

Dungeon Diver: Stealing A Monster's Power

Chapter 681

The silver flash of light fades, and a light blue background covers my surroundings.

I prepare to endure the bodiless, sensory-deprived reality or something equivalent this time as well, but soon a body materializes below my eyes.

Access to my links of loyalty is severed again, and my system skills are too, so I believe this is just another illusion.

However, that odd feeling I sensed when starting my last round is far stronger.

The Divine Ether left in my mind feels far more comfortable melding with my consciousness. It feels warm, flowing, and far less foreign than it did before; but I can't quite figure out why...

Other than this feeling, the body below me is certainly not real. It is like a mirage controlled by my mind, with no organs, cores, or access to mana or divine energy.

Before I can inspect it any further, my vision is filled with squares of shimmering glossy glass that appear like mirrors, but when I look into them, nothing at all is reflected. They just show more endless light blue sky.

More and more squares appear, easily thousands of them, forming a curved wall shape before me.

They finally stop multiplying, and then a silver text box shimmers in my vision reading [0/50] [0/50].

No voice comes with it, but simultaneously, the thousands of clear glass mirrors begin to shift in color and reveal a familiar face.

Every single one of them reveals Ember in his human form.

His eyes move back and forth identically on all the mirrors, and when he speaks, his mouth opens on all of them as well.

"I can only guess you see the same as me...? But... a better question would be, are you still sane?"

I raise an eyebrow, crossing my arms and looking at the wall of mirrors reflecting the long red-haired dragon, and reply.

"Am I sane? Even if I wasn't, that would not be an easy question to answer... Why?"

Ember's eyes don't stop darting around, as if he's looking at all of the mirrors on his end. Then they sharpen, and he moves forward with a palm in front of him.

I hear the crashing of glass, and the silver text before me changes to [0/50][1/50].

Ember nods, then his eyes go back to darting around while speaking.

"I was left to withstand over 900,000 years of darkness. I have both the experience to endure this passage of time and a mental technique that speeds it up for my conscious mind. I am curious to know how you are still understanding my words and not driven to insanity with merely two decades of life experience."

My eyes begin darting around the wall of mirrors, understanding what I have to do now from the change in notifications. The objective was to make it to the finish, and as Ember destroyed a mirror to move forward, we both need to pick the correct mirror 50 times to reach a middle ground.

I reply while the warm feeling in my mind subconsciously guides my eyes.

"Maybe we had different tests? I only remember a few months, or maybe a year of darkness at most. I just remember everything going dark after a while and waking up like nothing happened..."

As these words come out of my mouth, one of the mirrors in the top left corner of my vision feels warm in my mind. There is no visual feedback, but something tells me that this one is alive while the others are just mirages.

Without thinking any further, I jump upward and effortlessly crash through the pane of glass with Ember's confused face on it.

[1/50][1/50] appears in my vision in front of a whole new curved wall of mirrors.

I raise an eyebrow, grin, and try to jump high enough to fly over the wall, but I'm pushed down by an invisible, immovable force. The same thing happens when I try to fly under it or to either of its sides.

"The only way is through..." I whisper under my breath, but Ember responds with a pondering gaze not paying attention to my odd actions.

"I don't believe it... the Trials are meant to be fair. A challenger must face the burdens their bonded partner brings. Your trial must have been just as hard as mine, because our combined skill has been equalized to create a challenge of the mind. While anything learned during the trial doesn't affect the difficulty later on, our mental and physical

strength was tested before. If I were alone, it would have been hundreds of millions of years longer... for sure..."

While Ember tries to figure this problem out, his eyes continue to dart around his side of the wall, and he jumps through more mirrors, bringing his counter up to [17/50] in under a minute.

I have to take quite a bit longer, but the warm feeling rushes through my mind every time I lay eyes on the correct mirror, and in the same time, I reach [4/50].

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Ember doesn't come up with a reasonable explanation for this phenomenon, and since I can't remember a thing, I decide not to prod any further.

Maybe my mind is just that strong. Even this challenge seems to be moving by really quickly. It could just be that this throne was created for unintelligent monsters and demons.

I smirk and crash through the fifth mirror while Ember passes his twentieth.

Then, his voice comes through with an alarmed tone.

"Wait! How are you able to complete this round of the trial? It shouldn't be possible to do this without—"

He stops himself mid-sentence as he ponders further, but an idea dawns on him as I reply in a nonchalant manner.

"I don't know, I can just see which mirrors contain life. It's like I'm sensing your mind through each mirror. I don't know how to explain it other than you feel warm."

Ember grins, finishing his statement with understanding in his eyes.

"Divine Ether. It seems even a drop of low-quality ether in this realm is enough to do such a thing. That prize from the last trial was quite valuable..."

He looks upward as if he's looking at nothing and mutters to himself.

"Almost a million years... Let's say your subconscious shielded you from the passage of time and used this as a pseudo-closed cultivation room. It would be slower than the real thing, but the conscious mind couldn't have done such a thing... Genius... But—"

He looks back at me, clearly understanding something I don't.

"What? What happened? You're telling me that white pill has something to do with why my brain didn't melt in the last round and why I feel this warm pressure now?"

"It does... You've managed to awaken the beginning stages of what is called an Ether Sense. Though in a very unorthodox fashion, it has still occurred... Knowing your past accomplishments, I don't know what else I would have expected..."

We continue breaking through the glass as Ember explains the process that took place in my mind while time passed in that endless black void.

Apparently, this is just scraping the outer surface of what this foreign energy can do, but I need more time, a better environment to train, and more ether itself to actually progress.

[50/50][50/50]

In less than half an hour of perceived time, I break through the final mirror, and our conversation comes to an abrupt end once we both see each other's fake bodies, followed by a flash of silver light.

My mind is still wandering with a sense of awe at the reality that I, too, really managed to survive almost a million years of isolation.

Even now, this second round was completed with such ease... it feels like I cheated.

Both of us turn to each other back inside the throne, and my links of loyalty all return to me along with the perception of the outside world.

It seems not even a second of time has passed, as everyone in the battlefield outside is in the exact same position I left them in. Raven hasn't even activated the new power I granted her yet.

These thoughts of the outside world fade when my eyes meet Ember's. They focus with far more discernment as I've been searching for a very specific energy for the past few minutes and find exactly what I'm looking for. Search the [website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

His entire dragon's body burns hot with the same Divine Ether Energy, in far more clarity now that I know what I'm looking for. But, it is still very strange, giving off invisible readings that I can't quite understand. His voice echoes through my mind.

"Focus on the trials ahead. This next round may be easy as well, but don't lose focus. Just because you lucked out here doesn't negate the fact that there will be a new calibration on the next Trial above us. So, prepare for the worst."

His words sink in, and I nod, looking up at the next silver snake head coming down as more shimmering silver text covers my vision.

[Round 3 of 3 Shall Commence]

[Round 3 of 3 Title: Fortitude]

[Objective: Withstand the Pressure.]

As soon as I ready myself, a silver flash of light blinds me, and my vision turns red once it's done.

The sound of bubbles boiling enters my mind, and the sensation of burning surges through my body.

It feels like I've been dunked in a red-hot pool of magma, and the sensation of my skin, organs, and even bones burning away begins to repeat over and over. In addition to the burning, it feels like the heavy molten material is pushing in on me, simultaneously crushing my muscles and bones.

At the same time, a wave of pressure hits my psyche, that can only be described as a brutal wave of intimidation, making me want to pass out the second it hits me.

Just like the last two rounds, this is an illusion. I can't move my body, so I have to just allow this horrible pain to massacre my senses.

Every second that passes, the pressure seems to get stronger, and the burning sensation also gets hotter.

However, this is paired with the fact that the warm feeling in my mind is still present. It may be an illusion that I can't defend my body, but I can easily defend my mind now even without my system present.

In the first few seconds of this round, a smooth invisible mental barrier is put up, forcing the intimidation waves away; however, the physical attacks can't be stopped.

This pressure, I have to endure.

However, again, as most beings would be in excruciating pain like nothing they've ever felt before, this isn't much worse than most of my life-and-death battles.

With my mythic-grade self-regeneration skill, I've had my limbs torn off, body parts burned to ash, and blood boiled; constantly regenerating many times in the past.

The odd mental bliss about what is happening now is that I know for sure this isn't my real body.

It's just pain. I can withstand it.

If I could move this body submerged in molten rock, I'd be smiling throughout this entire last round.

A few days pass, but it is nothing compared to the perceived months that went by in the darkness.

I almost feel as though this throne is going too easy on me when the silver light returns me to the trial room, and notifications blare in my vision paired with an ancient voice.

[Round 3 of 3 Complete.]

[Trial 2: Mind: Complete.]

[Calculating prize based on trial difficulty...]

[Prize Calculated.]

The three headed serpent dissolves in a flash of silver light, just like the demon did on the floor below, and two identical black boxes fall from the ceiling.

As they hit the ground with a thud, I almost want to laugh out loud at the difference in difficulty from Trial 1 to 2, but I remember what Ember said before this one and silently approach the boxes.

The third will have another calibration to account for this new mental shield, but also, I'll be meeting the two remaining members of the big three if they've managed to survive.

If they are the same strength as Redgrave, I don't fear their presence at all...

The only being I'm concerned about is the Arch Demon that was so confident in its ability to become this world's lord.

While these thoughts race through my mind the two boxes in front of Ember and myself open on their own.

Simultaneously, the sensation of Raven pulling 1% of the power from the 36,004,922 links pops up in my status. It is paired with the imagery of her pulling a black spear from her chest and jumping upward off the desert floor.

Chapter 682

Raven's sharp gaze locked with the approaching Demon doesn't waver, even as it laughs and mocks her while she seems pinned to the desert floor at the center of a crater.

"Any last words before I make your life worse than death, and you realize it is too late to submit?!"

Raven activates the buff that has entered her consciousness and feels tens of millions of stat points rushing into her body, becoming reinforced by her True Core's threads and pushing her limits far beyond what they were just moments ago...

Even the dense black and purple aura flowing out from the spear in her chest was deadly enough to suppress her movements, thoughts, and make it difficult to breathe or move when it was close by.

Now, as she grins and tears the black spear from her chest with ease, jumping upward off the desert floor to match the massive Demonic Greater Form's unfathomable speed, the Arch Demon floating downward doesn't comprehend the scene in front of it.

Mid-jump, Raven reactivates her Divine Stealth skill and True Core's ability, disappearing entirely from the unsealed Demon's vision, only to be sensed again when her energy form's silver blades tear into the Demon's chest.

Her attack breaks through its defenses without even being noticed, and without its weapon on hand, all the demon can do is tank the hit just like she did for its last attack, twisting its body as best it can to have both her blades miss its Arch Demon's core by millimeters.

Dark red blood gushes out from its chest as Raven pulls out her swords and dodges its incoming clawed hands, but the instant she moves out of its immediate aura, she becomes invisible again, and the demon lets out a murderous roar.

It is filled with both rage and excitement, as the black and purple energy creating its greater form grows and the black spear on the desert floor floats back to its outstretched hand.

"Incredible! No one but the Noble Bloodlines has ever landed a hit like that on my unsealed form... You must truly be the strongest human left to guard this world."

It grins, showing an ominous smile of rows of sharp white teeth and bright eyes burning through its 40-meter-tall Demonic Greater Form.

There's no response, as Raven is still completely invisible, but its body twists when it feels sharp swords in its side, letting out another monstrous laugh while countering with its spear.

This time, not receiving such a deadly strike, but still having chunks of flesh and armor torn away before its spear blocks the swords.

In the next moment, Raven is gone again, and the process continues.

Over and over, Raven tears through the Demon's flesh and armor, going back on the offensive as this battle escalates even further, forcing the Demon to block and be on guard for its life.

Meanwhile, all throughout the silver dome, the insidious aura of a 1st Class Bloodline awakening was enough to turn all heads to the battle in Sector 1 taking place. However, Raven's new surge in power gives off a sharp and murderous aura of its own every time her blades collide with the Demon's spear.

The shockwaves of aura, even hundreds of kilometers away, are making many of the Crimson Army's troops, and even the red and orange cores of the demon's army, fall to their knees and have momentary lapses in their ability to fight.

Two True Cores, enhanced far above their natural capabilities, destroy the desert below them, showing off powers too vast for a small world like this to handle.

If not for the dome around them, the entire Dark Continent and 8 Great Regions would be subject to this pressure, similar to the time the Vermillion Lord and Flame Emperor had a brief mental clash.

The ones most thrown off by this dispute are the bronze-horned Demon, Abby, and Maria.

The Demon laughs with a hysterical tone, blocking Maria's blade again and going in for a counter with its flying dagger.

Maria may have just enough strength to block the hit momentarily, but her speed isn't up to par with the Demon's, and she has to concede ground to dodge a fatal blow from the flying dagger, even with the white dagger she uses to block.

Abby's speed is fast enough to dodge when the demon turns on her, and even if she is hit by the dagger, it just phases through. However, her offensive strength isn't nearly powerful enough to make an attack that would actually injure the Demon. **RaNoES**

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The three of them are locked into a perpetual cycle waiting for one to slip up, but the constant barrages of enhanced True Cores battling it out on the far side of the desert make the demon the most excited.

"I've never seen him have to go all out other than in training with the nobles! It is quite impressive someone on this world can contend with a 1st Class bloodline. If my fellow general is going this far, I might as well go all out too."

The bronze-horned demon grins, then disappears from both Abby and Maria's sight, reappearing in a blip of darkness; stabbing Maria in the stomach, then disappearing again to release a strange ball of energy from its daggers to collide directly with Abby a second time.

Both of the women are sent flying backward, coughing blood with their eyes wide open, as this Demon just used some kind of dark movement technique that was faster than both of their perceptions could see.

Darkness erupts from the wound in Maria's midsection, spreading quickly, unable to be slowed down by her self-regeneration alone. The only one capable of healing her is flying in the opposite direction, coughing blood while caught off guard by the instant high-powered attack that broke through her Immortal Form a second time.

