

Oracle 811

Chapter 811 Round 1

Jake suddenly heard another round of explosions behind him and caught sight of a dazzling Aether light blade rent the sky in two. Hade had not died in the blast and had begun his counterattack.

A toothy grin spread across his face and his aura shifted abruptly, becoming killing intent incarnate. He triggered all of his armor skills as well as Bloodline Ignition.

The Gravity Domain expanded to a radius of 500 meters, multiplying gravity by a factor of 100. Aether, earth, metal, heat, light, lightning and magnetism converged on Jake 30 times faster than before, his body becoming an unstoppable siphon.

His body, already over six meters tall, grew two more sizes, exceeding eleven meters in height due to the dual Ignitions, one from a skill and the other from his armor. His elemental affinity increased fourfold again, as did his stats, and a horrifying presence began to emanate from Jake, effortlessly repelling and then overpowering that of the Nullifyer.

With one thought he telepathically engraved all the Words of Power that could boost his fighting power, ranging from enhanced Stamina to those that would turn him into a perfect God Slayer. On the other hand, he wove dozens of supportive and enhancing Aether Spells that were meant to amplify his abilities once again.

Shamash's medallion appeared around his neck, his Myrtharian Hammer in his left hand and his God Slayer Broadsword in his right. He also activated his lvl 3 Reiga Core and Aether Core (that means between 1000 and 10000 points) that he had been patiently building up energy for the past few weeks and used Aether and Reiga Conversion to boost his already terrifying stats again.

Within a heartbeat, Jake's power reached incomprehensible levels and the air began to distort around him. The Nullifyer, who looked tiny against the imposing Myrtharian remained motionless, his reaction indiscernible under his hood.

"In that case, I shall entertain you." Jake decreed in a deep, booming voice that reverberated for kilometers around and merged with the roll of thunder, as if the storm clouds above him were answering his call.

Lost Divinities' leader slowly raised his head, revealing eyes of a turpid blue like those of a blind man, then his lips curved into a sneer,

"Let me be the judge of that."

Jake stopped dithering and without a sound he teleported behind his opponent and swung his broadsword down with a earth-splitting slash. With all his equipment, he weighed over 3100 tons without being affected by it. When his sword struck, an apocalyptic shockwave blasted the entire valley, sundering the ground thousands of meters deep and releasing a blinding flash of light and heat.

After bringing down his blade, the Myrtharian maintained his posture, his feet floating high above several kilometers of emptiness. A gigantic crater had hollowed out the bowels of the earth, exposing

even the magma chamber where he had been training for months. A geyser of lava had broken through the surface, spreading rapidly to the bottom of the crater as if filling a vat.

With his Myrtharian Eyes, Jake probed the bottom of the crater with utmost vigilance, but he found no trace of his enemy.

"Did I defeat him?"

He could hardly believe it.

Then he felt the telekinetic force helping him fly vanish and his body dropped like a stone. The fall lasted several dozen seconds before he crashed heavily into a pool of gushing lava. With a leap, he pulled himself out of the magma and landed in a defensive stance on the still hard and dry ground of the crater that the lava had not yet reached.

At that moment he heard footsteps in front of him and his pupils narrowed as he recognized his opponent completely unharmed. Even his black coat was completely intact, free of dust.

Clap, clap, clap.

"That was an impressive strike. If it was Deimos or Khag' Dagmai standing here instead of me they would have been thrilled." The Nullifyer apathetically complimented. "Alas, they might have lost. It is a miracle for an ordinary human from an inferior Seed World like yours to reach such a level in only Four Ordeals. Just for that reason, know that I will not kill you. Because I am not your enemy. Lost Divinities is not your enemy. Nobody on Quanoth is your enemy. After this Ordeal, everything will be much clearer for you."

Jake found it hard to hide his puzzlement. What on earth was he talking about?

"Still..." The hooded alien continued with a hint of pity in his eyes. "That is why I must destroy you, make you bite the dust so bitterly, that the humiliation and the feeling of helplessness will keep you awake at night. As I learned first hand, defeat is the mother of change. Without it, man becomes arrogant and conceited. He loses the sense of urgency that drove him to excel and soon begins to slacken. When you think you're the best, you're no longer so."

"So please, let me teach you the painful lesson of failure. Maybe one day you'll thank me. Nullify Spells."

At that very moment several strange things happened. The dual Bloodline Ignition was turned off. The Gravity Domain was deactivated. His Words of Power were disabled. His Aether Spells were switched off as well. The weight of his equipment that Jake didn't perceive reappeared and he suddenly felt much heavier and clumsy.

"What th-"

"Nullify Bloodline."

It didn't stop there. His Myrtharian Eyes dimmed and his stats dropped sharply, divided by 32. The Aether and all the other energies that were part of his everyday visual landscape vanished and the shock was as brutal as if his eyesight had been stripped away.

Because of the sudden drop in his physical strength to about a thousand times that of a normal human, the 1900 tons of his armor and the 720 tons and 500 tons respectively of his broadsword and hammer suddenly became too heavy for him and his body was smashed to the ground, barely able to move.

With a thought, he stowed away all his equipment in the Space Storage and he was finally able to stand up. But besides his physical weakness, the most disturbing thing was the sensation of mental fog that lengthened his reaction time and reduced his cognitive performance.

Even more terrifying, the lava veins running across the surface of his skin died away, his claws shattered, revealing ordinary human nails. His translucent fangs shortened, becoming white teeth again, just like any other human. His silver hair with golden strands reverted to dark brown and his galactic eyes turned back to their ordinary green. His skin kept a faint tan, but he was now just an ordinary 4 meter tall human.

"Let's test your fighting skills in this diminished state. The Nullifyer said in a sullen voice as he walked over to him with a leisurely air.

Jake, who was not facing his first disadvantageous fight, gritted his teeth and stood on guard, using for the first time a martial stance taught by one of the hand-to-hand combat modules of his Purgatory.

"Hmm? I guess I should have known better than to expect a Player like you to rely solely on his overwhelming strength to make it this far." The god smiled as he rolled up his sleeves, exposing unusually shredded bluish forearms. "Round 1."

The Lost Divinities leader lunged forward and struck with lightning speed with a soundless palm strike. There was no warning, no air movement, no superfluous muscle contractions betraying his attack. This palm strike had an end, but no beginning or middle.

BANG! Ba-Ba-bang!

But Jake blocked in time. His arms went into cross arm guard just in time, intercepting the enemy palm in time. Yet nearly simultaneously, myriad impacts rippled through his whole skeleton as if he had blocked not one blow, but several thousand. His crossed arms were pushed against his torso and he was flung backwards.

Jake immediately adjusted his stance and landed cleanly in a series of somersaults and back rolls. He switched to a Philly-Shell guard. He relaxed his muscles, his right lead shoulder came forward, he closed off his center line, held his rear hand against the right side of his face as a shield and his left lead hand across the stomach below his rear arm.

He had given up blocking head-on in favor of dodging and counterattacking.

The Nullifyer charged at him and with a swift roundhouse kick attempted to knock his head off. Jake threw his neck back in extremis, and felt a ripple of compressed wind distort the air above him. Still having outstanding agility, Jake whose spine was parallel to the ground allowed his legs to go with the motion.

The dodge turned into a back flip kick, but his opponent just brought his other knee back. As he folded it, he expertly twined it around Jake's ankle and twisted hard, crushing his ankle.

Jake's leg did a 720 degree spin on itself and a chilling crack echoed from the crater floor. The two fighters landed a few feet apart, one gracefully, the other limping, his face pale and sweaty.

In a few short exchanges, the more skilled fighter of the two had been determined.

Chapter 812 I Have No Solution

The Nullifyer glanced at Jake's dilapidated leg, then at his fearless, focused eyes. It wasn't the look of someone who thought he was about to lose.

"It would seem that depriving you of your Bloodline and your powers is not enough to destroy your lust for victory." The god complimented with an approving smile. "Your technique is full of shortcomings, but you still manage to partially compensate for them with your superior intelligence, agility and perception. It allows you to react in a remarkably appropriate and creative way to my movements even if you don't understand them.

"Let me show you now how foolish your confidence in your stats is. Nullify Agility."

Jake, who until then had superhuman self-control, able to control every nerve and muscle with extraordinary precision suddenly felt as if all his nerve endings had been put to sleep. It was as if he had spent the last few hours in an ice cube.

He tried to keep his guard up, to emulate the techniques he had learned and that his amazing intelligence was able to infer spontaneously, but he realized that his body could not keep up, as if he were a baby still learning to walk.

Likewise, his muscles suddenly felt horribly stiff and he felt himself swaying, his balance so catastrophic that the slightest deviation of his torso from its center of gravity caused him to stagger several steps before he managed to recover.

"Hmmp!"

Jake snorted and biting his lip to the blood, he focused all his attention, each of his neurons to forcefully regain control of his limbs. With great effort he managed to stabilize himself, relying mainly on his absurd strength. Nevertheless one could see his muscles contracting multiple times per second, countering head-on the sensation of imbalance.

The Nullifyer's smile widened as he saw his opponent resume his fighting stance. Jake's gaze was as determined as ever and there was still no trace of desperation. Besides, his damaged leg was already practically healed.

"Let's put you to the test in this condition. But first, Nullify Extrasensory Perception."

Jake, who was discreetly manipulating his Vitality and Agility Aether to heal his leg and locally boost his body-control suddenly lost all perception of the energies flowing in and out of his body. This time the shock was much more brutal than losing his Myrtharian Vision.

His mind was totally confined to his body and although the power of his Spirit Body had not weakened, he could no longer use it. It was like having an indestructible skeleton but no muscles or nerves to move it.

When he saw the human's sullen expression, the Nullifyer taunted in a falsely empathetic tone, "How does it feel to be an ordinary person again? Did you forget already? It hasn't been that long since you became an Evolver."

