

Extras 681

Chapter 681 True War Begins

Rey sat at the head of the table.

From where he was, he could see the faces of all the leaders in the Elven Camp—well, except for Feralia, who was standing right behind him.

It almost seemed like she was his bodyguard, and while that felt weird... he allowed it.

'Here we are... preparing for battle.' He nearly sighed, looking at the faces of the females who gave him star-struck expressions.

'I have no idea what happened in my absence, but all of them are beginning to look at me the same way Feralia did. Did my energy affect them all, but at a much slower rate? I'm not even sure anymore.'

The good news was that they weren't going to make any move on him, which made the entire meeting a whole lot bearable.

'Kara is busy with the Refinery Project and sorting out all the other important details within the Community.'

The Land of the Elves was a goldmine of resources, and it Kara's job was to help map it out and discover other hotspots that would provide potential revenue and immense profits for the Reaper Group and humanity as a whole.

'As long as it doesn't directly harm the Elves, then there's no problem, right? It's not like The Oracle forbade me from that.' He thought to himself with a bit of a smug smile.

"I believe you all know how the significance of this meeting."

The leaders fidgeted on their seats as they heard his voice. Their expression ranged from being tense to being attentive. The common denominator was that they were all serious.

"I have gotten a detailed report of your performance during the last attack. It was stellar work from your end, and I'm impressed that you did not suffer any casualties."

"It is all thanks to you, Sir Rey!"

"Hmm." Rey smiled and shrugged off the praise. He already knew that his contributions were what made the Elves stand so much as a chance against the Dragon Army, but he actually underestimated their performance even after granting them such tools.

'If you give a child a sword, that makes the child more dangerous, but it doesn't make that child too dangerous.'

Possessing a tool, and having the skill to use said tool were two very distinct things.

'But, it seems like they're practically the same for the Elves. Somehow, having those weapons I gave them made them quick experts—especially the projectiles.'

The Elementals at their command did a very stellar job, sure, but the Elves were also impressive. They didn't even allow any of the Dragons to come close to the Camp at all.

They were truly merciless.

'I guess this is how the Elves were also able to gain the upper hand last time after buying lots of Enchanted Items from us.'

Rey couldn't help but feel like this was yet another example of the world's bias.

'I mean... The Oracle is a literal god. She's also an Elf. If she can intervene with the System, it only makes sense that they are a chosen race. In that case, I should just ignore all of their benefits and focus on my task.'

"It's time for true war." Rey spoke up, interlocking his fingers as he leaned forward. He could see worry clouding the faces of his audience.

Still, he had to go on.

"Now that we've pushed back very heavily against the Dragons, they'll definitely feel the impact and try harder next time." The Elves must have been designated as a non-threat due to their previous state, so the Dragon Army probably wasn't trying their best in the last wave.

All of that would change very soon.

'Now that I know Adrien is involved, it only makes things even more complicated. Now that he's been pushed back, chances are... he'll push harder.'

For a long period, after knowing of Adrien's involvement, Rey considered whether or not to reveal himself as the benefactor of the Elves. Ater had already assured him that his presence in the Eastern Continent wasn't known to Adrien, so he could choose whether or not to reveal his identity.

In the end, Rey chose to remain hidden.

'I'll take a page off his own tactics and keep my identity secret. Might as well simply watch from the sidelines and leave all the agency to the Elves.'

Yes, it would be a slower battle as a result, but Rey had to remain on the side of caution.

'I'll only intervene when the time is right.'

"It's time..."

A bit of mist escaped Adrien's lips as he folded his hand while floating in the sky. He felt the coolness of the air seep into his body, but that had no adverse effect on him.

As his dark suit flapped, thanks to the breeze beating against him, his blue eyes glowed as he watched his Undead Army ascend to the skies.

All of them, in their thousands, flapped their rotting wings, all shrouded in blackish purple energy, as they roared with a disgustingly deafening cry. Their bodies were a mix of skin and bones, with layers of forbidden energy warbling all over.

They were abominations given form—the work of Necromancy.

Other than the Dragons who took to the skies, the footsoldiers consisted of multiple Monsters—most of whom ranged from B-Tier to C-Tier. There were also a sufficient amount of A-Tier Monsters there as well.

With their overwhelming numbers, and the perverse energy that they spilled onto the land as they began their march, they seemed to be an unstoppable army. A total of ten thousand of them—Dragons and Monsters combined.

"Where will we be positioned? Due to the density of Miasma, it will be incredibly difficult for us to be near the army, so how shall we lead the army?"

As Adrien heard this, he removed his gaze from the advancing army and turned behind him.

There, he saw the twelve Dragon Commanders that were all lined up in a straight line before him. He could see all their faces, and he could read all their thoughts.

Through it all, he merely made a light smile.

"We won't be participating in the battle. We are only going to watch from afar." His voice calmly elaborated on what he meant as soon as he began to speak.

In no time at all, he caught them all up to speed.

'My army is very advantageous, since Undead soldiers do not require rest or sustenance. They also deal passive damage to the enemy in terms of Miasma Poisoning. But... they aren't without a disadvantage too.'

The major disadvantage was that their Miasma was also detrimental to the Dragons.

'As a result, I can't employ the aid of the Dragon Army if I am to use my Undead one. Even the Commanders can't actively participate on the battlefield without exerting a lot of Mana to simply shield themselves from the Miasma being released by my minions.'

In a way, that made it so that Adrien got all of the accomplishments for the subjugation of the Elves, but it also meant he would be the one to bear the brunt of the losses suffered on his end.

'Until yesterday, I never really suffered enough losses to make me uncomfortable, but now... things are different.' He narrowed his eyes. If he was to lose these Undead soldiers, he would only have a quarter of his stockpile left. That meant this was quite the risk he was taking, but anything less would not be sufficient.

'The goal is to retreat if the battle becomes too fierce, but I have to see the extent of the Elves' power, as well as how I match up against them.'

The most important thing was finding the cause of their sudden growth.

'The best way to do that is to critically analyze and observe as the battle plays out naturally. I'll take everything in and supplement my current information to figure out what happened and how to handle the matter.'

To do all of these things, Adrien didn't particularly need the Dragon Commanders at all.

In fact, there was no significance to their presence.

'I suppose they are meant to be for security, but I don't really need it. Granted, I'm still hiding my true strength, so the Dragons don't know how strong I am... so I understand where this gesture could be coming from.'

Ultimately, Adrien's plan for the Commanders was for them to also be with him as he watched the battle with critical lenses and a clear mind.

'And with that... shall we begin?'

Adrien's eyes were wide with shock.

He did his possible best to control the rest of his expression, but his eyes easily betrayed him as he watched the battle from a distance, sheer surprise etched all over his features.

'T-this is...'

As his Undead Army fell, one after another, without even claiming the lives of a single Elf, he couldn't help but open his lips and mutter out a fragment of his thoughts.

"... Amazing."

Chapter 682 Assault On The Undying

"ROOOOOOOAAAAAARRR!!!"

The loud screeches of the undying ones rushed through the air like a perverse trumpet. As their coarse, bitter sound resounded throughout the battlefield, the ground shook as a result of their march... just as the air trembled as a result of their flight.

The army of death—the very one that every single Elf had feared for months now—were marching towards them in hordes unseen before.