Two loud crashes make the desert shake as both of them hit the ground, but that doesn't break the concentration of the 1st Class Demon and Raven locked in a battle of their own.

The Demon is put completely on the defensive now, but its expression hasn't changed.

The hits it's receiving aren't lethal, and it heals its wounds with Demonic Soul Energy before receiving the next hit every time.

Its eyes just take in Raven's fighting style, trying to guess where she'll strike next before she does, and it seems as though the Demon is getting better at predicting her moves each time.

They are of similar strength, but the Demon's perception skills and reflexes are exceptional.

Even the countless regenerations don't seem to be putting a dent in its stamina; if anything, it's getting more fluid and warmed up more after the long barrage of hits.

Even so, as it gets comfortable, there is nowhere for the demon to attack; it has to be completely reactive and only counter when hit.

This all changes when the demon finally speaks after over 30 exchanges, yelling in Raven's general direction.

"I think it's time I show you my skill as well. You have shown me the peak of human potential. To be honest, you have opened my eyes. I always believed you were all weaklings, but it seems there can be oddities among you. Even so, you shall never stack up to the true natural power of the demon race."

It grins while Raven ignores its words and comes to attack its back while it speaks to her.

The Demon doesn't even try to block, dodge, or counter.

It is sliced clean in half.

Then, dissolves into a mirage of black and purple mist.

Raven is temporarily confused at the sight, but in the moment her attack landed, three black spears come rocketing her way as the 1st Class Arch Demon shows off its Body Double skill for the first time during their fight.

While all of this occurs outside the tower, the two prize boxes open before Ember and myself in front of the silver arching doorway leading to the 3rd Trial.

Out of my box, a single item floats upward.

It is a palm-sized leaf, but it is glowing white, almost translucent, and it doesn't give off any energy. It only feels warm and gives an inkling of divine power.

I remember back to the first Trial's prizes, and this leaf looks very similar to the white scale Ember received. He reached out to touch it, and it was all absorbed into his body; then his scales momentarily shimmered golden.

While I cautiously examine the odd leaf, three items float up out from Ember's box.

Two of the items look very familiar, as one is the small white Low Quality Divine Ether pill that I received in the last box.

Without much thought, Ember takes it and swallows it whole.

In the same instant, the second familiar item is a small green orb, full of divine threads.

It begins to unravel just like mine did, but Ember opens up a storage rift in front of his finger to let the item fall inside before exploding.

My eyes open wide at this sight, as it's the first time I've actually been able to see the inner workings of the rift he's opened. Most of it gives off strange readings I can't comprehend, but I can sense the hot feel around its edges, meaning this power he's been using has something to do with this Divine Ether as well.

He looks down at the last item, which is a pair of black gauntlets that shimmer with yellow divine light, but he makes a dissatisfied look on his face when he examines them and turns to me.

"What? Are you going to receive your prize? It's another good one, a low-quality Ether cleansing herb. Just touch it; you won't feel anything now, but with your current mana-based storage setup, you can't take it with you."

I want to ask a ton of questions, but decide to just do as he says and reach out a finger to touch the translucent white glowing leaf.

Upon contact, it dissolves into invisible hot mist and is siphoned into my finger, flowing throughout my whole body, then disappearing from my senses like nothing happened at all.

I turn to Ember again, but he grabs the black gauntlets and throws them my way without warning.

"Your sword can eat these if it wants; I'm not a fan of Soul Weapons. Fighting with my body alone is more my style..."

At these words, the blade that circles around me perks up, rippling with a dark crimson glow, and I reflexively grab it while colliding its tip with the incoming gauntlets.

They're turned to yellow liquid and consumed the second they make contact.

There is about a second worth of digesting, but the hungry blade goes back to its black dormant state moments later as it hasn't leveled up again, but it's had its fill.

Ember speaks to himself but knows I'm listening.

"These prizes seem to all max out at the lower green divine energy realm. The Vermillion Family's Lord must still be a green core at most if this is the type of items the throne was seeded with. That would make sense for going after such a mana-lacking world. Not even a Cyan Lord would send their challengers here."

Ember smirks as the prize boxes disappear, then starts to walk forward.

"Ready to face the final trial?"

I nod and take a step forward.

"Yeah, I'm ready."

With 36,127,889 pairs of eyes looking through mine, both Ember and I step through the silver portal to be transported up to the 3rd and final Trial Room.

Chapter 683

[All Conditions In Completing Trial 2 Met.]

[All Challengers Have Arrived.]

[Would You Like To Start The Third Trial?]

[YES] [NO]

This text immediately appears in my vision, but I seem to be in an empty black room.

However, it is shaped in a triangular fashion, with Ember and myself standing at its furthest side, facing the pointed end.

I press the [YES] option, and the room around me begins to mutate and change, just as it did before the first Trial.

The ceiling rises, and the walls expand, revealing three more triangular rooms, connecting them to form a circular outline of the actual outer walls of the black tower.

In its center, a shimmering silver pillar of light shoots up from the floor, no more than 500 meters wide, stretching high into the endless darkness above, where the ceiling seems to have no end.

Six dense True Cores reach my senses over the next few seconds, tens of kilometers away on separate sides of the massive room.

Elara, Beckman, and the Vermillion Family Demon are waiting at the back of their triangular sectors, with their soul bonded partners, all looking at the silver pillar in the center of the room.

More text, and the tower's ancient voice echoes in my inner ear.

[Trial 3: Soul]

[Calculating Necessary Difficulty...]

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

[Round 1 of 2 Title: Negotiation.]

[Objective: Only One Bonded Pair Can Walk Through The Final Door, Be the Last One Standing.]

The silver pillar in the center of the room pulses, its barrier becoming more translucent, revealing a massive spiral staircase twisting upward high into the sky.

However, there is no entrance into the silver barrier, suggesting it is not part of this first round. It must be a result of the difficulty calculation...

My attention on the massive staircase is ripped away as a woman's angry voice echoes through the empty room toward me.

"What happened?! This is impossible! You're the brat Redgrave was meant to kill! I was waiting to have a good fight with that old man! Where's he hiding?" ❖

My gaze shifts to her as her body erupts in white icy energy, growing to over 50 meters high, her serpent's sharp eyes fixed on me.

If this were before I entered the tower, I would be on full alert, immediately activating my greater form; but her True Core's strength is roughly equal to Redgrave's...

My own True Core is far more powerful than hers, and with the absurd amount of stats flowing through me, multiplying my strength even further, not even my Soul Sword reacts to her rage.

Her level jumps out at me at [Lv. 19,112], similar to the fire user, and her only skill is supreme-grade ice summoning.

By the way the ground is becoming covered in white ice as her greater form grows, I could have guessed as much.

Beckman, the man in nothing but a suit and glasses, riding on an armored horse, opens his system interface and replies to Elara's yells while glancing over at me.

"Impossible... Maybe Redgrave was late entering the tower. He must be—no—I cannot sense him in the outside world. This doesn't make sense...."

The man on his horse looks down at his status, trying to decipher this, while the 10-meter-tall Vermillion Family Demon watches us with an amused expression, and the black and purple dragon beside him gazes at the silver pillar, uninterested in human affairs.

Ember stares at the Demon, ready to fight, but recognizes that the Demon is not yet in battle mode.

Ember's using an advanced concealment technique, and my aura is hidden behind my purple barrier. Only the bare minimum of my True Core's aura leaks out, making us appear rather weak. Our true level of strength is completely unknown to all parties involved, but that doesn't stop Elara from yelling out loud and making assumptions.

"Redgrave must have entered late! The Tower either killed him for unrightful late entry, or he'll be spit out once the world is claimed. That must have been it—there's no way a weakling duo like them could have killed him!"

Beckman looks up from his status and makes a comment.

"They aren't much stronger than the day we scanned their city. It must be an error. We could kill both of them right now, with less than 0.1% odds of even getting a scratch on us. Redgrave wouldn't just disappear into thin air; the ancient text stated two parties could enter the same door and fight to the death inside if there was a lack of doors... something isn't adding up—"

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Elara jumps forward, ice-stepping through the air with rising anger.

"What did you do? Our whole plan is ruined now! Hundreds of years of waiting, and some rogue child messes everything up! I'll kill you!"

Her icy serpent slithers along the floor behind her, creating jagged spears around its mouth, then releases them toward us as Elara raises her hand and summons a massive ball of white ice, tethered with extremely strong True Core threads.

She releases the ball of Icy Divine Energy, and it shoots toward us faster than the two are moving.

I glance at Ember, sigh, then point my blade at the attack that could obliterate an entire continent.

My Soul Sword flares up, sensing a challenge.

I activate my greater form as well, but keep it compacted, not growing very much in size, to only utilize its increased speed stats. This does send out a pulse of my actual power, and at the same time, my sword heats up with an intensity I've never felt before.

It has grown from [Lv. 0] to [Lv. 1] since the first Trial, and I haven't had the chance to use it yet.

The red blade morphs and bends as if alive, and I jump forward at the incoming ball of ice, swinging with everything I have, activating all of my buffs, along with my True Core's full strength.

The actual material of the red blade flickers on its edges, as though it's made of flames.

Beckman's eyes widen, as new information comes streaming into his consciousness when my blade fully activates and my greater form gives off more of my aura.

He yells out to Elara.

"Dodge! It's a trap- You cannot win this fight!"

When I swing it across my body, releasing a crescent of fire, it feels as though a part of my blade is unleashed in the attack.

A dense red crescent, as sharp as my sword and as strong as my True Core, slashes through the ball of ice with ease, sending its two halves outward toward Elara's advancing greater form.

At Beckman's word's she panics, and attempts to twist her body out of the way, but it's too late.

Her eyes widen as the living crescent of flames collides with her chest, tearing through the living Soul Armor that shields her body and effortlessly slicing through her flesh.

The Vermillion Family Demon's lips curl upward, and Beckman's eyes turn to horror as the fiery red slash shatters Elara's True Core, cleaving her body in half in a single motion.

The red fiery slash curves downward, slicing through the icy serpent's head and shattering its True Core, triggering mutual death.

As notifications ring in my ears, the red crescent of flames bursts into hundreds of tiny red droplets, curving back through the icy fog created in the explosion and rejoining my blade as though drawn by its own center of gravity, restoring its full form.

It feels like I could send out at least two or three of these high-powered strikes, and no matter where they hit, the mass of the Divine Soul Sword would always return.

As I land, the ice spears from the serpent whiz by me on all sides, and Ember doesn't even flinch as they explode against the wall behind us.

[Level Up] x1752

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Ice Summoning

Upgrade: Supreme

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

MCP: 8,521,426,902,388,295

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Stat: Speed

Points: 10,240

[YES][NO]

My level surges to [Lv. 14,341] as I absorb all the MCP, stats, and skill upgrades I can from both the woman and the serpent in less than a second, continuing my forward momentum to stand over their corpses, letting all of the two True Core's power and abilities flood into mine.

The fragments of the black armor Elara was wearing all turn to yellow liquid as I press [Consume], and my sword digests it before the white mist clears.

I point my sword at the man on the horse, staring at me as he takes in the new numbers in front of his eyes.

"You said 0.1% chance I'd leave a scratch? I guess I'm pretty lucky, aren't I?"

The man doesn't get hot-headed like his two deceased partners, the fire and ice users. He simply pushes his glasses up and meets my gaze.

"This must mean you killed Redgrave too..."

I feel emotions of horror, anger, and even fear being heavily suppressed. The man can't believe the sight before his eyes, but acts as if it never even happened.

He pauses, thinking to himself, glancing down at his status, and then back up at me.

"You may have hidden your power and concealed that weapon of yours until now, but I assure you, this was not the correct decision to make. You have stripped us of all bargaining power; I am not your main concern. We are now at the whims of this Demon."

His gaze shifts to the far side of the room, and my eyes follow to the Demon, who has yet to move or speak. It watches us with an amused expression for a few seconds, then establishes a telepathic link with everyone in the room. Its gaze turns to Beckman first.

"I remember you, the only sensible human on this world... We made a pact when I first arrived, allowing you a small kingdom with 25% of the population if all humans conceded in the final trial."

Beckman stares forward.

"That is correct, and I intend to honor our pact. Will you?"

The Demon nods.

"Of course. I am of Noble Blood. A Demon of my standing always keeps its word. However, there is another challenger here; it seems your perfect foresight isn't what you claimed it to be."

The Demon and the remaining member of the big three both look my way.

Without a moment's hesitation, I yell back.

"Deal's off."

The Demon's grin grows even more, and it turns back to Beckman.

"I won't break my noble oath. I will only fight back if one of you makes the first move. If not, I shall wait for you to surrender this world and honor the pact."

The link is severed, and the Demon watches as I ready my blade, while the man frantically sifts through data on his status.

He shouts at me.

"Be reasonable. Let us talk this out. I can give you half of the resources at central, you have proven yourself strong enough to take the place of the other council members. We can rule what is left of humans together."

I narrow my gaze on him, raising my blade as it begins to flicker red again, yelling back.

"You send me an offer now? After both of your partners tried to kill me? After offering my kingdom of people to the Demons, and so many more lands all over the world; just so you can keep your power?"

Beckman continues scrolling through his status, and responds.

"You do not understand. You haven't seen what this Demon is capable of."

I shake my head.

"I don't care what he's capable of. Is this what hundreds of years at the pinnacle of our world's power turns a human into, or have you always been this way? I would die before letting 75% of the human race fall to a Demon intent on using us as slaves. Don't try to offer me any part of your deal. I haven't given up hope like you. Even if the chance is low, it's worth trying."

My inspect and appraisal skills scan his status, revealing a far higher level than both Elara and Redgrave, plus unique skills and buffs I've never seen before...

This only makes me more intrigued as he responds.

"Then I must kill you. My odds of survival are far higher challenging you than they are breaking the pact I made with this Demon."

