

## **Destiny 1861**

### Chapter 1861: Battle of the Peak (Part 3)

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A few moments before Alice got 'ambushed' by Dio, Shin was about to succeed in taking down Keir, who was trying his best to protect Lia from the Phantom Apparition and the Eclipse Clone while also keeping his steady mind to complete the chants for his advanced spell.

Shin wanted to join his clones as well, but Ashura had already freed himself from his earlier stance and was only waiting for the Golden Immortal to be summoned. He engaged with Shin, preventing the latter from going further.

Boom!

Not long after, a huge pillar of light suddenly fell from the sky and descended upon the members of God's Paradise, protecting them from any form of threat.

Right after its appearance, the ground trembled violently. It was shaking with great intensity before spreading cracks in every direction.

Boom!

Not long after, the ground collapsed completely, sending the broken pieces into the air and turning them into floating platforms.

The gravity of the map seemed to become a bit weaker, making these stone platforms float in the air, especially because they were sent flying by the golden giant that was currently kneeling on one knee at this moment.

Each void gate also floated in the air along with its respective platforms, somewhat changing the features of the map.

Ashura and Lia furrowed their brows when they learned about this, realizing that it was one of the special features of the map prepared by their opponents.

Regardless, they proceeded with their plan.

Boom!

The Lia and Ashura fused with the Golden Immortal; one was providing a huge supply of energy and enhancing its healing capabilities, while the other seemed to be piloting it while standing right at the center of the golden giant's chest.

Keir, who had just finished chanting his spell, also made his move.

Boom!

Shin and the others were then taken aback by what happened right after.

Keir's body exploded and died in an instant, but he just left a huge cluster of dark mana that spread in every direction, affecting the surroundings.

There was also a dense clump of this dark mana, which flew toward the Golden Immortal and fused with it.

The dark mana seemed to be 'corrupting' the Golden Immortal, particularly its majestic armor. It spread throughout its body while drawing a series after series of mysterious runes on its golden armor.

Some of the dark mana even spread through the godly glaive that it was wielding, producing a black flame that danced around its blade.

Roar!

Right after the completion, the Golden Immortal seemed to have transformed into a fallen one, particularly when it released a powerful and eerie war cry that was no different from a monstrous beast.

This war cry also shook the surroundings and spread a mental suppression that made Shin and the others pause, fighting against it.

The transformation was not even finished yet because Kallavan and Susanoo also fused with the Fallen Golden Immortal.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

When Kallavan fused with this colossus, its already robust and sturdy body became even more powerful with bulging muscles that had black veins on them, which were also formed by the dark mana that Keir had left behind.

As for when Susanoo fused with it, the glaive seemed to have been further augmented by his sword energy, which also carried a powerful storm.

Boom!

Only when the transformation was completed that Shin and the others able to recover themselves.

Cloe swiftly cast a series of cleansing spells that helped the monster trio recover their mental strength, which was somewhat affected by the earlier war cry.

It was also at this moment that they realized that Alice had just died.

"Alice died!?" Cloe could not help but exclaim a little, realizing that their Elementalist had just fallen.

Shin frowned a little before reading the message sent by Diablo. He then told the others. "Diablo is already engaging with their sixth man, preventing the latter from going anywhere."

"Who knows if he can also fuse with this current Golden Immortal and further augment its powers," he added, telling the others not to worry about that side that much and focus on what was in front of them.

What had just happened had already happened, so there was nothing they could do about it. Right now, they had to focus on dealing with this Fallen Golden Immortal, especially when he could feel an immense threat coming from it.

"It looks like we have to reveal more of our cards," said Shin alongside a smirk.

Understanding what he meant, the others quickly responded.

Arthur suddenly leaped high up in the air while chanting out a series of Draconic Mantras. Immediately after, a huge golden summoning circle appeared underneath him.

Roar!

Not long after, his golden dragon pet with a long and complicated name came out of that magic circle.

Arthur then skillfully rode on it, activating his secondary combat class, the Dragon Cavalier Class.

This was his first time showing this class to the public, so he wanted it to appear much cooler compared to other secondary combat classes that were known the everyone already.

"Let's go-..." Arthur was trying to call out the full name of his dragon pet, but he was beaten by the Shin and Leonard into it.

"GOLDIE!"

The corner of Arthur's mouth could not help but twitch when he heard that and gave the two with sharp later. But the two just ignored him as they made their respective preparations.

Leonard turned and flipped his war axes. He twirled them around him before transforming them into transparent war axes that slowly fused with his arms, becoming a pair of gauntlets with a set of sharp claws.

At the same time, his Elemental Beast Possession and Reality Possession reached another level. Even the crimson tattoos all over his body became denser and brighter, further enhancing his overall stats.

He might not have a secondary combat class, unlike Shin and Arthur, but he still had a set of cards that was no weaker than theirs.

Roar!

Midair, he released a savage and horrifying roar that reverberated in the entire battlefield while an apparition of a humongous Primordial Beast manifested behind him for a moment before swiftly fusing with his body.

'Destroyer Skill (Quasi Tier 4): Soul of the Ancients – Primordial Beast Power'

At the same time, Shin released the 'Divine Constellation Possession' to transform his left-hand sword back to its sheath form before putting the [Yamato] into it.

He then activated one of his strongest skills, particularly the one under his Legacy Skills. This one was the one that had just undergone a transformation recently, turning into his real skill.

'Legacy Skill: Duplicator's Eyes – Summoning of the Eclipse Dragon'

Swoosh!

Right after the huge magic circle appeared underneath his feet, a huge and horrifying aura overwhelmed the surroundings, particularly when a dimensional crack appeared on that summoning circle.

Roar!

Not long after, a deafening draconic roar suddenly swept through every direction, followed by the appearance of a huge dragon crawling out of the summoning circle.

This Eclipse Dragon might be slightly smaller than the Fallen Golden Immortal standing not far from it, but the pride of the dragon never let them bow before anyone. It raised its head proudly and haughtily, seemingly looking down on the golden giant before it.

Roar!

Releasing another powerful roar, it seemed to be establishing its authority, especially when it sent the floating platforms higher into the air and spread them farther apart.

Shin and Cloe stood at the back of this majestic dragon while it slowly and strongly flapped its wings to fly a little higher from the ground, leveling itself on the same height as the Fallen Golden Immortal.

There was not much of a standoff between the two sides since they swiftly made their moves immediately after.

Roar! Roar!

The simultaneous roars coming from the two colossuses caused the surrounding air to tremble, accompanied by rumblings from the space itself.

The presence of these two beings was so strong that even the space was having a hard time stabilizing itself due to the collision of their auras.

Boom!

Immediately, Shin urged the Eclipse Dragon to fire its dragon's breath straight off the bat, not following the standard opening move.

Boom!

'Eclipse Dragon Breath: Unity Ray'

A beam of light swiftly flew out of the dragon's mouth, flying straight to the Fallen Golden Immortal that was standing not too far from it.

In response, Ashura controlled the golden giant. They wield the huge divine glaive that was currently covered with eerie dark flames and destructive gusts of the storm.

Shing!

With a powerful swing, it cut the incoming beam of light.

Boom!

At the same time, Leonard and Arthur had made their move.

Leonard jumped high up in the air, using the floating platforms to go even higher, before throwing a powerful punch down.

Boom!

His punch released a crimson light that descended from the sky, slowly transforming into a gigantic energy ball that resembled a falling meteor.

'Supreme Blood Sutra: Asad Tribe Arts – Sanguine Meteor'

Boom!

Seeing that, Ashura, with the help of Kallavan, raised one of the hands of the golden giant. It used its gigantic hands to 'catch' the bloody meteor, preventing it from falling on them.

Boom!

With a powerful clasp, it destroyed the blood meteor, producing a powerful shockwave that repeatedly and overlappingly spread in every direction.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

At the same time, Arthur had already had his way behind the golden giant, riding his golden dragon pet.

He tightly held on to his dragon spear before suddenly charging forward and throwing a powerful thrust just like a true cavalier.

'True Nine Dragon Arts: Dragon Cavalier Version – Breaking Through of the Golden Dragon'

Roar!

Arthur and his golden dragon seemed to become one as the golden energy enveloped them and transformed into an even larger dragon that was no smaller than the Eclipse Dragon.

Whoosh!

It flew straight to the back of the golden giant, attempting to slap itself into it.

Swoosh!

In response, the Fallen Golden Immortal suddenly twirled its divine glaive in the air, pulling the surrounding mana to create a dome-like barrier that protected it.

Boom!

The giant dome barrier protected it from the incoming attack from behind.

Regardless, the destructive prowess of that attack produced another series of shockwaves that swept through the surroundings and threw the floating platforms into chaos.

It was just a few exchanges, but it was the signal for the climax of this battle.

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Chapter 1862: Battle of the Peak (Part 4)

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Boom!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The next few exchanges between the two sides were so intense that the already 'modified' map was further destroyed.

With such a colossal body, it was quite easy for the Empyrean Talons to throw their attacks at it. It was such a huge target that missing was impossible.

Arthur rode his golden dragon pet to fly around the golden giant while attacking from a different angle. With the difference in sizes, Arthur looked more like a mosquito or a bee stinging full grown man.

