

Extras 701

Chapter 701 Deal With A Devil [Pt 1]

"No one knows, you know?"

As those words danced in the air, Justin struggled to comprehend their meaning.

Perhaps this was because his heart was beating too fast, and the loud pounding in his head just wouldn't stop. He found himself barely clinging onto Ater's words.

This felt like a haze... a dream.

No, not a dream.

This had to be a nightmare.

He was helpless—paralyzed in sheer hopelessness—as he listened to Ater's words as the latter circled around him, like a shark swirling around the wounded prey in bloodied waters.

"Rey, Belle... all of them don't know about you yet. Not to the extent that I do, Justin Blake."

Saliva was stuck in Justin's throat, but he was too frightened to swallow.

"Now, if you do not wish to be exposed, then you will listen to me well and do as I say. Is that understood?" As Ater asked this, Justin made no response.

He simply froze there, blankly staring at the man.

"I said... is that understood?"

As Ater drew closer, filling him with even more of his malevolent aura, Justin forcefully swallowed his saliva and shuddered in recoil. He quickly bobbed his head, nodding ferociously as he took a few steps back.

"I-I understand! I understand!"

"Good. If you do, then relax. Sit down and let's talk." Ater smiled, plopping to sit in what could be defined as mid-air.

Justin looked around him, but there was no available place to really sit. The only place left was the filthy ground, and someone of his caliber was not accustomed to such an action. Still... he didn't have a choice, did he?

He had to do as Ater said.

"O-okay..." As Justin began lowering himself to sit on the ground, he found himself occupying a rather soft, cushiony sofa.

'E-eh...?'

Before he could even process the sensation, he realized that his environment was completely different from what he had just noticed a second ago. Not only were there no walls, fences, or any familiar sights associated with the Royal Estate's expansive compound, but the place that Justin found himself in was indoors.

It was a place he recognized all too well.

"T-this is...?!"

The impossibly high ceiling, the incredible vastness, and the remnant malevolence; all of it sent chilling memories flooding Justin's faculties.

"... The Grand Calamity Class Dungeon." He gawked, slowly turning to look at Ater, who was also on a sofa similar to his, with a center table separating them. "Right?"

"Indeed."

Ater's confirmation made Justin look around him once again.

On the second look, he noticed a lot of changes in this Dungeon. For one, it appeared perfectly polished—worlds apart from the grimy and unkempt state that the Dungeon had in previous memory.

The ancient walls still had the effect of age to them, but with a much more pristine effect than ever before. Most of the ground floor was still an empty space, but it looked squeaky clean and perfectly renovated.

Justin could find no flaw with it no matter how hard he looked.

"I decided to do a little cleaning to surprise Master, considering the plans he has for this place. What do you think? Do you reckon he'll like it?"

Justin was speechless.

He didn't even think his input was necessary. The state of the Dungeon—at the very least, the ground floor that he was in—was more than enough to speak for itself.

"I think... he'll like it a lot."

"Is that so? Hehehe... then I suppose all of that effort wasn't for nothing." Ater's smile was not malevolent this time.

It was so pure—almost childish—as if he was a child who looked forward to seeing the proud look in their parents' eyes after a job well done.

Justin could not comprehend this sudden change in vibe, but it wasn't like he was fated to witness it for very long. In merely a few seconds, Ater's demeanor changed back to what it previously was.

—A mask of evil and chaos.

"I'm in a good mood, Justin, so I don't plan to hound you too much. After getting a gist of your situation, and also hearing your clearly unbiased thoughts on this place... I think I'm going to let you off easy."

Justin was confused, conflicted, and a lot more.

He didn't even know how they arrived here, talkless of what Ater could be talking about at the given period. He was completely at Ater's mercy, and that already made his future too bleak to consider.

Still, who didn't like the sound of mercy?

"You are doing this for your family, right? I completely understand. Family... family is really important, right? You really are a good kid, aren't you? You want to go home... do right by your folks—even that girl that you're so fond of."

Justin's eyes twitched the moment Ater mentioned his girl. He never told him about that, so how in the world did he know?

More shivers coursed through his veins, but he endured.

"Here's how this works, Justin. I want you on my side. That's the only way you walk out of this in one piece. Join me... or die."

Any man, when confronted with a chance for their survival, would always choose the option that best led to it. But, it wasn't so simple for Justin.

"I can't. If I betray Adrien, I die." He whimpered, sighing as he hung his head on his weak shoulders.

"How so?"

"I... am not allowed to say."

For a moment, tense silence permeated the room. The world around them was in an eerie state, completely devolving into one of despair.

"Pffft! Why so serious?" Ater chuckled, breaking all of that with a single question.

"W-what...?"

To Justin, the one whose life hung in the balance, he couldn't comprehend the question.

Why wouldn't he be serious? He was facing possible death here!

"I already know what card Adrien holds against you." Ater chuckled even more as he relaxed on his seat.

With warbling eyes that seemed to be reminiscent of blood, he parted his lips and let out the steep revelation.

"Your soul."

Chapter 702 Deal With A Devil [Pt 2]

"I only wanted to live..."

Justin wanted to live for his family—for the ones he cared about most—so he could return home one day. That desire turned into obsession after witnessing death for the first time.

First it was with Adam, and then during the Dungeon Rescue of Brutus, he witnessed even more people perish. Despite performing his role well, he found himself at the edge of death so many times.

To many, he was always the optimist—the jovial guy with no care in the world.

But inside... he was being torn apart.

He had countless nightmares of death that it eventually caused him so many sleepless nights. All of this compounded, becoming worse by day.

Until...

'I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!'

Justin grew desperate.

So desperate in fact that he made a deal with Adrien at the time, after being offered a way to preserve his life and escape death.

He would need to become an Undead—a high-class one, of course, but still an Undead.

With this new change of race, he would be immune to fatal damage and a lot of Status Conditions that would adversely affect humans. He would no longer need to sleep, hence preventing the nightmares from plaguing him.

Best of all... he would become stronger.

With all of these on the platter, there was already very little chance that he could refuse. However, Adrien also threw one more thing into the mix.

"I'm working on something that'll get all of us home. Join my side, and you can be a part of it."

That sold it for him!

There was no way he could refuse at that point... even if the cost of the deal was his life itself..