A few thousand Dragons decorated the sky, but the majority of forces came from the Monsters that looked just as grotesque as—if not more than—the Undead Dragons.

Their rotting flesh was held in place by the disturbing Miasma that filtered around the individual members of the army and formed a cloud over the entire group.

Their threatening presence was enough to—

~BOOOOOOOOOOOM!~

The first projectile that was launched from the Camp of the Elves marked the start of their own march—both figuratively and literally.

It was all a blur, but the 'thing' that was thrust into the air by the Elves and one of their trebuchet-looking catapults was able to instantly obliterate one of the Undead Dragons that charged towards them.

The horrid creature's entire body was set ablaze in an advent of flames and pressure, completely reducing to dust in only a few seconds.

There was no moment of silence that followed.

The army of the dead could show no hesitation, and so they merely kept marching forward. Unfortunately for them, they weren't the only army that lacked the shackles of emotions.

"RISEEEEE!!!"

As those words burst out into the air—spoken by the voices of all the Elves within the barricaded Camp—yet another miracle happened.

~RUMBLE!~

The earth began to shake.

~RUMBLE!~ It parted, creating a straight line across the earth which made way for the new participants in the battle. ~RUMBLE!~

Their emergence caused the air around to undulate. It felt like everything around them was unraveling as they arose from their depths—the Grand Elementals.

Flames. Water. Earth. Wind. Lightning.

One of these base Elements made up each Elemental, and there was enough variety among them that the battleground soon became a colorful field. No longer was it painted in black, matched with a dreary splash of purple. Instead, it seemed flowers—or perhaps glorious lanterns of bright colors—had sprung out of the earth to add a new flavor to the canvas of death.

Each Grand Elemental stood proud and tall, all of them bursting with abundant Mana and an intensity of the element they represented.

Yes, they were only a thousand.

Compared to the Undead Army, they were much fewer. The ratio was about 10:1, in favor of the forces of the undying. But...

~WHOOOOOM!~

... In terms of quality, the Grand Elementals were not lacking in the slightest.

In blurs of light, and echoes similar to whispers, the Elementals bravely charged into battle. They cared not for the wave of Miasma they were headed for, or the horrible Undead that glared at them with immense killing intent.

All the Grand Elementals cared for was the mission.

They conjured up weapons, or relied on Magic-like effects to break into the vanguard, completely wrecking the formation of the Undead with the overwhelming strength that they had. Unlike with living entities, Elementals could not particularly suffer from Miasma Poisoning. If the Miasma in the atmosphere was too intense, an Elemental could perish due to its Mana being eaten away and corrupted by Miasma. However, this was no poisoning.

It was simply a fatal attack.

To prevent this, Elementals had to constantly keep up a barrier. In a way, this served as a form of passive protection, while also doing their best to actively assault.

Unfortunately for the undying ones, however, these weren't regular Elementals.

They were Grand Elementals, all of whom shared a very intense climate of Mana. The pressure of pure energy that surrounded them was more than enough to counteract the effects of the Miasma that oozed out of the Undead.

No... it was even superior.

The Miasma around the Undead began to thin out at a rapid pace—almost as if the opposite of Miasma Poisoning was taking effect.

Just as this was happening, the slaughter of the Undead was being carried out by the Elementals.

Yes... the slaughter.

Undead entities weren't immortal. They were simply very difficult to kill—not only due to the Miasma, but also due to their tenacity.

Even if their heads were blasted off, Undead entities would keep fighting. They were machines that spread nothing but chaos and death.

Some even had regenerative abilities, making them practically impossible to deal with.

As such, the only way to completely eliminate an Undead is by destroying every facet of their body—preferably in one strike.

The goal wasn't to simply cut off a limb, slice off the head, or even decapitate the head. That wasn't enough.

One had to baptize them in the very destruction that they liked to dish out. By destroying their entire bodies—either by setting them ablaze, or crushing them beyond recovery—the Undead would have no way to keep fighting.

Unless they had some special regenerative Skills, their chances of survival were zero.

The quality of these Undead was high. Not only did they maintain the Level that they had during their lifetime, but they also had their Skills.

That meant they were major threats and worthy challenges for the Grand Elementals.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

... Or not.

They didn't really stand a chance at all.

The Undead were nothing but sacks of rotting meat to be completely obliterated by their adversaries.

Yes, they had the advantage of numbers, and they were much stronger than normal Undead, but that did them no benefit when facing the Grand Elementals.

The reason was simply due to a difference in Tiers.

A majority of the Undead Monsters were B or C Tier, with a few being A-Tier. The A-Tier Undead often served as Generals, based on the formation the army implemented, which meant they were placed at the rear of each squad.

Rarely would an A-Tier be encountered first.

Normally, this formation would have worked perfectly well due to the inability of the Elves to deal any lasting damage on the Undead, and even if they did, only the small fry would suffer it. However, it worked to their detriment when facing the Elementals.

Not only were the latter much faster than the average Monster, easily sweeping through them and destroying them before they could even comprehend what was happening, but by the time the A-Tier Undead was encountered, it was left vulnerable to at least two or three Grand Elementals.

There was no way such an Undead would win.

Ultimately, the Undead—despite performing their best, based on the instructions of their Master—seemed to not be trying at all.

The way they died so quickly and easily made them appear so weak.

... So powerless.

One would think that help would come from the skies.

After all, the Undead Dragons dominated that space, and as such... they were supposed to serve as an active backup for the footsoldiers. Unfortunately for the Undead Army, even the Dragons were occupied.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOM!~

For each explosion that burst through the air, like fireworks painting the night sky with beauty, an Undead Dragon perished.

The thick, dark clouds rumbled constantly as the Dragons did their best to resist.

They let out intense breaths of flames, or Miasma—both, in most cases.

The destruction and devastation that the attack should have caused was insurmountable. However, the barrier that protected the Camp of the Elves prevented anything from coming through.

And, as a reward for their attempt to counterattack—

~WHOOOOOOSH!~

~BOOOOOOOOOOOM!~

~WHOOOOOOOOSH!~

~BOOOOOOOOOOOM!~

—More projectiles were launched, and more Undead Dragons were killed off.

The Projectiles were either massive golden-looking rocks being flung into the air by catapults, or massive crossbows with golden arrows.

Both were manned by Elves, and their ability to consistently get a bullseye was outstanding. One had to wonder if this was due to the effects of the Items, or perhaps a result of the pure skill of the Elves.

Either way, the Dragons were being dominated by the constant barrage of attacks that they eventually began to adopt a new tactic.

Rather than being spaced out, they gathered together in one very compact wave. As a result, the air of Miasma around them became thicker—more intense.

Due to this, everything around them grew perverse and distorted, reducing the efficacy of any projectile that would be launched towards them. This tactic not only achieved that, but it also made the projectiles a lot more predictable.

If they knew where the attacks were coming from, they could easily counter it.

The Elves had to be freaking out at this point. No matter how fast their projectiles were, they wouldn't be enough to stop this horde of Undead Dragons.

~ZZZZTTTZZZZ...~

—Or so they thought.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!~

Like a massive spear that descended from the heavens itself, a massive strike of lightning, mixed with the flavors of all the other elements, came crashing into the group of Dragons.

Floating above the blinding display of overwhelming power was the Absolute Elemental General, its majestic form staring down at the chaos beneath it.