However, the might of his attacks was so strong that it could blast any other person once it landed cleanly.

Fortunately, the defense of this golden giant was so strong and tough that Arthur would most likely have to land clear strikes for at least dozens of times.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Boom!

Leonard was in a similar situation. But since he was not right, a flying pet or mount, he was not moving as freely as Arthur.

However, his speed was still quite fast, especially when he was skillfully jumping from one floating platform to another. At times, he was even utilizing the nearby stable void gates. He was jumping into them and appeared on another side, which was still within the main battlefield.

They had truly cracked the secrets of these void gates because they seemed to always know which one would lead them to their desired location. They seemed to be in full control of them instead of being the supposedly random gates.

On the other hand, the members of God's Paradise fully utilize the size of the Fallen Golden Immortal to their advantage, particularly the large area that their attacks could cover. With such a massive body, the range and scale of their attacks far surpassed anyone.

Even with Arthur's aerial mobility and Leonard's crafty utilization of the void gates, dodging such large-scale attacks would still be very hard.

Moreover, this Fallen Golden Immortal was also capable of casting powerful spells that were capable of destroying everything that it wanted.

Fortunately, there was Shin and his Eclipse Dragon, who restrained the golden giant to a certain extent.

Shin was commanding the Eclipse Dragon quite well, utilizing the innate power of the dragon race and their natural control over mana to counter the Fallen Golden Immortal.

Roar! Roar!

Boom!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The two colossuses repeatedly clashed against one another, creating great devastation in the surroundings.

On top of this, Cloe was not idle either. She kept on casting one spell after another from the back of the Eclipse Dragon. She was either using healing or buffing spells to support everyone, particularly the huge dragon underneath her feet.

Her spells were also very advanced that they could even affect the Eclipse Dragon to a great degree.

Even if the Fallem Golden Immortal possessed very powerful healing capabilities because of Lia, who fused with it. It also had a very strong defensive prowess that Kallavan and Keir further augmented during the fusion process.

The offensive prowess came from both Ashura and Susanoo, which hurt the Eclipse Dragon well during the exchanges.

Fortunately, Cloe's healing prowess was quite powerful on their own, particularly the more advanced spells.

With all these together, the two sides were stuck in a deadlock once again, regardless of the stunning show that they were providing everyone.

During the battle, Shin and the other noticed something about the Fallen Golden Immortal that they were fighting. They felt that despite all the powers that it possessed, it was still lacking something.

They were not sure what it was, but they could at least feel that it was lacking a certain factor.

Thinking about it, Shin could at least guess where this missing piece was. From what he could guess, it was most likely the other member of God's Paradise, who was currently stuck fighting against Diablo.

Thinking about this, he immediately sent a message to Diablo, telling the latter not to let Dio reach the main battlefield at all costs.

Shin could tell that a terrible disaster would fall on them once Dio regrouped with his teammates and even fused with the Fallen Golden Immortal, completing its perfect state.

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Bang! Bang! Bang!

On the other side of the map, right at its center, Diablo and Dio were currently engaging in an intense battle, where neither side was gaining a clear upper hand.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Boom!

Both sides were already giving their all, exchanging their best moves against each other.

Diablo had already activated his version of Elemental Spirit Possession to the fullest alongside his special ability to control the shadows, particularly forming the Shadow Equip – Divine War Robe.

Not only did his speed greatly increase, but he was able to meld with the surrounding shadows with quite an ease, moving quite freely to whichever place he wanted.

On the other hand, Dio was currently at his peak power. He activated his Ascended Abilities, which let him undergo a metamorphosis.

His current appearance seemed to be closely related to dragons or demons or both due to the pair of horns sticking out of his forehead and other special features that he currently had.

There was a reptilian tail sticking out behind him while his arms were filled with tough scales alongside razor-sharp claws. Even his pair of legs seemed to be from a scaled beast, which was most likely from the dragon race.

The spear that he was holding also grew a bit larger and gained similar draconic features. In a sense, he was more like Arthur in draconic form, but with a slightly different vibe.

After their exploration of the Frozen Kingdom, God's Paradise was able to gain quite a lot of things.

Among them, Dio had managed to convert his current in-game race to Draconian and even changed his religion to Dragon Worshiper, which was one of the main religions within the Frozen Kingdom alongside the Moon Believers, which came from the Vampire Race, and the Northern Barbarian Tribes of the Barbarian Race.

As for his class, he had chosen the Draconic Fighter, which had quite a lot of variations depending on which path the player wanted to take.

Since he specialized in spearmanship and was quite known for it, he naturally chose this path, which further enhanced his overall powers.

During their last battle, especially that time they had a scrimmage against the Empyrean Talons, Dio was being suppressed by Diablo most of the time.

The main reason was the gap between their respective class and races. He was also being gapped by Diablo's fighting style, which was quite tricky to deal with when it came to Team Competitions.

Now that he had converted to his current class and race, he was quite confident in this match-up, which was immediately proven through his actions and the current scene that everyone was watching.

The match was quite even between the two, showcasing their respective battle prowess.

Unfortunately, this was not a solo battle, but a team competition formation. Dio had to group up with the rest of his team to further augment their Unified Skill.

He was among the core components of this Unified Skill, particularly when he gained his current race.

His main goal in this battle was to regroup with the rest of the team and complete the fusion to reach the most perfect state of the 'guardian'.

Unfortunately, the opposing side was also fully aware of his thoughts. Diablo was not giving him any opportunity to get away and was constantly engaging in intense clashes.

Even if Dio wanted to utilize the void gates to his advantage, Diablo was always ahead of him.

Diablo always prevented him from jumping into any void gates, preventing him from going anywhere. Every attempt that he tried would always put him at a great disadvantage.

Diablo was even using his line of thought against him. This sly assassin was baiting him to get near these void gates before launching a deadly ambush.

Diablo had almost taken his life after falling into this trap. If not for him being a Draconian, then he would have most likely been killed in a single cycle of Diablo's deadly combo.

Fortunately, he was quite fast with his reflexes, activating his defensive buffs and such to survive that attack. He even used one of his lifesaving skills at the last moment, barely able to escape from such a predicament.

It was at this moment that Dio realized that his line of thought was completely wrong. He could afford to focus on regrouping with the rest of the team when facing such a crafty and highly skilled opponent.

If he wanted to leave this place, then he had to first think of a way to deal with this opponent, who was quite ahead of him in terms of combat experience.

Even though Dio was confident about his current strength and skills, he was still a bit behind compared to the veteran before him.

Diablo might not have that much fame within the experts' circle of the virtual world, but quite a lot of people had acknowledged him, especially after getting the information about him being a part of the mysterious Pandemonium Descendants, particularly being the former commander of the so-called Sweepers.

Sensing the change in the atmosphere surrounding Dio, Diablo knew that this guy had most likely regained himself and realized what was happening.

Flipping his shortsword and twirling his stiletto, Diabo gave the latter an inviting gesture. "Come!"

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Chapter 1863: Battle of the Peak (Part 5)

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Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Dio waved his hand and summoned an array of dark spears behind him, fanning out like a peacock's majestic tail.

He then pointed forward, sending them toward Diablo, who was still maintaining his inviting gesture.

'Devil Peacock Spear: Hundred Feathers'

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Right at the same moment, Diablo suddenly kicked the ground, moving in a zigzag motion and leaving a series of afterimages behind.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

With the barrage of explosions behind him, Diablo increased his speed, transforming into a dark streak of light that flew straight to his opponent.

Whoosh!

Raising his left hand forward along with the stiletto that he was holding, Diablo further accelerated while also manipulating the surrounding shadows.

Shriek!

Eerie wails of ghosts suddenly reverberated in the entire battlefield. There seemed to be dozens of vengeful spirits surrounding Diablo as their cries of agony assaulted the ears of his opponent.

'Shadowless Assassination Art: Vengeance of the Wraiths'

Swoosh!

Dio immediately responded after seeing how dangerous the incoming attack was. He forcefully recovered from the eerie cries assaulting his ears and swiftly gathered himself.

Flipping and twirling his spear, dark flames suddenly surrounded his entire body before spreading to his weapon.

Holding the spear with both of his hands, he suddenly took a powerful step forward, stomping so hard that the ground caved down and formed a small crater.

Swoosh!

'Devil Peacock Spear: Soaring Feather'

Shing!

He thrust the spear with all his might, forming a spiraling dark energy, and pierced through the air during its advance.

Boom!

A massive explosion immediately followed as the tips of the two weapons met and clashed against one another.

Dio was forced to take a series of steps back, leaving deep footprints on the ground just to nullify the residual force from the impact.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Meanwhile, Diabo was sent skidding back, trying his best to maintain his footing. That powerful impact revealed that his overall strength was still quite inferior to those with combat classes that focused more on strength and constitution, such as the Swordsman, Warrior, and Knight Classes.

Regardless, he was still able to maintain his balance and did not let himself get too overpowered by his opponent.

"Hup!"

Taking a deep breath, Diablo forcefully regained his stance before suddenly disappearing from his spot.

Swoosh!

'Shadow Dancer Skill (Tier 2): Shadow Strike'

He suddenly appeared before his opponent, who was still in the middle of regaining his footing.

Shing!

