

## The World of Otome Game is a Second Chance for Broken Swords

### Story Starts

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### Chapter 7.5 -

### The Storm

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As the swords descended from the heavens like divine judgement, Marie couldn't help but gawk in absolute awe at the sheer, overwhelming scale of this magical attack. Her heart hammered against her ribs as she took in the sight—thousands of blades materialising from nothing, each one unique, each one gleaming with lethal intent as they plummeted towards the battlefield below. Some were longswords with elaborate cross-guards, others curved sabres, still others massive zweihanders that tumbled end over end as they fell. The very air seemed to sing with their approach, a discordant symphony of whistling steel that made her stomach clench with a mixture of fear and terrible fascination.

*'This is insane,' Marie thought. 'This is absolutely insane.'*

"...!"

Both her hands were suddenly engulfed by warmth—larger hands than hers, steady where hers trembled. She looked up, breath catching in her throat, to find Oberon and Titania flanking her protectively.

Oberon was the dark-haired bishounen who would have sent her cooing and fangirling at any other time—all sharp angles and otherworldly beauty, the kind of face that made her knees feel weak. Even now, in the midst of absolute chaos, he was directing that devastatingly handsome smile at her, as if a rain of swords was merely a minor inconvenience.

Titania, meanwhile, bore Marie's exact visage—the same arrangement Julius had with Karna, a guardian spirit who had accepted to mirror their contractor's appearance. But where Marie's face was currently frozen in barely-contained

panic, Titania's expression held something far older and infinitely more knowing. Those familiar eyes, her own eyes reflected back at her, sent shivers racing down her spine.

The gesture was achingly brief. Their hands released hers, and then both guardian spirits leapt forward with inhuman grace, charging straight into the maelstrom of combat that had been closing in on her position.

Marie's chest tightened with worry even as relief flooded through her. *'They came for me. They actually manifested to protect me.'*

Oberon moved first, launching a dark, writhing magical blast towards one of Bartfort's guardian spirits—a stoic blonde woman who fought with eerie silence, her expression utterly blank as she engaged multiple opponents at once. A massive sword floated alongside her like a loyal hound, the weapon tracking her movements as if wielded by an invisible third arm, responding to her will without gesture or command.

The weapon was monstrous in scale. Its blade alone stretched easily as tall as Marie herself, whilst the width measured half her armspan—a sheet of silver-grey steel etched with wavy Damascus patterns that caught the light with every slight movement. The grip was nearly as long as the blade itself, wrapped in dark leather bindings with diagonal red accent cording, clearly meant for devastating two-handed strikes. But what truly drew the eye was the guard: a massive golden cross-guard wrought in an elaborate four-pointed star pattern, its sharp angular edges extending outward like a compass rose, inlaid with deep red gemstones that gleamed like captured fire. The pommel crowned the entire construction with an ornate sunburst of golden spikes radiating from a central ruby, giving the weapon the appearance of holy regalia despite its brutal purpose.

And without so much as a gesture—as if that terribly large sword was merely an extension of her will—the floating blade swung from behind its mistress. Crimson and dark energy wreathed the steel as it fell in a devastating arc towards Oberon. A perfect maki-uchi, or an oberhau as their school's sword

instructors would have called it—a descending cut meant to split an opponent from crown to sternum.

The blade cut through the air with such force that Marie could hear it whistling even from her distance.

Impact. A devastating magical blast followed, the shockwave strong enough to make Marie stagger even from her distance.

To her left, Titania was forming a perimeter—her hands moving in precise, elegant patterns as she redirected the rain of steel falling around them. Blades that would have skewered Marie where she stood were caught by invisible forces and sent spiralling away, embedding themselves in the earth at safe distances.

From what Marie could see, each blade was unique. Longswords, sabres, falchions, weapons she couldn't even name—all of them heavy, all of them real. The kinetic energy from their fall created small craters on impact, each weapon wedging firmly into the ground like a gravemarker for some unknown warrior. The battlefield was transforming into a forest of steel, and they were trapped in its centre.

Oberon caught the massive sword with his bare arm—and his limbs darkened before Marie's very eyes, scales rippling across skin that had been smooth moments before. His delicate pixie wings shifted from colourful butterfly patterns into predatory dragonfly appendages, iridescent and sharp-edged. He flipped over with supernatural agility, kicking the broadside of the floating sword away with enough force to send sparks flying.

But he wasn't quick enough to press his advantage.

The petite blonde guardian spirit pushed forward in silence, her floating sword returning to orbit around her as she drew two straight blades from nowhere—one black and red, one silver and blue. She slashed at devastating diagonal angles, one strike following another in relentless sequence, methodical pressure that gave Oberon no room to breathe. Each swing carried weight far beyond what her small frame should have produced.

Oberon was forced to retreat into the rain of swords, growling as he snatched a falling blade from midair. He batted aside everything in his vicinity, then redirected a dozen more towards the rushing blonde in a desperate counterattack.

Marie's eyes widened as she noticed something. There were intentional pockets of space where the rain of steel wasn't falling—safe zones that moved with every member of Angelica's team, tracking them across the battlefield.

*'He's controlling where each sword falls. Every single one of them.'*

The blade in Oberon's hand vanished.

Just—gone. Dissolved into motes of light between one heartbeat and the next. The swords he'd redirected towards Art vanished too, disappearing before they could reach her.

*'He can dismiss them too?!'*

More steel fell. The violent pitter-patter of impacts continued unabated, and Oberon—now weaponless—was forced to charge directly into the stoic guardian spirit with nothing but his transformed claws.

"This is crazy—is the Baron an idiot?!" Jilk shouted from somewhere to Marie's right, his green-and-grey power armour flickering with defensive enchantments. "He's forcing us to engage them in melee combat!"

With a clap of his hands, several magic circles bloomed behind him, each one intercepting falling blades and reducing them to harmless sparks. But for every sword he destroyed, three more fell to replace it.

Nearby, Julius was being double-teamed by two guardian spirits who looked distressingly identical—the same silver-white hair, the same pale features, the same unnervingly blank expressions. Twins, or perhaps the same spirit manifested twice. One fought barehanded, her movements fluid and precise as she intercepted every attack the Prince threw at her sister. The other wielded a giant halberd, swinging it with devastating force, each strike forcing Julius to give ground.

Julius scattered orbs of magical energy behind him as he retreated—proximity mines that detonated on contact, meant to buy him breathing room. His crimson-and-gold armour tanked the rain of steel without issue, sparks cascading off his shoulders with each impact.

But the twin spirits weren't deterred.

The barehanded one simply leapt over the mines with inhuman grace. The halberd-wielder was more creative—she scooped a falling sword from beyond their steel-free perimeter and hurled it into the minefield, detonating three in rapid succession. The explosion barely slowed her stride as both spirits pushed forward in perfect synchronisation.

"Protect the Prince!" Jilk's voice cracked with urgency.

