

Dimensional Descent

Chapter 2741: Pure Blood

The Spirituals actually had a very hard time progressing their Forces. The trouble was that it was a matter of relativity.

The Spirituals had exceptionally high affinity, but in comparison, their progress was slow. Due to this, while they seemed to be much faster than other Mortal Races, if this ratio was taken into account, they were actually quite a bit slower.

Leonel's progress was the perfect benchmark for this. It had only been three years at most since he learned about Force Manipulation and the levels of Forces, and yet in that time he had gone from an Unfurled State, through the Impetus States, and now had a hoard of Life State Forces at his beck and call.

Of course, not every Spiritual had an affinity as high as Leonel's own; that was ridiculous. However, at least in some aspects, they were certainly his match.

Earth Force was likely the best example of this. Leonel's Earth Force affinity was high, but not as exaggerated as his Fire Force or Dream Force affinity. Yet, after he grasped some understanding of it, it rocketed to the Peak of the Impetus State and entered the Life State not long afterward.

Comparatively speaking, the number of Earth Force Life State experts in the whole of the Spirituals Empire could be counted. While it wasn't a small number, it certainly wouldn't exceed the hundreds.

Why were the Spirituals so limited compared to their true potential? It all came down to their existence itself.

Spirituals were born as souls and could only construct their bodies after birth. Everyone seemed to be well aware of the benefits of having a separated soul, but no one mentioned the obvious other side of that coin.

Having a powerful body was just as important as having a separated soul.

While it seemed like Spirituals hit the jackpot, their greatest weakness was still their bodies. It wasn't easy to just construct a body that had perfect compatibility with your soul, and even if you did, the connection between them would still be a problem.

The soul was the connection to the Second Dimension, but the body was what anchored a person in this world. Without good communication between the two, you would inevitably suffer.

The only way for a Spiritual to shed this weakness was by creating a perfect body...

The Pure Blood Body.

This was what separated normal Spirituals from the Pure Bloods. Normal Spirituals would never be able to shed this weakness, but Pure Bloods would be able to reach an enlightened state later in their lives where they would not only escape this weakness entirely but also explode forth with accumulated momentum.

There was a catch, however...

In order to benefit from that sudden explosive increase in strength, a Pure Blood had to first reach the Creation State. Only like this would it be possible.

The Emberheart Lady had been accumulating for years, slowly crawling forward inch by inch, and she could finally sense her breakthrough on the horizon. Leonel wasn't the only one that had benefited from their fierce back and forth.

Of course, like she had said, just because she could sense a breakthrough to the Peak Life State didn't mean the Creation State was close. That step was one that most would never be able to take in their entire lives. But there was a reason she was so confident.

"I can do it..."

Her gaze flickered with determination. It was the most emotion she had shown in these last several months, but it was well worth it.

She had accumulated a large number of Forgetful Orbs over the last several millennia. She had never used them, not once.

So long as she could make it to the Quasi Creation State, her Pure Blood lineage should kick in, at least in part. That would carry her the rest of the way.

After that, she would have an explosive increase in strength, and it wouldn't be long before she formed a Dharma. In a few years at most, she could be able to form an Idol and become a God.

At that point, she could take advantage of her new status to crush whoever was working in the background.

She was certain this person wasn't a God; there were rules that had to be abided by, and anyone strong enough to ignore them wouldn't be messing with a small Mortal Race like theirs.

Once one became a God, they had to ascend to the God Worlds and leave their Race behind. There would also be a pact of non-interference signed.

It was learned long ago that a God's intervention in Mortal matters actually sped up the descent of the Northern Star. This was a large part of why the culling wasn't acted upon by the Gods personally and also why a Neutral Faction existed among the Gods. If not for this reality, it was more likely that most Gods would be in favor of a culling.

However, there was a buffer period between when one became a God and when one had no choice but to ascend. In that time, one could set their affairs in order...

And it was exactly this buffer that the Emberheart Lady wanted to take advantage of...

No, it was the one she would take advantage of. Whoever was scheming in the dark would pay a price for all of this.

Without a word, the Emberheart Lady took a step and vanished, choosing to enter a period of focused seclusion.

...

Leonel stood with his eyes closed, his breathing even.

He suddenly opened them and looked toward Eamon and Goggles with a grin.

"Ready?"

The two of them were aware of what happened after the first challenge and couldn't help but feel nervous. They didn't really understand why Leonel was doing this, but their Dream Force was also far too weak for Leonel to explain anything to them. He barely got used to telling things to his wife, let alone them.

"Let's go. It'll be fun."

Eamon felt sweat beading across his forehead. Why was this man always so eager about life and death situations?

Chapter 2742: Khafra

The man looked like a mummified statue. His skin was an unnatural shade of grey, and his body was as skinny as a willowy wisp. His joints almost seemed sharper than blades, his bones sticking out against his frail skin as though they might rip their way through at the slightest of movements.

And yet, despite all of this... the man seemed... healthy...

His Ethereal Glabella glittered with the radiance of a starry sky, and his expression was calm and impassive. When he opened his eyes, it looked like all his Life Force had converged onto just those two points, a great amount of vitality exuding from him.

This man was known as Patriarch Khafra of the Khafra family, and was also the current Pavilion Head of the Khafra Dream Pavilion.

When he received the notice of Leonel's challenge, he wasn't surprised. Why should he be surprised? Everything was going according to plan. All that was left to do was to secure two victories and enter the top 100. After that, the real games would begin.

With everyone's attention diverted to the Demi-God war, hardly anyone would notice the shift; they would dismiss it as a Pavilion asserting dominance after someone beneath them issued a challenge. Most might even assume that they'd fall out of the top 100 soon enough, much like Leonel's Vast Dream Pavilion had, or the former 100th place after Minerva took action.

However, what was missing in all of this was a why...

Just one top 100 Dream Pavilion wouldn't change much of the situation, and if they started trying to sneak in larger numbers of Dream Pavilions, no matter how well obscured their schemes, someone would take notice.

Patriarch Khafra took from his meditative position. He moved much more vigorously than a man who was mostly skin and bone should have. His strides were long and powerful, but he somehow seemed unhurried at the same time.

He soon stood before a statue of God Zoltene and gave it a deep bow. Only then did he exit his own Dream Pavilion.

The message had been sent to the rest of the Nomads of their ilk, so he didn't need to wait very long for them all to have gathered.

At the forefront, two Nomads stood out.

One would have reminded Leonel of another he had seen. His floating palms were so large that they dwarfed his figure. Just to stop from taking up so much space, all four interlocked into a single formation, making it look like a blooming flower form from an array of fingers and thumbs.

Much like the Spirituals, Nomads were separated into Lineages as well. The difference was that their own were even more obvious at a single glance.

As one might expect, the Nomads had their own legends about their origins and where they hailed from.

Many knew of their tales about their Nomadic origins. One portion was separated into a figurative representation, denoting their adaptability and their wide-ranging paths. Wicked was a very keen example of this, as his Incomplete World had been able to adjust their very foundations by undergoing quasi-rebirths.

The second, though... was quite literal. This represented Nomadic origins that stemmed not from poetry or imagery, but instead referred to a tale of a castaway race, one forced to become Nomadic by circumstance and not choice. It could even be said that the first interpretation of their name was a method of reclaiming a title that was once laced with shame.

Then, the question was obvious... what had forced them to become a nomadic Race? Why were they known as the Nomads?

These were tales that most of the Nomad Race themselves would be unaware of, but what they did know, and what they did take pride in, were their floating hands.

In their inner circles, they termed them the Hands of God. But not all of them had such a right...

Only those with hands so large, hands capable of blotting out the skies, were worthy of saying that they had the Hands of God. And such people were the noblest of their Race...

Which was probably what made the fact no one could see Patriarch Khafra's floating hands all the odder... a point only made all the more peculiar by the fact even this first man seemed to have an endless flood of reverence for him.

As for the second standout amongst the crowd of gathered, it wasn't because he had the Hands of God. Instead, it was because he was someone that Leonel would recognize had he been there.

He was someone who held a deep-seated hatred for Leonel, a man who would rot in hell just for the chance to see him crushed and annihilated.

Prince Gregwyn of the Dimensional Verse's Nomad Domain.

The last time Leonel had seen him, he had been nothing more than a mangled mess. In fact, his neck had been in Leonel's palm.

Ultimately, Leonel had been forced to leave due to the approaching Wicked. At the time, he hadn't been strong enough to deal with Rhangyl and Wicked at the same time, but that was the reason Gregwyn was still alive.

It ultimately boiled down to the fact that Leonel had let him live. Regardless of what he said about being uncaring or unfeeling about wiping out almost the whole Nomad Domain, in the end, he had spared Gregwyn.

It was a subconscious weight on his scale. He had let Gregwyn survive once after trying to kill him... that simply meant that the next time around, he wouldn't get such a chance again.

At that moment, the Dream Pavilions began to tremble, and their projections shot across the bounds of Existence.

Soon, the Vast Dream Pavilion was in their sights, but what they saw was a smiling Leonel.

When he saw Leonel, Gregwyn's eyes went completely red.

- Chapter 2743: Take Your Place

Leonel stood with Eamon and Goggles by his side, the former of whom was at the Seventh Dimension and the latter of whom was still at the Fourth.

Goggles was taking his time, reaffirming his foundation. With the resources that Leonel had given him, he could have certainly entered the Fifth Dimension already. But Leonel himself was the perfect example of why Dimension wasn't everything. He had taken it upon himself to comprehend every step of [Dimensional Cleanse] himself before even thinking about moving on, and he was also putting quite some effort into comprehending his Dream Force. Despite being in the Fourth Dimension, he was already at the Quasi Impetus State. Who knew, maybe he might even breakthrough soon. In that way, he was a trump card.

As expected, when the Nomads saw that Leonel had a Fourth Dimensional and Seventh Dimensional existence by his sides, they couldn't help but narrow their eyes. This was... Unexpected.

The Khafra Patriarch was taken off guard as well, his thoughts moving like lightning as he thought through the Fourth Dimensional existences they could send up. The unfortunate truth was that the list was small. Not only that, but they were all children as well. Some of them were as young as six or seven years old. Were they really going to throw them into battle like this?

Looking at the smile on Leonel's face, they frowned. On the one hand, someone who was so old and yet still in the Fourth Dimension wasn't a threat. Under normal circumstances, they would find it to be hilarious, actually. But the problem was that they had Leonel as a blueprint. Could it be that there was another genius like Leonel amongst the humans?

As troublesome as Goggles was to find an opponent for, Eamon almost had the opposite problem. There were so many Seventh Dimensional geniuses amongst them that it was hard to pick one to participate. This might even end up in some internal conflict before the battle even began. Had Leonel done this on purpose?

They thought that he was hot-headed. But if he was, shouldn't he make it a two-person battle again? Why had he made such a... smart decision?

'Something is wrong,' Patriarch Khafra thought to himself. 'I should-'

'Continue.'

A voice echoed in Patriarch Khafra's ear. He could practically hear the smile in the words that oozed with confidence. Flaura didn't seem to care about Leonel's little ploy.

The Khafra Patriarch looked toward the Hands of God by his side. He realized that he had been eager to participate, but it seemed that it would be his turn. Leonel wouldn't allow it.

He waved a hand. "Bring Little Fox and Ferrouge here."

Soon, a little boy and a young man in his very early twenties appeared.

The little boy could be described as cute as a button. He had large, chubby cheeks and a rosininess to his skin that accentuated his vibrant youth. Even so, there was a cleverness that belied his immaturity, sparkling in his large green eyes. He had a level of cuteness that could make a hoard of girls pinch him to death, and it was only made all the more adorable when he started playing games with his little floating hands.

