

Once Human 581

Chapter 581

For some time, words got stuck in Arthur's throat as he stared at the black-robed old man gazing back at him . The Dark Magic lingering in the area, which his body was strongly reacting to, was proof that this was not a mere hallucination .

"Z-Zodiak?"

The old man flashed a smile as he walked toward the dumbstruck parasite, his wrinkled face having an unusual serenity .

"We meet at last, Arthur . "

"W-what... how are you..."

He couldn't even ask a proper question due to the shock . He never expected to see a dead person here, much less Zodiak himself, in the flesh .

"I'm sure you're confused but before we begin, can you give me back something?"

The old man stretched his hand then continued:

"Sol'khin's cane, which you found near my corpse back on Astria . Please give it back . "

Arthur's mouth opened and closed a few times, not knowing what to do or say in this kind of ridiculous situation .

"This is a matter of utmost urgency, Arthur . "

Surprisingly, the parasite took out the creepy-looking cane and handed it to Zodiak, who inspected it then covered it with his Dark Magic, changing its color and causing it to pulsate with an ominous black light .

After dealing with the cane, Zodiak sighed and spoke again:

"I'm well aware that you kept some of my memories . Don't you think this place is a bit familiar?"

He turned around and pointed at the cindered rubble and broken down shack . Just as Zodiak said, Arthur's mind drifted to the faraway past, vivid images flashed inside his head . The shack was put on fire by a young and frail-looking boy, who, after doing the deed, left without ever looking back .

"This is your home? So this means that the whole city is also part of the past?"

"Yes . I have to say that Wolfram is highly skillful . To be able to recreate everything perfectly... it certainly isn't easy . "

Arthur kept a short silence before talking again:

"Wait... the person whom Lucy is met was you? You're with Forne with and the rest . "

Zodiak didn't deny anything, he just nodded his head while explaining .

\ "Indeed, I've entered the tower to end thing once for all . \ "

\ "End? As far as I know, Sol'khin is Leiu's problem . \ "

\ "You see, Arthur, when your brother was invaded by Timos' child, I was there . When the previous Death was killed, it jumped from the victim to the perpetrator . It was all a plan orchestrated by the Nameless Knight and Death to contain the monster . \ "

\ "Why does it have to be Leiu? \ "

\ "Because he's strong enough to contain Sol'khin . If it were any other person, they would have been completely controlled by him and the world would've been destroyed . \ "

\ "And how are you related to any of this? \ "

\ "How do you think Sol'khin became this strong? It's not just because he's the Black Devil's child . When the Dark Magic consumed my world, Sol'khin happened to be present and managed to devour the remnants, gaining some of my and your powers, hence his ability to possess hosts . In other words, it's my fault and I do not intend to rest until he's put down... even if it means killing your brother . \ "

Zodiak took another step, stopping exactly in front of Arthur . Despite his shorter height, the old man appeared rather calm even when getting glared at by the parasite .

\ "Don't give me that look, Arthur . It's either your brother or everyone else . By saving one, you're saving none . \ "

\ "Do you honestly think I and Wolfram will stand and watch you kill our brother? It's fine if you want to get rid of Sol'khin but that doesn't mean we'll throw Leiu's life . \ "

\ "I'm not saying we'll kill him . We'll be forced to only if the need arises, moreover, the probability of getting rid of the Nameless Knight is rather low so don't get so worked up . I know how much you treasure your brothers and family, however, when the time comes, whom will you choose... Lucy or Leiu? \ "

After saying that, Zodiak turned into a dark cloud and vanished from Arthur's sight .

\ "Damnit! \ "

Frustrated, Arthur punched the closest thing to him, which happened to be a still-standing yet fragile wall of the burned shack . His strike unleashed a lot of Dark Magic which consumed everything in its way and turned the whole area into an inky blackness, eerie and ominous .

After his little chat with Zodiak, Arthur toured the large city and discovered that there was a large number of soldiers, especially atop the 20m-high walls . They were fully armored and readying themselves for the upcoming invasion . Unfortunately, it wasn't really the case for the participants, who will most likely try to get pass through the Sky Door instead of facing the enemies .

Sure, there may be some who'll stay to secure some points but to risk their lives for this city is unreasonable .

A while ago, some royal knights appeared before Arthur and invited him to the castle, by the king's order, of course, though they were refused by the parasite, who wasn't interested in meeting anyone . Contrary to him, many of the contestants accepted the proposal and were given luxuriously accommodated in the royal castle . Exactly 287 of the 501 people accepted the invitation, the rest either entered an inn or wandered around .

Arthur was one of the people who stayed at an inn . He wasn't able to use his storage and use the gold inside, nonetheless, it wasn't that hard to rob a few coins from some wealthy, unaware merchants .

Coincidentally, the parasite happened to meet Ber Von Xin, the famous Sword God . At first, he wasn't going to greet him, much less talk to him but the latter was the one to initiate a conversation .

The sword user left his crowded table and sat down opposite of Arthur, who was drinking some beverage, lost in thought .

\ "Greetings, Mr . Arthur . \ "

Arthur snapped out of it when he heard an unfamiliar voice . He lifted his head and looked at the middle-aged man smiling at him . He had the demeanor and composure of a true expert, he was neither arrogant no aggressive .

\ "I suppose you're the Sword God . \ "

\ "Yes, it is I . I wanted to thank you for your help on the 3rd floor . You've saved us a lot of time . \ "

\ "It wasn't intentional but you're welcome . \ "

Arthur didn't behave coldly or ignore Ber Von Xin . He seemed to be an easy-going dude and, truthfully, it wasn't a bad idea to befriend a powerful individual such as a Sword God . At the very least, by forming a friendship with him, he won't have to worry about any interference in the foreseeable future .

\ "I have to say, I am a bit fan . \ "

Hearing this ridiculous statement, Arthur frowned .

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\ "Fan? \ "

\ "Yes, I witnessed what you did the Celestial Tribulation and, honestly, it left me with awe . If the circumstances were not so unfavorable, I would have invited you for a friendly spar... if you wouldn't mind, of course . \ "

\ "Ah, yes yes, unfortunately, we cannot do it here . \ " Arthur awkwardly scratched his head while replying .

The Sword God chuckled and raising his ale bottle toward Arthur . The parasite reciprocated then the two chugged down the alcohol, immersing themselves in the lively atmosphere of the restaurant .

For a short period of time, Arthur forgot about his worries and had some fun while talking with Ber Von Xin, who turned to be a really good and talkative guy . Basically, despite their different races and origins,

the two hit it off well, Arthur even managed to learn a few things about the participants and how the Red Tower works .

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"We will pass through the Sky Door the moment it appears . "

Forne calmly said, his gaze jumping from one person to another . There were multiple individuals facing him, all are part of a group and intend to take down Sol'khin . There was X, the Void Behemoth, G'am Tir, Lucy, and Celes . Zodiak was missing but he wasn't part of their 'alliance' though his intentions are similar to theirs .

"What about the city?"-Lucy

Hearing her out-of-the-blue question, the Black Seat frowned and retorted:

"What about it? Our job is to climb the tower and not protect an unknown territory . "

X also butted in, mockingly saying:

"Don't tell me you want to protect the people here?"

"No, I was just asking . "

Without even looking at the blurry-faced man, Lucy snorted and maintained her silence .

"Anyway, the enemy forces will siege this place at dusk, most likely . We'll move together and secure a safe path . "

After going through the rather simplistic and straightforward plan, they all dispersed, each minding their own business .

It has been two days since the contestants were teleported to this city and, from what the Red Tower said, the siege will occur very soon .

Some positioned themselves above the walls, along with the mix-raced soldiers, wanting to gain points and protect the city for some time . Others hid inside the city, unwilling to participate, their only goal was the Sky Door, which nobody knew how to it looked like or where it is .

One thing is for sure; the Sky Door is bound to appear with the alien race . It wasn't obligatory to kill or protect the city, however, it was highly advised to obtain some points for the sake of a better journey to the top floor as the goods from the Luxury Shop are useful and overpowered, even .

Arthur spent two days doing nothing in particular . At night, he'll chat for a bit with Ber Von Xin then go wander around the city, sometimes meeting participants lurking in dark places, doing shady and unnecessary things .

