

Evolution 321

Chapter 321: Inner Child.

In this dark little place, Levi was crouching with a soft smile as he stood before a trembling, weeping little child... a child that looked exactly like him, but at the same time, not?

Like being hidden in this place for over a decade changed him... made him easy to scare, to cry, to run, and to feel.

A little wounded fawn...

Levi reached out with his hand and patted him on the head... feeling his gentle, comforting touch, little Levi stopped trembling and lifted his head, gazing at Levi with a broken, tearful look in his eyes.

A look so heavy in pain and trauma, it would make anyone look the other way.

"We went through a lot... I know, I wish we didn't, but we did..." Levi said, his voice soft and assuring, "But... you don't have to be scared anymore... I'm here now. I've grown. I've learned... You can rest at last. You did enough. You survived, for me."

As he listened to his assuring voice, little Levi lifted his head and gazed at Levi with trembling lips.

"Can I?" he asked, his high-pitched innocent voice breaking apart as tears streamed down his face.

Levi gazed at the pupils of his inner traumatized child... eyes so beautiful, so mesmerizing, used to be rich in life and color... but now, they were dark and shattered like a mirror that was never meant to break.

But, it did.

Now, all he saw were hundreds to thousands of horrible scenes... each fragment showing him, reminding him of the hurt he wanted to forget.

His eighth birthday... children celebrated with a cake, a party, and their parents around.

Little Levi? He woke up to the smell of his mother's cooking... sunlight warming his cheeks. His father's laughter from the other room, calling his name to show him the gift he had prepared for him.

For a moment, little Levi forgot the screams, the blood, the darkness... he ran toward them with small eager feet, just for the light to fade away the moment he stepped inside the room.

The warmth vanished.

The laughter turned to a gurgled cry.

He found himself standing in the same spot in the living room... his mother's body was on the floor again, eyes wide, and bitten all over... and so was his father's chewed-off face.

The dream he wished so much to be real... turned to a nightmare in an instant.

A nightcrawler appeared behind him with a sinister, mocking smile and whispered near his ear, "I gave it back so you'd remember how it felt to lose it."

As little Levi wept on the ground, all curled up, the nightcrawler laughed.

When he woke up... he didn't find any solace in escaping the nightmare... why? His world of darkness was packed with nightcrawlers, laughing, and waiting for their turn.

They were taunting, making jokes, and even placing bets with each other, like the first to break little Levi wins.

Little Levi could only laugh at the sight like he was enjoying it too... for he had no eyes to shed tears, and it was a bliss in these moments.

Because even when his already cracked heart was breaking bit by bit, he knew he couldn't show any weakness... he just couldn't. Or else... the torment was going to get much worse.

He thought that if he could show a strong, unbothered front... the nightcrawlers would eventually get bored and leave him alone, but they never did.

The nightmares just never ended... each time he slept without an SR Pill, they were there.

Always.

They called him Soulless Gaze... a respected nickname amidst the nightcrawlers, for it represented a child who refused to break apart or sign a Sleepwalker contract with them.

If only they knew... behind that Soulless Gaze was a child, like any other, feeling everything they put him through... every nightmare, every pain, every heartbreak.

Everything.

He just soldiered through... night after night, day after day... awaiting the day that kept him sane.

The day he avenged his parents.

That's why the moment Levi met Darius, he lost his control over his emotions and wanted to kill him, not caring if his secrets would be exposed. Or in the cell... where he kept blacking out, just to wake up with his hands bloodied.

As Levi stared at the broken eyes of his inner child... he looked like he couldn't hurt a fly, an innocent angel who was born with a treasure that doomed his parents and life.

The eyes he wanted back so much, no one knew that he hated them... he despised them with so much passion, for he dreamed every single day to be born without them.

Then, none of this would have happened.

"It's okay... it's okay... You don't have to fight anymore. You have already seen the ugliness of this world... there is no need to see more... leave the rest to me."

A single tear slid down Levi's face as he reached out with his finger to little Levi's eye and wiped his tears... it was like he was telling him: you don't have to carry that burden anymore, let me feel the pain and cry for you.

Just rest...

As he looked at Levi's gentle smile, the little boy stopped crying... he stopped shaking... he stopped hurting.

He looked up at Levi... not the way a scared child looked at a stranger, but the way someone looked at home for the first time.

He went closer and hugged him... Levi hugged him tightly, his hands trembling nonstop, trying his best to keep a strong front.

For he needed to be strong... for both of them.

As they hugged, Levi felt his inner child breaking apart into angelic white particles... particles that slowly illuminated the darkness within his heart, forcing it to retreat away.

And then... the particles took the form of his father, mother, and little Levi in front of him. They had wide, gentle smiles on their faces as they nodded at him.

Still, Levi didn't cry... he just shared the same gentle smile of his mother and waved his hand at them, watching them walk away.

Little Levi turned around and smiled for the first time since that cursed night... he waved his hand at Levi, and they faded into the backbone of his heart.

They were gone, but they never left... never.

"Mom... Dad..." Levi uttered one last time with the same soft smile, "I love you."

Soon, Levi opened his eyes and let out a long exhale... his right cheek was stained with a single tear. But, he didn't wipe it off.

He just smiled at the Bishop and Darius... then, he stood up and walked in their direction.

"Heh, finally lost it?"

Darius sneered as he saw Levi's hands getting closer to him. But instead of killing him, he freed him from the straps, leaving him stunned.

Levi ignored him and went to the Bishop, doing the same... when he freed them at last, he walked back and dusted his hands.

"Big mistake... die!"

The Bishop was the first to move... launching at Levi and taking hold of his throat. Yet, Levi didn't fight back.

He let himself get choked, keeping the same serene smile... a smile that took months to build.

As the air was stripped out of his lungs and his eyes were slowly losing focus... Levi said one last thing, his voice escaping through the cracks.

"I will find you," He whispered. "And when I kill you in the most inhumane way possible... There won't be any hard feelings, right?"

He winked one last time before the darkness engulfed him... but it didn't remain for long.

In an instant, Levi found himself standing in the same grass field on Ash'Kral's territory with the three Ancestral Trees still in their spiritual forms.

He looked at them and breathed in like a man who didn't go into a trial... but a healing process. Of course, he wasn't fully healed, but it was a start in the right direction.

So, he didn't lash out at what he went through... no, he simply bowed his head in appreciation and said with a soft smile, "Thank you... I didn't know how much I needed that."

Chapter 322: Absolute Control.

"That's not the response I have expected... how did it go?" Ash'Kral asked in intrigue.

He was locked out of the spiritual trial by the three Ancestral Trees... Usually, he would be able to see what was going on without the ability to communicate with Levi, but that's for normal spiritual trials, not the ones hosted by the Ancestral Trees.

"I have learned a lot about myself..." Levi smiled, having no plans on elaborating what he went through. He wanted the experience to remain private.

Hearing this, neither Ash'Kral nor the Titan asked him about it anymore... they just smiled, noticing that Levi's demeanor seemed to have changed for the better, like he was more in tune with his own emotions.

Not faking calmness when his heart was a raging sea... he was truly at peace and free.

"How long did I spend inside?" Levi asked, somewhat worried.

About six months had gone by inside the spiritual trial, and Levi was worried that time went as fast as in the real world even though he had a feeling that the Ancestral Trees wouldn't really put him in a six-month spiritual trial.

As expected.

"Around six seconds?" The Titan answered.

"Six seconds?" Levi raised a brow in surprise, "I spent around six months inside."

"That's not so bad." Ash'Kral said, "Time goes extremely fast within spiritual trials... though spiritual trials under Shadowlife Seeds doesn't go as fast."

Levi nodded, recalling that the Hound spent months trapped inside Seraphis' spiritual trial... which meant, he might have been stuck inside for years or more.

Sighing in relief, Levi returned his focus to the Ancestral Trees.

'I understand now how hard it is... and how foolish of me to make lightly of the situation. While you aren't mortal enemies, I can tell your personas and egos clash heavily, making it hard to work towards a shared goal... but, until when?' Levi smiled bitterly, "If I allowed my anger and hatred to lead me, I would have never left that cell... it's the same for you. I am not asking you to hold hands, but why not work individually towards the same goal? I will be the common ground between you... help me, help you."

"..."

"..."

"..."

The Three Ancestral Trees remained silent, their branches, and leaves frozen in place. After seeing what Levi went through and still embraced his emotions for the sake of his true goal, the trees seemed to respect him a bit more.

This time, he talked the talk and walked the walk.

Still, it took more than that to make them work together wholeheartedly... but Levi's efforts didn't go to waste.

He might have healed some of the trauma that abused his mind and heart for over a decade, and this was considered a win... however, the trees still showed him some acceptance by increasing his resonance access.

Levi noticed it immediately after his emotions seemed more in tune with the trees' emotions... he could feel what they were going through a bit better, and Levi couldn't help but show a sympathetic smile.

The exhaustion... the tiredness... it was so heavy, Levi felt like if they laid it all on him, he would collapse on the ground lifelessly.

