

Evolution 261

Chapter 261: Monsters Are Just His Roommates.

However, the moment they reached the center of the hall, Arthur froze as a Corrupted Ashori beast growled in its sleep and shifted to the other side... its feathered tail brushing against his legs.

Arthur gazed at the Corrupted and then at his brother... sweat drops already forming on his forehead as he felt the weight of the feathered tail on his legs.

The smallest Corrupted was as big as an SUV car... so, although the tail was mostly feathers, it still weighed something... This made Arthur understand that if he were to move it away, the Corrupted was bound to feel it.

If one woke up, hell would break loose in the temple.

Levi saw everyone becoming slightly nervous... they knew that fighting was a lose-lose situation.

He used hand signs to tell Arthur to remain in his place as he handled it for him... Arthur blinked twice, not daring to even nod his head.

'Casting an illusion will cost too much energy... aetheric energy will be enough.'

Levi channeled aetheric energy in his finger, making it take the form of a concentrated needle... then, he pushed it towards the Corrupted's head, making it pierce its skull and brain. When the Corrupted felt the sudden jolt of pain assault its head, it instinctively woke up and tried to scream and thrash around in pain.

Levi had already used his aetheric grasp to seal shut its mouth and freeze its body in place... as the Corrupted's crimson eyes gazed at them in agony, its gaze showed nothing more than utter hunger... Even when it was dying, it wanted to feast on their sunlight at all cost.

Sadly, it dropped dead a few moments later with its hunger remaining unsatiable... When it died, everyone looked around them at the rest of the Corrupted... They sighed in relief after noticing that Levi's assassination was perfect.

Arthur swiftly removed the wing to the side and caught up to them.

After a short while, everyone made it to the other side without disturbing the tens of slumbering Corrupted... Unfortunately, it was only about to get worse from here on.

"Most of the Corrupted are hiding in the depths from the sunlight... and they are wide awake."

Levi whispered a warning as he watched more than a hundred Corrupted Ashori, mixed between humanoid and bestial.

When it came to the Shadow Dimension's corruption on Hollow, Beast, and Trueborn races, it could either kill them outright if the potency was too much or slowly turn them into a Corrupted race if they inhaled the corrupting atmosphere over decades or maybe even more depending on each race and person.

Once corrupted, they became zombie-like immortal entities that could survive for eternity as long as they were in the presence of the corrupting atmosphere, and avoided direct exposure to sunlight.

However, unlike the nightcrawlers, they couldn't possess other entities, turning them into Tier 1/2 night crawler-like beings but retaining the same strength they had before getting corrupted.

-Jasmine, how far can your portal put us?- Levi asked.

-I can avoid the first two floors.- Jasmine replied while tapping on her right eye.

Jasmine had already told them that she had a mutated eye that gave her X-ray vision... though, with a limited range of about thirty meters.

'The hidden chamber is behind a wall on the third underground floor... If she used her portal, we can avoid the Corrupted on the first two floors, but once we emerge, we will be detected by the ones on the lower floor.' Levi thought carefully, 'If all of us fought, the energy disturbance will be too much. Also, we

don't know what Tyrese or Evangeline's teams are doing currently... but I know they have no access to portals like us, so they are bound to have a tougher time, forcing them to fight most of the time.'

Although both teams had been teleported somewhere else, Levi understood that the energy disturbance affected them all... since they were the only ones with a teleportation-like ability, they had to make the best of it.

However, the energy consumption would be a problem for Jasmine, forcing her to tap into her growth totems' reserves quicker than anyone else.

Levi knew that they could share their reserves with her, but he didn't want to start tapping into them so fast... they had just landed in the site, they couldn't afford to go broke so soon.

'Screw this... we can't be tiptoeing throughout our whole exploration... something needs to be done to the Corrupted.'

Levi understood that tiptoeing around the Corrupted wasn't a long term solution... they still needed to leave the temple after getting what they wanted. Levi didn't see a way for them to do run their exploration in peace while hanging around a wide awake Corrupted horde.

Think, think... Levi kept pondering over their options as he scanned the floors, the staircase, and anything that could be of a help.

'What if we locked them out of the third floor?'

Soon, Levi's brow raised in intrigue after noticing that they had the necessary tools to make his strategy work... It would also help them avoid unnecessary battles in the depths and speak freely.

No delay, he updated everyone on their next plan... though, most of them didn't seem to agree with it, believing that it was too risky for him. But, Levi convinced them that he had it covered. They glanced at each other, and then they nodded in understanding.

Once everyone was on board, Levi descended the staircase alone.

It didn't take long before he arrived on the first underground floor... his harmonic spine painting a copy of the hall above him... the only difference was the countless Corrupted Ashori moving all over the place without any purpose.

Soon, Levi spotted the staircase for the next floor on the other side of the hall, leaving his eyebrows twitching.

'What kind of design is this... couldn't they have built a single staircase leading to the depths?'

Levi didn't know if the staircase design was like this as a defensive mechanism or not, but he could tell that the pattern would keep repeating on each floor, leaving them incapable of bypassing the Corrupted.

'Casting the Eternal Mirage on every target is impossible with my current spiritual reservoir... I have to use my illusionary techniques.'

The Eternal Mirage was indeed a powerful ability... however, just like most unlocked innate abilities from Ash'Kral's library, their limit was based off Levi's energy reservoir. Unfortunately, Levi could only use it on a couple Corrupted at most before his energy tank tapped out.

However, unlocking it had bestowed Levi access to Illusion Aspect... and while his Resonance Access was still at 10%, it was enough for Ash'Kral to teach Levi many low-grade illusionary techniques.

Levi had already mastered a dozen, each one with its own strength and weakness.

'It would have been more efficient if I was able to use my Violin... but, aether energy will do for now.'

With a flick of his fingers, Levi released strings of aetheric energy, each one slithering rapidly towards the heads of the Corrupted... he didn't concentrate the aetheric energy to avoid creating the green shimmer.

This left the Corrupted to keep roaming mindlessly around the floor, having no clue that their minds were being tampered with by Levi.

'I need to replicate the last scene in their minds through an illusion that keeps repeating over and over again.'

Once a connection was established, Levi held out his hands, and focused, sending an illusion straight into their minds... with his spiritual prowess being higher than theirs, none of them suspected a thing.

They froze in their place, but in their own minds, they were still moving around the place like nothing had changed... The floor clean, the walls intact, everything normal.

But, Levi knew that his illusionary technique, which was called False Scenery, wasn't perfect... it was like playing TV straight in their minds.

Sure, it would occupy them, but their senses and instincts were still sharp... the moment anyone walked amidst them, one of them was bound to wake up if its instincts tingled.

That's why he kept everyone upstairs... he trusted himself to walk amidst them without raising the alarm because he grew up with nightcrawlers.

Whether it was nightcrawlers or the Corrupted, Levi could walk amongst them and absolutely feel like he was at home... it was like being raised by a wolf pack or a lion pride. Without the inherent fear or worry screaming to be noticed, the Corrupted's instincts would remain dormant.

As expected, the moment Levi committed, he walked through the frozen Corrupted... his back flat, his heart steady, his breaths calm. He even walked between two Corrupted, who were literally one meter away from each other, and their instincts warned them of nothing.

'What kind of childhood did he have to be this comfortable with monsters...' Jasmine murmured inwardly as she gazed at this insane stunt with her peculiar vision.

Soon, Levi made it to the other side, and he walked down the stairs again... of course, he canceled the illusion as he couldn't afford to keep it active on each floor he had done the same stunt.

However, the Corrupted suspected nothing unusual once the illusion broke apart since the scene was the same in real life... they simply carried on roaming randomly again.

Meanwhile, Levi repeated the same process on the Corrupted in the second lower floor... walking amongst them without a change in heartbeat or expression like he was walking in his own apartment.

"How is he doing?" Shia whispered.

"He is already on the second floor." Jojo replied softly, tracking Levi's aura with her spiritual vision.

"He is really doing it..." Nurah raised an eyebrow in astonishment, "I knew he hung around nightcrawlers a lot, but still..."

"This is nothing compared to what Levi went through." Arthur frowned, "My brother has exhausted his fear and worries from nightcrawlers after a decade of being tormented by them... to him, monsters are just his roommates."

Chapter 262: The Mural.

Hearing this, the girls went quiet... they tried their best to imagine themselves in Levi's position, but every time, it ended with them losing their sanity.

Even Nurah admitted to herself that if she was given a choice between her childhood and Levi's, she would pick hers... it was tough under her mother's tutelage, but she was still living amongst humans.

Meanwhile, Levi had finally arrived at the third and last underground floor of the temple... it was nothing like the previous floors.

'What the...'

Levi's brows knitted at the sight of a massive hall packed to the brim with the Corrupted... however, he already knew about this. What caught his attention were the murals painted at the far end of the hall.

It depicted a gigantic phoenix, engulfed in flames, its wings stretched wide across the mural's span... From above, tiny droplets of fire rained down like sparks, but each flame in the painting showed Ashori below... some burning alive, others running in terror, some falling to their knees in despair, and some were praying in the direction of the Phoenix.

The artistry was brutal and straight to the point, as if it wanted to brand the image forever into the mind of anyone who looked at it... The final image of the Ashori citizens getting taken out by their own guardian.

Soon, Levi's breath hitched briefly after spotting a sun-shaped amulet hung around the Dawn Phoenix's neck.

The mural made it clear: this amulet was no ornament, but the source of the ashfall plague... a curse wrapped in sunlight, mistaken for divinity.

The ash that fell in the painting drifted almost three-dimensionally, painted so clearly it looked as though it might slip off the wall into the temple air.

Levi's focus soon changed to the bottom of the mural... while the citizens were running away, a single humanoid Phoenix stood upright, donned in royal robes and a crown. He was holding a staff in the sky, casting an illuminating beam in the Dawn Phoenix's direction.

But, it had never reached... mostly implying the emperor's final desperate stand for his people was not enough.

