

The Glorious Evolution

#Chapter 21: The Greatest Gift. - Read The Glorious Evolution Chapter 21: The Greatest Gift.

Chapter 21 - The Greatest Gift.

'...'

O'thnir remained silent, his eye scanning the whole situation from the mace...No matter which way he saw it, they were beyond doomed.

The supposed savior was taken out, Nel'Vess was approaching akin to the Grim Reaper, their mounts were murdered, and worst of all, the connection was down, so no one outside the forest had any clue about their predicament.

"To decide to group on me, I can't imagine what happened there." Sergio uttered in derision as he watched Arthur place Shia and Levi next to him. Then, he fell on his knees, incapable of standing up for another second.

"Get those f*ckers off me!"

Meanwhile, the spiders were still latched on to Arthur, leaving him to groan in agonizing pain.

"Arthur, I got you."

Levi reached out to the spiritual spiders in his vision and killed them off by bursting their abdomen with a single strike. The abdomen was their weakest point, making it simple for Levi to kill them without any struggle.

After he was done, he left the heads attached to his brother's flesh, knowing that removing them was a death sentence.

The fangs were just so deep, the moment he removed the heads, Arthur's wounds would gush out uncontrollably.

Jamal came from behind, still firing basic arrows to further clear out the area. While he had tried his best, he had merely cleared out a five-meter radius.

The spiders took no time to recollect their strength and surrounded the group in a small circle, making anyone believe that their lives were already claimed...But not Levi.

He could hear Shia mumbling something, and if his guess was correct, they must do everything in their power to buy her time.

"Protect Shia!"

Levi ordered as he stood in battle stance, facing the northern side. When Sergio, Jamal, and their nightcrawlers saw this, they couldn't help but smile bitterly.

In their minds, Levi could be excused for acting like this since he was blind and could see only the spiders' spiritual auras.

It was nowhere as terrifying and despairing as the sight of an army of flesh-eating disgusting giant spiders gazing at you akin to a delicious meal on a moonless night.

"Protect her!"

But, when even Blee'der voiced the same concern, everyone's gazes turned solemn, and they swiftly entered a battle stance, willing to fight to the last breath.

If Levi could be excused for not knowing any better, then Blee'der's words reignited hope in their hearts...Hope that Shia didn't group them up for no reason.

Screeee!!

Sadly, the spiders had no chill. The moment their eyes adjusted to their heat auras, they let out the same screech and charged at the party with their fangs clicking nonstop!

Jamal and Sergio pulled out dagger-shaped wooden totems from their backpack and nodded at each other.

Just as the spiders were about to pounce at them, Jamal shouted out an incantation while smashing the tiny wooden dagger on the ground, "By the sun's eternal flame, purge the dark and unleash your claim!"

"Shield your eyes!!"

The instant the last word left his lips, the wooden dagger exploded and released a potent flash of purified sunlight, expanding for more than ten meters and burning away all the spiders in the zone!!

The flash lasted for a mere second before dying out, but the damage it caused was astronomical.

Only ash was left behind in the ten-meter radius while the rest of the spiders cowered away akin to a teenager asked to do chores.

"Fear not, my little ones. It's just a D grade Assault Totem." Nel'Vess' voice resounded from a distance, "I didn't think you were still saving them. Oh well, what does it matter anymore?"

Sergio and Jamal's expressions turned gloomy, knowing that such totems were kinda useless at this point. They saved them for emergencies and as a last trump card, but this situation was simply beyond their grade.

As expected, the spiders pounced on them again after their short-term memory acted up and made them forget what happened to the previous pack.

Sergio glanced at the last assault totem in his possession and then smashed it on the ground with a grim expression, activating it at once with the incantation.

The second batch of spiders fried up again, but alas, more poured in to fill in the gaps.

"It's getting sad, just give up and I promise I will be gentle." Nel'Vess sighed, "If I was getting something out of this besides my survival, I would have been more motivated to kill you, but beggars can't be choosers."

Nel'Vess waved at the spiders, forcing them to behave temporarily since his authority could not rival that of Dra'Webra.

But, it was enough to create an execution ground.

"So, who's first?"

Nel'Vess picked a medium-sized wooden log and waved it around like he was playing with a twig. But the wheezing noise absolutely petrified the party, making them understand that a single strike was all it would take to blow them into pieces.

"Me...Take me."

Yet, Levi stepped in front of the group, standing with a straight back, but his expression was as regretful and bitter as ever.

"Levi...Cough, get down here. Let me go first, I am already halfway there." Arthur crawled towards his brother with a look of utter determination.

"Arthy, this entire situation is on me...I told you that risks are a must to move forward, but I have truly bitten more than I can chew." Levi smiled wryly, "I have spent my entire life visualizing life through books, but only now do I understand...Real life is nothing like books, where everything follows a written script."

"I am sorry, I have let you down..."

Levi was genuinely upset and regretful that his plan didn't just risk his life but that of his brother's.

He always dreamed of being a Daywalker and roaming the wastelands to reclaim the planet from the infestation of nightcrawlers due to reading many heroic stories of high-ranked Daywalkers when he was a child.

They were his guardian heroes, watching over him and fueling him with the courage to handle the nightcrawlers infesting his little world.

Only now did he truly grasp what life was like for Daywalkers in the wastelands—there were no safety nets, only constant threats, with everything and everyone trying to consume their light.

One could plan all he wanted, but at the end of the day, it would take a single passing powerful nightcrawler in a bad mood to snack on his body and shadowlife seed.

"Don't f*cking apologize to me. I would have chased you to the depths of hell if I had to. I have left you alone once, and you ended up watching our parents get murdered, and your eyes ripped away." Arthur reached out and held Levi's pants tightly and then said with an earnest stern tone, "I have since vowed to never leave your side, not now, not ever."

Clap Clap...

Nel'Vess listened to the whole thing and when Arthur finished, he slowly clapped his hands with a mocking look.

"Ah, now that's what I called true brotherhood. Though, I wish it never finds me." Nel'Vess sneered, "In the Shadow Dimension, you are proclaimed a walking corpse the instant you leave your back open to another one."

"Make no mistake, the real world is no different. But, that's what makes genuine and trusted relationships more special." Levi smiled faintly, "To know that someone has your back in this cruel and merciless era is the greatest gift."

"Greatest gift?"

Nel'Vess snickered, disappearing and reappearing in an instant behind Levi. Then, he pierced Levi's abdomen from the back, lifting him up and Arthur in the air with one hand like they weighed absolutely nothing...

"Huh...Brother?"

Arthur gazed at the pierced bloody log inside his brother's stomach and felt like his vision was getting cloudy. Before he could react, Nel'Vess smacked him back to the party like he was swatting a fly.

Then, he carried Levi in front of him, staring at his agonized, confused expression as Levi gripped the log with trembling hands.

His head darted around, struggling to process what had just happened...Until a creeping coldness spread from his stomach, dull and unnatural, making the moment feel even more surreal.

"The greatest gift is absolute strength! If you were strong, you wouldn't be dangling helplessly in my hands. If I was strong, I wouldn't be following that b*tch's orders. Strength, strength, strength, it's everything!"

Nel'Vess hurled Levi back to the group, his blood spraying and splashing Shia and the others. Yet, their stunned eyes never left the gaping hole in Levi's stomach...

"The sooner you get it through your thick skull, the better your life will get."

Nel'Vess sneered when he saw everyone grouping on Levi, trying their best to close the massive hole, but to no avail. The moment Levi joined the donut club with Rengoku and Ace, there wasn't anything they could do to save him...

"My bad, maybe in your next life."

Chapter 22: Is This Your Doing?

Nel'Vess took a deep breath to ease his agitation and then walked away, knowing that his authority over the spiders had expired.

In other words...Rustle! Rustle!

The spiders charged again at the party, seeing nothing but red. Sergio and Jamal have already closed their eyes, accepting their fate, while Arthur was left trying his best to stop his brother's nonstop bleeding, but alas...His giant hands were big enough to cover the hole, but that was the only thing they could do.

Tears flooded down Arthur's eyes as he gazed at the scorched marks in place of his brother's eyes.

It was like he was living a déjà vu, remembering the day he was brought up by his uncle to the hospital and seeing his big brother lying on the bed with bandages over his eyes and torso.

All he could do at that time was cry and cry while holding his brother's hand, feeling utterly helpless.

He thought if he were to fall into the same situation, it would be different, but here he was, sharing the same helplessness as when he was a child.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

As the spiders jumped on them and sank their fangs across their bodies, Arthur used his wide back to shield Levi, not letting a single spider touch him. Even Jamal and Sergio suffered from major bites to keep Shia safe until the last second.

It was like they still had a tint of hope in her...

"Totem...of...protection, shine...your light."

They made the best decision possible as the moment they were buried under the mountain of spiders, a sudden flash of light emerged from the cracks, releasing concentrated, purified sunlight everywhere!

Nel'Vess was hit by one of the beams and felt like he was pierced by a bullet, forcing him to jump away instantaneously. The moment he landed on a tree, he touched the hole in his chest with a grim expression, feeling the searing pain coursing through him.

But, he didn't give it much thought as his eyes were affixed on the sudden emergence of a golden shimmering dome, big enough to contain Shia's party!

As for the mountains of spiders? It was already decimated, leaving the rest of the spiders to cower away from the glaring dome.

"Huh...We aren't dead?"

Sergio and Jamal lifted their heads after sensing the warm sensation coursing through their bodies. It was like they were bathing under their Holy Pillar. Even their wounds were healing at a comfortable pace while the pain was numbed.

