

Once Human 531

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"In your case, there are two things weighing you down and rendering the use of the sword inefficient . The first is the absence of a real physical body due to your special, nonetheless, it shouldn't be that much of a problem if you learn how to manipulate the life force inside it . The second thing is the rip-off system you're using, looking at it is a joke in itself . "

Arthur listened to Timos, who was explaining a few things, though he still hasn't agreed to hand over Makaze, the Black Devil assumed otherwise .

"It automatically calibrates the usage of any kind of energy and though it seems helpful, it actually isn't . This is a lower version of the System created by Tiarius, whoever created it clearly has no clue what he's doing . Let me show you bad it is . "

The blue window showing his stats appeared before the Parasite . The system was supposed to be malfunctioning yet it suddenly popped without his consent . The numbers started changing and in a few seconds, they all turned into '0' but Arthur didn't feel the least bit weakened .

"It can easily be hacked or altered . "

"I thought only Tiarius can do such things?"

"No, you've got the wrong idea about the Twelve . We can all use or create a System but the GameMaster outdid everyone . The same applies to other powers such as Sedos' light or Xyktia's necromancy . "

After a brief pause, he resumed: "Anyway, the System you're using is, in my opinion, a malware . Not only does it hinder your skill usage but it also spies on you and store all the personal information, automatically sending it to some sort of an artificial hive . "

"Tell you what... I can create a personal system for you that doesn't interfere in anything and only show you numerical values of your prowess . I'll make it simplified and harmless . Consider it as a bonus . "

"No . "

Arthur blatantly rejected the offer, his expression remaining oddly deadpan . If the current system can spy on him then wouldn't Timos' do the same?

"Fear not, dear guest . The system I'll create is centered around you and your partner . Furthermore, I don't use Systems as they aren't 'accurate' and they don't factor everything . A mortal, with enough willpower, can do astounding things yet the system will only show his physical capabilities, crushing the person's confidence or stopping him from doing something he may very well regret . "

Arthur remained headstrong and didn't accept this alluring 'bonus' . Just as Timos was about to speak again, a blinding light flashed next to Arthur, it stretched to the cloaked heavens and nestled there, creating an illuminating spider web made of pure silver light .

The parasite turned toward Lucy, the source of this abrupt occurrence . Her long silver hair started floating as if it was being pulled by the sky, her skin became crystalline and her special eye enveloped her with a blue dome that seemed to stop time .

"A breakthrough in both her Physique, Soul, and Dantian . Truly a beautiful sight to behold . " Timos commented as he, like Arthur, was watching Lucy's evolution . Her aura kept rising but it was contained by the dome of time, stopping the energy from leaking outside .

As Arthur was focusing on his wife, Timos' voice resounded in his head again: "Now will come the time to see if you truly believe my words . As you can see, your wife is in the midst of a triple evolution and, were it in any other place, it would incur the wrath of the jealous heavens . If nothing interferes, everything will proceed smoothly and she'll reach a stronger stage, however, her body will only absorb a third of produced energy, at most . This is where you come, acting as a catalyst, forcing her body's capacity to unknowingly act . "

A frown appeared on the man's face, not understanding what the entity was talking about . Nevertheless, he didn't object but quietly listened, his two eyes fixated on the woman undergoing a massive change .

"The Twelve weren't born perfect so we were able to evolve but it was very difficult . Only Moriah was able to such a feat but I digress . In the process of any kind of evolution, the body only absorbs the necessary energy to reach a new stage and discards all the rest of the energy which it initially produced but didn't deem as 'important' . What many do not know is that an evolution is called so only when someone absorbs all the energy and reach perfection . To do that, the body must be under pressure, it needs to feel threatened so that it frantically inhales everything for the sake of 'precaution' . "

"Pressure? What kind?"

"Anything will do . Attack her with all your strength . "

As he heard that, Arthur had a dumb look and momentarily was unable to reply . Though Timos made it sound beneficial, he still won't Lucy, just thinking about it was absurd .

"I can see your obvious reluctance so I'll do it myself . You can thank me later, invitee . "

Just as he finished talking, Arthur's body was suddenly immobilized by an invisible force and from high-up in the sky, a thick and long tentacle came flying down, violently striking Lucy .

Fortunately, the tentacle was stopped by the blue dome, nonetheless, it didn't cease attacking Lucy, slowly pushing her away but inflicting no injuries .

"Can you see? No matter how much you attack her, it won't cause any damage . This is the uniqueness of a triple evolution . "

The silvery light around Lucy was being madly absorbed by her crystalline body . Her hair shone brightly and her eyes, one azure, and the other blood-red, ever-so-slightly opened, falling on the incoming tentacle which was thicker than the trees .

Mid-way through, her right arm, which was healed not long ago, started changing appearance . The snow-white skin was replaced by Scarlett scales, six-inch long claws appeared on her fingers and a big

spiky blood-red shoulder guard spawned . Her whole arm suffered a drastic change as it was raised in the air and clashed with the incoming tentacle .

The impact between the two force caused the place to slightly shake and the sky to be covered by a golden flames .

"Marvelous, too marvelous! A devil arm . You've exceeded my expectations, girl . " Timos sounded delighted as he spoke to the silent Lucy, his tentacle finally retracting and disappearing into the dark sky .

Dozens of seconds later, the devil arm vanished and the blue dome was sucked by her eye . Lucy stared at her right arm and clenched it a few times before standing up and looking around until she located a worried Arthur .

"What's wrong?"

Seeing her in perfect condition, Arthur breathed a sigh of relief and shook his head: "Nothing . Congratulations!"

In response, the woman flashed a smile at him then checked her body . She activated her Yin cultivation technique only to see 9 ice lotuses rotate around her, this meant that she reached the last stage of the Nine Star Yin Technique . Furthermore, when she manipulated her Mana and focused on her Dantian, 7 blood red stars materialized, indicating that she jumped from a Sovereign to a 7-star God Monarch . With her current prowess, fighting an Overgod on equal terms is possible .

As she nestled in her arms, Lucy could hear Timos talking to her and Arthur .

"Your partner benefited greatly from the drop of Primordial Energy but I can't say the same for you . She overtook you in less than a day so the best thing you can currently do is not let yourself get behind and become a hindrance . Although you didn't believe in my words, I think the results are enough to prove my honesty . Her Devil Arm is something I saw only once and the owner was actually Medtris herself which means that the Demon Blood that runs through her veins is somehow tied to the Demon Queen, not that I care though, I'm just pointing it out . "

To this day, Lucy and Arthur didn't know how Lucy is not a pure-blooded White Specter . Her father was human and her mother was a White Specter yet she was half-demon, which is totally illogical . Moreover, Katrina didn't explain the circumstances of Lucy's disappearance, or more accurately, she wasn't given the chance to . "

"Is it still not talking?"

Marshall Albert asked his subordinate while reading a few documents .

The soldier bowed and replied: "Sir, it refuses to utter a word . "

The Marshall waved his hand dismissively while saying: "Then plan a public execution . We can't have an unrestrained beast lurking inside our prison . "

This piece of news traveled far and wide and in less than a week, all of the Divine Planet were aware of the execution . No one dared to object the Marshall's actions, after all, he was a powerful figure of the Cloud Sea Sect .

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"No! Let me go!"

Saly, her hair now black due to the pigolo's Dark Magic, loudly protested as she held a tiny piece of paper . The news of Astrith's fate reached her so she became hell-bent on saving him, refusing to hear reason .

Delia, her face flushed, restrained the little girl while saying

"We can't risk exposing ourselves! They're only using him as bait . The real target is you!"

Unfortunately, the blond woman wasn't able to hold down the furious Saly, who successfully freed herself only for a big silhouette to appear and smash the petite figure on the ground .

Ominous threads of black light wrapped around Saly's limbs, restraining her . She could only grit her teeth and glared at the hideous face looking down at her .

"Let me go!"

Gutcha stared at her without saying a single word, his mind preoccupied with something else . Although Saly was oblivious, their current situation was dire, perhaps even desperate . With the addition of the Cloud Sea Sect, there are many others powers hunting them down, wanting to get their hands on Fenrir .

If they could harness Saly's powers, it would easily make them rise to the peak and become a dominant force . So, it came to no surprise that there was no lack of pursuers . They had to relocate every few days and it even got worse in the last period as there a group of black-clothed individuals following him on the clock . Fortunately, they remained passive but that doesn't mean they're allies .

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In a rowdy tavern, there stood a bard happily singing and chugging ale from time to time . He wore a green and violent costume and looked out of place, nonetheless, everyone in this place appreciated his famous poems and engaging melodious voice .

"Sing with me, my dear invitee!

The story of a conflicted man,

Never honest, and always bland

Protecting love, never grand

Uncaring of the moving sand

Not bothering with the unseen hand . "

A long while later, the bard left the tavern, humming and caressing his precious lute . The poet walked for a dozen meters before his path was blocked by someone wearing a jet black armor, a pale-faced youth, to be more precise .

"Ah! If it isn't grumpy boy!"

The bard, Aneirin, flashed a smile at Leiu and loudly greeted him, not behaving respectfully or showing fear . Unlike the rest, he and the Nameless Knight were old acquaintances, furthermore, he was a troubadour, harmless, only seeking the thrilling mysteries . Back in the past, he traveled with Leiu to forgotten lands and sealed tombs, looting priceless treasures and discovering shocking revelations .

"Do you have some time?"

