

D. of Pride 991

Chapter 992- Spectral Threat (2)

In fact, they were only safe right was because of the mystical properties of the True Gold that blocked all the foreign energy outside. If not for it, they would have been engulfed in the dark murky green energy by now.

Simon looked at Itherion...the fact that he only mentioned the plan now, must mean that there was a downside to it.

As he had expected the next words from Itherion basically confirmed his suspicions.

"However, if I use the True gold to protect myself as well as Vincent, it will temporarily weaken the shield's strength. Which you and that demon will be left vulnerable".

Rothgard fell silent, both plans carried risk. If they just used the artefact, Vincent would be left in a state of danger after its duration ran out. However, if both Vincent and Itherion left, the shield's strength would reduce drastically, causing him and Simon to fall into a state of danger.

If it was just him, Rothgard would have quickly agreed without hesitation; after all, he was a dead man who was brought to life by a chance miracle. Since he was supposed to die along with his troops he had no qualms laying his life if it meant it could help his friends.

However, he was not alone, Simon was also there with him. Although the other party was a Demon Noble, they helped him and the humans to win over the demon horde, no matter how small that victory was. He couldn't just let someone he was indebted to die because of him.

"We do what you say"

Just as Rothgard was keeping silent, mulling over his options, Simon spoke. He looked at the three humans and uttered what was on his mind—

"We are pressed for time, we do not have the option to dilly dally. If we don't do anything soon, the effects of the formation will activate. At that time not knowing what the formation does, it would be

too late for us to escape from here. There is no other option, it is a risk we must take. Rothgard and I will stay here".

Only he knew the future, the vision where they are forced to fight one another. In that vision, a massive abyss formed at the place they were standing at and there was no sight of him or Rothgard.

Simon didn't want to repeat the events from the future to know why he was absent from the picture. If there was a way to break the formation, he wanted to get done with it as soon as possible.

The three humans looked at Simon with surprise, they didn't expect the demon to be so decisive, especially when the decision concerned his life.

Vincent's sharp silver eyes studied Simon for a moment, his expression unreadable "You're surprisingly decisive for a demon. I expected more hesitation and selfishness from your kind."

Was it a compliment or mockery? Well given Vincent's character, it was more of the former.

Simon shrugged "I'm a realist. This formation isn't waiting for us to make up our minds, and the clock is ticking. If this is the only way, let's do it."

Itherion glanced at Rothgard, who appeared conflicted but eventually nodded "Fine, then. We'll act quickly. Vincent and I will locate the core and destroy it. Rothgard and... Simon, keep your wits about you. If something happens, try to hold out until we're back."

With that said, the two warriors left the confines of the shield. The golden light surrounding them shimmered as Itherion redirected some of its power to protect Vincent. The two figures moved through the murky green energy with an air of unshakable confidence.

They were just about to begin their search for the core when all of a sudden a garbled laughter rang out across the expanse.

[Kfufufufu...] The voice was fragmented and uneven like broken glass scraping against stone.

As soon as the voice appeared, it was as if the dark murky green energy became alive. It started swirling and converging towards a single point.

Slowly, a grotesque figure began to materialize—a dark green spectre with an otherworldly aura that seemed to distort the very space around it.

"What the hell is that?" Vincent questioned.

"No idea. But it does not look friendly" Itherion answered. The spectre hovered in the air ominously, its form unstable and flickering like a glitch in reality. Its shape constantly shifted along with the same dark green energy that surrounded it.

Two burning crimson eyes peered through murky green energy and settled onto the group below.

[Do you think this king's formation is so easy to break out of? Kfufufu... Pathetic humans. You underestimate me. You will all die here, your existence forever erased from history. This is your fate. Accept it!]

The spectre's words were full of disdain as it laughed at their struggle. Facing the unknown entity that appeared out of nowhere, the group raised their guards.

"that thing can talk. Is it some kind of ghost?".

Itherion shook his head, the True golden glow exuding from him became even more intense in response to the new threat.

"No, it's different than that. I can't put my hands on it but its very presence feels disturbing. As if seeing something shouldn't be there".

Meanwhile, under the shield, Simon tried using [Appraisal] on the spectre only for his eyes to harden the next second as it was immediately blocked.

Another peak-level existence!! Damn it. How many of these monsters are out here?

While they were observing the spectre, the being in question continued with its soliloquy.

[Humans and demons... working together? What kind of disgusting abomination is this? The only thing you need to do is fight each other and cause chaos in the world. Hmph. I thought our plan was working perfectly, but then I see this—this mockery]

[A demon noble aiding humans? And humans thanking demons? This is... unacceptable No, I can't let this stand. You're all meddling with the preconceived order of this world. This itself warrants erasing you all!] After giving its one sided declaration, The specter extended its distorted arms, and the dark murky green energy around it surged violently. Happy New Year!!

Chapter 993- Hidden Quest

From the dark murky green energy, abominable creatures began to form, their twisted shapes defying logic.

Within moments, tens of thousands of these monstrosities emerged, each one radiating an aura of destruction.

"[Let's see how long you can survive this!]"

The spectre laughed maniacally as the abominations charged forward. The abominations came in grotesque, nightmarish forms, each unique and terrifying.

Some had jagged, saw-like arms and legs that churned and screeched as they moved, Others had pudgy, slime-like bodies that absorbed the energy around them and launched it as corrosive projectiles.

There were spiked beasts with barbed heads, charging forward with reckless abandon, towering creatures with multiple heads, each emitting a piercing wail that disoriented those who heard it. Their sheer numbers and forms were mind boggling.

