

Reincarnated Avatar; I got 2 SSS-Rank Unique Skills

#Chapter 181 - 11th Final of the Warstar RPG Champions League; Phoenix Rising vs Scarlet Rose [1] - Read
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[Warstar RPG Champions League:]

[Scarlet Rose: 10 points]

[Imperium Tyrannus: 1 point]

That night, Old Trafford in Manchester turned into a cauldron of noise.

There were tens of thousands of Scarlet Rose fans present in the stadium, cheering on their team. Despite the decisive advantage that their team established after the 3 vs 3 battle rush, they didn't rest on their laurels till the last moment.

Afterall, despite the 5-point advantage that their team had after the 3 vs 3 battle rush and the individual battle, without winning the team battle, they would have still lost.

In the end, they didn't have a reason to be so apprehensive as Jonathan didn't just beat his opponents on the semifinal, he broke their spirit.

And once they lost the mental battle, it was only a matter of time before they lost the physical one.

And just like that, Scarlet Rose shot themselves to the final of the Warstar RPG Champions League again for the first time in 4 seasons.

That night, a fanbase celebrated all night.

And finally, the fixture for the final of the 11th Warstar RPG Champions League was decided.

[Playoff Round:]

[Semifinal One: Phoenix Rising vs Nightfall]

[Winner: Phoenix Rising]

...

[Semifinal Two: Scarlet Rose vs Imperium Tyrannus]

[Winner: Scarlet Rose]

...

[Final: Phoenix Rising vs Scarlet Rose]

...

2 weeks later after the playoff round started, the final game beckoned.

It was to be played on a Sunday.

For the next few days after the 2nd semifinal battle was concluded, Phoenix Rising and Scarlet Rose fans came to loggerheads on social media.

It was never going to be a peaceful final, the fans won't let it.

To the fans, peaceful was boring, and so they spread violence online through aggressive banter and trolling on social media platforms.

The media also didn't help matters. With their aggressive publicity and their subtle propaganda, they turned the final of the Warstar RPG Champions League from a clash between Phoenix Rising and Scarlet Rose to a clash between Dain Ironvalor and Crimson Saint, the 2 best Paladins in the English Pro Alliance.

The comparisons on social media were crazy.

Besides, it was not just that, there was more at stake in this final.

Afterall, before making the final, both clubs were the top 2 ranked clubs in the English Pro Alliance table.

Not just ranked top 1 and 2, but they finished the season with the same points, meaning that a league champion was yet to be crowned.

On Sunday, it was not just the Warstar RPG Champions League final, it was also the final to determine the league champion.

Winning on Sunday would secure not 1, but 2 trophies.

Considering what was at stake, even the players did not exclude themselves from the banter. Before Scarlet Rose played their semifinal game against Imperium Tyrannus, Gabriel already started the psychological warfare with his comments before the media.

After the semifinal, the psychological warfare intensified as both captains came to loggerheads, making misleading comments before the media.

Shots were repeatedly fired at each other.

The psychological battle was ammunition-filled and heavily loaded. And of course when it came to being shameless, Jonathan was far more proficient than his counterpart, Gabriel.

Before the media, Jonathan was unhinged and completely unbridled, making Chris blush in shame anytime that he accompanied his captain.

And yet, all of this was the spice adding more fire to the final.

And then, in the blink of an eye, D-day was here.

...

England, London...

Wembley Stadium.

The 11th Final of the Warstar RPG Champions League.

The night sky above London shimmered with a million lights, some from the stars above, but most from the roaring behemoth that was Wembley Stadium.

Tonight, Wembley Stadium was a coliseum reborn, wrapped in digital banners and hovering projections that painted the skyline with shifting sigils, spell circles, and guild emblems.

90,000 seats. Not one empty.

Every chant, every scream, every heartbeat echoed with one truth. This was more than just a game; it was a war of legacies.

A war to create more history in the long history of the English Pro Alliance.

When the team buses for both teams arrived, they received a boisterous welcome from their fans who were already in London. Phoenix Rising in particular enjoyed an advantage. Afterall, London was their home.

That night, it was a conflagration of red and yellow, red for Scarlet Rose and yellow for Phoenix Rising.

When the players stood up, walking to the playing booth, they were drowned in a cacophony of noise by tens of thousands of excited fans.

The two clubs were on opposite sides of the massive stadium, proudly donning the colors of their club as their form of support tonight.

On one side, Phoenix Rising, the burning dynasty, famed for their relentless tempo and rebirth strategies.

And on the other side, Scarlet Rose, cold, elegant, and methodical, a team known for crushing opponents under the weight of immaculate execution.

Tension bled into the air like static before a thunderstorm.

With the players already inside the playing booth, the 3-way holographic projection flared to life as the players loaded into the game.

[LOADING...]

Inside, the Warstar Arena had morphed the pitch into a battlefield of elemental zones and shifting terrain; volcanic crags on one flank, a frozen wasteland on the other, and floating platforms in the center.

Magical floodlights pulsed with the rhythm of the crowd, synching to the ambient war drums pounding through the stadium's speakers.

The atmosphere at Wembley Stadium was electric.

And then, from the commentary booth suspended mid-air above the arena, the legendary voice of the sport, Morgan Vale, spoke in a hushed tone, every syllable trembling with reverence.

"Ladies and gentlemen...,"

"Eleven years".

"Eleven seasons of blood, ambition, and miracles".

"And tonight, in the heart of Wembley, we witness a tale older than time itself... the final of the Warstar RPG Champions League".

"Tonight, 2 trophies are on the line".

"Tonight, it's a clash of Valor".

"Tonight, it's a clash of Titans".

"The fire that refuses to die... versus the thorn that never wilts".

"Phoenix Rising. Scarlet Rose".

"One match. One crown. One legend".

The crowd roared as the final countdown echoed.

The screen flashed.

[FIRST ROUND: INDIVIDUAL BATTLE]

[CHOOSE YOUR CHAMPIONS!]

For the first individual battle of the game, neither of the 2 captains shirked the responsibility. Gabriel and Jonathan decisively stepped out with their legendary Avatars, Dain Ironvalor and Crimson Saint.

The final of the Warstar RPG Champions League already started.

And with the realization, the stadium exploded into a frenzy; fireworks lit the night, fans cried out in dozens of languages, flags were waved, and thundersticks slammed like war drums.

The pitch transformed in real time, magma geysers erupting near the center, lightning splitting the sky, and a haunting, orchestral chorus thundering through the speakers as the battle began.

"And so it begins..." Morgan's voice was almost drowned out by the storm of noise.
"The final verse of this epic season. Etched not in ink... but in battle".

War had begun in Wembley. And all of Warstar watched.

On one side, Crimson Saint, the OG God level Paladin Avatar in the English Pro Alliance before the rise of Dain Ironvalor.

On the other side, Dain Ironvalor, the London Avatar who's taken the position of King in the Pro Alliance from Stinger of War, the Battle God Avatar.

3..., 2..., 1!

FIGHT!

As soon as the countdown hit zero, the ground beneath Dain Ironvalor exploded as the mighty Paladin charged after his opponent.

In response, Crimson Saint stood his ground, tightening his grip around his long sword even as he subtly raised his shield, and then...

BOOM!

Sword clashed against shield, and then all hell broke loose.

Gabriel and Jonathan had 2 distinct styles that they were renowned for; Gabriel's was aggressive and relentless, while Jonathan's playstyle was more grounded, patient, and solid.

It was not every day that fans get to watch the 2 best Paladin Avatars in the Pro Alliance and their controllers clash in an all-out battle.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Sparks filled the arena, consequence of the titanic battle.

Gabriel kept on pressing his advantage with heavy, swinging blows, while Jonathan kept on defending, and yet it didn't look like he was losing.

Both players were simply channeling their specialty, attack vs defense.

Aesthetically, the Crimson Saint looked miserly though as he kept on being pushed back by the barrage of attacks.

The clash was so intense that fans lost track of time, until...

DING!

The game was force-stopped!

"...!"

The fans were so shocked that some protested the decision, until they looked up and realized what the time was saying.

It was already 10 minutes!

The clash was so intense that they lost track of time as Gabriel kept on pursuing, while Jonathan kept on defending.

Neither Paladin could kill the other fast enough, and so the time died first.

Knowing what this meant, all the fans instinctively looked at the HP of both Avatars at the same time. And then, Wembley Stadium suddenly became as silent as a church, out of shock.

[Dain Ironvalor – 42% HP]

[Crimson Saint – 43% HP]

---<VICTORY>---

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DING!

The first individual battle was force stopped.

For a few seconds in Wembley Stadium, a wave of discontent rose until the fans focused on the score line of the game that was indicated on the 3-way holographic screen.

[Dain Ironvalor – 42% HP]

[Crimson Saint – 43% HP]

---<VICTORY>---

Silence.

A deafening silence descended on Wembley Stadium, until it was broken by the loud sounds of Scarlet Rose fans expressing their shock and joy with an explosion of noise.

BOOM!

Wembley Stadium erupted.

Even as the Scarlet Rose fans exploded, going haywire in joy, the stunned commentators also chipped into the fray.

"Wow!"

"What a battle!"

"Jonathan has done the incredible! The Crimson Saint has toppled Dain Ironvalor's reign of terror and invincibility that has spanned an incredible period of 2 years!"

"For the first time in 2 years, Dain Ironvalor loses a 1v1 battle in the individual battle round!"

"Leave the result for a moment, and let's focus on the battle itself".

"Bonkers! No one saw this coming!"

"What a performance from the Crimson Saint!"

"He's pulled off the impossible!"

The commentators raved about the incredible feat that Jonathan achieved by defeating Gabriel's Dain Ironvalor, but even the commentators didn't understand the full nuances of that duel.

Only the spectating pro players understood what truly happened, including Gabriel himself and for a moment, Gabriel could not help directing another glance at his enemy as his Avatar evaporated into motes of light.

This time, it was a glance filled with a lot of meaning, a guarded look.

For the first time in this final, Gabriel truly understood what was at stake. He always knew what was at stake, but he didn't know how determined his opponents were in claiming the 2nd Warstar RPG trophy in their history till now.

Scarlet Rose was ready to go any length to win.

Jonathan would kill to get his goal!

Gabriel finally realized it.

And as he looked at the Paladin one last time, staring at his full plate armor, the vermillion cloak billowing in the wind behind him, he felt a chill crawl down his spine.

That duel... Gabriel never saw it coming but he understood how he lost.

He was the better Avatar in the duel. He had higher APM, his skill was fresh and tyrannical, while he had almost just as much experience playing Warstar in the pro scene as Jonathan.