Leiu, his face still expressionless, talked to the energetic Aneirin .

"I always have time for you . Come, let me buy you a drink . "

The bard dragged Leiu to a relatively quiet restaurant and ordered some food and wine . Once the table was filled with plates, the bard started devouring everything while gazing at the motionless and silent youth .

"So, what brings you to this far away land?"

"I want you to tell me a few things . "

"What things? As far as I'm aware, you know everything I know . "

Seeing the bard's honest expression, Leiu chuckled and retorted: "Not quite . "

A frown appeared on Aneirin's face as he stopped munching the food, wiped his oily mouth then said:

"If you want to know about normal things then I can talk all day but you very well know that I've made a few oaths about certain matters and divulging anything about them will break my voice . Literally . "

"Don't worry, it isn't about them . "

After Leiu's confirmation, the bard breathed a sigh of relief, drank some wine then focused back on the armored youth sitting opposite of him .

"I want you to recount your experiences with him . "

"Him? Who's him?"

"Zodiak . "

Aneirin's brow creased as he heard that name . He tilted his head, pondered for a few moments before asking:

"I thought you were on bad terms with him . Why are you suddenly so curious?"

The Nameless Knight shrugged and answered: "Maybe I was wrong about him... who knows . "

Before talking, the troubadour spent a while collecting his thoughts and weighing what to say and not to say .

"I think all that needs to be said was mentioned in my book . If you're not that much of a reader than I'll tell you the shorter version .

The man was eccentric and very amnesic . He would sometimes talk gibberish, say random names and would disappear for a few days before coming back all bloodied . I clearly remember that every time he sleeps, he would have a nightmare, yelling loudly and vanishing yet again . Oh yes! He seemed to bear a grudge against all humans in general... it's kind of ironic since he was also a human . There was also the notebook, he would always write his experiences there . I once asked him why he's doing that and he said that someone told him to do so, as to not forget who he was . "

"Did he ever speak of his origins? His home?" While tapping on the table, Leiu asked .

"No, he avoided such topics . There was also something else... he seemed to be desperately looking for someone . "

"Who?"

"No idea . I only know it's a blue-haired girl . "

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"Parasites, my dear guest, are a race that can only survive with evolution . Not only do they require a host but it's also necessary to evolve in order to adapt to the ever-changing environment . In your case, you absorb your targets' powers but that doesn't make you them . You can also impersonate them to a certain degree, especially if they're powerful individuals . Sure, your race makes you immune to death by physical damage, however, there are some cases where physical damage is also categorized as soul-based, eradicating both the body and its consciousness . Plus, for you to get stronger, you would require fresh victims, something this place lacks so we'll try a different, unorthodox approach . "

Lucy was trying out her new devil arm and testing it with Lonely Moon, the silver revolver . As for Arthur, he was dragged to the side by Timos, who spoke of a new kind of training, a tactic that is guaranteed to enhance his powers .

"First of all, you need to know that your Dark Magic is categorized as a mental-attack, mainly prioritizing the target's emotions . Sure, it can inflict physical damage but it's real purpose lies in disturbing the enemies' mind, rendering them unable to think properly . In what we're about to do, you're only allowed to use your main attributes and nothing else . "

Arthur remained silent, listening to the Black Devil, who repeatedly warned him .

The parasite was led to wide cave illuminated by numerous torches, the air was cold and the ground unsteady .

"What you need to do is simple; don't get killed . "

Just as Timos said that, a violent gust of wind struck Arthur, sending crashing into a wall behind him . Before he could get up, another gale dragged him from the rubble and throw him to the other side .

When he was about to hit for the third time, a wall made from blackened earth sprung from below, barely stopping the invisible wind .

Sadly, it lasted for a brief moment before it was turned into dust, however, Arthur managed to manipulate the earth and create two large hands that blocked the whistling whirlwinds .

Earth beats Wind so Arthur focused on the former attribute . Unfortunately, he barely lasted for a minute before he was sent flying like a kite, his body bloodied . Even if he were to receive a fatal physical attack, he won't die so Arthur wasn't worried... until a strange gust of wind entered his body and perturbed his consciousness, causing him to feel an agonizing pain which made him crawl on the ground while holding his chest .

"The best and most basic way to strengthen yourself is through a never-ending battle . Since you're immune to anything physical, your soul and consciousness need to be hurt so they can suck energy to replenish themselves and heal the wounds . It's a forceful method but very effective . "

Since he shouldn't use Life Energy, he could not heal his wounded soul which made his movements slower and sluggish . Hours passed and Arthur was treated like a toy, being flung from one side to another .

His clothes became scarlet red and his body filled with horrifying scars .

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Outside, Lucy was calmly standing next to the lake, her right arm now covered with scales as it held the gun . Besides singing cicadas, everything else was awfully quiet .

Her eyes, which were closed for a long time, abruptly opened, her left one emitting a blue brilliance . Almost instantly, a blue dome surrounded her, dangerously slowing the flow of time .

Although her movements were slightly affected, she still was able to swiftly raise her hand and fire multiple shots all around her . The bullets that left the gun seemed frozen mid-air as they were trapped inside the blue dome .

Once her eye's ability wore off, the bullets, which were frozen, flew at several thin tentacles that sprung from the ground . As they were fired when time was slowed, the might of the bullets was ten times stronger, shredding the disgusting tentacles, turning them into bloody mists .

Just when she thought she was done, another tentacle attacked her from below, hitting her abdomen and flinging her high-up in the air . Thankfully, she managed to stabilize her body and step on the nine lotuses floating around her .

"Your reaction time is slow and you abandoned everything to defend the attacked spot . Girl, you can fool everyone but me . "

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"Why do you care?" Lucy coldly retorted, her hand softly pressing on her abdomen .

"Oh I don't care, I'm just curious . Expecting a child is considered a joyful occasion that should be shared with your partner . Almost all races celebrate such an event but here you are, keeping it from him . "

Lucy maintained her silence, unwilling to explain the reason behind her secrecy .

"You know what I think? You're afraid that, by knowing the truth, he'll focus more on protecting you and getting you out of here even if it costs him his life . It's just how he is and there's nothing you could say to change his mind . So, you'll only reveal your pregnancy once you two are out . "

She proceeded to ignore him as she sat cross-legged and entered meditation .

"Actually, what's shocking me is the fact that you're truly pregnant . You're half-demon half-white specter so the probability of 'it' happening is low but not impossible . The real catch is your husband, a bodiless parasite . Do you know, pretty invitee, that parasites infertile . No matter to what mutated kind he evolved into, he's still a parasite, a being incapable of reproducing . "

Her closed eyes slightly fluttered as she listened to Timos . Lucy knew when the unborn baby was conceived, it must've been when they were in the Mountain Ba sword sect as they didn't engage in any sexual activities after that .

"Now let us stop talking about the case and try to foresee the result . A child or a monster?"

When she heard the last word, Lucy's aura exploded, freezing everything around her, clearly incensed by what the Black Devil said .

"Wow, no need to get angry . I'm talking about the law of probability, what will the child be? A quarter demon, half a parasite, and a quarter specter? That doesn't seem logical . There are inheritances stronger than others, for example, demon is stronger than human, specter is stronger than both . As for a parasite's... I honestly don't know . Of course, he or she may turn out to be a human as the soul can be influenced by the parents' souls . In case of the parasite, he recently evolved so I guess when the deed was done, his soul was fully human . "

After a brief silence in which he studied Lucy's twisting expression, he resumed: "Though I cannot deny your physical and mental power, it still won't be enough to negate the savage aura lingering in this world . It'll be best to leave before the embryo develops and gets affected . Unlike humans, your pregnancy lasts much longer but it's advised to pass in the safest environment, especially since the father is a parasite, a race that adapts itself to the environment which makes them vulnerable to bad and good influences . "

"I don't need to hear an explanation about the cause and the effect . I'm aware of the situation and I know what to do . "

Once he finished, Lucy interjected, her face frowning and her aura wildly unstable .

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Arthur struggled against the violent gales for half a day before it finally stopped, returning the gloomy cave to its eerie silence . His body was covered in cuts, blood oozing from every corner, nonetheless, his high Vitality quickly healing his wounds and recovering all the lost energy .

"It's a shame, really... as the partner of the Dark Blade, your wind proficiency is supposed to be the highest yet such a simple trial shredded your body . "

The parasite listened to Timos, his breathing heavy and his body trembling . The gale attacks were peculiar, their physical damage is high but they also seemed to touch his consciousness and hurt his soul .

"The wind attribute is by far the hardest to master . In fact, I once met a young and simple-minded mage who reached perfection in Wind Magic . That idiot was able to cut six of my tentacles . Now, enough of this chitchat, let us start with the Trial of fire . "

As his words ended, an unimaginable heat assaulted Arthur, causing his body to profusely sweat .

"You're probably wondering why a simple heat is stealing your Health and affecting you . Your petty resistances are useless against true fire, one that has been around since the beginning of time . Yes yes, the Phoenix, Vermilion Bird, and Golden Crow, do indeed have special flames but they pale in comparison to Dimitra's fire of beginning . The Hell Fire you have is a bit higher-grade than the rest and it's certainly dangerous but you can't control it properly . In a fight, one uses the things he's most good at, whether it's magic or martial arts . Throwing around all kinds of powerful skills will do you no good against an opponent who truly mastered his art . "

The dark cave was suddenly illuminated by a fire that rose from the ground, filling the whole place and engulfing Arthur, who conjured a bubble of water to resist the heat . Sadly, the bubble was instantly vaporized and his body was soon scorched by the fire, his hand turned into ash and his legs were slowly but surely disappearing .

