

Brand New 1741

Chapter 1741: Counterattack

Ten years.

Elayne had achieved the impossible in that timeframe, by repeating farming techniques on mushrooms and moss that grew in the Netherworld.

She had done something as ridiculous as recreating farming from scratch to suit the "death" and "souls" carried through the Netherworld and all its living and unliving beings.

By letting those plants live inside her own body and cultivating them by feeding them her soul, they, in exchange, grew to love her and even communicate with her.

Unlike the plants of the living world, this moss and these mushrooms fed directly on the very essence of souls. Elayne had nothing else they could want more than that.

Thus, after ten years of diligence—without breaking her spirit for a single second—Elayne cultivated her soul and her mind.

And so, her surroundings became a farm whenever she wished it.

Spells? Skills?

Perhaps they had some meaning to her, but beyond that... she was achieving the ability to freely manipulate energies and elements, recreating the effects of spells and skills without needing them.

Thus, through {Farming Terrain Expansion: Netherworld Garden}, Elayne took over the entire arena and caused tremendous chaos.

Using the unique power of the plants that grew in the Netherworld, she absorbed their energy and gained an enormous, temporary surplus of power, while weakening as many foes as she could.

Her rebellion had finally begun!

And to the faces of all high-ranking Undead and Netherworld Races present, this one zombie everyone had looked down upon...

Became a genuine threat to all!

"Demon King of Death, you should've made sure you destroyed my soul thoroughly. You will pay for your carelessness. I will not stop until I completely dismantle your Kingdom into the ground!"

Elayne roared loudly. As she swung her sword forward, a glitching mass of energy struck the flaming, radiant slashes of Mark.

Now turned into a vengeful, mindless undead, Mark didn't even recognize her. He fought with the intention of killing her and destroying her soul.

BOOOM!

Explosions of flames and Netherworld energy erupted through the arena as Elayne ran toward the barrier in front of her, Mark rapidly following.

She felt deeply saddened by what had happened to Mark and was crying at that moment...

However, the plan had to go on, no matter what.

A part of her had expected something like this to happen, and in those ten years, Elayne had mentally prepared herself for the worst.

And this... was also the reason she asked Shade to teach her how to dismantle curses from souls.

But above all, Elayne had happily achieved one of her goals—

To enrage the bastard of Blaze, who had separated her from Mark and tortured his soul to the point of insanity.

FLASH!

From within the dark pit, an explosion of blue, green, and golden light erupted.

The millions of mushroom colonies and moss Elayne had diligently planted for ten years were not for nothing, nor were they left behind.

All of their power began to gather, unifying into a crystallized core. At the same time, Elayne revealed her chest, opening it to show a glowing green crystal, with moss and mushrooms growing inside her body.

This crystal was nothing else but a Spiritual Heart, a heart she had forged using the last fragment stored inside her soul. It glowed dark green, releasing nether and ghostly energies mixed with nature and spirit energy.

Before the eyes of all spectators present, Elayne drew power from her modified body, filled with mushrooms and moss, from her surroundings, and from what Little Hope was doing—all for this moment.

"Gardenia, it's time to wake up."

With a single command, a dormant ancient great spirit within her soul suddenly opened her eyes.

At the same time, within the dark pit, Little Hope was standing there.

She had disappeared out of nowhere thanks to her special ability.

Little Hope and everyone thrown into the pit had a special ability that deemed them unique enough not to be ground up into pills.

Little Hope's special ability was "Soul Exchange."

Like the advanced power of Liches, she could freely switch her soul between bodies, as long as she had a main storage for her soul, something similar to a phylactery.

Elayne helped Little Hope designate the giant crystallization of nether, ghostly energy, nature, and spirit energy within the dark pit as her phylactery.

The essence of all the flora Elayne had farmed underground rapidly gathered and crystallized.

And this crystal was...

"Now, Little Hope! Use the power of the Domain Core!"

A Domain Core, the same type of core that existed within her world on Earth.

All conditions had been met during Elayne's time down there.

She expanded her territory, spread spirit and nature energy, and imprinted her very essence and soul into the soil.

Thus, she solidified her ownership of the land, crystallizing a Domain Core.

Space rapidly warped!

BZZZZTTT!

"W-What?!"

Blazer gasped as he saw his surroundings warping and changing.

He couldn't believe that through mushrooms and moss, someone could go this far.

Seeing how the nobles struggled and glared at him angrily, Blazer roared—

"YOU DAMN WOMAN! I WILL PERSONALLY EXECUTE YOU!"

He raged, riding his three-headed infernal hound and charging toward Elayne.

Elayne looked into his blazing eyes.

She was being sandwiched between two monstrous blazing skeletons.

But that was just perfect.

She quickly encompassed her body with ghostly flames, kicked the ground with all her power, and jumped high into the sky.

At the same time, Mark and Blazer met.

"Ugh?!"

"GRAAAHHH!"

Mindlessly swinging his giant blazing sword, Mark struck Blazer with all his might, sending the commander flying with an immense, furious attack.

BOOOM!

"Gaaaha?!"

Blazer vomited nether from his skeletal jaws. A huge cleaving wound appeared across his face and skeletal body, his hands trembling in disbelief.

"Y-You damn bastard! Who do you think you're harming?! Obey me! I am your master! Go kill her! HER!"

"GRAAAHHHH!!!"

However, Mark roared monstrosly and mindlessly.

Blazer, at that moment, realized he had made a mistake.

By torturing Mark's soul to the point of madness and then beyond that...

He had made him so monstrous and primal that it became impossible for Mark to properly follow orders.

Especially once he started going berserk, nothing could stop his rampage.

Blazer groaned, swinging his pair of blazing swords as he clashed against Mark's giant blazing blade.

"I raised you; you damn piece of garbage! Obey me!"

Blazer swung his twin blades, unleashing a barrage of slashing attacks and covering Mark's body with scratches...

Yes, merely scratches.

"HEHEHEH! GYEHEHEHE!"

Mark laughed madly as he attacked Blazer. The more damage Mark received, the stronger he became—his flames glowing even brighter with more intensity.

"Go on Mark! Beat him!"