When he felt it, Levi gave them a slight nod in understanding and appreciation.

"I am giving you my word again... I will try to the best of my ability to help you achieve your cycles regardless of what it takes." Levi smiled, "You saw my enemies... you felt what I went through... as long as you help me take them down, I won't give up on you."

The moment the three trees heard this, even the emo Void Tree had its branches shake in agreement, taking his word for it. Then, the three of them disappeared out of his spiritual vision.

"15% resonance access... each." Ash'Kral sighed, "Boy, I genuinely don't know how you do it."

That's right! The Three Ancestral Trees had to bestow Levi with 15% resonance access together, which meant he could create abilities from all of his unlocked aspects at last!

Darkness, Void, Sunflame, Aether, Sound, and lastly, Illusion Aspect!

To have access to creating techniques of them all was so much better than unlocking new innate abilities... power-up-wise.

"Do what?" Levi shook his head, "I already told you... I am not doing anything but being genuine with them. If I gave them my word to help them finish their cycle, then that's what's going to happen."

"..." Ash'Kral was silenced.

Not because he felt like Levi did something extraordinary... no, he had seen many of his previous partners do the same as Levi. They gave the trees their words, and most of them were as genuine as him.

Yet, none of them were capable of convincing the three trees simultaneously... it was always one or two... never three.

This made him feel like he was indeed correct in picking Levi as his partner... there was simply something different about him.

He didn't know what it was exactly... maybe the trees had more faith in him than they ever had in his previous partners, or maybe it was something else entirely. But one thing was certain: there was something different about Levi.

Though, he wasn't complaining even when he had no clue what it was... as long as he kept showing such great strides in solving the Three-Body Problem, he was more than content.

"15% resonance access... that's big." Levi smiled, "I can create techniques with a complexity of fifteen details... so many doors will be opened."

"Indeed." Ash'Kral approved, "You can now create limited level three techniques... or perfect a level one technique like Thunder Chant."

The technique levels were based off Ash'Kral's perfected library of innate abilities... it was a basic system they used to discuss the techniques' potential, limitations, and such.

Levi knew that Thunder Chant might seem like a basic technique at heart, but in reality, it was quite complex considering that the power could be stacked to infinity or as much as his energy tank and body could handle.

"I have about fifteen days before the Joker Game begins... I need some serious offensive weapons and defensive techniques to survive the insane range of my opponents."

Levi sat down, resting his chin on his palm thoughtfully... he had checked some videos of the nine other monsters in their first games. He had to admit... they were either freakishly strong or possessed frightening mystical powers.

"True... Madam Future, the Dealer, The Dreambreaker, and Wanderer of The Seas are Rifters with mystical spiritual powers related to Fate Aspect, Chronometry Aspect, Dream Aspect, Reflection Aspect, and such... they might wield their sub-aspects, they are still powerful even when their owners are not considered pure blood." Ash'Kral nodded in agreement.

The ones he mentioned were powerful through mystic specialization... but it didn't mean the others were any weaker.

The Ruiner, Drayven, Hollow Titan, and Light Eater were beasts of nature from famous Lineages across the universe.

"I know... Madam Future is from the Chronovari Trueborn Race... a race that's believed to have a small percentage of Chronosian Ancient Race. The single known race that's capable of manipulating the flow of time and entropy... she even has a signature ability to see ten seconds or less into the future... this will make it easier for her to see through our cards in the future and then decide on the right decision." Levi nodded with a deep frown, "The Dealer is from the Fortunari Trueborn Race... people that follow the weaves of fate to the letter, making them in tune with fate, luck, and seizing the best opportunities."

These were just two Rifters out of nine, each one as powerful or unique as the other... coming from authoritative Lineages that commanded empires in both the chained universe and the Boundless Expanse.

Usually, these monsters fought amongst each other during their climb of the Nocturnal Ring since no one had the necessary powers to break through their circle. But Levi did... a mere human Daywalker from a planet under the threat of wide corruption.

He had no business being in their game, but with him possessing three Origin Seeds, he was the most special out of them.

"Fifteen days... it's not much, but I will make it work." Levi cracked his hands, "Now... what do I start with?"

Levi dreamed about this moment ever since he obtained the Void and Sun Seeds... the access to create his own abilities, not tap into the ones created by the past partners.

Sure, he appreciated their innate abilities, and they had helped him tremendously in his journey until this point.

But now? It was time to create his own legacy, and more importantly...

"I can finally create my own Battle Arts... Arts that encapsulate all powers of the Three Seeds."

Levi extended his hand in front of him, his fingers spread out... then, he started the visualization process with each Aspect.

His index finger started releasing vibrational noise.

His middle finger emitted a flickering golden flame like a lighter.

His ring finger darkened fully, showing a wavy darkness.

His thumb released a tiny black dot, representing the Void.

His pinky glowed in peculiar illusionary colors, sometimes appearing, sometimes disappearing.

Although he ran out of fingers... in reality, a concentrated green finger was born next to his pinky, representing his ability to command Aether energy.

Six fingers, six powers.

Levi, for the first time, had absolute control of them all!

Chapter 323: Creative Freedom.

"You have six aspects, three weapons... the sky is the limit," Ash'Kral warned. "Though, don't try to mix Void or Darkness with Sunflame... they are two opposite forces; you won't be able to create any decent combo with your current resonance."

"Hmmm... I expected as much," Levi nodded.

Levi understood that for abilities to combine, they needed to either elevate each other or synchronize... like the Aetheric Combustion System.

Meanwhile, even though it sounded fun to combine Void with Sunflame, they would start devouring each other until only one was left.

Still, from Ash'Kral's words, it sounded like there was a chance to make it happen if he had a much higher resonance access. It made sense... the higher the access, the more details he could add, which helped him get more control of those Aspects and thoroughly analyze if there was any way to create a powerful technique from them.

For now, he put those thoughts in the back of his mind and focused on what he could do.

"Let's create some basic techniques first and then see if I can combine them."

Levi decided to start with the Sunflame Aspect... he manifested his Starpiercer rifle and requested Ash'Kral to create some wooden dummies across the grass field. After they were created, Levi rested the rifle on his shoulder and aimed at the closest target... then, he started the visualization process of Sunflame Bullets, each one with a different detail.

He already had plenty of practice with his Nine Senses Seed's Aspect, so the visualization process went as smoothly as butter.

"First, the core..."

Levi imagined a tiny golden bullet born inside the chamber of his rifle... then, he started adding the details he wanted, shaping it to his utmost desire.

For now, he wanted to create an armor-piercing bullet, so he focused only on details that would enhance its piercing effect.

He made it thinner and longer, resembling a golden 40 mm bullet of a Winchester Magnum Rifle.

Then, he made its tip much hotter than the rest, making it glow faintly red... This ensured that it would pierce through most objects.

After adding about eleven details, Levi registered the bullet as a technique in his library and aimed the rifle at the closest target.

Deep breath.

Trigger.

Fire.

The bullet sliced through the air like it meant nothing before it... It reached the target in a blink and went through its wooden chest, disappearing into the void.

Levi pulled down the rifle and checked the damage after noticing the dummy was still standing... he thought that maybe the bullet wasn't as powerful as he expected, but when he zoomed in on the dummy, his eyebrows rose in astonishment.

"Damn... it pierced so fast, so well... it literally left a tiny hole in its chest without rocking it."

Levi knew that such a result could only occur if the bullet was almost unaffected by piercing the dummy... like piercing wood was the same as piercing air to it!

This kind of potency made Levi's grin widen.

He swiftly switched to another type of bullet and fired it at another target... This time, the instant contact was made, the bullet exploded into a giant fireball, consuming the grass field around the target.

Levi kept moving all over the place, firing other types of bullets... he switched to a fracturing bullet that shattered into countless searing shards, resembling a shotgun round.

Of course, Levi wasn't limited to just sniper gun style... he soon switched to other methods of destruction.

He held his rifle like a machine gun, tightening his grasp on the excess chain attached to the rifle.

"Say hello to my little friend!"

Then, he laughed while firing hundreds of small, fiery golden rounds nonstop, turning the remaining wooden dummies into burnt fragments!

Once he finished them off, Levi pulled the rifle next to his mouth and blew the smoke off the muzzle.

Levi would be lying if he said that he wasn't having fun... to have this much creative freedom with Sunflame was more than just amusement; it was a morale booster.

To know that he could kill nightcrawlers in any way or form made him confident in taking down even the Leviathan Phoenix in less than ten seconds.

After all, he was no longer limited to the past.

"Alright, let's test out some basic Void techniques now," Levi switched his weapon to the Judgment's Chainstaff.

"Be careful with melee Void techniques... without the Void form, you are still in danger even if the divine skin has enhanced your resistance," Ash'Kral warned.

"Yeah, I know," Levi held his chin. "Though, is it possible to create a Sunflame-infused Aetheric barrier to keep me protected? Vice versa with the Void-infused Aetheric barrier?"