"It's common knowledge that Water counters Fire, that is, if they're equal in terms of power . You have no talent in Water manipulation, just seeing you, desperately trying to resist the fire with your weak skills is a truly, truly saddening sight . My dear guest, do you realize it now? Without your precious partner and your Dark Magic, you're nothing special . "

Arthur gritted his teeth and created several layers of water barrier then he used the Wind Attribute to push away the raging fire, which dominated the whole place and released low, chilling growls . It looked like any normal fire but Arthur's health pool was drastically decreasing .

Half a day slowly passed and by the end of the Trial, Arthur's body was turned into black ash . Of course, he didn't die and the lost body was quickly recovered by using the White Tiger's special ability which instantly healed a large portion of his Health .

Somehow, somehow, after fully recovering, this artificial body created using the Dark Cloud, crumble and shattered like glass, forcefully ejecting Arthur .

"Good, you're in your real form . Do remain like that, we'll start the Trial of Lightning . "

Lightning smites evil and counters all kinds of Ghosts or spiritual being . Arthur, being a Soul parasite, is extremely vulnerable to lightning, however, his immunity to this magic guaranteed his safety against enemies that wield thunder . Unfortunately, it wasn't the case this time .

A bright blob of light circled around the dark cave, it seemed restless as it spun around, unable to sit in one place due to some unknown reason .

"In exchange for the Dark Blade, I promised to fairly compensate you and I plan to keep my words . This series of Trials is an ancient ritual us, The Twelve, used on our very first children . Of course, many failed

but those who prevailed became legendary figures, such as Zeus the champion . I'm aware that you do not fully trust me, however, dear invitee, do not think that your race gives you an advantage . Just like they have powerful racial abilities, the parasite race have innumerable downsides and the first of them is the severe lack of self-improvement . You rely on your hosts to get stronger which is an efficient method in the short run but, sooner or later, all those who you had left behind will surpass you, beginning from your wife . "

"Everything is almost ready . "

'X' crossed his arms and let out a helpless sigh as he glanced at the napping Joker, who flinched once he heard his words . Once he saw the Trickster sit up and stare back at him, the blurry-faced man continued:

"The second we open the path, the Black Devil will sense it . He may even break it . "

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"He won't . " The Joker confidently stated .

"W-what? Why?"

"Because he's the welcoming type . The last thing he'll do is push away incoming guests . "

As he was unable to hold his curiosity, 'X' asked:

"Anyway, why do you want to go there? I know that Arthur is trapped there but it's not like going there will save him from Timos . "

Hearing the talkative X, The Magician coldly snorted and retorted:

"Who said I'm saving him from Timos?"

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"Then why are you going?"

X's curiosity got the better of him as he asked one question after the other .

"Why? Do you want to join me?" The Joker playfully winked at him, his hand holding several cards that showed him the general stats of the man before him .

"You seek the Dark Blade so isn't it a good opportunity for you?"

X flinched and kept his lips shut for some time before speaking again: "I do need the orb but I value my life more than everything else . "

The Trickster clapped his hands while laughing, agreeing with what this strange man just said .

"Indeed, you're one of the wariest people I've ever encountered . Perhaps that's what kept you alive and away from the Nameless Knight, though it's not like he's looking for you or else you would've died a long time ago . "

Lolitta, who was busy tapping on the keyboard, suddenly stopped, turned her head to X and said:

"You're a good man! Don't fight that scary dude, he's a monster!"

She stood on her tiptoes and patted X's shoulders to comfort him, however, you could hear the latter gritting his teeth and clenching the hand holding the cane .

"Although you did try to trick Arthur, you were not planning on killing him, at least . Which is why I don't consider you as an enemy . As for Leiu, he already forgot what happened in the past so you should do the same and move on . "

"Move on? Do you even know what he did?!"

'X' became emotional as his aura increased and became threatening . In response, the Joker crossed his arms, let out a sigh and replied:

"Yes, I'm aware of everything . He killed your parents, not because of the grudge you thought he held against you, but because of another reason . "

'X' scoffed at the strangely-clothed man, angrily banged his cane on the ground before retorting:

"It doesn't matter the reason! I will kill him!"

Seeing that he couldn't reason with X, Wolfram shrugged his shoulders and signaled for the absent-minded Lolitta to begin the process of creating a path .

Thunderclaps resounded inside the now illuminated cave, dozens if not hundreds of bolts struck the fleeing blob of light, trying to incinerate it . At some point, the Quad-Spirit inside Arthur intervened, using its powerful Earth Magic to resist the incoming attacks .

Each thunderbolt was met with spears made of stones, blocking all of them . The ground shook and the earth moved on its own, defending Arthur's soul and pushing down the lightning till there was none . Everything happened so quickly and the trial, which was supposed to last 12 hours, was done in 10 minutes .

"That's quite a nice spirit you have there . A smart one . Earth counters everything for there is nothing that can totally destroy it, this is why Dimitra's natural elements do not include Earth . In fact, the Earth attribute appeared mysteriously and unknowingly when the Twelve started creating worlds . Earth is the source of everything and no one, however talented he or she may be, can master it . "

Arthur's soul, which was quietly being guarded by the moving earth, was finally exposed once the trial was over . The Dark Cloud materialized next to him against and slowly yet surely it transformed into his old body .

"I do want to finish the trials but it requires a real body and not fake one so we will stop here . "

Arthur was confused as he found no point in those trials which didn't help him in any way . Without needing to hear him, Timos knew Arthur's thoughts just by looking at his puzzled face .

"You won't understand the meaning of those trials, at least not right now . However, when you come across someone who mastered their attribute, you'll get to experience what 'resistance' really means . "

The parasite was 'thrown' out of the cave once the trials were finished . He soon located a nearby Lucy who was silently meditating, her face slightly frowning for some reason .

As he got closer, the half-demon opened her eyes and smiled at him .

"Did everything proceed well?"

Arthur nodded his head while saying "More or less . "

"Now that we're done with the training stuff, it's about time I present you with my last compensation . After you see it, you'll decide whether you want to trade or not . Of course, you can consider the rewards from trials as a 'gift' . "

Dozens of tentacles sprung from the ground, each one longer than the other, they twirled in the air with the couple at the center . A formless aura started revolving in the area, changing the peaceful atmosphere of the Free Space .

"Do not worry, this will do you no harm . "

Very soon, a red tornado was spinning around Arthur and Lucy, though it was absolutely ginormous, it didn't affect the forest but it still created a heavy, almost suffocating atmosphere .

"My dear guests, I bestow upon you the blessing of I, the Black Devil . "

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As he said that, the couple fell on their knees and clutched their heads for some time before they fell on the ground, their bodies ever-so-slightly twitching . Fortunately, the pain lasted for a brief period then the two fell unconscious, only waking up the morning of the next day .

They woke up at the same time and spent some moments to clear their dizzy heads . The first thing they heard was Timos' deep voice .

"You two are totally immune to my children's aura and the damage you receive from their attacks is reduced . In addition, the Devil arm can now unleash a special skill created by me, I hope you use it wisely . Also, check the spatial ring in front of it . "

Arthur stretched his hand and injected a bit of Nether Energy into the strange wooden ring . To his surprise, there was nothing but an enormous corpse, a lifeless body of a deceased dragon . It was by far

the biggest dragon he had ever seen, its skin jet black and though it was dead, its archaic aura remained .

"This is a body of a fully grown Black Dragon . I fought it in the past and barely managed to kill it . "

Arthur furrowed his brows and asked back: "Barely?"

"Yes, barely . There are many things you don't know and dragons are definitely one of them . I don't want to talk about it so I'll just give you a small hint: The records mention the birth of The Twelve and explain our creations, however, why was there no mention of Dragons? Vampires? And other powerful species... how did they come to be?"

The Strategist paused for a second, inspecting Arthur's system before adding: "You seem to already have the Dragon Breath so it's good . When you possess it, do not even think about try about taking its stats . Black Dragons are shrewd and stealing its stats may result in the loss of your consciousness, which will be controlled by the already-deceased dragon . Be content with the strong body and only use in a dire situation as its appearance will catch the attention of other dragons . "

Arthur gave no response as he retracted his sense from the ring and stared at the wriggling tentacles, which looked disgusting .

"So you're offering all of this for Makaze?"

"No, I'm offering all of this in exchange for the return of the Dark Blade to its home . I won't even touch it, you'll be the one who does it . "

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Their brief stay at the Free Space, which was more of a training and a lecture than relaxation, ended when the two couple left the peaceful forest and went back to the Frozen Keep .

"The humans actually want to reach an inaccessible place beyond the keep . It's actually an old monument that was used to hold my soul . My presence here is what's keeping Riarravar intact and they plan to destroy it and force a way out of here . Of course, if this world starts breaking, there is no way every one of them would survive, however, from their perspective, it's better than staying him for all eternity . "

Timos explaining the humans' goal, not hiding from the couple the consequences of freeing the soul .

"Wouldn't you want to be set free?"

Seeing that Timos wasn't that optimistic about being freed, Arthur curiously asked . From how he behaved, it was apparent that the Black Devil was bored of this place and wished to leave .