With a swift and deadly stab, Diablo sent his stiletto straight to the neck of his opponent.

Swoosh!

But before it could even reach its target, Dio swiftly took a step back and suddenly leaned back, barely dodging the deadly strike.

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Regardless, the force that was produced by that sudden stab from Diablo still sent out a strong gust of wind that somewhat hurt Dio once it grazed his face.

He then swiftly flipped his spear, letting it circle behind him, before throwing a forward stab straight to Diablo's abdomen.

Swoosh!

Unfortunately, despite his perfect and well-timed counter, all his spear had caught was the fading afterimage that Diablo had left behind.

'Twilight Skill: (Modified) Silent Steps'

Whoosh!

Diablo appeared behind his opponent without making any sounds before suddenly throwing a sharp stab straight to his opponent's back.

'Extra Skill (Basic): (Enhanced) Backstab'

Familiar with such a strategy of thieves and assassins, Dio did not even need to turn his head behind him and leaped forward, trying to create some distance between himself and his opponent.

Midair, he skillfully turned his body while also swinging his spear to deflect the incoming attack. He had also infused some of his unique mana into the spear not to lose in terms of strength.

Clang!

Diablo did not stop and continued pressing forward. He retracted his deflected arm and used the momentum to throw another stab with his other hand, chasing after his opponent.

His body also flickered repeatedly as he charged forward, resembling a translucent ghost.

'Shadow Dancer Skill (Tier 2): Flickering Stab'

When Dio's feet touched the ground, the tip of his opponent's stiletto was already almost upon his face, swiftly magnifying before his eyes.

But right before this stiletto could even put a hole in the center of his forehead, Dio was able to swiftly respond.

He swiftly leaned to the side while turning his spear toward the opposite direction, hitting the forearm of his opponent and redirecting the trajectory of the stab.

Bang!

He then moved his upper body around, twirling the spear and shifting it between his left and right hands. He danced along with his spear, twirling, flipping, rotating, and swinging it around while engaging in an intense melee against Diablo.

Diablo responded in kind, accepting the challenge. But instead of a frontal confrontation, he chose to go with the standard style that thieves and assassins used during the battle.

He would constantly launch an ambush from different directions, continuously coming in and out of his stealth. At times, he would even be utilizing his advantage in terms of speed to the fullest, harassing his opponent with repeated and swift attacks.

Along with the aid of his Ancient Shadow Powers, he was able to cast some shadow-elemental spells that would suppress Dio from time to time.

He was not giving his opponent enough time to recover or even formulate a plan as a counter.

With his repeated and swift attacks, Dio was having a hard time maintaining his peak form, especially when Diablo was craftily utilizing his advantage in terms of class.

But Dio was not someone who could be defeated that easily either. He stubbornly and steadily held his ground, not allowing Diablo to land a clean ambush.

Even if he was a step late in responding, he was still able to save himself at the last second. He always half-blocked or half-dodged those deadly attacks that could threaten to one-shot him.

Even though he suffered some serious damage from barely dodging or blocking the attacks, they were still far from being too fatal to threaten him.

By relying on the overwhelming regeneration abilities of his race, as well as some defensive and healing skills in his skill set, Dio was able to hold his ground quite steadily.

Of course, he was quite worried about the state of the battle on the other side of the map since he had spent quite a lot of time fighting Diablo. But he could not afford to think too much about it since his situation was not that optimistic either.

He might be able to throw a few counters and deadly attacks from time to time, after getting familiar with the rhythm of his opponent, but they were far from what he wanted to achieve.

After all, his goal was to either defeat Diablo in one fell swoop or at least create enough distance away from the latter, allowing him to jump into the nearby void gate and regroup with the rest of the team.

Glancing at the Dragon Rage right below his Mana and Stamina Bar, Dio could not help but slight a little.

He tried his best to use as little energy as he could during this battle, planning to save it for the latter. Unfortunately, it seemed like he was spending much more than he had expected as the battle progressed.

The more he tried to save them, the more he spent them in battle.

Even if he was not holding back in the fight, he was still keeping the consumption of his Dragon Rage in control. Unfortunately, he was draining it a little too much the more the battle progressed.

"I guess I will be thrown in the training dungeon after this match," he mumbled along with a bitter smile.

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In the meantime, Ashura was already reaching his limit for controlling the Fallen Golden Immortal for such a long time.

Even though his willpower far surpassed most people, he still had his limit.

The burden he was carrying was much more overwhelming than maintaining all his Elemental Spirit Possessions and his version of Reality Manifestation simultaneously.

It was especially true when he was the core of the Unified Skill that their team was using.

All the burden that everyone was suffering was directed to him, making it harder to keep controlling the Fallen Golden Immortal for an extended period.

He naturally had some solutions to deal with these, just like some unique mental techniques that boosted his mental prowess or forbidden techniques that could help him keep a clear state of mind despite suffering such a huge and heavy burden.

The only problem was the drawbacks that he would suffer later after using them.

This could even damage his mind in the real world, which was why he had set a specific limit on the use of these techniques.

He was supposed to stop it after reaching the border between these two limits.

"It looks like we still have underestimated the peak form of these guys, especially when they were together," he mumbled with a bitter smile before adding. "Particularly their coordination, understanding, and trust with each other."

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Chapter 1864: Taking the Lead

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Despite all the advantages that Shin and the others had during this battle, their current state was not that great either.

Arthur, who was still mounted on his golden dragon pet, was currently on a floating platform. He and his pet were quite exhausted from flying around and attacking the Fallen Golden Immortal. They suffered some minor injuries from the residual forces that Ashura had thrown at them earlier.

Fortunately, Arthur was quite good at controlling his golden dragon pet, maneuvering in the air with great mobility and skill.

Even though some dark flames had managed to graze Arthur and his pet while dodging earlier, he was still able to nullify their effects with the help of his Dragon Power.

Leonard was in a similar situation. He might even be more exhausted than anyone else since he had to keep on jumping from one floating platform to another during the entire battle, dodging the large-scale attacks from the opposing side that could greatly threaten him.

A single attack from them was more than enough to kill him on the spot, so he had to be extra careful during the entire battle.

In this battle, it was the Eclipse Dragon that was acting as the 'main tank' of the team. It was facing the Fallen Golden Immortal head-on, matching it with every move.

Following Shin's commands during the battle, it was still able to hold its ground without losing that much.

It suffered quite a lot of damage from the confrontation, but Cloe was able to heal it to a healthy state with her spells. But in exchange, Cloe quite exhausted most of her Mana Pool, especially when healing such a massive creature was no different from supporting an entire army.

The Eclipse Dragon was also the one that dealt the most damage to the opposition, especially with its offensive powers were no weaker than the golden giant.

Among the team, it was only Shin who was relatively in good condition compared to the rest. Since he did not have to do that much during the fight, he saved quite a lot of energy in the process.

His only job in this battle was to command the Eclipse Dragon while also protecting Cloe from any harm.

He barely made any moves during the entire process, which was why he was in a very healthy state both mentally and physically.

With all these together, it was clear that they had a higher chance of winning, particularly when he was basically capable of going for another round of battle.

Compared to those from the opposing side, who were not only physically exhausted but mentally as well, the Empyrean Talons were in relatively much better condition.

Ashura and the others had put up a good fight, but the current odds were clearly against them.

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Shing!

Whoosh! Whoosh!

On the other side of the battlefield, Diablo and Dio were still engaging in an intense battle.

The intense exchanges between the two were so stunning that it made the people watching it could not help but sit on the edge of their seats, holding their breath.

Everyone understood that this battle could decide the outcome of this match.

Clang!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

After another round of intense clashes, both sides were forced to retreat, distancing themselves from one another.

Bang!

But immediately, Diablo suddenly kicked the ground and propelled himself forward with extreme speed.

Swoosh!

He transformed into a streak of black light that flew straight to his opponent, leaving a shadow trail behind.

From the look of it, he wanted to end this battle with simpler moves rather than relying on more advanced techniques, unlike what most of the people were expecting.

But from the eyes of the top experts, they could not agree more on Diablo's decision. At times, battles on this level could be decided in a much simpler way than everyone else.

Sometimes, simple moves were the deciding factor in a complex battle.

Seeing that Diablo was coming straight at him with such insane speed, Dio knew that he did not have the time to execute a complex move to gain the advantage. He had no choice but to match Diablo's tempo for this attack.

Fully understanding this, Dio suddenly took a step back and squatted a little while lowering his spear. He inclined it a little before placing his left palm over the blade of his spear while channeling his unique mana into it.

He waited for a second before suddenly kicking the ground, striding forward, and throwing a powerful thrust to greet his incoming opponent.

Swoosh!

Shing!

In response to his actions, Diablo suddenly leaped forward, propelling himself even further and enhancing his speed a bit more.

Midflight, he suddenly swung his shortsword, turning it into a flash while cutting through the air.

Shing!

Whoosh! Whoosh!

Diablo and Dio brushed past each other right after that exchange before suddenly stopping themselves a couple of meters away from each other.

They maintained their respective stances for a couple of moments until something else happened.

Puchi!

A huge wound suddenly appeared on the side of Dio's neck, followed by a huge amount of blood gushing out of it. His Health Bar also reflected the damage that he had suffered, chipping out quite a huge part of it.