The price he had to pay to attain his desires was to relinquish the one thing that could cause his demise—his Soul.

"As an Undead, as long as you have your Soul intact, you can't really die. Since it belongs to Adrien and it is in his possession, one can even say it benefits you the most since any attacks on your Soul wouldn't kill you anyway... is what you tell yourself to feel better about your entire arrangement, isn't it?" Ater's question poked right into Justin's heart, but the boy could say nothing.

If he did so, his demise was inevitable.

"With this arrangement, only Adrien can kill you since he has your Soul hostage. I'm sure you've made some pre-existing arrangement that prevents you from doing some things... such as telling me the details of such an arrangement. Doing so would alert Adrien, and he wouldn't hesitate to finish you off since you're nothing but a tool to him."

The more Ater spoke, the more Justin felt pricks in his heart. He got everything right, and the very thought that someone could figure it all out without him opening his lips to say a word was frightening in itself.

It only made the helpless boy wonder just how much Ater knew about.

"Selling your soul for returning home... that sounds so poetic." Ater seemed to be making fun of his decision, but Justin did not regret it one bit.

He could count at least three instances where he would have already died without the perks of being an Undead. He didn't regret his decision since it helped him live this long.

If only he hadn't gotten caught, then... then maybe he would have actually...

"What if I told you that I could break these shackles holding you back... even making you stronger in the process?"

Justin's eyes widened and his brows were raised as he heard this.

After hearing all that Ater had said, and seeing some of the things he could do, there was no doubt in Justin's mind as to the capabilities of this man.

Even judging from his incredibly confident demeanor, it was clear that this man could back up his words.

The question, however, was why?

"Why would you choose to go this far for me?" Justin spat out.

He was a traitor who backstabbed everyone and was working secretly for a deserter. He hid his strength in critical moments, and even though it was likely that he could have prevented Eric's death, he did no such thing.

Even he hated himself for all of these, and yet...

"I quite like you, Justin. I believe you have potential, and I suspect it's why Adrien chose you as well..."

"R-really?"

"Of course not. Pfft! You're just easier to manipulate because you have things you hold dear, and a very strong desire to achieve your dreams." Ater laughed, causing Justin's slightly hopeful face to crumble in an instant.

He never once thought of himself as special or especially intelligent, but this was the first time hearing that he was easy to manipulate.

"Listen well. The most difficult people to control are those who have nothing to lose. As long as stakes exist, there will always be those who can see them."

Justin didn't even have the chance to process what Ater said before he was bombarded with another volley of information.

"I am the person you've been talking to all week, not Adrien. I'm certain he doesn't know the recent occurrences in the Capital. Even if he does, it is only to the extent that Master does, which is why I've intentionally limited the information I distributed... just in case..."

"Y-you were—?!"

"Yes. I have been observing you for some time too. Adrien's little dog... sniffing for clues and information for your owner. Well, I don't want that for you, Justin. You deserve better, you know?"

"W-what? Isn't that what you're trying to turn me into? A loyal dog?"

"I'm more of a cat person, you know? But that's besides the point." Ater shrugged those words away as if they were nothing.

"I want you to be my subordinate, Justin. I treat my subordinates well, you know? And if you agree... everything you desire will be yours."

Justin watched Ater in silence, waiting for a few moments before getting the inevitable question.

"So... what do you say?"

Chapter 703 Deal With A Devil [Pt 3]

"I-I..."

Justin didn't have a choice in the matter, the way he saw it.

If he didn't accept the deal, Ater was definitely going to do something incredibly awful to him. Ater knew all about his arrangement with Adrien, including the Soul issue, yet he was confident in killing him.

That meant there were other ways he could die—ways he didn't know yet.

'Adrien told me not to get overconfident about my immortality, so this is what he was talking about...' Justin sighed.

'If he can somehow save me from Adrien's grasp, spare my life, and make me stronger... is there really a reason to refuse?'

This was essentially just changing owners. It was the same job, but now he would be working for a different person.

'Adrien is searching for a way home, which I would be losing out on if I follow this man. But... I just have to bring it to his notice.'

"... I have some conditions to make before I—"

"No conditions can be made. This is not a negotiation, but a simple choice." Ater interrupted Justin before he could complete his statement.

"I know you desire to go home, and your deal with Adrien somewhat gives you that guarantee. You aren't sure you have that kind of security with me, which is fair. I won't make that promise to you, but you should also be aware that Adrien could just as well not keep his side of the deal... and you can't stop him."

Justin already knew that, which was why he had very loose loyalty to Adrien. Thanks to Ater's words, more doubt began to creep into Justin's mind.

Was there really a way home? Was he going to ever see his family again? He didn't know for sure.

"I can promise you this, Justin." Ater maintained his confident smile as he spoke. "You will see your family again."

"R-really...?" He whispered.

Was this a moment when Ater would laugh at him, or maybe mock him for being easily manipulated? Was it?

No... not at all.

"Yes. If you serve me well, you will meet them and have your happy ending—however you want it. Isn't that great? A concrete future that you can count on."

"I am not sure I can count on you, though."

"True. Which is why I told you that this isn't a negotiation." Ater shrugged, almost as if he couldn't be bothered by Justin's skepticism.

"You already know you have two options at the moment. Join me... or die."

"...."

"I believe you already know which is the best way to achieve your goals. You're sensible, at the very least."

Yes... Justin already knew.

"I get it. And, just to confirm, if I join you... you'll undo the whole Soul stuff with Adrien, right?"

"You wouldn't be of much use to me if you're still on his leash, so of course I'll liberate you from his clutches."

"And then you'll own my soul?"

"That won't be necessary. I do not need to own or even be in possession of it to affect it. I'll make sure to protect it from any external attacks, though, so you should still be safe for the most part."

"W-what does that even mean?" Justin, at this point, was in way over his head.

He could not really grasp Ater's explanation.

"Haa... okay, I'll try to simplify this whole deal to you so that even you can get it."

Justin ignored the clearly condescending tone and use of words that Ater employed. Partly because he had no choice in the matter, but also because he was interested in what came next. "You have your Soul with Adrien, but it's impossible for your body to function without a Soul occupying it, so only a portion is with you, while the rest is with Adrien. Both of them share a connection that tethers them to each other. Are you following so far?"

