

The Noble 391

Chapter 391: An Inevitable And Absolute Defeat

"..."

Mitrass did not respond to Seraphina's complaint, which seemed superior to his own. He simply exerted more pressure with his enormous, heavy sword.

Seraphina, for her part, continued to cast spells as they exchanged blows at close range.

Clang!. Clack. Boom!.

Spear and sword clashed again and again. After several exchanges, Mitrass finally came to a conclusion.

Seraphina wasn't just a physically strengthening mage, she was a flat out warrior as well and the art she was using wasn't something he could understand either.

That art seemed to cover the level difference through advanced moves and techniques; not to mention that every direct clash she seemed to suddenly increase her strength, deflecting hits that she shouldn't be able to handle.

Even so, from time to time he managed to graze her, causing some superficial wounds. For her part, she was unable to do anything against Mitrass, despite the spells she continuously cast, yet she was still able to stand up to him.

Clank!

The exchange intensified to the point where Seraphina stopped casting magic to bind, distract or pressure him. It all came down to direct combat

But the more they exchanged, Mitrass felt the flow of battle tilt against him.

He didn't understand why, obviously he has a clear advantage even if he fails to suppress it.

The situation was becoming strange, difficult to read....

Of course, he had to be careful not to kill her.. but he was giving his all, he was not playing with Seraphina, he was increasing his strength progressively, seeking to incapacitate her quickly.

But, for some reason he didn't understand, Seraphina also seemed to gradually increase her strength to match him.

She kept getting hurt, but far from weakening her, it seemed to give her energy. Her spear technique was improving by the second; her attacks were becoming more effective, more precise, faster.

The combat heated up. Literally. Seraphina's skin took on a redder hue.

Clang!—whoosh—crash!

Clashes occurred several times per second: feints, deflections, techniques executed without pause.

Mitrass began to watch between her movements. Seraphina's art was chaotic, with no clear flow and impossible to predict, but people have habits and Seraphina was no exception.

Thanks to this Mitrass finally managed to read a fraction of that chaotic flow.

Repulsion.

He executed a key move: an upward stroke synchronized with his skill .

KRAAANG!

The impact was brutal. Seraphina's spear flew upward.

Time seemed to slow down.

A decisive moment in which both sharpened their perception so as not to miss the smallest detail.

Mitrass completed the upward movement and, without stopping, chained a downward one.

He brought his heavy sword down with the greatest force he had used so far, aiming at Seraphina's right breast.

Still, he was careful not to kill her and for that very reason he was also very focused on this decisive moment.

Seraphina looked helpless without her spear.

But in that defining moment, she did not even react to her loss.

She extended her right hand toward the descending sword.

Mitrass interpreted it as a last futile effort. And he thought it didn't matter if Seraphina lost a limb. He did not stop.

But what he didn't notice - no one noticed - was that, even within that slowed time, the spear that was sent flying disappeared almost instantly.

And, with the same speed, Seraphina's hands were covered by thick golden gloves.

Everything happened in an instant within an instant.

Art of Lust, Fourth Stance: Erupting Embrace

CLANGG!!

Metal against metal. The impact resounded violently, and just a heartbeat later-

Art of Lust, Third Stance: Seductive Touch

BOOOM! CRACK!

The second impact came from Seraphina. Her left hand hit Mitrass' chest full on.

The force threw him several meters backwards.

It was a very effective counterattack for Mithras who thought it was already his victory, he didn't really expect such a powerful counterattack.

Yet Mithras was experienced. As he flew, he adjusted his center of gravity and landed on his feet.

In the center of his chest a puncture wound opened up. His own muscles were twisting, forcing its closure, and those same muscles were what prevented the attack from reaching his demonic core.

That was dangerously close to being fatal.

The armor, on the other hand, proved almost useless against Seraphina's peculiar attack.

Mitrass was already tired of being surprised... and yet, the surprises kept coming.

She was doing, one after another, things that should not be possible.

And Mitrass felt more and more oppression and a growing sense of alertness.

It was not just a feeling.

It was a feeling backed by his Skill, the flow of battle was further and further away from being in his favor.

His skill didn't tell him what the problem was, but he definitely couldn't go on like this.

Mitrass looked at Seraphina, ready to finally exert his full strength without any restraint. He even thought that, if she died, it would be understandable.

After all, Noha should also have seen - or at least sensed - how dangerous she was.

But the moment he looked at her.....

He felt a chill.

Why was that?

Seraphina didn't even look at him properly; she was drinking what appeared to be a potion with the hand that he had destroyed in the previous exchange.

No, he wasn't surprised that her hand was as good as new in such a short time, nor that she was drinking a potion in the middle of battle.

What set off all his alarms was what she was holding in her other hand, which was pointing directly at him.

Mitrass had been wrong about something.

Seraphina didn't stop casting spells at him because she was overwhelmed by the direct exchange.

No.

She had changed tactics. While fighting, she had been preparing something bigger. Something decisive.

That was the bridge that would break her desperate situation.

In her hand was formed a circle covered by an absurd amount of runes.

Mitrass could barely comprehend them. He had studied magic to confront mages, and as a demon he had decent proficiency in magic even if he was a warrior.

Still, the amount of runes and the way they were woven, intertwined and overlapping made him dizzy just looking at them.

Understanding what was going to happen was impossible.

But one thing was clear.

It was dangerous.

'I have to dodge.'

That was his conclusion. Maybe he could take it if he prepared himself, but he would not come out unscathed. Luckily, Seraphina didn't seem to be finished yet, there seemed to be room to escape.

Just as he was analyzing the direction-

He noticed something else.

The other two were right behind him.

His skin prickled.

That didn't seem like a coincidence.

He thought about how frightening Seraphina's consciousness was. It wasn't just her ability to grasp the big picture: she was fighting him, preparing a monstrous spell, and still keeping an eye on the surroundings.

