

Dungeon Diver: Stealing A Monster's Power

Chapter 661

Maria tests out the full capabilities of her power while I continue to attempt peering into her Soul Energy core to figure out what this pulsing sensation really is.

In between our exchanges, she feels multiple times weaker than the moment before our attacks collide.

I even test out using my other elements with telekinesis to throw multiple projectiles her way from varying angles while our main focus of a sword clash continues on.

The pulses in her aura allow for ice walls to form even separated from her body, mimicking the same increase in strength for a split second upon impact.

While it feels like matching a mid-level True Core is her maximum, every minute that passes during this clash adds small amounts of power to her base.

Thousands of new links are being formed all over the Dark Continent and 8 Great Regions, and the rate at which word spreads increases more and more about the extravagant perks granted to those that create links.

This allows an increasing amount of stats to be borrowed, slowly amping up the battle more with every collision.

I can feel her movements become fluid and instinctual, however, I can sense small amounts of the beginning stages of early divine energy poisoning along with mental and physical fatigue building up. The rate that it does increases drastically after each of the unexplainable core pulses.

I'm not too concerned, as with a few hours in hibernation using my skill, paired with Abby's restoration skill and a passive use of my self-regeneration skill, I'm sure she'll be fine. However, that takes time and brings us out of the flow state of training, so I want to hold it off for as long as possible and soak up as much experience as we can right now.

To make sure we don't completely overdo it, after about half an hour passes, we both stop and take a break, floating above the desert, but neither of us powers down our auras just yet.

The sun is beginning to set, and the mental clock in my head ticks away.

Once it rises again, there is only going to be one day left before the big three come to the Dark Continent.

Abby will be breaking through to her yellow core soon, and Ember should begin compressing his True Core by the time the sun rises too.

While it feels like I have limitless power at my fingertips, gaining 30x more stats than Maria has right now, I want to make sure I've done everything in my power to become stronger while there's still time left.

As these thoughts race through my mind, I feel a familiar True Core's aura approaching from the southern volcanic region while Maria speaks up and points her greater form's sword my way.

"Ready to go again? I can feel it, I'm on the verge of unlocking this odd sensation in my core... I just need a little more battle experience at this level."

I think to myself for a moment, picturing the pulses that only activate for fractions of a second at a time, then reply.

"I think you need someone closer to your strength to fight you. You're still subconsciously holding back and know I won't actually injure you. This was enough to get you used to this new power, but we're going to need to bring it up a notch if you want to have a breakthrough."

Maria raises a question back.

"Your greater form? There's no way— not yet—"

I smile and shake my head.

"No, something different. Get ready for a real fight. There's someone I want you to meet."

As Maria's gaze sharpens, I form a telepathy link with the True Core flying my way, and before I can even say a word, Raven's voice comes through.

"What's going on? Do we have trouble? This pressure is like nothing I've ever felt before. I can't tell— it doesn't feel like a True Core, but this is overwhelming mana control... Who— or what—"

I can't help but grin while I respond through our link.

"Come here and find out. It's about time you meet the people you'll be fighting beside."

With my perception covering almost a full third of the globe, I watch Raven's expression shift to one of confusion.

"This is one of your teammates? They weren't even orange cores the last I saw them. You're telling me this is a newly awakened's aura...?"

I reply as I feel her getting within visual range, now I'm positive Raven can see both of us.

"Yes, it is a little complicated. She's using a very unique buff to borrow power. But, there's no better first meeting for you two to get to know each other than a spar, am I right?"

Maria's aura grows in power as it appears I'm just standing in midair before her after telling her I'm going to step it up a notch. Simultaneously, Raven is silent through our link for a few seconds.

I reply back when I see her activating her own greater form and pulling out her silver blades with a look of determination.

"I guess I'll take that as a yes..."

Then, I open up a link between the three of us, and I float upward while a new True Core's pressure fills the air and the royal blue aura of the Ice Goddess becomes far more ominous.

"Maria, this is Raven, the True Core I told you about that has been helping me learn about the Order. Raven, this is Maria, the hunter I started my journey with. We were E-Class hunters together, and now we'll be challenging the entire world. I believe an all-out spar would be a much more productive greeting than a simple conversation."

If you find this story on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the infringement.

As Maria's blue aura clashes with Raven's white-yellow aura, I can feel a barrage of emotions rippling through it that I did not expect to feel at all at first.

On the surface, both are extremely curious to see what the other looks like and how they fight, but I feel undertones of jealousy and desire with hints of killing intent from each of them.

I raise an eyebrow and decide to make the most of this situation. One of the reasons Maria wasn't able to fully awaken whatever her cores were trying to do was that we were not in a real battle.

I activate my own greater form and pull out my second sword, flooding the battlefield in a new aura tens of times heavier than before, making both of the women below me reflexively shiver. Their greater forms' eyes lock with each other while I send them another message.

"Neither of you should be holding back. Maria, I want you to give in to the intuition and raw urges that power your Soul Energy core. Raven, consider this another chance to go all out like our battle and become even more skilled with your blades. Aim to kill, and trust that I will stop the fight before any real fatal moves."

To make things fair, the instant their blades collide, I share my mythic grade All-Seeing Eye with both of them. An explosion of energy ripples off their clash that feels far more extreme than the prior clashes.

They don't stay interlocked for more than a tenth of a second, as both of their forms twist around to create a counterstrike and dodge the others, leading to another clash right after.

Blue and yellow explosions light up the sky, and I can feel the essence of true battle in the air.

After about a minute of even clashes, Raven activates her divine stealth skill and catches Maria off guard, landing the first true hit, piercing through her greater form's side; however, it doesn't sink deep at all.

I'm watching this fight take place with laser focus, and the moment Raven's invisible blades pierce through Maria's defenses, her Soul Energy core vibrates faster than I can even perceive.

It shrinks and constricts unlike any other time before, then pulses, sending the same eerie intimidation wave through the desert, just like earlier in our training session. However, somehow, it just jumped in power again, even briefly slipping through my greater form's mental barriers.

The shiver I get makes me smile wide as Raven feels this aura and momentarily freezes to be struck by the Ice Goddess' blades.

Both of their greater forms fly backward and each of them coughs up blood, but the emotions and smell of battle in the air only heighten.

Raven yells through the link.

"There's another one of you? A battle maniac that grows after every hit. You sure do know how to pick 'em!"

Maria yells back.

"You're not too bad yourself! I couldn't sense you at all for a second there, that kind of hurt."

Then the line goes silent as the sky fills with blue and yellow explosions.

Every few minutes, a deadly aura ripples from Maria when she finds herself in a tricky spot, and as my eyes watch the battle go on, I can't help but believe Raven's sword style is shifting and getting better.

It looks like she's surpassed the skill level she showed during the height of our battle and somehow is keeping up with Maria despite her small increases in stats every minute or so as the battle goes on.

"Is that all you got?"

"Too slow! Gotcha again!"

"I'll make you tap first!"

"No way, Jay is going to have to save you before me!"

Every dozen or so strikes, I hear them yell something new through our telepathy channel, and I watch both of their bodies become riddled with near-fatal injuries.

Blue and yellow slashes glow all over Raven's greater form, while Maria's becomes riddled with True Core yellow threads as well.

I send telepathy transmissions to all my doubles and have them all stop what they're doing and go farm pure mana from the artificial mountains to bring it to me fast. No matter who wins this battle, the aftermath isn't going to be pretty for either one of them.

However, I'm mesmerized by the sight before me as the sun sets completely, and the sky overhead becomes dark.

The massive light show in the sky here makes it basically as bright as day.

While earlier, I didn't want to push Maria too far with our training, as we may have to give everything we have in a war in just one day; now I don't dare stop the sight before my eyes.

Both the women before me are improving at a rapid rate, while the emotional auras rippling out of them shift as well.

Before it was unease, skeptical, jealous, and borderline hateful emotions in the air, but now there is great respect for each other being shared through every collision.

There's only so much I can extrapolate from just watching; their blades connecting tell a deeper story between the two of them. They've come to some kind of understanding.

This shift has also led to far more frequent pulses in Maria's core, and instead of raw, eerie, mysterious power, they feel far more controlled, and the power being used each

time is just enough to block or counterattack rather than wasting it in a pulse of intimidation through her surroundings.

I'm still not quite sure what she's tapping into, as there is no description for it in the system, but whatever it is, she's beginning to figure it out; so I'll learn in time too, and maybe I'll be able to do the same with my Soul Energy Core.

Another twenty minutes pass, and the final rays of sunlight disappear from the horizon, while there are so many injuries covering the two women's bodies the residue is enough to light up the sky.

It's been a few minutes since either of them has improved any further, but they're still going at it, matching each other's attacks, and always finding a way to avoid a fatal blow, so I never have to step in.

Their movements even seem to be slowing, and at the same time, I feel my doubles coming near but stopping about 100 kilometers away because the divine aura is too strong for pure mana manifestations to survive in.

As the day comes to a close, even the links of loyalty have slowed down their rising as there is far less socializing at this time of night.

The atmosphere changes as everyone knows this battle is coming to an end, and simultaneously, Raven and Maria both charge their greater forms' blades for what looks like a final attack.

The eerie aura comes back while Raven completely disappears, and the jet black night sky above, paired with the endless abyss of a crater below, adds to the ambiance.

As they both charge at each other, ready to kill, my instincts tell me this is where I need to step in, and attempting to get in the center of this clash might actually be quite deadly if I just use the form I'm in now.

While I am a few times stronger than them, these two attacks that are about to collide are the culmination of a life-or-death battle where they've both used up their last bits of power and desperation for a final strike. Neither wants to lose.

I fly forward and pull up my rising emperor's domain interface and select just 1% of all stats and all mana control for over 5.5 million links of loyalty, matching the boost that Maria has right now

Maria's densest blue sword strike is swung toward Raven's neck and Raven's most precise and deadly swing of her silver blades is thrust through the divine stealth pocket dimension using her True Core's perk to aim right for Maria's heart.

At the same time, I feel over 5 million stat points per stat rush into my status. My eyes widen as it feels like time is slowing down around me, and my vision somehow becomes far more clear, making me thankful I didn't decide to pull more than 1%, because that might actually have been more dangerous than helpful at such close range.

It feels easier than breathing to create mana barriers that surround both of them, blocking these strikes like a twig hitting a metal wall.

At the same time, I let out a light pulse of intimidation to stop them from hurting themselves on the barriers I've created.

The final attacks that would have ended this battle in a draw are stopped moments before they can be fatal.

Both women pass out instantly, and their greater forms fade away to show faint smiles on both their faces.

Chapter 662

Even though I hardly used half of my power to release that intimidation pulse, it was enough to break both of their adrenaline-fueled concentration and stop them from fighting instantly.

Using my intimidation at full blast without these borrowed stats would most likely just scare them, an instant knockout with this much ease would not have been possible.

Even my doubles, who weren't the focus of the attack and were 100 kilometers away, were greatly affected by the increase in my aura.

If not for our instantaneous memory sharing, I would have had to forcefully deactivate all three of them standing by if I left my new mana control active for too long.

While Maria and Raven both fall into the crater, covered in divine residue and countless near-fatal wounds, I deactivate my power-stealing perk and completely conceal my aura behind my purple barrier, swooping down to catch them both.