In one powerful strike... it completely ruined the formation of the Undead Dragons.

Chapter 683 Fall Of The Undead

Once that explosion of power happened... it was all over for the enemy.

The Undead Dragons were sent crashing down due to the immense pressure that came from above.

This was no mere attack.

It was a charged assault that had been building up for a very long period; performed by none other than an S-Tier Elemental.

Due to being an Elemental of such high caliber, it could diffuse into the air and completely blend in with the elements. It did this to avoid detection, staying high above the roof of the sky as the battle began.

It was only when the climax was nearing that the Absolute General finally awoke.

Charging its assault, it prepared for the first blow.

Once it was ready to strike, it did. And... was there even any doubt as to the efficacy of its assault?

It was simply a lightshow that could be seen for miles upon miles, sending an intense shockwave reverberating through the battlefield and beyond.

The Undead Dragons struck by this attack were not all killed.

That was never even the intention.

Their hard shell of Miasma, and the Skills that some of them possessed, made it guaranteed that some would survive. In fact, most of them did.

However, it came at a rather horrid cost.

Not only was their formation completely ruined by the attack, but the intensity was enough to send every single one crashing down to the ground. Like meteorites, they all descended to the ground, sending massive noises up into the air as their large bodies made craters on the earth.

Undead didn't feel emotions, and wouldn't be too bothered about crashing. As long as they were still alive, they wouldn't stay on the ground for too long.

The Army of Elementals already knew this, though.

Each Dragon Crater was already surrounded by the Grand Elementals before anyone realized it, and the Absolute Elemental was waiting in the sky for any of the Undead Dragons that managed to shake off any of the Grands.

Not only that, but projectiles were still being fired into the battlefield—usually killing the Undead Monsters so they wouldn't be laying around.

All in all, the Undead were trapped—absolutely cornered, and all obviously fated to suffer an inevitable fate.

Their demise was nigh.

'Amazing! This is simply amazing!'

Adrien's eyes widened in shock as his lips stretched wide so he formed a rather sinister looking grin. He stared at the entire battlefield like a madman, observing everything that occurred within it in great detail.

He ignored the piercing gazes of his Dragon Colleagues and continued to watch the outcome of the battle with unbridled curiosity and amazement.

'There are more healthy Elves than expected, and their weapons... their expertise... the overall development of their warfare... it's unnatural.'

He had his suspicions before, but this basically confirmed it for him.

'They had some kind of external help. I don't know who it is... yet.... But this person is rather good.'

Not only were they able to heal so many Elves that would have died, also erecting a barrier to prevent subsequent Miasma Poisoning or overall harm, but they were also resourceful enough to share items with the Elves.

'Those Enchanted Items... if I can call them that... disappear after use. They're very powerful, even for Enchanted Items.'

He observed the catapults, as well as the crossbows, watching as they were being loaded. His silence was tense, squinting his eyes as he took in all the information he could.

'At this rate, this army will be annihilated. Not only that, but the subsequent army will also suffer the same fate.'

Adrien had no idea if the Elves were still hiding other cards after this. Yes, he had noticed the presence of something in the sky before the Absolute Elemental made its debut, so he could guess that the Elves—or rather, their benefactor—could also have more tricks up their sleeve.

He wanted to know what they were.

'I want to know so badly!'

As someone who had previously observed the Elves and their Community with scrutiny, he couldn't help but find this new development jarring.

And he wanted to comprehend it all.

"Are we not supposed to intervene at this point? At this rate, the army will—!" Adrien raised his hand to stop the words of one of the concerned Commanders.

He could tell that they were panicking over their immense losses. It wasn't like he wasn't moved by their deaths, but he simply had to keep a calm mind during this process.

"I advise that we attack them. We are Commanders, so a few of us could easily take care of that giant Elemental while the rest support the army."

With the Miasma in the air already so thinned out, the Commanders could actively join the battle. Doing so would be an absolute game changer for them.

They didn't have to lose this round.

"Hmmm..."

As Adrien rubbed his chin and considered their proposition, he wasn't thinking in the same line of reasoning that they were.

'There are still a lot of uncertain elements; all encapsulated in the fact that I do not have a good idea of how strong the Elves have become.'

How many more Elementals could they churn out? How many more projectiles did they have? What other surprises lay in store for them?

Adrien suspected that there could be even more waiting, considering the resourcefulness of the benefactor of the Elves.

'It'll be difficult for me to determine that myself, though. So... should I use the Commanders to test the waters?'

The moment he had this thought, he shook his head and sighed.

'That won't work. No... I can't even consider that as an option.'

Such an impulsive decision would be unwise to do when he hadn't fully taken in the full scope of the battle and theorized possible outcomes to prepare for. Besides, there was an even bigger risk associated with that move.

'If anything happens to these Commanders, Ce'phas will finally have a reason to pick a fight with me, and the other Generals will trust me even less.'

That was not a risk he wanted to take.

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[A/N]

Thanks for reading!

I hope you are enjoying more of Adrien's point of view. He was a big enigma in the previous Arcs, so it's nice to see him more fleshed out here.

Chapter 684 Retreat Interference

'I can't risk it...'

The very fabric of Adrien's plan hinged on the fickle trust of the Dragon Generals. Yes, he always had contingencies, but it wasn't something he could just afford to use in such a scenario.

'If there is an obvious pitfall, it's best I avoid it altogether.' He sighed to himself.

Adrien already suspected that Ce'phas must have had a similar goal in mind when he told Adrien to go with the Commanders. The General probably wanted some form of slip-up so he would finally be able to fight Adrien.

He wasn't taking the bait, though.

'I already used Enchanted Items with Recording Magic to capture everything going on here and report back to the Generals in the Camp... just so they can see what's going on.'

He constantly observed the Items too, ensuring that they remained unaffected and consistently sent the occurrences of the battlefield to the Generals in real time. All three of them had to be carried along on everything, not just relying on his anecdotes.

'It's possible that the Commanders end up giving biased reports regarding me and this entire event, so this is meant to provide the raw and objective report on the issue.'

Even with all of these precautions, it was too dangerous for him to give an order that would end in the death of any Commander.

Now wasn't the time for any kind of action.

"We are retreating..." Adrien turned to the Commander the moment he spotted the death of his last Undead Dragon.

The battle was over: they lost.

"We'll return to the Camp and give our reports to the Generals." He could see the annoyed faces of the Dragons. Their pride meant a great deal to them, and this crushing defeat served to badly damage their ego despite they not being participants of the frenzy.

Adrien ignored all of that, though.

'I most likely saved your lives.' He thought to himself, preparing his Spatial Magic. 'You're welcome.'

~Bzzzztzz~

"Huh?" Adrien raised an eyebrow as he realized something rather unsettling.

'Why isn't it working?'

Just now, at that very moment, he tried using Spatial Magic, but found it failing. Never before had his Spatial Magic failed to such an extent, which meant something.

'There's some kind of interference!' Instantly having widened eyes upon making this discovery, he turned towards the Dragon Commanders and yelled at them.

"Spatial Magic isn't working! We're going to have to rush out of here as fast as—"

~WHUUUUSH!~

~WHOOOOOOM!!!~

~BWOOOOOOMMM!~

Several projectiles began to fly in the direction of the stationary Dragons high in the sky.