"I do want to be set free but there are other ways . When 'God' and Quhea sealed me here, they made sure that my freedom comes at the cost of Riarravar so they tightly bound my soul and kept me here . As a human who transcended immortality, the man who calls himself the Shogun is almost as old as I am but he had reached his limits thousands of years ago or else he would have done the task all by himself . Be careful and don't be deceived... that's all I have to say . "

Before leaving, Arthur was guided to an underground room that was awfully eerie and deadly . The silent winds ripped his clothes and even cut off his arm, only when Makaze was shown did the wind blades stop attacking him but they still smashed into the unbreakable walls . The moment it came out of the storage, the Dark Blade released a deafening cry then flew out of Arthur's hand and stopped at the only illuminated area of the room .

It was a small circular altar with Evil Wind at the center, its sharp tip stabbing the cold ground while the rest of it heavily shook, from excitement and forgotten grief .

...

The way back to the keep didn't long as they weren't bothered by any ambushers . Arthur, wearing Zodiac's ominous black robe which covered him from head to toe, stood next to Lucy, who, surprisingly, wore white light armor . Timos told her that rather than plain clothes, an armor would suit her better then he motioned for her to take out one of the armors in her storage and throw it in the crystalline liquid .

The piece of equipment didn't change much in terms of appearance but Lucy could feel that it contained a small percentage of Primordial Energy which can protect her in dire situations .

The couple stood before the long bridge for a couple of seconds before the guards from last time appeared, however, this time they didn't bother with greetings as they nervously raised their weapons and readying themselves for a battle .

There was no need for Arthur and Lucy to come back after being chased out, so the only reason the guards could come up is that this weird duo wanted to cause trouble and harvest lives .

Arthur paid no attention to these samurai-like patrols and, instead, gazed at the woman at the back, whose face remained expressionless .

"We want to talk with the Shogun . "

The woman was uninterested as she shrugged her shoulders and was about to talk only for the robbed Arthur to suddenly vanish . She felt chills down her spines as she tried to retreat only for a dark shadow to appear inches away from her .

She attempted to kick him but alas, he vanished again, his body being replaced by a formless darkness which assaulted . Though the woman was faster than the creeping darkness, she still wasn't able to outrun Arthur, who teleported behind her and reached his hand to her neck, easily grasping it .

The strong woman was about to counter-attack but her body didn't obey her . Her limbs refused to move and a painful snake-like energy invaded her body and caused her to momentarily shake .

Arthur didn't hold her for long as he soon released his grasp and coldly said: "Take us to the shogun . "

The woman, blood coming out of her lips, glared at Arthur but didn't dare attack or retort . She could feel strange lightning tightly wrapping around her heart and despite her desperate tries, the lightning would not budge .

Lightning-users were rare and the man seemed to be some sort of a mage . She was more like a warrior so she wasn't adept at manipulating therefore she ended up falling victim to the parasite's Natural

Lightning . Once Arthur planted enough Natural Lightning into someone, their lives would be in his hands . Even if they tried to forcefully push it out of their bodies, it'll automatically detonate, ripping their insides and ending their lives .

The guards at the back were shocked when they saw the woman captured so easily . They were about to interfere only to hear ear-splitting gunshots coming from behind them . Before they could react, the bullets hit the back of their head and made them fall unconscious .

As Arthur didn't come here to massacre but to talk with the Shogun, he found it unnecessary and troublesome to kill the guards hence Lucy's 'benevolent' actions .

Although she wasn't chained, the woman still felt like a hostage as she led the couple to Frozen Keep . She didn't know what they wanted but felt a bit relieved when she saw Lucy knock the patrols instead of killing them .

After they crossed the bridge and arrived in front of the gigantic metallic gate, another group of patrols stopped them, clearly noticing something strange .

However, the woman shook her head and said:

"Go bring Lous and the others . "

After eying her for a few seconds, the man who seemed to be their leader quietly complied . He glared at Arthur and Lucy but the couple ignored him and followed the woman .

Seeing that she was purposely slowing her steps, Arthur pushed to the front and warned again:

"The place isn't big so either you obediently guide me or I'll do it myself . "

...

Unexpectedly, though there was a fair number of surviving humans, the place seemed quite deserted and devoid of any souls . Arthur saw a couple of people carrying some provisional sacks but there was a serious lack of guard inside of the fortress .

In less than ten minutes, he was brought to the main building, which was heavily fortified using magic and all sorts of stuff . In fact, ever since he stepped inside, he could feel his body tingling and distorting as if it was rejecting this place . Lucy didn't experience anything which is why he was sure of their safety even if things turn chaotic . She was a 7-star God Monarch with a Pure Yin Physique and can use the Golden Crow flames .

Furthermore, she has Lonely Moon, the eye, and her perfected Cultivation technique which now has a terrifying, almost unstoppable might .

"You didn't need to act so aggressively, I was going to invite you anyway hahahaha"

A middle-aged man with long black hair, a beard and two green and narrowed eyes laughed as he gazed at the guests . He seemed very calm even though two powerful individuals barged into his keep and appeared in his private room .

He sat cross-legged next to a small wooden table, where there was a hot cup of tea ready to be gulped . The Shogun wasn't threatened by Arthur and Lucy, instead, he motioned for them to sit next to him while saying:

"There is no need for fights, we all have the same goal . "

Arthur inspected the room then focused on the nonchalant, sensing an invisible pressure coming out of him . He certainly seemed strong but he didn't fear or helplessness like that time when he first encountered Timos . If he could compare him to someone then it'd be the Black-Haired Marshall who arrived at the end of the war between the Specters and the Undead . Of course, this was but a speculation but Arthur was certain of his hunch .

With him and Lucy, they could definitely overpower the Shogun, however, it's still too soon to think about the outcome .

"That's not what you said the last time we came . "

As he heard Arthur's emotionless voice, the Shogun momentarily frowned before explaining himself

"Ahh . . That! It was my friend acting discourteously due to our current circumstances . At that time, I was battling a few rats that managed to sneak into our keep . "

The man sounded genuine but for some reason, Arthur couldn't bring himself to believe him . The Shogun stared at the woman next to the couple and said:

"We've had it rough ever since the parasites started getting active so my friend here became overly-cautious . Please forgive our previous rudeness . "

He bowed his head toward the couple before laughing again, his face containing nothing but genuine honesty .

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After he finished 'apologizing', one more person entered the room and stood behind the Shogun . He was a slightly old man, his appearance average and easily forgettable yet the moment Arthur saw him, his pupils shook and his aura became momentarily unstable . Once could see that the years took a great toll on the man's tired face, in fact, he was pitifully weak in comparison to the woman or the shogun yet here he was, dutifully serving someone he considered as his master and leader .

Arthur's memories drifted to the past, just when he and Lucy got separated . The Emperor's castle got invaded by a bunch of monsters called Khin but were in fact the Cthulhu . There was a man who guided Arthur into their world yet he tricked him and teleported his people and himself, causing the world to crumble .

It was one of the few times Arthur almost died were it not for Anastassia's intervention later, he would have been killed by Bucama .

"Ah! Let me introduce you . He's one of my closest friends, Elias . "

The old man smiled at the couple and lightly bowed his head showing the necessary amount of respect . In response, Arthur's chilling gaze fell on the man, causing the latter to shake for a moment .

Even Lucy was surprised by his unusually hostile behavior . Through the invisible Soul Bind, she could see the Dark Magic boiling inside Arthur, ready to devour the man named Elias .

Although the man sacrificed Arthur to save his people, the parasite didn't care and now, he added Elias to his kill-list . He vowed to not leave Riarravar until this benign-looking old man is dead .

A very long time ago, when Arthur was resting with his brothers in a desolate cave, the Joker proudly narrated his adventures saying:

"Life without enemies is very boring which is why I tend to make one almost every day . However, an enemy is someone or something that needs to be killed, no matter the cost . If they escape then you hunt them down and kill them in the second meeting because in the third one, and believe me when I say this, you won't be able to finish them off . "

...

"Something wrong?"

The Shogun noticed Arthur's strange reaction so he calmly asked while glancing at the confused old man, who shook his head .

Fortunately, Elias didn't notice Arthur as the parasite's appearance did change drastically since last time . Furthermore, he didn't expose his Dark Magic and Makaze returned to his home so unless he say it himself, there's no way the old man will recognize him . Nevertheless, Arthur didn't forget the past grudge as he added one more step to his plan .

"Before we get down to business, I'll introduce myself . I am Sol'dhin and this one is called Sivenna . "

He pointed at the woman previously captured by Arthur . She left the couple's side and stood next to the easy-going Shogun, who heartily laughed as he saw her venomously glaring at Arthur .

"Don't force yourself, you're not his match . "

He softly stated, causing her to sigh and take a step back, nonetheless, he gaze remained on Arthur, who totally ignored her .

As he heard the man's name, he became even more shocked . It was very similar to the cane, the one he found near Zodiak's corpse . Its name was Sol'khin's cane, he was certain it's not just some coincidence .

"I am Bilgart . "

Arthur reciprocated by giving his last name from his first life, not even his expression changed as blatantly lied . By hearing him say a fake name, Lucy joined in and introduced herself:

"I'm Eva . "

After a brief and awkward bout of silence, the Shogun faked a cough and said:

"Ahem, I'm sure your goal is the same as ours . We want to leave this broken world and live a proper and peaceful life . This word, Riarravar, is completely isolated so the only way to escape is by destroying the seal trapping the Black Devil's soul . Once he's released, this place won't be able to handle his power and it'll crumble and, at that time, we'll create a Spatial Tunnel and swiftly leave . "

"And how exactly are we going to do that?"