And yet, what separated the 2 Avatars, helping the Crimson Saint claim victory was the deviousness of its controller.

Jonathan knew that his fingers were not young anymore. Compared to the regular Warstar player, his APM would be terrifyingly fast but Dain Ironvalor's controller was no regular player.

He was a skilled, experienced pro player; currently the best in the English Pro Alliance and the frontrunner for the MVP award this season.

And so, from the very beginning, he never tried to compete with Gabriel through sheer skill or APM. Rather, tonight, he leaned more on his deviousness than ever before to win.

Jonathan was weaker. He knew it. Gabriel knew it too so automatically, Gabriel had a superiority complex in the build up to the clash.

That was the core element of Jonathan's devious plan.

If Jonathan wanted, he could have actually challenged Gabriel to a stand still for some time though the better Paladin would have won eventually.

And yet, he didn't do that.

Instead of pushing for the victory, Jonathan employed a reverse psychology tactic. He let Gabriel feel superior, he let him bask in the moment.

And by playing his normal style, turning the battle into a long, slow-burn grind and yet still intense, Jonathan allowed Gabriel to establish and solidify his superiority in the duel.

When you feel superior in war, there's no reason to think about any other thing or another strategy. Afterall, if it ain't bad, don't fix it.

And Gabriel genuinely believed that he was winning, including every mundane spectator, including even some pro players.

Only a select few managed to see through his devious trick. By making Gabriel feel superior, the Phoenix Rising captain became so engrossed in dealing the next damage again and again so fervently that he failed to keep track of his own HP.

It was a mundane mistake you'll never expect from the MVP candidate this season, and yet with Jonathan's manipulation, it happened.

On the defensive, Jonathan played a perfectly tidy game, constantly on the defensive, retreating while lashing out on the counterattack occasionally.

Every move he made seemed desperate but it was deliberate and planned, all done to lure Gabriel deeper into the deceit.

And so, even Gabriel failed to notice it till it was too late. It was when the countdown sounded, indicating that the 10 minutes allocated for the individual battle was over did he realize his mistake.

Gabriel felt indignant but he felt more intimidated. 'This old bastard...'

After the first individual battle, this is how the score line of the final looked like.

[Phoenix Rising: 0 point]

[Scarlet Rose: 1 point]

Scarlet Rose was leading.

To Scarlet Rose fans, this was the thing in the world and their reaction to the lead reflected their excitement.

It was not only the fans who celebrated the victory. In the red player booth, the Scarlet Rose players also celebrated their captain excitedly, revealing that even they never expected this result.

The game continued.

For the next individual battle, just like in the semifinal, Chris stepped up with his Paladin and in response, Phoenix Rising sent out one of their Elementalists.

It was a crazy battle.

The Scarlet Rose youngster was pushed to his limits by the skilled and experienced Elementalist, testing his credentials as Crimson Saint's heir.

Chris rose up to the occasion spectacularly.

It took him 7 minutes, it cost him over 80% of his HP, and yet the Paladin managed to do the crazy in the 2nd individual battle after his captain did the impossible against Dain Ironvalor.

---<VICTORY>---

Chris won.

[Phoenix Rising: 0 point]

[Scarlet Rose: 2 points]

BOOM!

Wembley Stadium erupted for the second time in mere 10 minutes.

If the first victory triggered an explosion at this stadium, what the second victory triggered was a supernova.

Wembley Stadium turned upside down.

"My God!"

"What is this?"

"What are we seeing?"

"Scarlet Rose is leading the reigning champions by 2 points to 0!"

"Can they actually do it?"

"Can they create an upset?!"

"Two trophies are on the line tonight!"

"Can they go all the way and win the final?!"

The atmosphere in Wembley already changed.

If before among the Phoenix Rising fans there was an air of arrogant confidence, a feeling like the result of this game was already set in stone from the beginning. Now, that feeling was strangled to death, replaced by a dire feeling of sudden desperation.

For the first time, the Phoenix Rising fans faced the reality that they could actually go on and lose the game... lose this final.

It was a big shock.

And to them, losing was unacceptable!

And so, the Phoenix Rising fans made their voices heard, raising a flood of noise in this stadium in a sudden onslaught of support for their team. They were now desperate to win, to make a comeback, and so they roared.

The game continued.

For the 3rd individual battle, Phoenix Rising sent out their Combat Mage while Scarlet Rose sent out their Blademaster.

It was a harrowing clash of steel.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

It was an intense, fast paced duel.

Both Avatars and their controllers were even, both engaged in a brutal head to head duel. In the end, the duel lasted for just 2 minutes.

At the end of 2 minutes, a Combat Mage was left standing, bloodied, at red health, barely clinging to life. And yet, he was the last man standing.

The individual battle round finally came to an end and Phoenix Rising managed to get 1 point in the end to their opponents' 2 points.

In this final, one thing was already clear, the progression and outcome of this game could not be predicted at all. It was an unpredictable game.

It was still just the first round of the final clash, and yet, it already created unforgettable spectacles for the viewing fans.

The individual battle came to an end with Scarlet Rose leading. And without hesitation, the game moved on to the next round.

[SECOND ROUND: 3 VS 3 BATTLE RUSH]

[CHOOSE YOUR CHAMPIONS!]

After the individual battle, Phoenix Rising was rattled. But they were a championship team, something as mundane as a setback would not derail their entire momentum.

And yet, Gabriel learned from his mistakes, learning to fear and respect this Scarlet Rose side and their determination to win.

For the 3 vs 3 battle rush, Gabriel concluded on a trio led by his Dain Ironvalor, accompanied by the Warlock and then the Elementalist.

This was a proven Phoenix Rising strategy. Dain Ironvalor to lead the charge; and when dead, the Warlock picks up the slack, bombarding the enemies with debuffs and curses that would make encountering an Elementalist a nightmare.

Fueled by the weakness induced by the Warlock's curses and debuffs, the Elementalist ends up being an unstoppable wall that could not be breached.

As for Scarlet Rose? Jonathan led with his Crimson Saint, taking the young Paladin and his Gunner along.

The 3 vs 3 battle rush was going to be a battle to the death.

A bloodbath.

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CLANG!

The deafening clangor of metal striking against metal resounded in the fiery arena. Within the plumes of smoke rising to the sky, 2 valiant Avatars with a shield and a long sword clashed in a battle to the death.

Their movement was so fast that it left a blur behind.

Unlike his usual slow and methodical approach that Jonathan employed to deceive Gabriel in the individual battle, leading to his eventual victory.

This time, in their rematch, Jonathan employed another approach, the opposite strategy.

This time, it was the duel of Paladins that all neutral fans hoped for.

Crimson Saint clashed against Dain Ironvalor, no strings attached, no pretty or dubious elements added.

It was a raw clash of steel and will. And boy was it explosive.

Jonathan could decide to employ the same approach like he did in the individual battle, but he knew that his approach only worked because Gabriel never realized what his true intentions were due to his misdirection.

If he tried it again, Jonathan was 99% sure that Gabriel wouldn't fall for it a second time.

His Avatar would fall.

So, why hold back?

Afterall, just like the fans, he also always wanted this duel.

Though he always evaded the question when asked during interviews by the reporters, he still loathed the day that the loathsome boy stole his seat as the King of Paladins in the English Pro Alliance.

Which Dain Ironvalor? He was supposed to be the King, Crimson Saint.

Jonathan always dreamed of crushing Gabriel in a straightforward battle though he was sober enough to realize how unrealistic it was.

But who cares?

It was not as if the situation presented another way of maneuvering past a straightforward battle this time. And so, instead of looking for a way to evade like usual, Jonathan embraced it and fought.

BAM!

He fought.

And fought.

AND FOUGHT.

Till Dain Ironvalor's shield smashed against his shield for the last time, dealing marginal damage and wiping out the remainder of his HP.

---<VICTORY>---

Phoenix Rising won the first clash of the 3 vs 3 battle rush.

Gabriel lost, but Jonathan didn't feel bad. Rather, behind his monitor, he had a murderous gleam in his eye as he stared at the screen with dark glee.

[Dain Ironvalor: 6% HP]

Dain Ironvalor had only 6% HP remaining!

'Take that bastard!'

It was not the perfect scenario that he hoped for.

He didn't get to crush Dain Ironvalor like he always dreamt of. But he gave the bastard a good fight. He scarred him, and now he was in his last leg.

Remembering himself, Jonathan quickly turned his head to his right where a familiar young face was, completely engrossed and focused on his monitor.

"Go get him Chris!"

Chris nodded somberly without looking. "Yes, captain".

[LOADING...]

Chris' Paladin entered the 3 vs 3 battle rush arena after his captain.

As soon as he entered the arena, Gabriel chuckled, about to say a few words or maybe crack a joke but Chris didn't let him. Because he knew it was misdirection. He was long used to it.

Gabriel was a newbie at it, his captain was the true grandmaster.

And so, before Gabriel could speak, he interrupted him.

"Senior Gabriel".

The Paladin made an awkward bow, and then, it erupted in an aggressive blur, swinging its long sword to attack even as its shield arm was prepared to defend.

"Ah, I thought your captain would have taught you manners kid". Gabriel sighed, already swinging his long sword to intercept.

The Paladin's face was impassive, including the voice behind it.

"My captain taught practicality".

He struck.

WAM!

Gabriel had no escape.

The 2 Avatars entangled in a whirlwind of steel and just 18 seconds later, despite Gabriel's best efforts, his Avatar was torn apart, disintegrating into motes of light as Chris' Avatar was left standing with 88% HP.

Phoenix Rising's Warlock entered the arena next.

And immediately, the arena exploded into a cauldron of violence again.

{Demonic Pact=}

A low-level Warlock skill that summons a lesser demon to fight alongside the Warlock for a limited time.

{Curse of Agony=}

A low-level Warlock skill that inflicts a debilitating curse on an enemy, causing damage over time.

{Hex of Weakness=}

A low level Warlock skill that reduces an enemy's attack power and defense.

{Army of Shadows=}

A high level Warlock skill that summons shadowy minions to swarm enemies, dealing continuous damage.

As soon as the Warlock loaded into the arena, Chris' Paladin moved, cracking the ground beneath his feet in the aftermath of his explosive movement.

He rushed to close the distance knowing exactly what the Warlock would start doing, and the Warlock didn't disappoint.

3 low level skills, and a high level one.

That was what he was able to do before the Paladin closed the distance.

All were skills that either weakened his opponent or called forth allies for the Warlock. And just before Chris closed the distance completely, the Warlock's APM exploded, narrowly activating one final skill.