Leonel laughed when he saw the little boy, not out of disdain, but even he had to admit that he was too cute. He almost immediately felt fiercely protective of this little boy and

didn't want to see anything untoward happen to him, but that was what made him laugh harder. This was no doubt an Ability Index. It seemed that the little boy's Dream Force should come from a charming type ability. Leonel would use the Life Tablet to find out exactly what it was, but he didn't want to give his enemies any chance to see through him. Logically, almost no one should be able to sense the Life Tablet, but he wanted to keep all his ducks in a row. No use in overextending himself just for a little bit of curiosity. It wasn't worth the risk. This little boy was obviously Little Fox, and the young man should be-

"Patriarch, please!"

Gregwyn's voice suddenly echoed. Ever since Leonel had appeared, he had been looking forward with a gaze that could kill. Leonel had, of course, noticed him and recognized him as well; he just couldn't be bothered to give a damn.

"Give me this chance!" Gregwyn's irises had practically turned red.

He, too, was in the Seventh Dimension. He didn't want to miss this opportunity. He had to participate no matter what.

Patriarch Khafra frowned. This was exactly the situation he wanted to avoid, and yet it had still happened anyway.

He waved a hand, a force pressing down on Gregwyn and silencing him. Now wasn't the time to allow such dissent.

Ferrouge glanced at Gregwyn and his heart trembled. There was a tremendous amount of rage coming off of him in waves. Even Patriarch Khafra, who had just turned away, frowned once more, looking back. Gregwyn's floating hands were pulsing with a vicious light, veins of red pulsing into and out of existence as they bulged and shrunk in rapid succession. He looked like a rabid dog, turning all his aggro toward Patriarch Khafra. He couldn't stand this man for blocking his path forward like this. The skies above their Dream Pavilion trembled and the Pavilions quaked.

Suddenly... BANG! Gregwyn's floating palms explosively increased in size, his own body growing from under two meters tall to over three in that very instant.

Patriarch Khafra's suppression of him shattered, but he didn't react as one might have thought to this situation. Instead, his gaze glowed, a fascinated expression appearing on his face.

He looked at Gregwyn deeply as many of the weaker Nomads shied away, unable to withstand the sudden change.

"Interesting, interesting," Patriarch Khafra spoke to himself.

Then, he nodded. "Ferrouge, you'll step down. For this battle, Gregwyn will take your place."

- Chapter 2744: Fatigue?

Chapter 2744: Fatigue?

'Oh?'

Leonel looked at Gregwyn, his thoughts flickering. He took note of this, but when he looked at the veins of red, he vaguely remembered something else.

'That's odd, how could those two things be related?'

He slotted these things into the back of his mind as he did with everything. In this world, it didn't seem that there was such a thing as useless information. He had lost count of the number of times he had connected seemingly unrelated matters.

"Let's begin." Leonel's voice boomed.

He noticed that Eamon was practically shaking, but he could only smile bitterly.

Gregwyn's maleficent aura was, indeed, probably the worst sort of outcome for Eamon. He was already nervous, facing off against a person with such a great amount of hatred and animosity was, well...

Leonel put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry, victory is certain. Just do your best, I'm not asking for anything more."

Eamon nodded shakily.

Leonel sent a glance toward Goggles and the latter looked serious. Seeing this, Leonel smiled inwardly. That was the Goggles he remembered.

The man was outwardly a coward, but when it came time to put his foot to the gas, he did so without hesitation.

He was a person whose character Leonel could trust. No matter how he acted, Leonel with certainty.

They would win this.

The pair of trios vanished, appearing in a familiar courtroom-like environment.

They stood around in a circle, facing off in high stands while there was a podium down below in the middle of them. It looked like an enormous senate, and though most of the seats were empty unlike last time, the grandiose atmosphere was no less.

At that moment, the podium in the center of the circular room thrummed awake and three small pillars of light came from them.

"Please," Leonel said with a smile.

According to the rules, Leonel got to pick the participants, but it was the one that was challenged that got the chance to choose the actual challenge.

The catch was that the range of challenges wasn't endless. The True Dream World would randomly generate three, and they would have to choose from them. But usually, there was an excellent balance between these three challenges, meaning that the one picking would almost certainly be able to pick one that suited them the best.

Leonel had already taken a look at the first three spawned challenges.

Two were one on one sequences, while the last was three on three.

As for the specifics of the challenges, one of the one on one sequences was a Dream Beast challenge. They would each fight against the same caliber of Beast and whoever secured victory faster would be the winner.

The second was a more normal one on one combat sequence, but it was instead based on speed of comprehension. Whoever grasped a Force Art and replicated it faster would win.

The third, the three on three battle, was more complex. Essentially, it fell into what was called a "control center" battle. In this case, one of the three participants would be given control while the other two were "blinded". The controller would have to give commands to his or her two teammates to lead them through a task.

The task could fall into a myriad of categories. This one was a maze of Force Arts. It required the action of both blind teammates to unlock the exits and as with all this related to the Dream Pavilion, it was overly complicated.

The choosing of the challenge was a battle in and of itself, though. The opposing Dream Pavilion Head had quite a bit of pressure on their head because the way they chose might reveal the strengths and weaknesses of their team, something that could be taken advantage of the longer the rounds became and the deeper they got into Challenge Sequence.

There was another variable to consider as well, and that was what was called a "Twist".

This Twist was incorporated at random no matter the challenge type. It would tweak the rules here slightly. Not enough to completely change the challenge, but enough that it might be a surprise.

This meant that in addition to picking the challenges, Patriarch Khafra had to be cautious about what Twists might appear. If he chose a challenge that he wasn't proficient in just to throw Leonel off, a Twist might appear that would make him suffer.

However, if he chose a challenge he was confident in, then even if a Twist appeared, he would still be ready to deal with it regardless.

This was the balancing act he would have to play. It was akin to a game of chess within a game of chess.

To the surprise of the spectators, though, Patriarch Khafra didn't take his time to analyze each one of these options. He immediately chose the one on one battle against Dream Beasts, and he also immediately made it a battle of Dream Pavilion Heads.

Leonel smiled. "Confident, are we?"

The Patriarch's reasoning was clear to Leonel. He wanted a swift and decisive victory, one that would demoralize Leonel and his partners.

The two vanished from the gathering court and appeared on the top of a mountain. Each one stood on their own mountain, separated by over a hundred kilometers and yet still capable of seeing one another with absolute ease.

Both of these mountains had flat tops, smooth and almost as reflective as marble. The shimmering golds and whites of the True Dream World were just as vibrant as always, painting the image of a paradise.

At that moment, there was a golden Force Art that appeared high in the skies above both mountains. They rapidly expanded until they blotted out the skies, spinning like a pair of gorgeous magic circles.

Then, a beam of light came from their center striking down onto the flat-topped mountains.

When the beam faded, the flickering image of a beast took shape and then solidified. At that moment, the two immediately launched themselves into action.

The Challenge Sequence had begun and a bright grin spread across Leonel's face.

The world couldn't help but think...

Where was his fatigue?

Chapter 2745: Split in Two

A bird's cry resonated through the skies and feathers flourished.

A Snowy Star Owl appeared, a gorgeous creature to be sure. It had snowy white tufts around his neck, its feathers a gleaming white with veins of delicate gold. Every time it flapped its wings, a snowy rain of feathers would fall.

Compared to the first time Leonel had entered a Challenge Sequence, these creatures were on another level. This Snowy Start Owl alone had a wingspan of almost four meters, and when it bore down on him from above, it felt like it could decide his life and death with a thought.

It could truly begin to exude some of the majesty of a true Envoy of Creation, a beast that wasn't just a Sixth Dimensional Lineage Factor, but one that had been a God Beast amongst Gods.

Leonel met its gaze and he grinned. His Dream Force flourished and his robes and crown of silvery gold took shape around him.

His crown hovered above his head like a halo and his pale violet hair danced more like strands of light rather than tangible filaments.

He reached out with a hand and a rain of Force Arts took shape around him, an Auspicious Air that could resonate with the most ancient of bells blooming forth.

Natural Force Arts began to take shape and descended from the skies not much unlike the feathers of the bird above him. At the same time, the aura of a Wise Star Order flourished and he seemed to stand above the masses.

"What are you doing up there?" Leonel spoke, his spear finally solidifying in his palm only to become an arrow on the bow that formed in his other. "Don't you think you're a bit too arrogant?"

Leonel grinned, pointing his spear-bow at the skies.

BANG!

The spear shot upward, the rain of Natural Force Arts forming a bronze spiral around it. Space shuddered and the wind was sliced apart.

The Snowy Star Owl sensed danger and it rushed to veer to the side, but a gaping wound was torn right through its wing.

Leonel flicked his wrist and the bow disappeared, another spear taking shape. As with all Challenge Sequences, he could only use Dream Force unless there were special external items. But in this form of Challenge Sequence, it wasn't allowed. As such, you would live and die by your Dream Force manipulation.

This made people think that they had Leonel pegged perfectly, but they hadn't known one very specific thing.

Not only had Leonel broken through, allowing him the capability of displaying far more power now than he had ever done in the past, but he was utilizing something now that he hadn't used in the first round.

Natural Force Arts.

Force Arts were the easiest method of increasing the power of your Dream Force. It was a conduit through which one could give their Dream Force shape. If you lacked a Dream Sovereignty, this was the best option available to you if you couldn't bring in external treasures.

But, it was also precisely because Leonel was a Dream Sovereign that he hadn't been able to partake in this power boost. What a Force Art could provide, his Dream Sovereignty already did. And any Force Art that could provide more than his Dream Sovereignty would take far too long to draw in battle.

What they didn't know was that with his Control Ability Index, even large and complex Force Arts could be drawn by Leonel near instantaneously. He just had to trigger a protocol and his Dream Force would move on its own even without his input.

But even more importantly than that... How could they know that to Leonel, creating Natural Force Art was as easy as breathing?

Leonel's spear solidified and he appeared before the descended bird. It sent out a claw strike right at his throat, but his spear danced in response.

Beneath his feet, bronze Natural Force Arts bloomed. With every step he took, like the delicate lotuses of spring, another bloomed.

Unbeknownst to those watching, at that moment, all the accumulating Dream Force in the region had come together, wrapping around Leonel's spear tip in a spiral that almost made it look more like a lance than his usual pole arm of choice.

The claw of the Snowy Star Owl was obliterated and a rain of Snow Force fell. The Snowy Star Owl's coat of feathers glowed and it seemed to be protected by a coat of crystals in an instant. But by then, it had already lost the use of a wing and a claw, its balance was thrown completely off and there didn't seem to be anything that it could do as Leonel bore down on it again, the wild grin on his face only growing larger and larger.

He could remember the Owlman city vividly. Every street, every building was so meticulously planned and sculpted that even while just standing there, they allowed the flow of Force to dance to the rhythm of the world.

This unique rhythm, this resonance, it called out to Leonel. The Dream Force whispered in his ear and for the first time in a long while, his Mage Core responded to the call.

The long forgotten Natural Force Art he had claimed from the Merlin Trials, the very one that wrapped around the base of his Mage Core turned vibrant, ancient tree thrummed.

Every Natural Force Art Leonel formed became like another tonic for it and the individual leaves of his Mage Core danced.

At that point, his influence had flourished so far and wide that even the Dream Force a hundred kilometers away on Patriarch Khafra's mountain peak was being stripped away.

