

## Evolution 59

Chapter 59: Instructor Seraphis.

"What's with the ruckus?"

A robust, stern voice boomed from above, immediately silencing the hall. All eyes turned upward, locking onto a well-toned man in his mid-fifties descending atop the wooden platform. He wore a weathered ceremonial Daywalker gray coat and an old sun sigil amulet that dangled at his belt.

His arms were crossed over his broad, muscular chest. Though his clothes were worn, he had clearly taken care of his appearance...golden hair streaked with silver tied back in a low ponytail, and piercing ocean-blue eyes that froze every candidate in place. No one even dared to breathe.

"Shit... this year's instructor is Sir Seraphis. Quick, stand straight and don't say a word," Rayan hissed under his breath, snapping into rigid posture like a fresh recruit meeting his drill sergeant.

Arthur and JoJo dropped their antics instantly and followed suit.

"Who is he?" Levi asked quietly, his focus locked on the wild fluctuations of the man's spiritual aura.

Though Levi couldn't see his contracted nightcrawler, just like every other Daywalker present, he wasn't surprised. He already knew that nightcrawlers couldn't enter Willow Grove's spiritual bridge. They were only allowed inside in their physical form or the form of their weapon.

"That's Seraphis Veyne," Rayan muttered. "Meanest and toughest instructor at the center. He treats being a Daywalker like it's some divine oath... and he uses the assembly to filter out everyone he deems unworthy."

"Oh..." Levi frowned slightly.

He already understood that each assembly changed depending on the instructor and that they were given some freedom to run their own version. Still... he hadn't anticipated this kind of bad luck.

"I heard that in his last rendition, only seven contract seekers made it to the final trial," Melissa added. "Though all seven were signed... so his success rate was 100%."

"I see..." Levi's expression tightened. 'That ain't good.'

He had braced for resistance from instructors due to his blindness... but falling under the supervision of this man felt like the universe playing a cruel joke.

Above, Instructor Seraphis arrived on the first floor, stepping off the platform and walking toward the wooden railing. He leaned over it, arms resting lightly, eyes scanning the sea of candidates below.

Silence blanketed the chamber.

No one met his gaze. All heads remained bowed.

"I don't care if you were sponsored by the top four agencies or came out of lineage families' vaginas..." Seraphis said coldly. "The moment you stepped inside Willow Grove... your lives are now mine. Am I understood?"

"Yes sir!" the entire hall answered in unison, loud and firm.

Seraphis clicked his tongue... clearly hoping someone would slip up so he could set an example. But no one did. He moved on with a sharp nod.

"I am Instructor Seraphis Veyne, and I've been appointed as this year's assembly overseer... thanks to the garbage that's been spewing from these sacred grounds in recent years." His smile was colder than frost. "The trials are still the same... but I've added my own sweet twists to weed out the weak faster."

Uneasy gulps echoed across the room.

Seraphis loved the sight of crumbling confidence.

"As everyone knows, each year's assembly is split into five trials... all held within seven days or less."

He raised a pen-like device and flicked it forward, manifesting five massive holographic screens across the upper wall. Each screen bore a glowing title:

Trial of Light Affinity

Trial of Physicality

Trial of Spirituality

Trial of Intelligence

Trial of Combat

Then, with a wave, a sixth screen materialized, this one showing a long list of names lined up one beneath the other.

"This is the assembly's leaderboard," Seraphis continued. "You'll be scored through a point system based on each trial's result."

"And just so we're clear... scoring zero in any trial is instant elimination."

A wave of anxiety rippled through the candidates. Unlike prior assemblies, failure to complete even a single trial now meant disqualification.

Most weren't too concerned about the Light Affinity trial... unless they were disabled.

Unfortunately for one hidden among them, that was precisely the case.

'I'm screwed...' Levi's upper lip twitched. The new rule was a direct death sentence.

And he wasn't the only one who noticed.

Elsewhere, watching from a live broadcast, Shia, Sergio, and Jamal sat in silent horror. Seraphis' Neuralens was streaming the entire thing to national TV.

"Isn't Levi doomed from the start?" Jamal said, rubbing his forehead.

"Did he have to be this unlucky?" Shia growled. She clenched her fists at the injustice, after all Levi had done to prepare... this was how it was going to play out?

"We can only hope he finds a way through it..." Sergio murmured.

Back inside the hall...

"Once all trials are finished... your fate will be decided." Seraphis clapped twice. "Line up and enter the Willow Grove Dimensional Mirror."

Without hesitation, the more experienced candidates stepped forward. They walked to a massive circular mirror at the far end of the hall, its edges wrapped in thick, twisted roots like a natural frame.

The first candidate waited until the surface began rippling like a disturbed lake... then vanished into its depths.

One by one, they followed.

Until it was Levi's group's turn.

"It's finally time to kick some ass!" Arthur grinned as he shoved Levi forward, unaware of the internal crisis tearing his brother apart.

The moment they stepped through, they arrived on a floating slab of land suspended in a dimensionless void.

No sky... no sun... no stars. Just one massive artificial white sun above them and a never-ending expanse of misty colors swirling beyond the land's edge.

Despite its alien appearance, they could all breathe and move without issue. The space had been tuned to mimic Earth's gravity and atmosphere.

Above, Instructor Seraphis floated calmly on a platform of his own.

"Welcome to the Boundless Expanse," he declared. "You'll be spending the next several days here... so you better get used to the scenery."

"The Boundless Expanse..." JoJo murmured. "I heard they host Death Games here."

"Yeah," Melissa replied. "It's controlled by the Nocturnal Contract creator... that's why it's neutral ground for high-stakes events."

No one knew who the creator really was... but he didn't seem to mind letting others use his domain.

But for Levi, none of that mattered right now.

'I can't score zero in Light Affinity...' he thought, coming back to himself. 'That's the only one I can't pass.'

He knew exactly what the trial tested. The candidate's resistance to blinding divine light... a pure ocular test.

And Levi didn't even have eyes.

He had accepted this before joining, thinking he could make up for it in other trials. But this new rule... this timing...

'I just need time. Just one trial... just one to prove my worth...'

Then, his heart sank.

Seraphis announced, "Since talent is primarily the decider of a Daywalker's growth, we'll begin with the Trial of Light Affinity... to dig out the gems from the rocks. Then we can work on body, spirit, intelligence... and combat."

"..." Levi stood there... utterly speechless.

"Is something wrong?"

Arthur whispered near his brother's ear after noticing the change in his demeanor.

"It's nothing."

Levi forced a smile, not wanting to worry his brother and ruin his concentration. He could tell that his brother didn't connect the dots yet.

'I am left with the Hail Mary.'