Chapter 684

Not wanting to reveal the full extent of my abilities, after draining the Divine threads from Elara and her familiar, I still only let out the exact strength that I peaked at during our short exchange.

I sent a ripple of perception at the two remaining teams in the room.

The Demon's status is still blocked entirely, filled with purple question marks and unreadable characters.

However, the last remaining member of the big three has a status that shines bright in my mind's eye.

Beckman's level reads [Lv. 23,985], and his single skill is [Foresight][Divine Grade]. His three buffs include [Mental Fortitude], [Perfect Calculation], and [Divine Clairvoyance], making it clear his abilities are very mental strength focused.

The horse he rides on has an identical level but somehow has no skills. It just has one buff called [Mind Devourer].

The eerie feeling I got before when looking at the duo actually came from this horse, as its strength alone is not the most frightening thing about it. Its True Core has combined with its singular buff, and this aura it gives off makes me both excited and hesitant to move forward.

My instincts are immediately confirmed by a private telepathy message from Ember.

"You'll be fine if you keep your guard up; just don't stare that horse in the eyes for too long."

I nod, grinning and stepping forward while yelling out loud at Beckman.

"Kill me? That's a little extreme, don't you think? I thought you were the sensible one. Swear your loyalty to me, and you won't have to die a meaningless death."

My blade flickers red as it senses me walking closer to another potential enemy.

The man on horseback, at the back of his sector, continues sifting through data, taking in the consistent readings of my greater form and power output of my sword.

"No... It's impossible. I cannot take the gamble; the odds are not in my favor... Given your current strength, I can defeat you 71.88% of the time, while even if we worked together to challenge this demon, we would not be able to breach a 9% probability of victory. It is simply not logical—"

I cut him off.

"Maybe you don't have the full picture. Is this all the world is to you? Numbers, probability, a winnable game of chance to preserve yourself above all else?"

Beckman looks up from his screen and tightens his gaze.

"You would be a fool to believe this world is anything but that. To make it this far, you must understand there is always a time and place for battles to be fought and other times to retreat with what you can carry. We only have one chance at life; through our own eyes, we are the most important thing. Hundreds of millions of lives are worth the trade-off for my own, even the whole world if it was necessary. What would be the point of all of this if I gave up now?"

I continue to walk forward, increasing my speed, then respond.

"So this was your plan from the start? Ever since you made contact with the Demons? Stage a Great War, lie to your people in Central, and sacrifice the rest of the world just so you can live on?"

Beckman responds while motioning for his horse to move forward, the rhythmic echoing footsteps coinciding with his response.

"It wasn't my plan before the system linked to this world. I was rather content overseeing humans as the centuries went by. However, the system gave me new insight on the rules of reality. I am meant to live forever; I have the ability to choose the right path every time. You are far too young and lacking sight to understand my choice is the correct one. If you put your sword down now, there is a certainty you will live like royalty in a kingdom surrounded by flames. The humans left behind have no idea the world around them has moved on, and when the demons use the humans we've sacrificed to farm this world dry of mana and leave, we can be the saviors that put out the flames and open the walls to show the desolate world to the humans we've saved. It is a win-win."

His face remains serious, unmoving, and calm while his horse begins to gallop faster.

I reply with a simple answer.

"I disagree. This is not why I challenged the throne."

Links of loyalty surge faster and faster in my mind, as the reality of the situation in Central is being exposed by their last remaining leader in real time.

Many cities around the world that were contacted by long range transmissions from hunters, friends, and family members from the 8 Great Regions and Dark Continent see this too, and word that their nations are being used as bargaining tools between humans and demons right now spreads even faster.

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It is all linked to the surges that were felt when the throne awakened. The Flame Emperor's name begins to grow in popularity in nations I've never even traveled to before.

My links surpass 40 million as I speak again.

"I made a promise that I wouldn't let a single innocent human die in this war. It is a burden I will carry alone with the army that follows me."

Unknown to everyone in the room, I open my rising emperor's interface and link the visual feeds of the 4 Generals outside the tower, all battling Demons of their own right now, so the world can sift through feeds and see the full story playing out. Then I continue to speak while raising my blade.

"I made another promise that I wouldn't leave humans behind. One last chance, if you swear your loyalty to me, I can still save us all. However, if you insist on sacrificing hundreds of millions of lives just to save your own, then you are an enemy equal, if not worse, than the Demons in my eyes."

The gallops become faster, and a dense grey and yellow aura erupts out from the duo, increasing their size by about 50% with a pseudo energy form.

"Nothing can change my mind. I must choose the predestined path. No other outcomes are suitable."

I sigh, then compress half of my greater form into my lower body to kick off the floor with immense speed and enlarge the top half of my body to create a monstrous sword strike.

"Very well. You've made your choice."

We both fly into the center of Elara's old sector, and I swing my blade to release a red slash of energy toward the approaching duo.

Beckman changes his direction the instant he sees my attack, but this was expected, so I send two more identical slashes his way.

Each of these slashes is just as strong as the ones that easily killed Elara, but the expression on the man's face doesn't change.

He shifts his direction multiple times a second, staring forward, and somehow avoiding each of the flying attacks by millimeters.

It looks like a natural fluid motion, his directions shifting to counteract my flying attacks even before I've thrown them.

As the red slashes collide with the floor and back wall, they turn into thousands of droplets of pure divine soul fire, then disperse in beautiful displays while pulling back toward me to reconnect with my Soul Sword.

In the center of the massive collection of returning fiery particles, the ominous horse rider stares me down, and its horse's eyes pulse with dark grey and yellow light.

I look away and concentrate all of my greater form's energy into my legs to jump out of the enemy's path, but before I even move, it's turned to follow in the same direction.

My mind flashes back to Beckman's one and only skill, Divine Grade Foresight.

It makes me momentarily question if he can truly see the future, but I'm simultaneously reminded of the fact that he couldn't tell Elara to dodge until I released my full power.

To predict my moves, it must be a similar ability as my swordsmanship skill's perfect thread, just to an absurd degree, and with far more possibilities. Taking in his surroundings and understanding the best possible move to carry through with.

I whisper under my breath while changing my flight path again, upward, "I guess I'll just have to force your hand..."

His movements mimic mine, seemingly before I even do them, moving upward at the same time to close our gap even further.

All of the fragments of my sword return to my blade now that we're so close, but this has other issues that come with it.

The armored horse's eyes shine brighter, and the ominous aura coming out of it gets so close that it's impossible not to feel its presence.

It feels like I've been caught in a web of intimidation, with a cold sensation washing over me, seeping straight into my mind.

It makes me momentarily feel as though the last few seconds are all a blur, like the fight hasn't even started yet, and there is no reason to attack again because we're so far away.

However, as Beckman pulls a single black blade from an inside pocket of his suit, the familiar warm sensation of Divine Ether floods into my mind, negating all foreign buffs instantly; and my memories come rushing back, allowing me to swing my flaming sword again in the direction I'm meant to.

This prompts Beckman to move out of the way, but his speed isn't great enough, and he has to block with the knife he's pulled out to deflect the incoming strike.

My upward momentum continues once we collide, and Beckman on his armored steed goes rocketing downward.

However, the black originator blade he pulled out is shattered upon collision, and his full right arm is melted off from the intensity of the flaming strike he failed to predict.

There's a loud thud as they hit the floor and a horse's cry, while I hover above them with my sword pointed straight down.

"That was your one lucky shot, and you blew it. I'm not taking any more chances."

I release my True Core's full aura, and it shines over 3 times brighter and denser than the man below me, giving off all of the radiation from Elara and Redgrave's cores combined.

I let go of my blade and put both of my hands to their sides, releasing bright shimmering white divine light that makes the temperature in the room drop by a large amount.

"Seeing the future can't help you much if all paths of escape are physically impossible!"

The attack I create is far too fast to outrun, and far too deadly to touch.

Both the white serpent and Elara had ice attribute True Core abilities, and with the new perk of my Divine Absorption skill, receiving a supreme-grade ice summoning skill has granted me a far superior combination of all of these ice abilities combined.

In a flash, before Beckman can even predict my movements, a dome of ice is created, spanning over a kilometer wide.

The only hole that is left remaining is right at the top where I look down into it, and this is the optimal path for Beckman to leave through.

He moves upward toward me, expanding his horse's aura with a calm expression still on his face.

"Hiding your true strength again? If this is it, it's still not enough... It is probable that you will kill me, but you have doomed yourself and the entire human race—"

His words cease as I stop using my True Core's Ice and grab my sword again to fully activate the Divine Flames I stole from Redgrave's True Core; then point my blade forward to push out a red and yellow pillar of monstrous fire into the only small hole in the dome.

The man on the horse stops moving upward even before the flames collide with his body, as he sees the future and knows that there is no escaping this fatal blow...

Chapter 685

The yellow and red flames fill the dome, and the last remaining member of the big three is consumed by fire.

There isn't a single yell, curse, or attempt to escape the flames.

The man who lived his life consumed by numbers, certain he would live forever, merely disappears the moment the odds turn against him, accepting his fate.

I float downward as notifications ring in my inner ear.

[Level Up] x2365

[Use Absorption]

Skill: [Foresight][Divine Grade]

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

MCP: 14,289,200,896,345,001

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Stat: Mental Strength

Points: 18,909

[YES][NO]

My level hits [Lv. 16,706], and I press yes to accept every skill and stat point available to me, while draining the ice and fire around me back into my True Core.

The Divine Energy trapped within the Man and the Horse also flows directly into me, increasing my strength even further, and I feel two unique True Core abilities enter my body.

Both of which are instinctively comprehended in an instant; but I can't fathom the true extent of their power until I use them in battle...

In the same moment, the result of this match pushes my links of loyalty over 45 million, surging upward faster and faster at an exponential rate.

These new True Core abilities and additional hundreds of millions of stat points fill me with confidence as the black dagger's fragments and the horse's armor turn into yellow Divine liquid, consumed by my blade.

I let out a satisfied sigh, but my moment of victory is quickly interrupted by a slow clapping sound from one far corner of the room.

My head turns to the noise, and a telepathy channel opens with the Demon.

"Very impressive. It seems you have a decision to make: honor the pact in place and leave this tower at once to allow me to claim the throne; or fight me for the chance to make this world your own.."

—

Meanwhile, outside the tower, Raven sees three black spears coming at her from separate directions, with body doubles of the Demon she was fighting spawning out of nowhere.

Raven's senses are keen, but every time she locks onto the true body of the Demon, it instantaneously swaps to one of the other doubles.

She disappears using her Divine stealth, not even attempting to attack, but the body she sliced in two moments ago spawns back into reality, right underneath her. Four perfect copies of the Demon block all possible escape routes.

Even with her stealth skill activated, she is too close to fully dodge all four attacks.

The lucky spear that manages to hit her is a body double, but the mythic grade perk given to the Demon allows it to swap places instantly and use its true spear to land a devastating blow on Raven's side.

Blood leaks into the air, and a portion of Raven's body becomes visible as the density of Divine energy and demonic soul energy shocks her system, sending her flying backward.

All four body doubles follow like machines, as the Demon is no longer playing around, aiming to go in for the kill.

Despite Raven's invisibility, the gushing blood and residue from her wound give off a faint energy signature, making it easy for the Demon and its doubles to surround her again, landing another attack that sends her flying down to the ground with another horrific wound, this time in her leg.

Even though a full 1% of stats now rushes through her, putting her strength on par with the unsealed 1st Class Demon, the instantaneous, ruthless attacks from all sides put her on the defensive again just as the battle was starting to turn her way.

Even as the millions of links pour in, gradually increasing her strength, it doesn't do much against the third and fourth heavy hits she receives in the arm and thigh from unbreakable spears.

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The attacks she chooses to block or intentionally dodge turn into nothing but Demonic Energy manifestations, and the Demon's real body attacks from where she least expects it.

Each new injury that can't be fully healed by the shared mythic grade self-regeneration skill on her status just makes her invisibility less and less useful.

Dark blotches of Demonic Soul energy left behind in the spear's wounds make it easy for the Demon to triangulate her exact location each time.

While the individual hits aren't fatal, if enough build up, she will slow down more and more, becoming a massive target in the sky.

—

Maria and Abby face a similar problem, as the 2nd Class Demon's unsealed form is simply too overpowered for them to stand a chance.

Even as the links of loyalty surpass 40 million, then 45 million, pushing millions of new stat points into their beings, Maria's blade is continuously pushed back by the unsealed Demon's raw strength, and Abby doesn't have enough power to break through its Greater Form armor despite her superior speed.

They're able to hold it off, but with every second that passes, the Demon gets another chance to land devastating attacks.

Even after using Abby's Restoration magic, Maria's last wound in her stomach from a direct hit by the Demon's dagger isn't fully healed.

They only have fractions of seconds to heal before the laughing, psychotic monstrous force comes down to the desert floor where they are.

"You do not understand how bleak your future truly is! Even if you manage to fend us off for a few more minutes, you're only pushing off your inevitable end. Just from the fact that you haven't powered up again tells me this is truly your peak."

It sends its two blades right for Maria, as it knows its weaker attacks are pointless against Abby.

Maria jumps out from Abby's restoration circle to block both incoming daggers with her massive blue soul energy sword. It pulses deep within her core, pushing her newly awakened yellow core to its limits, able to go toe-to-toe with this True Core Demon with a bloodline ascending beyond anything humans should be capable of fighting.

Her Greater Form wavers, but she doesn't give up. The pulsing grows stronger, deeper, and faster as she's pushed backward, gritting her teeth. Tens of millions of eyes look through hers now, as the spectator feature expands for the world to witness the generals fight.

Her feet flow with Superior Ice magic powered by a borrowed plunderer skill, draining the area of all available mana, digging into the desert floor, while the wound in her stomach starts to reopen and expand with black demonic energy far faster than when it was first inflicted.

For the first time in a while, she actually holds back the Demon's attacks. Not just one, but both daggers.

There will be no dodging now, but the rising stats are starting to catch up.