Levi understood that his powers had friendly fire activated... not even he was safe if he wasn't careful. Without extremely high resistances, such powerful Aspects still posed immense danger to their user.

"It's doable... You just need to find the right percentage of infusion to ensure that the barrier maintains its Aetheric foundation while still possessing the protective qualities of Sunflame or Void," Ash'Kral nodded.

"The right infusion percentage..."

Levi wanted to test Void's abilities, but now... this experiment stole his thought process. He knew it was one of the most important techniques he could create.

He was already using a skin-tight Aetheric barrier, which kept him protected from many things... for example, the Aetheric Combustion he used to propel himself or change trajectories and such. Without the barrier, his skin would have been peeled off by the explosions.

"Aetheric energy is one of the best friendly energies in the universe... it can synchronize with almost anything."

Levi sat down with the staff resting on his lap... then, he created a big green sphere on top of his palm.

"Sound can agitate its natural frequency and make it reach resonance... but it's different for Void and Sunflame. I need to infuse the perfect percentage within it to not overwhelm it, but not too little that it won't do anything..."

Since Aether energy was believed to reside in an untouched plane of existence that separated the physical and spiritual, it possessed the properties of both realms.

That's why it had physical and spiritual utilities... Levi needed to consider this for his experiment.

Soon, he created a concentrated flame from the top of his finger, expelling it from a couple of centimeters away like a torch.

"Easy now..."

He muttered under his breath as he moved his finger closer to the green sphere... unfortunately, the moment the torch touched the green sphere, it burned it off.

"Too much."

Levi tuned down the flame's concentration and enhanced the Aetheric energy concentration. Still, the same result... the flame was too oppressive.

Unfazed, Levi noted the results and kept going, making sure to make small changes in the concentration of both energies.

But, he still kept failing over and over again... since Levi was quite stubborn in such matters, he kept going at it for hours, fine-tuning the concentrations by the smallest of percentages. He had a feeling that Aetheric energy harmonized with any type of energy as long as the infusion was perfectly balanced.

Of course, the infusion percentage meant finding the exact expelling rate for both energies continuously... it wasn't a fixed rate.

"Am I missing something?" Levi pondered with a deep furrow. "I have gone through most viable percentages... but, it's either too reactive or dormant."

"I think I am too deep in the box."

Levi stood up and walked away, leaving the Aetheric sphere hovering in midair. Then, he started circling it while tapping a finger on his chin thoughtfully.

He realized that he had taken Ash'Kral's words a bit too literally... he said infusion was possible, but he also didn't mention that the solution was that direct.

"Sunflame's nature is pure and destructive at the same time... it can heal, create, enrich, and simultaneously, burn and destroy corruption."

"Aether energy's nature is balance and flow... it can be anything, do anything... a true neutral energy untethered by physical or spiritual."

"Because of this, Sunflame reacts faster than Aether could respond... this leads to an unstable feedback loop: overload and failure."

Levi paused, tilting his head in intrigue.

"In paper, those energies should support each other... but, that's only if I stopped thinking in energy."

Levi walked back to the green sphere and crouched next to it... then, he smirked, "Frequency... the key is always frequency and vibrations... they are the tools of manipulating energy at its core since each energy dances at its own unique frequency, and if I don't find the frequency that can harmonize these two energies, the infusion will always fail."

Chapter 324: The Same Promise.

Levi recalled that Ash'Kral told him energy was vibration... he might not wield the Vibration Aspect to explore the world of energies at its heart, but sounds and frequencies were enough for the techniques he had in mind at the moment.

"Timing and Rhythm... that's the key." Levi held his chin and asked, "Ash'Kral, do you know the natural frequency of Sunflame?"

"Well, it doesn't have an exact frequency since its range is between 400 and 700 THz... compared to Aetheric energy that vibrates at an extremely low frequency, it will be challenging to find the best frequency that can harmonize those two energies together..." Ash'Kral replied.

"Indeed... one is ferocious and sharp, the other is slow and smooth. It's not going to be easy, but if I succeed... the rules of the game will change."

Levi knew that the applications of this combination weren't going to be applied only for a barrier... it went far beyond, opening new ways of Aether energy's interaction with not just Sunflame, but also other energies.

Yet, this was only one of the many combinations he could achieve with six Aspects under his control.

"Frequencies... I have to unlock and master the Vibration Aspect... I have a feeling it's the answer to unifying energies and powers... which means." Levi intoned solemnly, "The Unification of the Three Ancestral Seeds."

Three days later... (Six Boundless Days)

Levi and his friends were standing in front of the Willow Grove's dimensional mirror... Feng Ling was accompanying them.

Seraphis' funeral had concluded two hours ago... it was a beautiful ceremony held in the Fields of Silence Graveyard.

Most of the nearby Daywalkers had emptied this day of their calendar to ensure they would attend the funeral of the one and only... Lion's Heart.

After all, Seraphis might be a strict and tough instructor, but everyone respected him to the utmost level... most of his students were still alive to this day because of his teachings that made them better all around.

Even the citizens attended the funeral... knowing that he had no family, no home, just them. He gave them everything, even when this region wasn't his home.

Everyone appreciated it and showed it during the ceremony.

While Levi's friends were saddened during the funeral, Levi's heart was still burning with great vigor to ensure that his instructor would return to see another day... and most importantly, to see the end of the Hound and the Bishop.

He had a feeling that the Bishop was the one behind the fall of Seraphis' region since it was connected to the Hound... with them sharing the same enemy, Levi refused to let him die without a real closure.

After the ceremony ended, everyone returned home to say their goodbyes to their families and spend some time. Then, they grouped up in front of the Willow Grove's mirror... their next destination and home: the World Tree.

-Make us proud, children! Let the world see that Heliodorians are more than survivors... we are warriors!-

-Carry yourselves well, and beat those high and mighty brats from the top ten regions!-

-I will watch all of your raids, even if it means going into debt!-

-We believe in you!-

As Levi and his friends listened to the ruckus behind them, they couldn't help but turn with proud smiles... the entire first floor was packed with governors, citizens, Daywalkers, officers, family members, their friends, Rayan, Sergio, Jamal, and more.

The moment the news was announced that Heliodor's Raiders were leaving for the World Tree, no one wanted to miss it.

They simply couldn't miss witnessing the departure of the greatest Daywalker squad born in the history of their region.

Arthur raised his fist in the air and shouted, "Heliodor!"

Just like he awakened a dormant beast, the crowded floor instantly exploded in a unified chant... shouting back: Heliodor's Raiders! Heliodor's Raiders! Heliodor's Raiders!

"We shall return victorious! The Radiant Blessing is ours!!"

Seeing this, Arthur exclaimed with extended arms and a wide grin like he was bathing in their cheers... Jojo and the girls rolled their eyes at him, but even they couldn't help but feel goosebumps as they listened to the Heliodorians start chanting their team's name.

"I don't know about you, but I am still adamant about rejoining their party," Rayan said, his tone filled with resolve. "They have done more than enough to help us out... I will be spitting on their efforts if I can't join them again."

"You do you," Sergio shrugged lazily. "I am fine going at my own pace... if you seek to keep up with their pace, you might end up losing yourself."

Jamal nodded in agreement, "We aren't defeatists... we are just realistic, and the best thing we can do is support them from afar."

"No, thank you," Rayan smirked excitedly. "Where is the fun in that? Once they become Solarbound Daywalkers, their raiding team will expand to ten members... I am going to earn that spot even if it kills me."

"Hehehe, I guess I will be there with a shovel," Sergio joked.

"I will pick the grave," Jamal chuckled.

Rayan ignored their snarky remarks and kept his eyes affixed on his friends, who shared the same classroom as them. Although he knew that talent was a big part of a Daywalker's success, he didn't give a shit.

He was Rayan Morningstar, and he had never shied away from a challenge.

"Let's go... Dominic is already waiting on the other side."

Feng Ling said calmly as he stepped inside the mirror, pulling Arthur by the back of his collar with him... he knew if he left him behind, the idiot would keep uplifting the crowd.

The girls chuckled as they watched Arthur fighting against Feng Ling's grip, but to no avail... they might be laughing and smiling, but their expressions still carried a tint of sadness from the funeral.

Though their eyes reflected a new blaze.

The adventure was only beginning, and after they lost their instructor, they refused to soil his memory and legacy.

That's a promise and a toast they made above Seraphis' grave... as long as they live, his name shall be echoed across the universe through them.

Meanwhile, Levi was the last one left behind, looking back at the Willow Grove's packed first floor.

When the citizens, Daywalkers, and officers saw him facing their direction, their chants immediately switched to two words:

Levi Larson! Levi Larson! Levi Larson!

As his world was painted in beautiful colors of frequencies and enhanced by the chant of his name, Levi couldn't help but show a serene soft smile, recalling the day he left Tamara Settlement and kicked off his journey.

He had just unlocked the Echolocation ability, allowing him to 'see' for the first time, and giving him the first genuine chance to believe in himself that he was no different from anyone else.