It only stopped after dropping to a quarter of his total Health Bar.

At the same time, Diablo was frowning quite deeply because he did not get away from that situation unscathed as well.

There was a huge wound on his waist, as the earlier strike from Dio had chipped away a part of it, resulting in a significant drop in his health bar and reaching a critical level.

Regardless, he still kept his calm as everything had ended all according to his plan.

Dio was about to quickly turn around and follow the attack since he knew that Diablo should be in a similar situation. Unfortunately, he immediately noticed that his entire body was currently paralyzed.

"There was such a strong poison coating that dagger?" he frowned quite deeply after realizing this.

He normally should not be worried about this since his constitution was quite strong and had a very strong resistance against poisons. After all, Draconians were descendants of Dragons, so their physique should not be that weak.

Confused, he was trying to guess what kind of poison Diablo had applied to his daggers to have such serious effects.

It was at this moment that he heard Diablo's voice right behind him. "Confused? Then you should recall our entire battle and reassess everything."

Hearing that, Dio finally realized how he ended up this way.

Recalling all the details of the battle, he realized that he was constantly being cut by Diablo earlier, which did not deal that much damage. All the injuries that those attacks dealt were minor and negligible.

Little did he know that those cuts were slowly accumulating serious damage to him, poisoning him little by little.

What was scarier was that the poisons that applied to the dagger and stiletto were never the same.

At this moment, his body was carrying multiple poisons, producing a devastating result while slowly corroding his entire body.

On the other hand, the final strike from Diablo carried a poison that triggered the final and most deadly effects of the mixed poisons after coming in contact with them.

Dio could not help but smile bitterly after realizing something.

When he wanted to run away from this place and regroup with the rest of the team, Diablo was constantly harassing him, preventing him from going anywhere.

When he decided to focus on the fight and battled Diablo while trying to save as much Dragon Rage as possible, he spent quite a lot in exchange because Diablo kept increasing the tempo. This resulted in Dio spending more than he wanted.

Then, when Dio decided to give everything he had and forget about everything else, Diablo had already set up everything by slowly poisoning him during every exchange they had.

Diablo had read him like a book, resulting in the current situation.

With a bitter smile, Dio could only say. "Things will be different next time."

Diablo did not have any intention of replying since the match was still far from over. He did quick work on Dio, killing the latter with another cycle of his basic to slightly advanced skills.

He did not even pause for a second after finishing off Dio as he swiftly turned around and entered the nearby void gate.

With him joining the battle on the other side, Shin and the others were able to wrap up the match altogether.

They were finally able to defeat the rest of the God's Paradise, particularly the Fallen Golden Immortal, which still put up such a good fight until the end.

Ashura and the others had no intention of letting this match end that easily.

Regardless, the Empyrean Talons had still taken this first match, taking such a huge lead in the Grand Finals.

Getting a 9 to 1 score against the defending champion was quite huge.

With this, the Empyrean Talons had a very strong momentum for the next match two days later.

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Chapter 1865: Taking the Lead (Part 2)

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The first match between the Empyrean Talons and God's Paradise reached a very high level, even surpassing most of what the people were expecting.

The scores at the end might have looked like there was a huge gap between the two teams, but it did not tell the whole story of the match. It was actually much closer than what the scores were showing everyone.

There might be some obvious gaps between the members of the two teams, particularly their key combatants. But it did not mean that the lineup of God's Paradise was worse than Empyrean Talons.

Moreover, one of the main factors of the match was the maps that the Empyrean Talons had chosen. They were quite tricky to deal with, especially when their members had utilized their map advantages quite well, particularly in the Team Competition.

The next match between the two teams two days later would most likely be much more intense than this one, especially when God's Paradise would be doing their best to turn the tide around. After all, the 9 to 1 score was such a huge gap that they had to catch up with.

A lot of analysts were saying that this match would most likely be decided by the chosen maps that God's Paradise would be choosing. They would, without a doubt, choose the maps that they were most familiar with and utilize their unique features to the fullest.

During these next couple of days, a lot of people were already arguing online, particularly the fans of both sides.

All the online platforms were on fire due to these supports of the two teams, particularly the official website and forums of the game.

To further heighten the hype of the match, the organizers of the tournament were using a lot of marketing strategies. They had even commissioned Miss Bunny to produce another musical video that centered on the two teams.

The battle clips that Miss Bunny had used this time were not limited to the matches that the two teams had in the entire tournament. She had also used the most recent battles that the members of the two teams had within the game, particularly those battles that were incredibly stunning and crazy.

For the side of God's Paradise, most of their clips were about their raids, particularly those from huge expeditions that they had. Most of their battles were about battles against absurdly strong monsters and hordes.

But that was not all, they also had some battles against in-game organizations and top guilds within the game.

One of the most noticeable ones was their battles against an underworld organization that no one had heard of yet, but possessed a very powerful might that could rival most of the powerhouse organizations within the game.

There were also their clashes against the elite members of the Corrupted Cults, which was one of the biggest events in the places where God's Paradise went.

The highlight that they had in the battle clip was Ashura's battle against some big shots of the Corrupted Cult, particularly a certain NPC that seemed to have at least a very important standing within the evil faction.

In the meantime, the side of Empyrean Talons focused more on their most recent achievements. This included their matches against top teams within the competitions, followed by their battles against huge organizations within the game, such as Corrupted Cult and Demonic Churches.

There was also their battle against some members of Pandemonium Descendants, particularly the Sweepers and some members of the so-called Pandemonium Troupe.

There were also some highlights about their battles against some powerful monsters and NPCs, which did not include many secrets. They obviously did not disclose those concerning some top-secret missions, such as the secrets of Frozen Kingdom, Demonic Portal, and Forgotten Temple.

There were also the signature battles that each member had against other players, particularly those famed battles of Shin. There were also his huge battles, especially the ones against Immortal and his 'spawn'.

Coupled with Miss Bunny's famous 'Bunny Magic', she gathered more attention once again and won herself a lot of appreciation and praise from everyone.

Her current fame had already far surpassed her previous peak, especially when she was working under True Sight Industries.

There were even rumors that the said entertainment company was already regretting their decision. There were even some insiders leaking that the higher-ups of the said company were trying their best to call her back.

Unfortunately, Miss Bunny had already found quite a lot of sponsors right now and did not need them any longer, especially when she was already under the Flying Dragon Corporation, which was one of the top corporations around the world.

Then there was also news about the entertainment company facing serious trouble that could even lead to their bankruptcy, which was immediately followed by another rumor that some bigger companies were trying to buy them out, annexing them.

Among these companies was the Green Life Enterprise of the Green Family, which was a hegemon when it came to the technological industry, particularly when it came to making the most advanced tools around the world and military weaponry and such.

They also had a close relationship with the Sun-Moon Continent, which was the home of the most advanced technology in the world.

Then there was the Generation Industries from the Silver Wing Continent, which quite confused everyone. The main headquarters of True Sight Industries was in the Soaring Continent, which was quite far from them.

No one knew what these guys were thinking when they announced that they wanted to buy True Sight Industries. However, the two companies were working on the same circle, so there was not much of a question about their decision.

Another major competitor was the Flying Dragon Corporation, which was under the Levina Family and had the great support of the Springfield Family. With the support of the two families, the influence that this corporation had was quite immense.

Adding the fact that their main operation centered around the Soaring Continent, their main influence was further enhanced.

The other companies attempting to acquire the True Sight Industries might not be as big and influential as these three, but they were not that inferior in terms of major sense.

Most of the people did not think too much about this since it was nothing but another struggle and money war between huge corporations. But for those who could see between the lines, they knew that this concerned more than what everyone sees from the surface.

This might be another 'storm' that was brewing within the game.

The fact that a number of huge corporations around the world paid a lot of attention to this 'little' entertainment company was more than what everyone was thinking.

...

Meanwhile, the Empyrean Talons and God's Paradise did not concern themselves with this matter since they had a more important matter at hand.

The two teams would obviously not waste the time they had in their hands right now. They swiftly went to a last-minute training, further polishing themselves one last time.

They were also cooking up their respective preparations, particularly the methods about how they would suppress and counter their opposition.

God's Paradise would most likely center their strategies around their home advantage while utilizing the information that they had gotten from the previous match.

Meanwhile, the Empyrean Talons would think of a way to deal with the trump cards that they had seen from the opposing side, particularly that Fallen Golden Immortal. That card alone was more than enough to make them wary of God's Paradise.

Adding the fact that God's Paradise had the advantage in terms of the map right now, particularly when it came to the battle methods and formats of the match.

This was what the Empyrean Talons were most worried about, especially when they knew that God's Paradise would most likely cook something that would make it hard for them to counter.

Shin had to think about the arrangement of their lineup as well, especially when he was fully aware of the weaknesses of their team.

He also understood that the lineup for the next match would most likely decide the outcome of the match.

Shin was not worried about the individual strength of each of their members, particularly the key members and the main combatants. They should at least have a slight edge when it came to this area.

This gave him the impression that they would most likely get an advantage in Single Matches.

But that was only if God's Paradise had chosen the standard format of the match. He was aware that there was still the other format, particularly the Dual Match for round one, which worried him quite a lot.