"Tch! Hellhound! Kill that woman!"

"Woof!"

Blazer quickly sent his three-headed hound to attack Elayne, who was now dismantling the barrier with her Ghostly Nature Aura.

And... the help of a certain someone.

Chapter 1742: Demon Tree Religious Order

"Okay, so let me get this straight... You died, spent ten years in a dark pit surrounded by bizarre undead, and somehow mastered a forbidden farming art that uses netherworld mushrooms and moss?!"

"Yeah, pretty much, Gardenia. It's... really nice to hear your voice again!"

"And Mark was brainwashed into a giant, monstrous skeleton?! Oh my god, Elayne! How am I supposed to adjust to all of this? Ugh, and this realm is so cold—I can barely stay conscious."

"I don't expect much, but please guide me. I need to dismantle this barrier to escape," Elayne said. "Can you help me?"

"A Netherworld Barrier? Tch, easy." Gardenia's aura surged from Elayne's skeletal hand, spreading circuits of divine spirit energy.

Within seconds...

Crack, crack...

CRASH!

The entire barrier shattered like glass, revealing chaos beyond. Hundreds of undead and Netherworld races screamed, scrambling to flee or hoard the moss and mushrooms growing over them.

"I've got to say, you've mastered something truly lethal! Who would've thought you'd reverse-engineer these mushrooms and moss to absorb nether and ghostly energy—and weaponize them?" Gardenia laughed. "Even in death, you're still a Farmer, Elayne!"

The Great Spirit of Harvest and Nature seemed pleased, praising Elayne's perseverance despite her suffering and loss.

"It's not over yet," Elayne said, scanning the area. "I'm starting a rebellion. Join me and escape! I'll grant great power to those who truly wish to fight back. In return, you must swear loyalty to the Demon Tree Religious Order!"

The name, Demon Tree Religious Order, had been suggested by Norman. He told Elayne that forming a religious order would attract followers, giving them something to believe in.

It was strange and didn't suit Elayne at all.

But it was the only path forward, and she wasn't backing down.

Her voice echoed across White Bone City, resonating through every mushroom and patch of moss.

"F-Freedom?"

"A religious order?"

"No more torture...?"

"No, not trustworthy..."

"What if they sacrifice us too?"

"I swear to everyone here, through a soul vow, that I will never sacrifice you or turn you into pills. I will feed you, treat you with dignity, and ensure you have shelter. In return, I ask only for your help and cooperation to build a better world for us—the oppressed and abused undead!"

"...!"

"Really?"

"She made a soul vow!"

"If she lies, her soul will explode!"

"What nonsense is this?!"

"Who would believe it?"

"Soul vow, my bony ass!"

Many doubted her. But some believed. And those who didn't speak—those who simply desired to join her—were heard.

FLAAASH!

From the Domain Core, Little Hope released threads of green and blue ghostly nature energy, reaching their souls.

Those who chose Elayne regained their strength. The plants no longer drained them; instead, they nourished them.

"Ooh?!"

"W-What is this?!"

"We're no longer affected!"

"Is this the Demon Tree Religious Order's blessing?!"

Those who refused Elayne's offer remained unchanged, unable to stop the slaves and soldiers from escaping.

Some commanders and nobles stood firm, unleashing soul flames and weapon techniques to destroy the mushrooms and moss.

"Don't let those bastards escape!"

"Chase them down!"

"Ugh, damn Blazer! This is all your fault!"

Three undead commanders roared at Blazer, who was still locked in combat with Mark.

Blazer glanced at Elayne, expecting his hound to have torn her apart by now.

Instead...

"Good boy."

Elayne was petting the demonic creature's three heads. Blazer's jaw dropped as he watched her tame the beast with ease.

The three-headed hound wagged its tail, thrilled by her affection.

Elayne had heard its intentions—its inner voice.

It was easy to convince the creature to switch sides. Once connected to the Domain Core, the hound received a surge of energy, revitalizing it while others remained drained.

"YOU EVEN STOLE MY DOG?!"

Blazer roared, leaping over Mark's head with blazing swords aimed at Elayne. She remained calm.

"I'LL KILL YOU!"

CLASH!

Elayne swung her sword, meeting Blazer's dual blades. Her glitching strike spread a strange, decaying energy through his weapons, weakening the flames.

Blazer retaliated with a kick to her stomach, sending her crashing into the arena floor.

BOOOM!

"As you can see, everything is under control, great nobles! P-Please wait a minute or two—everything will return to normal!"

Blazer tried to calm the crowd, but chaos had already spread. Half the undead soldiers and slaves were fleeing.

"Tch, where do you think you're going?!"

Blazer targeted a group of escapees, invoking pain through their soul contracts.

But then...

A shadow emerged, severing the curse that allowed him to torture and control them.

"What is that thing?!"

Blazer glared at the shadow, which helped the undead escape.

Nearby stood a zombie, a tall skeleton, and a ghost.

"You're... those damn misfits!"

It was Shade, Sailor, Norman, and Dorothy.

Their mission wasn't combat—it was rescue.

Little Hope worked tirelessly, guiding escapees into the dark pit. One by one, they jumped, despite the guards' attempts to stop them.

"GRAAAHHH!"

Mark roared, swinging his massive sword at Elayne. She dodged, and ghostly flames erupted around them.

The three-headed hound growled, barking at Mark. He glared back, eyes glowing red.

"DIE!!!"

Mark swung again, but the hound leapt over his arm and bit into his skull with all three jaws.

"GRAAHHH!"

Mark's flames barely harmed the beast, which gnawed at his head relentlessly. The brainwashed skeleton struggled to shake it off.

"Well done, Cerberus! Keep him pinned!"

Elayne had already named the hound as she rushed forward.

BAAAM!

A blazing knight descended. Blazer swung his swords, and Elayne barely blocked the blow.

CLAASH!

She was sent flying again, crashing into a wall of bones and vomiting miasma.

Groaning, Elayne stood once more.

"You really don't know when to quit, do you?"

Blazer charged, his aura surging with nether and ghostly energy, fused with flame.

Within that aura, Elayne saw the truth.