{Binding Curse=}

A low level Warlock skill that roots enemies in place, preventing them from moving for a short time.

BZZZ!

Chris was temporarily immobilized!

In a battle of this scale, immobilization was a death sentence.

And yet, the Warlock didn't push to capitalize on the advantage immediately by spamming damage skills. Yes, Warlocks have skills that deal damage, but dealing damage was not their specialty.

This was why, this Warlock did something else.

As soon as he activated Binding Curse, even before the skill could take hold, his hands were already flying across his keyboard in a blitz, activating another skill.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

Chris' Paladin remained immobile for 2 seconds due to his high resistance.

But 2 seconds was just barely enough for the Warlock to complete the skill sequence that he wanted.

{Unleash the Abyss=}

An unusual Awakened level Warlock skill that transforms the Warlock into an Avatar of darkness, gaining increased damage, health regen, and new abilities for a short duration.

Chris' Paladin finally broke out of his immobile state, but what he faced was no ordinary Warlock anymore, but rather an Avatar of Darkness.

Chris ground his teeth behind his monitor, but he didn't hesitate.

Valiantly, he charged into battle against the Avatar of Darkness.

BOOM!

Just like the first clash of the 3 vs 3 battle rush, it was an explosive battle.

And due to the big size of the Avatar of Darkness, it was even more visually stunning as Chris stood his ground against the towering Avatar.

When the skill duration finished, the Warlock already dealt sizeable damage and he continued his devious playstyle, spamming debuffs and attack skills, summoning more helpers to attack too.

It was a tight battle, it pushed Chris to the limit.

And yet, the young Paladin pulled on through sheer determination.

Jonathan was the captain of Scarlet Rose. He seemed all powerful and yet as one of the closest players to him, only Chris knew how much he truly suffers in the Pro Alliance, how much he had declined and how fast he was still declining.

Performing consistently at this level was taking its toll on his fingers.

That was why Jonathan brought him into the fray, his heir.

What better stage to prove his worth than here?

Behind his monitor, Chris growled literally as he brought his whole fearsome skill and APM to the fore, descending upon the Warlock in a hurricane of steel.

6 minutes later...

---<VICTORY>---

The Warlock collapsed in a heap, dissolving into motes of light.

Chris' Avatar was the one left standing. But his HP was already deep in the red, hovering between 3% and 4%.

But still, behind his monitor, Chris had a grin on his face.

This was already a comeback and a half.

[LOADING...]

Phoenix Rising' last Avatar entered the arena, the Elementalist.

Against this type of opponent and with such low HP, Chris was helpless. The Elementalist secured a flawless victory, bombarding him to death from a distance.

[LOADING...]

Scarlet Rose' Gunner entered the arena.

And so, the final standoff came.

A Gunner and an Elementalist, both lethal long distance specialists. Both Avatars at 100% HP.

It all came down to a contest of skill.

The tension in Wembley Stadium was palpable, the atmosphere was electric, and then...

BAM!

Both Avatars clashed.

{Deadeye=}

A low level Gunner skill that increases critical hit chance for a short time and slows time slightly when aiming.

{Sniper's Focus=}

A high level Gunner skill that enhances zoom and accuracy, significantly increasing range and damage for a single shot.

{Piercing Shot=}

A low level Gunner skill that fires a high-velocity round that is capable of piercing multiple enemies.

This was the initial salvo of the Gunner.

As for the Elementalist? It was all out attack, chaos, AOE madness.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The clash this time was even crazier than the first two clashes.

Explosions filled the arena and in between them, brilliant flashes of light lit up the world, signs of the Gunner still causing mayhem amid the chaos.

It was AOE chaos vs precision attack.

In the end, after a grueling battle, one last Avatar was left standing.

---<VICTORY>---

A vermillion cloak billowed in the aftermath of the battle, eyes sharp like an Eagle, watching all the destruction with a nonchalant gleam; with one hand on his holster, still holding the Revolver and ready to shoot again.

The Gunner was the last man standing!

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[Phoenix Rising: 1 point]

[Scarlet Rose: 5 points]

The atmosphere in Wembley Stadium exploded.

Scarlet Rose won the 3 vs 3 battle rush!

No one saw this coming, not even in the wildest of dreams, not even the staunchest of Scarlet Rose believes and supporters saw it coming. In the wake of that victory, Wembley Stadium turned into a cauldron of noise.

BOOM!

Fans in red across the stadium jumped to their feet, hugging, screaming at the top of their lungs as the highlights of the battle was replayed on the 3-way holographic screen.

Watching the moment again ignited the atmosphere in this stadium, setting off sparks in the air and creating a contrasting atmosphere where fans in the red of Scarlet Rose jubilated exuberantly, while Phoenix Rising fans watched in stunned silence.

Their team lost the 3 vs 3 battle rush. It was such a shocking reality that they failed to come to terms with it.

And again, Scarlet Rose shattered another Phoenix Rising record.

Since Dain Ironvalor's reign started, taking the helm of the Phoenix Rising ship, the club was unstoppable. In all their playoff games across the past 3 consecutive seasons, this was the first 3 vs 3 battle rush that they lost.

Not only did Scarlet Rose dominate the individual battle round due to Jonathan's insidious strategy, taking down Dain Ironvalor, but also his radical strategy and Chris' brilliance now won them the 3 vs 3 battle rush.

"Jonathan!" "Jonathan!" "Jonathan!"

"Chris!" "Chris!" "Chris!"

From the Crimson Saint chants, the excited Scarlet Rose fans acknowledged the performances of their 2 star players.

After the 3 vs 3 battle rush, there was a short break for the players to rest their burning fingers and also for the fans to catch their breath. During this time, both teams were also given the time to finalize their tactics for the final team battle of their respective seasons.

The arena was already decided.

[Arena Location: Frost Hell]

[Description: In an ancient era, before the dawn of Human supremacy, there lived a Frost King and his army. After his death and burial, the energy contained in his body spread, corrupting the world, turning it into a frozen hell. His minions became Frost Wraiths. His kingdom is now an uninhabitable hell.]

[Hazards: Continuous frost damage, and Frost Wraith attacks.]

The break of the final was longer than the other games of the playoff round. Also, there was a reason why the music entertainment was not scheduled for before the game like usual.

This was because tonight, it was a halftime show.

The musician in question?

Nightingale took the stage as the guest performer for the 11th final of the Warstar RPG Champions League, and he killed the show.

It was an energy-filled performance drawing at the heart strings of the players. At the end of the electric performance, the fans were rested and hyped enough for the conclusion of the final of the Warstar RPG Champions League.

And finally, the commentators started the main event.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's time".

"The moment of truth".

"The final 30 minutes of the final of the Warstar RPG Champions League".

"The moment that will decide the 11th champion of the Warstar RPG Champions League".

"At the beginning, it seemed like Scarlet Rose were the underdogs but the circumstances have changed since then. Now, the men in red are leading".

"Not just leading, they're dominating!"

"Can Scarlet Rose actually do it?"

"Is this their night or will Dain Ironvalor orchestrate a comeback for the reigning champions?"

"And that's the thing! No one knows the answer".

"And that's why I can't wait to see it play out. This has the potential to become the greatest final of the decade!"

[LOADING...]

The players loaded into the arena.

For one of the 2 clubs, nothing changed. Phoenix Rising started with the same lineup, Dain Ironvalor leading his all-out offensive lineup of a Paladin, 2 Elementalist, a Combat Mage, and a Warlock.

As for Scarlet Rose, for the final, Jonathan made a change, finally calling one of the sub players in his team to the fore. The Gunner who secured the all-important victory in the 3 vs 3 battle rush was benched.

After such a grueling battle, he was yet to fully recover.

Scarlet Rose started with a starting V lineup led by Crimson Saint; comprising 2 Paladins, an Elementalist, a Launcher, and a Cleric.

It was the moment of truth.

In those few seconds before the clash started, the tension in Wembley Stadium hit a crescendo.

And then, it started.

BOOM!

Scarlet Rose's Launcher opened the game with a devastating salvo.

The Launcher is the one class with the highest range in Warstar, alongside the Sharpshooter class. Jonathan didn't decide to sub the Gunner for a Launcher just because the Gunner controller was tired, it was more of a tactical change.

In terms of range, other long range classes like Gunners and Elementalist simply could not compare. And when firmly entrenched, Launchers are capable of dealing truly devastating damage from a safe distance.

Frost Hell is not one of the truly big arenas in professional Warstar, it is more of a medium-sized arena.

A well-developed max level 100 Launcher's range can cover the full arena, making a Launcher a devastating enemy in this frozen hell.

Phoenix Rising knew this perfectly. This was why as soon as they were spawned in the arena, the Phoenix Rising players scattered, following the plan of their captain as they barely managed to avoid the brunt of the damage.

{Rocket Salvo=}

A low level Launcher skill that fires a burst of rockets that explode on impact, dealing area damage.

This was the initial attack when the players scattered, but it was not the last from the Launcher before the Phoenix Rising players could close the distance to the opposition players.

With enough distance between them, the Launcher had all the time in the world to type the complicated input for an Awakened level skill and that was exactly what he did.

He went for the most direct of the Awakened level Launcher skills, the one that could not be dodged.

{Satellite Cannon=}

Also known as Satellite Beam, this is an Awakened level Launcher skill that calls in a high-powered laser from orbit, dealing continuous damage in a targeted area. It was a truly devastating skill.

Having a Launcher in this arena was truly like having a cheat, but Gabriel anticipated it all. It was why he made his team scatter.

Also, he already made peace with the fact that one of his teammates would be targeted by the Launcher after they scattered. He just hoped he was the one who was targeted.

Alas, the Launcher had eyes for someone else... the Warlock.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The frost covering the ground cracked, ice evaporating in a titanic chemical reaction triggered by the consecutive laser blasts.

The Warlock suffered.

And yet, in that little time, the first Phoenix Rising player finally arrived at the rendezvous point. Dain Ironvalor arrived first having asked his teammates to deliberately move slower.

Only him could face what would follow next in his team.

At the middle point of the arena stood the palace of the Ancient Frost King, the only place protected from the damaging cold.

As soon as Dain Ironvalor arrived, he was ambushed!

But anticipating it, the Paladin defended himself valiantly, avoiding a damaging injury immediately as he faced an all-out attack from 4 enemy Avatars led by Jonathan's Crimson Saint himself.

Dain Ironvalor was barely good enough to hold his ground for a few seconds till his teammates arrived, and that was when all hell broke loose.

