

Destiny 941

Chapter 941 The Jade Kirin Scripture (Part 2)

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Caelum kept his calm while fighting Shin and the others. He remained unfazed despite being pursued closely by Shin as well as being bombarded by a series of powerful and accurate attacks from Ara and Alucard.

Even if Shin possessed a very fast movement speed alongside his quick draw attacks, Caelum kept the distance between them, no longer letting any attack to touched his body.

His main aspect was also his speed, so he would not lose to Shin in that area, especially when he had an overwhelming advantage in stats.

But as the battle progressed, Shin was slowly getting stronger. His seemed to be unpolished style was steadily being honed during the battle.

Caelum could even see that particular style reaching the perfect state by the end of this fight. "What a monster!"

His instincts wanted him to end this battle before everything was too late. But at the same time, his curiosity was also getting the best of him. He wanted to see how strong Shin could be after fighting him.

Moreover, there was also the prophecy that they received a long time ago, so the real reason why they were fighting Shin and the others was not to defeat them but to test them if they were worthy of carrying the burden of the world.

Taking a deep breath, Caelum wanted to pick up the pace to see how Shin was going to respond.

He flipped a couple of times backward, dodging yet another attack from Ara and Alucard, before taking an attacking posture.

With a powerful stomp, Caelum planted his feet firmly on the ground. He then pulled the bowstring back and stopped when his hand reached his cheek before an arrow made of mana appeared on it.

The bow arched beautifully as he pointed at Shin in the distance.

He was about to let go of the string and released the arrow when he heard a subdued clicking sound reverberating from Shin.

Click!

At first, there was nothing wrong with it. But all of a sudden, Caelum saw a stunning scene in front of him.

There was a flash of diagonal light coming from Shin followed by the sound of a glass being split into two.

That was also when he saw the space in front of him being cut by something. Then everything in front of him moved in the opposite direction, following the diagonal cut in the air.

Boom!

It was then followed by a massive explosion alongside the shattering sound of glass.

Due to what happened, Caelum couldn't complete his skill. He was forced to move away from the center of the explosion.

A genuine shock could be seen on his face as he stared at the scene. The space was already recovering itself, but he still couldn't believe what he just witnessed. "How can someone who is not even a Divine Being possessed that kind of power?"

"Even Lord Draco was only able to achieve that height after reaching the peak of Enlightened Being!" he muttered while looking at Shin full of disbelief.

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In the meantime, Shin suddenly became enlightened when executed that strike.

In all honesty, it was just a fluke as he was currently in the trace state. He was not confident that he would be able to do it again at his current level.

At the very least, he finally understood what kind of method was the 'Jade Kirin Scripture'.

Just like the 'Four Symbol Scripture', the 'Jade Kirin Scripture' was composed of multiple methods within it. He was only able to catch a glimpse of its real potential after continuously using it in his current state.

What really intrigued him about this Mentalism Method was the set of sword techniques hidden within it.

There was nothing special with those techniques as they were only a set of basic sword movements based on sword-drawing arts.

More specifically, a forward strike, a horizontal slash, a vertical slash, and a diagonal cut. These were the sword movements that he had to execute after drawing his sword out from its sheath.

But since they were such a simple movement, infusing an energy technique while executing them became much smoother.

Shin also discovered that he could link those movements together, creating a more complex move. And on top of that, he was also able to fuse some of his foot techniques with this set of sword movements to produce another set of techniques.

In his current trance, Shin's head was overflowing with ideas that he could use in battle. It was also at this moment when he felt the vague feeling of 'familiarity' become clearer.

If he was only suspecting it earlier, then he was now sure about this feeling. His body was 'remembering' this set of sword techniques. It seemed like they were hidden deep within his mind and started to resurface again due to his current situation.

Then he suddenly remembered Uno, who was currently sealed alongside his Martial Arts.

From what he could remember, Uno was his alter ego. He still couldn't remember how it happened, but he was sure that the two of them were been together for a long time.

"It may still be a little unclear, but I can tell that this 'feeling' that I am currently experiencing is somewhat related to him or the memories that I can't remember," muttered Shin to himself.

"I really have to talk to him seriously when he wakes up. There are a lot of things that I want to ask," he added with a solemn tone.

His trance was suddenly broken due to these thoughts. But he was not worried as he already knew what he needed to do.

There was already a picture inside his head, showing him how to use those sword techniques properly.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

That was when he saw a valley of arrows heading in his direction while carrying a very strong destructive force.

"Now, let's try what I've learned," he muttered before dashing ahead.

Swoosh!

While he was running forward. A green hue suddenly covered his feet, increasing his speed by twofold. And by each step he took, his speed continuously grew faster, turning himself into a blurry image.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: (Technique Application) Mystic Movements'

With the help of the Energy Circulation Technique of the Jade Kirin Scripture, this Epic Combat Technique that Shin had created a long time ago reached a new height.

Despite the valley of arrows covering everything on his path, none of them managed to touch Shin; not even a scratch.

Bang!

When Shin finally escaped from the barrage of arrows pouring down at him, he stomped his right foot, making it sink into the ground and creating a small crater on it.

And after revealing himself for a brief moment, he suddenly disappeared followed by a loud sound that reverberated throughout the whole place.

Boom!

A cloud of dust appeared on his previous spot before being cleared by a powerful gust of wind accompanying the explosion.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: (Technique Application) Mystic Movements – Discharge'

At that moment, Shin was already upon his opponent and was currently in the middle of unsheathing his sword.

Seeing that, Caelum couldn't help but narrow his eyes as he knew that he would not be able to dodge this attack.

In that instant, Caelum quickly gathered his energy and infused them on his bow, reinforcing its sturdiness. He was planning to use the stem of his bow to block the incoming strike.

Bang!

Swoosh!

But at that moment, a magic bullet and an arrow hit his thigh and shoulder respectively, making him lose his balance and strength in his arm.

Shing!

Then he heard the sound of the sword being pulled out from its sheath and was about to be swung at him.

"I will not let the same mistake happen!" muttered Caelum as he adjusted the position of his bow and prepared for the incoming attack.

He already experienced it earlier and knew what kind of attack was heading his way, so he would not let the same trick fool him twice.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: Quick Draw – Flash Strike'

Swoosh!

But contrary to what Caelum was expecting, the attack was not a horizontal slash but a forward stab instead. Due to that, the bow was unable to block the attack as Shin's sword slipped through its defense and struck Caelum.

Puchi!

(-5,234,422)

Fortunately, Caelum was able to twist his body at the last moment and avoided his heart from being struck by the incoming sword. Through, the blade of the [Yamato] still grazed through his chest, leaving a huge wound on it.

Gritting his teeth, Caelum quickly leaned his body away from the sword before spinning around. Then he threw his leg at Shin, making it look like a whip that struck with a powerful force.

It was supposedly a good counter since Shin just threw his attack and was currently not in the position to dodge or throw a counter of his own.

But with a quick reaction, Shin managed to raise the sheath of his sword and used the Jade Kirin Scripture Circulation Technique to cover it with a corresponding energy that was perfect for defense.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: (Technique Application) Sheath Wielding – Earth's Protection'

Bang!

Shin's body became heavy as the Earth Elemental Mana poured on his body, increasing his body mass and reinforcing his defensive capabilities. And due to that, he didn't even budge despite the powerful kick from his opponent.

After that, Shin quickly used the circulation method of Jade Kirin Scripture once again, changing the energy within his body for another time.

This time, he used the combination of Water, Wind, and Lighting Elemental Mana. He used one of his self-created skills, the Triple Slash, to execute the other set of sword movements within the Jade Kirin Scripture.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: Third Movement – Trinity Storm'

Crackle!

A series of crackling sounds could be heard as Shin drew a triangle in the air with his consecutive slashes.

Fortunately, Caelum was able to respond in time and distanced himself away from Shin after seeing that his kick didn't produce any kind of result.

He was about to fire a series of shots at Shin, planning to restrain the latter when he was retreating.

But before he could even execute his plan, he suddenly discovered that he was currently being surrounded by multiple 'Shin' in every direction.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: (Technique Application) Ghost Evanescence'

Then he saw all of those 'Shin' were currently in the middle of drawing their swords.

Click!

And before Caelum could even respond to them, the simultaneous clicking sound rang in from every direction, sending an intense chill on his back.

Shing!

Then a flash of light blinded him as the sound of the sword being unsheathed from its scabbard could be heard alongside it.

This was a sword technique with the combination of the Jade Kirin Scripture Energy Circulation Technique, the Movement Technique Ghost Evanescence, and the Class Fighting Style Skill – Moonlight Splitter'.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: Quick Draw – World Splitter'

Swoosh!

Boom!

Chapter 942 Cursed Beings (Part 1)

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Shing!

'Jade Kirin Scripture: Quick Draw: World Splitter'

Swoosh!

All of the 'Shin' surrounding Caelum turned into a streak of light before simultaneously charging at him from every direction.

Due to how realistic all of the afterimages that Shin had created, Caelum was unable to find the real body was coming from. And because of that, he couldn't do anything when the streaks of lights flew past him, creating a net of crisscrossing lines around him.

(-12,229,512)

Even though that skill looked so powerful due to the illusion that Shin created, its damage was still not as strong as the previous skill that he had used earlier since there was only one real attack from this attack.

Moreover, the previous skill Shin was a single-target skill, so its damage was naturally stronger than this skill which was an AOE skill.

But it also didn't mean that it was powerful. Its massive damage alone was proof of that.

Though, at the same time, Shin seemed to be a little unsatisfied with his current performance since he felt that he could still do better.

Hu~!

"Too bad, I am already getting exhausted," Shin still wanted to continue exploring what he could do with the sword movements that the 'Jade Kirin Scripture' had, but he was, unfortunately, feeling the metal fatigue already.

Being in trance earlier put a lot of burden on his mind which he immediately felt right after he got out of that state.

He took a deep breath to keep his focus and get ready for another round. He might be exhausted right now, but it didn't mean that his opponent would give him time to rest, so all he could do was continue fighting.

On top of that, Caelum still had a huge Health Bar that they needed to empty.

Fortunately, he was not alone – Ara and Alucard could also deal as much damage as they could while he was keeping Caelum busy. And it seemed to be working pretty well so far.

