

# Dungeon Diver: Stealing A Monster's Power

## Chapter 671

I watch the black cube that Ember called an amplifier pulse with yellow and white light, moving for the first time since I found it underground in its tomb.

The static noise of a telepathy channel between myself and the cube flickers in my mind, but the glow fades, and the channel severs less than a second later.

I yell at it as the temperature in the room rises, and the flaming attacks Redgrave throws at the ceiling wrap around the room's outside and come my way at the outer wall.

"Atom? What was that? Now would be the time to show yourself!"

I tap the cube with my outstretched sword, but it just bounces off and rotates in the opposite direction like before.

I grit my teeth and fly forward before the wall of incoming flames from above hits me, charging up my restored blood-bonded weapons again, wracking my brain for new ideas because whatever just happened with the amplifier isn't within my control.

My sudden movements snap Redgrave out of his manic dances, and his expression turns cold and focused once again.

A streak of divine flames rockets my way, so I do the only thing I can and form my hexagonal defenses again, swinging both my swords at full power to block his strike.

My only option is to block. His speed and raw True Core power are far stronger than my own. .

My perception and agility are my only advantage, and all that's good for is finding the optimal path to avoid a fatal blow.

Another shockwave of dark red and bright yellow flames erupts through the room's top as my defensive barrier shatters like glass, and both my swords are dug into by his sun-hot blade.

It's overwhelmingly powerful, like another True Core is grasped in his hands. I can't even use my appraisal skill to understand what the weapon is; it just looks and feels like another entity. If I didn't have to worry about it slicing me in half, I could probably counter and land a hit...

These thoughts race through my mind as the blast from our exchange sends me rocketing back again, slamming against the black wall just a few kilometers to the left of where I hit before.

It isn't any less painful when my vision blurs as I take the impact and hear Redgrave's echoing laughter in my mind again while he dances around the room, now weaving between the tallest pillar of artificial stone.

"Two hits and you're still alive? Now this is good!"

He yells, coming my way before I can fully heal my blades.

I jump off the wall, and in a flash of yellow light, he's curved around a black pillar to appear right beside me again.

The sun-hot blade rockets my way faster than I can even raise my blades to block. The half-formed hexagon of divine energy shatters, and I'm hit across the chest by a flaming crescent of fire.

I synchronize my air steps and convert the energy I would have used to imbue my swords into a defensive shield in front of my vitals, but I still can't move out of the way in time.

I'm sent flying across the entire 30-kilometer-long room again, slamming against multiple immovable pillars of stone, ping-ponging across the battlefield until I hit the other back wall.

My body feels numb and hot, as a massive yellow gash rips through my chest plate and opens a divine energy wound deep into my chest, torso, and left leg.

However, I'm still conscious enough to finish healing my blades and shake the ringing in my ears away.

Redgrave's laughter fills my ears again, and at the same time, I watch the originator cube pulse and blink even brighter than last time. The static telepathy link that almost formed before now opens, and I yell through it.

"Are you there?"

My perception watches the entire outside world go about their normal morning, and all the forces outside the tower have powered up and moved into battle formation, waiting for orders or for another force to make their move.

I take a deep breath and think, as there is still no response from the amplifier.

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There isn't even an intuitive feeling or pulse of a response back. The bright white and yellow glow from the cube just fades away to black again.

Redgrave's voice echoes through my ears, and I feel the divine injury on my chest burn with hot flames, as it isn't something that's going to be healed by simple self-regeneration.

"You survived that one too? I think Beckman was wrong about you! You're not weak at all! If we'd met decades earlier, maybe you could have joined the council."

He laughs even harder, weaving through the pillars of stone again, his yellow sword glowing bright, ready to attack.

My blades have healed, and I have time to position myself for a defensive move this time.

His words, paired with the images of hundreds of millions of innocent lives outside the tower, make an idea click in my head.

I lock eyes with the flaming man as his focused gaze returns, and I manage to receive his next attack with my hexagonal defense and my blades this time, but he still sends me flying to the far side of the room again.

While it hurts more than any injury I've ever taken before, my mind is partially elsewhere, opening up my Rising Emperor's Domain, using the instant communication perk to forcefully send a message to every single link of loyalty at my fingertips.

"If you feel your power has been borrowed, this is why. The battle has begun. I, The Flame Emperor, have started the fight to save this world. You may not believe me yet, or may not even want to, but I'm sending this message out so that all that I've done isn't in vain."

The throne's trials haven't even begun, and I'm already being thrown around and toyed with by an enemy who isn't even the main threat.

While I'm healing my blades and attempting not to draw any attention to myself until I'm ready to take another hit, Redgrave's manic laughter echoes through the room as he sends waves of fire at the ceiling again.

Next, I forcefully activate the [Spectate] perk on my Rising Emperor's Domain.

Usually, it would be used for surveillance or for me to give direct orders to subordinates, as using this skill gives me access to their visual and sensory feeds. I used it once

before to see through Abby and Maria's eyes after the B-Class exams. Smells and even feelings are transmitted through this link.

Instead of viewing through my link's eyes, I allow access for every single one of my links to watch through my own, creating a live pop-up feed of my every thought and move in the minds of over 17.7 million humans all over the 8 Great Regions and Dark Continent.

I yell aloud for all to hear through the link.

"If I die here, this world is in the hands of whoever kills me. I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure that doesn't happen. I still need your support!"

I lift my greater form's hands to form a defensive barrier and swing my blades while Redgrave turns my way and bellows out a yell.

"What are you babbling on about? This world was never yours! It's been mine! All mine! For centuries!"

His blade collides with mine again, carving chunks out of the blood-bonded weapons and sending me flying tens of kilometers with a blast of divine light.

As I slam against the wall, I see the amplifier glow again, but I ignore it, as the feeling of millions of eyes watching me takes precedence, and I want to take advantage of that attention while I have it.

I yell for all to hear.

"That's right! The Association has used us all! To put it simply, all the strongest nations in the world right now are fighting over an artifact that either means the end or salvation of the human race as we know it. I—"

My words are cut off again before I can heal my swords, so I have to take this attack head-on again, leaving another massive gash across my chest while Redgrave laughs and yells back.

"Oh, you must be talking to that dragon! What a shame, you're already delusional. I was getting excited that I would have even more time to play. It looks like your time is up, and you're right; the Hunter's Association is mine. The citizens of your 8 Great Regions and Dark Continent are nothing more than sacrifices for my ideal world."

He laughs again, sending divine flames at the ceiling while flying my way and yelling again.

"You know what? They're even more insignificant than that. When I control the throne, I will make your lands and everyone in them burn to ash just to celebrate! You think you

can protect them? They are all my people; their lives are mine. Today, The Flame Emperor dies, and I, Redgrave, shall conquer the throne and become this world's god!"

He weaves between pillars of stone faster than ever before, and I don't have the time to heal my blades while simultaneously dealing with the second near-fatal gash on my chest.

The wide, crazy eyes of the red-haired man come into full view as his greater form swings at me with the bright blade shining hot with a True Core's light.

I kick myself off the wall anyway and swing both my damaged blades at the larger-than-life divine flame user coming at me.

I have no way of dodging, and my swords can't handle another hit.

Still, I block, twisting my body to make the odds of my survival as high as possible.

Redgrave's sword swings across his body at me, and I feel the millions of eyes peering through mine.

Many still don't grasp the enormity of this situation at all, but every moment that passes, more begin to understand that today is not just like any other day.

As the yellow blade shatters my hexagonal barrier, instead of making contact with my blades, it collides with the bright yellow cube that rotates around me; and the eruption of gravity waves and static noise that follows makes all past collisions pale in comparison.

Even the flames of the hound and Ember down below us are extinguished and blown away by the blast of energy. I'm sent flying backward from the absurdity of the shockwave's force.

As my back slams against the wall like many times before, I grin this time while coughing up blood because across the room, Redgrave's eyes are wide open as he too makes impact with a pillar of rock, unable to control the momentum that pushed him back.

I feel both my blades finally heal back up to their natural state, but the amplifier that usually rotates around my body now stands still between the tips of both swords.

My craftsmanship skill instinctively pulls at my consciousness, and my True Core pours threads into the two blades as I see a yellow system message hover over all three items.

[Craft Soul Weapon]

[YES][NO]

## Chapter 672

17,742,991 people simultaneously receive a notification on their status and a gentle pull at the back of their consciousness, connecting them to a live video and sensory feed of what is happening inside the black tower at the center of the Dark Continent.

Some wake up with a lifelike movie playing in the back of their mind, unaware of what the link of loyalty they made on a whim for an extra stat boost was, but now they're beginning to see the whole picture.

Others are at a family breakfast table, or out and about in the streets on their way to work, and now almost 1 in every 3 people see this live feed pop up in their mind's eye.

The major cities in the 8 great regions and Dark Continent all stand still for a moment in time as the raw emotions and 360 degree view of the battle scene before them is shared.

Those that do not share the link begin asking questions and wonder what they're missing out on, as it seems mass hysteria has captured the nation.

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Even surrounding the black tower, all of the Crimson Army and Inner Circle receive this link as they all stand on guard with bated breath, waiting for their enemies to make a move.

Now, they too see what is happening within the tower.

The sudden jolt in aura and movement from the Crimson Army prompts the Demonic Forces to act.

The two strongest True Core Generals stand beside each other. One stands 7m tall with a long black spear in hand that matches the obsidian gloss of his horns.

The other, with shimmering bronze horns, standing an identical height of 7m with daggers all over his waist, speaks up to his fellow True Core.

"The New Lord has entered the throne. The Vermillion Empire has grown its reach by another world. Today will be a great day; our reputation in the 5 Great Families shall rise."

The black-horned True Core nods, staring at the Crimson Army and focusing on Raven.

"Yes, but we must do our job on the outside while our Lord secures the throne. That force has a very strong True Core of their own."

The bronze-horned dagger wielder stares at the massive forces of the Central Association, as they have about half a dozen mid-level yellow cores.

"Call me if your squad needs backup. The two groups that came from a foreign land won't take long. Remember, our orders were to keep the strong in line and only kill them if they're going to be a threat in the future or uncooperative."

The black-horned spear wielder grins.

"It won't be a problem. I can always unseal the Vermillion Bloodline if I'm in a bind."

Both Head Demon Generals erupt with the full power of their True Core's aura and give orders to the remaining 4 High-Level Yellow Cored Generals, who yell out orders to their lower ranks one by one. [search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.](#)

The forces split into two groups and move out to subjugate the human race.

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Meanwhile, inside the throne, yellow text hovers before my eyes in front of my two swords and the bright glowing originator artifact that just blocked Redgrave's sword.

[Craft Soul Weapon]

[YES][NO]

Past my blades, I see Redgrave shaking himself out of the impact he's made with the rock about 15 kilometers away, and hear an angry, rage-filled yell come out of him that sends ripples of divine energy pulsing through the entire room.

I know I have to act fast, but I've never heard of this term 'Soul Weapon' before.

Both of my blades are selected as the base material within my Mythic Grade craftsmanship interface, but there are no external popups explaining what this craft will do.

The Amplifier is selected as the power source, similar to if I were to use an element stone with a normal craft.