"So it plans to stop us from destroying the core, huh"

Rumble... Rumble... Facing their march head on, Vincent muttered, his silver blade already slicing through the nearest abominations with ease.

Itherion raised his golden shield, its light repelling the incoming wave "Then we don't have time to waste. Let's end this quickly."

The two warriors stepped forward, their movements steady and fluid, like a streaming river.

With a flick of his wrist, Vincent's sword shone, unleashing a torrent of slashes so fast they left afterimages. Each strike severed multiple abominations in an instant, their bodies disintegrating into the same green mist from which they formed.

"[True Sword Intent]," Vincent whispered, his figure vanishing momentarily only to reappear in the midst of a larger group of abominations. A single horizontal slash later, the creatures around him collapsed into piles of green mush.

Beside him, Itehrion summoned a golden book. Bright golden light expanded outward like a pulsating wave. The light incinerated any abomination that came into contact with it, leaving no trace of their existence.

He followed that up with a powerful downward slash of his blade, [Golden Arc Blade], creating a crescent-shaped wave of light that swept through an entire line of abominations. The force was so immense that it left a gouge in the space itself.

As the creation of that spectral creature, the abominations were meant to be powerful no doubt; however, when against the two heroes of humanity, they looked nothing more than cannon fodder.

Vincent and Itehrion moved like phantoms, their blade cutting through hordes of enemies with precision and elegance. Each of their strikes seemed to defy common sense, bending even space to strike targets that should have been unreachable.

They were such a force of nature so overwhelming that even the abominations began to falter.

The spectre, observing its minions crumble like leaves before a storm, let out a guttural growl of frustration.

"This... how can this be?! How can they defeat my Wailing Brood Offerings so easily?"

The spectre's form flickered erratically showing its panic. For a moment, it seemed to doubt its decision when its gaze shifted behind the two human warriors, protected under the dwindling glow of the golden shield further in the backlines, the figure of Rothgard and Simon came into its view.

Immediately a sinister grin appeared on its face.

"?"

Facing the enemy, Itherion's sharp instincts caught the shift in the battlefield immediately. The abominations, previously throwing themselves recklessly at him and Vincent suddenly changed their behaviour.

Instead of attacking haphazardly, they began to form a wall, blocking all their paths. His expression darkened.

"This is bad. The abominations targeting Rothgard and that demona are all above level 700. Those two can't possibly hold out against this. I'll hold them here. You fall back and protect them. Vincent —" ...

"On it." Vincent spun, his blade already shimmering with power.

"Where do you think you're going?" Suddenly the spectre appeared above them, its voice cackling "You think I'll just let you escape? You will stay and fight my Wailing Brood, champions. Let's see how long you can last against an endless tide!"

With a wave of its hand, the ground quaked as abominations poured in from every direction.

Further back, Under the protection of the shield, Simon's instincts flared. His heterochromatic eyes darted towards the centre of the conflict where the dark murky green energy seemed to pulse unnaturally. The pressure was growing heavier, more oppressive.

"Something's wrong," Simon muttered. For some reason, he had this bad premonition.

His eyes which never left the battle, suddenly saw the spectre's eyes focus on them. At that moment, he felt his heart being gripped.

The spectre in the distance raised its distorted hand, and suddenly, the abominations around it shifted their focus. A significant number of them broke away from the frontlines and surged forward.

"They're coming straight for us!"..

"Dammit" Rothgard cursed.

The enemy was much more shrewd than he thought. Since Vincent and Itherion proved much more powerful than he bargained for, it turned its eyes towards the weakest link of the group. That is the two of them.

Vincent and Itherion were being drowned by the waves of enemies making them unable to break themselves off to aid them.

This was bad, the enemies were far more powerful for the two of them to fend off alone, plus the shield itself wouldn't be able to last long under the constant attacks of the abomination.

What should he do? Rothgard fell into contemplation. During this time, the abominations had already crossed the distance.

Just when they were about to bang on their shield, from the corner of his eyes, Rothgard saw Simon moving his hands. Immediately, peculiar warriors with greyish appearance and runes marked all over their bodies, appeared around the shield and stopped the march of the abomination.

That was not all, to his surprise the two grey warriors were powerful enough to contend with the abomination and even push them back.

What was going on? Rothgard blinked his eyes unable to believe what he saw. With the abominations now targeting them, he thought that it was all over only to be proved wrong the next second.

Chapter 994- Hidden Quest (2)

"You... what... that" Rothgard was so surprised that he was unable to even form proper words. The mercenary he hired back then was this strong!!

No, it was only natural. Now that he thought about it, not only the other party was always resourceful but they were also a demon noble. It shouldn't come as a surprise that they were this strong.

"Kuh! Dammit, using the Finger of Ozymandias at such a level takes a great toll on my body. However, even after that the most I can do is push the enemy back" Simon grunted. He no longer tried to keep some of his trump cards a secret after all, this was a matter of life and death.

The effects of the formation could activate any moment, during such a crisis, he cannot just sit back and relax. That said, even though he had used the [Cursed Soldier] of the finger of Ozymandias, the most it could achieve was stopping the abominations for a little while.

However, the enemy's number was so great that they broke free from the [Cursed Soldiers] entrapment and were on their way over here.

"Tch, although I wanted to avoid it, there is no helping it. If it's number you want, I got it right here". Simon's hand flashed and the Euclid's cube appeared in his palm.

The next second, to the bewilderment of the observing Rothgard, the cube enlarged to the size of a mountain before spawning legions of Andromedas with brilliant glowing eyes and glossy armor.

