

Evolution 251

Chapter 251: Respect.

"Both fighters are out cold... It's a draw! One point to each corner!" Feng Ling announced with a pleased smile.

Then he glanced at his friend and said, "If you think this is peak, wait until the captain makes his move... You will understand then, why I am doing all of this..."

"Captain?" Dominic mumbled, switching his gaze to Levi's team and Tyrese's team, who had rushed to the arena to help their fallen teammates.

He focused more on Levi, who was feeding recovery totems to Arthur.

'A blind Daywalker with a peculiar contracted nightcrawler... both of them are exuding a strange, but powerful spiritual aura... so powerful, yet sealed to perfection... these two aren't normal.'

His contracted nightcrawler commented calmly as he gazed at Levi's sealed spiritual aura. He was a giant eel that stretched nearly thirty meters long in the void, with a thick, serpentine body.

His skin was dark indigo, but glowing blue veins ran across it like lightning bolts that came alive. His eyes shone with a ghostly pale white, and he had a fluffy white beard, giving him the look of an ancient beast born from storms and oceans.

'He is a blind, Psych Anomaly class talent Daywalker... nothing about his situation is normal.' Dominic said calmly.

He had already done his research on Levi the moment he received news of a Blind Daywalker emerging from Heliodor's Region... such a piece of news was too interesting to just skip by, leaving him to dig more into Levi's situation.

That's when he found out about his origins and knew what kind of fuel was pushing someone blind to become a Daywalker against all odds... However, when he saw his clips in their first raid, that's when he truly caught his attention.

'If he were to fight against Yanhuan... will he pose some sort of challenge to that monster?' He thought, knowing Yanhuan's full strength was on a league of its own. Although he had watched clips of Levi, it wasn't enough to convince him of having what it took to rival Yanhuan.

In addition, Levi had just recently become a Pathfinder in his mind, while Yanhuan had spent months as a Warden at the Evolution Stage.

If it wasn't for his desire to concoct a perfect evolutionary formula to break through, he would have easily become a Solarbound with his royal family's deep pockets... So, although he was a Warden, Dominic considered Yanhuan a Solarbound Daywalker, even if he was still lacking in some parts... like not having a Dominion.

'Well, it's better this way... if those were to clash, they should do it on equa...'

Before Dominic could finish his thought, Yanhuan stepped up to the arena with a cold expression.

"My apologies, but I believe we have wasted enough of everyone's time... no one is taking this seriously, so I might as well try to conclude it," Yanhuan spoke, his voice resounding across the arena. He pointed his finger at Levi's team and added calmly, "I challenge all of you together... If I win, the gauntlet is over, and Sir Dominic can discuss your future from there. If you win, I will resign from this exploration with my team, giving you our slot."

"How does that sound?"

Everyone was left dazed for a couple of moments... but for those who truly knew Yanhuan, they weren't that surprised by this turn of events.

They could tell that he absolutely hated getting grouped up with the other two teams and having fate decided by their performance... although he admitted that he had underestimated Levi's team and felt like it was beneath him to fight them, but now?

With Levi's team needing only four more wins to qualify, and his position being tenth and last, he couldn't wait any longer... He might as well get it over with before his turn arrives by challenging them all.

However, before Levi or the supervisors could voice their opinion, Evangeline walked up to the arena with a cold grimace and a sword already drawn.

"Yanhuan, who gave you the right to skip me like I don't exist?" She uttered, heated.

She was supposed to be next in line after Tyrese, and she already planned to get rid of the remaining ones and erect justice on behalf of the rest of the conference teams.

"Evangeline, it's not personal... I just want us to focus on what's important... the Ancient Site's exploration." Yanhuan said.

"No, what's important is to erect justice, and I won't let you foil such a noble cause to stroke your ego." Evangeline narrowed her eyes coldly, "I know you can't handle not being in the center of attention for more than a second as much as you like to act noble."

Hearing this, many sucked a cold breath... they knew Evangeline was as straightforward as an arrow, raised on only two noble traits: Justice and Honesty.

Still, to air out Yanhuan like this, and in public... was cold, too cold.

"Evangeline, I respect you enough to ignore such a blatant insult on my character," Yanhuan said, unfazed. "Now, may you please exit the arena so we can get this farce over with?"

"I am not leaving... unless you admit it."

"Evangeline... Don't push it." Yanhuan said, his eyes narrowing coldly.

"Don't forget what my aspects are... You can't hide from me, no one can." Evangeline stressed while tightening her grasp on her sword, "Now, are you going to leave and let me carry on with my duty, or shall I walk you out personally?"

Yanhuan glanced at her hand for a moment, and then he looked into her eyes... a second later, he asked, "Have you already forgotten the score between us?"

Evangeline went silent, knowing that she had lost every confrontation she had against Yanhuan... but this changed nothing.

She was a brave warrior who never backed down from a fight, even if she knew that her chances of losing were 100%... Especially if it was for a good cause.

Stupid? Maybe, but still, brave.

Realizing that she wouldn't get her way by talking to him, Evangeline lifted her head and directed her voice at Dominic and Feng Ling.

"It's up to you, Sirs."

Just as Dominic was about to ease the tension in the air with a joke and continue with the Gauntlet with the same format, a peaceful voice joined.

"I am starting to get sick and tired of our side being ignored like we don't exist in your eyes."

Levi stepped into the arena wearing his usual, easy smile... yet it clung to his face like a brittle mask. Beneath it, anyone could see the simmering tempest of resentment he could no longer fully hide.

"Heliodian... our fighting structure does not concern you,"

Yanhuan said coldly, already peeved at Evangeline getting in his way... he had no patience for another pest from a place he couldn't point on the map.

"Oh, but the thing is... it does, very much so..."

Levi said, arriving next to Evangeline and Yanhuan, standing in a triangle in the center of the arena.

He had just taken care of his little brother, who was sleeping soundly, after going toe to toe with a captain at their level of strength... even when he had the chance to win, he gave it away to push himself beyond his limit.

What about Jasmine? She took down five of them single-handedly without breaking even a sweat... if it wasn't for her energy depleting, she would have finished off Tyrese, too.

Yet, even after seeing that, they still refuse to put some respect on their names simply because they were from Heliodor's region? No, Levi wouldn't stand for it, and he refused to have himself and his teammates treated like dirt, not by them, not by anyone.

If they thought of him as some pushover, they'd better think again.

"Fine... I shall entertain you." Yanhuan turned to face Levi with his arms crossed above his chest... then, he asked with a faint smile, "Captain to captain, are you brave enough to challenge either of us to a one vs one as a final verdict?"

"No..."

"That's what I thou..."

Before Yanhuan could turn his head to Evangeline after losing interest in Levi, he heard him continue calmly, "You can come at me together, and the result will still be the same... You on the ground, I, towering over you... every, single, time."

"..."

"..."

"..."

The area collapsed to a deathly silence at once... everyone's dazed eyes were left affixed on Levi, feeling like they had just misheard him or something.

Challenging them to a 1 vs 2? Him... vs Yanhuan, and Evangeline? The two most powerful Daywalkers of today's generation? They didn't know whether to feel impressed by his bravery or mock his ignorance.

But soon, Yanhuan broke into a soft, controlled laughter while covering his mouth, resembling how aristocrats used to laugh... tamed, and somewhat phony? Like they forced themselves to laugh in this manner to separate themselves from the peasants.

Following his laugh, Li Mei, Guo Shi, and the rest of the Daywalkers on the conference side couldn't help but have their demeanor break as well, joining him.

"What a jokester... did he do this to ease the tension?" Mira chuckled.

"Defeating Evangeline alone is already a stretch." Guo Shi sneered.

"Defeat? Miss Evangeline can easily wipe the floor with him... his spiritual prowess is nothing against hers." One of Evangeline's armored teammates uttered coldly, annoyed to have his queen compared with Levi.

Levi heard everything they said, and yet, the same serene smile never left his visage. When Yanhuan and Evangeline noticed his calmness, they realized that he was being serious.

"I have heard you're blind... and it has always fascinated me... how you can become a Daywalker despite your condition..." Yanhuan said indifferently, "But, not anymore... Fools can't hold an intellectual conversation."

Chapter 252: Do You?

Levi's secret as a Blind Daywalker could be hidden from normal citizens, but not Daywalkers or Nightcrawlers... after all, how could he hide it when he was permanently connected to the Shadow dimension, even if he used his Harmonic Spine to paint his world of darkness?

The condition of having a spiritual link to the bridge of darkness was based primarily on vision. Although Levi called his way of viewing the world 'auditory vision', in the end, he was still perceiving the world through sounds and frequencies, not light.

The colors were a construct of the Harmonic Spine delivered straight to his mind, not actually painting the surrounding darkness.

Without light, darkness prevailed...

That's why, as Levi stood in the center of the arena, with frequencies painting his world, he was capable of seeing both humans and nightcrawlers gathered around them... he couldn't see only the nightcrawlers, which were summoned in their weapon form.

"A fool?" Levi chuckled.

"Yes... You want to fight us both; can you even handle me?"

Yanhuan doubled down while stepping closer to Levi... each step unleashed a part of his contained spiritual aura until he was a mere meter away from Levi... yet, his spiritual aura raged around him nonstop, forming a spatial distortion that twisted into the shape of a massive serpentine figure of blue smoke.

Levi stood before the emergence of this monstrosity that resembled Yanhuan's contracted nightcrawler...

He appeared as a long, snake-like dragon with thin, smoky scales... his body was leaking trails of bluish mist, making it hard to see clearly.

Instead of normal eyes, he had two glowing illusory slits that sometimes vanished completely when they blended into smoke... His claws and tail left wisps of smoke wherever they moved, while his jaws constantly dripped with a faint, hazy blue fog.

Although Levi stood before the nightcrawler and the wild spiritual aura manifesting him, which was trying to oppress him and fall to his knees, he wasn't fazed in the slightest.

"Yanhuan... I warned you, don't talk for me."

Before Levi could react, he noticed Evangeline stepping closer to him... allowing her contained white and black aura to expand to its limit, filling the center of the arena.

