

Evolution 88

Chapter 88: The Contract Ritual.

Sometime later...

Levi and the others returned to their rooms after the conclusion of the first phase of the assembly. While his brother and friends gathered in one room to talk about their battles and their next move if they got signed, Levi chose to rest alone.

As for Melissa? She decided to stay eliminated, realizing that a few hundred Solar Aegis weren't worth more than the Instructor's respect.

After all, she had been defeated fair and square.

Had she found a way to bypass the rules on her own, Instructor Seraphis might not have given her a hard time.

Right now, Levi was taking a shower, deep in thought about what Ash'Kral might do to help him pass the second phase.

He had already done his part perfectly in the first phase... Now, it depended on his partner to finish the job. If they couldn't sell their contract, nothing else would matter.

Levi only knew what was required of him to help fake the contract, not the inner workings. Ash'Kral had told him he wouldn't understand it even if explained a hundred times since it involved Ilthorien Arrays.

Levi didn't press further. He already knew that Arrays were beyond his current level of understanding.

'What's he doing now...'

Levi muttered to himself as he stared into the darkness, trying to sense what was happening across the spiritual bridge.

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Meanwhile, in the Shadow Dimension...

Where color was forbidden and light a myth, Ash'Kral hovered above three glowing hexes inside a ruined, colorless mansion.

Everything in and around the mansion was painted in shades of white, black, and gray...like a moving frame of an old noir film.

The mansion stood atop a cracked island floating in a river of similar landmasses, all drifting toward some unseen destination. Not a single one strayed off course.

Beyond this river of stone was nothing...just an infinite black void stretching forever.

Inside the ruined mansion, Ash'Kral was the only thing with colors, standing out akin to a flamingo at a penguin convention.

His three-striped pupil scanned the sea of Ilthorien inscriptions drawn across the hexes etched into the stone floor.

Each hex had a role.

One to mask Levi's spiritual aura, one for the contract signing, and the last to fake Ash'Kral spiritual aura...Without them, this mission would have been a dud from the start.

"The final step is complete."

He nodded and floated to rest atop a shattered throne's arm, shutting his eye to wait for the second phase.

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Two hours later...

The candidates were summoned outside the apartment complex and ordered to form vertical and horizontal lines based on their rankings.

The top ten stood at the front while the eliminated candidates lined up behind them.

Each candidate kept a distance of five meters from the other, spreading out across the platform.

Everyone had solemn expressions mixed in with some nervous anticipation.

The moment of truth had come...the time to find out if they would become Daywalkers.

"Whatever happens next, keep your heads up," Instructor Seraphis warned. "No tears. No begging. No shame. Nightcrawlers may help us become Daywalkers, but they need us just as badly. Never think of it as a favor."

"This is not a balanced partnership. You always have the upper hand... and you must live by that truth. Otherwise, your nightcrawler will corrupt you."

"Am I understood?"

"Yes, sir!"

Everyone knew that nightcrawlers always tried to reclaim control. If they succeeded, their host would serve them willingly. Most Fallen Daywalkers were victims of such corruption.

With the warning given, Instructor Seraphis clapped his hands twice, opening his boundless domain to allow nightcrawlers to spectate.

As thousands of eyes began to crowd the skies, he waited until the heavens were filled.

Then he called on any nightcrawler interested in signing candidates from this batch to write their names beneath the Nocturnal Contract.

—I'm already signed! Let me in! I want Nurah!—

A dozen nightcrawlers were already clamoring, showing heavy interest in Nurah, Omar, Arthur, Jojo, and a few others.

After a few minutes, Instructor Seraphis closed the registration and began reading out names.

"Nyx'Velar... Nin'Kyra... Grask'Thul... Tharn'Mire... Ko'Rrnash..."

With each name, a portal formed, and a towering nightcrawler stepped through.

Soon, over twenty nightcrawlers of varying size and shape loomed above the candidates.

"Don't be afraid," Instructor Seraphis said flatly. "I can erase them with a thought if they try anything."

He then shut off the public view of his domain, giving candidates privacy.

There was no need for thousands of nightcrawlers and humans to know what kind of nightcrawler each candidate had signed.

"Always so intense, Seraphy," murmured a panther-shaped nightcrawler as she licked her paw.

Her fur had drunk in all light, creating a shadowy silhouette that appeared only when it moved...Her eyes were rings of deep violet while her tail was shaped akin to a piercing dagger.

She looked simple, but none of the other nightcrawlers dared get close.