"Y-yeah!"

"Now, what I'm going to do is surgically separate the piece of your Soul that occupies your body from the one with Adrien. That would—"

"But wouldn't that kill me? Or maybe like... make me lose some of my memories or power? It's my Soul, after all!"

Ater shook his head and sighed.

"Sorry, sorry! Please just go on..." Justin swiftly apologized, scratching his head sheepishly.

"Fuu... fine, I'll explain Soul Theory to you."

"Soul Theory?"

"Your Soul isn't like your body. It doesn't have an arm or leg with distinct functions or parts to them. If you amputate a hand, you've damaged the whole body, and if it isn't healed, the body becomes incomplete forever. But with a Soul, it's different. While it is possible to harm a Soul, you can't damage it permanently by just attacking a portion of it."

"Really?"

"Yes. You attack the whole thing. It's why Adrien has the Soul with him tethered to the Soul with you. That way there's a constant connection that he exclusively has access to. If he wishes to harm you, he'll attack your Soul through the connection, damaging both pieces."

"So... by removing the connection this piece shares with his... he won't be able to harm my Soul any longer?"

"Indeed. Though, you are right in the fact that you'll lose a great deal of your power and potential if you lose that chunk that exists with him. Every living entity's true ability depends on the state of the Soul, after all..."

Before Justin could say anything after gasping, Ater raised a finger in the air to prevent him from speaking.

"Fortunately for you... I have the perfect solution. I'll supplement your Soul with lots of nourishment so you'll be even stronger than ever."

"You can do that?"

"Yup! You'll become as... hmmm... maybe a Dragon Lord will be your limit."

"D-Dragon Lord...?" Justin remembered the appearance of the Dragon Lord that shook everyone to their core.

He could never hope to go against that, and yet... he was hearing that he would be able to stand against such an entity. That sounded surreal.

"I agree! When do we start?!" As soon as Justin said this, Ater grinned devilishly, instantly vanishing from where he sat.

~SQUELCH!~

A hand pierced Justin's chest, causing the boy to instantly lose consciousness, and the silhouette responsible for that let out a soft whisper.

"Right now."

Chapter 704 Approaching Climax

[Moments Later]

"I... really don't feel any different." Justin and Ater stood face to face in the vast hall that was the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon. Indeed, just as he said, the former didn't look any different from how he always was.

He still had his handsome face, dirty brown hair, and overall tall and lean build.

He seemed the same.

"Adrien will try to make contact with you soon, so you're going to forget a lot of what happened here until the due time." Completely ignoring all of Justin's concerns about his body, Ater simply went straight to business.

"You will be loyal to Adrien for the time being, until I am ready to use you for certain plans I have..."

"But—"

"If you're wondering how Adrien won't notice that you aren't tethered to him, it's because when I surgically severed your connection to that Soul, I copied a portion of it and linked it to Adrien's copy. In essence, he still thinks you are linked."

"H-how can you do all of these things...?" Justin wondered aloud, staring at Ater with sheer stupefaction.

"That is not for you to know. Your limits will never allow you to attain that height."

Upon hearing those words, Justin's face sank deeper. It almost felt like he was stomped on, but with words.

"Don't be so downcast. You should be grateful for your lot and be content with it. That is what Nature has determined for you. Seeking any more would be venturing deeply into greed?"

"Is greed such a bad thing?"

"For those who cannot possibly attain anything greater... greed is useless. It leads to hollow hubris that tends to drive men into madness and destruction."

"... Eh?"

"Just remain where you are and allow yourself to indulge in the desires afforded to you. Chase after your purpose and do not seek out a wider ocean outside your pool. That is the best way you can find happiness." Ater smiled at him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"In essence... I should know my place?"

"Correct! You really are quite sharp, aren't you?"

For some reason, despite hearing demeaning words in the most brutal of ways, Justin felt a certain kind of relief wash over him. There was a strange sense of pride derived from Ater's words that caused him to smile.

"You're very mean with your words..."

"I prefer it this way." Ater shrugged, removing his hand from Justin as they both smiled at each other.

"Me too."

For a moment, silence reigned between the two of them as they simply stared at each other.

"What exactly are you up to? This grand scheme of yours... when does it take place?"

A chuckle escaped Ater's lips as he stared keenly at Justin. Before he responded, he walked away from the young man and took a few steps forward.

Crackles of energy danced around him, as well as Justin, as the world around them seemed to change and distort at a rapid pace.

"That is a surprise."

The clacks of polished black shoes hitting the ground echoed softly as Ater walked within a hallway, both hands in his pockets as he smiled.

He had several thoughts flashing through his mind—about his new pawn, his plan's progression, and most importantly, his Master.

All of these thoughts were neatly organized and immaculately calculated, just as the steps he made as he approached the door that stood in front of him.

'Once this is complete, all that's left is the big one...'

Ater felt the knob of the door twist in no time, and before long he entered into the room to meet a few people already occupying one portion of the room.

He already knew who they were, so he merely smiled as he walked in.

"You all finally made it." The girl who sat at the center of the huge sofa grinned as she looked at Ater's surroundings, but not directly at him.

She was clearly seeing something that wasn't real—something he constructed.

"Well, it's been a while indeed Justin." The other girl in the group of deserters giggled, blushing slightly as she tried to hide how happy she was.

The others around her rolled her eyes as they trailed invisible newcomers to the sofa that existed opposite them. Ater watched all of this in silence, already realizing what was happening.

He was the one who orchestrated everything, after all.

'Right now, the Deserters think they are having a conversation with The Otherworlders. They see Justin, Belle, Clark, and Trisha right now.' His thoughts trailed as he watched them converse passionately.

'They'll do their best to convince the Otherworlders to join their side, and Felicia will go as far as kissing all of them to make sure they do as she commands. Of course, in order not to make the whole thing suspicious, she'll have to do it discreetly, meeting them one on one right after the meeting.'

Ater already knew her line of reasoning, and he planned on making it so the illusion they all experienced flowed according to her expectations, just as everything thus far had been going for them.

'Once all the Otherworlders agree to join their side, the deal will be sealed. Then, all that is left will be the promised day... the climax of this little game I've made.'

He could feel his lips curling upward as he displayed visible signs of excitement towards the results.

As he concluded that line of thought, he proceeded to another.