Even Abby leaps over the exchange taking place, but the Demon was ready for a move like this, disappearing before their eyes and meeting Abby in the sky to press its palm into her chest, covering it with a thick layer of the same strange demonic energy used to create the balls of darkness from earlier.

Before she can even send off her attack, Abby is sent flying in the opposite direction, coughing blood, powerless to block it. She's sent hurtling toward the desert floor again, far away from Maria as she still attempts to block the two daggers pushing against her massive sword.

The Demon pushes its palms together, forming another ball of compacted demonic energy between them, then blips forward a few hundred meters to release this toward Maria's unguarded back.

It grins wide, disappearing into thin air again, and reappearing on the desert floor right where Abby's injured form is projected to land.

—

Simultaneously, a massive well of gravity makes everyone beneath the silver dome shiver as the arrow Arie sends at the Yellow Core general coming their way is blocked by the Demon's chest plate alone.

Before this War broke out, his arrow at half this power shattered its armor with ease and nearly killed it on the spot.

Blocking this should be impossible, but violent energy erupts from one of the two remaining demon generals as he yells at Arie.

"Do not underestimate the strength of the Demon Race. Even if I die, I will make sure to take you with me, the one who disgraced me in front of the Vermillion Lord. A 3rd Class Bloodline is enough to wipe every last one of you off the face of the planet."

These words echo from the Demon's furious Greater Form as it grows to over 15 meters tall.

The Demonic Energy vibrates, giving off strange readings. Each step closer makes the Demon's form waver, its energy levels rising and falling unpredictably.

—

This strange reading prompts the black-horned spear user to pause its relentless attacks and turn back to the base of the tower.

"He wasn't ready... Pushing himself further than his bloodline limits. A 3rd Class Commoner trying to pull this much power will surely become corrupted..."

The Demon considers putting its fight on hold to fly over to this other Demon, as if left alive for too long, it will surely detonate, taking out many valuable Commanders and Knights; but sees the second Yellow General send out extra commands to its surroundings to evacuate the immediate area.

The Demon grins and turns back to Raven's beaten form, now not even attempting to use her invisibility and merely blocking attacks to buy time.

Seven large Demonic Energy wounds drain her lifeforce slowly, but the Demon doesn't relent, multiplying three fresh body doubles and going in for the kill again.

—

Fear washes over Arie as Luna's words echo in his mind.

"It's going to be corrupted. Like those ascended beasts we faced in the abyss... If you don't kill it now—"

"I know." He replies, while my doubles catch on to the situation and yell out orders to take cover as something very chaotic and strange is emerging from the twisted demonic greater form...

Arie pulls back another single arrow with every drop of Demonic Soul Energy and borrowed mana he has.

Raven has four more spears closing in on her from all sides, with only two blades to block, impossible to know which one will be the fatal strike.

Abby rockets down toward the laughing 2nd Class Greater Form of the Demon as it charges up another black ball of Divine Demonic Matter.

Maria barely holds back the two black flying daggers, and an even stronger energy attack is headed toward her unguarded back.

The state of the battlefield outside the tower seems quite dire, but the world is watching.

The links of loyalty surge past 50 million, and a notification rings in all of the Generals' ears, giving them new hope to turn this battle around.

Chapter 686

[Congratulations! Rising Emperor's Domain Milestone Reached!]

[50,260,997/50,000,000 Links of Loyalty Created]

[New Perk Unlocked: Rising Emperor's Imperial Reach]

Info:

All Commanders can appoint 10 Knights and share 50% of their total borrowed stats. Each Knight may take up to 5% max of the Commanders' borrowed power.

All Generals, Commanders, and Knights can now borrow up to 2 Skills simultaneously from the Rising Emperor.

The generals may now borrow an additional 5% of all Base Stat Points and Mana Control efficiency from all subordinates under the allegiance of the Rising Emperor. In

addition, 5% of the generals' Base Stat Points and Mana Control may be temporarily distributed to any subordinate under the allegiance of the Rising Emperor.

The maximum amount borrowed or shared per general is now 2%. All generals acting together may control 10%.

When not in use, the Rising Emperor may use all 10% of this untapped power. The Rising Emperor has total authority and can override the generals' power sharing even if they are activated.

The caster may only borrow or share exclusively; both actions cannot be performed simultaneously.

Members affected by this perk are not required to be within range of the Rising Emperor's Domain.

This buff stacks with the [Expansion] perk, [Dominance] perk, [Authority] perk, [Power Holder] perk, and [Ruler's Gaze] perk if used simultaneously.

—

As I'm about to reply to the demon's words, new status screens in my Rising Emperor's domain pop up, and I do a quick mental math of what this new power grants me.

This brings the total stats now available to me up to 40%.

With this new General-to-Commander-to-Knight hierarchy in place, each general can now use up to 2% of stats, Commanders can be appointed and have access to 0.5% each, and Knights can use up to 0.025%.

While it doesn't seem like much on the surface, even a knight at such a low percentage can still borrow upward of 1.25 million stat points per category.

At 0.5%, the commanders can each borrow roughly 25 million at full capacity, and the generals using their full 2% borrowed power can now take just over 100 million each.

These numbers for my subordinates are approaching the 500 million stats I borrowed during my battle with Redgrave.

In addition to this rise in stats, two skills can now be shared at once with my Inner Circle.

The scene before my eyes outside the tower takes a drastic turn, and tens of millions of sighs of relief are had in unison, looking through our eyes.

—

My immediate attention shifts back to the situation in front of me, as I grip my blade tight while it digests the remaining Divine Energy within the Soul Weapons it devoured moments ago.

I take a deep breath and lift my blade as it shimmers red and yellow, then reply.

"I think my decision is obvious. I will fight for this world. Maybe I should be the one giving you the option to back out now. Head on back to the Demonic Realm, and we can forget this ever happened; what do you say?"

The Arch Demon in dense black armor grins, but still stands unmoving with a straight back, staring at me with unworried eyes.

Its purple and black dragon yawns, stretching its wings, still staring up at the silver pillar, not even seeing the human before it as a threat.

I can't help but look at the demon's shimmering blood-red horns, each the size of my entire Soul Sword, as it responds.

"The Vermillion Family has invested too much time and resources into this newly connected world. I'm afraid I cannot take your offer seriously."

Its eyes pierce into mine, and I reply.

"What about the generals that follow you? You're not concerned that if I leave this tower, I could take them out?"

"That would not be a problem. The one who claims the throne will have complete control of this world. As a noble bloodline, the warriors created from a 3rd Class Mana World like this will not be a problem. The man you just killed was right. Taking out this world's top warriors that have been looking after it for centuries will be the beginning of your downfall..."

I raise an eyebrow at his words, as this mention of a 3rd Class Mana World makes me wonder if there is a link between this and the Demonic Bloodline classifications that are being unsealed outside.

The demon reads my expression and expands on his point.

"It seems you're truly lacking sight if you do not even understand the difference between us. This is the lowest mana density world that fits onto the Standard Grading Scale. The beings of this planet can only progress so far and are born with an innate talent based on their surroundings. Second, First, and Noble-graded worlds are far superior from birth. You may have a few strong warriors, but the rest of your world is weak."

Its eyes shift to my blade, then to my right hand, focusing on the dark purple ring around my finger.

"That artifact is what must have brought you this far. Its creator comes from a 1st Class World much closer to the source... I've always wondered where that pocket realm went."

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It grins as my eyes widen, taking in all this information. This demon is not ordinary at all; its knowledge and nonchalant attitude about my purple divine artifact and blatant confidence make me feel unease again.

Even with the massive increase in power from both the True Cores of the big three, and 32% of the stats from over 50 million links, I can't see through the demon's mental or physical defenses to gauge its stats.

The demon's attention shifts away from me and toward Ember, who stands in his human form at the back of the sector we entered this room in.

"Are you a dragon? I can't sense any energy readings coming off of you... Other than that scent... I didn't know it was possible for your race to soul bond with a human."

Ember grins back but shrugs.

This lack of response prompts the purple and black dragon to turn its head away from the silver pillar of light and enter the conversation with a deep and slow voice.

"If a human clears a labyrinth before its actualization phase, it is theoretically possible. One would need to steal the dragon's egg, absorb the Demon Core meant for that labyrinth contract, and feed it an absurd amount of Mana or Demonic Energy to sync the Soul-Bonded Pairs levels before the contract start timer ran out..."

It stares at Ember, then shakes its head and turns back to the silver staircase.

"So, it's possible, but to limit a dragon's growth potential by bonding with a human is worse than dying before your contract even begins. That form is disgusting..."

Ember turns to me and nods.

"Ready when you are. This small talk is only wasting time. You take the demon, and I'll teach this dragon a lesson in underestimating the humans of this world."

I smirk and lift a finger to light a small fireball above it.

Then, I send it slowly flying across the massive room, right past the silver pillar, straight into the demon's chestplate.

It doesn't bother to block, and I take the few slow seconds of tension and silence to power up my greater form and activate all my buffs and new abilities to make the room fill with my maximized True Core's Aura and perception.

I send a message through the link as the small fireball collides with the demon and dissipates.

"There, I've made the first move. Your past agreement with the former rulers of this world is broken. Whoever wins this fight will claim the throne."

The demon reaches into a dark black and purple demonic rift by its side, pulling out a 7-meter-long demonic longsword with a True Core energy signature equal to its own, and doesn't waste any time, using that odd movement technique to blip forward.

Its eyes widen, and its grin grows.

While swinging its blade across its body, a horrific aura of intimidation pours out of this monster as it finally can let loose and not break some sacred pact made 50 years ago.

If it had released this aura outside the tower, I'm certain the entire world would feel it...

If I were within a few kilometers, it probably would have killed me instantly without me even being able to resist or know what happened.

Now, as it hits me, the violent energy is strong and insidious, but with a True Core almost 10 times stronger than when I entered this tower, far more borrowed stats, and a warm white barrier of mental Divine Ether protection blocking the dark waves that hit my consciousness, I'm able to withstand its aura and stay upright.

However, its absurd speed is impossible for my eyes to track, even with my all-seeing eye on full blast.

When it appears in front of me, already going in for the kill, an incredibly odd sensation materializes in my vision.

Powered by one of the new abilities of my True Core and the Divine Grade Foresight skill I've instinctively activated, it appears as though thousands of demons are in front of me.

All of the demon's images take different paths, and the exact strength and power necessary to block, dodge, or run away becomes clear in my mind.

It's distracting and mind-bending at first, but as the milliseconds pass and the demon's massive sword swings down toward my Soul Sword, swinging upward to block, fewer and fewer demons appear in my mind's eye.

It's as though all possible futures are compressing, and the best options for me are becoming crystal clear while worse options fade.

I'm able to see which movements I need to make to get a desired outcome within the next few milliseconds.

Trying to think further into the future spawns hundreds of thousands, then even millions of demons in my mind, as there are too many possible outcomes and variables the further I look.

It distracts me from the task at hand, even bringing on a faint headache. So, I focus on one crystal-clear option that leads to a desirable outcome.

I smirk, twisting my body and changing the direction of my sword to follow the exact holographic foresight images in my mind.

My blade scrapes against the demon's black sword, only adding to my momentum to the side while I airstep aside and spin to gain enough torque to swing my blade again at the demon as it follows through with its strike.

My second swing is directed at the demon's neck, but not to kill. Search the novelFire.net website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Too many future variants show going in for the kill ending in the demon's counterattack being too fast and powerful to block. Even activating my hexagonal defensive barrier right now would be too advanced, putting the demon on the full offensive before I can even prepare with my Astral Form.

The only option I have that gives me something to work with is grazing its flesh and tanking the counter hit while focusing 100% of my greater form's power into defense on a single point.

It happens just as I see it in my mind's eye, channeling all of my perception and attack into my blade with swordsmanship, and all of my defense into the demon's second sword swing as it pivots its body and even head toward me.

Its eyes lock with mine as I make a tiny scratch on its skin and receive a monstrous blow to the chest from its blade.

The impact force alone makes every bone in my body rattle, tearing through my full greater form, blood-bonded armor, and coming within millimeters of my divine core.

Stats rush through my mind as I break through its energy barrier just slightly, drawing its blood and finally seeing the true extent of this demon's abilities.

As I cough up blood and am sent flying back to the curved back wall of the room, I laugh out loud at the [Lv. 39,805] in bright purple text burning into my mind.

It even has three skills: [Body Double][Divine Grade], [Shadow Step][Divine Grade], and [Demonic Energy Manipulation][Supreme Grade].

The single ranked-up buff [Noble Bloodline Transformation] is the last status information I see before its wounds are healed and its protective barrier repaired. At the same time, I slam into the back wall with overwhelming force, reminding me of the bone-breaking battle I fought with Redgrave at the bottom of this tower.

My Self-Regeneration skill begins to heal the Demonic Energy wound and the hole in my armor, but before I can even pry myself off the wall, the demon disappears and reappears right in front of me, swinging its blade aiming to kill again.

-

On the other side of the room, the exchange between Ember and the purple and black dragon proceeds much slower.

The demonic beast looks down from the stairs, and back to Ember.

"Shall we fight? My master will kill your human in a matter of seconds. That Soul Bond of yours will kill you anyway. I might as well not waste the energy."

Ember grins and begins taking steps closer to the dragon, shifting his form to Hybrid, then into his full Dragon Form.

The crimson underbelly scales momentarily glimmer with a faint golden glow.

He speaks up while flapping his wings and flying into the air.

"Oh, come on, you're not even the slightest bit curious why a dragon bonded with a human? You've hit enough level thresholds to know this is not only theoretically possible but has happened before in the past. Your claim that I am stunting my potential is contradictory. I would say that bonding with a Demon limits your growth if you're truly aiming for the top."

The black and purple dragon's eyes widen, and its attention is actually captured for the first time at this remark, flapping its wings to lift off into the air and reply.

"A 3rd Class World knowing of this history? You must have read some false ancient text."

