

Dimensional Descent

Chapter 2681: Blasphemous Creation

"We challenge you," Verma's gentle voice echoed. She flapped her gorgeous red-gold wings, and the world was filled with a whirlwind of delicate feathers that looked like the embers of creation.

Leonel's eyes narrowed, wild sparks of lightning threatening to bring his Dreamscape crumbling down, but he controlled it, the slight change to his expression after such a long spurt of emotionlessness.

However, despite his indifference on the surface, he was grinning so wide on the inside that Aina had to bite her own lip to the point of drawing blood to keep herself neutral. To outside observers, it looked as though Aina was having trouble controlling herself again while Leonel was running up to the end of his rope.

Verma pecked her beak at the air, but rather than pulling something out from a hidden void like Somnus had, there was a sonorous call that suddenly filled the skies.

Minerva frowned. 'What the hell was going on?' She hadn't really thought much of Verma speaking. After all, if they were challenging in the Force Pill Crafting stream, then it was Verma's right. She was the Force Pill Crafter of their group. But she didn't like this.

"My apologies, Master Minerva," Verma bowed toward Minerva. "I am but a beast, and my methods aren't as sophisticated as Sir Talon or Sir Somnus. I can only use these crude methods."

A Celestial Ember Race elder with wings that blotted out the skies and could envelop the entire city suddenly appeared in the air. With a tap of its claws, the world shook, and

Minerva paled. This elder was far stronger than her; she would have to call the real Ancestors of the Owlman Race here to deal with this, but this matter was being completely under her control. This came completely out of left field.

Luckily, with a flap of its enormous wings, the elder Celestial Ember vanished, piercing through the Bubble veil as though it wasn't there at all.

Verma flapped her wings, and the ring that fell from the skies gently came to a stop in the air before being pushed toward Leonel.

"Please check the contents and ensure that they're to your satisfaction."

Verma wasn't afraid of Leonel pocketing the materials. What a joke; even the likes of Minerva, who could shatter his body with her aura alone, had felt all sorts of trepidation just now, let alone Leonel himself.

Leonel caught the ring and swept his senses inside of it.

"... This is 20 times what's on the list," Leonel said lightly, his tone seeming to tremble slightly. It was almost imperceptible, and to a layman, he would have sounded as though he maintained a steady rhythm the entire time. But how sharp were these people.

"Yes. In addition, I will put forward all 28 of our points as well."

Verma didn't explain her actions, nor did she have to. All that mattered was that Leonel would understand. She wanted the Life Tablet and the Segmented Cube.

Somnus frowned, not understanding. Had the Owlmen grown greedy? Did they think that by allowing Verma to take the reins, they could be one step removed from whatever happened from here on out? He thought about it. 'It's possible... it would just be a delicate balance to strike. Maybe it would really be worth it for them if they ended up with both treasures... '

Somnus remained silent. It was unfortunate that his plans hadn't gone as perfectly as he wanted, but it wasn't all bad either. There was still a chance here at survival.

He shook his head inwardly. This matter was truly too annoying.

Leonel gripped the spatial ring in a fist. "And what are the parameters?"

"Your wife and I will Craft a Healing Force Pill using any three poison Force Pills of the Seventh Dimension. I will leave the decision up to her. As for the time limit, 12 hours."

Those in the audience sucked in a cold breath.

It was said that any extreme was met by its opposite on the other end. This was a realm that was pursued by countless Force Pill Crafters... to be able to breathe life from the deepest of darkness, that was the realm they all aspired to.

This was a challenge that only the utmost geniuses could take up. To turn three poisons into a healing pill... and even giving them a chance to pick with poisons they wanted... That latter move could be seen as kindness only if you were a naive layman. By not giving Aina and Leonel the three poisons she would use herself, they had to guess from an array of billions of types on their own. Rather than knowing that there was definitely a solution somewhere, they were going in entirely blind.

The worst part was that Leonel had no choice but to accept. Not only had he just used his challenge refusal, but he had also set the parameters for what treasures would equate to his Life Tablet and Segmented Cube himself. He no longer had the grounds to refuse based on not having adequate points.

As expected, when the round began, it took Leonel and Aina upwards of an hour just to pick out three poisons to try out.

And when they began actually concocting, Leonel, who was already injured, ended up poisoning himself. The whole experience was like watching an angel that had just been soaring high in the skies have their wings clipped.

He protected his wife from the same fate, but the longer they went, the more discolored and shameful Leonel's appearance seemed to become.

The reversal was far too shocking. The arrogant Leonel plummeted right back to earth. It was clear he had a little bit of skill in Force Pill Crafting, but compared to his Crafting talent it was so inferior that they couldn't even be mentioned in the same breath.

And then the 12 hours were up.

Verma tossed her Force Pill to the pillar, causing it to tremble and suddenly erupt with an entire nine runes, better than any of the Crafters before but Leonel himself.

And then, the green-veined Leonel did the same.

But nothing happened.

Leonel and Aina's pill crumbled, blowing into ash riding the wind.

The Pillar of Truth didn't react to them. In fact, it had destroyed their Force Pill as though it was a blasphemous creation.

Chapter 2682: Sex-Ed

Leonel took a breath and exhaled. He pulled the finger sleeve off of his hand and placed it on top of the Life Tablet that stood as tall as his waist, sparkling with its array of rainbow-colored light blues, pinks, and violets. He swept a gaze over everyone and took his wife's hand.

Aina still seemed too angry to move, but Leonel smiled lightly and pinched her cheeks.

"It's alright," he said lightly.

Aina lowered her head, looking at the ground. She really didn't want to leave like this, but they had no points remaining and nothing left to give. There wasn't any other option.

Leonel took Aina's hand and left without a word. He didn't gaze at Minerva, nor did he give the other geniuses another look. He didn't have to.

Those that saw what happened here today would understand what happened, and those that didn't just didn't care to in the first place.

Minerva frowned. She hadn't expected Leonel to leave without a word. She even had intentions of forcing him to stay to watch the rest of it. There were many losers of previous rounds here too, so she had more than enough precedent to do so. However, for some reason, she hesitated long enough that he completely vanished.

It felt like he had suddenly gone from antagonistic anti-hero to sympathetic figure, and if she took action again then it would only play into the latter even more.

But then she looked at the Life Tablet and her gaze was mixed with shades of worry and anticipation. Not because of the Tablet itself, that thing was a ticking time bomb in this situation.

When she had joined the Challenge Sequence, she had planned to claim it. But those were under completely different circumstances. After all, there was a mad scramble at the time and there was blame to be spread around. In addition, the Owlans had been out of the spotlight for a long while...

A spotlight that Leonel had just thrust that back in.

No. Since the Celestial Embers had taken action, they clearly wanted it, and she would let them have it. Only the-

The Life Tablet trembled, and the spatial ring and Segmented Cube on its surface were suddenly sucked into it.

Minerva frowned. What just happened?

She immediately thought of Leonel, but he had already left and severed his connection to the Tablet. She wasn't a fool; she could see such things.

She shook her head. For now, it didn't matter. All things in due time. Acting rash would get her in trouble.

That said, she still sent a message. It wasn't the right time to kill Leonel just yet, especially since he had so much sympathy on his side now. However... that didn't mean they couldn't monitor him.

He had a fun time obscuring his journey here, but doing so on the way back was impossible. The Force Arts of the Owlans were on a completely different level.

Her lip curled and for the first time, she relaxed, enjoying the spectacle below.

...

Annoyance flickered in Leonel's eyes, but he slowly pressed it down.

"Are you okay?" Aina asked lightly, her voice dripping with concern.

"I'll feel better in," Leonel looked down at an imaginary watch, "about three days, sixteen hours, nine minutes, and three seconds."

Aina rolled her eyes, not because Leonel was spouting nonsense, but probably because that was the true exact period of time and he was probably occupying a portion of his brain just to count down properly.

She shook her head. She knew compared to her, Leonel was even more annoyed. He absolutely hated losing, even if it was on purpose. It had nothing to do with the opinions of others because he never gave a damn about that either. There was just something about losing that made his skin crawl.

"Let's go home," Leonel said lightly.

Leonel walked to a familiar location, the very same place he had stepped into when he first came to this world and found the winged knights and Aurora's husband waiting. Of course, they weren't waiting for him in particular, and most of them were just watching the stream of the events. Aurora herself had a big smile plastered onto her old face.

Leonel didn't say a word as he walked up to the teleportation platform and took a step onto it.

Aurora frowned and seemed to notice his presence finally. "Teleportation is closed, come back another day."

Leonel gave her a glance and then tapped a foot. The platform lit up without her input and before she could do anything, they vanished.

She was just about to rage when her husband caught her arm.

"Leave it be. Is it necessary to get angry? Let the wounded animal go lick its wounds," Lyric said lightly.

Aurora's gaze flashed. Her husband was always a gentle man, rarely fought and only dealt with administrative matters. But when he wanted his words to be sharp, they could be.

She found herself feeling better. She smiled and didn't mind it anymore.

Indeed. Was there a need to be enraged about a broken beast?

...

The Gathering of Minds continued, but all of Existence, in quite quick succession, people stopped paying attention.

What entertainment was there left now that Leonel was gone? It felt like they were just watching the same people win over and over again. The best story was Aerin and Lyra who managed to secure third place for themselves, but after they completed their final two necessary challenges, they too withdrew.

The result was uglier than Minerva thought it would be. It ended up being a head-on-head battle between the two remaining Demi-God pairs, but the irony of it all was that after Verma's carefully chosen challenge, no one else managed to secure nine runes, let alone the 12 runes that Leonel had managed to get.

In the end, Verma and Celestia managed to claim first place, with Talon and Somnus managing to claim second.

...

At the moment, Leonel with Aina by his side in the middle of an Inbetween World.

"Three days..." Leonel said lightly.

"Stop counting the time," Aina said with exasperation.

"What would you like me to do instead?"

"How about me?" Aina said with an innocent blink.

Leonel looked at her seriously, then looked her up and down before sighing.

"I'm not in the mood."

"Huuu, gasp!" Aina said with a laugh. "I heard about erectile dysfunction, but I didn't think I would suffer such a fate as a young wife."

She pressed the back of her hand against her forehead and fainted into Leonel's lap.

Leonel grinned. "You know, I've been meaning to bring that up. You really call yourself a Five Star Health Professional?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Aina pouted.

"Well, aside from the fact no Health Professional would make fun of their patient for such a sensitive matter, shouldn't you also know about other things?"

Aina blinked in genuine confusion. "What other things?"

Leonel grinned. This felt like an "I'm on my period" or "I need condoms" situation all over again, when Aina knew damn well she didn't get periods like normal women, nor would she get pregnant without her own will to.

"You think I don't know?" Leonel cleared his throat. "The Feminine Illusion, written by Celeste Aubrey, co-authored by Aria Mauve. Page 121, line three.

"...If we are talking a matter of statistics, the female body is far more likely to reach orgasm through anal penetration as opposed to vaginal penetration...!"

Aina was speechless for a moment before she burst into a fit of laughter.

She couldn't believe Leonel had just quoted something from their sex-ed textbook. She hadn't thought of that book since she was fifteen years old.

The couple laughed, seemingly forgetting about everything else for a moment.

Indeed. The world could be collapsing around them and it wouldn't matter in the slightest.

Chapter 2683: Wait a Moment

As Aina and Leonel were rolling and tumbling in the midst of an Inbetween World, oblivious to the fact that they were probably one of the very few couples who dared to do this, and more than once at that, the proceedings were slowly coming to a close and an award ceremony began.

Minerva and the rest of the Owlans were incredibly gracious. They tried to pretend to not notice the drop in viewership and continued with things as promised.

Though, Minerva was still a bit annoyed. Not at the drop in viewership, though that was its own problem. Rather, she was annoyed that her people had actually failed to stop Leonel from leaving.

'No matter,' she thought to herself. 'It should be an easy matter to track him now, Lyric should already be on it.'