'Master and Adrien should have already reached some sort of compromise by now, if not even striking an alliance. That should lead to some rather interesting turn of events over there, and I hope it goes as predicted.'

His eyes narrowed as he remembered one key figure in the whole thing, and for a few seconds, he remained motionless.

Even as the voices of the Deserters grew louder, and echoes constantly filled the air, Ater remained steadfast in his thoughts.

Everything seemed fixated on that one entity.

'Don't forget the deal we made, Emil. I'm counting on you over there...'

Chapter 705 The Great Elven War [Pt 1]

"The plan remains the same..."

The three Dragon Generals stood before their army of thousands of Dragons, their smiles broad as they felt some form of anticipation in their bones.

R'azak, U'riah, and Ce'phas had stayed out of the battle long enough.

However, now that they were all participating in the war against the Elves, the situation had now taken a turn for the better. The Morale of the Dragon Troops increased exponentially upon hearing of this news, so the atmosphere was electric with anticipation.

The 12 Commanders were also going to join the battle too. Having their leadership in the war, and their power in the overwhelming battle to come reassured the Dragons who looked up to them all.

Right now, the Generals were addressing the Newts and Soldiers who watched with clear attention and resolve to fulfill their role to the Empire.

Since most of them had not fought for a very long time since the intervention of Adrien, there was a kind of anticipation that dwelled in their eyes. Dragons were beings of chaos, after all, and so their unsated hunger for death and destruction made them more than happy to receive the news of their grand attack on the Elves.

Adrien stood among the Dragons who were being addressed by the Dragon Generals, smiling just as they were, with his own thoughts flowing as they made their point.

'He's basically restating what was discussed in the meeting, but leaving out the details. There's no need for footsoldiers and dispensable pawns to know the full picture. That role belongs to those commanding them...'

And as for the plan itself, Adrien didn't think it was particularly bad.

Sure, it felt a little simplistic, but considering the way the Elves attacked, having a very simple but effective plan seemed like the way to go.

'My Undead Army will attack from the front—same as always—then, the Dragon Army will attack them from behind.' Adrien nearly chuckled to himself as he went over the strategy that would be implemented.

Commanders would also attack from the right and left flanks, leaving no wiggle room for escape.

'Thankfully, we have a lot of air power, so the Dragons have a major field advantage.' He smiled and nodded one final time.

The most twisted part of the plan involved the Dragon Generals themselves.

'While all the efforts are being concentrated on the battlefield, the Generals will head to the Elf Community and wreak havoc there. If they manage to kill the Esteemed Elders, it'll severely weaken the entire resistance.'

That was the rationale behind their assault, and to be honest it was great.

There was only a single issue about the whole thing, and it was one that Adrien decided to pitch in to help the movement..

'I promised to keep the benefactor of the Elves busy while they destroy the Community and severely weaken everything. That's the best way I can pull my weight in this, outside of my disposable army.'

Adrien was one who prided himself as a realist, so almost as soon as he considered Rey as an enemy, he burst out into a chuckle and shook his head.

'I can't beat him...' But, he didn't have to. He just had to make it seem like he was doing his best and working so that the Dragons could win.

"DO WE ALL UNDERSTAND?!"

As the thunderous voice of the Generals rang in the air, lost echoes of Dragons tuned in to the loudest of volumes.

"YESSSSSSIIIRRRRR!!!"

[Moments Later]

"Fire!"

~WHOOOOSH!~

Just as was the plan with the Dragons, so was the execution.

The Undead Monsters rushed towards the Elven Camp in droves, their overwhelming number seemingly increasing with every step they took. A dark cloud of Miasma hung above them—like a thundercloud of heavy rain, or an unstoppable storm, that could not stop.

Then, there were the troublesome Undead Dragons that dominated the skies. Steam proceeded from their jaws as they shot perverse energy as breaths and intensely burned everything in their path.

In the intensity of this moment, however, the Elves stood firm.

They already had a sanctuary that served as the perfect base to protect them. With the plan that they had been using so far, which worked effectively to their benefit, they stuck to their projectiles and kept firing.

They also relied on their foot soldiers—the ones who felt no such thing as pain, and overwhelmed the Dragons during the last scuffles.

The Elementals were already stationed before the walls of the Camp, so the moment the Undead Monsters reached a certain distance, all of them whirled to life in an instant.

The Absolute Elemental General, which stood at the forefront of the army, was the first to move and set himself ablaze with energy. In no time at all, the rest followed suit.

Fire. Water. Earth. Air. Lightning.

Varying colors representing the elements shot up into the sky as each Elemental lit the world around them, and the one that was slowly closing in on them.

With all of this set up, an intense battle was afoot.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!!~

Noises like this filled the battlefield, as terror-filled screeches constantly rang across the expansive field of nightmares. As Undead and Elementals fought, the Elves did their best to take down the flying creatures who constantly tried to reduce the integrity of their battery.

Even though the battlefield was rough, the Elves still had most of things under control. They were the ones manipulating the flow of battle, all from a safe distance.

However... in life, the most unexpected could ruin everything. The Elves learned that lesson at the moment when, during their echoes of victory and excitement, they suddenly heard noise.

~RUMBLE!~

At first, many dismissed it as mere tremors. But, they got louder with every passing noise and vibration it made.

~RUMBLE!~

It seemed whatever this was... it was getting closer.

~RUMBLE!~

No one knew what it was, and just as apprehension mixed with curiosity was about to perfectly mix within the heart of the Elves, a certain Elf ran towards the battle area.

She was out of breath, and her terrified face was pale. Still, she found the strength to raise her voice and inform them of the source of the rumble.

"T-THE DRAGONS ARE AT OUR REAR!!!"

Chapter 706 The Great Elven War [Pt 2]

The Dragons opened their frightening jaws and released blasts of destruction from the depths of their throats.

~VWUUUUUUUMMMM!!!!~

The intensity of their breaths burned the barrier that protected the Elven Camp from invaders. At first, it stood upright, completely pushing back the flames of devastation that were constantly being pushed out.

Eventually, however, the barrier had to collapse.

Once it did, the Dragons all grinned to themselves, watching as the rear of the Elves' base was now breached.

It was time for the next phase of their plan—slaughter all of the Elves.