My body doubles air-step over now that the absurd auras have faded away, delivering about an hour's worth of plundered materials from the artificial mountains in the form of dozens of bright pink, dense mana crystals created with my crystal creation skill.

I accept them and share hibernation with both Maria and Raven, feeding the skill hundreds of quadrillions of MP each to activate the highest setting, emergency mode, to speed up the process.

It may delay the progress on the labyrinth's growth by a few hours, but at this point, it isn't a massive priority. I won't be making it to 200 floors in the next 36 hours, even if I use my main body to help plunder and speed things up.

A white flash of light surrounds each of them, and the divine energy poisoning, along with the hundreds of injuries all over their bodies, begins healing before my eyes.

"I think that went well..." I whisper to myself as my doubles return to their tasks, and I float in midair, lost in thought for a few seconds.

They've definitely become better fighters. I'm curious to hear what they'll say once they wake up.

Whatever it may be, I'm far more confident in their fighting abilities now, and I'm even considering giving Raven the option to become a General.

I mentally open my interface to review the details again and even look at Maria's settings. It appears these general slots are permanent positions that cannot be taken away unless the link of loyalty is forcefully severed by both sides.

If there are really only going to be five slots available to wield this power, I'll need to think carefully and strategically about the remaining four and not pick them too quickly.

With this on my mind, I pull a transport crystal from my storage and crush it with telekinesis, transporting the three of us back beneath the Crimson City.

—

The yellow divine threads down here are circulating much slower than before, but with the insulated true core-imbued shielding on the walls, all the threads stay inside, making the air far denser with energy.

I rest Maria and Raven against a wall as they continue to glow bright white in a state of suspended animation, and my eyes turn to Abby first.

Her core is even closer to breaking through than it was this morning, and my presence, along with an unknown entity in the room, breaks her concentration slightly. I feel a pull on my telepathy channel as it opens.

"Who is that? And what happened to Maria? I can't sense either of their presences."

I reply, "That is Raven. The True Core from the Southern Volcanic Region I mentioned earlier that was helping me learn more about central headquarters. I've protected both of their auras behind my divine barrier, as the residue and pressure they give off may be harmful to you here. We had a sparring session out in the desert to test the yellow core's power. I look forward to doing the same for yours."

The author's content has been appropriated; report any instances of this story on Amazon.

There's a slight pause, and I feel a ripple of emotion from Abby, similar to what I sensed from Maria before their battle. But she quickly suppresses it and responds.

"Good. At this rate, I should awaken by morning. I just need a bit more time."

She consumes another yellow fragment, and her body surges with yellow threads as she continues.

"A few hours ago, Ember stopped circulating the room, so we've been relying on the pure power of the fragments you left behind. Our absorption rate is the same; we just need to consume more since the residue remains stagnant."

I look around the room, and my eyes fall on the isolation pod next.

Peering inside, the sight I see is far more extreme than expected.

An incredibly dense yellow core is being compressed as we speak. Golden and silver threads cover the inside of Ember's body, containing every single yellow thread within, creating an extremely controlled and calculated process that doesn't affect the outside world with his aura at all.

If my perception wasn't so sharp, it would seem like nothing but an unawakened sat inside that silver pod, similar to the capabilities of my purple barrier.

I reply to Abby once I understand what's happening, not daring to contact Ember or push my aura near him, not wanting to disrupt the delicate compression process taking place.

"Let me help with your energy cycling problem. Just focus on healing and absorbing threads."

Next, I activate the True Core perk I stole from Sebastian and feel for all the stagnant yellow threads in the room.

Without letting any mana seep from my body, I attempt to move this stagnant yellow energy in circles around the room to simulate what Ember was doing before.

The entire room shakes slightly when I activate this power, and the threads begin to dance and wiggle as I form mental links with each of them individually. I sit down and close my eyes to pour my full concentration into this task.

At first, it's quite hard to move this energy without using mana as its base, as even the True Core's ability is paired with superior mana manipulation.

If I were to inject even a few thousand MP into the air, this would be simple. But I want the divine energy circulating into my teammates' cores to remain as pure as it is in the yellow fragments. Secondly, I want to train this unique ability while I have the perfect place to do so.

Minutes pass, and the dancing threads begin rotating around the room extremely slowly, making just one revolution in all the time I've been at it.

However, there's momentum now, and the second revolution only takes a full minute.

After another 15 minutes, I start to sweat, and the mental strain from pushing each individual thread with precision begins to build up.

I avoid hitting Ember's isolation pod, as well as the two women in hibernation.

However, now my understanding of the ability grows even higher, and a single revolution takes less than 20 seconds.

I have to strategically let go of the threads that collide with Abby, Lydia, and Fisher. If I hold on too long, I'll accidentally tear divine energy from their cores that could have been absorbed.

A smile grows on my face as the minutes pass and my precision improves.

Once a single revolution around the room takes less than 5 seconds, I start shaping the threads' flight paths much differently.

There's no one sitting in the center of the room, so I move the threads to the outer flight path, concentrating the energy more densely where we're sitting.

A few minutes later, once I'm more comfortable, the revolution time lasts less than a second.

Abby increases the strength of the bright green and yellow restoration circle on the floor, as far more threads are now circulating through everyone's bodies.

I could go faster, as my comprehension of the technique is improving rapidly, and I even recall the time when I was compressing my True Core, with cycles of energy coursing through me at magnitudes of hundreds or even thousands per second. However, the mental and physical limits of everyone in the room are a bit lower than my own.

I can tell Abby could handle more, but Fisher and Lydia are nearing their max.

I make one last adjustment, compacting the threads' density a little more by combining the portion near the ceiling with the threads circling the floor.

Before my eyes, their thread-gathering speed enhances a few times over without them needing to consume more fragments, just using the leftover residue in the room.

We sit here for another hour as I continue cycling the energy, and my progress with the True Core's ability grows even more.

I manage to control portions of the threads to weave around Fisher and Lydia each cycle, allowing Abby to absorb more without pushing anyone too hard or holding anyone back.

Each revolution delivers the maximum number of threads everyone can handle. In just two hours from the time I returned, I witness Abby's yellow core fully saturate, and all signs of orange threads in her body disappear.

A pulse of energy surges through the room as a result, and her eyes open wide, glowing yellow, while her green eyes and hair shine brightly beneath.

She speaks aloud.

"That was faster than I expected."

She grins but keeps the restoration circle active, as the threads circulating the room are still in motion.

I open my eyes and smile back.

"Congrats. You're a yellow core now. I have another powerful stat buff I want to share with you. Let's see how far you can push that second ranked-up buff of yours, the [Form of the Immortal Healer], now that you can wield this much divine energy. I wonder if I can still land a hit on you."

While I reply, the white glow around Maria and Raven begins to fade as their hibernation process comes to an end. At the same time, there's a click from the isolation pod at the back of the room, and the silver door slowly opens.

Chapter 663

As Abby looks down at her hands, still in awe of the power surging through her now that her yellow core is fully saturated, footsteps echo through the room.

Ember steps out from the isolation pod, and not a single thread of divine energy seeps from his body.

However, there's a new aura about him, one that exudes pride and excitement, sending ripples through my purple barrier.

The silver and golden threads have vanished back into the center of his core, now impossible to see unless I focus my perception closely. Instead, a brilliant white and yellow ball of light burns in his chest.

Ember halts in the center of the room, his crimson eyes glowing fiercely to match his flowing hair. They gleam golden as he stretches his arms and surveys the room, making eye contact with me first before glancing at Raven and Maria, who are beginning to stir as their hibernation ends. He turns his gaze back to me and speaks.

"I'm impressed. This planet isn't resource-rich at all, yet you've improved a lot while I was resting. There must not be many True Cores left..."

He chuckles and his aura sweeps through me, assessing my core's progress, before shifting his gaze to Abby.

He stares at her for a moment.

"I overheard your conversation earlier. The Form of The Immortal Healer—that's a buff you really have?"

Abby raises an eyebrow but nods.

Ember crosses his arms, grinning.

"It's been a long time since I've heard that name..."

As he speaks, both Maria and Raven's white hibernation light fades completely, and their eyes open, taking in their surroundings.

Raven looks startled at first, but I hold back the reflexive pulse of my true core's energy, keeping it behind my purple barrier to ensure everyone remains safe.

Maria turns to Raven, and the two exchange smiles, as if they've already become friends.

They stand and extend hands to shake.

Raven speaks first.

"So it was a draw."

Maria nods as they release their grip.

"It seems so. I like your fighting style. We should go again."

Raven smirks before responding.

"You know, I have a few artifacts back in my region you could use... I've never met anyone with such a strong ice affinity. They were meant for one of the big three named Elara, but I think they'd suit you better."

Ember's eyes shift from Abby to Maria for a moment, looking deep into her Soul Energy Core, grinning and nodding once, before settling his gaze on Raven.

"You're a new one... what an odd aura you have."

He steps forward, extending a hand, and they shake as well.

I speak up as they do, debating whether or not to tell Raven that Ember is a dragon.

"Ember, this is Raven, another True Core on our side. Raven, this is Ember, he's a— Well, let's just say he's a powerful addition to the team. A fellow True Core."

I decide not to reveal more, and from the amused aura radiating from Ember, I can tell it was the right choice. Once we fight together, she'll figure it out on her own.

Over the next few minutes, we catch up. I brief everyone on what I learned during my journey to Central, recounting the events after the B-Class exams that led me to meet Raven and take over the 8 Great Regions for expansion. Finally, I outline my plans for the next 36 hours before the big three return.

Maria and Raven plan to head back to the volcanic region to retrieve unique artifacts Raven hasn't touched in decades, which might prove useful. Plus, she still has over 180 yellow fragments, which she's more than happy to share with her new sparring partner.

If you stumble upon this narrative on Amazon, it's taken without the author's consent. Report it.

By the end of our conversation, they're acting bubbly and friendly with each other, their bond clearly strengthened.

Fisher and Lydia, their cores about one-third saturated, listen in too, though they're primarily focused on amassing more power.

Ember breaks the silence.

"Well, in that case, I'd like to spar with Abby. That buff intrigues me; I think I can push it to its limit."

I raise an eyebrow.

"Hey, there's still a lot I want to ask you."

He points to the bunker's ceiling.

"Well, we can fly to a sparring ground the long way. I'd like some fresh air."

Before I can point out the issue in the room, I watch Ember's right hand glow with bright white and yellow light.

"Stand back. This will fix the circulation problem while we're gone."

Pure divine energy flows from his fingertip, forming a string of dense, silky yellow light. The tips connect, creating a circle.

Then, A faint silver light flashes in his eyes, and miniature silver threads form within the floating energy construct. He expands it, allowing it to rotate around the room at the same rate I control the excess yellow threads, then releases it. Yet, it continues to spin.

I can feel it tugging at all the threads in the room, so I release my true core's ability, and the spinning threads keep moving on their own.

My eyes widen, but for some reason, no one else in the room seems impressed—they're either dazed or uninterested.

This strange sensation, paired with the feeling I had near the tower in the center of the dark continent and the dragon's words about memories of the Fallen One being fuzzy or non-existent, only adds to the list of questions swirling in my mind.

I decide not to bring it up and open the hatch above us to leave the bunker, as planned.

