

World 1471

Chapter 1471: The Target of the Assault

Arlcard was disoriented when Cain forcefully detached from him. He reeled back. The dead vampire elders used this chance to land some attacks on him.

Jack arrived in the nick of time and used Hundred Shadow Strikes to beat these enemies back. He then landed beside Arlcard and pulled him away, just as a torrent of fire showered the area. The archdemon lord continued throwing one spell after another, causing havoc and ruining the dead vampire elders' formation.

"Are you okay?" Jack asked Arlcard.

"I... I am fine," Arlcard answered. Clarity returned to his eyes. Those eyes were on Cain who was now battling Marcus. He wanted to rush forward to help but Jack stopped him.

"Wait! We can't win by fighting blindly," Jack said. "I have a plan. The enemies' attention is taken by the archdemon lord. This is our chance, but I need your help."

Arlcard took a breath to gather himself. He asked, "What do you need?"

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The archdemon lord was now the center of attention to the dead vampire elders, but they didn't rush forward. They knew all they had to do was defend for three minutes. When Zara's Forced Unsummon failed, she was notified of how long the archdemon lord's time was remaining. Once those minutes passed, the archdemon lord would disappear by itself. There was no need to risk attacking this eternal-grade opponent.

The archdemon lord saw the enemies' intention. It sneered. If the enemies didn't want to come to it, then it would come to them.

It cast its Flames of Doom while advancing. In response, a huge wall of ice and earth appeared back-to-back. These walls were defensive spells cast by the level 80 mythical vampire elder other than Xenos and the level 85 rare-elite vampire elder. The two walls were destroyed but the flames were greatly reduced. The remaining flames burned the dead vampire elders but they didn't deal much damage.

The archdemon lord cast Telekinesis and made a grabbing motion when it came close enough. One of the rare elites was snatched. It cast another spell on this rare elite vampire elder. The vampire's body shivered greatly before abruptly stopping.

The archdemon lord released the vampire. This vampire flew back and started attacking its brethren. The spell the archdemon lord used just now was Soul Capture, which took control of a target. While the Demonic Dominance from earlier failed to dominate the enemies controlled by the Chalice of Blood. This Soul Capture was a stronger spell that affected a single target. Combined with the archdemon lord's massive intelligence stat, this spell was able to overpower the artifact's dominance, at least until the spell's duration was over.

The archdemon lord cast another spell while its puppet attacked his previous comrades. An unending stream of fireballs poured out from his spell formation. It was similar to the Flame Wrath spell but conjured much more fireballs.

Throughout the devastation caused by the archdemon lord, Leavemealone and Terras pulled out. They didn't want to be killed by friendly fire. The spirit weapon had been killed earlier. Its HP wasn't as high as Terras. It was killed before having the chance to detonate its final form.

Jack and Arlcard, on the other hand, flew into the enemy's midst. Jack's two clones fought the enemies who tried to bar their way. They forced themselves forward under the archdemon lord's bombardment. Jack used Ghost Form while Arlcard was protected by his shadow veil. One of Jack's clones used the Gold Scale Armor while the other used Gold Dragon Vitality. Peniel also healed them when needed. This helped them survive the forceful advance. With the archdemon lord's bombardment, the vampire elders couldn't form a solid barricade.

"This should be close enough," Jack said.

They landed on the ground. When the enemies came at them. Jack's two clones went to face them while his real body used his cloak's ability, Elemental God Barrier. The cloak was in its fiery state, so the barrier could resist fire elements better.

The archdemon lord must be aware of his time coming to an end. It cast more intense fire spells with each passing second. The entire area around the barrier was flooded with flames. Jack received a notification that one of his clones had died. The other was not doing so well.

"Let's start!" Jack exclaimed.

Multiple small rune diagrams started to form around his and Arlcard's bodies. They were both using their rune techniques.

The intense flames obscured the enemies' sight, so they didn't see what the two were doing. Even if they saw, it would take them some time to destroy the elemental god barrier that was shielding Jack and Arlcard.

The archdemon lord continued casting offensive spells. One of the spells created chained explosions that greatly shook the hall. Luckily, Jack and Arlcard's concentration was solid. Otherwise, the shaking would have canceled their rune techniques.

Some of the dead vampire elders were killed by the archdemon lord's constant bombardment. Aubelard, who was the weakest among them, was the first to go. His eyes actually showed relief when it happened.

When its final seconds approached, the archdemon lord cast one final spell before it vanished, the Pillars of Infernal Fire. Huge pillars of flames rose from the floor. They revolved around the place before fusing into one huge fiery column. Jack's remaining clone died then.

Before this, Jack's Elemental God Barrier only suffered the residual damage of spells hitting the nearby area. This time, the huge flame column hit everything with the same intensity. The Elemental God Barrier was right in the middle of this flame column.

Luckily, the barrier could still take the full brunt of the spell. It was still standing when the Pillars of Infernal Fire ended. The flames receded as the archdemon lord vanished. At that time, everyone saw what Jack and Arlcard were doing inside the barrier.

Marcus, who was battling Cain, was also aware. He then noticed the two were dangerously close.

"Zara, protect me!" Marcus ordered. He again cast the intense illumination spell which drove Cain back momentarily. At the same time, he mentally commanded the remaining vampire elders to attack Jack and Arlcard.

Zara came to Marcus. She cast a spell and a phantasm shell encapsulated both her and Marcus just as Jack and Arlcard completed their rune techniques.

Jack was already casting Teleport when his rune technique was near completion. He disappeared from his place just as his Elemental God Barrier was destroyed by the combined assault from the dead vampire elders. Arlcard also turned into a shadow and rushed forward.

However, Marcus quickly noticed that Arlcard's zooming shadow was not in his direction. His eyes traced Arlcard's speeding shadow and found Jack reappearing. The two landed their rune techniques on an inanimate object not far away from Marcus.

The two were targeting the Chalice of Blood.

Chapter 1472: Removing the Chalice of Blood

Jack's Infernal Cleansing Flame stabbed into the shield that protected the Chalice of Blood. He had also activated his Storm Breaker's Overlimit when he teleported. Overlimit multiplied the rune technique's damage output by more than three times.

At the same time, Arlcard's Unrelenting Purgatory slammed into the same shield. The shadows of Arlcard's rune technique fused with the shield before countless black swords started stabbing in and out of the shield.

Damage numbers continued to appear as white flames and dark shadows assailed the shield. The rune diagram on the floor that generated the shield shone brightly as it tried to keep the shield intact.

The shield itself was not in perfect condition. It already lost forty percent of its HP when Jack and Arlcard hit it. The archdemon lord's spells hit a large area. This shield also suffered from the archdemon lord's bombardment before its duration ended.

The most troublesome thing about the shield was its recovering effect. The rune diagram on the floor healed the shield as it was damaged. If it was not for this healing, the shield would have broken under the archdemon lord's bombardment.

The rate of the damage inflicted by Jack and Arlcard's rune technique was greater than the healing by the rune diagram, so the shield's HP fell steadily. However, it didn't look like the shield's HP would be depleted when the rune technique ended.