His inherited guardian spirit, Roland, answered the call. The spirit hefted his greatsword with both hands and leapt into the fray with a battle cry, placing himself between Julius and the advancing twins.

Marie expanded her senses, reaching out towards her cherished comrades scattered across the battlefield. She could feel them—their injuries, their exhaustion, their desperate need.

Pillars of light bloomed around Folkvangr as reset after reset occurred. Brad. One of Greg's guardian spirits. A glancing blow that had nearly taken Chris's arm. Each healing drained her reserves, but she couldn't stop—wouldn't stop.

The announcers' voices had faded into mere background noise, their excited commentary lost beneath the clash of steel and the roar of magical energies. Marie steeled her mind against the chaos surrounding her, pushing down the primal urge to watch the battle unfold.

*'They're buying me time—I can't waste it!'*

She clasped her hands together, feeling the familiar surge of power as her armour responded. Channels of mana flooded through the engraved pathways etched into the armoured plating, the sensation like liquid fire racing through

her veins. A large translucent golden dome burst into existence, covering their immediate area with protective light that made her skin tingle with residual energy.

Unfortunately, the dome wasn't enough.

She had to extend her protection further—to cover the area where Angelica and the original protagonist were engaged in their own desperate struggle. The shield stretched, thinned, and Marie gritted her teeth against the strain. If the barrier fell, the rain of steel would cut through her allies indiscriminately.

*'Secure the area first. Then enchantments. One thing at a time.'*

Her fingers trembled as she maintained the barrier, sweat beading at her temples despite the cool air circulating through her power armour. She was grateful—desperately grateful—for the armour's assistance in sustaining such a massive construct. Without it, she'd have collapsed minutes ago.

From her position, Marie could see the main engagement in the distance—Setanta, Arthur, Arjuna, and Karna, four of their strongest spirits, all focused on a single point. The Bartfort Baron and his deadly duo of guardian spirits held their ground against impossible odds, and the legendary duo, plus the two new cosmic guardian spirits, were struggling.

*Struggling.*

The word felt wrong in her mind, but she couldn't deny what her eyes were showing her. The prince's guardians had to constantly dodge or redirect the endless rain of steel whilst simultaneously defending against attacks from three directions. Every sword they batted aside was another sword they couldn't use to press their advantage. Every moment spent on defence was a moment lost on offence.

The Baron had turned Folkvangr itself into a weapon.

Now that the dome was secured, Marie allowed herself a moment to assess the broader battlefield.

Greg was in trouble.

Olivia floated above him with infuriating serenity, her expression carrying that same aristocratic disdain Marie had seen directed at lesser nobles in court. Floating swords—woven from thread rather than conjured from nothing like the Baron's—swiped at Greg from every angle. Left. Right. Above. Behind. Each blade moved with almost sentient awareness, coordinating attacks that forced the lance-wielder into increasingly desperate defensive manoeuvres.

He couldn't counterattack. He could barely breathe. Every time he tried to close distance, another sword would dart in from his blind spot, forcing him to abort and defend.

*'She's toying with him,'* Marie realised with dawning horror. *'She's not even trying to finish him off.'*

Bird knights burst forth from Olivia—constructs woven from thread, abilities that hadn't existed in the game Marie remembered. The stork-shaped automatons added to the chaos, diving and harassing, forcing Greg, Chris, and their guardian spirits to divert precious attention to swatting them away.

Minor inconveniences, individually. But they stacked up.

And weaving through it all, another of Bartfort's guardian spirits glided across the battlefield like an elegant and deadly figure skater. Her bladed greaves carved trails of ice wherever she passed, icicles erupting in her wake to harry anyone who tried to follow. She moved in and out of the melee with fluid grace, dancing and twirling through a symphony of frozen destruction.

But she wasn't alone.

Marie's eyes widened as she realised the ice-skating spirit was carrying passengers—Angelica and Olivia riding her frozen wave like surfers on a crystalline tide. The pair took shots as they passed: Olivia's floating blades lashing out at targets of opportunity, Angelica's gunblades sending bursts of fire magic into any cluster of enemies foolish enough to group together.

*'That's not fair,' Marie thought weakly. 'That's just not fair, and what is with this group's obsession with swords?'*

The thought flickered through Marie's mind with a mixture of exasperation and genuine bewilderment. Leon conjured them from nothing by the thousand. Olivia wove them from thread and sent them flying with a thought. Angelica—who in the game had preferred rifles and long-range combat—was now dual-wielding gunblades like some kind of swashbuckling pirate queen.

*'Is there some sort of sword-wielding cult I wasn't aware of?'*

She shook her head, forcing herself to focus. Now wasn't the time for mental tangents.

Marie closed her eyes, shutting out the visual chaos. She couldn't afford distractions—not now.

She reached out with her magic, golden threads of power extending from her position like the strands of a spider's web. One thread connected to Julius. Another to Jilk. Greg. Chris. Brad. Their guardian spirits. Each connection required precise control, each enchantment a careful balancing act between potency and efficiency.

Strength enhancement. Speed boost. Damage resistance. Pain suppression.

Layer after layer of magical support, woven into each of her allies simultaneously.

Sweat beaded on her forehead despite the cool air circulating through her power armour. Her mana reserves were draining faster than she'd anticipated; the constant healing resets compounded with the enchantments to create an unsustainable burn rate.

*'I can keep this up,' she told herself firmly. 'I have to keep this up—this is for my happy ending!'*

When Marie opened her eyes again, the battlefield had shifted.

Brad was back on his feet, fully healed, the golden light of her restoration magic still clinging to his form like a second skin. He was rushing towards the Baron's position with renewed vigour, flying across Folkvangr in a zigzag pattern to avoid the blades falling around him at random intervals.

*'He's trying to add pressure,' Marie realised. 'Probably thinking—no, definitely thinking—that if they can distract the Baron enough, the rain of steel will stop.'*

It wasn't a bad plan. Overwhelm the caster, break his concentration, end the spell.

Brad's two guardian spirits flanked him as he flew, and Marie watched as he joined the chaotic melee at the battlefield's centre. The numbers shifted: Setanta, Arthur, Arjuna, Karna, and now Brad with his two spirits—seven combatants converging on just three defenders.

Seven versus three.

And yet, impossibly, the Baron's side was holding.

Marie's head spun trying to track all the combatants—blades clashing, magic flaring, bodies weaving through an endless rain of steel. It was chaos. Beautiful, terrifying, absolute chaos.

*'How?'* The question burned in her mind. *'How are they still standing?'*

Everyone's body glowed golden as her magic took hold—muscles strengthening, reflexes sharpening, minds clearing of fatigue and doubt. She surrounded each ally with a barrier akin to the dome protecting her current position, translucent shields of golden light layered over their armour. Each barrier would absorb at least one or two fatal blows before shattering. Maybe three, if she was lucky—either way, she could easily reapply it.

But the enchantments did more than protect.