From it emerged the figure of a humanoid female nightcrawler... she was tall and imposing, her eyes hidden behind a white piece of cloth. One hand was holding a scale with floating wisps of darkness on one side and white wisps on the other.

She had no legs, only a long ghostly robe fading into the darkness... her face resembled Lady Justice, but had some demonic features to it, like black lips, crooked ears, purplish skin, and two fangs protruding under her lower lip... one black, one white.

She looked holy and demonic at the same time, a weird mixture, but when it came to nightcrawlers... everything was understandable when considering their ability to possess almost any race in the universe, and steal everything about them.

With their spiritual auras fully unleashed, anyone with spiritual vision tapped into it, regardless of whether it was good or bad... the moment Warden Daywalkers had their spiritual Leywell unlocked, their spiritual vision awakened... this was for those with the worst possible talent for spirituality.

That's when they saw it.

Levi, as small as an ant, was standing before two massive spiritual auras, reaching up to tens of meters into the sky... meanwhile, his spiritual aura was contained within his skin, barely visible besides the faint hues of gold, crimson, and black.

He looked like he had no place being near those two monsters, and everyone felt the same.

"Do you really know what you're getting yourself into?" Yanhuan curled his lips... his expression carrying a tint of provocation and ridicule.

Levi glanced at them and then at their spiritual auras, which were overlapping with their miniature nightcrawlers behind them.

He cracked a faint smile and asked, "Do you?"

Without Levi needing to say anything, Ash'Kral deactivated the seal on Levi's spiritual aura with a single order... turning off the array in his castle.

Just like a sealed dam being opened after decades of inactivity... Levi's multicolored spiritual aura erupted everywhere, kicking off a cloud of dust with him in the center, catching everyone by surprise.

Yet, this was only the beginning...

Yanhuan, Evangeline, and the rest of the watchers were left stunned at the sight of his spiritual aura manifesting as Ash'Kral with three bright streams of light into the sky... crimson, gold, and black.

The colors were overlapping as they spread across the arena, devouring everything in their path until... a spitting image of Ash'Kral's cruel smile manifested behind him, towering over Yanhuan and Evangeline, whose own auras... once powerful... now consumed and bent under the immense oppressive authority of Levi's spiritual aura!

"What the..." Dominic's pupils slightly thinned out at such a magnificent, but deadly spiritual aura... which shouldn't belong to a Pathfinder.

"What did I say?" Feng Ling smiled, "That's our very own Anomaly class Psych talent... Once he evolved to a Pathfinder, the enhancement to his spirit was on a different league of its own... I believe his spiritual prowess is at Solarbound entry or the first stage at the moment."

"Tell me... are they still unqualified?"

"..."

Dominic was left speechless, a reaction shared by most watchers... they expected many things, but not a spiritual aura more powerful than Yanhuan.

After all, he went through three perfect evolutions to reach Warden rank, and he had the talents to back them up... Yet, unbeknownst to them, Levi had gone through three perfect evolutions as well... also, they were based on Origin Seeds.

When added to his Anomaly class Psych talent, this was the only appropriate and logical outcome.

"You... impossible..."

Yanhuan muttered as he gazed at Levi with a tint of disbelief buried in his eyes... a rare reaction from him when dealing with a peer of his generation.

Even Evangeline's expression was left frozen... her question for justice seemed irrelevant when Levi outclassed both of them. This meant he outclassed the rest of the teams she tried to erect justice on.

"Impossible? Haven't you heard? Anomaly class Daywalkers can't be perceived in the same breath as the rest." Levi said, emphasizing the term 'rest'... this made Yanhuan's expression twist for a brief moment, but he swiftly regained his aloof look.

Levi had been keeping his spiritual aura sealed through an array, knowing that its prowess would raise suspicion about him being this strong while still a Junior Daywalker. But now that everyone believed him to be a Pathfinder? He no longer needed to hide it... nor did he want to.

After all... he was an Anomaly Class talent, and such a title wasn't given lightly to just anyone. Not even Yanhuan was considered one despite his immense strength, which left a lasting impression on anyone who saw him.

If Yanhuan could be that strong and everyone accepted it, why should Levi keep hiding his own power? He had no interest in keeping a low profile and getting disrespected by people he could absolutely ruin, just because it might draw "interest" or provoke someone.

There was a fine line between being smart and being a coward. Levi was smart enough to keep his Sun and Void forms hidden, but he wasn't a coward who planned on concealing his strength forever just to avoid trouble.

He knew that was exactly how trouble would find him... by inviting disrespect through perceived weakness.

As for the three colors? Ash'Kral's new appearance embodied them, which would lead everyone to assume they were based on him, not three separate origin seeds... if they even knew what those were.

"So? Are we doing this or not?" Levi asked with his usual unprovocative smile.

Only this time, everyone's expression turned solemn, realizing Levi didn't come here to play... but to establish the name of Heliodor's Raiders no matter what it took. Even if it meant fighting two captains and putting them in their place before everyone!

However, before Yanhuan or Evangeline could respond, Dominic's voice resounded from above. "Alright, since the three of you are so keen on fighting, who am I to stop you?"

He continued speaking before anyone could interrupt.

"The three of you will fight in a three-way... and the winner will decide which team gets eliminated," Dominic said calmly. "Of course... Tyrese's team isn't included, since the three of you are the only ones causing so much trouble."

Chapter 253: A Three Way Battle.

Hearing this, Feng Ling's eyelids twitched, but he didn't object... although Levi's team was currently winning on paper, he knew that they were bound to meet Evangeline and Yanhuan in the remaining battles.

Hence, it might be better this way... all three captains at full strength, duking it out. The winner would decide the outcome.

"I accept."

Yanhuan was the first to agree, his expression unreadable... he contained his spiritual aura and walked a few steps before uttering with his back facing them, "I hope you're as strong as your spiritual aura... after all, battles aren't decided on who has the bigger aura."

Then, he continued on his way until he arrived at the edge of the arena. Meanwhile, Evangeline merely gave Levi a cold look and backed off to a different side... clearly, not over her quest for justice.

Levi said nothing... he smiled serenely and walked back to his friends.

Seeing that the three of them agreed, Dominic gave them a five-minute break until they expanded the arena's range... He knew these three monsters would need more space.

"A three-way battle... ahh, I wanted to have some fun too." Nurah pouted after Levi returned to their side.

"Me too... ever since we crossed into this camp, my bloodlust hasn't let up for a second. I need to beat someone." Shia joined in the protest.

"You will have your chance."

Levi smiled while checking on his brother... he could see that his body had been recovering at a steady pace thanks to the recovery totems and inherent powers of Aurikara's Gemheart. Though all the emerging crystals had returned to their place, awaiting the day he received another wicked beating to awaken.

Fortunately, after the transformation concluded, the increase in strength after restoring the body wasn't lost 100%... a significant portion of it remained permanently, as Levi could see that Arthur's muscles and bones had been strengthened immensely.

It was the same process as breaking one's muscles through intense heavyweight workouts and then rebuilding the muscles tougher... or making small bone cracks to allow the bones to heal strongly. The only difference was that Arthur did it with the help of Aurikara's Gemheart, which didn't just heal the broken parts but infused them with microdoses of Orryn's crystals to make them as hard as the gemstone itself!

'Is my family's name cursed...' Levi's brow twitched, recalling that his power-ups were also accompanied by hellish agony.

But soon, he shook his head and refocused on the battle ahead... he spoke big game, and it would be an embarrassment if he didn't show up.

As he began strategizing, the thought of Yanhuan and Evangeline joining forces against him never even crossed his mind.

Yanhuan's ego was clearly on cloud nine to actively seek anyone's help in his battles... as for Evangeline? He knew that her powers were based on the strength of her beliefs in Justice. The moment she decided to be sneaky or do something that would tip the scales in Levi's favor, her powers would weaken immensely.

While Levi and Evangeline were preparing for the battle, Yanhuan remained standing in silence with his hands hidden inside a royal purple robe. It was like Levi's spiritual aura demonstration didn't faze him a bit; his confidence unshaken.

'He is blind and his spiritual prowess must be at a Solarbound rank. My spiritual attacks might have trouble bypassing his defenses, but it doesn't matter... his other attributes are still lacking, and they won't pose much of an issue to my spatial attacks.' He thought inwardly, his inner voice as cold as it could be, 'Anomaly class? I will show all that such a title means nothing before me... I am the heir of the Imperial Sun Lineage, the strongest Lineage on the planet; nothing and no one is stronger than me under Solarbound rank.'

'No one.'

He clearly took Levi's words to heart; his pride and ego were left wounded even when he tried his best to appear nonchalant.

For people like him, who were too used to being glorified and worshiped since birth, they didn't see their actions or words as arrogance... but the norm.

After all, to inflate a child's ego from birth nonstop, one shouldn't expect it to have it shrink on its own. The only way was to get humbled, but... no one was able to do it in his peer circle.

Sometime later, Dominic called for the three fighters to step into the new arena. It was still the same, but its borders were increased by a third, pushing the staff and other watchers far from the action.

This forced many of them to summon their flying nightmounts, planning to spectate from high above.

When Feng Ling saw that Levi and the other two were in their position, he lifted his hand to the sky and waited a moment... then.

"Fight!"

Immediately after, Yanhuan summoned his porcelain-decorated Briar and brought it close to his mouth... then, he murmured as he took a slow, deep breath.

"Immersive Cloud Arts: Ninth Cloud."

As he exhaled, a massive blue cloud billowed out and engulfed him like a living scarf. The remaining cloud thickened beneath him, lifting him gently into the air as he floated above the ground... Then, he sat with his legs crossed... calm, indifferent.

He glanced at Levi and Evangeline for a moment, noticing that they had already summoned their weapons and seemed to wait for one of them to make the first move.

"I will do the honor."

Yanhuan took three deep breaths until his chest seemed bloated... yet, he still went for more, unafraid that his lungs might explode.

It was for a reason... he had awakened a mutation that strengthened his lungs beyond human capabilities to handle his Aspect and its related arts.

