

Brand New 1701

Chapter 1701: Rushing To Help

Suddenly, I felt a zap of Mana and Spirit Energy reaching me. It wasn't hurtful or an attack, but it was actually a special message.

Telepathy!

However, my defenses were so high I could completely deflect it if I wanted.

But why would I ever do that?

So no, I didn't do that, as I let whoever was trying to communicate with me do so.

And that Spiritual Energy was quite familiar, from someone we had talked with a few hours ago.

It was strong and icy.

"Elayne! Elayne, are you there? Were you able to deal with the camp down there?"

It was Khione's voice, and she sounded a little desperate.

What's going on?

"Khione! Yes, we managed to take it down, and now we're on our way back. What's going on?"

"Ice Trolls! They're coming here! And they're also accompanied by Ice Goblins and even Ice Orcs, and something else! I had no idea there were three tribes of barbarians!"

"Wait, what? Already? Where are they coming from?"

"They were seen coming from the depths of the mountain's interior! Please hurry, their first wave has already hit the walls, and my soldiers are fighting with all they've got. We would never need this much help if it wasn't because their numbers are utterly ridiculous! There are hundreds!"

"Okay! We're on our way! Don't worry!"

"Hurry! I'll give you anything you want, but please help us protect the Queendom!"

"We're going there! Are Rita and my friends helping?"

"Yeah, they're very strong, but I fear they may not be enough. There's something dark within these barbarians. They already are busy. If they strike from a blind spot, it'll be bad news."

"Okay!"

I nodded, releasing my full Yggdragon Aura at maximum power.

"Let's go!"

RUMBLE!

The entire walking cabin trembled, absorbing my Yggdragon Aura completely and then beginning to rapidly transform into a gigantic wooden dragon.

I breathed life and power into this cabin, transforming it into an Yggdragon Golem of sorts, a combination of several soul-bound skill effects and spells making it possible.

"GO!"

"ROOOAARRR!"

The Yggdragon Golem roared, leaping into the skies and then flying toward the mountain's peak, where the Queendom of Ice Fairies was located. I had left my clone there fighting, and after Khione told me about it, I quickly saw through my Spirit Clone the army approaching.

Rita, Lily, and Jenny were fighting in three different spots, while my Spirit Clone was protecting the city, forming a large formation and then combining it into a powerful Celestial Ward Barrier.

"These damn things! Where did they even come from? This shouldn't be legal, damn it!"

Rita was firing several bullets and cannons of darkness using her powerful gun, Onyx, blowing through the large hordes of Ice Trolls, Ice Goblins, and Ice Orcs that charged forward without end.

"Rita, stop pushing me too much! I'm already shooting hundreds of bullets at a time! I can't use Bullet Time repeatedly!"

Her gun constantly complained to her that she was being pushed to do things too fast, but Rita wasn't really listening to her, conjuring magic as well to compensate and cover an even larger area.

"Kyuuuuh!"

Whitey was by her side, helping her fight them with his powerful magic, bombarding the barbarians corrupted by dark energies with explosive spells made of holy light, super effective against them as they had embraced these dark powers, greatly weak against holy elemental magic of the light attribute.

"There are way too many everywhere! And just when Elayne is taking care of the camp down below! So they were indeed a diversion! Were they waiting for us to go down and leave the place defenseless?"

Lily was swinging her pickaxe around while also holding a hammer made of spiritual crystals and powerful magic ores fused together, swinging and smashing the ground, creating tremors that spawned massive, sharp boulders and pillars of stone and diamonds, either impaling her foes or sending them flying away into the skies or down into the mountain.

"Lily, keep conjuring long-range magic! You have to cover a wide range. Don't let them advance! We're going to erect more walls around the perimeter!"

"Okay, Terra! Thanks!"

Terra, her pickaxe, seemed to be helping her as well, giving her instructions and even thinking about strategies, complementing Lily's carefree personality that usually didn't think that far into the future, which was quite amazing. She spread out large walls of crystals and stone, stopping the armies altogether for a few seconds, buying enough time for the fairies to rest and recover with healing magic.

"Um, god damn it! I didn't think I would get into a damn freaking war! Aaaaggh!"

Jenny was screaming while fighting, constantly unleashing sharp and long-range attacks with her powerful and newly evolved halberd, further boosted by her equipment, her physique, and her magic powers. She was unleashing swarms of serpents made of purple poison-attribute Spirit Energy and Mana, swarming her foes and biting through their bodies, poisoning dozens after dozens of foes at once.

Her halberd was strong too, as she managed to evade some deadly magic and hammer attacks from Ice Trolls and Ice Orcs and then leap over them to behead them, swinging her halberd toward their necks. Her weapon was still not an Intelligent Weapon like Onyx or Terra, but it sure was strong and useful, giving Jenny the edge she needed to fight and survive.

Yeah, I am sure they're handling things fine, but that won't be enough. The armies kept coming from behind Lily's walls as they crumbled one by one. They will be eventually overwhelmed once their Mana runs low. I have to hurry.

We're already getting there, so wait just a few more seconds!

"Mom! What's going on?" Elena asked, confused. "The house became a giant dragon golem? Uwaah!" She ended up falling over her own butt.

"I'm sorry, but I had to hurry!" I said. "The city is under attack! They really wanted to bait us into going down there to let them attack the city while we weren't around!"

Chapter 1702: The Approaching Threat

"Wait, what?! So it was true! Whoever is doing this must be more cunning than your average Undead," Katherine said.

"It's definitely someone strong and not the usual jobbers from before!" Gardenia said. "Perhaps an actual Death General under the Demon King of Death? An important one at least."

"He or she most likely is..." I nodded. "The closer we approach, the more I can feel a powerful dark presence. They're unleashing a full-on attack without hesitation! Damn it, we really lowered our guard. I should have prepared more and left an army of Spirits or something...!"

"Don't blame yourself for something you couldn't predict," Mark said. "Look, we're almost there now! We have to jump down to get there faster! Make your Yggdragon Golem make a mess of the army while we're at it, Elayne!"

"Yeah, we have to wreck them good with all we've got!" Anna nodded. "We can't hesitate anymore or hold back. All-out from the start!"

"If we don't, that entire city could fall into ruins and be burned to the ground..." Monica muttered. "I don't want the same thing that happened to the Luminous Kingdom's Capital to happen to the Ice Fairy City...!"

"It won't happen, don't worry, Monica," Elisa said, as she transformed. "We're going down at full power! RAAAARRR!"

CRAAASH!

In her small golden dragon form, she broke through the golem's walls and carried all of us before we could even think about a strategy!

"E-Elisa?! Isn't this too reckless?!" Monica cried. "And since when can you go full dragon form IRL?!"

"Since now! I've been having difficulties doing it before, but I can definitely do it!" Elisa roared. "Now grab me tightly. We're rushing down at full power!"

