

Extras 491

Chapter 491 Unexpected Calamity

"G-Glitch Skill?"

Rey's brows furled up as he stared at Esme, obviously confused by what she was asking. "What's that? A Skill that causes Glitches?"

Perhaps she meant that the Skill's name was Glitch. The answer to that was no, obviously.

"No! Like, the Skill itself is glitching. Something like showing random letters, numbers or symbols." She responded. "Did it have something like that?"

"H-huh...?" Rey didn't know what Esme was talking about.

This was the first time he was hearing of Skills like that.

Did such Skills even exist on H'Trae?

"So you didn't see it, huh? That's odd... you even look confused about what I'm saying."

Esme's response only plunged Rey into more confusion.

"Hold up. What are you sayi—?"

"I mean, I thought you would at least know of it, even if you didn't know of its existence... right?" She mumbled, mostly to herself, now pacing around the room.

"I'm not following..."

"I've only ever seen the glitch once too. And I used it as an explanation for you doing all those things you did, having such unbelievable powers despite not having too many Skills on your Status Window."

At this point, Rey grew impatient and grabbed Esme by both hands, stopping her pacing.

"What exactly are you saying here?" He stared into her eyes, pausing to look at the confused expression on her face.

"You have a glitch Skill, Rey. So I thought that if the Skeletal Dragon had one too, it would explain why it was able to resist your power."

"Eh? Really?"

This was news to Rey. He had checked his Status Window more times than he could remember, but he saw no signs of a glitch Skill.

"Yes! It's—!"

"GAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Rey suddenly screamed, his body trembling violently as he took several steps away from Esme.

His body felt like he was on fire, and his brain felt like it would explode at any moment. This sudden sensation overwhelmed his senses.

It consumed him from the inside out, causing his whole body to shake immensely.

"UWAAAAAHHHHHHH! GUAGHHHHHHH!!!"

As if his body was being split in two, he could feel every ligament of his body straining, and every portion of senses being fried.

This felt like the most gruesome death ever—being destroyed, yet perfectly fine. It truly felt like he was dying. But no... this was a fate worse.

The overwhelming sensation, raw and pervasive, felt perpetual in its infliction.

Plus, Rey didn't even know the cause of his suffering.

Until—

[SYSTEM WARNING]

[Your Duplicate Has Been Destroyed!]

~Stats and Levels allocated to said Duplicate will be deducted and permanently lost~

~Due to your remnant connection with the Duplicate, you will experience this death, but not truly die~

~All functions will permanently plummet by 50 Percent~

[Recovery Process Will Commence As Soon As Possible]

"W-wha...?"

Rey's face, pale and lifeless, could barely move as he saw what the System displayed before him.

His tired, agonizing mind could hardly process the details.

"...EY!"

"... RE...!"

"... REY...!"

As he heard Esme's scream, it felt like she was distant, too far away to reach.

All his senses plunged into an abyss, and he found himself sinking as well—though only halfway through.

His body fell to the ground after his screech, but rather than the hard, cold ground, he found a soft cushion in Esme.

She had swiftly darted from her position and caught him, despite her own confusion on the matter. He could hardly see her worried face beyond the blurry lens that impeded his sight, despite being completely immobile, Rey was trembling inside.

Having 50 Percent of you perish had to be one of the most painful experiences; and Rey had to experience it all at once.

He had forgotten the sensation... until now.

Even now, despite the several things he wanted to say or do, only one word proceeded out of his trembling lips—almost as if he was having a severe seizure.

"W...hy...?"

Tears fell from his eyes as they began to close.

As he sank into the dark realm of the unconscious, the pain began to lose its lustre. However, in those final moments of partial consciousness, a new emotion gripped him.

—FEAR!

If his Duplicate was killed, then that meant there was something dangerous in the Capital, and that 'dangerous' thing was capable of killing a Duplicate of his.

Rey always limited his Rey standin, and the strict order it followed was not to display any power that exceeded the current level that Rey had revealed to his classmates.

As such, it was meant to act considerably weaker than it actually was.

However, even that didn't mean it was less durable and powerful. The only thing it was really restricted to was its use of Skills and optimal power.

The fact that the Duplicate was killed meant the culprit had enough power to deplete all of Rey's durability.

There were only two likely culprits behind this, and Rey was equally frightened for both outcomes.

'N-no... I have to... h-help them...!'

Whether it was Adrien or the Dragons, no one in the Capital stood a chance.

No one but him.

"... Please."

Rey fell into indefinite slumber, collapsed entirely in the crying Esme's arms... all alone in the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon.

No one could have predicted this; the fact that the true calamity was not within the ancient walls of the Dungeon that they conquered.

Instead, it happened in a bustling city—filled with life, and people.

The Capital, known as a haven from Dragons, thanks to being situated South, far from the rigors of war, was now in flames.

Several buildings had crumbled under the heat, and many more crashed to the ground, sending debris flying around.

So far, over ten thousand had met their end in this catastrophe, and that number only rose as time passed.

However, other than the natives who could do nothing but cry and run for their lives, the numbers of the saviors who faced this threat had already been cut short.

Of the twelve brave champions that faced the catastrophe, their current state was thus;

Three were already dead.

Nine were severely injured.

All would soon perish.

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Chapter 492 Prelude To The Calamity [Pt 1]

[Moments Earlier]

~FSHING!~

A bright light surged from the ground beneath all the Otherworlders, instantly sending them away from their respective positions before they even understood what was happening.

In the blink of an eye, all of them—without exception—found themselves in a wood clearing, just a bit on the outskirts of the Capital.

The first reaction of everyone was to look around, dazed and shocked to see their environment change once again.

"H-huh?!"

"T-this is...?"

"Isn't this...?!"

"Why are we here? Where did you guys come from?"

They looked around, recognizing the trees, the clearing they stood on, and most importantly... one another.

The initial look of shock was replaced with sighs of relief.

Everyone was happy to see the faces of their classmates and friends. Just the fact that they were no longer alone in the dark and dreary world of the Dungeon made them nearly leap in delight.

The fresh breeze... they breathed it in with smiles on their faces in spite of their unanswered questions.

It was only after countless sighs of relief and tears of joy that a voice finally spoke up and addressed the issue.

"Why are we back at the Capital?"

The teleportation that brought them here was too fast for them to properly examine. Even Adonis was too deep in his despair to properly comprehend what was happening until it was too late.