"So you grew this strong by devouring the souls and bodies of fellow undead... is that it?"

"That's just the natural order of things!" Blazer roared, attacking again.

Chapter 1743: Sweet Revenge

"So, you've grown this strong by devouring the innocent souls and bodies of fellow undead... huh?" she asked, her voice low and laced with disgust.

"That's merely the natural order of things!" Blazer snarled, his skeletal form lunging forward. He unleashed a flurry of slashing strikes, each one tearing through the ground like claws raking flesh. The earth split beneath him, scorched and fractured. Elayne met his assault with her blade, its edge shimmering with a strange, corrupting power that pulsed like a heartbeat.

"Hmph."

Though not physically imposing, Elayne moved with uncanny grace. Her body, saturated with volatile energy, danced around Blazer's attacks like a shadow in firelight.

CLASH! CLASH! CLASH!

Their blades collided again and again, ringing out like war drums. At times, they seemed evenly matched—two forces locked in a deadly rhythm. But Blazer's brute strength surged, and he would overpower her, driving her back with relentless fury.

"You're nothing! NOTHING COMPARED TO ME!"

"Ugh!"

Elayne gritted her teeth, struggling as she was pushed further and further. Yet—

She kept moving.

Faster.

Sharper.

With greater precision.

"Think."

"Imprint your knowledge into the world."

She thought—and kept thinking. Memories surged from her soul, enveloping her body.

The lost memories of her Swordsmanship Technique.

A gift from the System: the legendary swordsmanship of heroes.

Swordsmanship wasn't just a skill or a power granted by some game-like system. It was martial art. A discipline taught by people. A way of fighting. A philosophy of life.

Thus—

"{Heroic Legendary Sword Arts}"

"...What?!"

Blazer's will-o-wisp eyes widened. Something had changed in Elayne's movements. Despite her body being covered in burning wounds, despite teetering on the edge of defeat, something within her had awakened as she uttered those strange words.

"{Divine Sword Slash}!"

FLUOSH!

Nature Energy, Spirit Essence, Ghostly Energy, and Nether converged into Elayne's blade. The glitching, corrupting power turned pure white.

"...?!"

Blazer gasped, unable to comprehend what he was witnessing.

"T-This shouldn't be possible...! Y-You... You were a hero when you were alive?!"

He stepped back in horror, lowering his guard for just a moment.

"Agh, damn it!"

He charged again, spinning midair and descending with an infernal sword dance.

"I won't let you land that hit! I'll cut you to shreds right here, right now!"

"HAAAAAH!"

Elayne roared as their techniques collided in a blinding explosion of flames and white light.

BOOOM!

"Nnngh...! Kuuaaaaggh!"

Blazer screamed in agony. He couldn't withstand Elayne's attack. His swords shattered, and her blade struck his chest, leaving a massive, glowing white wound. His armor exploded, and his skeletal body collapsed.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

Elayne gasped, absorbing Nether and Nature Energy to stabilize her internal flow and accelerate regeneration. She was barely holding herself together. Gardenia summoned spiritual threads to stitch her wounds.

"Elayne, hang in there! You did it!"

"Ugh...!"

Elayne looked down at Blazer, who was struggling to move.

"T-This is insanity! What is she?! I'm getting out of here! No, no, no!!!"

Blazer, now missing his lower half, crawled away like a pathetic insect.

Elayne sighed and ran after him.

"Where do you think you're going?! Come back, coward!"

"Nnngh! Gyaaa! Nooo! Get away from me!"

Blazer screamed, dragging himself with his arms. Elayne hurled her sword.

CRASH!

"G-Gaaahh?!"

His fiery eyes widened. Her sword had pierced his forehead, cracking his skull and exposing his Nether Core.

"W-Wait...! Ugh...! Spare me...!"

Blazer begged as Elayne retrieved her sword and stabbed him repeatedly, grinding his bones into dust.

"You bastard! This is all your fault! Die! Die! Die! I'll turn you into white bone dust! I'll grind you into pills!"

"Please forgive me! I was just following orders—Gyaaaaahhhh!"

Elayne unleashed her fury, stabbing and crushing until nothing remained but bone dust.

"Elayne, calm down! He's dead! His soul is gone!"

"A-Ah? Ahh...!"

Elayne coughed, staring at Blazer's remains. His soul had been shredded and dispersed.

"Damn it, I wasted too much time... the terrain's collapsing. We've got maybe three minutes."

"What?!" Gardenia panicked. "Damn it, if I could just form a better body... Wait, how's your new dog holding up?"

"GRYARR!"

They turned toward the agonized cry of three dogs. Cerberus, covered in wounds, crashed behind them.

"C-Cerberus!"

Elayne rushed to him, casting a healing spell woven from Ghostly Soul, Nether, Nature, and Spiritual Energy. Gardenia assisted, creating a spell called "Heal Undead"—a spell that healed only the undead and harmed the living.

"You did well...! Rest for a minute."

Heavy footsteps echoed. A blazing skeleton approached, dragging a massive sword.

It glared at Elayne with fury and madness.

She pulled a long needle from her pocket—black bone, etched with cursed runes.

A Curse Weaving Needle. A tool used by Shadows to imprint or remove curses from souls and bodies.

"GRRR...! KILL... KILL... KILL...!"

Mark groaned, still in pain.

"Don't worry, Mark... I'll save you."

Elayne held back tears as the giant skeleton charged with unrelenting rage.

RUMBLE!

The ground ignited. Elayne's terrain turned to ash. She leapt away, barely dodging Mark's berserk strike, which split the earth.

Flames erupted, forming ghostly pillars.

"Elayne, what's the plan?! How do we stop that monster? Is he even... is he still Mark?"

"..."

Elayne clenched her fists.

"He is. I know he is."

She stepped forward.

Mark groaned, his sword rushing toward her.

She swung her blade, pouring all her power into it.

"{Heroic Legendary Sword Arts}"

She focused with absolute precision.

Their swords collided.

The difference in strength was clear.

But Elayne had something Mark didn't.

"{Heroic Parry}"

Energy surged.

BOOOM!

She released half her reserves. Heroic Parry connected, shattering Mark's blazing sword.