Expecting such a question, the Shogun grinned and replied: "We'll talk about the plan when the last guest arrives . "

"The last guest?"

The man enthusiastically nodded his head while explaining: "Yes, in addition to your esteemed selves, we need the help of another party . "

After a brief pause, Sol'dhin said: "The Calypso Parasite, Emir . "

Quite surprisingly, Arthur wasn't didn't show any reaction when hearing that . It was because Timos already told him about what was supposed to happen . Although the Shogun was extremely strong, he's not well-versed in Magic so he needs Emir, who's said to be an old Archmage .

"Please rest well and enjoy your time until he arrives . "

The Shogun signaled for Elias, who marched forward and motioned for the couple to follow him . The short road to their rooms was silent as neither Arthur nor the old man spoke . In fact, Elias didn't dare look behind him as he kept getting the chills . He didn't know why but Arthur was looking at him with eyes that contained unrestrained killing intent . The elder remained oblivious and swiftly left after taking them to well-decorated rooms which were prepared for them before their abrupt visit .

Sol'dhin was about to go look for them anyway so their sudden arrival saved him a lot of trouble .

After Arthur entered the room, he used his Space Magic to envelop the whole room and block any noise from getting out . He reinforced it with a silencing formation, as a precaution .

"Do you know him?"

Obviously, Lucy was asking him about Elias, whom Arthur was acting hostile toward .

"He's a bastard who tricked me when I went to save his people . "

Arthur told Lucy everything but his trip to Bucama's world . The suffering he saw there should not be described to anyone so he just briefly went over what happened, not mentioning any names and passing it as 'no big deal' .

"So what will we do?"

Seeing Lucy frown, Arthur sat up next to her, caressed her head and softly said:

"The same plan . I'll just make sure that the old man stays here forever . "

The only reason Arthur was agreeing to go along Sol'dhin's plan is because, currently, it's the only way to leave Riarravar . Though Timos told him there are 'many ways' to escape, he refused to tell them how so the couple decided to try this one . Sure, it'll lead to lots of casualties and the destruction of Riarravar, nonetheless, Arthur didn't care .

The only thing that will remain unscathed is the Free Space, which is an independent dimension that will follow Timos once his soul is freed .

The next day, another individual was invited into the Frozen Keep . He came alone and no one blocked his path as he traversed the long bridge and slowly walked to the Shogun's residence . He had a serious countenance, a handsome face, and a sky-blue long hair . He wore a dark blue robe with golden lines on the shoulders, the materials it was made of were top-notch as it emitted something called 'Mana Pressure' .

'Mana Pressure' are invisible vibration that leaks out of items that contain an unimaginable amount of Mana . Even Lucy's Lonely Moon, which is infamous for its high Mana reserve, didn't have 'Mana Pressure', this indicates that the robe, alone, was a unique and priceless equipment . In addition to the robe, Emir had a silver wand hanging on his waist, it was decorated with dozens of shiny and colorful rubies .

The Shogun and the Archmage talked for less than two minutes before Arthur was invited .

The moment Arthur got close, Emir's body twitched, seemingly noticing something . The parasite's gaze fell on Arthur, examining him from head to toe .

'He knows!'

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Arthur didn't need to ask as Emir's gaze was enough to tell him that this robbed-individual knows about his real race . He remembered Timos and his long talk about parasites . '

"Dear Guest, Calypso parasites are extremely rare and are the strongest existences under Zaarae . Emir is a loyal but eccentric subordinate of hers . He's very well-versed in magic and the only one in his time who's been called an Archmage . Although he'll be weakened in Riarravar, his prowess will still be superior to you and the Shogun combined . Though he'll still require your help to get his people out of here . "

..

The Shogun smiled at the couple, who just entered the room, and introduced them:

"This Bilgart and his partner Eva, they'll be helping us destroy the seal . "

Unexpectedly, Emir didn't show contempt or arrogance but actually did a noble's bow towards the two .

"He's the one I was talking about . His magic will destroy the seal and we'll be the ones protecting him . "

Sol'dhin vaguely went over the plan to which the old man, Elias, coughed and held his master back . As he saw the couple's confused gazes, he apologetically said:

"Please excuse him, he's not that good of a strategist . Please wait a moment, I'll thoroughly explain the plan . "

Elias disappeared from the room for fifteen seconds before coming back with a large parchment that was laid on the biggest table . The parchment was a map of the Frozen Keep and the place Timos' soul was trapped .

Once he confirmed that Emir and the couple got close and are attentive, the old man coughed and said:

"The Black Devil's soul is trapped in a spiritual prison . East of here, there is a broken bridge and beyond that, there is a floating piece of land . "

He pointed at a rectangular area on the parchment before continuing:

"The Spiritual Prison will be destroyed by Sir Emir, however, the place is guarded by two guardians and a fair number of angels . Sivenna along with our strongest warriors will deal with the angels, as for the guardians, our master will deal with one while the other is for Sir Bilgart and Madam Eva . "

To this point, everything was clear yet Arthur had a foreboding . There will be a lot of backstabbing as he knew Elias' true nature . He only cared about himself and his people so it won't be surprising to see him deceive Emir and them just so the humans could escape .

This is why he needed an ally, a powerful ally, someone he could rely on in this battle . Coincidentally, Arthur's gaze met with Emir, who smiled back as if he could read his kin's thoughts .

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Three days after Emir arrived at the Frozen Keep, the humans started mobilizing their strongest forces and preparing to leave . There are approximately a thousand living humans in the fortress and less than a tenth had enough power to defend against the angels .

As per Elias' plan, each party had its own task with the hardest one falling on the Archmage parasite, who showed no objection . The remaining parasites were also going to leave Riarravar for good, part of the deal the Calypso Parasite made with Sol'dhin .

Fortunately, there weren't many parasites, numbering less than a hundred, however, there are a few of them who are exceptionally strong .

Of course, before the appointed day, Arthur didn't forget to pay a secretive visit to Emir, who very much welcomed him . The two thoroughly discussed their cooperation and how they'll proceed .

Despite the notoriety of the Calypso parasites, Emir was quite friendly and cooperative after confirming that Arthur was his kin . He was curious about the mutation which changed Arthur's race but he didn't pry too deep and was satisfied by a vague answer . Furthermore, his focus laid on the spiritual prison and the shrewd humans, who, from what he said, will definitely try something in the middle of the battle .

As he'll be busy destroying the prison sealing Timos' soul, Emir requested Arthur to pay close attention to Sol'dhin and make sure the parasites do not suffer too much .

Their talk lasted for less than twenty minutes before left the room like a ghost, returning to his chamber .

"Hm?"

Arthur frowned as he saw Lucy caressing her abdomen, lost in a daze, not even noticing his appearance . He pretended to see nothing and lightly coughed, causing the silver-haired woman's body to twitch and face him, her expression that of serenity .

"How did it go?" She asked the smiling Arthur, who sat next to her and briefly talked about his conversation with the Archmage .

"Everything is in order . Let us finish our preparation too . "

He took out a complex medium-sized machine and put it in the ground before he got to work . Lucy sat next to him every time he signaled her, she spilled some blood on the noisy machine, which absorbed the red liquid like a hungry beast, it even made disgusting slurping noises .

This thing is a unique bullet-making machine created by Arthur using his knowledge and the Lost Magic . It is capable of converting almost everything into suitable bullets for Lonely Moon, the silver revolver .

With the addition of the Devil Arm, the backlash of the gun became negligible, moreover, the arm even boosted Lucy's storage capacity . Right now, Arthur is in the process of making a special kind of bullet, one that can kill anyone, including an immortal and old being like the Shogun .

Even without the System, Arthur could tell that Sol'dhin is unimaginably power which why he threw away the thoughts of confronting him head-on . Of course, it's not necessary to fight him but he and Lucy must always take precautions .

After pumping Nether Energy for five continuous hours and sacrificing two Blood Essences, one from him and one from Lucy, the expected result came out of the machine . It was named 'The Slaying Bullet', which had the same color as Lonely Moon . It was inexplicably heavy and had several vein-like red lines on its tip .

"So... it ends tomorrow?"

She looked at him with an unreadable expression before leaning her head on his shoulder and letting out a sigh . Arthur wrapped his arm around her and enjoyed this moment of peacefulness where only the two of them existed . He purged all the negative thoughts and closed his eyes, choosing to answer her with silence .

He rubbed his finger on the jet black storage ring, hoping to not use the mysterious sword given by Timos . Although it was extremely powerful, it's still a very dangerous thing that can kill him if used wrongly .

The usually quiet keep is eerier than usual as humans and parasites stood a distance away from each other, both standing behind the keep, on the broken long bridge leading to the faraway prison . Apart from the prepared fighting forces, all the rest shivered in the cold as they stared at their experts with hopeful eyes .

The vanguard was composed of three parties, the first one was the Shogun, proudly standing at the center and wearing a purple chest piece . At his right was an unknown couple, one was wearing a long black robe and the other was a silver-haired woman with a green dress, however, she didn't seem bothered by the passing cold breeze .

The last party was a lone figure wearing a robe that matched his hair, he floated a few inches above the ground while raising his wand . The bridge that supposed to be broken was slowly yet surely being reconstructed as magical rubbles started forming a steady path toward the other side .