Bottom line... no one had any idea what could have happened.

Still, everyone had their eyes on Adonis, expecting some kind of answer. He always knew things that others didn't, and a lot of the guesses he made were spot-on. If anyone could decipher the current situation, it had to be him.

"I... I don't know." Adonis simply whispered, his tone as sullen as his face was crestfallen.

His entire demeanor felt devoid of any life or energy—the kind that Adonis was known for no matter the situation.

That resolute face was nowhere to be seen now.

His response caused a heavy atmosphere to fall on the group. They remembered the enemy they had been facing until they all got separated, as well as the enemies that Adonis had fought and labeled Dragon Spies.

None of the Otherworlders really understood why Jet and Lux were being suspected by Adonis, since many other explanations could be used to replace the instances he gave them.

However, they trusted him as their leader and listened to his words.

It was no secret to say that didn't end well.

Anyone could see how that embarrassing and fatal mistake could make Adonis doubt himself and hesitate in making another assertion, so they didn't push the issue any further.

Still, the tension remained.

Many of the Otherworlders had already plopped to the ground to rest a little. After all, they were plenty tired from having used up so much energy and practically all their physical abilities to fight the Undead Dragon.

The worst part was, even after they were all transported away from one another, they found themselves swarmed with hordes of enemies.

There was no time to rest, as each person had to constantly fight for their dear life.

Now tired beyond what words could properly explain, the Adventurers hoped to catch their breaths and understand the current situation before departing to the Capital.

"I have two theories." Alicia spoke up, finally speaking after nearly a few minutes of silence.

All eyes fell on her, as well as her Familiar who wouldn't stop hugging her. They had been separated by the Undead Dragon back then, so it only made sense that the rabbit would be very clingy upon their reunion.

While it was incredibly cute to see, though, most of the students were more focused on Alicia's important opinion.

"One is that Sir Ralyks must have transported us here. Maybe he used some sort of delayed Spatial Magic that would bring us back here after a specified period of time."

The rings that they used for disguise could have been a conduit, or maybe he used another means. The man had such a wide array of Skills that it was practically impossible to limit him in many regards

Many of the Otherworlders nodded in response to this theory. It made a lot of sense, and it was also probably what happened

—considering Ralyks and his personality.

"What's the second theory?"

"That the Adventurers somehow managed to defeat the Skeletal Dragon. Jet and Lux most likely helped, and since we had done considerable damage to it... they were able to finish it off."

This theory had a lot of things going for it, especially its merits.

"If that's what happened, we should expect that the Adventurers also got transported away and the threat was vanquished." She added.

It sounded nice to hear, and many of the students really wanted to believe it was true.

"That's na?ve..." Adonis responded, his words like freezing water splashed on the flickering flames of hope.

"Do you really think they had a chance at beating that thing? Even after what it did to us, do you think they had a chance?"

"I-I mean, maybe using the Zone Shift tires him out, so he couldn't do it for a while after separating us..." Alicia tried to respond, but she found Adonis shaking his head in disagreement.

"It's foolish to think that. The Zone Shift was happening for those seven days straight. Why would it be exhausting for it to do something that has been going on for so long?"

"W-well, maybe the other Zone Shifts were the Dungeon's function, and what he did was a product of his Ski—"

"No! You're wrong. You're being too optimistic here!" Adonis said with a raised voice, a deep frown evident on his face.

"Maybe you're being too pessimistic."

"I'm not! I'm being realistic! There's no way they could have won against that thing. You're only making excuses because you don't like the idea that they're all dead!"

"At least I came up with two theories. You didn't contribute anything, so what gives you the right to criticize me?"

"I'm just saying the tru—!"

"That doesn't give you the right to be an insensitive jackass!"

"Me? Jackass?!" Adonis growled as he rose to his feet, his eyes burning with a complicated emotion of rage.

"I'm only saying what everyone is thinking! All of them... those Adventurers... they're all dead!"

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Chapter 493 Prelude To The Calamity [Pt 2]

Silence enveloped everything as Adonis shouted out his thoughts.

No one spoke a word.

They all just stared at him--everyone having distinct, yet similar expressions on their faces.

There was mutual disbelief. None could believe that the Hero, the most upright guy they knew, would ever utter such words.

... And do so in such a crass manner as well.

Many faces fell after hearing those words. The students who tried their hardest not to think about it found themselves breaking down.

No one could deny the truth.

Adonis was right. Everyone here already knew that the likelihood of any human fighting such a creature of unrivaled power was nonexistent. Even Jet an Lux stood no chance, based on what they saw.

The Adventurers were more likely dead than alive.

"Adonis... what the hell are you saying?" Tears began to fall from Alicia's eyes as she looked at the rage-filled face of the boy before her.

He looked angry, but there was no one around who his anger was directed to. The anger was directed only at himself, and when he could not take it anymore, he let it out to those he called friends.

"I--" Adonis wanted to say something, but Alicia was much faster.

"Look around you! Look at your classmates. The people you lead. Do you think we're oblivious to the more likely theory?"

As Adonis heard this, he moved his eyes around and observed the disturbed expressions of all his classmates. Most were hurting, and others looked miserable.

A few were even crying.

"We all joined the Conquest to grow stronger, but also to help the Adventurers. We did our best, but all of us failed." Alicia said, her own face also growing crestfallen.

"In the end... even after everything... we could not win."

This was nothing like the Royal Dungeon Incident, when Ralyks came and saved everyone, and it certainly wasn't like their Dungeon Raid, where he constantly watched over them.

The Conquest was their first ever independent mission, and they failed.

"Do you really think we have no idea how much we messed up? That we screwed up, and people are going to die as a result?" Alicia took a few steps forward, anger now evident in her eyes as hot tears flowed out.

Everyone's bitter face reflected just that--the weight of failure that hung on their shoulders.

They were just teenagers, yet had to carry the lives of thousands on their shoulders. Living in H'Trae had made many desensitized to the heavy burdens they carried, considering it as normal, but Alicia could not.

As someone who desired to return to Earth, she knew full well that she was only sixteen, soon to be seventeen.

She was an adult in this world, but she didn't consider herself one. None of them were adults, no matter how they tried to pretend otherwise.

"It is at times like this that you're meant to offer words of support and encouragement... not spilling out more depressing stuff for us to swallow."