"GAAHH?!"

Mark flew backward, crashing into the wall. His armor cracked. His right hand—the one that held the blade—was gone.

Elayne saw the terrain fading fast.

She had to move.

Faster than ever.

She had to channel lightning itself.

She remembered Belle's thunder. Her eyes glowed.

Golden horns emerged from her Ghostly Aura, shining faintly.

Through essence manipulation, Elayne recreated fragments of spells and skills. By combining them, she forged something stronger.

ZAAAP!

Her hands reached Mark's skull.

"GRUUAAA!"

Chapter 1744: Wake Up, Mark

Still under the influence of his brainwashed state, Mark struggled to resist. He grabbed Elayne's shoulders, pushed her away, and swung his claw, scorching her with its heat.

Elayne clenched her teeth and began weaving threads of her ghostly soul and consciousness into Mark's own. He struck her body with a punch, but she pressed on. Gardenia ensured Elayne remained healed—just enough to survive.

"Mark...! MARK!"

Elayne's voice echoed through an endless inferno.

Mark's soul.

After ten years of torment, it had become a purgatory in itself. No matter how hard she searched, Elayne couldn't find him.

"Mark...! No...! Please...!"

She gripped her needle and pierced his soul. Using Shade's technique, she began unraveling the Curse Runes. One by one, they fell apart. The pain and agony bound to them slowly faded, yet the purgatory lingered.

"Mark..."

Elayne walked through the flames of suffering. And she burned her soul alongside his. To understand his pain, she chose to share it.

Closing her eyes, she recalled the good times.

"Remember when you awkwardly asked me to hang out?"

"Those meals we shared, chatting about anything after work?"

"Mark... do you remember greeting me every morning, smiling like no one else?"

She smiled through the flames. No pain could ever erase those memories.

"Remember when we met at BNLO for the first time, hahah..."

"Or when we defeated the Demon King of Miasma and saved the forest?"

"Or... the time we visited my farm and met my family? I miss them..."

She kept walking, calling out to him.

Slowly... something began to change.

The flames she absorbed started transforming into countless memories and scenes.

"Remember when you asked me out?"

"Or... hehe, when you kissed me for the first time?"

Elayne touched her lips, smiling faintly. She descended deeper into the endless purgatory of fire. As she spoke, her emotions reshaped the flames into a beautiful landscape of memories.

"I love you, Mark... I love you so much. We've been through so much together. So please... don't forget me. Don't forget us."

She stepped into the deepest abyss—beyond the flames, into pure darkness.

The void.

There was... nothing.

As she gazed into the emptiness within Mark's soul, Elayne feared his memories were truly lost. And yet...

Why did the flames above still burn, shaped like their memories?

"No..."

She shook her head, remembering what she had once discovered.

"Memories are never truly gone."

"As long as our souls remain, attachments, grudges, and bonds linger."

"As long as you're here, Mark... somewhere inside, you still remember us."

She plunged into the darkness, her soul diving deeper, risking fragmentation and death.

And yet...

"Mark...! Remember our first time together? How good it felt? We shared warmth, kissed, and embraced. I remember the love you gave me—it meant everything."

The shadows began to shift, taking shape as she recalled their time together. Even memories from the Netherworld, ten years ago, surfaced. They had endured everything—because they were together.

"Mark...! I love you, Mark!"

She kept diving.

"MARK!!!"

Then, as her hand touched the bottom of that abyssal sea of nothingness—

FLAAASH!

A brilliant white light surged forth, illuminating the darkness. The shadows and purgatory flames transformed into radiant light.

Elayne found herself within a warm, comforting soul—filled with love. Countless memories returned.

Within that soul, Elayne and Mark found each other again.

"Mark?"

"Elayne..."

He was curled on the floor, clutching his head, sobbing.

How much had he suffered?

Elayne approached and embraced him tightly.

"Everything is going to be okay... I promise."

"I hurt you...! I...!"

Mark couldn't believe what he had done. He hated himself.

"You didn't do it willingly. You were manipulated."

"No...! I...! I was... Ugh...!"

"Let's go, Mark. Our story isn't over."

"Ahh... I don't know if I can keep going..."

"You can."

"But...!"

"You can, Mark. You've always inspired me to work hard, to keep moving forward. Now it's my turn to do the same for you."

"Elayne... Ugh...! Elayne!"

Mark broke down, hugging her tightly. Elayne held him close and kissed him.

"Let's go."

She smiled.

"Yeah... let's go."

Mark nodded, took her hand, and in the next moment—

They regained consciousness.

Cerberus, Shade, Dorothy, Sailor, and Norman were fighting to protect them. Dozens of guards and commanders surrounded them. Two nobles watched from above, ready to intervene.

"Elayne! You're awake!" Norman shouted. "W-We have to go!"

"Is Mark ready?!" Sailor asked.

"He is!" Elayne replied.

Mark was amazed by the new allies Elayne had gathered.

"Mark... let's fight."

"..."

Mark nodded and rose. His massive body blazed with fire. The Undead Guards and Commanders stepped back, awestruck and terrified.

"Y-You bastards...!"

"How dare you cause such chaos in White Bone City!"

"You've made a grave mistake!"

"We'll chase you to the ends of the world!"

"Let's see you try."

Elayne smiled as Mark swung his blazing arms. His fiery soul transformed into twin swords, cleaving through the enemy.

SLAASH! SLAASH! SLAASH!

He no longer needed a weapon—his soul was the blade.

"Gyaaaahhh!"

"Run! The champion's gone berserk!"

"That witch brainwashed him!"

"Commander Blazer is dead! What now?!"

The guards and commanders turned on each other, torn between fleeing and fighting. In the chaos, they had no choice but to let them escape.

Elayne and her companions climbed onto Mark's broad back. With his Ghostly Phoenix Wings, he soared into the dark pit.

The space around the pit warped strangely. Dozens of guards attacked it, trying to breach the barrier.

"Huhuh, how interesting."

"Demon Tree Religious Order, huh? I'll be watching."