"Damn you, dad...Did you have to make the custom incantation so damn long and complicated?" Shia spoke at last as she held onto a shimmering sun-like necklace.

"Shia, is this what I think it is..." Jamal's eyes widened in disbelief as he gazed at the shimmering necklace.

Before she could reply, Sergio exclaimed in shock, "It is! Grade 'A' Protection totem...Solar Dome!"

His reaction was understandable, as this totem wasn't even sold to the public, but used as a gift by the Solar Aegis Sanctuary to reward the top five highest-ranked Daywalkers on the Holy Heliodor Region leaderboard!

It was a priceless treasure for even high-ranked Daywalkers, yet it was in the hands of Shia.

"This isn't the time to discuss my father's treasure." Shia ordered with a hurried tone, "My arms are still broken, help the Larson Brothers recover faster! I have a couple of recovery totems in my backpack."

Sergio and Jamal swiftly reached into Shia's backpack and poured everything on the ground. Besides some makeup and hair gadgets, they found one assault totem, one defensive totem, and two healing totems.

When they saw them, they smacked themselves for not considering digging into her belongings earlier without her permission. But it was already in the past.

They took the recovery totems, and each one focused on a Larson Brother. Sergio flipped the passed-out Arthur away from Levi and immediately poured the pink liquid into his lips.

Although his body was filled with small spider bites, there were too many, causing him to lose a significant amount of blood. Yet, his situation was nowhere as brutal as Levi's.

"Shit...This, this is too much."

Everyone's expressions turned for the worse after Levi's massive stomach wound was revealed...His guts were exposed for the world to see.

"Feed him!" Shia shouted angrily at the shellshocked Jamal, "The protective dome is keeping him alive."

As she said, Levi might be passed out cold, but he was still breathing faintly. If it wasn't for the healing prowess of the protective dome, he would already be a goner.

That's what they thought, but in reality, Levi was still alive because of one entity...Unbeknownst to everyone, Levi was meeting him right now in his dream.

Levi and Ash'Kral were seen standing on top of an empty, dead field with a scarlet sky, clouds, and a cracked moon gleaming from above.

Levi's clothes and hair became pitch-black while Ash'Kral remained the same, maintaining his creepy bat-like appearance.

Levi instantly knew that he was inside a dream and that Ash'Kral had invaded it, twisting it into his desired environment.

The fact that he was here made him assume that he was still alive on the outside, which implied that Shia had succeeded in activating her protection totem.

While Levi didn't know what kind of protection totem was in her possession, he was the only one capable of hearing her faint whispers of the incantation, allowing him to guess the totem's type.

That's why he tried his best to buy time for her, even risking his life in the process. He just didn't expect Nel'Vess not to care about his Talk No Jutsu and pin him in no time.

"Ash'Kral, is any of this your doing? Be straight, I think we are long past the foolery." Levi asked.

"If you're talking about the Lurker Spider Queen's trap, I had nothing to do with it."

Ash'Kral floated towards Levi with a hunched back and claws long enough that they were grinding on the ground. When he was a mere meter away from him, he showed a sinister smile and confessed, "But, I did know about it."

"..." Levi went silent.

Ash'Kral's silence and disappearance ever since their last discussion about the contract did raise some concerns in his mind.

He knew that Ash'Kral wouldn't give up on him that easily, not after spending a decade monitoring and saving him for himself.

"What now? I believe you have the upper hand." Levi lifted his arms with a bitter smile, "Do your best, I don't have much choice anyway."

Levi wasn't delusional to believe that Ash'Kral hadn't brought him here unless he was certain that he had the upper hand in their negotiation.

"I like it when you are sensible." Ash'Kral chuckled, "Still, it's only fair to show you how bad your situation is. I don't want to hear you complaining that I have swindled you."

Ash'Kral snapped his finger, and the cracked moon rippled akin to a peaceful lake. Then, images of the outside world were reflected on it, stunning Levi.

"I can see...How?" Levi murmured as he touched his scorched marks.

Unfortunately, his eyes were still nonexistent even in the dream world. Yet, the scenes of Shia and the others trying their best to wake him up appeared as vivid as a voice in a silent room.

"I am sharing my vision with you, enjoy it while it lasts," Ash'Kral replied.

But, when he saw the condition of his little brother, the joy of seeing the real world after a decade was extinguished...Yet, this wasn't even the worst part.

The scene switched to Nel'Vess hurling giant trees and massive boulders at the Solar Dome. He seemed absolutely livid as he cursed Shia and the others.

"Is this what I get for trying to be nice? Wasting my energy and time for a decided outcome?!"

Crack! Crack!

Each time a tree or a boulder smashed the Solar dome, it released a wave of purified sunlight, weakening it bit by bit.

'The Solar Dome is great against nightcrawlers and their abilities, but it doesn't work as well against real-life objects.'

Levi's face went dark, realizing that if Nel'Vess kept his bombardment, he would destroy the dome in less than half an hour.

Half an hour should have been good enough to buy them some time until reinforcement arrived, but the network was down, and no one knew if their emergency flares were seen or not.

Even if they were seen in time, it took an hour, give or take, from the outpost to the forest using mounts.

In simpler terms, there was a high chance Nel'Vess would get to them before reinforcement arrived...This time, he wouldn't waste a single moment bashing their heads.

"You proved your point, I am willing to sign your desired contract." Levi requested with a look of unwearying acceptance, "My only condition is to save my brother and the others."

In his eyes, he wouldn't even bat an eye if the contract was pure rubbish. He was the one responsible for bringing his brother into this mess, a mess that was beyond their capabilities.

He would rather lose his sight ten times over before letting his brother die.

"Of course I will do that, I am not a monster." Ash'Kral's demonic smile said otherwise.

Without further ado, he waved his hand, and a massive Nocturnal Contract was summoned in front of them.

It was already written and prepared, even signed by Ash'Kral's name at the bottom. The only thing missing was Levi's signature.

Before Levi read the terms, he felt a chill course down his spine at the notion that Ash'Kral had this contract drafted for over a decade, awaiting this very moment.

But then, he glanced above him and saw the horror his party was going through. He took a deep breath and looked back at Ash'Kral.

"There is an old saying that I have read in a book." Levi smiled, "It says, if an oil company wants to buy your land, there's probably oil under it."

"What does that supposed to mean?" Ash'Kral raised an eyebrow in intrigue.

Levi replied calmly as he started reading the terms of the contract, "Isn't it obvious? I don't know why you are seeking my body, but I know there is something there. I am just saddened I don't know what it is before selling it..."

"Sign the contract and you will find out." Ash'Kral grinned.

Chapter 23: Turn Your Life Upside Down

Levi would be lying if he said he wasn't curious about what Ash'Kral saw in him. But, he didn't allow his curiosity to influence his judgment as he sped through the contract.

After a few moments, Levi finished the first major term and was left staring at Ash'Kral in bafflement.

He found out that he would be in charge of his body, possessing the majority of control. He thought before that Ash'Kral was manipulating him all this time to force him into signing a 50/50 contract.

This contract ensured equal control over the body as both the nightcrawler and the human would be able to alter between leadership and fellowship.

This contract rarely took place since both nightcrawlers and humans cherished having complete control.

They knew that if it was 50/50, it might lead to an uneventful death due to a lack of cooperation or worse, causing significant harm to innocent civilians.

Thus, it was frowned upon for Daywalkers to have this kind of contract as society wouldn't accept them fully.

Levi thought that Ash'Kral was seeking this kind of contract, but here he was, staring at 100% control in his favor.

"Why?" He couldn't help but wonder about Ash'Kral's reasons.

"All you need to know is that it has to be you in the lead."

Besides this cryptic message, Ash'Kral gave no further details. Realizing that he wouldn't get his answers, Levi moved on.

While this term had restored some hope in Levi's mind that maybe his life wasn't completely screwed, when he continued reading he found out at the end that everything wasn't sunshine and rainbow.

"No death binding, and an indefinite term?" Levi's expression turned grave. "Doesn't this mean I am stuck with you until you decide to let me go? Even worse, if I died, your soul will remain unaffected?"

Levi wasn't a fan of those terms in the slightest. He understood that nightcrawlers and humans could only work together efficiently if their life and death were bound together.

This would ensure that both parties would give their best in every single endeavor since their life literally hung on the line.

As for the other term? All Daywalkers' contracts had a fixed term. Usually, it lasted until the Shadowlife seed grew into a tree, bore fruition, and created a new Shadowlife seed, restarting the circle until a new tree was born.

When the two trees reached their growth limit, that was when the contract ended and both parties separated from the other, taking a tree for each.

Of course, this separation would weaken them a bit, but it would reward them with autonomy at a level of prowess unimaginable...It was a win-win situation for both parties.

While reaching this stage was extremely rare as it implied evolving the nightcrawler to Tier 7, which wasn't a simple journey in the slightest, it gave the humans and nightcrawlers a goal that assured their eventual autonomy.

But, indefinite term? Levi realized that he might be trapped with Ash'Kral forever.

"Don't flatter yourself, boy." Ash'Kral sneered, "The contract is indefinite for the opposite reason. I have no interest in being stuck with you if you don't live up to my expectations. I have, very, very high expectations."

"Wait, are you saying that I might be dropped in the future?" Levi knitted his eyebrows.

"Yes, I have a certain goal in mind, and if you prove inadequate in helping me achieve it, I will have no choice but to start again with another entity," Ash'Kral replied calmly.