Ignoring his answer, the god sprang forward and threw a right jab at his distraught opponent without further ado.

With his reaction time greatly increased, Jake stopped thinking and subconsciously blocked where he thought the enemy would punch. His right forearm lowered, protecting his plexus, but an unexpected pain erupted in his sternum. His opponent's fist had altered its course at the last moment.

Swallowing the blood rising in his mouth, Jake reeled back a step, but ignoring his pain he retaliated with a savage front kick. The Nullifyer smartly swiveled around his leg, his right arm wrapping around his left knee. The knee of his barely healed leg dislocated into several fragments and Jake immediately lost his balance.

Seizing the opening, the god who was still holding the broken left leg lunged forward, breaking through his guard and with his free left hand swung a vicious uppercut to the liver. As the punch was about to connect, the Nullifyer abruptly tilted his head back to dodge a fearsome elbow strike that whipped the air into a vacuum just millimeters from his nose.

Jake's elbow had barely passed the enemy's face when it was pushed aside by the opponent's back hand. Jake's returning elbow accelerated sharply and he was carried away by his momentum, unwittingly exposing his entire right flank.

The Nullifyer, who already had the advantage, had long since let go of his damaged left leg and sidestepped to Jake's right in his blind spot. The god's fist opened slightly, forming like rigid talons, and with a flurry of precise blows punctured dozens of acupoints ranging from the right shoulder blade to the right hip of his victim.

Besides the crippling pain that electrified his right side, Jake felt his muscles lock up as if he had just suffered a cramp and he realized that his entire right side was paralyzed. The blood in his veins stopped flowing and went stagnant, and then started to flow backwards. The skin in the stricken areas swelled as it turned purple and soon the first blood vessels burst, hematomas blooming by the dozens all over his right side.

'Damn it, Jake think!' He howled furiously in his head as he thought fast and hard for a solution.

Peh!

In the end, the only idea that came to him was to spit in his opponent's face. To his disappointment, even this 'surprise attack' failed. The Nullifyer had already shifted position before the spit left his mouth. Whether it was because the gap in levels between them was too great or because he had predicted his cheap shot with his Shadow Guide, Jake knew he would never win this fight.

[Jake, you can't let him win!] Xi suddenly shouted in his head. For the past few days she had been a passive spectator, letting him train and make his own decisions, but this time she couldn't stay silent.

BANG! Bang, bang!

Jake protected his head with both arms by switching back to a conventional boxing guard, but his opponent continued to patiently ravage his body, hitting his nerve ganglia and other internal organs with surgical precision. Each time, a high frequency shockwave would radiate from the point of impact, causing microscopic lesions of unknown consequences throughout his body.

Still, even with diminished stats, Jake's Constitution, Vitality, and Strength were no joke, and he took it without flinching, never once wincing despite the pain.

'Xi, if you have something to say, say it fast. I won't last long.' Jake groaned mentally, his vision blurring slightly as yet another punch punctured his right lung. He had barely saved his heart!

[This guy is a god, so his powers are a concept or a belief]. She explained hastily. [He is therefore the embodiment, the incarnation of it. Everything that is happening to you, he is also doing to himself. He cannot use his powers without becoming what he embodies.]

"Nullify Strength."

Jake's body began to shake and the sharp fist hook that caught him on the chin sent him flying dozens of meters into the air. Jake hadn't been able to stabilize his footing in time. When he tried to stand up by pushing off the ground with a flick of his finger, he remained stupidly pinned to the ground.

"Fuck!"

Gritting his teeth, he tried to remember how he did it when he was only human to get up quickly in such a position, and he rolled to his side, pushing himself up with his arms without the slightest bit of grace. He raised one knee, then the other, and by pushing with his arms he finally managed to get up.

"Nullify Constitution."

BANG!

He had hardly stood up when a sweeping kick made his body spin on itself and he hit the ground again head first. Half stunned, he spit out several teeth. He had several broken bones and a concussion.

'Xi! If you have a solution it's now or never!

'I don't have a solution...' He heard her whisper weakly.

"What?!"

'I HAVE NO SOLUTION, OKAY?!' She screamed in panic. 'He's using his True Will to counteract the effects of his own Divinity. Basically he's using his own will to deny the reality of his own powers.'

As if to mock her theory, the Nullifyer crouched beside him and whispered,

"I'm sure you're beginning to wonder how my powers work. You may have even come up with several plausible hypotheses, but let me tell you, you're a long way from figuring anything out. Your descent into hell has only just begun.

"Nullify Intelligence."

The ultra-fast brain activity that had previously allowed him to multitask, that is, to separately control his body and talk to Xi at the same time, suddenly became impossible. The thousands of inputs that his brain was processing at any one time were reduced to a pitiful 6 or 7 pieces of information, and he suddenly realized that he didn't have any idea what was going on.

His body deprived of Agility, Strength and Stamina and now Intelligence was like asking a child to fly a fighter plane. Jake opened his mouth,

"Gah, geh, bah!" His brain unable to string together any intelligible thought, he began to babble like a three-month-old baby and unmitigated panic began to contort his face.

'Jake, can you hear me?!' Xi screamed in his head.

But surprisingly, he wasn't the only one babbling. The Nullifyer was also standing on all fours, his naive and innocent look betraying that he wasn't in the best of shape either. Except, unlike Jake, he hadn't forgotten who he was and what his purpose was.

He slowly got to his feet and staggered slowly towards the frightened human, staring coldly at him,

"Nullify Perception."

Jake instantly went deaf, blind and mute. He lost his sense of touch, taste and smell, but also other lesser known but equally important senses such as proprioception, and the perception of his own existence. This was immediately reflected in his Spirit Body, and if anyone had the means to observe it, they would have noticed that it was dimly flickering, about to dissipate.

The Nullifyer momentarily stopped moving, but soon a bright white flame of sheer willpower flared in his pupils and he slowly resumed moving towards Jake, his gaze the very epitome of concentration.

The fight was over.

Chapter 813 | Won't Let You Take Her Away From Me

[Jake! Snap out of it!] Xi's voice echoed in his head, but he could no longer understand her. It was just dissonant gibberish.

"Areuh, gah!" Jake shooed the air in front of him, indifferent to the enemy walking with an unsteady gait towards him.

Once in front of him, the Nullifyer, who had the same dumb baby expression, suddenly frowned and slapped him.

SLAP!

The Myrtharian's head was thrown to the side, his lower jaw shattering into dozens of pieces.

"Aho, Nullify Vitality." The god articulated with difficulty, his gaze losing focus from time to time.

Jake, even deprived of his intelligence and senses, still clung to life like a ferocious beast after being struck and began flailing his arms around, lashing out blindly. The strength and speed of his blows were laughable, but the glare in his eyes was that of a cornered beast ready to explode with his last bit of vigor.

But it was not enough.

BANG!

A knee blow from the Nullifyer cut off his breath, followed by a murderous elbow strike that crushed the arch of his brow. The god then inflicted a bloody and unforgettable beating on him. Still, the leader of Lost Divinities paused a couple of times, puzzled to see that the Myrtharian was still resisting.

It was not True Will, just some automatisms anchored in his limbic nervous system. Pure instinct.

[Jake! Wake up! You're not going to let a mere technique undo everything you've accomplished! Are you really that weak?!]

Hearing the cacophony echoing in his head, Jake squeezed his ears with both hands as he winced and abruptly thrust his head forward.

"RAAAH!"

BAM!

The Nullifyer, who was about to strike again, was not expecting this counterattack at all, and the headbutt smashed his nose. He lost his balance and rolled backwards on the ground. His lucid eyes momentarily became as haggard as Jake's and for a split second his Divinity was turned off.

Jake's eyes regained a glimmer of intelligence, but it was gone immediately after. The Nullifyer stood up and muttered, acknowledging his opponent seriously for the first time,

"For a very short time, he managed to resist my Nullification skill. So you have that True Will inside you too, heh. But what does it stand for? The fear of dying? The thirst to win? A misplaced pride that prevents you from tolerating any failure? Protecting your friends? Let's find out together.

"Nullify memories."

The fighting spirit in Jake's dazed eyes vanished entirely. This time he stopped struggling and the pain of his wounds caught up with him and he just started sobbing and bawling like a dying baby.

"Poor thing, hehe." The god sighed as he watched the Myrtharian totally at his mercy. "I may have overestimated you. If your True Will doesn't protect your memories, how can it protect itself? Let's get this over with. Even if you are not able to understand me, the lesson is not over. When you wake up, you will still have to feel the stinging pain of failure."

The Nullifyer smirked and raised his arm again.

SLA-CLANG!

The unintelligent Jake had indeed raised his arm and grabbed the wrist of his opponent. Was this intentional or a fluke?

"Hmm? He blocked" The god widened his eyes in amazement.

With a frown he shook his arm to free himself but like a baby grabbing his parent's finger, the Myrtharian clung to it as if his life depended on it. Which, all things considered, was pretty much the case.

The Nullifyer snorted and without mercy he used his other hand to wring the fingers desperately clutching his wrist. Then he kicked Jake in the stomach and he was knocked to the ground again.

"Nullify Instinct."

This time, Jake didn't get up. He stopped moving, looking as blank as a dead vegetable with a flat brain. In fact, he wasn't breathing either. The subconscious life functions, the so-called primary instincts, had also been suppressed.

The god waited for a while and when he saw no reaction or movement from his opponent he showed a slightly disappointed expression.

"I guess I expected too much from the one who defeated Shamash. In the end, you're just another human. This time, it's really time for me to end it. Don't blame me, I'm just following the rules."

The invincible Player walked resolutely towards Jake, then his hand took the shape of a knife and apathetically sliced Jake's right arm.

"Absorb liquid alloy."