In a situation that the slightest carelessness would have been dangerous.

Leading him to that point... it was hard to explain from any angle.

The more time passed, the more he felt that Seraphina was some kind of incomprehensible monster.

Still his plans to dodge was present, He thought Noha would be fine because he had Oryx. But, for some reason, Mitrass felt Noha wouldn't move on purpose.

As if he was testing him.

Maybe a punishment for disobeying him... or maybe he just didn't understand how dangerous Seraphina and her attack was.

Whatever it was, Mitrass understood that he could no longer dodge, the oppression grew even more when he thought that Seraphina even came to understand them to the point that she predicted that something like this would happen.

He gritted his teeth.

He stood his ground.

It was then that Seraphina finished the spell.

Its complexity and power surpassed anything before it. It was something capable of easily taking down beings of the ninth metamorphosis.

And finally-

She culminated with a simple:

"LUX DEMOLITOR"

The sphere of light shot out of his hand at a speed difficult to follow even for Mitrass' perception.

By the time he managed to catch the movement, it was already in front of him-.

BROOMMMMMM-!

The sphere collided head-on with Mitrass, who had placed his greatsword in front of him again.

The explosion shook the cave, bringing it to the brink of collapse.

An overwhelming glow flooded everything, blinding those present.

And in the midst of that light, where no shadow could exist, a fifth presence that had remained hidden was exposed.

It was not self-sabotage.

She was waiting for exactly this moment.

And she attacked.

Art of Lust, Second Stance: Ardent Pulse of Desire

"Eh-! Agh-!"

The first attack was quick and precise, taking advantage of the blinding glare.

Art of Lust, Third Stance: Seductive Touch

"!!!"

She then chained a second attack without any pause. With a fluid displacement, she lunged towards Oryx to claim his life.

"Tsk..."

But Oryx managed to notice him and escape along with Noha at the last instant.

The first attack, however, had accomplished its goal.

The hand that carried the ring where Noha had kept the seedling was separated from it.

The attacker was none other than Seraphina's doppelgänger, wielding a short spear.

Although the second attack failed it was somewhat expected.

After all, she knew Oryx's Skill's well.

Name: Oryx Zevraen

Race: Human

Rank: Divine Metamorphosis

Gender: Male

Stats:

Strength: 353

Mana: 910

Agility: 201

Defense: 388

Vitality: 344

Skills:

Space Movement (S)

Affinity for Space (S)

Dilated Perception (A)

Death Detection (A)

His abilities made him a difficult cockroach to kill.

Seraphina did not expect to encounter two of the worst cockroaches on the same day, counting Sealis.

She knew that attack would be avoided. She wasn't surprised. What bothered her was that he even took Noha with him.

Still, it was a success: he had secured that which could endanger those close to her.

Wasting no time, the doppelganger picked it up and threw it towards Seraphina.

At the same time, Seraphina threw what looked like a dark purple arrow at it.

Everything was clearly orchestrated.

A small victory.

But with consequences.

"Fucking bitch... I was being merciful to you. Kill her... no. I'll kill her myself."

The anger of the hitherto calm Noha exploded at the loss of his hand. The passionate gaze he had directed at Seraphina was completely gone; all that remained was rage and murderous intent.

And he acted immediately.

At her feet a glowing circle began to form, and it was not one formed by runes.

Seraphina saw it and instantly understood what the demon would do.

She quickly assessed her surroundings.

He and Oryx ; were to her right.

Mitrass was in front of her. Wounded, but still standing. His flesh was writhing as the wounds forced themselves closed; the smaller ones scarred on their own.

The armor was largely gone, though remnants still remained attached to his body.

Behind Mitrass was his doppelgänger, who Without wasting any time, had already initiated an attack on Mitrass' back.

GRAoowww-!

At that moment a deep roar spread through the place.

The cave shook, it was already on the verge of collapse after so many impacts and the use of overwhelming magic, it was a miracle that it still didn't.

From the circle on the floor as if it were a door emerged a creature.

A huge black jaguar, with red spots, more than four meters tall.

Its aura was thick and bloody.

It was a ten-star beast.

Equivalent to the tenth metamorphosis.

Again she was not surprised.

After all, she had already seen the Noha state.

Name: Noha Ài Bisī

Race: Florathis

Rank: Divine Metamorphosis

Gender: Male

Stats:

Strength: 590

Mana: 978

Agility: 665

Defense: 711

Vitality: 625

Skills:

Bonded Sacrifice (Ω)

Beast Convergence (EX)

Breeding (S)

Alpha Vision (A)

Bestial Summon (A)

Bond of Submission (A)

Affinity for Plants (A)

Sensory Link (B)

Seraphina was now in a critical situation.

Even with the addition of her doppelgänger, she could not cover the difference in strength.

Each of the three of them as she thought from the beginning was a problem that would require her to give her all.

And, as far as She knew, Noha wasn't capable of summoning just one or two beasts.

It was an uphill struggle.

Defeat - and death - seemed inevitable.

An absolute destiny.

Chapter 392: Critical Moment

Yes, defeat seemed imminent for her.

She did not deceive herself by the fact that she had stood up to Mitrass or had come out relatively superior in the previous exchange.

She understood perfectly well that Mitrass had been holding back from killing her, and that the other two were just watching.

But that would no longer be the case.

her actions had crossed a point of no return and from every angle were clearly rash.

Mitrass no longer had any reason to hold back.

And besides him, she would have to face the other two... and who knows how many more beasts Noha could summon.

Analyzing her situation coldly and realistically, she was no better than a walking corpse.

Cutting off Noha's hand had done her no good: it only seemed like she was closing off her only escape route and actively seeking her own death.

And yet-

Just at that moment-when she should be overcome by despair or fear, with a beast of tenth metamorphosis halfway to devouring her-there was only one expression on her face.