Jack added the damage output by using his sword art on the shield. Once his Infernal Cleansing Flame hit, he didn't need to stay to maintain it. The white flame would continue wreaking havoc on its target until its duration was over.

Marcus and the others weren't going to just stay idle. They lunged at Jack. Cain's red smoke was back then. It understood Jack's intention. Its long-reaching smoke tentacles slapped around, keeping the enemies from coming near the Chalice of Blood.

Leavemealone and Therras did the same. They struck from behind the enemies and tried to gain their attention.

Jack knew Cain wouldn't be able to hold those enemies for long. He repeated his sword art multiple times as Overlimit was still active. The shield's HP went down faster but the rate somehow reduced after its HP bar went below twenty percent.

Jack sensed it was because the rune diagram on the ground injected even more energy when the shield was nearly destroyed.

From such a close range, his advanced mana sense could detect the mana flowing around the rune diagram. Given time, he should be able to deactivate it, but he didn't have that luxury for now. However, he was able to sense the multiple important nodes in the diagram.

He remembered when his Nine Yin Phantom Sword cut Marcus' tentacle-binding spell. The light tentacle regenerated instantaneously when he cut them using his swords. However, when he cut them using the Nine Yin Phantom Sword, they remained cut.

He focused his mana to conjure the phantom sword again. The black light appeared out of thin air and pierced the node where Jack sensed the energy transfer was regulated.

The effect was seen then. The nine yin energy could disrupt mana. Jack sensed the mana around the node he had hit was in chaos. It was as if a tiny black hole had appeared in that node. The diagram was not able to function as it was fully intended to.

The healing of the shield's HP didn't completely stop, but it was significantly reduced. The shield's HP now reduced at a faster rate from the white flames and shadow swords that were still assaulting the shield.

Jack resumed using his sword art to slash the shield, making its HP go down even faster.

Isaac pierced through Cain's red smoke with a bang. His halberd broke the smoke wall using Ki Strike. Multiple melee weapons revolved around him as he lunged forward at Jack. It was Weapon Master's Weapons Festival.

"Peniel, invulnerability!" Jack exclaimed. They were too close to fail.

The weapons festival struck Jack's body. He didn't back down. The invulnerability protected him. He continued slashing the shield.

Seeing Jack ignore his assault, Isaac used his body to block the shield.

Jack activated Ghost Sword. His two swords turned incorporeal. He then used Brave Slash while performing the One-word Slash powered by mana manipulation. The slash went through Isaac and the shield, hitting them both.

Without the express healing from the rune diagram, the shield could finally withstand no longer. It broke apart just as the two rune techniques ended. Arlcard materialized next to the chalice.

"Move that cup!" Jack yelled. His invulnerability had ended when Isaac hit him with a power strike. He was sent flying away.

Arlcard's hand was about to reach the Chalice of Blood but a light beam slammed into him and he was also sent flying.

"Protect the chalice!!" Marcus shouted. That light beam was his spell.

Zara and the others had been assaulting Cain's smoke form. The force of their combined assaults pinned him to the wall. He was unable to reach for the chalice. Leavemealone and Therras were even further away. They couldn't approach and help.

Jack was on his way back. His cloak and golden wings flapped while shielding him at the same time from multiple attacks coming at him.

Marcus hurriedly placed himself in between Jack and the chalice. He prepared a spell. As he did, his eyes caught sight of Arlcard who was also casting a spell. That spell was already nearing completion and he recognized its spell formation.

"No!" Marcus shouted. He was placing himself in between Jack and the Chalice. Arlcard was at a different angle. The chalice was within Arlcard's line of sight. He wanted to move his body to cover that line of sight but it was too late. Arlcard's spell was completed.

Arlcard's spell was one he had just learned recently, Telekinesis. Any target was valid for this spell as long as it was within range and the caster's line of sight. The Chalice of Blood fulfilled these two conditions.

The invisible force from the spell pulled the chalice out of the pedestal. As it did, the illusory blood tendrils linking the chalice to the vampire elders disappeared. All the vampire elders crumbled into dust.

Chapter 1473: The End of Sangrod's Emperor

With the vampire elders banished, Marcus suddenly found himself alone.

Even Motherboard was no longer around. She had been killed by one of the archdemon lord's stray spells. She wore an Amulet of Rebirth, though. She returned to life but at Vacharest's resurrection ground instead of her registered place. This was because the capital was still on lockdown. She was now in hiding, prepared to leave once the lockdown was lifted.

Marcus was unable to believe the situation. His eyes followed the Chalice of Blood that was heading toward Arlcard. He lunged forward to get the chalice back but his vision was suddenly covered by red smoke.

Without the vampire elders pinning him down, Cain was free to move. He pounced at his nemesis. His red smoke form swirled around Marcus and battered the vampire emperor with destructive energies.

Marcus fought back. He cast a spell that conjured a ball that pulsed with bright light every second. Each time the ball pulsed, Cain was as if set on fire. His red smoke form became smaller. Part of the smoke evaporated as the pulsing ball burned through it.

Arlcard threw the chalice in his hand to Jack. He then rushed forward with his rapier while casting a spell.

Jack caught the chalice out of reflex.

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Chalice of Blood (Legendary Artifact)

Bound a native with blood pact. The bound native will follow the chalice's owner's every command.

Bound native's life force deteriorates with time. How long the native stays alive depends on his level/grade.

Chalice has to stay immobile once activated. Moving it will cancel its effect and unbind all the bound natives.

Bound natives cannot travel farther than 25 kilometers away from the chalice.

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'Such an evil artifact,' Jack thought. He stored it in his inventory to make sure no one used it again.

"No! That's mine!" Marcus bellowed when he saw Jack storing the Chalice of Blood.

Despite his pulsing light ball hurting Cain more than Cain's red smoke hurting him, he couldn't move away because Cain's red smoke was locking him down. Arlcard's spell came then. The huge dark lord's sword pierced his body as Arlcard zipped around with fast movements, slashing him from every direction.

"Raaghhh...!! You impudent wretch!" Marcus had his one hand sustaining the pulsing light ball while his other hand formed a spell that created a huge hand made of light.

This hand of light was fast. It caught Arlcard despite his speedy movement. Arlcard found himself unable to move as his whole body was grabbed.

The giant hand of light lifted Arlcard and slammed him into the floor, taking a chunk of his HP. It was about to do it for the second time when Marcus was hit by a sharp energy wave. Marcus turned to his attacker. It was Terras who used its Oppressive Wave to attack from range. Terras was now coming at high speed using its Tyrannical Charge.

Terras wasn't the only one coming. Leavemealone had arrived first. His fiery fists performed the infinite lightning punches that pounded Marcus' body.

"You are f*cked, asshole!" Jack exclaimed. He also approached from another side and sent Marcus uncountable slashes. "This is for Alonzo and his brothers, and all the soldiers who lost their lives in the civil war because of your scheme with Themos!"