Time crept by and, finally, with the rising bright sun, D-day began . It all began with a loud alarm echoed across the whole city, waking up and soldiers and alerting all the inhabitants .

Excluding the contestants, there were quite a few distinguishable and strong characters standing atop the high walls . The city lord was one of them, he was adorned in a grey and thick armor, a dark gold helmet and a long two-handed white sword on his back .

Despite having their skills and techniques 'disabled', none of the present contestants is powerless... in fact, they should be able to annihilate the enemy forces if they all joined hands . Unfortunately, only a meager amount allied with the army while the rest stood at the back and watched the show .

As the light of the sun started to illuminate the dark sky, the ground started lightly shaking before it transformed into violent tremors . North-east, East, and South-east of the city, the terrain was rocky, making it rather disadvantageous to attack from there, so the aliens all came the West .

The thousands of archers prepared their arrows, some burning and others coated with poison or enhancement-magic, drastically increasing their damage . The wall was crowded with people, so was the ground, on which fifteen to twenty thousand soldiers unsheathed their weapons and raised their shields .

Arthur, who stood at the far edge of the wall, calmly looked at the beginning of this siege, his gaze lingering on the enemy forces . Their size was twice if not thrice that of beastmen and humans, they had four, six, or eight arms and their face is hideous, to say the least .

They brought with them a savage and barbaric red aura that affected anyone weak-willed and even affected the environment .

'Should've expected them to be here . '

"Master, they're different from the normal Cthulhu . They move in a precise formation and seem to be much more intelligent . "

The Quad-Spirit could see them clearly due to its high Earth Magic mastery . Through the shaking ground, it managed to study their marching formation and located what seemed to be the leaders .

'Intelligent or not, it matters not . Their creepy laughter and the nauseous smell of blood remains present . They're monsters . '

"It'll be harder than expected . The Sky Door is well-protected . "

Though he couldn't see what the spirit was talking about, Arthur still trusted its words .

Several minutes later, a looming shadow came from afar, bringing with it an enormous shadow reaching all the way to the high wall surrounding the city . Gargantuan Cthulhu were using chains to drag a massive black metal door, its height easily reached 50 meters if not more .

"Master, aren't you going to participate?"

'It's still too early . The big shots have not shown themselves either... well, except for that freak . '

As he replied to the Spirit, Arthur glanced at a green-haired woman standing at the front of the vanguard . She has unsheathed her sword and laughing while waiting for the Cthulhu to come closer . Right behind her, there was the mage Tula, the dwarf, the thief, and two others . One was a woman

wearing a long white and red robe, a priest, from the looks of it, while the other was a tall and muscular man covered in blue tattoos .

'Have you found any traces of Zodiak?'

\ "No, he's either not in the city or in a place void of Earth and Fire . \ "

'Tsk!'

Arthur clicked his tongue, feeling a bit uneasy . Ever since he found out that Zodiak is alive and kicking, he couldn't sit still . Furthermore, that old man wants to kill Sol'khin too, making him sort of Arthur's enemy .

Unlike Celes, X, and the rest, Zodiak is different in a way that can threaten Arthur .

The parasite still had some of his reincarnation's memories so he knew what the old man is capable of with Dark Magic alone . His attainment in that malevolent ability is nothing short of extraordinary .

Sure, Arthur can utilize Dark Magic well too but many of Zodiak's skills didn't get passed to him . For example, the ability to dodge attacks by changing parts of your body into an untouchable form such as gas or liquid .

It sounds simple but it allowed Zodiak to counter many, many enemies, easily passing through ultimate attacks and forbidden spells . The White Tiger's skill is similar to this but it's temporary and costs an absurd amount of Mana and Nether Energy .

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Unlike Maxine's party, the soldiers remained next to the wall, their job was only to protect the city walls . The first clash happened between her team and the closest Cthulhu, which were the typical ones but seemed more cooperative as they quickly surrounded the team of six and threw long javelins .

The young-looking mage, Tula, retaliated almost immediately, his lips spelling one incantation after another at an insane speed . The ground became slippery, making half of the nearby Cthulhu fall then, it transformed into mud before instantaneously hardening, immobilizing the targets .

The Red Tower did indeed disable the skills of Tula, however, this world is still considered a Magic world that has an abundance of Mana . As long as he repeats the necessary incantation, it is still possible to use a weaker version of his usual skills, however, this method doesn't work on everything . Ultimate skills that can obliterate half of this Cthulhu army should be inaccessible .

Maxine and the rest followed, each taking out five to six enemies at once . The flashiest ones were the green-haired woman and the armored dwarf, each taking a direction and started a destructive rampage .

The leader, even without her sword and martial skills, she was able to devastate the enemy lines, beheading several of these monstrosities with one swing . It has to be said that her sword mastery is nothing to scoff at, it should be a level above Sword Saint but a bit lower than Sword God .

In the other direction, the dwarf's axe rumbled as it struck the ground, splitting the earth and opening a bottomless hole that swallowed all the targets around him . Unlike their teammates, the thief, priest, and the shaman didn't attract much attention as they withheld their power and acted with caution .

The priest rarely attacked and preserved the stored Holy Energy for emergency situations . As for the thief, he was like a ghost, appearing behind the large Cthulhu and slitting their throats with one clean slash .

"What's the deal with the one at the back?"

Arthur stared at the guy with blue tattoos, wondering what he's doing exactly . Instead of attacking or supporting his comrades, he went around and erected some runic pillars that were half of his height . They surrounded him like a circle and once he started chanting with his closed, they vibrated and flashed with the same color as his tattoos .

"Shamans are basically people who forsake their consciousness for a much greater affinity for all the elements . They lose the chance to reach a high cultivation stage but for players, they rely on Levels so it's a win-win situation . In addition to having a vast arsenal of strong elemental skills, they can summon totems that act like a stationary turret shooting targets . "-Quad-Spirit

"Yes yes, I know that but isn't it supposed to be impossible to use skills?"

"Shamans, like druids, communicate with the nature therefore, the only skills they have are meant for support . He doesn't need the System to unleash offensive and defensive skills, which are mostly reliant on those small totems . "

In a minute or so, more than a hundred Cthulhu were defeated, however, Maxine's group couldn't stop the full assault of the enemy forces . Their attacks were devastating but the more they killed, the more Cthulhu surrounded them, elevating their threat level from the alien's point of view .

Thousands of Cthulhu rushed at the city walls, soon clashing with the soldiers, causing the ground to start turning red and the smell of blood to scatter across the whole battlefield .

As they advanced too much, Maxine and her comrades were at a great disadvantage, especially when the strong variants of Cthulhu made their appearance . One of them was very familiar to Arthur, a tall monster with a humanoid form, a skin that resembled a Dark Elf and two golden eyes . it held a red bow and looked exceptionally calm as it pulled the metal string, resulting in an arrow of light to start forming .

His target was Maxine's party, which seemed to be unaware of it . Back in Riaravar, Arthur fought this kind of Cthulhu, which is able to talk and assess the situation quite well to determine whether it's better to flee or fight .

Fifteen seconds quickly passed by and a whistling arrow that was over 4m in length was fired at the small and crowded area where Maxine and co were . The blow will not only kill its kin, it's bound to get rid of its enemies too, or so thought the massive Cthulhu Archer .

Right before the arrow was about to hit them, Maxine jumped in the air and stabbed her sword exactly at the top of the arrow made of light . It seemed to be such a simple movement yet it managed to instantly divert the arrow in the opposite direction, sending it back to the shooter .

The golden-eyes monster swayed to side, dodging the incoming arrow then he started bombarding the players with more arrows, weaker than the first one but much faster . A downpour of arrows descended upon the team, some successfully hit the dwarf, who drifted a bit far from his comrades, and the rest was blocked by a thick layer of water cast by Tula .

The armored dwarf was unharmed even after getting hit, he cursed out loud then swiftly got up and madly spun around, sending all the Cthulhu around him flying in the air .

As for the bow-wielding Cthulhu, its arrows were blocked by Tula and, to make matters worse, it became the main focus of the four totems erected by the Shaman . These small, unimpressive runic pillars each released a uniquely colored smoke before unleashing thin beams of light right at the monster .

Before it could dodge or react, the beams hit its chest and created fatal gaping holes, ending the Cthulhu's life within seconds . This wasn't the end of this totems as after pausing for ten to fifteen seconds, they fired again, taking dozens of Cthulhu at once and clearing the area a bit .