A big smile, as she looked at the agile beast.

In an instant, the single gauntlet she wore transformed back into a spear, though now it was shorter, similar to the one held by her doppelganger.

"ART OF LUST, FIFTH STANCE:." (x2)

Two powerful screams like never before echoed in unison: Seraphina's and her doppelganger's.

The latter was right behind Mitrass, who was already preparing to confront her.

The aura emanating from the doppelganger from the spear was almost identical to Seraphina's: an overwhelming, chaotic and extremely lethal energy.

The doppelganger's attack was aimed directly at Mitrass.

Seraphina's, on the other hand, seemed to be aimed at the demonic beast... or even at Noha, its summoner.

"I won't let-"

That was the obvious flow of what looked like it was going to happen.

Even Mitrass ignored a faint sense of incoherence he caught a glimpse of. Trusting the obvious, he braced himself for a serious counterattack.

Noha, for her part, instantly erected a protective barrier.

Oryx prepared to move alongside Noha in the worst case scenario.

The time for games was over. Everyone was ready to deal with Seraphina.

But-

"Saltus Spatii!... TEMPTING TORRENT" (x2)

BOOMMM!

GRAWWW!

What happened was completely out of everyone's expectations.

They both appeared right on top of the demonic beast.

THRUM!

They attacked almost the same spot on its back, in a perfectly coordinated manner.

The objective was clear: to kill it as quickly as possible.

They did not hold back at all.

The Fifth Posture of the Art of Lust was, on its own, almost a natural phenomenon: an aggressive vortex that propelled the weapon—while simultaneously dragging, pinning, and shattering everything else it reached.

And not only that.

Depending on the number of elements involved, that torrent became even more chaotic, more aggressive and more devastating.

In addition to the fact that these elements were empowered by multiple Skill, the damage inflicted by Seraphina -although not as striking or on such an enormous scale as the magic used before- was, at the time, her fastest and most powerful controllable attack.

'Get ready, they're coming.'

'Yes.'

On the other hand, the doppelganger used a higher percentage of the light element, but with the Spear of Lust - being the best possible amplifier for that element - while it didn't reach the damage of the original, it was still considerable.

Even more so because they both hit almost the same spot and, at that instant, both Seraphina were putting everything they had, holding back almost nothing.

Slowly...

GRREAAAAUGH!

The beast, of course, did not allow this to continue without resistance. It began to writhe and flail violently, but both Seraphina stood their ground, concentrating on driving their spears deeper and deeper, inch by inch, destroying skin, flesh and reaching the creature's bones.

At the same time, the chaotic and destructive aura of the Art began to invade its interior, causing a disaster from within.

"This wretch... what did she do because my connection to my baby, shit! Oryx, do something too! Try not to hurt my baby, And you don't just stand there like an idiot, didn't you want to kill her, do it now!"

Incited by Noha's fury, they all began to attack: Oryx with what looked like space magic, Noha himself initiating what appeared to be a powerful plant element magic, and, although he was farther away, Mitrass was already preparing to execute a strong follow-up attack.

BOOMMM!

Once again, the cave shook; collapse was only a matter of time. But the important thing was that the three, who had attacked without holding back, did not achieve their goal.

"Shit... really, how many tricks does she have...?"

Seraphina was still on top of the beast, but now she was holding the large spear instead of the short one, while her doppelganger had positioned itself in front of the three and the creature.

It wasn't that she could defend against attacks without restraint; she simply already knew that the three would attack without reservation and had activated her remaining defensive artifacts.

Some were among the few she had kept since rescuing Ciel; others she had purchased or received as gifts from her father, and some she had created herself along with Ciel over the last period of time.

There were none particularly good. The best would barely withstand attacks of up to the ninth metamorphosis; still, all together they were supposed to be able to completely stop many attacks of that range.

But the three were not easy opponents. The defences were barely enough to stop the combined magical attack and Mitrass's assault.

Even so, these gave Seraphina the moment she needed.

"Damn, it's harder than it looks—Art of Lust, Third Stance: Seductive Touch."

SCHRK!

At that point, putting more weight on the spear, she switched to the third stance, which had more penetrating than destructive properties, and entered even deeper into the beast.

And when she had penetrated deeply-

"Art of Lust, Fifth Stance: Tempting Torrent "

Krrrshh!

She was being extremely generous with her mana and didn't hold back for an instant. In fact, she already had a little less than ten percent left.

She was using all she had left.

Completely focused, the chaotic maelstrom went deep inside the creature, causing it such intense pain that it could no longer even attempt to remove Seraphina.

Seraphina knew: it was rare to find beasts that, without having surpassed ten stars, possessed intelligence.

These did not have the capacity of thinking beings to take countermeasures or make complex decisions; they only reacted by instinct.

And in this case, that was not enough.

Besides, it was a dominated beast, which depended on its summoner to make decisions, without that it was an even easier prey.

The wound was becoming lethal. Little by little, its movements slowed. It was a tenth metamorphosis beast, but it clearly did not excel in defense or vitality.

Seraphina had noticed this detail before; that's why she showed a big smile when she saw it instead of despair.

"Die, dammit!"

At that moment, Seraphina glimpsed what she was looking for and withdrew her spear. It disappeared, turning back into gloves, and went straight for the red stone and extracted it cleanly.

GRAAAWWWWW!

A scream of agony and inevitable death erupted from the tenth-ranked beast.

And that was the last thing it emitted.

The beast died.

A creature subdued by someone four ranks lower, in a short period of time.

The speed, tenacity and precision with which it reached the target surprised even the three, who were now ready to make more follow-up attacks.

But after the surprise... for Noha came anger at losing one of his valuable summons.

Immediately, another circle began to emerge from the ground.

No, it wasn't one: it was two.

One was even bigger than the previous one.