However, I can feel my True Core pouring energy into this entire process, similar to using mana crystals as a catalyst for a craft.

It all seems far above the capabilities a simple skill like craftsmanship should be able to do, but just like the time I exposed myself to large amounts of Green Divine threads and my body and the system itself began to mutate as a result of it; this feels just the same.

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I need something to bring my abilities to the next level, and my current weapons can't handle the abuse they've been taking much longer. Any more of this and they could take on divine energy wounds that need far longer to heal or, in the worst case scenario, permanently break.

As Redgrave's angry yells cease and his gaze turns to me again, I press [YES] without delaying any longer.

The red and black blades begin to fill with energy from my True Core, saturating them far more than they ever have in battle, beyond their limits, while the yellow cube floats closer to the center between the blades.

I feel the swords begin to pull toward the cube between them with a force of gravity of their own, and I instinctively let go while divine threads continue to flood out from my fingertips to power the process taking place.

The two blades begin to spin around the cube and shine brighter and brighter, giving off the shine and gravity signature of a newly forming True Core.

I watch in awe as they spin faster, getting closer together, while Redgrave kicks off the stone structure at the back of the room to stop whatever I'm doing and attempt to end this fight.

Shockwaves erupt from the bottom of the room as well, as Ember fends off the bloodhound relentlessly, sending flames his way.

The two rotating swords spin so fast and shine so bright, it's hard to see where each one is, and I can't even see the exact location of the originator artifact. I can only make a guess based on the dense center of gravity pulling this craft together.

Redgrave yells at the top of his lungs while swinging his sword across his body my way.

"This is it! You're finished! Not only am I going to obliterate the Eight Great Regions and Dark Continent, I'll slaughter every one of those divine-cored allies you've been nurturing below the Crimson City. Beckman wanted to keep them as farming slaves, but



I'll give them a fate worse than that because you scratched my new armor against that rock!"

His laugh and crazed stare return as he gets up close again, and at the same time, a pulse of incredibly dense divine energy and dark red energy explodes out from the center of the three objects that I set out to merge.

My reflexes take over, as there's only a fraction of a second to spare.

I jump off the wall and grab the object from within the aura of divine energy, and swing it across my body while positioning myself to receive the least lethal strike if all still fails.

However, my safety measures aren't necessary.

Both of my hands grasp around a glossy dark red longsword. Its color changes like it's alive, shifting from black to red to yellow to even white as my True Core instantly synchronizes with the blade in my hand as if it's an extension of my own body.

My system interface picks up a glimpse of its new status reading, stored in my subconscious.

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Divine Emperor's Soul Sword [Soul Bonded][Evolution Attribute: Lv. 0][Fire Affinity][Dark Affinity][+2769% Strength][+2518% Mental Strength][+2502% Speed][+2240% Agility][+2149% Defense]

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It collides with the hot yellow blade that Redgrave wields, and we're both trapped in mid-air with equal force.

The eruption of raw red and yellow flames intertwined with gravity waves that comes off it is even more brutal than our last exchange.

The old man's crazed gaze locks with mine, and when my sword withstands the blow of the attack, and a surge of hundreds of thousands of new links of loyalty's stats come flooding into my body, I have just the extra push I need to deflect the incoming strike.

I twist my body out of the way to swing again and counter with a slash that lands a gash across the massive greater form's chest.

We're both sent flying back again by the shockwave, but this time, I'm not injured at all.

It's my laugh that echoes through the room now, sending ripples of fear through the self-proclaimed strongest divine fire magic user in the world.

While the counter I sent his way hardly made it through his armor and only left a small scratch on his real skin, it is the first injury this man has felt in decades.

I yell back while jumping off the wall, amplifying my flame's heat, and letting more and more True Core's threads flood into the upgraded weapon in my grasp.

"I'm going to do a lot more than scratch that armor of yours! If you're one of the newest links that just joined the show, I thank you for the push. Today's series of battles have just begun."

Redgrave grits his teeth and holds his sword tight again, but doesn't build up enough momentum to properly block my incoming strike.

As our swords clash again, he's sent flying to the opposite corner of the room, as he's blocked my attack at an awkward angle, and his mind is shaken from the absurdity of my upgrade mid-fight.

Without having to waste time healing myself after every exchange, I immediately kick myself off the nearest rock structure and follow his flight path to send another strike his way with no mercy; going straight for the vitals as fast as I can.

There's another explosion of flames as he blocks me, still with superior overall strength on his side, but I position my strike to send him flying into the nearest rock structure. Then, spin around it to land another hit on one of his exposed legs, melting through his blood-bonded armor again, and leaving another small divine wound on his flesh.

Every few seconds, I feel more links of loyalty forming as a great surge of people not wanting to miss out on the odd shared phenomena spreads like wildfire.

Even so, in the pace that this battle is taking place, I still won't be stronger than my enemy before it's over.

I have to rely on the momentum I have now, and my superior agility and perception.

With a grin across my face, with eyes wide mimicking the crazed state of the man that threatened my life and everything I hold dear, I yell out again while sizing up my next strike.

"What was that? You said you'd do what to my inner circle? And what was it that you were going to do to the nations of people I've vowed to protect today?"

Redgrave is thrown back again as I hit him at an awkward angle, and I manage a secondary swing that rips through his chestplate again, leaving another gash.

There's no response from my taunt, as the old man's fiery, crazed, playful attitude is completely gone.

I land 7 more hits over the next half a minute, but this is over 20 exchanges, as it gets harder and harder to land the perfect shot.

His eyes show hints of fear and despair, but this emotion fades too. His aura grows more callous and his mind becomes more focused after each of our exchanges.

My instincts tell me I need to finish this fast, as the longer I put off landing a fatal hit, the more time this multi-century-old battle master will have to remember his prime and truly come out of retirement as he said he would...

## Chapter 673

Another dozen exchanges pass, and neither of us lands a single hit on the other.

Redgrave's advantage at the start, as I had a weaker set of weapons, has been nullified; and now, the element of surprise is no longer to my advantage as the divine flame user is fully focused and waiting for me to slip up.

Two massive divine energy wounds burn in my chest, while ten smaller slashes glow all over Redgrave.

All over this side of the world, more and more people are stopped in place, pausing their usual morning tasks to watch the movie playing in the back of their minds.

My understanding of the scenes playing out is transmitted to their subconscious minds, allowing them to receive a high level of perception of my surroundings.

Even if this wasn't an extreme life-or-death battle, the clarity with which I'm looking into my surroundings would already be jaw-dropping. Even the speed at which I'm processing changing variables is transferred to the viewers minds in a digestible manner.

The looks of awe and amazement on family members and friends prompt tens of thousands more links to rush in every few seconds, not wanting to miss out on the world-shaking event happening—or at the very least to be entertained.

The pairs of eyes watching me surpass 18 million, and rise with every exchange, adding more base stats to every strike I throw.

Not only this, but I become far more proficient with my new blade. It is longer, heavier, and sharper than any sword I've ever used before, but with every hit, I feel more confident throwing more deadly strikes.

Redgrave also falls into his own rhythm, digging deep into the depths of his mind to remember the old days when he was fighting to the top to become one of the three strongest figures in this world, even before it was connected to the system.

His calculated gaze grows sharper, and the energy pouring out of his core grows hotter and more precise.

Our rate of improvement feels equal, as both of us are raising the stakes after every exchange.

The old man's anger deep down grows, as he feels he should be the superior fighter by a long shot. It's masked well, but after another dozen clashes without either of us even landing a single hit on one another, his rage comes out, and he yells again... but not at me.

"Hey Mut! Ignore that overgrown lizard and help me take this imposter down. I have trials to complete, I can't be wasting my energy on this warmup."

A ripple of fear comes out in his yell as he looks down at the battle below, and I take advantage of his plea for help to land another light slash on his midsection.

I grin and kick off the air to follow the old man.

Down below, Ember shows off a toothy grin as well, realizing I've turned the battle around and put all of the odds in my favor.

The fiery hound that Ember has been trading equal blows with turns its gaze toward me, and its collar burns bright yellow, mimicking the True Core glow that Redgrave's sword gives off.

The flames that erupt from the monstrous hound's mouth are many times hotter and stronger than its past ones, and a yellow aura surrounds its body, showing off a greater energy form manifesting around it.

The massive wall of flames sent Ember's way is meant as a distraction as the bloodhound jumps upward toward me, attempting to keep me occupied while Redgrave gets a hold of himself to send a fatal blow my way.

However, Ember's words before the match began give me confidence that I can focus on my own fight.

He would take care of the pup, and I handle the old man.

I airstep forward without caring to defend against the approaching fiery dog at all.

My gaze and blade are completely focused on Redgrave as I land another hit on his side as he's off-guard again.

The reaction to my hit isn't the same, as his confident fiery attitude returns even while he's sent flying backward into the black wall.

His laughter and mocking tone echo throughout the room while I lunge toward him again, with the bloodhound approaching from my back at a fast rate.

"This is it, you can't dodge both of us! Your measly hits will be a reminder for me to keep my guard up when I climb the tower. I'll still feel these fresh scars when I watch your people burn."

This book was originally published on Royal Road. Check it out there for the real experience.

His eyes widen with his excited crazed stare as I swing my sword across my body, and the hound's open maw is aimed for my exposed back.

Right before its jaws clamp down on me to stop me from swinging at Redgrave, the yellow wall of flames from below that covered Ember pulses and ripples, then parts entirely.

A flash of light beams upward, and a massive dragon's set of claws covered in silver divine light makes contact with the throat of the fiery hound's greater form.

It's sliced through like butter, leaving bone-deep claw marks in its flesh and shattering the yellow collar around its neck.

Crimson blood explodes from the wound, and the greater form of the hound is broken while it's sent flying upward from the impact to smash against the red artificial sky above.

I continue my forward slash while Redgrave's excited gaze turns to fear, and he uses the last few milliseconds to move his sword in front of mine to try and block.

"Too Late."

I yell into his consciousness while twisting my body and completely avoiding his blade to land a direct hit on his right leg.

Without any proper preparation to block, other than the last-ditch effort with his sword, my attack slices cleanly through, crippling him on the spot.

The intensity of the clashing divine flames in the room incinerates the severed flesh before it even falls to the ground.

His murderous roar is horrific, but that doesn't deter me from kicking off the air again to land a counter and leave a deeper gash across his chest before we're both sent flying back.

His greater form allows him to create a phantom limb, so our battle isn't over just yet, but both of us know that was the deciding factor, and the rage-filled flames and incoherent yells he lets out like a kid throwing a tantrum say it all.

Ember soars upward with a single set of claws glowing silver with a calm expression on his face, while I rocket myself forward with the same precision and patience as any other attack and the slow grind continues.

Redgrave's excess energy is now allocated to forming an extra leg, while his mental state is broken again.

I land light hits almost every exchange, landing 34 more divine slashes all over his torso, back, and arms over the next 40 collisions.

Confusion, stress, and fear ripple out of the man that was on top of the world just minutes ago as my strength continues to rise, and his fatigue and blood loss become worse.

The fiery hound's amplifier of a collar has been shattered, and it has to rely on its True Core's strength alone.