As the participants saw how well Maxine's team was doing, they joined the fray and started killing left and right, though some had awfully effective methods . Amongst them, Arthur noticed a guy standing atop the wall and throwing javelins made of light . The shocking thing was how fast he's doing it and how powerful they actually were .

Before the first javelin reaches its target, the second and third ones were already thrown . Not only that, the light javelin would vanish only after it impaled three to four Cthulhu . This lancer was wearing a long robe which covered his head and hid his face .

Arthur had seen him in the waiting room, he was chatting with two other people also wearing white robes . His supposed comrades were nowhere to be seen, however .

'It's such a shame that I can't use Appraisal . '

With that precious skill, he'll be able to inspect everyone and know a few things . Judging based on appearance won't work and there's no telling who wishes to harm him amongst all the present contestants .

\ "Master, here they come! \ "

As the Quad-Spirit spoke, a group jumped from the wall, they were all enveloped by a thick grey fog but you could still their silhouette . Arthur didn't need a confirmation to know that it's Forne and the rest .

The fog was the result of Celes' Physique and the red particles enveloping it was the infamous destruction magic .

Indeed, when the group amidst a clustered group of Cthulhu, the area exploded, leaving a large crater . This wasn't the end as ground heavily shook then, like an eruption, a lot of magma sprung from below, melting the monsters in a diagonal line .

Without wasting any time, they dashed at the Sky Door far away, wrecking everything in their way . Whether it was the tall Cthulhu Archers or the gargantuan club-wielding ones, they didn't stand a chance against them .

The Void Behemoth took the front, its body becoming massive, bigger even than Cthulhu dragging the door . It spat purple orbs which expanded in size then exploded, devouring everything in the area, literally leaving nothing but an eerie emptiness .

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In just a few minutes, a clear and clean path was created after the total obliteration caused by Forne and the rest . The ground was turned into lava, the air filled with exploding red particles and the purple orbs which acted as some sort of black holes, sucking everything close to them . The usually mindless Cthulhu didn't recklessly charge at them after witnessing this bloody massacre, their forces slowly backed away, shocking obvious signs of dread .

The tall and golden-eyes ones kept firing arrows which decayed before they even crossed half the distance . So, just like that, Forne's team arrived before the Sky Door within three minutes, more or less .

The giants dragging the massive chains weren't able to defend themselves so they were cruelly killed by the rampaging Void Behemoth, which ripped their heads, leaving nothing but lifeless and headless corpses .

The gigantic metal door stopped its advance and remained tightly shut while facing the destruction magic of the Black Seat of Death .

"It seems we need more firepower to force it open ."

He motioned for 'X' and G'am Tir, who haven't participated in the battle against the Cthulhu . The enemies grew warier when they saw Lucy and co attempt to enter the door, causing the far away generals to personally step in .

Silhouettes that were 3 to 4 meters tall rushed at the group, their speed insanely faster, to the point where you could only see a black shadow .

"We'll deal with them . Begin with haste!"

Forne jumped in the air and performed a simple punch in the air, causing the sky to rumble and an absurd explosion to occur, momentarily stopping the incoming generals . When they were struck by the explosion, Forne was able to see their appearances, which was drastically different than the normal Cthulhu or the humanoid archers .

Their skin was jet black and they wielded curved red blades, moreover, there were dark red flashing crowns above their heads .

In total, there were three of these generals, two coming from the front and tried to stealthily attack from the back . Celes, Lucy, and Forne took one each while the rest prepared for the big blow meant for the Sky Door, which is very difficult to open using brute force .

"Insect-like livestock!"

One of the generals spoke with a ghastly voice as its body blurred, almost melting into nothingness .

\ "Hmpf! We'll see about that!\ "

Forne was like a raging beast, shooting into the sky and unleashing one explosion after the other, turning the luminous canopy into a scarlet curtain filled with cracks .

Celes didn't pale in comparison as she made full use of her rare Death Physique . Despite not having access to her techniques, the Death Magic released from her body was enough to push away the invisible general, forcing it to maintain distance and only circle around, trying to find an opening that he won't find any time soon .

The only one who slightly struggled was Lucy and that was only because she was hiding her true powers such as the Yin Physique and the fusion flame . There's also Lonely Moon but it was stored in her ring, which was currently disabled, unfortunately .

The black-skinned general descended upon the White Specter like meteor, continuously waving its blades at Lucy, leaving her no time to retaliate . Its attacks were fast and precise, mainly aimed at her vital parts, though, due to her unusually resilient body, the successful hits didn't do any severe damage .

\ "Why isn't she attacking?\ "

Celes, who was standing at the same spot, frowned upon seeing Lucy in a difficult situation . She mumbled with a low voice but the supposedly busy 'X' chuckled and replied with a crisp voice:

\ "Wait for it... wait for it!\ "

He raised his head and stared at the bloody sky, where you could see numerous mushroom clouds .

Thirty seconds later, Lucy's clothes became bloodied from all the injuries she received, nonetheless, her movements remained oddly monotonous . Either crossing her arms to block or dashing away from the general, which was enjoying this exciting hunt, contrary to the other two .

Even Arthur, who was watching from afar, wasn't worried about Lucy . Just like 'X', he stared at the sky and smiled, already knowing what's going to happen .

\ "I expected no less from the Madam . \ "

The Quad-Spirit, having a strong affinity to Earth and Fire, was the first to grasp what's going to happen .

Right after it spoke, the clouded red sky was split in two by a massive descending projectile . It was an absurdly large meteor covered in magma, its sheer size and speed added more to its pressure .

Even the explosions repeatedly occurring in the sky did nothing to the massive boulder, which seemed to distort space itself .

\ "Oi oi, I said take it fucking easy!\ "

Seeing the meteor coming straight at where he was, Forne panicked and loudly cursed before an ear-piercing explosion to push himself far away .

The Grey Seat of Decay remained on her spot for several seconds before snapping out of it and enveloping herself in a fog, appearing next to the Void Behemoth, which roared loudly and raised a spheric violent barrier, which seemed to be strong enough to absorb anything .

The only ones exposed to the meteor were the two still-alive generals and the rest of the Cthulhu that were too slow and clustered together to escape in time .

When the magma-filled rock finally crashed into the earth, the destruction preceded the deafening sound of the explosion . Large bubbles of magma flew into the air before hitting dozens of those hideous monsters, melting them on the spot .

The radius of the meteor was no less than two hundred meters so the devastation it caused was seriously no joke . When dust covered the area and the temperature dramatically rose, you could hear nothing but an eerie quietness .

Whether it's the defending soldiers or the Cthulhu, they weren't able to process what happened . Everything resumed its course when the agonizing cries of the enemies were heard, surely caused by the spreading Lava which turned the whole earth into a ground where no one could walk on .

Even the closed Sky Door opened was 20% opened but after a few seconds, it started closing again . Thankfully, 'X', G'am and the Void Behemoth already finished preparing the blow .

The behemoth supplied G'am Tir with an unlimited amount of Void Magic, which in his turn, the ex-Emperor converted it into a black liquid .

As for 'X', he hesitated for a brief moment before retrieving a minuscule coin from his pocket .

"It's such a waste to use it on the door... *sigh*"

Albeit his unwillingness, 'X' still carried his task and threw the coin at the door, causing it to stop closing . The coin emitted a loud clicking sound then went through the opened crack and expanded in size, becoming as big as the Sky Door .

Thanks to whatever 'X' threw, the door was unable to close due to the coin making it remain in that semi-opened state . The final touch was initiated by G'am Tir, who, after chanting a few incomprehensible verses, splattered in liquid on the ground .

Like some sort of a sentient being, the liquid rose in the air then transformed into a faceless and extremely short humanoid . It was made of the black liquid and behaved childishly .

G'am Tir pointed at the door while talking to the short black humanoid, which responded with actions rather needlessly talking .

It released creepy laughter before flying toward the massive door, its hands raising in the air and grabbing an enlarged needle that appeared from within his liquefied chest .

The 'boy' stabbed the black needle on the door before disappearing . Seconds later, the needle exploded, unleashing purple tentacle-like things which covered the whole door and, surprisingly, devoured it whole, leaving nothing but a welcoming entrance for the participants .