With all those attacks, Marcus couldn't maintain his spells. The pulsing ball and the hand of light that were locking Cain and Arlcard were gone.

Free again, Cain's red smoke locked Marcus' body. Arlcard did the same. He turned into a shadow and slipped behind Marcus before biting his neck and sucking the emperor's blood.

Alone, Marcus couldn't do much. The five continued to gang up on the emperor. When Marcus lost the chalice, the table had been turned.

"No! No! Get away from me...!!" He yelled. A sudden bright light exploded from his body, pushing everyone away.

He turned into a swarm of bats and tried to flee through the large hole that was created by the archdemon lord earlier.

Jack wasn't going to let Marcus go. He cast Lightning Pursuit. He marked five areas just before the hole in the wall. Thick Lightning appeared magically from the ceiling and hit the bats that flew into the marked areas. The lightning was very fast, the bats couldn't escape it.

Arlcard had also turned into a bat swarm and chased Marcus closely. He turned back into human form when Marcus's bat form was assailed by Jack's lightning. He then cast Darkness Net. The net rounded up the surviving bats and forced them to the ground.

Cain arrived then. His red smoke form turned into a solid ball and slammed into the bats on the floor. The bats merged back into Marcus. He lost another huge chunk of HP since lots of the bats in his swarm had died.

"I... I don't want to die... Please... Spare me..." He pleaded.

The red smoke above him formed a giant face, Cain's face. "You should know this day will come."

The red smoke locked Marcus' body again. Marcus was too wounded and too hopeless to fight back. The red smoke poured into him. It entered Marcus through his mouth and nose.

Marcus's body shook heavily as the red smoke ravaged him. His HP continued to drop rapidly. Arlcard just stood by the side and watched.

Jack also stayed back. He watched Marcus' HP bar fall to near depletion. He wondered if he should steal the kill. Arlcard was under him but he was not so sure about Cain. Even if the world system didn't consider Cain as under him, he should still receive exp and loots since he participated in a great portion of the fight, but a killing strike would net him more.

But from what he had seen, he knew Cain and Marcus had a strong history. He didn't think Cain would be pleased if he landed the killing blow. So, he restrained himself and stood by the side, but he still summoned his Runestone of Luck when he saw Marcus' HP was about to hit zero.

Which happened soon. As it did, Marcus' chest exploded violently and Cain's red smoke poured out of the open chest. Loots dropped beside the dead emperor and Jack received notification that he received exp points from the kill.

Chapter 1474: Sangrod's New Sovereign

Jack didn't go ahead and picked up the loot. Cain was floating above Marcus' mangled body. The red smoke was in the shape of Cain's human form and he just stared at Marcus' corpse in stillness. Jack couldn't make out the spirit's expression because the smoke was constantly shifting.

The silence ended when Jack took out the communication device Horatio had given him from his inventory. The device was making sharp pinging sounds. Jack turned the device on and Horatio's voice was heard.

"You succeeded! I hear the notification. The soldiers have stood down. I've been appointed as the sovereign since I'm the remaining heir. Right on time, I might say. Jygorth has been hammering this palace to get to the basement. Any longer and he might have dug a hole into it."

"Jygorth is the name of this country's guardian," Peniel explained when she saw Jack's confused face.

Jack didn't feel the tremors this Jygorth caused. Probably this basement was very solid or the battle just now was so intense that he wasn't aware of the tremors.

"At any rate, come to the throne room. We can discuss our next move in person there," Horatio said.

"Okay, I will be up there soon," Jack replied and ended the transmission.

Cain was still floating there in silence.

Leavemealone came to Jack's side. He asked, "Are we done here? We should go join Master Domon as soon as possible."

"You don't want to take the loots?" Jack asked.

"I've already picked up two unique-grade light armor pieces from the loots when you are talking on your phone. I leave the rest to you," Leavemealone answered.

'#@\$%. This bastard has even less courtesy than me, and it's not a phone!' Jack complained in his mind.

"I will be joining my army. You can go and join Jeanny's force. My gramps should be with her," Jack said to Leavemealone. The lockdown should be lifted now that Horatio held the power.

Leavemealone nodded. When he turned away and was about to leave, Jack stopped him and said, "Thank you for your assistance."

"... Thank you for saving me from being executed," Leavemealone replied. He then ran to the stairs. He would be using this capital's zone portal to teleport to this country's border town before crossing the border region into Palgrost.

Jack returned his attention to Cain. The bloody spirit was still doing nothing. He decided he couldn't wait indefinitely. He approached and started picking up the loot beside Marcus.

Leavemealone didn't touch the gold coins and mana cores. There were 50 gold coins and 3,000 mana cores on the floor. Jack needed these mana cores. It would be some time before he could summon another archdemon lord again.

Aside from those standard drops, the rest were mostly equipment and materials. These he would donate to the guild. The loots he was excited about were a unique-grade diamond and two Evolve seeds.

With this gemstone, his Runestone of Luck could finally be maxed. He didn't waste any time. He fed the diamond to the runestone from his status window.

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Runestone of Luck (legendary runestone)

Increase luck by approx. 25 points for 30 seconds.

Elemental energy required for upgrade: Fully maxed

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The level-up gave this runestone a whooping 10-point increase. Not only that, its duration was improved significantly from 10 seconds to 30 seconds. This gave him more windows when he was killing his opponents. He wondered if the secret cooldown of this runestone was affected. He tried summoning the runestone. He failed. He would do it again later to see if the cooldown was still one hour.

He turned to the two Evolve seeds. One was a super-rare-grade light seed and the other was a unique-grade time seed.

Jack knew the light seed gave the light element. They already have this seed in their guild warehouse. He supposed the time seed increased duration or reduced cooldown. He looked around for his trusted fairy to ask for confirmation. He saw Peniel was conversing with Arlcard.

He called her over.

"What are you talking about?" Jack asked.

"I'm curious about how Cain instantly killed those vampires at Leavemealone's execution ground. Turned out I'm half right."

"Half right, how?" Jack asked.

"It was Unholy Exorcism, all right, but one that was combined cast with another spell, Chain spell."

"Combination casting? But there is no one... Oh, right... There were two people there, Arlcard and Cain. They both cast a spell and combined those spells."

"Yes, we weren't aware the red smoke was Cain at the time. The red smoke also obscured everything so we couldn't see the spell formation," Peniel said. "The unholy exorcism when combined cast with Chain Spell will become Area Exorcism. It had the same effect as Unholy Exorcism but was AOE instead of a single target. No wonder the high elder vampire that supervised Leavemealone's execution was instant-killed too. Cain is an ancient vampire. He was much older than that supervisor."

"I see..."

"What do you call me for anyway?" Peniel asked.

"Oh, right. These seeds. Mind telling me what this likely gives to my skills?" Jack showed Peniel the time seed.

She confirmed Jack's speculation. Jack asked her what she thought the mana core cost would be to copy this time seed. She couldn't tell for sure but she thought it would need lots of mana cores. Even if it was not as expensive as the Mana Gathering Stone, it wouldn't be too far.

