

Evolution 60

Chapter 60: Trial of Light Affinity.

Levi knitted his eyebrows as he used the surrounding noise to form a sound bridge connecting him to the stage. Then, he pressed his index finger into the bridge and focused deeply on mapping it.

This was a technique he had refined over the past month... one that allowed him to visualize sound waves down to their tiniest crevices and reconstruct their structure by layering other noises on top.

He applied this skill to the Ilthorien inscriptions and symbols etched across the stage, forming a perfect three-dimensional auditory image of the surface... one he recreated in front of his mind's eye.

Then, he began analyzing the writings... desperately searching for a way to shift the trial from testing light resistance in the eyes to measuring his body's endurance instead.

Levi understood the principle. The stage, like most other totems, responded to spoken incantations. A command phrase activated the mechanism... and if he could find and alter it, he might just survive.

It was a complex, high-risk endeavor... but not one unfamiliar to Levi.

'Come on... remember what Mom wrote in her textbooks,' he urged silently. 'The Ilthorien language is interconnected so precisely... just one change in the incantation could alter everything. I just need to find the incantation frame and its supporting utterances.'

Levi knew this wasn't a quick task. It was like decrypting a layered password, because every incantation was buried beneath millions of meaningless inscriptions.

That was the totem's built-in security.

99.9% of the symbols served no purpose beyond camouflage... a forest hiding a single, vital tree. This was why most Daywalkers whispered their incantations. They didn't want anyone else decoding them.

Incantations were a free-for-all system. As long as you knew the language and how to pronounce it... Nothing stopped you from using it.

As for how he knew that this stage could test both eye and body affinity?

It wasn't a secret. Some instructors ran tests for both, but most opted out of the body test, leaving it for the Grand Training Center instead.

Not out of laziness... but because the results were almost always the same.

Eyes absorbed light through photoreceptor cells built for that purpose... skin reflected most of it and absorbed only limited wavelengths.

If a candidate's eyes scored 'SS,' their body was usually an 'A' or lower... a statistical certainty in over 99.99% of participants.

So the second test was seen as pointless.

Still, Levi clung to it like a lifeline. He studied the circular wall of strange symbols and pushed his mind into overdrive, desperately trying to extract the correct phrase.

Above him, Instructor Seraphis narrowed his eyes and turned his gaze toward the sky.

"Now... let's greet our ugly dimensional friends," he said, raising a finger toward the void.

Everyone instinctively looked up, and many immediately wished they hadn't.

Thousands of enormous eyes stared down at them, filling the sky.

Each one was different... seductive, monstrous, mystical, chilling. Not a single pair looked the same.

They belonged to nightcrawlers from the Shadow Dimension, invited to spectate the ritual.

Any nightcrawler that signed the Nocturnal Contract tied to this assembly had the right to watch... and to make a pact with any candidate they deemed worthy.

Each contract had a unique serial number. That number turned it into a multilateral link; anyone who had it could summon the same ritual and participate.

In this case, however, Seraphis limited the connection to nightcrawlers alone.

If he hadn't, millions of humans could've watched through the sky... their minds directly connected to this space.

Thankfully, his Neuralens broadcast was working fine. The void was still tethered to the Willow Grove Mirror, which kept Earth's atmosphere and gravity active in this bizarre plane.

The government had paid dearly to maintain this fragile bridge between worlds.

"Fresh meat at last... I've been waiting."

"Don't disappoint me, cuties... I want a decent partner this time."

"Look at those scared little faces... kikiki... this'll be fun."

The nightcrawlers' voices echoed across the massive floating platform, rattling some of the candidates to their core.

Seraphis had the authority to mute or dismiss them... but he didn't. Their commentary served a purpose, shaking the resolve of the weak.

"Once you hear your name, step forward and stand on the Luminance Rite," Seraphis commanded, clapping twice.

The crusty white marble trembled... then cracked open to form a staircase, rising ten meters high and leading to a circular stage: The Luminance Rite.

It was carved with Ilthorien symbols and arcane inscriptions.

Seraphis hadn't used his powers to forge it. Authority over this space was his by right... gifted through the Nocturnal Contract and its mysterious creator.

In this dimension, for the next seven days, he was a deity.

"Nurah Blackthorn."

A stunning, lightly tanned girl began her ascent.

Her curvy figure moved like a jungle cat... her plump lips curled into a confident smirk as she looked up at the sky full of monstrous eyes.

She wore a black latex suit that hugged her form. Twin daggers rested in sheaths at her waist.

Every step she took, she made sure her hips swayed... drawing the boys' attention. Most of the girls looked less than amused.

Rayan, predictably, looked like he was about to drool.

"Don't even think about it," Melissa warned flatly. "She's a siren."

"Oh? How so?" Arthur blinked, clearly confused.

"She's the daughter of the Midnight Slayers' second-in-command," Levi said calmly. "And probably their top prospect in a decade. The Blackthorn Lineage started training her at age three."