Oryx simply snorted.

Although Seraphina's achievement—killing a ten-star beast—was something he would not have considered possible for someone at the sixth metamorphosis, in the end it proved futile.

The tactic of picking off enemies one by one was understandable, but to him it was impossible for her to repeat it.

And, besides, he knew that Noha still had plenty left....

To Oryx, Seraphina's actions, while worthy of admiration, were fundamentally futile.

They were both certain that Seraphina would fall...

But those were just the thoughts of those two.

But Mitrass, upon seeing Seraphina standing over the corpse, bathed in blood and holding the demonic beast's core, felt a chill and an unpleasant sensation unlike anything he had ever felt before.

"Hehahaha!!... Now you sons of bitches, let's even this out! It's time for the second phase..."

Seraphina, with her other hand and while laughing, pierced her own chest, opening a hole in an action nothing short of suicidal and losing.

But Mitrass stepped forward with great speed towards Seraphina.

He, who could feel the flow of battle, understood: this was definitely wrong. He didn't know what it was, but he couldn't let Seraphina finish.

His movement was so fast that he would arrive in front of Seraphina in a split second.

He already had his heavy sword up high, held with one of his hands and surrounded by a red aura; he was obviously circulating his art and executing some very powerful technique.

His own body even began to be surrounded by a thick crimson flame.

That attack had not a bit of restraint; on the contrary, she seemed to be putting every possible ounce of her power, skills and mana into that attack.

And his sword was like a sickle of death, aimed directly at finishing off Seraphina.

But in front of him appeared a barrier: the last defensive artifact that the doppelganger had kept.

She couldn't really follow Mitrass' serious movement, but she had already activated it even before Mitrass moved.

She knew it was a critical moment and she wasn't going to allow anyone to intervene.

Boommm! -crack-

The blow resounded, followed immediately by a cracking sound. Mitrass had broken through the defense, but that small moment gave the doppelganger a chance to get in his way.

"Art of Lust: fourth stance-."

She activated her counterattack art as fast as she could, preparing for Mitrass' next attack, which - as he thought - would come immediately.

Boommm!

And so it did. Mitrass didn't even take a split second to use his sword again to attack the doppelganger.

Even so, the blow was so powerful that the doppelganger could not resist it at all, even when his hand, for an instant, had been covered in gold.

It was sent flying into the wall without even having a chance to deflect, let alone counterattack.

Mitrass did not hesitate for a moment. He paid no more attention to the doppelganger and went straight for Seraphina again, who at that moment seemed hunched over and in great pain.

Nothing unusual, considering that she herself had just opened her own chest. In fact, it seemed that in that short period she had even spat out large mouthfuls of blood.

Everywhere you looked, it seemed that even without Mitrass' intervention, she would die alone.

Still, Mitrass - who did not fail to sense that something was wrong - pressed on. When he arrived right in front of Seraphina, again with his sword raised high, charged again with his most powerful attack, he swiftly descended straight towards Seraphina's head to finally put an end to this.

Demonization (C) >>> Demonization (B)

Chapter 393: Corrective Force

Demonization (C) >>> Demonization (B)

At that moment something changed, something that Mitrass did not know, but he felt that change.

In that fraction of a moment, Seraphina raised her hand.

From Mitrass' perspective it was a slow movement that would not even make it in time, and would be of no use anyway.

Just as Mitrass' sword was about to collide-that hand that seemed impossible to reach simply accelerated in that slow world.

BANG!

A great impact sounded but it was not against what was expected, but against a golden staff, which began to appear in Seraphina's hand that had arrived in time.

With a quick flick of her wrist, Seraphina tilted it,

SSSSrrr-

The blade ran along the golden handle, scraping it, deflecting the blow that was heading straight for her head.

Art of Lust: Fourth Posture.

A minimal adjustment of feet.

Seraphina spun on her axis, completing the redirection and sending Mitrass' attack straight to the ground.

BROOM!

The impact shattered the rock. Nothing more.

Mitrass was incredulous. But it wasn't just that. Without looking away, he saw Seraphina's appearance begin to change.

Her white hair turned pink.

Clothes began to disappear, leaving barely something that could be called that.

Two pink horns emerged.

Her blue eyes turned pink... and in them was something different.

A clear intention.

'I will kill you.'

It wasn't just hostility or something they could easily overlook. It was a direct warning. More real, more dangerous than before.

Mitrass understood it instantly and, before she completed her move, he adopted a defensive stance, crossing his heavy sword in front of his body.

Erupting Embrace.

BOOM!

"Uagh-!"

The impact of the fully formed spear was brutal, and something that even Mitrass, who wasn't underestimating Seraphina, didn't expect at all.

Seraphina attacked from a low angle, completely breaking through his defense.

Mitrass was sent hurtling at high speed towards the roof of the cave, already on the verge of collapse.

That wasn't just any hit.

Seraphina had absorbed some of Mitrass's strength... and had given it back amplified with her new power gained from demonizing herself with the core of the tenth-ranked beast.

Strength: 401 → 882

Mana

: 412 → 906

Agility: 398 → 876

Defense: 308 → 678

Vitality: 420 → 924

A 120% increase in all her stats.

"bleegh!"

But the price was obvious.

Swollen, throbbing veins protruded from her chest, pulsing violently, straining the flesh to the limit.

Some looked like they were about to burst.

Seraphina was spitting blood in great gulps.

She had gone beyond what her body could take.

The brutal surge was tearing her apart from the inside.

Every cell seemed about to explode. If she didn't release that power, it would become really dangerous...

Without hesitation, she concentrated an enormous amount of mana.

She pointed her spear at Mitrass and shouted:

"Lux Demolitor."

The sphere of light that emerged was incomprehensibly more powerful than before.

BOOM!!!!

It impacted against Mitrass and detonated.