Ember doesn't miss a single shot, toying with the pup, leaving claw marks all over its body while sending it flying into pillars and walls with no mercy for its pain-filled howls.

Redgrave's anger takes over, and he loses all focus while yelling out loud as he realizes his end is truly near.

"Beckman! You were wrong! You're never wrong! This isn't right! I'm the strongest!"

He sends waves of fire at the ceiling while his greater form grows and his tantrum gets louder.

I land an easy hit on his left shoulder, as he's not even blocking properly anymore, and slice it clean off, sending it to spiral downward and burn to nothingness in the flames while he yells even more.

"I'm the Strongest Divine Fire User! I can't die, it's impossible! I'll burn this entire world to ash to prove it! The prophecy, the man of flames will be the one to walk through the final door... It's me! This is a dream! This isn't happening—"

His yells are cut short again as I push myself off another nearby pillar and cleanly slice off his last remaining leg, then bounce off the closest wall and slice off the final defending sword-wielding arm without taking another breath.

My mind's eye watches Ember pin the flaming hound to the floor on the opposite side of the room and swipe his claws across its neck to decapitate it, finishing the final blow.

At the same time, while the glowing yellow sword falls to the floor with the defenseless man's burning limbs, I airstep off the air to look the delusional angry man in the eyes while plunging my sword forward into his chest.

Once I feel the Soul Sword pierce his True Core, I finally speak again.

"You were right, this was a good warm up. One down, three to go."

There's a final burst of yellow flames that erupts from Redgrave's greater form, but his mind has become too fractured, and his decades of prophecy driven fantasies of becoming a god have made him far too delusional to even accept the reality in front of him.

I shove my blade deeper into his core, shattering it, and thrusting upward to finish the kill.

His screams vibrate through my body, but I don't feel sorry even for a fraction of a second, as this quick death is a blessing compared to what he taunted he would do to my Empire.

Level-Up Notifications ring in my ears from both Ember's kill and mine. Plus, absorption pop-ups show in my mind's eye as an absurd amount of True Core threads is siphoned out of the greater energy form I've killed and enter my own.

I feel my core grow in size by over five times, and the amount of divine threads coursing through my body multiplies enough to finally fill out my entire greater form to handle the hundreds of millions of borrowed stats coursing through my veins.

[Level Up] x4638

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Fire Summoning

Upgrade: Supreme

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

MCP: 5,988,728,288,427,550

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Stat: Strength

Points: 9,941

[YES][NO]

I reach [Lv. 12,589] and press [YES] to accept an upgraded version of my fire magic, almost ten thousand strength stats, as well as a massive amount of mana control while the innate understanding of a new True Core ability flows into my mind.

Without even trying to activate it, the flames that surround my body become hotter and they're tethered with True Core threads with such ease it feels like the fire is made of divine energy, and mana isn't even their base anymore.

The room fills with flames as both my power and Ember's power instantly skyrocket, and all the remaining flesh and weak gear from our enemies is burned away.

The three eyes of the silver statue at the back of the room pulse with silver light again, and the massive pillars of stone and red sky of a battlefield start to shift and revert back to their black natural state.

The only thing left is the yellow blade Redgrave was wielding, fractured pieces of a collar, and a massive red burning firestone in place where the corpse of the hound was under Ember's claws.

I can feel my blade drawn toward all three of these items in an odd way, tugging at the back of my consciousness, wanting to consume them.

However, one last notification that I haven't touched yet still lingers at the back of my mind and keeps my attention.

[Rank Up]

[YES][NO]



## Chapter 674

I hover down to the ground as the artificial sky turns dark, and the pillars of stone mold back into the floor.

A bright Rank Up notification glows in my mind's eye, waiting to be accepted, while my Soul Sword feels the presence of three items drawing me closer to them.

One feeling is far more compelling, so I fly down to hover above Redgrave's still-bright yellow glowing sword, which gives off the heat of a True Core even when its wielder is dead.

A new system panel hovers between my blade and the glowing one on the ground as I descend.

[Consume]

[YES][NO]

When I press [YES] and the two artifacts touch, the yellow blade on the floor glows bright white, turning to silky yellow liquid before my eyes, then siphoning into the tip of my own sword.

I expected a dramatic light show and process like when the weapon was crafted, but it all happens extremely fast. The blade in my grasp gives off the feeling that it is still hungry, and a food source like that hardly quelled its appetite.

My Sword feels stronger already, but the ease with which it consumed another living weapon, and the fact that it is still sitting at [Lv. 0], makes me realize I've yet to comprehend the potential of the new weapon in my grasp.

This feeling of awe and wonder only grows as I walk over to the Supreme Grade Firestone densely packed with divine threads and immense power; it, too, is consumed in less than a second.

Even the pile of glowing yellow shards from the fiery hound's collar turns to liquid and is pulled into my blade without any light show or sense of satisfaction.

It's as if the blade was expecting to finally quench its thirst after days in the desert, but all it got was a single drop of water.

Power surges through the now vibrant red sword, but it's desperately craving another battle. The blade's status still reads [Lv. 0] even now, but I can feel that its strength has grown a considerable amount in the last few minutes.

Once the last drop from the collar disappears, the blade goes dormant, falling back to a solid black state; yet I sense the presence of a static connection through my body and mind as it continues watching through my eyes.

I let out a sigh and power down my greater form as the heat in the room dissipates, and Ember flies over, powering down his greater form as well.

We both stand in the center of the massive black room with nothing but the silver demon statue looking down at us.

The same ancient voice reverberates in my mind while silver text flashes before me.

[All Conditions Met. One Soul-Bonded Pair Remaining.]

[Would You Like To Start The Trials?]

[YES][NO]

It shimmers in a metallic silver font, wavering in the air.

When I look away, the text is locked above the statue's head, right in front of its array of nine arms.

Ember reads it too, then grins and looks over to me.

"We can wait as long as we need to before beginning the first trial. The third rank-up isn't always instant. It may take a few minutes if it's a big one. It's best we take the time to rank up now while we still have that luxury."

I nod and sit down on the empty floor, letting go of my soul sword, and it rotates around me in a dormant state without me having to exert any effort whatsoever.

Ember sits down in an identical position about 100 meters away, and I speak up, feeling over 18 million pairs of eyes still watching in shock after the massacre they just witnessed.

"As I said before, this is just the start of today's fight. The opponent I just defeated is likely to be my easiest win. I'm not going to be able to do this without your help. You can hear me, see my actions, even peer into my system notifications, and feel everything I'm feeling. I'm going to take a moment to rest and rank up; the only thing I ask of you is to spread the word. Whether it's for entertainment while watching the show, or you feel obligated to save this world together, tell a family member, send a transmission to a friend outside of the 8 Great Regions or Dark Continent. We'll need every link we can get."

Stolen from its rightful author, this tale is not meant to be on Amazon; report any sightings.

Then, I press [YES] to rank up. Instantly, a familiar white light washes over me.

Mana and divine energy cycle through my body, creating a warm and satisfying sensation all over.

It takes a few minutes, just as Ember said it would.

My calm resting state is broken by the sound of notifications in my mind.

[+10,000 Strength]

[+10,000 Mental Strength]

[+10,000 Speed]

[+10,000 Agility]

[+10,000 Defense]

[New Buff!] [Divine Elemental's Astral Form]

Once I open my eyes again, all of my fatigue is gone, and even the two divine energy wounds on my chest have almost completely healed.

I take a deep breath in and out while standing to my feet and opening my status to see a brand new buff.

My eyes shift over to Ember and I see he's received a new buff as well.

[Divine Dragon's Astral Form]

My eyebrows raise as my voice echoes through the empty room.

"What's an Astral form...? It looks like we both received one..."

He replies while staring up at the silver demonic statue.

"It's far rarer than a Greater Energy Form. I believe you met one while we were inside that purple construct. Rarely does more than one entity per planet receive a form like this. I've had one before... This room will be too confined to show off its full power, but it will certainly help us during these trials if we run into a problem. It will be very straining to use this while we're yellow cores, it won't be worth the fatigue and strain to even test it out..."

I grin, remembering the green serpent, cyan knights, and enormous Dark Blue Giant that I witnessed within that construct, and think of how strong I'd be with a form like that.

Then, my eyes track back down to the skill section of my status, and I see I have enough [PP] to upgrade a mythic-grade skill to the next rank.

I upgrade [Absorption] without much extra thought, and the [Mythic Grade] tag beside it turns to [Divine Grade].

My eyes skim over the section that shows my ability to now upgrade every single one of my current mythic-grade skills to Divine Grade after killing an entity with the same skill. Even my Superior Grade Elemental Skills can all be upgraded to Supreme Grade if I kill anything sharing that skill, no matter the grade.

Another textbox hovers at the bottom of the skill info, right above the [Upgrade] Option.

[Pair Skill For Additional Perks]

It shimmers in white and yellow divine light, while the rest of my status remains blue.

I press it, and the entire info sheet ripples with yellow threads, spreading throughout my status interface and turning the Absorption skill completely yellow.

A new text box where the pairing option sat before now shows up.

—

All new skills upgraded to [Divine Grade] or higher using Absorption will now create unique True Core abilities for the caster.

—

My eyes widen again. In the last few minutes since defeating Redgrave, my strength and abilities have grown an astronomical amount.

The overwhelming power that Demon from the Vermillion Family showed before I entered the tower is far less intimidating, and instead of uncertainty, the only emotion flowing through me as I look up at the silver statue is excitement to begin the trials ahead.

I smirk and grab my sword out from its rotation around me and press [YES] on the silver message in the sky.

The text above ripples and disappears, then new silver lettering forms and the ancient voice speaks again.

[Enter the trial area.]

A portion of the floor glows with silver light, right in front of the demonic statue at the back of the room.

The text fades, and both Ember and I fly forward, activating our Greater Forms with caution to enter the multi-kilometer wide circle before the massive silver Demon.

The circle stops glowing once we stand in the center of it, but a faint silver outline still shimmers, showing the borders as we stand in the middle, looking directly up at the towering silver masterpiece.

It speaks again.

[Rules of the Trials]

[Rule 1. You may leave any time you wish.]

As these words enter my consciousness, a floating silver textbox hovers in front of my eyes, tracking my vision.

[Leave the Trials]

[YES][NO]

I press [NO] and it fades away, but afterward I'm left in silence. The thought of the textbox wanders into my mind again, and it reappears. I press [NO] and it fades just like before, proving its point.

The voice returns.

[Rule 2. Death within the trials is final. Your body, energy, and property are forfeited to the Tower Master.]

This could have been assumed, but my mind wanders back to the time I was in Celia's construct again. Death within that pocket world was not final; entities that died were simply transported out. It seems this construct is different.

[Rule 3. The third and Final Trial will only begin once all participants have cleared the two below, have left the tower, or have died trying.]

This message conveys quite a lot of information, indicating there are three trials in total, and confirming that this third and final trial likely requires all remaining members within the tower present.

The Demon's confidence that we would settle things within the Tower makes far more sense now.

The room falls silent again as the silver text completely dissipates, but the silver energy quickly returns as the three eyes of the demon statue at the back of the room shine bright; though it doesn't completely blind me this time.

The silver light just pulses outward and ripples through both mine and Ember's bodies as if it's performing an appraisal.