'If the Dawn Phoenix shouldn't by nature seek the extinction of its own kind, and the emperor seen trying his best to stop it, then...' Levi frowned as he analyzed the mural from a different perspective than what was shown, 'Is the Sun-Amulet the true villain? Is it the carrier of the Ashfall plague as seen in the mural? Did it contaminate the Dawn Phoenix's mind or something? But, we were told it is a natural dimensional flower. Why is the phoenix wearing it around its neck like an artifact? What's true or false? Just what happened in that era?'

Many thoughts coursed through his mind, leaving him to feel like he was thrown in a spiral of confusion... At first, Levi had the assumption that the Emperor might be the hidden villain and decided to rebel against the Dawn Phoenix for more authority and control.

After all, although both Beasts and Trueborn descended from the same ancestor, a World Ender Class Beast was almost always taken as the one with the highest level of authority in any bloodline.

Whether it was a guardian or a protector, its strength alone was enough to level the entire empire if it wanted... since strength was king across all timelines, the emperor could do nothing but be an 'acting' emperor.

Sure, his orders and rules were respected and answered, but once the Dawn Phoenix made an order, everyone would heed it, akin to a decree from their deity... the emperor included.

But, the content of the mural told a different story... the same story they were given outside the site, but with an unmentioned twist.

The Sun Amulet.

'If the mural content is real, then I might have been mistaken about my first assumption.' Levi's expression turned solemn, 'The Radian doesn't want the Sun Amulet because of its history, but maybe because it is an empire-destroying weapon...'

Soon, Levi shook his head, focusing on his part of the plan to get rid of the Corrupted once and for all... he knew it wasn't the time to seek answers when his friends were trapped on the staircase between two waves of Corrupted.

He swiftly cast the same illusion and walked amidst them until he arrived at the wall with the massive, slightly worn-out mural. Being this close, his harmonic spine showed him at last the exact details he wanted of the hidden chamber behind the mural.

His jaw tightened at the sight of skeletons filling the secret chamber instead of treasures... some slumped against the walls, others stretched across the floor, piled on top of each other as though they had all died reaching for the same thing.

Small frames, large frames... children, adults, elders.

No corruption, no gold, no weapons, no offerings, no treasures... Just bone upon bone.

In the center of it all sat a mud vase, sealed shut, its surface cracked but still whole... Unlike everything else, it seemed untouched by time, almost deliberately preserved.

Levi concentrated his auditable vision on the vase. At first, it was nothing more than a lump of clay. Then, as his concentration deepened, he caught a glimpse of what's inside.

A single scroll rested within... Its parchment was smooth, its edges slightly damaged, but it was still entire... it was surrounded by decay, yet it remained alive.

He didn't know if the skeletons were guarding it or someone had written in it after the despair set in... Whatever was written inside the scroll had outlasted all of them, and Levi wanted to retrieve it, understanding that the truth of the empire's collapse might very well be hidden within.

If it were possible to read it using his Harmonic Spine, he would have... but the scroll was rolled so tightly, the words appeared jumbled up together each time he concentrated on it.

Although no treasures were in sight, the scroll was the treasure in Levi's eyes... it might be the clue they needed to find the Sun Amulet and the rest of the treasures.

No further ado, he raised his hand and made an okay sign, knowing that Jasmine and Jojo should be able to see it.

"It's the sign... he is ready." Shia nodded at Jasmine and the others.

Everyone swiftly got into position, awaiting Levi's next move.

Meanwhile, on the bottom floor, Levi returned to the first step of the staircase and gazed at the stationary Corrupted... then, without an ounce of hesitation, he clapped his hands once.

Clap!

The clap rolled across the floor like thunder, echoing again and again until the illusion shattered in the Corrupted's minds, jolting them awake.

Grrrr...

At first, they were confused, but the moment their crimson eyes landed on Levi, he appeared as a delicious snack of illuminating sunlight... a snack their Shadowlife seeds had been starved from for eons!

Grrrrr!!!

Almost instantly, their hunger ripped them from their purposeless lives, driving them to surge toward Levi like camels stumbling upon an oasis after weeks in the desert.

Levi swiftly sprinted across the staircase until he arrived on the second floor. Without stopping for a second, he used his aetheric grasp to lift himself above the ground and fly in the direction of the next staircase.

Grrrrr!!

The Corrupted on the second underground floor swiftly gave chase as well, adding more numbers to the horde of the Corrupted... However, since their sizes were too big, the staircase and the wide-open door could support only one Corrupted at a time.

This caused chaos amidst the horde, each Corrupted wanting to be the first to taste sunlight and feed their starving seeds!

However, once Levi arrived at the first floor... he didn't head to the staircase straightaway, knowing that if he did, his plan wouldn't work.

'I need all the Corrupted to exit the third floor.'

He thought as he flew to the roof of the first floor, causing the Corrupted to spread their wings and fly after him.

Whoosh! Whoosh!...

The Corrupted chased after Levi as he weaved between the pillars, using them defensively to avoid reaching out to his other abilities.

Meanwhile, the Corrupted didn't care about the dimension's stability, but unfortunately for them, they had been starved for too long to have any solar energy stored within their seeds.

Without solar energy, they couldn't utilize any of their abilities, leaving them to keep trying to catch Levi with their talons.

Thud! Thud!

But he was as slippery as slime... one Corrupted lashed out with its long, razor-black talons, only to crash into a pillar as Levi dove beneath it. Yet before he could draw a breath, three more were already lunging at him from different directions.

No time for analyzing, Levi let his instincts guide him... he tapped into his aetheric grasp and waved his hand, controlling one of the three Corrupted to act as his meat shield!

Krrrrr!!

The two other Corrupted talons pierced through the stomach of one of theirs... yet, they didn't even bat an eye at its painful scream... they swiftly pulled them out and restarted the chase with the others.

As Levi was trying his absolute best to avoid getting murdered by a flock of corrupted Phoenixes, the noise and the tremors were bound to awaken the slumbering Corrupted on the ground floor.

Grrrr!! Grrrr!!

Arthur and the girls were standing right at the door of the staircase, truly putting them between a rock and a hard place... However, Levi had predicted as much and told them what to do.

"Finally, I can talk normally... The Last Bulwark, one wall!"

Arthur shouted with a wide grin as he gazed at the awakened Corrupted horde rushing in their direction.

A Vermillion wall manifested from the ground up and sealed shut the staircase door completely.

Thud! Thud!

The Corrupted horde started smashing their bodies on the Vermillion wall, but they did nothing but make it shimmer nonstop.

"How's Levi doing?"

Arthur checked with Jojo again as he could hear the loud noise coming from down the stairs, but he could do nothing but stay here.

"He is moving too fast for me to see him clearly."

Chapter 263: Echo Reading.

Jojo replied solemnly... her spiritual vision reflected a chaotic scene of hundreds of spiritual auras moving all over the place, attempting to catch a glimpse of Levi. But he was so fast, not even Jojo's spiritual vision could keep up with him properly.

-Get ready... the third floor is about to get cleared soon.-

Jasmine delivered her message through simple signs... easy enough for anyone to understand, given the context. In that moment, everyone knew all they could do was trust Levi to withstand the relentless onslaught.

The instant Jasmine saw the last Corrupted exit the third floor's door and fly in the direction of the second floor, she signed her name on an already prepared drawing of two portals on the wall next to them.

Jasmine gave them a slight head nod and entered the portal with the rest, leaving Levi on his own.

But they did this under Levi's orders, as he told them that if one of them remained behind, it would do nothing but slow his entry and might even cause the horde to chase after them through the portal, ruining everything.

Although no one informed him of the portal's existence, the moment they teleported away, Levi noticed their absence with his auditory vision.

Yet, he wasn't in a position to enter the portal, as he had found himself trapped near the corner by dozens of Corrupted, who were assaulting him nonstop with their gleaming talons.

Clang! Clang!

He swung his staff with both hands, blocking and striking in quick succession. One Corrupted lunged, only to be knocked aside by the staff, its jaw breaking with a loud crunch. Another slashed from behind, but Levi spun, the staff whipping in an arc to parry the blow.

Ting!!

But for every one he struck down, two more came crashing forward, their hunger unstoppable!

Talons clashed against the staff, causing sparks to fly with every impact.

"Too many..." Levi gritted his teeth as sweat dripped down his brow.

His muscles burned, his breath turned ragged, but he knew if he stayed locked here, they'd rip him apart sooner or later, his aetheric repelling barrier bound to crack.

With no other choice, he clicked the mechanism on his weapon... the staff's hidden chain emerged, akin to a snake. Levi scanned for the slightest opening before him, and the moment he noticed two Corrupted pulling each other apart to be on top of him, he whipped it forward!

The crimson chains snapped through the air until the crown latched onto a distant pillar.

The instant the staff locked firm, Levi braced his legs against the ceiling and yanked hard, pulling himself free of the tightening circle!

His body shot forward, piercing through the Corrupted horde while guarding his face, causing them to crash against each other or be thrown away!

Once he got out of the entrapment, Levi unsummoned his staff and flew rapidly across the hall, weaving between pillars as talons slashed past him, missing by inches!

With him moving at such insane speed inside a sealed chamber, Levi knew he could not slow his speed to make a turn and enter the staircase.

Instead, he kept his speed the same while manifesting two sound cubes on his soles and adding two concentrated aetheric spheres within them.

His target? The wall facing the staircase!

He evaded another gleaming talon in midair with a swift flip, which left his feet facing the fast-approaching wall.

Then, the moment his soles were about to land on the wall, Levi activated combustion leap!

BOOM!!

The concentrated aether exploded from the agitated frequencies of the cube, which negated the previous momentum and transformed it into a new momentum, sending him flying on the staircase towards the portal!

It hurt like hell even with the aetheric barrier protecting his legs... but, he gritted through the pain and kept on going!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Most of the Corrupted couldn't pull the same stunt and found themselves smashed against the wall, one after another, until the next ones had a cushion to soften the blow. This allowed them to squeeze themselves through the crushed horde and sprint after Levi on the staircase!

Seeing this without turning his head, Levi dove inside the portal, his world shifting to the third floor.

Thud!

He landed hard on the other side, rolling across the corrupted stone. But before the Corrupted chasing him could pour through, he spun around and summoned his staff. Then, the moment one of them made it over their side, he slammed it down on its head with all his strength!