Elayne heard two powerful voices behind her. The nobles who had observed the arena spoke but did not intervene. Though mildly irritated, they seemed to admire Elayne's talent and resolve.

As Mark pierced the spatial barrier, he and his allies vanished into the dark pit.

As Mark and Elayne vanished into the dark pit, the spatial barrier sealed behind them, warping and distorting the space around it. The guards outside continued their futile assault, their weapons clashing against the shimmering veil.

Inside the pit, the world twisted.

Chapter 1745: Escape

While falling through the dark pit, Mark was awestruck by what he saw.

"What is this place? Is this where you were thrown, Elayne?" he asked, gritting his teeth. "Ugh...!"

"Yes. I spent ten years here," Elayne replied. "And it's where I've decided to place my second Domain Core."

"Domain Core?!" Mark gasped. "What? How?! This is...! Haha..."

Despite the pain and everything he had endured, he laughed. With Elayne, he couldn't help but feel genuine joy and wonder whenever she did something this outrageous.

FLASH!

They pierced through the darkness as the pit stretched endlessly beneath them.

And then...

"Mama! The Domain is ready to move!"

"Okay, dear. Let's go, then."

At Little Hope's words, the entire space within the Domain began to shift.

Elayne and her companions descended to the bottom of the pit.

A vast cave awaited them, illuminated by giant glowing mushrooms and lush moss clinging to the walls.

At its center, surrounded by black roots, stood a glowing crystal—blue and red, the size of a car.

Little Hope's soul resided within.

"Woah..."

Mark looked around. The cavern was large enough to house nearly a hundred Undead comfortably—those who had chosen to escape by leaping into the pit.

RUMBLE!

The Domain began to move.

Like a bubble of air trapped underground, the cave—this enclosed space—slid through stone and soil.

When the spatial disturbances finally vanished from the White Bone Camp, all that remained was the same dark pit.

But the mushrooms and moss were gone.

Everything and everyone who had jumped into the abyss had vanished without a trace.

Many were left bewildered, especially the weaker, simpler undead who had been cast into the pit.

What they had done resembled a form of advanced space magic.

Yet none of them possessed such affinity. If they had, they would have been sent to the Sorcery Clan to be trained by a Lich and molded into proper Wizards.

Though some had shown unique abilities, their personalities made them unfit to grow strong like the champion.

They were thrown into the pit to either perish from soul starvation or serve as prey for the champion to demonstrate his strength.

But Blazer's entire plan had been undone by Elayne.

Using the knowledge she had retained from her life, she introduced the Netherworld to spells and magics the Undead had never seen.

In the Netherworld, there were no such things as Farmer Class Skills—let alone Spirit Nature Magic, known only in the Living World.

The Withering Tree Race came closest, but they merely controlled tree-like monsters and had no understanding of the power Elayne wielded.

"Commander Blazer is dead. What do we do now?"

"Without him, are we allowed to escape?"

"I mean... the gates are right there. No one's guarding them."

"Damn it. Maybe I should've joined that woman..."

The Undead Guards murmured among themselves.

Though they had once feared defecting, now that Blazer was gone, many began to reconsider.

However...

"So that useless bastard Blazer is dead, huh?"

"Not only did his 'champion' betray him, but the zombie he scorned and cast into the pit turned out to be a greater threat than he ever imagined."

"This is what happens when we let a fool run everything..."

Three towering figures entered the ruined city, each radiating immense power.

Their Nether Cores and Souls had been cultivated far beyond those of ordinary Undead.

The first was a giant, muscular zombie over three meters tall, stitched together from various corpses and embedded with metallic parts that crackled with lightning.

He led an army of two thousand undead. He was known as the Rotting Goliath—Franken.

The second was a ghostly woman composed of purple and red flames, surrounded by a noxious, toxic smoke that formed the shape of a dress.

A spiked crown of crystallized poison adorned her head, and her flowing "hair" shimmered like liquid venom.

She commanded two thousand five hundred undead. She was the Poisonous Ghostly Madam—Bellarine.

The third was a monstrous chimeric skeleton, forged from the bones of countless beasts.

His immense body resembled a six-legged creature with multiple heads, wings, and tails.

He led three thousand undead. He was the Bone Tyrant—Atrokus.

These three commanders had been monitoring White Bone City for some time, instructed only to supervise Blazer and manage their own forces.

Now, with Blazer dead, they had been ordered by the higher-ups to investigate what had happened—and to identify the mysterious revolutionary among the zombies.

"The pit is completely empty," Bellarine said, inspecting it with her ghostly form. "I believe the woman used a special formation she placed underground to teleport elsewhere."

"How could she create a formation as a mere zombie, with no knowledge or resources?!" Franken growled. "It makes no sense!"

"We are no longer dealing with ordinary undead, Franken. Common sense no longer applies," Atrokus rumbled. "We must consider this zombie woman... exceptional. But where did she come from? Who is she? What is her name? Does anyone know anything? That fool Blazer died before reporting a single detail... tch."

"Well..."

"We know very little, my lord..."

"We merely watched over the pit for ten years..."

"Commander Blazer told us to ensure they didn't escape, and we did..."

The Undead Guards tried to explain, but Atrokus turned his many empty eye sockets toward them.

Flames blazed from each one.

"Is that so?" Atrokus said. "Well then... Bellarine, it's your turn to interrogate them. Do as you please."

"Oh? Fufu, gladly, senior," Bellarine chuckled, her smoke spreading ominously.

"Gaaack!"

"Please, have mercy!"

"W-We didn't do anything, we swear!"

"Exactly!" Franken roared, slamming his fists down and pulverizing a skeleton guard into white dust.

"That's why we have to clean up your mess—because you did nothing! Useless bastards, all of you! Can't you do a single thing right?!"

"Please spare us!"

"Gyaaaah! The commander is furious!"

"Have mercy! We're just low-ranking guards!"

"And that," Atrokus said coldly, "is precisely why White Bone City is in chaos.

With Blazer dead, someone must take responsibility.

And you—his loyal servants—are next in line."

Chapter 1746: Pursued

"With Blazer dead... someone must take responsibility for this. And you, who served him, are next in line!"