Given that and his current state, Shin had to slow down the pace of the battle for the time being. At least, until he was able to recover a little from his exhaustion. Or also until their reinforcements arrived.

The battle continued and Shin tried to stick on their opponent as close as possible, not letting Caelum pull any big moves at them.

But since he needed to put as much pressure as possible on their opponent, the fatigue that Shin was suffering was constantly getting worst. This cost him to commit a couple of blunders during the battle.

Arthur wanted to lend Shin a hand but his hands were currently tied to protecting Ara and Alucard from the powerful attacks that Caelum was sending them.

Fortunately, those two marksmen were fully aware of their roles and perfectly supported Shin whenever he was forced into a corner. They were not focusing on dealing with the damage and instead support Shin with their skills so that he could escape those predicaments.

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"Sh*t!" Shin couldn't help but curse out loud when he was about to use one of his skills.

It was because of the sudden headache that assaulted his head when he was about to execute the skill. The headache was so strong that it made him kneel on the ground while holding his head with one of his hands.

"Ugh!"

Naturally, Caelum would not let that opportunity slip away from him. He quickly nocked an arrow on his bow and pointed it at Shin, preparing for a powerful shot that could kill Shin in an instant.

He didn't even bother to get away from Shin to make sure that he would not be wasting a time and guarantee this attack to land.

Ara and Alucard would also be making their moves at that time. They quickly fired consecutive shots at Caelum to stop him from firing an arrow at Shin.

Unfortunately for them, Caelum was already expecting that to happen which was why he had set up a wind barrier around him that warded off the incoming arrows and magic bullets from the duo.

Arthur wanted to sprint to Shin and protect him at that time but he knew that it was already too for him to stop that attack since he was way too far to stop it in time.

But before all of the hopes were gone, Arthur felt a pair of powerful presences arrive at the scene. And when he recognized who they were, he couldn't help but release a sigh of relief.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

At the same time, Caelum also sensed the arrival of two new people in the field. He wanted to continue attacking Shin but he also knew that he would be trapped within the encirclement of his opponent if he insisted on staying.

Moreover, his slight hesitation already gave Shin enough time to set up a defensive barrier that would further buy him enough time until two newcomers came and aided him.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: (Technique Application) Eclipse Pulse'

Left with no other choice, Caelum was forced to cancel his skill and distance himself away from Shin. Now that there were two more additional opponents for him to deal with, he could no longer continue with his current style.

Whoosh!

Clank! Clang! Clank!

But while he was trying to distance himself away from Shin, he suddenly discovered that he was currently surrounded by black chains that shot up from the ground, circling around him and covering every possible escape route that could take.

Faker, who was the first to arrive, pulled the chains with a slight tug of his hands and made them wrap around Caelum's body.

But as a powerful NPC-turned-monster, Caelum calmly stared at the black chains rapidly closing at him before kicking the ground and sending him up in the air, narrowly escaping their encirclement.

He might have escaped from the clutches of those chains with these movements, but he also made himself vulnerable to that position. And naturally, Ara and Alucard would not miss that chance and started firing at him without holding back.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A valley of arrows and magic bullets immediately greeted Caelum right after he jumped in the air.

He was supposedly an easy target in that situation, but to the surprise of the group, Caelum skillfully dodged each bullet and arrow in the air by twisting and spinning his body air, only letting a couple of them slightly graze his body which only caused almost negligible damage.

But despite that being the case, the others didn't look disappointed. Those attacks might have failed to deal considerable damage but they already brought enough time for Zero to arrive near Caelum and threw a skill of his own.

'Divine Swordsmanship: Splitting the Heaven and Earth'

Zero didn't hold back at the first sword technique that he used as he went straight to one of the strongest moves that he currently had from his arsenal.

Swoosh!

Caelum could feel how strong that attack was and made him wear a solemn expression on his face. He could also tell that this particular skill was much stronger than the skill that Shin had used against him earlier.

Realizing that he couldn't let himself get hit by this attack, Caelum was forced to use one of his instantaneous movement skills.

Whoosh!

A gust of wind suddenly gathered under his feet, letting him walk in the air for a brief moment. And with its help, he was able to escape such a dangerous predicament with ease.

But right after the duration of that skill ended, when he was about to touch the ground once again, he discovered Shin lying in wait below him and getting ready to throw his skill.

Instead of maintaining the common sword-drawing stance, Shin straight while holding his sheathed sword vertically. He then raised his other arm over his head while his hand was firmly holding the hilt of the sword.

He patiently waited for Caelum to start falling towards the ground before swiftly unsheathing the sword and strongly swinging it vertically.

The tip of the sword drew a beautiful arc in the air. It left a glowing trail on its path which created an image of a crescent light in the air.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: Quick Draw: Flash Crescent'

Seeing that Shin had perfectly timed the attack, there was no way for Caelum to dodge it, especially when was already descending toward the ground.

Fortunately, he was not an ordinary opponent that could easily be caught by such an attack.

Before the tip of the sword could hit him, Caelum quickly adjusted his body in the air and turned upside-down. And quickly after that, he pointed his bow toward the ground and released a powerful shot immediately after.

He then used the strong recoil from that attack to send himself back high in the air and escape yet another predicament.

Roar!

But at the same time, the corner of his eyes caught a glimpse of a golden dragon flying in his direction with its mouth widely opened.

Arthur decided to join Shin and the others and left Ara and Alucard behind.

Now that they had four people pressing on Caelum and attacking from different directions, he would no longer have the time to pay attention to those two. Moreover, these four gods could also cover those two marksmen by preventing the Archer King from getting a clear view of them.

With a quick flip, Caelum re-adjusted his position in the air and faced the incoming dragon before drawing a beautiful arc with his bow.

The loaded arrow was suddenly set ablaze by a blue flame as he pointed it at the golden dragon. And when the accumulation of power reached its peak, Caelum released the arrow and sent it to greet the incoming attack.

Swoosh!

Boom!

A deafening explosion immediately followed after the collision of the two powers and sent a violent ripple in the air.

Caelum took advantage of that violent wind and ride it to increase his distance away from his current position.

But despite his efforts, he still found himself surrounded by four people from different directions right after his feet landed on the ground.

"Tsk! Looks like I can no longer test their strengths with my current powers," muttered Caelum to himself after sweeping his gaze over the four people surrounding him.

He then took a brief pause before adding with a helpless tone. "I guess I have no choice but to rely on the power of the curse cast on us."

Chapter 943 Cursed Beings (Part 2): Acknowledgements

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The curse cast on the armies that tried to subdue the dark forces of the Frozen Kingdom was called the 'Undying Curse of Corruption'.

It was a curse that would slowly corrupt the minds and the bodies of the people or any creature that was affected by it.

Their minds were slowly getting corroded by it until they lost their sanity while also contaminating their bodies with its corrupted powers, slowly turning them into Corrupted Beings.

If not for the guardian dragon that was accompanying them, then Caelum and Nel would have already become mindless beasts just like the others. But despite that being the case, they still couldn't stop corruption in their bodies which still led them to become Corrupted Beings.

Draco and Lycan were somewhat of an exemption since they belonged to the group who were almost reaching the heights of a Divine Being.

Draco, who possessed the blessing of an ancient dragon, was supposed to survive the curse but he chose to sacrifice himself to protect the souls of all of his soldiers, subordinates, and trusted aides, from the corrosion of the corrupted curse and made them suffer worse than death.

He was supposed to use that blessing alongside his guardian dragon and protect everyone for as long as he could up until the Divine Pope sent some reinforcements to rescue them.

Unfortunately, they waited for a very long time to the point that they already lost track of how long exactly they had been waiting

Due to that, Draco and the guardian dragon became too exhausted to the point where they could no longer protect everyone.

As more time passed, Draco started to become affected by the corruption. Lost all hope, they were forced to use their remaining powers to protect the sanity of Draco as well as Caelum and Nel.

On the other hand, as an Enlightened Beast, Lycan possessed the natural powers to reject the corrupted powers of the curse. Especially when he drank the water from the fountain of life as well as gained insight from the tree of wisdom.

Even if he didn't have the powers to protect his lord and his colleagues from the curse, managed to retain his sanity on his own and was able to nullify the corrosion of the curse

Moreover, he also possessed a very strong vitality that help him survive the tribulations that tested him during his stay in this region.

They patiently waited for the salvation sent by their homeland, but due to the seal built by the messenger of the Winter Goddess, no one was able to reach them.

Lycan's mind became weak due to guilt, the guilt of being the sole survivor of their army.

In the meantime, the bodies of Caelum, Nel, and Draco became even more corrupted that they could no longer be considered living being.

For a long time, they lost their purpose of living. Especially when they couldn't even kill themselves due to the curse preventing them from taking their own lives.

At some point, they even doubt their own existence and even questioned their faith. This almost cost them at falling deeper into darkness and accepted the power of corruption.

If not because of the blessing of the ancient dragon protecting them, then they already fell into the temptation of corruption and were unable to return and maintain their final straw of sanity.

After a long wait without any sign of the Divine Empire, Grand Marshal Draco and his two most trusted aides finally gave up on the hope of getting out of this place. Especially with the current states of their body.

All they could do was wait for the promised people who would break the tower wall of ice sealing this place and free all of the poor souls trapped there.

Until then, they have to continue waiting patiently and clung to that sliver of hope.

But they didn't waste their time in this place by staying still. They still experiment on themselves to see if they could find a cure for their current states.

They might have been cursed and almost resigned to their fates but that didn't mean that they couldn't do anything.

Since they have all of the time in the world, then why not spent all of it productively? And that was until they discovered that they could control the corruption within their bodies. They could transform that power into something that they could use during the battle.

Moreover, this particular power of corruption could fuse with their original powers, so it could make them much stronger than they were before. With that power, they could overpower anyone who was below their Tier.

Or, at least, that was supposed to be.

But to Caelum's surprise, the group of youngsters fighting him were not only able to fight him as if that powers were nothing, but they were also able to force him into the corner repeatedly.

The class suppression was one thing, with the classes that Shin, Faker, and Zero had together with their insane speed, Caelum couldn't gain any advantage over them when it came to that area.