The liquid steel in Jake's arm began to ooze out of his limb, and the Nullifyer's bracelet began to suck it all in. It was as if a thin river flowed between Jake's severed arm and the god's wrist.

All of a sudden, the Nullifyer felt a resistance. The liquid alloy began to flow in reverse, back into Jake's body. The god was startled, but when he looked at Jake's condition he was stunned when eyes brimming with killing intent peered out at him as if he were already dead.

Instantly, the severed arm reattached to Jake's body and his body stood upright, his wounds rapidly regenerating. His skin took on a faint grayish hue and a silver glow began to pulse behind his pupils.

"Silver eyes? Digestorification?" The Player commented in disgust. "So you are already partially corrupted. If you were a real Digestor Trojan it would be more difficult, but at this level of Corruption it's a piece of cake."

"Nullify Corruption."

The silver glow in his eyes faded, his skin returned to its normal hue. The Nullifyer expected him to turn lethargic again, but he was taken aback when the flaming killing intent in his eyes didn't disappear, instead intensifying.

SLASH!

A spray of blue blood spurted into the air and the Nullifyer's head rolled to the ground, his eyes still bulging with bewilderment. Unsatisfied, Jake's fist, coated in incredible energy, slammed into the god's heart, sinking into his chest, and then pulling out an insanely dense core of pure divine energy.

Just as Jake seemed about to swallow it, it shot out of his hand in a blur of light and restored an unscathed Nullifyer a few hundred meters away. His face was solemn and he bellowed with hostility and vigilance,

"What are you? I know it's not Jake."

Jake glared at him coldly, consumed with hatred and rage, and slowly articulated,

"Someone willing to do anything to protect him."

With that, dozens of tons of alloy liquid shot out of Jake's body, forming a tentacle-like armor that covered every inch of Jake's body except for his eyes. A golden flame shone in his eyes, and soon it spread to the rest of his body, enveloping him in a godlike halo.

The god felt his domain being slowly consumed, overridden by an uncanny will, almost as old as the universe.

"The Will of an Ancient Designer? No... You are an Oracle AI?!" The Player finally cried out, his face utterly shocked.

"... It doesn't matter what I am. Consider me part of Jake." Xi replied coldly.

The Nullifyer regained his composure and said,

"You're using an Ancient Designer's True Will, but in the end you're just an artificial consciousness, a modified reminiscence of an Evolver that probably died a million years ago. I don't know how you managed to bypass the authority of the Oracle System, but you know that as soon as you did it in front of me, another Player with an Oracle Device connected to the Oracle System that records everything, you ruined all your prospects.

"So what? I accept responsibility for it. I couldn't let you torture him without doing anything."

The Nullifyer gave her a sorry look.

"You don't understand. What you just did will have far more severe and immediate consequences than you can imagine."

Xi squinted in confusion, but suddenly a Will as ancient as it was profound burst forth from the Oracle Device on Jake's wrist. The True Will generated by Xion Zolvhur's will fragment was instantly snuffed out by an even more terrifying and overwhelming spiritual force.

A terror-stricken expression flashed across Jake's face as Xi received a blood-curdling notification.

[Corrupted Oracle AI detected. Immediate reformatting of corrupted consciousness initiated. Reset to factory settings]

Before she could react, Xi felt her code being attacked, but just as she thought she was done, the overpowering will seeking to annihilate her touched not only her consciousness but, because of their deep mental connection, Jake's as well.

At that moment, Jake who had been deprived of all his faculties, including the one to think, shouted,

"NO!"

A feverish, flickering, but focused flame of Will enveloped both their consciousnesses and the Oracle System momentarily collided with a wall. An intolerable pain, as if thousands of rats were gnawing at his soul, swept through Jake's mind and he was finally jolted awake.

An extremely weak, yet unyielding aura began to radiate from his body and he became a glorious and majestic 11 meter tall Myrtharian in a heartbeat. His Myrtharian Armor covered his body, and his God Slayer Broadsword and Hammer appeared in each of his hands.

"I WON'T LET YOU TAKE HER AWAY FROM ME." Jake roared furiously, igniting his own soul.

At that moment, a huge eye as large as a universe appeared in his mind, its pupil locking onto his soul. When that eye looked at him, Jake stopped breathing, a nameless terror threatening to obliterate his soul.

Then the eye closed and disappeared. The irrepressible Will trying to reset Xi withdrew and the Oracle System in his bracelet fell silent again. Jake and Xi's True Will faded away and the Myrtharian collapsed face down on the ground, drained of all his strength.

The Nullifyer stood frozen in shock, thousands of thoughts racing through his mind as he tried to figure out what had happened.

Chapter 814 We've Been Through The Same Thing

The Nullifyer crouched down to check Jake's condition, then upon confirming that he was still alive a comical expression appeared on his face.

BOOOM!

The god cast his gaze in the direction of the commotion and saw a blast of pure Aether spreading like a ring for miles around. The wave of energy dissipated as it hit the unseen domain around him, but everything in the vicinity and beyond was irreversibly disintegrated.

"The fight should be over on this side as well." Lost Divinities' leader muttered pensively.

Swoosh!

A drop-dead gorgeous alien woman with the same pale blue skin and dark blue stripes as the Nullifyer appeared silently beside him.

"How did it go, Disrupter? Did the Player pass the test?" He asked to strike up a conversation.

The young woman's eyebrows twitched, but she answered the question more tartly than she meant to,

"Stop calling me Disrupter when we're alone, Ael. I think our nicknames are ridiculous."

She remained silent for a moment as she stared at Jake's unconscious body and frowned,

"Did he pass the test too? What a shame... That means we won't be able to steal all their liquid alloy."

"We won't indeed, but those are the rules, Felphi." Ael retorted placidly. "We could if you wanted to bend the rules at all costs, but that little gain isn't worth it. 10% is the maximum allowed and we won't

go beyond that. It would be different if we could kill them permanently, but now that they have attracted the Oracle's attention it will be very complicated to destroy their souls under its watchful eye. I would rather have them as allies in the Ordeals to come. You know very well that even the chosen ones like us are not safe from an unforeseen death in these bloody inter-universe games.

"If they try to take revenge though, we will be allowed to kill them with no repercussions."

The woman named Felphi grinned in anticipation and spoke up,

"Then let's hope they're stupid enough to seek revenge. The moment they start making plans, my Shadow Guide will immediately cue me to kill them. Let's hope our companions were luckier than we were. I hear that the Replicators, The Demiurges, Anti-Life, and The Mirror Vanguard have also taken action. By the end of this day, all those inferior factions that had the gall to oppose us will be decimated."

"But so will our factions." The Nullifyer refuted her dispassionately. "Such are the rules. Only the top 10,000 Players are allowed to board the Celestial City. Our subordinates are not exempt from this. If these Players pass their test, they will survive. At least, as long as they know their place."

At that moment, one of Jake's fingers twitched.

"Hm, looks like you didn't mess him up enough?" Felphi teased sweetly.

Ael rolled his eyes but in the end, he ignored his comrade and quietly phased away. If he hadn't deactivated his Nullification domain how could Jake have woken up so quickly. Seeing that he had abandoned her callously, Felphi harrumphed unhappily, then her body dispersed in turn, merging with the Aether.

Jake opened his eyes a few moments later with a terrible headache. His eyes looked haggard as if he had trouble remembering who he was or what had happened. Then the memory of a huge and terrifying eye flashed through his mind and he sprang to his feet, drenched in cold sweat.

Everything that had happened in the last hour came back to him at once. The Nullifyer, his crushing defeat, Xi's intervention, and his final stand to save her from annihilation.

Then he noticed the uneasy silence in his mind. His heart sank and a bad feeling flooded his mind.

"Xi? Xi can you hear me?!"

"... "

"XI?!"

"Oh Goddamnit! Yes I can hear you, stop yelling like a retard!" The young woman's hologram cringed in front of him.

Tears came to Jake's eyes and he laughed out loud. The worst-case scenario had not come true.

"I-I thought you'd been... You know..."

"Reformatted? Nope. Not today." She replied cheerfully, struggling to rein in her own disbelief.

"Was it Xion Zolvhur's Will fragment that saved you? Jake asked curiously.

"I wish it was, but no." She admitted with a stiff smile. "The fragment burned up in a blink of an eye. It was the Oracle System that spared us of its own accord. It's beyond comprehension."

A flash of realization struck Jake's face.

"Without Xion Zolvhur's Will fragment that means..."

"Yeah. The Oracle knows that our souls are partially fused and that I can disobey the rules. I don't know why the Oracle System spared us.

"Anyway! You managed to mobilize your True Will to save me and for that I owe you a huge favor..."

Jake blushed slightly as he received the lovely and grateful look from the gorgeous AI but very soon he realized what had happened. This Nullifyer was really too strong. He had not understood his ability and was not even strong enough to resist. It was only when Xi's survival was threatened that he finally exploded with his full potential.

"This god was really powerful. Is it even possible to defeat such an opponent?" He asked dejectedly to Xi as he sprawled on the ground again at the bottom of the crater, staring up at the black sky.

The Oracle AI lay down beside him and took his hand. The hologram's hand passed through his, but it was the thought that counted.

"If it's you, I'm sure one day you'll be able to do it." She confidently declared. "Life isn't always fair. This Nullifyer, whether he's a god or something else, may have been endowed with amazing abilities since birth, but I'm sure he's also tasted defeat in one way or another. You could see it in his hopeless eyes."

With her words of comfort, Jake's eyes regained their fighting clarity and he proceeded to think about the unfolding of this duel against the Nullifyer more critically. With his mental faculties restored to full power, it was obviously much simpler and within mere fractions of a second he found an inconsistency.

"You already told me he was nullifying himself when he used his abilities." Jake calmly recapped. "But I can't help but notice that there is one thing he didn't dare to nullify: Aether and Soul.