With a deep exhale, tens of meters were covered in blue smoke, and he was still pumping out more like his lungs were a smoke generator machine!

The moment he finished, he uttered coolly for all to hear, "Living Cloud, show the world their worst fears."

The blue cloud was awakened and swiftly rushed in the direction of Evangeline and Levi, akin to tentacles, splitting into hundreds of tendrils!

Seeing this, Evangeline's expression turned solemn as she held the sword with both hands... then, she pointed into the sky as she shouted, "Yanhuan! I mastered this technique just for you... Scales of Retribution Arts: Aura of Order!"

The sword started flashing with light into the sky, and then it broke off into wisps and fell over her, akin to rain... Evangeline bathed under it until she started to resemble a divine knight with a single purpose in life: to uphold righteousness regardless of what it took!

Then, she walked in the direction of the blue smoke tendrils, unafraid... why? With the Aura of Order surrounding her, no lies, no illusions, nothing could affect her.

She became the epitome of order, casting away anything related to chaos and what could bring such chaos to her soul and body.

Under everyone's astonished eyes, she walked through the blue smoke... her expression stoic, untainted.

"Hmm... not bad," Yanhuan raised an eyebrow at the sight, "Took you long enough to master something to counter my aspect's spiritual side... but, how long can you last?"

He knew that countering one's powers was significant in battles and could change the whole narrative... However, any ability used as a counter consumed a continuous stream of solar energy or spiritual energy, depending on the type of Battle Arts.

In this case, Yanhuan was spending a mixture of spiritual energy and solar energy while Evangeline was fueling her Aura of Order through solar energy alone... This meant that as long as she was in the smoke, she was constantly losing solar energy.

"As long as it takes."

Seeing them interacting with each other without acknowledging his presence, Levi merely cracked a faint smile... Then, he switched his focus to the smoke tendrils that were getting dangerously close to him.

'This will do just fine... Resonance Barrier.'

Levi coated himself in a barrier of agitated frequencies... the moment the blue smoke touched it, it dispersed outward, like the smoke particles couldn't move past it.

'Sound agitates the air, and without air, smoke can't move... simple approach, but effective and energy saver.'

Dominic nodded in approval, appreciating simple abilities much more than complicated ones... he knew that while complicated abilities were more powerful, their energy consumption made them inefficient for multiple uses.

Just like Evangeline's Aura of Order... he could tell that it must have taken her months to visualize such a technique through the Solarity System... Yet, if she kept it active for too long, it would be her downfall.

Meanwhile, Yanhuan clicked his tongue in irritation after noticing that his blue smoke was moving around Levi, avoiding him, akin to a plague.

'How bothersome... two counters to my spiritual attacks at once, I might need to take this seriously.'

While Yanhuan was too deep in his own vanity, Levi switched his focus back to Evangeline.

'I can't use that ability with both of them around... she needs to be taken out, and fast.'

Levi bent his knees slightly, both of his foot soles arched above the ground, appearing like he was taking a sprinting position, but not fully committing to it. Then, he concentrated on the bottoms of his soles, creating two compressed, agitated sound cubes. Next, he extracted the aether energy from around him into the center of each cube until condensed green wisps appeared before Shia and the girls behind him.

Before his movement could attract anyone else's attention, Levi pressed his heels into the ground while uttering, "Combustion Leap."

In the next instant...

BOOOOM!

Chapter 254: Immersive Cloud.

The blue smoke split apart as he shot across the arena with unprecedented speed, arriving above the stunned Evangeline in less than a split second.

Boom! Boom!

Levi released two sound shockwaves from his palms to rebalance himself in midair while flipping upside down, making everyone watch as his head slid past Evangeline's head a mere few centimeters.

Yet, he was only starting... he had a segment of his staff separated before he made his move, and now... as his head moved past hers, he reached out with his hands and used the chain to roll around Evangeline's neck.

Evangeline saw the chains touching her neck in slow motion, her mind processing everything as fast as it could to save her from this lightning-quick ambush. But as she tried to move her head away, she found her neck frozen in place.

Levi tapped into his aetheric chains, but used them mostly on her neck, making it nearly impossible for her to move it!

Cling!

The instant the bottom crown clicked with the chain, Levi landed on the ground a couple of meters away from her, sliding across the dirt while the chains spilled from his staff nonstop... until they tightened up!

Argh!

Evangeline's eyes popped out of her head immediately, feeling like an insane crushing weight on her neck, like the chains wanted to snap it off!

If it wasn't for the Aura of Order and her knight armor getting in the way, her neck would have been snapped the instant the chains tightened up... after all, they were crafted out of unbreakable materials... Getting choked by actual steel chains was merciful compared to this.

'Frequency Overload...' Levi uttered inwardly, popping off another addition to his ever-expanding library of techniques.

Levi's chains rattled noisily as he infused the full power of Death Chime Field into the chains, sending a fierce attack of high-pitched, multi-tonal frequency straight to Evangeline's brain and internal system!!

The Death Chime Field cast a sonic domain, but it was too weak, useful only against mob-like creatures... but this technique? It was overtuned to deliver as much devastation as possible to one's internal system in the shortest period of time!

Sure, it needed direct contact with the target and could only attack one at a time... but its effects were absolutely fierce.

Before Evangeline could use one of her ultimate abilities to free herself, her body stiffened, and her brain went stale.

Then came the spasms... her limbs jerked violently, her eyes rolled, and her teeth ground against each other as the piercing resonance overloaded her nerves from within!

She felt like she was put in an electric chair, serving a death penalty... her mind incapable of forming a single proper thought.

"..."

"..."

"..."

The arena went silent; no one uttered a single word or gasp... all they could do was watch in horror as Evangeline's mouth started foaming while her body buzzed with a harsh noise.

No aura, armor, or ability could save her from such a physical attack that targeted her brain primarily... the moment she was touched by the chains, it was over for her.

With one last violent shudder, Evangeline collapsed onto the ground, her chest rising and falling faintly... unconscious, but alive.

Levi was in complete control, stopping the moment he noticed that her brain had reached its breaking point.

He exhaled slowly and retracted the bottom crown, reattaching it to his staff... then, he turned around to face the stunned Yanhuan, who was still floating in the air akin to an eastern cultivator from a wuxia novel.

"Now, it's just us... as you wanted... can you start taking this seriously so I can get this over with before dinner?" Levi said calmly while leaning against the staff that was embedded in the ground.

Levi wasn't too interested in acting arrogant, but he was a firm believer in giving back the same energy he received... since Yanhuan had been nothing but a disrespectful prick from the very start, clearly believing himself to be much superior to him, Levi had no desire to act friendly.

Szzlzlzl...

Before Yanhuan could respond, Dominic appeared next to Evangeline, picked her up, and swiftly delivered her to Justice's team.

When they saw her poor condition, they swiftly used high-grade recovery totems to help her heal up before she turned into a vegetable. They could see, Levi was so close to frying her brain off.

They immediately gave him nasty glares, but when they remembered how Levi took their captain down, those vengeful thoughts evaporated.

Although everyone could tell that Levi defeated her because he acted fast and brutally while she was distracted by Yanhuan, giving her no chance to use anything to save herself... still, the fact that he managed to put her in this state spoke volumes of his strength, as it didn't seem like he went all out at all.

The entire sequence took less than two seconds, leaving even Levi's friends stunned briefly, not expecting him to finish off Evangeline this quickly.

They knew he was strong, but Levi had never entered his deadly mode when next to them, always acting as their strategist... but in individual battles? This was the first time they saw his true deadliness after he became a 'Pathfinder'.

No flashiness, no transformation needed, no extra movement, no bullshit... just a chained staff, and two powers that were invisible to normal eyes, leaving anyone incapable of guessing his next move.

'His strength is increasing at an abnormal rate for a mere newly evolved 'Pathfinder'...' N'ibby commented depressively, 'Jas... you should be wary of him and his nightcrawler; they aren't normal.'

'Wary of what?' Jasmine tilted her head in confusion as she gazed at Levi's back, 'He has been nothing but nice to me.'

'That's how they get you...' N'ibby stressed, 'Remember how he said that his mutated spine happened after his breakthrough to Pathfinder rank? Why did he need to lie about it?'

'...' Jasmine went silent for a moment.

She recalled how Levi lied to everyone about his Harmonic Spine being a new mutation when she had been seeing it for a long while through her peculiar eye. At the time, she didn't understand why he did it and meant to ask him... but N'ibby stopped her.

'His nightcrawler's peculiar evolution, his abnormal strength that doesn't fit a Pathfinder, the three colorful auras... others can be fooled, but not me...' She said, her gaze indifferent.

'What do you mean?' Jasmine asked curiously.

'I used to think that he might have contracted with just a powerful nightcrawler, but now... I am starting to see the signs.'

'Signs of what?'

'That he might be just like us...'

'Huh... how sure can you be? It seems too far-fetched.' Jasmine was stunned.

'About 10%... once he becomes a Solarbound, the truth will come out.' N'ibby warned again, 'For now, just don't trust him blindly.'

'Ah... oki.'

Although Jasmine responded with approval, she found it too hard to believe... she knew what she was, and understood that it shouldn't be possible for anyone to have what she had... especially, not when they were from the same dimensional sector, planet, region, and city.

She knew her contracted nightcrawler was suspicious by nature and believed that it might be just a false alarm.

For now, she put those thoughts in the back of her mind and watched as Levi and Yanhuan sharpened their weapons as they gazed at each other coldly.

"I am glad you took care of her... but, you shouldn't have let it get into your head." Yanhuan uttered while standing up from his blue cloud, "You want me to take it seriously? I will..."

'I have enough spiritual energy to use it.' As this thought coursed Levi's mind, he uttered, "You talk too much."

Levi tightened his grip on his staff and, without an ounce of hesitation, he hurled it in Yanhuan's direction! It was already embedded with Aetheric Combustion, turning it into a deadly rocket.

But Yanhuan was no average Tier 4 nightcrawler... the Aetheric spear pierced through the blue cloud and his body... yet, instead of blood pouring out, Yanhuan's form collapsed into blue smoke. Then, his body rearranged itself to perfection a short distance away.