She also had another reason to smile as well. Technically, Leonel should be fourth place, and that had earned him a lot of reward, but because he had let his pride get the best of him, even to the point of leaving first, he had not only lost everything, but he got nothing.

Minerva chuckled to herself and suddenly wondered why she even had to put in so much effort to kill Leonel in the first place. She had the Segmented Cube now, so everything else was meaningless. Plus, Leonel had suffered for his arrogance greatly.

In Minerva's opinion, a large reason for Leonel's Crafting skill should be the Segmented Cube as well. Now that it wasn't with him anymore, soon enough, her disciple would surpass him and the last worry would vanish.

Leonel would fall in obscurity just like the rest of the Human Race and become a footnote in history. No, that was probably more than he deserved.

Minerva smiled a gorgeous smile, one that seemed to light up the world as she handed her disciple the Minerva Spirit she had prepared. It was a gorgeous little fairy, with the chubby cheeks of a six year old and the childish grace of a 13 year old. All around, it broke the cuteness scale, flying around somewhat clumsily, but also endearingly.

With that, the competition came to a close.

...

"You're going already, Somnus?" Talon asked.

The one person who didn't seem happy about the ending of these events was Talon. He took no pride in what had happened afterward, though he also made no attempt to stop Somnus.

Somnus gave Talon a look. Of course he was getting the hell out of here. He felt uneasy and he couldn't really describe why. He was probably not going to return home either, maybe he should go to one of those Demi-God worlds ruled by Mortal Races and dip his toes in with the common man for a bit.

No matter what, he definitely didn't want to be anywhere near here.

Without answering Talon's question, Somnus stepped into the teleportation platform and disappeared. What a joke, he wouldn't explain his thoughts. If he told Talon, who knew what Talon would think? It was best if Talon thought he was disgusted with him, that way he could get off scot-free.

Talon raised an eyebrow, but then his gaze narrowed. He was much more intelligent than most gave him credit for, and that made picking up on things others didn't want him to easier than normal.

'To stay... or to go...'

Talon raised a foot to step onto the teleportation platform when he felt a wave of uneasiness in his heart.

Many thought that the only methods of the Barbarians were their strong bodies, but this hid something deeper... a warrior instinct. They were extremely in tune with the world and there were some strands of their lineage that tied with the Plutos, allowing them a sense for the weaving tapestry of time that others couldn't fathom.

Ultimately, though, in most Barbarians, this was dormant, and even in those who could grasp it, it only appeared in very specific situations.

Right now, something was telling him not to step onto that teleportation platform.

Talon slowly lowered his foot, standing in silence for a long while before he suddenly chuckled.

'You can have your intelligence,' he thought, turning around to return to the city, 'and I'll raise you omniscience.'

...

The atmosphere was quite cordial.

Verma and her Ancestor sat across from Celestia and Minerva. Clearly, the latter Celestial Ember had the ability to shrink her size considerably, or else fitting into such a space with what she displayed before would have been entirely impossible.

"... No, of course not. There's no problem here," Minerva said with a light smile. "It's because of Little Verma's efforts that the Life Tablet was procured in the first place, we will not fight for this. We only want the treasure of our Ancestors."

"Good, good..." the Celestial Ember Ancestor chuckled, a sweet sound that tickled the ears. Whether it was her or Verma, they both had voices that could rock the most irritable of babies to sleep. "In that case, we can proceed."

The two experts sat around the Life Tablet and began to check it. They assumed that it had to have an inner world of sorts to have taken the spatial devices into it, so they just had to form a connection with this world.

However, even after several minutes, they realized they couldn't.

Minerva's brows furrowed and a bad feeling began to form a sinking feeling in her gut.

Could it be that only a Wise Star Order could access that inner space?

Minerva was beginning to feel that this was more and more of the case. Could this Life Tablet be nothing more than a brick without being a Wise Star Order?

No, that wasn't true. According to the records, it should have the abilities of resurrection even without it... so why...

Minerva stood to her feet. "Esteemed guests, if you could wait a moment. I will have the human youth return and we will have this situation dealt with shortly."

The Ancestor Celestial Ember nodded with a smile.

- Chapter 2684: Find Him!

Chapter 2684: Find Him!

Things were quickly not going as planned. After receiving a report from Lyric, Minerva realized that the situation was far more complex than she had thought.

It was impossible. How could Leonel possibly evade her detection? The teleportation platforms of the Owlans were far beyond anything the lesser worlds would have. It felt like a joke to try and compare them.

She had seen Leonel's Crafting skill. It was impressive, but only insofar as his age and generation was taken into account. She still felt that she had nothing to fear from him on that front. Personally, she could like up at least 18 runes on the pillar.

As she was getting lost in her frustration, there was a rush and Aurora suddenly came into view.

"Master," she bowed low. Despite the fact Aurora looked older than Minerva, Minerva was actually the more senior of the two parties. In addition, she was by far the more powerful on top of that.

"What is it?" Minerva asked with a hint of expectation and irritability. She hoped that there was good news, but considering Aurora's expression... it didn't seem to be so.

"P-please follow me."

Aurora didn't dare to talk about this matter in public, so she took Minerva along with her.

When Minerva realized where they were going, she frowned. Wasn't this where they had stored the Pillar of Truth after the competition? What's going on?

Indeed, moments later, they entered a vast, well-kept underground space. At the center, there was the pillar of their ancestors.

"Why did you bring me here?"

Aurora's lips trembled, but ultimately she felt that showing would be better than telling here. She took out two braces that made Minerva furrow her brows. Weren't those the ones Leonel had crafted? Didn't he take them with him? Why were they here?

Aurora tossed them at the pillar and there was a sudden blinding flash.

BOOM!

The two braces shook and rose. Then, one after another, the runes began to light up, not stopping until a full 18 runes were shimmering with a splendid aura.

Minerva stood frozen.

Her memories flashed back to the event, remembering how Leonel had only tossed the braces out one by one. She had thought it was a bit odd back then, but she hadn't really thought twice of it. Maybe he had wanted twice the impact.

Logically, these braces weren't linked, them being together like this shouldn't change anything unless...

Minerva's heart raced.

The implication was obvious.

He had Crafted them casually. They weren't even worthy to be part of his collection, so he left them here for her to find...

As a final fuck you.

'No, there's something I'm missing here...'

But no matter how she wracked her brain, she couldn't figure out what it was.

...

The time continued to tick by and the Celestial Embers were growing more and more impatient. The Ancestor was already showing a great deal of grace by dealing with Minerva like an equal, when in reality she was far beyond.

Being made to wait like this made even a gentle woman like her irritable.

Every time another servant came in to say that they just needed a little bit more time, the temperature in the room just became a little bit more heated. Soon, the fine metals that made it up began to melt off the walls.

"We go. Now," the Ancestor beast said lightly. Even while irritated, she was gentle beyond compare.

She stored the Life Tablet away in a storage device of her own before sweeping up Verma into her wing. She was quickly getting bigger when Minerva rushed in with an ugly expression on her face.

"Apologies, young one," the Celestial Ember said lightly. "I do not have the patience to waste my life away here. If you find the human boy, you are free to visit my Celestial Ember Race any day. If my race finds a way to open the world, rest assured we will likewise return the treasure of your Ancestors to you."

With a flap of her wings, the Ancestor seemed to pretend as though the walls were even there, appearing high in the skies without leaving the slightest hint of damage... aside from the melted walls, that is.

Minerva clenched her jaw so hard she almost shattered her teeth.

Did she believe the Celestial Ember? She wanted to, but there was no guarantee. If they managed to open up the world first, and then found out the secrets of the treasure, would they just pretend they had never succeeded at all, pocketing both treasures?

This was why she hadn't wanted them to leave in the first place, but there was nothing she could do now. Although she could call her own Ancestors, if they forced her to remain here, wouldn't it cause war?

Plus, she was one of the very few who cared about that treasure so much. Everyone else thought it was a hot potato.

There was a reason she was the only high profile Owlman to show their face. It was plausible deniability. Should things go wrong, she would be the perfect scapegoat.

And yet now...

"FIND HIM!" Minerva roared, her chest heaving.

She would not be someone's convenient baby-making machine. She was an Empress, someone above it all.

This wouldn't be where her steps faltered.

...

Somnus' vision slowly cleared, but he frowned almost immediately.

The endless black, the cavernous trenches and pointed peaks, the rolling fog and the puddles and rivers of darkness...

The Inbetween Worlds? What was he doing here? Teleportation stations did malfunction from time to time, but certainly not so silently, and definitely not in the territory of a Clan as prestigious as the Owlans.

And then he saw them.

A pair of husband and wife, looking at him indifferently.

Leonel and Aina.

Chapter 2685: Both

Somnus' eyes widened. He was in a genuine state of shock.

His first and the most reasonable conclusion was that the teleportation device had malfunctioned for them too, so of course they were here....

But then where was everyone else?

And why weren't they surprised as well? Shouldn't they feel fear seeing him, a Demi-God, standing in their presence without anyone to check or regulate him?

And then he watched as Leonel slowly pulled out a spear. It flashed out from a depth of nothingness before his body was covered in an amorphous armor with neither shape nor form outside of something vaguely humanoid.

Leonel didn't speak a word, but the previous words echoed in Somnus' mind nonetheless.

He had said that his words would cost him his life, and here he was to collect.

Somnus suddenly began to laugh. "Is this what I look like to other people? Overly confident? Overly brash? Prideful to a fault?"

"You have no idea the gap between mere Mortals and Demi-Gods, but you came here to flaunt your insignificant wealth?"

Leonel's spear tip trembled, every downward stroke causing a ripple of flames to spark.

As he walked forward, Aina stood in silence, crossing her arms and not saying a word. The current Somnus was beyond Leonel right now, she knew that. But the measure by which Leonel won wasn't based on raw strength nor the common senses either.

Regardless of what the raw stats said... she felt that he had a 100% chance of victory.

So she stood there, her hair silently blowing in the wind as her husband continued to walk forward, his gait slow but steady. Every step looked precise, the same amount of distance apart, the same level of pressure, the same time from raise of foot to its descent.

And with every step he took, it seemed a new ability flourished.

First it was a rumbling air of bronze that came from his Auspicious Air...

Step.

Second came the slit eyes of his amorphous armor and their soles beginning to pop and sizzle with strands of smoking embers... His Destruction Sovereignty.

Step.

Third came a flourishing crown, billowing with dense silvers and golds... His Dream Sovereignty.

Step.

"Yip! Yip!"

Blackstar bared his little teeth, sitting on Aina's shoulder. He was none other than the reason the braces had been found in such a convenient location, and now he watched Leonel walk into battle as he had seen many times before, his blood boiling.

Step.

Leonel vanished and Somnus sneered, punching out with a violet-scaled claw.

BANG!

Spear and fist met.

Somnus frowned. The strength behind it was beyond his expectations. Leonel was just in the Fifth Dimension, it felt like a joke for him to face off against him even if he wasn't a Mortal, and a weak-Raced Mortal at that.

Wasn't Leonel heavily injured as well? He literally couldn't stop coughing up blood before? How'd he manage to heal the injuries of a Ninth Dimensional existence?

Leonel himself felt like his entire arm was about to be shattered. In fact, the casual punch alone made several fissures and fractures appear on his bone. But as soon as they formed, they vanished beneath the might of his body and Vital Star Force.

[Domain].

[Universe].

Leonel's crown shimmered...

[Finality].

His spear swung down again. Somnus met it with a change to his expression, but he was forced to take a heavy step backward.

"What...?"

Leonel's spear danced, striking out three times in quick succession. His armor thrummed and his spear tip passed through complex Force Arts that threatened to make even Somnus' mind spin every time they moved forward.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Somnus' scales split and the Scarlet Star Force licked at his body, corroding away his Force and crushing his defenses... well, the amount of Forces he could use in the first place under [Domain]'s influence.

Leonel had control over so many Life State Forces at this point that he could even suppress the likes of Somnus by over 20%.

The worst part was that Leonel's Dream Force was so far beyond Somnus' with the addition of his Sovereignty that the latter couldn't even muster up his greatest strength.