Leonel's hearty laughter filled the skies.

He kept having to suppress himself, kept having to tiptoe around these people, how could he not be frustrated?

But at least for today and the coming weeks...

He would let his beast run wild.

His hair danced and his spear struck, splitting the world in two.

Chapter 2746: Chain

Leonel's spear tore through the head of the Snowy Star Owl before Patriarch Khafra could even react. The latter had been biding his time, having already adjusted his strength to be marginally superior to the Emberheart Lady's. He had watched every second of that battle, so he knew exactly how much he needed to defeat them all.

But when Leonel suddenly erupted with strength that was far beyond his calculations, he realized that something had gone awry.

Although he could just quickly raise his strength and kill this Snowy Star Owl before him in the blink of an eye, if he did so what would those watching think? It was best if he pretended to be caught off guard and shocked, and only then would he raise his strength to deal a blow. At least at that point, it would seem more natural.

However, when he was looking over to see the situation and get a more accurate gauge of Leonel's strength, he found a sneering young man looking back at him, almost as though Leonel could see through his thoughts and was begging him to take action.

Leonel flicked his wrist and the body of the Snowy Star Owl shattered.

He sauntered over to the middle of his flat mountain peak and picked up the orb that was his reward for victory before vanishing.

When he appeared once more, Eamon and Goggles.

"See what I mean? There's nothing big or scary about these people," Leonel gave Eamon a pat on the back.

Eamon exhaled a breath, feeling more confident as well. It wasn't because he felt that he was as good as Leonel, but because he felt that Leonel wasn't lying when he said that he was good enough to win on his own.

He had watched the last battle and he knew that the reason Leonel lost was because of a technicality and points total, not to mention penalties.

But now he had actual teammates, and it was because of that it would be unlikely for such a thing to happen again.

Losing didn't mean you gathered zero points. It was all dependent on performance. So, even if he lost, so long as he did well enough, Leonel should be able to pick up the slack. In that sort of situation, what did he have to fear?

Above them, a beam of two lights appeared horizontally, one representing the Vast Dream Pavilion and the other representing the Khafra Dream Pavilion.

"They don't give us the actual point total?" Eamon asked out of curiosity.

Leonel chuckled. "The higher ups made the rules overly complicated because it thinks it makes them look more clever than they really are. If you want the real point total, you have to analyze the entire battle and factor in dozens of variables. Otherwise, you can only look at those beams. Whoever feels the beam first wins."

"Oh..." Eamon was a bit disappointed. He had seen some of those formulas, he couldn't divert the effort to calculate at all, or else he would end up suffering in the end due to depleted Dream Force.

Leonel looked up and met Patriarch Khafra's gaze with a smile. All things considered, he may have gotten a small bonus for winning, but because the Khafra Patriarch hadn't taken much longer than him, the scores were still quite close.

But Leonel didn't care much. He just needed to win to reassure Eamon. If he was too in his own head, he would perform poorly and end up suffering.

Like this, there would be balance.

Gregwyn's fists quaked, clenching high in the air. In the real world, this would have almost certainly caused some sort of phenomena. But this space was far too sturdy, bolstered by all 9999 Dream Pavilions. He stood no chance.

At that moment, another set of three challenges appeared and it was up to the Khafra Patriarch to choose again. Once again, they were an array of balanced options. However, this time, the Patriarch chose a three on three battle very similar to the earlier maze challenge. However, this one was far more complex, not in terms of the rules, but rather in terms of what it required for the two Dream Pavilion Heads.

The challenge was known as a chain type challenge. This was because it required a series of orders to go down a chain of command, whereupon the situation could change at any time.

Leonel would be controlling one of his subordinates, while the latter would be controlling the other, forming a chain.

In this situation, Leonel would be relaying orders to Eamon. Eamon would be in front of an ever-changing Force Art that would decide Goggles' situation. The real catch, though, was that Leonel could only be able to see one situation at a time, whether that was Goggles or Eamon, but never both at the same time. While Goggles and Eamon would only be able to see their own situations.

As soon as the Challenge was chosen, Goggles and Eamon disappeared, along with Little Fox and Gregwyn. This led the two Pavilion Heads.

Leonel had already stopped paying attention to the Patriarch as a screen appeared before him.

First, he checked on Eamon.

Eamon was in a control-center type region as well, but it was on a path of sorts, moving forward. This path diverted into many further along, some of which were filled with danger, some of which weren't. Eamon had control of a Force Art within his control center that could decide the paths he followed, but while he could see the Force Art, he couldn't see the situation outside.

Then, he checked on Goggles.

Goggles was in a maze, however he was immobile, stuck in a rolling ball. It reminded Leonel of a game he had played back on Earth. He had to tilt the maze to help Goggles

roll out of the dungeon. Or, more accurately, Eamon had to change the Force Art before him, and Goggles had to react appropriately.

No data found.

- Chapter 2747: Long Way to Go

Leonel got an overlook of the situation in an instant and then turned to Eamon. He had already memorized Goggles' position and a large portion of the maze. As expected with most things related to Dream Force experts, even Leonel couldn't memorize the whole maze at once, nor did he want to waste the time he would need to do so.

Eamon was already moving forward, and there was only a split second left for him to decide his coming path. This was obviously done on purpose to not let them rest for too long.

The thing was that if he gave Eamon a directive that helped Goggles, he would go down a more dangerous path. But if he chose the safer path for Eamon, then Goggles would roll further away from the exit.

This was obviously a different thing to balance especially when this challenge had a Twist. Leonel already saw through it.

There was a second Force Art in Eamon's control center that shouldn't have been there. After analyzing it, Leonel realized that it was a teleportation platform.

Under the usual challenge, if Eamon went down the wrong path, the control center would be buffeted by Dream Force, weakening its defenses. The more danger Leonel put Eamon in, the more the Dream Force would weaken the control center's defenses until it crumbled entirely.

If this happened, it would be their loss and they'd be teleported out.

However, clearly the Twist in this one was that Eamon would have to face off against the Dream Beasts personally. That teleportation platform should allow the beasts to enter the control center.

Once that happened, the path that Eamon was on would pause and Leonel wouldn't be able to affect change for Goggles until Eamon defeated the beast.

From what Leonel could tell, though, he could help Eamon fight against the beast, it just had to be through changes in the Force Art. And, once again, he could only relay orders.

'Interesting... there's a ton of variables to consider, and each layer makes it more complex.'

If he helped Eamon too much, Goggles would roll further and further away from the exit. But if he didn't, then Eamon would have to fight battles he might not be prepared for.

The last hidden layer of complexity was that not all threats were created equal. There was a wide range of beasts of different power levels that were present on the paths.

"Get ready Eamon, first one is coming."

Leonel made his decision and relayed his orders. Eamon's control center veered to the left, and at the same time, Goggles rolled toward the exit.

He had chosen to allow Eamon to fight this battle.

...

Eamon reached his hands forward and tweaked the Force Art. He felt the control center sway and inertia tilted his body. He knew that he had veered to the left as a result.

The control center was a large silver sphere, at least that was what it felt like from the inside. It was 20 meters in radius, and there wasn't actually much maneuver. Any threat that appeared would be troublesome to deal with for this reason alone, even ignoring what strength they may have.

The control center rocked to a stop and Eamon's hair stood on end as the second Force Art began to glow. Soon, a meter tall Starry Tailed Fox appeared, baring its teeth as it lunged toward him.

Eamon subconsciously reached for a talisman, only to realize that he didn't have one on him. How could he when no one was allowed to take treasures in? Everything was sealed.

He panicked for a moment before a voice echoed in his head.

"The world is your talisman."

The words made him tremble.

"The Force Art is not just for teleportation, it's also a chess board. Feel out its strokes, imagine that it's one of your talismans."

The first time Leonel met Eamon, he was a man who used talismans in everything. He even slapped them onto his body to increase his strength.

Since then, Leonel had learned a lot more about this world and he had obviously come to understand talismans as well. They were just special materials capable of giving Force Arts more substance and power.

He liked to imagine teleportation platforms when he thought of talismans. Teleportation platforms were usually drawn on stable platforms carved from Spatial Force Ores to bolster their powers. This allowed them to travel across impossibly large distances in an instant. The material used in a teleportation platform was just as important as the Force Art carved into them.

Talismans were smaller scale versions of this exact thing. Not everyone could casually draw Force Arts in the air like Leonel, and even if they could it was much weaker than just using a talisman.

Because of Little Tolly, when Leonel activated his Divine Armor, it was like his entire body had become a talisman, and his drawn Force Arts were on an entirely different level.

He quite literally had an Infinity Beast by his side, he could casually create as many "teleportation platforms" from thin air as he wanted.

But again, Eamon and others didn't have such abilities....

Normally, that was.

Leonel wanted to open Eamon up to an entirely new world. Talismans were great, but they were ultimately single or finite use items that would eventually wear away. What would Eamon do if he ever ran out?

As for whether he would be able to take that step... well, it would be up to him.

Eamon's eyes lit up as he pressed a foot down.

"Wow!"

Gorgeous runes danced and the golden Force Art seemed to become three dimensional.

Quickly, countless runes coated Eamon's body, forming an armor that protected him. By the time he was finished, the Starry Tailed Fox had already lunged at his throat.

It bit down on a flustered Eamon, but it ended up shattering its teeth on the defenses.

Leonel watched this matter speechlessly. If Eamon had just directed those runes at the Starry Tailed Fox, it would have never gotten the chance to attack him.

He rubbed his temples. It seemed that Eamon still had a long way to go.

A chuckle left Leonel's lips.

- Chapter 2748: Life and Afterlife

Chapter 2748: Life and Afterlife

Minerva coughed up a mouthful of blood, but her steps remained steady. She walked back into her Dream Pavilion.

How many had that been already?

The Dream Pavilion was, unsurprisingly, a main target of the invading God Descendants. It was a strategic choke point, and powerful Bubbles would ensure that this remained the case.

A Pavilion Head would have a great amount of control over the area, and as such it allowed Minerva to exhibit strength no less than that of her Ancestors within its borders.

Unfortunately, such an advantage could only go so far, especially when they were hellbent on making certain that it didn't stand for long.

The Owlman Race had lost their heritage and there were only a small number of Dream Force experts, comparatively speaking. In the past, as much as half their Race would have such an affinity, but now their 3-5% was already more than most could bolster.

Because of that, there were fewer that could fight on the battlefield that was the Dream Pavilion and much of this fell on her shoulders.

Although if you were powerful, you could ignore the Dream Force so long as the Pavilion Head wasn't actively using it to target you, there would still be a drop off in combat power that came from diverting some Force to protect your mind.

Due to this, if you didn't have an excellent Dream Force affinity, fighting on this battlefield was useless, and that didn't even measure the fact that many of that three to five percent were far too weak to participate in such a battle to begin with.

However, even through the bloody streaks on Minerva's once beautiful face, one could see nothing but a towering indifference.

Every battle, she felt her Dream Force inch forward.

Who would dare to provoke the Owlman Race in the past? Even with their inheritance severed, they were still among the best Crafters amongst the Demi-Gods, and that didn't even mention their Lineage Factor or personal strength.

Even now, it took the descent of literal Gods for them to be put into this situation.

This was all to say that in her entire life, Minerva had never truly fought an all out battle. She had always been beyond her peers, and friendly matches couldn't match this sort of intensity.

It wasn't until now that she realized how much toeing the line between life and death could stimulate her potential. She couldn't help but wonder if that was why Leonel was always so capable of accomplishing the seemingly impossible.

'Soon,' she thought to herself, sitting upon her throne weakly.