-

Maria and Raven use teleport crystals to return to the Volcanic base to check out her artifacts, while Abby, Ember, and I head off in the same direction, though taking the long way.

Once we're far from the Crimson City, I start a new conversation.

"So why are you so interested in Abby's buff?"

While Ember thinks, and the three of us airstep through the sky, I add Abby to my Rising Emperor's domain as my second general.

He responds.

"It's a rare one. Usually paired with the Restore skill."

He turns to Abby.

"I'm sure you know by now, but that's no ordinary healing ability. It's a unique skill, like Jay's Absorption. Only one entity can possess it in the system at a time."

I raise an eyebrow, but Ember continues.

"I remember the last holder of this skill. It brings back memories, so I want to see if you have what it takes to wield it this time."

Abby nods.

"I assumed it was unique. But don't compare me to whoever had it last—I want to learn to use it my own way."

Ember laughs, murmuring under his breath.

"That's exactly what she would've said."

Then, he speaks up louder.

"Fine, fine. We'll spar until you figure it out. I have a new ability I need to get used to as well. I'll limit myself to yellow core usage for now."

Abby shrugs, as she's clearly heard his first snarky remark back, and replies with a similar tone.

"Good."

She turns to me, asking about the new notification she heard. I briefly explain how the general perk works, but Abby decides to test her yellow core's base power first.

Ember speaks again.

"The system calls them generals? Interesting. Demons have the same ranking system."

My head snaps his way. I hadn't filled anyone in on the conversation I had with the demon and dragon in the labyrinth, but Ember's words pique my interest.

"What do you know about the demonic realm? And the dragons being intertwined with the system? And this throne created by a divine beast? -And... well- there's a lot of questions I have actually, but I'm more curious why you never told me the full truth about this world."

The three of us stop mid-air, hovering over the large crater training grounds where Maria and Raven sparred earlier.

Ember grins, and the golden light shimmers in his eyes again.

"It seems you've learned a lot while I was healing. It's not that I've kept information from you, but certain knowledge cannot be brought into this universe by me. Just as I was reborn as a fragile baby dragon, there's many more limits to my abilities in this life, that only scratches the surface. There's only so much I can share at certain levels."

I stare, trying to process his words.

"Here, I'll show you what I mean. The source is—"

The moment the words leave his lips, a blinding golden light engulfs my vision, and a loud white noise fills my ears.

I quickly sift through my body doubles' memories to see if they registered anything, but all three are blank, distorted like my own.

As seconds pass, even the memory of what just happened fades, leaving only the recollection of trying to understand.

Abby is floating nearby in a daze as well, equally if not more stumped at what just happened.

I look at Ember, shocked, and feel a faint aura of sadness from him.

"See, it's not that I'm keeping things from you. It's that there are things I cannot share yet until you are more powerful or have learned them on your own. These aren't my rules. Well, actually—"

Another flash of blinding golden light hits me. This time, I don't bother checking my doubles' memories. The golden image fades away again.

Ember sighs and speaks.

"Believe it or not, this isn't the first time I've told you about the labyrinths, demonic realm, the system's true purpose, and the intricacies of divine beasts. It's just the first time you're strong enough or knowledgeable enough to remember us talking about this much of the truth. Your first steps in controlling divine energy have definitely helped, but for us to talk this openly about demons and the system, you must have met another dragon with exceptional knowledge...."

He thinks to himself, and whispers again. "At least level 5000 to know this much."

I pause, considering his words.

"It's true. A dragon did tell me about the system. And a demon spoke of the five great families within the Demonic Realm. I can see the silver divine light that the throne is made of. But there are still too many things that don't add up. Who are you really? What did you do to earn the title of The Fallen One?"

Chapter 664

"So, they still know that name this far out? Interesting..."

Ember looks at me with a pondering gaze, then continues.

"I've already told you who I am in this conversation. My comments about the source should have explained everything. So, it seems all I can say is what you know up to this point. Yes, the throne is an artifact created by one of the divine beasts, used mostly for the ascension of demons to bring them to the next realm, the green core state."

Ember waits, and I nod in reply.

"Yes, I'm aware of this fact."

He grins.

"Good. And I'm sure you're aware there's a disparity between the simple silver threads in the throne and the golden light in my core. All I can say is there's a step above, and I wouldn't be down here if I hadn't—"

The golden light blinds my senses again, but I'm satisfied that my thoughts about the throne have been confirmed as true. I won't be able to ask him more about this name, but I can still learn more.

"So, the divine beast, are they on this world? Or in the demonic realm? It's one of those overseers like the Lich King, right?"

Ember nods, and a ripple of sadness comes from him again as he realizes I don't remember the second half of his statement. But he replies.

"They are definitely not on this world, nor are they in the demonic realm. I don't know the creator's identity for certain; they might be affiliated with the 5 great families you speak of. But an artifact of this magnitude cannot be crafted by a mere reincarnation of a divine beast. It is certainly one that is still alive and at the peak of its power."

He turns in the direction of the black tower, thousands of kilometers away, then looks back at me, his gaze deep.

"That is a problem for another day. This is an artifact crafted for descendants to easily conquer many worlds. You have to focus on the one world we're trying to save right now."

I stay silent and nod, coming back down to reality and looking at the situation at hand.

"Alright, speaking of artifacts, one last question then..."

I point to the black cube that slowly rotates around me as its center of gravity.

"You called this an amplifier. How can I make use of it? Ever since I walked into its tomb, it hasn't said a word to me..."

Ember chuckles.

"Really? An amplifier that can hold a conversation? It must be a strong one. What was its desire?"

I think for a moment.

"It watched many of its people leave this world behind. I believe its desire was to save humanity."

Ember nods, staring off toward the throne again, then back to me.

"That's a pretty good one. But I'm as in the dark as you are on what powers it might grant. It will activate once it's necessary—or maybe not at all. What you witnessed while meeting it may have been the last of its power. Again, amplifiers are all unique, especially ones from the originators era, there's nothing you can do now but wait and see."

I touch the cube as it comes my way, and it bounces back, changing its orbital direction without making a sound. Then, I turn to Abby and float backward.

"Well, I guess that's that. Ember is right. It's time you two practice and get used to your new levels of power. We don't have much time left."

I back up, and both of them hover in the air, exchanging words for a few seconds before Abby pulls out her two blood-bonded daggers. A bright green aura glows around her, while the yellow threads from her core tether around it, and space begins to bend as she prepares to fight.

Ember stands still with his arms crossed while she powers up, then gets into a fighting stance, releasing a small amount of divine energy from his invisible barrier.

He matches her output, feeling and looking like a newly awakened yellow core from here.

They both fly forward, and their spar begins.

Ember calmly blocks her attacks with his bare hands, and they fly all over the sky, giving off flashes of yellow and green light.

Every few dozen exchanges make Abby's control over her new power much more concentrated and deadly.

Just like Maria, she hasn't had the chance to have a good fight going all out since long before she even started wielding divine energy.

After over a hundred exchanges, she begins sending spears of earth magic imbued with divine threads Ember's way, and the fight reaches the next level.

Instead of just blocking with his palms, Ember shoots dark flames shimmering with yellow threads at each of the speared attacks, disintegrating them on the spot and dodging others while still clashing fist to dagger with Abby's main attacks.

Help support creative writers by finding and reading their stories on the original site.

A full ten minutes at this basic level pass, and I watch Abby's speed and precision of strikes increase more and more.

Ember keeps a cool and unchanging expression the whole time but yells out loud after one of their exchanges.

"Come on, let's bring this up a notch. What do you say?"

He lets more of his aura leak out, bringing him to the level of a mid- to high-level yellow core, similar to that of the old Apex Region Director. Even from a distance, it's clear Abby is affected by the overwhelming aura.

That is, until she activates her ranked-up buff, and her entire body turns green, while the yellow core in her chest continues to glow and spread throughout her body.

Instantly, she seems fine and flies forward, unaffected by the pressure tens of times greater than her own.

Ember grins, raising an eyebrow while preparing to block her incoming attack.

At the last moment, centimeters before they collide, I watch portions of her body return to their natural state, and she's able to land hits on Ember's fists; but they're nowhere near strong enough to do damage.

Ember strikes back, but his fist pushes right through her body like it's not even there, despite the clear difference in strength.

Abby uses this moment of surprise to spin around to Ember's back and release another earth-imbued crescent, but millimeters before impact, Ember spins around and blocks this too. He counters again, but when his fist makes contact with her stomach, it phases through like nothing is there.

Both lunge back, and Ember laughs, releasing the full aura of his True Core.

"It's really the same power! The Immortal Form while still holding a Yellow core, quite impressive. Use that new buff Jay granted you. I want to see everything you've got!"

As his True Core's aura ripples out, and they're only a hundred or so meters apart in the sky, Abby can feel that if she's too close, she'll be knocked out from the pressure, and any exposed limbs or body parts would be shredded by the pressure alone. Releasing her buff to attack would not be a good idea.

Moments later, Abby replies to this challenge by opening up her status interface and pulling the full 1% of stats from over 6.1 million links of loyalty.

Her entire body glows bright green, and her aura grows, giving off an immense amount of mana control and stat-based power.

However, I don't feel the same eerie sensation I did when Maria accessed these stats.

Instead of staring into the abyss of a Soul Energy Core, Abby feels inviting and warm. However, the raw strength coming off her is definitely intense.

They both fly toward each other again without exchanging another word, and bright green and yellow light ripples through the entire Dark Continent, just like the spar between Maria and Raven hours ago.

Right before each hit, Abby is able to deactivate small portions of her body and blood-bonded weapons to attack with; and Ember goes purely on the defensive.

Her exposed areas easily fend off Ember's domineering True Core's aura, and I smile as her attacks become faster and faster, aiming for fatal blows, while Ember keeps upping the pace to help her learn.

Another ten minutes pass as the exchanges become so fast, they near the speed and gravity waves I felt while facing off against the low-level True Core Bronze Dragon.

Abby's mana-rich aura ripples through the air, and I feel the same warm, calming sensation pass through me as she pulls mana from the surroundings and forms massive spears of stone to surround Ember, changing up her fighting style.

Some of the immense pillars reach hundreds of meters long, and they fly forward at varying speeds while she severs her links with them to focus on flying forward with daggers in hand, using the village-sized stones as distractions.

Ember replies to this barrage with ease, sending larger and larger waves of divine flames her way, disintegrating some of the spears and punching through others while simultaneously blocking her close-up attacks.

He yells out loud again.

"Not bad, a newly awakened yellow core fighting a True Core. No matter how many buffs are active, it's a feat that's basically impossible. Let's see if that physique still holds up now."

As he spins out of the way of one of her close-range attacks, he sends a kick flying toward her side. But to both Ember's and my surprise, his leg phases right through her like a hologram, and she counters, sending him flying backward with an aura of surprise and excitement bursting from him.

Red and black scales form all over his body, and his feet and hands turn to claws. A long, pointed tail emerges from his back, and the pressure from his True Core grows even higher, nearly matching Raven's. Then, he flies forward with an excited look on his face.

His movement speed is slightly faster than Abby's now, and his pressure is overwhelming. However, once he makes contact with Abby's body again, and it phases through with no resistance at all, his excitement only grows more.

Abby tries to counter, and Ember allows it to hit his right arm.