~WHOOOSH!~

Wings flapped as the horde of thousands of Dragons charged towards the camp, their wide eyes ready to devastate their prey with combined, unbridled violence.

"BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!!~

The ground cracked wide open as flames crashed upon it, sending fiery debris flying in multiple directions. The Elves that were meant to be watching—or rather, guarding—the rear, were sent flying back as a result of the intense flames that neared them.

If it hit them, the result would be their demise.

But.... "Sanctuary!" The voice of a certain Elf rang out, completely altering the intense situation of helplessness that had permeated everything within the Camp's rear.

As those words echoed out, a glimmering barrier was cast over the immediate area where all the Elves were huddled together, completely shielding them from the wrath of the beings above.

Everything else in the rear was burned to cinders, but thankfully all the Elves were saved,

Thankfully...

As all the Elves looked up to witness their savior, they found one of their own—the one hailed to be the strongest of all the Elves. She was adorned in a perfectly sewn white and green gown, with her enchanting hair dancing behind her as she held her staff gracefully.

She was currently donning some Enchanted Items, such as a special necklace, bracelets, and even rings. Amidst all of this, though, she clung tightly to her staff, glaring deeply at the aggressors who broke into their fortified place.

"L-Lady Feralia!"

"Lady...!"

"Y-you came to save us...!"

They were smitten by her valiant presence, but she didn't allow any of the girls to grow comfortable due to her being present. She inhaled deeply and closely observed all of the Elves behind her in a moment.

None of them were strong enough to assist her.

"Go. Retreat. Now!"

They were all reluctant to just abandon their Sister, but they better than to disobey others. It was also clear that they would slow her down. Realizing this quickly, they all nodded and fled.

"Huuu..." Feralia stole one more glance at the Elves and smiled at them running off while she exhaled deeply.

Her 'Sanctuary', the most powerful defense she could render at the moment, was reaching expiration rather quickly, and she had to find a way to defeat thousands of Dragons on her own.

As she watched them from the golden enclosure, still seeing the bright bursts of flames as they lived the ground and her barrier—almost as if they couldn't wait to get in—she steeled her heart and readied her body.

'It's shocking how they just appeared out of nowhere. I'll be having backup when the others mobilize, but until then... I have to do this on my own.'

She was much stronger than a Dragon Commander, so she was certain that when facing just Newts and Soldiers, she would fare well. In fact, she would fare better than well.

The real problem was their number and advantage in the sky.

'Still... since there is only one of me, as long as I know what I am doing, I should be able to stall them for as long as possible.'

Either until the Elementals could come to the rear to handle the Dragons, or for the projectiles to be used against these ones. Unfortunately, both of those options required time before they could be viable.

And so, until then—

'I'm on my own!'

~WHOOOOSH!~

The moment her sanctuary collapsed, Feralia shot up into the sky like a rocket, her body shimmering with golden aura. It felt like space itself blurred thanks to the intensity of her speed.

Before long, she had ascended to the same level as the Dragons.

'I'll use Elemental Magic to remain in the air, I'll focus more on evasion and defense. The goal is to make sure they don't advance very far.'

It was a tall order for one person to handle, but Feralia was the strongest Elf. If anyone could pull it off... it had to be her!

"Wuthering Waves, Clash and Fall... Rise and Swirl into a fine storm..." She pointed her staff forward as she watched the Dragons ready to launch a combined wave of Dragon Breaths towards her—intending on incinerating her to death, no doubt.

However, she was just a moment faster.

"... Absolute Elemental Storm!"

A swirling mass of pure energy—or rather, the amalgamation of elements, which birthed a pure display of energy—swelled out of nowhere and crashed upon the wave of Dragons that lined up before Feralia.

Their premature breaths were not sufficient to quell the storm, and the intensity only increased the more it gained momentum.

Dragon Newts and Dragon Soldiers were capable of B to A-Tier Skills at the maximum, so it was no wonder that they could not handle the Spell that Feralia dished out, which dwelled in the realm of the Absolute.

Not only that, but she was also being buffed by her Enchanted Items, so her Spell's intensity and range was amplified.

The result?

~VWUUUUUUUUSSSSHHHH!!!~

A fierce storm that threw the Dragon Army into disarray was born.

Their formation was ruined thanks to the Absolute Elemental Storm. While the Spell wasn't particularly fatal for them, due to being spread over a wide range, the pulsating energy was enough to disorient the Dragons for a limited period of time.

And with their defenses being brought so low, as well as her Mana saturating the atmosphere for that fleeting moment, all the conditions were fulfilled for Feralia's next trick.

Her ultimate Skill.

"[Time Stop]."

Chapter 707 The Great Elven War [Pt 3]

?[Time Stop]

It was an Exclusive Skill that belonged to Feralia—one that served as her ultimate card, but one she also had to utilize sparingly.

Not only could she only use it once a day, but it also consumed a great deal of Mana to utilize. It allowed her to completely halt the flow of time of anything she, or a portion of her energy, had contact with.

In essence, she could freeze any target of hers in time.

The duration for Time Stop depended on how much energy she expended in the period of activation, and since it usually took up a great deal of energy, it usually didn't last very long.

But... things were different now.

Feralia had access to the Mana within the Enchanted Items that she equipped, as well as the boosted effects of being saved by Rey's energy.

She was a far stronger entity than in the past.

Still... even with all of these advantages on her end, there was one thing she had to consider.

This was the first time she would be using [Time Stop] on so many targets at once.

These were thousands of Dragons. There was no way her Skill would be able to work on them normally—not with the strict conditions necessary to activate them.

That was why she first resorted to the Absolute Elemental Storm. This achieved two purposes, and its success was what led to her next act.

With the Storm successfully affecting the army of Dragons, they became vulnerable to the effects of [Time Stop], and since her energy had permeated the entire area, she could cast the Skill en masse.

The result?

~VWUUUUUUM!~

Every single Dragon froze in the sky, completely rendered still by the effects of her [Time Stop].

"Haa..." Feralia felt a bit pale as she watched all the enemies stay vulnerable before her. The horde was at a complete standstill.

"Good. With this, I've bought some time."

As she mumbled this to herself, she couldn't help but feel slightly lightheaded.

'I expended way too much Mana. They'll be like this for a short while, but hopefully that's enough for me to recover my Mana and for backup to arrive.'