RUMBLE!

Her Aura erupted as lightning surged from her body, clearing the cloudy skies as she plummeted into the army like a thunderbolt, blowing up the surroundings, melting the ice, and evaporating it instantly.

BOOOM!

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.It all happened too suddenly. From the depths of the Snowy Mountains, where the Ice Fairies lived peacefully, ruled by their benevolent Queen, Khione, who was the daughter of King Oberon, the King and God of the entire Realm of Avalon, something started emerging.

The fairies had sensed it the moment their footsteps became too numerous, and when they saw the snow crumbling down and the mountain trembling from within. Among the many strategies her foes could take, Khione had expected them to choose this one but still risked it, asking Elayne to take down the camp below the mountain just in case.

However, that was exactly what they were waiting for... no, what HE was waiting for, as he smiled viciously, his glowing, icy blue eyes releasing ice-cold flames, as he commanded his troops of Corrupted Barbarians from the Snowy Lands of the North to march forward.

Their conquest had started years ago, slowly, but now they had gathered over a thousand strong, and he felt it was more than enough, now that a part of Queen Khione's army was engaged in a fierce battle with the troops he had left under the mountain, waiting for them to take the bait so this would be the perfect and ideal time to attack.

His plan was simple. He aimed to bait half of the Queen's army to weaken her defenses! And it worked wonderfully. With her army smaller, he ordered his army to march toward battle without hesitation.

Not only were there Ice Trolls, but the tribes of barbarian Ice Goblins and Ice Orcs, both powerful and stronger, more savage versions of the normal Goblins and the rare Orcs, were also there!

The pig-like giants, capable of easily withstanding the cold, with ruthless red eyes and blue skin, Ice Orcs were able to pummel most threats easily. Being more intelligent than the Ice Trolls and more coordinated, they broke through the defenses of Queen Khione's army quite easily.

The ever-cunning Ice Goblins, more ruthless and psychopathic than the normal and beloved Goblin folk, crafted deadly weapons imbued with their Frost Craft abilities, massive ballistae shooting huge arrows and cannons, bombarding the walls and the barrier, constantly trying to weaken it.

And lastly, the Ice Trolls moved forward, with a combination of traits from both, a perfect balance that, helped by their huge numbers, allowed them to spread quickly, beginning to push back Khione's army and even crush the Queen's Ice and Snow Golems, her last line of defense, which she employed to protect her palace as much as possible.

"This can't keep going! Isn't our army enough?! How many...! Was this what they planned all along?!"

The cataclysmic attack was felt. Queen Khione panicked, calling Elayne despite being a queen herself, as she floated above her castle, wearing a pristine dress made of ice scales and ice crystals, looking like the true queen she was, which she usually didn't show inside her castle, as she was most often wearing her comfortable pajamas.

"I've already calculated, Queen Khione... there are approximately three hundred foes approaching," Chloe calculated. As a high-end ice golem, she possessed an almost computer-like core, capable of rapidly calculating things.

"This isn't good! Deploy the Formations! Strengthen the defenses of the Wall! Wounded Knights, please step back to be healed! What is the Magician Tower doing?! Are they not ready?!" Khione asked angrily.

"They are coming any minute, but they were caught by surprise, Your Majesty," Chloe said. "Most Magicians were working inside the tower. Some were taking their day off..."

"This isn't a matter of working or having days off. Their home will be destroyed if they don't do anything!" Khione said angrily. "Tell them to hurry!"

As Khione panicked, her eyes widened as she saw four figures rushing forward. One reached the skies, and the other three jumped off the walls.

She quickly realized who they were...

"Elayne's friends! Right, she did leave a few here...!" Khione cried out in happiness.

She saw Rita, Lily, and Jenny step into the middle of the war zone, valiantly fending off dozens of barbarians at once with their powerful auras and incredible weapons.

Chapter 1703: Queen Khione Steps Into Battle

"Elayne's friends! Right, she did leave a few in here...!" Khione cried out with happiness.

She saw Rita, Lily, and Jenny step into the middle of the war zone, valiantly fending off dozens of barbarians at once with their powerful auras and incredible weapons.

In fact, Khione was utterly flabbergasted by the level of strength they possessed, especially those weapons they had, which were apparently all made by Elayne herself.

The strongest of the trio were obviously Rita and Lily, who valiantly and bravely fended off mighty foes one by one with dexterous and devastating attacks, using magic and techniques together with the skills bound to their souls, their special weapons, and powerful innate abilities.

Jenny was the weakest of the three, but still very strong. Nonetheless, her halberd in particular possessed many powerful abilities, elevating Jenny into a competent fighter capable of handling hordes of foes by herself.

Meanwhile, the fourth member, resembling a pink and golden spiritual dragon, reached the skies, spreading a massive divine and celestial barrier, protecting the entire city from the incoming ballista arrows of immense size and other long-range weapons that the Ice Goblins had created.

"T-They're really managing to buy enough time...!" Khione said. "But even then, there are too many barbarians. I need to call Elayne! Please answer the call...!"

Khione closed her eyes, trying to call Elayne as much as she could using her abilities and Telepathy, until she was finally able to intercept her through a telepathic message, which Elayne barely managed to receive.

"Elayne! Elayne, are you there? Were you able to deal with the camp down there?"

She was able to message Elayne after trying for a good minute, acting more desperate than she wished she sounded.

"Khione! Yes, we managed to take it down, and now we're on our way back... What's going on?"

Elayne's voice sounded concerned once she picked up Khione's telepathy.

"Ice Trolls! They're coming here! And they're also accompanied by Ice Goblins and even Ice Orcs... and something else! I had no idea there were three tribes of barbarians!"

Khione was desperate, asking for help while telling her everything she knew.

"Wait, what? Already?! Where are they coming from?!"

It seemed that Elayne was already making her way there but had yet to arrive.

"They were seen coming from the depths of the mountain's interior! Please hurry, their first wave has already hit the walls, and my soldiers are fighting with all they've got... We would never need this much help if it wasn't because their numbers are utterly ridiculous! There are hundreds!" Khione said desperately.

"Okay! We're on our way! Don't worry!"

Khione smiled lightly as she felt relieved. Elayne's confident voice made her feel a little safer.

"Hurry! I'll give you anything you want, but please help us protect the Queendom!"

She even went out of her way to offer anything. This was no time to be stingy, and as a queen, Khione knew this.

"We're going there! Are Rita and my friends helping?"

Elayne seemed concerned about her friends after all, and Khione nodded, telling her everything she could see.

"Yeah, they're very strong, but I fear they may not be enough. There's something dark within these barbarians... Your friends are already busy and almost overwhelmed. If the enemy strikes from a blind spot they haven't covered, it'll be bad news."

"Okay! I'm going there, wait a few seconds! We'll try to get there in less than a minute!"