Levi went silent, not because he was 'hurt' by Ash'Kral's lack of confidence, but because he realized that if he was to sign the contract, he could not stop moving forward until he helped Ash'Kral achieve his goal.

That's because an early separation during the growth of the Shadowlife seed would kill both parties!

It was like the moment a Daywalker was born, the Shadowlife seed would turn into his primary organ, more precious than his heart or even brain.

Fortunately, when this happened, the seed died as well, ensuring the demise of the nightcrawler...This made the nightcrawlers avoid this scenario at all costs.

Yet, Ash'Kral was telling him straight up that he could easily drop him and switch him with another person like his life would be unaffected.

While it seemed impossible, Levi knew that Ash'Kral was too much of an enigma. If there was any nightcrawler capable of surviving the separation, it would definitely be him.

'What do I do? Do I sign it? Do I even have a different choice?'

Many questions roamed Levi's mind as he turned around and gazed at the predicament of his party.

Nel'Vess was getting angrier and more ferocious by the second, already uprooted hundreds of trees and hurled them at the Solar dome.

While the trees had gotten burnt out by the dome's flares, its illumination had gotten way too dim compared to its first appearance.

'Do I wait? Can I afford to wait?' Levi shook his head with a bitter smile.

No matter which way he studied his choices, he always came back to the same two choices. He could reject Ash'Kral's proposal and be left to die, knowing that he was the only one keeping him alive at the moment.

He wasn't scared of the idea of death as he always saw it as a much more merciful way of leaving his hellish world, but the fact his brother's life was also on the line changed everything.

"Boy, signing the contract to save your brother is understandable, but is that really your only motivation?" Ash'Kral whispered near Levi's ears, "Have you already forgotten about what happened that night? The screams of your dearest parents? The pain of having your eyes ripped away? Have you already forgiven those two nightcrawlers? If so, you are either the most benevolent human in existence or, you are just a coward."

Levi remained composed, already numbed to the nightcrawlers' emotional manipulation. But, when he was reminded of that night and what he had witnessed, he realized that it wouldn't cut it to just be an average Daywalker.

He had just spent a couple of days hanging with actual decent Daywalkers and yet, their lives were held by a pen in his hands.

Everything he had lived and experienced in those days made him truly see the world of Daywalkers and what had become of their planet.

The lives of people inside the Holy Pillars were utterly different from those exploring and attempting to reclaim their planet.

Now that he had experienced both worlds, he understood that it wouldn't cut it to just sign a contract with any Nightcrawler like he was dreaming about in the confines of his safe space.

He needed a strong nightcrawler, no, he needed the strongest nightcrawler as his partner to ensure that his potential surpassed everyone and everything...Especially, when his growth was impaired due to his missing eyes.

It wasn't like he had such nightcrawlers waiting in line to sign him up.

'If I am already living on the edge of life and death, of sanity and insanity, what's holding me back from giving it my all and seeking my parent's redemption?' Levi's expression turned icy by the second, 'Indefinite term? Dropping me if I was inadequate? Such conditions should have never fazed me, not now, not ever.'

Levi lifted his head and gazed at the empty signature location. The more he looked at it, the more it seemed to call him.

Before Levi could know it, he was already floating in front of it while holding a giant white pen.

Ash'Kral was there, right next to him.

"Sign it and your life will turn upside down, I guarantee it." Ash'Kral grinned.

"You should work on your convincing skills, that sounds more ominous than good...But, I have already made up my mind, you can stop pitching it."

Levi tightened his grip on the pen and double-checked one last time for any fine print he had missed in the contract.

When he found that only those two terms were considered 'negative' to him, he steeled his expression and started writing his full name, each letter widening Ash'Kral's devilish grin.

Just as Levi reached the last letter, he stopped and turned to face Ash'Kral. Then, he asked suddenly, "Am I your first contracted human?"

Ash'Kral paused for a moment, not expecting such a curveball.

"You aren't even in the top ten list."

But, he still answered him truthfully even though he knew his answer might change Levi's mind. In his eyes, if his answer changed Levi's mind, he would lose interest in him.

Levi was silenced for a few moments, many thoughts coursing his mind at the shocking implication that Ash'Kral had more than ten failed partners.

This would make anyone question if Ash'Kral was giving his partners a fair chance to aim at his goal or if he dropped them once an inconvenience arose.

Yet, Levi's confidence remained unfazed.

"I may not be your first partner, but I am going to be your last." Levi said coldly as he wrote the final letter of his name, "Mark my words."

Chapter 24: A Tiny Bit of My Peak.

"Oh, how I wish..."

Ash'Kral laughed in amused delight as he watched the Nocturnal contract burn into two clouds of ash.

"For now, enjoy the show...This will be the first time you see a tiny bit of my peak and most likely your last if you don't work hard."

Before Levi could react, he found himself kicked from the dream world, slowly regaining his consciousness in the real world.

When he expected to see utter darkness and everyone's spiritual auras like always, he was stunned to see Shia's, Jamal's, and Sergio's faces crowding him.

"He is up! He is actually up! It's a miracle!" Jamal laughed excitedly.

"What the...His stomach hole has been sealed without leaving even a scar..." Sergio exclaimed in disbelief as he gazed at Levi's smooth, dirtied abs.

His reaction was understandable when Levi ended up recovering faster than Arthur, who was still lying on the floor, salivating over the dirty ground.

Levi ignored them and immediately reached out with his hand towards Shia, caressing her face in astonishment.

"It's real...I can see..." Levi murmured to himself.

"Huh?"

Shia was caught off guard by his action, but she didn't pull away from his hand. She knew he couldn't see what he was doing and might still be in shock.

But, before she could think too much of it, her face suddenly went as pale as a sheet of paper, pure mortification taking over her. Then, her eyes rolled to the back of her head, passing out on top of Levi's chest.

Thud! Thud!

Jamal and Sergio followed along, one landing on top of Arthur's back and the other to the side of Levi...Even their contracted nightcrawlers went down.

"Am I really that ugly?"

Ash'Kral's saddened voice resounded from behind Levi, forcing him to turn around with a dazed expression.

He expected many things, but he didn't think that Ash'Kral would make an appearance in his flesh in the real world!

Yet, what shocked him the most was the sight of him standing inside the Solar Dome without a single scratch!

He could see that the Solar dome was trying its best to burn him, but his leathery, ashen skin remained untouched.

"How?"

"Save your questions for later, we don't have much time before our souls get linked and bodies inked."

Ash'Kral turned around and faced Nel'Vess, who was standing tens of meters away from them. He was just in the process of uprooting another tree, having no idea what was going on.

"Little f*ckers wasting my time and energy."

Nel'Vess cursed under his breath while cleaning his sweaty forehead with his sleeve. Then, he pulled the entire tree with its roots in a single motion, hugging it with both arms.

The moment he placed it next to him, his vision was finally cleared, landing on Ash'Kral and Levi.

"Here's anoth..."

Nel'Vess went quiet, blinking twice to double-check if his eyes weren't deceiving him.

Just a few moments ago, he was staring at Shia, Jamal, and Sergio, trying to revive their friend. In an instant, they were the ones on the ground while Levi was standing next to one of the meanest-looking nightcrawlers he had ever seen.

He ought to feel baffled.

"Who are you, and how dare you interfere in Queen Dra'Webra's feast?!"

Nel'Vess entered a defensive stance instantly, even bringing out the name of his master. He wasn't able to sense Ash'Kral's aura in the slightest, which crept the hell out of him.

"Dra'Webra? Oh, so that was her name." Ash'Kral murmured to himself.

Then, he pointed his long-clawed finger at Nel'Vess and ordered expressionlessly, "You have touched what's mine. Kill yourselves as an apology."

Before Levi could react to such a ludicrous command, his mouth widened to the limit in stupefaction at the sight of the spiders' army running into each other's fangs or smashing their abdomen against the trees, doing whatever it took to kill themselves!

While this could be excused for Ash'Kral's authority being on the higher Tiers, nothing could explain what Nel'Vess was doing.

Levi watched him hold his head with both hands and without an ounce of hesitation or complaint, snapped it off!

'Huh?'

Even Nel'Vess failed to understand what had just happened. His eyes reflected utter confusion and daze as he fell sideways, his hands still affixed to his shattered neck.

Thud!

The giant uprooted oak tree fell upon him after losing its support, seemingly avenging itself and its perished sisters...

Silence engulfed the forest at last as no spider was left alive, both near and far. It was like Ash'Kral's order resounded across the entire forest even though he spoke in a normal octave.

Stunlocked, Levi stared at Ash'Kral with lips moving, but no words coming out, only hushed out breaths. But soon, his perfect vision started fading, breaking him out of his daze.

"No, no, no, just a little more!"

Levi ignored everything and lay next to his brother, turning his head to face him. As his vision was going dark, Levi stared at his brother's face with a faint smile.

"You sure have grown into a good man." He murmured gently, "Though the ponytail has to go."

Before Levi knew it, he found himself back in pitch-black darkness.

He had dreamed of having his vision restored every single day of his life, and now that it happened, he didn't even appreciate it fully before it was robbed from him.

He didn't even look at himself in the mirror. Yet, Levi neither complained nor whined about it. He painted the same serene smile on his face to mask the pain within and turned to look at Ash'Kral, wanting to ask him how he did it.

But, the moment his spiritual vision landed on him, Levi's heartbeats started accelerating rapidly, akin to a child seeing the boogeyman.

Horror, confusion, shock, disbelief; a soup of emotions ran rampant across his entire system at the sight of a crimson potent spiritual aura covering his whole field of vision!!