At this point, she was right in front of Adonis, only a few inches from his face.

"I don't care that you're our friend, our leader, or the goddamn Hero. Nothing gives you the right to say shit like that at this point in time."

"..." Adonis' head hung shamefully as he faced the ground.

He clenched his fist and gritted his teeth as he heard what she said. Nodding as he sniffed slightly, he muttered.

"You're right. I'm sorry."

The moment he said this, Alicia hugged him tightly, allowing his sunken head to rest on her shoulder.

"I know you are, idiot." She whispered, crying as she smiled as well.

Everyone was hurting, but the one who was experiencing the most pain was Adonis. No one in the room could deny that fact.

And so, the moment Alicia hugged Adonis, everyone began to leave their positions and draw close to the two. Before they realized it, they hugged each other—all with bittersweet smiles on their faces.

"I'm sorry, guys... I shouldn't have said it like that." Adonis' words were stifled as he did his best to hold back his tears.

Everyone was there to comfort him—and one another—as they kept up their group hug.

"We get it, man." Justin spoke up, his smile not as wide as it usually was. "We got you."

Then, Clark spoke up.

"It hurts me too. I get it, Adonis."

Billy muttered his own words. "You've been a great leader. There's no need to take all of this on alone."

"Yeah. Don't blame yourself." Alicia nodded in agreement.

"Yeah..." Trisha murmured.

"We did our best. It just wasn't enough. That's not on you, or on us. Life's just fucked up like that sometimes." Eric sighed.

This time, he did not flex his glasses. Instead, his arms were wrapped around the group.

"Sir Ralyks might have saved them as well..."

The feminine voice that uttered that needed no introduction. The moment she said this, though, the gloomy mood in the air lightened slightly.

Somehow, her words seemed to resonate with a lot of the people who now smiled and muttered in unison;

"YEAH... MAYBE HE DID."

As they gradually let go of the grief and guilt that plagued them, embracing the possibility that their savior could have also saved the Adventurers, a certain voice echoed in the air.

"Hey, what's that?" It came from Rey, and he was pointing at dark clouds that seemed to gather in the distance. "Is it about to rain or something?"

Rey's choice of words, as well as his off tone tainted the mood among the students. Many would have groaned and glared at him if they didn't look in the direction that he pointed to.

Sure enough, there were eerily thick clouds that floated in the distance.

Something about its growing darkness seemed malevolent, and the intensity—even from where they stood—seemed chilling.

They felt it, cold chills running down their spine and spreading throughout their body. Was this merely rain, or was a storm brewing.

Despite all of these eerie signs, there was something else that made the students look at the faraway sky in concern.

"Isn't the Capital located in that direction—?"

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

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Chapter 494 Prelude To The Calamity [Pt 3]

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

The earth beneath the students rumbled as a flash of lightning descended from the darkened clouds.

It was so far away—perhaps a couple thousand meters or so—yet the impact of the strike caused a violent quake where they stood.

Everything happened instantly too, causing every student to get startled.

"A-ahh...!"

"What was that?!"

"A dark cloud? A lightning strike? The Capital?"

Many students were already on the ground, having been knocked over by the tremors and their intense surprise once they heard the noise.

Still, they couldn't help but gaze in the direction where the lightning struck.

Then, before they could process their thoughts, or answer their questions—

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

—Another blast of the same lightning struck once more.

The ground did not respond to kindly, and it shook even more than it did last time, causing nearly all the students to fall.

Adonis and Billy were the only ones who remained standing, and Adonis' distracted face as he stared at the Capital said it all...

"Smoke."

... The horror that was to come.

Right in front of them, the right distance away, dense pillars of smoke began ascending to meet the dark clouds above.

All of this vivid imagery burned into the minds of the students, and there was no longer any confusion or ambiguity.

"The Capital is under attack!"

They didn't know the enemy, but was there really a need to?

Their home—headquarters of their operation, and the heart of the United Human Alliance—was under attack.

"We need to go... NOW!" Adonis turned to his classmates, but found a different expression on their faces than what he expected.

Rather than the optimistic and resolute faces—the kind that they had displayed before leaving for the Adventurers City—only dread could be seen now.

The students were scared as they stared off into the distance.

Some of them were trembling, their lips shaking as their bulging eyes struggled to stay open.

"I-I don't think... I want to go anywhere."

To everyone's surprise, the one who spoke out loud was Eric. He was one of the most adventurous of the group, but the look in his eyes said it all.

"W-what if it's another Dragon? I... can we win?"

Thanks to the horrible experience that everyone faced in the Dungeon, the moment they heard the questions of Eric, their faces showed even greater fear.

"The Capital... if it's under attack... we... can't we just escape?" Even though Eric said this, the look on his face and the tears in his eyes made it clear that he didn't like it.

The boy didn't want to abandon all those innocent people—not again. He couldn't bear it on his conscience.

But... he also didn't want to die.

Before he was transported into the forest and reunited with everyone, he was surrounded by tons of Death Knights and Liches. His Mana Level was running low, and he saw his life flashing before his eyes.

'I don't want to die!' Those were his thoughts back then.

He had finally been summoned into this amazing new world, one where all of his fantasies were real. He had Magic, reliable allies, and a mission to save the world.

He was relevant to the world, and he wanted to continue being so.

Eric slept every night and dreamt of all the adventurers he would have with his friends, all the places he would visit with them... and how his life would turn out after he was finally done with his grand mission.

Perhaps he would take over Lucielle's position as the Grand Mage of the Alliance. He could settle down, have a few kids of his own, and tell them all the crazy stories of his wild adventures.

But... if he went in the direction of those dark clouds... something told Eric that those dreams of his would not come true.

"I don't want to die, guys... I don't want any of us to die." He sobbed even more as he looked at everyone.

Eric knew he looked pathetic, but he just couldn't control his instincts. He didn't want to lose everything he had gained so far.

'I don't want that. Please...'

"I also don't want to die." Adonis said, a sigh escaping his lips as he looked at the group in front of him.

Most of the faces that stared back at him had similar frightened expressions on their faces, though not as pronounced as Eric's.

But he understood it, regardless. Everyone was thinking the same thing.

—What if there is a Dragon waiting for us at the Capital?

If all their encounters with Dragons taught them anything, it was the fact that they were absolute.

Dragons were supreme—the apex predators of the world. Against such entities, what could they do but lose?