'What a bothersome power.' Levi frowned.

He had done thorough research on Yanhuan... finding out about his powers and abilities wasn't a secret when he loved being on camera all the time, flaunting his supreme strength and unique powers to the public.

He found out that Yanhuan owned a peculiar Aspect called Immersive Cloud.

This aspect was based on a rare gas imbued with faint spatial energy. It's believed to have an origin traced back to destroyed realms that were connected to many other dimensions... once they were destroyed, everything returned to their natural form... clouds of gas.

However, some of this gas made it through the spatial tears that were still linked to other dimensions... this process occurred across rich spatial environments, making this gas absorb and merge with it over many, many years until it finally emerged in other worlds as dangerous blue gas.

Levi knew that some peculiar races were born and thrived over this gas, giving them a high affinity towards it... with the nightcrawlers' possessive qualities, many of them must have inhabited some of those races and spread out across the universe... until one of them decided to give Yanhuan a chance.

Although the faint spatial energy within it allowed only a limited and grounded access to spatial manipulation, like short-distance teleportation and such... still, spatial powers must always be respected.

"Interrupting me mid-speech... how impolite." Yanhuan narrowed his eyes coldly, "But, you're right... enough chatter."

Without an ounce of hesitation, Yanhuan gripped his Briar akin to a sword and surrounded it with a long blue cloud, turning it into a gassy whip.

Then... in a blink, he disappeared from his place, reappearing behind Levi with a burst of blue smoke akin to a magician reappearing after a smoke bomb!

He flicked his Briar, and the blue whip slithered like a snake, attempting to entrap Levi. Yet the resonance barrier was still active, battering against the contained form of the smoke particles.

Yet.

Yanhuan knew this would happen and reinforced the spatial aspect of his Immersive Cloud to fight against the agitated frequencies desiring to break it!

This made the whip forcefully breakthrough Levi's resonance barrier, leaving Levi to notice that each blue particle was flickering out of the spatial plane!

It was like the smoke was no longer traveling across the planet's spacetime, but flickering between other dimensions unstably... unorthodox, but the method worked.

Whoosh!

Levi was forced to crouch down without turning his head and avoid the smoke's grasp that was about to hug him, his 360-degree vision giving him no blind spots!

In an instant, he pulled a leg sweep, targeting Yanhuan's ankle... but he was forced to halt it once he noticed blue smoke coming outside of Yanhuan's robe from underneath.

"Aren't you a bright one?" Yanhuan sneered as he swung his Briar down, wanting to smack Levi in his exposed head.

The weapon itself was nothing extraordinary, but Levi had seen too many videos of what happened to nightcrawlers once they were touched by it when it was covered in the blue gas... an instant death!

Chapter 255: Azure World.

Whoosh!

Levi used Aetheric grasp on himself to pull himself away before sliding back up with the Judgment's staff summoned again.

However, Yanhuan was nowhere near where he left him.

"No one can run faster than teleportation." Yanhuan whispered the instant his form materialized next to Levi, already in a swinging motion.

The moment Levi evaded the attack and tried to go for a counter, Yanhuan vanished into a wisp of azure haze, only to reappear behind him, at his side, or sometimes above, leaving the air somewhat trembling with residual traces of spatial energy!

Each strike came from a different angle, each movement a blur of blue mist. One moment a pillar of smoke rose from underneath Levi's feet; the next, a hand-shaped construct shot forward, aiming straight for Levi's chest!

Levi was forced to focus on defense, using whatever to evade the blue smoke from putting him in a closed circle!

He could go through it and his barrier would protect him decently, but he knew the moment he was touched by the weapon or the smoke made a circle with any part of his body... Yanhuan could sever it instantly regardless of what barrier was in place!

As mentioned, his Immersive Cloud was limited in spatial manipulation... hence, he couldn't use it to do whatever. However, he adapted and created his own techniques that delivered what he had in mind while still respecting his Aspect's boundaries.

His most infamous technique was Spatial Severe... Anyone who had the smoke manifest into a circle around their neck, limb, or whatnot... Yanhuan could sever that body part with a single snap of a finger!!

You see, he wasn't using the blue smoke to attack directly, no, no, no... instead, he was creative with it, activating the spatial properties of his smoke and enhancing it to the limit the moment he got his target where he wanted... then, the severance was nothing but a byproduct of spatial disturbance he created in that small area!!

Levi knitted his eyebrows as he darted across the arena... whether he took off to the sky or stayed on the ground, Yanhuan was always there.

This made him understand that his teleportation range must include hundreds of meters, which turned this arena into his personal dominion.

Unfortunately, Yanhuan wasn't going to keep repeating the same strategy all the time. Once he noticed that his attacks were being evaded, he changed his approach.

'Immersive Cloud Arts: Razor Fold.'

The smoky whip transformed into a misty blue blade... No hesitation, Yanhuan started swinging his Briar left and right rapidly, each swing sent off a blue misty blade in Levi's direction from a short distance.

'Twin Fang Style: Sound Cutters!'

In retaliation, Levi released his crowns and started swinging them rapidly, each full circle sent off a sound blade!

Slice! Slice! Slice!

Some sound blades crossed paths with the misty blue blades, and most met head-on... the winner? Both!

The sound cutters went through the blue misty blades without disturbing their form, like they were traveling in a different spacetime!

Yanhuan could have let his blue smoke drift naturally through the air, but after realizing Levi's powers could counter it, he had no choice but to pour more of his solar energy into reinforcing its innate spatial power.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

This left both sides to focus on evading each other's attacks... however, Yanhuan didn't bother. In a blink, he teleported and evaded all the sound cutters, reappearing above Levi's head, who was evading the blue blades the normal way.

'Escape this... Shred Tower!'

He took a deep breath of his Briar and exhaled a massive blue cloud above Levi... the misty cloud broke into multiple tendrils and moved rapidly to manifest a giant sealed tower with Levi in the center!

What was a tower besides a circle in a three-dimensional sense?

Everyone held their breath as they watched Levi being forced to focus on the storm of blades, which weren't attempting to cut him in half, but constrain him in a circle, following the same principle of Yanhuan's battle arts!

At the same time, the blue smoke tendrils were rapidly connecting in a massive circle with the occupied Levi in the center!

Alas, before Yanhuan's smile could widen, Levi evaded a blade with a crouch. Then, instead of standing back up, Levi activated Combustion Leap, which he had been creating on the side!

BOOOM!!

Levi's form pierced through the blue smoke, arriving next to Yanhuan in a second! Before he could react, Levi swung his empowered shimmering green staff with Aetheric Resonance in his direction!

He knew a single hit from it was enough to blow one's soul off if it was weak... but Yanhuan had no intentions of testing his soul against it.

Poof!

His body exploded into blue smoke, and he reemerged behind Levi, who was still in a swinging motion... with a cruel look, Yanhuan swung his Briar in a half circle around Levi's extended arm while simultaneously blowing smoke off his mouth in the shape of another arc!

In a split second, the two smoky arcs connected as a circle with Levi's arm in the center.

"Severe."

No hesitation, Yanhuan gave the order, and the blue smoke shimmered intensely with a bluish hue. Then, under Levi's team's stunned eyes, their captain's arm was gone... eaten by the spatial disturbance in less than a millisecond, leaving a clean area with no bones, flesh, or even a drop of blood.

It was like Yanhuan teleported Levi's arm somewhere random; he had no control over it since the spatial disturbance was uncontrollable with his current level!

Yet, all he cared about was the damage it could do, and so far... he was more than pleased as he stared at Levi holding his bloody shoulder while groaning in pain.

"See what one's big mouth gets them?" Yanhuan said as he teleported away, still not satisfied with teaching Levi a lesson.

"You think this is enough to defeat me?"

Levi uttered coldly as he summoned his staff again, holding it with the other arm while using aetheric energy to seal up his wound.

"I knew you would say that." Yanhuan smiled nonchalantly while placing the Briar over his shoulder... then, he gestured with his index finger for Levi to come, "Give me your best... so, once I put you down, you will never speak out of place again."

"As you wish."

Hearing this, Levi unleashed his aetheric grasp to the limit and captured Yanhuan in place, leaving him incapable of moving an inch.

'What a powerful spiritual containment... it feels like every inch of my body is chained up.' Yanhuan frowned.

He wasn't pleased with being caught, but Levi's spiritual prowess seemed to be on a different league compared to his. Although he knew it was going to be high, he didn't expect his body to be constrained even when he used his spiritual prowess to free himself.

Seeing that Levi was aiming the shimmering green staff in his direction, he recalled what happened to the nightcrawler in Heliodor's Raiders' first raid.

Yet, he waited for Levi to hurl the staff at him.

'Come on... do it, I will finish you off right away.'

As he narrowed his eyes at the staff, the moment he saw Levi's fingers letting go of it, he instantly activated his ultimate ability.

'Immersive Cloud Arts: Azure World.'

Without warning, Yanhuan's form exploded into a blue cloud, making the shimmering green staff fly away with nothing to show for.

When Levi and the others were expecting him to reappear as one, instead, tens of bluish smoky clones emerged around Levi, putting him in the center of their world... At first glance, Levi felt dread creeping up his spine at the sight of the clones' formation resembling a giant sphere!

Giving him no time to think, the clones' arms and legs began releasing streams of blue smoke, connecting to the closest ones to them midair!

This created a network of blue smoke in an instant, but the danger arrived when the smoke started thickening, creating a massive, semi-solid sphere that enveloped Levi entirely!

"Spatial Maelstrom... show him what the world is like outside his well," Yanhuan uttered coldly.

Within its bluish walls, the world was no longer the same before Levi's... the atmosphere started bending like someone held it and twisted it with their bare hands.

Slice! Slice! Slice!

Chapter 256: Every, Single, Time.

Inside the sphere, the spatial storm erupted. Invisible spatial currents of energy ripped through the air, tearing at the very fabric of space around Levi!