Everything glowed again, as if a mini sun had been born in the cave.

The sound disappeared for an instant-

Rumble - BRRRIIMM!

When it returned, it sounded as if the earth were lamenting, as if it were about to break apart.

The shockwave swept the surroundings; debris hit the ground, and light reached every corner.

Even the mana in the air trembled to the point that the senses were dulled.

The whole place had been shaken by the impact.

BANG!

In the midst of the roar, another thud was heard, followed by a sound that cut through the air.

In that world still bathed in light, Seraphina did not stand idly by, nor did she wait for the result of the explosion.

She lunged towards the last spot where she had seen Noha and unloaded a brutal blow.

Noha was hit squarely and was thrown upwards, as was Mitrass... the next one was Oryx, but although he could not stop the attack on Noha until the impact was heard, he had more than enough time to flee, making Seraphina fail once again.

Seraphina didn't care.

She looked up. The light had waned; the cave ceiling, which had once threatened to collapse, was no more. In its place, the night sky was exposed.

The attack had opened up several meters of earth.

Mitrass and the other two were still ascending on the accumulated inertia.

Mitrass was seriously injured, but still alive. Seraphina looked closely to see why and realised that the remains of his armour still seemed to have some function, as they began to disintegrate into a cloud of dust.

Noha, on the other hand, was covered by a crystalline layer. On his chest, a beetle-like insect remained attached.

Apart from the hand he was missing, he was practically intact. His gaze, filled with fury, was directed downwards.

"Ugh...Cough! It's still not enough. I need to get more out. Qetesh, can you do it or not?"

[[Piece of cake]]

"Okay."

Seraphina was still in pain. The veins in her body pulsed more violently, deforming her skin grotesquely.

Chaotic energy was escaping from every pore.

Still, she raised the spear aimed at them.

Noha and Mitrass immediately felt a great bad feeling.

Noha began to conjure another circle while giving orders to the only creature that still remained on the ground - the other one had already died - the reason, it was the same reason why he was intact after such a violent blow.

He had lost control of the situation. Either he regained it, or he would be swept away by Seraphina's flow... an increasingly lethal one.

Still, his reaction was a very slow step.

Before the beast reached her Seraphina's spear changed shape, taking on a strange, staff-like structure and aimed at him .

Art of the Nexus Ballistic, First Stance: "Chaos Bullet."

BANG!

A dry rumble echoed. A small light shot out from the golden staff.

Noha had no choice: she canceled the current summon and poured a huge amount of mana into the crystalline beast in her chest.

It was her defensive summon.

A very rare tenth rank beast: the Crystal Devourer.

BRROOMM!

A gigantic, savage explosion erupted at the point of collision and began to devour everything in its path, expanding uncontrollably.

Seraphina saw it and, from experience, reacted instantly.

"Aegis Clara," "Obductio Noctis," "Praesidium Fulminis." "Art of Lust, Fourth Stance - ugh!"

She resisted as best she could. She cast three high-level defensive spells and still braced herself for when they, inevitably, broke.

Her body was in such a precarious state that even with near-perfect control, she felt she was losing it.

She gritted her teeth. Placing her spear in front of her, she absorbed the residual energy from the impact of her own uncontrollable attack, and when she finally finished—

An enormous amount of energy was building up inside her, pushing a body that was already at its limit.

She moved immediately and aimed at the giant rock serpent Noha had summoned earlier.

Art of Lust, Third Stance: Seductive Touch.

She redirected all that chaotic energy, along with her own. Mana was escaping her like never before, but it was necessary: if she didn't release that excess, her body would collapse.

CRACK.

The beast, also damaged by the collateral effect of the art and still shaken by the explosion, reacted too late.

When it tried to defend itself, Seraphina was already in front of it.

She pierced its scales, with the spear.

"Noxaris Regnum Floreat."

From the point of impact, a dark spell immediately spread.

Tentacles of shadow slipped between scales and flesh, invading the interior, destroying it from within.

The snake tried to resist.

It was useless.

SPLAT!

With a final, dry sound, the creature collapsed.

Seraphina looked up to assess the result of her attack.

There was no one there.

Her pink eyes glowed with an unnatural intensity and a certain mysticism as she scanned the sky.

"Tsk... they escaped. Fuck... cough!, cough!. Fuck..."

She clicked her tongue, when she understood that I don't end up with any of them.

More worrying was her condition: she looked like a time bomb.

It had consumed enormous amounts of mana in seconds... and yet the core was still performing its natural function, supplying and replenishing it.

In those conditions, that was not an advantage.

It was a sentence.

Among the rubble, the doppelgänger emerged.

"Ugh... damn. what did I get myself into, Fuck... everything's a mess. Damn... but now I know: it was that banished piece of shit. It's the source of everything that changed and the demons went crazy here and there, ugh, by the trail left by Oryx's crude use of space magic they didn't go far. We have to be quick."

As she spat out complaints between gasps, she could barely stand. She was as bad off as Seraphina: one arm and part of her side were completely gone.

Even so, she immediately headed for the corpse, not the snake's, but the other one, which was a kind of green orangutan that had died as a sacrifice so that Noha would be unharmed.

"Do you think you can handle it?...."

"Ugh, I don't know, damn it! That bastard only has tenth-rank beasts?!... Without purification, which keeps most of the chaotic mana stable, the berserk or even the flexibility... ugh! I'm not going to last much longer... It doesn't look like you're going to last much longer either..."

The doppelgänger activated the demonization.

Seraphina knew it.

Those Three had not fled.

Noha was petty and vindictive; Mitrass, meticulous. With those personalities, they wouldn't leave risk factors like them alive. They would come back. No doubt about it.

And none of the three had given their best. They had not brought out their hidden cards or unleashed their full power.

They were reorganizing. Preparing to come back, kill her .

And the most important factor is that they need to get the ring back.