The barriers created a sort of mind meld, linking everyone together so they could operate as one well-oiled machine. Thoughts and intentions flowed seamlessly between them like water through connected vessels—Julius

sensing Jilk's flanking manoeuvre before it happened, Greg knowing exactly when Chris would create an opening, Karna and Arjuna moving in perfect synchronisation without needing to exchange a single word.

*'This is exhausting.'*

Marie felt the strain of maintaining so many simultaneous enchantments—a dull ache building behind her eyes, her mana reserves draining faster than she'd like.

*'But it's necessary. We can't afford to lose anyone here.'*

She steeled her resolve with a promise to herself: *'Once I win—once we graduate—I shall live my life with my reverse harem ending!'*

Thoughts of weekly Julius Sandwiches flickered through her mind, and she seized that mental image as inspiration, letting it fuel her determination as she surveyed the battlefield.

*'For the harem. For the sandwiches. I can do this.'*

With everything she knew about the game, Marie had accelerated everyone's growth by a significant margin. Extra training sessions. Carefully planned dungeon delves. Equipment upgrades she'd practically bankrupted herself to afford. All of it in preparation for her eventual duel with Angelica.

She hadn't imagined—hadn't even conceived in her wildest nightmares—that it would escalate to *this*.

*'This was supposed to be a formal duel!' she thought, watching another explosion rock the battlefield. 'A few one-on-one matches, maybe some dramatic speeches, a clean victory! Not a battlefield torn straight from a war epic!'*

In the game, unless you overlevelled at the start—which most players didn't bother with, rushing through to reach the romance scenes—your love interests would inevitably fall to the vassal knights Angelica forced to represent her.

Brad was always first to go. One-shot by superior firepower, his magical prowess meaning nothing against experienced combat veterans who knew how to exploit a caster's weaknesses.

Greg fell next. He'd never valued good equipment, always insisted that depending on gear was "a crutch for the weak." Noble sentiment. Got him killed every time.

And Chris—sweet, eager, reckless Chris—his penchant for rushing forward and forcing melee combat regardless of tactical situation made him predictable prey for anyone with half a brain and a longer weapon.

Three love interests. Three guaranteed losses. Unless you'd spent hours grinding before the plot even started.

That was how it was *supposed* to go.

Angelica, unable to find champions, would be forced to conscript vassal knights into a school duel—a shameful act that would disqualify her from the bet regardless of outcome. Marie had planned to magnanimously forgive the Redgrave daughter afterwards, cementing her own reputation as the gracious victor.

Instead, Angelica had found champions. *Dangerous* champions.

And now Marie's carefully constructed plan was burning around her ears.

*'I've tried so hard to change those outcomes,'* she reflected, maintaining her concentration even as worry gnawed at her insides like a hungry rat.

Jilk and Julius were more balanced fighters, at least. But in the game, even they were usually too underlevelled to achieve total victory against Angelica's chosen champions. The difficulty curve at that point was notoriously unforgiving.

*'To be honest, most of the game was unforgiving,'* Marie thought bitterly. *'Except the romance scenes. Those were very forgiving. Very detailed. Very—focus, Marie!'*

She'd done everything she could to change the odds. Multiple training sessions. Delving into the capital dungeon whenever possible. Even that harrowing expedition to the Bartfort estate's dungeon—*'God, that was terrifying even with my foreknowledge'*—pushing everyone harder than they'd ever been pushed before.

Then the skirmish was announced, and the Baron had immediately withdrawn access to his dungeon.

*'Using it as his own training ground, no doubt,'* she'd realised at the time.

And once the fight was announced, she'd used most of the Dia she'd earned to upgrade the problematic trio's power armour.

*'Practically bankrupted myself,'* she thought, the memory still stinging. Chris. Brad. Greg. The three who needed the most help. The three who were most likely to get themselves killed through sheer stubbornness.

She loved them—she did. They were sweet and devoted and caring in ways that made her heart flutter. But *God*, they could be stubborn about things that really shouldn't be negotiable.

Brad was a glass cannon—devastating magical output, but one solid hit and he'd crumple like wet paper. She'd had to practically force him into heavier defensive plating. *'You can't cast spells if you're dead, Brad!'*

Greg was worse. He'd always insisted that relying on equipment was a crutch, that his skills alone should be enough. Noble sentiment. Idiotic in practice. She'd threatened to withhold healing until he accepted the upgraded armour. *'Your skills won't matter when someone with better gear cuts through your bargain-bin chestplate!'*

And Chris—sweet, reckless Chris—had no ranged capabilities whatsoever. He'd charge headlong into every engagement, sword drawn, regardless of whether the enemy was ten metres away or a hundred. *'You're the Sword Saint's son, not immortal! Learn to throw something!'*

*'Why is "not dying" such a controversial position with these boys?!*

Yet she could still feel the pressure mounting. Her mana reserves were draining faster than she could replenish them, each healing spell a little weaker than the last. Golden light flowed from her like streams of liquid sunlight—beautiful, but finite. So terribly finite.

"Brad, Patroclus, and Bedivere have retired from the battle."

The announcer's voice cut through everything.

"...!"

Marie's heart lurched in her chest, ice flooding her veins.

*'What?!'*

*'No, no, no! Not Brad! Not already!'*

She'd just healed him. She'd *just* healed him minutes ago, poured her magic into restoring his body, watched him fly back into the fight with renewed determination. And now—

*'All of it for nothing.'*

And then, as if to mock her efforts—as if to demonstrate just how hopelessly outclassed they truly were—her golden dome shattered.

It happened without warning. One moment, the barrier stood strong. The next, it exploded into a thousand fragments of dissolving light, sparkling motes drifting away on the wind like dying fireflies.

A crimson spear embedded itself in the ground a few metres before Marie, still quivering from the force of its throw.

*'No.'*

The protective barrier she'd been maintaining—*her* barrier, the one thing she'd been counting on to keep everyone safe whilst she worked—gone in an instant.

*'No, no, this can't be happening!'*

And following the spear came Leon himself.

Setanta was the first to crash into their vicinity, his body bloodied and bruised. The young-faced spirit groaned in pain as he skidded across the ground, leaving a furrow in the earth—one of their stronger guardians, reduced to this in mere minutes.

Leon landed a moment later in a crouch that cratered the earth beneath him, dual-wielding spears with terrifying precision—crimson in one hand, golden in the other. Karna and Arjuna pressed him from behind, but he'd somehow manoeuvred their battle directly into Marie's position, bringing the chaos of the main engagement crashing into her supposedly safe zone.

Marie's breath caught in her throat as she watched him move. Each strike was calculated. Devastating. He blocked Karna's thrust, deflected Arjuna's arrow, and still found time to hurl another sword towards Jilk's defensive formation—all in the space of a single heartbeat.

Then several spears levitated above Setanta, like a judging guillotine as it fell on the downed guardian, Setanta vanishing right before the spears embedded in the space where the battle junkie once lay groaning.