Leonel kicked out, landing a sole right on Somnus' chest and sending him catapulting into the distance.

He lowered his spear, dragging it along the ground and leaving a line of fire that seemed willing to burn even the Anarchic Force in the surroundings.

"I would suggest you get off your high horse," Leonel said lightly. "I've heard that Dream Asuras like to play games, so how about we play one?"

"I'm wondering, how many times will I have to kick your ass for you to finally bring out your full strength? Is it going to take one kick to the chest?" Leonel asked. "A slap to the face?"

The flat of Leonel's spear suddenly slapped out, crossing the void and appearing by Somnus before he could react.

The resounding slap sent his head reeling to one side.

"No? Maybe it's castration?"

Leonel's spear flickered and his body vanished. The Anarchic force rolled and Somnus prepared to defend his crotch when two tendrils of silver suddenly appeared inches from his eyes.

He realized in an instant that Leonel had just lied to him, but it was already too late.

The two Force Arts took shame and two, roaring lasers of gold slammed into him.

Somnus felt the air get knocked out of him as he spiraled into the distance. He coughed, but still managed to land on his feet, his gaze suddenly becoming frighteningly calm.

"Cute..." He said calmly.

However, when he met Leonel's gaze, the latter seemed unperturbed by his lack of injury.

"You don't seem to know very much about Dream Asuras," Somnus said.

"I know more than you think. Enough to know a dumbass pretending to be calm when I see one. But whether it's you, or the Owlans, you'll both see a crushing defeat very soon."

Leonel raised his spear and pointed the blade right at Somnus.

Chapter 2686: Dream Finality

Somnus didn't immediately reply to the words. But soon enough, his handsome face split into a shit-eating grin that quickly became uproarious laughter. His laughter boomed so far and wide that it caused ripples in the Anarchic Force.

"You speak more boldly than anyone I have ever met. Do you really think yourself to be so great even after all that's happened?"

Somnus' reply was a spear, one that caught him off guard. He was almost completely certain that he could pull Leonel into a chat, but he didn't receive what he wanted at all, nor did he even manage to gain the information he wanted either.

Leonel was definitely correct. He was pretending to be calm. And condescending to his opponent wasn't something ingrained into his personality either. Rather, he just thought it was the best approach to use against Leonel.

Unfortunately, he was incorrect.

Leonel spoke when he wanted to; no one could goad him into speaking. And for that matter, no one could goad him into anything.

When he moved, even if his enemies thought he had fallen into their trap...

It was more than likely the very opposite.

The strokes Leonel left in the air stunned Somnus. As he fell on his back foot, retreating, he couldn't help but feel that Leonel's spear was too beautiful. It almost felt like he was drawing constellations through the darkness, each stroke a line so profound that it could connect the stars...

It dawned on Somnus in that moment that he had truly never seen such a perfect spear technique before, something that made his heart skip a beat.

How could that be possible?

Unfortunately for Leonel, though... the strikes were simply far too weak.

Somnus' back foot planted, and he was prepared to explode forth, when Leonel's spear suddenly rotated in his palms as he sidestepped.

The butt of Leonel's spear parried the strike to the side, its spin continuing in one fluid motion that slashed out a strike from bottom to top across Somnus' torso.

[Finality].

Leonel's strength suddenly had an explosive increase of 10 times, slicing apart Somnus' robes and into his fleshy scales.

The searing pain hit Somnus all at once, and he hurriedly circulated a technique to gain some distance. He seemed to split into three, retreating even faster when he split again into nine.

It looked as though every time he split, he shed more mass, and due to that he accelerated even faster. It was a physics-breaking technique no different from any one of Leonel's three...

Unfortunately, it relied on Dream Force to obscure the mind. Something that was entirely useless against Leonel.

Before the shadows could come together again, Leonel had pursued one of them, the tendrils of his armor poking at the skies and forming one Force Art after another.

In that moment, it looked like they were targeting all nine-eighteen clones at once, causing Somnus to sneer inwardly...

That was until they converged into one.

"[Finality]."

BOOM!

At first, it was just a slight spark through the air, a bolt of obscure lightning that drew a crooked line between the layered Force Arts and Somnus' retreating form.

But then the world fell silent for just a moment before a beam that split it in two took shape.

A roaring wave of golden Force shook the Inbetween World, appearing before Somnus so quickly that he had absolutely nowhere to dodge.

He was entirely enveloped by the beam, unable to escape.

Leonel's figure flashed forward, pursuing the streak of gold as though he would never be satisfied. Maybe even Somnus didn't expect such a dogged pursuit... nor did he really have the luxury to think so far ahead.

Somnus' figure finally appeared, and in that moment, he truly looked like a demon for the first time.

His body was revealed to be a dense canvas of violet scales, though these very scales were beaten and bloodied beyond recognition. His teeth were bared with malice, and his horns had grown considerably in size, the shock painted deep within his eyes.

Had a human really left him in such a state? No... this strength definitely wasn't Leonel's own, what are these techniques? Why are they so powerful? Why were they so much better than his own?

[Domain] suppressed him. [Universe] suppressed him even further, even to the point of breaking the laws of physics. And then [Finality] was like the nail in the coffin.

It was his fault for not really taking Leonel seriously, but it still didn't make any sense. Even if he stood still and let a Fifth Dimensional expert like Leonel attack him with all of their strength, he shouldn't even be able to feel it, let alone end up in such a state.

How could he know that Leonel had been storing up strikes for [Finality] for months already? He had diverted one of his minds to that task permanently, and he was even storing up more than just one Force at a time as well.

With Scarlet Star Force, because he had not just one, but two Innate Nodes, he could fill a new one every few seconds.

The only limitation was that every new fill required a new [Finality] Force Art to be formed and maintained...

But was that difficult?

Not at all. Leonel had simply created a new ability he called Dream Finality that did all the work in the background for him.

This was the might of the Control Ability Index.

Right now, he could easily maintain just over a thousand Finalities at once, and every time he used up one, it would be filled in instantly.

At his current pace of battle, even if he could withstand more, there was simply no need to...

He would never run out of Finalities.

Somnus suddenly punched out at the approaching Leonel, causing him to raise an eyebrow and slip out of the way, vanishing into thin air.

"Seems he finally wants to take this seriously now. Wife! It's your turn."

Somnus froze.

Chapter 2687: Seconds

Somnus had never been so humiliated in his life. He thought that the moment he started to bring out his full strength, it would all be over-that was why he had never panicked despite his shock.

But the truth was beyond his expectations.

Leonel suddenly took a step back and became a support while his wife took the vanguard. One wielded a ruby battle ax and the latter formed a bow from thin air.

The worst part was that the Domain was still effective.

One after another, Leonel unleashed a barrage of arrows that Aina herself didn't seem to have to slow or care for in the slightest. She fought all out, and from what he could tell, she didn't slow her speed or change her cadence in the slightest. There were even several moments where she would erupt with jerky, unpredictable motions and sudden changes in battle philosophy or approach, and yet it never seemed to faze Leonel at all.

He hung in there, hoping that Leonel would eventually slip up and end up injuring his own wife...

But that moment never came.

In fact, the two only seemed to grow stronger, especially when Leonel did something inexplicable and began fusing his [Finality] strikes into one.

The vast majority of Leonel's [Finality] Force Arts were formed of Scarlet Star Force... but who said those were the only ones he had formed?

A twin pair of Force Arts began to take shape before his bow every time he pulled back a new arrow, spinning in opposite directions like ancient magic circles.

At that moment, the immovable earth of the Inbetween World became akin to clay beneath his will, forming chilly black arrows that were quickly wrapped in flames.

Beneath the simultaneous barrage of Aina and Leonel, Somnus simply couldn't hold up. Even after growing to almost five meters tall, Aina's Dharma manifestation made an appearance, causing his eyes to open wide with shock.

At that point, he tried to run, turning tail and disregarding any dignity as a Demi-God that he might have thought he had.

Unfortunately, it was worthless.

One of Leonel's arrows shot through the back of his knee, pinning him into the ground as Aina appeared behind him, slashing across the other leg and bisecting it cleanly from the rest of his body.

In just a few hours, the mighty Dream Asura had wilted, falling to the ground, unable to muster up any more strength.

Leonel smiled, landing beside Aina who still had a bloodthirsty light in her eyes. She seemed to want more even now.

She had felt stifled and suppressed in these last few days as well, and this wasn't nearly enough to make her feel better.

Leonel patted her shoulder, smiling reassuringly. Soon, they'd have their revenge, and not just by proxy of someone else, but in the truest sense of the word. Once they grew powerful enough, no one would be able to stop them.

Then, his gaze shifted to Somnus and he frowned.

From what he could tell, Somnus was in the 3rd Tier of the Seventh Dimension. He was in a weaker tier than the participants of the Gathering of Kingdoms had been, where most of them had been in the 9th Tier of the same Dimension. But, he was so much more powerful.

Neither he nor Aina was injured, nor had they felt threatened while battling against him, but that was because they were both geniuses at controlling the flow of the battle. Plus, Leonel's [Domain] was constantly suppressing Somnus as well.

Yet, the man had still managed to last more than half a day, and even now, he wasn't dead.

Leonel had a much better appreciation now for the gap between Mortals and Demi-Gods. But that wouldn't stop him from dealing with Somnus.

There were some things that you shouldn't say, or you should be ready to face the consequences for doing so.

Originally, he hadn't planned on doing this to Somnus. Although he was very curious about the Dream Asuras and wanted to garner more information about them, the overall risk wasn't quite worth it.

But he had changed his mind. Somnus' display had reminded him that keeping Dream Asuras at arm's length wouldn't change a thing. If they wanted to target him, they would.

Just how many worlds away from the Demoneess from his own, and yet hadn't she still turned his world upside down? Had he ever done anything to her? Had he ever offended her?

None of that mattered to them.

In that case, he would bring the fight to their doorstep.

Somnus released a bitter chuckle that echoed with a gurgle of blood.

"You're going to be very disappointed. My Clan prepared to expel me for even coming here today, and if you kill me you'll find it impossible to access my treasures. So whatever you wanted out of this, you won't get it."

Hearing the first half of Somnus' words, Leonel's gaze narrowed. Truly, it seemed the Dream Asuras weren't to be underestimated. He hadn't given anything away, but it seemed that Somnus had already thought of the possibility of him trying to rope the Dream Asuras into this mess as well.

But clearly he wasn't 100% certain, or else he wouldn't have mentioned his treasures afterward.

Leonel smiled. "If you wanted to protect your treasures, you shouldn't have shown me how to open your hidden world in the first place."

Somnus sneered. As if he would believe that.

"One minute..." Leonel suddenly said, looking up.

Aina rolled her eyes. This man was really still counting.

Somnus, however, was very much confused. What was he talking about?

But Leonel didn't seem eager to divulge, crouching down and maintaining his silence as though nothing else in the world mattered but the ticking timer.

"Thirty seconds..."

Suddenly, the Inbetween World began to tremble.

"Twenty seconds."

Leonel looked off toward the distance, a smile tugging at his expression.

"Ten seconds."

BOOM!

A streak of rainbow appeared on the horizon and Leonel opened his hand toward it.

BANG!

The Life Tablet landed with a boom and Somnus' eyes opened wide. Was that...

Chapter 2688: Another Path

Leonel grabbed at what looked like empty air and pulled out the Segmented Cube and a familiar ring, chuckling to himself. He found all of this to be very amusing.

Watching her husband giggle like a little boy on Christmas morning, Aina couldn't help but smile to herself.

They both knew that somewhere, out there, there were some people who were very, very mad.

And unfortunately for them, while they were lost in their fury, they would miss the forest for the trees, falling further into Leonel's web. By the time they understood what was happening, it would be far too late.

Leonel pressed a hand onto Somnus' body as the Life Tablet disappeared into his glabella once more. Somnus was then sent into the Segmented Cube.

Leonel felt some resistance come from the man. Obviously, bringing someone into a spatial device required their acquiescence. Unfortunately, his resistance was futile purely because... he didn't have enough strength left to resist in the first place.