At that moment, what sounded like the call of a Phoenix echoed through the skies. Minerva's thoughts shifted and the Dream Pavilion projected the images she wanted to see into her mind.

As expected, a swarm of Celestial Embers had appeared.

Finally.

Now the real battle would begin.

Determination flourished in her reflected pink irises, the aura of an Empress coming out from her in towering waves.

The Owlans had been forced to lower their heads for so long... she would remind the world that they had a place amongst the Gods as well.

...

Three Void Race youths watched this scene with furrowed brows. They had weaved in and out of the battles, taking advantage of certain strategic points to gather up resources and enrich themselves. Honestly, they hadn't taken any of this seriously and thought that the battle would end in just a few days. So long as the Dream Pavilion fell, everything would line up accordingly.

But to their surprise, not only had the Dream Pavilion managed to stand their ground, but the Owlans were far more resilient than they had given them credit for.

As the battles went on, they showed more and more strength, and they seemed to be rapidly improving.

Before their eyes, they were watching the evolution of a Race that had undergone a great period of peace returning to a war-torn era. And the results were almost frightening.

Each one improved by leaps and bounds with every battle. Even if you killed one, three more would step up and improve to the point they could cover for the loss with their increased battle strength alone.

The Minerva Race had never been one that was well known for their battle strength, they had always used their Crafting to make up for that gap.

But somehow, the Owlans not only managed to maintain the talent for Crafting, but they had also birthed a great talent for combat that underlied it.

The fact they hadn't focused on Crafting for generations had allowed them to evolve down another path, and now the Void Race and other members of their faction were taking the brunt of it.

"Something is wrong with this picture. Did they do it on purpose?"

"It feels that way. They've been trying to distance themselves from the Minerva name for so long, what if it was all a ploy?"

They all fell into silence. They didn't really want to have to risk their lives in this battle, but it seemed that they might not have a choice.

One of them suddenly laughed, a toothy grin spreading across their face. Their skin of galaxies and nebulas split.

After one of them grinned, the others followed suit, a deep battle lust practically oozing from them.

Death? They were the mighty Void Race, when had they ever feared death? Did the Owlans think they were the only ones who could toe that line of life and afterlife?

Suddenly, all three stretched out their palms and layered them on top of one another.

"Ha, I get to pick first. I want the Dream Pavilion lady."

The other two clicked their tongues, retracting their palms.

"Fine, then I get the Beast Dream Pavilion. A bunch of animals trying to be enlightened, I'll knock them down a peg."

"Fuck you both," the last cursed. It seemed that he was going to be in a no-man's land. Hopefully something interesting came up.

Chapter 2749: Skirmishes

The two Void Race youths laughed and shot out in two different directions, leaving the last still grumbling.

...

Elo'Ray appeared high above the Dream Pavilion. He stood in the skies despite merely being at the Seventh Dimension, the laws of this world completely unable to constrain him. If he wanted to step onto the clouds, he would do so. Who were these worms to tell him what he could and couldn't do?

"Little Owlán, how about you come out and play?" He announced his arrival with a booming cadence. Universes that painted his skin flickered wildly with light, a trio of blackholes appearing to his back the moment he clenched his fists. In that moment, he seemed to have the power to wipe out all of existence.

Down below, there were several ongoing skirmishes. Void Race descendants fought against Owláns of all shapes and sizes, but he couldn't seem to be bothered with these battles at all. He didn't even try to influence them.

These fools had finally managed to get his blood boiling a little bit, he wouldn't ruin his own fun by wasting his time on trivial matters.

Minerva slowly walked out of the Head Dream Pavilion, her steps slow and her wings dragging on the ground. Her dress was torn and shorn, covered in blood that painted an array of colors as though she had killed all sorts of Races.

Her wings were broken in many places, but she suddenly flexed them, snapping them back into place with a single thought.

Her expression didn't even change in the slightest as she flapped them once, soaring into the skies like a striking meteor.

BANG!

She came to a sudden and forceful stop, clouds of pink, violet and sky blues shredding apart beneath the violent wings.

At that moment, her steps, too, stepped on the empty air as though she was walking on solid land. If she wanted to step on the clouds, no one could stop her either.

Golden Runes danced and glowed in her sparkling wings, but soon they became outlined with a pink color that somewhat caught Elo'Ray off guard.

That pink color... it exuded an aura that was eerily close to the Minerva.

"Hehe..." Elo'Ray chuckled. "... it seems that the Minerva have been hiding for a long while."

Minerva looked up and met his gaze, her own filled with an unbridled arrogance.

"You speak confidently for no other reason than your status as a member of the Void Race... do you think that is worth anything to me?"

Elo'Ray laughed into the skies, the three blackholes behind him suddenly doubling in size and then doubling again. In the blink of an eye, they were each over 20 meters in diameter, and looking into any one of them was like sinking into an endless miasma of despair.

"The mighty Void Race is supreme!" His voice boomed.

"Is that so...? All I see is a group of cowards unwilling to face off against the Pluto."

The words were enough for sparks to fly. In that instant, the two vanished in the blink of an eye, the skies collapsing beneath their collision.

By the skin of their teeth, Leonel, Goggles and Eamon secured another victory. The point totals were much closer this time around, but Leonel managed to out maneuver Patriarch Khafra due to one simple fact: Eamon's skill in using Force Arts was beyond that of Gregwyn's.

Gregwyn had the talent, but he had focused on combat much of his life. Even with Patriarch Khafra's direction, he was lacking considerably and the result of that was a lag in executing Patriarch Khafra's orders.

It wasn't until Gregwyn came to a Complete World that he learned he had talent for Dream Force at all. Before, he was much like a certain general of the Slayer Legion, not willing to take the risk.

Back in the Dimensional Verse, most had to take a risk to see whether they had Dream Force talent or not. It had to be remembered that when Leonel first ran into Dream Force, it had been an avoided abode in the Valiant Heart City, one no one dared to enter and he chose to do so on a whim.

He didn't even really understand the risks back then, or maybe he wouldn't have been so bold either. After all, if you flooded your mind with Dream Force and didn't have an affinity, you could get lost in an endless spiral of memories and be unable to extricate yourself. You would effectively become a vegetable.

Patriarch Khafra had thought that Gregwyn's combat prowess would have been an asset in this case, but because of the Twist, what would have likely been a marginal victory for them had become a loss instead.

Gregwyn's expression was quite unsightly to behold as they took a step out, but Patriarch Khafra seemed unbothered. He had already realized that there was a possibility for this to happen, that was why he had originally not picked Gregwyn. He changed his mind in the end under Gregwyn's pleading, but obviously, Gregwyn's words alone weren't enough for him to take such a step.

Obviously, he had other reasons for making such a decision.

It had taken an entire half month for that round to conclude. Some challenges would take far longer than others, and this wasn't too surprising.

That said, longer trials also provided more points. Due to this, they had already filled up a fifth of their bars, and due to this, the marginal victory from round one had almost been snuffed out. To the untrained eye, they almost looked neck and neck.

However, Leonel was likewise unbothered, feeling that this matter was only just getting good.

Three more challenges appeared, and Patriarch Khafra only glanced at them for a moment before choosing one.

Leonel's eyes narrowed and Eamon paled.

This was another one on one challenge, and this time, Patriarch Khafra had set the challengers to be the two Seventh Dimensional existence.

It seemed that he had used the first two challenges to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Leonel's team.

Now the counterattack would begin.

Chapter 2750: Die.

"Keep your head up. Don't be afraid to resign if need be," Leonel smiled and patted Eamon on the back. "As you can see, when we're together, they don't stand a chance against us."

Resigning wasn't a simple matter. After doing so, there were two options that could be taken. The first was for the Dream Pavilion Head to replace them, and the second was to give up all points entirely. There was a third option, but that had to be triggered through a series of "coincidences" and it also required some extra effort.

This third option was to replace the candidate with someone other than the Pavilion Head, but this required two things. The first was to sacrifice some of your points and the second was that the replacement had to fit the criteria of the one they were replacing.

When a Dream Pavilion Head replaced a participant, their point total would be nerfed. However, so long as the normal replacement shared the Dimension of the person in question, the only point sacrifice would be the initial loss.

As expected with the matters of the Dream Pavilion, this matter was overly verbose on purpose. It forced the participants to calculate many things and weigh the pros and cons of each action.

The short of it was that if Eamon chose to give up, they could either give up the round entirely, replace him with Leonel in exchange for a nerf on points, or replace him with another Seventh Dimensional existence in exchange for a set number of points.

Essentially, it was a round Leonel felt that he could crush the opponent in, it was better to take the nerf on points even if it was substantial.

But, if it was a close round like the first or second round, it might be better to hand over a set number of points in exchange for replacing Eamon with someone else.

The problem with this second option, though, was that Eamon would be permanently replaced for the remainder of the Challenge Sequence and wouldn't be able to be brought back even through another replacement sequence.

So, when Leonel told Eamon to give up if he really wanted to, he was essentially only thinking of personally replacing him.

They didn't have anyone else to swap in for Eamon or Goggles, for that matter. It was just the three of them.

Eamon grit his teeth. "I can do this."

Leonel smiled. That was exactly what he wanted to hear. Coddling Eamon a bit during the second round was bearing fruit.

However, this would be difficult. There were no Force Arts to manipulate, it was a one on one battle between himself and Gregwyn.

If he wasn't careful, he could very well lose his life. So, Leonel had to remind him to protect his livelihood as a first order of priority.

Soon, the two vanished.

Eamon stood on a flat mountaintop, trying to control his erratic breathing.

This arena wasn't much different from the arena that Leonel and Patriarch Khafra had fought on, but the difference was that they weren't on separate mountains... they were right across from one another, separated by no more than a few dozen meters as opposed to the hundred kilometers that had separated the former two.

Eamon's heart practically wanted to beat out of his chest. He looked up to see those massive palms in the skies, decorated with veins and runes of red. They truly looked like the Hands of God.

He clenched his fists.

"I would advise you to give up. If you dare stand in my way, I will kill you for no other reason than to secure the greatest number of points."

Gregwyn's voice was drenched in an abyssal darkness. With everyday that passed, he seemed to only grow more and more angry. From the cheery young man he had once been, he truly seemed to want nothing more than to watch the world burn.

Leonel had taken everything from him, and he swore to one day take everything from Leonel.

A cold shiver rose up Eamon's spine, but he gripped his fists tighter, circulating the Dream Force around him and trying to form quasi talismans as quickly as possible. The longer he managed to last, the more points they would get. He didn't have to win, he just needed to not completely give up the win.

These sort of direct one on one battles would give the largest potential for point disparity. If one side lost quickly, it could open up a huge gap. He had to hold on for as long as possible to make sure the gap stayed as small as possible.

Gregwyn actually laughed when he saw that Eamon dared to stay.

"Do you know why I hate Leonel Morales so much?" Gregwyn's eyes turned red, his black hair dancing in the air as he looked right into Eamon's eyes. "He massacred my people. Warriors, commoners... men, women... adults, children... He didn't give a damn, he slaughtered every single last one of them."

"The man you respect so much is nothing more than a Demon incarnate in human skin. He has no bottom line, no morals, and yet you fight for him?"

Eamon's pupils trembled. He didn't know what Gregwyn was talking about, but he didn't seem to be lying. Even so, at the same time, he could sense an oppressive Dream Force attacking his psyche again and again, if he was too casual, he might lose without understanding what happened.

"For the crime of following such a despicable man, you deserve no less punishment. If I let you live, won't you help in his future sins? You deserve death."