*'He's bringing the fight right to us,'* she realised with dawning horror. *'Right to me.'*

*'Oh God, we're completely exposed now!'*

"Setanta has retired from the battle!"

*'Shit.'*

Leon spotted the multiple drone-like objects converging on his position—Brad's distinctive power armour attachments, magical foci that let the glass cannon rain down beams of destructive energy from a safe distance. The floating metallic constructs hummed with barely contained power, their crystalline cores pulsing violet.

No time to deal with them now.

Leon ducked, muscles screaming in protest, and shot a blade to his right—the traced weapon materialising just in time to intercept Lancelot's advance. In the same motion, he blocked Setanta's kick with his raised knee, using the impact to close distance rather than create it. His twin swords came up to meet Setanta's blade, steel shrieking against steel, and he weaved his head aside as the guardian spirit's follow-up slash passed millimetres from his face.

*'Too close. Getting sloppy.'*

Leon traced a wall of blades between himself and the drones, dozens of swords materialising in rapid succession. The familiar drain on his od was immediate—a pulling sensation behind his sternum—but necessary. Each magical beam from Brad's constructs slammed into his barrier, impacts crackling and sparking like fireworks against steel.

Simultaneously, he traced a wicked-looking dagger and launched it downward. The blade embedded itself through Setanta's foot and into the ground beneath, pinning him in place.

The blue-haired guardian spirit's wild grin didn't falter—if anything, it widened.

But he couldn't dodge.

Leon thrust his elbow forward and up, clipping Setanta's chin with a crack that snapped his head back. He followed with a wide slash, blade meeting flesh, then kicked the guardian spirit square in the chest to create distance. Setanta stumbled backwards—directly into the zone of steel rain.

Arthur took his place without hesitation, golden blade already descending.

Leon didn't know how these guardian spirits could bear the faces of Arturia's knights. The resemblance was uncanny—the same features he'd seen during those empathic dreams whilst connected to her, before she was swallowed by the corrupted grail.

*'Is this some twisted joke?'* he thought bitterly, parrying Arthur's strike. *'How many ways can the universe remind me of my failures?'*

Though there was a sick pleasure in having the upper hand against Lancer's look-alike. Small victories.

The memories threatened to overwhelm him—Arturia's final moments, the corruption spreading through her spiritual core, his complete inability to save her—

*'No.'* He shut it down ruthlessly. *'Focus. Deal with the past later. Survive now.'*

The barrage subsided, leaving smoking craters where his barrier hadn't quite covered. Leon angled the blades skyward and launched them towards the drones—dozens of swords whistling through the air, each one guided by his will, seeking their targets with predatory precision.

At the same time, he tightened his control over the rain of steel above them. The safe zones shrank. The perimeter where blades didn't fall contracted further, forcing everyone—friend and foe alike—into an increasingly confined space.

A dangerous balancing act. He was deliberately creating a tangled, chaotic maelstrom of limbs, steel, and magic where numerical advantage meant nothing.

*'Let's see how well you coordinate when you can barely swing without hitting each other.'*

Ria appeared at his side like a golden blur, her giant double lance—the weapon he'd forged during their contract completion, as he did for all his

guardian spirits—slamming into the ground with earth-shattering force. The impact intercepted Arthur's downward slash, sending up a spray of dirt and debris.

A blast of mana followed immediately, so intense it made the air shimmer like a desert mirage.

"Thanks, Ria!"

She gave him a cheeky wink, already spinning her lance for another strike.

Durga was there in the same instant, dhal raised high to absorb the residual energy as she charged Arthur. Her multiple arms moved in perfect synchronisation—one wielding the urumi, that flexible whip-sword that moved like liquid metal. It lashed out with serpentine grace, wrapping around Arthur's blade and wrenching it aside, bypassing his guard entirely.

Two more guardian spirits joined the fray from above—Bedivere and Patroclus, dropping into the melee with practised coordination. They'd clearly trained together before this skirmish, their movements complementing each other seamlessly.

Ria met them head-on, her double lance locking against both their weapons simultaneously. The clash sent out a shockwave that flattened the grass in a ten-metre radius, her fairy wings blazing brighter as she pushed back, leaving afterimages with every movement.

Leon didn't let them settle.

He traced two greatswords—the same ornate design he'd crafted for Art, massive blades with elaborate golden cross-guards and crown-like pommels—and launched them at the newcomers. But Arthur was pressing him again, so he yanked one sword back by sheer will, using its momentum to intercept the knight's strike. The heavy blade's weight stunned Arthur momentarily, buying Leon the half-second he needed.

He launched the sword again, already tracing a fresh pair of enlarged Kanshou and Bakuya. The familiar weight settled into his hands like greeting old friends.

The greatswords caught both interlopers and sent them careening towards Brad's position. The glass cannon had to hastily redirect his drones to avoid friendly fire, the constructs scattering like startled birds.

Leon spotted him in the chaos—Brad standing on one of the distant plateaus, several drones floating around him with tips pointed upward, his own personal barrier protecting him from the rain of steel. Safe. Comfortable. *Annoying.*

'*Later,*' Leon promised himself.

He took advantage of the momentary chaos, leaping past Arthur with reinforcement-enhanced agility. But not before driving his heel into the side of the knight's head—a petty move, perhaps, but satisfying nonetheless.

He landed behind Arthur and slashed backwards with Kanshou in the same motion. The blade bit deep. Blood sprayed from the knight's back in a crimson arc, painting the ground beneath them.

But Arthur was back to full health within seconds.

The wound sealed itself as if it had never existed—Marie's healing magic washing over him in waves of golden light. Arthur didn't even wince, simply turning to face Leon as if nothing had happened. The same golden light enveloped Setanta as the battle junkie rushed back in, his foot apparently healed from the dagger Leon had pinned him with moments ago.

"Tch."

Leon clicked his tongue in annoyance. '*This is going nowhere. We're burning through energy whilst they just keep regenerating.*'

He ducked under Setanta's wild swing, countered with a thrust that Setanta batted aside, and found himself pressed between both spirits again.

*'There has to be a better way.'*

Leon threw another pair of Kanshou and Bakuya into the chaos—one of many pairs now encircling the brawl like predatory birds. The married blades curved through the air in unpredictable arcs, penduluming back and forth without discrimination, threatening friend and foe alike.

But Leon tracked every traced weapon. When one of his allies was in danger, he'd trace another copy of the pair, using the married blades' attraction to redirect the original's trajectory. The dancing buzzsaws wove around Ria and Durga whilst slashing at everything else.

Several blades nicked Arthur and Bedivere in quick succession—shallow cuts that drew blood, proof of concept.

Bursts of golden light followed immediately. Healed. Every wound, every scratch, gone in seconds.

*'Thank whatever higher power didn't allow mana potions in this skirmish,'* Leon thought grimly. *'At least she has limits. Eventually.'*

It wasn't just the healing. Marie's golden barriers surrounded every enemy combatant, absorbing damage that should have been lethal. Even his rain of steel—thousands of blades falling continuously—was reduced to mere harassment. Annoyances rather than threats.