The three ruthless Death Commanders had kidnapped over thirty guards—those closest to Blazer—and began interrogating them, extracting every shred of useful information from their souls.

Franken and Atrokus weren't particularly skilled in soul-searching or torture, relying mostly on brute force to crush souls into oblivion. But Bellerine was different. Cunning and methodical, she used her ghostly poisons to infect souls and torment them endlessly.

Through these methods, she extracted every secret from her victims. After several days, the trio uncovered a wealth of information.

The guards hadn't shared these details earlier, likely believing them trivial or irrelevant. But to the Death Commanders, every fragment mattered.

"Her name is Elayne... a female zombie bound to the skeleton she calls Mark," Bellerine reported. "Apparently, they shared a romantic relationship in life."

"Hoo, so that's how she reversed the brainwashing on his soul," Franken muttered, arms crossed.

"She was noted for her swordsmanship, but lacked other talents," Bellerine continued. "Also, before all this began, several soldiers noticed the dark pit filling with mushrooms and moss."

"Mushrooms and moss? Bah! Is that what she used before? It was maddening—my body grew weak out of nowhere!" Franken roared. "So her power is to manipulate mushrooms and moss? That's it?"

"No, wait..." Atrokus spoke in his lugubrious, ghostly tone. "It may seem insignificant, but she overpowered everyone in the arena. She weakened them enough to escape with the rebels. Whatever this power is, it must not be underestimated."

"She cultivated the mushrooms and moss in the dark pit, then drew power from them," Bellerine explained. "It gave her a tremendous boost—but it was temporary, tied to her terrain. That's why she fled instead of trying to seize the city."

"Who can expand terrain like that? Instantly? Such a bizarre power for a zombie..." Franken grumbled. "Makes me think she's not undead at all—more like a spirit."

"Hmm..." Atrokus pondered, his many ghostly minds swirling. "Her power resembles that of Druids from the Living World. But we've seen many so-called Druids fall here, only to find their powers useless. There's no life or nature to draw from in this realm. The mushrooms and moss here are entirely different—barely even plants."

"Aren't mushrooms and moss born from corpses?" Franken asked. "So she somehow twisted her Druid powers to control these pathetic little growths we step on or eat? And turned that into a force strong enough to overpower us? Even the nobles were weakened! Ridiculous! No such power should exist!"

"That's why we believe she's special. She might be one of the rare cases where an Undead is capable of inheriting part of the powers they had as living beings," Bellerine said. "Maybe inside her soul there was

a sealed power she was able to channel, unlocking all these abilities and... somehow adapting them to this realm."

"How troublesome," Atrokus groaned. "However... this is our job, and we cannot decline the request from the higher-ups. After all, if we ever want to ascend into Death Apostles, we must earn their trust."

"Especially now that we've hit a bottleneck in our growth..." Bellerine sighed, rolling her eyes. "If we can capture this zombie and present her to the higher-ups, I'm sure they'll be pleased and might even share some Ancient Nether Refining Scriptures that could help us grow stronger."

"Hmph, well, talk for yourself. I'm growing just fine with my own method!" Franken laughed. "I've heard that the Domain of Death is expanding quickly across the Living World! If we can gain more contribution points, we might be able to buy ourselves the right to explore the Living World and extract all the rare and precious materials up there."

"Souls will be all for the taking too!" Bellerine said, her eyes full of greed. "These lowly guards aren't even worth eating."

"Hmph, well, their bones are precious... don't waste them all," Atrokus said, collecting the dozens of bones left behind by the skeleton guards and soldiers and fusing them into his body using his unique Aberrant Bone Chimera Body. "For now... we should quickly restore order to this place... many guards and soldiers think they can do whatever they want now... let's go. All those who dare to even think about escaping... shall be turned into Ghostly Yin Pills!"

"I understand, but what about that woman?!" Franken asked angrily.

"We are already tracking her," Atrokus said.

"Indeed, don't worry, Franken," Bellerine smiled.

Both Atrokus and Bellerine's tracking spells and familiars were already on the move, using the mushrooms, moss, and clothes torn from Elayne to chase her whereabouts, running across the endless, desolate dark caves of the Netherworld's first territory.

"For the time being, let's stabilize things. Then, once we find another clue, we'll get moving. We must find her no matter what..." Bellerine said, glaring into the ceiling sky.

Completely unaware of this, Elayne and her band of undead misfits moved through the underground for several days, resting and finally relaxing for the first time since they all died.

Elayne slept for almost a whole week beside Mark, restoring her energy alongside her friends using the vast garden of mushrooms, moss, and other herb-like things that grew everywhere—things she had yet to appraise but that seemed cooperative.

And when she finally woke up, Elayne yawned, feeling like everything had been only a dream, only to realize she had indeed done all those things, which even now she could barely believe.

"I really did it... Huh?"

However, she quickly realized she was inside a large house made of black stone—a small palace someone had just built for her and Mark to live in within the Space of the Domain.

Looking at how Mark was still sleeping comfortably, covered by a blanket of warm dark blue moss and mushrooms that nurtured his body and soul and healed his physical and spiritual wounds, Elayne decided to go for a walk and see how everyone was doing.

Chapter 1747: A New Day

Elayne walked down a long corridor in her new "home," eventually reaching a door she opened slowly. Beyond it lay a small village built from black stone houses and glowing blue crystals. Each structure was covered in black mushrooms, dark blue moss, and patches of glowing dark green herbs. Some flowers even had red, blinking eyes.

She saw that the nearly one hundred Undead she had rescued were all safe. Most rested their weary souls, while a few wandered outside, learning from her friends—those who had embraced the Nature and Spirit Magic Elayne had taught them.

Some of the Undead were even attempting to awaken Nature Souls, a gift Elayne had bestowed upon her companions. This power allowed them to mimic one or two of her spells and manipulate the flora growing throughout the village.

"Mama, you're awake...!"

A small voice echoed behind her. Elayne turned to see an adorable ghost shaped like a five-year-old girl, with short black hair and glowing red eyes.

"Ah, little Hope! Have I slept too long?"

"It's been a week since we left... I've been moving us farther and farther away, but... I don't really know where to go now."