When they come back they would be more careful. More coordinated.

This was really starting... and they were up against the clock, so they wouldn't sit back and wait for them.

Seraphina felt her body - and the doppelganger's - crumbling. They wouldn't last much longer.

Worse: a specific Skill was vibrating strongly, wanting to break free from the suppression of her blessing.

If she held that kind of power too long, the consequences would be dire.

"Good. spatium solve."

The doppelganger began to chant a spell. her body was degrading even faster than hers. her hadn't been there long and she was already the same, or worse.

She gritted her teeth. They braced themselves.

As he readied himself, Seraphina inspected the ring.

Fortunately - or unfortunately - not just one, but all the seedlings were still there.

So what the demon had said was not a delusion.

That pissed her off even more.

And that feeling came back.

It was what she hated the most.

It wasn't about losing control—she knew that thinking like that was arrogance, an idea that led straight to an early death. What bothered her was that things were moving in a specific direction.

A direction that seemed to point to her. At her happiness.

As if something was trying to forcefully correct itself, pushing her to repeat the fate of her alternate self and snatch away what she cherished most.

She knew that fate didn't work that way. Least of all for someone with one of the fourteen legacies.

There should be no such thing as a "corrective force".

And yet...everything lined up that way.

It was so improbable that it infuriated her.

Her berserker Skill was being stimulated more than she had anticipated throughout the fight.

Now she was determined.

That bastards would not run away.

With all the seedlings in her possession, they would hunt her down, either she would die or they would.

"Huh?..."

Or so she thought-until the ring she was holding suddenly disappeared from her hand.

For an instant, confusion hit her. Then she understood.

They had played them; the damn ring had a recovery function.

"shit!!! Leave the secondary spells to number two, hurry up!!."

The oppressive feeling became suffocating. Her anger crossed another threshold.

"Sons of bitches... SPATII CONCORDIA ."

The doppelganger was just as furious. She took it without hesitation.

And they both disappeared.

Chapter 394: Battle Against The Clock

"Hcuaaaack... ack, what... was that...?"

"Haaahaah... ahhh... I almost didn't make it in time."

At that moment, in the middle of a dark forest full of fog, three people appeared.

It was Oryx, who had managed, at the last instant, to grab Noha and Mitrass and teleport away from that destructive attack.

All three looked shocked, each in their own way.

Even Mitrass. He understood that the situation could become dangerous because of his ability, but something so abrupt and of that magnitude was beyond any logical reasoning for him.

He did not understand what kind of being it was that he had encountered.

"She... it... whatever it was... was still in the sixth metamorphosis. But when she inserted the core, my skill could no longer understand her, and her rank seemed to skyrocket. Something of this level can only be a blessing; a blessing that somehow helps her use beast core as a source of mana."

Even Noha was so shocked and trying to understand what happened, as well as pondering seriously.

He had been foolish and lax: not only did he lose one of his beasts, but also his hand. He understood more clearly than ever that Seraphina was not someone to be trifled with and that their lives were at stake.

"Yes, Imperial Highness. her aura became chaotic and characteristic of demons. Her physical appearance also changed to a demonic form. But I know of no divinity or blessing that can do such a thing."

Mitrass also tried to understand, or at least decipher a bit what had just happened. He really felt overcome and wanted to rationalize, at least a little, what had happened.

"That's neither human nor demonic. You twisted its neck, broke its hand and it still recovered like nothing. It must be incredibly powerful regeneration or healing skill, to the point that it seemed like a blessing or divine grace as well."

Oryx also joined in, trying to understand and describe Seraphina.

"From the beginning, she was able to launch magical attacks that caused me damage, to such an extent that it almost seemed like a blessing or a divinity grace is that or she has more than one related powerful skill. Not to mention her power as a warrior. I was not using my full strength, but clearly her art

was more powerful and complete than mine. I saw no artifact other than the spear, and yet she was terribly stable in all aspects. And little by little I felt her becoming more powerful. It is very similar to my blessing."

"How many Skills does she have, why are they all so powerful? Because she seems to have more than four blessings."

"And that accomplice too. He appeared out of nowhere and cut my hand; I didn't feel anything and my automatic defense artifacts didn't activate. shit! It's like he had no harmful intent towards me, but something like that is impossible if he cut off my hand."

Really, a lot happened in a short period of time and everyone shared their thoughts as if they unconsciously wanted, together, to try to understand her.

"It's strange, as his imperial highness says. This one doesn't seem as capable, but he shared much of his magic and arts. They both seem to be capable of both at a level that even I have not seen."

"They both seemed very coordinated, and that appearance...why were they both the same? Do they both have the shapeshifting ability? Was it really Princess Silvercrest, is her accomplice some other kind of powerful ability?"

"Damn, now that you mention it, they both shared an almost identical mana signature. We're fighting the same being. This is driving me nuts, is she some god's favorite agent? That Silvercrest, was she from that family that had someone in the fourth soul conversion?"

But the more they thought about it, the more things didn't make sense, and in the face of such an indescribable being, the oppression that was being born in them increased, even though they didn't want to let it be seen.

"Yes, your imperial highness. Still, I doubt she's the real thing, though I heard that the second generation of Avaloria is very competent; the best only make it to the fifth metamorphosis, and she's not even among the best. Besides, she was in the city; she couldn't possibly have moved faster than me."

"... if it's that thing... It seems capable of anything. Though it's likely she's using that appearance for something else. After all, it's a complicated identity to deal with. It seems deliberate, considering how capable she was. She definitely guided all the events to get us to this point, as if she knew us; and her appearance must have been part of her plan. That's why, from the beginning, I believed that—"

"Goddamn it, shut up, Mitrass. Fuck, I know. It was my fault for underestimating her. I understand that we should kill her when she was playing dead."