Hence, Jack decided to use those seeds. He used the light seed on Tracing Beams and the time seed on Acceleration. Too bad Beast Form and Magic Weapon were not skills that could be evolved. Otherwise, those would have been his choice to use the time seed on.

After using the light seed, Tracing Beams transformed into Tracing Light Beams. The spell was now of light element and dealt higher damage. It also caused Blind for 3 seconds in addition to the original knockback. Its range was doubled. It could now hit targets 100 meters away.

The time seed not only increased Acceleration's duration, but it also improved the speed increase. The spell was renamed to Superior Acceleration. The duration had doubled to 1 minute, and its base acceleration had changed to 1000%.

Additionally, Jack's acceleration had gained another star upgrade just now. It had two stars. Each star of Superior Acceleration added 100% to the increased speed. When he used this spell, he could now move twelve times his normal speed for a full minute.

Jack was satisfied with these improvements. He looked ahead to the area near the pedestal. No loot there. The vampire elders killed by the archdemon lord gave him exp points but they dropped no loot. As for the one who vanished after Arlcard removed the Chalice of Blood, they didn't give anything.

Jack stood back up. Cain was still silent. Jack decided he couldn't wait anymore. He asked the spirit, "What now? Are you going to continue possessing Arlcard?"

Chapter 1475: Cain's Final Gift

Cain appeared to awake from a trance upon Jack's question. His red-smoke face gazed at Jack for a few seconds before saying, "Forgive me. You can't imagine what a thousand-year grudge feels like."

'I can barely imagine what a one-year grudge feels like,' Jack said in his mind. If someone wronged him, he normally just settled the matters on the spot, usually by fists. If he couldn't, then he consciously forgot about it, until he saw said person again. He rarely let a grudge dwell in his mind.

"As for your question," Cain continued. "I've been possessing Arlcard since his birth as a vampire. I might as well be him. I'm also the reason why he was not under Aubelard's influence despite his young age."

"I have all his memories," Arlcard, who had been silent by the side, confirmed the statement. "They were hazy at first, like dreams of distant past. Those memories became clear after I fused with my... his remains under the mausoleum."

"But... You are still two different entities, right?" Jack asked. "Will there be side effects for Arlcard? I mean, will he still have his personality if you continue possessing him?"

Cain chuckled. His creepy voice made the chuckle sound even more eerie. "You are quite concerned about him, aren't you? Well, I have piggybacked inside him since the beginning, so I dare say I know you as well. Don't worry, even if I want, I can't continue possessing him."

"Really?" Jack asked.

"You should have heard my talks with Marcus," Cain replied. "I studied a secret ancient necromancy technique that has something to do with reincarnation..."

Jack threw Peniel a mental message then, "Hah! Who before said there is no such thing as reincarnation?"

Peniel rolled her eyes. Why did this brute remember something from so long ago?

"... Unfortunately, my study was never completed," Cain continued. "Marcus' betrayal came before that happened... Well, to be honest, I'm not so sure now if I could ever master the technique even if I was given the chance. After existing in this spirit form for so long, I understood there is no such thing as immortality. We will expire sooner or later. In my case here, it will be sooner."

"You will leave?" Arlcard asked.

Jack sensed a longing in his companion's voice. Perhaps Cain's claim that they were one was the truth. Perhaps Arlcard saw Cain departing as a part of him leaving.

"I have no say in this matter... Once my essence was freed from under the mausoleum, the clock was already ticking for me. My separation from you during the battle accelerated the process even more."

"We can merge again to slow the process... If that's what you want," Arlcard said.

Cain chuckled again. "It doesn't work like that. Once the link is broken, it is hard to mend it back. I will be gone soon... But I want to leave you a final gift. Consider it my thanks for helping me dispense justice upon my brother."

"Gift...?" Arlcard didn't sound that excited.

Cain nodded. "You drank Marcus' blood during the fight. That is good. Your body has a peculiarity of absorbing the essence of older vampires' blood. I don't understand why you have this ability. Perhaps it's your special talent. Anyway, I can help you process Marcus' essence in your blood, at the same time transferring as much of my power that is still left to you."

"You... You don't have to do that," Arlcard said.

"I don't have to. I want to," Cain said. "It might hurt, though."

Before Arlcard could respond, Cain had rushed to him. Cain entered through Arlcard's mouth and nose as he did to Marcus. Arlcard felt Cain within him again, but the feeling was different this time. Before, they were one. This time, Cain felt like an alien entity. Arlcard understood what Cain meant then, their links had truly been severed.

Even though Cain felt like a foreign object now, Arlcard didn't fight him. He gave Cain free rein over his body. He felt the ancient spirit roaming within him. He felt the pain then.

He endured it, but it came to a point where his will was no longer sufficient. He let out a pained yell as he fell to his knees.

"Hey! Are you okay?" Jack came to him and asked with worry.

Arlcard couldn't hear Jack. His own scream was too loud.

Jack asked a second time, but Arlcard didn't respond. Arlcard just kept on screaming.

Jack understood that there was nothing he could do. At least he knew Arlcard wasn't in any danger. No damage number was coming out of his vampire companion.

He then heard a very loud thump from Arlcard.

"What the...?" Jack didn't know what to make of it. He turned to Peniel who shrugged, indicating that she didn't understand as well.

Jack heard another thump again, and another. The thumping became more frequent. Arlcard's body shook with each thump. It then glowed. Golden threads started to come out of his body.

More and more golden threads appeared. They wrapped around Arlcard who had stopped screaming. Arlcard's face was expressionless and his eyes were closed. He was like someone who was in a coma.

Jack simply watched without knowing what to do. After a period, the process finally stopped. Where Arlcard was a moment ago was now a large golden cocoon.

"Is... Is this what I think it is?" Jack asked.

Peniel didn't answer. She was gaping at the gold cocoon. She was as astonished as Jack.

When Jack wanted to ask her again, he heard a notification, "Congratulations on completing the companion quest, Blood Debt. Receive rewards of 8,000,000 exp, 100 gold coins, and 8,000 mana cores."

He was glad of the rewards from the quest, but he thought the true reward of his companion quest was the golden cocoon in front of him. Peniel finally came out of her daze and confirmed to Jack that what was happening to Arlcard was indeed the process of metamorphosis.

She said for it to happen to the same individual in such a short period was unheard of. A golden cocoon was also a higher grade than the silver cocoon Arlcard and Therras were in. She said that Arlcard was sure to be an Eternal grade when he came out of the cocoon. When would that be? She couldn't tell.

Chapter 1476: First Alliance

"Awesome! When he came out, I don't have to rely on the archdemon lord for a trump card anymore!" Jack exclaimed.

"This process will take a very long time. Arlcard won't come out any time soon," Peniel reminded, but Jack wasn't listening. He was too busy doing his victory dance after learning that he would have an eternal-grade combatant at his beck-and-call in the future. Peniel gave up trying to tell him.