At that moment, Elayne's communication cut off abruptly. Khione closed her eyes and sighed, suddenly hearing the sound of over a hundred wings flapping in the sky.

"Eh?"

Queen Khione glanced into the skies toward the origin of the wings flapping, a sound that made her realize what it was immediately, even before seeing it with her eyes.

"Your Majesty, the magicians have finally arrived! They're awaiting your instructions!" Chloe's voice reverberated by Khione's side.

She quickly realized that, although Elayne was a lifesaving help, she couldn't just rely on the human. As a queen, she had her army and her kingdom to protect. Relying on outsiders was simply not the way.

"Okay, follow me! I'm stepping into the battlefield as well!"

Khione valiantly led her troops into battle as they all charged by her side, roaring in unison, both fairies, goblins, gnomes, and other fae folk. Snowflake and Frosty were by her side as well.

"Come! Glacial Bear King! Winter Moth Princess! High Frost Elemental!"

Queen Khione's Spiritual Heart resonated with her Mana and her Spirit Power as three creatures emerged from her Spiritual Aura at once.

A giant white bear covered in sharp icicles growing over his body, some of which grew like horns around his head, resembling a regal crown, the Glacial Bear King! His size was over fifteen meters, and he overflowed with immense quantities of power, a true Elder Spiritual Heart Beast Ranked being.

A giant white, fluffy moth appeared, with wings made of sharp ice and a mystical snowstorm-like aura. The Winter Moth Princess emerged, spreading her beautiful wings and releasing icy snowflake scales everywhere.

And lastly, a giant, floating creature resembling an assembly of dozens of giant pieces of ice and plates of ice, floating around a glowing blue crystal pearl, with glowing "eyes" made of red crystals. This was the High Frost Elemental.

All of them were once powerful Spirit Beasts, which Queen Khione defeated and then absorbed their Spirit Cores, creating Spiritual Heart Beast Eggs, then Larvae, then Young Adults, and lastly Elders.

Their power was more than notable as their intimidating presences spread an icy wave everywhere... and Khione unleashed the power of her Spiritual Heart Beasts, tied to her own Spiritual Heart, which she had been growing and developing through her long life.

"{Snowflake Scales of Protection and Healing}!"

Queen Khione immediately started with a long-range and wide-ranging spell, combining the power of her Winter Moth Princess Spiritual Heart Beast. She made her beast flap its wings, releasing a snowstorm made of the snowflake scales of its wings.

Chapter 1704: The True Strength Of The Queen Of Ice Fairies

The army of soldiers outside, who were trying their best to survive, were suddenly healed of most of their injuries as snowflake scales covered their bodies. At the same time, they gained a boost to their defenses, as a nearly invisible veil of these snowflake scales appeared around them.

"A-Amazing! What is this?!"

"Wait a second, I recognize this! This is Queen Khione, her majesty's power!"

"It's her magic!"

"She has come to personally help us?!"

"No way...! Your majesty!"

The soldiers were moved by Khione's spell, but she was not done yet. She quickly activated another Spiritual Heart Beast Ability, raising her hands and spreading a giant veil of snow and ice crystals through the sky, enveloping the battlefield above the soldiers and barbarians.

"{Spiritual Ice Crystal Sanctuary Veil}!"

Her High Frost Elemental's powers activated as its spiritual and magical abilities spread through this veil, creating a gigantic and powerful effect. The ice crystals quickly began spreading everywhere, covering the bodies of enemies and slowing them down.

Despite these barbarians being highly resistant to ice, it didn't matter. The power of Khione's High Frost Elemental allowed her to bypass enemies' immunities and resistances to ice, beginning to freeze those that should never freeze at all.

At the same time, this mysterious veil increased the sharpness and attack power of allies. The soldiers felt stronger and more agile, overflowing with Khione's magical powers.

"Amazing, she really did it!"

"Queen Khione is the best!"

"Let's do this!"

"Go!"

"For our Queen and our Queendom!"

"OOOOHHHH!"

The knights started fighting once more, joining Rita, Lily, and Jenny and helping them out. The trio also received all the buffs and healing from Khione, feeling stronger and more capable of fighting all-out.

RUMBLE!

The sound of both armies clashing reverberated through the mountain. Rita, Jenny, and Lily pushed back the monsters with their special weapons and powerful magic.

Meanwhile, the magicians prepared large-scale spells, conjuring massive Frost Stars and raining them down over their foes. Boosted by Queen Khione's veil, they were able to bypass their enemies' immunities and resistances to ice, helping them break through and use their strongest ice spells without problems.

At the same time, Khione concentrated as she looked down. Her Glacial Bear King Spiritual Heart Beast unleashed his true power. Her Aura erupted, shaping into a pair of giant bear paws with long icy claws.

"{Glacial Ice Bear King's Frost Claws of Annihilation}!"

Unleashing a combination of Spiritual Arts and her Spiritual Heart Beast's Ability, Queen Khione delivered a devastating barrage of slashing and cleaving attacks. The icy barbarians began to be torn to shreds by the dozens, shattering the ground and shaking the whole mountain.

CRASH! CRASH! CRASH! CRASH! CRASH!

"A-Amazing!"

"Move aside from Queen Khione's magic!"

"Quickly, unless you want to get caught in the massacre!"

"Uwaah! I almost got swept!"

"Hurry, you idiot!"

The fairies quickly flew away from Khione's raging attacks. She was furious. Releasing all her frustrations through these destructive spells, in a matter of seconds, she had already slain over sixty barbarians on her own. Their bloody corpses, shredded to pieces, splattered across the field in front of her, painting the white snow crimson red and dark purple, the color of the barbarians' blood.

"Woohh! Now that's power! Hot damn, and I thought she wasn't that strong? She's so strong! I think she's stronger than me?!" Rita wondered, shooting dozens of foes at once while riding over Belle, whose horns released deadly thunderbolts. "Hmm, hard to say if that's all I've seen of her though...!"

"Incredible, your majesty!" Lily said, swinging her hammers and pummeling her foes while raising walls to stop them from advancing continuously as she drank Mana Potions. Silver was nearby, offering her support with the dragon's powerful magic and techniques. "I knew you could help out, but this is beyond my expectations! Just how much power do you possess?! This is beyond ridiculous, hahaha!"

"Oh yeah! The queen got it!" Jenny laughed, swinging her halberd and tearing through goblins trying to rush at her in hordes of dozens. Goldie was nearby, constantly healing her and unleashing devastating and explosive Sunlight Magic. "With her, we can keep this up for much longer!"

"Damned barbarians! I will not allow you to sully my beautiful country anymore!" Khione roared angrily as she unleashed her Spiritual Heart Beasts' full power. Claws rushed down, snowflake scales exploded, and deadly ice magic bombarded her foes. Khione was completely merciless. "You will all pay for what you've done! You will pay with your lives right now!"