Without wasting any more time, Forne and the rest went through the Sky Door and disappeared from everyone's view . Though, right behind them, several clever participants followed their footsteps, not caring about the incoming Cthulhu that wanted to block their path .

\ "Still no signs of Zodiak? \ "

\ "Are you fond of talking to yourself? \ "

Right after he asked the Quad-Spirit, a dark cloud descended from the sky, landing right next to the startled parasite .

An old man wearing a tattered grey robe revealed himself, his face riddled with wrinkles and his pupils contained some sort of primordial darkness that brought fear to anyone who stared back at them .

\ "Took you long enough . \ "-Arthur

\ "Long enough for what? I was watching the battle, just like you... just from a much higher viewpoint . \ "

Arthur glanced at his reincarnation and spoke after a brief silence .

\ "Aren't you going to through the Sky Door? \ "

\ "It's still too early for that, don't you think so? \ "

\ "Don't you want to climb to the top floor in order to get rid of Sol'khin? \ "

Hearing this, the old man chuckled and retorted:

\ "Unlike that impatient boy, I have to do things in order . Did you know? Each floor has a meaning but not all are meant for one person . \ "

Zodiak looked at the rumbling sky before continuing: \ "And I believe this one is for me . \ "

\ "What can you hope to achieve by staying here? Earn points? \ "

\ "Absolution, my dear benefactor . What I could not do in the past, I shall do now . \ "

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\ "You have to be careful, Arthur, there are some powerful individuals who want to bury you in this tower . \ "

Zodiak looked at the man next to him, his expression containing genuine concern .

\ "Since when were you a person to worry about another's well being? \ "-Arthur

Zodiak switched the subject by saying: \ "The Holy Dominion is stronger than it looks . You would think they gave up after suffering multiple defeats but that's definitely not the case . Even if they have to sacrifice one of their strongest warriors... as long as you're dead, it's worth it for them . \ "

Hearing this, Arthur frowned and questioned the old man:

\ "Just what sort of enmity do I have with them? \ "

\ "Enmity? There's no such thing . That's just how they are, never accepting things like Dark Magic, Demons...\ "

The old man let out a sigh before continuing: \ "When I was publicly alive, they chased me but couldn't capture me because I didn't have any weaknesses . Family, friends, they'll use everything to get to you, which is why you have to end it once for all . For everyone's sake . \ "

\ "I don't why all of you have such a high opinion of me . I'm not going to wander around and massacre every one... I don't think I have enough power to do that . \ "

As he listened to grumpy Arthur, Zodiac heartily laughed, finding what Arthur said quite ironic considering what the parasite had done in the past .

\ "I'm not responsible for you or what happens in the future . The advice was given and it's up to you whether to accept it or ignore it . \ "

\ "Max! The gate is open, let's roll!\ "

The thief appeared behind the leader of the group and shouted with a deafening, causing the green-haired woman to violently smack him .

\ "I told you to stop doing that!\ "

While rubbing his aching head, the thief stood up, looking quite miserable .

\ "There's no end to them and we can't use potions!\ "

Though they were doing very well in eliminating the attacking Cthulhu, these players can't fight forever due to the restrictions put by the Red Tower . Fortunately, none were injured by the blast from the earlier meteor did push all six a distance away from their prior battle area .

\ "Leader, Rody is right, the strong ones are showing themselves . We won't be able to handle all of them . \ "

Tula calmly spoke, his blue eyes gazing at dozens of tall black-skinned monsters dashing towards them .

Almost all the contestants were heading toward the opened Sky Door, unwilling to spend more time than needed on this floor . Yes, each and every one of them was an expert, however, even after Lucy's attack, the number of Cthulhu didn't diminish . In fact, it seemed to have doubled or triple and the golden-eyes archers became much more numerous .

The unstoppable arrows hit the walls of the city, slowly crumbling it and killing many of the elven archers firing from the top . On the ground, the battle grew fiercer as dwarves and humans clashed with the Cthulhu, which were physically stronger than their counterparts .

\ "Fucking cowards! Go ahead, I'll catch up . \ "

Max cursed at her teammates but in response, they glanced at each other before acting up, each one of them holding of Maxine's limbs and dragging her with them . She tried freeing herself but it was totally futile as Tula and the Shaman cast some binding magic, further immobilizing her .

A few minutes later, with the dwarf leading the way, Maxine's group enter the Sky Door and vanished . The path to the door was relatively empty as many of the participants were in that area, clearing any nearby enemies and going to the 5th floor . The only ones left were the greedy ones who wanted to gain more points .

Oddly enough, there were some who still have not acted and only stood at the top of the western wall of the city .

Arthur looked at Ber Von Xin, who was holding a simple wooden sword and slashing his enemies with ease . Unlike the flashy attacks everyone uses, his movements were simple and only took down one or two enemies at once, however, he faced no difficulties and was going around finishing one target after the other, showing no signs of going to the Sky Door .

...

An hour later, the situation suddenly shifted to the Cthulhu's favor as the sky turned jet black and the sun's light vanished, making the defenders unable to grasp what's around them or who's attacking . The fifty or so remaining contestants grew uneasy as ghastly laughter echoed across the whole floor, bringing shivers even to the strong willed ones .

Arthur, however, find this dramatic change shocking as he recognized this ominous darkness .

\ "As I told you before, each floor is meant for a person . What you're seeing now is the result of a Dark Magic explosion, something more dreadful than even your Dark Rizaki . It happened on its own though I was the origin . It basically devoured everything before Sol'khin got his hands on it . \ "

As Zodiak was recounting the tragic past, the contestants gave up on fighting and entered the Sky Door . The Sword God jumped high in the air then, like a shooting luminous star, headed straight into the entrance .

The last one was the mysterious lancer, who shot out a big bright javelin straight at the door but this one wasn't meant to eliminate an enemy but rather as a transportation . Just as he threw it, he swiftly jumped on it, soon disappearing into the door like all the rest, leaving only Zodiak and Arthur .

Of course, the soldiers and the city lord were still present, however, amongst the participants, only the parasite and his reincarnation were here, still unscathed .

\ "It seems the Dark Magic spoiled it... aren't you going to leave? \ "

Zodiak curiously asked the silent and motionless Arthur, his brow creasing .

\ "Hmpf! Why ask when you already know the answer? \ "

\ "You've always been bad with showing emotions . Is it really wrong to have compassion, sympathy, and pity? Why can't you do things because you want to rather think of a million reasons not to? \ "

With the appearance of Dark Magic, it wasn't only the mix-raced soldiers who were affected, the Cthulhu were vulnerable too . The siege was halted and only the dark-skinned generals or the golden-eyes archers maintained their deadly attacks .

You could hear the wails of the defenseless soldiers and continuous explosions sounds caused by the destructive arrows shot by the humanoid Cthulhu .

Despite the ever-lasting gloom shrouding the floor, both Arthur and Zodiac were able to see very clearly as the Dark Magic was having no effect on them . At last, both jumped from atop the wall and landed amidst the flailing soldiers, which were being sucked by the darkened earth .

Zodiac took out a long staff and stabbed it on the ground, causing the devouring effect to stop immediately . The half-conscious soldiers were then magically teleported out of the battlefield, literally leaving only the old man and the parasite facing the thousands of confused monsters and their snickering leaders .

The normal, hideous Cthulhu were of no problem to the two dark magic users, however, the generals and commanders sitting at the back were a real headache . Furthermore, the real boss still has not shown himself... like everything existing here, he also belonged to the past and is but a fragment of his real self, nevertheless, he's still an entity that should not be underestimated .

"I guess it's the first time we're going to fight together . "

Hearing this, Arthur shrugged his shoulders, uninterested .

"Seems like it . "

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Unlike with the usual Dark Magic, neither Arthur nor Zodiac were able to absorb it, however, it didn't take long for it to slowly contract into a singular black sphere floating far away above the enemy forces . This sphere was actually an entity known as Sol'khin, the first son of Timos, the Black Devil .

He was only a fragment of the past but that doesn't mean he can't hurt them . Quite the contrary, in fact, this Sol'khin is not only strong but he's dangerous to both Arthur and Zodiac, who can only rely on Dark Magic, which basically what the current enemy is made of .

"Come to think of it, I have always noticed a difference between Arthur and Zodiac's Dark Magic . "

The Joker commented while watching the two individuals facing the countless disoriented Cthulhu .

