

Evolution 163

Chapter 163: Reunion. II

Kaboom!!

Dust rose, leaves were blown... Yet, no one seemed to notice as everyone was still deep in their illusion, fed lies to keep them imprisoned.

All their senses were hijacked, and Levi knew this, which was why he didn't bother trying to help them first... If even he needed to empower his spiritual vision to break apart the illusion, it only meant that the only way to awaken them was to eliminate the illusion's caster.

And so, he tried... But Lord Darius wasn't foolish enough to rely on his limited vessel alone.

The expected noise of bones shattering and flesh ripping apart was nowhere to be found.

Tiing!!!

The dust cleared... Mantis was there, standing in front of his little brother, his mantis-praying arms blocking Levi's strike!

It wasn't easy; his feet slid backward many steps before coming to a stop.

With a cold, confident grin, he stood.

He had been rushing toward Demetris the moment he received the order from his lord.

This time, he came fully prepared to deal with Levi, not underestimating him one bit.

One of the preparations involved combining two totems: one camouflaged him from spiritual detection, while the other contained any noise he made within a half-meter area.

When combined with his predatory ambushing Mantis style, he became the ultimate weapon against Levi... Or so he thought.

But Levi had upgraded as well, and his upgrade beat any type of camouflage he could muster... Harmonic Spine!

In Mantis' eyes, he was invisible to Levi's, but in reality... He was painted in the vividest colors in the universe the moment he stepped into his vibrational world.

Nothing could hide frequencies when life was a never-ending melody.

"Le..."

Just as he was about to open his mouth, Levi appeared in front of him and whispered so only he could hear:

"Echoforging: Javelin Style."

A vibrating sharp edge shot out of the staff's crown, which was already pointed at Mantis' stomach.

Psss!

The sharp edge went through Mantis' flesh with slight resistance, but nowhere near enough to withstand the potency of a perfect ultimate ability.

Stunned, Mantis looked down between his weapons, eyes widening as he took in the gaping hole torn through his abdomen.

He couldn't even see the sound construct properly... But he could feel it alright.

"Blood of traitors runs thick, I see."

Levi spat, his tone filled with disgust as he watched Mantis try to stop the bleeding, but to no avail.

Mind consumed with the fear of death, Mantis staggered back until he tripped, falling next to his little brother.

Frantic, he reached for his bag with shaky hands, trying to pull a recovery totem to save himself.

Slice!

An arm cut off, blood sprayed across Demetris' silent poker face.

Ah... Aaaaaaaaa!!!

Mantis screamed in agony, his petrified face inches away from a newly constructed sound blade, vibrating mere inches from him.

But Levi didn't finish the job... He removed the blade and watched Mantis stare at him, his face overtaken by despair.

"You... How..." Mantis said, words stumbling out.

Levi's response?

Slice! Slice! Slice.

Three cuts... another arm, and both legs.

Then Levi stood still.

Mantis, limbless, collapsed to his knees... The pain was so much, his receptors were fried.

And suddenly... he was no longer Mantis.

He was just David... a broken man gasping for breath, eyes wild with terror, pain washing over his face like a tide.

The predator was gone... No menace, no pride.

Just a bleeding man, shaking, staring up at the one who had disarmed not only his body but the very illusion he wore like armor... The illusion of standing a chance against Levi.

"Deme..tris... Sa..ve... me..." he gasped faintly.

Demetris stared at Mantis' hollow eyes in silence for a few moments... Then, he uttered indifferently, "Useless."

"Brother...?"

Mantis felt his heart shatter into pieces... the last word he expected to hear from his little brother.

If only his life weren't hanging by a thread.

If only his vision wasn't clouded by blood and despair.

If only he had his hand to touch his little brother's ice-cold skin.

If only...

Sigh.

"Br... other."

Thud...

Mantis's limbless body fell on its back, its eyes soulless; yet, they carried a deeply rooted sense of betrayal.

He had betrayed humanity for his ambitions to create the Bane Legacy, his goals to be somebody, to stay alive at all costs, and most importantly... to stay by his little brother's side.

Yet, he died with his body aching in pain, and his heart torn to pieces...

