

Evolution 105

Chapter 105: Nocturn's Heart City.

A few hours later...

Levi finally flipped the last page while wiping a drop of sweat from his forehead. He had spent hours reading it nonstop, very, very carefully to ensure no fine print was on it.

Although he found nothing, the contract itself was still too complex, with extensive data about the Nocturnal Ring and Boundless Expense, forcing Levi to take multiple breaks to analyze it thoroughly.

There was a term regarding the Games Requirement, which enforced a single game per year for lower-ranked participants. Meanwhile, the upper-ranked Rifters needed to play one game per decade.

This was the bare minimum to ensure no fake retirees. If you were in the program and enjoyed its benefits, then you had to play the Death Games and provide value to the program.

Otherwise, one could always retire, anytime, any day.

No one was forced to be in the program, and this had to be emphasized so people wouldn't claim to be enslaved for entertainment or such.

As for its rules, there were many:

No body or weapon modification allowed... only cosmetic changes permitted.

No wintrading... throwing matches intentionally for another's gain is forbidden.

No bribery of participants or officials.

No alliances unless explicitly permitted by the event rules.

No surrender... unless the participant holds an official Resignation Token.

Assaulting a Gamemaster is punishable by death.

Skipping a game without a valid, verified reason results in soul imprisonment for a century or more.

All power types are allowed, including but not limited to:

Daywalker/Sleepwalker Contracts

Pure Elementalism

Witchcraft & Forbidden Rites

Totemic Bonds

Bloodline Echoes

Spiritual Parasites... etc.

There were many other unmentioned rules, but all of them made sense to Levi, which didn't bother him at all.

However, when he read about the peculiar powers of other races, he couldn't help but show his astonishment.

He asked Ash'Kral about them, and to his surprise, Ash'Kral didn't hold back. He told him that if he wanted to join the games, he would fight against them, and it was better to be knowledgeable about other races' special powers.

What surprised him the most was the fact that those races were also using a Shadowlife Seed that focused on their evolution.

The only difference was that, unlike nightcrawlers, those races could absorb light just fine, allowing them to evolve from a young age without any need for integration by another race.

Since each race possessed its unique genetic talents, the Shadowlife Seed evolved those talents, giving birth to special powers.

As for the rewards and penalties? Levi was satisfied with the former while dreading the latter.

The rewards included anything a man could ever wish for, leaving even Levi eager to win some of them.

But this eagerness was soon quenched by a single question from Ash'Kral.

"Now that you have the contract, are you willing to join the program, knowing that you will kill not just nightcrawlers, but also Humans, Elves, minotaurs, Drelvyn, Valkirn, Centaurs, and many other races who hold no enmity towards you, and neither do you?"

Seeing Levi's silence, Ash'Kral doubled down.

"What I am asking you is... are you ready to kill for selfish reasons and to entertain the watchers from all known realms?"

When put like this, Levi's expression turned solemn.

While he had no issue with killing nightcrawlers, it was different with humans and other races whom he had never interacted with before.

The image of purposefully killing another person, purely for the sake of self-improvement, clashed heavily with Levi's morals... but at the same time, Levi understood that his life was this now.

If he wanted to grow stronger and faster, there weren't many available options unrelated to the CRS Platform or the Nocturnal Ring...The majority of resources were monopolized by them.

Since:

Strength = Resources.

Resources = Desire.

Desire = Conflict.

Conflict = Death.

Unless Levi was born with a golden spoon and had everything he needed or wanted without having to lift a finger, there was no escaping from this formula.

"To be honest... I don't know," Levi uttered solemnly, "I want to get stronger, and while I prefer keeping my humanity intact, I understand that everyone participating in those Death Games had willingly signed their lives away... just like me."

"So, neither am I killing innocent people nor doing anything wrong," Levi stressed, "If one doesn't want to be killed, don't participate... the contract terms are clear; no one can join the platform while under enforcement."

As per one of the rules, Levi had noticed that the Nocturnal Ring emphasized immensely the participants' willingness.

If they were brainwashed, controlled, enslaved, or whatnot... it didn't matter.

The moment someone signed the contract, it ran a full diagnosis on their system to ensure no foul play was done. If something suspicious was found, they would be rejected until further notice.

It had to be the player's decision, and this was the only proper way to run such an insane idea and make it approved by the majority of the watchers.

"Boy, theorizing your reaction is one thing, and experiencing it is another," Ash'Kral advised. "You aren't a killer, not yet, at least."

"Then, I have to be one." Levi's spiritual eyes turned placid. "I always knew my path would be carved out of blood, not flowers. If so, I might as well start it early."

Levi understood that life wasn't fair... You simply couldn't have it both ways.