"Right... we don't have much of a plan, do we?"

Elayne had focused entirely on escaping. She hadn't truly believed she could succeed, so she hadn't planned what to do afterward.

But now, with a hundred survivors, a newly founded Demon Tree Religious Order, and the responsibility of leading those she had saved, she needed to think ahead.

"My main goal was to return to the Living World. But we have no clue where a Netherworld Gate might be. They open and close at random... and the only 'permanent' one is controlled by the Demon King of Death. If I go there, I'll die for real."

"Hmm... maybe we should gather resources. Some of our people are hungry."

"Oh? They can't absorb essence from the plants?"

"They can, but they say it's not enough. They're not Druids like us, Mama."

"That's true."

Little Hope had grown immensely over the past ten years. Once a skeleton with the mind of a five-year-old, she had become a ghost with the intellect of a fifteen-year-old girl—thanks to Elayne's love and guidance.

Elayne had taught her language, history, science, and mathematics, nurturing her into someone thoughtful and capable.

"Alright, gathering resources sounds like a good idea. Another thing we need to do is find my friends..."

"Your friends?"

"Yes, don't you remember? I told you about them—Rita... um, Lily, right? Then there was the cashier girl... ahh, my memory isn't what it used to be. What was her name? Janice? No... Jenny! That's it. Even now, it's hard to piece things together."

"Uh-huh. And who else?"

"Hm... my daughter and the kids managed to escape. And... the fairy—Kate? Katherine! That's right. Ahh, it's hard to recall. There was a cat too—wait, what happened to him? Kajithe, right? Where was he when everything happened? He... he vanished. Why am I only remembering him now? That's strange..."

"...? Cat?"

"Yes, I had a cat friend. I think he's still alive, thankfully. So Rita, Lily, Jenny... my pets Belle and Silver too—I think they died."

"Pets! Belle is the goat, Silver the snake!"

"Yes, yes, that's right! You're so good at remembering. Thank you for helping me."

"Heh!"

Little Hope puffed out her chest proudly as Elayne hugged her and kissed her forehead.

"I love you, Little Hope. You've always made me happy and given me purpose. Even if I'm not your biological mother, I truly don't mind being called your mom."

"Mama!"

Little Hope giggled, hugging Elayne tightly and refusing to let go.

Her ghostly form could solidify using spiritual energy, making her feel like a very cold person. Then again, Elayne wasn't warm either—except for the faint warmth produced by the plants living inside her body.

"Alright, shall we go wake up Mark? I want to introduce him to you properly. He's the man I love—my husband... or, well, we were planning to marry," Elayne sighed. "But we couldn't."

"That's okay... we can celebrate marriage using Netherworld traditions," Little Hope said.

"The Netherworld has traditions?" Elayne asked.

"Uncle Sailor and Uncle Norman told me about them! People here have their own customs and cultures. They're fun!"

"I see..." Elayne nodded, realizing just how rich the Netherworld's history was. "It really does feel like another world—so different from what I imagined."

She had always thought of the Netherworld as a bleak realm of death and suffering. And while that was partly true, it also held cultures, villages, cities, empires, kingdoms, palaces, sects, and more.

Ancient noble races existed, and the vast Netherworld was divided into territories and nations—some believed to be even larger than Arcadia.

Though she longed to return to the Living World and reunite with her daughter, part of Elayne sensed that her journey here was far from over.

And despite everything, she might as well enjoy it—if she could.

"Mark! Uncle! Papa? Papa..."

Little Hope hopped onto Mark's body until the skeleton coughed.

"Cough...! Ack! W-What...?"

Mark stirred, his skull igniting with red and blue flames. Slowly, the fire shaped itself into the faint outline of his former human face, giving him expressions he hadn't had since becoming a skeleton.

"Wow! Face!" Little Hope exclaimed. "Face! Face!"

"W-Who are you, little one?" Mark asked. "Where... where am I? Ugh, my soul still aches..."

"Good morning, Mark," Elayne said, appearing beside him.

"Elayne?! Elayne!" Mark cried, hugging her tightly the moment he saw her.

"Dear... it's okay. We're far away from that place now," Elayne said, gently caressing his flaming skull. "It looks like your flames can form a face now. That's amazing."

"I-I can?" Mark blinked. "I think something happened to my soul when you helped me recover my memories. These flames... they're my soul."

"Oh? I see..." Elayne nodded. "Well, now that you're awake, we have a lot to talk about. But I bet you're hungry. Here—I made some mushrooms and moss juice. They're packed with nether and ghostly energy. Eat up."

"Ah... hahah, salad in the Netherworld. Who would've thought?" Mark chuckled. "Thank you."

Chapter 1748: Together Again

After waking from a week-long sleep, Elayne wandered through the village before returning to her new "home"—a rudimentary house built from black stone, covered in moss and glowing mushrooms.

Once she helped Mark awaken with Little Hope's assistance, one of the most surprising changes was that Mark could now reveal his living face through the flames produced by his body. This allowed him to express emotions more clearly, even as a skeleton.

"I... I think something happened to my soul when you helped me recover my memories. These flames are my very soul, after all," Mark said. "I'm not sure what exactly changed, but I can control them better now."

"Oh? I see..." Elayne nodded. "Well, now that you're awake, there's a lot we need to talk about... but I bet you're hungry. Here, eat this. I cooked some mushrooms and made a small moss juice. They're packed with nether and ghostly energy. Eat up."

"Ah... hahah, salad in the Netherworld. Who would've thought?" Mark laughed. "Thank you... But, uh, how do I eat? I'm... a skeleton. I don't think I even have a stomach. Now that I can speak and think more clearly... it's kind of sad."

"I know, it is," Elayne nodded. "But this is our reality now. We have to accept it and move forward."

"I... I know..." Mark nodded. "I'm still... I'm really sorry for what I did before. For attacking you... for losing control."

"No, it wasn't your fault," Elayne said. "It was that damn skeleton who tortured you so much..."

"Ugh... just remembering that fills me with dread..." Mark sighed, his skeletal hands trembling.