"Technically, it's the same Dark Magic but it's indeed that the difference is rather huge . "

Leiu, who was also watching the unfolding events on the 4th floor, explained, his chilling gaze lingering on past Sol'khin .

"Zodiac relies on the Spirituality of Dark Magic, making it less effective in fast battles . He can feed off the opponent's fear to recover while Arthur uses his Dantian . However, that is only a slight different, the truth lies behind the effects of each one's Dark Magic . Arthur's can consume things... a bit like Void Magic . As for Zodiac's, it is more like a permanent curse... something that, once it touches something, never... ever, disappears . "

"You think Arthur's was affected by his Void Magic?"

"It must be, after all, the two have a lot of similarities . The reason I consider Zodiac's Dark Magic as more lethal is because he only focused on it while Arthur uses multiple types of Magic due to his race ."

...

The first to attack was Zodiac, who transformed into a large dark cloud which enveloped hundreds of Cthulhu, floating from one area to another, leaving nothing but blackened and lifeless bodies of the aliens .

As for Arthur, he took a more frontal tactic, charging at the nearby golden-eyes archer and unleashing an absurd amount of Dark Magic . A wave of rising darkness emanated from his body, shrouding part of the sky then falling like a tsunami, engulfing four archers and even one of those invisible and fast generals .

When the darkness vanished, the dark-skinned Cthulhu was still alive but unable to move . His body convulsed on the ground, a dark fog coming out of all his pores, he has clearly been consumed by Dark Magic and will perish very soon .

The onslaught continued for ten to twenty minutes, in which the army of Cthulhu was totally massacred . The city lord watching from afar was flabbergasted, not knowing whether to celebrate or evacuate . Though they were killing the enemies, the magic they were using seemed more evil and malicious than those hideous monsters .

While Zodiac was feeding off the fear of the fleeing Cthulhu to replenish his Dark Magic, Arthur could only rely on the amount stored inside the black talisman inside his body .

Just when the last one of the enemies was about to fall, the dormant Sol'khin finally made his move . A suffocating pressure was unleashed by the floating sphere, which was quickly followed by a devastating and lightning fast that struck Arthur instantaneously .

The parasite wasn't even able to dodge and ended up being sent flying until he crashed into the thick city wall . The black sphere started heading toward the two while initiating another invisible attack toward the fallen parasite, though before it managed to hit him, Zodiac intervened, creating a black cube which trapped the unseen Sol'khin and blocked his attack .

"Be careful, he not only can use our Dark Magic but has your abilities too?"

"What do you mean my abilities? Wh-"

Before Arthur could finish, the black cube shattered into pieces and, from inside, a black wolf descended from the sky . Its body covered in black flames and its eyes were shining with a scarlet, malevolent light .

"What is this? Both Zodiac and Arthur here... isn't it a fortunate encounter?"

A ghastly voice came out of the wolf's mouth . It slowly walked toward the old man and the parasite, its eyes locked onto its two targets .

"The soul is separated, it's a perfect opportunity for me to eat it whole!"

As he finished speaking, Sol'khin shot at them with an absurd speed . Zodiac jumped in again, slapping two talismans on the ground before pointing his staff at the incoming wolf .

In the meantime, Arthur successfully imitated [Eternium] without having to resort to the disabled System . His body became covered in Dark Flames, boosting his physical and magical powers for some time .

Zodiac unleashed countless intertwining black threads at Sol'khin, stopping his mad charge, then he jumped to the back while bombarding the enemy with dozens of dark and lengthy spikes .

Sol'khin's body changed, becoming a rat, easily dodging the spikes but the talismans that hit the ground did a great job at hindering him . Like moving sand, the rat was pulled by the blackened and corrupted earth, drastically slowing its speed .

Arthur used this opportunity to attack, making great use of his sky-high stats to rain down punches and kicks at the defenseless rat . Finding it disadvantageous to be a rat, Sol'khin changed into a large rhino but his limbs were still stuck into the moving ground, causing him to recent all of Arthur's ruthless and devastating attack .

The parasite's fists cracked the rhino's armor and were about to finish it but it suddenly unleashed a burst of Hell flames which forced Arthur to retreat .

His resistances were gone now so the flames damaged him, nevertheless, he didn't suffer any fatal wounds .

Fortunately, Arthur backed off in time as Sol'khin pretty much turned this place into a purgatory, dying both the sky and ground into dark red flames that incinerated everything . Even the Western wall of the city crumbled within seconds, burning hundreds of soldiers to death .

The city lord positioned the mages to a safer place then ordered them to create as much water as possible to stop the flames of hell, which were spreading way too fast . At this pace, in less than an hour, the whole city will be turned into cinders .

Zodiac became a dark cloud and rose high-up in the sky, merging with the clustered red clouds . In just ten seconds, an unusual rain took place, black droplets fell on the hell flame, extinguishing it and causing Sol'khin to yell in agony as the strange liquid was hurting him .

Seeing no purpose using the hell flame anymore, Sol'khin changed into another attribute . His body became that of a blue phoenix with massive crystalline wings . Arthur stared at this form with shock, not understanding what's happening:

"That is not something I possessed . "

Zodiac grumbled and retorted:"Who said he only has your abilities?"

"Fuck . "

The moment the blue Phoenix made its appearance, the temperate fell down and the suffocating heat was no longer present . Instead, a blizzard made its appearance, not only canceling Zodiac's black rain but also freezing the ground and causing Arthur's body to become extremely slow .

Even when he tried activating his Dark Magic, it didn't work . Zodiac was able to cope as flew around in the dark cloud form but when he attacked using Dark Magic, it would vanish before even reaching Sol'khin .

It was at this moment that the Quad-Spirit took action, making good use of its strong Fire powers .

The area was soon split into sides, one was a world of fire while the other a freezing blizzard . The blue phoenix screeched and waved its massive wings as it faced off against a humanoid covered in fire .

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"Another plate to the table!"

Sol'khin snickered as he unleashed a freezing burst which extinguished the fire and pushed the quad-spirit, it then followed with a skill similar to [Absolute Zero], turning the whole area into a gigantic block of ice . Even Arthur was instantly frozen though he managed to break it in a few seconds . Zodiac wasn't as lucky as the flying cloud became sky-blue then crashed into the ground, no longer being in its untouchable state .

However, it wasn't that easy to defeat Arthur's spirit, which is proficient in more than one or two attributes .

It quickly got back up, pulled a golden spear from the ground before facing the blue phoenix again . A dark armor materialized around its flaming body and a grey crown appeared above its head, drastically transforming its appearance .

Sensing a bit of danger from the spirit, Sol'khin gave up the phoenix form and changed into a more ridiculous appearance . A golden and blinding brilliance emanated from his body, he seemed like an unshakable statue, motionless but extremely deadly .

"Buddha?"-Arthur

Seeing this ludicrous sight, Arthur's shock deepened, even feeling a bit of helplessness . He glanced at Zodiac and found him back on his feet but, strangely, he seemed to be in a not-so-good condition .

Buddha and the quad-spirit clashed with each other, shaking the whole floor and causing unprecedented devastating . A third of the Western part of the city was destroyed but there were few if no casualties thanks to the lord's quick evacuation .

It was clear that there's no room for normal soldiers to join this battle of giants so the city lord wisely ordered the retreat of all the forces to the royal castle, where most of the citizens were too . There's no telling what will be left of the city once everything ends and the safest area is the castle, which is protected by a tough magical barrier constantly being nourished by more than 500 mages .

Sol'khin continued to defend using Buddha's golden light, easily blocking the spirit's attacks of four combined attributes and, at some point, it retaliated, firing a thick blast from the heavens . It struck the unsuspecting spirit, pinned it on the ground and not only shattered the dark armor but also broke the crown in two pieces .

Before any further damage was done, Arthur intervened by conjuring two dark hands that appeared above the spirit and blocked the rest . Half-conscious, the spirit automatically returned to its owner

consciousness after its best . If the floor didn't restrict the skills and techniques, it could have defeated Sol'khin but, unfortunately, it isn't the case right now .

The situation soon returned to the beginning with Zodiac and Arthur battling Sol'khin .