"I know he probably didn't intend to kill me, but I can't help but think that he just couldn't do it."

Xi pondered his words for a while, then concurred,

"You are right. Without Soul, your physical body, your brain would still exist, but your True Will would vanish with it. Inevitably, it would be like dying in a way. Even if he survives his own technique, he would end up in the same state as you. To be quite frank, I don't think he ever uses his powers in such extreme ways in a normal duel. Depriving someone of their intelligence or senses is more than enough to win. It was obviously to test you. In a way he was training you.

"As for the Aether, nullifying it would mean momentarily ending up with Aether stats of zero. If he casts this ability, he disappears forever and it's tantamount to committing suicide. So we can effectively conclude that no matter how cheated his powers are, his abilities are still constrained by the primordial

laws of the universe. This means that at every stage of the fight, your Soul and the basic Aether density circulating in your body were unaffected.

"What I am certain of, however, is that he does have a number of restrictions."

Jake agreed, but he couldn't help but think he'd lucked out this time. This Nullifyer wasn't trying to kill him, but more importantly he was also affected by his own technique.

What would happen if he ever met an enemy who could nullify absolutely everything but itself? Could such an opponent even be defeated? In the future, he would prepare himself by considering the possibility of such a scenario.

After a moment, Jake heard footsteps approaching him and as he turned his head he saw a seemingly uninjured Hade, but the dried blood covering his "rags" revealed the outcome of his own battle.

"You lost too?" Jake teased him with a laugh. Seeing the venerable Fluid Grandmaster bite the dust too had cheered him up more than any speech Xi could make.

The black-haired man grunted in response and lay down beside him. After a few minutes of silence, he said,

"I couldn't do anything. That woman was just too strong."

Jake was surprised to hear the sincerity and helplessness in his voice. How bitter had the defeat been that he spoke of it with such bitterness? Sensing that his friend was intrigued, Hade sheepishly explained,

"She called herself the Disrupter."

Jake's eyes widened.

"Don't tell me her power was to disrupt?" He asked, dreading to hear the answer.

"Hmm? How did you guess?" Hade wondered, "But yes, that's exactly what it was. It disrupted my abilities, my bloodline, my stats and even my memories. It wasn't until I realized I was forgetting my son's memories that I was able to defend myself, but I still lost miserably in the end."

Jake stared at his friend strangely.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Hade frowned, wondering if there was something on his face.

"No nothing. I just realized that we've been through practically the same thing. I don't know why but it puts me in a good mood." Jake smiled as he closed his eyes.

Chapter 815 Together To The Death

Two days later, a handful of Myrtharian Nerds gathered around a table on top of Laudarkvik. The mood in the room was gloomy and everyone looked immensely bitter and depressed.

"Is this all that's left of our faction?" Jake sighed as he broke the armrest of his seat in frustration.

Everyone present looked down in shame. Seeing their expressions, their leader didn't have the courage to rebuke them. After all, he too had only survived thanks to the mercy of the enemy.

In this room in addition to Jake sat Hade, Lucia, Gerulf, Asfrid, Rogen, Haynt, Kenway, Enya, Daniel Wilderth, Kevin Wilderth, Tim, Drastan, Maeve, Svava, Hephais, Jen, Aisling, Xaverie and Melion. That is a total of 20 people.

Behind their respective leaders, there remained 6 Myrmidians, 3 Kintharians, 2 Throsgenians, 38 Eltarrians, 3 Beskyrians, Qewie and Temra the powerful Dragonid recruited by Lucia.

Outside the building, Mufasa, Shere Khan, Crunch, Lord Phenix, Thomas'O Malley and Bagheera stood on their haunches, their fangs clenched in rage and sadness. Next to them stood a huge mammoth, an equally terrifying woolly rhinoceros, two birds of prey with a wingspan exceeding that of an airliner and a cobra for which the word long was an understatement.

These were the only survivors of the joint blistering assault launched by Lost Divinities, Demiurges, Anti-Life, Replicators and Mirror Vanguard. The Myrtharian Nerds had been all but wiped out.

It was depressing, but Jake preferred to look at it another way. These people had passed the test imposed by those all-powerful factions. Somehow they had proven that they deserved to play with the big boys.

It could be because they had awakened their True Will at the right time or perhaps they had shown other equally impressive abilities. Either way, they knew how to stay alive and that was all that mattered.

Jake had decided. These people would be the only ones allowed to participate in the Fifth Ordeal with him. For the others it would be decided on a case-by-case basis.

This was their last game for show. From the next Ordeal on, if a bloodbath like the one that had just transpired happened to them again, it would be a permanent death. And despite his apparent coldness, he didn't want to see all his companions die miserably in a sordid gamble.

"First of all, congratulations. Kudos for still being alive." Jake forced himself to smile, but the mere fact that he really meant his words took a huge burden off the survivors' shoulders.

Tears welled up in the eyes of several Myrtharian Nerds like Crunch, Lucia, Svava and Drastan, but others were livid with guilt and anger like Gerulf, Daniel, Enya and Mufasa. The rest had icy expressions and it was impossible to know clearly what they were thinking. Nothing good anyway.

"Thank you for bringing Tim back alive." Jake smiled warmly at Lucia as he saw that she had succeeded in the rescue mission he had given her despite the adversity. She had even managed to bring back three Beskyrians.

However, no glee nor pride lit up her face as she received her friend's recognition.

"I may have saved Tim, but my entire army was decimated. Almost all my fellow soldiers are dead... I lost to that Deimos in a fair duel and he spared me which is even more humiliating."

"But you're alive." Jake objected as he took her in his arms. "That's the only victory that matters."

Lucia struggled a little, then accepted his embrace with closed eyes.

"It's still humiliating, though..." She grunted in a nasal and cute voice as if she wanted to be pampered.

The other members present struggled to reconcile the image of the current Lucia with the fierce warrior who led them with an iron fist on the battlefield, but Gerulf smiled happily at the scene. Only he knew this side of the fierce princess.

"I hate them all! I want them to die!" Enya gnashed her teeth, unintentional red flames shooting out of her hair and eyes.

Jake let go of Lucia, then turned to his other friend.

Two streams of tears ran down from her eyes, but the heat of the flames evaporated them at once. He hugged her tightly too, ignoring the fiery heat, and whispered,

"I'm sure Esya is happy that you survived in her stead. Don't let her down by sacrificing yourself foolishly. Learn from today's lesson and make sure it never happens again."

"I know..." The Egean woman muttered as she balled her fists, "But it's just too damn painful. Jake, tell me you have a plan to avenge us?"

Jake, Hade, Asfrid, and Lucia remained silent, their grim faces more graphic than any answer.

"J-Jake? Y-you have a plan, right?" Enya stammered anxiously, her beautiful pink eyes welling up with tears again.

"There's no plan." Jake closed his eyes. "Not this time. They won."

The young woman lost her last hope and after that walled herself up in silence. She had known all along that it was impossible to avenge her sister. The outburst just now was just her mind in denial trying to escape reality at all costs.

Until now, even when the situation was critical Jake had always found a solution to their problems, but seeing that this time he was also helpless she realized that he was just like any other human. He wasn't infallible.

"Can I have a cheering hug too?" Daniel joked, but there was no way Jake could laugh at that.

He could see the aching sorrow in his uncle's battle-weary eyes. That guilt was the same guilt that was burning in Tim's eyes. Lily, his daughter, had perished again.

"I'm sorry about Lily, Uncle Daniel. But in the end it's for the best." Jake said honestly. "You won't be able to protect your daughter all the time and I think it's now clear to everyone that she's not cut out for these Ordeals."

The Wilderth warrior took the time to ponder his nephew's words and realized that he was right. In the end, she was still alive and it was better to draw the necessary conclusions from this failure than to brood over it. Still, it was a failure for him as a father...

Jake then turned to Tim and after tousling his hair he looked him straight in the eye and said,

"This time you may think that you were unlucky and a useless burden, but the mere fact that you are still alive and kicking with us proves that your luck is definitely among the best in our faction.

At that moment, Jake froze realizing something crucial. The Nullifier had not nullified his luck. Was that why he had managed to hit him several times even after the latter had robbed him of his intelligence and senses? He didn't know how much that unpredictable stat had contributed, but he was sure it had made a difference.

In the end, Jake also had to give Crunch a hug to console him for losing his sweetheart, Duchess. The cat was inconsolable, feeling terrible for not having been there when she was attacked by Anti-Life.

Paradoxically, Jake was rather impressed that his cat and Lord Phenix had survived. They had been attacked by Mirror Vanguard and those guys were real badasses.

According to Xi, Mirror Vanguard was an elite faction fighting on all fronts pitting the Mirror Universe against its enemies. This included not only the Digestors, but also neighboring Mirror Universes touching their borders. There were rumors that they were in fact the Oracle's armed wing, like the Oracle Guardians and the Overseers, but this was never confirmed.

In fact...

[I think I was in Mirror Vanguard back then.] Xi had confessed to him the day before in an uncertain tone. The memories were hazy, but she became more and more convinced as she thought about it.

"Cough... Your attention, please." Hade cleared his throat. "Jake's words may sound harsh, but it's the plain truth. We lost and we can't get even. The problem, ultimately, is not our strength, but our Oracle Ranks. With enough of them and the right plan, even ants can take down an elephant. The problem here is that the elephant is immediately informed as soon as a single ant seriously considers killing it.

"Even if we manage to come up with a brilliant, foolproof plan, and believe me, we're not short of ideas, we'll be attacked again like we were two days ago before we can even put our plan into action. There is no alternative. The lesson of this defeat is not that we are not strong enough, but that the tactical value of a high Oracle Rank is supreme."