*'Two problems,'* Leon catalogued. *'The healing and the barriers. Remove one, the other becomes manageable.'*

He found himself back-to-back-to-back with Durga and Ria, the three of them forming a defensive triangle as enemies pressed in from all sides. Setanta. Arthur. Lancelot. Bedivere. Patroclus. Five spirits, and Karna and Arjuna were still out there somewhere.

"Master, this is getting annoying," Ria complained, her voice carrying a petulant edge. Despite her combat prowess, she was still childlike in many ways—and children hated stalemates.

"Hmm, true," Leon agreed, his mind already formulating a new plan. His eyes flicked towards the golden dome protecting Marie in the distance. The source of their problems.

"Follow my lead."

A chorus of "Yes, Master" echoed from both his guardian spirits.

The trio didn't let up their assault—they charged forth as one, breaking out of the defensive triangle with explosive force.

Ria led the charge, her double lance a whirlwind of devastating efficiency. The weapon left trails of light as she met both Karna and Arjuna simultaneously, holding back the two legendary spirits through sheer aggression and skill. Her fairy wings blazed with every strike, afterimages trailing behind her.

Durga provided covering fire, crimson beams erupting from her various weapons in rapid succession. She targeted Brad's drones methodically, each blast forcing the constructs to scatter and reform rather than maintain their bombardment. The glass cannon himself stood at a distance, providing supporting fire whilst letting his constructs do the heavy lifting.

*'Smart,'* Leon acknowledged grudgingly. *'Stay safe, let the drones take the risks. But that means—'*

He knew exactly where to aim.

Leon charged forward, and Herakles's sword-axe materialised in his hands.

The weapon was monstrous—a brutal fusion of blade and bludgeon that had belonged to the greatest of Greek heroes. Its weight would have been impossible for a normal human to even lift, let alone wield. Leon's reinforced body handled it with practised ease, muscles singing with the familiar strain.

"What the—"

Setanta's cry was cut short.

Leon's power armour whirred as he stepped to the guardian spirit's right, pivoting on his heel with his entire body's momentum behind the motion. The sword-axe came up in a devastating underhand swing—not a slash, but a *launch*.

The impact was catastrophic.

Setanta shot towards the sky like a missile, his body ragdolling from the sheer force, limbs flailing as he tumbled upward through the rain of steel. The guardian spirit's wild laughter echoed even as he flew—because of course he was laughing.

Leon engaged his power armour's flight capabilities and launched himself skyward after Setanta. The armour didn't just offer flight—it provided leverage, letting him swing weapons as if he had solid ground beneath his feet even while soaring through open air.

The battlefield below rapidly shrank as he ascended. The ground battle was becoming an aerial one.

Durga followed his lead with supernatural grace, gliding upward as she charged Arthur and Lancelot simultaneously. Her multiple arms extended, gada and parasu primed in two of them, both weapons crackling with gathered energy.

She struck the ground just in front of both knights with calculated precision—not aiming for them, but for the earth itself. The impact cratered the ground and launched her upward in a front flip, form blurring with speed. Before Arthur or Lancelot could react, she was above them, and her follow-up strikes caught them mid-guard.

Two more bodies went tumbling skyward like leaves in a hurricane, joining Setanta in the aerial domain.

*'Three down, two to go,'* Leon thought, already tracking Karna and Arjuna below.

Ria didn't follow them skyward. She had her own targets.

She launched herself at the two legendary guardian spirits with a battle cry that echoed across Folkvangr, her fairy wings flashing like miniature suns. Blue, yellow, and white energy wreathed her form, coating her double lance in crackling power. The sheer force of her charge sent ripples through the air, debris swirling in her wake.

Karna and Arjuna—the spirits who had never been defeated in tandem combat, according to every historical account—turned to meet her.

Ria didn't care about history.

She slashed diagonally at Karna, the motion fluid and practised despite her cosmic fairy nature. The strike released an arc of pure energy that carved through the air like a crescent moon of destruction. It caught Karna square in the chest—*Karna*, the legendary solar warrior—and sent him hurtling towards the distant plateau, his golden form tumbling end over end.

Without missing a beat, Ria pushed towards Arjuna. Their weapons met with a thunderous clash, her double lance locking against his mystical bow. The dark-skinned guardian spirit's expression remained impassive even as Ria grinned at him, her battle-joy evident in every movement.

"You're fun!" she declared brightly.

Arjuna said nothing. He simply pressed his counterattack with cold precision.

High above the battlefield, Durga's ten arms moved in a lethal dance that defied human comprehension.

Each limb operated independently whilst maintaining perfect coordination—twin talwars meeting Lancelot's blade in a shower of sparks, her khanda blocking Arthur's overhead strike with a resounding clang. More sparks cascaded from the impacts like falling stars, bright against the darkened sky of raining steel.

Her parasu hooked around Arthur's ankle with predatory precision, the curved axe-blade catching his armoured boot and wrenching him off-balance. He spun away involuntarily—directly into the path of her gada, the heavy mace whistling through the space where his head had been a fraction of a second before.

A miss. But only just.

Arthur's eyes widened. He'd felt the wind of that strike brush his cheek.

Both knights pressed their assault with relentless determination, swords blazing with brilliant light that seemed to burn the air itself. They manoeuvred through three-dimensional space with practised grace, dodging raining steel and the deadly black-and-white buzzsaws that followed the aerial combatants with uncanny accuracy.

Each swing of their enchanted blades released devastating magical blasts. The attacks that missed their mark shot towards the ground far below, scorching the earth black and leaving trails of molten glass in their wake.

But Durga was equal to the onslaught.

Her dhal absorbed the brunt of direct attacks, the shield flaring gold with each impact. Her remaining arms wove intricate patterns with the urumi, the flexible blade creating a defensive web of singing steel. And when an opening presented itself, her trishul thrust forward with deadly intent—crimson and black beams erupting from its three prongs in a display of raw power.

The knights were forced to separate, breaking their coordination to avoid the barrage.

Durga smiled serenely. Divide and conquer.

Leon spotted Karna in the distance—the legendary spirit crashing into the sand far below, his golden form creating a visible crater even from their aerial vantage point. Ria had actually grounded him. One of the kingdom's most powerful guardian spirits, brought low by a cosmic fairy with a battle-lust grin.

"Now. While he's down."

Leon and Durga moved in synchronised precision, lashing out at their respective opponents to create space. They turned towards Karna's position as one—Durga loosing a volley of arrows from above, each projectile glowing with magical energy as they arced downward, whilst Leon traced Caladbolg II.

His circuits burned as he pushed energy into the spiral sword. Not enough time to break it properly. Not enough time to turn it into a true Broken Phantasm.

*'It'll have to do.'*

He loosed the arrow alongside Durga's volley. Multiple streaking lights traced their way towards the downed spirit like falling meteors. Leon directed even more of the rain of steel towards the plateau, hoping—*praying*—that the combined assault would be enough to keep Karna down.