As Gregwyn's words fell, his four floating hands, each four meters from palm to the tips of his middle fingers clenched at the air.

Large javelins formed as the tightened their grips, a surge of Dream Force being ripped out of Eamon's control as Gregwyn raised his hand to the skies and then pointed down.

"Die."

Eamon's heart stopped beating entirely.

Chapter 2751: Loss

Eamon felt as though all his paths to retreat were sealed off. No matter where he looked, it felt as though the word death was being written into the skies just for his viewing pleasure.

Except there was no pleasure at all.

Shaken, he quickly solidified the talismans he had been forming. This time, under Leonel's tutelage, he had learned that sometimes offense was the best defense. He couldn't always turtle himself up and expect the best results. He had to do more than that.

Half his talismans were diverted to his defense while the other rushed out... forming shields.

Leonel didn't know what to say when he saw this, but it wasn't his place to try and force Eamon to change too much. In the end. If he couldn't take the steps he needed to himself, then all that was left would be death.

The falling javelins shattered the shields apart. It was hard to even say if they were delayed at all, a rain of silver and gold flooding the area.

Eamon unleashed a low roar that almost sounded much more high pitched than he likely wished for. Even so, it didn't slow his movements.

His hands expanded beneath the power of his talismans. An illusory cloak of palms covering his own until they matched the ones in the sky.

...

Leonel's gaze flickered before a wild grin spread across his face. And for the first time, shock radiated out from the Khafra Patriarch.

Eamon was imitating the runes on Gregwyn's palms!

'I knew it!' Leonel's eyes shone like torches.

How horrible was the environment Eamon was raised in? Setting aside just the living conditions themselves and focusing on Crafting alone, who was there to teach him? Who was there to guide him? How had he even awakened to Dream Force in the first place? Who allowed him to take such a risk.

The answer was obvious: it was Eamon and Eamon alone.

From start to finish, he was responsible for his own growth. If he didn't take his own risks here and there, how could he even catch Leonel's eye to begin with? Just because he didn't take the same risks Leonel would, didn't mean that he was actually a coward, and in a situation where every step of his could lead to a deviation in his foundation that could cost him his life, wasn't it only natural that he was so "cowardly"?

But this was still just the tip of the iceberg.

Eamon had to get used to scrounging up information from tidbits and pieces of materials that were once whole. His deduction reasoning abilities should be some of the best that Leonel had ever seen.

How could the Slayer Legion have any materials to systematically teach him Crafting? Even Leonel had his father leading him step by step. In this regard, Eamon was actually beyond even him.

Such a person... if you displayed such runes and Force Arts so blatantly before his face, how could he not learn to take advantage of them?

...

Gregwyn was taken aback as his javelins were shattered. He thought that he could end the battle with just a single strike, but this useless person had actually managed to block one of his strikes.

Humiliation. A great Humiliation.

Gregwyn's eyes reddened as his Hands of God pulsed with light.

Eamon looked at his own hands, feeling somewhat flustered again. But before he could decide his next move, the next wave of attacks had already come, Gregwyn appearing before him in an instant.

Eamon became even more flustered, striking out with a large palm.

But Gregwyn's own hand shattered it with a single fist, jagged lines of red forming out from the corner of his eyes as Dream Force pooled and fueled his every action.

The fist shuttled through the illusory palm, crushing it and landing on Eamon's own palm.

The sickening sound of cracking bone echoed and Eamon released a howl as he was sent flying backward.

But before he could even fly far, one of Gregwyn's Hands of God slammed down from the sky, squashing him flat.

Blood flew from Eamon's mouth, but his talismans barely managed to keep his body from turning into a meaty pile of flesh and shattered bone.

He tried to push himself up, but the palm didn't retract, pushing him down with even greater force.

One after another, the talismans on his body began to crack. If things continued like this, he would truly become flat.

His mind raced as he tried to come up with new ideas, novel thoughts, anything that could help him turn the tide.

But there was nothing.

He was too weak.

Gregwyn bent down and wrenched Eamon's head up with such force he nearly snapped it. Because the large palm was still pressing down on him, it looked like that was exactly what Gregwyn had wanted to do.

Gregwyn's face twisted with disgust. He couldn't understand how anyone could try so hard for a disgusting example of a man. He couldn't stand the look on Eamon's face, he truly deserved death.

He raised a palm up, ready to cut him down. He didn't plan to allow Eamon even the chance to speak and concede.

But at that moment, a talisman flickered high above, so far that Gregwyn hadn't even noticed it, or else he would have sent his own hands to destroy them.

"I concede."

The talisman spoke with Eamon's voice, and at that moment, the grip Gregwyn had on his hair vanished as he disappeared.

Eamon appeared back in the courtroom-like space, coughing and wheezing out blood.

Leonel caught him, shaking his head. Ultimately, Eamon still had far too little combat experience and he hadn't spent enough time by Leonel's side for that to suddenly change. The reality was that he was lucky to be alive. He was a bit too stubborn and tried to hold on for longer than he should have.

Leonel looked up at the point totals and the close lead flipped as the Khafra Dream Pavilion pulled again.

Chapter 2752: Weak

By this point, they were already over the halfway point. There would likely be two or three more challenges between now and the end.

Of course, there could be more, but that was dependent on how short they were.

The challenges like the one where Patriarch Khafra faced off against Leonel provided the least amount of points. The long ones like the three on three between both teams provided the most points. While challenges like the one where Eamon almost lost his life provided the most disparity in points. It could be said that after this round, Leonel and the others had fallen much further behind.

But they were still in striking distance. One challenge loss wasn't enough to change everything, or else what would be the point in holding this combat to begin with.

Leonel helped Eamon stabilize his situation. He had broken an arm and practically all of his ribs.

Unfortunately, there were no items that Leonel could bring in, so he couldn't help him out either. This was a bit of a troublesome matter... for most people.

While it was true that he couldn't bring in any other items, the same wasn't true of Force. At least in this courtroom, he could use Forces outside of Dream Force, and because of that, he had his Vital Star Force.

He poured it into Eamon, and soon the latter's situation not only stabilized, it skyrocketed upward for the better.

Leonel looked up and the first thing he saw was Gregwyn's maleficent gaze, but he was having a hard time taking the man seriously.

"Take this as a lesson," Leonel said, looking toward Eamon. "Strength is very important in this world. The weak can only prattle on about justice and morality."

"LEONEL!" Gregwyn was furious. How could he not know that Leonel was speaking about him?

Leonel didn't even bother to respond. Gregwyn was good at loading his words, speaking of women and children, but he had never faced off against women and children, looked them in the eye, and then slaughter them.

Did he kill them? Yes. But he had done so no differently than what would have happened to the Human Domain had the invasion of Gregwyn's Nomad Race succeeded.

He walked by their planets and casually destroyed them with the indifference of those invading Races.

He remembered Gregwyn's face and demeanor quite well. It wasn't that he paid so much attention to such a meaningless person, but rather because his memory was too good.

He remembered Gregwyn reclining on his palms, laughing and chuckling as the Human Domain was being invaded, having the time of his life. He wasn't even part of the vanguard, he was just leisurely commanding from the back. How could a genius like him put his life on the line so casually? Of course others had to do it for him.

He couldn't take such a person seriously.

Did he really care about the death of the women and children? Or did he care more about the fact his status had been stripped away from him after his people died?

If he really cared about protecting their lives, why had he run back to the core of his Domain? Shouldn't he had stayed on the battlefield and let Leonel kill him there? At the very least, there should have been some sort of vanguard waiting for when he entered their Domain.

But where they were?

Scuttling like rats in the middle of their territory, hiding behind the women and children he claimed to care so much about, and shuttling away their nobles to the safety of another Domain.

Pathetic.

"Indeed," Patriarch Khafra said lightly. "The weak can do nothing more than clamber."

The words, this time, were clearly aimed at Leonel. What was he doing now if not clambering? He lost to the Owlans, so he challenged the Spirituals. He lost to the Spirituals, so he could only challenge the Nomads.

Leonel's indifference spread out into a maleficent grin. At the moment, he exuded far more intention to kill than Gregwyn could hope to live up to.

"Pick the one on one if you dare, old man. Someone who's already lost to me speaking about the weak? Learn your place. The world can see for itself which of us is the weak one."

"You did not have to ask," Patriarch Khafra spoke lightly, reaching forward and picking the Force Art Tower challenge.

In a blink, Leonel and Patriarch Khafra had vanished, the two of them appearing in separate towers.

The Force Art Tower challenge was likely the most important challenge to appear. It was the golden goose, so to speak.

While you couldn't win with a single challenge, and all challenges were created equal, this was the one exception to the rule.

Winning it in one go still wasn't possible, however, this was certainly the most important challenge, and a decisive victory here was certainly enough to open a gap no less than Gregwyn's victory.

It wasn't just this, but it would also be a long challenge, meaning that it would also provide a large amount of points.

It was likely that after this, there would only be one challenge remaining.

This challenge was "simple". The Tower had nine floors and each floor had an environment. This environment would, in reality, be a hidden Force Art. The world itself was akin to a Force Art.

To this day, it was still widely accepted that other than the Life Tablet and Gathering of Kingdoms Stele, this was the greatest Craft in all of existence.

To make a world out of Force Arts... just what kind of concept was this? It was beyond normal Realms of understanding.

And it was precisely this sort of world that Leonel appeared in. Everything looked so real, so lively.

Greenery surrounded him, a massive carnivorous plant loomed overhead, looking much more like an unbloomed lily with jagged rows of teeth on each petal.

The green was only interrupted by hints of blues and reds, sometimes yellows and purples.

It was truly a gorgeous world.

Chapter 2753: Joke

Leonel took a breath, feeling that the air almost smelt... bright.

It was an odd feeling, but he almost instantly dismissed it, his gaze sharpening.

There was only one way forward right now, and that was to crush Patriarch Khafra so thoroughly that the current point gap could be made up for.

This time, he would go all out.

Leonel reached forward and touched a leaf. At that same instant, the dormant carnivorous plant suddenly awakened, biting down toward him with full force.

The task of this challenge was to make it out of this floor, obviously, and the method to do so was by comprehending the Force Art, undoing it, and clearing the floor. However, that didn't mean that there would be no danger in doing so. In fact, you could very well lose your life in this challenge.

However, Leonel was frighteningly calm even as the carnivorous plant seemed ready to swallow him whole, thick globules of acid dripping from its maw.

His Mage Core was an interesting part of his talent. Its usefulness seemed to ebb and flow. Sometimes it was a huge part of his combat strength and at other times, he easily forgot about it.

Leonel never truly forgot it, but the main problem he faced was that much like with everything else, it was hard to actually make use of something if you didn't have the techniques for it.

Why was King's Might so powerful? Sure, it was an amazing Lineage Factor, but without [Assimilate], [Breathe], and [Arise], it wouldn't be nearly so fear-inducing. In fact, Leonel had had the Lineage Factor for years before he got the Golden Tablet, and all he could use it for was a boost to his Dream Force affinity and some help toward supplementing his Spear Force.

He had to admit that it was thanks to King's Might that he was able to master his grandfather's way of the spear so quickly, but even with that taken into account... weren't the results too lackluster?

This was the reality of the world. Having talent wasn't enough, if you didn't have the foundation of a great power, and all the thoughts and comprehensions of your ancestors backing you, the strength you could exhibit would always be limited.

Aina was a perfect example. She was a God Childe, an exceptional talent and should objectively be on the level of a God already. There was a reason they were called God Childes.