As she roared angrily, the army of barbarians was constantly pushed back more and more.

Until...

"Keheh... KEHEHAHAHAHAHA!"

A vicious, evil voice cackled through the air, the voice of an old monster echoing from the depths of the mountain. Khione saw even more barbarians breaking through her magic and Lily's walls.

"I commend your bravery and your strength, Queen Khione... However, this is as far as you'll get! I've already given you the false hope of victory, now it's time for you and your forces to fall into endless despair!"

"What?!"

Khione's eyes widened as she looked into the distance. A giant blue hand crashed through all of Lily's walls, blowing away hundreds of boulders and climbing through the mountain. A massive monster emerged, with a single blue eye and a long black, red, and blue horn.

Its giant, muscular body was covered in red and black tattoos and crystals of such colors, while its big, single blue eye was also red and black.

"G R O O O O H H H H !"

The monstrous giant, over fifty meters tall, roared, walking forward as it made the area around it tremble—no, the entire mountain!

"That's an Ice Cyclops?!"

Queen Khione and the rest of her troops were left flabbergasted as they saw a devastatingly powerful being, a humanoid Spirit Beast similar to Ice Trolls, well known for being fearsome barbarians that only lived in the most desolate, faraway ice wastes of Avalon.

Chapter 1705: Their Arrival

Queen Khione and the rest of her troops were left flabbergasted as they saw a devastatingly powerful being, a humanoid Spirit Beast similar to Ice Trolls, well known for being fearful barbarians that only lived in the most desolate, faraway ice wastes of Avalon.

They were feared as "mountain shapers" because they were capable of shaping mountains with their fists. Monstrously strong and yet very few in number, it was said in the past that Oberon fought their almighty king and won after fighting for three days and three nights, gaining governance over the ice wastes of Avalon and the rest of the Realm.

Since then, it is said that the children of their king have harbored an endless resentment against fairies, and that if they were to ever cross paths, a cyclops would not stop until it stomped and destroyed them all.

And now, one of them had suddenly and somehow arrived here!

To make matters worse, its body was corrupted by the same crystals that had been shared among the other guilds, which Elayne and her group had encountered on several other occasions.

Therefore, it wasn't just a Cyclops, but a much stronger, monstrous version of one, powered up by three destructive energies mixed together, creating Corruption Energy, mutated to a monstrous degree!

"RAAAAARRRRHHHH!"

But that wasn't all, as a second giant suddenly emerged from the other side of the mountain, aiming for the castle and the city from behind. It was not a cyclops, however, but an aberrant thing, a mix of various Ice Trolls, Ice Goblins, and Ice Orcs merged together with fleshy, black-and-red-colored tendrils and covered in an armor of black and red ice, using a Melancholia Crystal as its core!

"No!"

"What is this aberration?!"

"This cannot be!"

"How...?"

"What can we do?!"

"Those are too big!"

The soldiers, knights, and magicians all reacted in shock, glancing at both the Corrupted Cyclops and the Monstrous Aberration created by whoever was behind this.

Now, what that voice had said resonated within Khione, as she started to slowly fall into despair.

This was simply beyond everything she had ever expected. This peaceful Realm had not been attacked to this extent in perhaps thousands of years!

"We'll have to call my brother or my father!" she said. "We must retreat. It's hopeless. I don't want any of you to risk your lives anymore!"

"But Your Majesty!"

"We can't escape. What about our homes?"

"But..."

"No buts! The buildings don't make this country but its people. As long as we can survive, we can rebuild something new. We simply have to prioritize the—"

"It's endearing how much you think I'll let you escape. Don't be foolish, Fairy Princess. Your father will not come to your aid."

"Wha...?"

Khione's eyes widened as she heard the voice again, followed by a rumbling sound as the sky split apart, and a gigantic hand rushed toward her, the Cyclops.

It struck the barrier around the city, beginning to punch it, while the other monster began doing the same to the area behind the castle.

The barrier that Khione had erected was an incredibly strong barrier, further boosted by Elayne's Spirit Clone to a Celestial Level of endurance.

However, with each blow from these giants, Corrupted Energy spread through the barrier, weakening it.

This weakening energy stacked on itself over and over with each blow the barrier received, causing the barrier to tremble.

And...

Crack, crack...!

Cracks began to appear throughout it!

"Fuck, things are getting a little out of proportion..." Rita said.

"Still, is this worse than when we fought that Demon monster made out of hands?" Lily wondered.

"I don't think there was anything worse than that!" Jenny said. "But back then we had Elayne with us! Her Spirit Clone seems fully dedicated to keeping up the barrier. It's not as strong as she is, after all."

"Alright, we have to just—"

CRAAASH!

But before Rita could think of a plan, the barrier gained a small hole, as the aberration's tentacles, made of countless Ice Barbarian corpses merged together, pierced through it, rushing toward the castle, aiming to destroy it.

"The castle! No!"

Khione rushed forward, flying as quickly as she could, as her Glacial Polar Bear King's powers surged, materializing in front of her. It swung its giant claws, clashing against the tentacle and pushing it up while freezing it.

"There are still people inside! Chloe, tell everyone to evacuate to the underground escape portal!" Khione said.

"Yes, Master...!" Chloe nodded, about to rush down before the tentacle slammed the polar bear and pushed it back, rushing down once more.

"Ah!" Khione's eyes widened, managing to dodge, only for the tentacle to pierce the ground, slowly moving toward the castle while destroying anything in its path.

"Chloe!" Khione panicked, seeing that Chloe was right in the tentacle's path.

She rushed toward her, her only real friend, the ice golem she had created when she was just a lonely child, which she had upgraded each year, always by her side.

Someone she considered a mother figure after her real mother died of old age when she was still a child...

Chloe tried to run away, but before she could, giant boulders and icicle spears emerged from the ground, blocking her path and...

BOOOM!

Khione closed her eyes for a moment. She didn't want to see what happened, but then she opened them a second later.

Only to see something completely unexpected.

"Eh?"

"Your Majesty! Are you okay?"

Chloe rushed to her side, asking if she was fine.

"Chloe?! You're not dead? What... What happened?"

"They arrived! Barely in time!"

"Ah!"

Khione's eyes widened as she saw a giant golden dragon standing on the ground next to the castle, the entire tentacle burning and crumbling into dust as lightning spread through it.

And jumping off that mysterious dragon, Elayne and everyone else had finally arrived.

"Elayne!"

"We got here as quickly as we could...! But it looks like things only got worse... Don't worry, Khione, we'll dispatch these things quickly!"

Chapter 1706: Yggdragon Golems

BOOOM !

With a loud explosion of lightning, Elisa, in her powerful thunder dragon form, pummeled down, destroying the tentacles threatening Chloe and Khione. Her potent lightning burned through not one but three at the same time, making them crumble into dust in mere seconds.