No achievements, no prolonged battle, nothing.

He died as his destiny was decided from birth... Insignificant.

"Boy, you drew blood, and yet, you haven't flinched..."

Lord Darius turned to face Levi, as if Mantis' life and death meant absolutely nothing to him.

He had hoped for Mantis to make a difference and help him assassinate Seraphis... But he was wise enough to understand that life wasn't built on hopes and dreams.

He came short of his goal, and he recognized it was over.

Only a few seconds remained, and Levi hid Seraphis' body behind him, unmoving as a mountain.

And he was out of playing cards.

"It isn't the first, and won't be the last..." Levi replied, his tone unchanging.

"I can tell..."

Lord Darius showed half a smile... a smile so eerie no one would be able to decipher its meaning for over a century.

Was he pissed? Disappointed? Was his heart filled with hatred toward Levi?

Nothing.

He had no plans to hang around long enough for Levi to find out.

"I know just how much you want to kill this wastrel... But I still have a use for..."

"I don't think so."

Before Lord Darius could finish, Levi didn't wait to see what he had prepared to save Demetris... He didn't want to.

The only thing he wanted now was for Demetris to die...

And so, he didn't hesitate to utter: "Switch."

Levi flipped the staff in his hand while taking a new position... Lord Darius's wisp was strong enough to keep up with Levi, but not Demetris' body.

That's when he witnessed something that stunned him to the core... Levi's staff was transforming in mid-air while turning around its axis, the whole process happening in slow motion.

A deep vibration rolled through its core as the crimson chains slithered into place, forcing the crowns apart. The upper crown unfolded, reshaping into a sharp, extended barrel, while the lower crown stretched into a solid recoil pad.

As for the crimson chains? They detached from the muzzle's area and coiled around the staff, their color shifting from crimson to golden.

Each time the chain crossed a marked area, it transformed into a mechanism connected with the staff... handguard, trigger guard, handle, magazine, stock, and scope.

Whatever was left of the chain, which wasn't a lot, was stored inside the other crown.

The weapon was completed before it made its first spin... The entire transformation occurred in less than a split second, appearing instantaneous to the average person!

Thud!

The new, sleek staff-sniper rifle with coiled golden chains sat against Levi's shoulder... the remaining internal chains giving one last clink, as if acknowledging it was ready to fire.

As Levi watched the Duskbound Order's brand on Demetris' arm light up, glowing black and red, he aimed the sniper rifle at his head... his finger brushing the trigger.

Then... he murmured inwardly, Echoforging: Resonance Bullet.

Levi exhaled... Fire.

The sniper rifle vibrated slightly, then relaxed... A piercing, high-pitched, compressed bullet-like construct fired from its barrel in an instant, ripping through the air!

It was silent at first... a blur of vibrating pressure that reached its mark in a blink.

When it struck, there was no flash, no spray... only a violent shudder in Demetris' skull as the sound tore inward, shattering bone and liquefying thought.

His eyes went wide for half a heartbeat before his body crumpled, the echo of the shot arriving a split second later like a thunderclap.

Rumble!

Levi lowered the rifle, the chains inside giving a final rattle, as if satisfied being used for the first time in this manner...

This was his second unlocked weapon... Starpiercer Rifle.

A weapon that took him close to five hours of painstaking efforts, arguments, and even a fistfight with Ash'Kral to turn into a reality.

Levi's vision was too overreaching... wanting the staff to transform instantaneously into a sniper rifle.

The staff's hollow interior put the sniper's vision in Levi's mind since the moment he crafted it and knew that he could switch its forms.

However, when the time came, mechanical problems started surfacing... It wasn't like the staff couldn't transform and work as a sniper rifle; that was easily doable.

The core problem was clear: the transformation from staff to sniper rifle had to happen in less than a second... no delays, no bulky attachments, no complicated mechanisms that would slow him down in the heat of battle.

After a grueling, frustrating battle with his mind and Ash'Kral's negativity, who told him that two of his partners had tried the same idea but failed miserably.

He told him straight up... It couldn't be done.

But Levi refused to listen... Not because he believed he was smarter than Ash'Kral or his past partners... No, he felt it.