Leonel and Aina slipped into the Segmented Cube to find a glaring Anastasia.

Leonel coughed. "Oh, Anastasia. You're looking very cute today, did you know that? Look at those adorable cheeks, I could just pinch them for day-"

"Shut up! Do that again, and I'll never talk to you again!" Anastasia snapped.

"Ah... yes, ma'am!" Leonel stood at attention.

Anastasia was a huge part of the plan.

The Tablets didn't have inner spaces, not in the conventional sense. Even when Leonel entered the Wise Star Order Libraries, only his mind did so, his body was still very much on the outside. So, obviously, the Segmented Cube and the ring couldn't have just vanished into it...

He could only make it look like it had, and that relied on Anastasia.

Anastasia had the ability to hide, an ability he had made use of the first time he came to these Complete Worlds. Due to her control over space and time, not only could she distort the space around her, but she could also displace them in time, making sensing her, even for an Ancestor of the Celestial Ember's caliber, near impossible.

Of course, Leonel had to guide her in doing so. But after explaining what he wanted out of her, she did it without even blinking. It was incredibly easy for her.

If anything, Leonel had gone a bit too far. It was entirely unnecessary to displace them through both space and time, space alone would have been enough, but Leonel thought it was better safe than sorry. That was a step of the plan he couldn't afford to fail, and that was because whether the Life Tablet managed to make it back or not was also dependent on Anastasia.

Sure, the Life Tablet could respond to a summoning from him. But it had no ability to stop itself from being captured.

And worse than that, what if instead of stopping it, his enemies chose to follow it right back to him? They had already realized that not having a Wise Star Order made using the Tablet tricky, so there was a high likelihood that they would have taken such a path.

It was up to Anastasia to take the opportunity while they weren't looking to store the Life Tablet away. Then, she had escaped a sufficient distance away, she could pull it out again for it to sense Leonel's summon and return to him.

It could be said that without Anastasia... all of this would have been impossible.

Of course, this also opened the path for some spying in the future, but Leonel shelved that for now.

As with everything, Anastasia's abilities were limited to her and her alone. So unless he was inside the Segmented Cube, it would be useless. That was why she had to find an opportunity to store the Life Tablet first before she could escape, and that opportunity came when the Celestial Ember stored it in her spatial device.

But for now, that was neither here nor there.

"Anastasia-"

Leonel was about to ask Anastasia to open up Somnus' hidden world, but he froze.

Sparkling tears akin to crystal fell from the little World Spirit's eyes. She looked frustrated, scared and...

Leonel reached forward and pulled her into his arms, causing her to be stunned for a moment before she truly began bawling her eyes out.

Touching a World Spirit through normal means should have been impossible, so when Anastasia suddenly felt Leonel's gentle touch, she lost it. It was the first time she had ever been touched by anyone this way.

The floating cloud of blue that made up her lower body darkened and began to rain with its own tears.

"I'm sorry," Leonel said softly. "I swear I won't do it again..."

Leonel thought back to when both Anastasia and Aina had been angry with him. Back then, he had sent Aina on a "date" with that disciple of the Three Finger Cult for the sake of luring them away and dealing a death blow to the Human Alliance.

Anastasia had been even more angry than even Aina back then, and he could even tell that she was holding more of a grudge as well. A huge part of the reason Aina had stayed mad for so long was because of Anastasia in the first place...

Now, he felt like he understood.

It felt like he was abandoning Aina back then, and Anastasia really didn't like it. And now, this most recent plan made her feel like he was abandoning her, and it hit even harder.

In the past, Leonel's pride wouldn't have allowed him to even try these plans, he'd rather try something else entirely. But he was trying to change himself, trying to become someone who could not just survive in this world alone, but with everyone else he cared for surviving as well...

So he bent his own desires and will, sullyng them for the sake of picking the plans with the highest chance of survival... And the result was that this was the second time already he had hurt those he cared for.

He looked toward Aina... or was this the third? The fourth?

The Gathering of Kingdoms, he made Aina fight alone... The Gathering of Minds... he didn't allow her to fight at all.

He held Anastasia's little body tighter, stroking her hair gently as his eyes flashed with a cold light.

There was another path. If he changed himself once, he could do it again.

He wouldn't put those he cared about through this again.

Chapter 2689: No Flavor

"Ancestor," Verma spoke after they left the range of Owlán territory, a hint of excitement in her voice. Compared to her usual gentle demeanor, she seemed to hardly be able to contain herself at the moment, as though she might burst out at the seams any second now.

The elder Celestial Ember chuckled. "Calm your heart, young one. We have yet to benefit as much as you might presume."

Verma's gaze dimmed somewhat when she heard this. But soon, the warmth of her Ancestor's wings made her smile bloom once again. What was there to fear?

Her Ancestor was chuckling, so the situation couldn't be bad. Since when did the Beast Empire fear hard work? If that was all it took, soon enough they would rise again.

"What do you need me to do, Ancestor?" She asked.

"You've already done more than enough, little Verma. It's time we old bones carry some of the burden."

"Can I know what our plans are?"

The Ancestor Celestial Ember fell into silence, each flap of her wings taking her across several bubble worlds. Just the shadow of her form in the skies was enough to paint the tales of countless legends for years to come. The imprint of what seemed like the feats of a god were difficult to erase from the hearts of the masses that witnessed them.

Verma lowered her head. "I'm sorry, Ancestor. I've overstepped my bounds."

The Ancestor Celestial Ember chuckled. "It's good to be eager, but trying to bite off more than you can chew will only harm you. Even so, you've done a great service for our Beast Empires this time, and soon enough, you will have a seat beside me.

"What I can tell you is that even if we gain nothing from this Life Tablet, it will be of great use to us.

"The Demi-Gods and Mortals have long since forgotten the power the Gods of Creation wielded. They were the mighty harbingers of Beast Empire's pride. We, as their descendants, have yet to become worthy to understand the full scope of their being.

"All we can do is take the steps to one day return as their descendants to our destined glory."

Verma listened in silence, her gaze glowing. The gentle flaps of her Ancestor's wings that could take them across worlds was nothing more than a soothing warm breeze across her feathers.

"In that case, Ancestor... Does this mean we will be using the Owlans?"

The Ancestor Celestial Ember chuckled. "Little Verma, you are, indeed, a sharp one. Are you sad?"

Verma's eyes dimmed a bit. "... Celestia is my best friend..." she spoke softly, almost worried that her Ancestor would hear her.

A subtle stroke of ember caressed the junior Celestial Ember's head.

"Indeed, in this world it is hard to find such a friend. These coming events might very well put you on opposing sides of this coming conflict, and it will strain your relationship or maybe outright destroy it. However, in this world, there is no such thing as objective right or objective wrong, everyone carries their own scales and weights.

"If she no longer wants to be a friend of yours after these matters, then you will have to make a choice between your family or your friendship."

Verma's beak parted slightly, a gloom hanging around her for a moment.

Her friend? Or her family? Wasn't the answer obvious? How could she ever choose her friend?

"Will we win, Ancestor?"

The Ancestor's voice echoed across the skies, causing mountains of several worlds to tremble and shatter.

"The Beast Empire will rise again!"

Her voice dripped with confidence.

A familiar Variant Invalid sat on a pile of corpses. His Samoan-like tattoos flashed with red, his belly rippling as he bit into a beast leg over two meters in length.

Despite the fact he was eating beast-kind, those around him didn't dare to say a word.

In these last few days, this man had been completely insatiable, wanting to devour any and everything. He couldn't seem to stand any food he ate, and yet he wanted more nonetheless.

As expected, he finished off the beast leg and then his face twisted in disgust. He thrust two fingers down his throat and threw up the food he had just eaten before tossing the bone to the side and picking up another barely half-cooked leg of meat.

Everyone knew why he was acting like this. He really wanted the woman attached to the rest of that leg he had found. After eating that leg, nothing else could seem to soothe his appetite.

He kept killing one beast after another, eating up their legs in hope for the same delicious taste, but nothing could measure up.

"Bring me humans!" He barked. "It's not tender enough! Not flavorful enough! None of you beasts are enough!"

His roar was so powerful that a cyclone formed high in the skies above, his opaque eyeballs reflecting with a light of savagery and indecency.

The tiger beasts looked toward one another, their hearts trembling. There was only one human bubble left, and they had no idea where it was. And humans that could survive, even as slaves, in other worlds were both incredibly powerful, and would also have... unique statuses.

Trying to hunt down humans for this... creature to eat would be like antagonizing the other Mortal Races a step far too early.

Even so, they had to do it or else they would suffer his wrath...

Or so they thought before a message suddenly descended.

"Hm?" The Variant Invalid frowned. "Fuck!"

He stood and kicked away the pile of grotesque corpses and vomit before standing and suddenly vanishing.

The moment his oppressive aura vanished, the tigers collapsed, gasping for breath. In that moment, they had completely forgotten about the rage they felt toward the death of one of their own. All they cared about was the fact that the menace had finally disappeared.

The Variant Invalid flashed, crossing several worlds in a blur.

It was a journey that took over a day...

And when everything sharpened once more, he stood in a world of Demi-God Beasts

Chapter 2690: Beast Empire

"Apex, you're finally here," the gentle voice of the Celestial Ember Ancestor echoed before she frowned. "I can smell beast blood on you."

"And what of it, old hag?"

BANG!

Apex was sent flying so fast that the entire front layer of his skin was burnt off from the initial impact, while the back was torn away by the sheer flight speed of his backward ascent.

BOOM!

He collided in a mountain range that quickly erupted into a pillar of flames.

The gentle Celestial Ember Ancestor rose to her full height, her wings opening up wide and flapping with a world-ending majesty. Embers in the shape of feathers descended from the skies in a delicate rain, and yet whenever they touched an object, whether organic or inorganic, they would erupt into a rain of undeniable flames.

"Calm your fury, Nova," a voice that was just as gentle as the Ancestor Celestial Ember's own echoed, but this time it came from a creature that was somehow even more majestic. Despite this, from its voice, it was also clear that it was a male.

If Leonel was present, the first thought that would roar to the forefront of his mind was: Dragon. But the more you looked, the more... different the creature seemed.

It did have four limbs, it did have a pair of wings that could blot out the skies, and when it hummed the world seemed to listen to it as though it was truly speaking in the mythology's strongest magic... Dragon Tongue.

However, this was where the comparisons seemed to end.

Rather than scales, this creature seemed to have a leathery, white hide. Beneath the sunlight, it would shimmer with subtle hues of reflective blues and reds that could be mistaken for violets. If the sun lit it just right, the ridges and crevices of the tough hide would separate into portions that looked like crystal lamented scales...

But scales they were not.

Upon the head of the creature, there were a set of nine horns, two of which majestically curled into the skies while the others just acted as accessories to their dominance. And yet, upon the head of any other creature, the remaining sixteen horns would have a place in their own mythology.

The chin of the beast was mighty, and upon it a flowing white beard hung, accentuating its age. But those reflective blue eyes, that seemed to hold an exploding nebula within, showed that in exchange for time's coil, there was endless wisdom to be garnered.

This beast was an Ancestor of the Celestial Storm race, a monster incarnate despite his gentle gaze. A single breath of his could bring the end of a world.

This Ancestor in particular was known as Astral Winds.

As he spoke to calm Nova down, he cast a glance toward another of their companions, a mighty tiger, a member of the White Spectral Tiger Race... not one of their descendants, but a true Demi-God of their Bloodline.

The fury in the Ancestor White Spectral Tiger was far greater than even Nova's own. Which of them couldn't sense that it was the descendants of their race that the so-called "Apex" had been feasting on? Had Nova not acted first, Nebulafrost would have outright killed him, and right now...

That wasn't something any of them could afford to do.

When they had sent Apex down to the Mortal Races, they had known that there was a high chance of this happening. That was why they did it in the first place, it was easier to swallow the sacrifice if it was done to lesser beasts...

But that didn't mean that they liked it.