From arrows to blazing boulders, to several Spells and elemental attacks; all of them charged at the stunned Commanders with breakneck speed.

'How were they able to spot us?' Adrien's wide eyes bulged even further as the thought manifested in his head.

The moment he realized the Spatial interference, he already knew the chances of being spotted were high. It was why he wanted to quickly warn the Commanders of the harm, prompting them to flee.

But... it seemed he was too late.

'[Absolute Magic Interference]. [Collapse].' These two Skills were instantly activated the moment Adrien thought of them, completely stopping the multifarious attacks before they could reach the Commanders.

[Absolute Magic interference] dealt with all of the Spells, while [Collapse] destroyed the projectiles that were approaching.

In essence, he was able to protect his allies.

"T-those bastards!"

"Did they just fire at us?"

"Fools! Do they not recognize that—?"

"We're retreating!" Adrien yelled out, his voice containing a rather agitated vibe that none in the room had ever experienced before.

The moment they felt the paradigm shift in the mood surrounding them, they obeyed his words and raced away from the battlefield.

It felt shameful to run. All the Dragons agreed.

But... they swallowed their pride and sped off, following Adrien who was at the forefront of the charge.

It didn't take long before he halted, though.

"What is this...?!" He muttered, staring around him in confusion as he stared at his hands, and also around him once again.

"Why did you stop?"

"What's going on now? Are we not retreating?"

"Talk to us! You're leaving us in the dar—!"

~SQUELCH!~

Before the last Commander could complete his words, a golden blade pierced him in the chest.

The glowing weapon came out of nowhere, and it instantly ripped his heart apart, tearing through muscles and bones within a fraction of a moment.

"G-gurgh...?!" The Dragon Commander's pained face contained confusion, displaying absolute shock in his eyes.

Blood spurted out of his eyes, lips, nostrils, and ears, as he just floated there... absolutely stunned and dying as a result of the attack.

"N'alsi—!"

~BOOOOOOOM!~

He exploded as soon as his name was called, turning into nothing but chunks of mincemeat and sprayed blood. Even his entrails were blasted off as chunks—some splattering all over the other Commanders, while others descending into the still battlefield.

All the Grand Elementals stood there, their faces raised to look at the Commanders. The Elemental General also remained in its position, not budging one bit.

None of them seemed to be responsible for the assault.

They merely watched.

"T-this is...?!" As Adrien tried to process the information he was being dealt with, one of the Commanders held him by the collar and drew him close.

She had a spiteful look on her face, while the others looked around them with wary expressions, all of them ready not to be caught by surprise like their fallen comrade.

"Why did you stop?! It's because you stopped the retreat that he's dead!"

Adrien could see that the Commander was upset. She was the one always assigned to him, with the pink hair, tail and horns.

He decided to overlook her actions and explain.

"Why don't you try. Try to escape..."

Adrien stretched his hand towards the direction that they were flying in, but after a brief attempt to do so, his arms went nowhere.

The pink-haired Dragon Commander let go of his collar and also attempted to move in that direction, but despite seemingly making progress with flying, she didn't seem to be leaving her current position.

... Almost as if the distance to cover was endless.

"We can't escape." Adrien concluded, looking out to see the next wave of projectiles approaching them.

"We're stuck."

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[A/N]

Thanks for reading!

What do you think will happen next, folks? Want to make a guess?

Chapter 685 Dragon Pride

The realization of their imprisonment was only the beginning.

As soon as the pink-haired Commander felt the inescapable net that kept stretching forever, and she heard Adrien tell her the blunt truth, she felt something in her heart jump.

Swiftly turning to Adrien with an annoyed expression, she spoke up.

"Then figure something out! You're the smart guy who always--!"

~SPLOOOOSH!~

Blood suddenly sprayed from her face as she spoke. The red liquid gushed out as a golden blade impaled her from behind, slicing her head in half.

"H-huh...?" She didn't even realize her own demise until it was too late.

Her colleagues looked at her with shocked expressions on their faces. They had all huddled together in an attempt to protect themselves from the incoming attacks being launched towards them.

They were also confident that they could sense any hidden attacks as long as they knew it was coming. But... none of them had predicted this.

They didn't even sense it until it was too late.

"Che'ri!" One of the Commanders screamed, but his words were drowned by the sound of her flesh exploding into tiny particles of meat and blood. Once again, the area around them was tainted by fresh gore--all of it etched into the minds of the devastated Dragons.

All of them, without exception, were dumbstruck.

From 12 Commanders, they were left with only 10, and even that number didn't seem certain. No one knew when it would be their turn, so they panicked and looked around them with obvious paranoia.

Until--

"This is bullshit! We can't keep running and hiding like this!" Kre'mlin, one of the strongest-looking Commanders based on just physique alone, yelled out.

He had a deep glare on his face, one that he directed at Adrien, before turning towards the battlefield they were trying to flee from.

"We are Dragons! We don't run so shamefully... especially against feeble entities such as Elves. I don't know about you, but I still have my Dragon Pride left... and I won't allow it to be sullied!"

The Dragons around Kre'mlin instantly digested his words, and their eyes began to brighten up in support. Before any momentum could be gained, though, Adrien spoke up.

"Don't be foolish. The best course of action is to establish a functional defensive formation or construct and wait for the Spatial Interference to wear out, or for the Generals to come to our aid."

Since they were all watching the live recording of the event, there was no way they weren't seeing their predicament. In that case... It was only a matter of time before help arrived.

Unfortunately for Adrien, though, the Dragons had long passed the realm of reason. Their instincts were slowly taking over.

The hunger for chaos, the thirst for destruction... all added to the massive pride of the Dragons; one that now spurred them at the moment. No longer were they going to deny their passions and take Adrien's conservative approach.

It was time for them to act like true Dragons.

"Let's burn them to the ground!"

"Yeah!"

"They'll pay for what they did to our comrades!"

"This is what Che'ri and N'alsi would have wanted..."

"Let's do this!"

All ten Dragon Commanders, contrary to Adrien's wishes, decided to face the Elven Army--no holding back.

That was, in itself, catastrophic.

Commanders were pretty strong Dragons, and these were ones who belonged to the second strongest squad in the entire Empire.

Of course, they would be incredibly skilled and potent.

Victory was assured.

~VWUUUUUUUM!~

All of them took on their true Dragon Form, revealing their monstrous forms that were hidden under the beauty of flesh. In no time at all, they were charging towards the first target--the Elemental General.

Once they handled it, they would rain destruction and pain to the ones beneath.

The only thing on their bloodthirsty mind was "KILL!"

Naturally, they closed the gap between themselves and the Elemental in no time, but just as they were about to reach the entity... the Dragons realized something.

They weren't getting closer.

They were flying at max speed, but it just seemed like the space in front of them kept stretching and stretching. It was rather odd, and confusion ate at them even further.

None of them were able to touch the 'barrier' keeping them trapped, so they didn't know this was the exact same phenomenon. Instead, they thought it was perhaps some kind of Skill made simply for protection.

As such, the Commanders brought forth all manner of Skills to break free from the barrier, as well as fire at the Elemental.

All of them... all at once...

"ATTACK!"

~... shu...~

The flurries of energies and power that the Dragons had released with their potent Mana suddenly seemed to evaporate the moment it manifested, leaving behind only vestiges that softly echoed like a slight fart.