~fshiii~

While smiling to herself, albeit tiredly, she failed to recognize the silhouette that manifested behind her. Not until it was too late...

"Impressive..." A voice echoed very deeply, causing her entire body to shiver at that very moment.

It appeared right behind her, and the goosebumps she felt the moment she heard that single word caused her trembling body to freeze.

Her instincts told her to run, but not a single finger could be lifted.

She was paralyzed.

'I-I....!' With her eyes bulging, she witnessed the Dragons get released from her [Time Stop] Skill, all of them now floating towards the Camp as fiery hot energy began to manifest from within their gaping mouths.

It turned out she wasn't able to buy any time at all.

Tears of sorrow would have gushed out of her wide eyes if not for the fear that she was experiencing.

Death was right behind her, raising the scythe to send her to the underworld. She could not even see the face of her executioner.

She only felt the intense gaze and incredible bloodlust they oozed.

It was the end.

~CLANG!~

All of a sudden, the noise of blades clashing together resounded in the air.

Feralia suddenly found herself in the embrace of someone, feeling the familiar warmth and smell ooze through her as she surrendered to the man's grasp.

"Y-you..." She whispered, her voice lacking any kind of strength whatsoever.

Her heart raced—this time not because of anxiety or fear, but because of the man that held her tight. His presence offered her comfort, and the look on his face as she gazed upon him— that confident smile that he had—was out of this world.

She felt, at long last, perfectly safe.

"Sorry I'm late."

As his voice reverberated in her ears, she closed her eyes and shook her head slightly, pressing her body more on his reliable frame.

"No... you're right on time, Rey."

The man who had arrived was Rey, and his blade was currently pitted against the descending slash that would have ended her life.

"Give me a moment." He whispered, and then the next thing that happened became a blur.

~VWUUUUSH!~

The air around Feralia vibrated, and she felt everything around her distort.

It felt like space itself collapsed within a fraction of a moment, and the next thing she realized... she was on the ground—the familiar ground of the camp.

"Stay here." Rey told her, his dark air fluttering with the violent night wind.

His two eyes were exposed, and they shone bright red. His outfit, a dark fur coat, with completely black garment, and traces of red here and there, was in perfect blend with his hair.

Everything about him—the full darkness—oozed both danger and comfort.

As soon as he told her this, though, the figure that appeared behind her back not too long ago suddenly descended from the sky in a flash of lightning.

Feralia was able to see his face for the first time that night, and the moment she did... she was reminded of the angel of death that was responsible for the undying Dragons.

He was the one who put her in such a critical state—the one that Rey had cured.

"Don't worry..." The comforting voice of her savior danced in her ears the moment she was about to tremble out of fear or unease.

"... I'll take care of him."

At that moment, Feralia could not control her feelings any longer. She drew closer to Rey and kissed him on the cheek.

"Thank you so much... for everything."

As she said this, staring deep into his eyes, he kept his gaze fixed on the enemy, though returning her smile in his usual charming fashion.

"You're welcome."

Before she could say any more—

~WHOOOSH!~

—He had vanished from her arms and now charged towards the enemy.

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Chapter 708 The Great Elven War [Pt 4]

"Rey... it's been a while."

The deep, terrifying voice of the enemy echoed out into the dark world that surrounded them.

Feralia was there to witness it all—how the dark-haired, blue eyed enemy spoke so familiarly with Rey as they both brandished their blades.

She watched in the distance, her eyes wide open as she stood still.

"Yeah." Rey responded very sharply, clearly uninterested in further conversation.

Still, the malefactor grinned widely, walking around very playfully as if this was all a game to him. He had a confident aura about him—almost as if his victory was already certain.

"Just give up already. Join our side... the winning side."

"No. Never." "Think about it, Rey. The Dragons are superior to the Elves in every way. Resistance is futile..." As he raised his two hands, the thousands of Dragons that floated high in the sky began to draw close.

The heat in their mouths rose to a higher degree, and as the flames formed, it was clear that they were going to unleash hell upon the camp.

"Last chance, Rey!"

His amused voice echoed in the air, accompanied by the rising heat.

Feralia watched all of this with trepidation. She trembled at the sight of the armada, and she found herself violently perspiring as a result of the growing furnace—anxious about what would come next.

But, even amidst all of this... Rey simply smiled.

He raised his blade up with confident precision and muttered some unintelligible words.

Then—

~WHIIIIIIIIIISSSSHHHHHHHHHHH!!!~

A Sharp beam of light radiated from his sword, shooting high into the sky in order to meet the Dragons where they were. It was an instant shot of pure energy, and the result was a powerful burst of light that brightened up the night.

Like a reverse meteor, it rose with sheer beauty and power, until it finally achieved contact.

Once it did... the brilliant burst of light eviscerated the Dragons.

It didn't matter if they launched their fiery attacks or powerful breaths. All of those things were consumed by the powerful energy that sprouted from his blade.

In their hundreds, they vanished from sight, drowned entirely in the radiant display of power.

Just a few seconds later... none of those thousands of Dragons could be seen.

Rey had eviscerated them all... just like that.

"T-that was... I didn't know you had gotten so strong." The enemy said, beads of sweat falling from his face as he quickly took a fighting position.

"It's not too late to change your ways, Adrien. Join our side... and you might be forgiven." Rey let out his hand as he uttered those words.

Feralia knew this had to be a trick.

There was no way their savior would ever offer redemption to someone who had taken the lives of so many of her sisters. The man before them was pure evil, and he was deserving of nothing short of blood-curdling death.

Even as an Elf, Feralia thought that with all her heart.

Since she, as an Elf, could not kill the enemy—Adrien—because he was not a Dragon, she hoped from the depths of her heart that Rey would do the honors.

She prayed deep within her heart that her sisters would be avenged.

"You don't mean that." Adrien responded with a light chuckle, his eyes now glowing violently.
"Besides... there's no longer a place for me among you."

Just as Feralia had hoped for—a confrontation was at hand.

"My place is with the Dragons, and yours isn't. That makes us enemies..."

"Indeed."

Rey took his own battle stance, both of them firing up their respective weapons with energy that sparked with myriads of colors.

Then—

~WHOOOOSH!~

In very swift blurs, they charged towards each other. A clash of darkness, with their blades reflecting powerful light... the resulting clash caused a deafening echo.