The palace of the Ancient Frost King is a strategic location. The team that secures it first would have an advantage simply because the threat of the Launcher will be nullified, and they'll also be protected from the biting cold that deals passive damage to all Avatars exposed to it.

The Launcher's attacks cannot penetrate the roof of the gigantic structure to the Avatars fighting to the death inside it.

This was why when the Launcher attacked, forcing their opponents to scatter, the other Scarlet Rose players went straight to the palace to secure it.

But that was also why Dain Ironvalor led his team there to meet them though the possibility of an ambush there was very high.

BOOM!

Holding their ground, the 4 scarlet Rose Avatars blocked the door leading inside the palace, fighting against their opponents right there at the entrance, at a place where the Launcher could still help.

In this team battle, the Launcher was the cornerstone of the battle, the main character of this deadly game.

He kept on unleashing hell from a distance.

And now, it was a race against time. Which of the 2 teams would succumb first?

Phoenix Rising relied on their numbers advantage in the tight battle for the palace, unleashing hell against the 4 defenders with 5 Avatars.

But the enemies had a Cleric.

Not just that. Scarlet Rose depended on the support of their Launcher from a distance, which was why they focused on defense and self-preservation, letting the Launcher do the bulk of the damage from a safe distance.

For a few minutes, it was a stalemate.

A brutal, intense stalemate till the first death happened.

[Warlock Avatar, DarkLord Clotti has been eliminated!]

The Warlock died first, but he already set the foundation for his team. Afterall, a Warlock's curses and debuffs remain even after death, weakening opponents for his teammates.

Immediately after the Warlock died though, something changed.

Phoenix Rising became more reckless and aggressive with their attacks, Dain Ironvalor leading the charge.

The Elementalists turned into artillery war machines, unleashing hell on their enemies.

And in that momentary chaos, the battlefield sang a lullaby of death.

[...Avatar has been eliminated!]

[...Avatar has been eliminated!]

[...Avatar has been eliminated!]

Chapter 185: An unforgettable finale [1]

[Warlock Avatar, DarkLord Clotti has been eliminated!]

The first casualty in the team battle of the Warstar RPG Champions League happened, Phoenix Rising's Warlock.

In individual battles, the Warlock class is one of the weakest classes in Warstar but the revolutionary video game built such a solid world background and intricate power system that left no loopholes.

Every class in Warstar had its use, and its strong points.

The strongest single combatants were Combat Mages and Blademasters, but classes like Clerics and Warlocks also had their uses, and they shine mostly when they play alongside others, in a team.

A Warlock's importance was no less important than a Cleric in a team.

Like a Ghostblade that can cast spell boundaries to buff his teammates with various blessings, a Warlock can cast debuff spells and curses on enemies, weakening enemies for his teammates.

In simple terms, a Warlock can make a battle of 5 vs 5 become a battle of 5 vs 4.5 or even 3.5 depending on the level of the Warlock.

And Phoenix Rising's Warlock? The guy was world class.

He died first, but he already fulfilled his purpose in his team. And his death became the catalyst that galvanized the team battle to a crescendo.

Immediately after the Warlock died, something changed.

BZZZ!

Phoenix Rising became more reckless and aggressive with their attacks, Dain Ironvalor leading the charge.

It was an all-out battle! The Elementalists turned into artillery war machines, unleashing hell on their enemies, recklessly unleashing their last fuel.

And in that momentary chaos, the battlefield sang a lullaby of death.

[Elementalist Avatar, Rising Storm has been eliminated!]

[Elementalist Avatar, Poseidon's Fury has been eliminated!]

[Cleric Avatar, Gentle Love has been eliminated!]

The Avatars with the least defense and HP fell first.

As the attacking side, and under the bombardment of the hidden Launcher since the beginning of the clash for the Frost King's palace, the Phoenix Rising Avatars had come under a lot of punishment and when the battlefield sang a lullaby of death, they suffered more.

They lost their 2 Elementalists in the chaos, a class well known for its devastating damage but in exchange, they took their opponents Cleric.

A Cleric, unassuming but the most important component in a team battle.

Afterall, not only can Clerics heal teammates, saving them from death, they actually have a skill to Revive allies too.

Though in the English Pro Alliance, the Revive skill was restricted to be used on only 1 Avatar, it was still a game-changing move in a team battle.

Gabriel had a plan though.

From the beginning of the battle in the Frost King's palace, under all that bombardment and as the attacking side, Gabriel's target was always the Cleric.

"Remove him off the board by all means!"

This was the order he emphasized to his teammates during the team planning, and this was why he and his teammates focused on her.

Jonathan knew his plan, he knew that they were targeting his Cleric but he didn't fight it. This is because he knew that by directing all their attention to their Cleric, they would be leaving themselves vulnerable.

Jonathan's plan?

While they focus on our Cleric, we strike!

And strike was exactly what they did, effectively taking out both Elementalist, and Phoenix Rising's Warlock in exchange for 1 Avatar of their own though it was their Cleric.

To Jonathan, it was an acceptable situation. A win.

But was it really?

Clearly, the commentators thought so as they went crazy, going all lyrical about Jonathan's leadership and the level of play of the Scarlet Rose players.

While the commentators went crazy with their commentary, the game continued on the 3-way holographic screen...

After that harrowing lullaby of death, Phoenix Rising was horribly crippled, left with only Dain Ironvalor and the Combat Mage.

As for Crimson Saint? They still had Crimson Saint, Chris' Avatar, an Elementalist, and the well-hidden Launcher.

It was suddenly a 2v4 situation, an invaluable advantage to Scarlet Rose, but it didn't stay that way.

The team battle comprises of 2 teams with 5 starting V Avatars fighting in a team battle to the death. But if an Avatar dies in either team, it releases a slot for a substitute Avatar to enter the stage.

2 substitutions are allowed in a professional English Pro Alliance game.

And it takes approximately a minute to arrive at the Frost King's Palace from the spawn point of the Frost Hell arena.

Before the lullaby of death, a Phoenix Rising Avatar died first... the Warlock.

Since the Warlock's death, a minute already passed.

...

Jonathan could not believe what he was seeing.

Victory! He could see it, it was so close.

In the blink of an eye, they managed to take out 3 Phoenix Rising Avatars. His plan was solid, his players were skilled and determined but despite all that, Jonathan never expected his plan to go so smoothly.

'It's all us now!' He thought, unable to contain his excitement.

Jonathan felt an urge to type and taunt Gabriel in the chat, but knowing how important victory was to their trophy aspirations, he ignored that instinct in a rare moment of self-restraint as he led the attack on the 2 hapless Avatars.

The 2 Paladin Avatars descended on the lonesome figures of Dain Ironvalor and the Combat Mage, turning into a hurricane of steel again.

The clangor of striking steel filled the arena, and then...

BZZZ!

Suddenly, gentle green light reflected from the bodies of the 2 Phoenix Rising Avatars.

'A Cleric...?!' Jonathan's eyes widened.

Yes, a Cleric. Phoenix Rising's first substitute was a Cleric.

Having experienced the support of a Cleric since, and with his years of experience playing in the pro scene, Jonathan knew just how significant a single Cleric could be at this point of the game.

But this was not the reason why he was so shocked.

'How?!'

And finally, he understood.

With wide eyes, he looked at Dain Ironvalor. 'Devious bastard...!'

He finally understood.

He instructed the Launcher to stay in that vantage point not just to attack the starting V players of Phoenix Rising, but also to keep an eye on any substitute enemy player that enters the arena.

But due to how intense the battle is, the Launcher got lost, not paying attention to the exact moment when the Cleric was spawned in the arena.

And to avoid detection, instead of taking the fastest route to the Frost King's palace, the Cleric took a roundabout path, avoiding the Launcher's gaze.

He was able to manage this because Phoenix Rising already deduced the general location of the Launcher after suffering so many attacks from him.

It was also why the Cleric took more than a minute to arrive at the Frost King's palace.

Jonathan's eyes narrowed. 'I was fooled'.

But it didn't matter, the situation was still salvageable, or so he thought.

BOOM!

As soon as green light shone on their bodies, telling them that their ally was here, Dain Ironvalor and the Combat Mage finally shed their pretense of weakness.

Both combat classes erupted!

Shedding his defensive style totally, Dain Ironvalor threw itself alongside the swift Combat Mage at the enemies, going on an offensive barrage.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

[Elementalist Avatar, Cryo King has been eliminated!]

They focused on the Elementalist and obliterated him in seconds. Afterall, there was no more Cleric to heal his injuries anymore.

Most importantly though, even with the help of a Cleric, the intense battle since already drained the HP of the Scarlet Rose players significantly.

A burst of concentrated attacks was enough to finish off the Elementalist.

Now, it was a 3v3, and Phoenix Rising had a fully charged and potent Cleric.

{Basic Heal=}

A low level Cleric skill that triggers a small burst of healing, heals 3% health, 5% for a specialized Cleric.

{Heal=}

A low level Cleric skill that triggers a powerful burst of healing to restore a significant amount of health to 1 ally, 20%, can go as high as 30% for specialized Clerics.

{Rejuvenation Aura=}

A low level Cleric passive skill that slowly regenerates health for allies in a radius over time.

{Blessing of Fortitude=}

A low level Cleric skill that temporarily increases an ally's defense and resistance to physical attacks.

{Sanctuary=}

A low level Cleric skill that triggers a protective circle that reduces incoming damage and grants resistance to status effects while allies remain within it.

{Ward of Purity=}

A low level Cleric skill that dispels negative effects like poison, curses, or debuffs on an ally or the entire party.

{Haste Blessing=}

A low level Cleric skill that increases an ally's movement and attack speed for a limited time.

All low level skills, but this was exactly why the Cleric still was so feared.

They were a gentle menace capable of a lot of mischief.

A moment ago, Dain Ironvalor and the Combat Mage were in their last legs but as soon as these series of low level Cleric skills were activated, they were revitalized for the crazy finale.

3v3, the battle started.

But it didn't last too long.

43 seconds later...

The other substitutes arrived.

For Scarlet Rose, their first sub was the Gunner who came in place of their dead Cleric but for Phoenix Rising, their last sub entered the game.

Their last sub was a Blademaster but unlike the Cleric, he didn't charge towards the Frost King's palace.

Rather, he ran to a mountain range at the edge of the Frost Hell arena, the lair where the Launcher hid, causing mischief from a distance.

The deciding moment of this battle was here.

The finale was close to its end.

The fans held their breaths.

Chapter 186: An unforgettable finale [2]

[Warlock Avatar, DarkLord Clotti has been eliminated!]

Badump! Badump!