Given the current strength of their team, they would most likely be at a great disadvantage in this area.

He could pair Owen and Ithilien together for the first round if that happened, and then they could trust Alucard and Diablo for the Group Competition, ensuring a sure victory given their current high scores.

Even if God's Paradise used the other format for the Group Competition, which would be a series of 1 vs. 1s until all the representatives for this round had lost or won, he could also put Akailu in the mix, securing the most standard lineup with the highest chance of victory.

But they had to sacrifice their lineup for the final round, which was the Team Competition.

Putting all these together, Shin could not help but have a slight frown.

"Should I 'invite' you again-...?" he mumbled, knowing that this was their greatest trump card.

Unfortunately, Uno immediately rejected him even before he could finish asking about it.

[Forget about it. I'm not interested in fighting such weaklings.]

Hearing that inside his head, Shin could not help but shake his head repeatedly and smile bitterly.

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## Chapter 1866: When?

.....

While the matters within the virtual world were reaching their most exciting state, another wind was brewing in the real world.

Most of the younger generation were too focused on the grand finals of the United Cup with a few old men, who were capable of logging in the game or did not bother with the uncomfortable and heavy restrictions on their virtual avatar.

Did not bother about the secrets that they had within their body, not caring if some other party would learn them.

After the most recent announcement, these older generations had confirmed that the World Gaming Organization had most likely settled everything on their side and made sure that the almighty system of the game would tightly guard these so-called secrets.

They also knew that this system hid a secret of its own, which was not necessarily related to the gaming company itself. It was a secret to limit and restrain the people within the World Gaming Organization when it came to matters of the game.

...

Inside Military Headquarters under the Springfield Family, Nathan was currently skimming through the reports piled up on his table when his subordinate suddenly knocked and somewhat interrupted his thoughts.

Seemingly having the idea who it was, Nathan lowered the pile that he was holding and closed the virtual screen projected not far from him.

He then turned at the door and said in a calm voice. "Come in."

Not long after, his lieutenant suddenly entered and gave him a salute.

Nathan casually accepted and returned the salute before asking. "How are the preparations. Is everything ready?"

Lieutenant Steeves nodded his head somewhat nervously. "Sir, Yes, Sir! Everything is already set in motion. Everything about the first part of the operation is already going according to the plan."

"We are only waiting for your orders and the other part of the plan before making our move, Commander," he swiftly added.

He had been working under Nathan for quite some time already, yet he still could not help but feel immense pressure coming from the latter every time he saw this Commanding General.

This even became worse the more he got familiar with the commander. The same for his strength – the stronger he became, the more he became aware of the huge gap between them that seemingly did not shrink in the slightest. It might even be growing larger, the stronger he got.

In response to this, the pressure that he was getting from the latter was only growing heavier despite Nathan not actively releasing it.

Nathan slightly nodded. "That's good. You can focus on this operation for now and forget about everything else. I have already made the arrangements ahead of time, so you don't have to worry about the other duties that you have within the base for the time being."

"Tell everyone that they can proceed according to plan without waiting for him. Let General Anderson take over the main fleet that is heading out, and tell General Boris and General Baria to always be on standby and not leave their respective post."

"I will immediately pass your orders to them, Commander!" said Lieutenant Steeves before preparing to leave.

He was just about to leave the office when Nathan suddenly called him again.

"Ah! Before I forget! Tell Anderson that he can't engage in any conflict with Sauron during this entire operation. Make sure that he keeps it in mind," said Nathan with full solemnness.

'Sauron? General Sauron Green from the Ghost Corps of the Green Family's Mecha Army?' Steeve paused for a moment when he realized who Nathan was implying before trying his best to recover himself.

He then nodded his head heavily. "I understand, Commander!"

Even though he was confused about why Nathan would mention someone from the Green Family, he knew better than anyone not to question the words of his superior.

A soldier's job was to follow the orders of their superior.

He then gave Nathan another salute before leaving the office and closing the door behind him.

Nathan waited for a while before pressing one of the buttons on his table, projecting a call.

Not long after, the line immediately connected, showing the face of a fierce-looking man.

This man had a standard army cut, clean yet also intimidating. He had a huge scar at the corner of his right eye, which extended between his temple and chin.

His left eye seemed to be blinded, but it was implanted with a mechanical eye that had noticeable features, particularly the visible mechanical components around and on the side of the eye.

This person was also wearing a military uniform that was similar to Nathan's but also showed noticeable differences and design.

The multiple pins on his left chest showed the number of achievements that this person had merited. There were also the medals on his right chest, which indicated the much bigger achievements.

The five-star badges on each of his shoulders indicated his high rank within the military.

"Medici," said Nathan, seemingly greeting the other party.

At least, that's what he was showing on the surface. But the cold tone in his voice seemed to be indicating something else.

"Hmph!" the other commanding general snorted, displaying his displeasure, but did not say that much.

These two were rivals in a lot of things, making them hate each other's guts. If not for their elders telling them to work together for this upcoming operation, they would never have agreed to this idea.

They might hate each other's guts, but they also silently acknowledge the strength and abilities of the other party.

After being silent for quite a while, Nathan finally opened his mouth and started the conversation. "Everything is already in motion on our side. You can now start making your move on yours."

Medici Green kept his silence for quite a while before finally opening his mouth. "I don't know how your father has convinced my uncle, but I must warn you that this may not work that well."

"You should know our close ties with the Sun-Moon Continent and their connection with the Silver Wing Continent. This will set huge waves on the current 'peace' that we are experiencing."

Nathan snorted when he heard the word 'peace' from the other party, especially when both of them were fully aware of what truly lay underneath the mask that the world was wearing.

After the brief pause, Nathan suddenly smirked. "The elders had their plans and thoughts, so there is no need to be concerned about it."

"All we have to do is follow their lead, and they will take care of the rest. The tallest men will always hold the sky first when it crumbles," he added with full solemnness.

Medici went silent for another time before nodding his head. "I understand. But you must warn your men not to engage in any conflict with our side when the time comes. Things will be difficult once it happens."

"You don't have to remind me of this. I have already made my preparations," snorted Nathan.

"See you on the battlefield," said Medici before ending the call, without even waiting for Nathan to say anything else.

Nathan shook his head when he heard that before closing the projected screen.

They had always been saying those words to each other whenever there were some conflicts between their sides. But the meaning this time was a bit different since they would be working on the same side on this operation.

Not long after, Nathan received a message from one of his men, informing him about another matter.

Skimming through the contents of the message, he went silent for another time before sighing helplessly. He closed the projected screen before turning his head outside the window.

He looked at the clear blue sky before mumbling to himself. "Is it that time already?"

"I guess all the preparations that you have done up until now will be bearing fruit sooner or later," he added, seemingly talking to someone else.

He recalled that time when Adam had told them about his plans before using his forbidden technique on all of them.

Using the highest level of the Dream Heart Sutra to erase all their memories, saving them from the curse of that place, further adding to the 'crimes' that he already had.

He then became the most notorious fugitive, constantly pursued by the World Government and other organizations, who sought to uncover the secrets he carried.

They first painted him as some sort of evil, before slowly erasing his name from the river of history in a short time.

The achievements that he had engraved in history might be short, but all of them far surpassed what everyone, including those legendary figures and old monsters that were already hiding in some places as a form of retirement.

Nathan sighed helplessly for another time before turning his head and casting his gaze on a certain corner of the office where a certain helmet was located.

A nostalgic feeling quickly overwhelmed him as he reminisced about those memories. With a sad and helpless sigh, he smiled bitterly before mumbling to himself. "You promise that we will naturally recover our memories once we have achieved sufficient strength to nullify its effects."

"Just how much strength do we need to have to carry before we can share that burden?"

Chapter 1867: Going All-Out

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Staring at a certain helmet silently lying in the corner of his office, he continued to reminisce about his younger days when he was still young, adventurous, and full of fervor.

He was only able to regain his composure after quite some time before shaking his head. He bitterly smiled before raising his advanced watch and clicking a few names to send a group message with them.

[That game seemed to have undergone the first most crucial update. It will not take that long before it reaches the promised time.]

He looked at the names for quite some time before sighing once again.

Looking at the sky outside his window for another time, he went silent with no one knowing what was in his mind.

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It was that time within the game once again.

People gathered for another time to watch the second match between the Empyrean Talons and God's Paradise at the Grand Finals of the United Cup.

The live stand was already fully packed before the match even officially started. They were already standing there excitedly for more than an hour or two, unable to hide their expectations for the upcoming match.

The live broadcast was already being flooded with hundreds of millions of online viewers all around the world. It was even increasing continuously without slowing down.

Some of the players even halted their current progression within the game, dropping all the quests, missions, explorations, raids, or any other businesses they had just to watch this match.

Most of them even gathered in some pubs, inns, or restaurants within the game to watch the broadcast together, having a better atmosphere.

Watching alone might be for others, but it still felt different to have others with the same mindset to watch such a peak battle within the virtual world.

Even some of the famous lone wolves gathered in these pubs just for the atmosphere.

This was a very important match since it would most likely determine the outcome of the United Cup. The time when the top elite teams among all elites would emerge at the peak of the virtual world.

In the previous season, it was God's Paradise that had claimed the championship against the overpowered lineup of the Titan Guild.