\ "He's going to change again as Buddha's magic is vulnerable against Dark Magic . \ "-Zodiac

Who, after coughing a bit of black blood, returned to a healthier state, straightened his back and warned Arthur . Right after his warning, the ginormous Buddha statue vanished, leaving in its place a dense fog that blocked their visions .

A few seconds later, black wings that were, at least, 200 meters in length, rose high up in the sky, followed by a deafening dragon roar . Before Sol'khin's appearance was shown, the ground started heavily shaking and the gravity became ten times stronger, causing Zodiac's body to fall while Arthur managed to resist thanks his high affinity with Earth Magic . The skills were disabled attribute affinities are an inborn thing and, thanks to his race, he has a high affinity with all the basic attributes .

\ "What the hell are they doing?!\"

Celes, who was along with the others in the waiting room, looked at the big screen displaying the events happening on the 4th floor currently . Not only here but everyone who passed through the Sky Door was teleported here and waiting for the last two to come so the next task is given . Sadly, both Arthur and Zodiac showed no signs of passing through the door and only focused on taking down whatever that shape-shifting monster was .

\ "This isn't part of the plan . \ "

Even the usually calm Forne was troubled, letting out a helpless sigh as he watched his friend Zodiac persistently attack Sol'khin .

\ "That one is fake, I don't see the purpose in even fighting it . If the Sky Door is destroyed then they'll be disqualified... is that even worth it?\"

'X' also butted in, kind of feeling annoyed over Zodiac's selfishness . He didn't care about Arthur as he wasn't part of the plan but Zodiac was crucial to the success of their task, especially the cane in his possession .

G'am Tir maintained his usual silence while the Void Behemoth was growling while looking at the screen . Lucy stood to the side, her fists clenched, regretting not staying there to lend a hand even at the cost of exposing herself . If Arthur is out then there is no need for her to continue climbing the tower either, which is why she was so frustrated right now .

Dozens of meters away, in a corner filled with buzzing flies and crawling insects, Hach'ara enjoyed some of the presented fruits while enjoying the show . His eyes were glued on Zodiac and Arthur, wondering how they are related .

Their appearance may be different but their actions were oddly similar, though it takes a sharp perception to notice that .

\ "I see... hahahaha\ "

He started crazily laughing, not minding the weird gazes he was getting . The insect and poison master was not the only one who noticed the similarities in action and in soul .

Ber Von Xin sipped some of medicinal tea he just prepared while focusing on the grey-robed old man . His serene eyes contained a deep glint as they jumped from one target to another, seemingly able to fathom everything .

\ "What's wrong, uncle?\ "

Saly, who was biting her nails, happened to see the pale-faced youth crush the chair's handle as he watching the fight happening on the 4th floor .

Only when he heard her voice did he snap out of it and dismissively wave her hand to indicate that it's nothing .

\ "Leave him be! He's just excited to see your father fight . \ "

\ "Is that so?\ "

Wild and powerful sound waves reverberated across the whole area, splitting the ground and dramatically changing the terrain . Zodiak was shaken off balance as he was busy chanting a spell, causing him to fall and roll on the slippery and unsteady ground .

\ "What's wrong? No more Dark Magic?\ "

Seeing the weak state of the old man, Arthur became confused, not understanding why such an earthquake managed to get him .

In response, Zodiak grunted and held onto one of the rock, barely saving himself from falling into the abyss down below . Unfortunately, it was at that time that an absurdly massive black dragon showed itself, its golden eyes glaring at the weakened old man .

It opened its mouth and fired a strange black blast which was different from Dark Magic .

When it was about to hit Zodiak, several thick dark walls appeared in the air, stopping the blast while Arthur slid down and caught Zodiak's hand .

\ "Huh! Who would have thought!\ "

Seeing the hand tightly holding his own, Zodiak commented . Arthur snorted and pulled the old man while swiftly climbing the slope and landing on the steady ground .

\ "Is there any reason to save me?\ "-Zodiak

With his back facing the standing old man, Arthur stabbed his hands on the ground while answering:

\ "Is there any reason not to?\ "

Hearing this, Zodiac chuckled and removed his over-sized grey robe, revealing tight and black leather clothes fitting for a martial artist .

\ "In the end, we are very alike, don't you think?\" -Zodiac

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While listening to the other's rambling, Arthur smirked and manipulated the Dark Magic . Six hundred meters away, precisely where the Sky Door was, the ground turned jet black and countless black spikes sprung from within, stabbing every part of the door and corrupting it .

Within seconds, the enormous and opened door vanished, causing the previously given task to end, at last .

*All the contestants who managed to pass through the Sky Door will be teleported to the 5th floor . The restrictions will be lifted shortly . *

Chapter 588: 588

FLASHBACK

\ "What do you mean 'go do whatever I want'?\"

Arthur looked at the two-colored crow named Bilgart, not quite understanding his words .

In response, the Watcher flew down from the tree and landed on a rock just next to Arthur, its two strange eyes focusing on the man it created and basically raised for a few years .

\ "You don't have to go around doing this and that . Even for an undying person, life is always too short and it's wasteful to do nothing but fight for peace . \"

\ "So I'm just supposed to give up on everything? Is that what you really want me to do?\"

\ "Give up? Of course not . Just be responsible for your actions and do not mind the others . Take your family and go live somewhere quiet, a place utterly void of wars and conflict . You have to understand that even without you, there will be someone else who'll fill your place . A nameless hero who rises from the ashes and defeats the source of 'evil', it doesn't necessarily have to be you . \"

\ "You tell me to do whatever I want then advise me to live peacefully... isn't that contradictory?\"

The crow opened its beak, emitting serene and mysterious music that filled the lonely courtyard .

\ "You said it yourself, I'm only advising you . If you continue like this, I'm afraid you won't be able to handle the truth and by attempting to fix things, you'll only hasten the time of doom . \"

Seeing Zodiac take a martial fighting stance, Arthur said:

\ "So you're finally going to fight seriously?\"

The old man looked at the parasite, whose body became enveloped in green lightning and dark flames .

\ "Looking at you like this... how can I not?\"

Though Zodiac's self-empowerment abilities were not as flashy as Arthur's, it still increased his aura by several folds, making him look much more energetic and threatening . Black lines revolved around his body, dancing around as if they were sentient .

The last battle commenced when Sol'khin, the fully grown Black Dragon, attacked again . Despite its great size, the monster moved with surprising agility, damaging the environment around him with just the wind waves caused by his massive wings .

Instead of dodging the incoming massive beast, both Arthur and Zodiac lunged at Sol'khin, each performing a punch . Arthur's fist started glowing with a green light then was enveloped by crackling white thunder, boosting its already monstrous might . As for Zodiac, his hand vanished and its place was some sort of a black hole sucking all the light around it .

With the restrictions disabled, the two became much stronger so it wasn't surprising to see the dragon sent flying by their attacks . Arthur struck Sol'khin forehead while Zodiac hit the lower jaw thus making the dragon looked miserable .

Blood flowed from its gigantic mouth as it stabilized its airborne body and tried to counter-attack only for an unstoppable force to pull its wings . The parasite teleported above Sol'khin and used his inhumane strength stat to grab the black dragon's wings, spin around before throwing at it Zodiac .

The old man was more than ready as he rotated around himself, resulting in a transparent dark magic sphere to surround him . When the target was in his range, the sphere broke and a black-clothed old man jumped in the air, a thick jet black gauntlet on his right hand .

Before Sol'khin could do anything, his body was struck again by Zodiac, whose gauntlet dealt considerable damage . The tough black scales along with sturdy bones shattered like glass, causing the beast to roar in pain as it was yet again sent flying high-up .

A series of explosions occurred at the same time, all originating from dozens of creepy-faced fireballs detonating one after the other . Although they did not that much damage, they still stopped Sol'khin from stopping the parasite's next attack, which was in the form of a dragon .

A beast made of blue and white lightning twirled in the air, let out a deafening roar then clashed with the black dragon, which was thrice it's size . The beast was a lightning dragon created by Arthur, it had an absurd damage potential if it accurately hit the target, which, this time, it did not, unfortunately .

At the very last second, Sol'khin changed forms, became a much smaller and faster creature . It was also a dragon but the black skin vanished and was replaced by shell-like emerald scales that resisted the lightning dragon .