Elisa had struggled to channel the true power of her [Divine Golden Holy Dragon Princess Embodiment] Soul-Bound Skill this entire time. However, after awakening her Spiritual Heart and advancing in the ranks of her Inner Magic Circle and her Awakening as a Druid with a Nature Soul, everything came together. It allowed Elisa's formerly ordinary human body to finally become a strong enough vessel for the true power of her Soul-Bound Skill.

Even though she looked like a small golden dragon, not taller than four meters in height, compared to others who could reach dozens or even hundreds of meters, her power was the real deal. It exuded thunderous energies shaped like many serpentine dragons.

"R A A A H H H !"

With an almighty roar, Elisa's thunderous breath was unleashed, blasting through the incoming aberrant tentacles made of flesh and ice and vaporizing them on the spot.

Her breath attacks were short bursts of lightning and holy light, bombarding the giant monster behind the castle barrier, stopping it from easily reaching through.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The monstrous aberration, a horrible chimera made of the bodies of hundreds of barbarians, filled with curses and demon souls and covered in cursed ice, screamed in agony, creating a bizarre cacophony of a thousand wailing souls.

"A A A A A I I I I E E E E H H H H !"

As its scream echoed, the surviving soldiers screamed and began bleeding from their eyes and ears. Khione herself barely resisted the incredible pressure placed on her entire body and soul but ended up vomiting blood.

"Guck?! W-What is this! That thing is completely aberrant!"

As she screamed, a figure stepped forward. Her beautiful body overflowed with divine light, nature, and time essence. As her spiritual energies spread everywhere, countless trees, gardens of flowers, and hundreds of spirits began to appear.

At the same time, she pointed her hand into the skies. Celestial energy that only angels could wield was unleashed as a halo emerged above her head, and a powerful cube-shaped angelic barrier formed around everyone.

FLAAASH!

Dozens of spells came together alongside her immense quantity of Spiritual Energy, condensing into an even more evolved form of her Divine Ward.

"{Divine Spirit Ward}: {Curse-Cleansing Heaven Formation}"

FLAAASH!

The barrier not only protected everyone from the curse spread by the creature's scream but also quickly began healing what her Terrain could not heal.

The barrier exuded a bright golden light, spreading not as a cube-shaped construct but as white and yellow clouds reaching high into the skies.

The giant Cyclops and the Aberration were both pushed back by an unseen divine force, burning their bodies.

"Elayne...! She's truly like a goddess...! Her body might have been born as a human, but her soul...! It is unmistakably divine! However, she keeps denying it... Gods like Father are born through thousands of years of existence, sometimes through worship, but she is neither of those... Could she be the soul of an ancient goddess reincarnated into a human?! The case is extremely rare, but it isn't as if it hasn't happened before through the history of Earth and its many Realms!"

As Khione pondered that thought for a brief moment, Elayne swung her shovel and hoe down, and a giant mass of dirt, wood, and plants combined into a titanic draconic figure.

Then the figure started sprouting from the ground over and over again, replicating itself many times.

"{Spell Fusion}: {Divine Yggdragon Golem}!"

After growing so strong and awakening her Spiritual Heart, the things Elayne could do with Magic had evolved even further.

The instant combination, transformation, and modification of Spells and her Soul-Bound Skill effects were now possible as long as she poured a lot of her Spiritual Energy reserves.

She had no idea her reserves were so massive until she opened her Spirit Gate and let all of this power flow out of her like an ocean of glittering ethereal light...

"ROOOAAARRR!"

At her current level of mastery over these arts, Elayne was able to summon four full-powered Yggdragon Golems. They roared mightily and reached the skies. Two of them clashed against the Cyclops and the other two against the Aberration.

RUMBLE!

These golems weren't just created from this but also from Elayne borrowing Spells from her friends, such as the Stone and Earth Golem Creation Spells that Lily possessed, which she had copied and fused into her own Spell Fusion.

The convenient part of these golems was that she didn't have to rely heavily on her own internal energies, such as her divine power, which she was still trying to figure out how to regenerate and control properly.

When she went fully into Yggdragon mode in her true body, Elayne also felt a great amount of strain on her mind, soul, and body, more than with her avatar, which was almost nonexistent in Arcadia.

Therefore, even though she could maintain that form indefinitely, it still had limits based on how far she could go without breaking apart.

The abilities it had were incredible, such as creating portals that summoned divine dragon spirits, but she could not simply rely on that forever.

She had to be creative and play with the tools she had instead of always overexerting herself to the point of fainting every time.

And knowing her foes, it was likely that this was what they wanted.

Whatever was happening to Oberon right now, they wanted her to become exhausted, to constantly push herself so she would be tired and weakened once she finally reached him.

So in her weakened and tired state, they would be able to strike her down with all the power they had and also with the power of Oberon, whom she could feel was not in his right mind, likely brainwashed.

Chapter 1707: The Might Of The Ancient Spirit Beast

"GRAAAHHH!"

The Cyclops struggled to fight back properly, groaning in pain as he was constantly attacked by two giant Yggdragon Golems. Their claws dug into his flesh and made him bleed, while their magic melted his ice armor and weakened him.

However, the furious Cyclops wasn't weak enough to let two golems kill him. As a monstrous being from ancient times, his regeneration was incredibly fast, and his ability to adapt and gain resistance, then near immunity, to magic spells was terrifying.

The more the golems attacked him, the more resilient the monstrous one-eyed titan became, turning out to be much more troublesome than Elayne had thought.

His giant hands dug into the golems' bodies, seeking their ethereal spirit cores to shatter them.

Although traditional golems required much time and materials to create, Elayne could easily make them by condensing a spirit core inside them with her sheer spiritual energy.

While alchemists might need materials and time to create a core, Elayne could manifest it with a simple thought.

Therefore, she could also afford to discard them easily.

"Self-Destruct!"

With a simple command, the golem that had its body pierced glowed suddenly, its spiritual core exploding in a massive burst of rainbow flames, engulfing the Cyclops in these flames and burning his resistant, invulnerable skin.

BOOOM!

"GRYAAAAH!"

As the creature screamed, the other golem swung its fists forward, punching the creature by channeling the spells and physique techniques Maria had imbued into its body.

Indeed, these golems were now more akin to puppets that Elayne controlled with spiritual threads emerging from her aura.

Her mere thoughts made them move, and on their divine wood, the imprinted runes of her spells and physique abilities granted them some of her powers.

Blazing punches imbued with dream flames weakened the Cyclops' soul, putting it in a state of great dizziness.

The Cyclops, however, released his cursed frost aura, overpowering the golem and smashing it with his fist.

BOOOM!

Another explosion erupted right in front of him, as the last golem exploded and dealt significant damage to the monstrous creature, which fell to the ground once again.

Its wounds burned constantly, stopping it from regenerating.