"Nyx'Velar, I assume you're here for Nurah?" Seraphis asked.

"Yes. I liked that cutie," she smiled, locking eyes with Nurah. Her stare sent a chill down Nurah's spine.

Nurah had faced Tier 4 nightcrawlers before, but something about Nyx'Velar unsettled her.

'Don't tell me...'

Before she could finish the thought, a dozen nightcrawlers sighed and disappeared.

They didn't bother staying to compete once Nyx'Velar made her choice.

"Nurah, you may go with her," Instructor Seraphis said privately. 'She's Tier 5. A rare kind. She's been looking for a Daywalker for over a decade. You're lucky...but remember what I told you.'

Nurah nodded.

'I want to stay till the end of the ceremony.'

'Check with her, not me.'

"Can we talk after the ceremony ends?" Nurah asked.

"Fine by me," Nyx'Velar replied while gazing at Levi with a tint of interest. She had already figured out his condition from the first trial and wanted to stay to see how it ended.

Hearing their discussion, Demetris and the other candidates showered her with envious looks. They knew that Nyx'Velar must be a high-tiered nightcrawler to make the others leave without a fight. Yet, she still chose to respect her wishes.

Usually, the second phase of the assembly consisted of multiple nightcrawlers trying to convince a talented candidate to choose them, or if a candidate was lucky enough to be picked up.

While most candidates wished just to get signed, uncaring about the tier of the nightcrawler, the talented ones had to be smart in their decisions.

"Line up before your preferred candidate."

Following Instructor Seraphis' call, the remaining nightcrawlers started spreading out.

Arthur had two nightcrawlers facing him, one shaped like an obsidian Rhino and the other as a muscular green-skinned kangaroo.

Jojo had three nightcrawlers lined up, and the most unique one resembled a humanoid mountain goat with a long goatee touching the ground. He was wearing a yellow/red robe similar to hers.

Melissa was faced with a small childlike figure with limbs too thin and too many joints. Porcelain's face cracked in an eternal smile and wearing a patchwork dress sewn from flesh and skin.

Rayan was chosen by a skinless, sinewy hound with muscle wrapped in rune-bound cords. Its snout was twisted like a hunting horn, and its tongue dragged trails of bubbly blood.

Omar, Selene, and Keira also had nightcrawlers lining up in front of them.

While Demetris was beaten to a pulp, he had the most nightcrawlers crowding around him, leaving him with a cold smirk.

This was the potency of having a great light affinity. Although he was humiliated under Levi, he didn't surrender, and he showed that he had some good fighting capabilities.

Thus, many tier 3 nightcrawlers felt the need to snatch him for themselves, following the principle of: I can fix him.

On the other side of the coin, Levi had no Nightcrawler lining up for him, unsurprisingly.

When Demetris glanced in Levi's direction and noticed it, a wave of refreshing delight washed over his heart.

'I knew it!'

After the trial ended, he passed out immediately on the medical team's table due to the hellish agony he was suffering in silence.

He didn't want to pass out during the trial, knowing that it would eliminate him. If he had learned that the Trial of Combat was combined with the Trial of Spirituality, he would have eliminated himself to block Levi from earning his rewards.

Too bad, he was duped like everyone else.

While he wasn't pleased with losing the first wager, knowing that his big brother would be forced to pay the debt for him, he couldn't afford to lose the second wager either.

In other words, Levi must not be signed!

'I ain't taking any chances.'

Demetris narrowed his eyes coldly in the direction of Levi. Just as he was about to rat out Levi's secret to the instructor, he heard his voice resound across the domain.

"Levi, are you interested in retaking the Trial of Light Affinity? I am still unsatisfied with how you left it be."

When the nightcrawlers and candidates heard this, each one had a different reaction.

The nightcrawlers were pleased with the decision as they didn't want to give up on someone as talented as Levi...Especially, when he might be an Anomaly class talent.

However, most candidates weren't too pleased with the decision as it didn't feel fair to see one of them getting preferential treatment. The fact that most of them hadn't attracted any nightcrawler didn't make it any better.

Before anyone could respond, Demetris jumped in with a cold tone, "Sir, I believe it's a waste of time."

"Are you looking for a second beating?" Arthur retorted with a deadly gaze.

"Arthy, let him be." Levi smiled peacefully, "They have the right to know."

"You can accept your disabled condition as gracefully as you can, but it still won't get you signed."

Demetris paused and dropped a bomb with a cold sneer, "After all, how can you be blind and still fantasize about becoming a Daywalker?"