Even so, Astral Winds was very thankful to Nova for her quick thinking. If not for her, they might have gone down a road of no return and all of this would have been for naught.

Apex climbed out of the pillar of fire. Walking back toward them, laughing into the skies, he truly looked no different from a zombie.

Charred flesh hung from his bones, what skin was left flapping in the wind as though a piece of fabric rather than a person's flesh. His bone was clearly visible in most places, his organs half hanging out, half functioning normally.

Even so, he walked as though nothing had happened, still laughing into the skies. And the worst part of it all was that with every step he took, illusory crimson tattoos that hung

around him began to converge one after another, healing him so quickly that it almost looked like time was reversing.

By the time he stood beneath the four hulking beasts, he was back to normal as though nothing at all had happened, his laughter still echoing.

Of course, there was a fourth beast among them, the final pillar of the so-called Beast Empire... or so it seemed.

However, this fourth beast was hard to call a beast at all. It wasn't in the shape of any known creature, but it was rather a mountain. This wasn't a description of its size or anything else but its true appearance.

Its head was unseen, the mountain hiding the scope of the four, leathery legs that hung beneath it. It was a creature that was more a force of nature than a living being itself.

It had yet to speak a single word, but if one paid close attention, it would be possible to see that it didn't chill beneath Astral Wind's words, nor did its surroundings heat up beneath Nova's rampage. In fact, the space around it didn't even tremble beneath Nebulafrost's whimpering and whining space either.

This was a creature that seemed capable of stabilizing Existence itself, a mighty beast that withstood the test of time and despite Astral Wind's wisdom, seemed to outshine him in that facet as well...

They were known as the Celestial Terra Race... but that was only a name they had taken up recently due to unknown reasons.

Once, in a lofty past long since gone...

They were known as the Primordial Terrors.

Chapter 2691: No.

Even with the weight of four consciousnesses far beyond his own bearing down on him, Apex didn't seem to care in the slightest. As for the pain? He relished in it. It fueled something deep within him, likely stoking from the Barbarian Race he was meant to be born into.

But as with all things, Existence had forsaken him and he had ended up as a Variant Invalid instead. As far as he was concerned, there was no pain greater than that. What could these mere beasts do to him?

"Why have you summoned me here, hag?"

"You are to bring the news back," Nova said without much emotion and hardly any gentleness. "We have managed to procure the Life Tablet."

"Life Tablet?" Apex raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Isn't that thing in the hands of a human brat?"

"No longer," Nova replied shortly, not planning to give any further explanation.

"Then give it to me. I will take it to my master."

"No," Nova replied just as evenly.

She had no obligation to do such a thing. They weren't here in a subservient position. If so, what would be the point in everything they were doing? What purpose would all of this serve?

Apex laughed. "Stingy old hag. How absolutely ridiculous. I don't see the point in all of this posturing. You need us, not the other way around."

BOOM!

A mighty tempest of space descended from the skies and Apex was forced to his knees with such momentum that his knees dislocated, his upper legs driving into the ground and shearing away from the muscle and skin that connected them to his lower legs.

It was a truly ghastly sight, and even Nova and Astral Winds were frowning. However, they said nothing. It was hard to expect Apex to keep getting away with snubbing their noses in his careless disrespect. He spoke as though he was his master, but he wasn't. Ultimately, he was just a junior, an ant in their eyes.

Unfortunately, no matter how they punished him so, they didn't dare to kill him, not for fear of his master, but for fear of the end of their cooperation. Until it stopped benefiting them, they couldn't allow this to happen.

"Oof," Apex pulled his legs out one by one, stumbling backward and laying flat on his back. A bloody grin spread across his face as he looked up. Whether he was on his feet or not, it didn't make much of a difference with how absolutely enormous these creatures were. "So fiery today, are we? I would have thought that aged old bones like you lot would have gotten your tempers sorted out by now. At least let me see the thing."

Nova's beak parted as though she was about to refute again, but when she thought about it, she realized that she should probably show everyone it. It wasn't as though it could be taken away by the likes of Apex.

Seeing the expectant glances of the others, she nodded and was about to take it out when she froze.

"Hm?"

"What's wrong, Nova?" Astral Winds asked.

"... The Life Tablet, it isn't here."

Apex erupted with laughter as though he was having the time of his life, but the old beasts ignored him.

They obviously wouldn't think that Nova had created such a fuss just to dupe them. Not only did they trust her implicitly, but what would she have gained bringing them out here just to say she didn't have it? Plus, for them, the journey was barely a matter of a few strides. What could she gain by making them waste a few minutes? Even wasting several years wasn't a big deal to them.

Of course, there was the idea of forming an ambush, but it wouldn't be a very good ambush if she alerted them to her lie so early on. And, once again, they all trusted her.

"What could have happened?" Nebulafrost asked.

"... It could only be the boy," Nova said softly. "He accepted the matter too easily given his temper. It seemed he had plans of his own... But logically speaking, even if he had an ability to call the tablet back, it shouldn't have been able to escape my senses. The Life Tablet has been captured many times before by creatures far inferior to myself..."

Nova's eyes suddenly lit with understanding. Then, she actually chuckled.

"The brat is clever... It must be related to the Segmented Cube. It seems he also made off with my treasures as well, cheeky little bastard..."

The others were shocked hearing Nova curse like this, it wasn't something she ever did. But even so, it didn't seem like she was mad.

"Old Terror," Nova asked softly, looking toward the Celestial Terra Ancestor. "This won't change anything, will it?"

"No."

The voice was as old as time itself. When he spoke, rustling leaves fell to silence and loose rocks and boulders raised up from the ground. When his voice finally stopped echoing, the rocks and boulders fell, causing avalanches all around the realm.

Nova nodded, looking toward the others.

"The only hole to our plan will be if the boy exposes the fact he has taken the Life Tablet back. It will be best to try and kill to silence him, but he has also proven that he knows how to bide his time when it is necessary.

"In my opinion, his death is a lower priority matter, though something that is most definitely on the list just for the sake of tying up loose ends.

"Right now, though, our main focus should be forcing the Owlans into the light while we grapple from the shadows. While they are basking in all the pressure, we will take the reins and ascend to Godhood once more in a single bound.

"The question is, my brothers... are you prepared?"

Roars filled the skies.

"Go, boy. Report this matter to your master."

Nova swiped a wing and Apex was blown thousands of kilometers away.

...

In the Segmented Cube, Leonel sat in silence, a ticker of time continuously echoing in his mind.

Chapter 2692: Never Again

"It's not your fault, you know," Aina's voice suddenly called out as she plopped by Leonel's side. She leaned her cheek against his shoulder with a smile, pulling his hand into a sandwich between her palms.

She could feel Leonel's thoughts more clearly now than ever before. She knew that he was wrestling with himself, a battle between the man he naturally was and the man he wanted to be.

She could still remember that scowl of rage Leonel had on his face when he sent her to deliver that letter back in the Three Finger Cult. She could feel that he was suppressing what he wanted to do with what he thought the smartest choice was.

When there were no other variables, Leonel felt that he could take all the risks in the world and still come out on top. But when it was a matter of the safety of everyone around him...

He had no ability to guarantee that.

If he were to describe it cruelly, there were added variables that he couldn't account for. Trying to make sure that everything was dialed in on his part was difficult enough without also having to deal with an array of people that wouldn't act predictably.

That was how Leonel had always seen it. Or, rather, it was the way he had tried to pretend as though he didn't see it, while knowing full well that this was how his mind worked.

It seemed though... that even now his future self, though having disappeared, was still influencing him.

Even before he changed the path of his Dream Force, the back of his mind was still churning with ways of changing himself, of destroying what seemed to be an inevitable future and swapping it for something better.

What he had done to Aina had felt like that first step. It made him greatly uncomfortable, and it also struck right at his pride, but he still forced himself to do it nonetheless.

And now there was the matter with Anastasia... but that was still just one part of it all.

Losing on purpose? Making his wife act like an incompetent fool before so many people? Opening her up to ridicule and debasement at the hands of a conniving bastard like Somnus?

These were all things that filled him with more rage than he knew what to do with, things that made him want to snap the current foundation of his Sovereignty and go back to what felt good, what could soothe his ego and temper his fury.

Each one of these things was another layer of discomfort, and Anastasia's tears seemed to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

His wife would never complain. She never cared about the opinions of others. The only reason she had ever hidden her face to begin with in the Royal Blue Academy was to lie low and avoid trouble. That was only made obvious by the fact that not only did she not choose to use her original face, but she also got rid of it soon after the Metamorphosis began.

The only person's opinion she cared about now was her husband's. Even if the world was collapsing around them, so long as the two of them were happy, she would be content. She didn't care about anything else.

It was only when the opinions of others began to encroach on her husband did she react like a cat whose tail had been stomped.

When those people talked about her like she was a flower in a vase, that the only reason she might be worthy of her husband was because of her looks, and how they even tried to steal her husband away from her with the use of honeytraps...

That truly filled her with fury.

As for a little embarrassment? Why would she care about that? It hardly moved the scale for her.

Of course, she didn't like being sent to pretend to date another man. She had made as much clear to Leonel. But even then, she had only planned to be "angry" for a small while because she understood the necessity of it all. If not for Anastasia, she would have let it go after a few minutes of coaxing.

But to Leonel, even those few minutes of dislike were too much.

"It is..." Leonel said softly after a long while. "... It is my fault. I'll find another way in the future. The universe has an infinite number of variations and changes. Existence would have whatever number that is multiplied by another infinity for the number of worlds that exist. I don't believe that I can't figure out just one that doesn't require-

"Alright, alright, mister brains," Aina giggled and squeezed his hand between hers more tightly. "We can carry this burden together."

Leonel looked down at Aina. His heart wanted to say yes, but...

No, that wasn't true at all. It was his heart that wanted to say no. He didn't like it. He didn't want to have to share the burden.

Part of it was his ego again, and the other part was not wanting to put them through this.

Wasn't it precisely sharing the burden that had ended up with Anastasia in tears?

Aina smiled. It was a soft smile, one filled with meaning and double understandings.

"Anastasia is just a child, Leonel," she said in a gentle voice. "Although she's lived for much longer than we have, her mental state is still naive and immature. We have to protect her, but that doesn't mean you also have to protect me. We are stronger together."

Leonel fell into silence and Aina smiled a bit bitterly. She knew that her husband could be stubborn... and the problem was that anything she could say, he had probably thought of a million different ways in a few seconds.

But she wanted him to hear her nonetheless.

Eventually, Leonel smiled as well, pulling his wife into an embrace.

"You don't have to worry, I'm not going to do anything stupid. But... I'll also never give those people a chance to ever say anything bad about you again."

Chapter 2693: The Best

Aina blinked in surprise. She didn't expect to suddenly be pulled into Leonel's lap like that. But soon her bitter smile became a genuine one.

"Good. I'm not doing all this training just to get left on the sidelines," she remarked.

Leonel laughed. "Didn't we just beat up a certain foul-mouthed Dream Asura? I bet he's been trying to find a way to escape for ages now. Do you think he's despaired enough yet?"

Aina shook her head, unable to hold back a grin. "So that's why you've just been ignoring him?"

"I doubt a person like that's going to give up so easily. But that's also why it's good that it took us so long to beat him. It was a systematic crushing of his usual value system, one that was anything but a fluke. The only thing that would have been better was if either one of us could defeat him instantly. But that would also require him actually going all out first, something he was clearly not inclined to do."

"By now, though, he should have realized that he's entirely powerless in Anastasia's world. He can't do a thing. Let's go check on the puppet."

Aina squealed a bit as she was swept up into Leonel's arms. In a flash, they appeared by the Dream Asura.

Somnus hung in midair, his body wrists and ankles seemingly tied up by invisible ropes that stretched him out wide.

In this time, he hadn't even been able to move, let alone figure out a path to escape. Seeing the couple appear before him in such ridiculous fashion, he couldn't help but scowl. It felt like they were taunting him.

He sneered. "Oh? The useless Force Pill Crafter can't even walk on her own now?"

Aina blinked before laughing.