It was like his space of darkness transformed into a scarlet world!

Levi was almost always composed and rarely stuttered in his speech, but as he gazed at this frightening scarlet aura emitting from Ash'Kral, words failed to find him.

With great difficulty, he mustered a single question. "Jus...t...Just..What are you?"

He didn't even use the proper interrogative pronoun...Or did he? As this abomination before him couldn't be defined with just 'Who'.

"Me?"

Ash'Kral turned around to face Levi, his magnificent spiritual aura dying out rapidly akin to a flame being extinguished.

When his entire aura disappeared and was replaced with a fable twinkle, a spiritual aura known to belong to Tier 1 nightcrawlers, Ash'Kral grinned and answered with:

"I am your partner."

Chapter 25 - F...ck...Yo..u...

The moment Levi heard his response, he felt a sudden electrifying chill course through his entire body, paralyzing him completely. He fell on his back and lay there, feeling like his body no longer belonged to him.

'It's happening...it's finally happening.'

Levi had read too many books and dreamed of this moment for so long to not know what was happening...The Awakening of a Daywalker!

With a heart full of anticipation and a bit of unease, Levi focused his senses inward, desiring to feel the entire process and cherish it, knowing that it could happen only once in a lifetime.

He wasn't scared of pain or such as he knew that the Shadowlife seeds had a will of their own and when presented with a new host, they ensured that the integration process went as smoothly as possible.

That was the reason the process began with sedating the entire nervous system.

'Boy, it's best that you forget everything that you used to know about Daywalkers when dealing with me.' Ash'Kral advised with an impish chuckle.

'Huh? What do you mean?' Levi felt his heart skip a beat, having a bad feeling about this.

'Brace for impact, the first wave will hit you like a truck.'

Just as Levi was about to double down on his confusion, a sudden shocking tide of agony washed across his entire body, from his toes straight to his scalp!

AAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!!!!

His question turned into an agonizing screech as he started twitching on the ground with white foam spilling out of his mouth. He was paralyzed, yet he felt every ounce of torment like his pain receptors were being pricked by needles.

He couldn't even form a single thought, his mind was fueled with nothing but a never-ending wail.

After a few seconds, which felt like years to Levi, the pain lessened until it completely went away. Levi was left lying on the ground with a puddle of sweat already formed underneath him.

'Ash'Kral...You asshole...Are you screwing with me?' Levi cursed with great difficulty.

He refused to believe that what he went through was normal as the pain was nothing he had ever felt in his life. He had read hundreds of Daywalkers' awakenings and not a single one of them reported any type of pain.

'Don't relax now, two more waves are still to come.' Ash'Kral grinned.

Levi's heart sunk to the bottom of his stomach in dread at the sound of that.

'Please tell me you are lyi...AAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!'

Before Levi could react, a similar wave of hellish agony smacked him out of nowhere, leaving him vibrating akin to someone going into a seizer.

As much as Levi tried his best to resist the urge, the pain was simply too much, forcing his bladder to give in.

A warm stream of piss flowed down Levi's pants, but he didn't even feel it. All that was in his mind was for the torment to end already.

'Pissing on the second wave, not bad, at least he didn't shit himself like Aetherius.'

Ash'Kral seemed to enjoy the show as this was one of his favorite moments every time he established a contract with a new partner.

'Pl...ea...se...I...B..eg...Yo..u...No..More...'

When the pain subsided, Levi was left beseeching Ash'Kral to stop whatever was happening to him. He didn't even care if Ash'Kral was responsible for this or not, he just wanted it to end.

'Kekeke, I have watched you dream and prepare for this moment your entire childhood, I thought you would be cherishing and enjoying every moment of it.' Ash'Kral laughed, uncaring about Levi's pleads.

While he was absolutely merciless monster, he really had nothing to do with the pain as it was related to his unique seed.

'Don't give up so soon, there is only one more wave left.' Ash'Kral cheered playfully.

'F...ck...Yo..u...'

Those were the last words Levi uttered before his entire nervous system got struck by a thunderbolt of anguish, leaving him gasping for air.

A few seconds later, his consciousness bailed on him at last, realizing that if he remained conscious any longer, his entire nervous system would be fried.

'Surviving until the last bit of the third wave, I see a promise.' Ash'Kral nodded in satisfaction, 'He might eventually get used to it as I did.'

Unbeknownst to Levi, Ash'Kral had shared the same intensity of the pain with him as his unique seed didn't discriminate during their merger.

However, he had gone through the agony so many times he lost count.

Since the moment their souls were stamped, he was forced to give up on all of his previous powers and evolutions, becoming a mere Tier 1 Nightcrawler, the pain he felt was no different from Levi's.

He just grew numb to it after so many failures to achieve his goal.

As he gazed at Levi's foamy mouth and wet pants, a sight unbefitting of anyone, Ash'Kral could only murmur to himself:

"Don't disappoint me, child. I have fallen way behind...You are my last hope."

A few minutes earlier, on the other side of the Harrowing Forest...

Danny, Malak, and the rest of their squad could be seen riding on top of their mounts, rushing in a straight line with panicky expressions.

They turned around to look behind them every so often and then sighed in relief when they saw that nothing was behind them.

"Thank god we listened to Malak, and we didn't reseal our mounts."

Matthew wiped his sweaty forehead while glancing at Malak, who was hugging Danny tightly on top of his armored camel. Unlike the rest of the squads, they remained on their mounts, following the advice of Malak to head further into the forest to ensure a peaceful search for the dimensional natural treasures.

While they were extremely far away from the way they entered the forest, this move helped them avoid the slow spiders and head straight to another exit.

"I can see the edge! We are getting close!" Danny exclaimed in excitement as he eyed the emerging wide spaces between the oak trees.

"We have to immediately report this matter to the authorities." Matthew uttered with a solemn tone, "I believe we have lost more than 50% of our forces. Such a hit is too massive to our region, considering that many young talents were involved."

"Let's get out of here first, and then we can worry about..."

Whoosh!

Before Matthew could finish his sentence, his pupils widened in horror at the abrupt appearance of a massive thick sticky web attached between the trees in front of them.

"HAAAAALT!!"

Alas, no matter how hard he shouted or pulled his mount's hair, they were simply moving too fast and the web appeared only after it entered their ten-meter illumination zone.

Before anyone could react, the mounts ended up diving deep within the giant sticky web, stopping only after reaching a couple of meters of depth.

"No, no, no, no, this isn't happening, this isn't happening..." Danny immediately started panicking, moving all over the place to free himself.

Alas, the web was stronger than it seemed as it could hold down even a Tier 3 Nightcrawler. The fact they went to its depths made it even worse.

"Don't panic! The spiders are still too far, we can free ourselves before they arrive."

Matthew tried to calm everyone down with a stern tone, but inwardly, he was also filled with unfiltered amount of dread.

"Try to summon your weapons or reach out to your backpacks for Assault totems."

When Danny and the others heard his order, their agitation died down a bit, realizing that they had what it took to burn down the web...They just needed to hold them and utter the incantation.

Unfortunately, everyone's backpacks were either on their waist or back, making it nearly impossible to get hold of them. The sticky web completely sealed their movements akin to being thrown into a basin of glue.

Just when Danny started to panic again, he sensed Malak's presence behind him. His eyes immediately lit up in hope as he requested agitatedly, "Malak! Try to open my backpack with your mouth! You're our only hope!"

Matthew and the others couldn't turn their heads to see what Danny was talking about, but it didn't stop them from having their hopes reignited.

Sadly, the expected sweet fearful reply was nowhere to be seen. Instead, a hideous cracked voice resounded in their ears akin to a death decree...

"Now, why would I do that after spending this much effort getting you in my trap?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

An eerie silence settled over the area; no one could even muster a breath. Only the heavy thud of panicked heartbeats echoed through the web.

Chapter 26 - I Spit On The Likes of You!

Malak lengthened her neck akin to a serpentine, moving in the web freely like a fish in the sea. When she came face to face with the petrified Danny, her delicate face split in half, exposing the hideous visage of a hairy spider with eight crimson eyes.

"What's wrong, darling?" She asked, her mouth salivating with an acidic stench green liquid. "You no longer find me appealing?"

The moment Danny saw her true face and smelt the stench, his mind was already gone. He couldn't even muster a scream...His eyes rolled at the back of his head, passing out instantly to protect him from the horrible fate awaiting him.

"Danny! What's happening back there!! Danny!! Danny!!"

Matthew screamed at Danny to speak, alas, he heard nothing but Malak's cracked voice.

"Ah, you decided to be a coward all the way I see, fine, I guess I will save you for dessert."

Then, she completed her transformation into a giant eight-legged spider, resembling Queen Dra'Webra, but lacking some qualities.

Still, her appearance was terrifying enough for Matthew and the others. The moment she tiptoed in front of them, none of them dared to breathe out loud.

But the same didn't apply to their contracted nightcrawlers, whose lives also hung in the balance.

"Zyy'ra, I never expected you to be an undercover Sleepwalker for a Lurker." One of them uttered coldly, "We have chosen our partners at the same Assembly, we even spent half a year in the same classroom."

"The real question is how could you betray your own race, you scumbags." Zyy'ra's eyes narrowed murderously, "Humans are supposed to be nothing but food and playthings for us. Yet, you go along and enslave yourselves into weapons, used as mere tools in their hands."

"I spit on the likes of you!"

She committed to the spit as she splashed the nearest Daywalker's face with her acidic saliva, leaving him hollering in agonizing pain.