The new form was some sort of a drake or wyvern, it had thin wings and an unusually long jaw riddled with protruding red spikes . Sol'khin charged at Arthur, resisting all the attacks unleashed by the latter, however, when it was about to hit him, it was stopped by a watery-like surface coupled with a very thick dark barrier . The green shells started vibrating and within seconds, both of Arthur's layers of defense crumbled .

The parasite had already retreated far back as its speed was faster than the enemy, moreover, Zodiac finished his follow-up attack .

With a speed that even Arthur paled in comparison to, the old man shot at Sol'khin and stabbed a long dark spear into his abdomen . It all happened with a split second, before neither his fighting companion nor his target could react .

While still holding the spear, Zodiak dragged the wyvern-like monster around, the black lines dancing around him shooting at the wings and corrupting them, rendering them practically useless .

Sadly, before he could finish Sol'khin, the latter released an awfully ear-piercing cry and took a spiritual form that was untouchable by Dark Magic . Arthur swiftly intercepted by using a combination of Space and Lightning magic .

The sky was filled with thunderbolts hitting everywhere, the space magic provided support by locking the present dimension and making it impossible for the monster to escape .

Indeed, a few seconds later, Sol'khin was forced to switch forms again, this time looking like a human . He had azure hair that reached the ground, a fit build, and two strangely closed eyes .

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\ "Let us finish this . \ "

Zodiak talked to Arthur then retrieved a few black talisman, throwing them around the motionless Sol'khin . Arthur took a more passive approach as he retreated a hundred meters then started writing runic silver symbols on the air .

Soon, the area around him flashed with a blinding sight and a hundred sword made of silver light made their appearance . They followed Arthur's will and were part of an offensive and pretty strong formation that belongs to the Mirage Era Hall sect .

As Sol'khin took out thin chains that had scythe-like blades at their very end, Zodiak started attacking . He vanished from his initial position and appeared from one of the talismans closely surrounding the humanoid monster .

In retaliation, Sol'khin swung the chains in a try to stop Zodiak but they just passed through him as if he was made of gas . It ended up with the enemy taking the first hit, his shoulder was struck by a violent kick from Zodiak, which pushed him back a few steps .

Right after finishing the first attack, Zodiak disappeared again and rushed from another talisman . Meanwhile, Arthur manipulated the hundred swords and began assaulting Sol'khin, who did his best to fend off against the continuous attacks .

Even when he tried getting away from Zodiak's talismans, he failed as they followed his every movement and always surrounded him . Furthermore, the silver swords were not only numerous but too fast for him to block all of them, diverting his attention and making him suffer Zodiak's punches and kicks, which were embedded with Dark Magic .

Two minutes later, Sol'khin was pinned to the ground with more than twenty swords stabbing his body and dark magic chains wrapped around his neck and waist . He wasn't able to change form as Arthur and Zodiak did their best to block any kind of transformation .

The green-haired monster struggled to break free while crying loudly but it was totally futile . At some point, it was about to self-destruct but Zodiak managed to stop it by throwing a gigantic black ball made of Dark Magic which struck the immobilized enemy and everything around him .

All that was left of the fight was a split earth which seemed like an opened and bottomless mouth, a blackened and scarlet sky, and a devastated city . Half of the western part of the city no longer existed as it was swallowed by the earthquake, nonetheless, there few if no casualties and all the enemies were successfully eliminated, ending this battle once and for all .

After making sure that Sol'khin was really gone, Arthur landed next to Zodiak and inspected the area, neither of them saying any congratulatory word .

Only after a while did Arthur speak, his head facing the other way .

\ "You said it's absolution? I feel like there's more to it than that . \ "

The old man calmly wore back his grey and tattered robe, hid the talismans under his sleeves then answered:

\ "What if there's more? It concerns me and although I'm grateful for your help, that doesn't mean you're eligible to hear a truth that you don't need . \ "

Chapter 589

After a long, long wait, the last expected person joined the two brothers . Both the Joker and Leiu stood up and looked at the newcomer, who was covered in blood from head to toe and not looking particularly healthy .

Before anyone talked, Wolfram crushed a card which released a blinding light that enveloped Arthur and healed some of the injuries . It took five cards to completely heal his younger brother and it has to be said that even one of such cards is extremely rare and has a miraculous effect .

One has to wonder what kind of injuries did Arthur suffer to be in such a miserable half-dead state .

While smiling, Arthur said:

\ "I hope that the wait wasn't too long . \ "

The youth snorted but the tall magician wrapped his hand around Arthur's shoulder and jokingly said:

\ "It was so boring with this quiet dude, I felt like I was talking to myself . \ "

\ "Hahaha I can imagine that . \ "

Unfortunately, this light mood was quickly broken by the Nameless Knight, who reproachingly looked at the parasite while saying:

\ "In the end, you decided to come? \ "

\ "Why wouldn't I? My two brothers are betting their lives on the line yet you want me to hide? \ "

\ "Yeah how can you say that? \ "

The Joker butted in, trying to lighten the mood again but his older brother still had a chilling expression as if he wasn't really pleased by Arthur's arrival .

\ "It's not like there's anywhere to hide, after all, everyone knows of the Dark Lord . \ "

\ "Ugh stop that, it's so banal . \ "-Arthur

Arthur looked at the gargantuan red crack far away then shifted his attention to a blinding sun right above it, temporarily stopping the expansion of the incoming doom .

\ "Saly already left? \ "

\ "She insisted on staying but I sent her away . \ "-Wolfram

Hearing this, Arthur breathed a sigh of relief and caressed his marriage ring, which wasn't expensive or flashy but held a deep meaning .

\ "It's not going to hold it for long, we better begin . \ "-The Joker

\ "Ready yourselves . \ "Leiu

The Nameless Knight wore his helmet and retrieved his black sword, Anduril, from his back and wore his helmet . As for the Joker, he threw dozens of cards in the air, each one having an overpowered buffing affect .

\ "These should last for one year . I'll save the best for last . \ "

He laughed out loud, uncaring about what's about to happen or what they're going to face .

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Last but not least, Arthur removed the ring given to him by Lucy and used Dark Magic on it, erasing it from existence and officially releasing himself from the past .

\ "I shall become the wings of rebellion . \ "-Leiu

\ "Breaketh thy chains of captivity . \ "-Wolfram

\ "And release yourself from what has been done! \ "-Arthur

\ "My son, you have grown up . \ "

A deep voice came out of a shiny silver dragon curled on the ground with its piercing eyes focused on another dragon half of its size but with the same silver scales as it .

Yamak grew bowed its head in respect as he faced his mother, whom he's seeing for the first time . Seeing no purpose in following Xyktia's unreasonable order, he fled to the Dragon Realm but it's not like he can escape her grasp .

\ "It's good to see you, mother . \ "

\ "Have you been well? Did that parasite take care of you? \ "

\ "Yes, there is no need to worry . \ "

There was a tinge of awkwardness as Yamak wasn't really used to such talks . Arthur wasn't harsh when he raised him but he wasn't what you call 'motherly' so when he felt his mother's love, the lightning dragon didn't know how to act .

\ "Normally, dragon's won't meet their parents until they became an adult but, seeing that you willingly came here, there must be a problem, which I can kind of guess . \ "

Even without Yamak saying anything, the ancient Space Dragon was able to see the thing inside her son's body .

\ "I guess the Twelve do not really care about their treaty with the Dragon Race . Who's the one who did this to you? \ "

\ "Xyktia . She wants the Divine and Cursed swords . \ "

\ "To hell with what she wants, take me to her! \ "

None of the Twelve created the Dragon Race and the latter is not known to be a formidable race for nothing . A grown dragon like Yamak's mother can pose a great threat even to the Twelve, moreso for the trapped Xyktia .

\ "W-well . . \ "

For a while, Yamak hesitated before resolutely saying:

\ "She seems to have went somewhere... \ "

\ "Where? There's nowhere I can- \ "

Before she could finish, her son said: \ "The Red Tower . \ "

\ "What? Why would she go there? \ "

\ "I don't know . As far as I know, only the Divine Sword, grail, is there . \ "

Last time Yamak saw Xyktia, she was definitely trapped, however, when he went back, there were no signs of her or her white-haired servant . He tracked her only to arrive at the Red Tower .