"I think at this point we should call this place the Segmented Prison. How many idiots have you trapped in here?"

"Too many by this point," Leonel shook his head. "But at least the others know not to talk. Anastasia, it seems he doesn't need his right arm anymore."

The sound was sickening. Breaking bone and tearing flesh, a rain of blood that splattered against the gorgeous green grass, it all painted a symphony of torture.

As heavily injured as he already was, Somnus couldn't help but let out a low grunt that sounded almost more like a suppressed howl.

Having an arm severed with a blade was one matter, but to feel your flesh slowly give way beneath a greater force... that was a tragedy hard to describe for anyone who had not experienced it personally before.

The fact that it was slow rather than sudden and jarring made the matter only worse as large pieces of his shoulder and even some of his back suffered as well.

In the end, what looked like his entire right side was left in a rain of blood.

The severed flesh landed in Aina's arms as she hopped down from Leonel's embrace.

"What do you think?" Leonel asked.

"It's very high quality, you're right," Aina nodded. "If we keep healing him, we could basically change everyone's constitution. It's just a shame the Barbarian Race man didn't come, or else it would have been more than perfect."

Somnus shivered when he heard these words, understanding some of it, but not daring to be entirely accepting of it.

"And me?"

Aina fell into her thoughts for a moment.

"... Their bodies are peculiar. They're powerful, but they're also interwoven with what looks like Dream Force. Somehow, they've evolved such that they can directly translate mental acuity into physical prowess. The two are linked.

"If I were to use this principle to help you with that Lineage Factor, then we would have to change our approach. Before, we were entirely severing the mental and affinity aspects, but now... it seems that there's actually a way to make use of it. It was just beyond me at the time."

"And the difference now?"

"Impossible to measure," Aina smiled, looking up from the arm to Leonel, "unless I had a brain like yours, that is. But the difference between my original method and using the Dream Asuras as a template is easily at least a thousandfold.

"Going through all those steps was bound to accrue some loss. However, in this way, we can even use your Dream Force affinity to make them stronger than they otherwise would be.

"Well... the easiest way would actually be to," Aina looked at Leonel and shook her head.

She knew how stubborn her husband was. Since he said he would use his own Dream Asura Lineage Factor until the Demoness was dead, he meant it with every fiber of his being, and she didn't blame him.

It wasn't just a matter of pettiness, but also a function of survival as well. Leonel felt that he had broken free of the Demoness, but was anything really so easy? How could he allow a stronger connection for her to take advantage of?

Because she could turn the Lineage Factor on and off as she pleased, Leonel was entirely at her mercy and that was unacceptable.

But now that Aina was speaking about how the Dream Asuras could use Dream Force to strengthen themselves, didn't that also mean that the reverse was possible as well? Especially if it was someone much stronger than you?

It was no wonder the Demoness could turn it on and off as she pleased.

"Alright, let's do that, then."

Aina nodded and closed her eyes for a moment before her aura changed.

At that moment, Somnus experienced something he never thought he would in his life. Aina didn't even seem to be trying, but every stroke was genius, and every set was meticulous.

He was a Force Pill Crafter himself, and seeing this scene, he was completely ashen...

It was only then he realized just how much they had been played.

A useless Force Pill Crafter? What a joke...

Aina was the best Force Pill Crafter he had ever seen in his entire life.

Chapter 2694: [Bonus] Open Up

[Bonus chapter thanks to TheCodedProf :) (1/6)]

Somnus had no words to speak left after the pill was complete. He was certain that if it was brought before the Pillar of Truth, let alone nine runes, it might light up double that, maybe more.

He was just guessing and he had no way of being sure, but what he did know was that Verma was certainly not a match for Aina by any stretch of the imagination.

And to make matters worse than that... she was a Blood Sovereign?!

Somnus seemed to finally understand just how fearsome this couple was, and despite how Leonel acted, he was far more calculating and careful with how he did things than it seemed. Before anyone realized what was happening, they would have already fallen into his trap.

No... hadn't he already fallen?

If it was just one Leonel, it could be ignored. But such a young and powerful Force Pill Crafter, matched with the youth that was already crowned the beast Crafter of their generation...

Would they still dare to say that the Human Race couldn't rise again?

Somnus suddenly began to struggle, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't move.

He sent out signals and flares, but where could any of them go under Anastasia's control? This world was completely isolated, a blank canvas that Leonel could do whatever he pleased with.

Leonel and Aina didn't even look toward the struggling Dream Asura. The pill landed in Leonel's hand and he looked at it for a moment.

"Is this the strongest you can make?" Leonel asked.

Aina smiled. "What? Doubting me? It's not up to the lofty standards of the King?"

Leonel laughed. "Not what I meant. I'm more so referring to the fact this is only one of his arms. What's the pill compared to what you could have done with his whole body?"

"Well, there's some variability... but honestly I didn't actually need his arm. We can use him like a blood farm, it would be much easier to deal with. His flesh is helpful, but only marginally in comparison. It could be made up for with more blood."

"Really?"

Leonel was a bit confused about that. Before, Aina refined entire demons. This felt different from that in an odd sort of way.

"Yes. The secret to the Dream Asuras strength lies in their blood. It's a very clever use of Blood as a vessel.

"If you use our connection to see into my insights on Blood Force, you might be able to understand. Blood Force isn't Life Force itself, and Life Force alone can't be used to do much of anything.

"Under normal circumstances, the Life Force everyone is born with is restricted and can only be used slowly over the course of your life. It can increase when your strength increases or you ingest something special, and it can also decrease for the opposite reasons.

"Blood Force allows you to use Life Force on your own terms. It's the perfect vessel for the latter, and it allows me to use larger amounts of my Life Force any given moment I so please, and it also allows me to add more to my Life Force when I so choose as well.

"The Dream Asuras seem to have a very special Dream Force that is a fusion of Life Force and Dream Force. This allows them to use their Blood Force as a vessel for both.

"This is all to say that their greatest strength is stored within their blood. Their flesh is just a byproduct of that initial process. Without it, their bodies wouldn't be much tougher than humans."

Leonel's eyes lit up with understanding.

It was unlikely that all Dream Asuras could wield or control Blood Force, but their Lineage Factor should give most of them a proxy by which to do so. It was slightly different, but not wholly so in practice-

A flash of lightning shook Leonel's Dreamscape.

'... No...' he thought, his eyes widening.

During the first round of the selections, he and Aina had come across a group of individuals who had their Blood Force completely sapped clean of Life Force.

He hadn't thought about it in a while because he thought he had already found the culprits, that being the demons under the Sun and Moon Demon banner.

But had he?

Leonel's brows furrowed, spinning the pill in his fingers.

Was he being played? But anyone who wanted to do so wouldn't be stupid enough to leave a clue like that behind? Or was it that they assumed he would make the wrong assumption about what was going on? After all, he had already forgotten it for a long while now...

"Alright, I will take this for now. I know that you've wanted to break into the Eighth Dimension for a while now. We should have all the materials we need for everything here, so take whatever you need."

Aina nodded. They had already done all of the simulations, and she had a clear path ahead.

Soon, it was just Leonel and Somnus left, the latter of which had seemed to have lost all light of hope.

Leonel yawned. "There's really no need to pretend to be so distraught. Even if I lowered my guard to the abyss of hell, there'd still be no way for you to get out of here.

"Well, actually. I can think of a few ways. It's just that I doubt you could, and even if you by some miracle did, you could never execute them."

Leonel smiled and Somnus felt a shiver down his spine that was something other than pain for the first time in a long while.

If Leonel just said there was no way, he wouldn't believe him for a moment. But this...

"Now, shall we rob you thoroughly?" Leonel grinned.

"Anastasia, open up the world he's carrying around with him for me please."

At that moment, a tear in space took shape. Then, one after another, precious and not so precious items began to fall out.

Chapter 2695: [Bonus]

[Bonus chapter thanks to TheCodedProf :) (2/6)]

Much of it was expected.

In the not so precious pile, there were large amounts of clothing... both male and female. Leonel didn't really have to think very hard for why that might be. At least, that was until he found mounds of makeup as well.

Leonel chuckled, picking them up. "I didn't expect that the mighty Dream Asura would be fond of cosplay and cross-dressing."

He gave Somnus an amused look, but the latter didn't seem embarrassed, nor did Leonel plan to care enough to tease him for it either.

If he was being more serious, it was less likely that Somnus liked to cross-dress, and more likely that he sometimes found pretending to be a woman to be more useful than being a man.

That idea, though, was even more amusing to Leonel. That was because rather than just cross-dressing, he was probably out there seducing people and...

Leonel picked up a pair of fake breasts and almost burst into a fit of laughter.

"Hey, hey. These almost feel like the real deal."

Leonel squeezed and pressed a bit. At first, he found it funny, but quickly he found it to be very impressive.

The only reason he could tell that these were fake was because he was exceptionally in tune with his own senses. If he was a normal mortal, then the difference would have been far too subtle for him to even tell. He could imagine this being the greatest invention for the mind of a teenage boy and lonely male. Back on Earth, he would have been made a billionaire overnight if he invented this thing.

"... You can't be serious..."

Leonel reached over and picked up a tube. Well, he was going to pick it up, then smartly chose to use his Earth Force to control the metal casing it was in.

This time, there was a faint blush on Somnus' face, but even Leonel had a hard time picking it up, especially through all the blood.

"You know what," Leonel let them drop to the ground and began to clap, "I respect it. Going so far for your craft, I'm sure you've made a killing. I wonder, how many people, businesses and worlds have you pulled into your grasp with these tactics? This will be very useful..."

Leonel fell into thought for a moment. He had only planned to casually go through the less than precious things, but now he started going through them more seriously.

As he did so, he was quickly compiling a rolodex of information. Then, he formed a Dreamscape just for Somnus alone.

"...Three... five... six... seven worlds, you should have pretty firm control over that many. Impressive. Unfortunately, they're all Mortal Worlds."

Somnus' gaze flashed with a hint of terror. He learned all of that just by going through his costumes and trinkets? What kind of monster was he?

He wasn't even sure what kind of mental capacity that would take, and one of his own strongest Forces was Dream Force!

"You don't keep a record, so I assume all the information's in your head, right?" Leonel smiled. "If you cooperate, I might be willing to let you go in the future."

"... Do you take me... for a fool?"

Leonel chuckled. "Why wouldn't I let you go, we're family after all, didn't you know?"

Somnus' eyes opened wide, and as though a spark of understanding had taken shape in his mind, almost like he had his own Dreamscape, he was shaken to his core.

Could it be the reason he had sensed such a large influence of the Ancestor was because... Leonel was her descendent?!

Somnus' breathing became hurried, his heart quivering wildly.

Wasn't Leonel a Human? Why couldn't he sense any Dream Asura scent coming from him?

"Look at your mind go, you're probably trying to figure a lot of stuff out at once, huh? Well, you don't need to know."

Somnus' eyes dimmed.

He didn't understand why Leonel told him in the first place. Everything he came to know was a potential trouble point.

Even if this world was isolated, there was no way it was perfectly isolated. Someone as powerful as their Ancestor, for example, even if she couldn't enter without Anastasia's permission, would definitely still be able to pry into Somnus' mind if she was still so inclined.

Aside from the fact that it wasn't even certain if Anastasia could stop a deity on the level of the Demoness from entering in the first place, as a Dream Force expert, Leonel should be aware of this. So why was he allowing it?

Leonel chuckled.

The reason he wasn't worrying about it was because who ever said his plans stopped with the Owlans and those beasts? That woman liked to play games, right? Then they would play games.

But also, in such a frayed state of mind... how could Somnus protect his own?

Almost instantly, his mind was like an open book to Leonel, spilling faint connections and intricate lines between matters that Leonel should have known nothing about.

"You lied to me!" Somnus roared, realizing what happened immediately.

"If you're a fool, why blame me? You were enjoying playing tricks and scheming against me, weren't you? Did you get some great sort of satisfaction out of that? Well I'm going to make sure to play you to death. Whether in body or in soul, you'll not have a day of peace for as long as I don't will it."