The rest of the Daywalkers shivered as they heard their squadmates' despairing cries and the sizzling noise of his face getting melted off. In a few moments at best, his whimpers died out, making the nearest Daywalkers to him glance at his tragic ending.

When they saw his exposed skull and brain juices dripping down his chin, their hearts were frozen solid in despair.

"You think we didn't want to become Sleepwalkers too?" Another contracted nightcrawler in the shape of a sand scorpion commentated coldly, "It has become extremely difficult to manipulate them with so many protocols humans have developed: SR Pills, Anti-Sleepwalkers' Bureau, ankle monitors, and more. We were forced into this path to fulfill our evolutions, and I am certain you just got lucky with this girl."

During the earliest years or even decades of the great civilization's fall, becoming a Sleepwalker was easier than drinking water.

All the people, who weren't lucky enough to be in the chosen blessed cities by the Solar Divinities, ended up either eaten or forced into becoming Sleepwalkers.

Since at that time, not much knowledge was accessible about Sleepwalkers, nightcrawlers, or such, humans did anything to survive...Even if it meant accepting being possessed by a nightcrawler.

They were easily swindled as the nightcrawlers had written a fixed term in the contract, ensuring the humans that once the nightcrawlers' evolved into Tier 9, they would return their bodies to them.

It was like a parasitic relationship and as much as humans despised it, anything was for survival, right?

Wrong!

Everyone who signed the Sleepwalkers' contract came to the horrifying truth that their souls would be trapped in their bodies without a single way to regain control.

This would have been fine if the senses between humans and nightcrawlers weren't shared!

In simpler terms, if nightcrawlers were to feast on animals or worse, human flesh, the contracted human would sense every single thing, and he could do nothing about it.

"Luck? All I hear is excuses." Zyy'ra sneered, "Nothing has been forced on you. You are simply lazy, having no interest in mastering the arts of manipulation. You think I have found this beauty lying around and prepared to sign her life away?"

Zyy'ra went on to brag about how she tracked Malak for over two years since the moment her father committed suicide for not being able to handle lack of sleep, constant nightcrawlers' dreams invasion, stress to provide, the death of his wife, and more unimaginable traumas.

And how she made sure to visit her every time she slept, installing thoughts of vengeance in her dreams without showing herself.

After two years of wearing her off and completely twisting her personality to hate the government, the flawed system that drove her father to despair, she finally made her move and suggested the sleepwalker's contract.

At that moment, Malak's mind was already gone and all she wanted was to relieve herself from everything while going out with a bang.

"I had her so wrapped under my finger that she didn't mind participating in the Assembly so I could choose her and commence a 'fake Daywalker' contract. All I had to do in return was kill as many Daywalkers as possible, which was already my goal." Zyy'ra smirked cockily, "Luck? I don't believe in such bullsh*t, you either have it in you or you don't."

The Daywalkers and their contracted nightcrawlers were silenced, realizing that they were under the presence of a cruel mastermind. While she seemed to have cocky tendencies, they understood that she earned the right to be one.

Bypassing all the protocols humans had put in place to prevent the rise of Sleepwalkers was no easy feat—especially with contracts being thoroughly checked by the authorities during the Assembly and before issuing any Daywalker their official ID.

"Feel honored, you will be the food that will enrich my intelligence even more."

Before this snarky prideful remark could take root in the Daywalkers' minds, a sudden whisper assaulted Zyy'ra's ears.

'Kill yourselves as an apology...'

The moment Ash'Kral's cold authoritative voice was processed in her mind, Zyy'ra went blank for a second, and before she realized it, she found herself penetrating her abdomen with her eight sharp legs.

Pssssssssssss!!!

Abdomen's fluid flew everywhere, tainting the web and showering the Daywalkers' in the most revolting stench in existence.

Yet, no one paid any heed to the smell or their covered bodies in yellow juices. They just kept staring at Zyy'ra's twitching legs.

A few moments later, silence engulfed the area again...This time, everyone was too stunned to speak.

The only unified thought coursing through their minds was:

'What the f*ck just happened...'

They had foreseen their end in many ways; eaten alive, stripped of their Shadowlife seed, or even eaten by the incoming spiders' army. Yet, not in their wildest dreams would they have imagined such an ending.

The cocky and brazen Zyy'ra offed herself like someone pressed the shutdown button in her.

No matter how hard they thought about it, everyone came to a single conclusion regardless of how ludicrous it sounded...Was she killed by the Lurker Queen Spider?

Alas, no one was there to clarify this madness.

"Who f*cking cares! We live!" Matthew shouted hastily, "Wake up that moron and let's get the f*ck out of this hellhole."

"Seconded, I have never felt this level of creeps before in my life. Something sinister is happening under the surface and I have no interest in investigating it."

All the Daywalkers agreed with Matthew, swiftly using Zyy'ra's juices to slip up a hand or two and reach out to their backpacks. After retrieving the Assault totems, they burnt the web entangling them and their mounts, freeing themselves at last.

Danny was also freed while still unconscious. But, after landing on the ground face first, he immediately regained consciousness.

The first thing he did was beseech loudly while cowering behind his arms, not even daring to open his eyes.

"Please don't eat me! I can pay you handsomely! Please!! Please!!"

'Shut your trap, you goddamn disgrace. Where were my eyes when I picked you? I can't believe I am stuck with you for life, f*ck me!'

His contracted nightcrawler wasn't pleased in the slightest, cursing him nonstop. His reaction was more than understandable when considering that Danny was supposed to help him reach Tier 7. After this performance, he doubted if they would even survive their next fight.

This showed that when it came to becoming a Sleepwalker, the burden fell on the nightcrawler to convince the human by any means possible.

But, when it came to becoming a Daywalker, the burden fell on the humans to show their talents to attract a decent nightcrawler.

This was one of the main reasons all nightcrawlers refused to accept Levi. None of them was foolish enough to link their life and death with a blind kid, who could not absorb light efficiently nor fight properly with such a massive disability.

This would drive one to wonder, just what Ash'Kral had seen in him?

Chapter 27 - The Rescue.

On the other side of the forest, at the same time when Danny's party was captured in the borders' web, Mantis' squad wasn't faring any better.

They were forced to fight the entire time due to not having their mounts summoned and no one with Levi's great detection skill to warn them of ambushes.

Thus, as they were running towards the entrance of the forest while fighting simultaneously, they had already lost six members of the squad.

Only Mantis, Masai, and two more decent Daywalkers were left running for their lives with bodies painted red in wounds and yellow in spiders' juices.

"Keep running! There is only one kilometer left!" Mantis shouted femininely, "I am not dying in this shithole! And so are you!"

Masai and the other two showed looks of great resolve as they sprinted with everything they had even when their legs were beseeching for rest.

After everything they went through, the only thing keeping them standing was their adrenaline and hope that the borders' were just around the corner.

While they recognized that no help awaited them behind the borders of the forest, they knew that the spiders must have been ordered to remain in the vicinity of the forest.

They weren't certain about it, but it was their only salvation.

Alas, in this new cruel and merciless era, life rarely smiled upon the weak...

"Is that...no, no, it can't be..."

Mantis was the first to come to a full stop the moment his illumination strips landed on the massive network of stinky liquid, stretching for as long as his eyes could see in the dark.

"We are so doomed..."

Masai murmured with a despairing smile as he stood next to Mantis. His ears picked up on the terrifying rustling sounds of spiders behind them.

"We can't even burn out a path, we have wasted all of our totems..."

Their situation could only be described by the infamous quote by Tariq ibn-Ziyad, *The sea is behind you and the enemy is in front.*

'Screw this, I have tried my best to be the hero...They are unsavable, and the authorities will see it once an investigation launches.'

While his party already lost hope, knowing that the only way to get past the web was to burn it with their Assault totems, Mantis wasn't in the same boat as them.

If he wanted, he could easily survive by using a tramp card that no one knew of. He just didn't want to ditch them so fast and be held accountable back in the city.

'Do what you have to do, but make it seem like you truly tried your best until the very end.' Ti'nna backed him up inwardly.

'Smart.'

Mantis turned to face the incoming spiders' army and extended his weapon at them with a stern expression.

"As your leader, it's my duty to give it my all and protect you until my dying breath. Run alongside the web and try to summon your mounts, I will use everything in my powers to buy you time."

"Mantis..."

Masai and the rest of the squad were left stunned for a moment, not expecting such a heroic action from him. As Daywalkers, they were used to everyone being selfish and seeking their own benefits.

It was like the moment a Daywalker was born, he would start prioritizing only himself and his contracted nightcrawler.

It was an understandable development when considering their partnership would last for a lifetime unless they reached their defined goal.

"STOP ADMIRING ME AND GO!"

Mantis yelled one last time and then charged toward the incoming wall of spiders with his hand inside his backpack.

The moment he gripped his tramp card, which was in the shape of a peculiar wooden symbol, he started murmuring the incantation under his breath.

But, just as he reached the last part, a sudden lethargic voice resounded near his ear akin to being hand-delivered by the wind.

"I suggest you stand back."

'Is that?'

Mantis knitted his eyebrows in confusion, recognizing the voice to belong to the smoker guard standing at the outpost's gate. His deadpan voice was stuck in his mind after he checked his giant army's IDs one by one.

Before he could think too much about this development, the same voice echoed around the area.

"Zephyrian Wind Arts: Roaring Tornado."

Whoosh!!!

Out of nowhere, a powerful wind draft manifested hundreds of meters away from Mantis and turned into a gigantic tornado, razing anything in its path!