He might be fast, much faster than those three, but the trio alongside their solid teamwork was able to fight him without concerning themselves with his speed.

Then, there was also Arthur who could keep up with him and the others despite one being the 'slowest' person in the battle.

Arthur didn't blindly follow after Caelum who was moving at extreme speed just like the other three. Instead, he focused on reading the movements of the others and predicted their paths through his sharp eyes.

Whenever Caelum would find a window to escape the pursuit of those three, Arthur was always going to appear at that moment and prevent the Archer King from escaping, also buying enough time for the others to catch up.

With Arthur's support, the tide of the battle never left the side of their group.

There were also Ara and Alucard who could freely fire their skills at Caelum without worrying about their safety.

With the pressure of the four Godlike Players, Caelum couldn't find the time to think about those two. Dealing with these peak-class players was already troublesome enough that he couldn't bother himself about the two of them.

During this battle, Caelum has to admit that this group of youngsters surpassed his expectation. They were much stronger than they expected them to be.

Wearing the black armor that was continuously emitting the power of corruption and wielding a power contaminated with such power, Caelum looked at these young heroes with eyes that were full of hope.

"Maybe, they can really carry the burden of this world," he muttered to himself as he thought about the prophecy once again.

It said that the world would suffer a calamity much worse compared to the ones that it had experienced throughout its history.

This calamity would not only bring true terror and chaos onto the world, but it would also threaten the Heavenly Principle itself.

It was a calamity that was more chaotic than the Racial Wars from the Warring Era and even more terrifying than the invasion of the Demons from the Repelling Era.

If it was true, then all of the races residing within the Atlas World needed to join forces once again to fight for survival. They needed to work together and fight against this terrifying calamity that was about to come.

Some of the legendary heroes were still present and currently in seclusion. With their help, the residents of this world could feel a little at ease with their protection.

But if prophecy still stated that the world was in danger despite the presence of those legendary heroes, then it could only mean that this particular calamity was not something, that even with the help of those powerful beings, could stop.

This was why they need to find a new ray of hope. And it was supposed to be from the people who did not come from this world.

Being trapped in this region, Caelum, Nel, and even Grand Marshal Draco and Lycan were not aware of the existence of the Otherworldly Individuals (Players). But given their vast experience alongside their knowledge of this world, they could at least tell that Shin and the others were not a resident of this world.

They were curious about it and wanted to know more about them, but after seeing them fight and witnessing their powers, these three great generals understood that they must be from the current era of the world.

Moreover, there was also the fact that most of these young heroes belonged to the Transcendent Race who were the core figures during the Repelling Era, so they could at least trust these people despite them not knowing who exactly they were.

Finally acknowledging the strengths of Shin and the others, Caelum knew that it was time for him to fulfill his real task. And it was to train these young heroes until they became strong enough to challenge the Vampire Primogenitor and break the curse cast upon them.

Caelum looked at Shin and the others with meaningful eyes before drawing more powers from his soul.

"Now, should I start my final dance before lying down on my coffin?"

Chapter 944 Cursed Beings (Part 3)

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Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Multiple figures were flying across the snowy top of a certain mountain as the weather was starting to get worst. The snow was starting to fall from the sky and started to fill the group with their whiteness.

The already cold temperature of the surrounding was dropping at a noticeable rate. It could even make anyone shiver intensely due to how cold it was.

But despite that being the case, the owner of the silhouettes flashing across the mountain peak didn't bother about the chances in their surroundings.

From a spectator's point of view, anyone could tell that one of the silhouettes was way ahead of the rest as it was being chased. It was moving at an extremely fast speed that was seemingly making it impossible to catch.

On the other hand, four of those silhouettes were chasing after the owner of that particular silhouette in a very organized manner. They might be slightly behind and a little slower but they persistently chased after the first silhouette, not willing to let go.

At the same time, there was also a pair of silhouettes who were moving away from the first group. They were also fast but based on their movements, it seemed like they were coordinating with the other four silhouettes and controlling their speeds to maintain the distance that they had.

From time to time, those two were using their magic gun and bow to fire a couple of powerful skills to hinder the movements of the first silhouette.

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Naturally, the identity of those people dashing in different parts of the snowy mountain peak was Shin and the others while the one that they were chasing after was Caelum who was completely different from the time when they first saw him.

Caelum was now properly showcasing why he was called the Archer King of the famed Dragon Knight Army.

Shin and the others were now having trouble catching up to him despite the four of them being in the state of Reality Manifestation. Not only they failed to corner him with their complicated formation, but they were also forced to break their formation from time to time.

But despite that being the case, none of them felt threatened. Even if the attacks coming from Caelum looked powerful, none of them were threatening enough that would risk their lives.

Shin was not sure if it was on purpose but that was what he was feeling in the current situation. In fact, Caelum seemed to be trying to train them rather than planning to kill them.

He honestly thought that it was just his imagination but he became sure about it the moment when Faker, Zero, and Arthur voiced out their thoughts.

Even Ara and Alucard who were in the distance could also feel it. They might not be fighting in the frontlines, unlike the others, but the constant shots that Caelum was sending in their direction were perfectly timed to interrupt their big moves despite being pressured by the four Godlike Players.

Not only that, but Caelum was also putting a lot of thought into his position. He was controlling his position perfectly and aligning his body directly in front of those four to block their line of sight.

He was using the body of Shin, Faker, Zero, and Arthur to hide from the eyes of Ara and Alucard.

Due to that, the two of them were forced to constantly adjust their position, trying to get a better angle when attacking. And because of this, these two marksmen felt that they were the ones who were being trained the most.

Timing, positioning, awareness, and accuracy – Caelum seemed to be telling them that these things were the real weapons of a marksman in a battle.

In this sense, they were the ones who got the most in this battle.

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After continuing the battle for a few more moments, Shin and the others became convinced that Caelum was trying to train them. He might not be opening his mouth and instructing them, but his actions were speaking loudly for himself.

Shin didn't know why he was doing it, but there must be a reason behind his actions. They might not know it, but they would not waste this opportunity presented in front of them.

Due to that, the group decided to focus on the battle and the things that they could learn from it instead of trying to kill Caelum and end the battle.

Seeing that Shin and the others understood his intention, Caelum couldn't help but smile in satisfaction before increasing the intensity of his attacks. He even started getting bolder with his moves as he used a series of much stronger skills and combinations in the process.

As Shin and the others were trying to their best learn from Caelum, a similar situation was currently happening on the other side where the rest of their team was fighting.

Nel was still carrying his strong and confident aura as he was fighting the others. And just like Caelum, he was currently using the power of the curse to further strengthen himself.

A black aura was being emitted by his full-body armor, making his appearance much scarier and intimidating than the first time they saw him. His iron mace also grew in size while a bunch of black spikes appeared on it.

There was also a significant boost in his strength and speed that made Owen, Lawless, and Leonard become more careful at their moves. They might have understood that Nel was trying to train them but it didn't mean that they would not die if they got hit by his attack.

Moreover, his attacks became much stronger and scarier compared to before. He looked like a ferocious beast that was currently on a rampage.

During this battle, Owen became more confident in himself. By withstanding those crazy attacks and dodging a few of them, he was able to learn quite a few things.

His footwork when defending became more refined while his usage of his shield improved drastically. It would not be an exaggeration if he said that he was the one who gained the most in this battle.

With the powerful Heals and Buffs that Cloe and Black Hand were giving him, his confidence in himself grew significantly. And when he learned that each strike that Nel was throwing at him carried a lot of martial insight, Owen did his best to receive them despite how powerful they were.

In the meantime, Lawless and Leonard who were also fighting alongside Owen in the frontline also grew quite significantly.

They might not have gained as much as Owen because they already had a particular path that they were currently walking on, but the things that they had learned could help them grow in the style that they had chosen. Especially when they saw how Nel utilized his strength in every strike.

For people like them who were also using their bodies and strength attribute as their main weapon, Nel was one of the opponents that they wished to face to learn more about their respective styles.

On a certain mountain peak, away from the two battlefields, Grand Marshal Draco was currently looking at the horizon.

With his current strength, he was able to clearly see what was ahead of him no matter how small they looked from the distance.

His figure looked like a sturdy mountain that would never collapse no matter how strong the storm was going to clash against it.

Crossing his hands on his back, he stared at the distance with his calm eyes. He remained expressionless as he watched the ongoing battle between his two most powerful subordinates and the young heroes who arrived in this place.

A few moments later, a spiraling shadow suddenly appeared beside him before turning into a humanoid figure.

Grand Marshal Draco didn't have to turn his head in that direction as he already knew who was that person.

"You look so calm despite knowing that your end is near," said Dracula, the Vampire Progenitor, as he also stared at two battlefields in the distance.

"For cursed beings like us who managed to retain our sanity, dying is the same as regaining our freedom," replied Grand Marshal Draco in a calm tone.

Dracula didn't reply and continued to stare at the ongoing battles. He only opened his mouth when he felt that he observed enough. "As expected of those people, the inheritors of their legacies are very talented."

He then paused for a moment before looking at Draco from the corner of his eyes before continuing. "You are also as strong as them. Are you sure that you are not going to pass down your legacy to these kids? From what I can see, there are quite a few of them who are worthy to be your successor."

Grand Marshal Draco remained silent for a moment before shaking his head. "These young heroes already have a path that they had chosen. Trying to persuade them on accepting my legacy would only do them more harm."

He then paused for a moment as he stared at the certain person before continuing. "But you are right. It will be a pity not to pass my legacy to anyone which is why I am going to ask them to hold onto it until they found a worthy individual to carry it."

"Hoh~! I see," Dracula nodded his head in understanding.

The silence between the two continued as they watched the battles. A few moments later, the grand marshal finally opened his mouth. "The contract is about to be fulfilled. I hope that that choice they are going to make is the right one."

Dracula didn't immediately answer as he stared in another direction before responding. "I am also hoping for the same result."

"Though, I also want them to move as fast as they could since I can feel the spawns of that Demon King are plotting something. He must have sensed my sudden change of heart."

He then paused for a few moments and turned his head toward the sky before continuing. "After being trapped in this place for a very long time, I realized how foolish of a choice I did back then."

"I was blinded by the rage and revenge, and chose to turn my back to the world and betray our roots," he added with a tone full of regret and longing.