Ember's front claws become covered in a dense layer of silver threads.

"Oh, I assure you, these are real memories, not ancient texts."

Chapter 687

The black and purple dragon pulses with murderous Demonic Soul Energy, making the room twice as heavy as when the demon released its aura of intimidation, and its eyes lock onto Ember with genuine rage.

"You're an Overseer... We were wrong... The Divine Beasts that reincarnated to this new world for their cycle were not all killed off..."

Ember grins, showing his sharp teeth while responding.

"Yes... I stayed on my last world longer than expected. I wasn't able to ascend in my last life. I managed to make it to this world just in time. But—an Overseer? Don't group me in with those underachievers."

Ember's True Core pulses, sending waves of yellow divine light all over his body. Its unique ability is being manifested for the first time, and a bright yellow fire moves up from his chest into his throat and out his mouth in a blinding display of light before the purple dragon can even process the words he just spoke.

A pillar of bright yellow light, crackling with trace amounts of silver threads, hits the Demonic Dragon's left wing, searing right through with almost no resistance at all.

There have only been a few other instances when an ability like this was used in the past, one of them being when Ember displayed his Soul Energy's unique properties, dissolving a mountain within a dungeon.

His True Core's Divine Flames seem to have a similar property, dissolving through the Dragon's flesh like it's water dripping away.

The pillar of flames hits the back wall of the room, and a wretched dragon's pain-filled roar erupts from the demonic monster.

A moment of terror and realization courses through this beast as it was caught off guard, and the monster turns its head to see the edges of the hole where it was hit expand, dissolving its wing even more.

It lets out a wave of dense purple and yellow divine demonic soul energy from its mouth straight at the wound nonstop, surging high up in the air away from Ember while relentlessly attacking its own wing.

This collision makes the room fill with even more heavy aura, alerting both myself and the Demon that the battle between our bonded pairs has begun.

The Arch Demon before me doesn't even change its expression as the yellow and purple energy explodes above us; it still swings its sword to kill with no hesitation.

Now, with no incentive to find the Demon's stats, all I have to use my Foresight ability for now is to dodge and get a feel for my opponent's battle style.

I swing my blade upward and jump out of the way to do exactly that.

Red and purple aura collide as our swords meet, and we're both pushed back.

I follow the optimal path, and we collide five more times, blipping all over the room's floor, circling the silver pillar in the center of the room.

Two massive dragons clash in the sky a second time; however, an ominous dark purple Greater Form expands out from the Demonic Dragon in order to block the second pillar of Divine Fire without losing more flesh. ❖

The circular wound in its wing hasn't been healed, but after excessive Demonic Soul Energy regeneration, the spreading dissolving properties finally stop once it doubled in size.

The activation of its Greater Demonic Form makes the Dragon over 150 meters long and creates a new heavy aura in the air.

Another seven exchanges go by between myself and the Demon, circling the pillar of silver light again.

I manage to get a far better feel for my foresight ability, as each dodge and block I act on leads to the next exchange, allowing me to pair up possibilities and dance around the battlefield, missing deadly blows by millimeters over and over again.

Both myself and the Demon know neither of us is using our full power.

However, the third collision in the sky above shifts the tune of this battle from warmup to death match immediately. A wave of Demonic Energy collides with Ember but is completely negated once he begins to expand with a yellow aura to match the purple dragon's size; I know this has to be his Astral Form.

The divine energy density in the room changes again as Ember doesn't stop growing once he's larger than his opponent.

Two monstrous dragon roars fill the air as the Demon before my eyes multiplies, and six of him surround me with swords swinging my way.

All of them feel extremely strong, filled to the brim with mana, demonic energy, and divine threads.

However, I can tell them apart by the sword they carry.

The Demon swaps between its body doubles as my eyes track it; but the Soul Sword in its hand can't be perfectly replicated.

My foresight still sees a path out, but it would result in losing a limb at the very least.

I'm going to activate my Astral Form, but I know it will trigger the Demon to unseal his bloodline on the spot, amping up this battle to its maximum intensity.

I close my eyes for a fraction of a second to prepare, but at the same time, I get a barrage of new notifications from my Rising Emperor's domain coming from outside...

Half a minute ago, all of the generals received notifications that they are now capable of pulling up to 2% of linked stats.

The bleak situation they were in moments ago has been flipped around once again.

Raven is the first to act on this opportunity, adding an additional 50 million stats to all of her base stats, doubling the power that her True Core can enhance in milliseconds, making the four incoming black spears far less intimidating.

She grins, as the world around her feels like it's moving in slow motion.

With access to two borrowed skills, she lets self-regeneration continue keeping her wounds at bay and pulls Supreme Fire Summoning from the bank of usable skills that just popped up in her interface.

An overwhelming aura bursts out of her, and there is no need to run or attempt to turn invisible at all.

The incoming spears are so slow in her eyes that dodging all of them is a simple task.

Her entire greater battle form erupts in yellow flames, and she twists her body, sending waves of fire out from her silver swords to instantly take out two of the Demon's body doubles.

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While kicking off the air again, she sends another two unfathomably fast and powerful waves of fire at the remaining two.

One of the doubles disappears in a poof of black smoke, but the remaining demon is hit across the chest, armor shattered, and a flaming divine energy gash rips into its chest, almost slicing through its divine core.

The first-class Demon coughs up blood, its eyes wide in shock, as it's sent hurtling down toward the desert floor fractions of a second after an attack it thought was going to be the deciding exchange—in its favor.

As Raven deactivates the fire summoning skill and focuses all of her remaining power on self-regeneration to completely heal the demonic wounds that were plaguing her body, she activates her divine stealth ability and disappears from the demon's senses.

She lunges forward in silence, aiming to end its life in the next exchange.

On the other side of the desert, Maria holds back two Demonic Flying daggers while a ball of dark matter comes flying toward her unguarded back.

The notifications that ring in her ears prompt a surge in power that lowers the temperature of the area of the battlefield by an absurd degree.

Her longsword is powered by a pulse from her core that turns the black daggers pushing against it to pure blue ice instantly, shattering to thousands of pieces in a single swing.

In the same movement, she twists her Ice Goddess form around and collides head-on with the energy ball, creating an explosion of ice and demonic energy that shakes her very being.

The vibrations travel through her blade, but her Soul Energy Core pulses again, and the excess energy channels the explosion upward to create a massive blue and purple pillar into the sky.

As her quick actions destroy the Demon's attacks and save her from injuries, Abby pulls a full 2% of stats as well.

She's headed straight toward the arrogant demon that believes this battle is already won.

The massive explosions in its peripherals already notify it that Maria is done for, and now the injured green-haired woman is plummeting toward her doom.

This is far from the truth, and it is only made known to the Demon once it releases another dark energy ball at Abby, and instead of finishing her off, the attack phases right through her Immortal Form.

The Demon's eyes widen at the odd phenomenon, but it doesn't have long at all to think as Abby creates six massive sharpened pillars of stone the Demon's way. They all collide with its chest, shattering its obsidian armor, sinking into its flesh, and sending it flying backward while Abby lands right where it was standing moments ago.

She turns to her side with a smirk when she sees a bright blue blur of light flash by and follows right beside Maria to end this battle as they truly have the upper hand.

Scared yells come from the Demon as it hits the desert floor a few hundred meters away.

"H-How? What is this? You were still holding back? But why? A third-class world has humans stronger than me, it shouldn't be possible—"

Its words trail off as it jumps into the air, trying to run away from the blue and green light following it.

However, a wave of royal blue ice magic catches up behind the Demon, colliding with its back and instantly making it harder to move its legs and arms, slowing its speed away from the duo.

Another barrage of spears comes flying toward its back, and the Demon doesn't even feel the impact as its body is being frozen and all of its nerve endings are destroyed.

The Demon's arms and legs are shattered off, and the last thing it feels is a sharp pain in its neck as it watches its own body be destroyed by a massive blue sword and its True Core shattered by a green-haired woman's daggers.

This is all the second-class Demon sees from a lower point of view while its head topples to the ground and shatters like glass; then everything goes dark.

Blue and green streaks continue upward into the sky after their kill, and the moment both of them realize their job is done, they deactivate their power-sharing buff to allow 4% more to be used by the Flame Emperor.

Simultaneously, Raven's invisible blades come back into reality, shimmering silver, to slice through the falling first-class Demon's body.

One blade goes straight through the open fiery wound in its chest, shattering its True Core, while the other blade slices through its neck.

This Demon is decapitated, and its body explodes from the released pressure of its core just a few hundred meters above the ground, creating an enormous crater, leveling the desert down to its bedrock for hundreds of kilometers in all directions.

Raven reappears into reality but doesn't give back her stats just yet.

She swaps out the fire magic skill on her status for telepathy and stares toward the tower, zeroing in on the battle taking place and the third-class Demon that is about to explode.

As the strongest General outside the tower, she yells out orders through their links, appointing Lydia and Fisher as her commanders, and even giving Arie battle plans on how to best take care of this situation.

A chain reaction of orders is given and followed out, as Arie does exactly as told, appointing Monk as his second Commander.

All four commanders on the battlefield appoint every single member of the Crimson Army as Knights, giving the entire human race a massive boost in power that makes all of the Demons fighting shiver with fear.

Lydia and Fisher leave their formation at the front lines of the Crimson Army, as they aren't needed for protection anymore. They flash over to assist Arie by creating a massive mana and Divine Energy shield in front of him right after he releases an arrow at the monstrosity coming his way.

The corrupted third-class Demon is growing and shrinking in size, spewing Demonic and Divine Energy everywhere it looks, even killing over a dozen Demonic Knights and even a Demonic Commander that is too close by.

It screeches, moving in random directions, and seems as though it's lost all intelligence. The General has turned itself into a brainless Demonic Bomb to get its revenge by any means necessary.

Arie uses the maximum power he has available to him in a single shot, zeroing in on the center of the corrupted Demon's Core. On impact, the violent tendrils of dark black energy cease for a fraction of a second, as instead, they pour into the crack that Arie managed to make in its Divine Core.

Before anyone can blink, the detonation of this angered Demon kills another two dozen of the demonic Knights and three demonic commanders nearby.

It decimates the desert for over 20 kilometers in all directions. The only thing protecting the Crimson Army, the Saint, and even the demonic troops fighting the humans is the unbreakable barrier that Fisher and Lydia created using their enhanced orange cores with trace amounts of yellow threads.

The shock of this blast and massive increase in power from a majority of the troops on the battlefield now using the Rising Emperor's stats has put the Demonic army into chaos.

One of their generals just killed itself. The Saint clashes with the only remaining general left, holding it off using a massive white pure Qi form powered by a high-level Yellow Core.

Arie turns his attention to this last general, pulling back an arrow while Fisher and Lydia unsummon their defensive wall.

The three dozen elite troops in the Crimson Army all go on a rampage, borrowing supreme fire summoning as the most destructive skill at their fingertips. The result of this boost in stats and morale is horrendous for the Demonic forces.

The Red Core Demons needed to be handled by multiple army members before, and they were constantly being saved by Arie in the background.

Now, each of the elemental Elites with over a million base stats in each attribute slices through the Demonic Knights with ease, burning them to ash, killing with no remorse and even challenging some of the orange-cored demonic commanders that scramble to give orders to their knights.

Monk and the two orange cored followers of The Saint join in, targeting the few Demonic Commanders that remain.

From outnumbering the Crimson Army eight to one moments ago, the Demonic forces are cut in half in seconds, and it looks like their full extermination is near.

This all-out slaughter allows Arie to focus on aiming for the perfect shot, pulling back his Greater Form's bow many kilometers away with Luna's eyes guiding his shot.

The Saint also assists in moving the last remaining general into the perfect position, and Arie releases his black arrow to soar over the battlefield.

Fisher and Lydia speed through the masses, slashing through the final remaining Demonic commanders with ease while traveling beneath Arie's shot.

They yell out right before its collision with the general.

"Brace for another impact, this is it!" Putting up massive mana and divine energy defenses while the Saint jumps backward and the final arrow pierces the General's Divine Core.

A massive blast of purple, black, and yellow energy makes a seven-kilometer-wide crater in the desert floor again as this general is killed.

The entire Crimson Army takes this sound and vibration through the desert floor as a final war horn to tear through the remaining enemy troops, not leaving a single Demonic Knight behind.

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Just seconds later, the entire desert below the Silver Dome goes quiet.

Every single Demon under the Vermillion Lord's control has been killed by the humans under the Flame Emperor's command.

The last remaining 4% of stats is relinquished by Raven, Arie, and their underlings, as their job is done, and this power is needed much more elsewhere...

All of the Generals' spectator feeds are cut off as well, and the 51,972,081 pairs of eyes from the growing links of loyalty around the world look at one remaining live feed.

—

It shows me pulling an additional 8% of stats while activating my Astral Form.

Chapter 688

Hundreds of millions of additional stats rush into my system as I make full use of the 40% of borrowed power accessible to me, and simultaneously my Astral Form pulses outward.

The future possibilities using my foresight skill shift, and far more options that don't end in my demise or losing limbs become crystal clear.

While I grow in size, I shift my body and swing my soul sword to release a crescent of red fiery soul matter that flies in a circle, slicing through five of the Demonic Body doubles coming my way.

They are destroyed, leaving only the Demon's main body for the final collision.

Its black Soul Sword blocks mine, pulsing with purple energy, holding us at a standstill momentarily.

However, as my Astral Form continues to expand, becoming reinforced by more and more Divine Power, the Demon loses its upper hand in strength. Its blade is pushed aside, allowing a direct hit across its chest.

A deep red and yellow gash tears through its armor, and the force of the blow sends it flying across the room, tens of kilometers away.

Power surges through me as I lunge forward to follow the Demon, expanding in size past 100 meters tall, feeling as though there is an endless pool of power to pull from. With the ceiling towering high into the sky, unlike the 1st Trial, I feel as though I'll get to use the full extent of this Astral Form's power.