After Jack wasted some precious minutes celebrating, he finally went up from the basement and to the throne room. Inside the throne room, Jack saw two other individuals there. He knew one of them. Caleb Lucien, whom he met in Tranviste when he first came to Sangrod.

The other individual was a high elder vampire who was a level 75 rare elite. This vampire went by the name of Darius Armand.

"My friend!" Horatio exclaimed after seeing Jack. "Come! Let me introduce. These two are my confidantes. I think you remember Caleb. As for this gentleman, he is Darius Armand. They were the two who bravely led the rebellion outside the capital and drew Marcus' blood army away from this palace."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, King Storm Wind," Darius greeted.

"I must say, I never expected the outworlder ambassador whom I met in the past to now stand before me as a king," Caleb said. "Please forgive me if I appear to have a hard time believing it."

Horatio laughed. "We were just discussing how we are going to reorganize our personnel. Many simply followed my father out of fear, but a few were indeed loyal. I must purge them out before they cause me trouble, but you don't need to concern yourself about this. I can continue this discussion later. First, before we talk about our arrangement, I want to represent Sangrod and thank you for having ended my father's tyrant rule for a thousand years."

Jack heard another quest completion notification. His quest, Help Horatio Ascend the Throne, was now completed. He received 5,000,000 exp, 60 gold coins, 3,000 mana cores, and 300,000 merit points.

With the exp points from the completion of two quests, the exp from killing Marcus, and the exp from the vampire elders killed by the archdemon lord, he leveled up two times. His Brave Swordsman and Time Sage were now level 77.

"Now, I will honor our agreement," Horatio said. "I've sent a request for an alliance through the monarch system. Once you accept it from Thereath, our two countries will be officially allies."

"What about the war in Palgrost?" Jack asked.

"Your army is marching there. As an ally, it won't be proper for me to just sit by. I will send an army into Palgrost to assist President Thelgrun as well."

"Thank you!" Jack exclaimed.

"But!" Horatio interjected. "It will take some time to organize this army. I've just assumed power. I need to do a lot of reorganization. I think you understand."

"... How long will you need?" Jack asked.

"I can't say for sure, but I promise I will have an army heading to Palgrost the latest within three days," Horatio answered.

"That long...?"

"Don't worry. The border between Sangrod and Palgrost has a train system. I can use all the available trains to have my army arrive in Palgrost in one day, saving the days needed to cross the border. So, by day four, we will be in Palgrost territory already. However, I need to warn you. I might not be able to muster too many troops under current conditions."

Even if the Sangrod army arrived in Palgrost, they still needed some time to reach Balgudur. This was not ideal, but Jack thought this was the best he could hope for. "Thank you, Emperor Horatio. We will hold the enemies until your force arrives."

"It will be best if you can vanquish the enemies before my force arrives," Horatio laughed.

"That will be best," Jack laughed as well. "Uh, the matter of my army crossing the Jagara region..."

"I've sent a transmission to the Sangrod army that was sent to the Jagara region. That army should have also received a notification that I am in charge of the throne now. They will stand down and stop bothering your army."

"Thank you," Jack said. He sent a message to John then, giving him the good news, only to receive a reply that his army was already in Palgrost territory.

"You took too long time. I don't feel like waiting for you, so I cross the border using my own way," John said.

"Motherf*cker. Did you kill any Sangrod troops?" Jack asked.

"Don't worry, we didn't touch them. Well, Arther did slam into the Sangrod army's leader and Meryl shot some arrows at them to slow them down. But no one was killed... At least not that I'm aware of."

"Sigh... Just head to Balgudur as fast as you can. I will join you soon. I need to return to Thereath to settle something first. We are now allied with Sangrod. They will send an army around three days from now to help us in Palgrost."

"Ho... You went to ask for permission to pass but ended up getting an ally and an army. This is good, I couldn't build any supply depot since I was marching in secret. With Sangrod as an ally, I can send a battalion to build a supply line crossing through their country. It saves us a detour. I must say you never cease to amaze me, expert."

"I'm just lucky," Jack said.

"Okay, your luck never ceases to amaze me," John replied.

Jack stopped entertaining John. He ended the message and told Horatio that he would return to Thereath now to formalize their alliance. He also informed Horatio about Arlcard in the basement. He asked Horatio to cordon off the place so nobody could disturb Arlcard.

Horatio told Jack not to worry. He would take care of it. Jack left then.

After Jack left, Caleb asked Horatio, "Should we truly send an army into Palgrost?"

"Are you suggesting we abandon our ally?" Horatio asked back.

"No... But, are we truly allies? I mean, it's not just for show?"

"I don't do thing for a show, Caleb," Horatio said. "The Themisphere king had proven to be someone dependable. He managed to defeat my father. That deserves respect."

"Yeah, I admit I didn't expect that," Darius said. "The preparation I've made to deal with the late emperor after he was weakened by the Themisphere king was wasted."

"As long as we get the result, it doesn't matter," Horatio said.

"... I heard that Themisphere king was a righteous man," Caleb said. "What if he learned the truth about Rain and Lili? That it is you who assassinated them and placed the blame on Marcus?"

"Desperate time requires desperate measures. If Rain and Lili are still alive, I will have to fight them for the throne. This means I can't ally and send troops to support the Themisphere army as quickly as I can now. At that time, perhaps King Storm Wind would have no choice but to help me fight my two siblings. The result will be the same. This is simply faster.

"The Themisphere king is no fool. I'm sure in some way, he is aware. The world has its grey. It's not always black and white. I might be cruel and scheming, but I also value loyalty and friendship. That's why you two stick by my sides, don't you?

"As for Rain and Lili, they are not my true siblings. We are only related through Marcus' blood. We never care about each other. They would have done the same to me the first chance they got. The Themisphere King, however, was different. He values relationships. As long as we stay true to him, he will stay true to us. That's why I cannot betray the thing I have promised him."

"I see. You are always wiser than me. I follow your decision, Your Majesty," Caleb said with a bow.

"Go and make the arrangement to rally the army," Horatio said. "In the meantime, Darius and I will continue our discussion about whom to keep on my officer list."

After Caleb left, Horatio said to Darius, "Before we resume our discussion, I want you to send a transmission to your mother. She has the fastest brigade in our army. Have her take her brigade to go as our vanguard into Palgrost and aid the Themisphere king."

"I think she will need at least one day to organize, but all right, I will relay your command," Darius replied.

Chapter 1477: The Best Flame Wielder

Using the zone portal of Vacharest, Jack teleported to Thereath. He went directly to the palace. Entering the throne room, he called for Thaergood.

He used the monarch system and saw that there was indeed an alliance proposal from the Sangrod Empire. He accepted the alliance. At the same time, he spent coins to build an embassy in Sangrod.

When Thaergood arrived, Jack informed him about the alliance. Thaergood called his team and they spent a few hours discussing this new alliance with Jack. The general rules of an alliance in the monarch

system were non-aggression between the two countries, open borders, sending reinforcement when one was invaded, and sending reinforcement when one was on a campaign.