Nothing else... nothing at all was in sight.

How was that even possible? For sure, they knew their Skills hadn't failed. In fact, even if it was just for a split second, the Dragons had seen their powers manifested.

But, all of a sudden... the whole thing could be seen no more.

Why?

Before they could answer that question, though, yet another phenomenon occurred.

"H-huh?"

"W-what's this? What's happening?"

"Why does this place feel... tighter? I'm being pushed back...?!"

"Escape! Try again! We have to try our best!" Kre'mlin roared, pouring in all his energy into his breath and opening his mouth so he could blast everything in one powerful roar or breath.

But—

'It's not coming out?! How?! Why isn't this working? Why? I don't... I don't understand!'

As if that wasn't bad enough, the entire space around the Dragons began to slowly contract. The shrinking effect became faster and faster, causing the once prideful Dragons to dread what was to come.

"Adrien, help! Do something here!" Kre'mlin wanted to yell out, but no words came out.

It was as though he was surrounded by a vacuum.

They all were.

"H-hel.... HELP!" Those words never reached their destination.

They were forever lost, even before being sent forth, as the Dragons became crushed by an invisible prison they could not perceive.

All zones around them were removed, and the walls around them closed steadily... all until the ten of them were squished and compressed into a small box.

A small box... of concentrated Dragon essence.

*

*

*

[A/N]

Thanks for reading!

I wonder who could be doing such horrid things to our Dragon friends. It's so sad...

Chapter 686 Another Serving Of Shock

'Amazing...'

Adrien's eyes were wide open as he watched his allies get turned into an abominable compression of blood and meat. The cube that contained their remains floated in the air for him to see, and he observed all of it in perfect silence.

'I couldn't save them.' He thought to himself, his lips parting to show dumbfoundedness. 'The perpetrator must have known, or at least counted on, that.'

There was also the fact that the Dragons were killed in such a way that he couldn't get sufficient material to use for his Necromancy.

'Do they know that I'm a Necromancer... or is all of this coincidence?'

It seemed to be more than coincidence, especially considering the value that the Commanders would have as his Undead Sentinels. They would have been such indispensable assets, and now... they were absolutely wasted.

Adrien had to consider the possibility that the perpetrator had to have known something.

'Speaking of the perpetrator, I can't spot them at all. It seems they're incredibly gifted in that regard...' All of this was even more frustrating because Adrien always had a choice to make.

'Should I use my true strength or not?'

If his life ended up being in danger, something he found to be very difficult to achieve, he would have no choice but to use even more of his power.

However, this conservative approach of his had always been his method of handling affairs.

He was reluctant to change.

~ZZZZTZ~

Suddenly, he felt a buzz around him, causing him to leak out a small smile.

'Those idiots. If only they waited for a while...' The Spatial Interference around them had been lifted, which meant Adrien could finally teleport away from the trapped battlefield.

'The Skill or Spell's effects most likely ran out. Though... there is also the chance that the perpetrator released it. But... why would they?'

He, just like the Dragons, was an enemy of the Elves.

Whoever was on the side of the Elves had to recognize him as a threat and eliminate him as quickly as possible. As such, he was more inclined to believe that the Spatial interference around him had been used up, or at least weakened.

And so, without wasting any further time, Adrien departed from his position and transported himself to the Dragon Camp.

All of this while avoiding the swarm of projectiles that neared him even until the last second.

~FWUUSH~

Space opened and collapsed according to his will, and in the blink of an eye, Adrien found himself standing right in front of the Grand Tent.

"Huu..." Adrien found himself exhaling deeply.

Here he was, the only survivor of an unbelievable purge that shocked even him.

His army... his allies... none of them stood a chance against the might of their new enemy. There was a lot going on in his mind, but Adrien knew he had to focus now that he was about to see the upper echelon.

He already knew that the Generals would be inside, and based on his incredible senses, he could already spot the three of them standing still there.

'It's a moment of great loss for the Dragons. In the grand scheme of things, this moment isn't particularly significant, but... I understand how this will be quite devastating for them. I have to acclimate to—'

Before Adrien could conclude his thoughts, already about to step into the tent, he felt something intense directed towards him.

He instantly froze in his tracks as the sensation intensified.

'This is... killing intent...?!'

Adrien was stunned, to say the least. The kind of killing intent he felt didn't just emanate from one, but all three of them.

Yes, the situation was unfortunate. They must have witnessed the crushing defeat of the Dragon Commanders, so their rage and bloodlust were understandable. But—

'Why are they directing it at me?!'

~WHOOOSHH!~

Adrien instantly leapt from where he stood, right as a powerful explosion resounded there.

~BOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

Debris scattered around the area of impact, followed by a swirling storm of dust and smoke. Within the smoke were three silhouettes, their eyes glowing with deep passion as they remained stationary.

'They... want to kill me...!' Adrien landed a few meters from the Dragon Generals, his expression still displaying the surprise he felt.

The smoke soon cleared thanks to the intense winds that blew in the area, revealing the Generals and their completely rage-filled features.

Adrien was still observing them in silence when he realized that the entire area was surrounded by Dragons displaying obvious signs of enmity. All of them—from the lesser revered Commanders, Soldiers, and Newts—all glared at him as they watched his every movement.

It almost seemed like they were waiting for his arrival so they could eliminate him.

'Aren't they overreacting a little...?'

Yes, Adrien knew the death of the Commanders would warrant consequences regardless of the footage as evidence, but this wasn't at all how he envisioned things to play out.

The most spontaneous event would be Ce'phas using the commotion as his chance to assault Adrien, using the death of the Commanders as an excuse to fight. Compared to that, this situation was infinitely worse.

"Why are you—?"

"You have quite the nerve returning here after what you did, Adrien..." R'azak spoke up first, his rough tone carrying the weight of sheer hatred.

He seemed to be the most bitter of the bunch, and it was clear he was using all of his self control to restrain himself.

"What I did? Surely you watched the recording. I actually—"

"Yeah. We saw everything..." This time, U'riah spoke up, his eyes furrowed while a frown remained etched on his face. "We saw how you betrayed us, killing the Commanders while they were retreating."

'What?!'

To say he was stupefied would be an understatement. Adrien recoiled after hearing such an unbelievable report.

'Me? Kill them? Ah...' His mind swiftly went into action as soon as he received the information from the Generals.

'They don't seem to be lying, and if they really think this... it makes sense that they are displaying such clear killing intent.'

The logic was pretty coherent, only having one fatal flaw.

'How the hell did they arrive at such a conclusion?'

Chapter 687 Resounding Clash

'I didn't want to come to this conclusion before, but...'

As Adrien stood before the Dragon Generals as an accused traitor, surrounded by the entirety of the Dragon Camp, he found a small smile crawling up his face.

'... There's definitely some mastermind pulling the strings here.'

It felt a little ironic—rather hilarious, even—to Adrien. He was the one who usually took on such a role, so it was a little shocking to have someone else manipulate these events from the shadows.

'Whoever they are... they are good.' He smiled to himself. Not only were they able to catch him off-guard, stripping him of the advantage he had built up from the start, but he was still unaware of this person's identity.

All possible suspects weren't present, which meant this had to be a new foe. 'Unless...'

"What's with that look?! Do you not have words of defense to give?" R'azak yelled out, his eyes bloodshot as steam proceeded from his nostrils.