In a matter of seconds, a new bridge was formed, creating a spacious path leading to the enemy . A small group of humans and parasites started marching, their weapons raised and their fighting spirits ignited . Arthur and Lucy walked at a slow pace, following behind the serious shogun whose hand was placed on his unsheathed blade . The Archmage was the last as his body floated behind this small army, his eyes fixated on the silhouettes of the prison, from which numerous flying humanoids appeared .

The flying shadows grew closer until their appearance could clearly be seen, a pair of white feathery wings and a holy aura enveloping them . They wielded long spears and had faces that slightly resembled humans though they were totally expressionless .

There was also one more enemy to be wary of, they had larger builds and were made of white stone . They are known as gargoyles, usually, creatures of darkness but these ones are different, mutated after absorbing too much light . Their appearance was similar to stone statues but their glowing red eyes and unsettling growling confirmed that they are indeed living beings .

The three main parties didn't move even when the enemy attack, it was the small army that jumped in the air and resisted the attacks . Amongst them, Arthur noticed a young female parasite accompanied by a few of her kin, moreover, there seemed to be a handsome young man wielding a glowing sword and wearing a flashy protective armor . He was none other than Vyncent, who has shaved his beard and tidied his greasy long hair, this caused his appearance to become much pleasing to the eye .

"When we're two hundred feet away from the prison, the first guardian will appear, it'll be your turn then . "

Without looking back, Emir spoke to Arthur and Lucy, his wand emanating a blue radiance which shot toward the prison, which was actually a large white sphere enveloping a green blob of light .

The Shogun, the couple, and Emir advanced forward without any hindrance from the angels or gargoyles, their speed wasn't fast but remained consistent . Around ten minutes later, when the battle started heating up between the creatures of light and the small army, the first guardian finally made its appearance .

Like the ones fighting behind, the guardian was a large white gargoyle that wielded an axe-like weapon . It sprung from the abyss down below and blocked the path of the Shogun and the rest .

Before it could attack the assailants, two shadows leapt at it, each from one direction . A series of violent explosions caused its massive body to take a few steps back then, as it swept its spear to get rid of the source of the explosion, its hand was frozen in mid-air, covered by a thick layer of ice .

The gargoyle roared and glared at Lucy, whose Yin ability immobilized the guardian's whole arm . Its two glowing red eyes shot out two beams which were faster than Lucy's reaction . Fortunately, she managed to activate her Time ability, creating a blue sphere around her, which, when hit by the two beams, caused them to become much slower hence allowing her to step to the side .

This, however, was only the beginning of the guardian's counterattack as it kept shooting thick red beams from its eyes . The beams were following Lucy, whose figure became illusory as she jumped from one place to another .

"Let's move forward . "

The Shogun, who was lost in a trance, snapped out of it when he heard Emir's voice . As he saw the couple fighting, he let out a sigh and clenched the hilt of his sword, inwardly wanting to fight them . As for the Calypso Parasite, he didn't even glance at the couple as his eyes locked on the white sphere, unleashing vast amounts of power from all sides in an attempt to pulverize it . After a few unsuccessful tries, the Archmage chuckled and whispered to himself:

"I knew that such foolish tries won't work but it didn't hurt to try . "

Then he held the wand with his two hands and somehow elongated it, transforming it into a long staff . He pointed the staff at the abyss down below, causing the winds to rage and the artificial bridge to shake . A dragon's cry could be heard from down below, it was so wild and ear-deafening that it caused many of the angels and gargoyles to lose their will and helplessly fall into the primordial darkness .

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The only one left with nothing to do was the shogun, whose opponent showed itself when got very close to the strange white sphere . Unlike the large gargoyle, the second guardian was a monstrous angel with two pairs of wings, all painted with gold . The feathers released a beautiful white aura as they fluttered against the wind, the angel grasped its weapon, a golden longsword and looked at the pitifully small Sol'dhin standing before it .

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Though its appearance was frightening, the shogun wasn't fazed as he cracked his neck and said:

"Been a while since I fought you beautiful guys . " He smirked at the expressionless angel, unsheathed his blade and leapt at it, his body emitting a powerful pressure .

Unlike the usual sword essence, Sol'dhin's was the color green though it had nothing to do with the Wind or nature, in fact, it was pure condensed Qi . He had a body very compatible with Qi, just like Lucy was with Mana . Were it not for her flashy Yin power, one would see small particles each time she unleashes a skill .

The battle between the couple and the gargoyle was proceeding well as the guardian clearly wasn't strong enough to resist the duo's bombardment . Arthur didn't even use Dark Magic to not alert the far away Elias, who's too weak fight but Arthur knew very well that the old man was strong enough to defend himself from the angels .

There's another thing that surprised him but in a pleasant way . The Life Energy in his left hand was reacting to the white sphere and the angels all around him .

Arthur stepped on the air and lunged himself at the gargoyle, which just received a heavy blow from Lucy, and punched him, his fist emitting a small green luster coupled with unnoticeable white thunder .

The moment the fist connected with its target, a deafening thunderbolt descended from above, hitting the guardian's head . Furthermore, Arthur's monstrous strength caused a huge part of the creature to be obliterated, resulting in big amounts of white liquid to gush out of its new wound .

As he saw that the Guardian was in no condition to fight for the next few seconds, Arthur shifted his attention to the angels and gargoyles and raised his left hand . An aura full of life and vitality was released from his hand, quickly reaching the numerous creatures and causing them to freeze in mid-air . Some were caught off guard and ended up being killed by the humans and parasites as for the rest, they magically followed Arthur's command .

Even Arthur just discovered this new ability as the System never mentioned anything related to Death or Life energy .

So, without needing to spend any energy, Arthur and Lucy backed off while dozens of angels and gargoyles attacked the injured guardian . Arthur could only control a third of them but they were more than enough to pin down the helpless Guardian, soon putting him out of his misery . The life energy coming out of his hand seemed to have strengthened them and there was no resistance whatsoever coming from them .

"You are full of surprises . " Emir commented as he glanced at the angels and gargoyles flying around Arthur, showing no signs of hostility .

"Heh, you're one to talk . "

Arthur smiled at the Archmage and looked down below, catching a glimpse of a large shadow pushing away the darkness flying toward the sky . Soon enough, a majestic dragon made of water made its appearance, its body was easily double the size of the Azure Dragon Arthur fought in the past .

The beast cried loudly as it spun in the air then turned to face the white space . Many of the nearby angels and gargoyles tried to attack the dragon but their spells and weapons went through its liquefied body .

Emir could not talk anymore as his attention was solely focused on the dragon, trying his best to control it . His forehead was sweating and the hand holding the staff was slightly shaking .

The dragon's might could be felt by everyone, including Arthur, who sucked a deep breath, feeling chills down his spine . The dragon's presence was almost similar to the Black Devil, making Arthur feel true fear from an existence created by an ancient Archmage .

Once the Water Dragon appeared, even the Shogun and the angel fighting him got out of the way, knowing that there'll be nothing left if they tried to block its attack . The body of the beast was twice the size of the spiritual prison, which seemed to fortify itself as the light sphere became denser, making it harder to see Timos' trapped soul .

"Dear guest, behold the true power of an Archmage . Truly... truly the peak of magic mastery . Even I, can't help but feel amazed . "

Timos voiced his thoughts as he gazed at the large dragon from far away . He didn't condone the humans' action but didn't interfere, after all, they were willingly freeing him .

Things started heating up as most enemies have been killed and only the angel guardian and the prison remained . The dragon waited for no one as it wrapped its body around the white sphere with its head pointing at the center . The body made of water tightened around the sphere, causing it to crack but those cracks were healed almost instantly . Nonetheless, the dragon kept doing the same thing while opening its mouth, where a violent aura started manifesting .

Arthur stood a short distance away from Emir, both he and Lucy were secretly guarding the busy parasite . The Shogun managed to successfully kill the guardian and was currently returning to the bridge .

Now was the deciding moment... who'll backstab who?

The two parasites already talked over this and decided to cooperate rather than trust the humans, or more precisely, Elias and Sol'dhin . Honestly, the Shogun seemed like a friendly and truthful guy but it could be a facade, after all, the man lived for a long, long time so it's not hard for him to put up such a believable act .

Half a minute passed and the dragon breath was finally prepared and unleashed, wreaking havoc all around the prison . Everyone backed off as the bridge, which was initially fixed by Archmage, was destroyed, as for Emir, he remained at the same spot, floating in the air .

Arthur used his wings to fly and Lucy stepped on her crystalline lotuses . The Shogun couldn't fly so he returned next to his people, his face showing a satisfied smile . Everything was proceeding smoothly so why wouldn't he feel happy?

A mix of water energy and turbulent Mana were spat by the dragon, its gaping mouth facing the spiritual prison . The Dragon Breath dispersed the chilling air around the whole area and shook the Frozen Keep, seemingly about to destroy it but the fortress managed to barely hold on, its sky-piercing top releasing unseen vibration which negated the dragon's area of effect attack .

The prison was resilient but it still couldn't resist a dragon's breath so it crumbled into nothingness after twenty or so seconds of resistance . As for the green soul lingering at the center, it quickly flew on its own, heading directly toward Timos, who very much welcomed it .

"Ah! True freedom, at last!"

The Black Devil sounded truly happy as he released an ear-piercing cry which shook all of Riarravar . The ginormous body laying on the horizon started to slowly move whilst the enormous tentacles danced in the air .

It was at this moment that the expected happened, one of the present powerhouses was backstabbed .