Starpiercer Rifle was doable... The staff's design mixed in with a rifle was just too beautiful a theory to remain... a theory.

That's when an idea sparked when he examined the crimson chains.

What if the staff and the chains transformed simultaneously?

What if, instead of forcing the entire weapon to rearrange itself, the chains could morph selectively, shifting and wrapping around the rigid body of the rifle already formed inside the staff's frame?

The moment this idea took root in Levi's mind... It refused to leave.

Levi acted on it, and the Starpiercer Rifle was born under Ash'Kral's astonished eyes... not expecting Levi to actually pull off what his partners deemed impossible.

Now, Levi stood with a solemn expression... The Starpiercer Rifle in hand, its shaft black as midnight, while the golden chains coiled around it, akin to a serpent.

He watched as Demetris' corpse was covered in a wretched protective barrier made of moving, vile arms.

Abruptly, the ground behind him split open, revealing a dark, swirling portal of similar vile arms.

Demetris' corpse was dragged into the portal by the arms... yet his lifeless hollow bleeding eyes never left Levi.

Suddenly, Levi's guard rose to the limit after noticing a misty grey spirit rise up from Demetris' corpse.

'We shall have our third meeting, boy...' Lord Darius sent a calm telepathic message, 'Next time... It will be me, and the Bishop won't be there to spare you... again.'

Levi aimed his sniper rifle again, and this time, he used the Sensebound Pearl to refine his spiritual prowess to the point that his will was enough to construct a spiritual bullet!

Target lock.

Aim.

Exhale.

Fire.

The spiritual bullet rushed like a poisonous breeze... gentle, but deadly.

Unfortunately, the barrier of disgusting arms blocked it like it was nothing... When Levi tried to prepare another bullet, Lord Darius was nowhere to be found.

"Where is he?! Where did he go?!"

Levi gritted his teeth, pushing his echolocation to the limit, hoping to detect the emergence of a portal or something.

"Give it up, Levi..." Ash'Kral said calmly, "He is gone."

"How!"

Levi refused to accept it... He was so close to catching one of his nightmares.

He knew he wasn't the one ripping his eyes out, but he was the one giving him the clawed scars on his back.

"It's the Duskbound Order's brand effect," Ash'Kral explained patiently. "Once activated, the owner gets protected and teleported straight to one of the Duskbound Order's branches in the Shadow Dimension... Not even a Solarbound Daywalker could break that barrier..."

Ash'Kral continued, explaining why Mantis hadn't used the same method to survive despite also being a member.

"For him to activate it with Demetris' body... It only means that he is at least a Pawn rank member of the Organization."

Silence fell.

"Most importantly... He must have been using a wisp to control the boy... You know, wisps can be given up without damaging one's soul."

Levi kept listening, his head tilted toward the gloomy skies in silence.

With Demetris' death, his Dreamvault field vanished as well, finally releasing everyone from his genjutsu.

The illusion shattered like glass, and reality returned in a harsh wave.

Velmira gasped first, clutching her head. Arthur spun around, shield raised... then froze. Nurah steadied herself, eyes narrowing at the still air above.

No nightcrawler birds.

No enemies scanning from the sky.

Just silence.

Then they saw him.

Levi stood alone at the heart of the field, his back to them, gazing upward in absolute stillness.

At his feet lay what remained of Mantis... dismembered, but recognizable.

As for Demetris' corpse? It was gone.

Shock hit them like a slap.

Velmira instantly checked on Seraphis, sighing in relief when she noticed his steady breath... Then, she stepped forward, her voice grim, "Levi? What happened?"

"Big bro, are you fine? What the hell went down here?! Why is this bastard sliced up next to you?! Where is that slimy brother of his?!"

Arthur's questions were as rushed as a hurricane, but they captured what everyone had in mind.

Yet, Levi said nothing.

His grip tightened on his staff, now back in its original form... His eyes remained fixed on the skies, replaying Lord Darius' final words in his mind.

He heard them louder than the voices around him.

'Me too... I won't be the same when we have our third meeting.' He uttered, his voice as chilly as the wind blowing his blood tainted hoodie...