Levi knew if he stayed here for even a couple more seconds, a spatial tear might emerge inside his body, ripping him in half!

He swiftly tried to escape, but alas... the moment he was imprisoned in it, he had nowhere to go.

Yanhuan's voice, calm and almost teasing, whispered through the chaos, "No matter where you move... I am everywhere."

That's when Levi realized, no matter where he moved, the blue sphere followed him along under Yanhuan's control!

If he could teleport himself, he could definitely teleport the blue sphere, wherever he wanted inside the boundary of his control.

"Are you planning to keep on watching until he dies? As much as I hate to admit it, I don't have any control over the spatial tears," Yanhuan asked calmly as he gazed at Feng Ling and Dominic.

Seeing their silence on the matter, Yanhuan frowned for a moment, thinking that their reaction was a bit weird... but then, it hit him, 'Do they have that much belief in him?'

Once his mind went to this place, his heart turned cold.

'Fine, let's see how far your belief will take you.'

He watched as Levi tried his best to escape from the blue sphere, but no amount of speed could be faster than instant teleportation.

Unfortunately, the spatial storm was only growing in strength the more time a spatial area was disturbed.

From dealing with a couple of spatial tears emerging here and there, to being forced to evade countless ones emerging at the same time!

Slice! Slice!

In the end, the storm had gotten too much for Levi and before he knew it, he lost two more limbs and barely survived a spatial tear that cut his waist from the right side, leaving him gushing with blood akin to a fountain.

When Yanhuan saw this, he decided to end the battle the proper way, having no interest in adding Levi to his kills list... He swiftly canceled his ultimate ability and teleported behind Levi, who was barely hanging on for his dear life.

Then, with a spinning kick, he hurled him back into the ground.

Bam!

Levi's body smashed against the dried-up ground, kicking up a cloud of dust and hurling small pebbles everywhere.

Yanhuan manifested a staircase of blue smoke and took slow and steady steps, resembling a divine royal entity stepping down from the heavens.

Once he arrived, he walked up to Levi's beaten bloody form... or what remained of it.

Blue smoke still rising faintly from his body... His shadow fell long across the ground, looming over Levi, who once spoke with such defiance. He tilted his head and spoke, his voice calm, but as sharp as the spatial tears that ravaged Levi's body.

"Do you remember what you said to me, Levi? That you'd be the one standing... while I would be the one on the ground?"

A humorless chuckle escaped him as he crouched, bringing his face closer to Levi's bruised features... His next words dropped into an icy whisper.

"If it weren't for the weight of my reputation... I would have let you die here. Just to teach you a lesson."

Evangeline was right in her assessment... as much as Yanhuan tried to hide it, he was in love with himself so much he valued his reputation above all else. Thus, if someone sought to ruin his reputation, he would take immense effort to ruin them instead.

Levi's spiritual aura display made him understand that if he didn't go this hard on him, they would start comparing them... he hated nothing more than having his name next to another one in the same breath.

He was Zhang Yanhuan... the son and the heir of the Imperial Sun Lineage... he was born under the belief that their Lineage's name must not be tainted by anyone or anything.

This was his father's and family's creed... and he lived by it every single day.

For a moment, silence stretched between them... but then, Levi's lips twitched into a small, serene smile. Although his voice was hoarse and emerging under a lake of blood in his mouth, it still carried an unsettling calm.

"I'm glad you told me that... It makes me at peace with the decision I have made."

Yanhuan's brow furrowed for a moment... but then, a smirk manifested as he leaned even closer.

"In this state? What could you possibly do?"

"Look closely... at my face." Levi said, his voice seemingly not so 'pained' anymore.

Yanhuan's gaze narrowed, choosing to indulge him, though his heart had already skipped a beat at the unsettling way Levi carried himself despite his broken state.

But, as he peered into Levi's features, he was startled to see his face beginning to crack, fragmenting like glass... Piece by piece, Levi's visage broke away, until what stared back at Yanhuan was his own face.

An eerie reflection of himself.

His breath was stuck in his throat, his pupils tightening to the limit, and his heartbeat started accelerating nonstop.

Before he could react, he blinked instinctively... And in that single blink, the world inverted for him.

When his eyes opened again, it was Levi who stood above him, smiling faintly, while Yanhuan lay bound to the ground with his body completely chained up.

When his eyes traced the crimson chains, he saw Levi holding onto a segmented staff... one crown chaining him, the other was placed near his neck, emitting sharp vibrations nonstop.

He could tell, one wrong twitch, and he would share the same ending as Evangeline.

As his mind started regaining its clarity on this sudden, impossible development, Levi's calm voice drifted down to his ears.

"As I said... in every confrontation, I will be the one standing, and you will be under me... every, single, time."

"I think we have seen enough... Winner, Levi Larson." Dominic announced while rubbing his eyelids after the insanity he had just witnessed.

It wasn't just him... every single watcher was left absolutely dumbfounded, feeling like they had watched the biggest humiliation ritual in the century.

"Next time, don't fake being good... either be one or don't."

With that sentence left behind, Yanhuan watched as Levi unsummoned his staff and walked away towards his friends, not a single scratch on his body.

Memories of what he did to him were still fresh in his mind, so real he could taste them... yet, as he listened to the surrounding chatter, seeing everyone pointing their fingers, chuckling, or shaking their heads in disappointment, he couldn't help but feel like he was trapped in a dream.

'Orr'Fume... for the love of god, tell me what happened, I am about to lose my mind!' Yanhuan asked his contracted nightcrawler, feeling like he was about to have a panic attack.

'You were outclassed... nothing more, nothing less.' Orr'Fume replied calmly as he gazed at Levi's retreating back.

Hearing what he said, Yanhuan felt like someone ripped his heart out and feasted on it right in front of his face. He knew that his nightcrawler wasn't the chatty type, and he had no intentions of making a fool of himself and asking his teammates.

"Astra... replay the last ten minutes."

"As you command, Sir."

Astra AI went on and manifested a small holographic screen in front of his right eye, showing him a scene he would never forget for the rest of his life.

Everything was normal, Levi taking out Evangeline in the blink of an eye, and then talking to Levi for a few moments... however, the moment he said 'You talk too much', instead of Levi hurling the shimmering green staff at him, he remained in his place with his arms crossed.

As for him? He teleported away and started smugly talking to himself like a fool... But, this was only the beginning of the worst five minutes of his life.

Yanhuan's face kept turning whiter and whiter at the sight of him teleporting all over the place, appearing like he was fighting a ghost.

He received telepathic, dimensional, and even messages through Astra AI from his teammates, showing up on the holographic screen too.

'Yanhuan! What are you doing?! He is right there in front of you!'

'Captain? Are you okay? Why are you fighting by yourself?'

As the situation kept developing for the worse, watching their captain absolutely make a fool of himself, and he didn't seem to realize it, they finally began to realize that Levi had already made his move, and their captain had fallen in it head first.

Unlike Levi's team, who refused to interfere when Jasmine was hypnotized, Yanhuan's teammates didn't give a shit... they knew if they didn't try to wake him up, he would channel his wrath on them after he finally woke up.

'Captain! Wake up!! I think he has put you inside an illusion!'

'WAAAAAKE UP!!'

Alas, they screamed, cursed, and shouted... nothing.

Yanhuan had no memory of receiving any of those messages, leaving him to question his own reality.

Unfortunately, Astra AI recorded everything that went down... the real truth.

He kept watching in stunned silence mixed in with a tint of pure dread... watching as he traded blows with no one, using his ultimate ability on air.

Yet, the worst of it all? Him wasting a technique slot in his limited library of techniques to create a staircase of clouds... Just to walk down slowly and nonchalantly towards Levi, who was standing in the same spot with his arms crossed while leaning against his staff.

Then, right next to Levi, he started talking to the empty ground, chuckling, and whispering... Only when Levi had enough of making a fool of Yanhuan did he chain him up slowly and throw him on the ground.

At the time, everyone watched in utter horror as Yanhuan didn't even struggle while Levi was chaining him... it was like he felt nothing in the real world, a completely helpless victim that could be killed any second Levi decided.

"Recording complete. Would you like me to replay it, or save a specific segment?" Astra AI said monotonously, having no clue that her words left Yanhuan's heart scarred even more.

Chapter 257: LEEVVIII!!!

With a twisted expression, Yanhuan bounced off the ground and shouted at Levi from a distance. "What have you done to me?!"

Levi turned around slowly and said with the same unprovocative smile.

"Nothing that you didn't deserve."

Then, he turned back to his friends, who were raining down on him with questions about whether he had used his perfect ultimate ability after his 'breakthrough' to Pathfinder rank.

Seeing Levi entertain his friends while treating him like he didn't even exist finally pushed Yanhuan past his breaking point.

He had just made an utter fool of himself under the gaze of his teammates, who once respected... no, worshiped him... under the eyes of Dominic, the strongest Daywalker in the world, and the staff members, whose solemn expressions made his blunder sting even more.

Yet, he knew the worst had to arrive... with this many people, some of them were bound to share clips of what happened on the network.

Then, his father, his family, his agency members, everyone was going to see it.

Him.

The noble Yanhuan, the undefeated Daywalker of today's generation, didn't just lose... he was absolutely outclassed, like his contracted nightcrawler had said.

The fallout of his reputation was unredeemable... the crowned king of today's generation dethroned in the most humiliating manner imaginable.

The least... the least Levi could do was tell him how he did it. Yet, instead, he turned his back on him.

"LEEEEVIIIIII!!!"

Szzlzlzl!

But, just as he was about to do something that he was going to regret for a lifetime, Dominic appeared next to him and used his oppressive spiritual aura to freeze him in place.

Once he felt Dominic's aura used on him, Yanhuan's fury was extinguished... not fully, as most of it buried itself in the deepest parts of his heart.

"Yanhuan... I think it's best if you don't participate in the site's exploration. Go back to the headquarters, and work on yourself... especially, here." Dominic said calmly as he tapped his temple.

"My apologies, it seems I have lost my cool a little..." Yanhuan apologized with a crooked, forced smile, "I think it was Levi's ability effect on my mind... it did a number on me."