The Vermillion Family's Demon coughs up dark blood as it's overpowered, but there is no fear on the monster's face.

Even with the total extermination of its entire army outside the tower seconds ago, pure confidence and superiority are the only emotions I feel from the Demon as it grins and closes its eyes.

Less than half a kilometer away from the far wall of the room, its glowing white eyes open to release an aura that makes my skin feel like pins and needles are poking me all over.

Absurd amounts of Demonic Soul Energy tethered with Divine threads pour out from its core, covering its body and completely healing the fiery wound on its chest and armor.

Its momentum backward halts instantly, and it floats in the air, growing in size at the same rate as me, filling the air with murderous intent while the two dragons above clash for the fourth time.

Ember's form has grown to over 400 meters long, dwarfing the purple and black dragon's greater form. However, the moment this Noble Demon's Bloodline began to unseal, the same sharp insidious pressure awakened within the Dragon, and its form starts to grow again, reaching for a second peak similar to my own overlapping energy forms.

The Demon kicks itself off the air while both its body and greater demonic form grow.

The shimmering red horns expand from its forehead, and a third crimson horn grows from the center.

Huge muscle mass grows from its body, and the blood-bonded obsidian armor around it expands with the monster's growth.

In fractions of a second, the 10-meter-tall Demon grows its true body to over 40 meters tall, and the Demonic Energy Form around it breaches 200 meters almost instantly upon unsealing its bloodline.

This pulse of energy collides with my own expanding yellow and red aura, and we both continue to grow in size, continuously pulsing with power. It speaks up, laughing out loud for the first time while projecting its voice throughout the entire tower.

"You, a human, have an Astral Form? It is a well-known fact that these abilities do not manifest in worlds below 1st Class. Are you an outsider, come to claim this world for a human settlement closer to the source?"

I hear its words, but am far more concentrated on unleashing my full power to combat what happens next.

In addition to this, my perception and understanding of the matter around me skyrocket, and I see into the Demon's body, taking a good look at its cores.

There is a massive yellow Divine True Core glowing in its center, and rotating around it, I see three dark black Orbs filled with an even mix of Demonic Energy and Qi. They vary in size, and from small to large their status readings in bright purple text read [Greater Demon's Core] [Arch Demon's Core] [Ascended Demon's Core].

Even looking deep into the bodies of all the demons outside the tower before this battle, none of them had more than one core. On top of that, I've never seen an Ascended Core... I always assumed the next rank was just a Lord.

While these questions race through my mind, I'm more focused on the fact that my Astral Form is surpassing its former limits, breaching 300 meters in height.

There is still more room to grow, but the Vermillion Demon lunges my way, its greater form growing to become a similar size.

Gravity bends space itself around the edges of our bodies and blades as I, too, jump forward and clash sword to sword.

The entire room fills with scorching Divine Astral Flames and insidious dark purple energy that pours out from its three cores.

If not for the Divine Energy and Qi holding this Mana and Demonic Energy together, if our basic power were to clash, a destructive explosion of golden sparks would fill this tower and destroy us all.

Thankfully, this isn't the case, and as we collide with equal force, the Demon yells out again.

"Come on! Answer me! I am at the top of my Class in the Noble Bloodlines. No mere human from a world like this could ever dream to even withstand the pressure of my final form!"

Its excitement and bloodlust pour out, as for the first time since touching down on this world, the Demon feels as though there is a real worthy challenger.

Beckman's words of how he believed even he had a chance against this Demon now sound like a child's fantasy, as there is no way he ever took into account the absurd amount of power coming out from this unsealed Demonic Form right now.

Being in contact, Soul Weapon to Soul Weapon, allows me to feel that this Demon is nowhere near unleashing its full power either...

We both bounce back from our clash, and my foresight ability shows thousands of massive Demonic Forms growing and launching attacks in the future.

Fractions of a second later, we clash again, and everything plays out just as I see it.

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Sword strikes collide with so much force and gravity waves radiating off them that if this tower wasn't here, I'm certain we would split this world in two.

It creates more body doubles as distractions, but they pale in comparison to the Demon's True Form. I'm able to easily distinguish which is which, and a single crescent of my Soul Swords Red fire is enough to send flying around the room to kill its doubles with ease.

Once all 5 are destroyed each time, the crescent of Astral Soul Flames explodes into thousands of droplets of fire and reconnect with my blade.

The massive tower that seemed to have endless room inside it now begins to feel cramped as our auras spread out, and both of our energy bodies surpass 500 meters.

At this point, it stops using its doubles and focuses its full power into its Soul Sword for maximum damage and power.

We circle the silver pillar in the center of the battlefield, sharing over a dozen clashes, and the two dragons above us grow in size as well, both surpassing a full kilometer from nose to tail.

As Ember releases another wave of bright yellow flames, and the Demonic Dragon releases a beam of purple energy from its mouth, their energy blasts collide while two murderous, reality-bending Dragon's Roars echo through the tower.

The Demon yells out while raising its sword again.

"Tell me your name. I want to use your story as a reminder that even the weakest race can raise strong warriors. A human clashing with a Noble Demon with a fully saturated True Core? They won't believe me once I tell them in the Upper Realm!"

The Demon lets out a laugh, as its energy body surpasses 600 meters tall, and at the base of its Soul Sword, a massive black and purple eye opens up to release another aura that nearly doubles its power in an instant.

I yell back while lunging forward, "Call me Jay, The Flame Emperor. Though, maybe you should tell me yours. I'll remember it as the final fight I had on my home world."

The Demon lets out a deep laugh as its shimmering purple blade collides with my massive Red Astral Soul Sword, and another devastating gravity pressure ripples through the tower.

This time, however, even standing at over 650 meters tall myself, I'm overpowered...

Its Soul Weapon is too strong.

Every single possible future timeline I see with my foresight ends in that purple eye tracking my every movement and my Soul Sword being overpowered.

It was still holding back... is all I think while choosing the path with the least downsides.

I twist my body and don't fully block this last incoming strike.

Doing so would result in a sword lock that I would not be able to free myself from without a severe wound and my Astral Form cracking all over, just like it did when I blocked that final sword from the first Trial.

Instead, I conserve my power, redirecting a large portion of the energy from its attack, and compromise by allowing some of the Demonic Energy to hit me head-on while pushing myself backward to negate its full force.

The Demon's victory yell echoes through the tower as a deep demonic wound opens up across my side.

It hurts, and can't be healed with a simple self-regeneration on the spot, but this is far better than the alternatives.

The Demon takes advantage of this moment to follow up with a counter, yelling while all three of its Demonic cores and the purple eye on its sword pulse in unison.

"I am Drako Vermillion. For such an incredible display, I shall award you by letting you know my name as you die!"

He swings his blade with even greater force than his last strike, matching my height at 700 meters now.

However, I push off the back wall, activating my hexagonal defensive array in front of my sword as I counter.

As we collide again, the Demon's incoming strike is slowed by the massive shield of dense Divine Energy.

While it does shatter and the purple-eyed sword breaks through, the fractions of a second delay add up, and I'm able to dodge just in time.

The explosion of power that follows blows both of us to opposite sides of the room, and I have a moment to breathe and explore my options.

I can feel my Astral Form's growth beginning to slow down as the air density in this room is finally starting to fill, and even the full power of my True Core is reaching its limit.

The three-horned Demon, grinning ear to ear at the other side of the room, still feels like he's pulling from endless power, and it seems that soon our power gap will deviate far too much to hold off with my foresight and Astral Form alone.

Just as I prepare for another clash, my foresight shows countless gruesome scenes, and reality catches up very quickly as the Demon's immense 800-meter-tall Greater Form disappears and reappears right in front of me using its Divine Shadow Step technique.

I block as best I can, positioning my body for the least amount of damage possible, but I receive another Dark Demonic Slash through my Greater Form, twice as large as the last one.

It sends me flying, and portions of my Astral Form waver and fracture as I receive a devastating blow, simultaneously reaching its full size potential.

It reappears in front of me again in an instant, traveling faster than even my foresight can predict as its strength continues to grow while mine has stalled. Another deep slash across my chest cracks my Astral Form even more, sending me flying to the back of the room.

Above us, the Demonic Dragon from nose to tail grows to almost 2 kilometers long, while Ember stalls out just shy of 1,500 meters.

Instead of evaporating each of its Demonic attacks and forcing the purple dragon to dodge and be on the defensive, now, they are nearly equal in strength, and the Demonic Dragon is still growing.

Before this battle began, Rodrigo and Bri used teleport crystals to leave Central Headquarters to avoid the incoming Divine Cored Scouts. When they return to the Apex Region, they call every single Association Branch within the 8 Great Regions to get more access to long-range transmission devices to spread the word to smaller, isolated nations all over the globe.

They discovered that while they were away notifying Central, many independent parties had created their own networks of association hunters that shared links of loyalty and felt it was their duty to do exactly the same.

Before this final battle began, there were 20 million links within the Dark Continent and 8 Great Regions, 25 million in the Central Cities, and over 5 million scattered across the world in nations that didn't even know of these foreign countries until today.

However, with word spreading that the battle around the tower has been won and the final fight to save the world is underway, new links surge upward even faster.

During this fight, the links have surpassed 70 million, with a large number of these new links coming from the foreign nations.

Before the system connected to this world, the human population peaked at nearly 9 billion.

This was 80 years ago.

After the initial surges and breaks in the first few years—when humans had not yet leveled up and were unable to defend themselves—the population was massacred and fell below 3 billion.

Over the next 30 years, as the world adapted to these changes and hardships, focusing solely on survival and protection of the well-populated cities, humanity's monster hunter strength grew. However, despite the average hunter growing stronger, far less families settled down in this stressful time. The population dwindled again, down to just over 1 billion.

When the first Noble Demon arrived 50 years ago, a great war was staged, and a silent agreement between the world's leaders was made.

Since then, the population has remained stagnant, and the common people have enjoyed the luxury of not having to awaken their systems to survive daily life.

Large amounts of the population are below 18 years old and unable to awaken their systems just yet, and others choose to stay unawakened, hanging on to the remnants of the old world.

The total amount of potential links of loyalty connected to the system on this planet is just over 500 million.

I can sense this, easily able to see every single person in the world with my advanced perception. My power is growing at millions of links per second now, but as the Demon Shadow Steps my way to land a fourth slash I realize I'll need to find another source of power. It sends me flying across the room again, and I'm certain that even gaining every single link of loyalty in this world isn't going to make up for this growing gap.

Ember is hit in the side by the first wave of pure Demonic Energy from the dragon above, and his Astral Form takes damage, leaving a dark stain just like the slashes across mine.

The Demon's voice rings through the tower as 73,401,995 pairs of eyes stare through mine.

"It was a valiant effort! If this is truly your home world, then you have made your race proud. This may be the strongest human planet in the entire System. It has been an honor fighting you, Flame Emperor. I will remember you well when I ascend!"

Its noble demonic voice spreads throughout the entire world as its Soul Sword glows bright purple.

The Demon is far larger than me now, surpassing a full kilometer in height.

If this next slash hits me, my Astral Form is going to shatter.

The Demon disappears into the shadows, and I reach into my storage to grab a small compact green Divine Orb that I received as a prize on the first floor of this tower.

Chapter 689

The instant the green divine orb hits the open air, the compact threads within continue their violent unraveling.

With the Demon nowhere to be seen, shadow stepping my way in the darkness, I don't waste any time and swallow the strange prize from the first floor.

The Vermillion Family Demon materializes in a black and purple mist, towering over me as he swings his blade.

All possible paths I can take using my foresight skill show the next few milliseconds ending in the fall of the human world...

I still attempt to block and twist out of the way, but the moment my Soul Sword clashes with his, I feel myself being overpowered by an astounding degree. A dangerous pulse comes from my chest.

Instead of the green orb unraveling in the open air, it's been swallowed, now sitting at the center of my chest, unraveling inside me.

An absurd amount of pressure squeezes my core, like I'm having a heart attack; but at the same time, sharp energy explodes throughout my arms, legs, and even shoots into my brain.

It's both the most pleasurable and most painful feeling I've ever experienced.

It feels like the times I tried to absorb green threads in the past, eating the divine fruits, and absorbing the green serpent's aura—but as if I'm doing thousands at once.

It's impossible to tell how much divine energy was in that orb. Now, as it tears my real body to shreds but simultaneously empowers my Astral Form, I let out a blood-curdling scream and swing my blade back at the Demon.

From the center of my Astral Form, an eruption of green light spreads outward like dye dropped into pure water.

My strength skyrockets as my Astral Form expands, instantly matching the Demon's height at just over 1,100 meters tall.

His strike, meant to kill me, is instantly negated, and the Demon is hit across the chest with a fiery green slash, blown back to the opposite side of the room.

Just because I've managed to fend off this strike doesn't mean the battle is won.

As the green light in my core continues to expand, not even my Astral Form is large enough to contain it.

My physical body is being torn away faster than I can heal it, and the small green orb keeps unraveling more and more, with a seemingly endless amount of divine threads.

The pleasure I felt at the start of this process is quickly overwhelmed by far more pain and a sharp ringing in my ears.

Cracks in my Astral Form explode outward with dense waves of green divine threads, and I continue growing in size, struggling to stay upright and conscious.

All I hear over the ringing is the Demon yelling in a rage-filled tone.

"Disgusting. That much green divine energy in a True Core that isn't fully saturated will only lead to your demise! It takes years to assimilate with the throne—you have taken the coward's way out!"

This is all I hear through his laughter as my Divine Core struggles to process all the green threads being forced through it.

Large portions of the threads aren't even processed and are just shot out into the atmosphere. But enough stay within my core to change its tint from bright yellow to pale green.

I feel my links of loyalty skyrocket, breaching 80 million after this stunt. Through the pain, ringing, and hazy mind, I rely on my foresight ability to guide my next movements.

More cracks in my Astral Form break open as it grows, but I need to take advantage of this strength while it's at my fingertips.

