

Evolution 79

Chapter 79: Domesticated Nightcrawlers' Division.

Sometime later...

Levi exited the Boundless Expanse through Willow Grove's dimensional mirror under Instructor Seraphis' guidance.

"Follow my voice."

"Ah, thank you."

Instructor Seraphis led the way toward the elevator, using his voice to guide Levi, fully aware that helping him this way would preserve the battery of his device.

What he didn't know was that his assistance also saved Levi from wasting his solar energy, as Levi kept his echolocation ability turned off, relying purely on Seraphis' vocal cues.

He had lived over a decade like this, so it wasn't much of a challenge.

After a short while, they arrived at the elevator, and Instructor Seraphis pressed an illuminating rune marked with an arrow pointing upward.

Upon activation, the runic diagram on the elevator's floor shimmered softly, and then the platform began rising, passing floor after floor of the Willow Grove.

At any other time, Levi might have used his echolocation to paint his surroundings and see Willow Grove's inner workings in great detail...but now, he had to ration his energy until the end of the assembly.

He was missing quite a view.

Each floor of Willow Grove served a unique function for the Solar Aegis Sanctuary. The ground floor was open to civilians for paying respects to the Grove and the Solar Deities. From the first floor upward, various divisions were housed: governmental liaisons, human resources, totem engravers, totem auction houses, natural treasure traders, donation centers (crystallized seeds only), Solar Aegis coin exchanges, and much more. Some of these divisions were open to Daywalkers, while others remained private under sanctuary jurisdiction.

It could be said that Willow Grove was the beating heart of the Daywalkers' regional operations.

Meanwhile, the highest floor was reserved for the guardians of the Solar Aegis Sanctuary...those who supervised and maintained authority over the region's sanctuary branch.

Although Levi hadn't asked where they were headed, he knew that Instructor Seraphis was taking him to the Domesticated Nightcrawlers' Division... the division responsible for all matters related to nightcrawlers repurposed as pets, mounts, livestock, or otherwise.

When the elevator finally stopped, Levi's spiritual perception picked up a bustling scene filled with Daywalkers and chained nightcrawlers scattered across the floor.

Although he couldn't see them physically, their spiritual auras painted his world in vibrant strokes, making it feel as though he had stepped into a crowded bazaar.

-Luminos snacks of the highest quality! Sold in bulk for cheap!-

-Tier 2 Nightingale up for auction in fifteen minutes!-

-Hey, champ, you look like you need a Mighty Ox testicle. C'mon, don't give me that look. Just slow-boil it for three hours and eat it. You'll be running like a nuclear engine!-

His ears caught the cries of merchants, the rhythmic thunk-thunk of woodcarvers' tools, and the gentle sway of rope bridges above.

Stalls of all sizes had been built into the living bark of the grove, glowing with lanterns made of bioluminescent fungi. A soft greenish haze blanketed the air.

When Levi inhaled deeply, a whirlwind of scents bombarded his nose... some pleasant, some putrid. Yet the atmosphere somehow remained fresh, almost humidified, with one dominant aroma prevailing: the rich, earthen scent of Willow Grove itself.

"Welcome to the Nightcrawlers' Bazaar. First time here?" Instructor Seraphis asked as he led Levi through the dense marketplace.

"Yes. I was homeschooled, so I never went on school trips inside the sanctuary," Levi replied.

"I see... Well, you're not missing much."

Instructor Seraphis went on to explain that the Nightcrawlers' Bazaar was the region's largest hub for nightcrawler-related trade and information. Here, people bought and sold Tier 1 and 2 nightcrawlers, their food, body parts, accessories... You name it. Even instructional books on raising nightcrawlers were available.

"But we're not here for any of that."

"I know. You're going to help me register the wyvern under my name and assist with changing its incantation." Levi nodded.

"Exactly."

Ignoring the merchants' calls, Instructor Seraphis tugged Levi by the shirt through the crowd, making a beeline for the Registration Office near the entrance. A long queue of Daywalkers was already lined up outside its gate.

The registration office was the only place authorized to officially register nightcrawlers in the entire region, making it one of the most demanded services in the sanctuary.

Though the government handled data and enforcement, the chains and registration fell solely under sanctuary control. After all, every nightcrawler needed to be bound by divine chains to gain immunity from sunlight and holy energies.

Unfortunately, once a nightcrawler was chained like this, evolution became nearly impossible.

The immunity blocked their ability to absorb solar energy, the primary catalyst for higher growth.

As for Luminos snacks, Growth Totems, and such? They were affectionately named snacks for a reason. They served more for bonding and mild enhancement rather than real growth.

"I don't have time for this."

Instructor Seraphis had no patience for lines, especially not with another trial beginning in two hours.

He bypassed the queue entirely, flashing his instructor credentials. The guards didn't stop him. Foreign Daywalkers grumbled in protest, but the natives remained silent, recognizing him on sight.