The text paired with the voice returns.

[Trial 1: Body]

[Calculating Necessary Difficulty...]

The bright silver text that reads [Body] stays hovering over the Demon's head while all other text fades away.

Then, in the grasp of each of the Demon's hands, silver longswords start to form from left to right.

One by one all nine hands of the Demon form massive silver swords in their grasps.

[Difficulty Calculated: Trial 1: Round 1 of 9 Shall Commence.]

[Objective: Block The Incoming Strike.]

As this text fades, eight of the nine silver blades disappear, but one remains.

The Demon's head doesn't move, but I can feel its three silver glowing eyes staring deep within me.

Then, the kilometer-long arm holding the single massive silver blade comes swinging down toward us.

## Chapter 675

Ember's voice echoes through my mind as the silver blade comes down toward us.

"Block it. This first round shouldn't be difficult with the new power we've gained."

Despite these words, I can't sense the blade's true power. It is tens of times longer than my greater form's rendition of my soul weapon, yet I still act as if this is a deadly strike, putting almost everything I have into a block, even activating the hexagonal defensive array in front of my blade while swinging upward.

Ember grins and flies up to block with a clawed hand as well, but he doesn't even use the silver energy he did while attacking the fiery hound in our last fight.

When the city-sized blade crashes down to slam against my barrier and Ember's claw, I feel its immense pressure, but it stops with ease, not even making it a quarter of the way through my defenses.

A massive silver [3]... [2]... [1]... [0]... floats in the sky, and as the [0] dissipates, so does the entire sword pushing down on us.

The Demon's arm moves back upward into its dormant position, and new text appears.

[Round 2 of 9 Shall Commence.]

The same Demon's arm grows a new silver blade, and on the opposite side of the statue, a second silver blade forms right after.

The first sword that formed instantly flies downward, and Ember's voice sounds in my mind again, his tone a bit more serious than the last transmission.

"Brace for impact..."

My defenses from the last round haven't even dissipated, so I just imbue more divine energy to restore the hexagon and stare upward, ready for another strike.

That hit was strong, but really nothing I can't handle. Even if I didn't block it and took it straight on my chest, I doubt it would have left a mark larger than the first blow I took from Redgrave.

That being said, with my True Core being over five times stronger now, multiplying my absurd boost in stats even higher, it may have given me a new skewed perspective on what is really powerful or not.

Just minutes ago, I probably wouldn't have been able to block that sword without using my full power.

Still, in the back of my mind now, I question whether or not I'm overestimating these trials...

Maybe Redgrave really was the strongest of the big three, and I already fought the toughest battle today...

These brief thoughts are instantly discarded as the blade from above slices through over three-quarters of my hexagonal barrier, proving to be far more lethal than the first round.

Before I even piece this thought together, the second arm swings downward too, following a mirrored flight path and coming down on the exact pressure point to fuse with the first sword.

Together, they press downward and shatter my hexagonal barrier with ease, now clashing blade on blade with my Soul Weapon's greater form and Ember's set of claws.

[3]... [2]... [1]... [0]...

The two swords disappear once the countdown stops, and I immediately restore my energy as quickly as possible to prepare for the next attack while turning to Ember.

"What was that...? The sword got stronger... and there were two... Is it going to get exponentially harder each time?"

Ember finally readies his claws with silver divine threads while replying.

"I've never faced this exact trial before, so your guess is as good as mine. There may be one problem, though. It calibrated the strength difficulty based on both of our potentials, not just yours. So, prepare to push yourself to a new limit. That fight we just had really was a light warm-up."

The next round's text glows in the air as soon as Ember's words cease. Three blades on the Demon statue manifest in its grasp, and the first comes swinging down mere seconds after the last round.

My gaze becomes fully focused on the statue overhead, and instead of just blocking, I jump upward, matching Ember's technique, and my Soul Sword pulses red for the first time since it consumed the leftover artifacts, as now it senses this will be a real challenge and it is intrigued.

The only thing on my mind is stopping the silver blade coming my way as I swing my sword upward and activate my hexagonal defenses, paired with releasing a wave of divine flames using my True Core's new Divine Fire ability.

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Even so, my barrier is shattered by the first silver sword like it's glass.



Ember makes contact with the blade with two sets of claws covered in identical silver light, but it doesn't slow it down.

We're both pushed down to the black floor in the center of the testing circle.

I can feel the weight of the blade, tens of times stronger than in the first round.

The second sword moves the instant we get comfortable, and when it slams downward to combine with the first, I feel shockwaves vibrating through my bones.

My telekinesis skill activates, as well as my mana manipulation, wind magic, and all of my gravity control abilities turn on as well, pushing upward on the blade with every trick I have to keep it from moving downward any further.

Ember lets out a roar and sends a pillar of dense flames from his mouth to push the blade upward as well.

It pushes against the sharp side where we block at the same time that the third and final sword comes crashing down.

The imagery of Palmyra falling from the sky flashes back into my mind, but this is so many times heavier, as if the stone was made of pure iron, and a giant demonic god is above applying telekinesis to combat my own to crush us, the bugs below.

Numbers count down in the sky, but I don't even pay attention to them. I just use every bit of strength and energy to hold the three silver blades back.

They dissipate once the numbers hit 0, and the massive red and yellow crescent of flames that had been held back in my blade rockets upward, and so does Ember's fiery beam of light.

As the three arms move back to their start position, and the message for round four blinks in the sky, I turn to Ember while breathing heavily.

"If we have six more of these rounds... You're going to need to use that golden light—"

He cuts me off as the swords begin to form in the demon's hands, two on each side.

"My power is sealed for good reason. I can only use so much before we leave this realm. Small bits of silver threads can be used now that I'm a True Core, but any more and I'd be out of commission for quite a while like last time."

The first sword of the fourth round begins to move down, and his eyes become extremely serious, while a bright yellow glow starts to expand around him.

"Activate your Astral Form. This one won't be pretty if we take it on like this."

I stare upward at the incoming blade and do as he says.

—

Outside the tower, the moment I began the trials, the throne flashes silver and everyone, demons and humans surrounding it, received an identical message in their vision.

[All Challengers Have Entered: The Trials Have Begun.]

Simultaneously, a massive transparent dome of silver light, hundreds of kilometers high and thousands of kilometers wide, erupts from the midpoint of the tower up in the sky and creates a forcefield of strange energy around the desolate desert where the Abyss used to cover the lands.

The bronze-horned Demon takes this cue to bring half of the Demon forces, containing two high-level yellow cores, half a dozen orange cores, and over a hundred red cores, to challenge the Central Association's forces that don't even have a single fighter above a mid-level yellow core.

The black-horned Demon, wielding a mysterious long spear, eyes Raven up and down for a few seconds while the other head general leaves, then gives the orders to his identical battle squad to move out toward the Crimson Army and Inner Circle.

Everyone's auras are semi-concealed, as the Generals on the battlefield know if they were to push their pressure on their subordinates, they would all be knocked unconscious before the battle even began.

This is evident as many yellow flashes of light simultaneously burst upward into the sky, away from the tower at a 45-degree angle in varying directions.

Half a dozen yellow cores from the Association's squad collide with the three generals from the demon squad deep into the dead zone of Sector 3, and the bronze-horned Demon Dagger wielder watches his two underling generals toy with the Association's remaining strongest troops like mice.

The Commanders and Demonic Knights charge toward the two groups of central association workers and wield foreign Demonic Soul Energy strengthened by divine energy that overpowers every single one of the humans in less than 15 seconds.

They don't go for the kill, mostly immobilizing or knocking out the humans as per their orders, because once the world is conquered, strong humans will be necessary for labor.

Meanwhile, the black-horned spear user and Raven fly the furthest away, toward the silver barrier's edge in Sector 2, almost a thousand kilometers away, before they release their True Cores' Auras.

The Demon doesn't immediately attack, but still cautiously looks at her with his arms crossed, and the spear spinning around his body slowly.

He speaks while grinning to show his sharp white teeth.

"You're the strongest one left on this planet, it seems. All of your leaders that could have taken us out will be killed inside the throne. Our Lord Vermillion is destined for unfathomable greatness. The humans of this world are doomed; it would be in your best interest to give up now before I make you wish you died with your leader."

Raven pulls out her two silver blades, pointing them forward with sharp eyes.

"I could say the same to you... Put down your spear now and I'll make your death quick and painless."

At the same time, two massive mana-dominated divine Auras ripple outward from Sector 1, as Abby and Maria both pull from the 1% borrowed stats available to them from over 18 million Links of loyalty to combat the two high-level yellow cores that follow them.

Two more strong purple auras ripple out from near the tower, as Arie promotes Luna to a Commander and she gains 0.25% borrowed stats, while 13 enormous demonic eyes appear in the sky.

Arie uses the remaining 0.75% borrowed stats to power up his greater archer form and use the link through Luna's eyes to watch the Association's troops being decimated. Simultaneously, he keeps an eye on the second squad of approaching orange and red demonic forces. His strongest arrow is pulled back, ready to kill with pinpoint accuracy within milliseconds.

Fisher and Lydia lead the Crimson Army into battle to take on the Demonic forces four times their size.

Monk, The Saint, and the two orange cored disciples glow white, growing and activating unique Qi powered greater forms to follow close behind the Crimson Army's troops. My three doubles hover above them all, ready to take on red-cored Demonic Knights and sacrifice these mana manifestations if necessary to save my allies.

Raven and the black-horned Demon are the first to collide, silver blades against a long black spear; sending an ominous divine energy ripple throughout the entire silver dome, signifying that the battle outside the throne has begun.

## Chapter 676

I activate my new ranked-up buff, the [Divine Elemental's Astral Form], and feel a very strange energy vibrate out from my True Core.

At first, it feels like pure mana, as if I'm just activating a normal system skill, but the artificial feeling of a True Core's ability triggers in my mind.

By the time a yellow aura begins to grow outward, making another figure expand larger than my Greater Form, it feels extremely natural, like my divine energy is tethering with the mana manifestation and replacing it entirely.

If I wasn't completely focused on the silver sword above me, I wouldn't be able to tell the difference between the mana particles being activated and the divine energy that is melting together with it.

Ember grows larger as well, both of us expanding many times our original size before making contact with the silver blade that falls down on us. My energy form grows to over 150 meters tall, making my sword alone near the size of a sports field.

I brace for a mind-bending pressure to vibrate through my bones again, pouring every drop of power into this buff, feeling as though there is no end to the expansion it's allowing. I would have grown even larger if there wasn't a time constraint of having to block the falling sword.

However, on impact, it doesn't even feel heavy at all...

Before I know it, the second blade comes crashing down, then the third, and the fourth as well.

My intense concentration is broken out of shock at how easy this block was, but it doesn't even matter; all four blades combined don't even stack up to the pressure I felt in the first round.

I didn't even form the hexagonal defensive array to slow the blades, and it feels like I was blocking a wooden sword in a practice room without even activating magic.

The numbers count down to zero, and the swords dissipate.

This massive Astral Form feels so real....

Unlike my Greater Energy Form, where it is clear I'm controlling a mana manifestation, this incredibly massive Divine Flaming Perfect Energy Depiction of myself feels as though I'm standing in my normal body.