Adonis knew all of that, but still...

"I don't want any of us to die, but... I have to march forward."

One would think that, after facing despair, Adonis would be able to understand and accept the position of cowardice. And while the former was true, the latter remained far removed from his mind.

After all, compared to this despair that he currently faced, the one that waited for him if he chose not to march forward was far worse.

And so, unable to ignore the horrors that would eventually come, Adonis walked ahead.

"You can all retreat and save your lives. But... I will go ahead." As he walked forward, Adonis clenched his fist and tensed up his body so he wouldn't shake.

'At this point, it's safe to say that the future is completely changed. If I am to survive this, then I can no longer rely on my knowledge of the future...'

Swallowing hard and breathing heavily, he prepared his legs to dash away. But—

"Where do you think you're going, leader?"

"Leaving the rest of us behind? How rude..."

"I'm not leaving you alone to handle everything on you own."

"Kwii kwii."

"Count me in! I won't ignore those in danger."

"It's what Sir Ralyks would do!"

"Let's do this!"

Adonis turned back to see all the Otherworlders, with the exception of Eric and Justin, standing right behind him.

"You guys..."

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Chapter 495 Prelude To The Calamity [Pt 4]

"You guys..."

Adonis' eyes grew moist as he watched all the smiling faces of his comrades. Beneath their acts of bravado, he knew they were scared.

He was too.

'We're all exhausted, and the Mana in our Enchanted Items are depleted. We also don't know who the enemy is...'

In all honesty, Adonis wasn't assured of his survival if he went alone. Most likely, he was going to die.

But... with his comrades backing him up, he felt like he had a chance.

"... Thank you!"

"Won't you go with them...?"

Eric slightly glanced at Justin, who sat beside him on the dirty ground of the woods. He was the only one who stayed behind, while the others had long departed.

"Nah! I won't leave you by yourself." Justin responded with a slight smile.

"W-what? Why?!"

"Because then you'll be forced to come with us. That's the kind of scaredy-cat you are." Justin winked as he gave another brilliant smile.

Eric's face fell as he stared at the ground in both shame and melancholy.

"I... I don't understand them." He whispered. "Aren't they scared that they'll die? If it's a Dragon and it wipes them all out, it's over!"

Justin nodded at all of Eric's words, most of smile already gone.

"I just... I don't want to lose all these precious memories. I want to make more of them. I know this world isn't all fun and games. I know danger awaits at so many corners, but I also know that there are dangers we can choose to avoid."

He buried his face under his arched his forehead resting on his two hands.

"Does that make me selfish? Am I a bad person for just choosing to live?"

Eric knew that there was a chance that the enemy wasn't a Dragon. It could be some natural disaster, or powerful Monster. The Capital may not even be in any danger at all.

There were several things that could be true. But—

"We have all been weakened considerably. We lack no means to escape once we face the enemy. Out Items have mostly run out of power."

All in all, they were in their most vulnerable state.

"If we were to encounter a powerful opponent now, it will be the end. And I can't help but think that there is a powerful enemy waiting for us over there."

Once Eric was done speaking, he let out a deep sigh, waited a few seconds, and then slowly glanced at Justin.

"Why aren't you saying anything?"

Justin shrugged, blankly staring at Eric as he parted his lips. "What else is there to say? You've pretty much said it all."

Eric set his distracted gaze forward and set it on a distant tree.

"You already know I have a girl back home. I have my family and friends too. I don't want to die knowing I didn't at least tell them all the wacky shit I've been through in this world."

Eric let out a small laugh, causing Justin to smile a bit more.

"I don't think any of them want to die. They just... don't want those who are currently in the Capital to die."

All of what Justin and Eric felt—their strong will to live—was also imprinted into the hearts of every single human being.

The denizens of the Capital were no different.

"Fathers. Mothers. Children... Lovers. Siblings. Friends..." Justin stared into the distance, watching as the thick pillars of smoke kept rising.

"The Capital has all of those kinds of people. Several, just like me, have stories to tell their families. Some probably want to go on crazy adventures and explore the world, just like you."

In the end, they also had dreams and goals.

"I think Adonis and everyone else simply didn't want them their dreams to die."

Eric slowly turned from the tree and cast his gaze on Justin.

"That's pretty dumb..."

"Yeah... I know." Justin smiled, closing his eyes as he crossed his legs. "But I guess that's what makes us human."

Eric bit his lip as he heard those words, closing his eyes as well. He felt the soft breeze on his face, and the sweet herbal smell of the forest.

Staying here, watching from the distance, it was a lot better than racing to fight a battle that he wasn't sure he could win.

That was practically suicide, and he refused to partake in it.

"I suppose that makes me inhuman." Eric mumbled, relaxing his body so he could recover his strength even more.

This was curtly interrupted with a deep voice.

"No."

It sounded like Justin, but the aura of seriousness around it made Eric nearly think it belonged to someone else.

"You're definitely human." Justin stated said as Eric turned to look at him.

"..."

For a moment, they both stared at each other and a fleeting sense of tension danced in the air. However, Eric quickly rested once again and closed his eyes.

"Of course, I know that. It was just a witty comment."

"...."

"Why so serious...?"

Eric's voice trailed in the peaceful world that surrounded them. But that peace only lasted for a few fleeting moments.

Then came destruction.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

As the city burned in flames, five figures floated in the sky and watched the entire scenery from their high estate.

They had wings behind them, but they had humanoid appearance—well, almost human.

Horns protruded out of their heads, most of them possessing three of them. They were also dressed in black robes; almost like uniforms.

A golden badge decorated the right portion of their chests, and the image imprinted on it was that of a rising dragon.

Four males, and one female; the latter being at the center and slightly ahead of the rest.

This wasn't the only difference she had with the rest, however.

"Well, what do you think, Lady Kar'en? Does it suit your tastes?" As one of the voices behind her asked this question, the echoes and throes of the perishing humans reached the ears of the Dragons.

The one they called Lady Kar'en turned to look at one of her subordinates, a broad smile on her beautiful face.

Her four horns gleamed brightly underneath the setting sun.

"I think it's a little lacking."

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Chapter 496 Calamity Upon The Capital [Pt 1]

The once-grand capital city lay in ruins, a sprawling landscape of devastation and despair.