A pillar of golden light erupted from Karna's position.

Marie's healing. Immediate. Complete.

*'For nought,'* Leon thought bitterly. *'All of it for nought.'*

Arthur banked left through the open air, his gleaming blade carving a luminous arc. A crescent of pure energy shot towards Durga—a ranged attack to test her defences.

She countered with her katar, the punch dagger channelling dark energy that split the crescent cleanly in two. Both halves dissipated harmlessly on either side of her.

Lancelot capitalised on the distraction with the instincts of a master swordsman, his sword descending in a blur of light that would have bisected a lesser opponent.

But Durga was no lesser opponent.

Her bagh nakh raked across his armour with savage precision—tiger claws screeching against metal in a shower of sparks. She pivoted to meet him in midair, her multiple arms already moving to counter his follow-up strikes before he could even complete them.

Two against one, and she was *winning*.

Meanwhile, Ria faced the kingdom's most formidable guardian spirits alone—and she was *thriving*.

Karna's golden armour blazed like a miniature sun as he thrust his spear with divine precision. Each strike released solar flares that created brilliant flashes of light, the heat so intense it distorted the air around them. Any lesser spirit would have been incinerated.

Arjuna's bow sang its deadly song from the opposite angle, arrows of pure mana streaking through the air like comets. Each one was capable of levelling a building.

Ria's double lance spun in a defensive pattern, deflecting projectiles and parrying spear thrusts in the same fluid motions. Her own magical energy surged in response, creating a visible aura around her form—blue and gold and white, crackling with power that rivalled theirs.

She pressed forward through the sky, grinning like a madwoman.

*'This is the best day ever!'* was practically written across her face.

The air around them cracked and shimmered from their exchanges, each impact sending shockwaves rippling outward. Reality itself seemed to protest the violence being done to it.

Karna lunged with supernatural speed, his spear wreathed in flames that could melt steel in seconds. Ria parried with the upper half of her lance whilst the lower section swept at his legs—a coordinated attack that forced him to abort his thrust and defend.

Arjuna loosed three arrows simultaneously from her blind spot, each one aimed at a vital point.

Ria barrel-rolled aside with explosive force, the arrows passing close enough to singe her hair. But she twisted mid-flight with acrobatic grace, launching a barrage of invisible air blades in retaliation. The projectiles carved through the sky towards the archer, each one sharp enough to slice through stone.

Arjuna's expression flickered—the first emotion he'd shown all battle.

He had to dodge.

Leon maintained his aerial position, mind racing through possibilities at lightning speed. Angles. Trajectories. Magical outputs.

*'The constant healing negates our damage output completely,'* he observed, parrying a stray slash from Setanta without even looking. *'And that damned golden barrier absorbs most of our attacks like they're nothing.'*

Two problems. He'd identified them earlier.

His eyes narrowed as the solution crystallised with sudden clarity—pieces falling into place like a puzzle solving itself.

*'Time to level the playing field.'*

He knew exactly what he needed. Weapons from Archer's memories. Weapons that broke the rules.

*'If they want to cheat with infinite healing, I'll just have to make wounds that won't heal.'*

Leon traced two spears from Archer's memories into existence.

Gáe Dearg—the Crimson Rose of Exorcism. A spear that could pierce any magical defence as if it simply didn't exist. Barriers, enchantments, protective wards—all rendered meaningless against its edge.

Gáe Buidhe—the Golden Rose of Mortality. A cursed spear that inflicted wounds which could not be healed by any means. No magic, no potion, no divine intervention could close what it opened.

Together, they would break through Marie's protective enchantments and render her restoration magic utterly useless.

*'Diarmuid's spears,'* Leon thought, feeling their weight settle into his hands. *'Let's see how immortal they feel after this.'*

Leon burst forward with explosive force, power armour thrusters flaring bright. The aerial domain became a blur of motion as he closed the distance.

Setanta noticed his approach immediately. The guardian spirit's wild grin spread across his bloodied face like a predator spotting worthy prey—and instead of continuing his assault on Arthur and Lancelot, he turned to meet Leon's charge head-on.

*'Good,'* Leon thought. *'Come to me.'*

Their weapons collided with thunderous force, sending a shockwave rippling outward through the sky. Leon's dual spears crossed in an X pattern to catch Setanta's descending blade, crimson and gold forming a deadly barrier. The impact jarred his arms despite his reinforced body—Setanta hit *hard*.

"Finally!" Setanta laughed with genuine joy, eyes alight with battle-fury that bordered on madness. "Someone worth fighting!"

He pressed forward, blade singing through the air.

"Show me what you've got, Bartfort!"

Setanta shoved his blade upward, disengaging from the lock—and immediately brought his skull crashing towards Leon's face.

Leon didn't dodge. He *leaned into it*.

Their foreheads met with a crack that echoed across the aerial battlefield, reinforced bone against reinforced bone. The shock travelled down both their spines like lightning, stars exploding behind Leon's eyes.

When they separated, both were grinning—Setanta with manic delight, Leon with something darker.

"Not bad," Setanta admitted, blood trickling from a split in his forehead.

"I've had worse," Leon replied, already moving.

They separated and clashed again immediately, spiralling through the air in a deadly dance. Setanta's sword whistled with lethal precision, each strike aimed to kill, but Leon weaved between them on pure instinct.

Then he saw his opening.

Gáe Dearg thrust forward like a striking serpent, its tip glowing with anti-magic properties. The crimson spear punched through Marie's golden barrier as if it were made of wet paper—no resistance, no flare of protective light, nothing.

The barrier simply *wasn't there* anymore.

Setanta's eyes widened in genuine surprise. For the first time, something had bypassed his protection completely.

His grin only grew wider.

"You truly don't disappoint Bartfort," he breathed, excitement radiating from every pore.

Leon spun through three-dimensional space with fluid grace, bringing Gáe Buidhe around in a sweeping arc. The golden spear left trails of sickly yellow light in the air—a colour that promised suffering.

Setanta raised his arm to block instinctively.

The spear bit deep into his flesh.

Blood welled immediately—and kept welling. Droplets fell like crimson rain towards the battlefield far below, a steady stream that showed no signs of stopping. The wound gaped open, angry and raw, edges refusing to knit together.

In the distance, Marie's golden light flared around Setanta.

Nothing happened.

The wound remained. Open. Bleeding. *Cursed*.

For the first time, Setanta's grin flickered with something other than joy.

"What—" he started, staring at the injury that defied everything he knew about this battle's rules.

"Wounds from that spear don't heal," Leon said flatly. "Not ever. Not by any magic."

Setanta's grin returned—but now it carried an edge of respect. "Aiming to kill, aren't you?"

"Just evening the odds."

"Brilliant!" Setanta roared, face painted with his own blood, grin maniacal.