"I'm not trying to blame you, your imperial highness. Even I could not comprehend the danger she poses. But I guess that doesn't come without a price. She was clearly having difficulties, despite her burst of power. Perhaps, if we wait and return, we can eliminate her and her accomplice."

"Ugh! I lost contact with my stony serpent... how the hell does she sever the connection we have? I really want to kill her. She killed three of my beasts... ugh. But we'd better back off. We didn't come here to fight, and who knows what else that thing can do."

"But, your royal highness, she has—"

"No. She doesn't. Look."

In Noha's one hand appeared the ring Seraphina had "stolen". He checked it: inside was still everything.

He really wanted to go back and make her pay for cutting off his hand, but even he began to feel something akin to fear.

The repertoire of what Seraphina showed seemed endless, and everything seemed to be in a higher order, to the point of forcing them to flee.

He wanted revenge, but he wasn't about to foolishly throw himself into a fight where he could die.

"I understand... I too think it's best to retreat."

Looking at the ring, Mitrass also agreed.

He personally wanted to get rid of such an unknown risk factor, but Seraphina was so abnormal that he couldn't have the slightest clue how it would all end, and the battle flow was at a neutral point.

Although she didn't seem to be in good shape, who knows what else she was capable of.

"Oryx, take us to the camp."

"I understand, your imperial highness. Just give me a moment; I need to build up mana to get there in a single-"

"-Vinculum Spatii"(- Space Bind)

"!!!" (x3)

Just at that moment a voice was heard that instinctively caused a shiver to run through the three present.

Again, what happened was not something expected by any of them, especially Oryx.

Space magic was something that was not supposed to exist on that continent, but in front of their eyes it appeared, along with the tip of a golden spear pointed directly at Oryx's head.

But Oryx was not as easy to surprise as an ordinary mage. Thanks to his skill, he saw the attack clearly and managed to move quickly.

To begin with, mages already had quicker thinking than a warrior, but for him, at that moment, it was clearer than his peers: the spear heading towards him at a horrible speed he easily perceived it and could think many things at that instant.

He knew exactly what he had to do. He activated his affinity and tried to move immediately out of the spear's path... but he could not.

He felt a kind of restriction, as if the space around him did not obey him. He, who had always had total control of his space, saw his authority restricted.

Still, it didn't seem like a big deal; he felt he could regain control in a few seconds, but he didn't have that time: the spear was a split second away from killing him. His affinity was not an option.

But he wasn't an idiot. He switched methods and used his other ability.

'That... was close.'

This restriction did not seem to affect him, and he was able to teleport. Space Movement (S) was an Skill that allowed him to teleport anywhere his consciousness and vision could reach, without needing to spend as much mana.

She glanced in Seraphina's direction, where she was still executing her actions as if she had taken into account that he was going to dodge it. She directed her next attack towards Noha.

Seeing this, Oryx was going to intervene again. If he wanted to keep his backup, he had to keep him safe at all costs.

Oryx could see, analyze and predict countless things in a single instant; as a space mage, his execution was just as swift.

But in the end, only his mind was fast. By the time he felt the pain, it was too late.

CHHK!

"!!!"

And the sound of something being pierced came after the pain.

He felt the cold danger of death. He could feel it, and he didn't even want to understand the source.

He teleported as he had planned and immediately grabbed Noha, teleporting back.

'Tsk... she really is a tough cockroach to kill.'

The culprit was Seraphina, demonized, who only had one of her arms. it was the doppelgänger who had missed her attack whose target was Oryx's life.

But, knowing his skills, she first made a non-harmful attack. Now Oryx had a purple arrow stuck in his abdomen.

But again, the Seraphinas knew that they were not in favor of time; they had to drag them immediately into their battle flow; they had to overwhelm them.

They could not allow full collaboration or any cooperation, they could not let them take control of the situation or it would be over for them.

This ambush was swift and decisive, and only the beginning of what was to come in this battle against the clock.

Chapter 395: Fierce Exchange

Yes, there was not a moment to lose, and Seraphina immediately went after Mitrass.

This could not fail.

Oryx was busy with Noha, and Mitrass had never been his priority.

Bang!

"Argh!..."

Another contest of attacks and exchanges between Seraphina and Mitrass began.

This time, Seraphina seemed to have the physical advantage in the exchanges, and Mitrass was the one who seemed to have to give his all to withstand the heavy, fast, unpredictable and flexible attacks of Seraphina, whose art now made it clear how overwhelmingly superior it was to her own.

In fact, not even three exchanges passed when Mitrass felt that the chances of losing were absolute.

He felt it even more vividly when Seraphina's spear broke through his guard and slipped through his defense, wounding his side.

Mitrass felt the chill of death. It was not a skill like Oryx's; it was a sensation born of his experience as a warrior who had seen death up close.

If he didn't do something in the next instant, he would definitely die.

FWOOOOSH-! BOOM!

A thick crimson flame engulfed Mitrass.

Seraphina's attack was repelled by a violent repulsion, throwing her backwards.

BANG!

Mitrass did not waste the moment. He advanced and counterattacked.

This time, the clash was more even.

Now it was he who had a slight advantage.

The crimson flames contracted, but his skin began to turn even redder. Crimson fire gushed from his wounds, so hot that it would have melted any common weapon.

The heat was intense even just by being close, and Seraphina sensed it immediately and countered by putting on a bed of ice as well as exuding a white flame herself .

Both were like bright beacons in this dark misty forest.

She prepared to face a Mitrass who had just revealed one of her trump cards...

'Ex umbra quae nutrit, non quae-'

As another part of her anticipated what was to come next.

BANG! KRAK! CLANG!

Spear and heavy sword clashed again and again.

The exchanges became fast, precise, brutal.

Both pushed their skills and combat techniques to the maximum.

Mitrass used repulsion when he found the slightest opening, repelling attacks with violence.