Smoke billowed from the charred remains of once-proud buildings, casting a dark pall over the cityscape. Flames licked at the rubble-strewn streets, hungrily consuming everything in their path.

The air was thick with the acrid scent of burning wood and stone, mingling with the metallic tang of blood. The cries of the wounded echoed through the ruins, a haunting representation of pain and suffering that seemed to permeate the very air itself.

Everywhere one looked, there were signs of destruction. Buildings lay crumbled and broken, their shattered facades serving as grim monuments to the horrors that had befallen the city. Debris littered the streets, blocking off once-familiar thoroughfares and trapping survivors in their makeshift tombs.

Amidst the chaos, the charred remains of what was once a bustling marketplace stood as a stark reminder of the city's former glory. The stalls lay overturned, their wares scattered and trampled beneath the weight of destruction.

The smell of burning spices and roasted meats mingled with the stench of death, creating an unsettling tableau of destruction and decay.

In the distance, the ominous silhouette of a dark cloud loomed overhead, casting a shadow over the devastated cityscape. It seemed to pulse with malevolent energy, a harbinger of further destruction yet to come.

And, the figures who loomed there... the malefactors of this tragedy... they simply stared down on the chaos.

All, without exception, donning a smile on their faces.

"Humans. Look at them sprawling around like Maggots—pathetic in every way."

Kar'en uttered those words as she stared down on the desperate men and women who were clinging to life despite the catastrophe that had befallen them.

"You would think we, as a superior species, would have matured beyond the need to show these creatures any attention. That, after establishing our dominance in every way, we would have eliminated them by now..." She said, as a wide smile began creeping up on her face.

The grin was unnatural, It covered most portions of her face—a literal grinning from ear to ear. It made her humanoid form appear monstrous.

"Yet, it seems there's something about trampling these insects that brings us so much satisfaction." Licking her lips, she narrowed her gaze at the innocents.

The suffering of children—particularly infants—brought her the most satisfaction.

Kar'en wanted to see more of it.

"Lady Kar'en, we shouldn't forget the details of the mission." One of the men behind her said with a slight bow.

In the Dragon Empire, the hierarchy existed—perhaps in one of the strongest ways. In their civilization, it was easy to determine where the other party scaled in the pecking order.

Their horns told all the story.

Four to Five Horns were Dragon Generals. Five to Six Horns were Lords. The Seventh belonged to one; the undisputed strongest of the Dragon Lords.

Then, standing at the apex was the Dragon Lord who had nine.

A Horn represented power. Just as Fairies boasted of their strength through the color and beauty of their wings, and the Elves did through the intensity and fragrance of their scent, Dragons had horns to prove it.

Maturity and strength were measured in horns, giving rise to an inevitable hierarchy where those with the highest number of horns reigned superior.

And so, even if he looked much taller and physically stronger than Kar'en—at least, in humanoid form—the one known as Amu'ra bowed to Kar'en and spoke in the most reverent tone.

"Of course, I haven't forgotten about the task. There's no need to be so tense and overly formal all the time."

Everyone knew Amu'ra as the party pooper; the strict Dragon who didn't know how to have any fun. Even if he smiled every now and then, it wouldn't be long before he went on about serious matters.

Still, this quality meant he was a loyal and by-the-books Dragon. He followed orders to the letter, and his competence far exceeded most Dragons.

Among the Dragon Commanders, he was the most powerful.

The thundercloud that covered the capital was made by him, and he had a lot of attacks that could cover a wide distance; useful for AOE damage.

"I-I apologize." Amu'ra said, once again bowing.

Kar'en sighed and nearly slapped her palm on her face the moment she witnessed his awkward and stiff behavior.

It seemed he would never change.

"It's fine, dude. As for the Dragon Lord's orders to investigate, we're on it at the moment." Kar'en said with a knowing smile.

The Dark Dragon of the Black Mountain had given Kar'en and her team a task to investigate the death of a Dragon Commander whose last recorded location was within the Alliance Capital.

According to him, "I find it strange that the humans have someone capable of such a feat, yet they would rather he stay in the Capital and not the front lines. Incompetent as Jer'ard was, Dragon Commanders cannot be killed by humans at their current level."

With their team investigating, it was pertinent that they find the cause of death of one of the Dragon Lord's many progenies.

It wasn't the most difficult task, considering how easy it was to deal with humans, but Kar'en thought they would have some fun first.

"If we cause enough destruction, whoever or whatever killed Jer'ard will show up. It's as simple as that." She said with a shrug.

"Isn't that a bit reckless, Lady Kar'en?" Once again, Amu'ra bowed while speaking formally.

A rumbling sound from his thundercloud echoed in the distance.

"Reckless? Are you scared? Don't worry, I'll protect you from whatever secret weapon that the humans have against us."

Kar'en chuckled loudly, clearly making a joke of the matter.

Unfortunately, Amu'ra did not take it that way, and ended up bowing before her in gratitude.

'What a square...!' She nearly sighed as she shook her head.

"So, should I go with another volley, Lady Kar'en?"

Once Amu'ra said this, she nodded to herself, glad to see the Dragon Commander had quickly redeemed himself.

Once more, Kar'en would get to see the sufferings of more innocents.

"Hehehe! You should!"

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Chapter 497 Calamity Upon The Capital [Pt 2]

Amu'ra raised his hand up high, ready to send another burst of lightning down to the humans.

He shot a quick glance at them—all their pain and misery—and he felt nothing like pleasure from watching all of it.

He just felt... nothing.

'Why am I so different? Is there really some intense pleasure about killing insignificant creatures like this that I do not know of?'

Ever since he was little, Amu'ra was different from the rest of his peers. While being incredibly exceptional and disciplined, he simply could not understand certain emotions that the rest of his race exhibited.

The most prevalent one was the satisfaction that Dragons had upon killing those deemed to be inferiors.

He initially wondered if it was a biological function, but after learning of their anatomy in the Draconic Empire Academy, there was no specific hormone released when a Dragon killed a human, or any other member of an inferior race.

It wasn't biological.

Was it a social construct then? He strongly felt that it was, but why was the exception?

He was raised in a culture that valued and encouraged the genocide of every other race except the Dragons.

So why? Why did he not share their values? It wasn't like he particularly cared for humans. They weren't particularly impressive or interesting. Their knowledge of the world was lacking, they were incredibly small, and very weak.