Now, look at how far he had come... a blind Daywalker, who many had doubted in the beginning, had become the unofficial crowned best new-generation Daywalker on Earth.

But none of this was luck... Levi had struggled since his childhood, and god knows he struggled.

The same boy tormented by nightcrawlers for over a decade and rejected by most of the citizens for believing he was a ticking time bomb... Now, his name was resounding across the center of the city by thousands of citizens... their expressions filled with nothing but hope, pride, and care.

Some were even praying for him and his friends to the Solar Deities... their eyes closed, and mouths muttering under their breaths.

People lie... words lie... but hearts can't.

Levi could see everyone's beating hearts and what was within them.

The majority genuinely wished for them to succeed on the global stage... and even go beyond it, for they knew... their victory was theirs too.

"My promise remains the same from last time... farewell."

Levi turned around and walked through the dimensional mirror, not saying much... and yet, his words were more than enough to make the citizens cheer even harder for him, recalling the day Levi was announced as an official Daywalker in front of the Willow Grove.

As they stared at his fading back, that promise resounded in their minds in Levi's voice:

"I crawled out of a life no child should endure... and I vowed no one else would have to. That's not a dream... that's a promise."

Levi Larson, broken, but never shattered.

Chapter 325: The Bishops' Meeting.

The Inverse Sanctum... Shadow Dimension.

As Levi and his friends went to settle down inside the Conference's dorms, the Bishop was sitting on his throne in silence with the Hound standing beside him. The Hound kept twitching like it was painful to stand motionless for too long.

After Dominic beat him black and blue, the Bishop punished the Hound with indifference... he didn't give him any further orders or speak to him again. He just left him to squirm next to him, knowing that ignoring his pet was worse than beating him senseless.

A few moments later, the Bishop received a dimensional call from his peers... the other six Bishops on Earth.

He opened the dimensional screen, and it expanded into six smaller ones... two showed as black screens, but the rest appeared as shadowy entities with a different colored misty scarf behind them: Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow... all of these colors were dark and gloomy.

"What's with the emergency call?" Bishop Va'ren asked expressionlessly.

He was the Bishop of the European Continent/Western Asia, and the one most opposed to Bishop Na'thir... Levi's mortal enemy.

"My pawns have brought me news on the situation with the Supervising Radian."

Bishop Ro'valk shared calmly... her expression unreadable behind the shadowy veil. If it weren't for the dark red, misty scarf behind her, no one would be able to tell them apart.

Hearing this, everyone quietened down and gave her their full attention... even Bishop Na'thir leaned in closely, awaiting updates impatiently.

His own pet was beaten senseless, and he still had a long list of targets to finish... still holding a grudge against the ones ruining his promotion.

Most importantly... he still wanted to capture Levi alive to explore his secrets, not forgetting about his form-switching weapon.

But... he could do none of this, not until he was assured that the Supervising Radian wasn't going to stick his nose in their planet.

"I don't have the full details... but it looks like Dominic wasn't bluffing." Bishop Ro'valk said sternly, her tone slightly feminine. "Rumors are spreading within the World Tree that Dominic had a meeting with the Supervising Radian, and it went well... it's rumored that the Radian has decided to bless their minor holy regions with an increased divine light range."

She was the Bishop of North America, and her sources were trusted by her peers... she had the largest channel of spies across the globe in very important regions and nightcrawler nests. Not even the rest of the Bishops knew about their identities.

"..."

"..."

"..."

The Bishops went silent... their expressions might be unreadable, but it was clear that none of them were pleased with the news.

They had been conquering Earth slowly and comfortably because of their unofficial peace treaty against the Saviors... However, if the Radian was to give them orders to focus on Earth, they knew their honeymoon phase was done for.

They would target their empires, challenging them to Death Games, and they couldn't afford to lose.

"I know what's on everyone's minds... but you are overthinking it." Bishop Ke'laas shared, his tone low and soft, "Earth is helpless... its Life Force Potential is on the low end and the Radian will never move resources from other vital areas to focus on it... he would be risking his supervising position if any of those vital planets were to fall under his command."

"Still... if the news is accurate, then the Radian will keep his attention on Earth for a long while." Bishop Va'ren said solemnly, "He might not order the mobilization of Saviors, but if we were to make a big move, he might order them to defend and win... he can't allow this planet to be attacked when Dominic has brought him what he needed... it will send the wrong impression about his authority."

Most of the Bishops nodded in agreement.

They understood that Dominic might not be able to convince the Radian to get rid of them and turn their planet into a protected territory under the Primordial Tree of Life... However, his attempt did put Earth on the Radian's radar.

Sometimes, this was enough.

"How bothersome... Bishop Na'thir, you know I am not a fan of pointing fingers, but I am afraid this situation is on you." Bishop Ro'valk intoned, her voice flat, "My sources told me that the one bringing the Sun Amulet was a kid from your territory... Levi Larson. He was the sole Daywalker to leave the

ancient site with his memories intact and the Sun Amulet in hand... You should have taken care of him when you had the chance... and you had plenty... right?"

While the rest of the Bishops were confused about this, as this was the first time they had heard such a name before, Bishop Na'thir's expression turned frigid underneath the shadows.

'Does she know about that night a decade ago? How? Who told her? My connection to that night is known by only me and Darius within the Organization... Damned snake, does nothing escape her eyes and ears?'

He felt threatened... understanding that if she knew about that night, there was a chance she also knew about the treasured eyes.

This was the worst-case scenario.

After all, if she were to rat him out to the Black Veil Queen, she wouldn't hesitate to ask him about it... and he couldn't lie to her.

No one could.

In simpler terms, he would hand over the eyes and most likely get excused without a punishment or a reward.

Bishop Na'thir hadn't accepted the humiliation and punishment from the last Silent Convergence just to have his grand plans foiled like this.

But... he couldn't say any of this or show even the slightest change in his breathing.

"If it wasn't him, Yanhuan would have done it or someone else... I know you fools can't help yourselves from pointing fingers, but this ain't my problem." Bishop Na'thir replied coldly and hung up the call the moment he saw Bishop Va'ren's shadowy mouth open up.

He knew that vermin was going to mock or insult him... he had no plans to stay behind and listen to his bullshit.

"Master... do you want me to bring him to you?" The Hound asked, his head lowered.

The Bishop paid him no attention... he kept tapping his finger on the armrest, analyzing the situation and the best next move to make.

'Bishop Ro'valk wants to make me a scapegoat if the situation deteriorates beyond the bottom line... I have to keep a low profile so no matter what happens, I survive. Otherwise, the Duskbound Order won't hesitate to forsake me if it means pleasing the Radian and keeping the planet under their control.'

Many people thought that the conflict between the Duskbound Order and the Solar Aegis Sanctuary was black and white... but in reality, the conflict had been ongoing for so long, the colors had blurred out a long, long time ago.

Now... unless a planet's Life Force potential was high, forcing them to fight tooth and nail for it, their 'conflict' was mostly negotiable regarding lesser planets.

If the situation got bad enough to force the Radian's hand... they wouldn't hesitate to give up on a single Bishop to give him something to show for. In response, he would leave the rest of the Bishops to carry on with their slow corruption.

Everyone wins... but the natives, of course.

Even if the continent was freed, it would take no less than a decade before a new Bishop gets set up on the continent to carry on with the previous Bishop's duties.

By then... the Radian would be excused since everyone, but the natives, would have moved on.

"Levi Larson... I am genuinely beginning to regret showing mercy that night." The Bishop uttered coldly, his tone laced with a tint of murder as he gazed at the void above him.

Although he knew that Levi should be under the protection of the World Tree by now, the Bishop still had no plans to leave him to sit in peace... not when his plans were being foiled left and right with Levi always being in the front row.

A pattern was being created... Levi was becoming a problem to his ambitions, even when they hadn't met since that cursed night.

"Rain, Fang... once you conclude your missions, return... I have a mission for you." He sent a dimensional message with a cold tone.

When the Hound heard this, his expression turned nasty... but he didn't make a sound, understanding that if he were to object to having his missions given to his peers, he was only going to piss the Bishop off.

A couple of days later...

Levi stood on top of a snowy peak in the southern pole, hundreds of kilometers away from the World Tree.

He wasn't wearing any thick clothes against the cold... he didn't need to, not when he had already succeeded in fusing aetheric energy and sunflames.

Right now, it might not show outside his clothes, but Levi was wearing a thin layer of aetheric energy that was infused with sunflames, making it flicker in gold.

Besides the change in appearance, Levi also benefited from an increase in heat, feeling like he was wearing a warm blanket on a rainy night without the threat of getting burned by it. Yet... this application was the least interesting as he had found much, much more.

"How do you feel?" Ash'Kral asked as he watched Levi manifest a dimensional portal with the word: Ready?

Levi took a deep breath while thinking of the training he had gone through in the past two weeks... The more research he had done on his opponents, the harder he worked to create the right abilities against them.