"I understand."

Dominic patted him on the back with a light chuckle as he retracted his spiritual aura. Feeling like he was freed from the weight of a planet, Yanhuan bowed his head respectfully at Dominic and said, "I will take your advice to heart... I was lacking today, and I am sorry for making you lose the bet."

"It's okay... losses and defeats make our life more interesting." Dominic smiled, "Imagine if you win every time, all the time... what will you learn? What kind of fun will there be in winning when you know nothing can challenge you?"

"I sure have learned a lot today." Yanhuan nodded, "Next time, I will be more prepared and won't lose like this again."

"That's the spirit." Dominic laughed.

"If you would excuse me, I have to apologize to my teammates."

With one final head bow, Yanhuan walked towards his teammates... but, just as he took three steps, he heard Dominic utter with a tone as soothing as a breeze.

"Yanhuan, don't raise your weapon on your allies' backs again... next time it happens, I won't be smiling."

Yanhuan felt his heart, along with all the negative thoughts swarming his mind, freeze for a second... then, he turned his head and forced another crooked smile.

"How can I? I know which side I belong to."

"Good."

Seeing his retreating, defeated back, Dominic shook his head slightly and focused back on Levi... then, he smiled wryly, knowing that those two's story was only at its beginning.

Sometime later...

Levi was seen sitting by himself on the roof of a ruined building with the three pyramids in front of him... he was too far from them, so he could only use his echolocation to create their gray wavy appearance in his world of darkness.

But it was enough for him.

Arthur and the rest of his teammates were having a bonfire dinner at the camp's center... they invited Levi to join, as even Tyrese's and Evangeline's teammates were more than pleased with how he handled Yanhuan.

Hell, Tyrese and Arthur had even hit it off and became friends... though, of course, only after Tyrese apologized to Jojo for his harassment.

Although Evangeline was still not satisfied with how Heliodor's Raiders got their access to the Ancient Site's exploration, her coldness melted slightly when she regained consciousness and heard what happened.

Yanhuan, as strong as he was, wasn't very popular amongst his peers... unless they were his teammates.

Probably, even his teammates couldn't stand him, but they could do nothing about it, considering his strength and, most importantly, his status in their home region.

Levi knew that their bonfire's subjects would involve the ability he used, and Levi had no interest in talking about it and exposing his cards in detail.

So far, everyone saw only Yanhuan lose his cool, but they had no idea how he did it, and this was burning a hole in everyone's mind... though, they guessed it must be related to illusions. Their guess would be correct... but what he did to Yanhuan was no simple illusion.

'You sure have done a number on him... was using it the best decision? You know, people like him with their heads in the clouds can't handle the reality of being brought to dirt.' Ash'Kral said lazily.

'And? How's that my problem?' Levi replied calmly, 'You think it would have ended differently if I took him down the normal way? People like him can't accept defeat regardless of which form it arrives at... and I have no interest in walking on eggshells when dealing with him... especially when we are bound to meet again in the conference.'

Levi wasn't an idiot... he knew that defeating Yanhuan in that manner would backfire on him as he would be making an enemy out of a member of the strongest Lineage, the strongest agency, and the strongest region in the world.

But, he also understood that the only way to get along with these kinds of people was to feed their narcissistic persona in any way or form.

Levi had no interest in being someone else's dog just because of their fearsome status... since he disliked Yanhuan already due to the way he treated him, his team, and his region, Levi felt no remorse in casting his third unlocked innate ability of the Nine Senses seed.

Whatever consequences would come next, he welcomed them.

'Still, this was the first time I used Eternal Mirage on people... I genuinely didn't expect its effect to be this deadly.' Levi said, recalling the day he had hit the Evolution stage of his Nine Senses Junior rank's evolutionary path and unlocked this innate ability as his final one.

Sometime ago, before unlocking Sun and Void forms...

Levi was seen sitting on the floor in his apartment's living room, wearing only his boxers... he had just succeeded in feeding the gluttonous Nine Senses seed, helping it reach its final growth stage in Junior rank...(30%)

'Finally... growth totems are really coming in handy in the lower ranks.' Levi exhaled in relief, feeling quite drained.

Before he came back home, he had spent hours cultivating in the outskirts of his region with the divine light. When he grew too burned out from the process, he returned home and used growth totems to push for the last remaining 1%.

He knew once he became a Pathfinder, using these low-grade growth totems would be obsolete... ten of them might not even help him grow the seed by 0.1%.

Soon, he shook his head, not wanting to ruin his mood by thinking about the hole he was digging himself into.

'Let's see what our final ability is...'

No delay, Levi pressed on his tattoo and had his consciousness teleported inside the Nine Senses Ancestral Rooted Plane.

Once he was standing before the massive flower of abilities, Levi held his chin thoughtfully and asked, "Ash, you think it's feasible to unlock a higher-tier spiritual ability with my current spiritual prowess and the enhancements I will be getting in the near future from the Sun and Void evolutions?"

Levi had done the same in his Rookie rank when he unlocked Death Chime Field as his third innate ability... instead of choosing from the lowest graded abilities, he skipped a grade, unlocking a higher quality ability, believing he had what it took to support it.

Now, he wanted to do the same with his third innate ability, knowing he must not take these opportunities for granted... he understood that his path would slow immensely after becoming a Pathfinder, and might even grind to a halt for a very long time once he advanced to Solarbound.

In other words, entering the Ancestral Rooted Plane to unlock freebies would no longer be as frequent, forcing him to focus more on his personal techniques.

"I don't see why not." Ash'Kral approved. "A higher-grade ability might consume an insane amount of spiritual energy, but I believe you currently have the tank to use it once. That alone is enough as a start."

"I thought so too." Levi nodded in agreement.

Then, he floated toward the flower and skipped another line of abilities, moving closer to the leaves, which shimmered more brightly than the ones at the bottom.

Naturally, as he approached the center of the flower, the number of abilities decreased... compared to the tier where he had chosen before, which held more than a thousand, this one barely carried a hundred abilities.

Without hesitation, he pulled one at random and turned it around to read its details.

//Eternal Mirage:

Type: Illusion Aspect.

Description: The user seizes control of the target's nine senses and overlays them with a fully fabricated reality... To the victim, the world shifts into whatever scenario the caster wills it to be... heavenly

paradise, endless battlefield, haunting nightmare. They see, hear, feel, and even smell this new world with absolute realism, unable to distinguish illusion from truth.

Total Sensory Overwrite: The victim's perception is rewritten entirely, leaving them blind to the real world.

Reactive Illusion: The illusion can adapt to the victim's thoughts and reactions, making it seem even more inescapable.

Combat Manipulation: The caster can place false enemies, false allies, or fabricated terrain to control the victim's movements and actions in reality.//

Chapter 258: A Cry For Help.

"Woah... I have actually unlocked two main aspects in a single rank... this is huge!" Levi's expression turned bright, focusing more on the Aspect than the ability.

"This is indeed massive." The Titan smiled, "Ash'Kral is a master in illusionary arts... I was genuinely questioning if you were going to miss out on his tutelage."

"I can tell," Levi murmured as he read the ability's details, realizing just how deadly and fearsome his illusory battle arts must have been.

If this were a reasonable medium-tier ability in the Perception Sense Leaf, Levi couldn't imagine what that monster must have created at the peak.

He could understand stealing one's senses, but to do it without requiring a decent medium was something else... it made him realize that he could literally put anyone in a realistic illusion of his desire without even using his weapon or an energy-based medium.

Just have a high spiritual prowess compared to his enemy, and his life was no longer his. If he were to channel it through his weapons or aether energy, its efficiency would only improve.

'Fearsome... too fearsome.'

Back to the present...

Levi smiled briefly as he recalled using Eternal Mirage on Yanhuan... he had never planned on revealing it, believing he had what it took to defeat Yanhuan without it.

After all, the fight in Yanhuan's illusion was orchestrated by Levi from A to Z, like a choreography... that's why his thoughts were still heard, and he chose to use only the set of abilities and techniques he had already shown before.

But in reality, if he truly went all out, Yanhuan wouldn't have stood a chance even without Levi using Eternal Mirage on him.

After all, his spiritual prowess was on a different league than any of his peers, and Yanhuan was included... as long as he kept his spiritual energy saved.

Hence, he had to take down Evangeline quickly.

But, after everything that happened between him and Yanhuan, he wanted to test his character... to see if he was just a spoiled prince, who knew no better, or an actual piece of shit.

Look and behold, the moment Yanhuan believed he had won, he didn't hesitate to tell Levi that if it weren't for his reputation, he would have killed him... all because of the soft interaction they had before.

Once he said it, Levi knew exactly where to put Yanhuan in his list of 'Acquaintances.'

'By the time he grows some balls and decides to make a move on me, I will have already left him to eat my dust.' Levi remarked on Ash'Kral's previous question.

As for his family? Levi knew that none of them would dare put a finger on him... not when he was still participating in the event and under the Solar Aegis Sanctuary's protection. Even without it, Dominic had made his stance clear.

He might have said his warning only for Yanhuan, but with Levi having his ears everywhere, he heard him too... that made him understand that Dominic had his back, and everyone else in the conference.

If there was one thing no Lineage would dare do, it was to get on the wrong side of the strongest Daywalker on the planet, who was also the Supervisor of the SAS Headquarters.

His authority was on the high ends of the pyramid, and no one in their right mind would think it was a good idea to challenge him... With all of those points combined, Levi had no reason to be scared of upsetting Yanhuan or his family.

For now, his only focus was the Ancient Site.

A couple of days later...

Levi's team, Tyrese's team, and Evangeline's team were all gathered in the camp's plaza while Dominic, Feng Ling, and some high-ranked staff members were in front of them.

The atmosphere was solemn as everyone had just received the news that the Ancient Distorted Site's gate had finally reached the tipping point, opening for the first time.

Levi and the others were all geared up, wearing as many artifacts as they could afford... money and energy-wise.

Levi finally wore the black armor he found in Grave'Maw's treasury... He had been saving it for the time he could wear it proudly, and no one would question him about its source.