They were also highly unattractive, unlike the Elves—who had a glimpse of his attention. But, after kidnapping a few and carrying out several experiments on them—such as breeding and torture—he found that interest waning fast.

Even the prettiest flower would grow tiring to the eyes after gazing upon it for so long. That was how Amu'ra felt about the Elves, who had now become an eyesore.

Perhaps he would capture a Fairy next? Those ones were highly evasive, and he had never even set his eyes on one before.

He felt a tiny spark within his cold heart. Maybe an 'interaction' with Fairy would give him the awakening he needed.

'I so desperately want to feel what you all feel...!' He stared at all his comrades and made an internal sigh.

Amu'ra knew what everyone said about him.

They called him a killjoy, a tryhard, a stiff... and so on. All he really wanted was to fit in with everyone—ever since his academy days.

Unfortunately, that never happened.

'Let's get this over with so I can go home...!' With his hands raised high in the air, he prepared himself to activate [Absolute Thundercloud] and blow a relatively populated portion of the city into smithereens.

"Fall and—"

~SQUELCH!~

Before Amu'ra could complete his words, he felt a blade pierce him from behind, instantly striking his heart from where he floated.

"—gurgh....?!" His eyes bulged as his face showed a mix of pain and shock.

The Dragons around him now stared with an equal expression of surprise. Some stared at him, but their prevalent gaze was on something—or rather someone behind him.

~SQUISH!~

Before he could do anything else, another blade was embedded into his neck, causing even more pain and shock coursing through his body.

Dragons were resilient, but these two weapons that were lodged into his body were draining his Life Force faster than anything in the past.

Amu'ra already knew it... he was dead.

"L-lady... K-kare...n... pro-omisd..." His fading words vanished almost as soon as they left his lips, and the blades were instantly dislodged from his dead body, sending a trail of blood splashing away.

All of this happened in a split moment—evident by how the Dragons barely had any time to react. His eyes went blank, and regret filled his last moments in the void.

It seemed... Amu'ra's desires would never come to pass.

"Why you—!"

All eyes were on the figure that just dislodged his blades from Amu'ra's corpse, causing the latter to descend to the ground.

One of the Dragons instantly rushed after it, while the remaining three had their gaze on the one who perpetrated the act. It was a man coated in Light, with hair as golden as the sun, and eyes burning bright amidst the chaos.

On one of his hands was a blade of light, while on the second was a powerful and beautiful blade that was indescribable.

'L-Light Magic? At this level?! This is Grand, no... this is in the Absolute Level!' Kar'en's eyes widened as she glared at the human before her.

How could a human possibly possess power at such a scale?

~WHOOSH!~

Right as he killed Amu'ra, he sped off, almost like a flash of light. He was too fast for Kar'en to follow, so she swiftly barked orders to the fastest member of their team.

"Catch him, R'ashu!"

"Y-yes ma'am!"

~BZZZTTZZZ!~

Blue lightning instantly covered his body and he sped away in a burst of power, leaving two Dragons left in the sky.

Before they could even get a breather, a barrage of powerful Magic Attacks—ranging from ice to fire, and even lightning—

charged at them with immense intensity.

All of them hit their mark, sending a surge of explosion etched into the sky.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

The display of fireworks was high enough for everyone to witness, and the shockwave spread across the entire sky. As the winds rushed with pressure, the darkened thundercloud in the sky began to dissipate, and the intense smoke that previously rose from the city slowly ceased..

All of this seemed so spontaneous—like a miracle born out of thin air.

However, it was not.

This was the result of a well-coordinated effort of the ones who were the champions of humanity.
—The Otherworlders.

With only seven members participating in this task, they divided themselves into two groups.

The Assault Team and the Rescue Team.

Belle Vanitas and Rey Skylar took on the role of rescue, considering the former's Magic Prowess, and the latter's speed and versatility.

Also because Rey could be a liability in a battle with Dragons.

As for the others; Adonis, Billy, Alicia, Trisha, and Clark... they were members of the Assault Team.

Their role was simple—eliminate the Dragons!

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Chapter 498 Calamity Upon The Capital [Pt 3]

"Alright! Looks like we got 'em!"

The one who spoke loudly, but quickly realized he was shouting and hushed, was none other than Billy. He was just so excited to see the combo between him, Alicia, and Trisha work.

After the Assault Team was created, the group was further divided into three—for the sake of the plan, of course.

The first was Adonis; who would launch the first strike on the enemy by catching them off-guard. This, he promised, would throw them into a state of confusion and panic, giving them the window of opportunity to strike.

The second team—theirs—was to wait until one of the Dragons pursued Adonis, and the other one went to fetch the falling corpse, before striking the remaining two in the air.

According to Adonis, they were to give it everything they had.

"They're mostly Dragon Commanders, but one of them is a General. It would be difficult taking the General down first, but you guys can kill the Dragon Commander beside her and weaken her as well."

That was their task, and it seemed like they executed it splendidly.

'The third team consists of just Clark, who will find a way to hold down the Dragon who went after the corpse, and we're meant to back him up by ambushing the Dragon, while Adonis takes care of the one that went after him...'
Alicia's thoughts trailed.

Once they were done with their tasks, they could finally deal with the wounded Dragon General together.

It was a basic strategy, but considering how they didn't have enough time and more numbers, this was the best route they could take.

Right now, they were hiding at the edge of the forest, some hundred meters close to the Capital's walls. Once they got the signal from Clark, as well as recover some of their Mana, they would jump out and unleash a bombardment of attacks on the Dragon Commander that Clark would be occupied with.

'I'm concerned about him, but... ' Alicia thought about Clark Kant, the one on the sole third mission until their intervention.

The idea of only him facing one Dragon Commander by himself was worrying. However...

"Don't worry. I might not be able to beat one myself, but I'm confident in my ability to take a beating!"

... After his declaration, they decided to leave that role up to him.

'Belle and Rey have the safest task. But, with the amount of destruction already done, and the many people needing saving, I just hope they don't get overwhelmed...' Alicia thought to herself in worry.

Rey was a pretty bold and resolute person, so she was mostly worried about Belle who seemed very soft and emotional.

Either way, she was relieved that both weren't in harm's way for most of the battle.

'If they're done with rescue efforts first, they supposed to come and assist us. But, considering the scale of destruction that has been wrought in the city, I doubt they'd be done before us.'