Boom!

The Corrupted that had followed him through the portal crashed into the ground with a shattered skull.

Before the others could push through, Jasmine sealed shut the ink portal, slicing the Corrupted caught in half.

The chamber fell silent, leaving only the heavy sound of Levi's breathing as his brother and friends looked at him with astounded eyes mixed in with a hint of concern.

"Big bro, are you good?"

Arthur swiftly went down to check on Levi after noticing that his leather armor was all scratched up... if it wasn't for the armor and the barrier, Levi would have been bleeding all over by now.

"I'm good, just a bit tired." Levi replied while wiping his sweaty forehead.

"No shit... I knew your plan was insane from the start." Shia sighed in relief as she handed him some recovery totems.

"It did work, though."

Levi smiled, his auditory vision affixed on the sealed-shut door of the third floor with Arthur's Vermillion wall... He could see the rest of the Corrupted trying their best to smash it apart, but to no avail.

-Good job.- Jasmine showed a thumbs-up with a sweet smile.

When Levi told them about his plan, most of them protested against it, feeling that it was too dangerous for Levi.

After all, he was going against more than a hundred Corrupted, and he needed to buy time without relying too much on his abilities... it was much more difficult than simply getting rid of them.

But Levi convinced them that he had it covered, and all they could do was trust their captain's word.

"Haha! What did I tell you girls? My big bro always clutches." Arthur grinned proudly as he extended a fist pump to Levi, who returned the favor.

"I just hope all of this effort is worth it," Levi uttered solemnly as he stood back up, walking straight to the wall with the massive mural.

Now, without the Corrupted being a pain in the ass, he could actually analyze it properly.

"I guess I was mistaken... Dawn Phoenix might have really been the one to bring forth the plague." Nurah remarked as she gazed at the mural with the others.

She also reached the same conclusion as Levi... that the Sun Amulet might have played a huge role in the empire's collapse... but still... the Dawn Phoenix was the one wearing it and unleashing the plague.

"We still don't know for sure, but I believe the answer lies behind this wall." Levi walked to the wall until he was a meter away from it.

-Should I teleport us inside?- Jasmine asked.

-No need, the key must be in the mural... give me a minute.-

Levi's gaze lingered on the bottom of the mural, scanning every scene and every face, wanting to find out if there was anything that seemed out of place.

At first glance, it was nothing more than paint, but as his focus landed on the emperor holding the staff skyward in his final, desperate stand... his harmonic spine tingled, urging him to focus.

"...Wait."

That's where he found it—etched into the length of the painted staff was a string of tiny Ilthorien inscriptions, so faint that the naked eye would never have noticed them.

Most of it was intact, but several sections were blurred and worn, as though time itself had chewed at them... whole phrases were fractured, changing the entire meaning of the inscription.

'This must be the key... but there are too many words missing.' Levi thought, leaning closer with his chin resting on his palm.

He knew that the place wasn't booby-trapped, as his harmonic spine hadn't caught any hidden traps or such... so it might be best to give it a try.

"So?" Nurah asked.

"I found the key, but it's incomplete..."

"That's unfortunate, I guess it's up to Jasmi..."

Before Shia could finish her sentence, Levi continued calmly, "I can solve it in a couple of minutes."

Arthur and the girls went speechless... they knew that Levi was proficient in Ilthorien language, but to recreate the entire passcode while it was missing multiple words and had broken phrases? It didn't seem plausible without investing hours to days.

"How?"

"I have my ways..." Levi shooed them away with his hand and sat down cross-legged. When they saw him concentrating on the task at hand, they didn't want to bother him anymore.

They walked away until the whole mural became alive in their field of vision... then, they started discussing their opinions on what went down.

Meanwhile, Levi was left on his own to solve the Ilthorien inscription... only that he didn't do it through the conventional ways Arthur and the others believed.

He tapped into his harmonic spine and used one of the latest innate utilizations he had gained access to after his previous evolutions.

Besides the range increasing and giving him the ability to reconstruct frequencies into sounds, Levi had obtained another ability he never had the chance to use properly... It was called Echo Reading.

He exhaled deeply and then focused on attuning his harmonic spine to the painted staff... a few moments later, the silver threads on his spine started releasing gentle waves of frequency, appearing like guitar strings being played by Levi's mind.

The frequencies flew to the wall, and more precisely, the faded missing characters... the moment they touched them, the faded letters started reacting differently to each frequency they touched.

Sometimes they remained dormant, and sometimes they started flickering with different colors in the shapes of runes only Levi could see.

'Echo Reading... one of the best abilities to recover anything that was believed to be lost in time,' The Titan commented with a fascinated tone.

He knew that Levi was channeling the harmonic frequencies through his spine, which were resonating with the faint imprints left behind on the surface.

It was believed that every word, every stroke ever written, always carried a unique vibrational frequency when first written.

Even when the ink faded or the carving eroded, subtle echoes remained, imprinted within the material itself.

By aligning his harmonic frequencies with those echoes, Levi could reconstruct the missing letters, syllables, or patterns, restoring the message to its original state!!

The Titan knew such arts were almost extinct since they required the finest level of frequency control for one to reach such a state... but in Levi's case? He didn't need to learn it. He had the best auditory organ in the universe when it came to sounds, frequencies, and vibrations... it gave him natural control.

It was like not needing to teach someone how to see... it was the job of their eyes. In this case? It was the Harmonic Spine's job to deal with any matter related to sounds or frequencies.

However, the process was not without risk... Levi knew that the older the inscriptions, the stronger the frequencies needed, which could overload his spine or distort his senses if pushed too far.

Hence, the reason why the Harmonic Spine slowly gave him access to its innate abilities as his mind and body grew stronger to support them.

'I can see it...'

Chapter 264: A Letter Across Eons.

Once the resonance reached perfect alignment with the ancient frequencies used to write it, the faded inscriptions glowed faintly in his perception.

One by one, the missing words revealed themselves, flickering as though the mural itself remembered what had been lost.

Slowly but carefully, he let the harmonics adjust, shifting pitch by pitch until the faint frequencies overlapped perfectly with the hidden inscriptions.

Then, the staff's full inscription aligned before his eyes, appearing brand new, like it had just been written.

His lips moved slowly as he spoke the incantation in Ilthorien:

"Sha'reth Vahl... En'dru Solari... Ka'them Ashorii..." (By the Sacred Oath of Power... By the Bearer of the Eternal Flame... I unseal the Gate of the Ashori.)

The final syllable reverberated like a struck church bell... and then, the wall trembled, kicking up dust everywhere as cracks spread around the emperor's painted staff.

Rrrrrmmmm...

Then, with a grinding groan, a seam split open at the base of the mural, widening into a door. It revealed a staircase leading to a dimly lit chamber.

Levi stood up and turned to face his friends with a serene smile, "Ladies first?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

Shia and the rest were left speechless as they gazed at the wide-open door... even their nightcrawlers were taken aback.

They knew Levi told them he could do it in a couple of minutes, but their nightcrawlers knew better... recovering a perfect inscription was extremely difficult even if a single word was missing.

To recover this one, when it had multiple broken phrases? It was nearly impossible in a few minutes unless one got lucky or used a secret method.

"Nah... how did you do it?! I have to know!" Nurah swiftly took hold of Levi's shoulders, not wanting him to go anywhere until he quenched her curiosity.

"90% luck and 10% skill?" Levi chuckled while swiftly slipping away from her hands.

"Noooo... don't hide it. I also want to do the same... It's a must-have skill when dealing with locked doors, wallets, and totems." Nurah pouted with a saddened puppy look, "Pretty please?"

"As much as I would like to teach you, unfortunately, the skill is related to my spine's mutation." Levi shook his head with a serene smile; her puppy look had no magic on him.

When Nurah and the rest heard this, they decided to drop the subject... they knew that asking one about his mutation's inner workings was a breach of privacy.

Even if they were friends and from the same team, they shared only their mutations' effects that they were most comfortable sharing... This was an unspoken rule in the Daywalkers' world.

Never ask one about the details of their mutation, their nightcrawler, or powers unless they opened the door.

"Let's go, it is getting wild upstairs, and I am starting to believe they might actually dig through the ceiling." Levi swiftly changed the subject by pointing upward.

Thud! Thud...

Arthur and the girls' expressions turned slightly grim, noticing that the tremors were increasing in noise. They knew that the Corrupted would not stop until they ate them, even if it meant breaking their talons to dig through the hard, yellow stone.

Without hesitation, they chased after Levi, who was already descending inside the hidden chamber... The moment they joined him, their eyes thinned gloomily at the sight of skeletons spread everywhere... especially when they saw that the majority were of children.

"How cruel..." Jojo clasped her palms together and whispered a prayer for their souls.

"Cruel is an understatement." Shia frowned, "This must have been a safe bunker to hide the children, the elders, and other helpless citizens... they locked themselves inside until the chaos and the plague went away... but it looks like it never did, forcing them to die of starvation."

"Damn... some of them are still babies."

Arthur sighed sadly as he gazed at a mother who was hugging her baby until they drew their final breath... she held it tightly in her arms, dying together in one final warm embrace.

Meanwhile, Nurah's eyes were drawn to a bunch of skeletons piled on each other... some of them had cracked bones or beak marks on them.

She knew that they had resorted to cannibalism when their situation had finally reached the despair stage... with hunger and the instinct of survival taking over their minds.

She sighed inwardly and walked forward with Levi, who went straight for the mud jar in the middle of the chamber.

Levi carefully unsealed the mud jar, knowing that it must be extremely fragile... after removing the sealed lid, Levi used his aetheric grasp to gently pick up the scroll, preferring to be as gentle as possible.

"A scroll? Did one of them write his final hours in it?" Arthur wondered.

"We are about to find out," Levi replied as he unrolled the scroll as slowly as possible, noticing that its texture was brittle, like it would shatter into dust with the slightest amount of force.

Once it was fully opened, everyone peeked over Levi's shoulder at its content, seeing that it was written in ancient Ilthorien.

"Why Ilthorien and not their native language? Were they trying to be as inclusive as possible, considering other races getting here?" Shia questioned.