After all, when he looted it in the treasury, he was yet to be a CRS Rifter or someone with access to the dimensional network in everyone's eyes.

As for telling them he bought it from Heliodor's markets? He knew that such a lie would never work when such purchases left records behind.

"Following the briefing we had yesterday, I would like to emphasize again the grave importance of avoiding unnecessary battles against the Corrupted." Dominic uttered solemnly, "You are bound to meet them, and they won't be friendly... but, if you manage to contain or kill them without creating too much energy disturbance, the site will remain stable."

Everyone nodded in understanding... they were already informed on what to expect inside the site, how to notice early signs of the dimension's instability, and such in detail. They were also given a nocturnal contract that acted as a dimensional gateway to the World Tree's mirror... though, only the captains were given such contracts due to budget issues.

The SAS Headquarters had already invested way too much to claim the site under their name, and they couldn't afford to give each Daywalker a contract since each one was priced in the tens of thousands of credits, and they were a one-time use.

The Ancient Site's dimensional spaces were extremely difficult to access or leave, which meant, each dimensional gate needed an immense amount of spatial energy.

As everyone knew... Nocturn's Administration was being extremely frugal with such rare energy, increasing each dimensional gateway contract's price based on the amount of spatial energy required.

"Move out... Fractured Sites have unstable gates, and we don't know when they will close or open again, if they ever will."

Knowing that their time was precious, Dominic kept his briefing short... Then, he led the way to the Pyramid of Khufu with everyone else following him.

After some time, the teams had arrived at the base of the Pyramid of Khufu... since they left its corruption as it was, and they couldn't use cleansing totems, everyone was required to wear a corruption cleansing mask. The same one Levi wore during the Lord of the Broken Peak's expedition.

As Levi walked across the corrupted lands, he used his harmonic spine to color his world, as if there was anything to color in an infested, corrupted site. Unlike everyone else, he was able to see the corrupting atmosphere do its black magic, turning the pyramid's stones as black as night while leaving nasty, slimy tendrils on it.

'From a pyramid considered one of the seven wonders of the world to this state... the Shadow dimension's corruption is truly a plague... a plague with no cure.'

Levi smiled bitterly, feeling like he was watching his beloved world die slowly and have its memories and history slowly corroded... it wasn't just the world's history; their ancestors' great efforts too.

Whether the means of the Pyramid's being built were questionable or not, its creation was a staple in human history and redefined how the modern era viewed ancient humans.

Now... all that was left of their world was this.

A corrupted black ruined pyramid that had its beauty and ancientness stolen... and humans could do nothing to prevent or protect it. Yet, the saddest part? It was only going to get worse until their home planet got devoured by the Shadow dimension, just like Ashora's empire on the other side.

It wasn't yet fully devoured, but the emergence of ancient sites connected to it was nothing but a sorrowful scream for help.

Levi had read rumors in the dimensional network that those Ancient Sites were born out of the planet's strong memories that were being devoured by the Shadow dimension, escaping briefly and seeking a connection to another place that shared the same kind of memories.

It wasn't just having a similar history... it was more than that.

It was life.

It was the planet's soul crying out to its kin across the stars, begging not to be forgotten.

As Levi gazed at the swirling gate in the far distance, he didn't know if he was just being sentimental or not... but he could feel it.

The other planet was calling for them to save it, to help it escape the gaping maw of the Shadow dimension.

Alas... how could they save another planet when they couldn't even save theirs?

Is this our planet's final fate? Using our history and memories to seek kindred spirits that could save it, not knowing that its cries for help will be left unanswered... Levi thought, feeling his heart tighten for a brief moment.

He knew it was foolish to cling so tightly to a mere piece of land, but he didn't care. Earth was more than soil and stone... it was his cradle and his grave, his mother, and his father.

It was the streets he grew up on, the skies he first dreamed under, the rivers that had carried his laughter, and the mountains that had borne witness to his pain.

Earth was his childhood, his blood, his everything... the thought of losing it was like being asked to carve out his own heart.

As he neared the gate with his friends, Levi reached out to a small, untainted piece of stone... then, he caressed it gently for a moment before he continued on his path.

'Earth... no one will need to hear your sorrowful cries for help.' His expression turned calm as he stood in front of the swirling gate, 'As long as I live... your fate will never end like hers.'

'Never.'

Chapter 259: Ashora Temple.

"We don't know where exactly the gate is going to throw you at, but based on experiences, it is almost always near a place with a rich shared history between the two-dimensional locations... so, you can expect to find yourself either inside a pyramid or near one." Dominic gave them a stern head nod and added, "Remember safety first... Astra Ai's services will be disabled, and even your dimensional messages won't reach us. So, we will have no idea what's going on the other side, and we won't be able to send a rescue team in time if something terrible were to happen... So, prioritize your safety at all times; we can't afford to lose either of you."

"Sir Dominic, you're making me blush." Mika covered her cheeks playfully.

Seeing the judgmental look from Feng Ling, Dominic's eyelids twitched. He swiftly coughed and dismissed them with a wave of a hand.

"Go, go, go, and good luck finding the Sun Amulet... the planet's fate might very well depend on it."

The briefing explained why SAS Headquarters was so invested in this site... once everyone heard that the Sun Amulet could sway the supervising Radian of their dimensional sector to grant more attention to their planet, their entire approach shifted.

From a mission to hunt for treasures, and the Sun Amulet included, to prioritizing the Sun Amulet above all else... when it came to their planet's survival, no one was messing around.

Of course, Levi's team planned on prioritizing Seraphis' miracle medicine as well, not forgetting the main reason they were participating in this exploration.

"Let's go."

Evangeline ordered calmly as she took the lead, her armored knightly teammates following close in a perfect formation like well-trained soldiers.

As they were walking towards the gate, Dominic and the rest of the SAS Headquarters staff members were positioned on the sides in a long line, creating a corridor for them.

All of them lifted their right hand slowly, fingers parted... index, middle, and ring fingers extended. Then, they held it close to their hearts as they watched Evangeline's team disappear into the gate.

"I will see you there."

Tyrese waved a peace sign to Levi's team and walked with broad shoulders to the gate, wearing a skin-tight black leather armor that was cut from the shoulders, exposing his muscular frame that was hidden underneath his baggy clothes.

Mira, Blake, and the others followed him, each wearing a different set of artifacts that included the accessories.

After they were gone, Levi's team was next... no hesitation, Levi walked first, and the rest of his team stayed behind his back, trusting him with their lives, just like he trusted them with his back.

Naturally, Arthur was the first one behind him... always watching his big brother's back from anything... Just as Levi was about to step inside the gate, he heard one last dimensional message from Feng Ling.

'Your parents would have been proud if they saw how far their sons have come along.' He said, his stoic expression unfitting of such sentimental words.

But Levi felt it... Feng Ling meant every single word.

'Thanks... but save it for later.' Levi smiled in his direction as he stepped inside, leaving a final message of his own, 'I am only getting started.'

Feng Ling cracked a faint smile as he watched Arthur and the girls disappear into the portal... once they got inside, the swirling black gate started glitching for a few seconds, freezing his smile.

But, just as he was about to expect the worst-case scenario to surface, the dimensional glitches subsided, and the gate returned to its peaceful state.

"Well... that almost gave me a heart attack." Dominic sighed in relief.

"It must be Levi... his spiritual prowess is at Solarbound, which caused the gate to almost collapse after the others went in after him." Feng Ling replied.

"We anticipated as much, we just didn't think the dimensional glitches would show up instantly..." Dominic frowned as he gazed at the gate, "This means the site's dimension might be more fractured than we have calculated."

The SAS Headquarters staff members showed solemn expressions... but they knew that nothing could be done about it besides wishing the teams a safe return.

Meanwhile, the moment Levi stepped out of the portal, the world snapped into form through frequencies instead of light.

He found himself inside a somewhat ruined hall of a temple. Its interior was massive, its ceiling supported by thick yellow stone columns carved with sharp geometric patterns and artistic drawings of battles between humanoid and bestial Phoenix-like birds against nightmarish, shadowy monstrosities.

The same was for the walls, which were painted with faded murals devoured by the unforgiving passage of time. Yet, Levi could feel the rich history and weight behind each painting.

When he switched to the floor, he noticed that all that was left was dried-up sandstone... cracked all over like it hadn't tasted a drop of water for thousands of years.

It wasn't far-fetched... the air was dry, heavy with dust and the distinguishable acidic taste of the Shadow dimension's corrupting atmosphere.

Before he could analyze the temple's chamber, Levi swiftly enhanced his harmonic spine's range to the limit, showing him a massive layout of a temple in the shape of a slumbering Phoenix built from yellow stone... his radar also captured the existence of hundreds of corrupted bestial birds spread across the entire temple.

Most of them seemed to be lying motionless... but Levi could hear their heartbeats, making him understand that if they weren't quiet, they would wake them up.

And they couldn't afford that.

Thus, the moment Arthur and the rest of his teammates emerged from the same gate behind him that was affixed on a wall crack, Levi placed a finger on his mouth. He knew his brother had no such thing as volume control.

Seeing his reaction, Arthur swiftly closed his mouth shut... he was just about to appreciate the temple's beauty with a loud 'whoah'.

Since they had no service for Astra Ai or the dimensional network, they were left with talking through the old traditional way... whispering.

"What is it?" Nurah asked softly.

"The Temple is infested with the Corrupted... from their spiritual auras, the weakest is Tier 3," Levi replied while signing with his hands for Jasmine.

Hearing this, everyone's expression turned solemn... it wasn't like they were afraid of them, but the fact that they couldn't fight using their powers had placed a heavy limitation.

Hence, they must avoid them at all costs.

"It's good that we have a satellite radar with us."

Shia joked under her breath to lighten the mood... Everyone chuckled on the low, resembling a bunch of rookie tomb raiders who had no idea what they were doing.

"No wonder Ashora's empire is connected to the ancient Egyptian Civilization... besides the content of the murals, the art style, the language's style, the architecture... everything shares an uncanny resemblance," Nurah commented in intrigue as she gazed at the sea of faded murals surrounding them.