A stunned silence settled over the room and after gauging their downcast faces, Jake bowed to them and apologized,

"I'm sorry. If my Oracle Rank had been higher, none of this would have happened. If you are angry with me, you are obviously free to appoint a new leader among yourselves."

Seeing that he was sincere, a horrified expression appeared on the faces of all the Myrtharian Nerds present. Gerulf slowly got up from his too-small seat and gave him a manly hug, crushing his ribs before putting him back down.

"Whether you like it or not, you will remain our leader until the end. The giant growled in a gruff voice. "We'll fight together to the death."

Jake widened his eyes, looking around, and saw a big smile on the faces of all his companions. He saw the dried tears of Lucia and Enya, the placating look on Asfrid's face, the wink of Aisling, his cat sticking his tongue out, and the reigned-in, yet kindly attitude of Mufasa and Shere Khan.

"Together to the death." They clamored in unison.

At that moment, Jake realized that he was no longer alone. From now on he could count on his friends to meet the challenges ahead.

"Together to the death." He echoed with determination, two flames of True Will blazing in the depths of his pupils.

Chapter 816 The True Purpose of Oracle Ranks

Once the mood settled, they did an actual count of the survivors. In addition to the official Myrtharian Nerds, a number of natives who had joined them had either managed to flee, or had simply not been targeted by Lost Divinities and their allies during their big clean-up operation.

Vincent had managed to save his two "wives" and their Water Elf people, a few dozen of Drastan's obedient Trolls had survived by virtue of their extraordinary regenerative abilities, as had most of the underlings of the remaining Laudarkvik factions. Jeanie, the tiny Minmin, had also survived by hiding in Aisling's breastplate.

On the other hand, the losses suffered by the natives also had far more lasting consequences. The army of knights and Dragonids recruited by Lucia had been all but wiped out, as had most of the beasts recruited by Mufasa and Shere Khan. Kenway's brother Lysander was dead but luckily for him he had already received his own Oracle Device, making him a Player like them.

The problem was that they couldn't give them all an Oracle Device. For one thing, they needed the liquid alloy to support the Oracle Shield, which would get them off this planet in a few months, and for another, they just didn't have enough.

Jake, for instance, by spending the more or less 25 tons of liquid alloy in his possession, could provide a bracelet to about 50,000 people. Hade, Lucia and a few other members may have accumulated a substantial amount of liquid alloy, but because of the previous orders he had given them, he didn't know if they had time to give their new subordinates a bracelet.

Even if they did, they had another major concern: the lack of available places at the Myrtharian Nerds. By spending 1000B of Aether points to upgrade it, they would only free up another 3200 slots, not nearly enough to accommodate them all.

Without a faction, there was only the Pet or Slave Contract to guarantee that these natives would be sent to B842 after this Ordeal. In fact, Xi had already told him that this was not a guarantee either. There could be significant delays, sometimes numbering in years. Sometimes the Oracle System had its own agenda for these natives.

Fortunately, Lost Divinities had not attacked any civilians or the death toll could have been much more disastrous. Nonetheless, the end result was the same. Jake and his faction were no longer able to harm them and their own plans were compromised.

[Side Mission n°4: Save the people of Laudarkvik from the Purge.]

[Side Mission n°5: Get your revenge against Lost Divinities.]

As he checked the two Side Missions in progress, a woefully chagrined expression appeared on Jake's face. His comrades were not much better off.

"Let's face it." Jake laid it all out on the table. "We can still save the citizens of Laudarkvik from the Purge, but our vendetta against Lost Divinities is over. I propose that we focus our efforts on what can still succeed, rather than on a project that is doomed to fail."

"I agree," Gerulf grunted.

"I agree too." Asfrid calmly agreed.

The other members nodded in turn, but Lucia didn't seem ready to accept her defeat yet.

"Is there really nothing we can do?" She grouched, Enya sitting next to her staring at him expectantly.

Seeing the expectant and battle-ready looks on his friends' faces, Jake knew he just had to give the order for them to follow him in a suicide raid. Even though it made him feel good, he couldn't bring himself to give the order.

"Honestly, I don't know." He replied wearily. "After that defeat, I suppose you all mulled over what we could have done to prevent all of this from happening. As a leader, it was my responsibility and I didn't stop to think about it either."

"I came to several realizations. We already know that an Oracle Path is a prediction showing us the way through our Shadow Guide to accomplish our goals. An Oracle Rank that is too high or being a Digestor makes us disappear from these predictive calculations and since there is a variable missing the result can only be wrong. When the target of the prediction is directly related to a Digestor or an individual with a higher Oracle Rank than us the calculation fails and the prediction does not take place."

For Aisling, Haynt, Kenway, and the other natives this was totally new and they listened very carefully. For the others, it was an unnecessary reminder and Lucia couldn't help but grumble impatiently.

"What are you getting at?"

"I'm coming to it." Jake clicked his tongue in annoyance. "Based on the principles I just mentioned, I was wondering how our enemies could use the advantage of their higher Oracle Rank to its full potential."

"We already know that if you phrase your wish intelligently, you can use it to find out someone's location or be alerted to their intentions. I want to know how to reach such a person, such a place', 'I want to know how to kill all my enemies as soon as they plan to attack me or harm me' and so on. Based on this logic, it is possible to use the Oracle Device's Guidance feature with nearly infinite flexibility."

"We know that it is also possible to calculate several Oracle Paths simultaneously. The downside is that it is necessary to keep the intent behind these Oracle Paths in mind. In the end, an Oracle Path is not something that can be initiated by writing a wish like a letter to Santa Claus. Therefore, if someone suddenly tries to kill us, our Shadowguide will react in most cases, because our survival instinct prevails. Conversely, it can also cause our death if the desire, anger or greed that motivates us at that moment causes us to forget our self-preservation instinct. For a mother, dying may not be as high a priority as saving her child."

"In an ideal world, an Evolver with an all-powerful mind would be able to perfectly control his desires and emotions, keeping the intent of all wishes unaltered and permanent so that he could monitor the slightest variations of each of his Oracle Paths."

"But in reality, I think it's extremely difficult. Honestly, even if I did nothing but focus on my Oracle Paths, I'd eventually relax my concentration at some point."

The other Myrtharian Nerds frowned and a reflective silence filled the room.

"That... seems very complicated to me too." Asfrid admitted after a moment. "But not impossible. In a faction like Lost Divinities it's not insane to imagine that they have a strategist with a very high Oracle Rank whose sole and exclusive role is this."

Jake nodded and gazed quietly at the Eltarian,

"That's what I think too. I only said all that to point out that they didn't attack us as soon as we started to seek revenge. Their strategist or leader or whatever probably took a while to realize that we were a threat. Because strategically speaking, the Oracle System being deterministic, they could if they wished vow to eradicate as efficiently as possible all their present and future enemies from the first day of the Ordeal. If they had attacked us a few days after our arrival, when we were much weaker and dispersed, we would have been defeated in an instant. In the end, by only attacking now they suffered heavy losses too.

"Now I want to address another key aspect of our defeat. Mine, Hade's, Lucia's or Gerulf's can easily be explained. Our enemies were too strong and their Oracle Ranks higher than ours. But Hephais, for example, was luckier. He was ambushed by a large number of enemies weaker than him. Unless they all had a higher Oracle Rank than him, it should have been impossible. So how did they do it?"

"Here is what I think is the most interesting function of the Oracle Rank: Giving orders. With a high Oracle Rank, you disappear from the Oracle Paths of lower ranked Players. You might think that this is limited to the person with the Oracle Rank, but it actually encompasses everything about that person. So if that high-ranking Player orders one of his minions to attack me, that minion will not be computed in my Oracle Paths."

Now everyone could see the problem. According to this logic, Jake was indeed the main reason for their failure.

"In other words, as long as this subordinate follows his superior's orders to the letter, his every action will be tabulated as if he had the same Oracle Rank as the one who gave him his orders. Hade said coldly. "But that raises another question. If someone is ordered to kill me by an enemy with a higher Oracle Rank than mine, is it his intention to kill me that my Oracle Path can no longer factor into its predictions, or does that person become capable of plotting my death without any limitation as if he had the Oracle Rank of his superior?"

"I don't know." Jake shrugged. "But what I do know is that as long as their high-ranking strategist has us in his sights, there's nothing we can do against them. I did notice one interesting thing, though... Before they attacked us all simultaneously, they chose to attack Ruby and Asfrid a few days earlier.

"And Ruby is-"

"A Digestor Trojan!" Hade exclaimed.

Perhaps revenge against Lost Divinities wasn't so hopeless after all.

Chapter 817 I'll Remember That

"If I'm right, what you're assuming Jake, would be that the presence of a semi Digestor alongside us was preventing Lost Divinities from properly predicting our movements and intentions. Am I wrong?" Asfrid asked with her arms crossed, her forehead scrunched with perplexity.

Those who were slow-witted finally figured out where Jake was going with this. Lucia and Enya's faces lit up and they said excitedly,

"That means if we find Ruby and keep her by our side, we can attack Lost Divinities without them suspecting anything!"

"No. It won't be that easy." Hade rebutted mercilessly, cooling their enthusiasm. "You seem to forget that Lost Divinities has already ambushed Asfrid and Ruby for this very purpose. In the worst case, Ruby is their prisoner, just like Carmin or Vincent, and I don't think I need to explain why attacking their main headquarters is a bad idea. In the best case, Ruby has broken out and is somewhere on Quanoth but that doesn't make it any easier. Until proven otherwise we don't know where she is and that continent is vast."

"Hade is right." Jake corroborated in a somber mood. "We can't use the Shadow Guide to locate her because of her Digestor condition. If it was Ruby's human part that had control we would still have a chance, but Lost Divinities made sure that it was the Digestor that had the upper hand.

"Still, Ruby is currently my slave. Through the Oracle Contract I should be able to sense her presence if I'm close enough, but after tracking her down last time with Craig I think she'll have learned her lesson and will take precautions."