Lunging forward, I clash with the Demon again, bouncing off his sword and countering to leave another green fiery slash across his flesh, sending him flying to the back of the room.

He tanks the hit, growing in size with me, holding his blade with both hands. Letting out a yell, he jumps back toward me.

"Still holding on? You know what? Maybe this is the proper way to go out. I commend you for giving everything you had until the very end!"

The eye on his purple blade pulses, and a bright Demonic Aura makes his Soul Sword grow in size, matching the 1,500 meters in height his wielder now stands at.

The Demon's roar surrounds his entire body with strange Demonic Soul Energy, and he swings his blade forward to collide with my red blade, now tethered with green divine threads.

The gravity wave of this Demon's fully unsealed form, and my chaotic green Astral Soul Sword, make all other moves we've thrown so far in this battle pale in comparison.

We're on equal footing again, but the green orb in my chest is far from finished.

My mind is shutting down, and the small percentage of flesh left on my physical body is hanging on using divine energy-tethered self-regeneration to stay in the physical world deep within my Astral Form.

All I can do is rely on my instincts and fight back, because the world depends on it.

Above us, as my links surpass 85 million, two dragons continue to spew energy waves at each other, while a wave of green divine threads rises up from below.

Ember thinks to himself, 'It was a necessary move... However, I cannot do the same. I believe you will attempt to save your physical body, so I will follow suit and save that item for when this life's body can handle it.'

The Demonic Dragon sends another wave of dark matter at Ember, and with less size and speed, it is impossible to dodge.

He takes another injury to his Astral Form, leaving a second massive black stain.

The Demonic Dragon laughs and taunts Ember.

"Your human has chosen to blow himself up. Even if you use your sealed power, it is over. We have won! Good luck on the next planet that connects to the system!"

Ember smirks, unsealing a far larger portion of the silver threads locked within his Immortal Core.

Before, just a thin layer around his claws was enough to complete all the trials and fend off his enemies. Ever since his True Core awakened, using this small amount of power has been enough to wield continuously without needing to rest from fatigue.

The golden threads could end this battle in an instant, but using a large amount in combat of this magnitude would do far more damage than the last time he used just a small amount as a sonar in Celia's construct.

As silver light erupts from the center of Ember's Astral Form, he yells back at the Dragon, who believes it has claimed its first world.

"Don't underestimate that human. A little green divine energy won't be enough to kill him. Honestly, I doubt it'll even leave a scratch on his physical body once we're done here."

Ember's entire Astral Form starts to shimmer silver, as the density of divine threads shifts. Almost a full tenth of the energy making up this yellow dragon in the sky is filled with a weakened form of the energy this very tower is made of.

His speed skyrockets, and in the blink of an eye, deep silver claw marks open up in the Demonic Dragon's underbelly, sending it flying upward with a screech filled with fear and unease.

Ember releases a strong wave of disintegrating flames from his mouth, filled with yellow and silver threads, following his prey upward as the wave of green threads from below fills the tower.

Links of loyalty surge past 100 million as my mind completely shuts off. I rely solely on my foresight ability and battle instincts, while my conscious mind focuses on withstanding the horrible ringing in my ears and maintaining even a single drop of blood in my physical body to avoid losing touch with this world.

Clashes of gravity waves that could destroy worlds twice the size of ours continuously echo through the tower.

Tens of clashes go by on equal footing, but the green threads from the green orb I consumed just keep making me grow larger and larger.

More and more of my Astral Form cracks away, allowing plumes of green energy to pour out. However, my True Core transforms from a pale random mixture of yellow and green; to a much brighter green outer layer and a yellow center settling into its natural state.

I surpass two kilometers in height, and a single sword strike that overpowers the Demon snaps my conscious mind back into reality.

This is not only because I've landed a third hit—one so powerful into the Demon's stomach that it hesitates to attack for a moment—but the best thing about this exchange is that I feel the green energy expanding within me begin to slow.

The violent orb loses its spherical form, and moments later, the source of all this energy finally stops producing more.

I can finally breathe.

With my conscious mind aware, as if I've just opened my eyes, I lunge forward and strike the hesitating Demon with ruthless speed in the exact same spot.

The author's tale has been misappropriated; report any instances of this story on Amazon.

My green flaming sword shoves all the way through the massive Demonic Form, and it coughs up blood, its eyes wide.

"H-How... You've fully absorbed this many green threads in mere seconds..."

It tries to counter, but I throw the Demon to the side. Deep within my Astral Form, from the small drops of blood and bits of flesh remaining of my real body, I begin to regenerate my body.

It's still extremely painful, as the green threads coursing through me are still tearing the newly grown flesh to bits the moment it returns to reality.

However, there is no new energy attacking me at the source.

My True Core has processed all of the pure green threads available to it. Now my body is just dealing with the aftermath.

The excess threads that I can't even use are seeping out of my Astral Form. Even the cracks all over me start to heal now that I don't have to use every spare bit of power merely to stay alive.

My True Core is still yellow, but in an instant, it's pushed over halfway to breaking through to green. Now I can take advantage of this power that is all mine.

I laugh and swing my blade across my body with unfathomable speed and fluidity, colliding with the Demon's purple sword and deflecting it aside to land another hit across his torso. I immediately counter again, leaving an additional gash in his leg.

We're both blown back from the force. In this moment, the Demon sees my green-and-yellow Astral Form completely heal.

"You're a monster... you can't be a human. Even a Noble Class world can't produce talent like this—how—"

I don't waste any time, sending another flurry of attacks his way, leaving three fiery green wounds on his side, back, and left arm.

My gaze is focused, my mind is clear, and my physical body has completely reformed, now adapted to the constant stream of green threads ravaging through it.

The mutation that started within that divine construct has just been pushed to a whole new level. I'm not giving up on the physical world.

We circle the small pillar in the center of the room as my links of loyalty surge higher and higher, surpassing 120 million, then even 130 million. Each surge adds to my base stats, which are further elevated by the green threads coursing through my veins, widening the power gap between us with every second that passes.

The Demon is fully on the defensive, and the entire world watches as I leave countless near-death fiery slashes all over his dark Demonic Form.

I yell for the world to hear, as every nation, day or night, watches and feels the magnificent battle that will decide the fate of the world.

"Without every single one of you, this wouldn't have been possible. I, the Flame Emperor, have vowed to protect humanity. I will not let you down for as long as I live!"

The Demon's unwavering confidence and noble presence shatter in his mind as he hears these words. Simultaneously, a massive flash of silver light erupts tens of kilometers above us.

His Demonic Dragon's pain-filled roar, and the massive green Astral Soul Sword coming its way, do not seem real.

This result was an impossibility.

Raised on a Noble Class world, brought to the Demonic Realm as a chosen General to serve the Vermillion Family and become one of its Lords in the Upper Realms for hundreds of years.

It was always a well-known fact that no monster could ever rival a demon of this caliber in pure strength alone.

Especially not a human of a Third-Class world.

This was supposed to be a simple stepping stone to a long life of nobility and luxury.

Now, he watches two halves of his Soul-Bonded Demonic Dragon fall from the sky, covered in claw marks and silver wounds.

The last thing he feels is a two-kilometer-long fiery Soul Sword slicing through his head and shattering his Divine Core.

The explosion of Demonic matter and the threads of his True Core surge through the tower, filling it with thick, hot, and violent light.

My yell as I throw this final strike is paired with over 140 million gasps and cheers all over the globe.

Before I can even see again, notifications echo through my inner ear. I realize—I really did it.

I won.

[Level Up] x8396

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Body Double

Upgrade: Divine Grade

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Demonic Energy Manipulation

Upgrade: Supreme Grade

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Skill: Shadow Step [Divine Grade]

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

MCP: 189,299,458,901,262,190

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Stat: Strength

Points: 144,230

[YES][NO]

[Use Absorption]

Buff: Noble Bloodline Transformation

[YES][NO]

My level reaches 25,102, but I have far more than just the stat upgrades on my mind. I accept them all and try to look upward to see Ember, as it seems he has finished his fight with a victory as well.

But my vision is filled with black, purple, yellow, and green energy. The pure yellow threads that pour into my Divine Core strengthen my Astral Form even further, unintentionally growing me a few hundred meters taller.

There is so much divine energy pouring into my body that it is taking far longer than usual.

Simultaneously, an odd phenomenon occurs, as I feel the True Core ability I gained from defeating Beckman's black horse activate.

It's unclear exactly what it's doing, but it feels like it's absorbing far more than just pure divine threads, like my absorption skill.

I ponder this phenomenon while, in the same instance, I feel my Astral Soul Sword hunger for the falling purple blade with an eye on its handle.

Before the Demon's entire body or Greater Form's Excess Energy completely falls, I push my blade closer. It turns the Purple Sword to glowing liquid and consumes it whole with ravenous hunger.

[The Divine Emperor's Soul Sword Evolution Attribute has reached Lv. 2!]

The blade pulses red, then shifts to its black dormant state the moment it senses there are no more enemies and no more powerful Soul Weapons to consume.

As Ember flies downward from the ceiling, deactivating his Astral Form, I set my sights on the large black Ascended Demon's Core in the center of the falling Demonic remains.

Post Chapter Status Update:

Current Links of Loyalty: 146,921,008

Additional Base Stats Added:

Strength: 5,759,303,513

Speed: 5,622,910,040

Agility: 5,999,016,284

Defense: 5,809,312,595

Mental Strength: 5,700,945,818

+14,398,258,784 Additional Hp

+14,398,258,784 Additional Mp

[Status Open]

Name: Jay Soju

Level: 25,102

Hp: $(125,515/125,515 + 14,398,258,784/14,398,258,784) = 14,398,384,299$ Max Hp

Mp: $(125,515/125,515 + 14,398,258,784/14,398,258,784) = 14,398,384,299$ Max Mp

Strength: $(229,065 + 5,759,303,513) = 5,759,532,578$ Base Strength

[+82649292494] [+131778105385] [+147904796603] [+127746432580]
[+87544895186] [+173073953969] [+138919925781] [+115478628189] [+2879766289]
[+5759532578] [+57595325780] [+416932563321] [+14398831445] [+14398831445]
[+23038130312]

= 1,545,858,543,935 Total Strength

Speed: $(93,976 + 5,622,910,040) = 5,623,004,016$ Base Speed

[+90361674537] [+91317585220] [+156431971725] [+124774459115]
[+105656245461] [+136638997589] [+179879898472] [+110098418633]
[+167565519677] [+2811502008] [+5623004016] [+56230040160] [+390348938791]
[+14057510040] [+14057510040] [+22492016064]

= 1,673,968,295,564 Total Speed

Agility: $(85,953 + 5,999,016,284) = 5,999,102,237$ Base Agility

[+93226048763] [+113922951481] [+162395697556] [+146618058672]
[+105284244259] [+152737142954] [+211168398742] [+122681640747]
[+131500321035] [+2999551119] [+5999102237] [+59991022370] [+393541106747]
[+14997755593] [+23996408948]

= 1,747,058,553,460 Total Agility

Defense: $(62,112 + 5,809,312,595) = 5,809,374,707$ Base Defense

[+81389339645] [+139076430486] [+127922431048] [+108461025780]
[+89812932970] [+200016771162] [+141167805380] [+115316087934] [+2904687354]
[+5809374707] [+58093747070] [+362446887970] [+23237498828]

= 1,461,464,395,041 Total Defense

Mental Strength: $(97,060 + 5,700,945,818) = 5,701,042,878$ Base Mental Strength

[+113564774130] [+115731170423] [+142526071950] [+118980764864]
[+119778910867] [+158603012866] [+212420857634] [+131694090482]
[+146288760249] [+2850521439] [+5701042878] [+57010428780] [+405344148626]
[+14252607195] [+14252607195] [+22804171512]

= 1,787,504,983,968 Total Mental Strength

Skills:

Absorption [Divine Grade]

Swordsmanship [Mythic Grade]

Combat Magic [Supreme Fire Summoning]

Inspect [Mythic Grade]

Enemy Detection [Mythic Grade]

Body Hardening [Mythic Grade]

Self Regeneration [Mythic Grade]

Spatial Magic [Item Storage]

Plunderer [Mythic Grade]

Telekinesis [Mythic Grade]

Appraisal [Mythic Grade]

Conceal [Mythic Grade]

Berserker [Mythic Grade]

Dungeon Walker [Legendary Grade]

Intimidation [Mythic Grade]

Dagger Mastery [Mythic Grade]

Stealth [Mythic Grade]

Bloodlust [Mythic Grade]

Equivalent Exchange

Combat Magic [Superior Wind Summoning]

All-Seeing Eye [Mythic Grade]

Extreme Strength [Mythic Grade]
Dual Wielding [Mythic Grade]
Telepathy [Legendary Grade]
Final Breath [Mythic Grade]
Combat Magic [Superior Earth Summoning]
Combat Magic [Superior Mana Manipulation]
Life Steal [Mythic Grade]
Hibernation [Mythic Grade]
Combat Magic [Supreme Demonic Energy Manipulation]
Combat Magic [Supreme Ice Summoning]
Body Double [Divine Grade]
Lie Detector [Legendary Grade]
Hush [Mythic Grade]
Craftsmanship [Mythic Grade]
Extreme Speed [Mythic Grade]
Combat Magic [Superior Water Summoning]
Screech [Mythic Grade]
Phantom Step [Mythic Grade]
Flare [Mythic Grade]
Confusion [Mythic Grade]
Blast [Mythic Grade]
Bind [Legendary Grade]
Bloodweaver [Legendary Grade]

Poison Mist [Mythic Grade]
Iron Fist [Mythic Grade]
Extreme Stamina [Mythic Grade]
Combat Magic [Superior Lightning Summoning]
Combat Magic [Superior Dark Summoning]
Blink [Mythic Grade]
Cocoon [Mythic Grade]
Imbuement [Mythic Grade]
Barrier Creation [Mythic Grade]
Flight [Mythic Grade]
Area Buff [Mythic Grade]
Mind Palace [Mythic Grade]
Astral Spears [Mythic Grade]
Flash Step [Mythic Grade]
Call of The Void [Mythic Grade]
Crystal Creation [Mythic Grade]
Heavy Hand [Mythic Grade]
Combat Magic [Superior Light Summoning]
Spirit Anchor [Mythic Grade]
Echo [Mythic Grade]
Metal Creation [Mythic Grade]
Final Strike [Mythic Grade]
Dark Mist [Mythic Grade]