Hearts thrummed like war beats in a thousand chests, heaving up and down in trepidation as the final reached its penultimate finale.

The deciding moments of the final team battle was here.

And every subsequent death triggered a reaction in Wembley Stadium.

[Elementalist Avatar, Rising Storm has been eliminated!]

[Elementalist Avatar, Poseidon's Fury has been eliminated!]

[Cleric Avatar, Gentle Love has been eliminated!]

They gnashed their teeth, some hugging their siblings, others hugging their spouse to cope with the tension of this moment.

The fans were the ones watching through a 3-way holographic screen but they didn't feel that way at all. Rather, they felt like they were the ones behind the monitors, typing rapidly on their keyboards, maintaining 150% focus on the battle.

The tension was palpable and filled with venom.

It crackled in the air like electricity. The atmosphere was electric; the tension, the excitement, it all infused Wembley Stadium with a unique drive of competitive energy. Both fans silently cheered their teams on.

Some prayed, others hoped, some even shed tears as they watched.

This... this was just too peak!

[Elementalist Avatar, Cryo King has been eliminated!]

Another death, more reactions among the fans.

These were not just any Avatars dying on that arena. These were some of the best Avatars ever created in the history of the game, and every one of those controllers could take on dozens of the fans in a battle and win.

They were experts, the best of the best, pro players.

And yet, they were the ones now dying on the 3-way holographic screen, on the arena that was now drenched in blood.

Time crawled toward the edge of destiny.

The once chaotic battlefield had become eerily silent; no more reckless charges, no grand explosions, only the ruthless dance of survival.

Scarlet Rose had the numbers advantage, just barely.

By now, all the substitutes already entered the arena, joining the dance of death that invoked the Devil himself.

On Scarlet Rose's side, the constant bombardment by the Launcher that started all the way from the beginning of the team battle finally lessened considerably as the enemy Blademaster chased after him.

The Launcher was forced to focus on the Blademaster and save himself.

As for the others still in the Frost King's palace? There was Crimson Saint himself, Chris' Paladin Avatar, the Gunner substitute, and then Scarlet Rose's final substitute, a Berserker, making it a total of 5 Avatars still alive on their side.

As for Phoenix Rising? The reigning champions were at a slight disadvantage.

One of their Avatars, the Blademaster kept the Launcher busy while Dain Ironvalor led the others, the Combat Mage and the Cleric substitute.

It was now a 5v4 in Scarlet Rose's favor.

It was a brutal showdown in the Frost King's palace.

Numerous iconic highlights were already extracted from the brutal showdown in the Frost King's palace, but with the arrival of the substitutes, the violence and brutality only increased.

Leading both parties were 2 Avatars, 2 Paladins, the best Paladins in the English pro scene.

One designed in a red theme, while the other in yellow and gray.

Crimson Saint vs Dain Ironvalor.

BAM!

The 2 Paladins slammed their shields against each other again, triggering a titanic explosion but then...

CRACK!

Both shields shattered!

Dain Ironvalor and Crimson Saint's shields were S-ranked equipment. And yet, both equipment shattered in the violence of this crazy battle.

Of course, it would be repaired by their club Warstar scientists after the game but for now, both Paladins were suddenly left with only their swords.

They didn't hesitate though.

With just their long swords, they dove into battle again, making the battle even more straightforward and deadly.

It was a brutal battle to the death.

Shoulder slammed against chest, armor caved in...

Sword clashed against sword, sending sparks flying...

And yet, this was not all, the 2 All-star Paladins were just the leading figures, they had subordinates behind them that also spread wanton destruction.

Phoenix Rising's Combat Mage already triggered so many chasers in the cause of this crazy battle that his speed became as fast as that of an Assassin!

He moved like a Ghost, his battle lance striking left and right like a viper.

As for the Cleric, she tried to protect herself from the lethal attacks of the enemy Gunner even as she kept supporting her teammates with her healing skills.

As for the Berserker?

Berserker is one of the classes in Warstar that truly thrives in a situation like this, in a chaotic battlefield that already lost all sense of order, and filled with blood.

In this palace duel, the Cleric and Dain Ironvalor were Phoenix Rising's stand-out performers but the other team also had their top performers.

For Scarlet Rose, Jonathan played the game of his life with Crimson Saint.

Eager to contribute to his captain's victory, Chris also played at an otherworldly level but the Berserker was the one who caused the most chaos.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

He swung his Great sword like a battering rod, crushing his surroundings to oblivion and any Avatar that was unfortunate enough to eat a hit from that head-on, his HP dropped like water from a tap.

The Berserker was like a walking disaster the confines of the palace's entrance. The battle was plain brutal and chaotic, and HP kept on draining.

Eventually, another Avatar died.

[Paladin Avatar, Sage Quentin has been eliminated!]

In the Scarlet Rose player booth...

CRASH!

Chris smashed his keyboard in frustration and dread with wide eyes as he watched his Avatar slowly fading into motes of light.

His body felt cold. He was eliminated, by Dain Ironvalor.

His Avatar was already eliminated, but he could still see the battle through his screen. He didn't watch it from there though, rather, carefully not to disturb his teammates, he walked behind his captain to watch.

It was a disorienting whirlwind of chaos, bright light, and steel.

The clanging sound of steel reverberated in a harrowing symphony, creating a cacophony of battle sounds.

Chris was out of the game, but standing behind his captain, looking through his screen, he felt his blood burning hot.

'Come on!' 'Come on!'

He clenched his fists tightly, filled with tension.

Now, it was 4v4 but the Phoenix Rising Avatars had lower HP.

This wasn't much of an advantage to Scarlet Rose at this moment though, this was because Phoenix Rising had a Cleric and they don't have.

As soon as Chris' Paladin was eliminated, Jonathan felt it but he showed no reaction. He continued the battle for 7 more seconds, then, he typed in the Scarlet Rose chat panel.

He made a radical decision.

{Focus on the Cleric.}

Immediately, all the Scarlet Rose players changed their targets, including the Launcher who was busy running for his life from the pursuing Blademaster.

In a moment of reckless determination, they focused a barrage of attacks on the enemy Cleric that already sustained some damage by now.

Phoenix Rising did not try to defend their Cleric though.

The moment that Scarlet Rose changed their strategy to focus on their Cleric, Gabriel noticed and once again, he showcased the acumen and swift decision making ability of pro players as he also made his decision.

He typed a simple phrase in the Phoenix Rising chat.

{All-out attack!}

Phoenix Rising abandoned their Cleric, focusing on dealing as much damage as possible just as the enemies focused on their Cleric.

KABOOM!

The world exploded.

Everything turned white, and then seconds later, from the light, a notification appeared.

[Cleric Avatar, Soul Flame has been eliminated!]

The Cleric was eliminated!

Before the shock and realization could settle in for the Phoenix Rising fans, another notification appeared the next moment.

[Gunner Avatar, Captain Swallow has been eliminated!]

That notification appeared just in time when the bright white light died down, revealing a scene of Dain Ironvalor sticking his long sword through the tiny visor of a Berserker's helmet.

The Berserker shuddered.

[Berserker Avatar, Rampaging Mountain has been eliminated!]

Silence.

Deep, shocked silence.

Scarlet Rose just lost their Gunner and Berserker!

Gabriel took the same crazy gamble that Jonathan took earlier with his own Cleric. By sacrificing his Cleric, they managed to take out 2 enemy Avatars.

And in a blink, the numbers advantage that Scarlet Rose enjoyed before now was obliterated, overturned in an instant.

Outside, the Blademaster still pursued the Launcher.

In the Frost King's Palace, only the Crimson Saint was left standing against Dain Ironvalor and an almost spent Combat Mage.

Incredulously, the Combat Mage was still alive though with only 7% HP remaining.

For a brief moment, there was silence.

The battle came to a momentary stop as the 3 Avatars stood at a standoff at the entrance to the Frost King's palace, looking at each other.

They had things to say? Maybe, but they didn't chat, it was meaningless.

Crimson Saint simply typed...

{Haha}

...And then he advanced on the 2 Avatars.

Dain Ironvalor and the Combat Mage met the enemy Paladin, and once again, in this penultimate finale, all hell broke loose.

BOOM!

Chapter 187: Champions of England

It seemed scripted, but it was not.

Dain Ironvalor vs Crimson Saint, part of the final survivors in the skirmish at the entrance of the Frost King's Palace.

Now, it was survive or die, no strings attached.

The icy wind howled through the Frost King's Palace, blowing flurries of snow and ash across the shattered battleground.

The once-pristine marble steps at the grand entrance were now scorched and cracked, a silent witness to a war fought by legends.

And standing amid that ruin, three titans remained.

Crimson Saint, the immovable Paladin of Scarlet Rose, his once glorious armor cracked and singed, the crimson cape torn, fluttering weakly.

Dain Ironvalor, the indomitable Paladin of Phoenix Rising, his shield barely intact, sword trembling in his hand.

And between them, gasping, bleeding and defiant, Lucien the Arclord, Phoenix Rising's Combat Mage, flickering like a candle about to be snuffed out, his HP bar hanging at a meager 7%.

There was no more dialogue. No speeches.

Just judgment.

Lucien raised his staff.

{Haha}

Crimson Saint typed and then with a roar, the Paladin charged through the ice and flame, raising a new A-rank substitute shield that he summoned, boots shattering stone as he dashed.

Dain Ironvalor didn't even try to shield the Combat Mage. He knew, and his teammate also knew that his best use at this moment was to try buying him an opportunity to deal a debilitating blow to the Crimson Saint.

The Combat Mage tried.

Lucien unleashed a final spell, a condensed arcane nova, but the Saint cut through it, shield glowing with holy vengeance.

The spell exploded, sending debris and mist flying.

And when the light cleared, the Combat Mage lay crumbled, his staff shattered, his health gone.

He couldn't even buy the time he hoped for, he couldn't create an opportunity for his captain to strike the killing blow.

And now, two remained.

The last Paladins.

The final vanguards of their teams, the Avatars of unbending will.

Crimson Saint and Dain Ironvalor stood just a few feet apart; no full health bars, no backups, no ultimates.

Only grit.

Like the Crimson Saint, Dain Ironvalor also already summoned a new substitute A-rank shield.

BOOM!

They charged simultaneously, sword clashing with a thunderous clang that echoed across the frozen palace. Shields slammed into each other like war drums, holy auras flaring violently.

Every swing was desperate. Every parry was righteous.

Dain Ironvalor struck from above, Crimson Saint blocked and countered low...

Dain Ironvalor sidestepped, bashed with his shield, Crimson Saint reeled...