Her dagger bounces off without leaving a single scratch, but when Ember strikes back again, his left set of claws fall deep into her green body and don't leave a mark either.

Another five minutes of back-and-forth exchanges follow.

Ember's hybrid form and Abby's full power pulling 1% of stats are nearly equal when it comes to speed and technique accuracy; however, the raw strength differs.

While I'm not sure Maria could keep up with these fast-paced exchanges, I am sure the full power of her Ice Goddess' blue sword could have left a mark on Ember.

That being said, the more yellow and green flashes of light that go by, the more intrigued I become with Abby's near-invincible defenses.

I watch with a proud look across my face from about a kilometer away, high above them, while they continue to spar, becoming faster and stronger with every strike that passes.

Now, not even counting myself, I have four teammates I am positive can hold their own against True Cores. With the rate at which my links of loyalty are growing, we'll at least double the amount of stats to pull from sometime tomorrow.

However, the scorching heat of those divine flames surrounding central keep resurfacing in the back of my mind, making me wonder if all of this is enough.

—

As another half an hour passes, and the two of them continue practicing at Abby's full power, my senses wander outward, routinely surveying the Dark Continent and eight Great Regions. Suddenly, I see something very odd emerging from the receding abyss.

In the center of the Dark Continent, over the last few days as the black mist flows back toward the tower, many abandoned villages and ruined cities have been revealed.

Some were pillaged by rogue hunters and bandits, while others were destroyed by the demonic beasts that roamed within the demonic energy of the abyss.

None of these beasts dared to step outside the darkness, as the air in this mana-rich world is harmful to pure demonic energy-born creatures.

But now, for the first time, I see a sliver of space giving off odd readings right on the edge of the abyss near Sector 1, about 700 kilometers from Valor City.

I wouldn't have noticed it at all, except for the fact that my senses picked up a large number of gravity wells emerging from seemingly nowhere. Their numbers continue to grow at a rapid rate.

So, I focus all of my perception in that direction now to see what the disturbance might be. My eyes widen as a large demonic rift, over 10 meters high, floating above the desert comes into view.

Many demons with bright red divine cores glowing in their chests step out onto the sand, lighting up the night with their crimson divine light. They're dressed in full black armor, long swords and shields in hand, and emit a dangerous and unique aura of killing intent.

Chapter 665

I watch dozens of red-cored demons, dressed head to toe in metallic black armor, step out from the rift. Some carry longswords, others shields, and a few wield axes and hammers.

Their horns vary in height and length, with colors ranging from black to brown to red. The exposed skin on some demons shares these color tones. Even their heights and builds differ—some standing near human height at 2 meters, while others tower up to 5 or even 6 meters tall.

These are all arch demons, ranging from level 5000 to 9000, and their sharp eyes scan the darkness of night with ease, spreading out in multiple directions.

The constant flow of red cores halts after about four dozen demons emerge, and then an orange-cored demon steps through.

It moves forward, raising its arms to begin giving orders to the surrounding demons.

At such a distance, with the interference of the abyss, the True Core-level fight happening in front of me, and the thousands of kilometers between us, I can only make out a few words.

"Survey the lands, and report back the throne's approximate opening time!"

"I want threat levels calculated! This world is located in a 3rd Class Natural Mana Zone. There shouldn't even be enough mana here to create a fully matured Stage 2 labyrinth."

"Scope out potential nearby threats and secure this land to begin the base builds!"

"Lord Vermillion will be expecting your scouting results back in 15 minutes!"

The demons split into two groups.

Some spread out to begin surveying the outside of the abyss as it slowly seeps inward toward the tower, while others get into formation and start glowing white and purple.

At first, my eyes widen as I mistake this purple glow for something similar to the ring I'm wearing, but the longer I look, the more intriguing it becomes.

Their Demon Cores all glow and vibrate with this light purple sensation, and a material emanates from their bodies, giving off the radiation of Qi in the back of my mind, while also simulating the sensation I feel when someone uses Soul Energy.

No mana is being used in these movements, and it clicks in my head what they're using once the base of a structure begins to form on the desert floor.

"Demonic Soul Energy..." I whisper to myself.

It appears that just as mana and Qi can combine to create a far more powerful base, Demonic Energy and Qi can do the same. Demons on this world are usually too weak when they form labyrinth contracts to obtain such a substance, so they're all mana-based creatures here. Only a small portion are capable of wielding demonic energy through their cores, and even less have ever even seen Qi.

However, every single one of these demons is using both of them combined, to an exceptional degree. They are the elite force Pluto spoke of seeing when he was young, an army of Demons lead by the Vermillion family called the Red Cored Demonic Knights...

—

As this unfolds in my mind's eye, the spar between Ember and Abby continues.

In Ember's hybrid form, their speed and battle IQ are similar, but it's clear Ember has far more raw power.

Even the attacks Abby lands only scratch his natural scaled armor, while Ember's attacks can't land either, as Abby's body allows them to seep through like nothing.

Every time her Immortal body is tested, I feel a faint warm ripple of energy coming from her, hitting me and everything in our surroundings. I'm over a kilometer away, and it is very faint, but I zero in on it with my All-Seeing Eye as the battle goes on and discover that energy is being expended and ejected each time. The explanation for how it works is almost as strange as the pulses from Maria's core.

Ember yells again as they both fly back after a rapid series of exchanges.

"Alright, if I can't land a hit on you with this, I'll be thoroughly impressed!"

His body glows with a yellow and golden radiance, growing in size.

The scales multiply, covering the remaining exposed skin, while his clawed hands and feet grow larger.

This text was taken from Royal Road. Help the author by reading the original version there.

His tail extends and thickens, while above it, two obsidian-black wings sprout with crimson red undersides.

His True Core's silky divine light pulses outward, imbuing his entire form as it grows tens of meters long, giving it a shimmering mythical glow.

He lets out a roar, emitting the full power of his aura, dominating the battlefield with multiple times the pressure from moments ago.

Abby remains unaffected, using her second ranked up buff.

She yells back, "Come at me with everything you've got!"

She deactivates her earth magic and puts away her daggers, focusing purely on defense.

There were no marks on Ember's hybrid form, so attempting to attack this form seems pointless. Right now, they're testing the effectiveness of her Immortal form.

The two forces move forward, and I watch Ember's claws move first as he releases a wave of bright divine flames.

On contact, Abby's green body ripples, and an even hotter wave of pure mana pulses out. Yet again, she's completely unscathed from Ember's full-force direct attack.

The black and red dragon's laugh echoes throughout the air as their exchanges continue, with him releasing flames and deadly strikes her way.

Over two minutes pass with dozens of attacks. Every time Abby tanks the hits, I feel hotter and hotter waves of energy radiating from her body.

—

In my mind's eye, I continue to watch the demons build their square shaped structure from Demonic Soul Energy, while others circle the abyss.

I could intervene, but they're about to hit the apex of their battle, and Abby's physique is finally reacting to Ember's blows in a way that's pushing it to its limit.

The demons present could be taken out in seconds if I flew over, but I don't see them as a threat. It's best not to disturb the flow state of the battle before me.

The heat waves from their fight grow so intense that I back up another kilometer.

Meanwhile, some of the red-cored demon scouts report back to their orange-cored leader. I can only make out two of their responses, as the divine radiation interference here grows more intense.

"Commander! The perimeter is secure—no ascended demonic beasts or humans within 100 kilometers on either side."

"31 planet hours—this is the approximate time of the awakening!"

The orange-cored commander nods, then turns to walk back through the open rift.

Less than a minute later, multiple orange cores emerge from the rift.

My heart rate speeds up as I see the sheer number of demons with bright orange cores walking out into the desert of the Dark Continent. I count over a dozen, and the hundreds of red-cored demons following them are even more absurd sight.

Over a dozen commanders begin giving the hundreds of red-cored demons orders, repeating the process of surveying the abyss and building symmetrical bases a few kilometers apart—one for each orange core.

—

I consider breaking the news to the fighters before me, but the heat waves coming off them continue to rise as Abby's energy form glows brighter with every second.

Her speed is increasing exponentially, and it feels like she's converting stagnant energy in her body into a boost for her movement speed.

As my All-Seeing Eye enhanced vision tracks her, it looks like she's experiencing a breakthrough, similar to the one I had when fighting Sebastian the True Core. I had strategically selected areas of my greater form to alter its density, enlarging for higher attack power or compacting for greater speed.

It seems Abby is doing the same, making portions of her body less immune to attacks where she isn't being hit, using that energy to propel herself through the air faster.

—

Once the hordes of orange and red cores stop flowing from the rift, six yellow-cored demons walk out next.

This finally gets my attention, and I open a telepathic link with both Ember and Abby, no longer caring if I break their flow state.

"We have company... Demons are emerging from a rift near the abyss-"

These demons are all level 9000 to 9900, and every single one of them possess enough divine energy to surpass the apex region's director. Two of them are newly awakened True Cores, while the other four have such large yellow cores that it looks like they're about to collapse into True Cores at any moment...

Instinctively, I activate my greater form, and begin to send a warning through the open telepathy channel to my other teammates, but a seventh demon walks out, and the rift closes behind it.

I stop before I fully get the message out, as for the first time in a long time, I'm unable to get a reading on a being's status.

All that comes back are question marks and purple text that makes no sense.

Another heavy True Core demon emerges from the rift, its gravity signature many times larger than any True Core I've ever seen. The only similar reading I've ever felt is the divine flames in central. Its eyes pulsing white and yellow, sending a wave of perception throughout the entire Dark Continent.

With it comes a domineering pressure, and I don't need to say a word to Abby or Ember—they feel it too.

The pulse travels far beyond us, deep into the 8 Great Regions, Raven's territory, and even further, beyond my senses.

The demon stands tall, inspecting the structures being built, then orders the yellow cores to construct one of their own.

This demon stands over 10 meters tall, with bright shimmering red horns jutting from its forehead, jet-black skin, and obsidian armor that shimmers to match. Its face bears a noble, all-knowing expression.

Once its subordinates get to work, it stares west, shifting its gaze slightly three times before moving its sight toward the south to look directly at me and send a wave of perception laced with a nasty aura of intimidation.

From over 3000 kilometers away, the psychic attack hits me, rattling my entire being.

My vision blurs for a split second, severing my long range perception and telepathy channels while an intense pain like pins and needles ripples through my body. I feel I've just looked into the soul of an evil god of war filled with nothing but bloodlust and ruthless killing intent.

The cool outer image of the noble demon is very deceiving.

About 2 seconds later, I manage to recover by instantly activating all my buffs, and concentrating on my self regeneration skill to cleanse the dreadful aura from my mind and body.

However, once my long range vision returns all I see is the demon lose interest and turn away from me to look at the towering throne within the abyss.

Chapter 666

"Beckman, you felt that too, didn't you?"

Floating above central headquarters, the three strongest True Cored humans on the planet feel real fear for the first time in decades.

"I did, Redgrave. The Vermillion Family has returned..."

Beckman scrolls and taps through his system interface while sweat trickles down his temples.

Elara speaks through the link next.

"It feels like that True Core has grown stronger since the first visit... That Demon's Aura made it through the S-Grade Originator Stone Defenses. It's like he could see right through, as if we're in a glass room."