"Absolutely *brilliant!*"

He ignored the wound entirely—or perhaps he *relished* it—pressing his attack with renewed vigour. His movements became more aggressive, more unpredictable, a wild dance through the sky that abandoned defence entirely in favour of overwhelming offence.

*'He's actually fighting harder now,'* Leon realised with a mixture of exasperation and grudging respect. *'The bloodloss should be weakening him, but he's compensating with sheer aggression.'*

Setanta's blade whistled past Leon's ear, close enough to draw a thin line of blood across his cheek.

"More!" Setanta demanded, laughing. "Give me *more!*"

Their aerial dance intensified to a fever pitch.

Leon's spears created a whirlwind of crimson and gold, painting deadly patterns against the sky. Gáe Dearg pierced barriers. Gáe Buidhe left wounds. A devastating combination that slowly, methodically, took Setanta apart.

A gash across his shoulder that wept blood continuously.

A puncture through his thigh that should have crippled any normal fighter.

Shallow cuts along his arms that accumulated like tally marks of a duel's score.

Yet Setanta fought on with manic glee, revelling in the pain as proof that he was truly *alive*. His bladework became more aggressive and wild with each exchange, technique giving way to pure instinct and battle-fury.

He was dying by inches, and he'd never been happier.

Of course, this wasn't a one-sided slaughter.

Setanta's skills were formidable—Leon's power armour bore the evidence of every attack that had slipped through his guard: gouges in the plating, dents where blades had bitten deep, one section near his ribs that the nanomachines were frantically repairing even now.

But the difference was simple: Leon's wounds healed—eventually. Setanta's didn't.

And unlike Marie—stationed safely at the backline as dedicated support—Olivia was at the forefront of everything, ready to provide healing if Leon truly needed it. She could probably replicate Marie's mass-healing strategy, but it would be pointless right now. Not when they were outnumbered. Not when her combat abilities were needed elsewhere.

*'We win through attrition,'* Leon reminded himself, deflecting another wild swing. *'Every wound I land is permanent. Every wound I take is temporary.'*

Leon caught Setanta's blade on crossed spears, holding him in a momentary lock.

"Time to thin the herd," he announced through the comms, voice calm despite the exertion.

Acknowledgements came back immediately—Durga's serene hum, Ria's enthusiastic whoop, and from somewhere in the chaos below, Olivia's delighted laugh.

They knew what that meant. Press harder. Stop holding back.

*'Let's end this.'*

Brad's drones swooped in like mechanical vultures, raining magical beams down on Leon's position in a coordinated bombardment. He moved aside at the last second—the attacks carving through the space where he'd been hovering, heat intense enough to feel through his armour's shielding.

*'Annoying.'*

He retaliated instantly.

A wall of traced blades materialised between himself and the drones, points aimed outward. The constructs had nowhere to go—caught between the wall of steel and the constant rain of swords from above. Leon's reinforced arm hurled the wall forward with devastating force.

The drones entered a blender of blades.

Metal shrieked. Crystalline cores shattered. Violet light flickered and died as construct after construct was shredded into sparking debris that tumbled towards the distant ground.

Brad's supporting fire went silent.

Setanta capitalised on the distraction with predatory instinct.

His blade sliced across Leon's ribs in a spray of sparks—the nanomachines hardening at the last minute, absorbing most of the impact, but not all. Leon felt the sting through the protection, a line of fire across his side that made him hiss through gritted teeth.

He pivoted in midair, using the pain to fuel his counterattack.

Gáe Buidhe drove into Setanta's exposed side with brutal precision. The golden spear sank deep, and the guardian spirit grunted—genuine pain, not performance—as another cursed wound opened in his flesh.

This one wouldn't close either.

"Getting slower," Leon observed.

Setanta's grin was bloody. "Getting *better*."

"I'm tightening it even more!" Leon declared that the spaces void of rain still shrank further.

The aerial battlefield had become absolute chaos—a maelstrom of magical energy and clashing steel playing out against the open sky.

Durga's multiple weapons created a storm of steel and energy, keeping both Lancelot and Arthur at bay despite their relentless assault. Two-on-one, and she was still winning. Her serene smile never wavered.

Ria traded earth-shattering blows with Karna and Arjuna, shockwaves rippling outward with every exchange. The legendary spirits—the ones who had never been defeated in tandem combat—were being matched by a single cosmic fairy who treated the whole thing like a festival game.

And somewhere beyond the immediate melee, Leon could hear Olivia's distinctive laughter mixed with explosions. She was engaging the remaining opponents with her characteristic enthusiasm, and from the sounds of frustrated shouting, she was winning too.

Setanta stumbled in his flight for the first time.

It was a small thing—a hitch in his movement, a momentary loss of altitude—but Leon saw it. The accumulating wounds were finally affecting him despite his iron will. Blood loss was making him sluggish, his reactions a fraction slower than they'd been minutes ago.

Leon pressed the advantage without mercy.

His spears moved in perfect synchronisation, extensions of his will given form. Gáe Dearg shattered what remained of the golden barrier in a shower of dissipating mana—Marie's protection stripped away entirely. Gáe Buidhe followed immediately, carving another line across Setanta's chest.

Another wound that wouldn't close. Another tally mark on the growing tapestry of injuries.

Setanta was still grinning. But the light in his eyes was beginning to dim.

"Master, incoming!"

Durga's warning cut through the din of battle—and Leon looked up just in time to see Brad's remaining drones converging on his position from multiple angles. Their magical cores glowed with overcharged energy, pulsing violet-white, building towards something catastrophic.

Not a bombardment this time.

A coordinated detonation. All of them. At once. Centred on *him*.

But Leon steeled himself, projecting Archer's bow into his hands.

"Durga, Ria—I'll leave it to you!"

"Yes, Master!"

"Aye, aye!"

Ria pushed off with a kick, dodging Arjuna's magical arrow and Karna's concentrated mana blast as she glided backwards. Her grin never wavered as

she assessed the threats surrounding Leon—drones converging from one direction, legendary spirits pressing from another.

She held her double lance at her side, and it blazed with golden, blue, and white light. Then she performed a twirling strike that split the air itself.

Two massive arcs of energy sprang forth in opposite directions—both horizontal, one barrelling towards Karna and Arjuna, the other towards the cluster of drones.

Multiple explosions lit up the sky.

The legendary pair met her attack with their own mana bursts, the energies colliding and cancelling each other out in a shower of sparks. The drones weren't so lucky—three of them detonated prematurely, their coordinated attack disrupted.

Ria stuck her tongue out and pulled at her lower eyelid in a mocking gesture before rushing back towards Leon and Durga.

*'Cheeky brat,'* Leon thought, though he couldn't suppress a smirk.

In the meantime, Durga held the line against the trio of Arthur, Lancelot, and the heavily injured Setanta—all while raining crimson and black beams at the remaining drones. Her ten arms moved independently, half focused on melee defence, half providing covering fire.

At the centre of all this destruction, Leon took aim.

He traced Hrunting—the homing sword that never missed its mark—and Gáe Dearg simultaneously, binding their vectors together. Where one flew, the other would follow.