In his case, it was even worse.

For he knew, the moment he signed the contract with Ash'Kral, his life was bound to his goals. While he hadn't told him yet about them, Levi wasn't dumb.

It was obvious they would be grandiose and require a level of strength beyond what Ash'Kral could achieve on his own... otherwise, he wouldn't need anyone to achieve them.

In other words, Levi had to always give it his best to increase his strength as Ash'Kral was watching him, analyzing his decisions and what they meant for his end goals.

If Levi wanted this partnership to last until he was strong enough to break off the contract without fear, he had to keep showing him that he had it in him.

Or else...Instant Replacement.

Levi and Ash'Kral might be bickering, joking, and helping each other, resembling two friends, but Levi had no plans to get too comfortable with him.

For he knew...That demon wasn't to be trusted.

As expected, Ash'Kral's smile widened in pleasure the moment Levi summoned a white illuminating pen and nudged his fingers closer to the signature area.

A heart-skip later, Levi's nickname was written on it, signing it under the Void Seed's serial number.

-Three Body Problem, Welcome to the Nocturnal Ring! -

The moment Levi signed it, a dark, sinister spiritual notification popped up before him. As Levi gazed at his new name, he felt a deep sense of purpose wash over him...He thought long and hard for a nickname.

In the end, no other name spoke to him as strongly as this.

Just as astronomers broke their minds on the erratic dance of three suns, Levi must unravel the secret of these seeds' harmonized growth, nurturing their potential without letting them tear his spirit apart.

In every clash within the Ring, he fought not only for victory, but for the fragile equilibrium that kept those three seeds...and his own existence...from spiraling into oblivion.

"What will it be? Will I be the first to conquer the Three Body Problem, or will my opponents defeat me before it?" Levi chuckled to himself at the irony hidden beneath, "Either way, it shall be conquered in my lifetime, even if it's for a brief moment..."

Soon, Levi's eyes were attracted to two words written underneath the notification.

Join-Leave.

Levi pressed the Join button, and before he knew it, his consciousness was snatched again. Only this time, it was taken to an actual place.

-The Nocturnal Ring's Main Hub -

Levi's consciousness separated from his slumbering body and rose on a soft current of light. In moments, he found himself floating above the Nocturnal Ring's Main Hub in the Boundless Expanse... only he arrived in his spiritual form.

Unfortunately, he couldn't see the city's grandeur, only the spiritual auras of its citizens populating his world of void.

But, he didn't come alone.

Since he was contracted to Ash'Kral and was considered as one based on their contract terms, Ash'Kral also had his consciousness snatched from the Shadow dimension. He showed up near Levi's shoulder.

As Ash'Kral spread his eye far and wide, he was met with the city's seemingly infinite landscape.

Its borders were so far apart that he failed to see them over the horizon, no matter how hard he tried.

At the center, hundreds of crystallized towers stood straight toward the colorful skies, connected by arched bridges in a massive circle, closing it off from the rest of the city.

It was for a reason; the center of the circle was the Nocturnal Ring's main hub, where all the buildings were related to it.

Levi read in the contract that the majority of the Rifters in their dimensional sector were residing here full-time.

They had everything they needed, leaving them to give up on the Chained Universe forever.

"Woah... I knew it would be a cultural shock, but this is still too much."

Although Levi could only pick up on the citizens' spiritual auras, he still found himself marveling at the people of every race moving through the metropolis.

"This is a rare sight even in the Boundless Domain...It's called Nocturn's Heart City for a reason." Ash'Kral commented while staring at people walking on solid ground in flesh and armor, while others appeared as faint, glowing spirits like them.

There were humans in simple robes reading from hovering books. Elves hanging in corners with lit-up cigarettes...Centaurs wearing half-maid outfits and welcoming customers to their coffee shops.

Long-bearded dwarves hugging each other while holding gigantic wooden beer cups, chugging them like they amounted to nothing.

Even the nightcrawlers were here in humanoid forms, trading goods at stalls, chilling on rooftops, and some even drinking tea while holding news scrolls.

It was as wild as a fever dream.

Because they were here in their spirit form, they couldn't hear, speak out loud, or sense anything...Just sight.

The one thing Levi was missing, which left him struggling to capture some of the magic.

Luckily, Ash'Kral turned off his dickhead mode and narrated for him whatever he found interesting to help him paint in his mind.

For Levi, who was used to the sight of humans and nightcrawlers, this distinct, chaotic but harmonious scene of thousands of peculiar races hanging out left him wordless.

"Is this true peace, or is it the crushing authority of Nocturn forcing everyone to abide by the rules?" Levi murmured, floating closer to the streets until he was a mere couple of meters above the ground.