He seemed the most upset. Perhaps this was because he trusted Adrien the most, so he didn't expect this sort of outcome from their ultimate pawn.

Whatever the reason was, the fury he felt nearly drove him mad.

"It doesn't matter what I say, does it? You've already concluded that I am the perpetrator." Adrien answered with composure, slowly acclimating to the surprising situation that he found himself in.

"I don't know what you saw, but what happened was simple. The enemies overwhelmed us. We tried to escape, but couldn't. Then, some invisible enemy attacked the commanders and killed them. After they all perished, the interference was lifted, and I was able to escape..." As Adrien said those words, he too realized how off the series of events were.

It all played out too conveniently.

"An invisible enemy, huh? You mean YOU attacked and killed them, don't you?" U'riah growled as he deepened his glare.

Adrien was forced to sigh again. 'This is why I didn't want to respond. It doesn't look like there's anything I can say to change their minds...' He found it to be a shame, though. If the Dragons could use their brains a little, they would realize that the whole narrative didn't make a lot of sense.

'Why would I kill the Commanders in such an overt way when I am being watched and recorded by Magic? Speaking of Recording Magic, that's probably how the mastermind was able to implicate me.' He leaked out a wry grin, remembering a particular moment of the past.

'I suppose this is how you felt, Rey. Being surrounded and accused so surprisingly, despite having plans of your own...'

The only difference between Adrien and Rey was that the former was not in any way responsible for the death of the Commanders, while the latter was.

'That means we can resort to using the Truthseeker, right? Or... perhaps that's what the mastermind wants. If the Truthseeker has been tampered with, and it proves me guilty, then there's no coming back at all.'

That would definitely put him in an even worse off position.

'This whole affair still confuses me, though.' Adrien felt everything slow down as he had these thoughts, slowly raising his head to look at the Generals.

'The best way to explain the current situation is if the Recordings were tampered with right as it was broadcasting the information to the Generals, allowing them to see completely different information from what was actually happening.'

But... that didn't make any sense to Adrien.

'My Magic was coursing through that device and I was constantly observing it. There's no way anyone would have interfered with it and I wouldn't have felt a shift.' He thought, tightly gritting his teeth.

He already envisioned a similar situation like this happening, so he made sure to take all the precautions necessary. Yet... it seemed that wasn't enough.

'Is there something I'm missing? What exactly is it? I have to know—!'

"THAT'S ENOUGH YAPPING!" Ce'phas yelled out, causing everything around him to tremble like with an earthquake.

His eyes were bulging wide, and his lips were stretched so they met both sides of his face. In all honesty, he seemed nothing short of an insane man.

Well, a very young one, but still...

Energy pulsed out of Ce'phas as he stepped forward. The very air vibrated, constantly buzzing as sparks and crackles of light danced off him.

"We already know he's guilty, and that he's dangerous. He killed twelve Commanders, so the answer is clear. He's working for the Elves and has backstabbed us. Perhaps this was his intention all along. In that case..." Ce'phas crouched, almost as if getting ready to sprint.

His position felt slightly animalistic, and his slithering ashen tail, coupled with the four horns that were evidently protruding out of his head, shot up as his eyes widened considerably.

His eyes shone a bright white, and his hair took on that color instantly.

"... We should execute him!"

~WHOOOOSH!~

In a blur that would be impossible for any normal eye to keep up with, he zoomed away from his position, causing the ground beneath him to shatter.

Not even the Dragon spectators could keep track of his movements. What they could only see was a blur, and the blur only had one destination.

—The traitor, Adrien.

"Hahahahahaahaha!!!"

Cacckles of laughter echoed out as Ce'phas launched his claw towards Adrien, who blocked it with a blade that he manifested out of seemingly nowhere.

The result?

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

Immense destruction spread for a dozen meters or so, but everything that surrounded them for at least a couple kilometers shook in response to the impact.

The clouds slowly began to shift as the air pressure was slowly changing.

"Don't worry, everyone! I'll execute him for us!" Ce'phas licked his lips as he stared very intensely at Adrien, who kept up his calm facade.

The other two Generals sighed, shaking their heads as they witnessed their colleague go savage again. They already knew there was no stopping him at this point.

Once the Dragon General decided to have his fun... it was too late.

"He could still be useful, though. Isn't killing him a bit of a waste?" U'riah mumbled, looking at R'azak with a bit of forlorn eyes.

As much as he didn't trust Adrien, there was no denying his value. Surely, his comrades could see that and arrive at a compromise—perhaps enslaving the boy in some way.

"Don't overestimate him, U'riah. He is only a human in the end." R'azak's response was cold and detached, but his frown seemed to show something different.

"I would have granted his request, you know? The kid had so much promise. He just had to blow it..."

"Yeah..."

The two Generals chose to watch the fight from where they stood, ignoring the other soldiers who were already seeking shelter from the devastation that the clash was causing. Not many could withstand the debris and several lashes of energy that chaotically befell the camp.

But, all of this was nothing.

It was nothing more than a welcome greeting from the two—especially Ce'phas.

"Get ready, Adrien!" He licked his lips, clenching his other hand to form a fist as his claw scraped against Adrien's blade.

"We're going to have quite a ride!"

He wasn't interested in a swift execution—or any kind of execution at all, despite declaring himself as the executioner.

He just wanted to FIGHT!

~BOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

The blow from Ce'phas resounded across the land, and it sent Adrien flying into the sky. "You used a barrier, huh? Hahahaha! That's impressively fast!" Ce'phas' laughter echoed as he ascended to the sky to keep up with Adrien.

In no time at all, he was right in front of him, the both of them ascending together.

"I always knew you were strong! Stronger than you were letting on!" He reached for Adrien's throat, but found the barrier that shielded the boy was still in effect.

"Hehehehe! There's no need to be so shy!"

The child-like voice of the General felt like metal scraping metal—a disgusting display of the lust for battle.

Strands of saliva floated out of his lips as he spoke. As his now white hair danced with the wind, he raised both hands, clasped them together, and then sent them crashing on Adrien's barrier.

The result was a shattering effect.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMM!!!~

In an instant, the barrier broke apart, leaving Adrien defenseless as he began to descend to the ground as a result of the powerful impact that Ce'phas exerted.

Before he could fall any lower, though—

"Where do you think you're going?!"

—Ce'phas grabbed him by his shirt and yanked him back up. The transition was smooth, and the moment Adrien was pulled up, a wave of energy crashed upon him that sent the boy falling back down.

"Hahahahah! Hahahahahahahaaha!! Hahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaaha!!!"

Ce'phas laughed maniacally as he held Adrien tightly and thrust himself towards the darkened ground, aiming for the two of them to crash upon it together.

"We're going to be having loads of fun, Adrien. Let's enjoy ourselves a lot!"

Chapter 688 Adrien Vs Ce'phas

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMM!!!~

The earth shattered apart, and everything around it was both a pile of molten rock, and a disorganized heap of debris.

Standing amidst this sight of destruction was a single being.

"Aww... you used Spatial Magic to teleport before we hit the ground. Yeah... forgot you had that." Ce'phas mumbled, slowly above the huge crater he created as a result of his crash.

His gaze was fixed in one direction alone, and that was where Adrien floated, his hand tightly gripping the same blade from earlier.