I see clearly out of the multiple-meter-wide eyes, and grasping my sword feels eerily natural.

Ember's voice echoes in my mind as I watch his form continue to grow.

"Don't hold back. The moment you deactivate this form, we're going to be in trouble. Give it your all until the Trial is over."

As silver text for the 5th round and an ancient voice ring in my ears with far more clarity than before, I shake myself out of the awe of the new form and continue pouring every drop of mana and divine threads I have into it.

The five silver blades come crashing down on us one by one, and my Flaming Yellow Astral Form reaches over 200 meters in height.

The blades that collide with my crimson-glowing Astral Soul Sword definitely hold weight this time, but it still feels like something I'd receive in a friendly spar.

Ember's eyes are as serious as they were in the third round when we were almost crushed to death, and when this round finishes and the 6th begins, his bright yellow Astral Claws start to shimmer with silver light.

My body becomes over 250 meters tall, and at this point, I can feel the growth begin to slow.

The excess divine aura radiating off of me feels as if it's constrained within this small room, as none of my yellow threads can seep out of the black walls. It reminds me of the green serpent I saw in the sky of celia's construct, as its aura stretched thousands of kilometers.

Ember even said it would be limited in a room like this.

With the amount of power surging through me now, it's hard to believe this is still somehow an incomplete version of this Astral Form.

That, coupled with the fact that the mere availability of my True Core's threads is also holding me back. I feel as though I could grow this form to an astronomical size, with no natural limit at all given enough divine energy and space to push my aura outward.

As the three silver blades on each side of the demon fall down on us, I activate my hexagonal barrier this time around, as Ember isn't taking any chances either.

It withstands the first four blades but is shattered by the fifth, and once I take the full impact of the sixth blade, with Ember even sending a wave of flames from his Astral mouth, the true weight of the Demonic Statue is felt throughout my body.

I've reached an absurd amount of power, and am certain I'm at my limit.

The blades pushing down on me are manageable, and I don't feel as though I won't block this attack, but I do have to use my full focus and push upward with considerable strength. If I didn't block the blow with a defensive array beforehand, I would be sweating.

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The countdown commences, and the six silver blades disappear. This is when the true gravity of the situation kicks in, as there are three rounds to go...

The 7th round comes and goes, and it is even worse than I expected.

While pushing upward with everything I have, the second of seven swords breaks through my defense array, and myself and the 250-meter-long glowing silver and yellow dragon take a beating from seven massive blades.

I feel my links of loyalty surpass 19 million while the countdown begins. My mind is elsewhere, but a new surge in power is noticeable as an abnormally high amount of links come rushing in from somewhere. All new and old eyes stare through mine, looking past the seven silver swords at the two remaining dormant and the three silver eyes staring down at me.

The timer hits zero, and the blades disappear, but the enormity of the five-kilometer-high Demon exudes its True Aura while eight blades light up with silver glowing energy.

The Demon's silver text and ancient voice ripple into my consciousness while I already prepare to use every trick I have to block this next strike.

Amplified Gravity magic using my heavy-hand skill, telekinesis with the upward momentum that would hold up the entirety of Solara, a fully charged 120-meter-long Astral Soul Sword swinging upward fortified by Divine Fire Magic, and a defensive barrier holding as many divine threads as my form can spare.

My Soul Sword burns hotter and hotter in my grasp, as it is far more excited to receive the first incoming silver sword than I am.

Before the demon's blade has even made its way halfway to us, it's hit with Ember's beam of fire, with trace amounts of silver threads within, and my aura is focused upward on a small area to slow the fall, but it hardly does a thing.

My barrier is shattered like glass, and we both take the blow head-on.

I feel déjà vu, like we're back in round 3, as with each passing sword strike, my vision becomes more tunneled, and my bones vibrate with sharp pain. The only thing on my mind is pushing upward. I don't even pay attention to the countdown, as every bit of my mental and physical power is going into blocking these eight fused blades.

I almost black out, but the pressure is lifted once the counter hits zero, and fatigue and pain ripple through every part of me. My bones feel as though they've been fractured and partially healed hundreds of times over in just a matter of seconds, and a familiar mind numbing ringing now sounds in my ears

It feels as though I just fought an exhausting battle, far worse than the shape I was in after defeating Redgrave, almost comparable to my mental state after meeting Raven for the first time.

Abby's restoration magic, or a full hibernation period is necessary right now, but there's no time to rest.

I somehow have to face an attack magnitudes stronger than that while in far worse mental and physical shape...

[Round 9 of 9 Shall Commence.]

This echoes through my mind before I can even regroup my thoughts, and all nine of the silver blades light up while the demon's three eyes flash and look down on me.

Fear runs through my mind, and it can be felt throughout all 20,119,524 links that watch through my eyes. It has only been a few seconds, but over a million fresh links of loyalty flow into my system.

While I could look throughout the Eight Great Regions and Dark Continent to pinpoint where this new surge of power is coming from. My mind is fully occupied on the Demonic Statue above me, as for the first time in this entire trial, its head moves to look down, and the first bladed arm moves to strike right after.

Every single link felt and conceptualized the strength of that last barrage of eight attacks and the extent of my power I just used.

My mind races for ideas, and I reach into my item storage to grab a handful of unique green fruits leftover from my True Core's awakening. If anything would, these could give me a boost, but I'm not sure if they will really do much.

Even Ember contemplates activating his golden divine threads, but we both know if he does that, I would be all alone to finish the trials and face everyone else inside. It is a hidden trump card, but not one we can afford to use right now...



What is coming next might be impossible to stop.

---

Before these trials even began, during my fight with Redgrave, two people deep within the Apex Region make a decision that may change the result of this final round.

Bri and Rodrigo hear the words being spoken about Central Headquarters and tear the Apex Region's headquarters apart top to bottom, looking through every spare vault and even small Association headquarters all over the Region looking for a single object.

A message is sent out to all of the Regional Directors, A-Class hunters, B-Class hunters, and even Regional Elites all over the Nation, linked to the Rising Emperor or not, and there is only one transmission back after a nerve-wracking wait.

"Yes? Regional Overseer Ms. Briana, this is a transmission from the off-site Apex Region Vault. There are old transport Crystals to Central stored here from right after the war. Will those do?"

"Send your location," is all that is heard back, and soon after, two flashes of white light blink through the sky to a base 200 kilometers away from the capital.

While my fight with Redgrave battled on and the Trials began, Rodrigo and Bri find themselves teleporting into an old underground headquarters in the middle of the Central Headquarters mountain built far before the divine flames were made around the mountain.

Neither of them wastes time and breaks through the ceiling upward many floors before they find themselves in one of the many Central Association branches full of C- and B-Grade hunters.

Normal intruder protocol is followed, but there are barely any elite forces present in Central at the moment.

Almost every single divine core holder, minus a small select few red and orange cores to man widespread security, has left the world capital to fight in the Dark Continent.

The duo, wielding light magic and mana control that far surpasses anyone on this entire mountain, subjugates everyone in their way until they reach the control rooms and people in charge of large-scale public transmissions.

On the far side of the world, it is nearing nighttime, while in the Dark Continent, the sun is still rising.

A broad message in a woman's voice echoes over many local news stations and public channels for many millions of people walking through the streets to hear.



"This is not a normal message! I repeat, this is not a normal message! There is a vast world beyond this city. The leaders of the Central Association have been lying to you all for decades. Many listening may not believe a word I say at first, or may be too young to even understand. The Great War never ended, it carries on beyond those yellow flames. If you do as I say, I can prove it to all of you right now! If you wish to leave this land, or save the world, listen to my words!"

Mass confusion ripples throughout the city, as one of the ten Local Sectors seems to have had their transmission cables breached and a message sent out to millions of civilians in a populated area.

Then 9 other branches that keep the Central Headquarters in line send troops toward this headquarters, flying through the skies the instant this message is sounded; and the few remaining divine cores in the city that actually know what is going on today instantly move out to stop this security breach from spreading further.

## Chapter 677

Bri's voice echoes throughout a local sector of the massive mountain above the divine flames.

Rodrigo questions all of the top officers within the headquarters they've taken over in mere seconds and finds city maps pinpointing the other control centers that manage security and a link to wire into the transmission coverage across the other nine districts.

Bri's words of the big three that lived in the floating black boxes high in the sky and the fact that the creator of those yellow flames surrounding the tower is being defeated right now is heard by tens of millions of system awakened men and women.

Her words about the Great War get many of the older crowd interested, especially when Bri gives instructions on how to help in the Second Great War, to help finish it once and for all.

Even if they don't know or care what she's talking about, the permanent stat buff bonus that she mentions next brings in the younger crowd's attention.

As her voice echoes through all ten districts of the Central Association's Mountain Civilization, Bri repeats this message over and over again, and small amounts of people

begin to give it a try, reciting their sworn loyalty to a mysterious Flame Emperor figure to get a few extra stat points or give in to the fleeting hope that this woman's words of the Great War are true.

It starts off as a slow trickle, but with the expansive scene that is instantly transmitted into their minds of a demonic statue swinging silver swords at a 250m tall flaming figure that can only be called the Flame Emperor, the word spreads like wildfire that it's real...

Echoing transmissions fill every major city, but at the same time, over a dozen red cores and an orange core circle the building that Bri and Rodrigo have infiltrated with angry looks on their faces.

The orange core gives the order for all of the red core Central Association scouts to eliminate the threat.

—

Meanwhile, a battle begins in the center of the Dark Continent.

Raven's blades clashing against the black-horned demon's spear sends a shockwave through the entire silver dome, notifying everyone that the strongest forces here have begun their battle.

The hazel-eyed sword wielder doesn't want to reveal her divine stealth trump card, as an eerie aura comes off this demon that makes her feel extremely on edge about getting too close.

While the 7-meter-tall demon's appearance is menacing enough, it has a True Core strength slightly less powerful than Raven.

Even its level is just below ten thousand, but the monster has incredible natural strength and Demonic Soul Energy that can easily rival Raven's pure mana.

Their speed and reflexes are very similar as well; there is just a confidence behind the demonic white eyes and an invisible aura that makes her hesitant at first to use all of her tricks.

"Is that all you've got?" the demon laughs while their exchanges begin, and Raven's mind flashes back to the battle she had not too far away from here with the Flame Emperor; going all out with no fear of dying at all, and enjoying the fight itself.

She doesn't yell back, only grins an unnoticeable amount, and disappears before the demon's eyes.

—

Closer to the tower, the front lines of the Crimson Army's forces collide with one of the demonic forces.

Fisher and Lydia send waves that look like an icy tiger and a water serpent into their main forces, imbued with orange and yellow divine light, killing a dozen red demonic knights instantly, and a single orange-cored general, while the Crimson Army's elemental elites team up to face the red cores left behind injured from the initial strike.

Waves of dense divine energy and soul energy come out of the two leading the battle while my doubles hold the rear with the pure Qi manifestation wielders.

After Fisher and Lydia send off a few more attacks, and the Crimson Army's forces get deeper into full battle, dense black arrows come flying into the mix from Arie watching from far behind with Luna's eyes above.