Now... it was time to face the music.

"Let's kick some ass." Levi's expression broke into a serene smile, stepping into the portal without looking back once.

Chapter 326: The Arena of Gambits.

Meanwhile, back in the World Tree...

Jasmine laid on the swinging hammock chair, wearing cute Hello-Kitty-like pajamas, but in black and white, making her resemble a Gothic Cutie.

She had a dimensional screen open, showing a countdown to a Death Game... The title of the game was written in the center.

The Joker.

'His death game is about to start.' Jasmine smiled, her eyes reflected a tint of anticipation and concern.

Jasmine wasn't too bothered with watching Nocturnal Ring's Death Games... however, after Levi told them that he was going offline for some time to handle a classified mission under the High Chancellor, she swiftly connected the dots.

She had a feeling that Levi wouldn't go on such a mission without telling them about its details... they were his teammates after all, no need to be so secretive.

Hence, she discerned that maybe he was taking part in the Nocturnal Ring... her assumption was more assured after realizing that Levi wielded three Origin Seeds, and he needed a crazy amount of resources to handle them.

She knew he could never have grown this fast without investing an insane amount of resources that he shouldn't have been in possession of before the ancient site exploration.

After a quick search... she found the sole entity fitting the description.

A Rifter starting less than a year ago, had Radian or Oblivar bloodlines, and most importantly... he wielded literally the same weapons as Levi.

Who else, but the Celestial?

Though, she told the news to no one... not even Levi knew that she found out about his secret identity and was tuning in to cheer him on.

'You think he is going to win?' N'ibby asked depressively.

'Of course.' Jasmine nodded with a faint sweet smile, 'It's Levi.'

'Have you seen his opponents?' N'ibby rolled her eyes at her blinding confidence, 'He is going against powerful Rifters from great infamous empires and Lineages... they might not be the heirs or such, but just being part of those Lineages is serious business.'

'So?' Jasmine shrugged, 'It's still Levi...'

'...You're helpless.'

'No, I am as realistic as I can be... tell me, have you ever seen or heard anyone at a Pathfinder rank or maybe even less, defeating a Tier 8 powerhouse?' Jasmine said.

N'ibby remained silent for a few moments... she knew that Levi's win came at great cost and wouldn't have been possible without many situations aligning in his favor. But, she also knew that still meant nothing... Azhukar was a Tier 8 Trueborn Royalty. Even if all the odds were against him, Levi shouldn't have won that unless he truly earned it.

And he earned it.

'Let's hope for the best.'

N'ibby shrugged and then emerged as a brush, lying next to her... her depressed eyes appeared on the staff and watched as the countdown had no more than ten minutes left.

Meanwhile... in the Void of the Boundless Expanse.

A massive decagon-shaped building was floating in the middle of nowhere above an island that matched its size.

Although no one was nearby, the building's name was displayed proudly above the closed front gate: Arena of Gambits.

The Arena of Gambits looked less like a battlefield and more like a giant mind puzzle made from steel and stone.

Within the central plaza building, ten unique Rifters were chilling away from each other... eyes darting everywhere, but no one talked.

Levi was leaning against a combat room's door while checking the place and registering every little detail in his mind.

The central plaza was crafted out of black and white tiles, crossed akin to a chessboard... in the middle, there were ten platforms placed in a circle with inbuilt dimensional screens. They were currently on, showing a number from one to ten in different colors.

'Looks like the screens will choose the rooms for us and possibly, who will be the challenger or the challengee.' Levi thought to himself.

He could see that each combat room's door had a different color to it, matching the ones on the screens.

Those rooms were evenly spaced like the numbers on a clock... Each room had a tall rectangular entrance.

They couldn't see what was inside or hear anything as those rooms possessed the highest forms of soundproof and anti-spy systems... not even Levi's previous eavesdropping techniques could work here. Above each door, there was a big screen displaying the Joker card spinning around its axis.

The entire building was sealed shut with clear white LED lights illuminating the entire place, making it resemble a prison more than a gaming building.

'A Promotion Game is no joke...' Levi thought inwardly as he moved his focus to his competition.

Although he had watched tens of their videos countless times, the feeling was nowhere the same as seeing them in front of him.

His gaze moved to Drayven, the third Rifter in the game who made it here with only two wins... This meant he earned either perfect or near-perfect scores in his previous Death Games, obtaining the achievement titles too.

Levi had seen his two games and wasn't surprised that he got both titles.

'The first humanoid Dragon I have ever seen... although his Scarlet Dracara Lineage is in the middle of the Seven Noble Dragon bloodlines, his strength is beyond fearsome.' Levi commentated inwardly.

It was like Drayven sensed Levi's gaze somehow... he turned his head lazily and glanced in his direction.

"Whatcha looking at?"

Then, he cracked a cold sneer... his shining fangs protruding out of his scarlet-scaled mouth. He stood almost three meters tall with a muscular build: broad shoulders, long limbs, and clawed hands that looked almost like natural weapons.

His scarlet-red scales gleamed under the LED lights like gemstones... unlike Vyra, he didn't have spikes on his back. Instead, he had deep cracks with actual lava flowing through them, resembling volcano fissures.

His head was long due to his draconic features taking over... he might possess a humanoid build, but it was limited to the structure of limbs.

The rest was as draconic as it could get... a set of leathery, ashen scarlet wings, backward-sweeping dark horns, and ember-like slits. From his face to his long tail... his entire body was covered in protective scarlet scales.

Levi didn't respond... his vision was filled with Drayven's overwhelming scarlet spiritual aura... He could tell Drayven hadn't even let it run wild yet.

"Drayven... are you sure about wanting to antagonize a Leviathan Slayer?" The Dealer smiled playfully, "He might target you in the game..."

Hearing this, Levi switched his focus to the Dealer... his harmonic spine painting his appearance as detailed as it could get.

Unlike Drayven's menacing appearance, the Dealer looked like a sleight-of-hand magician... he was wearing a burgundy-colored tuxedo decorated with some peculiar symbols. He had a black top hat, covering his flowing silver hair, which matched well with his luminous gray skin.

"Mind your damn business, party trickster." Drayven responded coldly, "I know your physical strength is trash... don't make me break you in your first round."

"Go for it... it might be fun."

The Dealer chuckled while leaning against a wall... his hands shuffling a tarot deck of cards playfully, not too bothered.

Drayven scoffed and ignored him... although he talked big game, he had no intentions of challenging someone from the Fortunari Race on the first round... He knew that luck was almost always in their favor.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Rifters had no plans of getting involved in their discussion... they just waited patiently for the arrival of the Gamemaster.

Though, Levi did notice the Masked Butcher keeping a much closer eye on him compared to the rest.

He wasn't too surprised... the Masked Butcher was the sole nightcrawler in this game. To his misfortune, he was a pure nightcrawler with ancestral genetics, not a Sleepwalker.

This meant... Levi posed the most threat to him due to his Radian Bloodline!

'Celestial... I can't be at peace if you're alive in my game.' The Masked Butcher thought murderously, 'Dirty Half-Radian... your death is mine to claim.'

Chapter 327: Gamble On!

Suddenly, the LED illumination went out, putting the entire plaza in serious darkness... However, before anyone could trip out, the lights blinked back.

Everyone was confused at first, but when they saw a blue-furred Squirrel in the center of the platforms, their expressions turned solemn and focused.

The squirrel had a white curly mustache like the old man mascot in the Monopoly board game... he was also wearing a dark gray formal suit, and a classic watch on his wrist, resembling a '007' James Bond in any of his casino scenes... of course, the James Bond of Squirrels.

"Well, hello there." The Gamemaster bowed his head in everyone's direction and introduced, "I am Gamemaster Gamble, and I am the creator of this new Game Design... It's a pleasure to meet you, my lovely test subjects."

No one seemed pleased with being called test subjects, but they weren't stupid to take it on the Gamemaster... they understood that their backgrounds meant absolutely nothing before the Gamemasters.

Once annoyed or cursed during a Death Game, only prison or death awaited them.

"As you know... creators of new Death Games get to host them regardless of their rank." Gamemaster Gamble smirked, "Aren't you happy to have a blue-tailed Squirrel host your game?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

Levi and the majority of the Rifters gazed at him in silence... seemingly having no interest in inflating his ego. Though one of them did sound excited.

"Haha, I am a big fan of you, Gamemaster Gamble... I have been obsessed with all of your game designs since they revolve around mind games and our nature as different species." The Dealer shared with a big smile.

"Is that so?" Gamemaster Gamble rubbed his white mustache with fake shyness, "You're already my favorite."

Although they heard this, no one seemed bothered or worried that Gamemaster Gamble was going to play favorites... the system was extremely tough on Gamemasters to maintain fairness.

If they were found to have abused their powers, they could even be sued by the Cricetii Clan, responsible for the juridical system in the Boundless Expanse.

"We don't have much time before the game starts... so, let's get this over with quickly."