Seraphina, for her part, struck, deflected and withstood direct hits without yielding ground.

The difference in size and musculature was enormous. Even so, neither could get the better of the other.

THUD—CRASH—RUMBLE—KRAAASH

Both moved ferociously, devastating the forest around them. Trees shattered, ground bursting, shockwaves coursing through the area.

The intensity was such that the beasts that inhabited the place - some of eighth metamorphosis - died as mere collateral damage.

They were walking disasters. Taking the lives of those they crossed and terraforming everything in their path:

Both fought with absolute concentration, assessing each other without pause, reading the environment, looking for an advantage, a mistake, a split second.

Both were fighting to end the fall of the other as quickly as possible.

There was no holding back.

There were no distractions.

Only the intention to kill.

BOOM—THRUM, CLANG!

The hands of both were already damaged. Minor wounds were piling up, blood splattered on the ground... but neither hesitated.

Neither looked away.

A single mistake could lead to their death.

Mitrass quickly entered a state where he looked like a red-skinned demon, his blood was literally on fire.

On the other hand, Seraphina stood firm with her ice and white flames that contrasted with Mitrass's.

Crimson flames were shooting out of Mitrass' body and, from time to time, splashing Seraphina.

He knew what his blessing was capable of.

Even so, Seraphina had no reaction.

Originally, any contact with his blood in that state was supposed to cause the opponent's blood to begin heating or burning from within, to the point where that alone would be enough to ensure his victory.

But no.

With Seraphina, that wasn't happening; the white flames seemed to counterattack him perfectly.

BROMM! CLRANG! BANG!

The two powers kept clashing again and again to demonstrate their superiority, and with each exchange the violence escalated and more injuries were sustained.

Mitrass thought that this would ultimately give him an advantage, since another function of his blessing was that the more wounded he was, the stronger his fire became and the more strength he received.

But even that was countered by Seraphina, who possessed the berserker skill, which, in addition to rage, significantly increased her strength with each wound she suffered, in exchange for her sanity.

But Seraphina didn't have to worry about that last flaw.

For that very reason, it was one of the skills that her alternate self implicitly suggested she try to obtain at some point.

That is why she had done what she had done before and risked herself to obtain this powerful and, most importantly, highly compatible skill.

Boomm!

"Uagh!"

Mitrass' body trembled under the impact.

It seemed that the progression and strength gained from the wounds - at least from the amount of wounds received - was more noticeable on Seraphina than on Mitrass.

She again reached a point where she began to overwhelm Mitrass, piercing through his defense and wounding his shoulder.

The attack was aimed at his heart, but he managed to deflect the impact, but did not quite make it, and impacted with his shoulder.

Mitrass even now did not understand what she was doing.

His tyrannical body, and even more so in this state in which he was using his blessing, should be so strong and resilient that even someone of his rank specialized in physical defenses would be far behind him.

And yet, Seraphina managed to wound him with ease every time her spear struck.

Moreover, that blow, even though he deflected it, seemed to affect him greatly. He felt that it had hit one of his joints in such an exact point that he lost all coordination with his left arm.

Mitrass was feeling a tightness like never before. He felt that even that attack, which originally seemed aimed at his heart, had had that purpose from the beginning, or rather that every attack of Seraphina's came with innumerable intentions.

It was an experience and decision making in combat that even he had not seen in the best veterans.

She also seemed to find weak spots with extreme ease.

Even if he didn't show it, Seraphina's presence began to become more oppressive and overwhelming, within him.

The oppression was growing to a point that someone like him, who had never thought to feel anything like fear, was beginning to feel it.

Looking into Seraphina's pink eyes, which seemed to pierce him and were determined to kill him, made it even worse.

Mitrass felt it: he was at death's door.

Even giving everything he had, he felt overwhelmed. Still, he didn't let himself be crushed by that feeling and again burst out his crimson flames and his ability to get Seraphina off his back.

He needed to regain control of the situation... and himself.

But-

Bang!

Seraphina wouldn't let him. She did not take off. At the cost of some injuries, she stayed close to Mitrass.

It was as if she didn't mind dying, as if she was determined to go to the end, where there would be only two outcomes.

Either he would die, or she would drag him with her to his death.

With no other options.

That thought only increased the pressure on Mitrass. Seraphina was overwhelming him both physically and mentally: his two strongest points.

And with the loss of one of his arms, a sense of inevitability washed over him. His end was near; he predicted that less than three exchanges was how long it would take Seraphina to finish him.

But then-

"Cough-!"

The flow, fury and overwhelming aura were stopped as Seraphina suddenly let out a heavy puff of blood.

Her movements faltered, became awkward, and finally gave Mitrass the respite he needed.

When Mitrass saw Seraphina stop and her bad state-not to mention that she was spitting blood-he noticed that blood was pouring out of her narisz eyes and any orifice and use her chest seemed to have turned black and that the veins were more swollen and grotesque.

Just as he had deduced earlier, using so much power while being only a sixth morphogenesis did not come without a price.

Mitrass felt it was an opportunity to change the flow. Although he had finally been able to take a breather, he decided to attack and finish her off.

But as he advanced, instead of seeing helplessness or fear in Seraphina's eyes, he saw a bit of...

Relief?

When Mitrass saw it, a shiver ran through his body. He tried to back away again, but it was too late.

Seraphina opened her mouth and uttered the last verse of what she - no, what they both - had been preparing.

"Thronus Spinarum Obscurarum"(x2)

Both voices echoed, and although their battle was supposed to have been fierce and they had moved around a lot, for some reason everyone still seemed to be very close by.

Mitrass's chill grew even more intense; he realised too late that at some point Seraphina had stolen his entire focus and he hadn't noticed the chaos surrounding him.

Yes, it was true that Seraphian also had all her thoughts seriously focused on Mitrass at all times during their combat.

But it was only a thought.