Beckman looks up from his status screen full of numbers.

"Yes, that wave that hit me was approximately 129% stronger than the strongest attack I felt the last time we met. That is certainly the same Demon, I don't forget faces."

There's silence on the three-way line for a few seconds before a laugh echoes through from Redgrave's crystal.

"We've grown stronger too, you know! Three on one should get the job done, don't you think?"

His transmission device clicks off, but his laughter continues in private as he begins to dance around and send shimmering yellow divine flames at the inner walls of his room. Voices come out of the transmission tablet left behind on the arm of his throne, the first is from Beckman.

"That is not part of the plan. We shall stay on target and wait one more day. The probability of unnecessary fighting is too high if we approach now."

Elara returns a message.

"He won't go unless you give the order, he's just getting overly excited..."

A few dozen messages are sent back and forth between the two of them while Redgrave finally begins to calm himself down and walks back to his transmission tablet to hear Beckman's next words.

"Yes, that would be best. Awaken the emergency squads. I want bases built as close to the abyss as possible, far away from the Vermillion Family's forts, and preferably far from the Flame Emperor's strongest settlement in Sector 2. Have the yellow cores bring the offering package to their leader, for now; we're holding true to the pact."

A satisfied sigh comes through the channel from Redgrave next.

"Fine, fine. Elara, take care of activating my squad. I don't want to talk to either of you until we're actually heading toward the throne."

There's an annoyed click of the tongue from Elara before she speaks.

"You know I can't do that, you need to activate your squad through the designated channel. This is a safety protocol for all of us."

He grumbles back.

"Then at least let me take out that pest calling himself the Flame Emperor on our way over. I want a clear mind before I enter the doors."

There's silence on the channel again, but finally Beckman speaks.

"That shouldn't be a problem. If the Vermillion Leader hasn't killed him first, you're permitted to do as you wish once we make our move. But please, keep the civilian casualties below 1,000,000 if possible this time. We cannot risk losing a portion of central's population if there aren't enough workers left to satisfy the Demons."

Redgrave grins.

"Deal."

Three clicks follow as the transmission tablets all go dark, and many hidden bases deep beneath the divine flames surrounding the city turn their lights on for the first time in decades.

Hundreds of red-cored elite A-Class hunters open their eyes. Dozens of orange cores and a few yellow cores do the same in silver pods lining the walls of mana and divine energy-rich underground fortresses. They all receive voice commands with specific instructions, preparing them for an event they've been waiting for since the Association was founded.

—

Meanwhile, after shaking off the shock of the Demon's gaze, I continue sending my distress message to all loyal teammates and high-ranking followers.

"Be on guard, prepare for war. The Demons have arrived."

Deep in the heart of a volcano, Raven and Maria open their eyes while cultivating in a solid black room surrounded by containment cases full of unique looking treasures.

This tale has been pilfered from Royal Road. If found on Amazon, kindly file a report.

I send a message directly to them next.

"Their leader knows we're here, and they don't appear to be aggressive, but whatever you're doing, don't get too absorbed; I could need backup."

In the Apex Region, both Rodrigo and Bri get another unique message from me.

"Our campaign the last two days was a great success, but I want double—no—quadruple the merchants and hunters in the streets of every major city tomorrow morning spreading the word. Empty the Association's treasury, promise to power-level

hunters to whatever strength they desire, use every trick in the book you can for a final push. I need every link of loyalty I can get."

Similar messages go out to Chester in Sector 4, and both Monk and Lith in Sector 1. I give an additional warning to Monk to relay to The Saint who is hidden away in the temple, telling him that the final moments are among us, and that the Demons are closest to Sector 1, so be warned.

The final message is sent straight to Abby and Ember, who pause their battle and return to their base forms.

Abby uses her restore skill to soothe both of their minor battle fatigue, and Ember returns to his human state while replying to my words of worry.

"If he wanted you dead, you would be fighting him right now. A warning is good to get everyone ready, but just know an Arch Demon of that caliber can listen in on any telepathy channel they wish. Even now, there is no stopping him from hearing my words."

My mind's eye still watches the unbothered Arch Demon stare off at the slowly receding abyss as his workers continue to build their bases.

Ember speaks again.

"Worlds like this are resources after all, killing the strongest beings on it would only be a waste for their long-term profits."

As these words enter my mind, another oddity tickles my senses in one of the furthest points of my mind within the Dark Continent. It is about 800 kilometers from Solara in Sector 4, on the edge of the receding abyss where some of the red-cored demonic knights are beginning to make their way out to.

My first thought is that it must be another Demonic Rift, as more signatures of Demonic Qi have emerged from seemingly nowhere; however, these thoughts are pushed aside once I see for myself what comes out from the black wall of Demonic Energy.

Two figures emerge shrouded in darkness, moving quickly toward four red-cored knights that survey the lands.

One of the figures carries a bow, and he blips in and out of sight while sending light purple arrows at the demons' arms and legs. The obsidian armor is shot through with ease, immobilizing two demons and forcing them to drop their weapons and shields as they lose access to their limbs.

A woman follows close behind, sending crescents of what looks to be wind magic imbued with dense purple Demonic Soul Energy.

These blades of wind slice through the armor of the demonic knights that approach, doing the same as the archer, forcing them to the ground in a split second, immobilizing them before they were even spotted.

The man and woman have bright purple Soul Energy cores in their chests. The archer has an Arch Demon Core that overlaps with his Demonic Energy core, but I'm certain they're not Demons.

The two of them place a single hand on the fallen demons and drain their bodies of Demonic Energy in seconds, not killing them, but leaving them powerless in the desert as they creep further along the abyss in the dead of night. Search the * website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

The corner of my mouth turns upward as Arie and Luna's name tags within my Rising Emperor's Domain interface come back online, shining brightly as the only purple-colored text in my interface.

I curiously watch as they easily take down five more red-cored demonic knights that followed the scouting squad, and repeat the same process, draining Demonic energy from the immobilized Demons.

As Arie drains the last drop of Demonic Soul Energy from his prey, he notices an orange-cored knight coming their way and whispers to Luna.

"There's a far stronger one coming now. We'll have to fight it together, don't hold back. It's using the same odd gravity magic... I think we can take it. This will be our final test, then we're headed back to the Crimson City to show the others what we found."

Luna nods, not saying a word, and closes her eyes.

Seconds later, a massive purple eye forms high in the sky above them, and a dozen smaller eyes form all around it, looking as though they've been summoned from all kinds of demonic monsters; some resembling snakes, others cats, and some birds.

They all emit their own purple aura, and cover the distance between them and the approaching Orange-Cored Demon while Arie's energy form grows in size and six arms emerge from his back to draw back and load three massive bows.

The Arch Demon that approaches wields a heavy shield and a longsword, and stares at Arie while activating a communication link to his superior.

"General, we've encountered the first threat. They seem to be humanoid Demonic Beasts. Strong ones, they took out seven of our knights. No divine energy is present, but the scent of ascended beasts is all over these two. I'm going to engage, but I'll need backup."

There's a click, and one of the yellow cores sends orders for the requested reinforcements, then turns to their leader and reports the news.

He replies in an unbothered tone. "Intelligent Ascended Beasts? No—it's most likely humans that used the throne's excess radiation as a training ground. Take care of them yourself, I don't want a single orange core injured."

"Yes, Sir!"

The high-level yellow core floats in the air, then heads off in the direction of the disturbance.

—

All 13 of Luna's Eyes simultaneously blink, and at the same time, Arie sends three arrows toward the Orange Core running their way.

The first white arrow bounces off the tough obsidian armor chestplate tethered with orange threads without leaving a mark.

The second light purple arrow hits the demon in the leg as it curves around its massive shield, and a small fragment of armor is broken off, making the demon misstep.

Arie grins as he sends his final dark black and purple arrow toward the commander.

Its core is filled with dense mana, while its outer layer is charged with all of the Demonic Soul Energy that he siphoned out of the Red Cores on his way here. There are leftover red thread residues in this attack, accidentally strengthening it even further.

Arie lets go of the arrow, and it twists around the demon's sword like it has a mind of its own and hits the commander right in the arm, shattering its orange-thread-imbued armor and forcing it to drop its sword.

The 13 eyes above blink three more times, and each time they do, Arie sends out another three shots, hitting the demon's other three limbs, and immobilizing him on the ground.

As Luna and Arie move toward their target, a transmission goes off in the commander's helmet.

"Support is on the way!"

As the poisonous [Demonic Essence of The Ascended Scorpion] laced within Arie's arrows flows through the demon's body, its eyes are wide open. It can't speak, move, or even think of the words to reply.

There is only silence as the 13 eyes above stare down and Arie drains the commander's body dry of Demonic Soul Energy.

Chapter 667

Four more orange-cored commanders nearby leave their posts, flying through the air just above the desert's rising and falling dunes toward the last known point of the downed knights and the source of the distress transmission from minutes ago.

The thirteen monstrous purple eyes floating above the edge of the abyss blink simultaneously again as Luna speaks to Arie, while they run past their previous prey.

"More of those Orange Demons are on the way, and dozens of reds are coming into view. They're building structures in Sector 1..."

"Keep sending me their exact locations and weak points. I can handle a few more of them." Arie responds, drawing back more arrows now laced with small threads of orange from the last commander's core.

Dozens of rapid-fire shots go off in the dead of night with pinpoint accuracy, thanks to the eyes of the chimera above.

Paralyzing poison spreads through the Demonic Commanders before they even realize they've been hit, as Arie uses his Mythic Grade Stealth skill to disappear from their senses and attack from their blind spots.

"I'm hit—"

"Need more backup, send—mo—"

"I can't see... I can't move—"

"General—"

Bleak messages echo through the transmission device in the general's helmet on the way as one commander after another is taken out by a mysterious demonic force from the abyss.

—

From afar, I watch as the high-level yellow core bends space around him as he rockets through the air.

Luna's eyes in the sky sense it as it approaches, and I watch Arie charge up another set of arrows and let them fly as a long-range attack to test this approaching opponent's strength.

The first two bounce off, as expected; however, the third and most powerful arrow, imbued with orange threads from four commanders, does the same, heading toward the general's chestplate and disintegrating the instant it makes impact.

Clear shock and awe ripple through the two of them.

Taking on Demons that are naturally stronger than any humans of the same level is a feat in its own right.

They've even faced Demons with Divine Energy of the second rank, the orange core, without forming their own divine cores.

They've grown incredibly strong, but taking on a Demon on the verge of transitioning to a True Core without any divine energy would be absurd.

My gaze tracks the surrounding desert area to pinpoint dungeons I could teleport to in order to intervene, but the General has its sights set on them, and their impact time will be well before I can get between them.

The closest dungeon point I could access is still hundreds of kilometers away.

My gaze shifts to the Vermillion family head, but he still just stares at the throne, uninterested in the battle.

Then, I take a deep breath and open up a telepathy channel between myself, Arie, and Luna while pressing a few buttons on my system interface.

"Welcome back, you two. Don't go getting yourselves killed on the day you finally decide to return."

I add Arie as the third General and send a message to him as he pulls back three more arrows, and the yellow-glowing Demon draws its sword back, preparing a long-range attack to take the two of them out in a single strike.

"Open up your status before you take the shot. I got you a coming-home present."