"I am originally planning to let you take my life when I lose myself from breaking my contract with that Demon King, but who would have thought that you are going to be cursed by one of the gods that you used to serve back then."

"Fortunately, our hopes are still alive. The guardian dragon is still alive and unaffected by the curse cast upon you."

Taking yet another pause, he lowered his head and stared at Arthur who was fighting in the distant mountain peak before continuing. "What's more, a Dragon Knight suddenly appeared when we are about to lose all hope."

"It must be fate," said Grand Marshal Draco after a long silence.

Dracula silently nodded his head at those words before continuing to watch the ongoing battles. His eyes were full of hope and longing. He was waiting for this for a very long time – the time when he could finally break free from his curse and enter his eternal slumber.

Chapter 945 Final Exchange

...

Shing!

Bang!

Caelum blocked one of Shin's sword-drawing attacks and was forced to slide back due to the powerful force behind him. His feet drew a long trail on the ground as he was trying to stop himself from moving further away.

And when he was finally able to regain his footing, he stood up straight and looked at the people surrounding him from different directions.

Shin and the others stopped moving as they stared at Caelum with grateful eyes. Their time with him might be short and had a strange relationship, but they had learned quite a lot from the battle that looked like a training session.

Ara and Alucard were the ones who learned the most from him which made their marksmanship reach another level. They might still be far from standing on equal footing with these monsters alongside them, but they were sure that the gap shrunk albeit a little.

Caelum swept his eyes at the guys surrounding him before nodding his head. "I guess my job is done. There is no point in me staying here now."

He took a brief pause and stare at the sky. "We have waited for his moment for such a long time, so I think we at least deserve some rest now albeit it is going to be an eternal one."

"But didn't feel bad now that I think about it," he continued to mutter before lowering his head once again. "But before we drop the curtain, how about we end this with one final move?"

Shin and the others couldn't reply as they didn't know what to say. They just nodded their heads and started taking their respective stances.

"Thank you," said Caelum as a lonely smile flashed in his eyes.

After that, he put a lot of strength on his legs before jumping high up in the air. He continued to climb higher as he tapped his feet on the air repeatedly. And when he reached the highest point that he could reach, he suddenly stopped his body from falling by creating a pair of wings on his back with the help of the corrupted man that he had.

He then faced the ground before raising his bow and pulling its string. There was no physical arrow nocked on it but a transparent one suddenly appeared as he absorbed the mana from his surroundings.

The arrow made of mana was formed before its color started to change due to the power of corruption that spread on it. The black man slowly transformed the arrow and turned it into a black one blazing with a black flame.

That black flame grew in size until it made an illusion where the arrow became as large as a huge harpoon.

Below, Shin and the others could only see a black dot shrouded with a blazing flame due to how high Caelum was.

"Alright, let's end this battle so that we can finally proceed to the next stage of our quest," said Shin as he started preparing his final move.

Boom!

It was at that moment that they heard a powerful explosion sound coming from the sky followed by a streak of black light descending toward them at full speed.

"Let's go!" Shin shouted, signaling the others to finally make their moves.

Ara and Alucard were the ones who fired their attacks.

Ara nocked an arrow on her bow before infusing her mana into it. She also started chanting a series of elven prayers, summoning a series of runes around her.

The runes then aligned themselves, seemingly forming a phrase before fusing with the arrow. And after a second, the arrow covered my multiple runes alongside the blazing mana that it produced.

She then raised her bow and pointed at the sky before quickly releasing the loaded arrow.

Swoosh!

'Self-Created Skill (Fusion): Spiritual Revolution'

On the other hand, Alucard took out his sniper rifle and pointed it at the sky. Aiming at the descending attack, a cluster of mana suddenly appeared at the end of the barrel, pulling all of the surrounding mana from the surroundings as if it was a black hole.

When the accumulation of powers reached its peak, he quickly pulled the trigger of the sniper rifle, releasing the magic bullet from the chamber.

Bang!

And right after the bullet flew out from the muzzle, it pierced through the cluster of mana before it got wrapped by it.

Swoosh!

It then flew straight to the sky, leaving a bright trail behind.

'Class Fighting Style: God-Slaying Bullet'

...

It only took a couple of moments before the two attacks reached the descending arrow from the sky.

Bang! Bang!

But no matter how powerful those attacks looked like – they couldn't affect the descending arrow that much. Aside from briefly slowing it down, nothing else happened.

But that brief moment was more than enough for the other four to complete their preparations.

Zero summoned a powerful gust of wind that sent the four of them toward the sky. And while riding the wind, they quickly executed their respective skills.

And these skills were executed while they were in the state of Reality Manifestation, the power and momentum that they had were much stronger than ordinary skills.

Zero, who summoned the gust of wind that pushed them toward the sky, called out an even stronger wind coming from the surrounding.

The wind revolved around his body, forming a small tornado around him, as he flipped his wrists alongside the swords that he was holding.

A second later, the surrounding wind formed a pair of wings behind him, increasing his speed by a large margin.

He then transformed into a streak of light that flew higher in the air while swinging his swords that were glowing with a jade-colored light.

'Divine Swordsmanship: Soaring through the Great Heaven'

In time meantime, Faker shrouded his body with a black smoke filled with Death Aura. And with a flick of his wrist, the black chains wrapped around it were suddenly released before spiraling around him.

He then spun his body following the movements of the chains. And while he was doing that, he raised his hands above his head and pointed his daggers toward the sky.

A moment later, his Death Aura and black chains created an illusion of a black serpent that was opening its mouth and ready to devour anything.

'Valentine Family Secret Style: Ancient Serpent – Devouring'

A few distances away from him, Arthur was currently covered by a golden aura that resembled a flame. There were also a couple of crackling electricity swimming on its surface.

He put his shield behind him to hold his properly hold his spear with both of his hands. He first flipped the spear around him to create a strong momentum before thrusting it toward the air.

A moment later, the aura around him turned into a head of a golden dragon as the trail that he was leaving behind turn a serpentine body.

'True Nine Dragon Arts: Gold Dragon transcending the Nine Heavens'

The three powerful attacks collided against the black beam of light descending from the sky, creating a massive explosion.

BOOM!

Shin, who was slightly behind the three, waited for the explosion to subdue before making his move.

Then he took a deep breath as he gathered all of the energies within him toward his sheathed sword. He utilized the Energy Circulation Method recorded within the Jade Kirin Scripture to convert all of those energies into the most optimal energy that he needed in his current situation.

While preparing this move, Shin was thinking about speed. A fast attack that couldn't be blocked or dodged despite his opponent knowing it coming. And he could only think of a single element that could achieve such a feat – Light Energy.

When that thought crossed his mind, he subconsciously converted all of the energies that were infused with the sword into Light Energy, making it glow with a brilliant light.

Click!

When Shin's thumb slightly pushed the guard of the sword and make its blade slightly peek outside, a blinding light was suddenly released, illuminating the surroundings.

Looking from the ground below, Ara and Alucard couldn't help but narrow their eyes due to that light. If they didn't know that it was a skill from a player, then they would think that it was a sun peeking out behind the dark clouds in the sky.

When the explosion in the sky finally subdued, Shin used Mondi's Steps to continue climbing higher.

He was also utilizing the Mystic Movements once again to increase his speed with each step that he took in the air.

Bang!

And with the final step, he discharged all of the force that he had, making all of it explode as he sent himself higher in the air.

Shing!

At the same time, he unsheathed the sword in the process and thrust it forward, executing the first basic movements of quick draw style from the Jade Kirin Scripture and strengthening it with the momentum that he currently had.

Swoosh!

And due to his explosive speed, he drew a vertical line with a blinding light in the air, cutting through the still-subduing explosion and arriving right in front of Caelum within an instant.

'Jade Kirin Scripture: Quick Draw – Flash Final'

Puchi!

The sword pierced through Caelum's chest making him vomit his contaminated blood. But despite that being the case, a satisfied smile was currently present on his face while looking at Shin.

"What a beautiful strike," he muttered before his eyelids grew tired and slowly closed.

But before he totally closed his eyes, he forced himself to open his mouth once again. "Thank you for fulfilling our long-awaited wish. And sorry for leaving the world's future into your hands-... Oh-... G-Great H-Heroes of this E-Era."

With those words leaving his mouth, Caelum's body started to turn into specks of dust that scattered along the wind.

What was left behind was a black bow and a black bead that Shin swiftly took and quickly put in his inventory.

After that, he transformed the [Dawn's Mantle] into a pair of wings and spread them wind, making him stay in the air.

He didn't know why, but he couldn't help but recall the time when Alyssa was executed back in the Black Serpent Mafia Training camp during the final moments of Caelum.

The lonely yet relieved eyes that Caelum had were strangely similar to what Alyssa had during that time.

Shin raised his head and looked at the sky, trying to calm the turmoil that he had in his heart. And after closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, he suddenly muttered. "What is real and what is fake? I don't know anymore."

Chapter 946 Final Exchange (Part 2)

...

As Shin and the others wrapped their battle on their side, a similar thing was happening on the other battlefield. Leonard, Lawless, and the rest of the group were about to finish their battle.

Nel was currently kneeling on one knee while using his iron mace to support himself. He then stared at the three people standing a few meters in front of him before laughing out loud. "That was fun! You guys are worthy to be called warriors of the upcoming Era."

He then put more strength on his arms and forced himself to stand up before continuing. "That you still count me out. Not until I take my last breath."

"Sounds good to me!" responded Lawless as he understood what Nel meant with those words.

Leonard was the same as he immediately took his fighting stance once again. "A true warrior never stops. They only did when they die in battle."

"Then let's have one final dance," said Owen as he followed after the two.

The others from the blackline already finished their battle as well as cleared the remaining fallen knights. They were about to join the other three when they suddenly hear Lawless shout at them. "You can leave this to us. This is a battle that needs to end in a warrior's way."

Hearing those words, the others quickly stopped preparing the spells, especially the three mages who were about to finish their finish summoning most powerful spells.

In the meantime, the three on the frontline were already preparing for this final exchange. The same for Nel who was already summoning all of his remaining strength.