\ "Back then, Ventus definitely killed her . How can she be alive? Are you certain it was her? \ "

\ "Definitely . \ "

\ "Hey, aren't you going to do anything about her? I don't like her face . \ "

The Joker complained while pointing at a black-haired woman amongst the contestants . She didn't stand out and was neither too strong nor too weak, in fact, not even the Red Tower's system was able to see through her .

The Trickster was able to recognize her only thanks to his Card Magic . As for the Nameless Knight, he's considered to be an acquaintance of hers though you can't say they parted on friendly terms .

\ "What about her?\"

\ "What do you mean 'what about her'? Isn't this supposed to be a fair competition? She's way too strong for them . If it's going to be like this then I might as well go down too!\"

The Joker stood up, seriously considering joining the participants .

\ "Sit down . \"

Like an obedient, the Magician snorted and obediently sat back up, appearing quite comical and childish .

\ "What's happening? Who's she?!\"

Saly, who was silently watching their interaction, grew curious and asked the pale and stiff-faced uncle .

\ "Just an old friend, don't mind her . \"

\ "Old friend? Try old lover! Hmpf!\"

Wolfram crossed his arms and leaned against the chair, clicking his tongue at what his brother said .

Seeing that Leiu didn't give an honest reply, Saly went to her teacher and act pitiful to quench her curiosity but the weirdly dressed man ignored her and said:

\ "It's quite fortunate that Arthur didn't bring Makaze . If that blade gets near Xyktia, all hell would break loose . \"

\ "It's a good thing that it isn't the case, then . \"-Leiu

\ "I said not to bother me!\"

The Yellow Seat furiously turned toward the laboratory's entrance and shouted, though when he had a good look at the visitor, he was shocked .

\ "What brings you here?\"

He quickly retracted his anger and shifted back his attention to the experiment while talking to a short man standing next to the door . This was none other than the Red Seat of Supremacy, someone who rarely interacts with the other seats and quite a hateful fellow . He does not have a good relationship with most of the other seats and no one really knows why Forne still keeps him .

\ "It's lonely with everyone gone so I came here to talk . \"

\ "Talk? You've never visited me here and now you say you want to talk?\"

The scientist frowned but didn't chase away the short man .

\ "You've always been someone who believed more in number rather than emotions so don't you think the probability of taking down the Nameless Knight is extremely low?\"

\That's a fact so what's your point?\ The Yellow Seat pulled his sleeves and sat on a squeaking chair while gazing at the short man pacing around with his hands behind his back .

\I'm just saying that this emptiness may become permanent if things go wrong... don't you think it's time for a 'refill'?\

\"...\"

After a short silence, the scientist opened his mouth and said: \Continue . \"

The Red Seat chuckled and walked closer, revealing his face to the small light illuminating only a part of the laboratory . He had a bald head and several long sword scars across his not-so-handsome face .

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\Thank you! Thank you!\ With tears welling up in his eyes, the city lord repeatedly thanked both Arthur and Zodiak, who insisted that he stopped kneeling again and again .

After finally getting him to stop with that, he patted his armor before saying:

\You want to get to the higher floors, right?\

While Zodiak maintained his silence, Arthur actively interacted with other people, even strangers, finding it more efficient than relying on simple movements as if he's a mute .

\Yes, is there another way besides the Sky Door?\

The city lord grinned and answered:

\As a matter of fact, we have a door right under our city but we don't know where it leads . \"

\Can you lead us to it then?\

\Why the hurry? Stay for the celebratory banquet!\

Seeing as he'll probably insist on them staying, Arthur waved his hand dismissively while adding:

\All the others have already gone up to the next floor, we must move with haste . Please guide us to the underground door . \"

Reluctantly, the city lord did as request and took Zodiak and Arthur to a secret and well-guarded place two hundred meters under the castle .

There were old mages guarding the entrance and constantly the barrier protecting the whole area . Fortunately, with the city lord with them, the two were able to smoothly enter the room and witness a really massive door, as big as the destroyed Sky Door . However, this one was one with the ground and facing the roof, it was golden and closed-shut, just like its counterpart .

\The city was purposely built above the door to hide its existence but I honestly don't know where it leads or what it does . \"

\It's alright, we just need to open it and go through . \"

Zodiak ignored the two conversing men and stepped closer to the door, which didn't react to his arrival . Slowly, he pulled a large black talisman from his heart and put it right at the center of the golden door, which soon caused it to lightly shake then submissively open .

With their powers no longer restricted, it wasn't as difficult to open the Sky Door or this one hence the instantaneous and effective result caused by the talisman .

Shortly after, the two contestants passed through the golden door and vanished from the city lord's sight .

Right when Sol'khin was defeated, the screen displaying what's happening on the 4th floor was cut off and the Red Tower informed everyone present at the Waiting Room that they'll be taken to 5th floor in half a minute .

Lucy wasn't very worried about her husband as she knew he could handle all kinds of troubles, especially with Zodiak tagging with him .

In total, there were 479 contestants who passed through the Sky Door and safely reached 'Haven', which is what the 5th floor is called . Presumably, this floor is like a checkpoint where it is possible to recuperate and gather more data about the Red Tower, specifically the higher floors .

Forne and the rest wanted to quickly reach the top floor, however, when they appeared in Haven, the robotic voice didn't give any task or say how to reach the next floor, which kind of irritated the Black Seat though he could only sigh and patiently wait .

As the name suggests, Haven is a place of safety and refuge, where one does need to worry about an enemy attack . Fighting each other is strictly prohibited and, apart from a few literal humanoid robots setting stalls to sell some merchandise, the place was rather barren .

The sky was permanently dark with shimmering stars across the canopy, a grassy yet empty area that could fit all 400+ contestants . Obviously, some were confused while others immediately started searching for a solution or an escape, wanting to reach the next floor before anyone else .

Sadly, none of them managed to achieve that and their hopes were crushed as the Red Tower gave out a notice only 15 minutes after they all appeared in Haven .

*Contestant Arthur MoonStar and Zodiak have successfully passed through the Earth Door and arrived at the 6th floor . *

To their surprise, Arthur and Zodiak leapfrogged over the 5th floor and appeared on the 6th floor, named 'Land of Rabbits' .

Like always, the tower spoke to the newcomers, explaining the rules and the task .

*On the 6th floor, the contestants need to catch a randomly generated number of rabbits .

Please be warned that there's a limited number of rabbits and once they're all caught, all the contestants who didn't reach the given quota will be disqualified .

Please warned that a rabbit can bite, two can stab, and three can kill . *

For a while, neither Arthur nor the old man next to him said anything .

\ "What is this 'one can bite, two can stab, and three can kill'? \"

The parasite questioned his reincarnation, who shrugged his shoulders, pulled the hood over his head before replying:

\ "Figure it out yourself . \"

Right after saying that, he transformed into a flying dark cloud and vanished from Arthur's sight .

The place they were at was a bamboo forest which was surprisingly big . Arthur's sense covered only a small portion and even his map didn't show anything useful, nonetheless, the parasite didn't remain idle for a second longer and, like Zodiak, started searching for said rabbits .

The number of rabbits he needs to catch is 120, which is either too much or too little depending on the number of rabbits currently in the forest .

Arthur took the form of a rare monster called treant, which actually a moving tree with the height ranging from 2 to 6m . Although it severely decreased his movement speed, it won't alert said rabbits, if they are actually rabbits, that is .

Unlike Zodiak, who went around wrecking the place to find the target, Arthur took a more subtle approach and wanted to capture the rabbits while they're unaware . After all, there has to be a meaning to the tower's warning and recklessly attracting attention may be dangerous if not suicidal .

As he had expected, ten to twenty minutes later, the parasite located and closed in on a small furry creature that looked like a normal rabbit in all aspects . It looked totally harmless and the moment it heard a slight rustling nearby, it hopped away with a speed that was laughable compared even to Arthur's current form .

Confused by this, Arthur followed whilst stabbing his hands, which were actually long branches, in the ground . Several brown vines drilled through the soft earth and caught up to the rabbit, quickly binding it . Arthur didn't know if he had to kill it or what but such thought vanished when the creature turned into a flashing light then disappeared . The given quota, which was shown as part of his system, changed and the number 0 was replaced by 1, indicating that he successfully captured one target .

Seeing how easy it turned out to be, Arthur actually felt worried that this may be a trick . Despite catching a rabbit without any effort, he wandered the forest with the utmost caution, fully aware that this 6th floor is not what it really seemed .