Gamemaster Gamble kicked off the ground and hovered above everyone's heads. Then, he extended his hand to the side, manifesting a dimensional screen with a list of questions and answers prepared.

Instead of letting them waste his time with questions, he wrote the ones he had expected to make an appearance and answered them already.

"Everything you need is here... if you're still not understanding something, feel free to ask."

Levi focused on the Q&A list, reading it internally. He found that the game had no trap mechanism since there weren't many Rifters in it and the design was new and complex... Adding another challenge might ruin the game.

'Good... I was worried about what they had prepared for us.' Levi sighed in relief.

He wasn't too scared of the game's design and details since he knew about them for fifteen days... enough to prepare his strategies. But, trap mechanisms were different, either shared during the Q&A or found inside the game.

Soon, he moved to the title achievement: The Hand of Madness.

'Oh? We have to gather all Joker cards before the game ends... doesn't this mean we have to either kill everyone to claim their Joker cards in ten rounds?' Levi frowned.

After what he earned from the Leviathan Slayer's title, Levi was beginning to target those titles... whether he got them or not didn't matter as much as trying.

Though even for him... he could see that such an achievement was too hard to complete. If it were just a simple killing of Rifters, it would be a different story. However, he understood that many rounds were going to be thrown, resulting in no deaths.

After all, when everyone was at peak... one should expect peak attack and peak defense.

'The only way to achieve this is to kill my opponent every round, regardless of the chosen cards... that ain't a viable option against these monsters.'

It seemed like the rest felt the same, deciding to ignore the achievement for now and focus on getting promoted to a noble status.

Many of them already came from noble status... however, since this status couldn't be passed along bloodlines or bestowed by anyone besides Nocturn himself, it forced everyone from such backgrounds to participate in the Nocturnal Ring.

If they failed to claim their noble status... they became a laughingstock back home.

So, it was personal for every one of them.

Levi moved to the next important points... the dos and don'ts, also the extra rules like how long the break periods between rounds would last.

'We can't trade cards, we can't show each other's locked-in cards' picks, and we can't challenge the same person in two rounds in a row... but, a challenger can challenge back the Rifter who targeted them.' Levi murmured inwardly, 'So, nothing new.'

These extra detailed rules were found within the game's details... but some Gamemasters still chose to show them again before the game started, since many questions were related to them.

"Stand before any platform... once the game starts, you will be assigned a random combat room and a role: Challenger or a Challengee..." Gamemaster Gamble said calmly, "You will find your personal deck of cards within the rooms... You can also decide your target on a screen you will find inside. However, if two or more challengers decided on the same target, you will be given a die to throw. The Rifter throwing the highest number will be given priority of choice, while the others will need to choose again."

"You will have five minutes to choose your target and cards... once five minutes are over, the doors will open up, and the challengers can walk inside their targeted Rifters to start the Card Duel." Gamemaster concluded, "I believe the rest is self-explanatory."

Seeing everyone nodding their heads, Gamemaster Gamble clapped his hands once, and the entire LED roof of the building started flickering... then, under everyone's surprised looks, millions of eyes started showing on the screens, gazing at them with looks of pure excitement.

"Ladies and Gentlemen... Are you ready to witness one of the most highly anticipated low-ranked promotional games on the platform?!"

Gamemaster Gamble instantly switched to his hosting persona, addressing the hundred million viewers... his voice stern but comfortable, like an old, wise Englishman.

Whooooah!! Whooooah!!!

The watchers were hyped up to the seven heavens; their noise was thunderous enough that it made the building shake all over.

'There are so many... 405 million viewers in the first two minutes?' Levi raised a brow, 'I am starting to think this game might actually break the 'B' barrier.'

Levi already anticipated the game's popularity as he had seen it within the network... the ticket prices were insane, and still, many viewers were buying them like there was a limited supply.

The reason for such hype? It wasn't an everyday experience to witness a promotional game involving ten infamous Rifters with high followings in the network, playing a completely new game design!

'Good for me, I guess... I just need to win it now.'

Knowing that the Rifters split up a percentage of the streaming revenue meant that having more watchers was always great for the participants.

'Good luck, Levi...'

Unbeknownst to him... one of those eyes belonged to Jasmine, and she was cheering him on silently, wishing for his success.

"You stand in the Arena of Gambits, where destiny is shuffled, cut, and dealt without mercy. Some of you will draw triumph... others will draw your final breath." Gamemaster Gamble brought the dice-decorated microphone close to his mouth and shouted while the countdown kept ticking on the screens, "Now... let us discover who fortune smiles on, and who she leaves to rot!"

"GAMBLE ON!"

Chapter 328: Coming for The Kill.

When the game started, the viewers' noise and chatter were muted, returning the building to its peaceful state... though this was only for the Rifters' ears, in reality, the Gamemaster and viewers could still hear everything.

Levi and the Rifters weren't surprised by this... having the viewers this close would only ruin the game for them due to their noise.

"Get in your stations."

Hearing Gamemaster Gamble's order, Levi walked to the closest platform to him and stood in front of the screen. It was already showing different colors changing randomly on all screens.

"Three, two, one!"

The moment the countdown concluded, the screen locked on a purple color for Levi with a single word written underneath it.

-Challengee-

'Starting as a target... not ideal, but it's decent in the first round.'

Levi looked at the others and noticed that most of them had poker-like expressions or were wearing masks, making it hard to tell if they were challenger or challengee. However, Levi didn't need to look at them since the screen's details were for all to see.

After all, the challengers needed to know their targets... if they were given such an advantage, it would be unfair to leave the challengee without a clue about who would be coming after them.

The Joker was a mind game at its heart... which meant a certain level of knowledge was needed to manipulate others.

"I am a challenger."

The Dealer announced with a playful smile while glancing at everyone's looks; his hands were shuffling the tarot cards at an insane speed.

"So... who will keep me company in this round? How about we let the cards decide for us?"

Levi and the rest remained silent, watching as the Dealer placed nine tarot cards in midair... each one had a different picture and a word.

There was The Fool, The Magician, The High Priestess, The Empress, The Emperor, The Hierophant, The Hermit, The Devil, The Tower, and The Sun.

"Each card will represent one of you from the start to the end of the game... any one of you interested in knowing what fate will decide for us?" The Dealer smiled as he made those cards spin around him.

He didn't need to tell them about their cards... it was like every one of them was drawn to a card on their own.

The same mysterious feeling went through Levi... however, he didn't feel any connection to the chosen cards... instead, he gazed at the tarot deck in the Dealer's hand.

'What a strange power...'

In the end, Levi didn't wait for the Dealer to continue his shenanigans... they had five minutes to make their decisions, and the timer started the moment their rooms and roles were chosen.

He wasn't the only one leaving... most of the Rifters gave the Dealer an irritated look and went to their rooms, having no plans to have their minds tampered with by 'fate'.

"You guys are no fun." The Dealer sighed in disappointment and recollected the tarot cards... but when he tried to collect the Sun Card, he noticed that it wasn't linked to the Celestial as he had expected.

Intrigued, he switched his gaze to Levi, who was about to step inside the purple-colored gate... then, his eyes turned starry all of a sudden.

A faint, gleaming string manifested in his vision between Levi's abdomen and a specific card within his tarot deck... a string only he could sense.

The Dealer ran his finger on the deck, stopping the instant he reached the marked card... he pulled only half of it, but the moment he saw it, his heart couldn't help but skip a beat.

'This... how? Why?'

The Dealer was left stunned and mostly confused by the results... if he wasn't an excellent fortuneteller, he would honestly doubt his findings.

'Three-Body Problem... what are you exactly?' The Dealer murmured inwardly, his eyes affixed on the slow-closing door.

...

Meanwhile, inside the combat room...

Levi went straight to the platform in the center of the combat room. The room was massive indeed, possibly covering tens of kilometers easily.

The insane size didn't match how close the doors were to each other... This made Levi assume that the rooms had spatial expansion compared to the central plaza. They weren't in a different dimension or such, but the space itself expanded beyond the norm.

Though the white combat room had nothing going on for it but the platform in the middle and the massive roof screen, showing millions of eyes... creepily staring at Levi, their voices muted.

After reaching the platform, Levi noticed a small deck of cards placed on top and a dice next to it... the platform was one meter wide, serving as a flat screen and a surface.

Levi picked up the deck of cards and spread it out on the screen, showing each card.

The defensive cards had a blue shield shape and numbers ranging from one to nine.

The offensive cards had a sword shape and numbers also ranging from one to nine.

The Queen card showed a Queen spreading an illuminating blessing from her hands.

The King card presented a noble king charging on his horse amidst a bloody battlefield.

The Jack card showed an honored knight throwing a gauntlet in front of another knight, declaring his intent to a battle.

Lastly... the Joker card... it was of a slightly terrifying clown. If one looked closer into his eyes, they would have the feeling of it staring back.

'Three minutes remaining... I already know who is definitely going to challenge me. Now, I just need to predict which angle he will come at me from.'