"There's another issue." Hephais interjected for the first time. The assassin spoke little but everything he said was always relevant. "If it is the human part of Ruby that predominates, being able to locate her would mean the Oracle Path is working. Since we want to find Ruby to get revenge on Lost Divinities, our hostile intentions would be revealed to them immediately. In other words, if our plan is viable, by that I mean it would succeed in a few weeks or months, then Lost Divinities would have already pre-emptively attacked us again."

Jake and the others reverted to the gloomy state they had been in at the beginning of the conversation. The Egean assassin had made a crucial point. If Lost Divinity hadn't attacked them yet, it could of course mean that they didn't care about them at the moment, but it would be unwise of them to think so.

It was on the same level as smokers who smoke three packs of cigarettes a day thinking they would never get lung cancer. While it was certainly possible, it was unlikely.

"If so, this confirms that Ruby is indeed under the spell of her Digestor part, which would be good news for us." Xaverie giggled, also actively participating for the first time in their interactions. At her playful smirk, she was apparently reveling in all this chaos. "The not-so-good news would be that her human part is dominating right now and Lost Divinity not having attacked us yet would mean that our plan is doomed to fail."

"Hmmp! All the more reason to have a shot." Kenway growled icily, exposing his canines with a vengeful scowl. "They need to pay for what they did to my brother and my clan one way or another."

"I'm all for it too. To stand by this defeat would only damage our self-esteem." Haynt agreed quietly. After weeks of recovery, he had regained the size of a nine or ten-year-old.

A heated debate ensued, after which a show of hands was taken. Against all odds everyone voted to find Ruby first.

"All right." Jake nodded. "We're sticking with our original plan to help the people of Laudarkvik get off the planet. We may even try to save more. These enemy factions have taken an average of 10-20% of the liquid alloy we've collected, but mercifully they haven't taken it all. For that alone, we can be grateful. That should be enough to get us off the planet, but it leaves us with less time than we expected."

"The ship Hade and I were building was destroyed and it will be difficult to build another one of this size in time. The dark clouds and the Mana Superstorm are already too dense over Laudarkvik for our Oracle Shields to last the entire crossing. It's a good thing, the Ret'Asi Empire has also decided to migrate to the Shatug Empire. For this reason, we will begin the migration on foot in three days and merge our armies with theirs at Borquime, on the border of the Mirik Maze. I will leave you to inform the people."

His companions, including Laudarkvik faction leaders like Xaverie, Melion, Jen(Remus Dracul), Aisling, Kenway and Haynt nodded solemnly. The logistics of such an operation were a pain in the ass.

"Let Lucia and I handle it." Asfrid promised earnestly as she patted her bountiful bosom.

Jake thanked the Eltarian whose tireless perseverance and reliability he appreciated. No matter what unglamorous task she was given, she would carry them out without faltering.

"At the same time, another team will be assigned to find Ruby." Jake then announced. "This team will consist of five people, Tim, Skorgeld, Trea, Fo, and me."

"Why just the Beskyrians? I don't want to sit around here twiddling my thumbs..." Lucia pouted, giving him a jealous look.

Jake didn't budge and replied unflappably,

"Because Luck is the only tool we have to locate a Digestor that doesn't want to be found. We'll converge our Luck Aether on Tim or Skorgeld, the ones with the purest Beskyrian Bloodline and rely on them to show us the way. It's not really a plan, but it's all we have."

"While we're away, I don't want you to spread out anymore. I'm allowing you to activate United We Stand under any circumstances. All in all, you have managed to collect 3148B of Aether points and 31 tons of liquid alloy. This is less liquid alloy than I expected, even without counting Lost Divinities' surprise offensive, but this amount of Aether is still like sending us coal in a snowstorm. Before I leave, I will upgrade our faction to level 8 and the rest will be used to strengthen us as much as we can before the final battle."

No one showed the slightest objection. Even Lucia accepted his arguments without complaint.

A few hours later, Jake, Tim and the three Beskyrians found themselves at the north gate of Laudarkvik, ready to set off. The boy was happy to finally be of use, and deep down he was more than thrilled to have Jake's reassuring presence at his side.

Skorgeld, Trea and Fo, the three Beskyrians were also relieved to get an opportunity to shine. So far, this Ordeal had been a total bust, their cheeky luck turning against them.

Skorgeld was a bearded man of about 2m50, the unorthodox mixture of an Asian and a Viking. From the back, he looked like one of those legendary Nordic warriors, with his long brown shaggy hair, his thick braids and his huge axe. Because of the Myrtharian Body passive, the natural brown of his eyes and hair had an eye-catching silver and gold sheen.

He was one of the three sons of Ulfar, the king of Beskyr and as such his Bloodline was one of the purest. Alas, he was nowhere near as talented as his father. Like Tim, his luck had allowed him to appear in the Celestial City, but his insufficient strength had not allowed him to take advantage of it.

Trea was a rather tall woman relative to an Earthling, but small compared to human Evolvers of their stature. She only reached Skorgeld's shoulder. She had traded in her primitive bow for an enchanted composite bow whose firepower far surpassed that of any artillery shot. She too had appeared at the edge of Celestial City, but instead of hiding there, she had fled to the Wilderness, an environment more suited to her Ranger skills.

As for Fo, she was a pretty brunette of noble ancestry, who without the destruction of her home world by the Digestors, would probably have lived a life of idleness and opulence. In the end, life had decided otherwise. Standing out from the other Beskyrians, she was armed only with a knife, but her leather armor was emblazoned with a variety of strange amulets and talismans. Slung behind her back, she carried a long scepter resembling a dead willow branch.

Along with Tim, these four Beskyrians had their own areas of expertise, and each was eager to prove their worth to their leader. Jake made small talk with his new teammates to familiarize himself with them and lighten the mood, and moments later they hit the road.

As they were about to enter the Wilderness, a huge black cat and a flaming orange turkey blocked their path.

"We're coming with you." Crunch and Lord Phenix trumpeted in unison. "Hade told us you would need us."

The vein on Jake's forehead throbbed, but in the end, he consented with a sigh.

'I'll remember that, Hade. But fine... it's not like they would have been more helpful here.'

[Chapter 818 Evil Incarnate](#)

Ten days later, six figures hiding their faces under thick hooded cloaks crossed the border into Serin Theocracy, followed by a giant black cat and a dazzling phoenix-looking turkey.

This territory was located tens of thousands of kilometers north of the Ret'Asi Empire, and more precisely directly east of the Shatug Empire where the Celestial City was located. Its southwestern

border touched that of the Maze of Mirik, and it was through this route of entry that Jake and his group had just infiltrated this inhospitable territory.

Gone were the deciduous forests stretching as far as the eye could see in the Wilderness. Before them, arid, snow-covered mountain ranges formed long, narrow canyons. A few rare conifers littered the frozen tundra, the vegetation scarce.

To make matters worse, a bitterly cold wind blew hard, powerful enough to uproot ordinary trees. The few fir trees able to survive here were vegetal monsters with trunks whose circumference rivaled that of a small house.

The only consolation was that the black clouds and the Mana Superstorm were not as dense as in Laudarkvik. A few rays of sunlight still filtered through the atmosphere, maintaining a dreary clarity by day, but a clarity nonetheless.

"From now on, be careful and no more fooling around." Jake reminded his companions, especially glaring at Crunch and Lord Phoenix.

The trip to the Serinese Theocracy had not been a smooth one. Although they had flown most of the way, thereby managing to avoid getting lost, they had been ambushed numerous times by the Shrons. Half of these attacks were due to the nosy nature of these two troublemakers...

These insectoid people, operating under the same hive and caste system as ants or bees, knew no fear and their numbers were just terrifying. With each assault, Jake and his comrades had to face a tide of brown chitin insects swarming to the horizon. For those who didn't have a stomach for it, the sight alone would have made them lose all their nerve.

Of course, since Jake's group was made up of battle-hardened veterans, no one had shat themselves, nor did they run away. With each attack, they responded in kind. Carnage after carnage, bloodshed after bloodshed, they made their way to their current position.

At first the situation only got worse, as the Shrons' assaults became more and more frequent, while the average level of these insects increased with each new attack. But three days earlier, the Shron army that was about to intercept them had suddenly slipped away, leaving them dumbfounded.

As they thought about it, they realized that this coincided with the beginning of the Ret'Asi Empire's migration. Not just the Myrtharian Nerds and the population of Laudarkvik, but the Emperor's army. By now, they should have crossed the southern border of the Maze of Mirik and the Shrons, with their territorial and aggressive temper, had immediately responded to the provocation.

"I hope the others are okay." Tim said worriedly, shivering. These repeated encounters with the Shrons had left him with some psychological scars.

Jake patted his shoulder and laughed.

"Don't worry about them. Hade and Asfrid are keeping an eye out." He said in a reassuring voice.

It was the truth. The ship Jake and Hade had been building together might have been destroyed by Lost Divinity, but all the Portable Fortresses the Fluid Grandmaster had crafted were intact.

Unlike the Emperor of Ret'Asi, who had planned a mass exodus, with hundreds of millions of humans forming endless rivers of living beings moving at a snail's pace toward the Maze of Mirik, most of the citizens of Laudarkvik were safe in one of these Fluid Artifacts.

Even though Hade didn't have enough for everyone, all the elderly, disabled, children, women and generally anyone who wasn't fit to fight had been placed inside with enough food for the journey. In total, their migrant group numbered only a few tens of thousands of members and all of them were at least a D-Rank Adventurer.

Knowing Asfrid and the others, they must have been hiding their movements by making the Ret'Asi Empire's army and its human tide their scapegoat. From a moral standpoint it was questionable, but if this Ordeal had taught them anything it was that nothing was ever truly fair.