The man held his chest and puked blood, there was a hole in his armor and a brilliant thing seemingly wanted to leave, or to be more precise, it was being pulled toward an irresistible source . The victim was none other than the Shogun, however, it was neither Arthur nor the still busy Emir who did this .

Arthur and Lucy turned toward the group of humans and spotted an old man holding a strange coin .

'It's that damn coin again!'

Although this ambush wasn't directed him, he still can't risk it so Arthur immediately got to action . An ominous darkness was unleashed from his body, rapidly creeping to the expressionless Elias . The old man noticed the Dark Magic and seemed to be momentarily startled, nonetheless, he wasn't afraid .

A shadow sprung from behind and blocked the Dark Magic, resisting it with a purple shield that devoured everything .

'Void Magic!'

Arthur recognized unstable magic emitting from the shield . He backed away while signaling Lucy . Sol'dhin was still holding his chest and resisting the effect of Elias' artifact . He was puking so much blood that he couldn't talk to the traitor, he merely glared at him, his expression clearly demanding an explanation .

"Master, please do not blame me . For the survival of my people, I need your soul to replace Timos' . "

Obviously, the Shogun was confused and wanted to talk back but only blood came out of his lips .

"You're strong so traveling through the spatial tunnel won't hurt you but my people are mere mortals so I have to guarantee their safety first . I know how you are so you definitely won't care the lives of a few mortals . Unlike you, Sivenna joined my cause and decided to help me . It seems that even someone who's been with you ever since the beginning doesn't want you to leave Riarravar . "

The old man chuckled and walked closer to Sol'dhin, the coin in his emitting a strange black light .

Just as Elias took three steps, there was a loud sound of a gunshot and before he could react, a fountain of blood splattered on his face and body, dying him scarlet red . He only snapped out of it when he heard chain noises coming from under his feet .

Before the jet black chains could bind him, the coin in his hand strangely extinguished them . Right behind the old man, there was a small group of weak humans shyly following him with their heads dropped, not daring to look at the Shogun .

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Sivenna, the woman who just protected Elias, was turned into a fountain of blood by Lucy, who fired at her using Lonely Moon . Seeing the gun pointed at him and Arthur ready to strike again, the old man raised his hands and said

"Wait! No need to complicate things, I was only after Sol'dhin . "

His face showed true fear as he was confident enough about the coin's ability to protect him from the assault of both Arthur and Lucy . Furthermore, the people behind him were mostly mortals and weaklings, none of them are powerful enough to resist the duo . The coin was his last hope and, from the looks of it, he wanted to ally himself with Arthur .

"His soul will last for some time and we'll use that opportunity to leave Riarravar . This world is wildly unstable so the moment Timos' soul fully returns to him, everything will be automatically obliterated, we won't have time to create a spatial tunnel . "

Besides its ability to attack a strong person like Sol'dhin, Arthur knew that the strange coin could mass teleport so, basically, Elias was lying to his face . In all cases, he was going to kill this old man before leaving this world and the opportunity presented itself .

Elias picked up the shield containing Void Magic but didn't raise it to defend as he saw Arthur contemplating his offer, or so it seemed . Before he could react, Arthur appeared before him, his hand stabbing at his heart, planning to finish it swiftly and without any mishap .

Unfortunately, just when Arthur got too close, the coin released more black light which flung Arthur away then enveloped the old man, whose face became deathly pale, not expecting Arthur to be so ruthless . Though he was relieved the coin acted on its own, he was still inwardly panicking as Arthur seemed uninjured by the previous counterattack .

By the next second, several gunshots could be heard as Lucy unhesitatingly fired at Elias . The target raised the shield which absorbed all the bullets except one particular purple one, which penetrated the artifact and ripped a hole through the old man's shoulder .

He cried out in agony and dropped the now useless shield, blood gushing out of his shoulder . The Void Magic inside the bullet quickly ate away his organs and muscles, causing him to vomit a lot of blood, however, the coin yet again interfered, using the black light to get rid of all the void magic inside its holder's body .

"Y-you . . " He tried to talk but, just like the Shogun, he kept coughing blood . Lucy darted at the old man, nine lotuses circling around her, slowly blooming and freezing everything in the surroundings . Sadly, when she was meters away from the old man, a lightning-fast silhouette blocked her path and, before she could react in any way, stabbed her right through her chest .

"Aigoo... I told you they're not gullible . "

A nonchalant voice could be heard, it actually belonged to the person who just attacked Lucy out of the blue . The man was about to twist the blade and finish off Lucy only to be pushed away by an enormous force that assaulted him from the side . A man covered in green lightning and black flames managed to not only push him away but also cause slight injuries on his flawless body .

The man let out a chuckle, licked the blood on his lips while having an amused expression . This was none other than the Shogun, who was supposed to be dying .

As for Lucy, the stab she received was more fatal than it looked, especially due to the coin, which was sucking something out of her body, causing it to violently shake . Uncaring about the unscathed Sol'dhin, Arthur held Lucy's body while using his left hand to heal the injury .

No matter how much Life energy he poured, the energy wouldn't disappear and soon enough, blood dyed the ground as well as her dress .

Arthur couldn't continue his healing as a fast figure leapt at him, swinging a sharp blade at both he and Lucy . Before the Shogun could reach them, a seemingly normal bubble of water sprung from the ground and turned into a spike that clashed with the attacker .

A robed man appeared next to Arthur, his expression unusually serious . Emir looked at the Shogun then at the coin in Elias' hand, a bit surprised that such an artifact was actually here and that he didn't sense it earlier .

"We should leave, the coin is a soul-hungry artifact and it clearly wants her soul . The farther she is from it, the better . "

Several parasites appeared around the couple and Emir, all raising their arms and preparing to face the Shogun . Furthermore, those weak-looking mortals behind Elias took out unfamiliar red orbs and raised them, preparing to retaliate .

As he heard no reply, Emir glanced at Arthur but the latter was wholly focused on Lucy . The Archmage could hear the sound of grinding teeth, as well as the inhumane growling originating from the parasite kneeling beside him .

"What do you think now, dear guest? Isn't it fascinating how humans act? I didn't expect such a 'foreplay' but it was obvious that they were going to deceive you and the Archmage, it was only a question of how... though, I don't understand why he targeted your partner and not you . "

Unlike Arthur's current mental state, Timos sounded calm as he spoke rationally, stating facts and kind of insulting humans in general . As he saw his wife suffering and his healing not taking effect, Arthur planned to end Lucy because, unlike everyone else, he knew that she won't really die . Just like he created a body for him, he also created one for her and tasked Gutcha to hide so if she were to die, she'll be reanimated elsewhere, for sure .

However, his thoughts were miserably crushed by the Archmage's next words:

"If we make it in time, we can heal her but we can't save them both, sorry . "

It took some time for Arthur to process what he just heard .

"...both?"

He lifted his head and stared back at Emir, who frowned and thought for a moment being realizing something .

"Oh... you didn't know..."

The Archmage didn't know what to say as he saw Arthur's twisting expression . His face was already hideous due to the black flames covering most of his body but it became much more terrifying after this abrupt and not-expected revelation .

"She's pregnant?" Arthur tried to control his shaky voice while asking Emir, just to confirm his already answered suspicions .

"Yes . "

The Calypso Parasite let out a sigh and shifted back his attention to the Shogun, who was playing with his sword, not caring about what he did or what they were talking about . As for Elias, he gasped for breath as he spat more blood before calming down . The coin got rid of the Void Magic but his shoulder

was still severely wounded, making him in a bad mood . It wasn't supposed to be like that, nonetheless, his artifact will soon absorb Lucy's soul and be upgraded .

Emir signaled for one of his subordinates before walking toward Sol'dhin, planning to hold him off until his people teleport out of Riarravar .

"My people already created a suitable Spatial Tunnel so quickly go with them!"

The Archmage urged the dazed Arthur before waving his staff and creating a water barrier that easily blocked the Shogun, who jumped at them while releasing a maniacal laugh .

Surprisingly, the young female parasite who, supposedly, escaped her base and joined the humans at the keep, walked up to Arthur and said:

"There's no time to waste, let's leave . "

She nudged the silent Arthur, who lifted Lucy's body and presented it to her, his face distorting and his eyes blackening .

"Take her with you, I'll catch up . "

The young girl wanted to object but stopped herself as she felt a chilling and suffocating aura emanating from the man before her . While holding Lucy's bloody body, the girl hastily walked away, directly toward the group of parasites which already opened a large Spatial Tunnel at the edge of the broken bridge . Amongst the group, there was Lissandra, who somehow allied herself with parasites and guaranteed herself a spot .

"Hahahaha you won't get away . "

Several water droplets flew at the Shogun, who deflected them all then flew at the group of parasites, precisely aiming at Lucy .

Just before he could reach her, a silhouette appeared in his sight and slashed him . He knew it was Arthur but wasn't scared so he raised his arm to block, unfortunately, what happened next totally caught Sol'dhin unprepared .

He could see his arm flying in the air then falling into the abyss . Thankfully, Arthur didn't continue without another attack, nonetheless, the Shogun remained flabbergasted as lots of blood gushed out of his shoulder . He stared at the blade in Arthur's hand, trying to sense something from it but the sword looked and felt completely normal . It was no different than a steel sword forged by a mortal blacksmith yet it easily cut his arm a second earlier .