The moment Levi saw the Masked Butcher getting chosen as a challenger, he was certain that he would be coming for him with his strongest cards in the first round.

After all, if he didn't come at Levi... he would be leaving room for Levi to challenge him in the second round.

He couldn't afford to give Levi such freedom, understanding that the moment Levi challenged him with a King card or Jack card, he was done for.

As for the Joker card? He could use it to cancel only one card... this meant he was damned to get hit unless he used the Queen card and the Joker.

Too many utilities were wasted just to survive... he didn't like it.

Hence...

'The Masked Butcher will come at me swinging, and the other challengers know this too. So, no one will challenge me, leaving us to handle our business.' Levi tapped his finger on the Joker card, 'Whatever happens... they knew we would be losing special cards, weakening us immensely for later rounds.'

Levi saw the Masked Butcher going inside the yellow room, which was two rooms away from his own... he tuned out the noises in his mind and focused his harmonic spine, attempting to see if he could spy on him or any other competitor.

Unfortunately, his harmonic spine's range was still in the hundreds... it couldn't even bypass the immense range of his room. As for Echo Location? The walls were perfectly soundproof; not a single frequency could bounce outside.

This meant Levi was left to explore his options through intelligence alone... no cheats available.

But he wasn't too worried.

'The winning condition of this game is research and playing the Rifters' personas, not their cards.' Levi thought calmly, 'The Masked Butcher will most likely choose a Queen card for defense and a King card to cast his ultimate ability... he won't be stupid to bring the Joker card right from the start... it might allow him to cancel an ability of mine, but since he is the challenger, then his cards take priority over mine... if I used the Jack card, and he had the King card, he would be allowed to use an ultimate ability on me before I can duel him. With the Queen card in hand, he doesn't need to be afraid of retaliation if I survive... he can use it to block a single attack of mine and heal up his wounds.'

'However... if I can reach this conclusion, so can he... There might be a chance that he will skip his challenge and save up his cards for defense. But if he did this, he would leave himself under the threat of being consumed by fear... he won't dare pick low-numbered cards when I am the challenger... how long will this last? Someone like him doesn't like living in fear, and as long as I am in the game, he won't be at peace.'

Levi knitted his eyebrows coldly, 'He is coming for me... and he is coming for the kill.'

Chapter 329: Death By The Third Attack.

A few minutes later, the five challenger Rifters came out of their rooms and went to the platforms... the screens showed a list of the remaining five Rifters with a single word underneath their names: Challenge?

The Masked Butcher, the Dealer, the Ruiner, the Wanderer of the Seas, and Drayven picked their targets.

"Targets have been picked! Look at that, no one decided to skip!" Gamemaster Gamble called out while pointing his mic towards the chosen names.

Levi had two marks on his name, and the rest chose different Rifters. When the Masked Butcher saw who challenged Levi, he couldn't help but frown coldly.

'Drayven... he also wants a piece of him. But... I can't trust him to finish the job. It needs to be me.' He thought.

"Rifters... let the dice decide priority!" Gamemaster Gamble said.

Masked Butcher and Drayven pulled out their dices and threw them on the ground simultaneously.... the moment the dices stopped, Gamemaster Gamble announced the results, "Masked Butcher rolled a six! He wins the priority pick!"

"I am sticking to my choice." The Masked Butcher uttered, his voice rough and deep.

It matched his rugged, forceful appearance... he was a three-meter giant with an insanely muscular frame that was decorated with thick brown fur on the chest, shoulders, and back. He had the head of a bull and the face of a shadow creature from the depths.

He wore a dark bull's mask and a white Butcher's apron that was splashed in black.

He looked more demonic than demons... his red, thin, leathery tail ended with a bloody sun symbol.

"Very well! Challengers... let the universe witness the results of your choices! Did you take an unnecessary risk by saving the strong cards, or did you go all out?"

Hearing Gamemaster Gamble's passionate shout, the challengers walked in the direction of their targets' doors.

The moment the Masked Butcher arrived at Levi's door, it opened up on its own for him. He stepped inside, and the door closed behind him.

Then, he walked in the direction of Levi, who was waiting for him in the center of the room... his expression was nothing but three celestial stars rotating slowly.

"Were you expecting me?" The Masked Butcher said coldly.

"..."

Levi remained silent, merely standing there menacingly, waiting for him to make his move. Seeing that he had no plans to chat with him, the Masked Butcher scoffed and reached into his pants.

He pulled two cards, and Levi did the same... although Levi already saw what he picked the instant he entered his combat room.

"Challengers, reveal your words!"

The Masked Butcher immediately flipped his cards over, showing two cards that made the viewers gasp in anticipation...

-Crazy! A Nine Number offensive card and a King's card?! He came to absolutely obliterate the Celestial, not giving him a chance of retaliation!-

-Holy! If the Celestial picked an offensive card or used a special card, he is done for!-

-Levi... please tell me you were prepared.- Jasmine's eyes reflected a tint of worry.

Gamemaster Gamble had taken their omnipotent vision of the cards before they were picked to add to the suspense... what a suspense it built, as no one expected the Masked Butcher to come out swinging with both cards, saving nothing for defense!

"Celestial... I knew you expected my challenge, but I doubt even you anticipated I would be that crazy to enter a combat room against a Half-Radian without any defensive measures." The Masked Butcher grinned, appearing quite proud of his bold move.

Levi remained silent for a few moments... then, he flipped the first card, and the veil was removed from the viewers' eyes, showing a Nine-number Defense Card!

The viewers gasped, but they knew this wasn't enough... he could use it to counter the nine attacks, but the ultimate ability would ruin him without a much stronger defensive ability.

Everyone assumed that the second card would be a Queen card, believing that Levi would take the safer option.

But no...

The moment Levi turned his card over, the Masked Butcher grinned murderously while many of the Celestial's fans had their faces turn as pale as ghosts.

"He picked an Offensive card!!" Gamemaster Gamble shouted, "Not just any! It's the Ace!"

-Ace card?! What the hell is he thinking about?! The Ace is the most useless card in the deck! It shouldn't make an appearance in a defensive stance!-

-Celestial... does he think those monsters are the same as the weaklings he fought in his first games? He lost the plot!-

-Levi... what are you thinking about?-

Jasmine was also left confused, thinking that Levi was taking the situation too lightly. She had seen most of his abilities and knew that his defensive abilities wouldn't be enough to block the Masked Butcher's nine strikes and an ultimate.

"Hehehe... I was scared for a second that you would use the Joker card."

The Masked Butcher tightened his grip on a giant meat Cleaver and walked in Levi's direction with a look of pure blood thirst.

He had invested almost everything great in his offensive to get rid of Levi, believing he was his worst counter... he would never waste this opportunity.

Levi ignored his mockery and watched the two cards disintegrate into paper fragments... then, he summoned his Judgment Chainstaff and threw it into the air.

As the Judgment Chainstaff was falling, the chatty and chaotic viewers had their eyes track it down... that's when their expressions slowly changed from confusion to dumbfoundedness.

Under their silence and the stunned gaze of the Masked Butcher, the Requiem of Hope and Despair fell in Levi's hands... looking aggressive and classy at the same time.

Then, Levi manifested a chair out of sunflames and sat on it, his body burning up fully, but he didn't seem to care or feel any pain. He just placed the violin on top of his shoulder, supporting its weight with his extended arm, and leaned his invisible chin on the back.

Then, an aetheric green hand manifested as a third hand and rested itself on the strings on the board...

Levi brought the crimson bow closer to the string and played two faint notes as a warm-up... then, he lifted his head slowly and used the aetheric hand to make an infamous gesture.

-Come get it.-

No words were exchanged... and yet, Levi's strange appearance and new weapon left everyone gazing at him in silence.

They were still struggling to understand how he was able to wield a staff and a sniper rifle with the same nightcrawler... and now? Their brains were fried.

The Power System Logic was no longer making sense in their minds.

"A violin?" The Masked Butcher scoffed, "Are you going to play me a lullaby to sleep? Violin, Staff, or a Gun... you can summon them all together, and your fate shall be the same."

"DEAD!"

As the Masked Butcher's murderous shout resounded across the combat room, his muscles tightened up, making metallic noises like he was twisting metal bars.

Yet, he wasn't done... gray bones protruded from his wielding arm, and they hardened his grip on the cleaver, making it go nowhere.

From the wounds caused by the bones, a river of blood flew in the air and covered the Cleaver from handle to tip, and even going beyond it.

The Cleaver seemed to adapt to the increase in size, its metallic body increasing to match the slowly crystallizing blood.

For it to increase in size, it only meant that it was considered a weapon born out of an ability, not an artifact or a signature Shadowseed's weapon.

After the Cleaver turned into a five-meter gigantic crystallized and reinforced weapon, did the Masked Butcher point it at Levi... its size was six times that of Levi's!

"You're dead by the third attack."

The Masked Butcher announced coldly and then lifted his gigantic Cleaver above his head, placing the center exactly in Levi's direction.