However, if Aina was an Eighth Dimension God, would Leonel even have to do all of this? She could have just snapped her fingers and destroyed the Owlans, and he would have happily been a house husband.

The trouble was that she didn't have the foundation of a God. Her father had finally gotten a useful technique to her, and it was only then that she began to improve by leaps and bounds, but even then she was still greatly lacking.

Leonel had too many examples of this in his life. Emna was another, James could be considered another, Elrion...

The list was endless.

But that was part of the beauty of things as well... because when you happened to stumble into a huge breakthrough, the changes to your strength wouldn't be small in the slightest.

The Mage Core was based on the Camelot Magic System, a world where the strongest had only been Fourth Dimensional. Leonel had already left behind their strength by so many leaps and bounds his current Mage Core probably couldn't even be recognized by Mordred herself.

Of course, this was also due to the fact that his Enlightened self had made changes while he was unconscious.

But just now, in his first challenge against Patriarch Khafra, he had felt a huge change. His Mage Core reacted to his Natural Force Arts more fiercely than he could have ever expected, and there were even sweeping changes that occurred.

At that moment, Leonel felt that creating Natural Force Arts was so easy that they even seemed to be creating themselves... and that was practically exactly what was happening.

Leonel had long since realized that his Mage Core scaled with his Force comprehension. But what he didn't realize was that there was a feedback loop formed between the world and himself. It wasn't just him taking from the world, but it was also the world giving to him. And it wasn't just the world giving, but also him reciprocating.

That push and pull that formed not only allowed him to control the Force around him without having to take it into his body, but it also allowed that Force to communicate with him and almost whisper its thoughts into his mind.

The first shocking thing about this change was that his Forces... were much stronger. No, they weren't stronger. Rather, they were able to exhibit a larger power of their real strength instead of being limited by his Dimension. In fact, Leonel felt that if he could perfect this fledgling ability, he could ignore the limits of his Dimension entirely and exhibit the strength of Force purely based on his Comprehension, something that even Gods couldn't do.

The second shocking thing was that he didn't need to put as much effort into analyzing the world before forming Natural Force Arts. In fact, through his Mage Core, he could even create an ability with his Control Ability Index to passively create Natural Force Arts on a whim.

Both of these matters felt more abstract than real, especially since they were tied into one another. That was because Leonel felt that in order to free his Forces of the restriction of his Dimensions, he had to do so through Natural Force Arts.

At the same time, though... what did it even mean to casually create Natural Force Arts from thin air...?

The carnivorous plan continued to bite down toward Leonel, a savage light emitting from it as acid continued to drip. And then, it chomped down on Leonel whole.

BANG!

Suddenly, the entire world of green became a landscape of white that stretched into infinity. In the whole region, only Leonel stood unblemished. However, soon, a bronze Natural Force Art expanded beneath his feet, moving so fast that soon it too seemed to extend into infinity.

... It meant that this challenge had suddenly become nothing more than a joke.

Chapter 2754: Should Be

Patriarch Khafra smiled when he entered the first floor. It was identical to Leonel's, filled with carnivorous plants hidden within the beauty.

On his practically mummified face, such a smile was nothing short of eerie. His bones rattled and four swirling portals of space rippled behind him, but in the end, he settled them down. No, it still wasn't necessary to go so far.

Leonel was definitely a surprise, but his strength wasn't to the point that it was unfathomable.

During the first battle, he had gone at about 10% or so. 20% should be enough to crush Leonel, but there wasn't much room for error anymore.

'I'll go at 30%. In this environment, it's easier to explain it away.'

Even if he cleared this Tower with exceptional speed, it could be explained away with the fact that he was just particularly good at analyzing and clearing Force Arts. Plus, this was the one recurring challenge that many prepared for and trained with. There was even a Pavilion in every Dream Pavilion that could replicate some of this challenge's effects.

In that case, this was the perfect chance for him to exhibit some of his strength without seeming too suspicious.

30% was already far more than what Leonel deserved.

A carnivorous plant tried to swallow him whole from above, but Patriarch Khafra suddenly waved a hand, causing it to disappear into motes of light. However, when one looked closer, these motes of light had several runes dancing within them.

'The secret to clearing these Realms fast is to find the core of the world, decipher it, then diffuse it akin to a bomb... the core should be...'

Patriarch Khafra's gaze flickered toward where the core was. He had already found it; this was the first floor after all. But he waited a few seconds, fighting back against a swarm of carnivorous beasts before he flashed and appeared near the core.

The region was quite swampy. It was a lake, but it was covered in so many leaves and lily pads that it looked almost like solid ground.

He observed it for a moment before he nodded.

His figure flickered and his toes lightly tapped the ground. He hopped from lily pad to lily pad so quickly that only the slightest ripples spread through the water.

Every time he did so, a gorgeous light would radiate, and slowly, a chain was formed through the water.

When Patriarch Khafra made it to the other side, the rippling lights connected and echoed through the whole world. In a flash, the world was enveloped and then vanished into an infinite scape of white.

'Good. Let's move on to the next floor.'

...

When Patriarch Khafra appeared once again, he found himself in a desert. Dunes rose and fell for as far as the eyes could see, and the ground suddenly shook beneath him.

A sinkhole that seemed to span hundreds of meters appeared beneath him, and a beast tried to swallow him whole.

...

Patriarch Khafra left the fourth floor, entering the fifth. This time, it was a land of snow. However, every time the snowflakes that fell from the skies landed on him, he felt his Dream Force being sapped away as his mind was attacked. It was a cold that was more than bone-deep, it was soul-deep, reaching into the depths of his being and trying to force him to give in.

He raised up a palm, letting a snowflake fall onto it.

'This is a bit more difficult. The formation is actually hidden in the falling snowflakes, and every time they hit the ground, the overall formation becomes more complicated.

'The trick should be that the snowflakes are all identical. Even Gods wouldn't be able to form such a complex array, and any that would exist would be far too difficult to maintain just energy-wise.

'In that case... Just a single Inverse Force Art should do. Analyze the snowflake and counter it on a large scale...'

...

Patriarch Khafra moved with great speed. If much of the world's attention wasn't diverted away by the battle of the Owlans and Voice Race descendants, he would have certainly impressed a large segment of the population. Who knew that the Nomads had such an expert amongst them? It was a shocking matter without a doubt.

What he didn't know was that his two subordinates were frozen.

As Patriarch Khafra cleared the fifth floor, Leonel had already long since appeared back in the courtroom. In fact, he had appeared the moment Patriarch Khafra entered the third floor.

The comparisons were odious. It weighed so heavily on them that they couldn't even fathom what was going on.

Little Fox held a teddy bear in his arms, squeezing it tightly as he looked toward Leonel. Leonel met the adorable little boy's gaze with a grin.

"How did you do that?" Little Fox asked in a voice so tender and innocent it was hard for anyone to reject him.

"How?" Leonel chuckled, his grin widened. "Because I'm strong."

The words echoed and Gregwyn felt like a hammer had struck him.

The first round was still acceptable because it was clear that Patriarch Khafra just didn't expect Leonel to explode with so much potential. But this round...

What was the explanation?

They looked up and witnessed their Patriarch slowly making his way forward. He was meticulous and impressive by any metric you wanted to use. And yet, every time he cleared a floor, it was like another slap to their faces.

Watching him earnestly press forward, and even hold back as though he was certain he was in the lead, they felt their hearts twisting as though a dagger had been plunged into it and wrenched out again, and again, and again.

All the while, Leonel stood there with a bright smile on his face as though he had just done the most normal thing in the world. He didn't mind the glances or Gregwyn's despair.

This was how all things should be.

Chapter 2755: Unwilling

Leonel grinned, observing Little Fox curiously.

"Tell me, how many lives have you lived?"

Little Fox's expression changed before he quickly covered it up.

"What is mister talking about?"

"Don't you feel a little sick to your stomach pretending to be a little boy? You don't need to hide it, no one is watching the courtroom, while the challenges are ongoing they can

only see the challenges themselves. Why don't you let this mister know? I won't hurt you."

A sinister light flashed in Little Fox's eyes.

"My parents told me not to trust strangers."

"I'll be sure to swing by your neighborhood with a white van and some candy. I bet you won't be able to resist then."

Little Fox's gaze flashed with confusion, but he was ultimately a Dream Force master. He could feel the intention of Leonel's words even if he didn't understand the terminology. And when he did, he felt furious.

However, he slowly calmed himself down. He would wait and see how long Leonel would be able to prance around for. Even if they lost this, did Leonel really think that things would come to an end here? Of course not. If anything, he would just put himself in a different line of fire.

At that moment, Patriarch Khafra stepped out, feeling pleased with himself. But when he saw Leonel, a baleful aura suddenly erupted from him.

It only appeared for a brief instant, and it vanished an instant afterward. But it was still more than enough for Eamon and Gregwyn to sway on their feet, almost collapsing entirely.

Leonel's smile didn't fade, his gaze not leaving Little Fox for even an instant. By the time the "little boy" remembered that he should have been scared, it was too late to pretend now. Even if his thinking speed was on another level and he would have still had time to fool a normal person, he knew that it was useless before Leonel.

The points were tabulated and then the bars fluctuated. Soon, Leonel and his Vast Dream Pavilion reclaimed first place and by a decent margin at that. It was clear that there was barely enough room for one more challenge.

The first requirement for a win was to fill your bar up entirely. If you did so and the other party failed to do so, the challenge would end and your Dream Pavilion would win.

However, there was a second caveat. If both teams cleared the bar in the same challenge, then the winner would be decided by whoever had the most points in the end.

Right now, Leonel had such a large margin of victory that even if Patriarch Khafra and the others picked on Eamon or Goggles, so long as they showed up and admitted defeat, he would still secure his victory.

It could be said that the Tower of Force Arts had already sealed Leonel's victory, and Patriarch Khafra realized this.

Judging by the point disparity, Patriarch Khafra realized that he would have had to go at 100% to stop this from happening. But he had no idea how Leonel had done it.

How was this possible?

"What are you waiting for?" Leonel grinned ear to ear, pointing at the three floating challenge orbs that had already manifested. "Aren't you going to pick?"

Patriarch Khafra felt stifled.

"Leave it to me," Little Fox suddenly said.

Patriarch Khafra looked over and frowned. What was he talking about? It was already over, it didn't matter if...

Little Fox gave him a glance and Patriarch Khafra could only nod in the end. With a thought, he picked another one on one challenge and it was the only one on one challenge available. The others were a three on three and a two on two.

The challenge was quite simple. It was a maze challenge, but this time, there were no guides, they were on their own.

Leonel looked toward Goggles with a smile, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"You don't need to push too hard, just have fun with it. If you find yourself in danger, you can always give up."

Leonel looked into Goggles' eyes and paused.

Goggles was looking back at him, but in that moment, it was as though he was looking at a completely different person. No, it felt like a thin facade had been ripped away.

With a shrug, Goggles slid his shoulder out of Leonel's grasp.

"I won't be participating anymore."

Before Leonel could respond, Goggles had already disappeared.

Eamon was shocked. Let alone him, even Gregwyn was shocked. He didn't understand what had just happened.

Gregwyn let out a hollow laugh that quickly became uproarious. He was like a drowning man that finally found a life raft.

The Dream Pavilion Head could never force others to participate on his behalf, at least not without external force. That was why only Clarence and Leonel had participated in the first Challenge Sequence, they had no ability to force everyone else to participate without threatening their lives on the outside.

But since Goggles dared to do this, would he even be in the Dream Pavilion anymore by the time Leonel returned? And Leonel obviously couldn't leave now, or else it wouldn't just be himself who was giving up, but the entire Vast Dream Pavilion.