Mantis and the rest of his squad were left gaping at the sight of the terrifying spiders' army hurled into the sky, devoured by the charging tornado!

If it wasn't for the trees, dirt, and other picked-up objects, they wouldn't even be able to see the tornado under this moonless night!

In a few moments at best, the roaring tornado died out and everything it ate was dropped from hundreds of meters, killing any surviving spiders.

"Don't go anywhere...The rescue squads are on the way."

Hearing the same lethargic voice from above, everyone lifted their heads and saw only a small smoke cloud left behind...

Mantis returned to his squad and after trading a few dazed glances, one of them finally stuttered, "Zephyrian Wind Arts...Only one man is infamous for such unique arts."

"It's definitely him! It's Sir Feng Ling!" Masai laughed loudly in excitement, "We are saved!!"

Sir Feng Ling earned a massive following in Heliodor's region as he was considered almost a superstar. All due to him being one of the few youngest Daywalkers to become a **Solarbound Daywalker** at the mere age of twenty-three.

Solarbound Daywalkers had managed to successfully evolve their Nightcrawlers to Tier 5, which was more than enough to earn them a seat at the big boys' table in Heliodor's region.

Alas, a decade later Sir Feng Ling was still stuck at the same stage, which had brought down his hype levels immensely.

The once believed a generational talent that would have helped Heliodor's Region advance and compete against much more powerful regions was nowhere near his prime glory.

No one knew what happened exactly for such a dramatic fall of grace to occur, but he was still well respected among the commoners and Daywalkers alike.

"I can't believe it...Sir Feng Ling was working as an undercover outpost guard?" Mantis murmured, "Did he know about this trap beforehand?"

"Who cares, now he is here, nothing will touch us, not even the Lurker Queen. So, how about we go farm the spiders' crystallized seeds?" Masai grinned as he looked at the depth of the forest.

Upon hearing this, everyone's eyes lit up, and their tiredness disappeared immediately. Even their wounds didn't hurt anymore.

"Let's go quickly before the rescuers arrive and collect them."

Mantis turned around and was the first to sprint towards the tornado's destructive aftermath.

"Mantis, for what you did back there, I will give you 50% of all crystallized seeds I collect."

"Me too, I seriously owe you my life."

"I will rally everything to our agency and recommend you for this year's promotion to a senior captain's position."

"Haha, you have my vote too, and my friends' votes!"

"You guys...I just did what any captain will do."

As they kept admiring and glazing Mantis, all he could do was laugh it off and act humble. If they knew that he was planning on ditching them from the very beginning, their reaction would have been totally different.

'Hehe, they weren't lying when they said that good karma finds good people.' Mantis grinned cheerily, enjoying their attention and blessings.

Chapter 28 - A Playful Gag.

All Ti'nnu could do was roll her eyes at his shamelessness, realizing day by day, that some humans were just as bad as nightcrawlers if not worse.

The fact that Mantis, Masai, and the others' first idea after surviving this ordeal wasn't to check on the rest of the Daywalkers, but to satisfy their greed was enough proof of their innate depravity.

Even if they do have no energy to fight or move, they could have at least shown some worry for the others, but no...Their faces displayed nothing but utter glee as they kept farming the hundreds of spiders' crystallized seeds.

What's worse? Every time Feng Ling found some survivors and saved them, they acted in the same manner...

Feng Ling saw their actions and seemed unbothered, already used to much worse displays of corruption from both humans and nightcrawlers.

He had already accepted one solid fact...Once a human hung around with a nightcrawler for too long, even if he was one of the kindest and purest beings in the world, he was bound to be twisted sooner or later...

As they say: one's character was seen by the surrounding entourage.

What would one expect from Daywalkers to become when their souls get linked with ruthless and evil beings at a young age; an age when they were most impressionable?

For now, Feng Ling focused on finding as many survivors as possible and specifically, Levi!

He knew that Levi had gone a day earlier with Shia, which drove him to head into the center of the forest.

When he arrived at the ruined Shadow Castle nest, his piercing dark eye spotted a tiny gleam on top of the umbrella's shaft.

He swiftly appeared on top of the shaft and reached out with his hand, picking up the silver jamming device.

'As expected, the signal was being jammed.' He thought as he scanned it for a moment and then placed it in his pocket.

'You won't deactivate it?' Mao inquired from on top of his shoulder.

'No, it's too bothersome.' Feng Ling replied expressionlessly.

'Figured so.' Mao chuckled, anticipating his answer.

She knew that her partner hated nothing more than his peace being disturbed by meaningless chatter or bureaucracy.

If he were to turn off the device, his Neuralens would be assaulted by hundreds of messages if not more after calling a purple emergency.

He preferred dealing with this matter on his own terms instead of listening to their meaningless orders.

If he was one for respecting orders, he wouldn't have been sent to this outpost as a disciplinary punishment.

'Mao, do you hear that?'

Suddenly, Feng Ling's ears picked up on a peculiar faint noise in the distance. As a wind specialist, he was able to command the wind to highlight any strange noises in a massive radius.

He used this innate ability to locate the alive Daywalkers as their battles were making too much noise relative to the silence in the forest.

'Yes, it resembles the noise of trees falling down.' Mao replied, her ears twitching.

With no more questions asked, Feng Ling chased after the faint noise until everything suddenly went silent...Even the creepy rustling noise of spiders disappeared, puzzling Feng Ling and his partner.

"Something weird going on."

Feng Ling narrowed his eyes and continued on the path of the last noise he heard...A couple of minutes later, he came to a sudden halt, his eyes landing on a shimmering dome of light amidst a horde of spider corpses.

'Grade A Solar Dome...Must be belonging to Morningstar's daughter.'" Mao remarked.

Feng Ling nodded as he looked deeper, finding the fallen Shia's party within it. Soon, he appeared next to the barrier and scanned everyone's vitals with a single glance.

When he confirmed that all of them had steady heartbeats and no life-threatening injuries, he let out a sigh of relief.

He couldn't care less about Shia and the other Daywalkers as he firmly believed that Daywalkers had a responsibility to protect themselves at all times. But Levi and Arthur were still helpless civilians.

Plus, he kinda had a sensitive side for kids who lost their parents at an early age.

"Poor cuties, they must have passed out from exhaustion." Mao commented.

Feng Ling agreed and left them be, knowing that it was best to remain within the Solar dome since it was healing their wounds and helping them recover faster.

As he looked around him and noticed Nel'Vess' corpse lying under a tree, he blinked next to him and kicked the tree away.

When he saw how he died, his pupils and Mao's thinned in bafflement.

Mao jumped on top of Nel'Vess' stomach and removed his hands from his neck easily.

Seeing the tight marks and shattered neck bone made her exclaim, "He must be a Tier 3 nightcrawler, yet he really killed himself, and his expression screams of not knowing why."

"Is it the Queen Spider?" Feng Ling asked, knowing that it was too far-fetched.

"Impossible, Queen Spiders will never kill their own children unless their survival is threatened, and they were ordered to." Mao tapped on Nel'Vess' chest, "As for him? Only a powerful mind control ability or Tier 7 and above nightcrawlers' authority is high enough to make him kill himself."

"Are you suggesting..."

"I am not suggesting anything; the clues are." Mao replied with a stern tone as she returned on top of his shoulder, "We should move with caution, a monster might be hidden in the forest."

"I doubt he is still around if there is truly one."

Feng Ling shook his head, understanding that if a Tier 7 nightcrawler were still in the forest, they wouldn't be chatting.

"The fact that only spiders and nightcrawlers had self-inflicted wounds implies that the target might be the Lurker Spider Queen," Feng Ling said.

"You mean she is already dead?" Mao asked.

"We are about to find out."

Feng Ling relied on the same innate ability to find out the path leading to the nest, understanding that this many spiders popping out in the middle of the forest entailed one thing...A massive underground network.

Within moments, he caught a faint breeze leading into the underground. Following it from the surface, Feng Ling soon found himself several kilometers away from the forest.

'It's here.'

Feng Ling tapped his feet on the hardened ground while looking around him, seeing nothing but a desolate wasteland and no entrance to the underground.

'Are you going to dig a path?'

'Yes.'

'I am down to stretch my limbs.' Mao said as she stretched above his shoulder, purring cutely. Then, she transformed into the black saber, landing on Feng Ling's hand.

Feng Ling closed his eyes and released a cold exhale as he tightened his grasp on the saber. While his eyes were closed, the sight before him was of many windy auras connected tens of meters under his feet, creating a massive, chaotic underground space.

Any disturbance to the wind appeared as a dark area, allowing him to see what was going on underneath, even if it wasn't perfect.

When the entire underground cave was painted in his mind, he couldn't help but knit his eyebrows in confusion.

'What?'

'Check for yourself.'

Mao tapped into his wind vision and found out that the anticipated scene of hundreds of spiders moving around was nowhere to be found.

It was deathly silent with no movement whatsoever.

'Don't tell me?'

Feng Ling's response came as an action. He pointed the tip of the saber on the ground and then murmured, "Zephyrian Wind Arts: Piercing Tornado."

Whoosh!

The still wind gathered tightly around his saber, swirling at the tip with precise control until it began to emit a faint glow. The excess wind funneled toward the hilt, forming a small but fierce tornado.

Feng Ling leapt into the air and positioned himself like a spear, letting the wind surge around his body as he spun rapidly.

In a flash, the saber drilled into the ground, cutting through everything in its path until he burst out on the other side.

Without hesitation, he unleashed the full force of the swirling tornado he'd built up.

Boom!

The wind exploded into a thunderous shockwave, pushing away everything and anything around him.