Levi gazed at the gigantic, menacing Cleaver, and then he lowered his head; the three celestial stars were facing the Masked Butcher.

"No."

Chapter 330: The Unknown.

"No."

Levi uttered... his voice as deep as the cosmos and as serene as a lake within a mountain. It was like he was making a statement more than denying The Masked Butcher's claim.

Before the Masked Butcher could scoff at his ignorance, his pupils suddenly thinned out at the sight of two illuminating green domes manifesting three meters away from Levi. Then, he played two distinct sharp tunes from his violin.

What came after those tunes left him, Gamemaster Gamble, and the rest of the viewers bewildered for a moment.

"Wait... that's sunflames... but, is that... no... it can't be..."

Gamemaster Gamble commented with a hint of disbelief in his voice as he watched two distinct opposite energies spill out of Levi's body: One Golden, One Black.

The two distinct energies infused themselves within each green aetheric layer... never touching, never getting in each other's way due to the aetheric layer acting as a container, keeping them dangerously close, but simultaneously, separating them.

This created a defensive dome around Levi that shimmered in gold, black, and green... creating a mesmerizing show of three unique energies: two enemies, and one mediator keeping them from ripping each other apart.

"Ladies and gentlemen... many of you can recognize those two energies faster than your children's faces... Sunflames, and Void! How!! Just how?! Isn't he supposed to be a Half-Radian?! What business does he have wielding Void Aspect, too?!" Gamemaster Gamble shared... his voice cracking in utter amazement and disbelief.

His reaction was tame compared to the viewers, who had just received confirmation of the insanity they were witnessing.

-You got to be shitting me... I knew the Celestial was an enigma... but this... this is too much.-

-Is he a f*cking experiment?! No race in the universe can wield both Sunflames and Void! It's a taboo to just think about it!-

-Dear lord... is he a Half-Radian, Half-Oblivar, Hallow Race, or Trueborn Race?! What the f*ck is this abomination?!-

-This is crazy... the network is about to have a field day with him!-

-Network? Screw the network! What will Oblivars and Radians think of this?! They are mortal enemies, and their eternal conflict is our universe's unified culture! The Celestial's existence is like a child born out of their peace! We all know these two having a truce is a joke, don't even mention peace!-

More than a billion viewers were left absolutely losing their minds as their widened eyes were affixed on the multi-layered dome... many viewers had their attention focused on other Rifters' battles, but the moment they noticed the ruckus, all of them switched to the roof above Levi's combat room.

The Masked Butcher lifted his gaze and was startled to notice the screen absolutely packed with curiously stunned eyes... There were so many of them that the screen no longer had any openings. It was just eyes stacked tightly next to each other, creating a creepy, but strange scene.

"You... what are you?"

The Masked Butcher asked, his hands grasping the Cleaver even tighter... from the single sweat drop falling down his forehead, it was clear... he started feeling nervous for the first time since he stepped inside the room.

There was one thing everyone in the universe feared the most... whether the weakest or the strongest... it didn't matter.

The Unknown.

Nothing scared the shit out of anyone worse than the unknown... the idea of having no clue what you were facing anymore.

In this very instant... the Masked Butcher felt just that, driving him to ask the one-million question that roamed in the viewers' minds.

Levi raised the bow, ignoring the Masked Butcher's question or the increased viewership of his battle... His fingers settled on the strings, and he drew the bow slowly, letting a single note ring out.

The moment it was released, the viewers quietened down like they had been possessed... they had a feeling that Levi wasn't going to answer them, but show them in action.

And that's what he did...

Everyone watched in stunned silence as the Void reacted to the thin and soft tune... it started dancing, moving nonstop across the aetheric layer like patches of jelly inside water.

But then, he shifted his fingers slightly and played a second, deeper note beneath the first. The tone thickened, and the Sunflame answered with its fierce vibration.

The two energies shook against their aether layers, already trying to tear through them... but they kept failing, like Levi was playing the perfect mixture of tunes to keep them agitated but contained.

He kept this tune on repeat like a broken radio... when he noticed that the Masked Butcher wasn't coming at him, Levi merely lifted his head and faced him.

He didn't say anything... however, the orbiting three celestial stars seemed to line up in the Masked Butcher's eyes as a question mark.

He didn't know why, but he felt like he was asking him... are you attacking or not?

'Screw this... Half-Radian, Half-Olivar... none of this matters.' The Masked Butcher reclaimed his confidence with a cold look, 'I have the ultimate offensive force, while he can do nothing but block...'

"I will do the universe a favor and get rid of such unexplainable abnormality... your existence makes no sense, and is not needed in our reality."

Following the Masked Butcher's solemn announcement, his arm swelled again as his muscles pushed against the skin until thin cracks opened across his forearm!

Then, the Masked Butcher inhaled once through his nose and swung downward with everything in him, roaring, "DIIIIE!!"

The crystallized blood on the blade carved a long red arc through the air, and the bone spikes along his arm shuddered under the force, releasing cracking sounds across the combat room!

The metal core of the cleaver took all that force and pushed it forward, adding weight, speed, and impact into a single devastating motion!

The swing dropped like a guillotine in Levi's direction, splitting through the air like nothing was meant to block it.

A strike meant to end anything in its path!

Jasmine and the viewers held their breath, not expecting such a devastating attack to be a mere single attack.

If this were a technique, what kind of devastation would an ultimate deliver?

"The Masked Butcher made his move!! Are the Celestial's peculiar defenses enough to block it?!" Gamemaster Gamble commented excitedly.

As the Masked Butcher's massive cleaver was already dropping, Levi didn't look at it... he focused on the strings, pressing his index finger down on the A string.

The bow touched it lightly... then dragged fast.

A sharp note filled the room while the aether layers responded at once. The thin green layers rippled like a surface hit by raindrops, implying that Levi's tune had matched the natural frequency of aether energy.

Rapidly, Levi slid his middle finger down next, stretching the pitch higher, making the vibration faster and more demanding.

The note shifted... Sharper... Louder... More aggressive, sending goosebumps on many viewers' skin.

Yet, Levi wasn't done... he added the next layer by dropping his ring finger and brushing the bow across two strings at once.

The sound became multi-layered, two pitches beating against each other while the pressure from the vibrations doubled!

Aether reacted instantly... its surface started shaking like it was boiling.

The moment it reached this state, Levi's thumb pressed tighter against the neck of the violin as he picked up speed.

Short strokes... Faster strokes... The bow moved like it was sawing the air apart, his fingers and the bow barely visible anymore!

The instant Levi saw the forceful Cleaver's scarlet blade mere inches away from the agitated green dome, he leaned in and dragged the bow harder, pulling a loud, aggressive rising note that was strong enough to make dust lift off the floor!

The aether layers reached resonance at last... and it wasn't the only one.

Sunflame, Void, and Aether... all hitting resonance simultaneously!!!

In that brief millisecond... the aetheric layers exploded outward the instant they were touched by the Cleaver!

Ka-boooooom!!!

The sunflame layer flared bright gold while the void layer unleashed its devouring darkness... the two forces didn't merge or synchronize... no, no, no... Ash'Kral already told Levi that it was impossible to synchronize these two energies with his current resonance access.

That's how he figured out this technique... if he couldn't synchronize these opposite forces, what if he was able to take advantage of their destructive and devouring qualities when matching?

A single idea... sounded foolish at first, but not to Levi... for he was the sole being to possess the right tools to make it happen.

An Instrument Weapon, Aether energy, and control over frequencies and sounds.

All were a must for this technique to come to life.

Now... the Masked Butcher, Gamemaster Gamble, and the watchers were left stunned at the sight of the scarlet forceful cleaver getting absolutely destroyed and devoured by golden and dark shockwaves blasting outward!!

It was like a hydrogen bomb went off... the two conflicting energies expanded outward fighting to devour each other through resonance, uncaring about anything in their sight!

The powerful Cleaver attack? It was like the two energies were so prideful that they saw only each other as enemies... anything caught amidst their conflict was erased or devoured.

Seeing the two conflicting energies' explosion expanding in his direction, the Masked Butcher swiftly retreated far away... his face devoid of color in fear as he was almost consumed by it, feeling the intense sunflame heat assault his skin.

Fortunately, the explosion expansion didn't last long... it went off as fast as it had appeared, leaving behind a canvas on the white floor in gold and black. It represented the two energies' brief but cruel conflict... neither won, neither lost.

But one person did...

Levi ended the tune with the bow hanging in the air, the echo of the last note left a lingering ring... he was still sitting on the chair of sunflames in the center of the mesmerizing canvas.

Untouched, unharmed, unbothered.

He lifted his head and gazed in the direction of the Masked Butcher, who was already standing a couple kilometers away from Levi... his guard raised to the limit.

No words... Levi lifted his index finger in front of him.

-...-

-....

-....

The viewers stared at the single finger in stunned silence; the meaning was clear... The Masked Butcher had gone through his first attack and it did absolutely nothing to Levi!