Arie's eyes widen at the long-range telepathy channel from me, one of the last things he expected in the moment, but he mentally checks his status, struck with even more surprise.

His expression turns focused and calculated moments later, and the Demon that approaches sends a crescent of dense Demonic Soul Energy tethered with yellow divine threads their way.

It carves out the desert on all sides, leaving a hole hundreds of meters deep from its aura alone as it gets too close to the ground.

Luna's eyes blink, then disappear, but Arie grins and speaks out loud.

Reading on Amazon or a pirate site? This novel is from Royal Road. Support the author by reading it there.

"Stand behind me; don't worry, I've got this..."

His base stats rise as 1% of over 6.2 million links of loyalty flood into his system, and his greater archer form naturally grows larger.

The General sends a transmission back to his leader right after he swings.

"They're taken care of, as requested. We've lost four commanders, though, it will—"

But he stops mid-sentence as Arie's aura expands and erupts with a deadly pressure hundreds of times stronger than it was seconds ago.

He releases all three of his arrows in a single shot, the two weaker white and purple ones spinning in front of the darker shot as they collide with the Demon's slash.

The night sky lights up in a purple and yellow flash as massive amounts of desert are decimated, and the two front arrows explode, splitting and weakening the demonic slash.

Two halves of the attack separate to opposite sides of the Archer and the Wind Mage, carving out the desert and leaving them on a small elevated level of sand while Arie's final arrow, shrouded in darkness and concealed by his stealth skill, rips through the open air.

There's a second explosion of light and divine radiation as it hits the Demon's chestplate right where his last attack did, but this time shattering it to pieces and piercing through, spreading the strongest dose of an Ascended Demon Scorpion's Poisonous Essence through its bloodstream in an instant.

—

While in any other circumstance, I would be happy about this outcome, there is a large looming fear that makes me yell through our link.

"Now fall back! You have no idea what you're dealing with here... That Demon is child's play compared to what you're walking into right now. Do not even stop to drain its Soul Energy. Run!"

As these words enter their minds, the air pressure through the entire Dark Continent shifts, and a dreadful demonic voice replies, forcefully adding itself to our link.

"Don't think you can kill my men and leave so easily..."

The Vermillion Family head disappears into thin air, traveling hundreds of kilometers before I can even blink, reappearing above the fallen general right in front of Arie.

I instantly reply.

"They're not dead... Let's settle this before we do something impossible to take back. "

The Demon shifts its gaze toward me, still thousands of kilometers away, and sends another wave of intimidation just like before.

"You have no right to negotiate. Die, human."

This time, I'm prepared to receive it, activating my power-borrowing perk from my rising emperor's domain, and pull 5% without thinking twice, drawing tens of millions of stat points per stat in an instant, taking the mental attack on without batting an eye.

Ember's stats and mana control rocket upward as well, thanks to our link, and Abby reactivates her Immortal form to withstand the new mana control aura blasting out of me, making the air and desert below vibrate for hundreds of kilometers without even sending out an attack.

The Demon's gaze tightens, and I feel it send another burst my way, this one even stronger than before.

My initial instincts are surprise mixed with fear, as the realization dawns that this Demon was still holding back.

I pull another 5% of stats, increasing the total amount borrowed to 10%, and when this second wave hits me, I'm glad I did so.

My head rings and pounds as pins and needles fill all my senses, but I stare forward without moving a muscle.

I get ready to steal every single stat available, but the Demon grins, showing me his sharp white teeth—the first bit of emotion I've seen out of this noble entity that isn't dread or anger.

He looks toward Arie and Luna, then back to me, sending a message in the same dreadful tone.

"Five minutes. I want all my men in the same condition you met them, back up and working, and we're even. You're not as weak as I thought. You will be useful once this world is mine. It would be a shame to kill a powerful soldier."

As these words enter my mind, I'm temporarily put at ease, allowing me to use my full perception to focus only on the situation at hand, and I realize that the 10% of stats and mana control I've taken has led to catastrophic events.

For over 500 km in every direction from me, a domineering aura radiates, that would easily knock out any yellow core.

Even in the Crimson City, over 2,000 kilometers away, and in the 8 Great Regions, over 5,000 kilometers away, a heavy pressure is felt, and many weaker hunters feel light-headed, while others are woken up in the dead of night by the eerie sensation of killing intent. Everyone on this side of the world holds their breath, realizing something big is happening.

It's mostly directed forward at the Demon, but others are caught in the crossfire without me even realizing it.

Ember suppresses his aura, shielding Abby, as even in her Immortal form, it's quite dangerous to be this close to me right now.

My eyes widen, and I force my aura to retreat behind my purple barrier, allowing everyone to breathe.

Then I send a message back.

"We'll get it done."

The Demon disappears, then reappears back in his original spot in front of the other yellow cores, crosses his arms, and looks at the throne with an unbothered gaze, but sends me a private word of warning.

"You and I both know if we fought here, no one would survive. This small world cannot handle it. As much as I want to put you in your place, it would cost me 60 million humans in the process. Let us save this dispute for inside the throne—assuming that Redgrave fellow doesn't kill you first. Thirty hours remain."

He forcefully severs the link and stares ahead.

I want to ask him what he meant by that last statement about one of the big three, but his mind is an unbreakable fortress that I can't breach to ask.

So my attention shifts elsewhere, thinking about the area my aura just reached, affecting millions of people, and the fact that I could still increase it by taking 20% more stats if I wanted. Then, I picture what an attack using that kind of power would produce...

It leads me to think about whether or not that Demon was even using its full power, and I lean toward no because of the fact that I still couldn't get a single reading on its status while borrowing 10%.

Before I can think any further, messages from allies come streaming into my head from all over the nations as they felt that wave.

I block them all out and send messages to Arie, Luna, Abby, and Ember.

"This isn't the welcome back party I expected to host for you two, but at least it's interesting. Five minutes to heal them, here's the plan—"

I explain the plan while airstepping over to Ember, powering down to my base form but keeping all my borrowed stats, and hopping on his back.

Abby gets on behind me and holds on tight while the purple barrier envelops us both.

With a flap of Ember's wings, we fly toward the Abyss.

Chapter 668

With 10% of borrowed stats coursing through Ember, we fly through the desert faster than I've ever traveled, making it to the center of the dark continent in under a minute; coming to a halt right above the crater made by Arie and the Demon General's clash.

Ember reverts to his human form, and we float down to begin restoring the immobilized demons scattered across the desert.

Green restoration circles powered by 1% borrowed stats and Abby's yellow divine threads form beneath the paralyzed and dying demonic soldiers, neutralizing the poison and healing the lost limbs of some of the knights Luna sliced through.

I follow behind Abby, pulling out Qi crystals that I farmed from the desert floor below Palmyra, using my True Core's divine energy manipulation ability to crush the white energy into a digestible microscopic mist, and streamlining pure Qi into their cores.

For the orange-cored commanders, I pull a few orange divine fragments out, careful not to accidentally inject any of my own yellow thread into their bodies, and use red fragments to do the same with the knights.

All of the demons stand to their feet once we're done, and I hear a telepathy channel open for all of them; their leader is letting me in to hear their orders.

"Stand down, men. You may do what you wish with them once I enter the throne. For now, we do not engage."

The link is severed, and all of the demons leave without saying a word.

The yellow-core General gives Arie a glare as he leaves, but the others are shaken and keep their heads down.

I float over to Arie and Luna next, a smile across my face, and Arie speaks aloud.

"Sorry to put you in this position. I didn't know there would be—"

I shake my head and extend a hand. [Search the Novel\(F\)ire.net website](http://www.Novel(F)ire.net) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Don't worry about it; your stunt actually gave me the perfect moment to talk to their leader. It might have been much worse if I was the one to make the first move."

We shake hands, and I speak again, glancing over at Luna standing behind him.

"Glad to have you back, and I'm also glad I got the chance to see you two in real action. You've grown strong."

Ember and Abby float down to greet them next, and we have a brief reunion, interrupted by more telepathic messages from across the 8 Great Regions and Dark Continent—as people still worried about the aura I released moments ago.

I quickly respond now that their lives aren't in danger of the head Demon's wrath.

"Meet me above the Crimson Dome. It's not an emergency; don't be frightened by the aura I just released. This will be quick but necessary. There's someone I want to welcome back and an update to the incoming battle plan."

As requested, all notable figures come to the Crimson City.

Bri, Rodrigo, Maria, Raven, Monk, The Saint, Lith, Chester, Abby, Ember, Luna, and Arie all float before me in the air above the red dome in the dark desert.

Lydia and Fisher even emerge from the bunker for a few minutes to listen in, and I invite the dozens of high-level members of the Crimson Army to partake in this briefing as well.

We start by getting comfortable with the familiar faces here. Many reunite with Luna and Arie, while others like Bri, Chester, and Lith reconnect after years apart in the trade scene, even before they met me.

I quietly wait for everyone to get comfortable, scanning the crowd repeatedly, checking my status to see links of loyalty rise, using my all-seeing eye to monitor everything within a 5,000 km radius. Part of my mind keeps examining the interesting new gear Maria is wearing, from which I can't get a status reading, all while thinking carefully about the next words out of my mouth.

"Less than 30 hours remain... The first threat has shown its face, but we're at a stalemate until the Abyss completely recedes..."

I tell everyone here everything I know about the Big Three and the Demons, leaving out one small detail about my arrangement with the Demon in the Crimson City Labyrinth.

Many eyes widen, hearing for the first time about Divine Energy, a Demonic Realm, or even the Association being run by pseudo-gods who believe they can take over the world because they've been in control for hundreds of years.

Many of my closer teammates are already aware of this, but they patiently wait for the crowd to calm down and let this information sink in.

If you come across this story on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen from Royal Road. Please report it.

I speak up next with a grin.

"Many of you here were fighting right by my side when this city was founded, in the battle against the Dark One. You all trusted me and fought with your lives on the line, and now I'm asking you to do it again."

As these words leave my lips, I sense hundreds more forces gravitating toward the Abyss.

It seems to be a similarly sized force as the demons: hundreds of red cores, dozens of oranges, and a handful of yellow cores, all wearing Central Association logos.

Their trajectory isn't aimed at us; it's directed toward the open land in Sectors 3 and 4.

The only others who can detect this are Ember and Raven, so I send a private message to them to check it out and not engage unless necessary while I continue my briefing.

"There will be two other elite forces, possibly larger than our own, in this fight. One will consist of demons, and the other of humans just like us. Our goal isn't to kill everyone who shows up, as no sides have attacked anyone yet. But they are on our land... and while I sort things out with their leaders, there's a very good chance a battle larger than any one fought before in history will break loose. There is a high chance this will go down as the Second Great War."

I let out a sigh while continuing to watch the troops of Association soldiers in my mind's eye peacefully float across the sky over the 8 Great Regions.

"If they attack you, or a single citizen, do not hold back and have no mercy. It might be in an hour, 12 hours, 30 hours, or more... but get ready for war. This time, it isn't just to save a city; the entire world is on the line."

There's tension in the air as these last words hang, and many people in the Crimson Army begin asking questions one by one. I answer them without holding anything back over the next few hours.

The sun rises, and we've made no contact with the Association's troops.

They establish two separate bases near the Abyss, mimicking the demons' setup, avoiding Sector 2 as if ordered to steer clear of us.