"It's okay," Elayne said, gently holding his hard, bony hands with her soft ones. "We've both been through a lot. Don't worry. I understand your pain; I saw it too. I tried to ease it, but even then, it lingered... I should be the one apologizing for not doing enough."

"Don't apologize..." Mark said. "Back then, we were both powerless... and yet you still found a way out."

"I couldn't have done anything without their help," Elayne smiled. "The company of our new friends kept me sane and helped me hold onto hope. I fought to change our fate, and even though it seemed hopeless at first, I kept moving forward—and eventually, I found a way."

"Yeah..." Mark nodded. "I'm still amazed by that... So, uh, how do I eat though? I guess we got a little off-topic."

"I suppose we just need to talk more. Back then, we couldn't even form proper words," Elayne smiled. "Anyway, just eat them. Try to swallow using your memories of eating. You'll see."

"...? Okay," Mark nodded, still confused.

He opened his large jaws and tossed the entire salad inside, biting it with his teeth and swallowing.

Swallowing shouldn't have been possible for a skeleton with no tongue or throat... but it worked.

Mark managed to swallow, and something resembling a stomach began digesting the food slowly.

"Woah?! What is this? I could barely taste anything, but maybe that's for the best... Still, it worked?"

"Yes, I discovered it recently. Undead who develop enough can grow a 'Soul Stomach' to digest compatible food," Elayne explained. "That's how we're able to consume Ghostly Yin Pills."

"Hoh, so that's it..." Mark said. "It's strange to eat with my soul... but I think I can get used to it. Thank you for the meal, Elayne."

"It's fine. Are you sure you don't want more?" Elayne asked, roasting mushrooms over ghostly fire and preparing more green moss paste.

"I wouldn't mind some more. My soul feels weary and wounded..." he nodded. "If we don't want to rely on pills, this is the best alternative."

"Yeah, I thought about it a lot," Elayne said. "And yes, it really is the best option. These plants and mushrooms are cultivated within the Domain. They feed on the spirit energy I crystallized to grow quickly. They provide nourishment without us having to destroy innocent souls. Eating meat is one thing, but consuming souls and denying them rest is just wrong."

"Especially when those souls seem to be from people. And it's not like we ever ate people," Mark nodded, continuing to eat as Elayne served him more.

Elayne also began eating from a large plate and gave one to Little Hope, who happily devoured the mushrooms and drank the moss shake.

"The flavor isn't great. We have no spices, salt, or anything—no oil or butter," Elayne sighed. "But I managed to manifest a few Cooking Magic Runes, so the food is at least presentable and edible."

"Yeah, I can barely taste it, but... the warmth is comforting. Thank you," Mark said, finishing his second plate. "I think that's enough for now... phew. I never thought I'd feel full as an Undead."

"Me neither," Elayne sighed in relief. "I suppose... even the dead must eat sometimes to feel satisfied. As ominous as that sounds."

"Hm," Mark nodded, hugging Elayne and letting her rest on his armored legs. "A lot has happened."

"Yes..." Elayne nodded, happy in his embrace. "But I'm happy as long as we're together."

"Me too..." Mark smiled softly. "Thank you for coming for me. For never giving up... thank you, Elayne."

"It's fine," Elayne said, caressing his blazing face. His flames didn't burn her—they felt warm and comforting against her cold hands. "I prepared myself to face anything."

"Even then..." Mark smiled.

"It's fine, don't worry," Elayne insisted. "Anyway... did you know? Those mushrooms and the moss are considered pests and dangerous. Their true nature is to consume souls and corpses. They can even become parasitic to the undead."

"E-Eh?" Mark panicked for a moment.

"However, when I befriended them, I realized they were just living beings—alive, existing in this Realm, the Netherworld, surviving and adapting," Elayne explained. "Through our friendship, I gained their trust and power. A single mushroom or a bit of moss isn't much, but when they gather in thousands... I was able to refine spiritual energy from their lifeforce and nature essence. It allowed me to strengthen my soul, refine my Spiritual Heart, and eventually create a second Domain Core. It took ten years... but I also developed a new Farming Technique."

"You did?!" Mark was amazed.

"Yes, it was registered as a Skill," Elayne smiled. "It's called Netherworld Farming Arts. I deciphered it after getting used to the corrupted text that kept appearing."

"I-I see..." Mark muttered, still amazed.

"You've grown strong too," Elayne smiled. "Even after everything you went through... did you awaken some kind of Phoenix power?"

"I... yeah, something awakened," Mark said. "But I don't remember it clearly. I'll need to train for a while to figure out what I can do."

"That's fine," Elayne nodded. "I plan to train as well and test my abilities."

"One thing I'm confused about is... well, what's going on?" Mark said. "We landed in the Netherworld with our real bodies, but we're still in Arcadia, so there's a System we can learn Skills from... and it's glitched for some reason. Also, what happened to our avatars? Can't we combine with them or something?"

"I don't know. Maybe something is preventing it," Elayne explained. "This must be the Death Domain. Maybe our avatars can't cross into it."

"So you're suggesting that... by returning to the World of the Living, we could merge with our avatars?" he asked.

"Maybe. I'm not even sure myself," Elayne said. "That's the beauty, I guess, of not knowing anything."

"Hm..." Mark nodded. "So what's the plan now? We finally escaped..."

"The path to escaping this Realm might take longer. It's much bigger than I expected," Elayne sighed. "But it's not impossible. I'm sure there's a way—we just have to find it and seize the opportunity."

"Yeah, you're right," Mark nodded. "We're still clueless about this world. We need to learn how it works, what each region holds... and where exactly we are."

"Very true," Elayne nodded. "We also need equipment. New weapons, armor, maybe magic items. We'll be protecting many people with the Demon Tree Religious Order, so I want to ensure their safety. We'll need a lot... Little Hope, I wish we could learn more."

"Hm, but we can!" Little Hope said. "Let's ask those aunties and uncles I met before for help!"

"Hm?" Elayne was confused. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean what I mean...!" Little Hope said. "Uncles and Aunties can help us. They know more than even the friends we made in the Dark Pit!"

"Right... we could ask the Undead we rescued," Elayne nodded. "Some of them were important soldiers and guards."