Everyone wanted to see if God's Paradise would be able to turn the situation around in this match. With such a huge disadvantage, a lot of people were hoping that they would turn this around so that the plot of this tournament would become even more interesting.

The 9 to 1 score was quite difficult to turn, but there should still be some hope, especially that they had the home advantage this time around.

It would be even more interesting if they managed to earn themselves the same 9 to 1 score, putting everything at an even state.

With such a tie, then there would be a forced tie breaker, which would require another match that would be a bonus for every fan.

Moreover, this bonus round would have no home advantage for either team since the map would be chosen randomly by the system. The same for the rules and the battle formats.

Either situation was good, but it would be much harder to achieve than what was shown on the surface. After all, the Empyrean Talons would not be giving them that much chance for a comeback. They were not foolish enough to lose such a huge advantage.

That was not unless God's Paradise had a very powerful trump card that could fully turn the situation around.

...

During the final few hours before the match, the rules and format that God's Paradise had chosen had finally reached the Empyrean Talons.

It was as per the rules of the tournament, which also happened during the entire playoffs.

"As expected, they have chosen the modified format," said Cloe after receiving the notice.

The entire Empyrean Talons were currently gathered within their private virtual space, making their final preparations before the match.

"A two-versus-two for the first round and the second format for the Group Battle," she mumbled before adding. I understand why they have chosen that format for the first round. Given the available data that both sides have, they indeed have a high chance of winning either the first round or the second round."

"But aren't they a bit too confident about the second round. Our side has the slight advantage when it comes to individual strength," she added with a slight frown.

"They must likely be saving something for this situation," said Arthur, trying to sound a bit smart. "I wonder what card they have right now."

Leonard rolled his eyes before turning to Shin, asking whisperingly. "What do you think, Shin Bro? I feel that those guys are plotting something."

"That's obvious!" Shin chuckled before asking everyone. "Have you guys heard any news about the other members of their adventurer team?"

"Those guys with decent standing like their main combatants," he added to clarify which people he was talking about.

Diablo, who was responsible for gathering information, thought for a moment before saying. "The 'mad alchemist' and the 'twin star' have never been seen anywhere. They seem to have never logged in the game for quite some time now."

"They same for their main tank," he added after recalling all the information that he had gotten from his different information channels.

Leonard, who was quite close to Mister Jiang, also nodded. "The same for my side. It is what we have learned from other channels as well."

"Maybe they have some important matters in the real world or something?" guessed Owen.

"Well, there is not much of a difference if the twin stars or their main tank are present since we can just deal with them with our lineup," said Alucard before quickly adding. "It is the 'mad alchemist' who is a problem. That crazy guy is strange and weird, which also somehow becomes his main strength."

"I've heard about that guy as well," said Ithilien before quickly adding. "There are even rumors that their team commander, Martial God Ashura, is incapable of fully controlling him."

"He is always out of his mind. A truly insane person. A complete lunatic," nodded Arthur with a tone full of familiarity.

He then turned to Shin as he asked. "Do you think that those guys are finally back?"

"That is what I suspect. After all, those guys will not propose such formats for this match, particularly the Group Competition," nodded Shin, voicing out his thoughts.

"If they put Mad Alchemist as one of the combatants in the Group Battle, then I think even Alucard and Diablo will be having a hard time dealing with him," he added with full seriousness.

Alucard and Diablo frowned slightly when they heard those words, but they did not refute them because they were fully aware that they were not confident that they could take on that crazy guy in a one-on-one battle.

Shin then turned to everyone as he added. "And have you guys not noticed the format for the Team Competition? They have chosen a full seven-versus-seven format."

"Eh!?"

"Huh?"

"For real!?"

The group was taken aback when they heard those words. They swiftly opened a virtual screen before looking at the notice given by the system about the rules of the upcoming match.

"Eh!? It's real! They have chosen a full-on seven-man lineup for the Team Competition!" Arthur exaggerated it a bit, but it was clear that he had never read the rules and format of the match from the very beginning.

"I forgot the rules for the grand finals. It is more flexible and a bit special when it comes to round formats," said Cloe.

"In exchange for that, the map advantage for the Team Competition will return to us," added Arthur.

As someone who regularly participated in such events, he was quite familiar with the rules. But he was too lazy to do it all the time since he preferred enjoying the match and always being in the spotlight.

Unexpected developments like this were what he loved the most, as they added drama and spice to the match, making him feel more like a protagonist.

Adding that Shin and Cloe were on the team, he did not have to think about these complicated things since it would only tire him.

The corner of Shin's mouth twitched when he heard those words before giving his showoff brother a sharp glare.

"Now, we are in a tricky situation," started Shin as he looked at everyone. "It's just good that the third round, the Team Competition, still gives 5 points despite being a seven-versus-seven battle."

"What arrangement do you think is the most ideal for these formats?" asked Cloe.

Shin thought for a moment before turning to Archimedes and Daulla. "I think it is time for the two of you to finally showcase your abilities."

The two paused for a moment before nodding their heads heavily.

They had few appearances in this entire tournament, so they could not fully showcase their talents and abilities. This format just happened to be their chance to show everyone that they were not some freeloaders in the team.

Shin then turned to the rest and continued. "Chaotic Luck, Akailu, and Alucard will be representing us in the Group Battle."

"Chaos will be the vanguard while Akailu goes second," he paused for a moment before looking at Alucard, and continued. "You will be the anchor."

Alucard nodded along with a wide grin on his face. This was just like what he wanted.

Then Shin continued. "We will keep the members from the last match's competition along with Owen's addition."

Arthur then suddenly started smirking as he looked at the members, who were called first for the first two rounds. "You guys can take it easy. It is fine to lose the first two rounds since we can win the Team Competition anyway."

The team knew that he was only saying that to relieve the burden and pressure for Archimedes, Daulla, and Chaotic Luck, who were not used to the pressure of such a huge competition.

But the way he worded it was a bit too much, which earned him collective curses from the entire team.

Regardless, this eased up the atmosphere, achieving his initial goal.

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## Chapter 1868: First Round: 2-Versus-2

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It did not take long before everyone received the notification from the system, informing them about the format of the match.

Skimming through it, the people waiting for the match to start could not help but have different reactions. Some found it an interesting development, while others were quite confused by the decision regarding God's Paradise.

Given the information and the results from the previous match between the two sides, it was clear to everyone that the Empyrean Talons had a slight advantage over God's Paradise when it came to the individual prowess of their key combatants.

The core members of the Empyrean Talons were noticeably more skilled and experienced compared to those of God's Paradise. Others even directly countered most of their members.

However, the advantages of God's Paradise were also obvious to everyone. The overall quality of their members was much better than Empyrean Talons. After all, the latter had more rookie members while their side had members who were either Godlike Players or Maverick Gods.

Taking advantage of this situation, it was more ideal for God's Paradise to use it to their advantage, which was why the 2-vs-2 format for round one was quite understandable.

However, their choice for the second round, the Group Battle, was a bit confusing.

This made people think that God's Paradise was quite scared of the arrangements of Empyrean Talons for Group Battle. After all, the result of the previous match was still fresh to their minds.

What Alucard had done during that match was still quite shocking for many, particularly how he 'toyed' with Sheryl and her partner during that match.

The people could not help but think that they were afraid of Alucard slaughtering their members again in the Group Competition.

People think that the members of God's Paradise were not confident in dealing with Alucard in the Group Battle, which was why they had chosen the current format, since they could at least exhaust him, particularly his Health Bar and Mana Pool. After all, using potions in this format was forbidden.

At the same time, there was also the matter concerning the concentration of the players, so having consecutive battles would put quite a heavy toll on their minds, particularly at the peak of the competitive scene.

Even someone from the peak of the Godly Ranking Lists would find it quite staining when facing people of the same level or equally skilled.

Everyone could not help but feel a little curious about the lineups that the two teams would be sending on the field, particularly God's Paradise, since the formats of each round were their choice.

The top experts of the game were particularly curious about the arrangement that they prepared for the Group Battle, particularly when everyone was fully aware that this would most likely decide the outcome of this match.

...or the tides of the match at the very least.

Then there was also the format for the Team Competition, which was very intriguing in the eyes of everyone.

A seven-versus-seven format for the Team Competition was truly quite tricky to deal with. After all, the previous two rounds would already have exhausted most of the combatants of the Empyrean Talons, so throwing such a format for the final round would gain the members of God's Paradise some advantages.

Putting the earlier data into consideration, the Empyrean Talons would most likely pinch their forces, spreading their main forces a bit wide.

Given that the overall quality of God's Paradise was a bit better than Empyrean Talons, the current situation gave these top experts and analysts the impression that the latter was a bit in a disadvantage.

They were starting to understand the thoughts of God's Paradise when choosing these formats.

But it was also quite easy to counter. The Empyrean Talons could just drop the first two rounds and put their strongest member for the third round, gambling everything on the outcome of the Team Competition.

Since their side had such a huge advantage in terms of score, they could afford to take such a risk, especially so when the home advantage for the third round would shift toward their favor after God's Paradise had chosen such an all-out format.

...

Not long after, the system finally announced the start of the first round.

\*Ding\*

System: Grand Finals of United Cup, Second Match!