At the same time, it had grown dizzy, and its soul was rather weakened. This was the perfect time to take it down.

"Everyone, go take that thing down, hurry!"

After hearing her command, Mark, Elisa, Monica, Anna, and Elena rushed toward the creature, attacking it with their strongest techniques.

Elisa's thunderous breath blasted several holes through the monster's thick hide and began tearing apart its new cursed ice armor with her claws.

Monica's ghostly curses and binding spells stopped it in place, now weakened enough for her spells to affect it to some extent.

Anna summoned her Familiars and combined their magic into a multicolored beam, striking the Cyclops' forehead repeatedly.

Elena swung her blade, cutting through the monster's thick neck and digging into its muscle but unable to cut the bone properly, although its blood splattered everywhere.

"Damn it, this thing is way too tough even after all of this!" Elena complained.

"GRUOOOHHH!"

Despite everyone doing their best, the Cyclops was truly an Ancient Spirit Beast, easily shaking them all off with a furious roar and standing up yet again!

It was a truly admirable and incredibly tough being.

Unlike in Arcadia, where they could use the full extent of their avatars' powers, skills, items, and resources, in the real world, things were much more complicated.

Their weapons glowed with all their spiritual power and mana as they attacked the monster's ankles, quickly helping it fall for a moment!

As the ground trembled, the Cyclops quickly swung its giant arms against them, sweeping everyone away with a massive attack!

RUMBLE!

"Hey!"

However, at that moment, a roar echoed from afar, and a blazing titan emerged, made of metallic wood and encompassed in blazing flames.

Dozens of powerful Totem Spirits materialized around his body.

Although it wasn't his Avatar's body, Mark could transform into his gigantic form for a few minutes without feeling too much strain on his body and soul.

"GRAAAH!"

The Cyclops manifested a giant axe of ice, clashing against Mark's blazing swords, but his techniques quickly overpowered the Cyclops, pushing him back and covering him in searing, burning wounds without end.

A pair of phoenix wings manifested from Mark's back, firing dozens of blazing, explosive feathers and pushing the Cyclops back while his Berserk Blade merged with his Knife, piercing the monster's body.

"GRRRRR!"

The Cyclops hissed furiously, using his massive hands to stop the blazing sword and then punch Mark's head down into the ground.

"Wha...?!"

Mark collapsed onto the ground, the Cyclops, with his burning blade piercing its chest, roared, beginning to stomp him wildly while cursed ice started spreading into his spirit flames.

"D-Damn it!"

As Mark screamed, the rest attacked the Cyclops once more, aiming at its back. Their concentrated attacks, bombardment of spells, and more barely scratched it.

"How is that thing tougher than Demons?" Elayne asked, surprised.

"It's not that! Barbarians of the Ice Tribe and Ancient Spirit Beasts like a Cyclops all have the power to reflect Mana and even Spirit Energy partially," Khione explained, recovering. "You have to aim at its weaknesses and the inside of its body. Their vitality is also ridiculously high. They can live for days with a sword piercing their hearts!"

"I see," Elayne nodded. "Then we'll finish this quickly."

Elayne remained calm and composed, stepping onto the battlefield on her own. Feathered wings spread out as she flew toward where the battle was ongoing.

She looked down, sending three living weapons toward the monsters below.

A giant nightmare scythe swept through the barbarians, cleaving their bodies and souls apart in seconds. Nightmarish creatures started crawling out of their corpses.

Another scythe exuded demonic power and terrifying crimson flames, destroying the ice goblins and ice trolls that were approaching the barrier.

Lastly, a floating demonic staff constantly shot rays of energy, vaporizing dozens at a time while creating demonic beasts to fight for her.

"Aim at the interior of its mouth and blast it from the inside out!"

As Elayne spoke, everyone heard her loud and clear and nodded, climbing the creature. The Cyclops kept screaming loudly, so it wasn't hard to aim at its open mouth.

However, the giant defended himself with his hands before kicking away a shockwave of cursed ice energy, pushing back everyone else.

Chapter 1708: Fighting The Aberration

"Yggdragon Golem Summon!"

Elayne summoned another golem, wrestling with the cyclops and grabbing its arms, pushing them behind its back while holding it in place.

The cyclops constantly froze the golem's body, so they didn't have much time.

"Mark!"

"Alright!"

Mark quickly grabbed his sword and, instead of trying to pierce the incredibly hard ribcage of the monster, pulled it back and pierced the monster's mouth with it.

CRAAASH!

"GRAAAHHHH!"

The cyclops screamed in agony as powerful flames burned its insides. Its giant eye turned red and then exploded, as fire emerged from its eye, ears, and mouth.

BOOOMMM!

The titan finally died. Its interior was much weaker and softer than its outer armor-like skin, collapsing on the spot in a mere second.

At the same time, the Aberration that Elayne had been holding back this entire time began to spread around her barrier, trying to sneak through somehow.

"Where do you think you're going?"

She swiftly blitzed through the sky, swinging her hands forward.

Her entire formation began to respond to her control, as its clouds encompassed her body.

Fusing with her aura and her spiritual energies, the clouds made of celestial wards turned into a pair of sharp dragon claws overflowing with both the power of angels and spirits.

"Incredible...!"

Khione gazed into the distance. Not only was she amazed when they killed an Ancient Spirit Beast that only her father or her older siblings could kill comfortably, but she was now seeing Elayne do something even more ridiculous.

She wasn't just a Druid, nor a Dryad, nor a Spirit, nor an Angel, nor a Human, nor a dragon, and yet she could converge the power of all these races and tribes into her vessel and coalesce them into something akin to a divine spell.

"No, this isn't a spell. It's like a manifestation of her own soul!"

Khione admired the intricate ability that Elayne possessed to control her energies and powers and combine them.

She saw hundreds of magic spell runes and physique runes converge through the white and yellow clouds of her celestial ward formation barrier.

Imbued with draconic power and her vast spiritual energy, Elayne had once more created something powerful.

Lightning surged from the giant, floating, transparent claws made of golden, white, and blue light, while white and yellow clouds encompassed them.

"{Fusion Spell Spirit Artifact}!"

Through this strange thing that Elayne called a Fusion Spell Spirit Artifact, she could also feel the power of countless spirits merging with it.

"She's creating a spirit in the form of a weapon through spirit synthesis. But it's also a spiritual weapon...! Oh my god, this is completely out of the ordinary! Is it the same level of control my father has over spirits?"

"{Heavenly Thunder Dragon Spirit Claws}!"

RUMBLE!

Holy lightning erupted from both dragon claws as Elayne rushed down with her angelic wings, clashing against the aberration on her own.

The aberration quickly began sprouting giant heads everywhere, firing beams of demonic light from its eyes and mouths.

Elayne used a floating shield by her side and a shovel to defend against the beams, rapidly intercepting and reflecting their attacks.