Everyone in my inner circle, the Dark Continent leaders who will be up close on this matter, and the strongest Crimson Army fighters now know everything about the impending war and are ready to put their lives on the line the second I say the word.

Everyone returns to their posts to continue their day, but I stay floating above the Crimson Dome, staring toward the Abyss, anticipation filling my mind.

It's the calm before the storm, eating away at me from the inside out.

The only thing I want to do right now is start the fight, or at the very least; know who exactly I'll be fighting.

Or, if I'll be fighting anyone at all...

Arie and Luna talk with Monk and The Saint, led by Lith to teleport them back to Sector 1 to inspect some Originator Artifacts Arie had in his item box from their hometown.

He took them out after my speech to show us, and I recognized letters similar to those in the Tomb of Atom, seeing phrases like "A Realm Beyond" and "Energy of the Gods," but there's nothing new I don't already know.

Raven and Maria return to cultivating inside her volcano fortress, while Abby, Lydia, and Fisher head back to the bunker to use as much of the remaining yellow threads as possible in the time we have left.

Chester looks around the Crimson City, Bri and Rodrigo return to the Apex Region, emptying all the gold and mana from the treasuries to spread word of the Flame Emperor's loyalty link and its benefits.

By midday, I hear a notification as I hit 10 million links, but I hardly look at the status message for more than a minute all day as my mind is elsewhere.

[Congratulations! Rising Emperor's Domain Milestone Reached!]

[10,014,679/10,000,000 Links of Loyalty Created]

[New Perk Unlocked: Rising Emperor's Expansion]

Info:

All 5 Generals may select 2 commanders and share 50% of their total (Currently 1%) borrowed stats. Each Commander may take up to 25% max.

The caster may borrow 5% of all Base Stat Points and Mana Control efficiency from Party Members under the allegiance of the Rising Emperor. Additionally, 5% of the caster's Base Stat Points and Mana Control may be temporarily distributed to any Party Members under the allegiance of the Rising Emperor.

The caster may only borrow or share exclusively; both actions cannot be performed simultaneously.

Members affected by this perk are not required to be within range of the Rising Emperor's Domain.

This buff stacks with the [Dominance] perk, [Authority] perk, [Power Holder] perk, and [Ruler's Gaze] perk if used simultaneously.

Now, I have up to 35% of stats available to me, and the Generals are able to share half of the 1% they're borrowing with any two people they appoint as commanders.

I beam this information to Maria, Arie, and Abby, but continue to stare off into the open desert, my heart pounding.

Two slots remain, but something in the back of my mind intuitively makes me hold off and not fill them just yet.

The hot sun makes the air bend on the horizon, but my All-Seeing Eye still sees everything crystal clear.

Ember floats beside me in silence, and the citizens of the Crimson City go on with their daily lives as though nothing is happening.

Across the world, everything seems normal.

Even after my announcements in capital cities, asking for support and basically telling the nation a war is near, there are smiles everywhere—groceries and toys being bought, friends going out for drinks, even local newspapers still running their routes.

One in every five people has given a loyalty link to me, and the word keeps spreading. Some even mention a strange feeling that they felt in the night during a family walk in the park or as others eat a late breakfast together after a long night out partying.

The world is about to end or be saved within the next 24 hours, but only those with the power to grasp the enormity of this threat seem to care.

People are especially carefree in the Dark Continent, where new rulers, lords, and black market dealers constantly shift control, people just follow the continuously changing rules to support themselves or their families.

No one understands that this time is different.

I continue listening to my heartbeat as I watch the nation's day unfold, the Abyss receding faster toward the black tower at its center.

The Vermillion Family head watches silently too.

Even the Association's team remains in their structures, unmoving at their stations.

The world goes on, even as the sun sets and the final hours draw near. Everyone who will soon fight for control stand still in their bases, waiting for the throne to awaken or for someone to make the first move.

The Crimson Army, Luna, Arie, and all fighters in the Inner Circle who wield Divine Energy regroup above the Crimson Dome one last time to make plans to head toward the center of the continent.

While I make up my mind on the next order I'll make, the Demon's last words to me still linger in the back of my mind. It was a warning that he'll deal with our dispute inside the throne, as long as Redgrave doesn't get to me first.

Chapter 669

Everyone stands before me in newly upgraded gear.

Many spent yesterday farming for MCP using my absorption skill in the higher floors of the labyrinth, crafting the highest-grade blood-bonded armor they could with A-Grade loot, while others rested and waited for these final hours to draw near.

While there are thousands of C and B-grade hunters around the 8 Great Regions and the Dark Continent who would happily put their lives on the line if I had their regional directors give the order, it is best that an elite squad fights on the front lines.

The weakest troops from the Central Association and the demonic army have red divine cores; only the Crimson Army and the Inner Circle can handle forces like these. Even Bri and Rodrigo stay behind in the Apex Capital with the A-Class hunters for now, continuing to spread the word.

Having semi-powerful, well-known figures in the public eye bringing me more stats to draw from is a battle of its own.

"The war shall begin when the sun rises. Be ready for anything... Any last questions?"

No one speaks, all wearing serious expressions, as the details of our mission were made clear yesterday.

"Good, let's move out."

With myself and Ember leading our army; Abby, Maria, Raven, and Arie follow close behind.

Luna follows Arie, while Fisher and Lydia walk beside her.

Monk and the Saint, along with his two orange-cored disciples, follow behind them.

Finally, the Elemental Captains lead three squads of Crimson Army troops.

Our aura lights up the night.

Everyone here has been power-leveled above level 7000 and have mana control far beyond their level. All their skills are fully upgraded and they're stacked head to toe with high quality A-grade gear.

We have 3 True Cores, 3 Yellow Cores, 2 Orange Cores halfway to Yellow, 2 Newly Awakened Orange Cores, 2 Demonic Soul energy wielders, and 3 dozen elite soldiers wielding elemental energy with mana control far stronger than the perks a mere red-core Demonic Knight has.

Above and below, two of my body doubles float with us in stealth mode, and one trails behind us a few kilometers as well.

Our force is less than 25% the size of either of the other two forces we're going against, but with over 15.6 million links of loyalty at my disposal, the number ticking upward every second, I feel both nerves, confidence, and excitement flowing through my body.

We all stop and float down to the desert floor at the edge of the Abyss, now less than 50 kilometers from the base of the tower.

To our north in Sector 1, the Demon's troops have begun moving into their own formation, following their Commanders and Generals as they move toward the Abyss just like us.

To the west in Sector 3, and to the northwest in Sector 4, forces of about 100 troops each move inward toward the Abyss as well.

The Vermillion Family Demon still stays behind a few hundred kilometers away, silently watching the tower, but I vividly remember the speed at which he traveled over to Arie not too long ago and know he could be with his troops in the blink of an eye if he wished.

With his words of wanting to settle our dispute within the throne, all I do now is size up the armies left behind and feel confident my teammates can handle it.

The only thing that irks me as we wait in the silence of night is the fact that the Big Three are nowhere to be seen.

Not even a word of them is mentioned by the troops left behind, and I don't get a single reading of them anywhere within thousands of kilometers.

Again, as the world sleeps calmly as if this is nothing but another day, three armies stand at a stalemate, waiting for the darkness to completely recede back into the black tower that reaches high into the sky.

—

I constantly scan the surrounding desert, and we slowly move our formation forward, spreading out to cover a few kilometers while following the Abyss as it moves closer to the black tower.

My All-Seeing Eye even scans the tower from time to time, but all I get back is a blinding silver light, similar to the golden glow I felt during my conversations with Ember.

Even the Abyss itself is filled with dense radiation, like intense, invisible gravity waves similar to the time I flew in the sky above the abyss attempting to see the throne up close for the first time.

Unlawfully taken from Royal Road, this story should be reported if seen on Amazon.

It recedes at the same rate as the black fog, allowing us to get closer, and the sounds of demonic beasts within the Abyss fighting and dying can be heard with my enhanced senses, but their bodies and energy are absorbed by the dense fog as it continues to retract. Search the novelFire.net website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

—

The sun begins to rise, and all of the forces surrounding the tower are less than a kilometer away from its base.

Now the pressure coming off the tower does not retract any further, but the black fog continues to do so.

"Halt... We shall wait here until the throne awakens or another army makes their move..."

So much about this massive divine artifact is still a mystery to me.

I know there are trials within, it is a device used to help Demons ascend to become Lords or green cores, and it can be used to take control of a world. But my mind races, wondering what exactly will happen once this fog disappears and the throne awakens.

The only ones who truly know seem to be the Vermillion Family Demon and Ember standing by my side. I won't be getting answers out of either of them, so all I can do is wait and prepare for the worst.

—

It feels like hours pass when in reality it's just minutes, and the morning sun slowly heats up the desert while the final bits of dark demonic energy disappear into the bottom of the tower, making a clear view of the open desert sand from where we stand to the base of the smooth black curved wall.

All I can hear is my heartbeat and everyone's breaths around me as we wait for something to happen.

The tower is tens of kilometers wide, and each army stands on opposite sides a kilometer away from the base, no more than a dozen kilometers away from each other, but no one moving a muscle.

I feel the ground vibrate first, but still no one moves.

Then the vibrations cease, and the tower before us vibrates, sending out a low hum that grows louder and louder until the entire structure starts to glow with silver divine light.

It flashes, and a pulse of energy moves outward like a wave, flying through all of us; eerily similar to the surges I've felt before, but hundreds of times stronger.

It doesn't hurt or do any physical damage to the surroundings, but I'm certain dungeons will be breaking all over the globe as this wave travels further.

The visible silver light of the tower fades back to black, and in my vision, I watch the Vermillion Demon disappear, reappearing in front of his troops with the corners of his lips curling upward.

I send a telepathic message to everyone on the battlefield while pulling out my fire and dark swords.

"Get ready for anything... It's happening now..."

At the same time, from the west, three wells of gravity, hundreds of times stronger than any True Core I've ever felt, come rocketing our way from Central Headquarters at hundreds of kilometers per second.

The ground vibrates again, and the tower lights up with its silver glow a second time, sending another surge throughout the entire world, then fading back to black.

This time, the smooth tower walls aren't the same as they were moments ago...

In front of me, there is an outline of an archway many kilometers high and wide, and the sliver of space that leads to the inside of the tower glows with the same silver light.

My All-Seeing Eye finds three more archways that look exactly the same in front of each of the armies that seek to enter.

I watch the Demon's Leader take a step forward, then point a finger and open a Demonic Rift right beside himself.

An enormous black dragon with a dark purple underside steps out onto the sand, its True Core visible in its chest, but its pressure and presence are concealed just like the demon it stands beside blocking me from reading its true strength or status.

The approaching forces from Central veer off in three different directions.

Two head toward their armies waiting to greet them, while one of the wells of massive divine energy turns to come right toward me.

The ground vibrates more than it ever has before, and the entire tower flashes with silver light, blinding the entire Dark Continent and sending out a catastrophic surge.

When the silver light fades, the entire tower returns to black, save for the four arched doorways left behind.

Now there is no black door blocking the entry; it is an open silver divine portal leading into the tower.

The Vermillion Demon disappears, and his dragon does too, but the sand is disrupted beneath his flight path as they blast forward, flying straight into the silver light without hesitation.