Somnus seemed to finally collapse, blood leaking from wounds he couldn't even register as his head fell limply, his gaze dim.

He didn't have the will to fight anymore.

Leonel sneered.

Now, if anyone looked into Somnus' mind, they would think that Leonel had lied just now because that was what Somnus believed.

Looking into another person's mind was a double-edged sword. It wasn't always clear and defined what they were thinking, and if they believed something that was wrong, it could easily come off as fact in the eyes of an observer.

And that was perfect for Leonel's needs.

'Now, let's see what other useful stuff you have on you...'

Chapter 2696: [Bonus] Asura Force

[Bonus chapter thanks to TheCodedProf :) (3/6)]

Leonel had asked for a large list of things from the Celestial Embers, so in terms of raw resources, he wasn't actually looking forward to what Somnus had all that much. Instead, he was looking for things that might be unique or beyond his expectations. He also didn't expect a single person to be carrying around such a large amount of raw resources to begin with.

But he was actually pleasantly surprised. Somnus had clearly been lying. Not only had he had enough to match far more than what was on Leonel's list, he was wealthier than what the Celestial Embers had provided.

Leonel chuckled. 'I guess this man was hiding himself a bit too.'

The issue was that Somnus' wealth wasn't in raw resources. Well, they were, just not in the normal sense. It was just that there were piles and piles of Ninth Dimensional Urbe Ore. The amount of wealth was obscene and it made Leonel grin ear to ear.

He had gotten a total of three Demi-God level Ninth Dimensional Urbe Ore mines from the Celestial Embers, but if he could save those and use them to start up a whole network of mines under Anastasia's supervision, how much more valuable would they be? Then, he could use Somnus' wealth to temper his body instead.

"Anastasia, please help me dump these in the ocean, and let me know when they're perfectly purified."

The large piles of Urbe Ore vanished.

The next thing Leonel found was actually a whole collection of World Spirits. They were separated into orbs, each one with a different sort of affinity, clearly crafted from worlds that had unique environments.

'There's something interesting about this... When I asked for a Demi-God World Spirit, I thought I was shooting for the stars, but not only did Talon produce one, Verma produced one, and even this Somnus produced one...

'There's clearly something going on here for all these top echelon people to have World Spirits at their disposal.'

The array of World Spirits were mostly Mortal. However, there were two of the Demi-God variety, one of which had a strong water affinity and the other of which seemed to be streaking with bolts of lightning.

"Hey, I know you're focused right now, but do you think you'd have any use for a World Spirit?"

Leonel talked as though he was chatting to the air itself, but he knew his voice would reach Aina thanks to Anastasia.

"A World Spirit... I don't know, I would have to see and observe it."

Leonel nodded. That was, indeed, how Aina's ability worked. Usually, she wouldn't know exactly what to do and would have a feeling she would have to parse apart herself.

"Here," Leonel said, tossing out all the World Spirits toward her, including the Mortal ones. Maybe she could find something of use through them. After all, their simulations didn't account for World Spirits.

While he let Aina figure that out, he picked up the last of what was left.

'Oh?'

They were polished gems, and when Leonel gently pulled his fingers across their surface, he realized something curious.

'These are similar to the Dimensional Cleanse Trial Zone key... there's information hidden within them, and you have to puzzle them apart and use your Dream Force to realign and read them... Easy enough.'

Somnus' dim eyes looked up for a moment when he saw this. He shook his head and gave up. He had given up on hoping Leonel wasn't smart enough to do things, and as expected, just moments later, he had already broken through.

It was a shame, though... because he had left the family expecting to potentially be expelled, he had not only brought all his wealth with him, but he had also exchanged all his accumulated contribution points for a few things that he had been wanting to learn for a long while.

Some of them were just methods and tidbits of information. But another portion were techniques it had taken him years to finally trade for.

And now, Leonel would be the one benefiting from them. It was enough to make a man choke to death from anger.

'Hm?' Leonel's brows shot up. '[Spirit Refinement Sutra]... Interesting...'

It seemed that Aina was right about the unique Dream Force of Dream Asuras. Known as Asura Force, it was a combination of Life and Dream Force, connecting the two together.

What was interesting about the Force, to Leonel at least, was that it seemed to be a unique tether between the body and soul, almost in a very human-like way, but not quite because the souls of Dream Asuras were very much separate from their bodies.

Leonel couldn't help but wonder... if it was because of these similarities that the Demoness had chosen to have children with his grandfather. Maybe she was looking to capitalize on potential synergistic effects...

Regardless, this method of the Dream Asuras was bone chillingly similar to his Divine Armor and Metal Body... except they used World Spirits and Spirits instead.

Their Asura Force was capable of devouring World Spirits and taking on their characteristics for themselves. Well, in theory.

The trouble was that it was very difficult to get a 100% success rate, and unlike with Ores that had many of a single kind, World Spirits were extremely unique in their variability.

Due to this, Dream Asuras often spent most of their time trying to collect an array of World Spirits that would perfectly suit them. In the end, this Sutra usually wasn't even used until they reached the Ninth Dimension.

It could be said that all of these nest eggs were just Somnus' attempt at gearing up for his inevitable breakthrough in the distant future.

"I see... so I was right, you did run away from your Clan..."

Leonel had been fairly certain, but only now did he fully confirm it. It didn't make sense for Somnus to have a technique he couldn't use for a long while others.

'Now, what else is here...'

Chapter 2697: [Bonus] Spirit and World Spirit

[Bonus chapter thanks to TheCodedProf :) (4/6)]

They're actually all methods to use World Spirits? Leonel was taken aback. He had expected something different, and maybe he could find something like [Domain], [Universe] or [Finality] that could take his combat prowess to another level. But... it was outside his expectations that it would all be like this.

There was one method that taught of how to subdue World Spirits, there was another that taught of how to use a World Spirit as a sacrifice to save your life in a pinch, there was another that taught of how to use a World Spirit under your control to corrupt another...

The methods seemed endless, and some of them read more like scientific literature and theory than actual applicable methods.

And yet, Leonel was completely enraptured. For the first time, he forgot about the ticking timer in his head and engrossed himself in reading.

The more he did so, the more he felt that he wasn't just reading about methods to help himself, but more importantly... Anastasia.

There was too little he grasped about World Spirits and their usage.

It seemed that World Spirits took much longer to mature than other living creatures, and as a result, they were probably both some of the most dangerous and also most susceptible creatures in existence.

But what was more interesting than that was the fact that Spirits like Little Tolly and others were more interconnected with World Spirits than Leonel had previously come to understand. In fact, it could even be right to go as far as to say that they were the same Race.

They shared the name Spirit, but Leonel had never really thought much about it before because it felt irrelevant. The word Spirit could evoke so many things...

But now that he thought about it, even across languages, the word was the exact same. It made sense to dismiss it in English, but when every other culture was likewise the same...

'I neglected something so obvious... Okay, we're making a change. I need to cross reference my intelligence not just in English like I've been doing, but also in other languages. I have a feeling that'll allow me far more breakthroughs as well...'

Leonel made a mental note of it and slotted it into the back of his mind. He didn't create a new ability, but rather evolved and mutated Dreamscape into something new.

Then, he went back to work, and almost instantly, a raging spark of lightning shot through his mind.

'This...'

Leonel trembled a bit before exhaling out a slow breath.

The thought he had had just now was absolutely maddening, but even when he scrutinized it, turned it upside down and right side up, spinning it left and right, he couldn't find any flaws in it...

Spirits were to World Spirits...

What Variant Invalids were to the Races of Existence.

The implications hit Leonel like a speeding truck and he, rightfully, felt that it was ridiculous. But when he thought of Tolliver's propensity to devour, its insatiable appetite, how it was like a World Spirit, but not quite...

It all fell into place one after another and he was somewhat shocked into silence.

The question was, though... what could he do with this information?

He knew this was a big deal, huge, even. Piecing these things together from the bits and pieces of fragmented thoughts and ideas in these research papers, he knew that he had stumbled onto something huge.

But he couldn't quite make the final leap just yet. Even his mind was at a loss for what to do.

'Unless...'

Variant Invalids really want to consume humans. Or in this case, any Race that's of their kind. Could it be that swallowing World Spirits was a faster path toward Tolliver's improvement?

But that was honestly just a surface level thought, Leonel had already realized it ages ago. What was more interesting was what that meant for him and his Divine Armor, and on a deeper level than even that, his connection with Little Tolly and the beast that the little guy had devoured the potential of...

By now, Leonel had gathered more than enough information to be better than 70% sure that the beast hidden in the Dimensional Cleanse Trial World's Vital Star was the legendary Infinity Beast... the God Beast of Creation.

How his future self got his hands on a living member of their species, he had no idea, and he was even less inclined to think about what that might mean.

But what was certain was that these combinations of factors would weigh extremely heavy when the time came to take advantage of them.

After some thought, he took out the World Spirits in the Celestial Ember Race's rings.

He laughed when he noticed that there was a protection on it. It seems that they had been more cautious than he gave them credit for...

Too bad it was useless.

With Anastasia's help and his guidance, he shattered it as though it wasn't even there and took out a World Spirit bathed in flames.

'Indeed...' Leonel thought. '... I've yet to run into anyone else who uses Scarlet Star Force... but the Celestial Embers come frighteningly close... The Emberhearts... the Celestial Embers... Emberheart Force... And this World Spirit...'

Leonel smiled.

If feeding a Spirit a World Spirit would automatically grant it its abilities, everyone would have already figured this out long ago. At best, some people probably knew the connection, but the next step was elusive. The end result was using World Spirits as a power up, but nothing more.

Those people, though... didn't have an Infinity Metal Spirit at their beck and call.

Who needed a Minerva Spirit when you had a God Beast of Creation?

Tolliver swallowed the Emberheart World Spirit and roared into the skies.

Chapter 2698: [Bonus] Sigh

[Bonus chapter thanks to TheCodedProf :) (5/6)]

Tolliver's silver exterior, dancing with golden runes, quickly became lit ablaze as though it had been set on fire.

Leonel could sense the struggle of the World Spirit beneath it and he wondered if he had bitten off more than he could chew.

World Spirits didn't have Dimensional grades like humans or beasts did, but that was because they were technically all at that Ninth Dimension. They were birthed at the peak potential of the world they governed.

In this sort of situation, it was like Tolliver was trying to swallow a Ninth Dimensional Demi-God, and that sort of task spoke for itself.

Leonel believed that Tolliver's potential would win out, which was why he chose to take the risk anyway. But that didn't stop him from worrying.

Luckily... it didn't seem that Tolliver would leave him to worry for long.

Very quickly, the struggles of the World Spirit became faint whispers and eventually, all that was left was the kernel of its being, one that was quickly swallowed up and devoured by Tolliver whole.

Leonel grasped out with a hand and the enormous tsunami of molten metal that Little Tolly had become was soon restricted into an arm sleeve attached to his skin once more.

Leonel sucked in a cold breath, feeling a hint of stinging pain.

Tolliver had finally broken into the Seventh Dimension and there were a great number of changes that had just taken place. The golden runes on its silver body had gained tinges of red, and from time to time, a strong pulse would come from his arm as though Tolliver was trying to swallow him whole.

It was quite painful if Leonel was honest with himself. It felt like he had gone right back to square one in terms of how difficult it was to stop the little Metal Spirit from eating him alive.

Luckily... Leonel's Fire Force affinity was off the charts and nigh impossible to measure. Slowly, he got the hang of it, and once he did, that stinging pain vanished.

The more difficult matter, at least from an outsider's perspective, was how this change would affect his Crafting.

Leonel had trained all this time with a Metal Spirit. Obviously, the methods and paths of a Spirit with Fire attributes would be much different than what he had come to be used to.

However, Leonel didn't feel that this was actually much of a problem at all.

Setting aside the fact his ability to control flames was far greater than his ability to control Earth Force to begin with, his Crafting had already surpassed the usual strict guidelines. If anything, the added flexibility of being able to use flames wouldn't only help him, and it made him wonder...