"Maybe someone from Ashora's Empire made it to Earth somehow during that age and helped them? Didn't they use to say that the Pyramids were believed to have been built by aliens a century ago?" Shia wondered, half serious, half jokingly.

"If such a possibility were true, the Sphinx would have been sculptured as a phoenix," Levi replied calmly as he walked around the sealed-shut chamber... it was as big as a basketball court, and seemed to have served as a place for prayer.

Levi could tell from its structure... the entire chamber was empty, having only the columns still standing strong and a ravaged platform by the corruption at the far end of a closed-shut stony door.

"Did the Shadow dimension cause their downfall, or is the information we were given about the Dawn Phoenix more accurate?" Jojo asked.

"Hmm... maybe both are correct?"

Levi pondered with his chin resting on his fist, also noticing that the murals' descriptions conflicted with what they were told.

"The murals might be describing their eternal war against the nightcrawlers' invasion just like us, trying to stop their planet from getting devoured... but, something might have happened that caused a rift to emerge between the Beasts and Trueborn, creating a divide between them even if they descended from the same Ancestor." He shared.

"Again... I feel like it's too far-fetched for the Dawn Phoenix to cast the Ashfall plague on its people... Beasts and Trueborn alike." Nurah shook her head, "Regardless of how bad the conflict was, it would

never slaughter everyone... after all, World Ender Classified Beasts' intelligence might not have evolved to humans' intelligence, but they knew what was right and wrong."

"I agree with your assessment... but anything is possible."

Although Levi doubted the validity of SAS Headquarters' research on the site's history, he would never go so far as to use the word 'never.' He knew too well... in life, everything, and everyone was subject to change.

That was the very essence of Evolution.

Chapter 260: Silence is Survival.

"What happened in the past is no concern of ours," Arthur said sternly. "We must act quick and find the Sun Amulet and any other treasure before we are forced to leave... or god forbid, Dreads' team and Buzzkill's team get to them first."

They were told that just their existence alone affected the stability of the site's dimensional membrane... the layer that kept every planet and celestial body protected and hidden from the roots of the Tree of Death and Tree of Life reaching them.

But once there was a crack in this protective layer, or it became too weak... the two Primordial Trees' roots would notice them instantly, like the Eye of Sauron atop the Dark Tower catching sight of anyone foolish enough to wear the One Ring.

In the case of Ashora's Empire, the Primordial Tree of Death's root got to them first, which made them linked to the Shadow Dimension.

Right now, the dimensional membrane was still holding... albeit extremely weak and unstable, it was still active, allowing the Shadow Dimension to slowly corrupt the planet instead of devouring it full out.

If they didn't want to be there to witness it, they must act fast and efficiently.

"You're right... time is of essence, and that's why studying Ashora Empire's history is an important step," Levi replied while gazing at the murals. "For a Radian to desire the Sun Amulet, it means it is a treasure heavily connected to the Ashora Empire's rise and fall... it can't be just a regular natural A grade treasure... a Radian will never look in its direction otherwise."

"If we can uncover its location, the rest of the treasures will follow... it must be kept in a treasury, or at least near other treasures, given its immense significance to the empire."

Hearing this, Jasmine and the girls nodded in agreement... they knew that Radians had access to such treasures quite easily... especially if they were related to Sun Laws.

The Sun Amulet must carry some sort of significance to the Radian... history-wise.

If it carried such significance to a Radian, it would be considered a sacred Relic to the Ashora Empire... which meant the answer of its location lay in the murals and any other historical piece that managed to survive time and corruption.

Unfortunately... the murals in the chamber spoke nothing about it, focusing more on the battles between the Ashora Empire and the Shadow Dimension's invasion.

After Levi finished memorizing the important aspects of the murals, he faced Jasmine and requested with a hand sign.

-Can you get us out of here without the need to touch anything?-

Levi knew that the door could be opened through some sort of mechanism, but whether it worked or not, he had no intention of testing it out... He understood that the noise would be too loud, and he had yet to master a technique that could suppress sounds.

Although he was at 10% resonance access, it was still not enough for the complexity it would take to create a field that suppressed sounds... After all, creating sounds was one thing, and removing them entirely was another.

Jasmine nodded, and walked right away to the door. Then, she summoned her brush and tapped into her peculiar vision that turned the world black and white... besides the absence of color, it gave her the ability to see through objects like an advanced version of X-ray.

Then, she turned the door's surface into a scroll and painted two dots... one next to them, and the other a few meters behind the door.

Once she signed it, the ink portals manifested and she showed her friends a thumbs up with a sweet smile.

"Having you and Levi on our side really feels like a cheat."

Arthur grinned as he tried to deliver the same message through a broken sign language that he was learning on the side with the girls.

But all Jasmine and Levi read was:

-You and Levi are cheating.-

Still, both of them smiled in appreciation for his attempt to speak her language... Levi liked it when his brother went out of his way to learn anything new that was unrelated to muscles and strength.

Jasmine could see that Arthur and the girls had been working hard on their sign language in case neither dimensional messages nor Astra Ai would be much of a help.

The fact that all of them were putting such effort for her sake made her feel more included in their little party... for her? This was more love shown to her by anyone else than her father.

"If you weren't too focused on learning cursing with sign language, you might have nailed it." Jojo rolled her eyes at Arthur as they walked side by side towards the portal.

Instead of replying, Arthur lifted his hands with a faint grin... Then, he rubbed his palm in a slow circle over the top of his bare head, as if polishing something smooth.

Next, he jabbed a finger against his temple to make it clear what he meant... Without pause, he bent both hands up by his head, extending only his pinkies and index fingers like little horns.

A crooked grin manifested on his lips as he wiggled the horns and finished with clawed hands snapping forward.

Seeing this, Jasmine covered her mouth in amusement, knowing that he had just called Jojo a bald-headed demon again.

Then, she walked after Levi, leaving Jojo and Arthur behind bickering if he cursed her or not... of course, they were whispering throughout their fight.

However, after they stepped out of the ink portal, the mood shifted... they put a pause on their fight after noticing the corridor resembled a pathway to a demonic castle.

The yellowish walls were covered in shadowy sticky vines... and some of them were releasing faint black miasma, resembling pierced gas pipes in an underground tunnel.

"Use anti-corruption gels on your skin," Levi ordered solemnly while pulling out a wooden totem in the shape of a small bottle.

Then, he murmured an incantation and opened the bottle, pouring a golden shimmering sticky liquid on his palm... He rubbed it over every inch of his exposed skin, making it shimmer with a faint golden hue.

The others did the same too, creating a protective layer against the corruption... this totem was a must when exploring ancient distorted sites since the corruption was highly concentrated in sealed areas compared to being in the open.

That's because they couldn't use any totem that removed the corruption entirely in those sites without affecting its stability.

After smearing themselves, Levi led the way in the direction of the exit... the corridor was long and split into many other corridors, resembling a minimized labyrinth.

However, after walking for a few minutes, Levi stopped them with a hand extended backward... then, he lifted one finger and pointed it at the right turn that awaited them.

Everyone understood that he meant a Corrupted was lying there. Jasmine stepped forward and signed.

-Do you want me to create a portal behind it?-

-No, keep your energy saved.-

Levi shook his head, knowing that Jasmine's abilities consumed too much energy depending on their complexity... a spatial ink portal obviously devoured a sizable chunk with each utilization.

Levi pointed at Nurah and gave a slight head nod. When it came to silent takedowns, Nurah was the second best behind Levi... but Levi didn't want to waste his spiritual energy this early on a mob, understanding that its recovery took way too long compared to solar energy.

No words traded, Nurah drew her dagger and walked in front, her footsteps were as light as a panther... once she arrived at the turn, she peeked with one eye and saw the slumbering Corrupted in the middle of the corridor, blocking the exit.

It was curled tightly, its giant body hunched and wings folded inward... Feathers clumped in blackened tufts, leaking faint trails of black miasma between cracks spread across its body. Its beak rested against its chest, and with every heavy breath it took, it released a faint shadowy gas as though the corruption itself exhaled with it.

'Corrupted... for it to survive for this long without substance, the corruption is really a zombie-like virus.'

Nurah thought inwardly as she used her ability to connect her shadow with the Corrupted. Then, she slowly lowered her hand, causing the Corrupted to sink into its own shadow.

Immediately after it disappeared, she gestured for the rest to move quickly. They increased their walking speed until they got out of the corridor. Once Nurah caught up to them, she deactivated her latest Pathfinder first stage innate ability... Shadow Slip.

The Corrupted slowly rose up from its own shadow and remained slumbering in its place like it had never moved.

Only when they put a decent distance between them did Levi whisper, "We will be heading towards the depth of the temple... stay alert, our path is infested."

Levi didn't need to warn them... the moment they stepped out of the corridor, their eyes caught sight of dozens of Corrupted slumbering across the ruined hall. If not for the windows and the massive triangular gaps in the roof, where the moonlight and starlight seeped through, they would have been impossible to notice... their skin was as dark as the night itself.

"Silent Step Totem."

Levi ordered under his breath as he scanned the spread-out Corrupted, wanting to find the best and safest path from their position to the door on the other side of the hall... He could see with his harmonic spine that most of the rooms had nothing in them but the Corrupted, and erased murals, failing to survive like the ones he saw in the Prayer Hall.

Meanwhile, he was able to see a hidden sealed chamber in the depths of the temple... his harmonic spine's 'auditory vision' range weakened immensely when it reached there, making him incapable of detailing its interior.

But it didn't take a genius to realize that a hidden chamber either implied a safety bunker or a treasury.

After everyone applied the totem on their soles besides Nurah, who had an inbuilt silent step from her first perfect evolution mutation, Levi ordered them to remain in a line and follow his exact steps. Then, he walked calmly in the direction of the slumbering Corrupted, weaving between them with unflinching confidence.

Silent Step Totem gave them about two minutes of walking without emitting any noise or pressure... it was like their trails were being erased.

And yet...

Grrrrrrr...