In moments, right before disaster, the lives of Crimson Army members are saved so they can battle on with full force without the fear of death.

—

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Abby and Maria erupt with power from their general's 1% buffs, and the high-level yellow cores that come their way with killing intent in their eyes meet an unexpected early end.

Two women that looked like overconfident, easy, low-level yellow core prey moments ago turn into an indestructible green flash of light and an enormous blue ice goddess.

Abby decapitates and shatters the core of the demon that follows her in mere seconds, and Maria's icy blue blade doesn't even need the extra pulse from her soul energy core to come crashing down on the archdemon below her in the sky.

Its blade moving upward to block is broken into pieces on impact, and the demon's body freezes to pure ice, shattering to icy bits while Maria finishes the entirety of the swing.

Both of them stand in the sky, without any change in their breathing, with sharp eyes waiting for a real opponent while level-up notifications ring in their ears.

—

The bronze-horned demon subjugating the Central Association's troops turns his gaze to Sector 1, the direction in which two high-level generals just went dark out of nowhere.

His eyes widen and he yells out orders while pushing himself off the desert floor with a massive amount of Demonic Soul Energy.

The dagger-wielding demon lets out an angry yell while rocketing through the air, traveling hundreds of kilometers in seconds, releasing his True Core's real aura, and waves of killing intent, while planning to kill the two women before him.

The remaining two high-level yellow generals, and forces of red and orange cores, plan to do exactly as their captain said, setting out to slaughter the entire Crimson Army as they are clearly unfit to take orders from the proper demonic authority.

—

While this battle begins, on the inside of the tower, the first of nine silver blades comes down toward me.

An abnormal amount of links of loyalty are rushing into my body, but I don't believe it will be enough...

I eat a handful of all the remaining green fruits I have leftover from the divine construct, and at the same time, clear my mind, focusing solely on doing everything I did in the eighth round, but with extreme and total precision like the fate of the world truly depends on it.

Unbeknownst to me, as I swing upward with all of my offensive skills activated, a defensive array forming in front of my blade, ripples of green light pulse out from my Astral Form's chest; strengthening my body like strong green veins or an exoskeleton of aura.

As the first blade shatters through the hexagonal barrier like it isn't even there, the blade comes crashing down against my Red Soul Sword, and against Ember's fire pillar from his mouth, and silver claws, now fortified with twice as many silver threads as they were for any of the last rounds.

This first blade feels heavier than all eight of the blades combined on the last round.

I feel my bones and cells within my body vibrate with sharp pain, and my Astral Form desperately wants to dissipate on the spot.

However, the green lines of energy that wrap around my form hold everything together, as the entire room lights up with a bright yellow and silver glow.

The ringing in my ears of divine energy poisoning from staying enlarged in this form and exerting myself grows over ten times louder in a single strike, so loud in fact I don't even feel or see the next blade coming.

It slams down, and the ringing gets worse, and the pressure on my body becomes unfathomable.

I black out.

Or, to better put things, I white out.

My body and mind continue to push upward with instincts alone, and the silver swords keep slamming downward one by one while my mind escapes elsewhere.

I hallucinate, seeing images of the first day I awakened my system, farming goblins just to pay rent.

My life flashes before my consciousness.

The smile of an old merchant who bought my mana crystals even before I had a hunter's license, showing up to Maria's awakening ceremony, meeting Abby at the Association, and traveling to the capital of the Vice Region for the first time with a small guild.

Images of working for the Association, good and bad, farming dungeons, going to the C-Class exams where I met both Arie and Ember, meeting new teammates, and eventually being betrayed by the Association but continuing on with all the cards I've been dealt.

My adventures through the Dark Continent, learning of Qi, Divine Beasts, Demons, and expanding my empire back to where I started, the 8 Great Regions, eventually all show up in stunning detail.

Awakening a Divine Core, and learning who really controls this world, touring city to city to get support before a battle that will decide the fate of all humans.

Even the battle against Redgrave replays in my mind as the silver swords continue to fall down on me...

The green energy that gave me a boost, holding my Astral Form together, all fades away, as energy of higher tiers does not stay in one's body until the core is fully formed.

However, the mental trip I've experienced flashes through everyone's minds that shares my link, showing now over 22 million people the equally beautiful and dreadful world I've seen in such a short time.

Unknown to me, still in a fugue state, almost 4 million people in the Central Association have just seen the outside world for the first time in many decades.

My links skyrocket, hitting 24 million by the seventh sword, and 27 million by the time the ninth and final sword in the center of the demon's grasp comes down.

My massive fiery Astral Form shows cracks all over its surface as I hold the nine blades back, with Ember's flames still bursting outward at full force, filling the room with fiery heat.

As the timer counts down from three, more links flow in, and more cracks form all over my greater form's surface.

By the time the counter hits zero, over 30 million pairs of eyes watch through mine while the nine swords disappear, and my Astral Form shatters as I stop giving it any extra energy because my job is done.

—

All of the demon's arms move back to their starting point.

Silver text hovers in the air.

[Round 9 of 9 Complete.]

[Trial 1: Body: Complete.]

[Calculating prize based on trial difficulty...]

[Prize Calculated.]

All of the text disappears, and the entire silver demon statue fades away shimmering with the same silver light.

Two small black boxes fall from the ceiling and hit the floor in front of the massive arching doorway that now glows completely silver just like the door I entered to begin these trials.

## Chapter 678

The ringing in my ears is extremely loud, but my vision has returned, as my full power isn't fully concentrated on keeping my astral form at max capacity anymore.

Now, a large portion of my mind is occupied with using my self-regeneration to its maximum output while walking forward to the black box that's fallen from the ceiling. Each step is painful, as my entire body is fatigued and filled with pins and needles that become sharp with every movement.

Ember, walking forward in his human form, doesn't look like he's in much better shape than me.

His face still exudes a confident and curious expression, but his body language shows that the ordeal took a lot out of him too.

While I have an enormous amount of pure mana farmed from the artificial mountains still locked away in my storage in pure crystal form, ready to use for emergency hibernation if necessary, the boxes in front of me hold my full leftover attention.

They glow with a dim white light that feels similar to divine energy, creating subtle gravity waves as it seeps out of the black boxes that don't show any openings.

As soon as Ember and I get up close enough to the prizes, the tops of the small boxes dissolve away, shining with a far stronger white glow inside.

The box in front of me holds three items.

The first that catches my eye is a jagged piece of black metallic stone, but as it floats upward, pushed up by the white mist inside the box, it begins shimmering deep yellow and gives off the gravity signature of a true core.

The red soul sword in my hand mentally tugs toward this object, but my gaze shifts to the other two that float upward in the white mist.

One is barely visible, a small white orb, not bigger than a common marble, but it shines with the same odd divine light that this white box's inside does.

The last item I see is about four times larger than the white marble, but it is similarly shaped; its color glows bright green, and I can see an immense amount of shimmering divine threads inside of it.

As the green orb comes out of the white mist, the pressure it begins to exert on the room becomes greater and greater, and I even see green threads start to violently spin out from the orb as it begins to unravel itself.

Without hesitating, I open an item storage portal and let the dangerous item fall inside.

The two items that remain float upward completely out of the box, and the hunger from my sword grows as the chunk of black and yellow metal comes closer.

I move my blade forward to tap it against the raw material, and a [Consume] window shows up for me to accept on the spot.

The originator rock melts to a yellow pure divine energy mixture instantly and is consumed by my blade.

My gaze switches between the red sword, rippling with yellow light as it takes longer than usual to digest the mass it's eating, and the one remaining item in front of me.

Ember's voice echoes in my ears.

"That pill is made of Low-quality Divine Ether, and it's in a very pure form. I guess the difficulty of that trial worked out in our favor in the end. Eat it; it'll do much more than just heal you."

I raise an eyebrow and turn my head to see Ember's box open as well, and in front of him, there's only a single item: a small white dragon's scale, glowing with the same odd white divine glow.

His finger makes contact with the white, nearly translucent scale, and at the same time, he transforms his body into his hybrid dragon form. The scale starts to glow brighter white, and the excess energy around it starts to flow into Ember's body, making his black scales, crimson eyes, and tail glow with a bright white light.

The scale disappears once it looks as though it's been absorbed entirely, and all of the white light around Ember dissipates as well. I can't even tell if anything has changed, other than the pleasant expression on his face now and his apparent lack of fatigue.

As he begins reverting back to his full human form, I notice a slight golden shimmer beneath some of Ember's scales, like their true color is peeking through for the first time.

However, a headache pulls my vision away before I can observe any further, and I do as Ember instructed and drop the Low-quality Divine Ether pill into my mouth.

It dissolves instantly, and tastes sweet like candy.

The white glow spreads throughout my body quickly, feeling similar to when Abby uses her Restoration skill, but with a strange divine twist to it. It feels as though I'm just being healed back up to full health, but at the same time, an innate potential deep inside feels like it's being brought up to the surface, where I would usually have to dig far deeper to grasp.

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Just as soon as the warm feeling washes completely over me, it leaves just as fast, and the white glow completely disappears with the two black boxes with it.

All of my fatigue, ringing in my ears, and even the pins and needles all over my body have completely left me. Yet, I don't feel especially refreshed; I just feel normal...

Two lines of text hover in front of my eyes, the first in yellow, and I feel my Soul Sword vibrate in my hands as the system text rings in my inner ear.

[The Divine Emperor's Soul Sword Evolution Attribute has reached Lv. 1!]

The second is in shimmering silver, above the arching doorway, in the ancient tower's voice that rings in my mind with even more clarity than ever before.

[Proceed to Trial 2: Mind]

—

Around the outside of the tower, the surges of links of loyalty surpassing 30 million increase the general's stats by an immense degree.

It is much needed, as two new high-level yellow-cored generals come rocketing toward the crimson army from their rear. The only forces waiting strong enough to stop them are The Saint in his large white pure Qi-infused Greater Form, and Arie now releasing one of his poisoned arrows toward one of them as they approach.

However, the greatest boost is noticed in Abby and Maria, as a fuming mad bronze-horned Demon with a True Core burning in its chest collides with both of them at extreme speeds.

One of its shimmering bronze daggers phases right through Abby's Immortal Form, while the other is stopped by a massive blue Soul Energy Sword.

There are two massive eruptions of energy that ripple through the desert, the first being the nearly equal exchange of the Demon's dagger and Maria's energy blades, while the second is Abby flying around to the demon's back and stabbing through its armor with two daggers of her own.

All three parties involved in the exchange are blown backward, and two gashes are visible on the Demon's side, but both the black obsidian-colored armor and the Demon's flesh become covered in purple Demonic Soul Energy and heal back to perfect condition almost instantly.

No one wastes any time getting back into the clash, but the Demon is now wary that Abby is hard to hit, and the Ice Goddess can match his overwhelming physical strength even with Demonic Soul Energy imbued in his strikes.

Even though this Demon is at the lower tier range of a True Core's size, its seven-meter-tall natural stature and Demonic Strength are similar to a middle-level true core human, surpassing that of almost all order members other than the big three.

Despite this, the absurd amount of mana and stats coursing through the two women's veins creates a sight unbelievable to the pride-filled Arch Demon's eyes.