"Maybe."

Levi wasn't certain, and he had no time to waste on speculations. He coughed to clear his throat and read the scroll with a solemn tone.

"I write this not knowing if anyone shall ever read it..."

As Levi's Harmonic Spine traced the letters, an image manifested into being, showing the world as it had once been inside the chamber.

A humanoid phoenix, wearing tattered white robes, was seen huddled in the corner against the stone walls of the hidden chamber.

His eyes affixed on the surrounding refugees... their faces unkempt, bodies shivering, and all of them seemed malnourished, like they hadn't eaten in days.

This was one of the high priests of the Ashora Empire... he had survived the initial waves of the plague with his people simply because they weren't close to the plague breakout point... the heart of the Ashora capital.

Looking at everyone's hollow eyes, the priest let out a long exhale and started writing on the scroll.

"The Ashora Empire... it is no more. The Dawn Phoenix, our guardian, has betrayed us for the sake of ascendance and fulfilling the fable Glorious Evolution... she got her hands on the Sun Amulet and desired to use it as the main ingredient for its final evolution... however, the evolution failed, and the Dawn Phoenix went into an uncontrollable rampage, channeling its immense powers through the Sun Amulet to unleash the worst plague our nation has ever known... Ashfall."

"Our beloved Pharaoh Azhukar has stood against it with the rest of our brave warriors... but alas, all they could do was buy the citizens some time to flee the Ashenra capital."

"We fled here, thinking safety could be found in the temple's underground sanctuary, thinking we could hide from its wrath... but the plague does not sleep."

"We kept receiving updates that the world had become ash and fire... entire cities had crumbled; the ground was littered with the skeletal remains of men, women, and children. Forests smoldered; oceans churned with dying creatures. Ashfall's plague had spread across the planet, leaving nothing untouched..."

The priest paused, his shriveled hands trembling like they were too weak to hold the feathered pen properly.

"Just when we thought that the plague had died off, our hopes of leaving the sanctuary were dashed after we heard news from the last survivors that the plague had contaminated the deserts, the buildings, the walls, and the very air we breathe... after every dawn, it returns, rising like fireflies at dusk, amber sparks riding the wind. Anyone touched by it is burned alive... there is no mercy, no sanctuary... no hope, at least for us..."

The priest's face twisted in anguish as he traced the last words with his fingers:

"The Sun Amulet rests in the throne chamber of the Great Pyramid of Dawn... Our traitorous guardian has been weakened immensely by the plague, and yet she still refuses to let go of the Sun Amulet, her heart and mind struggling to accept the failure of her ascendance."

"She is slumbering deeply with the Sun Amulet around her neck... if it is not destroyed... if someone does not act... our empire will be erased from history by the plague and the Shadow Dimension's corrupting atmosphere."

"To whomever is reading this... I am not begging to be saved or my people... I know we are doomed. But please, please save the nation and whatever remaining bloodline we have. The Great Ashora Empire cannot fall like this... its legacy shall forever be tainted."

"I am not making this request for free... the empire's largest treasury is in a secret location within the Great Pyramid of Dawn. Only the Emperor and the High Priests are trusted with its location and the key."

"If you're seeking the empire's riches, you will find everything that you need on the backside of the scroll."

"Yours sincerely, High Priest Velkhar."

Levi lowered the scroll slightly, letting the memory wash over him... he could see the fear, the despair, and the hopeless determination of the priest... the last witness to the empire's fall.

He turned the scroll around and noticed that it indeed had the drawing of a map inside the pyramid with the treasury being the 'X' mark... Also, even the Ilthorien password was written underneath it.

At the bottom of the scroll, the High Priest's final cry for help was written:

"I beseech you to save our Ashori Bloodline."

Chapter 265: The Fabled Glorious Evolution.

"The Glorious Evolution... isn't that what everyone refers to in the network as ascending beyond the final growth stage of the Shadowlife seed?" Arthur frowned, "I thought it was nothing but a myth."

"It is far from a myth." Nurah remarked solemnly, "While no news of anyone ascending has been spread in our current time, I have heard that a few managed to achieve it in past eras."

"Really?"

"Yes, it is believed that the energy levels across the entire universe and its realms have been at an all-time high... what we consider rare today was nothing but a normal atmosphere to some races." Levi supported Nurah's claim with a head nod, "When this richness was added to the low population at the time, monsters were born left and right."

Levi had done his own research on what to expect if one managed to reach the end of the road in their evolutionary path... for Nightcrawlers (Tier 9), for humans (Eternal rank), the rest of the races also had their own names for their cultivation systems, even though 99% of them were based on the Shadowlife Seed Growth Cycle.

Although many names flew around, the fable Glorious Evolution was shared across all civilizations regardless of their timelines.

It was believed that reaching the final growth cycle of the seed wasn't the true end... for one to bypass it and break their evolutionary limit, they needed to ascend.

But only a very, very rare few managed to achieve it from the Chained Universe... Levi and the others had no idea if the Radians, Oblivar, and other Ancient Lineages had achieved this kind of evolution, which explained their celestial status or not. However, they knew that the Glorious Evolution was nothing but a dream, a dream for those at the very top of the evolutionary ladder.

For them? They didn't even dare to have this kind of dream when they knew that just becoming a Solarbound Daywalker was a difficult challenge of its own... not to mention the other ranks awaiting them.

'The Glorious Evolution... was the Dawn Phoenix at its wits' end when dealing with the Shadow Dimension's invasion, and believed that the sole solution for its people was to ascend despite the risks involved?' Levi thought inwardly, many questions roaming through his mind, 'Why hasn't the priest added any more details? Why did he refer to the Dawn Phoenix as a traitor? Also, why did my harmonic spine fail to sense the existence of Ashfall's particles contaminating the temple? Even if it rose from dawn to dawn, my harmonic spine should still be able to spot them.'

Levi wasn't born yesterday to believe anything that was written at face value... although he believed that the priest had no reason to lie in such a desperate situation, the letter did raise a couple of concerns.

'Is it capable of hiding from my harmonic spine detection, or did the plague already die out after eons went by?' Levi asked his tenants.

'Everything has a natural frequency, and nothing can hide it from the Harmonic Spine's watchful gaze.' Ash'Kral replied calmly, 'The plague must have been eroded... There is almost no plague that can last forever, especially not one born out of a Highborn Lineage's treasury.'

'I think so too.' Levi nodded in agreement.

He didn't show much reaction to the warning in the letter because he had full trust in his harmonic spine to fish it out if it was real... dormant or not, anything with a frequency around him can be perceived.

Though he still needed to upgrade his body if he wanted to spot energies or separate them from their frequencies.

This was currently the only small concern he had... what if the Ashfall plague was energy-based and awakened by sunlight or something like this?

'What do you think?'

'It's a possibility, but too rare... an energy-based plague also suffers under time... although energy cannot be destroyed, only transferred, the plague shouldn't be contaminating the desert and buildings after eons of corrosion... rising with each dawn? Maybe in the first centuries, but not from the Erased Era to the Modern Era.' Ash'Kral replied.

'Makes sense.'

Levi could tell that Ash'Kral wasn't withholding information from him... If he had any information about the plague, he would have shared it, considering that it could kill Levi or, at the least, ruin his chance to collect the treasures.

"So what now?" Shia wondered sternly, "Do we head to the Great Pyramid of Dawn to retrieve the Sun Amulet and the treasures, or do we leave the site? If the plague is still contaminating the buildings and the desert, we can't afford to carry it with us to our planet."

Jojo and the others nodded in support, understanding that they would be dooming their planet too... if even phoenixes couldn't handle a burning-based plague, how would humans fare against it?

"There is about 10% of the plague still tainting the planet... We can't end the exploration without anything to show for it... Instructor Seraphis relies on us." Levi said calmly.

Hearing this, Arthur and the girls were surprised at the percentage given, believing that it was quite low considering that the priest seemed quite assured of his information.

Levi went on and explained to them what he had discussed with Ash'Kral to put their minds at ease... still, even with 10%, it was too risky for them and their planet.

"We were told that the Ashora Empire's planet is on a forty-eight-hour day timeline compared to our planet... so we still have at least a couple of hours before dawn." Levi suggested, "We can go to the Pyramid and check the situation... once dawn is near, we can leave."

"Most importantly, we have to warn the other two teams." Jojo frowned, "They may not have the same information as us... If they remain beyond dawn and the plague proves to be true, it will be over for all of us."

Levi nodded in agreement... with the lack of communication tools between them, they had no idea where they were thrown... though, Levi was assured it would be near the capital, like this temple.

He didn't have concrete evidence to support his claim; however, based on many exploration teams' experiences, they almost always get thrown near the place with the richest amount of history connecting the two locations.

After all, it wouldn't make much sense if they were thrown in a forest or a mountain when history or rich memories of a place were the sole link.

This meant... heading to the capital was a must if they wanted to meet up with Tyrese's and Evangeline's teams, since they would also be doing the same for the sake of treasures.

That's if they hadn't already been teleported straight inside the capital, unlike them.

"Let's get going... we need to figure out how much time we have exactly before dawn."

Sometime later...

Levi's team had emerged from the temple after putting some effort into bypassing the trapped Corrupted on the first floor... since Jasmine's portal range was limited based on her peculiar vision, they needed to make two jumps to get out.

However, this time Levi had no plans to risk his life by putting the Corrupted in an illusion, understanding that they were too agitated and hungry to be fooled like before.

Now that they knew about their existence, nothing much could work on them besides slaying them.

Instead, he came up with a plan for Jasmine to create a portal with the least number of Corrupted gathered on the first floor.

Once the portal was created, Arthur went out first and used his Vermilion Fortress to protect the portal, sealing it completely.

Then, under the Corrupted's fierce onslaught on his fortress, Jasmine created another portal, linking it to the roof of the Temple.

The only downside of this plan was Jasmine being forced to consume a decent amount of growth totems to recover her exhausted solar energy.

Right now, everyone was standing on top of the slumbering Phoenix's head, gazing at the endless desert around them and the sparkly, starry night above.

"So beautiful..."

"Woaa... their planet has a ring."