Enrage [Mythic Grade]

Foresight [Divine Grade]

Shadow Step [Divine Grade]

Items Equipped: [20 Slots Available Post 3rd Rank Up][Currently Items 14/20 Equipped]

Platinum Ring of Visual Manipulation [Blood Bonded] [+1992% Mental Strength][+1607% Speed][+1554% Agility][+1435% Strength][+1401% Defense][+750% Perception][Illusion Attribute]

The Behemoth's Platinum Amulet [Blood Bonded] [+2394% Defense][+2288% Strength][+2030% Mental Strength][+1899% Agility][+1624% Speed][Hardening Attribute]

Enchanted Boots of Extreme Speed [Blood Bonded] [+2782% Speed][+2707% Agility][+2568% Strength][+2500% Mental Strength][+2202% Defense][Wind Attribute]

Enchanted Ice Serpent's Pendant [Blood Bonded] [+2444% Agility] [+2219% Speed][+2218% Strength][+2087% Mental Strength][+1908% Magic Resistance][+1901% Ice Magic Resistance][+1867% Defense][Ice Attribute]

Platinum Ring of The Blue Ogre King [Blood Bonded] [+2101% Mental Strength] [+1879% Speed][+1755% Agility][+1546% Defense][+1520% Strength]

Berserker King's Armor Set [Blood Bonded] [+3443% Defense][+3005% Strength][+2782% Mental Strength][+2546% Agility][+2430% Speed][Hardening Attribute][Earth Attribute]

Cloak of Total Darkness[+3726% Mental Strength][+3520% Agility][+3199% Speed][+500% Perception][Blood Bonded][Hidden Passive Ability][Concealment Attribute][Dark Attribute]

Enchanted Lightweight Gauntlets [Blood Bonded][+2430% Defense][+2412% Strength][+2310% Mental Strength][+2045% Agility][+1958% Speed][Hardening Attribute][Earth Attribute][Fire Attribute]

Storm King's Dagger Set[Blood Bonded][+2980% Speed][+2566% Mental Strength][+2192% Agility][+2005% Strength][+1985% Defense][Lightning Attribute][Wind Attribute]

Greater Demon's Core [+50% All Stats]

Arch Demon's Core [+100% All Stats]

Ascended Demon's Core [+1000% All Stats]

Celia's Purple Core [Living Ring Artifact] [Divine Limiter][Hidden Ability]

Divine Emperor's Soul Sword [Soul Bonded][Evolution Attribute: Lv. 2][Fire Affinity][Dark Affinity][Demonic Affinity][+7239% Strength][+7110% Mental Strength][+6942% Speed][+6560% Agility][+6239% Defense]

[EMPTY SLOT]

[EMPTY SLOT]

[EMPTY SLOT]

[EMPTY SLOT]

[EMPTY SLOT]

[EMPTY SLOT]

Skill Buffs:

[Berserker] +250% Strength + Mental Strength

[BloodLust] +250% Speed + Agility + Mental Strength , +100% Perception

[Extreme Strength] +250% Strength

[Extreme Speed] +250% Speed

[Final Breath] ~ +400% All Stats (Exact % will vary, conditions & circumstances apply)

Permanent Buffs:

Rising Emperor's Domain[Hidden Ability][Passive]

Rising Emperor's Greater Form[Hidden Ability][Active]

Master of Illusion [Hidden Ability]

[Divine Elemental's Astral Form]

[Noble Bloodline Transformation]

*Stat Increases shown do not account for Greater Form, Astral Form, Noble Bloodline, Qi, Demonic Energy, Mana Control, or Divine Core Power Increases.

Chapter 690

[Ascended Demon's Core] [+1000% All Stats] is what my appraisal skill shows hovering over the largest black orb.

My curiosity grows at the sight of this, as pretty much all of the gear I'm wearing far surpasses this buff. However, a greater and Arch Demon's core both fall with it, surrounded by shattered blood-bonded gear from the demon that surpassed 5000% buffs.

There must be a reason that it had all three, it definitely wasn't for the stat increases.

I follow the falling gear downward by deactivating my Astral Form.

From a staggering 2600 meters in height, the pure mana and divine energy form compacts and shrinks back down into my Greater Form, then back into nothing more than my physical body.

Green and yellow threads spin in my core, and they fight for dominance inside my body, causing violent microscopic tears all over my flesh every second.

My entire being feels hot and unnatural, but I can tell that if I let up on regenerating for even a second, the energy inside will tear away every bit of physical matter holding on.

It's a very odd sensation, as every second I continue to hold on, my True Core attempts to adapt to the changes taking place. My Divine Absorption ability continues to morph my genes, making it slightly easier to stay standing with these many green threads ravaging through me.

This doesn't stop me from reaching forward and touching the Ascended Demon's Core, watching it fall into my open palm.

The moment it disappears, a third Core appears inside my chest.

There are five cores in total: one soul energy core with qi and mana, one dense divine core with green and yellow threads, and now three Demon Cores of varying sizes. None of them have any active demonic energy inside.

I feel the instant stat buff add to my status, but nothing extra or special happens. I look around while opening up my storage to let the two smaller cores fall inside as well as the three crimson horns that remain from the Noble Demon's True Form.

Other than that, all of its flesh and blood-bonded armor was burned away by my flames the moment it died.

I take a deep breath, feeling my links of loyalty continue to surge upward, and take in the silence of the aftermath of the battle.

At the same time, the absorption of all of the Demon's True Core's threads finally finishes; there is even some yellow energy leftover that I cannot fully absorb.

Its words at the start of our battle, claiming that I don't even have a saturated True Core, make sense to me. I can feel there is a soft limit to the amount of yellow threads I'm able to gather—my core doesn't want to take in any more.

It is far more eager to process even the ambient green divine threads that float in the atmosphere around me.

Paired with this feeling, another odd sensation washes over me, as now I can fully understand what Beckman's horse with the [Mind Devourer] buff had as a True Core ability...

Memories come rushing into my mind like a tidal wave. I gasp for air as my vision goes black and I lose touch with my links of loyalty and the outside world while my mind is swept away to look through the eyes of this Demon's Past.

—

I view its earliest memory: being born as a fledgling Demon in a sea of Darkness.

It's as if the memories are my own.

I can feel the high density of Demonic Energy in the air, and it's like nothing I've ever felt before.

Almost like it's swimming in an ocean of pure power to absorb at its fingertips.

The first few days of its life, it did exactly that—wandering around in the darkness with no knowledge at all of what it was or why it was brought into existence.

The only thing it knew was that it felt good to become stronger, so it absorbed the thick plumes of Demonic Energy all around it and wandered aimlessly while growing its fledgling body.

However, on a Noble Grade world with so much energy to consume, there are plenty of other beings that seek to grow stronger than the rest.

Its only ability was a shadow movement technique that masked its presence from danger, as well as the innate knowledge of how to absorb and manipulate Demonic Energy. Ĩ

This not only allowed it to hide from Demonic Beasts and other ravenous Demons far stronger than itself but also gave it the power to lurk in the shadows and become a silent killer, only attacking those it was sure to defeat.

Colossal Beasts lurk in the depths of this Noble Grade Demonic realm, shaping its worldview. To survive, it must become unfathomably strong.

Years pass, and this Demon never makes a wrong move, killing anything weaker than itself with ease and never challenging a monster out of its league.

The darkness is where it hides, and anything that moves is danger.

The author's tale has been misappropriated; report any instances of this story on Amazon.

Never seeing the light of day, this is what life is, and harnessing the darkness is all it knows.

That is, until one day when red, orange, and yellow beings lit up the darkness and slaughtered mountain-sized Demonic Beasts with ease.

Whatever these colorful beings were, the Demon knew they were strong, and it knew it for sure when one of them appeared before it, pointing a long sword at the young Demon's neck and exuding an ominous pressure that made it want to fall to its knees.

However, It didn't submit despite the overwhelming strength gap. It tried to fight back and survive by any means necessary, but it was impossible to run; the yellow figure that looked very similar to it blipped in front of it everywhere it ran, repeating the same words over and over:

"You have been chosen." Search the [website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

All over this small Noble Grade Demonic world, Knights, Commanders, and Generals from the Vermillion Family seek out fledgling Demons that have made it through the incubation process on a world owned by the collective Five Great Families.

This Demon and thirty-four others were chosen and brought back to the Demonic Realm.

—

Memories rush through my mind of the vast world filled with Demons, Demonic Beasts, civilizations, and most awe-inspiring, the five massive black towers that resemble the throne here on the human world.

40 years of Demonic combat training go by, teaching these new recruits how to awaken their bloodlines, and many missions to far regions in the Demonic Realm are ordered by the current Generals in charge.

Even outings to other worlds are required to build knowledge and experience.

Other new groupings of first and second class Demons are brought to this realm as well, but their training is done separately, as everyone knows that the hierarchy must be followed and those above are worth far more than those below.

—

The Demonic Realm itself is only a Third-Class world, as the energy density is extremely spread thin from its massive size. However, it is such a vast land that it is a perfect base for the Demons, with room to bring resources from other worlds and expand.

Even Third-Class Commoner Natives from this planet have the ability to give offerings to the Five Great Families and join their ranks if they train hard enough and show their loyalty.

However, while possible, Commoners usually don't move up the ranks past the Demonic Knight or Commander Positions. No Commoner has ever been permitted to compress their True Core and be granted a chance to become a Lord.

Only those already within the ranks know that the families like control and would rather raise their underlings from birth as mindless killers with morals and ideals guided by their Lord.

All of this training is done for the purpose of getting ready for labyrinth contracts. It is the final test and vetting process before these recruits are accepted into the Vermillion Family's ranks.

It is known that the other families have their own processes, but it is very secretive, and only the Lords of each family in a place called the Upper Realm ever discuss business between them.

For those in this lower realm, the only necessary work that must be done is becoming strong and following the orders of those who are stronger.

The vetting process usually takes decades, sometimes centuries. This batch of thirty-four Noble Demons has already been trimmed down to less than ten before the final test even started.

Many died fighting Demonic Beasts far above their levels in the outer regions of this realm or on other worlds, while others died in death matches between Demons to settle disputes.

More groupings from incubation worlds are brought back to the Demonic Realm every few years, so losing many fighters is not a problem. Only the strong are meant to survive.

—

I watch more memories flash by, of this Demon being sent off to a foreign world, creating a contract with a dragon, and defending a labyrinth for over 130 years.

It is granted the Body Double skill for accepting the Labyrinth contract, and set out on its journey to rise the ranks from a Greater Demon to an Arch Demon, to an Ascended.

It managed to fend off every challenger that made it to the top floor, even some with levels three times higher than its own.

In solitude on the top floor of the labyrinth, as the beings of the world continued to bring pure mana into this construct, the Demon and the Dragon sparred, talked, and became stronger every day.

It didn't only rank the labyrinth up once, but twice, passing the Noble Bloodline test in order for the Vermillion Family to accept it into their ranks.

—

The Demon accepts red divine energy in exchange for the farmed mana of this world, as a prize for being the first in its class of Noble Demons to return.

Another 110 years pass as the Demon rises from a Knight to a Commander to a General in the Vermillion Family.

It trains in the Demonic Realm, partakes in Demonic Beast extermination on incubation worlds, and even brings back new groups of Demons to begin their training the same way it did.

Everything changes the day Drako Vermillion finally compresses his True Core and is granted permission to speak with the Green Cored Lord.

It gives him a mission to plant an artifact on a small Third-Class world filled with humans extremely far from the source.

Images continue rushing through my mind faster and faster.

I see this Demon's agreement with the Big Three, its 50-year wait inside a special Demonic Cultivation Chamber to fully saturate its True Core, then bonding with two more demon cores in preparation to become a Lord, and finally its last battle against me—the Flame Emperor...

—

No real time at all has passed when I see the room around me again, and all of my links of loyalty reconnect to my vision. Ember floats down from the ceiling, transforming back into his human form.

However, I just experienced over three centuries of memories in crystal clear quality...

Some of the finer details are lost, and others are still sinking in, trapped in my subconscious and needing a nudge. But the passage of time feels quite real.

These were in far greater quality than the little light show of the past Celia once gave me inside her construct.

It's apparent that I'm in a bit of shock as Ember touches down on the floor beside me, but from his tone, it sounds like he just thinks I'm still recovering from the fight.

"Congrats, you just killed a Noble Demon." He grins and takes a step closer.

"Oh yeah, and saved the entire human world."

As he lets out a chuckle and I'm still wide-eyed coming back to reality, a familiar ancient voice rings in my ears while I see silver text fill my vision.

[Round 2 of 2 Shall Commence]

[Round 2 of 2 Title: Soul Stairs]

[Objective: Climb to the Top, and Assimilate with the Throne.]

There's a shift in the air, and the entire silver pillar in the center of the room vibrates.

I see it shifting in color near the top, to a dark green, and my gaze follows it down until it hits the floor with a far lighter green that is almost clear.

The moment it hits the floor, a small archway opening in the silver pillar appears, showing the entrance to the staircase.

Very minimal amounts of green divine threads pour out, then Ember speaks again.

"Well—I guess you haven't saved the world just yet. Come on, let's go beat the final trial. This last round is going to be a lot easier than the ordeal we just went through."

As the wave of fresh green threads begins to come near, I feel the dormant purple ring on my finger ripple with emotions ranging from relief, to excitement, to nostalgia.

I reply, feeling the 160 million pairs of eyes all around the world stare through mine.

"Let's do it. Let's Claim the Throne."