Andromedas MK5, MK4 and MK3 all joined the battle. And thus with the appearance of the Andromedas, the stark number difference was quickly overturned and the tides shifted.

As inanimate creatures, they were impervious to the corruptive nature of the green energy outside and since their frames and all their parts were moulded with Mythril and all the high grades ore there was, they were also somewhat resistant to the corrosion.

The abomination that broke out from the Cursed Soldiers were now all stopped by the Andromedas, thus causing them to lose the initiative.

"Hoh, would you look at that? That demon had such a trump card hidden under his belt" Itherion smirked, even after getting besieged by numerous abominations from all directions, not even a trace of tension can be seen on his person.

"It just means that he was not going all out when he fought me" Vincent was the same, numbers meant nothing in front of his sword.

"Oh, if I recall weren't you the one who attacked him? Are you mad that he had the leisure to hold back some of his powers against you? But didn't you do the same? You didn't even use 1% of your power back then" Itherion laughed.

"Anywho, it seems like they are doing more than batter over there. Let us finish our job too".

Itherion nodded "You are right, we can't just let a demon noble outshine us. Let's put more effort into it shall we".

Right after saying that, a brilliant golden light started exuding off of his eyes and body. [True Gold]-[Brilliant Dawn] At the same time as if responding to Itehrion's wishes, a huge halo appeared inside the murky green sky of the formation.

Meanwhile, Vincent's whole body started giving off a silvery glow. He was so bright that he looked like a star.

[True Silver]- [Myraid Phantom Swords] The silvery glow around him took on the shape of hundreds of thousands of swords, appearing just like a starry river from the distance.

The next instant, with the swipe of the sword from the caster, the two techniques came down.

SHING... SHING.. SHING... SHING... there was a bright flash of Gold and Silver and a second later all the abominations surrounding Itherion and Vincent stopped moving. The next second, with a supersonic grinding sound all the enemies disintegrated into pieces until not even their remains left behind.

"Strong..." Simon who was paying a close attention to their battle, gave his honest opinion. Even to his trained eyes, the technique and movement from Itehrion and Vincent were too profound for him to capture.

To others, it looked like the abominations were disintegrated with a single flash of gold and silver.

"This!!" It was not only Simon who was impressed but the spectre too was befuddled by the sudden increase in strength of its opponents "You defeated by my Wailing Brood Offerings so easily?"

Just a moment ago, it was dominating the battle with its brood offerings, targeting their weakest link and destabilising the formation. However, the next second metallic beings appeared out of nowhere and quickly dispersed its advantage. Thus leading to their current situation right now.

"Well then, it's just you remaining now. I remember you stating that this formation was your doing. Then all we need to do is defeat its caster you and the formation will naturally disappear" Itherion pointed his blade at the spectre.

The next second he disappeared and appeared behind the spectre, his blade drawing a clean cut on its unguarded back.

SPLASH.... KIEEEERRGHHHH... Green puss sprayed from the wound, accompanied by a screech that sounded more like static than a living cry.

"Hoh, you can give that kind of sound too huh? How about you scream some more"

Silver light flashed and another gash appeared on the spectre. This time, it was on its front. The spectre twisted and thrashed wildly, its body glitching violently.

[Insignificant ants! You dare to attack me?! I will tear you apart, piece by piece!]

In a fit of rage, the spectre spread its arms, the murky green energy of the formation surging toward it like a tide. Twisters began forming, like coiling worms burrowing out of the sky, their roiling energy feeding off the formation.

[You will die here. All of you. This world will forget you even existed!]

The spectre's voice carried an almost manic glee as it gave its verdict. It then plunged itself into the typhoon and disappeared into one of the twisters.

Chapter 995- Hidden Quest (3)

Tsk... Vincent clicked his tongue in irritation "It's hiding now? Coward."

He slashed through one of the twisters in frustration, but it revealed nothing. The spectre had completely blended its aura with the surrounding energy making it impossible to locate. The only way to find it now would be to destroy all of the twisters.

Next to him, Itherion stood in the air, silently contemplating in his head. His golden eyes reflected the eerie green energy of the formation.

'What is it thinking? It knows that our goal is to destroy the core. Even if it hides its actual body, as long as we get to the core, we can get out of the formation. It knows that which is why it tried to stop us earlier. Yet it is trying to hide from us now? What is it thinking?'

If he didn't know any better, Itherion would have thought that the spectre was running away from them. However, given its previous declaration and its abominable character, the spectre was definitely up to something.

Itherion who was silently contemplating his enemy's motive, suddenly widened his eyes. His extremely refined senses warned him of danger and he hurriedly raised his hands to the side to guard himself.

Sparks flew and space cracked as True Gold met True Silver.

CLANG... the attack was deflected effortlessly; however, the defender stood rooted in his place, shocked and in disbelief. The reason for that was simple, the attack earlier contained the essence of True Silver, a power that only a single being in this world possessed.

That's right, the attack came from none other than Vincent.

"What are you doing?" Itherion questioned.

Vincent did not answer him, instead he looked at his own arm with the same shock and disbelief as Itherion.

"This?! My body just moved on its own!".

In the distance, Simon also widened his eyes at the unexpected. He was keeping a close attention on the spectre who suddenly went into hiding and the two humans who were trying to find it when suddenly this happened. Vincent attacked Itherion out of nowhere.

Why did the former do that? Although he didn't know the two humans well, from their attitude and coordination during battle, he could tell that the two humans were friends and trusted each other enough to even entrust their lives to each other.