System: God's Paradise (Home) versus Empyrean Talons (Away)

'Spirit Shaman' Amor (Maverick God) and 'Dark Exorcist' Odium (Maverick God)

Versus

'Calamity Witch' Daulla (Titled Ranker) and 'Bird of Hermes' Archimedes (Titled Ranker)!

...

"They really appeared!" said Arthur with a slight frown after seeing the names of the representatives of God's Paradise.

"The famed Twin Stars of God's Paradise," said Cloe solemnly, fully understanding that this was not going to be an easy battle for Daulla and Archimedes.

"The strength of those two is no joke," mumbled Leonard while recalling the time he clashed with those two.

If it were just individual strength, then he could crush either of them quite easily. But together, even he would not dare to face the two.

If he could compare them to any famous duo within the game, then he would choose the couple from Dark Hero Adventurer Team, or more specifically, Slayers Adventurer Team of this era – the 'Flame Witch' Ember and 'Winter Demon' Ravier.

The understanding of these two was on top of the pyramid, rivaling even the level that the Monster Trio had reached to a certain extent.

"These two are indeed a bit difficult to deal with," seconded Diablo, recalling the time he was still the Head Commander of the Sweepers and assigned to hunt down the top experts of the game.

There were very few that gave him enough trouble during his operations during that time, such as Zero and others who were at his level. As for the others who were not in the top rankings, he rarely encountered anyone who could threaten him, especially when he was with his units.

He could clearly remember the targets who had survived his hands, which proved their strength.

These two, before them, were among those who managed to achieve such a feat.

Alucard did not say anything since he had never met these two. But if it was the Mad Alchemist, then it was a whole other story since he did exchange some blows against that person before.

Owen neither agreed nor disagreed since he felt that his coordination with Ithilien would not be lost that much against these two. At least, they could also match against the famous couple of the Slayers Adventurer Team. After all, their most recent spar against those two gained them positive results.

The rookies of the team, on the other hand, could not say anything since they were not as experienced as the others.

In the meantime, Shin focused on a slightly different matter. He smiled a little as he pointed. "Well, those two are at least a bit lucky when it comes to the map."

Pointing his chin forward, he added. "It seems like the so-called twin stars are not expecting to face Archimedes and Daulla for this match."

Hearing his words, the rest of the team could not help but turn their attention to the battlefield, realizing that the opposing side had chosen a very interesting map for this round.

"Whistle~! I guess our surprise still has some effect," commented Cloe after seeing the map.

The map was not that special or anything else. It could be counted as a standard map within the Divine Colosseum.

Floating Island.

As the name suggested, it was a map set on an island floating in the sky. In a sense, it was similar to the Sky Island that was situated in the Primal Kingdom, where Archimedes and Daulla had met Shin and the others.

However, it was a way smaller compared to the Sky Island. It could also be counted as a smaller version of it.

This floating island had three major sections such as the forest, the ruined temple, and an open field.

Putting all these into consideration, it could be considered as a home advantage for Archimedes, who stayed in the Sky Island for quite a while when he was accepting the remaining inheritance of Garuda.

As for Daulla, she would also not have a hard time adjusting to such an environment since she was always with Archimedes most of the time.

With this map, the rest of the Empyrean Talons felt that they somehow gained a bit of advantage over the opposing side.

But since this was the chosen map of the said Twin Star, they also could not ignore the fact that those two would most likely be plotting something.

"Let's just hope that the 'Father-Daughter Duo,'" chuckled Arthur.

Cloe and Leonard also nodded their heads, feeling that this was going to be an important match for Archimedes and Daulla. The experience they would gain from this match would likely contribute significantly to their growth.

After all, the pressure that such a stage gave to everyone could also be an oil that could help the fire within them to grow stronger.

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Chapter 1869: First Round: 2-versus-2 (Part 2)

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Swoosh! Swoosh!

Right upon being summoned by the system to the battlefield, Archimedes and Daulla immediately swept their gazes on their surroundings.

"Floating Island?" mumbled Archimedes after realizing which map their opponents had chosen.

As someone with a Winged Race, he was very familiar with this map, especially so when this map shared a lot of resemblance to the Sky Island in the Primal Kingdom.

Since he was Garuda's Descendant, he could be considered the ruler of the Sky Island, having all the Tribes of the Winged Race under his command.

But since he was still weak in the eyes of those Tribe Chieftains and Elders, his title had to stay honorary instead of an official one. He was more like a symbolic leader of the race than its true ruler.

In a sense, he could also be considered the young lord of the race, who was still in the process of growing. He had to wait until he was fully grown before he could take on the role as the true leader of that race.

Due to his race and the inheritance left behind in the Sky Island, Archimedes was quite familiar with the region, particularly the maps that shared quite a lot of resemblance.

Floating Island was among the maps that he trained with during their training sessions, so he was very familiar with it, particularly the few unique features that it had, such as the patterns of the blowing wind right above it.

As for Daulla, she was naturally in the same situation since she was always together with Archimedes most of the time.

This map could be considered as their home ground.

"I don't think it is going to be that simple," said Daulla, feeling a bit worried about the schemes that their opponents possibly had.

After all, this was their first time being on such a big stage, especially so against such powerful opponents.

Even if they were considered as top Titled Rankers, they were still quite inexperienced compared to most of the players in the competition, much less compared to their current opponents.

Twin Stars, they repeatedly heard this title from the veteran members of the Empyrean Talons, which greatly emphasized how strong these guys were.

They understood that Shin had put a lot of trust in them to face these two while also not giving them that much pressure since it was just the first round of the match.

It did not matter much if they lost this match since they were too far ahead in the score. But if they managed to somehow find a way to win the battle, then the impact that they could give to their opponent would be great.

After scanning everyone with his sharp eyes, Archimedes turned to Daulla while pointing at the sky. "I'll take sky. You have to be careful."

Right after that, he unfolded the pair of snow-white wings behind him.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

He then kicked the ground and launched himself in the air before flapping his wings strongly, propelling himself higher and disappearing into the clouds.

Whoosh!

Daulla did not think that much about his actions, as she was very familiar with him and used to his antics.

After a few more moments of sweeping her eyes in the surroundings, she cast a series of speed-boosting buffs on herself before diving into the depths of the forest.

She was also quite familiar with this map, so she knew where to go to gain the advantageous position. She was heading to the place where she could best observe the entire map.

There was a high chance that she would bump into the Twin Stars later when heading to that place, but she was not that worried since Archimedes could see the entire map from the sky.

Crackle! Crackle!

Swoosh!

She disappeared into the woods while leaving electric trails behind.

...

On the other side of the map, the Twin Stars of God's Paradise appeared on the ruined temple.

"Tsk! Tsk! Our luck is a bit too bad recently, don't you think?" said Amor while glaring at her twin brother.

Odium rolled his eyes as he refuted. "It is not my fault! That 'thing' that we have retrieved during the exploration will not affect our luck in the virtual world."

"The curse shouldn't be able to do that-... probably," he added with a quiet voice, not having that much confidence.

"Tsk! We have to immediately participate in this without even being able to rest, much less do some preparations," complained Amor with a deep frown. "I don't like this."

Odium shrugged his shoulders. "There is nothing we can do. Who would think that the team would be this behind against those guys?"

"Since it has come to this, then why not go with the all-out battle instead of this format?" snarled Amor, unable to help herself from feeling a bit annoyed since she was too exhausted after their mission in the real world.

"If not for uncle disturbing me right after returning, then I would have been having by beauty rest right now," she added with solemn expression.

She did not care about this tournament that much since there was nothing else for their Adventurer Team to prove. Moreover, the prize that they could get from winning the championship was not that appealing to them.

However, she must admit that she was quite curious about their opponents, who managed to push their team into a corner.

Odium pursed his lips a little before saying. "I don't know what happened during our absence, but it seems like something big has taken place when we are on an expedition."

"I heard that a lot of organizations in the real world are pouring huge forces and paying a lot of attention to the game currently. Even our school and the royal family are putting a lot of importance on the game right now."

"It is as if they are preparing something big," he added, filled with curiosity.

"Is it because of the major update that is about to launch right after the United Cup?" asked Amor.

Odium shook his head as he continued. "It is not like they are not expecting it. I think it is just one of the reasons that accelerates the current interest that they are giving the game."

"I am not sure about it either, but it seems like the eldest uncle seems to be rather anxious during the time he urges me to log in the game right after returning," he added with a deep frown.

"I feel like something big is happening," he mumbled, feeling the storm that was slightly brewing.

Amor rolled her eyes when she heard that. "Isn't it obvious? With Void Manifestation Experts, Ruler Realm Mentalists, and Swordmasters entering the game next patch, a lot of things would change."

Odium shook his head. "It is not only that. I heard that the Central Institute and the Royal Family are drafting quite a lot of people. I am not sure about the exact details, but it seems to be a very serious matter. Even Third Uncle is called back from his post."

Amor frowned even deeper before nodding her head solemnly. She did not say anything again since they had finally walked out of the ruins.

Given their nonchalant attitude, they seemed not to be taking this match that seriously. They were not in a rush to do anything and were calmly chatting with one another.

They were more concerned about the matters in the real world rather than the fight that they were currently in.