At the same time, knowing full well that mere spells wouldn't work and that perhaps not even simple skill effects did any damage to these things, Elayne decided to create something she was still grasping the concept of an artifact made of spirits that was also made of her divine wards, infused with her dragon power and her spiritual energy.

It was still a rough creation.

But!

RUMBLE!

Explosions of lightning surged from her sharp claws, tearing apart the giant aberration's tentacles one by one, burning them to ashes with each attack.

Like before, when she used the spells that Lily used to manipulate the earth and summon golems, she was now copying Elisa's Holy Thunder.

As someone with both the Element of Thunder and Dragon within her, Elayne, with a single glance, was more or less capable of imitating its grand power to an extent.

CLASH! CLASH! CLASH! CLASH!

Each of her powerful, gigantic dragon claws dug through the aberration, disintegrating over a third of its body already.

"GRYAAAAHH!"

The creature let out another cursed scream, making her soul, mind, and body convulse as she was imbued with hundreds of curses.

"Ngh, annoying!"

As she groaned, she felt Gardenia's powers encompassing her and protecting her.

"Gardenia! What are you doing?"

"Elayne, you're pregnant. Don't get exposed directly to the curses!"

"The child is an extension of my body. They're being protected at all times by my soul. Don't worry. You're risking your life by taking on these wicked curses!"

"You're always so reckless!"

"I have to be. This entire city is coming down if I don't do something about it!"

"But you're not alone in this!"

"Everyone else is too tired, and I don't want to ask them to work harder than they've already done...!"

"I'm not talking about them. Look!"

Elayne had completely forgotten, but suddenly three of her familiars appeared from the skies. A thunderbolt struck the aberration as a majestic, white goat with golden horns appeared.

"MEEEEEEEE!"

The divine goat ferociously began trampling the aberration with her golden hooves, crushing its body and trying her best to burn it to ashes.

"Please don't forget about me either, Master Elayne!"

At the same time, a blinding beam of sunlight pierced the monster from afar as a giant golden koi appeared, trembling with slight fear but being brave enough to step into the fray.

"ROOAAARR!"

And a draconic roar echoed from the other side as a giant silver dragon rushed down, emanating moonlight everywhere, firing dozens of beams of moonlight against the aberration.

It was Belle, Goldie, and Silver!

"GRYAAEEEGH!"

The aberration let out an agonizing wail of a thousand souls, attacking the beasts instead, who rapidly flew around the skies, avoiding all manner of attacks.

With that small distraction, Elayne spun in midair with her giant dragon claws, rushing down and piercing through the aberration's entire body.

Chapter 1709: An Archangel's Power

CRAAASH!

Elayne dug deeper into the sea of self-regenerating flesh, finding hundreds of screaming faces and hands rushing to grab her.

However, her spinning descent unleashed a thunderous aura, burning everything in her path as she found an open section where a pitch-black "core" floated in midair.

From within the "core," she could feel the presence of a powerful being.

"Y-YOU?! HOW DID YOU EVEN...! TSK! GET OUT!"

The entity panicked, releasing a stream of demonic light toward Elayne, but she used her shield and weapon to defend herself while charging with her claws and hitting the floating sphere.

CLASH!

RUMBLE!

A tremor of energy erupted. Pure, condensed cursed energies struck Elayne, but she was much more resilient than everyone else.

"What are you? Where did you come from? Do you serve the Demon King of Death?"

"The Demon King of Death is merely a contractor!"

As the entity spoke, Elayne saw cracks within the sphere, realizing it wasn't a "core" but an entity inside controlling the aberration.

It was an imp-like demon with a pair of sharp black horns, red eyes, and blue skin.

"A Demon!"

"When the Demon King of Death absorbed the powers of that magician you killed, all of the deals and contracts that magician had with us passed to him!"

"What?"

"This is why he can summon all of us now, see? You've only made things easier for him now, kahahaha!"

"Damn it! You know about Arcadia!"

Elayne and the demon clashed, explosions of golden lightning and demonic light erupting constantly.

From the walls, ceiling, and floor, fleshy tendrils rushed toward her, releasing screams packed with deadly curses.

Elayne encompassed herself with the pure power of Dreams and Holy Light, creating wards to protect herself by condensing yet another angelic ward.

Her Celestial Energy was already running low.

"How come you're so strong? Ungh! What is this power?"

Elayne couldn't believe her strength was being suppressed so much.

"I am simply combining the magic-nullifying powers of this formidable barbarian race with my endless curses! Their wailing souls create the most wonderful cacophony, don't you think? Kehehehehe!"

She needed more Celestial Power, but she was running out.

Her dragon claws were draining it too fast, and they were growing faint now.

"Big sister!"

And then she heard his voice.

"Gabriel!"

BOOOM!

A powerful beam of light descended from the ceiling, piercing a massive, blazing hole through the aberration and entering the hidden chamber inside.

"An Angel?!"

The demon panicked as he saw the bright, spiritual figure of Gabriel manifesting.

It wasn't exactly him, as Gabriel had stayed back inside Elayne's Domain.

But this was Gabriel's Spirit, almost identical to him, which Elayne was able to create through their powerful bond together.

"No, merely a Holy Spirit! I can handle this much! Die, both of you!"

Hundreds of sharp tendrils appeared from all around Elayne and Gabriel, aiming to pierce their bodies and infuse countless curses to kill them.

However, Gabriel rushed toward Elayne, fusing his spiritual body into her own and using her Spiritual Heart as a sort of vessel, the same way Spiritual Heart Beasts did.

In fact, the still-growing and quite weak Spiritual Heart Beasts inside Elayne rushed toward Gabriel, as if feeling he could help them help Elayne.

And so...

FLAAASH!

"This is...?"

Elayne saw her young Spiritual Heart Beasts merge their powers with Gabriel, who then grew larger within her body, infusing her with potent divine and celestial energies.

Even her growing child began to absorb this excess energy. Although that wasn't a bad thing, Elayne wasn't sure what this would mean for her child once they were born.

However, instead of worrying, she fought.

Her body, overflowing with Angelic Power, changed into a True Angelic Form unlike any appearance she had taken before.

Her hair became long and blonde, her clothes turned into a beautiful white and gold dress with golden armor, and she gained six white, feathered wings and a large halo shaped like four golden swords pointing to all four cardinal directions.

For that small moment, it was as if Gabriel's true power had come back in full.

"What...? An Esteemed Great Archangel?!"

The demon screamed in horror as he saw the brilliance emanating from Elayne's body. Her dragon claws combined into a giant, spinning spear of light, piercing through the black jewel and into his body.

"Ngaaaahhhhh!"

Before the demon could do anything else, both his body and soul were pierced, prompting him to explode into pure, blinding light everywhere.

BOOOMMM!

The bright light consumed the rest of the aberration, completely vaporizing it and leaving nothing behind.