Arthur remarked in awe as he stared at a wide ring circling the planet, glowing softly under the starry night... the view was calm and breathtaking, and for a moment, none of them said a word after Arthur.

It was like only after staring at the sky did it finally hit them that they were standing on a completely different planet than Earth... god knows where in the universe.

Only Levi seemed to stare at the sky with a faint, serene smile, unable to appreciate the same view as them... even with his current tools to replace his sight, his sky was still as dark as an abyss, none of his abilities capable of reaching such a great distance.

It was these very moments that reminded him of the harsh truth that he was still... blind.

Chapter 266: Unenviable Situation.

"The capital... I can see it, I guess..."

Suddenly, Jojo pointed north, squinting her eyes behind the endless dunes... seeing a tiny pyramid over the horizon... Although it was nighttime, the structure still appeared as a dark entity, consuming all light in its vicinity.

Nurah swiftly brought out a pair of night goggles with enhanced zooming capabilities... although they were Daywalkers, who relied mostly on their powers, it didn't mean that they had no access to technological tools.

If it weren't for the dimensional membrane being fractured, which messed up everything on the planet, they would have taken a Handheld Transceiver (walkie-talkie) with them.

Unfortunately, if not even the dimensional network was accessible, how could radio waves survive the fracture?

"She's right, I can see the Great Pyramid of Dawn."

Nurah confirmed while gazing at a giant corrupted pyramid behind a green backdrop of the goggles.

"How about the time?" Levi inquired, "Can you tell from the sky?"

"Not really... There is no moon to use as a reference." Shia shook her head.

"How about the ring?" Arthur wondered as he glanced at his brother, "Can we use it as a reference?"

"It's possible to a limited extent, but we don't have information about the planet's axial tilt and the season... and such vital information that can help with getting a somewhat accurate reading," Levi replied. "Still, tell me... which side is brighter? We may not be able to predict the exact position of the sun, but we can at least figure out its general direction."

Levi had read a book about the movement of the stars and planets, as he was always fascinated by space, just like any person with the desire to uncover the truths of the universe.

In the book, there was a detailed explanation of how planets with rings always appear along the same line in the sky... roughly east to west, which was a reflection of the planet's equator.

"The western side is slightly brighter," Shia shared her findings, and the others supported her claim.

"Hmm... this means the planet spins retrograde," Levi said.

"Retro what?" Arthur scratched his head.

"The planet spins in the opposite direction from our planet... which means the sun rises from the west, and that's where our attention should be focused," Levi shared. "We must stay together, so the moment we notice signs of the plague resurfacing, we leave."

Once everyone nodded in understanding, Levi summoned Vyra and helped his brother get behind him on top of his Nightmount... the girls had their own flying Nightmounts.

Even Jasmine summoned a giant black crow with white feathered tails, which appeared quite magnificent and deadly... then, they took off rapidly in the direction of the capital.

Meanwhile, the Ashenra city lay in ruins, its streets buried beneath small dunes of yellow dust and scattered shards of fallen obelisks. The Great Pyramid of Dawn was the only structure still standing... corrupted, yet unyielding... like the final remnant of an empire refusing to be erased by time.

The dormant Ashenra's streets were awakened for the first time after eons of inactivity with deafening explosions, screeches, and exploding lights flashing once in a while on a single wide street aligned with ruined corrupted buildings.

Kreeeeee!!!

An ear-piercing bird screech echoed across the distance, belonging to the silhouette of a massive corrupted black-feathered phoenix, its wings stretching wide enough to blot out the stars!

It was so massive, it made the Corrupted in the temple resemble fun-sized pieces of candy compared to the real thing.

"MOVE! MOVE!"

Tyrese shouted, his voice booming through the cracked streets as he sprinted ahead, his armored muscular body crushing through building walls, dunes, or anything that was blocking his team's path!

He was like an armored demolish vehicle charging through the city, opening up new paths for everyone behind him.

To his right side, Evangeline's team ran through a parallel street, their faces pale as the ground trembled under the sea of Corrupted chasing after them.

The giant phoenix in the sky wasn't the only one hunting after them... it was like the entire city was awakened, as thousands of Corrupted swarmed from temples and windows, flying, crawling, and shrieking as they closed in from all directions... the armies were mixed between beasts, guardians, priests, soldiers, citizens, and more.

If only four words could be used to describe them, it would definitely be... the Wrath of Ashora!

"Damn it, Tyrese!" Evangeline yelled, flipping over a fallen pillar before landing beside him. "You happy now?! Did you have to be so damn loud?!"

"How the f*ck can I know that a Leviathan-class corrupted Phoenix has been lying dormant under the city?!"

Tyrese snapped back, slamming his fists into a wall and sending a shockwave that collapsed the street behind them, burying a cluster of Corrupted that were planning to corner them.

"You ruined everything! Now, how are we supposed to survive this?! We can't fight without going all out, and we can't run from a damn flying Leviathan!"

Evangeline shot back while slicing apart tens of Corrupted with her shimmering white sword, her slices leaving behind aftermaths of the Corrupted's sinful life... when it came to the Justice Aspect, its attacks were extremely effective against any beings related to the Shadow dimension.

After all, her powers were linked to erecting justice, and most of those entities had no such concept to lead their decisions, which left them vulnerable to her attacks.

"You're the one who said, 'Let's go deeper; maybe we'll find the treasures in the pyramid.' Now look where we are!" Tyrese cursed. "Damned Corrupted... they are everywhere."

"Yes! Let's go deeper while maintaining our camouflage! Who told you to break apart the pyramid's gate?!"

Evangeline narrowed her eyes coldly as she charged in the direction of a team of Corrupted made out of humanoid Phoenix, wearing torn-out armor pieces and holding brittle spears... some were holding just the hilt of the spear, and yet, they wielded them like they were the most powerful weapons in the empire.

"Wave Formation," Evangeline ordered as she ran two fingers on her smooth silver blade, causing it to start shimmering with white light.

Her teammates also wielded swords, but each one with a different taste to it... some were fully blue and emitting a chilling air, another was green and emitted a green poisonous hue.

As the team captain, she accepted only sword-wielders... however, since her lineage and agency had plenty of sword wielders, finding them wasn't much of a problem as many fought to great lengths to join her team.

Following her order, the knightly armored teammates took their positions in a single vertical line... then, they swung out gleaming elemental arcs in multiple colors at the same time, creating a giant multi-elemental arc!

Sliiice!!

In one swing, the tens of Corrupted soldiers in front of them were sliced from the torso... front to back, dropping on the ground without a tint of life in their eyes.

They made sure to target the abdomen, where the shadowlife seeds resided. It was common knowledge that these seeds became vital points in the body... just like the brain or the heart. Once severed, unless one could swiftly reunite the seed with the body, everything would collapse, like a heartless corpse.

Hence, one of the first lessons Daywalkers learned was to protect their abdomen area as strictly as their hearts and heads.

"Left!!" Tyrese suddenly shouted, pointing toward a broken fountain ahead connected to two streets.
"We can split the swarm there!"

Evangeline clenched her jaw, knowing that splitting wasn't the wisest decision to make at the moment... but they were out of options.

It was better for one unlucky team to get chased up by the Leviathan Phoenix and half of the swarm than both teams being in this hellish situation together. At least, if a team found themselves in a dead end, they could retreat inside the dimensional gate, returning to Earth, while the other team would be left with a chance to find the Sun Amulet and the treasures.

However, just as Evangeline was to commit to the plan, her eyes picked up on a couple of black dots in the sky fast approaching from the front.

'This... is it?'

She squinted in focus, and the moment she noticed their silhouettes were different from the Corrupted, a spark of hope was ignited in her heart.

"Don't split! Levi's team is approaching!" she shouted at Tyrese's team.

Hearing what she said, Tyrese, Mira, Blake, and the others lifted their heads and noticed them as well... their expressions turning bright almost instantly.

"Haha! I never thought I would be this happy to see ponytail!" Tyrese laughed in delight, understanding that Levi's team could give them a chance to summon their Nightmounts at last.

Since half a minute was a must to summon their nightmounts, they couldn't pull it off while the corrupted flooded the streets like a living tide of darkness.

Unbeknownst to them... Levi and his friends were not on the same page about saving them.

Chapter 267: What it Means To Be Kind.

Meanwhile, Levi and his friends had noticed the massive shitty situation those two teams had put themselves into the moment Levi's echolocation picked up on the thunderous noise coming from the capital.

Although tens of kilometers separated them, he was capable of seeing everything that was happening in the capital, making his expression turn solemn.

"What have they done to awaken a Leviathan Class Beast and thousands of Corrupted... this is no laughing matter." Nurah uttered coldly, "Should we leave them to deal with the consequences of their own actions and sneak inside the pyramid?"

"I am down." Shia agreed indifferently, "They are bound to leave the site once they realize that there is no running away from them... this will save us the trouble of worrying about them picking up the plague at dawn... the less we are, the better in this situation."

"That's not cool." Arthur frowned in disagreement, "At the end of the day, we are all humans and part of the same side... if we left them to suffer on their own, a day will come when Karma bites us in the ass."

"As much as I hate to agree with the Gorilla, he is right." Jojo shook her head, "I am not comfortable with the thought of not offering help to those in need... especially for those who tread on the same path as us... Namaste."

Neither Arthur nor Jojo had any intentions of turning their backs on them just because of what happened in the camp... although they weren't likable at the start and had some frictions between them, they did put everything behind them in the bonfire and got closer.

They were technically competitors in the site, but still, Dominic insisted on offering assistance to each other when required since all they had was each other.

-What do you think, Jasmine?- Nurah asked for Jasmine's opinion with simplified signs to get her point across.

Jasmine glanced at them for a moment and then at Levi... she shrugged and pointed her finger at their captain, seemingly telling them that she was fine with any decision he made.

Seeing this, everyone focused on Levi, who was left in deep thought... analyzing the best option to commit to, not the easiest, but the best one.

He knew that the easiest option was to change their trajectory and sneak inside the pyramid while letting both teams act as the distraction.