"Wait... the assassination family?" Arthur asked, eyebrows rising.

Even Arthur, who hadn't studied their competition deeply, had heard about the Blackthorns.

They were feared across every Holy Region... known for assassinating rogue Sleepwalkers and Fallen Daywalkers alike. The Midnight Slayers agency was built on their blood.

If the Morningstars were battlefield hyenas... the Blackthorns were silent owls; deadliest when the world slept.

Onstage, Nurah reached the top, posed with a hand on her hip, and toyed with her long, braided black hair.

"Lift your head and stare at the artificial sun... no blinking," Seraphis ordered.

"Oki~" she replied, voice sweet and melodious.

She obeyed instantly... staring at the blinding light without flinching.

Five seconds... ten... thirty...

The symbols on the stage began to glow with each passing milestone, drawing gasps from the crowd and nightcrawlers alike.

Finally, she blinked past thirty-five seconds. Without delay, she pulled out a wooden bottle and applied eyedrops.

Then she whispered an incantation:

"One drop... one blink... the burn will sink."

Her eyes pulsed once... and the irritation vanished like morning fog.

"Nurah Blackthorn... thirty-five seconds... Light Affinity grade: SS... score: 150 points," Seraphis announced with a rare hint of satisfaction. "You carry your mother's torch well."

"Thank you."

"You may step down."

"As you wish."

Instead of walking down... she drew her daggers and leapt.

Mid-air, she stabbed one dagger into the wall beside the staircase, using it to slow her descent in a controlled slide.

Just before hitting the ground, she kicked off the wall and flipped... landing like a panther.

"..."

"..."

"..."

No one said a word.

She didn't look like a contract seeker... she looked like a Daywalker already.

'She's a real superhuman,' Levi admitted, staring at her graceful gray aura.

Ash'Kral wasn't kidding when he warned him about monsters in this assembly.

She was the complete package... talent, preparation, resources, and unrelenting will.

Levi might've trained for two months... she had trained her entire life.

And of course... the nightcrawlers were enchanted.

"Now that's a partner."

"She's mine!"

"Back off! I called dibs!"

"SS light affinity and elite flexibility? If only she didn't use daggers..."

Even among the candidates, she was drawing admiration, envy, and desire in equal measure.

But the mood quickly soured.

After Nurah's dazzling performance, more than fifty candidates stepped onto the stage... and none of them came close to matching her score.

Seraphis' expression darkened with each result... as if he had tasted heaven only to be served sewer water afterward.

'D' grade... 'C' grade... 'D' grade... 'B' grade... 'A' grade...

While no one had received an 'F' yet, none had even grazed the 'S' tier, let alone touched the legendary 'SS' grade.

Most candidates barely lasted ten seconds before blinking, as though their eyes were on the verge of combustion.

Though eye resistance to light could be trained, improved, and even restored with totems, this trial still held heavy weight in the eyes of both the candidates and the nightcrawlers.

Because if someone could last more than thirty seconds without blinking, it meant they had the potential to cultivate for extended hours each day when given the right resources...

Unlike the others, who would burn out within moments.

This trial effectively set the cultivation pace for every candidate, and nightcrawlers paid close attention to it... A strong result promised faster evolution and a quicker return to their former power.

After about an hour, Melissa was called and managed a solid 'A' grade. Jojo followed and didn't disappoint either, earning an 'A' as well.

Then came Rayan and Arthur... both scoring a respectable 'B.'

"Ah... I really thought it would be different," Arthur sighed, disappointed.

His score didn't surprise him. He'd already tested his light affinity at the Blood Hunters Agency; his results had always hovered between 'C' and 'B,' with a max hold time just above ten seconds.

"It's alright," Melissa consoled him gently. "Light affinity isn't an exact prediction of someone's future. Your pace might be slow at first... but once your eyes adapt to cultivation, you'll take off."

"I do hope so..."

Arthur muttered, glancing at his placement on the leaderboard. Rank eighty-eight... right in the middle of the pack.

Meanwhile, Levi had completely shut out the world.

He filtered out every sound that wasn't Instructor Seraphis... rendering himself deaf to the crowd and blind to everything else.

It was the deepest focus he could achieve, an optimal state for decoding the hidden incantation behind the Luminance Rite. And he was close... almost at the breakthrough...

Until a sharp voice cut through the air and struck him like a hammer.

"Levi Larson! Step forth!"

His heart skipped a beat.

But his face showed nothing... no panic, no hesitation. He simply turned and walked through the parted crowd toward the staircase.

"Why do I feel like he's going to score the highest out of our group?" Rayan murmured, eyes shining.

"Me too," Melissa smiled. "Arthur's been hyping him up for a whole month... he must be the real deal."

'Damn you, Arthy...'

Levi's brow twitched slightly as he realized his stupid brother had been running his mouth again, painting him as some kind of genius.