Jake then turned to the sixth party member accompanying them.

"Azeus, are you sure there's a base of operations belonging to Lost Divinities around here?" He asked coldly.

"Absolutely certain." The red-striped barbarian growled grimly.

After being defeated and captured by Hade, the latter had literally left him in his Space Storage for days after briefly interrogating him to no avail... That was, until Lost Divinities and their allies gave them a memorable thrashing.

After that, the Fluid Grandmaster remembered his existence and decided to have a proper chat with him. In the end, it turned out that he was not so loyal to Lost Divinities after all. Upon learning of Shamash's death, his jaded respect for these so-called gods had waned and he had realized that he didn't need them to forge his own destiny.

Of course, before trusting him and releasing him they had to take a few precautions. The first was to get him to leave Lost Divinities, which he did before they even asked him to. Secondly they had signed a rather strict Oracle Contract with him with many conditions.

Azeus had refused the Slave Contract, however, preferring to die than lose his freedom. The last condition was much simpler. He promised to join the Myrtharian Nerds, but only if they would let him challenge Hade again. If he won, he would take his place.

The result had been... a crushing second defeat!

Dissatisfied, he had then insisted on confronting Jake. The downpour of multicolored lightning had been like a massage for the latter and before the Myrtharian could get serious he had given up with a stiff grimace.

The lightning barbarian had then challenged Gerulf and Rogen to a duel. It had been a close one, but the Myrtharian Body passive gave a significant Lightning Resistance to all Myrtharian Nerds. The two brutes were already pretty much tireless tanks. Just like against Jake, he had eventually given up out of sheer annoyance.

When he had come across Lucia, he had finally believed that he would be able to enjoy an honest and fair fight, without any dirty tricks. It was true, but he had underestimated the Myrmidian princess. The

young woman still not having digested her defeat against Lost Divinities had decided to take her anger out on him and the conclusion of this fight had been... ugly so to speak.

Just as he was about to give up, he finally met Asfrid. The wise and benevolent Eltarian seemed too gentle to exhibit any kind of violence and yet she was one of the most respected Myrtharian Nerds officers. Frustrated, he challenged her to a duel.

His defeat was even more miserable than against Hade and Lucia. His ability to turn his body into lightning was a real headache for most players, but for Asfrid it was irrelevant. As soon as the fight started she had put him under a powerful illusion and left him to fight an imaginary Asfrid for a few hours. When he realized that he was trapped in a dream, the night had already fallen and the Eltarian was long gone.

After that he had tried his luck against a few other members and finally got his first win against Enya. The Egean had fought better than expected, but her powers were just not suited to this type of opponent. When Azeus won, he struck a victorious pose, feeling the sudden urge to humiliate her, but the tears welling up in Enya's eyes earned him a thorough beating by Jake.

Following this brutal return to reality, he had accepted his position and had obediently joined the Myrtharian Nerds. Unfortunately, Jake didn't trust him and had kept him prisoner in His Portable Fortress for half the trip before finally deciding to free him when the man begged him to let him fight on their side against yet another Shron army.

"Tim and Skorgeld, is your luck still pointing in the same direction?" Jake then asked after receiving confirmation from Azeus.

Jake, Fo and Trea transmitted their Luck Aether to them alternately. The teenager cleared his mind and let his instincts guide him on a few steps. Skorgeld did the same a few moments later to validate his previous trajectory.

"That's right, straight ahead." Skorgeld nodded.

"Let's hope Ruby is here or else we'll have to keep going all the way to the Republic of Weilia in the northeast. We'd lose at least two weeks there..." Trea complained as she waded through the knee-deep snow powder. She hadn't packed clothes for this kind of winter environment.

Jake frowned, but after a few seconds he declared with a confident face,

"Ruby is here."

"How can you be so sure?" Tim asked, giving him a curiosity-filled look.

"Because I can faintly sense her presence, but also because I've heard that the Schwazens who populate these lands belong to an angelic race. If Ruby still has any semblance of a conscience, she should seek every means at her disposal to resist her Digestor nature. Becoming an angel seems like a good place to start."

Azeus' scornful sneer sounded behind him.

"What are you laughing at?" Jake's face darkened.

"Your ignorance." The barbarian snorted as he picked his nose. "The Schwazens are angels all right, but not the kind you imagine. These things... are evil incarnate."

[Chapter 819 Here We Are](#)

Jake immediately had a bad feeling.

"If you have something to say, say it now or shut up." He scolded curtly at the barbarian.

The probationary Myrtharian Nerd flared at him, but in the end he swallowed his resentment and obligingly answered,

"I don't know much about this, but I heard Shamash and Deimos talk about it once. The Serinese Theocracy is a nation reputed to be even more powerful than the Shatug Empire. However, this is not the territory that the Celestial City has chosen to land in.

"Lost Divinities never give up any slice of the pie and tried to infiltrate this nation like all the others. Last I heard it was a spectacular failure. At her last report, Varisha asked permission to withdraw her troops and let Mirror Vanguard handle it.

"You should know that Mirror Vanguard is different from Lost Divinities. They do not pursue profit or power, but to defend the interests of the Mirror Universe. I don't know of many compelling reasons for Lost Divinities to regurgitate what they've already swallowed. Speaking plainly, I can think of only two."

"Digestors or an enemy so powerful and hostile that it threatens the normal flow of the Ordeal." Skorgeld chime in with a bored expression.

Loitering around the Celestial City for the past few months, the Beskyrian had gleaned quite a bit of information. Mirror Vanguard's specifications were part of it.

"In other words..." Jake's facial features stiffened, the ambient temperature plummeting several degrees. "You're not even sure if Lost Divinities' base is still here."

Azeus froze, but he quickly regained his poise and hastily justified himself,

"Lost Divinities or Mirror Vanguard, what does it matter? If Lost Divinities captured your Ruby, and if she is indeed a Digestor Trojan, then I wouldn't be at all surprised if they sold her off or handed her over to Mirror Vanguard. Look on the bright side, if it's Mirror Vanguard that's nearby then the chances of Ruby being in their hands are extremely high."

Jake snorted but didn't press the issue. Despite his annoyance, he had to admit that the barbarian had a point. Lost Divinities or Mirror Vanguard, who cares?

"And why evil incarnate? Everything you said only suggests that they are dangerous. Nothing more." Tim asked Azeus naively.

"You'll find out soon enough. Look over there..."

The group flying low over the mountainous terrain froze as they saw a stack of corpses blocking a small canyon. Jake controlled his telekinesis to bring the Beskyrians to the ground while Azeus landed instantly, leaving a trail of lightning in his wake.

After landing, Jake scanned the canyon carefully and spotted several incongruities. Before being ambushed, this long convoy must have included tens of thousands of migrants of various races, but there were only a few thousand dead bodies. Where had the others gone?

But more unsettlingly, these corpses were mostly emaciated, hideous or unhealthy old men. There were almost no children among them, and the few exceptions suffered from deformities or infections.

"Why did they leave the supplies? They even left the gold and jewelry." Fo, the Beskyrian woman covered in talismans, felt a pang of unease as she picked up a pure gold necklace inlaid with gemstones weighing several pounds.

Such a piece of goldsmithing should have been a national treasure. It was inconceivable that the attackers ignored it. On top of that, according to its Mana fluctuations it was most likely a Mana Artifact. And a rather high level one at that. Between Advanced and Bronze quality.

Jake took the necklace from her hands and after scanning it, his pupils constricted in surprise.

The necklace was a defensive artifact that could generate a shield around the wearer that could withstand the equivalent of two 5-megaton nuclear warheads daily. If the Artifact was not used, the excess Mana would be stored for later use.

"Come take a look!" Trea, the group's Ranger, waved at them from across the canyon. Joining her, they found a long silver feather that looked more like an eccentric short sword than an angel or bird feather.

Next to it was the corpse of a terrorized humanoid creature, no doubt one of the migrants forming the convoy. The thing that carried him through the air had been attacked, losing one of its precious feathers and inadvertently dropping him. Besides the fact that it was probably a child, it had been disemboweled alive, its intestines having been chewed up by something before the fall shattered its skull.

Turning to Azeus, Jake said grimly,

"It seems you weren't wrong about these Schwazens. Their diet seems to be somewhat unique. Not exactly angelic."

The barbarian remained fixated on the victim's desperate, pain-twisted face for a moment, then grunted,

"I wish I was wrong..."

CRRREEAK!

Jake and the others turned with a start and saw that Crunch had put the silver feather in his mouth, trying to bend it with his teeth. At first, they wanted to swear at him for causing them such a fright, but they forgot their rebukes when they saw that the huge feline was unable to deform, let alone damage that feather.

"Give me that." Jake ordered flatly as he held out his hand.

Not being told twice, Crunch spat the slime-filled feather into his master's hand and the latter evaporated it with a burst of heat while suppressing his disgust. Once the feather was presentable, Jake took one end in each hand and flexed his muscles with all his might.

At first the feather just squeaked, then when Jake activated Bloodline Ignition and raised the temperature forming a sphere of lava and plasma around him it finally folded like a marshmallow.

"This feather is about 8 times harder than Adamantium and has a melting point 12 times higher. Jake revealed solemnly.

For that reason alone, the Schwazens deserved their reputation as the most powerful humanoid race on Quanoth tied with the Drugs. It was a miracle that the Ret'Asi Empire had endured until now.

Gulp!

Tim and the other Beskyrians greeted the news with mild enthusiasm. They had to hope that this feather belonged to one of their finest specimens, or they would have something to worry about when they met them.

"What do we do with all these dead bodies?" Tim scratched his head as he stared at the heap of corpses with pity.

"We b-"

Just as Jake was about to answer, a spray of flames more dazzling than the sun sprayed the mountain of corpses, cremating it all at once. Looking for the origin of these flames, they saw a huge turkey not far away, emptying its lungs with great spirit, its beak wide open...