However, he also knew that they would provide vital assistance during their exploration of the pyramid and retrieving the Sun Amulet... they were told that the Dawn Phoenix was slumbering at its depths, and Levi had no clue if it possessed the same monstrous strength or not, but it would be much easier with eighteen of them than just six.

'Worse... if we left them on their own and forced them to use the dimensional gates to leave while we can provide help, Dominic won't be pleased... especially if we had our asses kicked in the pyramid and were forced out of the site empty-handed too.' Levi knitted his eyebrows, 'Most of the blame will be put on us, and we can't afford to get on Dominic's bad side when we still have plans to join the SAS Conference.'

Dominic had already stressed many times that they needed to act as a united front inside to ensure the retrieval of the Sun Amulet... they could compete over the treasures, sure, but only if the situation allowed it.

If any team was in deep trouble, it was their duty to assist them... although he hadn't told them what would happen if they went against his wishes, Levi wasn't interested in finding out... He would rather be on his good side so if he ever needed assistance with anything, he would still be an available option.

'Even if we want to help, how can we do it while ensuring our safety?' Levi pondered, 'It's not like they are trapped under a rock... they have a Leviathan and thousands of Corrupted behind them... this is no joke.'

Levi believed that under such a situation, their team might be excused if they decided to ditch them... after all, he could easily tell Dominic that they didn't have what it took to handle the situation. If they were going to offer assistance, it might lead to having them also put in the same cursed situation, which might force them to retreat back to Earth.

This would conclude the exploration with nothing to show for it.

In simpler terms, the grounds were equal... there were both benefits and negatives in rescuing them while also having a foolproof excuse for Dominic if they didn't, making the decision much harder to make.

"If there was a chance of them dying, we won't hesitate to save them." Nurah remarked calmly, "But, if we got ourselves involved, nothing guarantees that we can succeed, which might end our exploration because of their mistakes."

"If it were us, I doubt any of them would have bothered to spend a second discussing our rescue... they would have ditched us in a heartbeat."

Shia nodded in support, understanding that both teams had a way out, which they were refusing to use... it shouldn't be their problem to help them fix their mistake, especially not when it would have them putting their lives on the line.

"I disagree... Dreads might be an asshole, but he ain't no coward." Arthur remarked sternly, "Consider me delusional, but I would rather see the light in their hearts than their darkness... we already have enough darkness around us."

"Nurah, Shia... I understand that you were raised in a cutthroat environment where logic tramples over emotions." Jojo sighed with a bitter smile, "But we can't complain about the system when we are given the chance to contribute and ignore it."

"..."

"..."

Shia and Nurah went silent, grasping the meaning behind her words... humans constantly complained about one another, neglected to help those in need, carried more evil than good within them, and, more often than not, simply fell short of being decent human beings.

Yet, here they were... put in a scenario that encapsulated what it meant to be a human... put in a situation that gave them the choice of either being the good guys or the bad guys.

They didn't hesitate to choose the latter, not thinking anything was wrong with their decision... In a sense, they were correct.

What would they get from offering their assistance to Tyrese's and Evangeline's teams besides putting their lives at risk? Thanks? Appreciation? Favors? They weren't too enticing to have them risk their lives for others.

However, this was the crux of everything that was going to shit with humans as a race... what would I earn from doing this? A question that guided most of our lives from birth to death.

Worth.

Shia and Nurah didn't notice it, but they had just put a value on Tyrese's team and Evangeline's team.

A value that was so low, it made them reject giving them a hand when considering the value of the second option... leaving them to act as the bait, the distraction.

"I understand where you are coming from as I also was like that in the past... but one of the quotes that helped me make the transition to a monk was a verse in a scripture called Dhammapada." Jojo narrated with her eyes closed and a soft tone, "Even when no fruit is seen, the wise do good... the good act done at cost is greater than a thousand done for gain... Namaste."

Hearing this, even Levi had his thoughts altered like he was struck by a lightning bolt... his mind went as still as a lake. Instead of hundreds of thoughts about whether to save them or not, he realized that he was thinking about this wrongly.

If he truly was a good person who was guided by his kindness, then he wasn't being the best example of it... what he was doing, what he had been doing before, it wasn't kindness.

He was choosing kindness when it suited him and forsaking it when it proved to have some downsides.

True kindness was to do good, always, every time, and regardless of what effect it would leave on his body, soul, or identity... as long as it was for the sake of goodness.

Hence, the reason the kindest souls were the most broken and the strongest of them all... for one to be truly kind, their life could never be an easy one since they decided to be kind all the time despite the negatives.

Anything else was nothing but rationalized decisions while having kindness slightly alter one's decisions to keep the illusion alive... the illusion of being kind.

'Maybe I'm not as kind as I've always believed. Perhaps my rationality makes it impossible to be kind when I consider the consequences... maybe, I can't be a truly kind soul when my path demands I play the devil too. But... I'm okay with that.' Levi smiled softly. 'I'm okay with trying, even if it seems impossible. As long as I keep trying, as long as I don't give up on my good side... I will be okay.'

Levi swiftly changed his approach to figuring out a way to handle the Leviathan and the sea of the Corrupted with minimal losses as much as it seemed impossible... he had to try, he just had to... for himself, for his brother, for his friends, and just for humanity.

Ash'Kral scoffed in silence at his decision, but he said nothing... for he understood, kindness was not a single decision, it was a series of tests put before one... a series that would only get tougher, and more cruel to one's heart.

It was up to the person to either continue being tested for his eternal life to maintain his kindness and purity, or... be defeated by one of the tests and have his world view shifted once and for all.

'One day he will realize that kindness is a poison that slowly eats one's soul and body away until the day they will be put before a test that demands their life as the ultimate price.' Ash'Kral spoke indifferently to his friend, his mind swimming with scenes of the past, 'She chose to pay the price, and still, it led to nothing but pain for all against her wishes... they betrayed her, kindness betrayed her.'

'As I always say... Kindness is Death, and I will die on this hill.' He uttered coldly.

'Ash'Kral... don't be so hard on him... he is still young, they are all still children figuring out about themselves and their universe.' The Titan smiled bitterly, 'A day will come when they will understand that kindness only works if everyone was... kind.'

'Otherwise, to be kind, is to keep giving always, and get nothing in return but suffering...'

Chapter 268: What Do I Gain From This?

After Levi voiced his decision to help the two teams, everyone respected it... whether it was what they wanted or not, it didn't matter. The captain's orders were final.

However, Levi still shared his reasoning.

"Whether it's the right thing to do or not, I know that neither team is going down without putting up a fight... we all know what that means," Levi said.

Hearing this, everyone showed a deep furrow, realizing that they had missed such a critical revelation. Besides doing it for the sake of helping each other out, if they decided to ignore the two teams and use them as a distraction, it wasn't going to end on a good note for them either.

After all, they wouldn't hesitate to go all out to save themselves if it meant avoiding returning to Earth empty-handed... when they do this, Arthur and the rest couldn't imagine what would happen to the fractured dimensional membrane.

Their own exploration might be canceled if the instability reached a certain level... a level that threatened the planet's collapse into the Shadow dimension.

The only good side of such a situation was the shift of blame... instead of falling on Levi's team, the other two teams would be the ones getting burnt.

"In other words... It's a lose-lose situation." Nurah frowned, realizing that the other two teams also had the choice of whether to be nice or assholes.

If they were nice, they would leave the site under their care even if it meant leaving it empty-handed... if they were assholes, they would ruin everything for everyone in retaliation for not helping them out.

As The Titan mentioned... it was hard to be kind, and stay as one, when almost everyone was in it for themselves.

"I have the fastest mount, so I will deal with the Leviathan... I will try to buy you time as you guys focus on saving them from the swarm."

Before Arthur and the others could protest at him taking the most difficult task again, Levi continued with the explanation of his plan, ignoring their dissatisfied expressions.

After he was done, he uttered calmly, "I will meet up with you inside the Pyramid... don't forget to lock it behind you."

Then, he left Arthur to ride on Jasmine's nightmount and took off on his own towards the gigantic flying shadowy phoenix that was wreaking havoc in the city... as they watched his disappearing figure, Arthur and the girls glanced at each other with stern expressions.

"Let's go save these idiots," Nurah uttered irritably, not pleased with having Levi distract a Leviathan Class Beast for their sake.

Although she knew that the Leviathan was out of energy, just like the rest of the Corrupted, which had weakened its overall strength immensely, it was still a Leviathan.

'If I am doing this, I am going to make the best of it.'

As Levi flew rapidly in the direction of the gigantic, shadowy phoenix, many thoughts were coursing through his mind on how he was going to handle it.

In the eyes of Arthur and the others, he was just going to buy them time by distracting it... But in reality, Levi never had such a plan in the first place.

He knew it was almost impossible to find a Leviathan in such a state in the real world... no access to abilities and alive solely through the corruption.

It might not seem like much, but he understood that a Corrupted Leviathan was nowhere as dangerous as the real deal... that's because the corruption turned them into Tier 1/Tier 2 nightcrawlers when it came to intelligence.

In other words, the Leviathan Phoenix had absolutely no idea that its spiritual prowess was so powerful, it could literally cripple them purely through its spiritual aura!

Instead, it was chasing after the two teams, akin to a giant, stupid bird that had no idea what was going on in its mind besides eating their sunlight.

As for its dominion? It couldn't use it too since it consumed an insane amount of solar energy to bring it to life... so much that early-stage Solarbound Daywalkers were advised to either use it right away or avoid it since its energy consumption might devour their entire tank and life force too.

'If I can take it away from the city, I might be able to devour its soul through False Sun.' Levi steeled his expression, 'A Leviathan's soul is worth hundreds of Tier 4 nightcrawlers if not more.'

As mentioned before, Levi understood that he was guided by his rationality, not his emotions... this meant, even if he wanted to be kind, he would always seek out a way to benefit from the situation regardless of whether his motives were pure or not.

The moment he saw the Leviathan Phoenix, the first thought that came to him was whether he could take it down for its soul or not... he buried that thought so fast because it made him despise himself or what he had become.

Hence, the reason he was always getting defensive when a situation called for being a good person... whether he knew it or not, Levi was trying to hide what the Nightcrawlers had done to him in the past decade.