The Vanguard King squatted his hip and faced the three sideways. Raising his left hand, he opened his palm widely and pointed it at the three while resting his iron mace on his shoulder.

Boom!

With a loud explosion sound, a black aura suddenly exploded from his body before turning into a shadowy flame with a towering height that was as twice Nel's.

The flame-like aura dance alongside the wind before shrinking and compressing within Nel's body before forming a spherical object within his chest. And when it happened, another explosion could be heard as the pressure coming from him became even more suffocating.

Boom!

Then he looked at the three, turning his left hand and doing a taunting gesture at them. "Come!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Seeing that, the three quickly sprung into action. They simultaneously stomped on the ground and charged at Nel in a very aggressive manner.

Owen took the lead as he accelerated forward, overtaking the two who were running shoulder-to-shoulder with him.

During his charge, a blue aura suddenly covered his body before turning into an image of a bison aggressively running forward.

Owen raised his shield in front of him during the charge before further increasing his speed. And during that time, his body suddenly transformed into a light that dashed forward, heading over to Nel who was grinning from ear to ear.

'Class Fighting Style: Divine Charge'

The Vanguard King waited patiently for Owen to arrive before swinging his iron mace forward with a strength that seemed to be able to obliterate anything that was coming his way.

It was at that moment when Owen's shield met the iron mace as if it was greeting him for his arrival.

Boom!

Looking from the spectator's point of view, the others could see a huge bison being stopped by a giant with his iron mace.

The sturdy head of the bison clashed against the iron mace, refusing to be stopped by it. Unfortunately, the giant seemed to be having a similar thought and also refused to budge despite how strong the force that clashed against him was.

Boom!

With a powerful explosion, the aura covering Owen with the image of a Bison slowly crumbled right after the collision.

Owen continuously stepped backward, trying to regain his footing. The impact from that clash was so strong that almost made him stumble on the ground.

Swoosh!

Then the curtain of snow that was produced by the previous clash was suddenly split open as Nel charged through it and appeared right in front of Owen and was about to swing his iron mace down.

Seeing that, Owen quickly lowered his head and raised his shield over him before using his most powerful defensive skill.

'Class Fighting Skill: Divine Bulwark'

Blue mana suddenly shot up from the ground and moved in a spiral manner, forming a dome-shaped barrier around him that protected him from the incoming attack.

Boom!

A loud explosion immediately followed right after the iron mace descended. The ground shook violently as the shockwave produced by the collision sent the snow up in the air before a huge crater was formed with Owen and Nel situated at its center.

Owen might have successfully blocked that attack, but he lost all of his remaining strength right after that exchange. He collapsed on the ground and could no longer continue fighting.

But that would be fine since he already brought enough time for Lawless and Leonard to adjust their current state.

Lawless already used the bloodline power of his Special Race and Class to its maximum limit, making his appearance look like a ferocious tiger that was showing its might.

A scarlet aura was surrounding his body which had a black hue swimming on its surface from time to time. His eyes were shining with a brilliant light as he appeared right beside Nel, squatting down and about to throw a powerful punch.

Nel quickly recognized how dangerous Lawless right now, so he quickly forgot about Owen and redirected his next attack towards this ferocious tiger instead.

Boom!

The impact from this collision forced Nel and Lawless to be separated from each other, sliding back and leaving a long trail on the ground.

The grin that Nel had grown larger when he felt his right arm trembling violently due to that last exchange.

Licking his lips, he was about to charge at Lawless and continue the fight when he sensed something dangerous from behind. And when turned his head, he saw Leonard aggressively pouncing at him like a violent beast.

Currently, Leonard's body was currently covered by a flame-like aura. It was a crimson aura that resembled a lion's mane dancing alongside the wind. And just like Lawless, he was not wielding his battle axes as they also fused with arms and turned them into his most dangerous weapon.

Leonard quickly swung his fist forward right after he reached the target.

Due to how suddenly Leonard appeared behind him, Nel didn't have the time to counterattack. He could only raise his iron mace in front of him and used it to block the incoming fist.

Boom!

Nel was pushed by that powerful punch, forcing him to slide back once again. And right after he stopped himself from moving, he found himself in the middle of two hungry beasts, circling around him as if he was some sort of prey.

"You two are the best!" shouted Nel as slammed his iron mace on the ground.

Boom!

His actions caused the ground underneath them to tremble. Then a delayed shockwave immediately followed, further destroying the ground and making the debris fly up in the air.

Lawless and Leonard were forced to jump away from the epicenter, trying to distance themselves from it.

Whoosh!

That was when Leonard heard the sharp sound of an object splitting the air apart.

Without further ado, he quickly halted his steps and took a stance before focusing his crimson mana on his right fist. And when the accumulation of powers reached its peak, he suddenly swung his fist where the sound came from.

'Blood Sutra: Muerte Sangre'

His fist left an intervening trail of lights in the air resembling the blood flowing within the veins of a person.

Boom!

Then his fist collided against an iron mace that split the could of dust and snow in front of him.

Taking a deep breath, Leonard quickly pulled his fist back before putting it beside his waist alongside the other. Those fists glowed with crimson light as his mana formed a spherical energy covering them.

Then, in the very next instant, Leonard started throwing a series of consecutive punches in front of him.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

'Blood Sutra: Sanguine Tempestad'

Boom! Boom!

A series of explosions immediately followed as Leonard continued to throw a barrage of punches with unstoppable momentum.

With such a violent attack, Nel was forced to stay on his spot and swung his iron mace repeatedly, exchanging blows against Leonard.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The series of explosions continued to create shockwaves that further destroyed their surroundings. But regardless of what was happening around them, Leonard and Nel continued to throw their attacks, completely unbothered.

Roar!

And just like a tiger patiently waiting to jump on its prey, Lawless sneaked behind Nel and threw a powerful punch at the fully exposed back of their opponent.

'Berserk Heaven Killing Style: Fist of Wrath'

Swoosh!

Right before Lawless' fist hit its target, Nel suddenly spun his body while swinging his iron mace and sent the two flying in opposite directions.

Bang! Bang!

He didn't bother to look at the two as he quickly raised his iron mace in the air and pointed it toward the sky, gathering all of his remaining energy on it.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

While he was gathering his energy, Leonard and Lawless quickly picked themselves up and directly sent themselves back to where Nel was standing.

While charging ahead, the auras that were covering their body grew stronger as they circulated their respective energies to the fullest.

A few moments later, their respective auras turned into a pair of ferocious beasts, charging toward Nel in the distance. A savage and dreadful tiger for Lawless while a majestic yet fierce lion for Leonard.

Lawless pulled his right fist back gathering all of his mana into it. He was flexing his arm so hard that it made his muscles contract. And when he reached the ideal distance away from Nel, he threw that fist forward while releasing a dreadful howl.

Roar!

'Berserk Heaven Killing Style: Destruction of Heaven'

In the meantime, Leonard was doing something similar. He was taking large strides while dragging his fist which was filled with blood elemental mana. Each step that he took left a deep footprint on the ground as his fist left a beautiful trail in the air.

And when he was about to arrive beside Nel, he forcefully stopped his charge with a powerful stomp before transferring all of the force toward his fist and thrusting it forward.

Bang!

And with a roar similar to what Lawless had released, he shouted at the top of his lungs as he swung that fist with all his might.

Roar!

'Blood Sutra: El Puño Del Infierno'

Swoosh!

Boom!

Right before the two fists reached their target, Nel suddenly swung his iron mace toward the ground, creating a powerful explosion that extended in every direction.

Despite the continuous damage that they were receiving and the powerful shockwave that was trying to push them away, Lawless and Leonard refused to give in and continue to move forward.

"HAHHH!"

With a powerful shout, the two summoned all of their remaining strength and pushed their fists further ahead.

Boom!

And alongside a delayed explosion, a blinding light suddenly devoured the figures of the two together with Nel who was standing in the middle.

...

The others worried looked at the explosion as Cloe cast a sturdy barrier that protected them from it. Owen was now beside them as Seven saved him earlier when the Nel was busy exchanging blows with Leonard and Lawless.

They refused to remove their gaze from the thick cloud of dust created by the explosion waiting for it to settle.

Looking at the corner of their eyes, they knew that both Leonard and Lawless survived the explosion given that their HP Bars were still in there, albeit hanging with a sliver of health.

When the cloud of dust subdued, they could finally see three figures standing in the distance. They were still maintaining the postures that they had at the final exchange, seemingly unable to move.

The fists of Leonard and Lawless were still a few inches away from Nel's body but the damage of their final attacks could easily be seen.

Right now, Nel's black armor was fully destroyed while his body hidden underneath was full of wounds.

Their punches might not have connected but the forces behind them clearly reached Nel and flanked him from both sides.

Nel continued to stare at the ground and his iron mace in front of him as he couldn't raise his head. He lost all of his strength and was unable to move a single muscle within his body.

But despite that being the case, a satisfied smile was currently present on his lips as he knew that he could finally rest.

He then forced himself to open his mouth and spoke. "T-Thank-... y-you. Thank you for everything."

'For making me remember the thrill of such an exciting battle, for fulfilling our wish, for freeing our souls, for carrying our legacy, and for carrying the future.'

He had many things that he wanted to say but couldn't voice them out as he no longer had the strength to say them. He could only maintain his smile as he waited for his body to disappear.

Leonard and Lawless also refused to move as they watched Nel turn into specks of dust and scatter along with the gentle wind.

They had an unexplainable feeling inside their chest that they couldn't say. All they could do was stared at the scattered dust with meaningful eyes, ignoring the iron mace and black bead that was left behind.

The legendary Vanguard King was no longer bound by his curse and could finally rest.

Chapter 947 A Brief Rest (Part 1): Suspicions

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No moment when Shin and the others arrived where the rest of the group was located, the battle against Nel was already over.

Briefly looking at the completely devastated place, Shin could easily tell that the battle that took place was as intense as the one that they just experienced earlier, if not more.

Turning his gaze towards Leonard and Lawless, who was currently slumping on the ground, Shin couldn't help but smirk. "You guys looked like someone who went into hell. Have you been beaten up that badly?"

The two were too tired to look at Shin at the moment, so they could only open their mouths to respond.

"You don't have to remind us about that. I am already missing my bed."