After ten exchanges pass, the two women keep getting slightly stronger somehow, and every time the demon thinks it's about to land a hit, Maria's core pulses dark blue to let out an ominous pulse of energy to overpower it.

Abby zips around the battlefield with superior speed and invulnerability, landing shot after shot on the Demon's unguarded blind spots while it's mid-clash with Maria.

While after every collision the Demon heals, mental and physical fatigue will kick in eventually. With the links of loyalty only growing, the longer this battle rages on, the more of an advantage they'll have.

The Demon figures this out very quickly as well, but its overall composure doesn't change. It even laughs, mocking the two of them even after being sent backward from Abby landing another two hits.

"For humans, I have to give it to you, you really are strong. Especially on such a world with low-quality resources like this..."

It heals its wounds back up and grips both its bronze daggers while its body becomes covered in Demonic Soul Energy.

"I'll give you one last chance to submit. Lord Vermillion is a reasonable leader; he will spare your lives in exchange for labor. Not just on this world either; once we've taken over this planet, the expansion will only continue."

Maria's massive energy blade comes crashing down while Abby zips through the sky around it to send a dual attack.

As they all clash again, and the Demon is pushed back with two dagger marks in its chest plate, Abby replies to its words.

"One last chance? I don't think you know who you're up against here... you're not walking away from this battle alive, and neither is your Lord."

Abby glances toward the tower, but the Demon only bursts out into a monstrous demonic laugh.

"You believe any mere human could kill a Demon with a noble bloodline flowing through their veins...?"

It laughs louder and louder while all of its wounds and armor heal.

"You truly believe our leader could be killed on this puny world? Allow me to demonstrate; as one of the Lord's underlings with just a fraction of its power. I'll unseal my bloodline to give you a taste of what fate this race is in for..."

Its laughs cease, and the demon closes its eyes.

There isn't even a fraction of a second of activation time before its eyes open again, and a pulse of grey energy erupts from its core.

An eerie pressure fills the silver dome, and the gravity of the bronze-horned Demon's True Core increases many times over.

It jumps off the air to move forward, and its speed is incomparable to what it was just seconds ago.

It collides with Maria's blade that would push it back before and keep it occupied while Abby went in for the kill, but this time Maria can't follow through with her strike at all.

She has to use her Soul Energy core to pulse with dark blue light multiple times in a row to keep her positioning while Abby goes in to attack.

The sound of Abby's daggers clanging against the Demon's now impenetrable obsidian armor is matched with both Abby and Maria flung backward in a shockwave that erupts from the Demon as its core continues to grow stronger as its bloodline is fully unsealed.

Its yell echoes out again in a confident, arrogant laugh while its physical body grows in size.

"This is the power of a 2nd Class Demonic Bloodline. I could kill everyone in this desert before you take 10 breaths...And you still believe there is someone from this world that can stack up to our lord?"

It laughs again while locking eyes with both of them, grinning, as its body grows larger and plumes of dark purple Demonic Soul Energy cover its massive form. The Demon's aura makes the air hot and heavy while it creates the manifestation of a massive dark black and purple Demon the same size as Maria's Ice Goddess.

It speeds forward with its enlarged energy daggers ready to kill, now truly on the offensive.

## Chapter 679

My Crimson Soul sword levels up and burns hot in my hands, ready for war after digesting that jagged piece of originator stone. However, it slowly fades back to black as it feels my calm heartbeat and senses no worthy opponents nearby.

There's no additional information shown on my status about it, other than the hundreds of percent increases in stat buffs and the [Lv. 0] turning to [Lv. 1]. I'm certain I'll find out more once it's in the mood to fight again...

I walk forward into the massive silver portal at the back of the room, and the same warm and cold teleportation magic envelops me and Ember, bringing us into what feels like an identical room.

My foot hits the hard black ground, and I look around to see the same high ceilings and smooth walls.

I can still feel the outside world with perfect clarity and see the battle between the demons and my army beginning; however, after stepping through this portal, I feel tens of kilometers above the ground. My vantage point of the world has risen, as this portal has brought me higher in the tower.

At the back of the room, I see the outline of another door, and a massive silver statue sits in front of it. Instead of a demon, it seems this second trial has a three-headed serpent guarding the closed door.

Its body coils into a large base, and its three necks stretch upward over seven kilometers, even higher than the nine-armed demon below us.

Ember walks out by my side, and we both look at the shimmering silver text floating between our gaze and the six eyes that shine with a silver glint, frozen in time and looking down at us.

[All Conditions In Completing Trial 1 Met.]

[Would You Like To Start The Second Trial?]

[YES] [NO]

I take a deep breath, walk forward, and press [YES] as I feel more than ready to take on whatever it has to throw at me next.

[Enter the trial area.]

The message rings in my inner ear, and a nearly identical silver testing circle lights up in front of the silver serpent.

Both of us walk forward without a word, and once we stand in its center, more text appears.

[Trial 2: Mind]

[Calculating Necessary Difficulty...]

[Difficulty Calculated: Trial 2: Round 1 of 3 Shall Commence.]

[Round 1 of 3 Title: Isolation]

[Objective: Endure.]

The far left head of the serpent moves, baring its fangs and long tongue while moving down to eye level. The entire statue glows with a faint silver light, but I can't sense it at all... just like the silver blades in the last round, this energy is undetectable to me. Even when making contact with it, I could only quantify the pure force it exerted, not its full potential.

With this knowledge, I want to be ready for anything, so I point my blade forward and activate my greater form, even preparing to activate my astral form if needed.

Ember grows into his dragon form as well, but he's not nearly as on edge as I am.

Before I can ask why, the serpent's head halts, and its eyes flash silver, blinding me entirely. My audio, visual, and even physical senses are completely overwhelmed before I can even think to try to stay conscious.

All 33,921,800 links of loyalty looking through my eyes lose vision of what I'm seeing, and I lose my view of the outside world.

The silver light fades as fast as it came, but when the darkness returns, my senses do not.

All I see is darkness, and I can't feel my body either...

A twisted thought races through my mind, wondering if I failed and this is what death feels like... but feeling death dozens of times already from the perspective of my body doubles makes me quickly believe that hasn't happened.

There was no notification, and a very interesting sensation lingers in my consciousness.

I'm unsure if it is part of this trial or an aftereffect of the prize from the last one.

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I feel a very faint, indescribable pull that feels extremely similar to that white energy Ember called Divine Ether.

I can't see it, and have no frame of reference to say I physically feel it, but for some reason, it is present within this endless expanse of darkness around me.

The trial is one testing the mind, and the round's descriptor was isolation...

I have no breath to take, nor any heartbeat to measure the time. I can't even mentally pull up my status window for external stimulation.

Whatever this trial has in store for me, all I can do now is as it instructed: Endure.

---

Just a few moments ago, as Abby and Maria are attacked again by the unsealed bronze-horned demon, its power seems to grow more and more with every second that passes.

Maria's dark blue blade can deflect its dual daggers, now coated in a dense layer of Demonic Soul Energy, creating a Greater Demonic Form.

However, she's using her full concentration and entire strength to even contend with the bloodlust-fueled demon. She's been moved entirely to the defensive, even being overpowered on some of the recent hits.

The Ice Goddess Form is sent flying backward after every exchange, closer and closer to the silver dome's back wall; and now, with the thick Demonic Soul Energy defenses, Abby's close-range attacks aren't even able to make it through without dealing with that overwhelming aura with her unguarded body.

The tone of their battle has completely turned on its head.

One moment, they're the ones landing consistent hits to tire the demon out, and now, both of them are being overpowered.

Its chaotic yell erupts through their battle as it only grows more powerful with every swing, settling into its unsealed form.

"It sure feels good to let out my real full power! Not so confident now, are you?"

He blocks Maria's incoming attack with just one dagger, then throws the other to his left side while a stream of purple soul energy shoots it forward with unbelievable speed and force.

While the two are locked together, the demon's flying dagger aims straight for her vitals.

Maria accepts that she won't win this exchange, twists her body out of the way, and is shot backward from the force, but the demon's flying attack grazes her midsection while it curves back to the demon's open grasp.

A massive gash opens in her side as it tears through her blood-bonded armor like paper, and a Demonic Soul Energy wound imbued with True Core's threads burns bright as she's slammed against the back wall of the silver dome.

Abby attempts a long-range attack while the demon is focused on Maria, but the demon twists its body and sends its other dagger flying through the air, obliterating the barrage of earth pillars sent toward its back.

While in its flight path, it aims to take out Abby too, but it phases through her Immortal form like a hologram.

She grins, but the demon doesn't seem concerned.

The dagger comes flying back to it like a boomerang, and the demon points both blades together to create a dense ball of Demonic Soul Energy floating between them.

Its strength and True Core's density only become more intense and deadly with every moment that passes, and the ball of matter it's creating is densely packed with True Core's threads and violent dark purple energy.

As soon as Abby darts to find another angle to launch an attack, the demon releases the strange ball of matter, and it shoots forward even faster than the flying daggers did.

The instant it makes contact with Abby's Immortal Form, her eyes widen, and the ball of energy explodes in a violent display of power.

She's sent flying backward from the blast, as the initial impact had enough strange energy inside it to somehow overpower her ranked up buff for a split second at the instance of the explosion.

The green woman coughs up blood as she shoots tens of kilometers back at a downward angle, hitting the desert floor and creating a crater from the impact.

Its loud thud is followed by the demon's laughter, and at the same time, the live video feed inside the tower goes dark as the second trial begins with a mysterious severing of the visual feed...

---

Thousands of kilometers away in Sector 1, Raven lands her first hit on the black spear user's stomach; perfectly evading its senses in her invisible stealth form until the moment of contact.

Her attack would have pierced right through the demon's core, but it was fast enough to shift its body and counter with its spear.

Before the demon and Raven collide a second time, its shattered black armor and bleeding stomach regenerate in a plume of Demonic Soul Energy.

In their next exchange, Raven manages to slice through the demon's shoulder, but it counters with its spear, milliseconds away from landing a vital shot on Raven during the moment she's visible upon contact.

The demon smirks, keeping a calm expression while waves of grey and demonic energy ripple out from where its true core partner is fighting.

"Looks like you humans are pretty strong, after all... if my partner had to unseal his bloodline, your teammates are certainly not ordinary."

His eyes sharpen, and his grip on his spear shifts slightly as purple soul energy surges through his hands into the weapon.

There's no response from Raven, but the demon predicts Raven's exact positioning on her next strike, and they clash blade to spear on equal footing.

"That is an interesting skill—a divine-grade stealth integration. I don't think I've ever seen one before..."

They push each other back, and more purple demonic soul energy pours out of the demon's body, covering its spear and even its entire seven-meter-tall frame, leaving only its white eyes piercing through the veil.

In response, Raven sends over half a dozen more attacks its way, but she's blocked right before impact each time. Every counter the Arch Demon makes is dodged just in time too.

However, even now it appears the Demon is holding back and just watching Raven attack for fun. It speaks again with a confident smile and calm tone.

"It's a shame I'll have to kill such a budding talent like you. If this was truly my full strength, you might have a chance, but there's no point in toying with you longer than necessary. I will teach the elite of your human world true despair. Behold, a 1st Class Demonic Bloodline."