They had changed him... reshaped how he thought, how he felt, how he chose. Somewhere along the line, he had stopped doing things because they were right like his mother used to teach him, and started doing them because they made sense.

Every decision was weighed, every emotion filtered through logic. Kindness became a strategy, not a feeling.

He hated that.

He wanted to believe he was still capable of being kind for no reason... that he could help someone without needing to gain anything from it. That he wasn't like them. But deep down, he knew that part of him had already been molded by their ways.

The Nightcrawlers taught him that trust was a luxury, empathy was a weakness, and mercy was a liability... they didn't believe in good or bad... only in what benefited them, what kept them alive.

And so, when Levi tried to be kind, he wasn't just trying to be good... he was trying to fight himself. To resist the reflex to calculate, to benefit, to turn everything into a transaction.

He wanted to believe he was different, that he was still a human, and that his mother's teachings on morality weren't erased.

But every time he hesitated before helping someone, every time he caught himself asking "what do I gain from this?", he felt the truth crawl back under his skin... he was still one of them.

Kindness, for him, wasn't natural... it was rebellion!

A war he fought every single day against the part of himself that the Nightcrawlers had molded across a decade of torment and interaction.

Just like how most children grow to resemble their parents, whether they admit it or not, the teachings of Levi's parents had been corroded by the sea of Nightcrawlers he met in his childhood... as he continued getting stronger and earning more freedom in his decisions, it started to become clear to him.

He resembled a Nightcrawler in his thinking more than he would ever want to admit.

That's why he said that as long as he didn't give up, as long as he believed himself to do good, he was okay... because it meant that he might not win the war today or tomorrow, but at least, he was trying.

But for now... he had a different war to fight.

In no time, Levi arrived near the Leviathan Phoenix and stole its attention with a single move... he activated a Luminos Snack, making him appear as illuminating as the sun under the blanket of the night.

Kreeee!!!!

Almost immediately, the Leviathan Phoenix screeched into the sky and flapped its wings in his direction... its expression screaming of agitated hunger.

"Vyra!"

Hearing his order, Vyra narrowed her eyes and swiftly flew in the opposite direction from the city. The Leviathan Phoenix gave chase, but its speed was slower as it needed to pick up the pace slowly due to its massive size, unlike Vyra.

However, Levi knew that the moment the Phoenix's speed picked up, catching them was nothing but a matter of time... after all, acceleration and being fast were two different things.

"I can't believe it..."

"They came?!"

"Wait... they are actually helping us."

Mira and the rest of Tyrese's team were left stunned as they watched Levi take the Leviathan Phoenix away from the capital.

When they first noticed them, their happiness clouded their judgment... but, when they spun it around in their minds, they realized that only fools would put themselves at such risk when they could benefit from it.

They thought like this because most of them believed they would have done it too.

Meanwhile, Evangeline and her team were also slightly surprised, but not for the same reason... unlike Tyrese's team, they assumed that Levi and his friends would disappoint them just like most Daywalkers would.

"They do have integrity after all..." Evangeline murmured with a flicker of interest as she watched Levi's fading silhouette.

But she was swiftly brought back to reality after finding herself and her teammates surrounded by the Corrupted from every possible direction.

The number of the Corrupted was increasing rapidly, making it nearly impossible to see any sort of opening unless they went all out to escape the entrapment.

Just as she was about to voice the order to pierce through the entrapment, Arthur's thunderous voice resounded from the sky!

"Heavens Breaker Arts: The Last Bulwark!"

Everyone glanced above them, witnessing Arthur falling from the sky while his shield was pointed at the center of their formation.

BOOOM!!

They instinctively covered their faces after a storm of sand and rubble assaulted them... when they took a peek behind their covers, they were startled to see a Vermillion fortress built around them, completely sealed shut!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The Corrupted army kept banging their talons and heads on the fortress, but to no avail... Evangeline and her teammates could see behind the flashes of illumination that the Corrupted had completely buried the fortress under their insane numbers, creating a small shadowy black mountain.

"Stay here."

Arthur ordered coldly while putting his shield behind his back, walking in the direction of the fortress's closed gate.

The moment he arrived, an ink portal manifested, and he stepped inside. Then, the portal closed shut behind him, leaving Evangeline's team to stare at each other in stunned silence.

He came, he protected, and left... fulfilling his duties.

Chapter 269: Heliodor's Raiders For The Rescue!

As much as Arthur wanted to save them because it was the right thing to do, and he always wanted to be a hero that saved everyone... everything changed when his big brother was forced to put his life at risk to deal with the Leviathan for their sake.

But, it had to be done since the Leviathan was the only entity capable of absolutely breaking apart his fortress... not the gemstone itself, but it was powerful enough to uplift it from its roots entirely.

Now, he still wanted to save them, but he was just as irritated as Nurah.

Meanwhile, when Arthur emerged from the portal, he found himself falling in midair, but he didn't panic... he scanned the situation from the sky and saw that Shia, Jojo, and Nurah were dropped off at Tyrese's team.

Shia used Bleeding Pillars to manifest a similar sampling-like dome around them, which sealed them with a couple of Corrupted, leaving the majority outside.

'Here she comes.'

He narrowed his eyes after catching the sight of Jasmine flying in his direction from underneath... she was painting on a floating giant paper scroll, manifesting inked projectiles to fight off against the flying Corrupted desiring to feast on her light.

When she spotted him, she waved her brush on the scroll, creating an inked arm that caught him the moment he was near her... then, she helped him get up on top of her nightmount and gave him a slight head nod.

Arthur ended up showing her a thumbs up, feeling his hands cramp up every time he wanted to use them to sign what he really wanted to say.

'Good everything is going to Levi's plan... now that they are protected, we can gather everyone in my fortress and teleport them with their mounts summoned in the direction of the Pyramid.'

Without needing to say anything, Jasmine was already drawing inked portals linking Shia's blood dome with Arthur's fortress... and also, another portal for themselves since she knew they couldn't handle thousands of Corrupted if they decided to switch their focus to them in air.

However, the moment she signed it, her worst fear came true... the majority of the Corrupted suddenly shifted their focus toward them, realizing that the pair soaring in the open sky were far easier prey than the Daywalkers fortified within the strongholds.

Kraaaa!!!

They screeched fiercely as hundreds of Corrupted flew in their direction with their gleaming talons fully ready to cut them apart.

Seeing that Jasmine's inked portal was tens of meters in front of them, hidden behind a massive swarm of Corrupted, Arthur swiftly stood up with a grim look. Then, he tapped Jasmine on the shoulder, telling her that he had it covered.

He transformed his shield into a deadly weapon with Orryn's edges... then, he threw it with everything he had in the direction of the swarm blocking the portal.

Slice! Slice! Slice!

The air screamed as it tore through the corrupted swarm ahead... cleaving flesh, feathers, and bone alike! Each impact released a spray of dark liquid, scattering limbs and shrieks!

The shield carved a somewhat clean path through the chaos, a tunnel that led straight toward the inked portal behind the corrupted mass!

"Go!" Arthur shouted while dismissing his shield before it could enter the portal and sever anyone inside Shia's blood dome.

Jasmine's crow screeched, its wings tucked in akin to an arrow, piercing through the crimson mist... It stormed through the gap Arthur had made with great difficulty, leaving both Jasmine and Arthur to hold into it tightly, getting hit rapidly by the Corrupted's rain of flesh and blood.

The instant they made it through, Jojo, Shia, and Nurah were waiting for them on the other side.

"Shadow tendrils!"

"Sticky Blood Vines!"

"Spiritual Bind!"

They used whatever abilities in their arsenal to catch the nightmount and slow its speed as much as they could, not wanting to have them smash face-first into the blood pillars!

Yet, despite their immense efforts, the nightmount's speed was too much, forcing them to get dragged out across the sandy grounds... their expression twisted from the insane strain on their bodies... They felt like they were trying to stop a train while it was at its maximum acceleration.

Seeing this, Tyrese swiftly jumped in front of Jasmine's nightmount and entered a brace stance, his muscles tightened to the limit.

"BRING IT ON!"

With a thunderous roar, he seized the nightmount by its shoulders and drove one knee into the ground, forcing its beak down with sheer strength. His muscles bulged to their limits, veins straining as his eyes turned bloodshot... every fiber of his body braced against the unstoppable force dragging him backward.

His knee and feet slid across the sandy grounds, failing to gain a strong grip... however, he wasn't the only attempting to stop its momentum as the girls were still pulling with their shadowy, blood, and spiritual abilities.

In the end, the nightmount's momentum finally died out with Tyrese's back smashing against the blood pillars.

"Ponytail... maybe you should start cutting." Tyrese uttered with a faint grin as he gazed at Arthur, who was holding onto the crow's feathers for his dear life.

"Daring to call me fat after I came to save your sorry ass."

Arthur scoffed in annoyance while getting down from the poor nightmount, who was coughing sand nonstop. It had its beak planted firmly on the ground, and could do nothing to eat sand.

When Jasmine saw this, her expression turned cold as she gazed at Tyrese, who was still holding her nightmount.

She said nothing but her icy look made Tyrese swiftly relax his grip on her nightmount, lifting them in the air with an apologetic smile.

"My bad, Queen... I didn't mean to be this hard on it."

"She can't hear, dumbass."

Arthur helped Jasmine off the nightmount and then turned around to look at the portal, but he found out that it was already closed.

He lifted his eyelids in surprise and gave Jasmine a fist pump, not expecting her to close it while they were fighting for their lives not to smack head first into the blood wall.

It was like she trusted the girls to have them covered while she focused on the portal, knowing that if it was left open, the Corrupted would spill out nonstop.

Jasmine glanced at his raised fist and remembered the small ritual the Larson brothers always did whenever they pulled off something big. Her cold grimace softened, and she bumped her fist against Arthur's, a faint, sweet smile breaking through her usual composure.

If only she could hear Arthur's thoughts and why he brought her in their brotherly-tradition.

'She is really the perfect sister-in-law.' Arthur grinned happily, living in his own delusion.