The surrounding, corrupted, miasma-covered field was quickly healed back to normal, as a beautiful forest of spiritual ice trees, grass, and flowers appeared everywhere.

Even some holy trees, flowers, and herbs appeared, blessing the land with the energy of angels.

"Haaa... it's done?"

Elayne sighed in relief, looking around to find the writhing soul of the demon within the light, slowly disappearing into nothingness, dying for good.

"It's done! Phew..."

Elayne's transformation ended, and as she descended, Gabriel appeared in her arms, exhausted.

"Gabriel, that was amazing! Just what was that power? Did you recover your true strength for a moment?"

"E-Eh? Did I? I don't really know... but your beasties helped me get stronger!"

"I see... they must've responded to your desire to help me, heh. I had no idea they could do that."

Elayne smiled and quickly walked toward Khione, looking at the young-looking queen of ice fairies with a gentle smile.

"I believe it's done. The one behind this was a demon inside that aberration," she said.

"Ah! Is that so?" Khione sighed in relief. "Elayne, are you okay?"

"Me? I'm alright," Elayne said, confused. "Oh no... half the city's trashed, isn't it?"

"Yes..." Khione looked at her city with pity. "Luckily, we were able to evacuate the citizens to the underground area, so it should be alright."

"Nyeh, we cleared the remaining barbarians," Kajithe walked into the conversation with a grumpy expression. "There are lots of corpses everywhere, which means a lot of money! Who's picking them up, though? I can't carry that many in my pocket item."

"I can, don't worry," Elayne said, smiling. "Let me store as many as I can once I'm done checking on everyone."

Chapter 1710: Aftermath

While looking around at the many soldiers sighing in relief or being brought to other areas to be healed and recover from their many injuries, Elayne regrouped with her family and friends.

Using her powers, she quickly healed any injuries they still had, and everyone decided to relax for a while if possible.

"Whew, that was pretty damn tough," sighed Rita. "That cyclops was really tough too! What the hell?"

"It was hard," Elena nodded. "I didn't realize until now, but we have to keep growing stronger. I can't really just get content with what I have."

"Me neither..." Anna agreed. "But at the same time, I'm exhausted..."

"We've fought too much today..." Jenny said. "Ouch, my back hurts..."

"I want to rest on a comfortable and warm bed... it's so cold up here," Elisa said in her human form.

"Alright, I know everyone is tired, and we all did a good job, so let's go have a meal and rest comfortably until tomorrow," Elayne said. "Hm, maybe we could take a day off tomorrow too and depart the day after tomorrow so we can all fully recover."

"That sounds good~" Lily agreed. "I really need a rest."

"So what was inside that thing?" Mark asked, as everyone started making their way back to the city.

"A Demon..." Elayne said, recalling what she saw. "It wasn't particularly big or intimidating, but what made me upset is that it was a full-fledged demon in their flesh and all... Well, it's not like it's impossible for them to do that, but they usually come as souls, right? Can you guys tell me?" Elayne asked her two Demonic Weapons.

"Yeah, Demons require a lot of power and energy to fully materialize themselves..." The Demonic Scythe, Querlax, said. "If that demon could materialize and work as a core for the Aberration, then he was fairly strong."

"Makes sense why I almost lost..." Elayne sighed. "I could've mustered more strength if I wasn't so tired from all previous battles and overexerting myself... Maybe Gardenia wasn't wrong... But at the same time, he was really small and scrawny, and I didn't feel the same aura from him as from the other demons, like the Demon Prince we faced before."

"Hmmm," the Demonic Staff, Berbelianna, spoke. "Perhaps that means he wasn't that strong by himself, but his master was, right?"

"His master..." Elayne said. "He told me that because we defeated Merlinus, all the contracts that old man had with them passed to the Demon King of Death... why, though? I have no idea. He somehow absorbed his powers? But we made sure to kill him... Not even his crown should've remained."

"Perhaps it wasn't as you thought," Querlax said. "The Demon King of Death is a powerful contractor, even more so now... His control over souls and the concept of death is immense too. There's a possibility that something truly heinous is being planned."

"And you guys really don't know anything? Really?!" Rita asked the two floating demonic weapons with suspicious eyes.

"We merely know what we were told. We were brought here by our master, offered souls as compensation, and that's about it! We swear!" Berbelianna said, growing nervous under Rita's gaze.

"However, we can speculate!" Querlax said. "The Demon King of Death has gained a significant amount of power after Merlinus's death, unlike what you thought after defeating this magician, right? This means that he most likely had planned his downfall from the beginning and used you all to get rid of him, obtaining the powers the old wizard, I assume, had managed to forge after many years."

"Yes, that's... that could be it," Elayne nodded, sighing as she grew more nervous. "Hmmm... And Oberon's fate... We don't know what's going on over there, right?"

"No, we don't," Katherine said, floating next to Elayne. "But it seems that the area... I can look from afar and feel a strong aura of darkness everywhere, but this is not from a foreign origin... it's from the King?"

"So what Queen Khione said earlier...?" Elisa asked. "Could it be that he was attacked or something? Maybe... brainwashed?"

"Brainwashed?! King Oberon?! He's so strong... he could never fall for such things!" said Katherine.

"Nyah, maybe you think that, but who knows," Kajithe said. "What if he willingly let them control him, for example?"

"...?!" Katherine was shocked, glaring at the cat with an angry face. "I appreciate your help, Sir Kajithe, but please stop slandering Lord Oberon. We will make our assumptions once we finally see what's happening with our own eyes."

"Why are you so mad? I was just saying..." Kajithe rolled his eyes.

"Hmmm..." Maria kept thinking, deep in thought. "This feels odd... But even if it might be a trap, what else can we do than walk there and try to do the best we can? We can't escape or anything, and we don't have the time to gather forces either..."

"Queen Khione could help, but asking for the other villages we visited would be too much," said Mark. "Better go extra prepared anyway. Let's recover and gather our resources, materials, and see what else we can do. Maybe upgrading our equipment one last time?"

"I don't know if it's possible. The more cubes we use on items, the more unstable they become. Using more than two cubes on equipment in real life could destroy them. It's a gamble," Elayne explained.

"Huh..." Mark looked slightly worried but then smiled brightly anyway. "Well, we'll find other ways to grow. You showed some amazing strength there, Elayne, so don't be disheartened..."

"I know..." Elayne said, as she rested her head on Mark's shoulder, holding his hand.

"Is the baby alright?" he asked.

"The baby's fine, don't worry," Elayne said with a confident smirk. "I think I've figured out various new ways to use our power. As we fight beings capable of just outright canceling our spells and taking no damage from our techniques, perhaps these methods could help us, but they won't be easy to learn... and I'm not even sure if I've ever mastered them or if I can teach them."

"What are these new ways you're talking about, mom?" Elena asked.