Only then did Feng Ling's eyes scan around with great vigilance, anticipating an attack from the Spider Queen.

However, when his eyes saw the scene before him, they couldn't help but widen in shock.

'What the...' Even Mao's slits enlarged from the saber in disbelief.

Their reaction was understandable before the ludicrousness they were witnessing.

The terrifying Lurker Spider Queen that would make anyone piss their pants in fright from a single glance was sliced up in pieces and hung from her own web. The head, the torso, the abdomen, the limbs.

Everything was hung up by a singular string of web in various positions, and each cut was clean like it was made by an artistic surgeon.

As for its children? They were nowhere to be found. Only small stains of blood were seen marked on the walls and the ground around their mother.

'How terrifying...A tier 5 Lurker getting dealt with like this...' Mao muttered, 'There were no signs of a fight, just a pure one-handed slaughter.'

'Slaughter?' Feng Ling shook his head as he flew to the bottom of the cave, standing in front of this horrifying artistic work.

The moment he faced it with Mao from the bottom, his eyes reflected a new scene. The hung-up limbs and other body parts lined up perfectly, creating an image of a flipped middle finger with the Queen's head as the tip of the middle finger.

As Feng Ling and Mao gazed at the horror painted on the Queen Spider's eight eyes, they could only imagine what kind of beast she faced.

"This is nothing but a playful gag to him..." Feng Ling uttered, his voice calm, but carried a faint hint of dread.

Even he, realized that maybe it was for the best to never meet this monster...

Chapter 29 - Levi's Inked Tattoo.

The Next Morning...

Inside a luxurious clean suit with glass windows peeking over Tamara's settlement, Levi was lying on a comfortable hospital bed. He was fully covered, only his head was being bathed under the warm rays of sunlight.

Meanwhile, Arthur was sleeping on a nearby couch, looking as uncomfortable as one could be. One leg was on the ground, another touching the wall, and half of his chest was spilling over the couch. Yet, he was still snoring soundly.

'Wake up, it's morning, we are wasting precious sunlight.'

'Levi, wake your ass up! You have been sleeping for fourteen hours straight.'

'LEVIII! LEEVIII!'

While Ash'Kral was shouting at the top of his lungs in Levi's mind, he was living in another stratosphere with the biggest adorable smile on his face.

At first sight, everyone could guess that he was having a very nice dream. Those kinds of dreams that no one would want to wake up from.

For an entire decade of being under constant harassment from nightcrawlers, this was the very first time Levi hadn't dreamt of a nightmare...All due to Ash'Kral protecting his dream from the invasion of any nightcrawler.

Levi had forgotten about everything in the real world and lived in a dream, where he was playing tag in the backyard with his little brother and father, while his mother was cooking them a warm meal in the kitchen.

The sky was blue, the sun was gentle, and life seemed quite simple...

Just any other common family, nothing special, nothing great. Just a day to day life of an average family.

Yet, this was Levi's eternal dream life...

A life he would give everything to have again, he wouldn't mind even if he was still blind. In his heart, the darkness would feel less sufferable if he had the company and love of his parents.

'Whatever, a difficult journey awaits him, might as well let him start it with what was stolen from him.'

As Ash'Kral gazed at Levi's peacefulness and saw what kind of dream he had, he didn't let his assholiness get the best of him for the first time. He could easily ruin his dream and wake him up, but he ended up closing his eye and leaving him be.

Fortunately, Levi's biological clock acted up the moment the clock hit 8 am.

The dream collapsed against his will and his conscious was returning to gaze at the infinite darkness. He was up, but no one could ever tell when he had scorched marks for eyes.

Levi slowly sat up on the bed, sensing that it was different than the one in his home. His senses were alerted and he started reaching out with his hands, touching everything in sight.

When he touched the plastic tube attached to his wrist and the metallic short railing at the sides of the bed, he knew that he was in a hospital.

Soon, memories flooded his mind of everything that happened in the Harrowing Forest, leaving him overwhelmed for a few moments.

Then, he touched his face and murmured, "Am I really a Daywalker?"

"If you are still doubtful, reach out with your mind to your abdomen and try to feel your seed," Ash'Kral said with a faint smirk while floating in his line of spiritual sight.

Yet, Levi didn't even hear what he said. He kept looking at him in a daze for a couple of seconds, sizing him up and down.

Then, he broke the silence with a faint crackle that kept growing in volume until he was laughing his ass off while pointing at Ash'Kral.

His reaction was understandable when Ash'Kral's creepy and terrifying appearance was nowhere to be seen.

He was turned into a single floating eye with two small wings on its back and tiny cute feet on the bottom.

His grey leathery skin was changed to black fur and his singular horrific slit transformed into three differently colored slits crossing on the center. One was golden, one was black, and the last one was red.

He was as cute as Nightcrawler could be.

"Little f*cker, I knew I should have ruined your dream." Ash'Kral's single eyelid twitched in irritation, but it only made him look cuter.

"HAHAHAHAHAHA!! I can't! I can't!"

"Just keep laughing, we will see if you will laugh when I show you your tattoo." Ash'Kral smirked.

Levi ignored what he said and kept chuckling, waiting for this day for a very, very, long time. He was bullied by Ash'Kral daily, always being his number one hater. It was finally time for his payback and Levi wasn't going to hold back.

"You look like a disabled peanut when you blink." He roasted him.

"Haha, real funny." Ash'Kral sneered annoyedly.

"Wait, I have a better one." Levi chuckled, "Those wings aren't for flying; they're just there to distract from the rest of you."

"..." Ash'Kral was silenced, wanting to laugh but it was at his own expense.

"Oh, oh! I have another one...You look like a fuzzy tennis ball with an identity crisis."

Levi laughed while slapping the bed, if he had eyes, tears would already be pouring akin to Niagra Falls.

"Done yet?"

"Please just one more."

"No."

"Please, I promise it's good."

"How annoying...Fine."

Seeing his beseeching excited expression, Ash'Kral waved his wing akin to a hand, gesturing for him to go for it.

"You're the bat version of a 'work in progress', except the progress stopped halfway. Hahahaha!"

"Okay, that's a good one, I give you that." Ash'Kral chuckled, incapable of keeping it serious anymore.

"Just what happened to you?" Levi asked amidst his dying laughter.

"This is my starting Tier 1 appearance. Unlike most nightcrawlers, my end appearance depends on the chosen evolutionary path." Ash'Kral clarified casually while sitting on top of Levi's shoulder.

In other words, the version Levi always interacted with wasn't his permanent appearance. It might be his original appearance, but it still could be altered.

Now, that he was restarting his evolutionary journey again, he could end up looking vastly different or quite similar depending on Levi's choices.

"Did it really have to be this damn cute? Both of us will get bullied now." Levi chuckled, "A blind kid contracted with a singular eye bat...Two entities and still we are three eyes short, how ironic."

"Don't worry, one eye is all we need to steamroll them," Ash'Kral smirked.

"I hope so." Levi's expression suddenly turned serious as he asked telepathically, 'What happened after I went down? Is my brother okay?'

'He is fine.' Ash'Kral shared, 'He is sleeping on the couch nearby.'

'Good, leave him be.' He sighed in relief.

After everything that happened, he was just glad that both of them made it out alive. This situation had taught him a grave lesson that just because he planned ahead, it didn't mean that everything would go based on the script...Especially, when the wastelands were involved.

'What about the others? How were we saved? They must have already seen the inked stamp on my body.' Levi frowned, 'They must be waiting for me to wake up and question me about the contract details.'

'Your friends are fine and no one has seen your inked tattoo.' Ash'Kral scoffed, 'Do you think this is an amateur hour? I have already hidden your tattoo.'

'For real? That's possible?' Levi raised an eyebrow in surprise.

He understood that Daywalkers/Sleepwalkers inked tattoos were permanent inked marks that could be removed only once the contract term concluded.

'Before I was stripped of my powers, I used them to cast a permanent veil on it. The only way to bring it to light is to use an incantation.'

'Good thinking.' Levi nodded in appreciation, 'I am sure the authorities are preparing to investigate and interrogate every single one of us. The death toll of Daywalkers is just too much.'

As Levi mentioned, all of the Daywalkers saved in the Harrowing Forest were placed in this hospital, awaiting the dust to settle before starting the investigation.

When it came to such incidents, it was almost guaranteed that a Sleepwalker or a Fallen Daywalker to be involved...The fact that a jamming device was found made it even more certain.

'What's the incantation and where did you ink the tattoo exactly?' Levi returned to the inked tattoo subject after touching his entire body and failing to feel its presence.

Every person had the tattoo inked in a different place on their bodies, depending on their choice. But, since Levi's integration experience was vastly different and filled with agony, the last thing on his mind was the tattoo's placement.

Ash'Kral told him about the incantation, which wasn't anything complicated or long. As for its placement, he merely showed his known mischievous grin.

'What did you do...' Levi felt his blood turn cold at Ash'Kral's silence.

Seeing that he wasn't answering, Levi swiftly murmured the incantation, "By ink and skin, reveal within, Let hidden marks now shine again."

The moment he finished, he felt a sudden burning sensation right above his buttcheeks.

"No, you wouldn't..."

Levi reached out with a shaking hand towards his tailbone with a mortified expression. Alas, against his hopes, his fingers caressed the cold black ink.

"You gave me a tramp stamp..." Levi covered his ashamed face with one hand while continuing to feel the tattoo with the other, "You dirty bastard, this is too much."