So what happened?

if not for the vision earlier, Simon would have been stumped just like the two humans in the sky. However, since he saw the future, he knew exactly what was going on.

The formation was activating... but why so suddenly and without any indication?

Simon's thoughts ran and he suddenly understood why. It was the spectre, it was controlling the murky green energy and hastening the effects of the formation.

"It's the formation. The formation isn't just meant to trap us—it's designed to turn us against one another" Simon hurriedly issued a warning.

The next moment, he turned around and parried an attack with his claws. It was a friendly attack, needless to say, it came from Rothgard.

However, unlike Vincent who still retained his sanity, Rothgard was completely overwhelmed by the formation. His eyes glowed green and like a feral beast, he started attacking Simon madly.

"This might hurt a bit but I have no choice"

Simon threw a powerful kick knocking Rothgard back. He then commanded a couple of Mk 5 Andromedas to temporarily hold the latter down. The remaining spread all around the formation in search of the spectre.

"So that's what the formation does huh? Vincent, you need a hand?" Itherion glanced at Rothgard and then at Vincent, gauging the state of his comrade.

"Save it" Vincent replied curtly, his voice calm but carrying an edge of annoyance "I was just careless before, it won't happen again. Let's find that bastard and finish this farce".

Although his voice appeared calm, one could clearly see that Vincent was annoyed. And why wouldn't he be? The fact that he fell for his opponent's tricks, pissed him to no extent.

"He got us good," Itherion admitted, his tone grim "There's no way to differentiate between his aura and the energy here unless we destroy the entire formation. This murky green energy is masking everything."

"Leave it to me."

Just as they were at an impasse as to what to do, a voice interrupted. Turning around, they realised the voice came from none other than the demon who was commanding those unknown metallic golems to scatter through the formation.

.

The Andromedas and Revenant Crows swarmed the formation, weaving through the murky green energy and twisters with remarkable precision. Their advanced sensors scanned the area, picking up even the faintest anomalies.

[Kfufufu... You puny ants might be stronger than I thought. However, if you think it's so easy to find me, then you are gravely mistaken. Once the formation activates, you'll all die here!]

The spectre's voice echoed around the formation, its location impossible to pinpoint. Simon did not fall for the obvious provocation and instead focused his mind, all unnecessary thoughts were discarded.

All sorts of information were transmitted into his mind from the Andromedas and he needed to focus so as to not miss any clues.

The spectre's aura might have been hidden, but the Revenant Crows were equipped with advanced detection systems that scanned for disturbances in the energy field itself. Even with the Spectre's seamless ability, it won't be able to hide for long.

The Revenant Crows and Andromedas darted through the twisters, their data streams feeding directly into Simon's mind. His nerves were tense, his senses sharp, as he sifted through the countless readings.

Suddenly, a small anomaly appeared on one of the crow's scans. A tiny imperfection, a small deviation in the data.

There it is.

A disturbance in the northwestern quadrant. The energy there fluctuated unnaturally, and the flow around one particular twister differed slightly from the others.

"Caught you," Simon smirked. Without hesitation, he relayed the coordinates to Vincent and Itherion.

"Northwest, about 250 meters up. Three twisters clustered together—it's hiding above the middle one."

Chapter 996- Hidden Quest (4)

Vincent and Itherion wasted no time. Vincent nodded at Simon's directions, his silver blade glowing faintly as he prepared to strike.

"Got it. Let's end this"...

The two heroes burst forward in perfect unison, their auras blazing as they surged toward the location Simon had pinpointed.

[Impossible! How did you—?!]

The spectre's laughter faltered as it sensed the approaching threat. Before it could finish, Itherion's golden blade cleaved through the twister, the sheer force of his strike obliterating the murky energy surrounding the spectre.

"Your tricks end here," Vincent's words were as sharp as his sword. He gave no time for the spectre to react and plunged his sword directly into its head.

BOOM... the next second with a wail, its entire head blew off. Green puss along with what looked like pieces of a brain, splattered everywhere.

THUD... The spectre's grotesque body having lost its life, fell down from the sky with a lifeless thump.

The battle was over or so it should have been. Itherion and Vincent who had just finished their opponent, didn't relax their guards immediately and continued to observe their surroundings with grim expressions.

"Why isn't the formation coming down?" Vincent muttered with a grimace.

Itherion's expression mirrored Vincent's concern as he scanned the surroundings. The barrier of the formation was still intact and the dark murky green energy surrounding them showed no signs of fading.

As he had explained earlier, to break a formation one needed to destroy its core or in other cases, defeat its caster. That way, with no one to operate it, the formation would come undone on its own.

They didn't destroy the core but they did defeat its caster. Going by the flow, the formation should come undone by now... so why was it not?

Itherion could only think of one reason. That is the formation wasn't set up by the spectre. However, the enemy boldly acknowledged the formation as its own work, there was no reason for it to lie at that time.

Itherion's gaze dropped to where the spectre's body lay, a growing suspicion gnawed at his mind. If the formation was indeed set up by it, there could be only one reason the formation didn't break.

That is unless the caster was still alive.

The thought just arrived in his mind when a garbled laughter echoed around them.

[Kfufufufu... You thought you had won? Pathetic insects, I will show you how futile your struggle is.]

The spectre's voice was so twisted that it sent chills to anyone who heard it. Then all of a sudden, even without a head its 'corpse' started to twitch unnaturally.

It levitated off the ground, its body swelling to epic proportions. Its limbs bloated, body bulged, like an overfilled sack of flesh the entire figure expanded rapidly, growing to the size of a house.