Sweeping their gaze at the surroundings, they stopped right before the entrance of the ruins before casting their gaze at the small mountain at the center of the forest before them.

"From the information that we have... one of our opponents is from that Winged Race, right?" said Amor before turning her gaze to the sky.

"This is going to be a bit tricky," she added while pouting a little.

Odium nodded in agreement while continuing to look at the mountain. "Let's focus on his partner instead. That Lightning Mage is much easier to deal with at the very least."

"She will most likely be heading to that vantage point right now," he added.

"I have ordered the little kids to spread out," said Amor.

She refused to cast her gaze away from the sky as her eyes glowed with a pale light. "Found you~!"

"You can start now. Leave the Birdman in the sky to me. I've already marked him," she added while her pupils seemed to disappear, making her eyes filled with nothing but white light.

Odium then summoned a black scythe and nodded. "Then, I'll be going ahead."

With that, he started sprinting into the depths of the forest. His target was that small mountain at the center, or more specifically, the lightning mage, who was running with the best of her abilities to reach the peak.

Dark spirits then fly around him, seemingly cheering for him.

Swoosh!

Not long after, his figure suddenly disappeared into the woods.

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Chapter 1870: The Twin Stars Versus the Star Duo (Part 1)

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Whoosh!

Crackle! Crackle!

Daula reached the peak of the mountain not long after. She swiftly swept her gaze around the surroundings before proceeding to look through the entire map.

She was trying to find any signs of their opponents from this vantage point. She even activated her special version of ocular skill while sweeping her eyes on the map, looking for the traces that could point her toward their opponents.

Whoosh!

Not long after, her eyes finally picked up some signs, particularly after seeing the trances of spirits that were flying through the map.

But what shocked her was the number of spirits that were spreading in every direction and flooding the entire map.

These spirits were either passing through the trees or flying in the air, seemingly filling the map with their spiritual energies and somewhat changing the atmosphere.

From her perspective, Daulla could see that the air within the map was being corrupted by these spirits, which varied in different types. There were Wandering Ghosts, Vengeful Spirits, Dark Specters, Evil Apparitions, and many more.

These spiritual beings were spreading in every direction, spreading their respective corruption everywhere. They also started to affect the entire map with this, slowly transforming the entire place into a ghostly place.

They were slowly transforming the map through their influence.

Seeing that, Daulla suddenly had a bad premonition. She felt that they had to finish this battle as soon as possible before the entire Floating Island truly transformed into a Floating Ghost Island.

Before she could even inform Archimedes of her findings, her perception suddenly picked up a signal of a rapidly approaching presence.

Swoosh!

Turning her gaze toward the source of that presence, she saw a dark cloud made by dark spirits spiraling around one another.

At the center of this spiraling ghost cloud, she saw an individual riding a huge scythe and flying straight to her.

Shriek! Shriek!

She was about to cast a spell when her ears were suddenly assaulted by eerie and loud cries of evil spirits, breaking her concentration.

“Urgh!”

Realizing what was happening, Daulla swiftly raised her staff, casting Blink a couple of times to further distance herself away from the incoming opponent.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

She was able to create enough distance, escaping the most effective range of the ghost cries. She quickly regained herself and waved her staff while chanting a series of magic words.

Crackle! Crackle!

Immediately after, lightning arcs suddenly appeared and danced around her. They formed an electric ring that surrounded her before spreading outwards.

‘Electromancer Spell: Lighting Circle’

Swoosh!

Crackle! Crackle!

Lightning was one of the banes of ghost-type and evil-type creatures, which was why any form of attack made by such an element was highly effective.

Due to the lightning circle, the deadly ghost and evil spirits that were rushing toward Daulla were unable to reach her, with some of them even getting annihilated in the process.

Shriek! Shriek!

These ghosts and spirits turned into dust right after the lightning circle touched them, purifying them.

But despite that being the chase, more evil spirits and ghosts swarmed at the lightning mage from every direction. They seemed to be planning to flood Daulla, overwhelming her with their sheer number.

Wail! Wail!

The eerie cries also assaulted Daulla, attempting to break her concentration and preventing her from casting any advanced spells.

However, Daulla was not caught off guard this time. She immediately cast a mind-cleansing and boosting spell that enhanced her mentality.

Hu~!

Inhaling deeply, she swiftly waved her staff and free hand while also chanting a series of magical syllables.

She was doing triple casting, summoning three magic circles behind her that represented each of the spells that she was casting.

She did not stop there and fused the three magic circles, forming a whole different spell.

Crackle! Crackle!

Lightning danced in the clouds along with the loud clap of thunder.

Boom!

Not long after, a flash of lightning suddenly fell from the high heavens and struck the spot where Daulla stood along the wide area around her.

‘Electro Magister (Tier 2): Judgement Strike’

Boom!

A blinding light suddenly illuminated the entire mountain peak as the lightning struck.

At the same time, the surrounding evil spirits and ghosts that were swarming toward Daulla from every direction immediately dissipated, getting purified by the lightning.

The lightning continued to strike the mountain peak for a whole minute, preventing any evil spirits and ghosts from approaching it.

When everything settled down and the mountain peak returned to its original state, everyone could see that Daulla maintained her stance while an array of magic circles appeared behind him, forming a very advanced magic formation.

Pointing her staff forward, she suddenly chanted. “Judgement!”

Boom!

Immediately after she chanted out that word, the advanced magic formation behind her was suddenly activated, shining brightly before firing out a beam of lightning.

‘Electro Magister (Tier 2): Forbidden Spell – Calamity Strike’

Whoosh!

The lightning beam flew straight to the dark cloud that was still flying at her at a steady speed.

Odium, who was riding his scythe within the dark cloud, suddenly leaped forward. He extended his hand midair, grabbing the scythe that chased after him, before suddenly swinging it with all his might.

Swoosh!

But instead of sending a powerful strike to meet the incoming lightning beam, his scythe slashed through the space and created a huge dimensional fracture in it.

Shriek! Shriek!

This dimensional fracture seemed to be connected to another dimension where evil spirits and ghosts resided.

‘Forbidden Exorcist Skill (Tier 2): Evil Summoning – Gates of Hell’

Wail! Wail!

Eerie cries suddenly came out from the other side of the dimensional fracture and immediately reverberated throughout the mountain.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

At the same time, evil spirits suddenly started flooding out from the dimensional fracture and strongly clashed against the incoming lightning beam.

Boom!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The initial collisions produced a massive explosion followed by smaller ones that repeatedly reverberated in the mountain peak.

The huge number of evil spirits and ghosts that were flooding out of the dimensional fracture fearlessly dived into the incoming lightning beam, exhausting its powers.

When the dimensional fracture was finally closed by the space and sealed off the gates that connected to another dimension, the lightning beam had finally dissipated.

Whoosh!

Immediately after, Odium suddenly jumped out of the dark cluster that had unknowingly appeared behind Daulla.

Shing!

He tightly grabbed his huge scythe before suddenly swinging it forward, cutting through the air and sending a barrage of shadow energy toward the lightning mage.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Daulla immediately sensed the incoming attack, so she quickly augmented her body with lightning energy before casting a movement spell.

Whoosh!

Crackle! Crackle!

She suddenly transformed into a series of lightning arcs that flew throughout the mountain peak, dodging the shadow cuts that were chasing after her.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

When her lightning buff was finally exhausted, evil spirits suddenly pounced at her, grabbing onto her legs and arms. They clung to her body, preventing her from doing anything.

But despite her dangerous predicament, Daulla kept her calm and focused her mind. Her eyes then suddenly emitted a blinding light, with electric traces visible within them.

Boom!

Not long after, an intense light suddenly erupted from her body, along with the intense lightning storm that annihilated the evil spirits clinging to her.

But right after she freed herself, she was immediately attacked by Odium, who was already right in front of her and strongly swinging his huge scythe at her.

Shing!

Daulla felt like the time had suddenly slowed down as she helplessly watched the briskly approaching and rapidly magnifying scythe before her eyes.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

But before that deadly strike could even reach its target, Odium suddenly sensed an incoming hail of arrows swiftly flying toward him. They were targeting his head, arms, and legs with extreme precision, forcing him to abandon his initial plan.

He immediately stopped and swiftly retreated, dodging away from the hail of arrows.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The arrows hit the ground before Daulla, saving her at the most crucial moment.

She then swiftly responded and distanced herself from the Odium as much as possible, afraid that she would fall into another trap.

In the meantime, Archimedes, who had fired those arrows from the sky, immediately nocked another batch of arrows in his bow. He was planning to press their advantage to put more pressure on Odium.

“Hi~! There~!”

But before he could even proceed with his plans, his eyes suddenly contracted when he heard a soft voice coming behind.

He quickly responded, flapping his wings hard and distancing himself away from that spot, before swiftly turning around and immediately firing his arrows toward the source of the earlier voice.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

But the arrows were suddenly blocked by a huge palm of a giant spirit, protecting its master.

“That’s quite rude, don’t you think?” said Amor as she was revealed behind the giant spirit.

She was currently sitting on the shoulder of the giant spirit quite leisurely and swinging her legs playfully.

She gave Archimedes a seductive and playful smile before saying. "Let me play with you for a moment. I've brought quite a few toys with me just for this match~!"