There were, of course, more terms and details that were not outlined in the monarch system, such as information sharing, tax reduction on traded goods, protection for traders and dignitaries, and so on. Jack had Thaergood and the team wrote them up. He gave Thaergood the authority to discuss these details with Sangrod.

Thaergood understood Jack couldn't stay long, so he kept the meeting concise. Jack left soon after the meeting. He first went to pick up Tip. Jack brought Tip because Tip could summon their guild army if he used the guild army summoning crystal near the Themisphere army. Tip had been staying behind in the headquarters to continue developing the guild. He only followed once the Themisphere army had crossed into Palgrost.

The two of them teleported to Sangrod's border city. Palgrost was in a state of war, no one could teleport directly into the country from abroad. Jack and Tip could use the train that existed at the border between Sangrod and Palgrost, but Pandora was still faster. He would check out the train some other time when the situation was not so urgent.

Jack summoned Pandora right from the city's zone portal. He let Tip sit behind him and they flew out of the town. This drew curses from the guards at the zone portal.

Jack sent a message to John asking for his location. After getting the coordinates, he directed Pandora. Pandora streaked across the sky, leaving a bright trail of fire.

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Balgadur was a capital built inside the mountain Sedgebare. It didn't need protection walls. The mountain itself was its wall. Of course, if it was just a normal mountain, it would still not resist the onslaught of siege weapons. Like a defensive wall of a city, the mountain surface was covered by rune diagrams. They increased the sturdiness of the mountain and also had self-recovering property. Unlike a wall, a mountain was covered even on its top, so flying units were useless when sieging this place.

Three days after John led the Themisphere army into Palgrost, Master's huge army gathered near the mountain.

Slightly to their East was another army. That was Boron's army. Boron's original 1,200,000 army had shrunk. This was due to the parting of three of his influential followers.

These three were among the four dwarf leaders the Corporate United targeted. One of them was Yonhilda Mountchest whose brother was rescued by Grace and the others from Fort Khurn Valdur.

Yonhilda left Boron's camp after Dograr was brought to her. She brought 80,000 troops with her when she left. The other two dwarf leaders that Corporate United had successfully persuaded brought 20,000 troops each.

Boron's force was now 1,080,000. He lost ten percent even before the battle started. The troops he lost went to Thelgrun, who accepted the defected leaders happily. He couldn't afford to punish these leaders for opposing him in the first place because that would dissuade the remaining leaders in Boron's camp who might still have second thoughts. Hence, he pardoned their initial sedition.

Master and Boron had a meeting the night before when their armies arrived near the outskirts of Mount Sedgebare. The meeting was conducted at Liguritutum's field command tent. Boron objected to the location of the meeting at first. As the future sovereign of this country, it should be the Liguritutum's ruler who came to his command tent. Liguritutum served as his support in this war.

But Master sent a transmission reply that their forces should just act on their own in that case. After persuasion by Sizhad, Boron finally relented.

This morning, they were facing the enormous mountain, ready to carry out their plan to take it down.

However, one gargantuan creature watched over these two armies with burning eyes. It was a dragon with bright red scales. It perched upon the side of the mountain above the main gate into Balgadur. It was as if announcing that anyone who wished to enter would have to get through him.

The red dragon was Palgrost's country guardian, a level 90 eternal-grade dragon.

"Uddroth...," Master uttered while gazing at the magnificent red dragon. "Let's see whose fire is hotter."

Master used his ruler badge and summoned Suzaki. The sky burned and the giant flaming elemental bird descended.

Uddroth's eyes narrowed when he saw Suzaki.

"Empress of fire... I never thought we would finally fight," Uddroth greeted.

"Wasn't that what you always wanted in the past? You were eager to prove that you hold the best dominion over fire," Suzaki replied. "This is your chance. You can finally get your fight."

Uddroth chuckled. "I was young then. When you age, you start to see things differently. Well, I don't have the passion to prove that I'm the best in controlling fire anymore, but I do have the passion to protect this place and its sovereign."

"I respect that, but I also have the commitment to carry out the request of my contract bearer."

"Then let today not be the day we decide who is the best flame wielder, but to decide who is the most committed to our duty."

Uddroth unleashed an intensely bright fire breath once he finished speaking. Suzaki spread its wings and a flame shield appeared before her. Uddroth's flame hit the shield. The flame swirled upon contact. It was as if Uddroth's flame was broken apart. Tendrils of the swirling flames then gathered above Suzaki, forming a fireball.

Uddroth stopped his breath. He had heard that Suzaki could not be hurt by pure fire energy. He would need physical contacts for that. He simply fired his breath to make sure that was true. He spread his wings. His huge body lifted off. Despite his size, he was very fast. The air burned as he flew past.

Suzaki didn't retreat seeing the incoming dragon. She flew forward. The fireball she had formed using Uddroth's flame followed beside her.

They clashed in the sky, multiple times. As the battle turned more heated, they flew higher and higher.

This was Master's instruction to his country guardian. He wanted Uddroth out of the picture, and Suzaki was luring him away.

As the two country guardians flew ever higher, Liguritutum and Boron's armies started advancing.

Chapter 1478: The Siege of Balgadur

"Are you not afraid of losing that firebird of yours?" Spring Crown asked.

"Suzaki is five levels stronger. She is also immortal," Master answered. "No need to concern yourself on her, focus on your task."

"Aye, aye, boss!"

The invader armies continued to approach Mount Sedgebare.

The soldiers on the mountain were ready. Palgrost was not only the richest country, but its military tech was also the most advanced. This came at the cost of their mystic path being behind other countries. But for a siege battle, their advantage in military tech gave them an advantage. They had the advanced mana cannon, which delivered a powerful payload over a very long distance. At this stage, no country's siege weapon could rival the mana cannon's reach.

The mana cannons were situated at several openings on Mount Sedgebare. They started firing once the Liguritutum army came into range.

Master was already aware of Palgrost's siege capability. That's why he didn't bother competing with them on siege weaponry. His guild had also exhausted all their guild siege weapons during the Hydrurond battle. Even with his resources, he couldn't have his guild rebuild all those siege weapons this fast.

The siege weapons he had brought here were the country's normal siege weapons. That's why this time his army invaded at a normal pace, unlike the rush tactic during the Hydrurond war.

He had developed a particular Liguritutum's siege weapon for this war. Liguritutum had a special ballista that was equipped with giant shields. This gave the ballista extra defense and endurance. It was also equipped with larger wheels which gave it faster movement speed than the common ballista.

When Master saw this armored ballista in Liguritutum's military tech, he immediately learned the tech and had it produced. This was because he knew this siege weapon would play a crucial role when he invaded Palgrost. This armored ballista now showcased its use.

Master had produced quite a number of this armored ballista. He had them lined up at the front line and they took the brunt of the damage from the mana cannon.

The armored ballistae couldn't compete with mana cannon's range. They could only defend without being able to retaliate. They served as the Liguritutum army's shields while the army advanced slowly. The soldiers who had defensive skills or spells helped mitigate the damage endured by the armored ballistae, while soldiers with mechanic skills restored the siege weapons' HP while they suffered damage.