The spectre's body distorted further as the dark murky green energy of the formation flooded into it.

"This thing... it isn't just feeding off the formation's energy to get stronger," Itherion muttered, his face grim "It's trying to self-destruct!!"

"What?!"

Vincent's eyes widened, and in an instant, he and Itherion burst forward in an attempt to stop the enemy before it could finish its transformation but it was too late. The spectre had already absorbed all the energy it needed.

[Kfufufu... You will die here. Feel despair, insects! This is your end! But do not worry, I will torment your souls in my Wailing Cradle for all eternity, [Brood Rupture]!]

Its monstrous body swelled to its limit, the murky green energy within it compressing and pulsating dangerously as if ready to explode. The ground around the spectre cracked, and the air warped with the sheer density of energy.

But then when all seemed hopeless... nothing happened.

[Kfufu.. fu.. ?] The spectre's laughter wavered. [DIE!!!] Its bloated body trembled intensely as if ready to detonate but then nothing happened again. Seconds stretched into an eternity, the spectre remained frozen in its grotesque, overinflated state.

[What... What's happening?! Why won't it activate?!]

The spectre roared in panic. It tried again and again, its energy spiking erratically, but the result was the same. No explosion, no destruction—only stillness.

In its desperation, the spectre probed its body through its consciousness, that's when it realized the horrifying truth.

It was no longer in command over its own energy.

[This... how can this be?! Why won't it listen to me?!]

The realization rattled it to its core. The murky green energy, the essence of its power and existence—the very "Wailing Energy" that formed the lifeblood of the formation had rejected its control. It was foreign now, unresponsive, and alien.

[No, it can't be] The spectre struggled harder, its distorted limbs flailing wildly as it tried to assert its will on the wailing energy once again only to fail in the end.

Then it stopped, frozen in dawning horror. Its repeated attempt finally made it realise... [Someone else is controlling the Wailing Energy... But who?!]

This fact alone should be impossible but what truly opened its eyes was when it realised that the other party was not only controlling the Wailing energy, but they were in complete control of it as if they were its master.

[How?! What? This?! Who can control the Wailing Energy here other than me?]

The spectre scanned the space frantically, its headless neck swivelled wildly. It was then it landed on the demon.

The latter stood there unmoving, eyes closed and in intense concentration. His aura was suppressed to the point of near invisibility and he looked like he was out of touch with everything that was happening outside.

Nevertheless, the spectre just knew that it was that demon who was messing with the energy here.

[Impossible! The Wailing Energy belongs to me! How can this insignificant creature command it as if it were his own?!].

The spectre wasn't the only one who was flabbergasted, Itherion and Vincent were too. They stopped in their tracks in the sky and looked at the spectre with incomprehensible eyes. Just a moment ago they were preparing themselves for the inevitable. But now here they are looking at the Spectre's incomprehensible antics.

Chapter 997- Hidden Quest (5)

The spectre's energy rose to such a level that it was impossible to stop it in time. The ballooning energy reached a critical level, ready to detonate.

However, the explosion never came. Instead, the grotesque spectre floundered around, its energy rising and falling erratically without any apparent cause.

"What's going on?" Vincent muttered, lowering his blade slightly.

"It's not detonating... but why?" Itherion's eyes narrowed in confusion, observing the creature's erratic behaviour.

"Does it not want to detonate? Or maybe it can't?" His eyes followed the direction the spectre was facing and a chilling realisation dawned in his mind.

The next second though, he quickly discarded the thought thinking that it was impossible.

"It doesn't matter why the Spectre isn't detonating. This is our chance. Vincent align your Ancient Symbol with mine. The amount of energy that thing has absorbed is tremendous, we cannot approach it without caution. We will first trap the spectre within the ancient symbols before dealing with it".

Vincent nodded his head onboard with the strategy. The next second the two warriors split. Itherion stood a couple of meters away in front of the spectre while Vincent appeared behind it.

Both of them as if in perfect sync, clasped their hands in prayer. Gold and Silver light burst forth, its radiance so dazzling that it even pushed away the Wailing Energy.

An ancient pressure that was impossible to resist descended onto the place along with two glowing objects. Both objects appeared to be circular in shape with numerous rings of halos around them.

There was also some kind of rune rotating in the middle of the halos but it was impossible to make out. Both objects shone with pure gold and silver light respectively.

The objects were none other than the Ancient Symbols of True Gold and True Silver.

The next instant on Itherion's and Vincent's will the two symbols started getting bigger and bigger until they were the size of a mountain. The two symbols covered both sides of the spectre cutting off all of its exits.

Then it slowly closed in until the latter was completely captured inside it.

BANG... BANG... [Let me out!! How dare you low class creatures capture me inside]

The spectre reaptedly banged its limbs against the Ancient Symbol only to get burned in return, the wailing energy slowly seeping out of its body.

On the ground, Simon finally opened his eyes. Faint traces of green streak flashed the moment he opened his eyes before completely disappearing.

"Phew... it really worked?!" He gasped as he looked at his own self and the captive spectre in the distance. His face betrayed the excitement and the feeling of enlightenment that he had just gained.

"This ability... "

Simon's voice trembled, he had just done something impossible and it was difficult for him to reign in his wildly beating heart.

Just a few seconds ago, right as the Spectre was wildly devouring the wailing energy, Simon who was anxiously watching the scene knowing what would happen if the Spectre detonated, suddenly fell into a trance.