Half of the Demons turn to their right, and half turn to their left, holding up their weapons and letting out an immense aura ready for war.

I take a deep breath, turn to Ember, and activate my greater form while he fully transforms into his dragon form.

Then, send a final wave of telepathy to everyone behind me.

"I'll do my job inside the tower, and you do yours out here. Let's save the world."

We blast forward through the dense gravity surrounding the throne, and I borrow 5% of stats from everyone that isn't on the battlefield now, boosting our speed to travel faster than I've ever moved before.

At the same time, I watch a blue, yellow, and white blur of light fall from the sky and enter the Central Headquarters doorway in Sector 3. My perception picks up the image of a muscular woman riding a 30-meter-long white serpent, but there is so much divine radiation in the air, it's hard to see it clearly.

Then, in the doorway facing Sector 4, a black, yellow, and white light rockets toward that door. I can see a slim man in nothing but a black suit riding an armored black horse, but the aura I receive when peering at him for too long is eerie, like a bad dream.

Finally, a yellow and red ball of divine energy comes down from the sky, aiming right for the doorway that Ember and I are flying toward.

It is a tall, muscular man with red hair and a matching beard, riding a massive hound with vicious eyes and a glowing collar matching the intensity of his True Core.

Elara and Beckman enter the doors in Sectors 3 and 4 at the exact same moment that Ember and I touch the silver door just above the desert floor.

However, the flaming man in the sky makes contact with the silver portal about a kilometer overhead, yelling aloud for all to hear.

"The time has come! The world is truly at my fingertips!"

He pulls a long flaming yellow sword from a sheath by his side and points it downward, making eye contact with me and yelling again while both of us phase through the silver portal.

"Flame Emperor, I've been waiting for you too. You'll be my first battle to celebrate coming out of retirement. I'll warm up by killing you before the first trial even begins!"

We all disappear into the throne and a fourth and final surge of silver light flashes from the entire tower before the portal-like doors fade and it returns to black.

- Chapter 670

Chapter 670

My vision and senses are filled with a pure silver light and a high-pitched ringing once my full greater form phases through the throne's open door.

It feels warm and hot at the same time, similar to a far superior aura of perception moving through me, and it easily bypasses the purple barrier surrounding me like it's not even there.

Once the flash of silver ceases, my vision goes black.

I expect my senses to go dark as well, but instead, they feel heightened.

The outside world is still completely visible to me, in crystal clear clarity...

In fact, it's even better than it was before. My perception is being effortlessly boosted without me having to even use any additional mana.

The Dark Continent and the 8 Great Regions aren't the only things I can see and feel. The vast ocean separating this Nation from Central to the west becomes visible to my senses with ease, and I can see every single human in Central Headquarters above the flaming mountain.

Not only that, I can see even further than I've ever traveled before, to the east, north, and south as well.

Hundreds of Nations housing tens of millions of citizens each all over the world show up in my senses.

Not many of them even have A-Class hunters, and even fewer have any divine core holders, as they are not the main powerhouses of the world; but it opens my eyes to the vastness of the world beyond what I've traveled, and the lives of innocent, unaware citizens that I'll be fighting for today.

Not only can I feel everywhere the throne's surges have touched, but my senses inside the tower have heightened as well. Ember by my side shows up in my senses in pristine detail, and I can feel the presence of two True Core Monsters above me, entering the tower as well.

I feel the walls of the room I've been transported into, over 10 kilometers high and nearly 30 kilometers wide and long; however, I can't sense Elara, Beckman, or the Demon that entered the tower at all...

Redgrave and the flaming hound he rides on come into full view about a kilometer overhead, and their levels and status beam into my mind, burning with yellow divine light.

A bright [Lv. 19440] hits my senses from both of them, telling me they must be soul-bonded entities. Over a dozen armor and gear pieces stack all over his body with maxed-out 5-category stat buffs ranging from +1000-2000% each.

He still points his flaming yellow blade down at me, and I see [Fire Summoning][Supreme Grade] on both his and his beast's status while he fully releases his aura to light up the dark room we've been transported into.

"Time to die, Flame Emperor! I am the strongest Divine Fire User on this planet! There can only be one!"

The man's golden armor amplifies his flames, and the hound's color glows bright while it too explodes with a murderous aura even stronger than the intimidation attacks I felt from the Demon that engaged with me in the desert.

His whole body pulses and expands, creating a massive yellow-white flaming greater form that amplifies his aura by multiple times yet again.

My eyes widen, and I don't hesitate to pull a full 32% of stats from 17.7 million Links of loyalty to boost both mine and Ember's strength to withstand the wave of flames coming our way.

I don't pull from anyone on the battlefield and leave the 3% available for Maria, Arie, and Abby to pull from as I assume they will be having battles of their own.

While they are all strong, the amount of usable stats I would gain from them is minuscule compared to the ringing notifications in my head from the massive stat gains I get from my links all over the Nation.

[+509,760,277 Strength]

[+551,023,950 Mental Strength]

[+496,654,239 Defense]

[+510,020,524 Speed]

[+499,160,400 Agility]

The borrowed MCP surges into the hundreds of trillions as well. It helps, but the power of massive stat boosts, raising my base stats by thousands of times their natural limit, is what really makes up the difference.

When the immense wall of yellow flaming aura ripples off my enemies, it is combated with a strong aura of my own, making an ear-piercing static crashing sound that makes it feel like reality itself is bending and breaking between the auras that clash.

My aura mimics that of Maria's when we were testing out her powers for the first time, skewing dark crimson in color as there is more mana and soul energy flooding out from me than my True Core's threads can even handle tethering to.

This tale has been unlawfully lifted from Royal Road. If you spot it on Amazon, please report it.

The dark red and yellow flames colliding light up the entire black room, and at the back of it, a 5-kilometer-tall statue of a silver demon with 3 eyes and 9 arms guards the archway of a door that looks very similar to the one we just entered.

As our auras collide, a voice rings out in my inner ear that sounds very similar to a system notification but with a more ancient and echoing tone.

Silver letters appear in my mind as it speaks, and from the widened eyes and change in heart rate of Redgrave, Ember, and the flaming hound; it's clear they can see the message as well.

[One Soul-Bonded Pair Per Door Is Permitted. The Trials Will Begin Once One Challenger Remains.]

All three eyes on the Demonic Statue at the back of the massive room glow bright silver, and my vision and senses are blinded again.

Once the light and ringing fade, I witness the entire room start to shift and morph before my eyes.

The jet black ceiling turns into a red sky, and the floor below us morphs and shifts into a dark black rocky terrain where spikes and pillars of stone shoot upward, ranging from a few hundred meters up to kilometers high and thick.

[Sudden Death Match Has Begun.] Echoes throughout our minds again as the room turns into a massive battlefield with open areas and strategically placed mazes and underground hiding spots, making this look like a natural canyon or dungeon I'd find in the outside world.

All of the terrain is made of silver divine threads; it feels very similar to when I looked into the inner makeup of Celia's purple divine construct.

The only thing that doesn't change from the original room is the 9-armed silver demonic statue at the back in front of the doorway watching it all.

No other sound or ancient system notification follows, all that I hear is the maniacal laughter of Redgrave, who now floats on the opposite side of the room.

He sends two massive crescents of yellow fire straight at the ceiling and yells out loud again.

"This is great! You're actually not that weak! This will be fun! Yes, very fun indeed!"

He twists his body around in circles, like he's dancing, and sends another wave of yellow flames in a seemingly random direction, while his fiery hound locks eyes with us and opens its mouth to send a pillar of flames our way.

The fire escaping these two is easily three times as strong as the fire that circled the central capital.

I grip my flaming sword and dark magic blade and yell as the pillar of divine fire comes toward us while Redgrave's last attacks slam against the red sky above and spread all throughout the outer walls of the room.

"I expected this level of strength at least, but this guy is crazy! An absolute lunatic..."

I propel myself upward to dodge the incoming flames, while Ember flaps his wings to stay eye level with the hound, sending me a telepathy message.

"This is a good warmup for us too. I'll take the pup; you handle the old man."

Ember bursts into a massive ball of fire while I fly upward and begin weaving through the black pillars of artificial rocky terrain to hover in front of the red-haired madman that laughs and throws more and more yellow fire at the ceiling above. Search the * website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

However, the instant I get to eye level with him, his aura and demeanor completely shift, and he kicks off with a cold and callous stare, charging his blade with an immense amount of Divine Energy that seems to endlessly pour out from his True Core, which trumps mine in size by over 5x the diameter.

I tighten my gaze as well, channeling every drop of Soul Energy and spare divine threads into my weapons, kicking off the air and activating the hexagonal shielding True Core Trait to add even more protection and power into my dual sword strike.

At the top of the room, my dense crimson flames collide with his sharp yellow fire.

Our auras clash again, but this time with far more intensity as we're both sending out our most powerful attacks.

His yellow blade collides with the hexagon in front of both of my blades at the same time that Ember sends a glistening clear soul-energy fire that flows like liquid from his mouth, tethered with True Core strands and an absurd amount of Mana.

Our attacks collide at the same time, sending two shockwaves through the top and bottom of the battlefield on impact.

A collision like this would have easily decimated the entire Dark Continent in seconds, but nothing within the tower changes at all.

The Silver Demonic Statue watches without moving, and the pillars of stone at varying sizes and heights all around withstand the blast and don't budge at all.

The two streams of flames below stay pushing against each other at seemingly equal strength, while my hexagon of pure divine energy blocks Redgrave's incoming divine sword.

I can see his face, bright white smile, and crazy wide eyes close up and personal now.

His blade is stopped in mid-air, just meters away from me, but it is still moving forward at a slow rate.

His bellowing laugh echoes through the room again while his flames burn brighter and brighter yellow as energy surges out from his core to power his blade.

In the next moment, his blade breaks through the defensive barrier, shattering it and letting the full power of his initial attack be released against my two swords.

I'm pushed back the instant they're hit, and I feel his sun-hot blade piercing into the two blood-bonded weapons in my greater form's grasp like they're butter.

It's like he's wielding his True Core in his hands and swinging it toward me. Despite all the power at my fingertips, he still follows through and sends me flying backward 15 kilometers in the blink of an eye to slam against the back wall of the room.

I cough up blood while my vision blurs for a moment. His echoing laughter rings throughout the room, and he goes back to sending seemingly random flaming crescents of divine fire all over the ceiling.

"That was everything I had... I need to somehow step it up another notch..." I mutter to myself while shaking myself out of the brutal impact with the solid wall and bringing my blades up in front of me again to focus my blurry vision.

As soon as my full perception comes back to reality to look at the blade marks in my damaged swords, I concentrate my full power into self-regeneration to slowly heal them.

The ringing in my ears finally stops as I grit my teeth and watch Ember fend off the hound below. Their initial attacks looked equal, but the overwhelming raw power of the fiery animal's yellow divine flames is beginning to push the Soul Energy burst from Ember back.

I have confidence that Ember can use his trump card to get out of this situation whenever he wishes, there is only one enemy I need to keep my eye on.

My gaze tightens on the maniac dancing in the air, and the black originator cube that rotates around me comes into my peripherals making its usual rounds. However, this time it blinks with divine energy for the first time since I found it in its tomb.