The moment he saw Levi and Jasmine interact, he could see that his big brother wasn't treating her like any other girl as much as he refused to admit it.

Maybe it was because she was deaf, which made their interaction seem more unique, but Arthur didn't give shit about any of this.

He knew how his brother viewed romantic relationships with the opposite sex... bleak and nothing but a waste of time.

Arthur had no intentions of watching his big brother stay single for the rest of his life... so, he was slowly working in the shadows to make them get closer.

What's a brother if he wasn't a wingman?

Of course, he kept these thoughts to himself, understanding that both Jasmine and Levi would beat his ass up if they found out that he was meddling in their lives like this.

'One day I will have a sister to bully...hehehe.'

While the girls were checking up on Jasmine, Arthur was looking at them with a creepy grin, leaving even Tyrese somewhat uncomfortable.

But swiftly, Arthur recalled that it wasn't the time to think about his brother's love life when he might be fighting for his life to survive.

His expression turned grim as he turned to Tyrese... then, he uttered coldly, "If something bad were to happen to my big bro, I would beat you senseless."

"Levi? Come on now, we both know your brother is a freak of nature." Tyrese smirked, "I can't imagine him dying after what he had done to Yanhuan."

"You god-damn right."

Arthur's expression softened while scratching his nose. He was weak to compliments and even weaker to praises directed at his brother.

Unfortunately, while Tyrese and Arthur's confidence in Levi was admirable, they had no clue that he was fighting the Leviathan, and he was losing... badly.

Far, far away from the capital...

Levi hovered in the air, blood dripping from several wounds across his body... His artifact armor was torn while his breaths were shaky.

Across from him floated the Leviathan Phoenix... massive and untouched. Its wings spread wide without a single mark on them.

The two faced each other in silence after their last fight broke off, with Levi's sound/aetheric/illusionary attacks failing to make the Phoenix sweat once.

Meanwhile, if it wasn't for the barriers and his artifact armor, Levi would have gotten out without a limb or two.

Levi's spiritual eyes stayed locked on the beast even as blood slid down his body.

"Leviathans are truly monsters... even without abilities and intelligence, I still can't cut a single feather from its body." He uttered with a low, tired laugh.

'Are you done with limit testing?' Ash'Kral said calmly, 'If you want to win, you know what you have to do.'

'I know, I know...' Levi sighed, 'I thought I could take it down without tapping into it... But, I guess I am not at that level yet.'

He exhaled slowly and flipped his staff above his head.

The staff began to change forms drastically; its crimson chains and four segments, mixing amongst each other until it turned into a long, sleek sniper rifle engulfed in golden flames for less than a split second.

Levi caught the Starpiercer and rested it on his shoulder. Then, he aimed it at the Leviathan Phoenix, which let out a piercing screech with its massive wings blocking the sky behind it.

Levi narrowed his eyes, his tone calm but cold.

"Get ready..." he muttered as the barrel started emitting a golden light. Then, with a faint grin, he whispered, "This is gonna hurt... badly."

Chapter 270: Overwhelm It.

After he was assured that he was alone against the Leviathan, Levi tried to fight against it using the powers of his nine senses seed... but even when the Leviathan was immensely weakened, he failed to achieve anything against it.

The only reason he dared to test his current strength against it was his absolute confidence in being able to take down the Leviathan using the Sun Seed's powers.

If it were a normal Leviathan, his Sunflame aspect would have also failed to give him an edge... but against a Corrupted Leviathan?

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Levi fired a volley of ignition marks... each one detonated across the Phoenix's wings, bursting into miniature suns that scorched and ate through its feathers!

The Leviathan Phoenix shrieked in agony, squirming violently in midair as its burning wings lit the sky... with a furious cry, it tore off the inflamed feathers, scattering the embers away before they could engulf its entire body.

This surprised Levi, but not too much... he knew that its intelligence might be of a Tier 2 nightcrawler, but its battle instincts were still as sharp as ever.

As the furious Phoenix locked its crimson eyes with Levi, he could feel its bloodlust twisting the atmosphere between them.

Kreeee!!!

It let out a piercing shriek and charged straight at him, each wing flap creating a powerful gale that launched it at great speed.

'I have to maintain my distance for now.'

Levi used aetheric combustions on his soles to push himself backward while he kept firing more ignition marks nonstop... some landed on it, and the others had their trajectory shifted from the powerful gales.

Yet, he kept firing nonstop until he covered the Phoenix in tiny glowing seals... but this time, he didn't detonate them. He had already noticed that it could expel the burning feathers, so he kept stacking the marks, waiting for the right moment to cause the most damage.

The Leviathan swiftly closed the distance faster than Levi expected, its wings cutting through the air like it was nothing.

The moment it got close, it flapped its extended wings in his direction, releasing the same crushing gale in his direction.

It slammed into Levi and sent him spiraling backward uncontrollably, feeling like he had been slapped by the sky.

Then, the Phoenix dove after him, talons fully extended... massive, gleaming, and three times his size!

Seeing it coming, Levi used sound shockwaves from his hands and soles to rebalance himself... the moment he regained it, he shifted his weapon back to a staff and hurled the bottom crown in the talon's direction.

The crimson chains wrapped around the Phoenix's closed-up talon... as for Levi? He used another aetheric combustion, but this time inside the staff's hollow shaft!

Just as the talons were a mere five meters away from him, with the Phoenix's immense size blocking his entire view, he uttered inwardly, 'Resonance!'

BOOM!!

The concentrated aetheric energy within the staff exploded and found only one exit available to release the kinetic energy... the wide-open hole left behind by the separated bottom crown!

Levi found himself getting pulled away wide from the Phoenix's gleaming talons, evading them successfully.

However, he wasn't done... since the crown was already tightened around one of its black claws, he was instantly snatched by the diving Phoenix, chasing after it with nothing more than a couple of meters between him and its talon!

"Solar Pulse!" he shouted as he held the tightened chains with both hands, leaving the staff to get engulfed in sun flames. Then, he whipped in the direction of the Phoenix's leg, causing an explosive arc of sunflame to burst through the Phoenix's right leg!

The explosion tore through flesh and feathers, setting its entire lower limb ablaze instantly!

Kraaaaaa!!!

The Phoenix screamed, beating its wings wildly to put out the fire with wind. It did succeed, killing off the flames before they could take over... however, its leg was ruined... flesh exposed, half-melted, barely holding its weight!

Meanwhile, Levi held tightly to the chains, refusing to get thrown off it from the raging gales... he waited until they weakened, and then he swiftly retracted the bottom crown, shifting his weapon to Starpiercer.

Sensing imminent danger, the Phoenix swiftly swung its wing and sent another storm of wind his way, the gale powerful enough to blow off a nearby cloud!

'I ain't leaving!'

Levi countered instantly... activating Sun Jets beneath his feet to push himself through the powerful gale, straining against the force until he broke through.

The instant he reached the back of its left wing, he placed the Starpiercer against its feathers point-blank.

Then, he uttered coldly as he pulled the trigger, "Solar Shotgun."

Kaboom!!

The concentrated Solar Pulse erupted from within the muzzle, akin to a shotgun, sunflame exploding point-blank and charring a deep crater across the Phoenix's wing!

Kraaa!!

The beast screeched in agony; half of its left wing was set in golden sunflames... however, its survival instincts were on a different league. It ignored the pain and rapidly dove in the direction of the desert.

The wind was its greatest ally as its speed caused the flames to get picked up by the wind, extinguishing them again.

However, the Phoenix still didn't stop its descent. It kept going until it smashed against a dune, shooting sand into the sky as it buried itself inside the closest dune to it.

As it rose back up again, the flames were extinguished completely, leaving behind a massive burnt mark on its left wing, still steaming.

However, just as Levi was about to dive to continue his onslaught, he was stunned by the sight before him.

The surrounding sand began to move, the grains slowly shifting toward the beast, drawn to it like iron to a magnet... within moments, the desert was awakened as the Phoenix started flapping its wings rapidly until a sandstorm was born around it.

Levi's harmonic spine pierced through the sandstorm, showing him a sight that made him knit his eyebrows solemnly.

The sand began to climb over the Phoenix's wounds, layer after layer, crawling into the cracks in its burned flesh... then, the grains fused with the exposed tissues, creating a peculiar scene of molten glass sealing itself.

Everywhere the sand touched, the bleeding stopped... the burned flesh darkened and hardened, creating a transparent glass-like layer where feathers once were.

Levi's expression turned solemn. "So that's how it is... it has an innate passive that can heal it with sand too."

Levi knew that flames could heal the Leviathan Phoenix even if it was on the brink of death... however, because it was corrupted, such innate ability no longer worked on sunflames.

Levi didn't expect it to also have the ability to recover with sand... although it didn't seem like the healing process was as perfect as through flames, it was still healing.

'If you thought it was going to be easy to take a Corrupted Leviathan down just because you wield sunflames, think again...' Ash'Kral uttered calmly, 'Energy or not, all Leviathan have plenty of innate passive abilities that were built in their systems without needing solar energy... just like your mutations.'

'Kid, don't forget... sunflames are powerful against Shadow Dimension creatures, but the stronger they are, the more resistant their bodies become to sunlight or sunflames.' The Titan sternly reminded, 'If you are going to take it down, you must either overwhelm it or use a powerful one-shot ability.'

Hearing this, Levi recalled how Ash'Kral was completely immune to Shia's Solar Dome in the Harrowing Forest... the Sun Seed's powers were dormant at the time, and yet, he appeared immune to sunlight.

This made him understand that having sunflame abilities didn't mean that he had an instant kill ability against Shadow Dimension's creatures.

The stronger they were, the stronger his sunflame abilities needed to deal with them... otherwise, he could never dream of burning a Tier 5 or 6 nightcrawler with a single ignition mark like he did to Razer in his second Death Game.

'Powerful sunflame ability... Corona Tempest fits the description, but I can't use it without entering the Sun Form... I don't think it's wise to use the Sun Form for this.' Levi pondered as he gazed at the Phoenix, who was screeching into the sky in utter fury.

'Overwhelm it... I guess I'll have to push it a little further.' Levi uttered calmly, 'Nova Blades, awaken.'