"What are you talking about? That's the finest location known in our Shadow dimension." Ash'Kral showed a wronged look, "Only royalties have the right to tattoo their tailbone."

"Really?"

"F*ck no, that's a tramp stamp through and through." Ash'Kral laughed mockingly, getting his revenge over the previous roasts.

Levi swiftly used the incantation to hide the tattoo, not wanting to think about it for even another second...Out of sight, out of mind.

'It's fine, it's fine, no one will see it...' Levi sighed helplessly.

'I don't care about the others.' Ash'Kral grinned, 'All it matters is that I know of it. You will never win an argument with me again, hear that, trampy?'

'Once an asshole, always an asshole.' Levi's eyebrows twitched.

Realizing that there was no winning against Ash'Kral's foolery, Levi decided to switch the subject by asking him about what he meant earlier concerning the seed.

He had yet to see what it was and he was a bit concerned, especially when the integration process almost fried him alive.

'First, reach out with your spiritual vision and see what it is.' Ash'Kral said, 'It should be much easier for you compared to other newbies.'

Considering that Levi had been using his spiritual vision for an entire decade each minute of the day, this was nothing to him.

As expected, the moment he focused on his abdomen, he was startled to see an elastic sphere filled with a peculiar white liquid. There were three seeds inside of it orbiting each other over and over again with a sense of chaoticness.

There was a pitch-black seed that resembled a black hole. A blinding bright seed that appeared as a minimized star. Lastly, a crimson seed that was pulsing nonstop.

As for the Shadowlife seed that Levi used to read about and was waiting his entire life to own, it was nowhere to be seen.

'What is this?' Levi asked, having no idea how he was supposed to react.

'Settle down and open your mind.' Ash'Kral advised calmly, 'I am not going to repeat myself, so focus.'

Hearing this, Levi locked in.

'First, I have to ask.' Ash'Kral shared, 'Have you ever heard of the cosmic theory 'A Three-Body Problem?'

Chapter 30 - A Three Body Problem Seed.

'A Three-Body Problem?' Levi raised an eyebrow in confusion, 'I think I have read about it briefly in one of my mother's physics textbooks. What does it have to do with those seeds?'

Levi knew that The **Three-Body Problem** was a classic problem in physics and celestial mechanics that involved predicting the motion of three celestial bodies (such as stars, planets, or moons) that were influenced by each other's gravitational forces.

Unlike the two-body problem, which had a clear and straightforward solution, the three-body problem was much more complex and almost always chaotic, making it nearly impossible to figure out the exact calculations and predictions of the stars' movement.

'Everything.' Ash'Kral uttered calmly, 'While you don't need to solve the problem and predict the movement of those seeds, you have to create a perfect balance amongst them as you feed and grow each one separately.'

'Your seed is the coalition of three unique alpha seeds, each one desiring to lead and own the full rights of the host. If you dare to give more attention to one seed, the other two will rebel against you and show you a fate worse than death.'

'However, if you try to play it smart and give each seed the same amount of attention, their roots and branches will grow simultaneously throughout your soul. If they were to get entangled or get in each other's path, you would experience a fate worse than death again.'

'This is my eternal dilemma and how all of my past partners ended up dead, failing to find the best solution to deal with those three Divas without getting themselves killed.'

'Now, the torch has been passed to you.' Ash'Kral smiled innocently, 'I have high hopes for you, don't disappoint me.'

'...' Levi merely kept staring at him speechlessly.

He had listened to everything and at the same time, he didn't understand anything. It wasn't that he didn't understand what he meant, but how the f*ck did he get himself involved in such insanity.

Three seeds? A three-body problem? Perfect balance? Entangled roots and branches? Not in his wildest dreams did he expect to hear such terms when dealing with a seed.

He knew that Ash'Kral was a special entity, and he expected to deal with some unfamiliar matters, but he believed they would be related to a mutated Shadowlife seed or even another different seed, not freaking three seeds!

Just as Ash'Kral was about to carry on with his ludicrous explanation, Levi swiftly stopped him, his mind already failing to keep up.

'Wait, wait, wait, I think you have skipped a whole damn lesson!' Levi exclaimed, 'What are those seeds? Where is your shadowlife seed? how did you even get three seeds in your body? How will this craziness work? I know one seed allows a Daywalker to embark on a single evolutionary path, does having three seeds mean I need to embark on three evolutionary paths simultaneously?'

Ash'Kral wasn't bothered by his questions as he was already used to having his partners lose their crap over his unique situation. He answered his questions one by one.

'First, I never had a Shadowlife seed in my life. I was born from the crimson seed, which I call the Nine Senses Seed.'

'Second, the other two seeds are called The Void Origin Seed and The Sun Origin Seed. You don't need to know how I got them.'

'Third, I might have been able to maintain all three seeds in my body, but the other two are considered dormant since I have no connection to darkness or light. That's why I have been seeking partners with such unique connections to activate all three seeds at once. You cutie are one of the few entities with the best connection to all three seeds.'

'Fourth, you will indeed embark on three different evolutionary paths. One related to dark energy, one related to light energy, one related to all known and unknown energies.'

'Each evolutionary path will result in us obtaining correspondent abilities and powers related to a seed.'

'Is everything clear?' Ash'Kral paused, allowing Levi to process everything.

Hearing his answers, Levi went silent, taking everything in and reanalyzing it. First, he understood that Daywalkers' standard evolutionary path consisted of nine ranks:

Starting with a Rookie Daywalker, Junior Daywalker, Pathfinder Daywalker...And ending with being an Eternal Daywalker.

The cultivation system might be complex in nature, but it was simple to understand. The Daywalkers must harness the absorbed sunlight into the seed, feeding it every single possible chance through direct sunlight, luminous snacks, growth totems, natural treasures, and any source of purified sunlight.

It was like watering a plant that never got tired or harmed from water...The goal was to help the seed grow into a Shadowlife Tree within the confines of the soul and body.

To reward the nightcrawler for helping the seed grow into its final form, it assisted him tap into his ultimate potential by accelerating his evolution.

It was a win-win-win situation.

The seed became a tree, the nightcrawler evolved into his final form, and the humans obtained strength, powers, and longevity that would have been deemed impossible before.

That's why the Shadowlife seed or any other type of seed seemed to have a will of its own.

The nightcrawlers were simply carriers, which forced them to seek out sunlight to evolve, but as citizens of the Shadow dimension, direct sunlight was their ultimate enemy.

A conundrum that could be solved only through possessing a human or another entity capable of absorbing direct sunlight.

On the other hand, we have Ash'Kral and his f*cked-up three-body problem seed. He didn't want to just help one seed grow to its final form, but all three seeds together, which would cause Levi to end up with three trees within his body.

All those trees had a will of their own and from his explanation, they didn't like sharing one bit.

'I kinda get the gist of it.' Levi held his chin thoughtfully, 'All early Daywalker ranks are separated into three stages; first, second, and third. To reach the first stage, one needs to hit a 5% target, and as a reward, we obtain the ability to shapeshift the nightcrawler into a permanent weapon and unlock the first random innate ability of the nightcrawler.'

'If I am using three seeds and each seed allows me to travel on a different evolutionary path, does that mean I need to hit the 5% target on each path to obtain three different abilities and three different weapon variants?'

'Yes, you catch on quick.' Ash'Kral nodded, 'You will be much slower than others when it comes to reaching the third stage and evolving me, but you will be obtaining three times the rewards on each rank.'

'Also, the Daywalkers had two weapon choices, one unlocked at the start and the other called awakened weapon in the middle of the evolutionary path.' Ash'Kral smirked, 'My seeds are different. You will have three weapon choices, one at the start, one in the middle, and one near the end. Since you have three seeds, it means you will possess nine weapon variations at your peak.'

'No one in the history of Daywalkers could reach this number.'

Levi was left dumbfounded at the insane number of variations, knowing that just possessing three weapon variation was too much to ask for.

After all, each weapon needed to be mastered as it defined a unique fighting style that depended on the unlocked innate abilities and specially the learned arts techniques.

Nine variations? It was a bit overwhelming.

'Don't overthink it boy, you should feel delighted if you unlocked your first awakened weapons.' Ash'Kral said.

Felix felt his heart skip a beat, realizing that if he were to unlock his awakened weapons, it implied that he had already helped the seeds grow into young trees.

At that time, he would have three young trees, and he could already imagine the shambles of roots and branches entangled.

'Ah, this sounds like it's gonna be an agonizing experience.' Levi smiled wryly.

'Only if you allow it to be.' Ash'Kral cheered him on, 'I will help you in the early stages, but as we reach the middle, we will have to figure out a solution to deal with the three-body problem and commit to it.'

'Is this how your past partners have done things?' Levi asked, 'How far did they reach?'

'My latest partner made it to Warden Daywalker and was stuck in it for more than a decade. In the end, he couldn't deal with the chronic pain of the young trees' roots and killed himself.'

'...' Levi went quiet for a second and then asked, 'Isn't Warden Daywalker the 4th rank?'

'Yes.'

'You are telling me your best partner out of the dozens reached his limit at the 4th rank.'

'Yes.'

'He committed suicide from the chronic pain?'

'Yes.'

Levi lifted his head and remained staring at the infinite darkness in silence. After a few moments, he inquired with a bitter smile, 'How screwed am I?'

'Well, objectively 99%.' Ash'Kral showed an encouraging smile, 'But, for some reason, I feel we will pull it off. You just have to remain positive and think of it as you having a whole 1% to beat the odds.'

'Are you f*cking with me?' Levi glared at him in vexation, realizing that he might have simply prolonged his death sentence.