The worst part was that even if Goggles had joined the challenge and then given up right after, they still would have won. But because he had given up without even entering, the penalty was far harsher.

Leonel didn't even have a Fourth Dimensional expert to replace him!

"You reap what you sow!" Gregwyn said between bouts of manic laughter. "Even your own people can't stand you!"

Leonel stood in silence, staring at the location Goggles had just been standing in.

The Goggles he knew would have never done this. The Goggles he knew would have stood by his side to the end, even if it meant death. The Goggles he knew had already given up his life for his sake once before and would have been willing to do it again.

It didn't make sense, none of it made sense...

Except it did.

Leonel knew the answer in his heart, he was just unwilling to admit it... he was unwilling to accept what it meant for Goggles to betray him right here and right now.

A tear fell from Leonel's eye, streaking down his cheek.

Chapter 2756: Nature versus Nurture

Leonel stood in silence for a long while. He tuned out the world, lost in a bit of a daze.

Whatever nonsense Gregwyn was talking about reaping what you sow wasn't even worth listening to. Goggles' actions had nothing to do with Gregwyn or his words. Just logically speaking, that was a foolish conclusion to draw.

If Goggles was stupid enough to believe the words of a scorned fool, then he wouldn't have been nearly as close to Leonel as he was. Originally, he was Leonel's trusted aid. Because of his Ability Index, he almost had no choice but to be intelligent.

The more information Goggles had on hand, the better he could predict the future.

Honestly speaking, Leonel could understand if someone drew the conclusion. Technically, Goggles would be able to grasp that Gregwyn was technically telling the truth with his Ability Index.

But the fact Goggles only chose to withdraw now was the final nail in the coffin.

He wasn't leaving because he felt that Leonel wasn't worth following due to Gregwyn's words, he was leaving because he had already made an assessment. In fact, he had likely already made the choice to betray Leonel before he even stepped foot into this place, and he had always known that he would be able to protect his life.

From the very beginning, this was what he wanted to do.

It was a line of thought that Leonel had wanted to ignore, that he had forced himself to ignore, that he had stuffed away into the recesses of his mind.

He was too intelligent not to see it, he just didn't want to see it.

Was a person's personality set from birth? Would they almost certainly become one way or another? Or were they shaped by their environment?

Almost anyone would tell you that it was a combination of both, it had to be both... whether that was for the world to make sense or for you to keep your own sanity.

You should want the ability to change if you forced it hard enough. Why should who you were meant to be end up being decided without your input, at the hands of some amorphous power of probability?

It wasn't fair, and no one would want to accept that.

So in that case, how could he ever expect things to always be the same? To expect the same person to always make the same choice? To assume that the person he knew would always be the person he had come to know and not some stranger wearing the same skin?

He couldn't.

And that was exactly what he didn't want to admit.

He shed a tear not for Goggles, he could accept it. In fact, had he not purposely ignored all of the signs, dead set in his way, he would have known this was coming long ago.

Goggles' abilities were exceptional. His Ability Index alone was rated at a much higher level than Leonel's own and he had exceptional Dream Force talent as a result.

However, it was impossible for him to hide something from Leonel for so long, and even less likely to pull one over on him.

Maybe if he was a great distance away, or maybe if he had some great expert protecting him from the shadows it would have been possible. In fact, it was almost certain that the latter was true... the difference was that this "great expert" still wasn't enough to pull the wool over Leonel's eyes.

It was certain that Goggles hadn't made this choice on his own. If he picked against Leonel, there was a reason he had done so, a reason that he had changed his allegiances to follow another.

And all signs seemed to point toward the Dream Asura.

From the very beginning, Flaure had likely known this would happen. In fact, she had likely begun to lay out these plans long ago. She might have used the trump card that was Goggles earlier than she thought she would've had to, but she had been ready to use it for a long time.

Even with all of this, it still wasn't the reason Leonel had shed a tear.

The moment that Goggles had done such a thing, he was dead to Leonel. Not only would he make him regret this choice he made today, but he would make him suffer a fate worse than death.

The betrayal was only the first layer, but the festering wound he had ripped open was the true reason for Leonel's reaction.

If even Goggles could change so much, what about his father? If he somehow twisted fate and reversed reality, bringing his father back from the dead when it should have very well been impossible...

Would Velasco even be Velasco anymore?

Would he still be his father? Or would he have done all of that to bring back a man who shared the same flesh as his father, but none of the same mind, none of the same soul... none of the same heart?

Standing there, watching Goggles leave, it was like Leonel was watching his father die again.

The final strands of hope he had been holding onto drifted away and something in his chest seemed to break.

The pain came in relentless waves until streaks of black came from his eyes.

There was so much darkness, so much grief.

Flickering lines of smoke came from his eyes as the black streaks drizzled down his cheek, forming droplets that dripped downward.

BANG!

They landed on the floor with a resounding boom.

The killing intent that filled the air was so violent that Eamon, who had been worried for Leonel's safety, lost consciousness, his eyes turning red and then rolling to the back of his head.

The crown of Dream Sovereignty appeared above his head, but it flickered. From a radiant gold and silver color, it danced between that and a dark black and maroon as though a demon emperor had descended.

Chapter 2757: Sigh

Goggles appeared outside, landing in the Dream Pavilion. He cast a glance toward the shadow of the Khafra Dream Pavilion before he shook his head.

With long strides, he left the region. He didn't have much time, and he didn't stand much of a chance against Leonel.

According to his understanding of Leonel, even if it seemed impossible, he would still try to find a way. So that should give him time. But humans tended to be unpredictable, especially when emotions got involved. That was why he could only rely on him.

This Flaure person provided him a better opportunity, and when the time came to betray her, he would do it without hesitation as well.

However, that was a matter for the future. The first thing he needed to do was to quickly find a way off of the Human Bubble, and for someone as weak as him, that was easier said than done. But luckily, he had his own plans. He wouldn't trust Flaure to help preserve his life.

Although hiding in the Bubbles seemed like an option he knew that Leonel would be able to find him much too easily. The only answer was to get out of here as quickly as possible, only then could he protect his life properly.

Leaving the Dream Pavilion was easy, entering it was the true problem. Luckily, he obviously didn't have to worry about the latter problem.

The moment he left, he entered the chaos that was now the Human Bubbles. They had still yet to be stabilized, and since this had been the territory of the Four Great Families, the situation was even worse here because of their disappearance.

Goggles walked by a building and at that moment, a shadow strolled out of it. If anyone was observing, they'd be shocked to find that there were two Goggles, not just one... at least that was what it was for a short time before they casually slapped their palms together and fused into one.

Goggles continued forward, his steps never pausing. He slid into another abandoned building and wiped some dust off of a teleportation platform before stepping into it and disappearing.

Soon after he was gone, the teleportation platform crumbled and the abandoned building shattered after it. Everything that had happened here was buried beneath the rubble.

...

Goggles appeared in a familiar place not long afterward. It was none other than the ruins of the Cult.

He rubbed a ring on his finger, his gaze flickering. After some hesitation, he took out a familiar Tablet.

A Black Tablet.

Using it as his guide, he entered.

The last time Leonel had visited this place, he had taken away a lot of people, but he didn't do much to the region itself at all, mostly because it was too difficult to. The construction was built to the standards of a long lost standard of human ingenuity. It wasn't easy to get rid of, and it was difficult to tell just how Goggles had managed to even know of its existence.

He entered and soon found what he was looking for. It was another teleportation platform, but this time to the unknown.

Leonel had found this as well, but he, much like Goggles, could tell that it was dormant and there was no telling if there was anything on the other side. Leonel had no intention of randomly teleporting himself to an unknown land, especially not one related to the Cult. And neither did Goggles.

He had only come here for one reason, and that was to commandeer the equipment.

He began to change around some of the runes, exhibiting skill in Crafting that should have been far beyond him.

Only after a long while did he exhale a breath and stand.

It had taken him months to reach this point. It was difficult because doing things without Leonel noticing was incredibly difficult. Luckily, he had pulled the wool over his own eyes, or else maybe he would have never dared to do such a thing... at least not without some more assurances.

He rolled his thumb over the spatial ring on his finger again.

With the resources he got in exchange for this, he would be able to go far. He had most of [Dimensional Cleanse], and even if he didn't, with the Black Tablet he had access to a whole library of techniques.

He would truly be free now.

As for Leonel? Well, he had his own problems to deal with. If he wanted even a chance of seeing him again, he would have to survive first.

Goggles stepped into the platform, disappearing from the Human Bubbles for good.

...

Life was complex. It was something that most couldn't hope to comprehend, and even those with the strength to catch its faintest edges ended up being the most confused of them all.

Leonel trusted Goggles not because of his recent actions, but because of a past action that they had already long deviated from.

Because Leonel returned to Valiant Heart Mountain with so much more power, he didn't need to struggle for every victory like he didn't originally... and because of that, Goggles never got to meet Rollan, and because he never met Rollan, he never met his wife and could therefore never fall in love with Rollan's wife.

Many of the actions of the Goggles Leonel had known were done because he had fallen for the woman of another man.

By this point, he had already met Rollan's wife. But the circumstances were completely different. She was pregnant with Rollan's child, and living an entirely different life. Whatever it was that made Rollan fall for her the first time simply wasn't there anymore.

It was just a small change, and yet it changed everything.

In an unknown location, Nilrem reclined in silence. There was a reason he had allowed the Valiant Heart Mountain to reform, the very same reason he had allowed Leonel to find it.

Leonel needed to know that life wasn't so cheap.

Even if you could seemingly toy with it as you pleased...

There was always a price to pay.

A sigh echoed through Existence.

Chapter 2758: No Choice

Leonel's aura seemed to carry with it a towering, unsuppressable fury. The veins beneath his skin twitched wildly as he stood in silence, trying to rein in his temper.

Plumes of black and dark violets rose and fell around him, his Dream Sovereign crown flickering with pulses of demonic light.

Let alone Eamon, even the three Nomads felt shaken. Their own minds seemed to be corroding away under Leonel's might, and the world seemed to be slowly swaying toward shades of red.

Somewhere deep inside, Leonel had always felt that it was possible. No matter what the world said, no matter what logic said, he had always felt like he was above it all. Even after he changed his Dream Force path, the truest core of his nature had never changed.

There was a reason he had always tended toward absolute confidence. He never measured himself by what others could or couldn't do, and the only person he had ever truly respected to the depths of his heart was his father. As for anyone else, what they could or couldn't do was irrelevant to him.

And it was this very father that had given him a chance to break free of the Demoness, this father that had taught him everything he knew, this father that was the reason for the strength he held today.

His father had given up so much, so wasn't it only right that he be able to accomplish all things? Wasn't it only right that he could play with the lives of a Demi-God World on a whim? Wasn't it only right that he didn't care very much that his Fawkes identity had been exposed even if that meant becoming the enemy of the world?

Who cared if he was the enemy of the world? He would just win anyway.

There was nothing that could stop him, nothing that should be able to stop him... because his father had paved the path to invincibility for him...

So wouldn't he be letting him down by letting something as foolish as the limitations of others hinder him?

So he had held onto that hope, clung onto something he knew didn't make sense.

Until it all came crumbling down today.

It didn't matter if he truly found a way to bring his father back to life, if he somehow surpassed the Regulators and brought his father back from the jaws of death... because just by virtue of doing so, his father would never be his father again.

The man that had raised him would never return. And any attempt to reform him into that man would only sully his memory.

Ironically, it was precisely because Leonel respected his father so much that he simply couldn't do it.

