in the past, but it was ultimately just of the Fourth Dimension, so he had left it far behind over time."

"It was hard for him to believe that a Fourth Dimensional anything could be formed of a Creation State Force. It was wholly incompatible and didn't make sense."

"Beyond that, he had gained a lot of understanding of the world since then. He knew that the Force Art wasn't built based off of just a single Force, but it was something deeper than that, something more magical."

"But what was it?"

"I feel like I'm close, and yet so far...' Leonel thought. It was like he was sitting in front of a complex circuit and all he had to do was connect a few points for the light bulb to turn on."

"Strings of Dream Force danced in his Dream World, forming one Force Art after another and then dispersing them before trying again. His hands worked the same way, forming one after another, after another, but this time with Emulation Spatial Force."

"The Emulation Spatial Force formed thin strings of silvery gold energy, pulling at the tips of his fingers as though the strings of a puppet."

"Every time his fingers twitched, they would form new connections and snap into a new Force Art, but it never stayed around for long, a single tremble of his wrists disturbing the net of strings into their original forms before they went at it again."

"Is it space, maybe?"

"The thought came like a gentle wind. He had wondered for a while, why Emulation Spatial Force? Why was it the weaker little brother to Infinity Force?"

"Infinity Force was said to be all Forces there were, it was the greatest force of Neutral Force, one that didn't just exist... but would rather create."

"Neutral Force?"



"This thought came to Leonel quite suddenly as well."

"Indeed, wasn't Neutral Force also an amalgamation of Forces? The difference was that Neutral Force was extremely impure, not in the sense that there were energies aside from Forces inside of it, or that there were other things that weren't energies at all, but rather as a measure of its balance."

"What separated Neutral Force was the much stronger Pure Neutral Force was that the latter had a perfect balance of Forces. One didn't overpower or overshadow the other, allowing the strength to be much greater."

"But by how much?' Leonel suddenly wondered."

"Did Neutral Force really contain all Forces, or was it just a large segment of them? Would he really be able to find extremely rare Force mixed in with Neutral Force? Or was it just relatively common Forces?"

"And what does this have to do with space...?"

"It was said that Spatial Force users were extremely dangerous. They were the only specific Force type that all powers actively guarded against."

"The ban on Dream Force that Caspian tried to trigger was something all too common to Spatial Force users. Something that was interesting because Dream Force was just as dangerous, and even more so in many ways."

"The difference between the two, though, was that Dream Force manipulation on a high enough scale couldn't be stopped, and yet, at the same time... it was the easiest to stop."

"Anyone could put up defenses against Dream Force if their Force Manipulation was high enough, but no one could stop a mass murderer from suddenly teleporting into your home unless you were likewise a Force Art expert."

"And then Leonel suddenly remembered."

"Dream Force is rooted in the Second Dimension because it represents not life itself, but the impetus of it, the chance at life, the potential for it..."

"He had forgotten something that was extremely key to all of this..."

"In a lot of ways, Dream Force was all Forces, just in a different form. It wasn't the Forces themselves, but rather the idea of them, almost like a bookmark of their definitions, ready to be spread out into the wider world..."

"In that case, if Neutral Force was only the amalgamation of many Forces and not necessarily them all... and Dream Force was almost the rolodex or library of Forces and what they were or could become..."

"Then why did Emulation Spatial Force need Spatial Force at all?"

"As a bridge...' Leonel suddenly thought."

"A bridge from the Second Dimension to the higher Dimensions? Maybe... or was it even more general than that, a simple root to reality itself... laying claim to what Dream Force could not alone..."

## **Chapter 2620: His Own Form**

The thought was completely contradictory to most of the progress Leonel had made until this point. That was because he had already come to believe that he should view "combination" Forces as their combined form, and not as the separate Forces that made them up.

He shouldn't think of Emulation Spatial Force as Space and Dream, but rather just as Emulation Spatial Force...

And yet, he always seemed to make breakthroughs when he separated them.

His Scarlet Star Force was the perfect example of this. It wasn't until he realized that-whether it was Star Force, Light Force or Fire Force-it was made up of Forces decided to create and shed light did he come to understand that this Force had been misunderstood for a very long time.

'I've been too focused on just one path. It isn't that thinking of them separately is wrong, but rather that thinking of them solely in that way will lead me astray...