~BOOOOOOOOOMM!!!~

The instant their swords met, the surrounding area was leveled—turning into a land of devastation.

Feralia watched all of this from a safe distance, and even had a barrier around her to defend against the might of the resulting shockwave. Still, she felt the hair on her skin stand as she witnessed the destruction their clash resulted into.

The ground shook. The air trembled. The skies parted. Everything darkened, turning into a land of ash and smoke.

"... Rey..." She whispered, watching as her savior sent his blade flying towards the enemy, who readily blocked it with his own.

~CLANG!~

~BOOOOM!~

~CLING!~

Their dance was far too fast for her to possibly keep up with, so she maintained her distance and watched in sheer wonder.

"They appear evenly matched. Is the enemy really that strong... or is Rey holding back?"

She didn't know for sure.

All she knew was that for every clash they had, it felt like the very lands were being torn to shreds. She could only wonder how long it would take before the Camp—and even the lands surrounding it—was reduced to nothing.

"O' Nature... please watch over us."

[Meanwhile...]

The Elven Community was relatively peaceful, far separated from the rigors of the battlefield.

They did not hear any of the resounding echoes of destruction that plagued the camp, and they were blind to the catastrophes being wreaked upon both parties in the intense clash that lasted on and on through the late evening.

The Elves were in sanctuary here.

The Youngs went about their carefree activities, oblivious of the sacrifices of the Elders. And as for the Elders... they were either performing chores or looking after their Youngs.

Either way... all of them were engaged in mundane activities.

The Esteemed Elders were in their hall, having their usual meeting—the norm of the evening.

None of them were aware of the enemies that floated above their haven.

"So this is the Community..."

"We should have just come here from the start."

"Right?"

The three Dragon Generals were suspended in the air as they watched the peaceful, mundane lives of the Elves. Their simplistic setting and completely unbothered demeanors seemed ironic, given the current circumstances.

It made the Generals frown, but also smile.

"They have no idea..." R'azak commented as he glided forward.

The other two followed suit.

".... What's about to begin."

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Chapter 709 The Great Elven War [Pt 5]

[A Few Moments Earlier]

"Looks like the plan is working, and Adrien is keeping to his end of the deal."

U'riah was the first to speak up after all three Generals keenly watched the footage that was displayed before them.

The semi-transparent holographic screen before them—similar to a Status Window in certain regards—showed the implementation of their strategy in real time.

As the Undead attacked from the front, their Dragon Army, led by Adrien, would come from behind.

Then, there were also the Commanders who would emerge from both flanks. No matter how one sliced it, the Elves were bound to be overwhelmed by the sheer size of the assaulting army, as well as the many angles they were attacking from.

"Spatial Magic sure is useful..." R'azak commented, chuckling to himself as he caught glimpses of Rey and Adrien commencing their battle.

"So that's the benefactor of the Elves..."

All went silent as the voice of C'ephas echoed among them. They could sense the rising tension in the space where they floated.

The intensity was so palpable that they could almost taste it.

"I want to fight him."

The two other Generals—R'azak and U'riah—stared at each other and slightly shook their heads.

"Adrien is taking care of that." The latter of them said with a sigh.

"If you want to face him, then maybe we should wrap things up early here. What do you say to that?"

The moment C'ephas heard this, he brightened up just like a child.

"Alright! Let's do this!" He grinned maleficently.

Relief spread on the faces of his colleagues at that point.

"Before we start anything, though... we should report this to the Lord. It's a new finding, after all." U'riah added, to which R'azak agreed with, but C'ephas groaned about.

"Can't we wait until we return?"

"You know how our Lord can be sometimes. Let's just get it over with now." U'riah said with a somewhat exhausted face.

They hadn't even begun their mission and he was already feeling drained.

"I agree with U'riah." Thankfully, R'azak backed him up.

As crazy as Ce'phas was, he usually respected their joint decisions. This time appeared to be no different.

"Tch... fine, fine..."

As U'riah used his communication device to connect to their superior, R'azak and Ce'phas kept watching the thunderous fight between Adrien and the one known as Rey.

Their display of swordsmanship skills and raw power felt unbelievable for humans. It even caused R'azak to get chills in his body.

He hadn't really seen Adrien fight before, so he was amazed by his display of ability in the fight.

But... Adrien wasn't the highlight of all this.

"That Rey... he's very strong."

"Indeed he is." Ce'phas responded, his eyes still glued on the screen.

"I think he could be stronger than I am... based on Combat Expertise alone." As R'azak muttered this, he half looked at Ce'phas, whose eyes remained glued on the screen.

"Yeah. He'd definitely beat you..."

The bluntness and certainty that Ce'phas employed when addressing the issue slightly offended R'azak.

He couldn't believe his own comrade was so quick to dismiss his strength and not regard it as tentative.

Perhaps it was because of some sort of revenge, or maybe it was merely curiosity, that R'azak directed a question similar to the proposition towards his comrade.

"What about you? Do you think he's stronger than you are?"

"...."

With no response gotten, R'azak decided to go one step further and ask the question that would definitely get a reply.

"If you and him fought... who would win?"

It was at this point that Ce'phas finally took his eyes off the footage and gazed upon his fellow General.

He had a flawless smile that encapsulated everything about his position.

"I'd win."

"Why don't we kick things off with a big one?" R'azak raised his hand to the sky, a swirling pool of energy oozing out of it.

His broad smile was accompanied by crackling of energy that danced all around his body.

All in response to his starting Skill.

"[Absolute Thunderbolt Strike]."

This was a simple Skill with a rather straightforward function.

A bolt of lightning would descend from the sky as a result of it, and only one would manifest per use of Skill.

But... what made this Skill so deadly was the quality of that bolt of lightning.

~RUMBLE~

Not only was the level of damage it could wreak out of this world, but it moved so fast that it practically bypassed most defenses anyone could muster.

Before most could even realize what was going on, this Skill would have ended their lives.

Its Area Of Effect ranged from 500 Meters to 5,000 Meters, depending on how much energy was put into its activation.

And so, just because he could, R'azak set it to the maximum.

~RUMBLE!~

It descended only a second after activation.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!~

The flow of electrical currents rebounded loudly, as if signalling the demise of the unsuspecting Elves.