There was something beautiful about life, something that no amount of power could replicate, that no amount of strength could reform.

It was a chaotic probability.

Leonel had started much of his life as a person who held morality in the highest regard. He couldn't deduce the worth of a person, so he felt that all people should be equal.

In the past few years, he had still not found such an answer, a hidden secret formula to weigh the life of a person, but he had become much more lax with his views on morality nonetheless.

He decided that since there was no objective morality, his only responsibility was to himself and those around him. Only by doing right by them could he leave a fulfilling life.

But now he understood that it wasn't just that all lives were equal, nor was it that all lives were equally worthless. In fact, every life was so individually precious that it was simply impossible to ever replicate them again.

Were his brothers even the same people they were before they died? Was Rollan the same person? Was Goggles the same person?

Was Aina the same person?

The bloody streaks fell from Leonel's eyes and the courtroom shook more and more violently as though it might collapse at the seams.

Eamon huddled up in a corner, too afraid to look up. The pupils of Patriarch Khafra continuously trembled from side to side, his heart rolling in waves. Little Fox's large eyes flashed with denser and denser hints of fear.

None of them could understand what kind of monster was standing before them.

On the one hand, he seemed to be a normal human. But in their minds... he seemed to project out as large as an entire world, as though he was a looming Void Beast rather than a simple boy.

Just when it seemed like the courtroom would truly crumble, a figure stepped out from the Segmented Cube.

Aina appeared in the midst of Leonel's aura, pressing a hand to his cheek. She couldn't seem to feel the stream of blood running down the back of her hand as she looked into his eyes.

Leonel met her gaze, his own flashing with a towering hatred and helplessness. He truly hated the world, and for a moment, he felt like it should just all burn down.

He had never felt so much hatred in his life.

Hatred for the Four Great Families. Hatred for the Demoness. Hatred for the Regulators. Hatred for Existence.

Aina smiled weakly and slipped into his arms. She pressed her ear to his chest, listening to the thunderous booms and echoing war drums.

Somehow, her warmth felt separate from the heat rising in his body.

Leonel's breathing slowly calmed down. He subconsciously wrapped his arms around her until his beating heart returned to a steady, slow rhythm. At this pace, it only thrummed once every several minutes.

He wasn't the only one that had lost people. His wife had lost her mother, his brothers had lost their parents, there were people who lost loved ones every day.

The difference between him and them is that they had already accepted it, but he never had.

And today, he had no choice but to do so.

Chapter 2759: Repay the Favor

Patriarch Khafra's gaze sharpened.

"It's been long enough," he said coldly.

There wasn't a strict time limit on sending in participants, but that didn't mean that they were perfectly lax. There were methods of pressure that Patriarch Khafra could use, and some of those even included losing even more points.

All of this was just a formality at this point. Whether Leonel sent someone in or not didn't matter. He had only really spoken for the sake of regaining face. The rest of it was irrelevant to him.

He had all the time in the world. So long as Leonel stalled for any longer, he would just deduct more of his points.

This was just the first step of their plan and they weren't on a timeline crunch... yet.

Leonel completely ignored him, closing his eyes and taking deep breaths. The entire rest of the world was meaningless to him; he felt at peace so long as he could feel Aina in his arms.

His violent aura slowly receded further and the world returned to peace. Finally, the tears of blood that ran down his cheeks were burnt into a falling rain of ash. The last to recede was his crown of black and violet, his robes leaving just a moment before.

Soon, there was truly a peaceful quiet.

"-Hurry up!"

The first thing Leonel heard when he started paying attention to the world once again was Gregwyn's incessant chattering. He seemed to be even more pissed off than Patriarch Khafra that he had felt so much fear just now.

He was eager to watch Leonel fall, and his previous complacent laughter had been muffled by his unhappiness.

Once again, Leonel ignored him.

He was painted into a corner? What complete and utter fools. He had never been painted into a corner in his entire life, and he doubted it would start now.

If he wanted to lose on purpose, then he would lose.

If he wanted to win, no one could stop him from doing so.

He was willing to accept that he couldn't bring his father back not just because of Goggles action, but because of the deep and profound respect he had for the man who had raised him. Recreating that man was nothing more than a spit to the face of everything his father had always meant to him.

And in this life, from here on out, that was the one and only loss he would ever take. It was a loss not to the world, not to these jumping clowns, but to his father himself. No one else was worthy of defeating him.

Leonel pulled back and looked into Aina's golden eyes.

"I'll need your help."

Aina nodded, already understanding from Leonel's thoughts.

With a movement of her intention, the technique her father gave her circulated and she fell from the Eighth Heaven back down the Third.

With a quick pop of several pills, she entered the Fourth Dimension in a flash.

Patriarch Khafra's eyes widened, but it was already too late.

Aina accepted the challenge and both her and Little Fox vanished.

Patriarch Khafra's lip trembled. He had a bad feeling, a very bad feeling.

Leonel stood in silence, his heart calming down for only a moment before there was a rush.

Respect and Persistence.

He Respected his father enough to never try and recreate the man he had been to him.

He would Persist to prove to the world that Velasco Morales was the only one worthy of him admitting defeat to.

BANG!

Leonel's Dream Force rose to the Higher Life State. At the same time, his True Dream Sovereignty reached the Silver Grade. If before his Dream Force was only akin to a level above, right now his Higher Life State Dream Force felt like a Quasi Creation State Force in the eyes of others.

He grasped onto the fainted edges of the Self Path and he understood why he hadn't been able to understand it in the past.

He was too stubborn.

The core of the Self Path was understanding the uniqueness of a person, a uniqueness that couldn't be replicated. Only by understanding how special you, yourself, were, could you impose that Will onto the outside world and force the various treasures of the world to abide by your thoughts and your whims...

Only that way could you suppress the natures of the Forces of the world and force only your own nature to shine through the brightest.

If he never truly accepted his father's death...

He would have never comprehended the Self Path.

"You..."

Leonel closed his eyes, directly ignoring Patriarch Khafra. However, he didn't see darkness when he opened them. Instead, he saw a world of grey and black.

It was a maze and the goal was to make it to the end before the enemy did. However, not only were there other dangers here, but he could directly meet Little Fox as well.

Aina gave over full control of her body over to Leonel. Honestly speaking, just by virtue of their connection, Aina had enough comprehension of Dream Force to pull out this victory.

But Leonel didn't just want a victory. He wanted to crush their spirits.

Aina had been forced to regress to the Fourth Dimension before she had been enlightened. This meant that it wouldn't be a flash to return to the Eighth Dimension like it had been in the past. These people had not only cost Aina one of her precious regressions, but they had handicapped Leonel of his strongest fighter.

More than all of that, they had made him feel a pain that was worse than death, forced him to face a reality that he hadn't wanted to face.

In that case, he would repay the favor.

Aina shot forward under the control of Leonel's senses. They zoomed through the maze with such speed that it seemed as though they knew where every trap lay, and where every turn curved.

In a flash, they suddenly blocked Little Fox's path.

The little boy's eyes widened. How had Aina found him so quickly?

"Die," Aina said lightly, slapping out with a palm.

The world seemed to go dark.

Chapter 2760: Victory

The momentum of Aina's palm was suffocating. Little Fox was taken off guard by her appearance alone, let alone the fierceness of the attack. It felt like, for a moment, death was standing right before him. There was no way to dodge, no way to evade, no way to...

"Mental attack!"

Little Fox quickly snapped out of it. If he was truly a little boy, his life would have ended right then and there, but his actual experience was far beyond his age.

None of them could have expected that this would happen. They assumed that there was nothing that Leonel was still hiding, but to think that Aina was such a Dream Force expert.

Even so, there was no time to regret it now. Leonel hadn't given them any time to assess what happened. The only thing left to do was fight.

So long as he could hold on and reach the end of the maze, it didn't matter what Aina did, the victory would be theirs.

Little Fox quickly clasped his hands together and protected himself with a shield of Dream Force.

BANG!

His vision went black as the palm landed. The disparity was far greater than he could have ever imagined.

Just now, he thought he had a firm handle on Aina's strength. The palm was powerful, but the Dream Force control was poor and lacking. This made sense, it seemed that Aina was a lot more like Gregwyn in this respect, relying on great talent but lacking in experience.

However, when the palm actually landed, Little Fox felt as though he was nothing more than an ant facing off against an elephant.

He had no idea how Aina had done it, but despite the simplicity of her attack, the hidden complexities within were on another level entirely.

It clicked for Little Fox the moment his consciousness faded back into focus.

They were doing this on purpose! Aina wasn't a layman at all!

But it was already far too late. Another palm came crashing down and despair took root in Little Fox's soul.

He slapped his small palms together once more, his floating hands following suit. He couldn't die here, he had no choice but to go all out.

Suddenly, his floating hands expanded and seemed to become the hands of adults rather than the toddler he was. They looked aged and wrinkled, and soon they began to morph even further.

One gained angel wings, another became covered in demonic scales, a third became covered in fur and the last seemed to grow pulsing green veins that wiggled about as though they had minds of their own.

The four palms formed an odd cycle between them, the balance resonating with Dream Force akin to the birth of a world. It was like, for a moment, Little Fox was truly tapping into the Second Dimension, the birthplace of Dream Force.

His strength skyrocketed as he coughed up a mouthful of blood. Whatever method he was using seemed to place a great toll on him, but it was between this and death. He had no other methods.

Aina's second palm crashed into the combination of four as Little Fox hurriedly scrambled to his feet, rushing backward at a greater speed.

Little Fox rounded a corner, only pulling his floating hands back toward him as he increased the distance.

The floating hands of Nomads had a limited scope of influence, but that was only for normal Nomads. The more control you had, especially in the case of Dream Force experts, the larger said scope would be. For Little Fox, he could even teleport his hands back to himself on a whim, it was just that he didn't want to display that ability just yet-

BANG!

Little Fox was sent flying backward.

He was so focused on escape and survival that he didn't even notice a Dream Beast appearing before him. The tail of a Starry Tailed Fox slapped against him, nearly twisting his head from his shoulders.

He tried to scramble up again, but he found that Aina was already slowly walking toward him. From the beginning, she never seemed to increase her pace. In fact, it was as though-

'She knew there was a beast here?!'

Little Fox's heart was practically beating out his chest.

This maze was so complex. Although he knew there were patterns, the idea of actually capitalizing on them in such a life and death situation was the furthest thing from his mind.

It didn't make sense for Aina to be able to both focus on hiding the true extent of her Dream Force abilities, while also calculating everything else in advance as well.

"No!"

Aina's palm struck down again, ignoring Little Fox's final plea. The little boy teleported his hands toward him in the final moment, but four of his palms barely managed to deal with Aina, not that he had to divert them toward separate attacks, he stood not the slightest chance.

His body was shattered into a rain of blood and gore, and the world fell silent.

Aina reached out and grabbed the four palms that remained, gazing toward them curiously before turning away and leaving.

It was a maze that should have taken weeks to navigate your way out of. Between the dangers, the traps, and the attacks on the mind, not to mention the changing to the maze over time, this was already a great time.

Yet, not only had Aina found Little Fox in barely a few hours, she left the maze in less than a day.

When Aina completed the maze, Leonel's eyes slowly opened, his gaze calm as his wife appeared by his side.

What remained of Little Fox's body were pulled to their side, but his palms stayed with Aina.

The bars of points rolled forward and a disadvantageous situation was turned around. In a single breath of time, the Vast Dream Pavilion took their victory, rising up to the 163rd position on the leaderboard.

Victory was theirs.