"D*mn! What kind of game is this? It is too realistic to be called a game. It is a second world already."

Finding a spot to sit near them, Arthur suddenly asked. "What do you guys get? Is it something interesting?"

Leonard powerlessly turned his head to the side and looked at Arthur. And when he saw the latter's current state, he couldn't help but sneer. "Hah! Shin Bro is talking as if you guys beat your opponent like a walk in the park, but it looks like you guys are not in a better condition either."

The corner of Arthur's mouth suddenly twitched when he heard those before refuting. "I can at least still walk on my own, unlike you, who looked like a dying animal."

"Anyway! Tell us what you've got already!" yelled Arthur in annoyance.

What they had gotten from Caelum was a high-quality bow, which seemed to be at the peak of the Black Mithril Rank weapon, alongside a bead that could let someone change their class into a hidden class with a high rarity.

The bow might be very powerful at the current state of the game, but Arthur already had a set of high-quality equipment of his own as well as weapons. Moreover, his class was a warrior/knight type, so he was not interested in that kind of weapon.

As for the bead, it was said to have a class on par with the Transcendent Class if the possessor was able to complete the series of tests that it had.

Unfortunately, that kind of privilege was no longer as appealing as before due to the news about the Ascended Classes and racial upgrades that came alongside it after the information about the major regions of different races was revealed.

On top of that, Arthur already belonged to the Dragonkin and a Dragon Knight which were a Transcendent Race and Class respectively. He didn't have a use for such an item.

Based on what they had gotten from Caelum, Arthur could already guess what kind of loot the others got, he just wanted to ask to know if the things that they had could interest him.

Understanding what he was thinking, Leonard clicked his tongue before replying. "You can ask Cloe Sis about it. She is the one who collected the drops."

"Though, I can say that it will only disappoint you," he added before turning his head back to the sky.

In the meantime, Faker sat beside Lawless before asking. "Did you release the 'Killing Star'? You are radiating with its murderous aura."

Lawless couldn't help but laugh when he heard those words before replying. "Hah! Do you think it is possible? We are inside the game and not in reality, such a thing is impossible."

"As for the murderous aura, it is because I used one of the advanced moves from the 'Berker Heaven Killing Style'," he added after a brief pause.

"Impossible, huh? I can't no longer say that it is impossible since I've already witnessed someone fight with a dual personality within this game before," responded Faker in a nonchalant tone.

He added after a brief pause. "So, you being able to release your 'Killing Star' shouldn't be impossible either, especially when it is just a special state of mind."

Hearing the first part of Faker's words, Lawless couldn't help but become interested. "Dual Personality? That mental illness? That's rather interesting. So, who is it?"

Faker refused to answer and just shrugged his shoulders. He then changed the topic and continued with what they were originally discussing earlier. "If I were you, I should find time to try experimenting with it. Now that we discovered the Reality Manifestation, I think it is worth the try."

"Moreover, just like what you said, we are currently inside the game. You don't have to be worried about the risk of getting out of control, especially with the current technology that we have."

"The gaming cabin will immediately detect it if something went wrong. On top of that, we are somewhat close with the young masters of the Springfield Family."

"You should know that one of the people who managed to control their Killing Star is from that family, so we can at least try asking for some guidance from them if an unfortunate accident happens."

"It is way better than us being on constant guard, worrying about it going out of control," he added with a tone full of concern.

Lawless naturally knew where Faker was coming from and could only shake his head. And after considering for a couple of moments, he slightly nodded his head. "I'll give it a try when I've gotten the chance."

"For now, let me have a rest. I am really exhausted after that fight. That giant is a pain in the *ss," he added before closing his head to relax his mind.

Not far from those two, Ara run towards S.Tigris and Black Hand who were currently discussing with each other.

Seeing her sitting beside them, S.Tigris immediately asked chucklingly. "How was it? Is it an unforgettable experience?"

He was aware that the other opponent on their side was an Archer, so if a similar thing happened to them, just like how Nel felt like training their group, then Ara should be one of the people who gained the most in that battle.

S.Tigris felt a little pity when he thought about that since he couldn't partake in fighting Nel in the frontline. If he did, then he would be able to experience fighting such a monstrous person and gain some insights during the battle.

Well, it also couldn't be helped since his role earlier was important. The remaining fallen knights were the most elite member of the army, so they were not easy opponents either.

Moreover, they also became more aggressive when Nel appeared on the battlefield, so his earlier job of ensuring the safety of their mages and healers was very important.

Knowing what S.Tigris was trying to ask, Ara closed her eyes and recalled what happened before answering. "It is not bad. I learned quite a few things from it."

She then remembered how Shin and others before grimacing. "And I am once again reminded how weak I am compared to the real 'monsters' of the game."

"Calling them a genius or a prodigy is an understatement, they are monsters. A bunch of monsters," she added with a weird look on her face.

She then turned at Alucard who was walking towards Owen and continued. "Even that guy is way better than me. His skills are powerful but his accuracy and positioning are on an entire level higher than mine, if not more."

Hearing that, Black Hand couldn't help but give his comment. "Of course, he is that strong. He is the Gun King, after all."

Snapping their heads toward his direction, Ara and S.Tigris simultaneously repeated his words.

"Gun King? That Gun King we know?"

"The Unrivalled Sniper Roger? The Gun King of «Nemesis» Online?"

Black Hand briefly looked at them before turning back to Alucard. "Yeah. THAT. Gun King. I've already had some suspicions before but after observing him closely, I am now sure that he is the Gun King."

"B-but... Isn't the Gun King-...?" Ara was trying to construct her question when Black Hand suddenly cut her words off.

"I know what you are thinking, but I am sure that he is the Gun King. He may be able to mask it with a couple of variations but old habits are hard to hide, especially from someone like me."

Hearing Black Hand's confident tone, the two could only nod their heads and agree.

At that time, Black Hand continued. "I also know why are you doubting my words. After all, the Gun King appeared in the Shadow Ranking Cup and is going with his 'real' in-game name."

Taking a brief pause and turning to Shin, he continued. "But with that guy as our living proof, then we can assume that the Gun King is only using an alias during that time, which happened to be his previous name from «Nemesis Online»."

"Now that I think about that, maybe that event is also the link between him and the Empyrean Talons, especially when Owen and Akailu are also on their team," said S.Tigris while nodding his head.

"Then what about the Sword King?" asked Ara innocently.

Hearing that question, Black Hand suddenly remembered something before looking at Alucard, then at Shin, then at Alucard once again.

After that, a sudden thought flashed through his mind. "About that... I am also quite interested."

Seeing the mystifying look that Black Hand current had, S.Tigris knew that the guy somehow discovered something but was still not sure about it, which was why he couldn't tell them anything yet.

But whatever it was, he was sure that it was worth keeping an eye on since everything that piqued Black Hand's interest was something that was out of the ordinary.

Knowing that S.Tigris knew him well, Black Hand gave his captain a sidelong glance before smiling mysteriously.

"I'm sure that even the Alliance Leader and those old foxes in the main branch will be interested in this."

Chapter 948 A Brief Rest (Part 2)

...

Alucard left a little awkward after regrouping with the rest of the group. He might be a member of the Empyrean Talons but there was actually no one in the Adventurer Team that he could say to close with.

He might also spar with some of the members but that also shouldn't be enough to be really close with any of them.

Ironically, the guy that he could say that he was closest with was Akailu, a guy who he detested the most and always picked a fight with him.

He wanted to sit in a corner away from the others, but he also felt that he needed to get along with the others even for a little since he no longer wanted to walk the same solitary path once again.

He did it before since no one could match his pace, not even his brothers. He continued moving forward and did not look back. But what he saw, in the end, was nothing but emptiness.

His brothers even left him, or more precisely, he left them behind.

This time, he wanted to enjoy the journey and share the experiences with the people that he could trust. This was the real reason why he chose to join the Empyrean Talons back then. He wanted to give it a try.

Moreover, he was no longer the one who was walking ahead of the others. Instead, he was the guy who was chasing after their back.

It was an entirely new feeling for him. And he would not lie, he somewhat enjoyed that feeling.

Having those thoughts, he walked towards Owen, who – just like Leonard and Lawless – was currently slumping on the ground. "What's with that appearance? Did you get beaten up that badly?"

Owen gave Alucard a sidelong glance before rolling his eyes. "Don't try to copy those guys. That is not like you. Just continue being a loner and observe the others from the sidelines. Just talk when you have something important to say."

"Tsk! And here I am wanting to have a change. Can you be a little more cooperative? Even just a tiny bit?" responded Alucard, clicking his tongue.

"Go away! I am too tired to talk to you. Just leave alone," said Owen while shooing Alucard with his hand.

Unfortunately, Alucard ignored his words and asked. "Hey! Why did you join the team? I mean what makes you join the Empyrean Talons when you are someone who loves to play alone?"

Owen was taken aback by the question and couldn't help but slightly open his eyes. He then looked at Alucard who was staring at the sky before sighing. "I am also not sure. At first, it is because of the circumstances that Ithilien had, but aside from that, I am also quite curious about Brother Sickarius, to be completely honest."

"He beat me in the Shadow Ranking Cup, not just once, but twice. I want to at least have a re-match and win, but I later found myself chasing after his back instead."

He took a brief moment of pause before continuing. "Then I met the other members of the group who are in a completely different breed of monsters compared to him. And I became more curious about them."

"I actually enjoy fighting alongside them. Not only do I feel secure and can trust my back with them, but I also feel the healthy competition that we are having from time to time, which is making me grow significantly stronger."

He then took another pause and turned to Alucard. "Isn't it the same as you?"

Alucard was silent for a moment and continued to stare at the sky before slightly nodding his head. "Well, you are not wrong about that."

Not far from them was Charlotte who overheard their conversation. She was actually somewhat the same as them, so she couldn't help but nod her head in silence.

She was curious about Shin who she felt was full of mysteries. Setting aside the incidents that she had with him in the real world, the events where they encountered each other inside the game were also quite peculiar.

She then learned about his insane growth rate which seemed to be not going to stop no matter how far he got. He even overtook her, who was currently regaining her previous form from the past games that she played, and reached the height where the peak-class players were currently standing.