Seraphis had worked at the Grand Training Center for over fifteen years. Anyone who'd grown up in the region knew his name.

Once inside, they waited a few minutes while the current client was processed. The official at the desk was a wrinkled old man with a bald head mottled with red flecks.

He wore the traditional sanctuary uniform... a white suit with black stripes on the shoulders and a green robe. The robe's color denoted his rank; the runes on his back, his position.

"Come back in a week to pick up your nightcrawler... Next!" he croaked, sounding like he'd smoked ten packs a day.

"Good morning, Yousef. How's the family? That bratty granddaughter of yours still giving you a headache?" Instructor Seraphis greeted with a chuckle, taking a seat at the wooden desk.

The office felt like a squirrel's den: oval, cozy, furnished with a desk, two chairs, and a wall-length library stacked with wooden totem figurines. Bioluminescent fungi lit the space in a warm, white glow.

"Seraphis, long time no see. The family's fine. And yeah, she's still a handful. What about you? Still waging war against relationships?"

Seraphis laughed and shook his head. "I gave up. Relationships are nothing but trouble."

Levi, listening quietly, noticed a small skip in Seraphis' heartbeat... just a flicker... but said nothing.

"Well, you're nearly fifty. Only you can crack your own stubborn mind." Youssef chuckled and turned toward Levi. "And who's this young lad? One of your trainees?"

"Not yet." Seraphis smiled faintly. "He earned one of my personal gifts during the assembly. I brought him here to register it."

"Oho? Must be something special if you're personally involved."

"Are you calling me stingy?"

"Haha, a bit."

"I'm not stingy...I just don't entertain mediocrity with my generosity." Seraphis scoffed.

"Whatever helps you sleep at night." Youssef grinned and looked at Levi. "Well then, what are we registering?"

"A Tier 2 Aerowyvern, sir," Levi answered, handing over the figurine and retreating respectfully.

"Polite kids like you don't need to stand," Youssef smiled, offering him a seat.

"Thank you."

Levi understood from his tone and took the offered seat across from Seraphis.

"Excuse the mess," Youssef said, brushing aside papers, coffee cups, and scattered totems before placing the figurine on the desk. He fixed a magnifying loupe to his right eye and began scanning the item.

After a few moments, he muttered under his breath:

"Ferocious and vicious... Are you sure this is the right gift for a pre-contracted Daywalker?"

"Is she that bad?" Seraphis frowned. "I bought her on a bargain overseas. I knew she was wild, but not unmanageable."

"You're mistaken, my friend. This isn't a pure Aerowyvern. She has traits from the Finite Storm Dragons. See here?" Youssef pointed at the tri-clawed wing with a magnifying glass. "Typical Aerowyverns have two claws, not three."

"I had no idea."

Seraphis raised an eyebrow. Astra must have misclassified it.

"Is that a good or bad thing?" Levi asked politely.

"Unfortunately, not good," Youssef sighed. "If she could evolve, it'd be promising. But since she's being registered, she'll stay stuck at Tier 2."

"The Finite Storm Dragons are notoriously aggressive. I'm afraid she inherited their temperament and some of their low-grade abilities...Nothing more."

"I understand." Levi nodded calmly.

"I suggest you start with a tamer Nightmount. Many rookie Daywalkers end up injured... or worse, cause harm to others." Youssef warned.

"Thank you for the advice, sir. I'll keep it in mind," Levi replied respectfully.

Seraphis, sensing Levi's resolve, chimed in.

"Still, go ahead and register her under his name. He can use her as a mount once he becomes a high-ranked Daywalker."

"Alright. I'll need your full name and your chosen incantation written down. I'll begin immediately."

Levi wrote his incantation discreetly, showing it only to Youssef. Even Seraphis wasn't allowed to see it... that way, if the Nightmount was ever stolen, it could be tracked via the registry.

Youssef stood and placed the figurine on the uppermost shelf.

"Come back in three days."

"We will. Thank you for your time."

Seraphis shook Youssef's hand and tossed out a dad joke about his granddaughter before leaving with Levi.

As they retraced their steps through the marketplace, Levi asked curiously, "Why three days?"

He figured Youssef could've sped things up as a friend. He didn't know that three days was the expedited option.

"The paperwork takes less than an hour," Seraphis explained, "but changing the divine chains and registering your incantation takes longer. He has to send it to the twentieth floor, where they'll break the old chains and bind new ones under your authority."

"I didn't know the chains needed changing, too." Levi raised an eyebrow.

He was aware of the basics, like people getting burned for touching others' chains, but he hadn't realized the significance of ownership.

"Only the registered owner can handle divine chains without consequence," Seraphis explained. "That's why the system is so strict."

"I understand." Levi absorbed the information quietly, nodding with a thoughtful hum.