"I can't fight you like a normal opponent, it seems. You're smart and strong... an annoying opponent, which makes you worth fighting. Ohhh... I can't wait till I completely crush you and crush you, and—!"

"Ce'phas, you're getting carried away!" U'riah yelled out from the distance where he stood. R'azak was right beside him, and they both had unpleasant expressions to give him.

"We need to get this sorted out quickly so we know what to do about the Conquest. They could attack our Camp any minute now, so this isn't the time to be wasting any—"

"Time? Yeah, got it!" Ce'phas grinned, having a certain twinkle in his eyes.

"Haaa... whatever. Please just finish up quickly so we can prepare for our next course of action."

U'riah's hands covered his face as he sighed in exasperation, so he couldn't see Ce'phas' look of disappointment after being chastised.

This terrible mood of his didn't last long, though.

"Fine, fine..." He said with a brilliant grin, quickly returning to the optimistic vibe he had earlier.

".... I'll end it quickly."

He crouched once again, watching Adrien like a predator observes prey. The lad in the sky narrowed his eyes as he took his stance in the air, preparing himself for whatever attack that would be dished out.

"Here I come!"

~WHUUUUUSH!~

Now much faster than before, Ce'phas caught up with Adrien within a fraction of a moment, his hand already tightly on his neck.

As soon as this happened, Adrien vanished from his position, but—

"Not so fast..."

~ZZZZTZZ~

All of a sudden, as if reality had just become a glitch, everything about Adrien, and the area where he vanished from began to show signs of static.

And then... Adrien returned to Ce'phas' grasp.

"W-what?!" Adrien's expression seemed to say in shock, but Ce'phas had already begun to squeeze his neck, so the expression was bound to transform into a suffocating one.

Fortunately for the former, however, he had another Skill to come in handy.

~VWUUUUUUSSSHHHH!!!~

A sudden surge of flames suddenly engulfed the two of them, completely baptizing them in searing heat.

"You can't escape with just this!" A single burst of energy from him quelled the flames, sending it into oblivion. Unfortunately for him, the moment this happened, he realized that Adrien was no longer in his grip.

"Slippery bastard..." Ce'phas mumbled, slowly letting down the outstretched hand.

'No matter. His escape doesn't matter anymore.'

His Dragon Senses showed him where Adrien had gone to, and it wasn't left or right.

"Above!" Ce'phas turned his attention to the sky and found the lad to be charging at him with a shroud of lightning encasing his entire body.

~WHUUUUUSH!~

The brilliant flash of light resonated greatly with the surroundings, and it fueled Adrien's blade as it clashed on Ce'phas in no time.

Normally, such a hit would deal a significant amount of injury on him. In fact, even the brilliant plumes of flames that he recently banished should have done the same.

But Ce'phas didn't appear to be injured at all.

In fact, he was grinning like a madman.

He went ahead to hold Adrien's blade, instantly shattering it with his hardened hands, stretching his second hand towards his throat.

Once again, Adrien tried to retreat. But—

~BZZZTZZZ!~

He found himself in the same situation that he tried to escape. He was stuck in the same situation again... allowing Ce'phas to grab his throat.

Before Adrien could even squirm out or move... the Dragon General thrust his sharpened claws, and a considerable length of his arms into him.

~SQUELCH!~

Following that disgusting sound was the spraying of blood.

Adrien's gaping stomach overflowed with the crimson liquid as Ce'phas let him up and let the blood gush out.

"We aren't done, of course... never done."

Once Ce'phas said this, Adrien's wounds were reversed—

almost as if he never had the injury, to begin with.

The shocked look on Adrien's face showed that this was not even his doing.

But what did that matter?

Ce'phas targeted his neck next, breaking it in one simple breath. Normally, this would mean the death of the target, but... this too was reversed in a single moment.

He went on to dismember Adrien, but then the effects reversed.

This process went on, causing bloodshed and a reset that never seemed to end. Again and again, all manner of punishments were dealt to Adrien, until finally... he was done.

Ce'phas flung the helpless body of Adrien to the ground, causing the ground to shatter in the process.

"Hahahahahaha! This is so much fun!" He stood on top of Adrien, his fist pummeling him, and then reversing it over and over again.

But, not all were reversed. Slowly, the wounds began to build up, displaying scratches, bumps, and a bunch of other unsavory aspects on Adrien's bloodied face.

"Ce'phas, please just end it already. We really need to—"

"Shut it!" Ce'phas yelled out, shutting down U'riah, as well as anyone else who would desire to challenge him.

Despite being colleagues, U'riah was forced to follow the command of Ce'phas and keep quiet.

The reason was due to a difference in strength.

And no, it wasn't just brute strength. It was a power that only Ce'phas and one other Dragon had—the kind that made one invincible.

No one wanted to suffer under its hands—the kind of suffering that Adrien was no doubt experiencing at the moment.

'[Time Dilation]'

The ability to slow down, reverse, or increase the flow of time on a specified target.

That was Ce'phas' trump card!

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Chapter 689 How The Fight Ended

The Strongest.

It means different things to different people. Some attribute only physical characteristics to it, while others consider the mental or supernatural attributes to the term.

However, everyone shares one common assumption when addressing the matter.

To be the strongest means to be the best.

And... Ce'phas could be considered the 'Strongest' of the 2nd Squad.

Not only were his Stats absurdly high, at least compared to the other Generals, but his Skills had a much higher level of mastery. His Level was higher too, making him an all-round superior entity when compared to almost every other General.

But, that wasn't the only reason he was feared and revered as the strongest.

The main reason was due to his Skill: [Time Dilation].

[Time Dilation]

Tier: S

Ability: Allows the user to control the flow of time experienced by a specified target. The target's time can be slowed, reversed, or advanced.

[Limitation: Physical contact must be made on the target to activate this Skill.]

[End Of Information]

With this Skill, Ce'phas could advance his own time, making him much faster than normal. He could also slow down the time of his targets by only touching them once.

The most dangerous aspect of it was the 'reversal' aspect, that allowed him to reverse the state of his target--including their positions or wellbeing.

Using this power, even if he fell under a fatal attack, it would be as if he never sustained any injury. As long as this power existed, and he had it activated, Ce'phas was unstoppable by those within his rank or lower.

He was an absolute monster.

"It's over, Ce'phas. You win..."

The two Dragon Generals stood beside the Dragon General. He was kneeling atop the bloodied corpse of Adrien Chase.

There was only so much a corpse could take before turning all mangled and gross; unrecognizable from its previous state. Ce'phas had dealt such intense and immense damage on the body that it had become nothing but a mesh of ground bones and pasty flesh.

The ground had suffered considerable damage. The whole area around him had sunk to the ground, making it an expansive crater with blood designing its walls.

Ce'phas, after hearing the words of his colleagues, and feeling their hands on his shoulders, finally stopped pounding the boy's dead flesh and exhaled deeply.

"Huuu..."

For a moment, dreary silence filled the crater.

The Generals were still as they waited for him. He used his Skill to remove all the blood from his body, making him squeaky clean. His ashen outfit also returned to him, and in no time at all... he was back to normal.

He looked nothing more than a sweet kid with horns, wings, and a tail.

Some speculations were already floating around that he constantly used his [Time Dilation] to keep himself forever young, and that he was much older than he seemed, while others claimed he was actually still a child considering his personality.