At the same time, there was also the feeling that she couldn't explain whenever he saw him talking and laughing with Cloe. Whenever she saw the sight of them being together, there was a stinging sensation inside her chest that made her hard to breathe.

"What's wrong with me?" she asked herself before turning her head towards Shin who was currently walking towards Cloe.

She could only sigh to herself and shook her head, trying to shake off that feeling. She then turned away from them and looked at the others.

She then caught sight of the couple who seemed to be arguing with each other about pointless things.

"Hey! Did you buy that vacation package offered to you by Emma? I remember seeing the tickets lying on the side of the bed before we log in," asked Ravier with a suspicious tone.

Ember flinched when she heard those words before acting innocently. "W-what are you talking about? Those tickets are gifts she gave to me. Yeah, gifts."

"Tsk! I know that you also want to see the others, but you don't have to go that far. You can just tell me that you also want to head to their country and meet with them," said Ravier while shaking his head repeatedly.

Seeing his actions and hearing the tone of his voice, Ember couldn't help but feel annoyed. "Yeah! I want to see them! What about it? Are you the one who suggested going traveling together a few days ago?"

"I just buy the vacation package since it is way cheaper and very convenient! Not only we can save some money, but we can also have a relaxing vacation!"

"Why it sounds like it is my fault, huh!? Huh!? Tell me!" Ember suddenly started yelling at Ravier, pointing her finger at him and not caring about the others who would overhear them.

The corner of Ravier's mouth started twitching uncontrollably after hearing the barrage of words that were coming from Ember.

He just wanted to ask about the tickets and tell her that it was fine. He was not planning to reprimand her about it or anything. But why it suddenly became like this instead?

Sigh~!

With a helpless sigh, he could only flash a bitter smile and repeatedly nod his head, accepting his fate. He already learned it from experience, there was no point in arguing with a woman since they were always right – he learned it the hard way.

Chaotic Luck, who was currently assessing his performance earlier not far from them, couldn't help but look at the two weirdly. And since he could no longer concentrate because of them, he could only stand and look for another spot where it was quieter.

...

Shin chuckled a little as he watched the others while moving toward Cloe. She was currently smiling and waving at him.

"Ah~!" he sat beside her and quickly asked about the items that Nel had dropped, going straight to the point. "So, what did you guys get from the general? Is it something good?"

Cloe didn't mind his actions and reached out on her inventory, quickly taking out the black bead and iron mace that they received after defeating Nel.

Shin quickly examined them before pursing his lips. "It is pretty much the same as the ones that we got."

He then took out the black bead and warbow that Caelum had dropped. Cloe took a quick glance at them before telling Shin to take them away.

She then looked at the surroundings before saying. "It looks like that Grand Marshal Draco is not going to show himself any time yet."

Shin slightly nodded his head. "Yeah. It seems like it is also another part of the quest."

He then took a brief pause before continuing. "Based on our current progress, the next battles are most likely the main quest scenario."

"But we haven't encountered the Vampires yet?" asked Cloe with a frown.

Shin raised his brow before explaining. "I think it is going to be a link quest. We must remember that this is Arthur's Empire Quest."

"If my guess is right, then the main quest should be about freeing the dragon sealed somewhere here. And when it is done, it will most likely help us melt that towering wall of ice surrounding the whole region."

Taking a brief pause, Shin slightly creased his brows before continuing. "And given the current information that we have, this region is going to be unlocked and become available to the public while another race or religion is going to be introduced."

"I don't know about the race but the religion is probably the so-called Dragon Worshippers," he added after careful thinking.

"Then what about the vampires?" asked Cloe once again.

Shin thought for a moment before answering. "If I am not wrong, then that is where the World Quest that the Pandemonium Descendants will come into play. It may also be the reason why our quest and theirs somehow coincide with each other."

"Well, we will find out about it soon enough," he added with a mystifying tone.

He might not be completely sure about it, but he was confident about his assessment. And if he was really right, then the next course of events was most likely a separate event where they needed to divide their forces once again.

Chapter 949 Making Plans For The Final Stretch

...

As Shin was currently discussing with Cloe the possible events that were going to happen on the next part of their quest, he suddenly felt that they had missed something.

"Hmmm, now that I think about it, I think we are also overlooking the fact that the Corrupted Cult is deeply involved in this matter," muttered Shin in deep thought.

'The Corrupted Cult and the Demonic Churches must be on the same side on the surface, but they definitely have different goals in mind, especially with this quest. The current position of Immortal and the Pandemonium Descendants in our current situation is proof of that.'

'The Corrupted Cult may have hidden their real purpose by using the sudden invasion in the Saint Heaven Kingdom, but their original goal is definitely hidden in this region. After all, they are already preparing to open the portal right before we arrive.'

'Yeah, their main purpose is within this region. And it is more than the destruction of the Saint Heaven Kingdom or crippling their economy, there must be something into it that we are forgetting.'

Shin paused his thoughts and recalled the possible purpose of the Pandemonium Descendants. 'Given the current information that we already have, I am now sure that the purpose of the Demonic Churches is related to the First Vampire and his contract with the Great Demon King.'

'And we suspect it to be the portal that will connect the Atlas World with the Devildom once again.'

'And it is going to be much more chaotic compared to the previous Era given that Caelum and Nel emphasized the 'future' of this world. It is definitely a major event – a World Event on top of that.'

'...'

'Then what about the Corrupted Cult? What do they want?'

'If they also happen to have a particular quest that somehow coincides with the Empire Quest that we currently have, then it can only be related to two things since we only have those two matters left to deal with... The Vampires and the sealed Guardian Dragon...'

Reaching that point, Shin suddenly paused and added. 'Well, if we add Grand Marshal Draco, who is a Cursed Being and possessed a type of power of corruption, then we can say that he is the third option...'

Shin treated it as a passing thought but a sudden realization flashed through his mind when it happened. "Wait! Cursed Being? Corruption? And the sealed Dragon! That must be it! That must be their goal!"

"Jeez! That really freaks me out!" said Cloe as she almost jumped from fright due to Shin's sudden outburst.

Unfortunately, Shin didn't pay attention to her reaction and snapped his fingers while saying. "I think I finally figure out the real goal of the Corrupted Cult!"

"They must be targeting Grand Marshal Draco who is currently cursed by the Goddess of Winter! He may be a Cursed Being, but if he is in the same state as Caelum and Nel, then he is most likely controlling the power of that curse which is practically another form of Corrupted Powers!"

"If my guess is right, then they are planning to capture or somehow control the grand marshal. I am not sure what method they are going to use, but they may have some sort of a plan to make it happen!"

"Then they are going to use him to corrupt the sealed dragon within this place, turning it into a Corrupted Dragon!"

"They must be planning to turn those two powerful beings into weapons that they could use against the righteous faction!" the more Shin talked about it, the more confident he became about his conclusion.

The others also overheard his words and couldn't help but nod their heads, they found it to most likely be the case.

It also now made sense why the Corrupted Cult and Demonic Churches were not on the same page in this position. Or more likely, they were competitors regarding this matter. And since they couldn't openly harm each other, they decided to take different approaches.

The Corrupted Cult decided to take the matter into their own hands since their sole goal was to take the 'weapons' for themselves. Aside from that, they didn't care what was going to happen to the Frozen Kingdom or the Saint Heaven Kingdom.

As long as they get their hands on Grand Marshal Draco and the Guardian Dragon, everything else was irrelevant.

On the other hand, the Demonic Churches were a little different. They didn't care about those two, instead, they were more concerned about the First Vampire and the contract that he had with the Great Demon King.

But if they put it like that, then it would indirectly affect the Frozen Kingdom. After all, he was still the ruler of this land regardless of the reason. And he only agreed with the contract with that Demon King because of the 'injustice' that his people had suffered in the past as well as the 'revenge' that he wanted for his father and ancestors.

If this land, which was their home, was completely destroyed and his people, who now became the vampires, were wiped out of existence because of forcefully undoing the seal of the Guardian Dragon, then all of his sacrifices in the past were going to be meaningless.

This must be the real reason why the Pandemonium Descendants needed them to properly undo the seal of the Guardian Dragon and clear their Empire Quest.

If everything went smoothly for their group, then the Pandemonium Descendants would avoid the rampage of a berserk dragon and the wrath of the First Vampire altogether.

Then the linked quest would be triggered. And it was where Shin and the others, together with Lycan and the Guardian Dragon, fought against the First Vampire and his retainers, doing all of the hard work for the Pandemonium Descendants.

And regardless of the outcome of the battle, it was going to work for those people since both sides were going to be at their most exhausted state at that time.

It was most likely the cue for those guys to make their move.

"Tsk! Such clever bastards," sneered Shin as he could already imagine the outcome of the battle inside his head.

"They almost got us good," he now understood why Diablo was confident that the Pandemonium Descendants were going to offer them this cooperation that they currently had.

It was to avoid all of the unnecessary troubles and let Shin and the others do all the physical labor for free.

He then fell silent once again and started formulating a series of plans inside his head. Now that they were already of the objective of their opponents, then he would have an easier time making countermeasures against them.

They were no longer blindly guessing the intention of the Corrupted Cult and Pandemonium Descendants since everything was now basically laid right in front of them. And if they played their cards right, then they might even create a situation where those two would fight against each other.

The only problem was finding the right solution where they could gain the most benefit.

Thinking more deeply into it, Shin could only think of a single solution. And that was dividing their forces once again and doing the two quest scenarios at once.

But the problem was how he was going to do it.

They couldn't afford to weaken their forces right now, especially when they were aware that the Corrupted Cult was currently targeting Grand Marshal Draco.

If they somehow left an opening at an important moment and Immortal and the others took advantage of that, then they would, without a doubt, lose everything.

Their biggest reason right now was the group that Immortal was leading. And if they were going to work with the remaining members of the Earners Mercenary Group, then it was going to be more problematic.

At most, he could only think of a few members who would not weaken the overall strength of the group without their presence. But the question was if they could fight the First Vampire on themselves.

Thinking about it, there were only five people at most who could somehow achieve it. But if he further narrowed the criteria to the ones who could sneak inside the castle and get away by themselves if something went wrong, then there were only three people who could fit for the job. It was Zero, Faker, and himself.