But before Dain Ironvalor could capitulate on the slight advantage, the shrewd controller of the Crimson Saint improvised, showing his experience as his Avatar recovered almost immediately with a clever technique.

Before Dain Ironvalor could push his advantage, Crimson Saint retaliated with a spinning slash that cut through armor and HP.

Damage notifications filled the air.

They clashed again and again, moving up the frost-ridden steps, their boots slipping on ice, their blades chipping with every brutal impact.

Each skill felt like it would be the last. Each swing pushed them beyond human limits, beyond pro limits.

And finally, with both health bars in red and flickering...

Dain Ironvalor roared, using his last ability. An Awakened level skill.

{Divine Nova=}

An Awakened level Paladin skill that after activation, a burst of radiant energy emanates from the Paladin, dealing devastating damage to nearby enemies and healing allies.

But Crimson Saint responded before being caught in the skill.

In response, Jonathan's fingers also went haywire, flying over his keyboard in a blur...

Tap! Tap! Tap!

He managed to use an Awakened level skill of his own.

{Divine Judgement=}

An Awakened level Paladin skill that calls down a pillar of light to heavily damage enemies in a small area. Deals extra damage to evil-aligned foes.

KABOOM!

Light and flame surged. Steel screamed. A final, desperate clash.

And then...

Silence.

The two Paladins stood still at the top of the palace steps, until both slowly dropped their weapons, fell to one knee...

...and collapsed at the same time, their bodies disintegrating into shimmering motes of light.

[Paladin Avatar, Crimson Saint has been eliminated!]

[Paladin Avatar, Dain Ironvalor has been eliminated!]

Draw.

The battlefield lay still.

In the stadium, tens of thousands of fans held their breaths, sweat dripping down their faces as they numbly watched.

Only two remained now.

Far away, the fate of the final of the Warstar RPG Champions League would be decided in one final duel between two unexpected candidates.

Not Dain Ironvalor, not Crimson Saint, not even Chris' Sage Quentin, rather it was between Phoenix Rising's Blademaster vs Scarlet Rose's Launcher.

And the world held its breath.

...

The battle moved from the ruined steps of the Frost King's Palace to a frozen ridge overlooking the vast glacier beneath.

After a lengthy chase, the Blademaster finally cornered his prey, the Launcher.

Snowflakes swirled as the final two Avatars stepped into the light.

Kairos, the Blademaster of Phoenix Rising stood tall, one shoulder slumped, and katana dragging behind him. His armor was cracked, one gauntlet gone, but his stance radiated balance; grace forged from exhaustion.

Opposite him stood Vesper Quinn, the Launcher of Scarlet Rose, boots rooted in ice, cannon cradled in her arms like an instrument of war.

Her coat was torn, her health bar low, but her glare was sharp, deadly. Her aim, unshaken.

This was the single Avatar that caused Phoenix Rising so many problems in this team battle.

And now, the final moment of the Warstar RPG Champions League final.

One swing. One shot. One victor.

There were no words.

Vesper moved first.

She backstepped smoothly, cannon flaring as she fired a triple salvo of concussive rounds. The first two slammed into the ridge, shattering ice and creating a wall of smoke and shrapnel.

But Kairos dashed through it, blinking forward mid-step, leaving only a fading blur behind in his wake.

He was like a mirage, here and there at the same time. Too fast.

And yet, the Launcher was undeterred, her aim unflinching and true.

But the third shell flew straight into a parry. Kairos slashed it mid-air, detonating it early in a fiery burst that knocked him backward but not down.

Vesper slid to the side, pulling a grenade from her belt and launching it into the sky. It hovered, then burst, raining explosive flak all around. A trap.

Kairos leapt high, spinning, diving between the blasts as he came down in a falling arc, his blade glowing. He slashed...

...but Vesper sidestepped at the last second and unloaded a point-blank cannon blast into his chest.

CRASH!

Kairos skidded across the ice, groaning. His health bar blinked.

[HP- 15%]

Vesper approached, loading a piercing round into the chamber; her final shot as she took aim. Both Avatars were activating skills rapidly as they moved.

Vesper took aim, but Kairos moved. Faster than thought, faster than she could lock on.

{Flash Step=}

He was suddenly behind her.

{Blade Draw=}

A single horizontal cut.

And the cannon dropped from her hands.

Vesper turned, eyes wide; not in pain but in a mixture of complicated emotions; fear, dread, and an indignant feeling of frustration just before her Avatar shattered into digital shards and vanished in the night.

[HP- 0%]

Silence.

---<VICTORY>---

[CHAMPIONS: PHOENIX RISING]

The victory screen flashed but tonight it was not just the victory screen. A system announcement rang across every corner in Wembley Stadium, announcing the newly crowned champions of the Warstar RPG Champions League.

On the frozen ridge, Kairos dropped to one knee, blood dripping from his lip, katana stabbed into the ground to hold himself upright.

He didn't cheer. He didn't smile. He just breathed.

A deep, shaking breath...

...as champion.

And then, Wembley Stadium exploded.

A tidal wave of noise crashed through the iconic stadium as the screen flared with the victory text and the newly crowned champion's text.

The stands shook as tens of thousands of fans leapt to their feet, screaming, chanting, and weeping. Red and gold flags erupted like wildfire through the stands, flares lit the night sky, accompanied by loud chants.

"FOUR IN A ROW!"

"FOUR IN A ROW!"

Phoenix Rising fans chanted excitedly, their voices echoing like thunder through the ancient steel bones of the stadium.

People hugged strangers. Some just screamed incoherently, overwhelmed by the sheer release of tension. Others pounded drums, climbed over barriers, waved banners with Kairos's name in bold, gilded letters.

As for the commentary? The commentary booth shook with sheer disbelief, the sound barely containing the hysteria inside.

"OH MY WORD... KAIROS! HE'S DONE IT!" One commentator shrieked, voice breaking with emotion.

"AGAIN! AGAIN! FOR A FOURTH STRAIGHT SEASON, PHOENIX RISING REMAIN UNTOUCHABLE!" The other roared.

"DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?! DO YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE THIS?! THAT WAS A BATTLE FOR THE AGES!"

"Vesper Quinn pushed him to the edge, pushed him off it even... and he still somehow found footing! T-this is the stuff of poetry!"

"The stuff of legends!"

As the commentators let loose, the camera panned to Phoenix Rising's team box where players were storming the stage, lifting Kairos into the air, laughing, crying, overwhelmed.

Confetti rained down from the Wembley arch as the digital crown icon floated above the team's avatars on the jumbotron.

Phoenix Rising had done it again.

And in that moment, on that pitch, they were immortal.

Chapter 188: An unforgettable night in London

9:12pm.

Wembley Stadium, London, England.

Wembley was a cathedral of chaos and celebration.

Phoenix Rising had done it again. And in that moment, on that pitch, they were immortal.

Then came the reactions.

The moment the final pixel of Vesper Quinn's health bar vanished, the stadium erupted into a deafening roar, a sound no roof could hope to contain.

Fans of Phoenix Rising wept, screamed, collapsed into their seats with hands on their heads, unable to believe what they had just witnessed.

A fought consecutive title. They actually did it!

Now, they were one step away from history, just one trophy away from Cyber Squad's legendary record of 5 Warstar RPG Champions League trophies.

And not just the trophy record, they were also gunning for it the same way that God Noah led his team with Stinger of War, winning it for 5 consecutive seasons, the imperious Cyber Squad reign.

At the beginning of this game and in the buildup to it, Phoenix Rising fans were so confident in their team winning that they overlooked Scarlet Rose's threat.

This season, Scarlet Rose forged a legend of their own but due to overconfidence, Phoenix Rising fans overlooked their opponents at first. But by the end of the game, they learned to respect their rivals.

Scarlet Rose played the game of their life.

It was almost unjust that they actually lost the game at the end.

It was the closest score line of a Warstar RPG Champions League final in years.

[Phoenix Rising: 6 points]

[Scarlet Rose: 5 points]

Just 1 point separated both teams; that was how close the game was.

If Gabriel was not placed at that God status yet, after this final, he finally attained it, the peak.

From today, he was no longer just Gabriel, but God Gabriel.

The new God level player of the English Pro Alliance, the captain of the record-pursuing Phoenix Rising team, Dain Ironvalor's Controller.

He was all that and more.

As soon as the countdown completed, finalizing Phoenix Rising's victory in addition to the victory screen that followed, Wembley Stadium turned into a cauldron of noise. The Phoenix Rising fans didn't even try to be conservative with their celebrations.

Red and gold ignited across the stands like wildfire. Scarves were waved, flares lit the air in a glowing haze, and chants filled the air.

"Phoenix!" "Phoenix!" "Phoenix!"

The chants boomed like battle drums.

Some fans fell to their knees, overwhelmed by joy and the overflowing emotions of the moment. Others jumped into group hugs, couples kissing with passion, arms thrown around strangers turned kin by glory.

Not just the fans. On the field, the players of Phoenix Rising stood as if in a dream; faces dazed with joy, sweat gleaming, adrenaline still coursing through their veins.

Kairos, the Blademaster dropped to his knees, his hands raised to the sky in silent gratitude to his God.

The young Blademaster still couldn't believe it.

He could go on and retire his Pro eSports career now and he won't regret it. Being the savior of his team in the final of the Warstar RPG Champions League, this was something he dared not even see in his dreams, but now, it was reality.

Tears of joy streamed down his eyes; he was a mess of cascading emotions.

His teammates mobbed him, lifting him up with cries of 'MVP' and pounding his back even as the fans joined them in screaming 'MVP!'

As for Gabriel himself, he still felt surreal.

His rise and his team's rise in the English Pro Alliance was an unbelievable story in itself. Along the way, he, his Avatar, and his team had been underdogs once, then level challengers, and then favorites.

At the beginning, actually winning a Warstar RPG Champions League final felt like a luxury that was reserved for the legends like God Noah alone.

Gabriel never imagined winning a Warstar RPG Champions League while not playing for Cyber Squad. Winning multiple? Not even in his wildest dreams.

And yet, here he was.

When Phoenix Rising started, just like every other pro club that rose in London after Cyber Squad, everybody expected the club to die out, snuffed out by the towering shadow of Cyber Squad, the OG London club.

And yet, despite the deep, dark shadow cast over them by Cyber Squad, Gabriel and his team actually managed to do it.

Now, Phoenix Rising was the top club in England.

Gabriel felt melancholic and it was all due to the nature of today's win.

From the insecurity of being underdogs in the final, he grew, he matured, becoming the confident and capable captain that he was today.