Whatever the case was, the two Generals behind him didn't care one bit.

As long as he was not a threat to them, and he could handle their enemies with the same fervor... they were always going to be on his side.

"How long was it this time...?" He asked, rising from the gore beneath him.

R'azak and U'riah looked at each other for a few seconds, each wondering if the other would do the honors of saying it. After those moments of uncomfortable silence, R'azak finally took on the mantle of speech.

"Five hours. It's not bad, considering your past recor... ahem, I mean... yeah."

"I see..." Ce'phas muttered, returning his gaze to the bloody mess he had turned Adrien into. His white hair darkened and his eyes stopped glowing, leaving a dead look in his eyes as he leaked out a sigh.

"I thought he'd make me last longer. I suppose he wasn't as strong as I was hoping."

"Yeah..."

"Sorry about that..."

The faint melancholic mood was soon discarded the moment Ce'phas smiled and returned to his cheerful mood.

"I suppose that's good news for you! I didn't take up too much of your time, so we can commence the meeting!"

The moment he smiled, the other two Generals did the same
—albeit a little more awkwardly.

"Yeah! We were even considering starting without you."

"What? Are you for real?!"

"Yep! That's what you get for not ending it quickly!"

"But I can't help it..."

"Yeah, yeah..."

The Dragons ascended from the crater, laughing cheerfully as if nothing had happened. As soon as they did so, they found all the Dragons of the Camp already gathered around.

They totalled a couple thousand—not a particularly impressive number, considering what the Elves had just displayed.

Still, the fact that they all belonged to the proud Dragon Race was enough of an assurance for the Generals, who were now slowly walking to the tent.

"We should get this over with already. The sooner we crush the Elves the better."

"Indeed. The rest are already waiting for us."

"We can't keep them waiting, can we?"

The Generals entered the tent and found their 12 Commanders occupying their positions in their respective seats. The moment the Commanders noticed the entry of the Generals, they all rose to their feet, bowing in respect.

As usual, the Generals responded by slightly raising their hands, and the twelve returned to their seats. Everyone was in a serious mood, as expected of such an important meeting.

... Even the man at the foot of the table.

"Apologies for the delay. We had to handle a rather suspicious traitor, as you all know. Hope you don't mind the wait, Adrien?"

All eyes fell on the human who sat comfortably and watched the Dragons with a calm smile on his face.

"Not at all. Who would have expected that a Dragon would betray the Camp in favor of the Elves? You were right to punish him..." All twelve Commanders nodded, and the Generals followed suit—satisfied with Adrien's answer.

"Right? In any case, we should commence the meeting."

*

Chapter 690 Fulfilled Wish

"DAMNIT!"

Adrien raised his voice in frustration as he returned to his tent, anger clearly visible on his face.

His clenched fists sought a place to release all the tension coursing through them, but he controlled himself despite the overwhelming sensation that coursed through him.

He couldn't afford to go rabid after everything that had just transpired.

"Huu... haaa..." Closing his eyes, he inhaled and exhaled multiple times until the fiery frustration in his heart receded.

Once he was satisfied, he went to his seat and calmed himself once more.

'We just finished the meeting regarding the problem of the Elves and how they were able to destroy the second wave. Looks like everyone is on edge...'

The Generals were particularly upset by the outcome that had befallen Adrien and the Commanders. How could they have lost? It brought shame to the Dragons.

Adrien could remember a lot of things that the Generals said, and while a lot of it was frustrating to even remember, this outcome was much more preferable to what would have been if he left things as they were.

'To think I had to use [Wish Fulfillment] so early... damnit!'

The more he thought about it, the more he understood how necessary it was for him to resort to it, but that didn't make him the least bit happier about the outcome.

'How could I have been pushed to such an extent? I didn't even use the Skill on my own terms, but in a scenario orchestrated by another. Were they after this all along?!' He could feel his anger rising, but he controlled himself once again.

Taking in another series of breaths, he found his head clear.

'[Wish Fulfillment] is a one-time Skill. I spent so much of my Stat Points to obtain it, and it was never supposed to be used until I got to the Dragon Continent. But now...' To say he was frustrated would be an understatement.

One of his most important Skills had now become exhausted. The worst part about it was that he couldn't get anything like it again.

'That's the limitation of [Skill Creation].'

Adrien thought back to when he first laid eyes on the Skill. Back then, he thought it would be the most versatile thing ever, and in a way... he was correct.

With Skill Creation, he could create whatever Skill he wanted--especially if he had sufficient incentive for it--generally Status Points or other Skills.

As long as he sacrificed a portion of his 'strength' to the Skill, he could make any kind of Skill. Each Tier had its requirements, and he couldn't make any SSS Tier Skill.

All in all... it remained a fair bargain.

'But, I wasn't aware of this limitation until after I obtained the Skill. I can't create a Skill that I have already created.'

No two Skills of his could have the same effect or name, so once he made a Skill--one-time use or not--he could not make a Skill with the same kind of effects.

Even if he wanted to make a variant, the functions of both Skills couldn't be too similar, else the Creation Process would fail. That was the most vexing part about [Skill Creation], and why he was so annoyed that he was pushed into using such a useful Skill like [Wish Fulfillment].

"Well, there's no helping it, is there?" He thought loudly as he chuckled.

Adrien had been played, and played good for that matter.

It was a new experience, and it left him confused about how to respond to the situation.

'For my plans, I have to make sure the Dragons keep me on their side. I have to get to the Dragon Continent through legitimate means and seep into their Empire. All of it has to be organic, which is why I'm enduring all of this.'

As regretful as he was about the events that transpired not too long ago, and how he had to respond to it, he was glad about the results.

'The status quo has returned to the way it was, and the present reality has overwritten the past—at least, in their minds.'

Adrien did not have nearly enough resources to actually affect reality, so the most he could do was make everyone 'think' in a new way.

'[Pinocchio] is already at its limit, since I've created 12 Puppets to replace the Commanders, but at least the Generals are back on my side.'

Still... this was only a treatment, not a cure. Adrien recognized that much.

'I'm nowhere close to finding the Mastermind behind all of this. The one supporting the Elves... the one who actually played me...'

It was frustrating, but Adrien didn't know who the person was.

'And then, there's the other thing bothering me...' Adrien looked at the glowing object on his table that had the form of an orb.

It warbled constantly, but the light it displayed was dim.

'Why isn't Justin picking up? I've been calling him all this time, yet he isn't responding.'

Such a thing hadn't happened before, and would normally never occur, which made Adrien suspect that something was going down in the Capital.

'It's unfortunate, but I can't leave for the Capital due to my plans here, and how the current situation has worsened more than ever.'

If he allowed himself to be distracted at this point, there was a good chance he would lose the war on all ends.

'I can't allow that to happen.'

With [Pinocchio] unavailable for use, Adrien's best bet had to be using his backup Undead to investigate what was going on there and report to him after a specified period.

'While that is happening, I have to really understand this Mastermind that's messing with me, as well as what they want.'

So far, Adrien only had one person he suspected.

As he was still going through everything, every time only arriving at the same person, the door to his tent opened up and someone walked in.

"Hey, man..."

Adrien raised his head the moment he heard the voice, his eyes wide as the name on his mind overlapped with the figure he saw in front of him.

"... Long time no see."