But the three of them couldn't disappear all at once when they were thinking about the lineup of their opponents. At most, they could only send a single person toward the castle and observe the final boss.

It might be risky but they didn't have much choice.

With their skillset, any one of them should be fine if it was just observing or buying enough time for the others. That was the most positive thought that Shin could make, albeit dangerous.

Thinking about that, Shin couldn't help but also look at the unexpected and conceited quest that he received from Vladimir, way before they entered this region.

It might even involve Grimrace if he was lucky and made things escalate even further.

"I can at least summon those two with their buffed powers when I am in the most dangerous situation," he muttered before adding to his thoughts. "In the end, I am still the most ideal person to take on this task."

He then turned to the others and thought. "Now, all I have to think about is to find a way how to ensure the success of these guys at rescuing the Guardian Dragon. And in the quickest way possible at that."

While Shin was contemplating the choices that they had, he suddenly caught a glimpse of Arthur from the corner of his eye.

Turning his head over, he squinted his eyes and paid close attention to the speck of lights circling around the latter.

He then glanced briefly at S.Tigris and Black Hand before deciding to send a private message to Arthur.

Sickarius: Hey! You said that the last Dragon that you've gotten from Sky Island is pretty powerful, right?

Arthur slightly creased his brow before giving a reply.

Siegfried: Yeah, it may be as strong as your Ancient Void Spirit at its prime at the very least.

Siegfried: Or it may also be as powerful as that Fire Goddess or something that you get from the incident in Blind Abyss Empire.

Siegfried: What about it?

Shin then sent another question.

Sickarius: How did you capture it?

Arthur was confused why Shin was asking such questions but still replied regardless. He was sure that this guy was trying to cook a very spicy plan for their opponents to take.

Siegfried: I summoned a powerful dragon to beat it up into submission. Then I proposed a condition with it to form a contract and turn it into one of my Elemental Dragons.

Siegfried: If you are planning to ask me to use that skill and do the same method to seize the Guardian Dragon, then I am going to tell you that I can use it right now.

Siegfried: It has a frustratingly long cooldown and I also need to meet certain conditions before I can use it.

Arthur knew Shin very well, so he could somehow understand what the guy was trying to do. Unfortunately, the plan was not going to work since he couldn't use that special skill.

Shin fell into deep thought as he replied.

Sickarius: I am actually planning to give up on Grand Marshal Draco and let Immortal control him if that is really their plan.

Sickarius: Then let them forcefully break the seal and let you deal with the dragon while leaving the rest to us.

Frowning deeply, Arthur couldn't help but ask confusedly.

Siegfried: Then why not let the others know about the plan?

Sickarius: Well, that is only Plan B. I still want the others to give their all at defeating the grand marshal, which is for the best.

Sickarius: To completely fool your enemies, you must fool your allies first. Something like that.

The reply came too quickly as if Shin was already expecting his reaction.

Arthur further creased his brow and even started stroking his chin. He then replied after a brief thinking.

Siegfried: Actually... I think we can do it somehow. That Plan B, I mean... Probably.

Chapter 950 Going For The Final Stretch

...

Shin gathered everyone and discussed his plan with them. Of course, he omitted the contingency plan that he discussed with Arthur. He didn't want Immortal and the others figured out that the group was aware of their real objective.

It didn't mean that he didn't trust the others, he just wanted to take the more careful and much safer approach where they could trick their opponents. And it was also to make the opposing side believe that they had everything under their control.

Shin didn't need to worry even if an intense fight broke out since the group had the most reliable people.

They had the current number one player, the former number assassin, the former commander of the number one adventurer team of «True Era» Online, the best healer of the game, a player who ranked pretty high in the Strategist Ranking List, together with the crazily strong pair of War God Simba and Dragon God Siegfried.

With such an insane lineup composed of those monsters, Shin was confident that they would be able to hold themselves even if the opposing side had a little advantage in terms of numbers.

If it was an isolated battle, then Shin would definitely worry. But since it was going to be a team battle, then there was nothing to be concerned about, especially when Cloe, the best support that they could ask for and was very strong when it came to such situations, was accompanying them.

For now, Shin had to put his trust in Arthur and hope for this showoff of a guy doing a good job later at the most critical moment.

What was left now was Shin's job. He needed to head over to the Frozen City and sneak into the Castle alone.

He would be lying if he said that he was not feeling nervous, but he was also feeling thrilled at the same time. And fortunately, he would summon Vladimir at his current buffed state when he encountered the vampires, which was why he was not totally worried.

After discussing what they were going to do, the others immediately nodded their heads and started to get ready for their next move.

"Are you sure that you will be fine?" asked Cloe as she tugged Shin's arm from the side.

Shin understood her worry but he just smiled at her. "Don't worry. As I said, I can summon one of my Elemental Spirits later due to the special quest that I received earlier."

"What's more, his strength will not be restricted by me due to that quest. He may not be at his full power but it will be enough to handle the situation."

He then paused for a moment as he remembered something before continuing. "And if I am lucky, I may even be able to create another special event scenario, where I can summon one more Elemental Spirit in a buffed state."

"Maybe even more," he added trying to reassure Cloe.

Cloe looked at him with squinting eyes, seemingly scrutinizing him, before sighing helplessly and nodding her head.

Seeing that, Shin patted her head gently while saying. "Then I'll entrust you with taking care of the others. Your role in the upcoming fight is going to be important."

Cloe glared at Shin's actions but she still let him pat her head. She then pouted a little. "Why do I feel like a hen taking care of her chicks, after hearing that?"

Shin chuckled at those words. "Well, you can't do about it. You are a commander of an adventurer team now, after all."

"Anyways, I need to go now," flashing one more smile at her, he then turned around and walked over to Arthur.

"Hey! Don't be too much of a showoff and mess up, alright? You don't want to be the reason why we are going to fail at clearing your Empire Quest, do you?" said Shin with a smirking smile.

Arthur glared at him gesturing a shooing action with his hands. "Go away already. You should worry about yourself instead. Heh! Trying to be the showoff and try taking care of the final boss alone? Let's see how are you going to survive this one."

"Don't come crying on us later, when you realized that you've bitten more than you can chew, later," he added with a sneering tone.

Shin just shrugged his shoulders before proceeding to look at the others. And when he was sure that everyone was finished with their preparations, clapped his hand to gather their attention. "Alright! Since everyone is ready, let's move out and finally put an end to this operation."

"This may be too much to ask, but please make a quick work on your side and save my *ss later," he added to ease the atmosphere a little.

The others started chuckling at his words, easing up the mood that they currently had.

Shin swept his gaze at them before nodding his head. "Let's go!"

In the meantime, the opponents that Shin and the others were expecting finally met each other.

Immortal looked at Flouree, who was noticeably in her weakened state, before saying. "Looks like you are not at your best. I guess you really have bitten more than you can chew."

"Are you sure that you are going to be fine for the upcoming fight?" he then asked with clear doubt in his words.

Flouree glared at Immortal as she could read what he was thinking before saying threateningly. "You don't have to worry about that. I can still affect the battlefield with my spells even if I am currently in this state."

"And I must warn you, don't try something funny later, or else, you will pay dearly for it," she added as her voice turned colder.

Immortal gave her a mystifying smile before replying. "Don't worry, I at least know my limit. I will not harm the people on my side in this situation, especially when we are currently against those guys."

He then took a brief pause to look at the remaining members of Earners Mercenary Group before asking. "Ironically, it looks like your team is still in a good shape."

"Hmph! Just get into business and stop having funny thoughts about my members," said Flouree, warning Immortal once again.

Immortal continued to wear his enigmatic smile before shrugging his shoulders. "Let's go. Justin and the rest of the Silent Night are already waiting."

As he turned around, he suddenly remembered something before turning back at Flouree. "Oh! Let me warn you too. Those guys' moods are also on the bad side, so I have to ask you to keep your members leashed. We don't want a fight to break out and further weaken our forces."

"Even if we are in a clear advantage in terms of numbers, we still can't be sure about the outcome if it is going to be a team battle. They have the Gentle Goddess on their side, after all."

Flouree didn't immediately reply to Immortal as she continued to give him a sharp glare. No matter what situation they were in and she was supposedly working with Immortal, she still couldn't get herself to trust him.

With his pretty bad reputation, Immortal resembled a sharp knife pointed at anyone's neck regardless if they were his teammate or an enemy.

After being silent for a moment, while observing Immortal closely, she nodded her head and finally responded. "You don't have to worry about my members. I've already warned them, so unless Justin and his people don't pick a fight with us, nothing is going to happen."

Immortal shrugged his shoulders at her reply before turning around and leading them to where Justin and the rest of Silent Night were waiting.

While all of it was happening, Diablo, who was tasked to keep an eye on the members of the Pandemonium Descendants, finally discovered the one who would be leading the operation of his former organization.

He was currently standing in front of a player whose appearance was hidden underneath a black hooded cloak.

The snow was falling pretty bad from the sky alongside a violent gust of wind but the two were not bothered by the weather and continued to stare at each other.

"This is quite surprising. I am expecting that the organization is going to send either 'Wrath' or 'Pride', at the very least, but I guess I am wrong," said Diablo as he stared at the person standing a few meters away from him.

The other person might have hidden their appearance, but Diablo could easily identify them given the aura that they had.

He was pretty familiar with the higher-ups of the Pandemonium Descendants, especially their Troupe members and the ones who could contend against him on an equal footing, so guessing the identity of this person was not a problem for him.

That person refused to respond and just stood on their spot, not willing to talk at all.

They might have respected this person in front of them in the past, but now that he was an enemy of the organization, they had no choice but to take him down regardless of his reason for leaving.

Diablo completely understood it which was why he chose this place to be their battlefield. It was an isolated area within the Frozen Kingdom and far away from the current base of the Pandemonium Descendants within the kingdom.

He didn't want to be bothered during the battle later.

"I know that I've disappointed some of you guys. But you have to understand me as well given that the organization has disappointed me as well."

"I am not planning to convince you to choose the same choice that I make, but I hope you at least respect my decision."

He then took a brief pause to take out his weapons and raised his head, wearing a determined look on his face. "And don't try convincing me to come back. I will not set foot in that place and experience that betrayal once again."