What other elements might be useful for Crafting?

Thousands of wild ideas came to mind in an instant, but he forced himself to calm down. Even if he could think of many ways a Wind Attribute might benefit a very specific kind of Craft, what good would it do him if he couldn't control it properly?

There was also the fact that Tolliver was now part of his armor to consider as well. The affinities that Tolliver gained would affect him implicitly. He couldn't do anything too wild that would ruin his path.

However... sticking with things that were on his path was a different matter entirely.

A thought flashed in Leonel's mind.

'All those years ago, when I first stepped onto Planet Luxnix, I tried to create weapons that utilized my Destruction Sovereignty, mostly to help Blackstar. I somewhat succeeded, but mostly failed... but with this...'

He had been thinking too simply before. If World Spirits were capable of being used like this, why limit himself to simple concepts like Earth or Fire? Why not try to combine them into something more unique? Something of a higher tier? Something that embodied a Sovereignty?

'Interesting idea... but I can't succeed with just the World Spirits I have on hand, and for now, it's just a working theory. I'll keep this slotted in the back of my mind for now...'

Leonel stood, his mind racing.

'One of the seven worlds that Somnus has sunk his claws into has a Dream Pavilion... this could be useful...'

A timer suddenly went off in Leonel's head again. Then, he smiled. 'Excellent...'

He looked down at the pill in his hands. If he took this, he'd be able to veer his Northern Star Lineage Factor down a new path and truly be able to take advantage of both his mind and body.

When the day came that he crushed the Demoness and unleashed his Dream Asura Lineage Factor in full force, the foundation that this laid would allow him to shoot ahead by leaps and bounds.

'All of my Forces are at least in the Half-Step Life State... I've comprehended the Black Constellation Realm... I've comprehended Dream Sovereignty... I have a World Spirit of a Demi-God World to swallow now... and I've formed a Natural Force Art under my own strength...'

'The only thing I have yet to do is comprehend Black True Destruction Sovereignty... Once I do that, I will be able to enter the Fifth Dimension...'

'But before that... shouldn't I complete the Fourth Dimension first?'

Leonel's lip curled into a smile.

All this time, he had been in the 1st Tier of the Fourth Dimension. Since he was going to wreak some havoc soon, why not eke out a little bit more of his potential?

It would be a shame if he couldn't see the faces of the Owlans as their world crumbled down around them.

...

El'Rion appeared in a vast void, then stepped out and entered an Inbetween World. When he appeared, nothing seemed to be there... everything left would be eaten away by the Anarchic Force, it was truly the best place to kill someone.

And yet, when he reached out a hand, he still managed to pick out a piece of mangled flesh.

Looking at it, he sighed.

Chapter 2699: [Bonus] Olden Days

[Bonus chapter thanks to TheCodedProf :) (6/6)]

By now, El'Rion was quite aware that he had been used. Well... used was either a term that either far too well-meaning, or far too severe depending on how you looked at it. On a spectrum, it was either Leonel had led him by the nose like a bumbling fool, or he had given him an opportunity.

There was no doubt that this mess could only be catalyzed by Leonel because of the Plutos involvement. If not for this, the Gods wouldn't give a damn.

As much disdain as other Mortal Races had for humans, Demi-Gods held even more so toward the Mortal Races, and the Gods above them disdained their ilk even more.

This was the way of the world, and they couldn't be bothered to care about ants.

The Pluto Race, however... That was a different matter entirely.

The troubling matter was that El'Rion had quite literally just told Leonel that the Plutos couldn't afford to get thrust into such a storm... but he also couldn't be mad either, because whatever ire their enemies brought down upon this world would be entirely concentrated on these lesser Races. If anything, they would divert their attention away from the real plans of the Pluto.

And that was why it was so bitter sweet. On the one hand, Leonel was helping him. And on the other, he was manipulating him.

At that moment, El'Rion stood at a crossroads that most of Leonel's brothers had stood on in the past.

Down one path, there was acceptance that Leonel did things differently than others did, and that if you were going to be close to him, it was likely that more than once in your life, you would find yourself being manipulated by him. Of course, it would be to your benefit, but it would be a form of manipulation nonetheless.

And on the other path... there was the choice to sever relationships with him entirely.

Those that could even realize they were standing at such a fork were few and far between. To even notice that you were being manipulated to begin was a huge matter. But when you did...

El'Rion held the piece of flesh in his hands for a moment before tossing it aside.

He was a Pluto.

Minerva sat on her throne, feeling agitated. More than two days had passed now, and there was still no sign of Leonel anywhere. It was suffocating.

She had even led the search personally, but her interference changed nothing at all.

To make matters worse, she had been getting harassed by her elders and Ancestors about the ongoings of this matter.

Those bastards had wanted nothing to do with it originally, but now all of a sudden, now that the Life Tablet was involved, they wanted to stick their noses into her business.

Had they been present, would the Celestial Ember have dared to leave so easily? This was all their fault to begin with?

BOOM!

Minerva shot to her feet almost at the behest of the sudden cacophonous boom. Her heart shook and a worry she had tried to bury deep suddenly came roaring forward.

Before she could do anything, she was sent flying from her Throne and barely managed to spin in the air in time to catch her balance.

When her gaze landed on the Throne, her heart shook once again and she hurriedly bowed her head so low that her inner organs twisted and bent, not out of a lack of flexibility, but because her pride was akin to a knife writhing in her gut at the moment.

But how could she not bow? She didn't dare not to.

Because before her... A Void Race Elder stood. It was a man that had appeared once before, a man who Leonel had sent flying away with a few words and a careless wave... and that was precisely why it stung so much...

Because Leonel dared to do something that she did not.

Drae'Von stood in silence for a moment, his eyes closed. In that moment, his presence covered the whole of the Bubble World, not leaving even a single stone unturned.

Then, he came back and focused on Minerva.

"The Life Tablet. Where is it?"

Minerva's heart skipped a beat before she grit her teeth. She took a breath and slowly exhaled, still not looking up.

"The Life Tablet is not with me. It has been taken by a member of the Celestial Ember Race against my wishes. Unfortunately, I do not have the backing of my entire Race, and-

"That's enough," Drae'Von said coolly. "Call the Celestial Ember here."

"I... yes, yes I will do so."

Minerva made her attempts, but unfortunately, the result was as expected. Let alone trying to convince the Ancestor, her attempts at communication didn't even make it through.

Drae'Von stood there in silence for a long while as Minerva became paler and paler.

"Good... good..." Drae'Von said slowly.

This was what he had expected.

Before, he had no plans to force the Owlans to hand the Life Tablet over. The Gods knew far more about it, and he knew it would be useless in his hands even if he got it. In addition, even though he was the head of the Void Race's Dream Pavilion, much like Minerva, he didn't have the full backing of his Race. They didn't give a damn about any of this.

But now... things were very different. Not only had the Life Tablet appeared, but the Plutos were involved and now it had fallen into the hands of fallen God Beasts?

That was something that his Void Race could not allow.

The rise of the God Beasts? The rise of the Owlans? The rise of them together?

That was entirely unacceptable.

It suddenly hit Minerva right then. She was stuck so far in the weeds that she hadn't been able to see the whole picture.

In her mind, it was she alone who was trying to get the Owlans to rise again, while her entire Race seemed to want to pull her down.

But what did outsiders see?

They saw a Race using a useless Dream Pavilion Head as a sacrificial lamb so that they could return to the olden days...

A day where God Beasts were the de facto rulers and the closest to rekindling their light were the Minervas.

Minerva fell to her knees, tears of blood flowing from her eyes out of sheer fury.

Chapter 2700: Own Creation

Leonel sat in the middle of the Cleansing Waters of the ocean, surrounded by Pure Ninth Dimensional Reinforced Urbe Ore.

According to his father's technique, he needed one Essence per cell. But before he took action on this front... he swallowed the pill that Aina had created.

Almost instantly, his body superheated as though he had become the core of his own world. His veins lit on fire, becoming molten streams of crimson that threatened to burn him up from the inside out.

During these last few months, Leonel had been thinking a lot about the soul and the benefits of having it separated versus being a part of his body. Those thoughts had, obviously, been triggered by Aina's own path.

That said, Leonel didn't actually believe that his father was wrong. Rather... he felt that he was looking at things the wrong way the entire time.

It was one thing to follow the path a technique set out for you... but understanding what that path was and why each step was as it was was a different matter entirely.

The best example of this was actually [Dimensional Cleanse]. The difference between whether you could share that technique or not was entirely based on whether you understood its various layers. For a long while, Leonel had been able to use the technique, but he was unable to share it with Aina or his brothers because he didn't really understand it.

These thoughts had led him to realize that he had never really understood his father's intentions behind each step either.

He shuddered every time he saw the number of resources he needed just to progress a single step forward, but he had never stopped to think... Why?

The establishment of [Final Destruction] seemed to be the creation of a Destruction World. Secondary to that, it was turning the body into an anchor for this world. And in the end, the soul seemed to be an afterthought in this equation...

Or was it?

If he took a step back, if his soul was still using his body as an anchor through the Dimensions, then how would his Destruction World be able to do the same? In the end, wouldn't his soul and Destruction World end up clashing against one another?

It seemed, then, the reason he had to separate his soul from his body was precisely to avoid this sort of outcome.

But now what? Did all of this mean that he was forever lost to the path of humans?

Leonel wasn't so certain of that.

Taking deep breaths through the pain, the Cleansing Waters washed away much of the heat, rushing out in waves and carrying the bubbles to the surface.

Slowly, he began to feel his body's strength increasing by leaps and bounds.

Using his Dream Force as a conduit, his Northern Star Lineage Factors began to strengthen his body not through a newly created mechanism, but rather the mechanism they were always designed to be used with in the first place.

The process was either shockingly easy, or acceptably so depending on your perspective.

Even with the Dream Asura Lineage Factor suppressed, Leonel's body was still somewhat different from other humans. His ability to use his Dream Force to directly affect change in his body was on a completely different level.

And it wasn't just this Lineage Factor either...

Wasn't his Control Ability Index precisely designed to control the parameters of his body? Wasn't that the tradeoff for being unable to project Dream Force in the first place?

When these thoughts began to click into place one after another, Leonel realized that his talents were more synergistic than he had ever given them credit for.

It all seemed too perfect, slotting in one by one.

Even without raising up from the 1st Tier of the Fourth Dimension, his abilities increased by leaps and bounds, and from the restrictive chains of a Mortal, his body soared and quickly reached the stature of a Demi-God.

He could feel his body growing as light as a feather, many of the restrictions on his Forces loosening as his power bloomed.

His body became more perfect, his muscles more proportioned, his skin more resplendent in their bronze hue, even his face gained subtle hints of improvement-not obvious enough to make him look like a completely different person, and yet still enough to take him from a handsome man, to one that was blindingly so. Whatever gap there had been between himself and Somnus vanished into thin air, at least in the looks department.

Leonel seemed to glow, every one of his cells shimmering and multiplying.

Leonel originally had more than a hundred times the usual 30 trillion cells of a human. Now, he seemed to have gained another hundred times atop of that, the dense perfection he was exuding thrumming with its own resonance.

And then, without taking a break, he began to absorb the Essences of the Urbe Ore around him.

His mind split millions of ways, tempering each individual cell at the same time.

He grew explosively, his aura condensing and his very pores spilling over with Force.

His entire body had become his Nodal Pathway. He could pull in Force from any direction, and expel it from any direction just the same.

At the same time, the aura of Destruction pulsing around him was both vicious and undeniable. Just a single move of his intention could crush anyone in his path.

The rise of a towering might continued to tremble around him until it reached a tempest that exploded forth.

A solid pillar of water shot out from the surface that was easily hundreds of kilometers above him.

Despite the violence, it was perfectly smooth and controlled, rising so high into the skies that it could be seen from countless kilometers around.

Ten Stars shone within Leonel's body and the bounds of space and time bent and twisted. In that moment, Leonel felt as though he had truly become the center of his own world...

A World Spirit of his own Creation.