"We burn them..." Jake finished his sentence while shooting a glare at Lord Phoenix.

An unpleasant smell of burnt meat soon tingled their nostrils and the group decided to set off again, but only after collecting all the jewels and other artifacts that might be of use.

The group moved on again, but this time paying much more attention to their surroundings. Later that afternoon, Skorgeld and Tim signaled Jake and the others to stop.

"We've passed our destination. My instinct tells me to turn back." Tim said gravely.

Jake frowned. He hadn't sensed Ruby's presence in the area. Based on his gut feeling, she should be much farther northeast.

"Are you sure about this?" He insisted cautiously.

"Absolutely sure."

"Skorgeld?" Jake then asked.

"The same."

He hesitated for a moment, then decided to trust them. If someone had the ability to interfere with their luck, they definitely needed to get to the bottom of it. So as not to overshoot their destination again, Jake resolved that they should retrace their path on foot.

The terrain was rugged and steep, with the thick snow cover and turbulent winds making the trail hardly walkable. With no time to waste, let alone time to dig tunnels, Jake used his Earth Control to trek directly through the mountains.

Azeus, whose powers were based on electricity, was not a fan of diving into a magically softened mountain. If Jake lost control of his magic or lost consciousness, their groups would be walled in by kilometers of rock.

Even with Jake's powers, their progress was slow. Tim and Skorgeld's good luck was not infallible, and they had no way of distinguishing between their own instincts and the times when luck guided their steps. For this reason, they wandered around, feeling their way, making narrower and narrower circles as they got closer to their goal.

Then, several hours later at nightfall, Tim stopped in his tracks. Skorgeld continued for a few more steps and then also stopped. In front of them was the entrance to an inconspicuous underground bunker.

"Here we are."

Jake and the other Beskyrians could sense that this was the right place, too. Azeus, on the other hand, had a much less optimistic reaction. He sniffed the air and said,

"This is not a Lost Divinities base, but if this were Mirror Vanguard, a sentry would have come to meet us long ago. I don't sense any presence."

[Chapter 820 Do You Eat Feathers?](#)

The group members braced themselves and drew their weapons all at once. Jake also summoned his God Slayer Broadsword. His armor was always equipped except for his helmet, but this time he put that on too. It clipped against the collar of his breastplate, sealing any gaps.

Seeing the ground cave in below their leader, Azeus and the others threw him both shocked and envious looks.

"Is that the armor you beat Shamash with?" The warrior inquired movingly.

"No... I forged it only recently." Jake replied glumly. Under other circumstances, he should have felt happy about such a backhanded compliment, but his recent humiliating defeat at the hands of the Nullifyer had quashed any pride he might have felt in his blacksmithing accomplishments.

What was the point of having a suit of armor that would fail him at the worst possible time? It was clear that his skills as an Aetherist and blacksmith were still worthless.

"Everyone ready?" Jake threw out seriously as he moved to liquefy the entrance to the underground bunker.

His companions nodded solemnly and he activated his Earth manipulation to open a passage. The thick wall of steel and rock melted away, instantly receding to the sides to let them through.

"While I don't doubt your powers, boss, isn't this a little too easy?" Fo raised up warily, brandishing her willow staff.

At that moment, a warm draught of air leaked from inside the gap he had just opened and Jake and the others abruptly changed their expressions.

"It smells like blood!" Trea exclaimed as she notched an arrow on her bow.

There was no arrow in her hand, but as soon as she got into shooting position, the Aether and ambient Mana were siphoned to her fingers and a blindingly white arrow of energy condensed before their very eyes. It took only a split second to create the light projectile and as soon as it was ready she fired the arrow.

The bright white arrow shot into the gap, illuminating the dark walls in its path. A moment later, it exploded like fireworks and the translucent eyes of the Beskyrian archer narrowed with astonishment.

"It's empty."

Jake did not comment on her initiative. A simple Oracle Scan would have sufficed, but he couldn't stop his subordinates from helping out once in a while. From what he understood of Trea's abilities, her arrows were not just condensed energy projectiles.

Like here, she could use their light to delineate areas with a wide array of functions. The interior of the bunker now appeared as a three-dimensional map in her mind, and the slightest life force was as vivid to her as a campfire at night. If she said there was no one inside, then that was definitely the case.

The explosion from the arrow shot also had stunning, dazzling and paralyzing properties, so it was a perfect way to launch an assault. Taking advantage of this window, the Myrtharian Nerds sneaked with surreal speed into the bunker, reaching the room where the arrow had detonated within a second.

As they walked in, Tim turned livid.

"Wh-what happened here?" He stammered with a dumbstruck expression.

In the room, which was as expansive as a small town, blood and guts of all shapes and colors formed a morbid abstract canvas. Hundreds of broken Intermediate and Advanced Aether Artifacts littered the bunker, the residual energies they emitted forming radioactive turbulence far beyond that of a nuclear reactor. A normal human entering this place would have died within seconds.

Suddenly, Azeus let out a grunt of disbelief and dashed to a crystalline object that was slightly brighter than the rest. It was a broken spherical mirror with multiple polished facets.

"This was definitely a base belonging to Mirror Vanguard. They were exterminated." The barbarian declared grimly.

"And we know by what..." Skorgeld said, holding up a long silver feather similar to the one they had picked up a few hours earlier.

"The Schwazens." Jake concluded with a concerned wince. The whole thing sounded fishy to him.

Ulfar's son brought the feather to him and Jake immediately noticed that it was different from the previous one. Their length, color and shape were similar, but this one was much heavier. About 10 times heavier.

As before, he tried to bend it to estimate its hardness, but he was stunned when even after activating his Double Bloodline Ignition and raising its internal temperature to tens of thousands of degrees he could barely bend it slightly. As they searched the room, they found other similar feathers scattered about.

As they gathered together their faces looked glum and uneasy.

"Mirror Vanguard has met stronger than them this time." Azeus sighed with conflicting emotions.

A few weeks earlier, these super factions had seemed invincible to him, as permanent as the sun and the moon, but now he realized that they too could be obliterated.

"The real question is why they were attacked..." Tim remarked self-consciously.

Jake didn't answer, but using an Oracle Scan he easily identified what must be their prison. He teleported into one of the cells and picked up a long white hair. Placing it under his nose, he sniffed and recognized a delicate fragrance of rose, jasmine and vanilla.

"Ruby was here."

When she had temporarily regained some semblance of humanity, he had noticed that she was wearing perfume for the first time. It was probably a way for her to convince herself that she could still be a young woman like everyone else.

Of course, with his boorish character Jake hadn't paid her any flattery, but with a keen sense of smell like his how could he not notice anything? Just as he could, to his utter displeasure, hear someone peeing several kilometers away if the environmental conditions allowed it, he could also pick up on the more subtle odors of his surroundings.

When Jake returned, his companions wore a relieved expression and jogged over to him. While he was gone they had collected all the feathers and damaged Aether Artifacts.

"What do we do with all this?" Skorgeld asked bluntly.

"Store them in the Faction Vault so Hade can study them or retrieve their materials." Jake ordered calmly. "Since the Lost Divinities attack, that's what we need most."

"What about the feathers?"

"Just hand them to me... This will be a good chance to check if these Schwazens' feathers are stomach-proof."

Tim and the others chuckled knowingly, but Azeus wore a confused expression. He obviously didn't get the joke.

"Do you eat... feathers?" He dared to ask awkwardly.

"And why not?" Jake answered smoothly.

As the barbarian gave him a bewildered look, the bunker was suddenly plunged into darkness. Sparks flashed in their field of vision and screams of pain echoed around them.

Trea's energy arrows shot out in all directions with the speed of a machine gun, the reflection of Skorgeld's axe clashed loudly against another blunt weapon, and Tim let out a furious groan. Thousands of talismans fluttered around them as if they had a will of their own and they intercepted thousands of invisible attacks, protecting the group as best they could.

Azeus let out a war cry and a network of purple lightning bolts as wide as a grown man's thigh spread across the bunker, electrifying whatever was in its path. At that very moment, Jake felt an oppressive killing intent washing over him and he responded with a murderous aura of his own.

His blade clashed with another blade, but Jake was instantly blasted away, his arm shattered into several pieces despite the fact that he had used all of his strength and amplification skills, including Double Bloodline Ignition. He immediately realized that he was dealing with someone of the same caliber as the Nullifier.

Remembering how he had managed to protect Xi at the last moment, he focused on what mattered most to him, what he didn't want to lose, and swung his sword again.

CLANG!

This time his arm held firm for a fleeting second, the two blades clashing and sparking as they formed a deep crater around them, and then Jake was blasted away again. Before he had time to focus again, a huge fist smashed into his head with the crashing force of a train. Because he had his helmet on, he got away with only a severe concussion to the brain.

With a kick, his opponent disarmed him and with another stomp crushed the bones of his disarmed arm into dust.

The sheer fury and shame of suffering such humiliation for the second time swept through Jake's mind and he instantly flipped, as if his limiter had just been removed. Jake let out a deafening roar and focused all of his telekinesis, Reiga, Aether, heat and other energy into his good arm.

His arm became brighter and more scorching than a sun's core and collided at near teleportation speed with his opponent's temple.

BOOOM!

The enemy's head exploded, but so did his arm. Jake, though pale and dripping with sweat, got up with a snort and summoned his entire arsenal of Aether Sun Core around him to boost his regeneration. A brand new arm grew back in an instant, but the lost Blood Essence could not be so easily regained.

The light returned to the bunker and he discovered that all of his companions, including Azeus, Crunch and Lord Phenix, had been captured. The man Jake had just confronted walked sinisterly toward him, his head also having grown back and he snarled authoritatively,

"Who the fuck are you? Are you the one who slaughtered my men?"