The goal of Adonis' plan was to end things as quickly as possible. Everyone was low on Mana, so a drawn-out battle would be detrimental to them. Most of their attack patterns relied on the element of surprise.

And as for the Dragon General, since it would be a five against one...

"Kwii kwii."

... Correction, a six against one, they had a high chance of winning.

"Thanks for helping us scout the area, Snow." Alicia smiled as she pet her white rabbit, a soft smile on her face.

The little creature purred, almost like a cat, and she found that adorable. It seemed, even in the tension of battle, one could enjoy the little things like this.

'I wonder what's taking Clark so long, though...' Alicia looked in the direction where Clark's Heat Vision was supposed to pass through, yet she saw nothing.

"Is he really o—"

~VWUM!~

Before Alicia could conclude her sentence, she—and everyone else with her—felt space warp behind them, and a certain overpowering entity emerging from behind.

"—kay...?"

It was all a blur, but this silhouette had purplish black eyes, with three horns; each rising from three sides of his forehead. A cold expression was imprinted on his face as he stared at them, both hands behind him.

Then, with his mouth open wide—

"EVERYONE RU—!"

—A devastating blast followed.

~BOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

The entire forest erupted with the overpowering explosion, and the shockwave alone sent Alicia and her comrades flying away from the covering of trees.

"Gahh!" She screamed, her eyes tightly shut as she felt one of her arms dislocated as a result of the force alone.

One of the joints in her arm was broken, and the searing pain caused beads of tears to gush from her eyes.

'I have barely enough Mana for it, but I can still use [Absolute Healing] on my...self...?'

Alicia reconsidered her thoughts once she saw Billy and Trisha beside her. They had lost an arm and a leg respectively. Everything was blown off by the blast, and from their cries, and the blood that spurted out of their wounds, it was clear whose situation was worse.

"[Absolute Healing]!" She swiftly proceeded to squeeze out every ounce of Mana she had to heal her two comrades.

It worked! They were both able to grow out their limbs, reversing the effects of destruction that had been wrought on them.

However—

"Bleughh..." Alicia found herself puking out loads of vomit, mixed in with traces of blood.

Not only did she feel nauseated, thanks to the drain of Mana affecting her physically, but her entire body screamed at her with pain.

She was still struggling with these feelings when she realized that there was something—no, someone—missing from those who were with her just a moment ago.

"How interesting. Healing to such a degree..." The deep voice of their adversary came forth as he emerged from the burning woods.

"A-ahhh...!"

Alicia's eyes were widened as she saw the man. Not simply because of his intimidating aura or his overwhelming presence, but due to the gory remains that stained his dark apparel.

"... Snow...?!"

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Chapter 499 Calamity Upon The Capital [Pt 4]

Despair stared Alicia straight in the eyes.

As the marching steps of the adversary grew near, it drew closer to her.

"Looks like I got some of the entrails of that filthy beast on my body..." The humanoid Dragon said, instantly setting himself ablaze with energy.

The remnant white fur, one long rabbit ear, and the fluffy tail of the dead creature he spoke of was instantly consumed by the blue energy that coated his body.

In no time at all, they became ash and flew away—even the blood of the beast.

All of it... gone with the wind.

"S-Snow...?" Alicia muttered, her eyes wide open as tears fell out of them.

Her body shuddered as her mind struggled to process the loss. In that moment, something rose from within her depths, and she opened her mouth to bring forth even more vomit laced with blood.

Her insides were on fire, and her mind felt like breaking apart.

At that moment, Alicia remembered the blurry incident that just passed. She recollected how Snow jumped in front of the blast to protect her, which ended in her death.

"... N-no... S-Snow..." As she whispered and muttered, drool and tears flowed down her pretty face, cascading to the vomit beneath.

"How disgusting you humans are..." The Dragon before them said with a smile on his face.

His cold stare seemed to have vanished entirely once he witnessed the suffering of the people before him.

Trisha and Billy, who had recovered to an extent, still had perplexed expressions on their faces. And as for Alicia, she was in the middle of a mental breakdown.

All of these things seemed to amuse the Dragon, who still stared at them with disgust.

"I know what your small minds must be wondering at this moment." Both hands were behind him as he floated a feet or two into the air.

"What about our comrade? The one who was supposed to occupy this dragon while we ambushed him from the side?"

The eyes of the three twitched as soon as they heard those words. They had been too occupied with thoughts of fear, pain, and survival, but somewhere at the back of their mind... they also wondered what happened to Clark.

He was not an incompetent comrade, and his capabilities were also top notch. The fact that their enemy was able to catch them off guard like this meant he must have failed somehow.

But... how?

"Well, he should be joining us right about..."

~BOOOM!~

Like a meteor, something descended from the sky, instantly making a crater in front of the three who knelt on the ground.

The shockwave caused them to fly a few meters away from the point of impact, their bodies helplessly flailed to the side due to the shocking descent of a powerful force.

"... Now." As the Dragon finished his statement, his gaze fell on the lump of flesh that had landed on the ground.

Smoke rose from the roasted body, with blood spurting out of the nostrils and mouth. His flesh looked mangled, and so many bones appeared to be broken.

But... he was not dead.

"Such a durable guy. Even after sending him over a thousand meters into the air and rendering him unconscious with my full-powered blast, he's still not dead."

The crash had made a huge crater on the ground, and the terrible state of Clark's body made it clear that the boy was better off dead.

Coughs and strained breathing made it clear that he was now conscious, and the pain that was coursing through his body at the moment was nigh unimaginable.

He couldn't even scream since his throat had been burned and his voice was lost. All he could do was writhe in pain as he nearly choked on breath.

"To think humans would catch us off guard. I have to say... pretty impressive. I didn't think I would have to keep my guard up when facing you people, but it seems I was wrong."

He began to approach the group, his body floating in the air as he did so.

"Your plan could have actually worked, given the right conditions. However, it was doomed to fail from the start considering the opponent you were up against." His eyes glowed brighter than ever, and his smile widened like that of a demon.

"My name is Ser'ith, and as a Spatial Magic user, your strategy was going to be useless to me no matter how you went about it—"

Before he could move any further, the burned-up hand of Clark's scorched body held one of his legs in a tight grip.

His resilience, despite the pain that coursed through his body spoke volumes about his resolve.

"R-runn... p-pleasee..." Whispers surged from his charred lips as he slowly turned his head towards his comrades.