In that state, he was able to perceive anything and everything. From his beating heart to the breath and the smallest movement of the people fighting in the distance. The trance was very similar to the state of transience yet different at the same time.

In such a state not only was his senses, mind and cognition ultra heightened, but he was also in complete harmony with his self. A realm of empowerment that made him feel like he could do anything right now if he put his mind to it.

It was in that state that Simon realised he could control; no command the wailing energy inside the formation. The dark murky green energy that was hostile to all life and corroded anyone who came in contact with it was like a docile child in front of its parent when facing him.

He could command the energy to do anything he wished to as if he was the supreme ruler and everything was beneath him.

Wasting no time, he did as his guts told him and voilà he snatched all control from the spectre rendering it into a state where it was unable to detonate.

If Simon wanted to, he could even undo the formation; however, that would be too conspicuous as the spectre was still alive. As such, he left it at just stopping the spectre.

"This... feels like the time when I came in contact with the curse energy. At that time too, I was immune to the effects of the curse energy and could control it any way I wanted for some reason"

Curse energy... Wailing Energy... What was the relation between these two? Why was he able to control them?

Simon decided to think over it later and focus on the situation at hand. Now that the spectre was captured, it was over right?

"Give up, no one can escape from the binding of two ancient symbols" Itherion declared aloofly. He put down his weapon and got closer to the spectre who was encaged within a golden-silver barrier.

"Now then, tell us who; no, what are you? Why are you so hell bent on having the humans and demons kill each other? What are you plotting?"

Being as intuitive as he was Itherion still remembered the words that the spectre said when it first appeared.

[Humans and demons... working together? What kind of disgusting abomination is this? The only thing you need to do is fight each other and cause chaos in the world. Hmph. I thought our plan was working perfectly, but then I see this—this mockery]

"What did you mean by your plan? What kind of plot are you cooking?"

[Kfufufu.. you low class creatures you don't even realise what you have done huh. Kfufufu... do you really think I will tell you anything? Your fate is to die like ants just like how it should be.]

The spectre's words rubbed Vincent the wrong way and he used his Ancient Symbol to make the cage even smaller.

Chapter 998- Hidden Quest (6)

[KIEEEEE!!!]

When the light from the ancient symbols touched it, it was as if the spectre had met its natural enemy. Its agonising scream rang all across the space of the formation.

"It is weak to the power of the Ancient Symbols!!" Vincent made an amused expression at the unexpected discovery of the enemy's weakness.

[Kuhh... How dare you low class creatures harm this king's body. I'll incinerate your souls and make your bodies into one of my brood offerings... KIEEE!!!]

The spectre lashed out but before it could say much with that foul mouth of its, the light from the ancient symbols dropped down on it once again.

"Shut up!" Vincent snapped, his voice sharp as a blade. "You'll only speak when told to. If you spout any more nonsense, I'll personally incinerate your soul."

The threat seemed to possess incredible effect, as the spectre which moments ago had been buzzing like an annoying fly, suddenly grew silent.

This unexpected reaction did not go unnoticed by Itherion and Vincent. The spectre had survived without its head and had even attempted to obliterate them all through self detonating itself, seemed almost invisible.

It had no weakness, even destroying its body meant nothing. Yet, in the face of the Ancient Symbols, it was so afraid.

Vincent exchanged a meaningful look with Itherion "Could it be..."

"...that the spectre can be killed using the power of the Ancient Symbols?" Watching from the distance, Simon muttered to himself.

Both warriors, although still wary, began testing the idea, pouring more power into the cage created by the glowing runes.

Itherion questioned, "If you don't want to die, answer my previous question."

"However, if you start spouting nonsense once again, you'll feel that excruciating pain all over again" Vincent added threateningly.

Having experienced the pain before, the spectre writhed in fright, its form glitching and spasming in unnatural ways. After a moment of silence, it spoke in a voice trembling with desperation.

[Wait, no more! I give up! It's my loss! Just... don't use the Ancient Symbols on me anymore!]

"Hoh, then speak." Itherion's narrowed his eyes, his full attention locked onto the spectre. He didn't know why, but for some reason, he couldn't get the words spoken by the spectre earlier out of his head.

Those words that held deeper meaning, what could they have actually meant? What was he missing? He wanted to wring out all the information from the spectre.

[Fine, I'll tell you... The war... it's all... ■■■■. The ■■■■ is ■■■■ to ■■■■. The end... ■■■■.]

In the middle of its sentence, the spectre's words suddenly started becoming fractured and incomprehensible.

"What are you saying?" the two tried to make sense of the situation when the space behind the spectre began to distort.

CRICK... CRACK... the area around the cage grew dense, trembling as though it could no longer contain itself. Then, with a violent RIP, the very fabric of space tore apart.

From within the shattered space, a hideous green hand emerged. The hand was massive, dwarfing even the three meter spectre. Dark pulsating lines marked its finger and it was covered in a sickly green scales.

The mere sight of it was enough to evoke a deep, primal fear in anyone.

The moment the hand appeared, the atmosphere shifted drastically. The oppressive energy that radiated from it was unlike anything Simon had ever experienced. It was a suffocating force that seemed to crush his very soul, a palpable sense of despair that made his entire body tremble involuntarily.

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead and his throat became dry just from looking at that hand. What's more, this level of pressure was something that was brought forth from just a hand, what if the entire being appeared here?

Simon couldn't help but break out in cold sweat. This sense of danger, even when compared to the Dmeon Archdukes he saw from Walpurgis and Hexennacht, was leagues beyond.

Whatever that thing was, cannot be allowed to come here.