As the bombardment continued, one armored ballista separated from the rest. This armored ballista moved faster than the rest. A squad of soldiers also followed it, using defensive skills to boost its defense as it advanced toward Balgudur's sealed main gate.

As this lone armored ballista approached, Palgrost defenders started to focus their attacks on this siege weapon. The cannoneers, Palgrost's special unit which had exceptionally long range, started sending their attacks to this advancing armored ballista.

When this concentrated attack was about to hit, a large glowing shell appeared and blocked all these attacks. If Jack was present, he would recognize this shell. It was Heavenly Shelter, a level 50 skill from the special class, Valiant Paladin.

As the dust settled, the defenders above had a better look at the approaching armored ballista. The Liguritutum ruler was rolling on that ballista!

Sighting the enemy's leader, the defenders immediately called for another barrage of attacks. Almost everyone on the mountain focused their attacks on this approaching armored ballista.

Master who was riding on this ballista cast a spell. An angel appeared above him. This angel cast Soul Link on Master, a Reaver's spell that maintained the same percentage of HP between the target and herself.

Master then used the level 60 skill of his Valiant Paladin class, Ultimate Sacrifice. At its first level, this skill emitted a light that covered allies in his surroundings, which included the armored ballista. Within one minute, all the damage dealt to these allies was transferred to him while being reduced by 50%. It was similar to Coca's Final Sacrifice but covered a larger area and reduced more damage.

Master had maxed level this skill. The damage it reduced at the max level was 80% and it lasted for three minutes.

The armored ballista continued advancing while all the reduced damage was transferred to Master, who shared the damage with his summoned angel. With the significant damage reduction and the angel's high HP sharing the damage, Master tanked all those attacks. He and his angel also cast healing spells to recover the damage they received.

The defenders expected the armored ballista to start shooting its giant bolt when the capital gate came into its range, but it just continued rolling forward.

When the Ultimate Sacrifice's three-minute duration was almost over, the armored ballista was very close to the gate already. Master cast teleportation and he appeared right next to the gate. He then took out a magic scroll.

The magic scroll in his hand was one of the only two in his possession. He already used one when they seized Liguritutum's throne. The one in his hand was the last.

He originally wanted to wait until he got the Book of Creation before using this scroll because he didn't have a sure way of getting another one. This magic scroll was extremely rare, but he decided to let it go for the success of this siege. He couldn't afford to lose too many troops here. He still had three more countries to conquer.

The magic scroll was activated and a nine-rune spell formation was seen. As the spell took effect, the rune diagrams on the surface of Mount Sedgebare started to dim.

The spell contained inside the magic scroll was the Greater Dispel. The defensive rune diagrams continued to dim until they were completely gone. The mountain was now a simple huge chunk of rock.

Linda ordered a full assault then. When the defenders focused most of their attention on Master, the army continued to advance under the bombardment. They were now close enough and had the mountain within the range of their siege weapons. The ballistae, catapults, and trebuchets which they brought from Liguritutum opened fire then.

These siege weapons dealt extra damage to structures. They not only reduced a structure's HP, but they could also alter a structure's physical form in the same way some skills were able to cause wounds to natives. Without the protection of the rune diagrams, the surface of the mountain shattered upon being hit.

Chapter 1479: The Empress of Fire

Linda ordered the siege weapon operators to aim below the openings where the defenders were. The stones from the catapults and trebuchets broke the mountain wall. The defenders lost their footing when the ground below them crumbled. Both the soldiers and the mana cannons fell and tumbled down the mountain under rains of stones.

Boron's force also charged after the mountain lost its protection. Balgadur had several entry points. Boron was in charge of entering from one of the side entrances.

After dispelling the protective rune diagrams, Master took out one of his guild's siege weapons, the dragon-head battering ram. This ram immediately took action as it bashed its metallic dragon head upon the main gate. The soldiers who followed him rushed forward and attacked the gate to increase the pace. The armored ballista was left behind, it had served its purpose.

Without the protection from the rune diagrams, it didn't take long for the main gate to shatter.

Master had been casting multiple summoning spells when the ram did its job. When the main gate fell, his army of minions rushed forward. They became the vanguard force for the rest of his army which was also flooding toward the open gate.

Jack and Tip had joined John and his army two days ago. Jack constantly used his Runestone of Marching to increase his army's pace. But even with the increased movement speed, it should still take them around three to four days to arrive at Balgadur.

He and John were now receiving messages from Jeanny about the situation in Balgadur.

Jeanny was currently inside that capital. Her force stopped harassing the Liguritutum army after the army came close to the capital. Her tactic was only working because the enemy had to keep moving. If the enemy stopped and focused their attention on her, her force would be the one in trouble.

Hence, she and the others teleported into Balgadur and aided the capital's defense before the capital went into a lockdown for the incoming siege.

"What? The gates have fallen and the enemies are now breaching inside the capital?" Jack said after reading the message. "F*ck! Is this going to be like the last time with Hydrurond? The capital fell before we were even halfway there?"

"That last time, the capital fell when we had just arrived, not halfway," John corrected.

"Is that important?" Jack asked in annoyance.

"So, how is the current situation?" Jack sent a message to Jeanny.

"Although the enemies have breached the gates, we are still defending. Palgrost's settlements are unique since they were built inside mountains or underground. They are not open space. They have many connecting pathways, which means if properly utilized, we can use them as chokepoints. We are now defending these chokepoints, slowing the enemy's advance."

"Oh, very good. This means not all are lost yet. It's a good thing you people come up with this choke points tactic."

"Actually, it's John's. He requested that we send him a complete map of Balgadur. He marked a few spots and told us to prepare defenses at those places in case the gates were breached."

"You've expected Balgadur to be breached?" Jack asked John.

"No, but it can't hurt to have a backup plan, can it?" John replied. "And it's proven we do need it."

"Anyway, can you hold out for a few more days?" Jack resumed his message with Jeanny.

"I don't know... No, we can! We will! We will hold them out! Palgrost hasn't lost that many soldiers. At these choke points, the enemy's large number is useless. We will hold them until you arrive!"

"That's the spirit! Three days. Give us three days. We will arrive by then!" Jack announced.

After ending the message, John said, "You know, there is no need for them to hold out for three days. One day will be enough."

"Huh?" Jack didn't catch John's meaning.

"Liguritutum's country guardian can only stay for one day. After that, she has to leave even if she can still fight," John said. "Palgrost's guardian doesn't have that handicap. Once the lame bird leaves, Palgrost's country guardian can aid the defenders in dealing with the enemy's army."

"You are right!" Jack remembered that rule now. "If only one day, I'm sure they can hold out!"

"Let's hope you are right..., " Peniel said.

"Why do you sound so pessimistic?" Jack asked.

"The Liguritutum's country guardian is Suzaki. Palgrost's is Uddroth. He is a level 90 eternal-grade dragon."