This was why like his fans, he also underestimated Scarlet Rose tonight. He underestimated Jonathan's resolve.

It was not till Jonathan fell him with his Crimson Saint that his eyes opened.

And yet, he couldn't stop it, the momentum already slipped from him.

When his team lost the 3 vs 3 battle rush, he was more shocked than the fans and the commentators. At that moment, Gabriel lost his composure for the first time in a long time, an unpleasant feeling he last felt only at the World Championship against the Chinese menace, Meng Wu Ya.

After all that cascade of emotions at the end, for his team to still end up on the winning side, if this was not ironic Gabriel had no idea what was.

It was a humbling experience. Still, he was filled with joy.

While he celebrated, while Phoenix Rising as a whole celebrated, the contrast could not have been more brutal.

The POV switched to the Scarlet Rose player booth...

It felt like a funeral though no one died.

Scarlet Rose players stood still, a painting of heartbreak. Chris already broke down in tears, trying to wipe his tears to no avail.

Vesper Quinn's controller slowly removed her headset, her eyes distant. She was so close, she almost had it... and yet it lost.

She felt devastated.

Her teammates sat slumped, shoulders low, Avatars fading into the post-match summary.

They were so close!

Victory seemed such a step away, and yet that simple step felt like it was left by a Giantess, too long and steep to cross.

The glimmer of triumph had slipped through their fingers in the final moment, and they could only watch as their rivals bathed in gold.

Jonathan? Scarlet Rose's captain was quiet, very quiet.

While his teammates stood, unable to sit down, expressing their devastating in different ways, crying, Jonathan simply sat on his gaming chair, still looking at the monitor as if in a daze.

His eyes were not unfocused though; just there, stale, unmoving.

His lips were curled up slightly as if in a smirk. A smirk filled with a lot of meaning; a lot of hidden pain and suffering.

Tonight meant more to Jonathan than just the 3rd Warstar RPG Champions League final that he played in his career.

Not only did he lose 2 trophies tonight, the Warstar RPG Champions League trophy itself and the league trophy, something even more significant happened in his career; his step down from the highest level.

After tonight, the Crimson Saint would not remain the same.

After tonight, Jonathan and Crimson Saint would no longer be synonymous with the same person and Avatar. After tonight, he relinquished authority of his Avatar, letting Chris inherit it.

After tonight, Jonathan would become a reserve Scarlet Rose player, focused on helping his heir, Chris fully inherit Crimson Saint.

This was why this game meant so much more to him.

Jonathan felt pained, so pained that it seemed like his heart was ripped right out of his chest. But he didn't feel regret.

He leaned back on his gaming chair, looking up at the ceiling.

'I gave my all'. He thought with a smile.

"Haha". Letting out a small hollow laugh, he stood up finally and looked at his teammates. "What are you guys waiting for? Let's go congratulate them".

They looked at him, complicated emotions hidden behind their eyes.

Jonathan smiled. "No need to feel bad, we gave our all".

He grinned. "We played a good game".

With that, Jonathan let his team outside the Scarlet Rose player booth.

As soon as they walked into the arena, Wembley Stadium erupted again. This time, it was a standing ovation across the stadium.

Tens of thousands of Warstar fans, both Phoenix Rising and Scarlet Rose supports applauded the losing team.

They may have lost, but they won the respect of millions.

Jonathan grinned, waving at the crowd and approaching Gabriel to shake his hand and hug him. He and his teammates exchanged pleasantries with their rivals, congratulating them on the victory.

Then, the stadium lights dimmed...

A single spotlight shone on the center stage. There, 2 robotic arms descended from the ceiling, carrying the glittering Warstar RPG Champions League Trophy and the League Trophy.

The first was gold, obsidian, and ruby, while the second trophy was silver; both masterpieces forged to crown legends; champions.

The Phoenix rising squad assembled below, arms linked.

Kairos stepped forward accompanied by his captain, his expression hard to read; part solemn, part on the edge of tears. Then, with his captain raising the league trophy at the same time, he also raised the Champions League trophy.

BOOM!

Wembley Stadium erupted one last time.

A burst of light. Pyrotechnics detonated. Flames roared into the sky.

"FOUR!" The fans chanted, fists raised, confetti raining down like digital fire.

The championship screen across Wembley simply read:

[PHOENIX RISING – LEGENDS OF THE GAME]

And in that instant, surrounded by roaring fans, falling gold, and their own tears, Phoenix Rising were no longer just champions.

They were myth.

Chapter 189: Holiday [1]

Almost 2 months later...

The 11th season of the English Pro Alliance was over, and with it, a new league champion and Warstar RPG Champions League champion was crowned, it was Phoenix Rising who defended their trophies.

Considering how grueling a full season of the English Pro Alliance is for pro players, the Pro Alliance gives their players enough holiday time to recuperate and prepare for the new season.

This time, they added even more time to the holiday simply because a full year after the first World Championship, the world of Warstar was now preparing for its second World Championship.

The championship would commence as soon as all the major Warstar Pro Alliances across the world conclude, determining the champion clubs that qualified to represent their various countries in the World Championship.

After winning their 4th consecutive Warstar RPG Champions League trophy, Phoenix Rising's owner was not stingy.

He splurged money, rewarding his players with a brand new latest gen Mercedes Benz while also giving them an all-expense paid trip for a vacation abroad.

They were not the only ones who enjoyed the luxury though.

Club Echelon didn't participate in the just concluded Pro Alliance season, and yet through the holiday, they were one of the main bone of contention among discussions within eSports communities.

Just like Phoenix Rising, Nightingale decided to make the holiday a special occasion for his players, rewarding them with an all-expense paid vacation abroad.

Noah and his crew were in Miami, U.S.A.

But at the moment? They were inside the game, raiding a dungeon.

~~~~~

[DUNGEON NAME: The Obsidian Labyrinth!]

[Location: Hidden beneath the ruins of the extinct volcano, Mount Kael'Dran, on the western edge of the Fireveil Continent.]

[Level Requirement: 100]

[Reward: Massive skill point cache + a chance at Mythic-grade items.]

[Lore: Once a prison forged in the planet's heart to contain the ancient deity of torment, Tharion the Chainburned, the Obsidian Labyrinth was sealed off after the eruption that destroyed Kael'Dran. Recently unearthed by shifting tectonics, the dungeon now pulses with infernal energy.]

~~~~~

It was a new dungeon, part of a batch of new series dungeon that the Warstar developers released as soon as the holiday started.

After the big server update that resulted in the introduction of SS and SSS-Rank unique skills, the Warstar developers finally seemed to have removed the limit breaker as they releases new updates with far more frequency than they've done in over a decade.

To enthusiastic Warstar players like Noah and his crew though, the new updates was heaven. They were eager to explore new maps.

That was why even on their vacation, they dove into the game, tackling the challenge of the new dungeon.

The entrance of the dungeon was carved into molten black stone, glowing sigils sealing an archway that bled heat into the air.

Inside, a descent of 99 floors awaited; each one a twisted gauntlet of traps, puzzles, and infernal monstrosities.

It was a deadly challenge, but if any team could take on this challenge and survive to tell the tale, surely, it was Lord Doom's team.

Floor 1 to 20 was a dance of death through mechanical traps and lava-infused golems. Caleb's Summons scouted ahead, disarming and distracting deadly constructs while Benjamin rained elemental fury to clear swarms of Fire Wisps and Cinderlings.

Clearing through them was a blitz for the team.

Floor 21 to 40? Here, Aria took point in the Hall of Silence, a zone that nullified voice commands. From floor to floor, it became a brutal melee affair. Thankfully, that was where she excelled.

Aria was the star in the descent from floor 21 to 40 as her blades spun like hurricanes, while Genevieve's hand signals and glowing sigils kept the team healed and protected.

Lord Doom was simply the anchor, making sure that nothing too difficult for them to handle did not have the time to settle to pose a threat.

And then, floor 41 to 70. These floors were a series of cursed chambers filled with Shadow Priests and Flame-Warped Beasts.

Illusions twisted their perceptions; at one point, Noah had to fight a mirror version of himself, triggering a legendary solo sequence where Lord Doom cast the Awakened Warlock skill, Shadow Rend: Abyss Crown to obliterate his phantom double.

Despite knowing exactly what Lord Doom was capable of doing before now, still, seeing him in action left his teammates shaken.

An enemy that could use all skills, not just low level skills, including high level and Awakened level skills of all classes. Lord Doom was simply the singular most powerful Avatar in the game.

His Versatile Avatar SSS-Rank unique skill was simply a cheat.

They were glad he was not their enemy. They were glad he was team.

Unlike most other Avatars whose growth potential stunts after hitting level 100, by now, Aria and the others already learned that Lord Doom's growth potential was limitless.

Yes, Lord Doom already hit level 100, the max level of the game.

Yes, Lord Doom's attributes could no longer improve, but who cares when instead of qualitatively, this Avatar could get stronger quantitatively?

While other Avatars are limited by the amount of skill points that they have, Lord Doom conveniently has an SSS-Rank unique skill that multiplies the amount of skill points that he gets every time.

Pair that with Versatile Avatar, the SSS-Rank unique skill that makes him learn every skill, and Lord Doom becomes a menace that is able to grow stronger after every battle.

Aria could not wait for the new season.

Watching Gabriel, that bastard and his team claw their path from the jaws of defeat to secure another champions league trophy, Aria was reminded of why she was coming out of retirement.

She wanted to do the same, and she could not wait any longer.

And then, from floor 71 to 99. The Chains of Judgement zone. Here, there are giant moving platforms suspended over lava rivers with infernal chains attempting to drag players down.

A single mistake meant death.

But these guys made no mistake. Noah and Aria performed synchronized maneuvers; Combat Mage and Blademaster cleaving through chain spirits mid-air while dodging platforms collapsed.

It was stunning display of skill and camaraderie, and eventually, they defeated all 99 floors and finally arrived at the last floor... Level 100.

At the heart of the dungeon lay Tharion the Chainburned, bound in the middle of a massive obsidian forge chamber. His body was covered in molten chains, each one glowing with rune-etched agony.

His face, a mask of eternal suffering, slowly turned as they entered. His voice, deep and echoing, welcomed them like a sermon.

"You step into a crucible, mortals. Let pain be your teacher".

And then, no more words.

The final battle started.

In the first phase of the boss fight, Tharion fights while partially bound, a restriction to nerf his strength.

But even with it, he was a fearsome existence.

BOOM!

He slammed the ground with chained fists, causing Seismic Fissures to erupt in molten bursts.

In response, Caleb summons Titan Shell, a defensive colossus that blocks incoming chain whips.