Simon's gaze shifted to Itherion and Vincent. For the first time since meeting them, he saw genuine apprehension etched onto their faces. The two warriors, who had stood unshaken against everything they'd faced, now wore grave expressions as they stared at the entity emerging from the rift.

"This could be dangerous, I didn't expect to put my life on the line here" Vincent muttered, preparing himself to face the new enemy.

Meanwhile, the disposition of the Spectre changed the moment it saw the huge green hand appearing from the space. It was as if it had seen its worst nightmare, its body started trembling intensely.

[No... No! Why are YOU here? This... no, please, not me! No, I can still do it!]

The spectre pleaded desperately. Its voice was even more desperate than when it was pleading for its life from Itherion and Vincent. All of its smug and menacing aura was gone and it shrank back against the wall of the cage like a beaten dog.

[I swear I wasn't going to betray the ■■■■■■■■ ... I didn't mean to fail! It was the humans and the demon! THEY FORCED ME! PLEASE, LORD ■■■■, I BEG YOU!]

The spectre's pleas were drowned out by the hand which mercilessly grabbed the Spectre and pulled it inside the space beyond.

The sound of the spectre's scream and unfiltered horror rang out for a while before everything turned silent. The formation entrapping them faded along with the wailing energy, and they were back on Mount Gorger once again.

Every trace of the fact that they fought the spectre disappeared as if it was never there to begin with. That is if not for the shattered space in the sky and their memories they would have seriously doubted if any of these events actually occurred.

"This, I can't believe we missed our chance to finish off that spectre" Vincent muttered in frustration.

"Yeah, there were many things I wanted to ask it" Itherion added, His eyes continued to stare at the shattered space with an unreadable expression.

Chapter 999- Demon Lord of Envy— [Agramon]

"Well, it is for the best. If we had fought that thing, there was no guarantee that we would have won. We can't deplete our power here, especially when we still have to fight the Demon Lord and its forces."

Vincent reasoned, as someone who has fought numerous battles with Itherion, he understood full well what the former was thinking.

While the two warriors were having a conversation, on the ground Simon was alerted by a sudden noise.

DING... [Hidden Quest fend of the ■■■■■■■■■■ on Mount Gorgor has been cleared]...
[Calculating merit, altering scenario] New notifications appeared in front of his eyes.

What's this? Hidden Quest? Simon arched his brows, his sweat and effort were rewarded in an unexpected way. Who knew that progressing with the story would initiate a hidden quest?

That said, the notification said that he cleared the quest, which means that he didn't fail the mission of saving the South Wing army. Simon opened the quest window, and there it was: the mission [Prevent the Souther Alliance from getting annihilated—In Progress].

For some reason, it was still in progress. Other than that, there was also the other notification.

[Calculating merit, altering scenario]...

What did it mean by altering the scenario? Did his clearing of the hidden quest lead to a chain of events that was different from the past?

While Simon was busy trying to wrap his head around the new information, Rothgard woke up. With the formation gone, there was no longer any reason to keep him restrained.

"What's going on? Kuh!! Why does my body hurt so much?"...

"Oh?" Rothgard's voice snapped Simon from his contemplation. He looked at the former and asked "Do you not remember anything that you did?".

Rothgard shook his head "I remember meeting Itherion and Vincent then after that everything is hazy".

All his memories from the time the Spectre appeared and was then snatched away by the big green hand was gone.

Did the new entity do something or is it that people under a certain aren't even able to remember it?

Before Simon could ponder on this matter, Itherion and Vincent landed in front of him. The former put a hand on his shoulder and expressed his gratitude.

"You fought well, you saved my friend once again". If not for the demon, the abomination would have reached Rothgard and broken down the shield. The demon saved his friend once again.

"No need" Simon thwarted the hand away "It was a mutual cooperation. I was just doing my part".

"If you say so" Itherion nodded.

"Anyways did you find out anything about that entity?"...

The two humans shook their heads "Regretfully no, but I plan to find it out. It seems there is some big ploy at work here. Unless I uncover it, I can't have peace of mind"...

"Wait Itherion, what do you mean? Don't tell me you plan on heading inside that" Vincent pointed at the shattered space that was slowly healing itself.

The person in question nodded his head "There is no other option, I need to do this. Whatever that thing; no those things are planning it is definitely dangerous. I can't participate in the war without realising what they are up to".

Itherion words surprised everyone present here, three humans and one demon all showed varying kinds of emotions.

"Wait what is going on? Can someone explain it to me?" Rothgard who had forgotten about the events leading from the moment they were trapped inside the formation, was reminded of it by Vincent.

"All this happened... I see. It does concern me too as to what they want but we have more pressing matters at hand. Itherion have you forgotten about your duty? The demon lord's forces have already broken through here, if they reach the capital it would spell the end"...

"You must join with the Angels before that happens. You already wasted your time by coming here and saving me. Although I'm grateful, it just means that we have lost that much more time"...

Vincent added, "Rothgard is right, think about it".

Itherion was silent as if trying to make a decision then all of a sudden his eyes shifted towards Simon, the only outsider in this group.

"What do you think? Are humans and demons destined to fight each other?"

Itherion words struck a chord that the latter had been avoiding thinking about causing him to be unable to give an answer.

A couple of years ago, he was naïve enough to think he could befriend humans. However, after an eye awakening encounter, he realised that it was just a foolish hope. Humans and demons, the hatred between the two races was so deep that they could only rest in peace if either of the races died out.

As such, Itherion words made little sense to him.

"Asmodeus... he definitely knew something we didn't".