They would all be dead before they even heard the sound of the thing that would kill them.

It was too late.

~FSHIIIIII~

The rush of crimson lightning scattered just as it was about to reach the point of impact, which would have caused the devastation to spread far and wide within the community.

At the very least, a third of the land would have become completely pulverised.

But... the attack never landed.

"A barrier... huh?" R'azak commented, his eyes wide open as he witnessed a transparent foil of energy being unwrapped after the strike of his Skill.

"Seems It could only handle one of your Skill, but still... impressive." U'riah mumbled, observing as the rest of the barrier dissolved into thin air.

"Yeah. But who could have been fast enough to—"

"It must have been set up preemptively. Probably in preparation for a surprise attack like this."

"Yeah... yeah, I get it." R'azak appeared disappointed, and rightfully so.

The good news for the Generals was that, since the pesky defense was gone, they could finally attack the Community with full force.

The bad news, however, was...

"Here they come."

... They had lost the element of surprise.

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Chapter 710 The Great Elven War [Pt 6]

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

The sound of rumbling lightning sent the entire Esteemed Council in an uproar.

The imminent destruction that was averted by some unknown power was felt by every single Esteemed Elder, causing them to abruptly end their meeting.

"Did you hear that?!"

"Is that even a question? We all heard it!"

"Do you all feel it? The concentration of energy atop our Community?"

Panic spread across the Esteemed Ones, but the shout of a single one brought order to the Council.

"That's enough!"

Everyone instantly stopped with their shouts and looked in the direction of the Head Elder, who was looking up for a well-suspected reason.

"I feared that this day might come, but it is beyond escaping now..."

All the Elders stared at each other, and then gazed up so they could see and sense the same thing that the Head Elder did.

"The Dragons have arrived here."

Once she uttered those words, confirming the appearance of a threat that sent shivers running through the bodies of most of the Elves in the room, everyone gasped.

Still, there was no time for such frivolities.

"We have too many Youngs here to allow our sanctuary to fall. Everyone... be prepared for the fight of your lives!"

Despite how scared and reserved most of these Elders were, the moment they heard the call to duty, they all straightened their faces and nodded.

Every Elf knew how valuable their fellows were, and the duty they owed their Community.

Elders protected the Youngs, and the Youngs obeyed the Elders.

There was an equilibrium to be kept.

Right now...

"Let's go, my sisters! We will confront those vermin before they can further do harm to our people!"

... There was no time to think, no time to fret, and no time to doubt. All that mattered were their duties, and they were ready to fulfill it to the letter.

All of them... without exception!

"Here they come." R'azak said, watching as the energy from beneath them was swelling at an unnatural level.

It was clear that the Elves were gearing up to fight them.

"How many do you think will attack us?" He turned to U'riah, who was simply silent as his blue eyes constantly watched the Community.

"There are a few hundred thousand Elves here. Most of them are immature, referred to as Youngs." The more U'riah spoke, the brighter his blue eyes became.

"It makes sense, considering why the Elves never requested for ample backup when we had a major advantage..."

U'riah was currently using one of his Exclusive Skills: [Seer's Sight], which allowed him to witness and process a lot of visual information at an impossible pace.

At the moment, he was taking in a lot of things at once, translating all his findings in brief summaries.

The other two Generals kept quiet as they watched him.

Until—

"Should I send another round of—?"

"Don't waste your energy. There's no need to do any of that..." U'riah interrupted with a bright smile on his face.

The energy from beneath was swelling to a massive degree when the General completed his words.

"They're coming to us."

~WHOOOOOOOSH!!~

That very moment, several beams of energy, each containing varying elements shot up from the ground.

"Hehehehe!" Ce'phas chuckled to himself as he saw all of them, and the rest of the Generals braced themselves accordingly.

"Hahahahaahahaha!!!"

The several beams danced in the air, each going in multiple directions in order to strike the Dragons in many areas at once.

It was all useless, though.

"[Zero Contact]."

Once U'riah uttered the name of his Skill, the space around him—as well as the rest of his comrades—grew distorted, completely blocking off all the energies that would hit them.

The result?

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

A loud explosion, albeit nothing reaching the Generals.

Elves, about twelve of them, rushed into the sky once the explosion reverberated through the air.

Guided by Magic, each of them had intense Mana flowing out of their bodies. They circled the explosion, arms outstretched for the next volley of attack.

"Give it everything you have!" The oldest-looking among them, also recognized as their leader, let out a sharp cry.

None of the Elves hesitated in casting their Spells upon hearing the command.

Bursts of lightning, mixed with plumes of flames, supported by swirls of wind, danced out of their outstretched hands and shot straight for the target.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!~

The explosion was much larger than the previous one, and once the attack was sent from all sides, all flying Elves recoiled backwards before floating off to rendezvous with one another.

Seconds after, they were together in a group—surrounded by a powerful barrier that warbled with intense power.

All eyes were on the site of the explosion, with gazes focused past the smoke and what lay beyond. Despite such destructive efforts on their part, the Elves did not—for even one second—let down their guard.

They kept their eyes focused on—

"Hehehehehe..." A loud snicker began to echo from within the smoke.

"... Hahahahahahaha!"

In a single flash, before anyone could utter anything in response to the howls of laughter, the smoke cleared.

It seemed like a whirlwind was responsible for the dispersion of the thick clouds of remnant heat, but it wasn't at all.

That was nothing short of the manifestation of the energy of one of the Generals.

"Already established your defenses, huh? I'm impressed! You're certainly not dumb!" Ce'phas was the one who spoke out, and it seemed he was the one most excited for the battle to come.

The other two Generals coolly looked at their opponents with more observant eyes, but he didn't seem to care that they far outnumbered him and his comrades.

He was simply out for blood.

"So many of you... where to even start..." Ce'phas eyed the Elves one after the other, licking his lips in anticipation. "How about we each take four? There are a total of twelve, so it makes sense." U'riah muttered.

"I agree." R'azak responded with a sigh.

Usually, C'ephas would agree with them and reduce his bloodlust.

But no.

Not this time.

"I want to fight ten of them." Steam proceeded from his lips as he uttered those words.

Not even bothering to get confirmation from his fellow General, he readied himself for action with a big grin.

"You can handle the remaining two."