"He is five levels lower..., " John muttered.

"That's not the problem," Peniel said. "Uddroth's affinity is the fire element. Suzaki has another title aside from being called the Immortal One. Her other title was the Empress of Fire."

"I guess this means Uddroth can't defeat Suzaki considering most of his attacks will be fire-based due to his affinity," John said. "But he doesn't need to defeat her. All he needs to do is survive for one day."

"That's the thing," Peniel said. "Suzaki is called the Empress of Fire not only because most fire attacks can't hurt her. It is also because she can get stronger the more fire attacks she receives."

Jack and John were silent after hearing that.

"Let's increase the pace!" Jack announced. "We will reduce our sleep quota by another hour starting tonight. We have to get to Balgadur as soon as possible!"

Above Balgadur, Uddroth was tussling with Suzaki. In terms of direct combat, Uddroth's superior physical strength had the advantage. But Suzaki was not completely powerless. Aside from her claws and beak, she also attacked using the fireball beside her. The one that was formed using Uddroth's flame.

As the fight continued, Uddroth was finally aware of the situation below. He saw the enemy armies pouring into the mountain. He was extremely shocked seeing the scene. How could the mountain's defenses crumble so soon? It was as if the protective rune diagrams had stopped functioning, or maybe that was what had happened.

He realized then that Suzaki had purposefully drawn him higher into the sky.

He unleashed a flame blast with strong knockback force. He then dove down to the armies below, but before he was halfway, something crashed into him and forced him tumbling to the side.

He looked and saw that it was the fireball that had constantly followed Suzaki. He noticed then that the fireball was larger than when it was first formed.

Chapter 1480: Demonic Dragon

As Uddroth was looking at the fireball, he sensed incoming from his flank. It was too fast to dodge. He used his wing to block just as another fireball slammed into him.

His body tumbled in the air from the impact. He got a good look at this second fireball then. It was Suzaki in her fireball form. She turned around in the air and came back for him like a flaming comet.

When Uddroth prepared himself to catch her, the other fireball also came at him from his back. Due to the interruption, he couldn't properly deal with the attacks. The two fireballs took turns hitting him.

The repeated attacks caused Uddroth to cover himself completely with his large wings. He had gone into a total defense. Or so Suzaki thought. When she was about to hit him again for the umpteenth time, the two wings opened abruptly with a burst of fierce flame.

She was smacked by the sudden blow. The force even canceled her fireball form as she rolled uncontrollably in the air.

Uddroth's whole body was covered by flame. It was similar to Leavemealone when he activated the Fire God Suit. Uddroth turned around and caught the second fireball that was about to hit his back. He grabbed the fireball tight. The fireball wriggled, trying to break free. Uddroth clamped down on it.

He tried to break it with brute force, but the fireball resisted. Not only that, it was even expanding.

"What...?" Uddroth noticed his fire suit was shrinking. Its flames drifted into the fireball in his hands as if they were being absorbed.

"Argh...!" He felt pain in his back. Suzaki had pierced him with several flame lances. The fireball in his hands broke free. The fireball flew back to Suzaki's side.

"You... I see now... No wonder you are called the empress of fire," Uddroth said. "I admit in terms of the fire element, I'm not your opponent, but don't think this means I will lose! Haaahhh...!!!"

Uddroth's body trembled as it shone.

Suzaki sensed the mana intensifying in Uddroth. She wasn't going to just sit still and watch. She shrieked with a disrupting mental cry as hundreds of fiery feather darts shot out of her. At the same time, her fireball flew toward Uddroth again.

Aside from taking out a few HPs, Suzaki's cry didn't do anything to disrupt whatever Uddroth was doing. Uddroth also ignored the flame darts that stabbed his body. His sturdy and thick scales gave him incredible defense.

The fireball slammed into Uddroth. Uddroth jerked from the impact, but Suzaki sensed Uddroth's aura continued to spike. The fireball came in another time and it was stopped by Uddroth's hand this time. A slightly different hand. One that was covered by sharp scales and some small horns jutted out at the wrist.

It was not only the hand, Uddroth's entire body had changed. Aside from becoming sharper, his scales had also turned darker. It was no longer the bright red color of a burning flame. It was now dark red with many black spots. Little horns covered his body, especially his spine and tail. The two straight horns on his head were now crooked and another four had sprouted out beside his two original horns. His body was also larger.

"Demonization...?" Suzaki uttered. "Impossible... Dragons shouldn't be able to learn this skill."

"Hehe. I thought so too. But it seems that if one is determined enough, one can learn the impossible," Uddroth said. He strengthened his grip on the fireball. The fireball trembled heavily before getting crushed into flame dust.

"If I can't beat you with my flames, then I will just rip you apart with my claws!" Uddroth exclaimed and his body shot forward.

Suzaki used her flame burst. The area around her was covered with raging flames. Flames covered everything, Suzaki was not visible among this sea of fire. Uddroth was unflinching. He rushed straight into the fire.

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Inside Balgaur, Jeanny organized her guildmates to aid Thelgrun's soldiers in holding the choke points. These chokepoints came in the form of tunnels that connected the multiple cavity halls within the mountain.

Mount Sedgebare might have lost its defensive rune diagrams, but it was still a colossal mountain. Liguritutum's siege weapons might have broken its surface with their attacks, but the rock wall was thick. It didn't affect the capital inside except for causing a few tremors.

If they wanted to blast through the thick rock wall to create a hole, it would take them years of constant bombardment. That's why the invading army had no choice but to use the tunnels to advance deeper into the capital, and these tunnels were where the defenders set up their choke points.

Thelgrun's native soldiers formed the barrier while the players provided firepower. Jeanny organized so the different guilds she had brought from Themisphere covered the multiple choke points. For her own guild, she divided them into three divisions and covered three different choke points. This was because her guild had the highest number of high-level players.

She had Fierce Flame, Giant Steve, and Trinity Dawn with her. Giant Steve was with the native soldiers serving as barricade while Fierce Flame and Trinity Dawn supported from the back.

Giant Steve and Trinity Dawn were level 71. They both had three new skills from the first-class special classes Jack bestowed on them.

Giant Steve received a skill called Curtain Wall when he became the Royal King's Guard. Curtain Wall erected a wall in front of the user that lasted thirty seconds. This wall blocked damage equaled 700% of the user's HP. All damage received by the wall was reduced by 50%.

The second skill he received when he reached level 60 was Fortress. This skill increased his defenses by 500%, his elemental resistances by 50 points, and reduced all received damage by 30%. He also became immune to status effects and movement restrictions. Skills that normally passed through a target were blocked if they hit him. Using this skill reduced his movement speed by 50%. This skill lasted five minutes.

The third skill he received at level 70 was Field Bastion. This skill gave the same benefits as Fortress but half the values. However, it affected not only himself but every ally in his vicinity. Giant Steve couldn't move if he activated this skill. If he was somehow forced to move, then the skill ended.

With these skills, he contributed a great deal in holding the choke point even when his HP couldn't compare to the native soldiers around him.