When the name Asmodeus was brought up, Vincent immediately fell silent. A thoughtful expression on his face. He then looked at the demon beside them and sighed loudly.

"Alright, do whatever you want. Just know that I won't wait for you. If you don't come on time, I will defeat the Demon Lord myself" Vincent declared proudly and in all seriousness.

"Yeah, I promise that I won't make you wait" Saying that, he turned towards Rothgard and spoke "I have made my decision. I will head inside the space the tear leads to. I need to find what those creatures are up to. Once I know their goals, I'll come back. Don't worry, I won't put myself in much danger".

Rothgard respected his friend's decision and nodded his head. In any case, worrying about Itherion was pointless. The man was one of the strongest beings in the world, the peak the humanity could offer.

If there is any danger, he should be able to protect himself and guard his life.

"Alright, then we will meet you in the final battleground. Once you are out, meet us in the Kingdom of Orlandos, that is probably where the demon lord's forces are headed".

Chapter 1000- Demon Lord of Envy— [Agramon] (2)

Rothgard looked at Simon who nodded his head. As a demon himself, he shouldn't give out information to his enemies. However, he was not from this timeline and besides, this much was already known.

The Demon Lord of Envy wanted to regroup with the Demon Lord of Greed to expand their forces and take the Central Continent in one fell swoop. Kingdom of Orlandos which connected the northwest with the east, was the ideal place to assemble.

As such, the Demon Lord's next target would be to take over the Kingdom of Orlandos.

Itherion nodded, without any further words he headed inside the tear before it could completely recover.

With Itherion gone, the three of them also left the scene. Two humans, one demon flew through the air. The scenery below them quickly changed from a mountainous region to a fertile plain land.

Vincent was flying through the air without man wings, Simon was using his own demon wings while Rothgard was using an artefact to fly.

[Mana Wings] was a skill that one could only acquire after reaching level 500 and since the latter was yet to reach that level, he had to rely on an artefact to fly. Unlike now, artifacts such as this were much more common.

In the middle of the flight, Simon's mind wandered. Now that Itherion was out of the picture, there was no guarantee that he would be able to come back in time. Could the final battle, which he needed to stop, be solved on its own now??

Without Itherion the Seraphim of Honor shouldn't be able to slay the Demon Lord of Envy right?

Just as those thoughts arrived in his mind, his eyes went towards Vincent. He had just seen a fraction of the latter's strength. It was too early to discount that the Southern Alliance had no powerful pieces to checkmate.

Contrariwise, it would also be bad if the human forces had no powerful beings to stop the Demon Lord. The trail wanted him to stop the fight with neither the Demon Lord or the Seraphim dying.

If the Demon Lord's forces become too powerful and the Demon lord slays the Seraphim of Honor, it will run contrary to his case.

"We will soon be entering the territory of the Kingdom of Orlandos. What are your plans?".

Simon stopped his wildly running thoughts and answered "I will regroup with the demon lord's forces. I can't be seen with the humans, it is better for you too right".

Vincent nodded, humans and demons are arc enemies, after all, they can't be seen together lest they get misunderstood.

"Before you go away, I want to say good luck. Even though we are from the opposing forces, it is hard for me to see you as an enemy. I hope you survive the war"...

Saying that he suddenly started chuckling "Haha, you remind me very much of a demon I met in my younger years".

A demon? Curious, Simon couldn't help but ask who?

"Other than the current Itherion, he was the strongest being I ever met. That guy even while being a demon noble, held no enmity towards humans. No, far from it, he looked at us as if we were not different. He crushed all of my attacks and made me realise what the true pinnacle of power looked

like. Even though he could, he didn't kill us. And by us, I mean Itherion and me. Of course, we were nowhere as strong as we are right now back then"

Vincent made a conflicted face as if he still could not come to terms with his defeat at the hands of Asmodeus.

"The world knows that there are only two conquerors of the Forbidden Ground- The Thousand Trials. But in reality, there is a third one, a demon in fact"...

"As you can guess, it was Asmodeus. However, unlike he didn't choose to inherit the power of the Ancient Symbols and instead passed this opportunity to us. His reason being that he was searching for a different forbidden ground and not this one. Can you believe it?"

Someone who would reject the allure of the Ancient symbols, it was indeed difficult to believe. Although Simon didn't possess any Ancient Symbols, from what little he had seen and knew, he could tell that they were unparalleled treasures in this world.

They not only possess mystical powers but could bolster one's power to the pinnacle of this world.

"Anyways, he was a demon with a mission. I don't know what he was after but it was definitely not waging wars like this. You kind of remind me of him, prideful and noble".

Simon nodded, becoming curious and curious about this demon named Asmodeus who was spoken so highly of by one of the two strongest human Heroes.

"By the way you didn't get to know the latter half of your question right? Since it's your reward, you should naturally get to hear about it. Let me answer your query, the Seraphim who was killed was the newly Appointed Seraphim of Justice"...

"And the one who killed him was none other than the Demon Lord of Greed".

The words struck as thunder in Simon's ears, these were information he was unaware of. The prelude to the Second Apex War that started with the blood of the Seraphim and that Seraphim was none other than the Seraphim of Justice.

He had never met any of the Seraphims so it was hard for him to imagine what kind of beings they were. However, he did know a little about the current Demon Lord of Greed, Procell.

It was said that Procell was chosen by the Fragment of Greed about 3000 years ago from the present timeline. Considering that it takes a lot of time for each fragment of sin to find a worthy successor, it can be said that the Demon Lord of Greed here is the predecessor of Procell.