Tears flowed down his closed eyes. His eyelids were now glued together after his flesh melted, so he couldn't properly open them. Even then... he pleaded desperately.

"R-ruu—"

~BOOM!~

The Dragon Commander crushed Clark's face underfoot, causing thick blood and the last set of Clark's teeth to fly out.

His face instantly became deformed as Ser'ith constantly stepped on it, changing its pasty shape with every pound.

"You. Dare. Hold. My. Leg. YOU VERMIN?!" The Dragon Commander yelled in fury.

Despite the heavy descent of Ser'ith's foot, Clark still held on, not allowing the Dragon to pass.

"Die. Die! DIE!" Serith yelled, pounding on his face even more.

His skull must have shattered many times over, and his entire body convulsed to prove just the kind of pain he was experiencing.

This continued... until Clark's grip finally loosened and his hand fell.

"Hmph!"

Ser'ith frowned in disgust as looked at Clark's bloodied face, spitting on it before floating away.

"How can he still be alive even after that...?" He shook his head, sighing in annoyance.

Once he finished crossing the crater, staring at the weakened three who were yet to leave their positions, his smile returned.

"Now then... where were we?"

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Chapter 500 Calamity Upon The Capital [Pt 5]

Crippling fear.

The kind that prevents your body from moving. That was what currently affected the three who watched the horrors their classmate was experiencing to save them.

Despite seeing his sacrifice, they could not move.

Logically speaking, there was no use running away. Their opponent was a Spatial Magic User who could instantly appear before them no matter where they ran to.

Plus, they were also physically exhausted after everything that had happened.

However, those weren't the reasons why they could not move.

It was simply fear.

The fear that caused one's legs to stop working and shut down all motor functions; that kind.

Even as the personification of inevitable suffering neared them, they could not move in the slightest. These were no longer the fearless saviors of the world, the champions of humanity, not the hope for the Alliance.

They had reverted back to the sixteen-year-old High School Students whose biggest worries were failing tests or being bullied in school.

How could those people handle the unstoppable march of doom that approached?

"L-Lightni--" As Trishs tried to say something, a blast was suddenly fired beside her, easily burning her left ear off.

It destroyed the ground behind her as well.

"Aaarrrghhh--!"

"Be silent." The Dragon appeared right before her, tightly gripping her mouth as he said those words to her.

"The only reason you're still alive is because I haven't been ordered to eliminate you. If you push me, I'll end your lives right here and now."

His dangerously cold eyes told Trisha that he wasn't messing around. Her shivering body could not stop its trembling, and she closed her eyes in surrender as she did her best to stifle her sobs and scream.

"That's more like it." Ser'ith said, removing his hand from her mouth. "Just grovel in fear like that."

As he watched the other two; the boy who was busy worrying about the vomiting girl, he was slightly disappointed that they weren't making a scene.

Ser'ith wanted more defiance. That would give him the perfect excuse to kill.

'Or maybe I should just...!'

"That's enough, Ser'ith." A voice suddenly emerged from above, causing his bloodshot eyes and crazy smile to dissipate.

He instantly gazed above and found his superior--Kar'en--and his colleague, Phil'emon, descending from above.

As expected, they were completely unscathed.

"You did well capturing these three, ah, I mean four..." Kar'en smiled, looking at the crater in the distance to see the barely breathing body of Clark.

All in all, four humans who had defied the Dragons in a joint attack.

"They'll be useful for questioning, so it's best we don't kill them now." She added, placing her hand on the sighing Ser'ith.

"I know."

His voice was more mellow, but the dissatisfaction that oozed from his tone was obvious.

With the three Dragons now floating before Alicia, Billy, and Trisha, the expression on their faces--especially the last two--was utter shock.

They thought, at the very least, they had killed the Dragon Commander beside Kar'en--Philemon--and that that even the General herself would have sustained heavy injuries.

But... neither had a scratch on them.

"My defense Skill is both Passive and S-Tier. Even though you combined those attacks of yours and caught us by surprise, there was no chance of injuring me to start with."

Since Kar'en was right next to him, the attacks didn't reach her as well.

Billy and Trisha's faces easily depicted disbelief at the situation, with more despair clouding their faces. As for Alicia, her vacant eyes and pale face showed just how overwhelmed she was by the situation.

The stimulus was too much that it overloaded her mind, rendering it incapable of processing any more. She merely knelt there, unresponsive to anything around her.

"What of the last one? The one who killed Amu'ra?"

Right as Kar'en said this, a distant shout rushed from behind them, and in a zooming crash, the body of the man in question fell to the ground.

~BOOOM!~

Yet another crater was formed, this time right behind the helpless three.

Smoke rose from the center of the scattered debris, and a certain figure slowly rose to their his feet, groaning in pain. As this happened, the fourth Dragon showed up in the flash of lightning—almost as if he teleported.

He had spiky hair and a child-like appearance, despite the dark robe he also donned. The humanoid Dragon Commander was also missing an arm, though the thing seemed to be regenerating back at a quick pace.

He had wounds on his body as well, but those were also recovering.

"What took you so long, R'ashu?" Kar'en asked, her gaze still on the figure that rose from the debris around him.

In response, the child-like Dragon itched his spiky blue hair and groaned.

"That guy was pretty strong. If I was just the slightest bit slower than him, I would have definitely died."

"You? He would have killed you, even in a direct confrontation?" One of the General's brows were raised up in surprised as she turned to look at the young Commander.

"Y-yeah..." R'ashu muttered. "I even had to use [Mirror Reflect] to damage him with his attack and send him crashing here."

"I see..."

As soon as the conversation ended, R'ashu was done regenerating, making him just as capable as the rest of his comrades.

"Huff... huff..." As the distant echo danced in the air, Adonis emerged from the smoke and dust, his glowing blade in hand.

Before any could say a word, he dashed forward, ready to slash at the enemies in sight.

But—

~FSHIII~

A transparent barrier, akin to some sort of spatial distortion, appeared in front of the group; courtesy of Phil'emon.

"It's useless." The Dragon Commander said with a slight smile, watching as the blade crashed into his barrier.

Adonis smiled slightly.

The ignorant Dragon had no idea of the kind of weapon that he wielded.

One of its primary functions was simple, yet difficult.

~SWOOOSH!~

... It ignored defenses!