Aria leaps from chain to chain, cutting key bindings on Tharion's limbs to progress the phase. All the while Benjamin used wind and ice to cool sections of the floor, creating safe zones from lava bursts.

And then, phase 2 of the boss fight starts.

With a sound like that of crashing thunder, Tharion breaks free. His chains unravel and hover in the air, attacking independently.

It was chaos, and death.

But in response, Noah enters full Spellforged Overdrive, chaining Arcane Blink + Flame Bind + Mana Rupture to create temporary safe pockets.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

His fingers flew across his keyboard in a mirage.

"Haha," he laughed. "How long I missed this feeling".

Sitting beside him, Genevieve was also focused and in the game, her Cleric casts Sanctuary Sigil, anchoring the team through a barrage of Infernal Wails, a unique fear-based AOE attack.

Tharion grabs Benjamin and hurls him toward lava, but Aria intercepts midair, triggering a cinematic Blademaster counter.

{Dragon Reversal: Crimson Fang=}

The damage from that attack finally pushed Tharion to phase 3 of the boss fight. At red health, 10% HP, Tharion begins casting 'Eternal Shackle', a raid wipe spell.

"All-out attack!" Noah roared.

Caleb releases his trump card: Elder Abyss Drake, a giant monstrosity that grabs Tharion from above.

Aria and Noah leap together in a dual limit break finisher.

{Voidstorm Lance=}

{Blade Tempext X=}

KABOOM!

The screen flashes white.

Chains shatter.

Tharion screams as his body crumbled into ash and flame.

Then... silence.

They stand in the silence of the forge, breathing heavily. Then, a pillar of light appears in the center.

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[You have completed the Obsidian Labyrinth dungeon!]

[+10 Skill Points Gained.]

[Mythic Drop – A Rank: Tharion's Shackled Mantle (Combat Mage Exclusive)]

[New Dungeon Cleared Record Set: Team Echelon – 2 hours, 12 minutes.]

~~~~~

Aria whistled.

"Not bad for a vacation".

Noah smirked. "Next time, let's not pick the dungeon named after eternal torment please".

They laughed.

The screen faded to black.

[DUNGEON CLEARED]

Chapter 190: Holiday [2]

Miami, Florida...

Ultra-Lux Villa, Oceanfront, fully-staffed and with private access, Noah and his teammates relaxed in their luxurious villa just days after they cleared the Obsidian Labyrinth dungeon.

Noah sat beneath a swaying palm by the infinity pool, shirtless with sunglasses low on his nose, sipping a frozen margarita he didn't order but wasn't refusing.

He wasn't used to this; the silence, the peace, but it was starting to grow on him. Occasionally, he'd glance at the Warstar forums on his tablet, grinning at the chaos their dungeon run had caused.

Top guilds were still stuck at floor 83.

He chuckled to himself. He shouldn't feel so attached to the happenings in the game, after all, he was a pro player. And yet, after spending so many months playing in the game, leveling up from level 0 as Lord Doom, he regained his attachment to the casual side of the revolutionary video game.

Noah almost forgot how it felt when Warstar was just launched already more than a decade ago, till he started playing Lord Doom.

With a sigh, he closed the tab and stretched, letting the sea breeze blow his hair back. Victory was a flavor best enjoyed under the sun.

Aria was already half a legend in Miami Beach.

After nearly causing a bar fight, which she won of course, and becoming an Instagram sensation for accidentally high-kicking a volleyball into a drone, she now lounged on a yacht in the bay, bikini-clad and surrounded by champagne bottles she refused to pay for.

"I'll never return to civilized society," she declared, while threatening to duel a jet skier who splashed her.

Staring at her, Noah chuckled.

Caleb was holed up indoors in the air-conditioned villa library, a tropical smoothie in hand and a whiteboard covered in formulas for optimal spell scaling ratios.

In his words, he was relaxing but everyone knew he was reverse engineering the A.I pathfinding of Tharion's chains from the last dungeon.

The only sign of his true vacation spirit? The flamingo-print swing shorts he wore with a dress shirt.

Genevieve floated peacefully on a pink donut-shaped pool float, a wide-brim hat shielding her from the sun, a book titled >Restoration Magic and the Art of Letting Go< propped on her chest.

She refused to let anyone disturb her... except Noah, who somehow got away with splashing her and running.

"Enjoy this peace," she told him once, eyes closed. "Because the next dungeon will ruin us".

Noah laughed. "I can't wait".

Benjamin? Well, Benjamin was... Benjamin.

He was on a rented jet ski, screaming "WIND SLASH!" at the top of his lungs while making splash waves at unsuspecting tourists. When asked what he thought of Miami, his reply?

"Good beaches. Great waves. ZERO GOBLINS. 10/10".

He also tried surfing, salsa dancing, and launching fireworks from the beach. All on the same night. Thankfully, no casualties were reported.

In their different ways, they were enjoying themselves.

It was nearing sunset.

A golden hue bathed the white marble of their beachfront villa. The gate buzzed, and through it came faces long separated by the brutal months of conflict and secrecy.

Gabriel walked in first; calm, refined, but unmistakably pleased to see them. Behind him was Jonathan, grinning wide and already opening his arms for a bear hug that nearly broke Noah's ribs.

Following them were more familiar faces; former comrades, rival guild elites, including top players from the older days.

Some held beach bags. Others already wore gear IRL customized to match their in-game Avatars. For a few seconds after they arrived, there was silence, it was almost like an all-star meeting or something till it was interrupted by Benjamin.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?"

He walked up to them, smiling brightly. "Wow, we've got bastards and fools right here, what a rare sight". He grinned.

"Foolish bastard!" The older players snapped back at Benjamin, laughing.

Well, that was the beginning of the reunion. They laughed, cried, which was weird to Benjamin, and the clapped each other on the backs.

Genevieve blinked. "Did we just become a resort guild?"

Noah stood up, his relaxed expression sharpening just a bit.

"We're more than that," he said. "This is the war council".

Such a reunion abroad was a rare thing, and it wasn't just coincidence.

They'd come for one reason; to challenge >The Grand Monastery of Aetheryos<, the newest SSS-Ranked Level 100 dungeon.

A 20-man, no-respawn gauntlet designed for elite coordination, split-path raids, and world ending bosses.

As the Miami sky dimmed and the stars took their place, the gathering of legends laughed and shared stories under villa lights.

"Hey Jonathan," one of the more older players called. "How shameless of you to come".

Jonathan bit into his lap of chicken, an innocent look on his face. "What do you mean? I don't understand".

The retired pro player shook his head, exasperated. "You're so old already, and yet, your shamlessness still prevails".

"What do you mean you don't understand?" The old retiree glared at him. "I mean, don't you know shame? Gabriel just beat you in the final less than 2 months ago, and yet here you are, about to raid a dungeon with him".

"So what?"

"Huh?"

Jonathan laughed. "Let me tell you something George. In the journey of life, a wise man once said... life is a spoon". His face was solemn.

George's face twitched. "Bastard". He said through gritted teeth.

The others burst into laughter.

Jonathan also laughed. "Anyways old man..."

"Who are you calling old man?!"

"Well, sorry, young man I guess. Anyways young man..."

George's face twitched again.

Jonathan continued without paying attention to him. "You see that final last time?" He looked at Noah. "I didn't want this bastard to remain the G.O.A.T, giving the others such a big gap when it comes to winning trophies".

"While preparing for the final, one night, I had a dream". His face turned solemn again. "Jesus Chris appeared to me".

They stared at him with deadpan expressions.

He chuckled. "It's the truth!"

No one said a word.

He chuckled again. "Anyways, he was the one who told me to be benevolent. I deliberately let Gabriel win so he could pursue Noah's trophy record".

Gabriel finally looked at him. "You don't mean it". He laughed.

"I'm dead serious!"

"Shameless bastard!" The others erupted in laughter.

They continued sharing stories under the villa lights, relaxing.

Tomorrow, the battlefield would shift back to pixels and steel.

But tonight? They were just champions on vacation.

Together again.

That night, due to most of the rooms in the villa being suddenly occupied, Noah was forced to share a room. Since Benjamin was already with Caleb, and Aria was with her boyfriend, Noah was forced to share a room with Genevieve.

...

By sunrise, the villa was no longer just a paradise retreat. It was a war room.

The transformation began early. Noah stood at the center of the wide, marble-floored hall, coffee in hand, while Caleb issued orders like a general architect. The villa staff were politely dismissed for the day, this was sacred territory now. They could not afford to be disturbed when they started.

Cables were coiled, routers upgraded, monitors hauled in by the dozen.

Each player's setup was custom-built for peak performance; multi-screen rigs with ultra-low latency, ergonomic chairs perfectly tailored, and crystal-clear surround sound headsets.

Benjamin kept calling it 'The Temple of Tap-Tap Vengeance'. No one objected.

Power strips were anchored to the walls, cooled beverage fridges lined up at the edges, and each player's desk had their guild crest burned or engraved into the side.

The lighting was adjusted to mimic a sleek esports arena; soft blue backglow beneath the desks, tactical overhead illumination, and blackout curtains to shut out the Miami sun.

It was expensive but as some of the biggest Warstar pro players in England, most of them were rich.

In the corner, Aria and Jonathan calibrated a giant curved tactical overview screen for team comms, top-down analysis, and real-time dungeon schematics.

Gabriel set up the warboard beside it, pinning mockup boss diagrams and loot expectations like he was planning a heist.

Every station was linked through a private, encrypted LAN server Caleb had personally built that morning, and Genevieve double-checked each player's ping.

Anything above 10ms was unacceptable.

Even the ambient soundtrack had been chosen; epic orchestral swells mixed with subtle heartbeats, building tension.

By noon, the villa's once opulent hall had become a sleek battlefield command center, humming with energy, glowing like the cockpit of a starship.

It had the soul of a guild all and the edge of a professional esports arena.

Twenty battle stations.

One synchronized goal.

No distractions. No delays.

The Grand Monastery of Aetheryos awaited.

And as Noah stood before the group, now fully geared and in formation, he muttered just loud enough for them to hear.

"Let's remind the system who we are".

Silence, for a few seconds, then...

"Muahahahaha...!" The oldies burst into such loud laughter that youngsters like Gabriel were infected, also laughing.

Benjamin rolled down from his chair, clutching his chest in laughter.

Noah looked at them, dismayed. He shook his head.

"That was so cringe!" Benjamin laughed some more.

Noah conveniently ignored them and logged into the game.

[Combat Mage Avatar >Lord Doom< has logged into the game!]