'If I focus too much on the individual strands and not the collective whole, then it would be wrong. But... if I consider them both... not just what Dream and Spatial Force do alone, but also what they're meant to do together, then...'

**BOOM!**

Sitting there, his eyes closed and lost in thought, wild tendrils of silver and gold floated around Leonel, forming a beautiful canvas his Force seemed to paint on.

His Emulation Spatial Force stepped from the Half-Step Life State to the Lower Life State, but he didn't seem to notice at all, his mind occupied with the next step.

What his Natural Force Art had to pull at wasn't some existing force of nature, nor did he have to understand everything there was... he just had to tap into everything there was.

This sounded impossible, but he had already done it. Every time his mind connected with the Dream World, he was doing exactly that... even when he wasn't conscious of being connected to that world, he was... everything was, even if it wasn't in a true tangible form.

All that was, all that had been, all that ever would be could find its roots in that world...

The Second Dimension... the Impetus of Life.

That was only the first time he had done so... because he had also done it during another attempt as well... and that was when he had created his Destruction World...

Then there was a third...

When Little Blackstar had brought him into his Shadow World...

A fourth...

When Modred had brought him into her own...

He had so many examples of these worlds, this higher resonance of sorts that touched onto another Plane of existence.

A Natural Force Art was taking a piece of those worlds for itself.

It suddenly made perfect sense to Leonel.

Why could Auspicious Air sharpen your comprehension of so many things at once? It was because its mere presence was helping you to resonate with those worlds. Rather than observing Forces through the filter of the higher Dimensional Worlds around you, you were instead observing them in their truest form, their strongest form...

Their purest form.

The strings of Emulation Spatial Force formed and then broke again in Leonel's hands again and again.

The world began to ripple with Auspicious Air, but as soon as it formed, Leonel would disperse it.

He was chasing after something grander, something deeper.

'The Fifth Dimensional Layer...'

Merlin's Natural Force Art wasn't the only one he had come across. There was a second... and it was in the Fifth Dimensional Layer of [Dimensional Cleanse].

It was likely not a coincidence. For both his father's method and [Dimensional Cleanse] to require identical things, it was definitely related to a matter of the mind.

The Natural Force Art of [Dimensional Cleanse] was a Visualization method designed to unlock the shackles of the mind. His father clearly had something similar in mind. But that was precisely why Leonel was pushing so hard...

His father wanted him to form a Natural Force Art, but he should know that the Fifth Dimensional Layer of [Dimensional Cleanse] already had one...

That meant that what he wanted him to do was different from just this alone...

He had already fully comprehended the Visualization of [Dimensional Cleanse], he had just been lacking in the method. But now he had that as well.

Then what was his father looking for?

Was there a difference between forming a Natural Force Art yourself versus another?

He wanted to reach for the dictionary to ask, but he felt that his mind was on a roll, like he just barely tasted it.

Then his eyes suddenly snapped open. 'Aina...'

Leonel's aura rippled out in all directions, Auspicious Air suddenly forming in waves. The flood was so potent that an ancient bronze energy began to shake in the air, almost like the faded image of a rusted bell.

He was thinking of his wife not just because he missed her, though that was part of it. But rather because of her path.

Aina had fused her soul with herself, when all convention seemed to say that this was the opposite of what she should want to do. If it wasn't because Leonel knew how her ability worked, even he would have advised her against it.

In fact, his father believed so as well. Or else... why would one of the first requirements he had of Leonel be to separate his soul? It wouldn't make sense...

But then he thought of something else. Wasn't his soul just the same as the Dream Force of Emulation Spatial Force? It was the potential that dictated everything else, and allowing it to be free in the Second Dimension, rather than spread out through all the Dimensions he took his body through, was the perfect way to allow it to shine the way it was meant to.

In that case... what did it mean for your soul to be fused with you instead? Wasn't it greatly weakened...?

Or, was it that instead of allowing the soul you were born with to dictate all of your talent... bringing this soul firmly into your own Dimension gave you control over your path that others couldn't fathom?

WHOOSH!

This was a path that took both steps into consideration... On the one hand, he rooted his soul in the Second Dimension and allowed it to exhibit its greatest strength, and on the other...

He used this Natural Force Art to bridge its existence to his current self, giving him unprecedented control over himself...

His own form of Clairvoyance.