The blade met no resistance as it cut through everything and easily got rid of one of the Sol'dhin's arms . However, the cost was equally terrifying as Arthur knelt on the ground and held his chest . Both [Eternium] and [Transmutation] disappeared as he reverted back to his original appearance . His current unstable body started getting blurry and his soul was hurting like hell, causing him to cough one mouthful of blood after the other .

Emir was equally surprised by Arthur's unstoppable attack but he regained his composure fairly faster than Sol'dhin . As the Archmage was about to follow up with a spell of his own, Arthur interrupted him by saying:

"No need, go join your people . "

The parasite hesitated and questioned Arthur's words but before he could talk back, the latter told him something telepathically which made him turn around and leave through the tunnel . Moreover, the tunnel created by the parasites disappeared a few seconds later, leaving Arthur alone with Elias and his group .

"You seemed strong but I didn't expect such fierce power!"

Unlike his previous nonchalantness, Sol'dhin turned serious as he pressed his hand on his bleeding shoulder, closing the wound and stopping the severe blood loss . As for Arthur, he stored back the sword and glared at the enemy .

The two didn't exchange any more words and, instead, lunged at each other, violently clashing on top of the small area behind the Frozen Keep . The old man, Elias, though still very pale, managed to order his people to open up a large Spatial Tunnel . They were well-prepared and the portal to the outside was quickly opened .

Unfortunately, just as they were about to step into it, Arthur hammered Sol'dhin with a large bronze platform above him then raised his hand and pulled the empty air . This simple movement caused the Spatial Tunnel to shake and shatter, killing two humans who tried to hastily enter it .

Elias' face turned grim as he saw the tunnel easily break like that, he turned toward Arthur while mumbling:

"He's a Space Magic user..."

The old man recognized Arthur the moment the Dark Magic appeared, which is why he didn't dare provoke him . The Shogun was holding him off but, apparently, he was being overwhelmed by Arthur's ruthless bombardment .

Like a ghost, Sol'dhin appeared before Arthur and swung down his sword, unleashing a torrent of silver threads which were about to hit Arthur only for countless green thunderbolts to envelop the parasite and fend off against the attack .

Furthermore, the humans at the back were also attacked by a massive sea of flames that engulfed the whole place, incinerating the ground and melting part of the fortress' towering wall . Elias was able to block the flames using his coin but only a small portion of his people survived the fire . Dark red flames dominated the ground while a miniature orange sun rose in the sky and exploded, obliterating the already unsteady floor .

Elias grit his teeth and backed away, choosing to lead his people inside the safe, which was way safer than remaining here and getting hit by Arthur's destructive spells .

Sadly, the moment he led his people into the Frozen Keep, the old man could hear loud shrieks coming from a few middle-aged men walking at the front . They were clutching the strange red orbs and rushing

inside only for several tall silhouettes to appear from out of nowhere and indiscriminately kill anyone in their way .

These slaughter machines were fully-armored Death knights, and, in addition to these undead, the ground turned dark and creepy hands immobilized the fleeing mortals . Arthur spared no one as his summons turned the place bloody, beheading the humans and sucking the life out of them .

In the air, next to the keep, Arthur and the Shogun faced each other, however, the former was handling both Sol'dhin and Elias, hell-bent on killing the shrewd elderly . He was only able to do that thanks to the Quad-spirit, which was controlling the four elements and destroying everything . Even the supposedly unbreakable keep which was built using anti-magic stones was being devastated from inside out .

"Heh... you're a crazy one!"

The leader of the humans wiped the blood leaking out of his mouth and snickered at the silent Arthur . The place turned more chaotic as dozens of fireballs with creepy faces were ejected from Arthur's hand, heading toward the Shogun and exploding, letting out both Dark Magic and the flames of hell in the process .

Sol'dhin's clothes were scorched but his body wasn't severely injured, with the exception of his missing arm and a few minor scratches . Nevertheless, he had to resort to a special wind skill and constantly jump in the air as he couldn't fly like Arthur, who was using his invisible thin threads freely fly around . The threads acted on their own as they became sturdy spider webs that allowed Arthur to fly and even trap the Shogun .

In addition to the detonators, several thick white thunderbolts descended from above and hit the target, leaving him no choice but to raise his sword to defend . Arthur used this opportunity to teleport next to him and attack with his palm .

An image of an illusory golden palm could be seen in front of Arthur, the slightly gigantic palm crashed into the unfocused Sol'dhin, sending him flying into the abyss down below . Arthur didn't even look at the disappearing figure of the enemy and, instead, flew at Elias, who was using his coin to extinguish the rampaging death knights .

The old man's body trembled as it suffered the frontal assault of a suffocating pressure coming from above . Like a falling meteor, Arthur descended on the old man, his fist glowing with a green light as it slowly made its way toward the defenseless victim .

Just as Arthur was about hit him, the coin materialized a semi-sphering black barrier which stopped Arthur fist, however, it only lasted for a few seconds before it broke and flung away both Elias and the attacker .

Arthur quickly stabilized his body but the old man couldn't, he rolled on the ground and coughed more blood before getting up with much difficulty .

"I really didn't expect you to go through my advice . "

Timos' voice echoed inside Arthur's head . The Black Devil's soul was almost fully integrated inside his body and it was soon the time from the self-destruction of Riarravar . After a momentary silence, the old being spoke again:

"You kind of remind me of Zaarae . Your crazy fighting style is a carbon copy of hers but, unlike her, you're not laughing like some crazy witch . "

He followed that with an unsettling chuckle as if he remembered something funny .

...

A few days ago, when Arthur and Lucy were still in the Free Space, Timos gave an absurd advice to Arthur . It was when the trade was finally done and Makaze returned to his home .

"You seek power, I mean... who doesn't, right? But, dear guest, you're a soul parasite and you've already reached the peak of physical strength . Even if you gain more stats, the increase would be insignificant . To properly get stronger, one must focus on his core . A body-cultivator trains their body, a necromancer tries to bond with death and so on... in your case, your soul needs to be nourished, to enlarge, and the best way to do that is either from extremely rare and miraculous herbs which I doubt you'll find any, or through death . "

Arthur thought he heard the end of the sentence wrong, he frowned and asked back

"Death? I need to die?"

"Yes... well, technically, it's dying but you won't really 'die' . A soul is something that gets much stronger through reincarnation . I can sense that someone used a reincarnation artifact on your a while ago so even if you're killed, you'll be reborn somewhere else . Furthermore, a final death will unlock the 'unbound' passive skills which even I, don't know what really is . "

"..."

Arthur gave no answer as he listened to Timos' nonsense, not knowing whether to laugh or cry . Death? He's doing everything in his power to not die yet this being was shamelessly telling him to die and reincarnate .

"I can assure you that through just one reincarnation, your story will become unimaginably stronger and you'll have enough strength to overpower anyone in your way . "

"Yeah but I'll have to die... I can't do that . "

"And why can't yo-ah! Because of your partner? I didn't say you have to die now or here, anyway, just think about it . "

...

"This is sooner than expected but it's nice to be so determined . "

Arthur paid no heed to the blabbering Timos, he was about to attack Elias again only for a blade to appear inches away from his neck . Before it could decapitate him, his eye emitted a blue light and the sword was frozen and so was its holder .

The eye's ability was activated to its maximum, making the Shogun totally motionless in mid-air . Arthur conjured a dark sword and stabbed the enemy's chest .

It went through the hole Sol'dhin made previously to fake his injury and cut through his skin and bones, invading his organs . It was at this moment that the time stop effect wore and the Shogun regained control over his body .

He attempted to back off but Arthur didn't let him, he let go of the sword and unleashed countless small void mouths which devoured the half-broken armor . Arthur quickly followed by an unseen kick that hit Sol'dhin's hand and flung his sword away .

The parasite crouched to dodge a clumsy counterattack before punching the Shogun's lower chin, sending him flying in the air . [Faster than Death] was used again and Arthur appeared above his target, a lengthy black spear in his hand . He bulged his muscles and threw the spear which whistled in the air and struck the unresponsive man .

Arthur did land a lot of hits but most didn't do any significant damage... even if they did, he was someone who will only stop when there's nothing left of his opponent . As the Shogun's body was falling, a threateningly large dark arrow appeared next to Arthur, its sharp tip pointing at Sol'dhin .

The parasite controlled his trembling hand and threw the Heavenly Arrow, following after it with a Dark Rizaki . A series of ear-deafening explosions occurred as the sky was shrouded by an ominous darkness, the Frozen Keep and everything in the area disappeared and all you could see was an inky blackness . This short period was coupled with an eerie silence which lasted for a few brief seconds before the occurrence of a loud explosion .

A huge chunk of the fortress vanished and the rest of it was dyed by the corrupt Dark Magic, weakening it and causing it to start crumbling, slowly but surely . As for the Shogun, his figure could be seen jumping from one falling boulder to the other . His body was covered in blood and his face didn't look too good .

"I only wanted to play with you yet you're so savagely serious . "

Arthur could see him grit his teeth yet he didn't care, he clenched his shaky hand and used another Rizaki, this time containing the fire of the Vermilion Bird . His body was in such a terrible state was solely due to the backlash suffered from the blade, apart from that, he didn't get hit by the Shogun even once . Part of the reason was because Sol'dhin was fighting in an unfavorable location, forcing him to focus on finding a steady ground rather than facing Arthur . Moreover, the parasite had a large arsenal that allowed him to simultaneously attack from long and close range . There was also Arthur's previous sword slash which got rid of Sol'dhin's arms, severely handicapping him .