The white glowing eyes behind the purple veil close, and when they open, an eerie pressure reaches every being in this dome. Its initial gravity wave at such close range is enough to seep deep into Raven's psyche and forcefully deactivate her divine stealth mode.

It makes heads turn hundreds of kilometers away, and the waves of gravity and killing intent only become stronger while the Demon's Greater Energy Form begins to grow in size.

## Chapter 680

Cut off from the outside, alone in a black void of darkness with no way to feel my body or know when time will pass, all I can do is wait.

The round's name was Isolation, so my best guess is that I must endure and not crack under the pressure of endless time without stimulation.

On its surface, this seems like a quite simple and straightforward first round for the trial.

All I have to do is sit and wait, but the daunting underside of this is that there is no timer signifying how long exactly I have to wait.

The worry that the outside world is moving on without me doesn't seem like an issue, as the tower's rules stated the third and final trial won't start until all challengers are present; and I trust my Inner Circle to stand their ground outside.

If Ember is in a similar situation as me, I trust that he will be just fine as well. As he's most likely lived more lifetimes than I can comprehend, waiting in an endless void may not be very difficult for his psyche.

I've been through something like this before, inside the Titan's Domain the first time I fell inside by accident, not knowing when I'd ever make it out of that solid white box.

Even returning to train, the isolation definitely changed me, but it was possible...

However, as these thoughts race through my consciousness, the fact that the difficulty of this trial was calculated beforehand just like the first one does give me a tinge of unease. My definition of long isolation may be far different from my battle partner's.

Even so, I can't move, speak, smell, or see; all I can do is endure. So that's what I do...

---

What I can only believe to be the first few hours go by extremely slowly, as this is the time when the reality of this situation truly sinks in.

I want to move around or hear some noise; it's like a gut impulse that craves patterns and wants there to be some kind of movement within the infinite darkness that hits my senses.

I try to count in my head, but after reaching 100,000, even this begins to seem trivial.

Then again, the moment I stop and decide to just sit in my own silence again, my mind forces me to restart the count.

I can think about potential scenarios in the outside world, like a fantasy playing in my mind, but they all fall short of the reality before me. This is not my normal mind; I cannot just picture crystal-clear images as if they were reality. All I can do is savor the fading memory of what it used to look like to see.

It's not like I'm closing my eyes to see this darkness; I don't have any eyes to close. This abyss of nothingness is everything I have.

Colors and sounds become nothing but a fading memory as I recalibrate to what's before me.

I don't feel hunger, pain, or pleasure whatsoever. My count reaches 100,000 again, and it doesn't feel like I'm counting fast or slow at all.

Both concepts begin to split away.

Maybe in the first few hours, I could have guessed that I'd say one or two numbers in my head every second, but now I can't tell if seconds, minutes, or even hours are going by between each number.

I begin to have mental slips in between each number I count, spacing off into the endless void, not remembering whether or not I was imagining what it was like in the outside world or still counting, and having to reset my numbers again and again.

From this point forward, I never make it back anywhere close to 100,000 again.

I consciously realize this, but there is nothing else to keep my mind occupied. I can only think about using my system, or the faces of my teammates, or the impending battles in this tower for so long.

The daunting feeling of being trapped in true endless darkness because of my soul pact with an immortal being that keeps me partially sane. Slipping away for too long now could be catastrophic if this is just the beginning.

Fleeting memories of Ember's calm eyes and unfazed demeanor in every situation we're in begin to make far more sense. When looking into the void of eternity, what is there truly to fear...

There's a point where this notion is all I really think about, and an eerie calm washes through what's left of my mind.

I sit in the darkness, with only darkness on my mind.

I know I have a goal: it is to endure, but at a certain point, I don't know why or what I'm enduring for.

There isn't anything else to do though, so endure is what I do...

—

Darkness envelops reality and becomes it.

Days could have passed, maybe years, decades, centuries, millennia; I don't know.

My mind has put its walls up. The moment I lost the ability to count any further and accepted this reality, a mechanism in my mind decided to save its conscious thoughts, tucking them away into the depths of my consciousness; only to let my subconscious play with the endless darkness and lack of stimulation in my surroundings.

If anything happens in the void around me, it is impossible to tell, as I've mentally cut off my conscious mind from its surroundings as an automatic defense mechanism.

—

In reality, my subconscious wanders, and it finds what I sensed slightly the moment I started this trial.

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It is an invisible, unsensible, undetectable energy floating around in my mind.

When my active thoughts attempted to pursue it, it could never be found, but now, my subconscious plays with the invisible energy left within my mind that is Divine Ether.

It acts as though it has a mind of its own but moves extremely slowly, only communicating with my subconscious on a scale of years rather than seconds as a usual conversation would.

My mind accepts this conversation as a slow-moving white mist in a sea of darkness, and it creates a barrier between the nothingness and my true mind deep within, shielding it from the passage of time while having a conversation with my subconscious.

—

903,881 Years, 7 Months, 2 Weeks, 4 Days, 11 Hours, 30 Minutes, and 16 seconds pass...

—

Silver light and an ancient-sounding voice echo through my mind, waking me up from the longest nap I've ever taken.

[Round 2 of 3 Shall Commence]

[Round 2 of 3 Title: Perception]

[Objective: Find the finish.]

As I see these words flash through my mind, the feeling of my body returns to me, my tight grasp around my soul sword is evident, and my divine core burning bright in my chest is powerful and ready to take on the world.

Ember looks at me with an expression of concern, and the second head of the serpent moves toward us.

It is all extremely overstimulating, as it feels as though I just stared into darkness for a few months, or maybe even a full year.

It feels longer than any time I ever spent in the Titans Domain.

I remember counting, and waiting, then counting more... then just darkness... and now I'm awake.

It really didn't feel like much of a challenge now that I look back on it.

There is an overwhelming feeling that comes over me as though I'm definitely missing something, but too many things attack my mind at once.

Even if this first round was easier than expected, the instant connection to 35,947,021 links of loyalty is quite overwhelming.

I can't remember the exact number of links from before, but as my perception seeps back to the battlefield outside the tower, my eyes widen, and I realize it was all an illusion...

Even so, I do remember being extremely confident about the odds of the battle outside going into this, and what I can see around me, the battles aren't going quite as planned.

Some time has certainly passed.

With the silver serpent's head coming closer, I make the split-second decision to open my Rising Emperor's domain to make some changes in order to help those on the outside before I won't be able to anymore.

The same instant I do, the silver serpent's eyes flash silver again, and my vision is blurred.

—

Just a few moments ago, my whereabouts inside the tower were cut off from everyone on the outside world.

Maria has been injured by a strange demonic energy-laced dagger, while Abby was knocked backward by a ball of darkness, stronger than any attacks Ember threw at her during their training.

On the other side of the desert, Raven is having a rude awakening of her own; as the aura alone from this demon unleashing its bloodline made it through her divine stealth True Core's ability, rendering her trump card useless.

Both the Demon's body, spear, and purple-glowing Demonic Greater Form grow in size, becoming far larger than Raven's battle form, and suppressing her movements entirely with its aura alone.

Not even sending a concentrated attack Raven's way, she winces, having trouble even looking up at the massive Demonic Form. It speaks loud enough for the entire Dark Continent battlefield to hear.

"You have all been doomed from the start. We can suppress the strongest in this world with ease. Our Lord shall reign supreme, and you shall obey..."

It releases a real wave of intimidation, and Raven is sent flying backward from the shockwave alone.

It grins and lets out a low laugh.

Its fellow True Core on the other side of the desert matches its tone, as they have both shown their dominance, and no one in this world is anywhere close to strong enough to stand in their way.

The link from within the tower is severed, and even the Crimson Army has its hands full, fending off eight times the number of troops attacking them from both sides.

Arie has managed to keep the casualties at zero so far, as his full concentration has been saving soldiers in danger from afar while the Crimson Army fights with everything they have.

However, that too looks like it's soon to change, as two high-level yellow cores are coming their way, one of which is dead set on Arie, as it's the one that he almost killed and humiliated in front of its Lord.

Even as all hope of salvaging this fight seems lost, no one backs down.

The Saint and Arie turn their focus to the Generals while Fisher and Lydia pull back to stop being hyper-aggressive and make sure to watch the backs of their fellow troops now while the full yellow cores handle the front lines.

Maria tanks the purple wound that won't go away no matter how much self-regeneration she does at the moment. It only slowly heals, and would take minutes that she doesn't have to fully recover on her own, so she recharges her soul energy sword to face the superior demon that threw that hit.

Abby, forming half a dozen spears of rock around herself, shakes off the hit she received and zips around the back side of the demon to support Maria as it comes her way.

Maria pulls out a small white knife from her item box, one of the unique items Raven gifted her when they cultivated together in her volcanic base.

She lets go of it, and it begins to spin around her Ice Goddess form, leaving a trail of white ice behind it. There is a faint divine energy coming off of it, and Maria's expression tells this won't be enough of a boost to turn the tide of the battle, but it will give her enough time to wait for support or think of another idea that will.

This is proven true as she and the demon collide again.

Maria is overpowered just slightly by their collision and has to twist out of the way again, but as the second dagger comes hurtling toward her midsection, the white icy blade hits it, and it's thrown just off course enough to avoid hitting her.

Abby sends a massive raining attack of earth pillars down on the demon, and it has to use up another attack to destroy them; giving her just enough time to curve around to Maria and use her restoration magic to heal the demonic wound on her side.

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While Maria and Abby have just enough power and gear to fend off their Second-Class Bloodline Demon, the First-Class Monstrosity staring down at Raven is in a league of its own.

"You still dare to look at me like you have a chance at winning?" it arrogantly yells while pointing its black and purple Greater Form's spear down at Raven, making her look like an ant in comparison.

The ripple in space the spear makes as it comes closer sends Raven flying backward just from the radiation; but her grip on her blades stays tight and her eyes stare up at the Demon without fear.

It laughs, retrieving its weapon and flying forward while yelling again, "Very well, I understand, the strongest warrior of humans wanting to be killed while holding onto hope for their world..."

Then, it throws its spear forward, faster than the eye can see.

It almost looks like the spear disappears in the demon's grasp, and only reappears when it makes contact with Raven's chestplate.

It shatters, and the shockwaves it creates crack through the entire dome, sending her flying downward toward the desert floor, coughing blood.

The Demon yells as she plummets downward.

"While I understand, I do not respect your wishes. You are a human, and we are your gods. You shall submit, and I will make an example of you to the world as my personal slave. Go against the Demons that rule you, and this is the result. Even your strongest cannot resist."

Another massive boom echoes throughout the dome as a crater is formed on impact and the purple spear pins Raven to the rocky desert floor.

It missed her vitals by mere millimeters; this was clearly done on purpose as the Demon floats downward with a twisted grin on its Greater Demonic Form.

However, Raven's hands still grip the silver blades, and her eyes are as sharp as they were when the battle started.

That's because, on the way down, the sensation of the view inside the tower returned.

Now, after impact as the Demon comes closer, a notification rings in her inner ear. A new unique buff is granted within her system interface.

Raven has become the fourth General of The Rising Emperor, and now watches her unsuspecting prey float down toward her from above.