"Hounds of the red plain—Hrunting."

The first shot streaked towards Brad's position like a crimson meteor.

Leon traced again. Aimed. Released.

"Hrunting."

A second.

"Hrunting."

A third.

Three streaking lights rushed towards Brad and his guardian spirits, each one a paired combination of homing blade and barrier-piercing spear.

Simultaneously, Leon dismissed every Bakuya currently orbiting the battlefield. Dozens of white blades dissolved into motes of light.

The hundreds of Kanshou scattered across the battlefield—embedded in the ground, orbiting combatants, spinning through the rain of steel—suddenly had nothing to be attracted to. They hung in the air, momentarily directionless.

Then Leon traced three fresh Bakuyas and launched them towards Brad's position.

Every. Single. Kanshou. Found a new target.

The Hrunting combinations struck first—homing blades finding their marks with unerring accuracy, Gáe Dearg piercing through Marie's protective barriers like they were made of smoke. The golden shields around Brad, Patroclus, and Bedivere burst into dissolving motes, leaving them exposed.

The rain of steel from above intensified around their position. The guardian spirits worked double-time, parrying sword after sword, desperately trying to protect their contractor.

They didn't notice the Bakuyas sailing past them.

They didn't notice the hundreds of black blades—scattered across the entire battlefield moments ago—now screaming towards those three white swords from every conceivable direction. Above. Below. Behind. From angles that shouldn't have been possible.

The married swords' attraction was absolute.

By the time Brad looked up, it was already over.

Everything converged on a single point. Hundreds of black and white blades, pulled together by an attraction forged in ancient legend, forming a sphere of absolute destruction with the trio at its centre.

Three bodies vanished in flashes of light—teleported away a fraction of a second before the killing blow landed.

"Brad, Patroclus, and Bedivere have retired from the battle!"

The announcement echoed across Folkvangr. Leon allowed himself a grim smile.

*'Glass cannon down.'*

Leon spotted Ria rushing towards him, fairy wings blazing.

"Ria, follow me," he said through the comms, already turning midflight. He traced Gáe Buidhe, nocked it on his bow, and aimed at the golden dome protecting the remaining enemies below.

Release.

The cursed spear streaked downward like a golden meteor, and Leon rushed after it.

"Durga—create space!"

He barrelled past Setanta on the way down—and almost as an afterthought, delivered a massive haymaker to the guardian spirit's jaw. The impact sent Setanta spinning away, his accumulated wounds finally catching up to him.

*'Sorry about that,'* Leon thought, feeling a twinge of guilt. The spirit had been a worthy opponent—reminded him of Lancer in all the best ways, actually. The dark thoughts of beating Cu Chulainn's face that had surfaced earlier were gone now, replaced by something closer to respect.

*'I'll treat him to something tasty after this.'*

Durga released one of her tulwars—the weapon vanishing as she gripped her gada with two hands. She swung with devastating force, catching Arthur square in the side.

The guardian spirit went flying towards one of the distant plateaus at Folkvangr's edge, tumbling end over end.

Leon handled Lancelot personally.

He traced Caladbolg II and fired it point-blank into the purple-armoured knight's chest. The spiral sword's rotational force sent Lancelot hurtling far outside the floating island's boundaries, his form shrinking rapidly against the open sky.

*'Unfortunately, no ring-out rules,'* Leon noted. Lancelot would be back. But not immediately—and that was enough.

"Ria—assist Art after this. Durga—support Angelica and Olivia."

"Yes, Master!" they chorused.

But first, the legendary pair.

Ria matched Leon's speed as they descended, both gliding backwards with weapons raised, facing Karna and Arjuna as they followed the trajectory of Gáe Buidhe towards the battlefield below.

The golden spear shattered Marie's protective dome on impact, the barrier dissolving into motes of light.

An opening.

Ria grinned as she primed her lance, energy crackling along its length. The weapon was enormous—a double-ended polearm with twisted, braided shafts extending from a central grip, crystalline blades gleaming at both ends. Leon had forged the handle longer than the original design to suit her fighting style,

making it nearly twice her height. In her hands, it became a whirlwind of death that could strike from any angle.

Leon traced fresh copies of Gáe Buidhe and Gáe Dearg.

They met the legendary pair in a clash that shook the air.

Ria caught Arjuna off-guard, spinning her double lance in a blurring arc and getting inside his reach before he could loose an arrow. Their weapons locked—but only for an instant. She pivoted and slammed the rear blade's shaft into his nose with a sharp crack.

The previously stoic guardian spirit actually *flinched*, his expression shifting to a frown of genuine irritation.

Karna struck at her exposed back, but Ria was already moving—reversing her grip to parry his spear with the opposite end of her lance, then using the momentum to redirect herself towards Art's position. She blew a wink and a kiss at Leon as she passed.

Leon just shook his head.

*'Cheeky brat.'*

He lunged at Arjuna with Gáe Buidhe. The strike wasn't powerful enough to shatter the golden barrier entirely—that required a decisive blow—but it glanced against the protective shield and disrupted its integrity. Enough to create an opening.

Leon's follow-up nick caught Arjuna's forearm, drawing blood that wouldn't stop flowing.

Another cursed wound. Another permanent injury.

Karna's counterattack came immediately, but Leon parried and used the momentum to shoot downward, descending towards the melee below.

Leon landed at the centre of the melee, earth cracking beneath his feet.

The battlefield had shifted in their favour. Ria had already joined Art, the two cosmic spirits harassing Jilk, Roland, Oberon, and Titania—the Marie look-alike who moved with unsettling grace. Durga fought alongside Angelica and Olivia, the three of them pushing back the remaining opposition with overwhelming force.

Leon ignored all of it.

His eyes locked onto the two legendary spirits still floating above—Karna blazing like a sun, Arjuna cold and bleeding from a wound that wouldn't close.

Setanta crashed down nearby, struggling to rise despite his accumulated injuries. The guardian spirit's grin was still plastered across his bloodied face, stubborn and defiant to the last.

Leon didn't look at him. He simply raised one hand.

A dozen spears traced into existence above Setanta, hovering like the blades of a guillotine. The blue-haired spirit looked up at them, and his grin only widened.

"Not bad, Bartfort," he managed, coughing blood. "Not bad at all."

Leon let the spears fall.

Setanta vanished in a flash of light, teleported to safety before the weapons could prove fatal. The spears embedded themselves in the earth where he'd lain, a cluster of cursed steel marking his final position.

"Setanta has retired from the battle!"

*'Battle maniac to the end,'* Leon thought. Despite everything, he felt a twinge of respect. *'I'll treat him to something after this. He's earned it.'*

"Karna! Arjuna!" Julius's voice cut across the battlefield, cracking with desperation. "Why are you holding back?!"

The two legendary guardian spirits exchanged a glance.

Something passed between them—ancient warriors recognising the same thing. They'd been fighting at reduced capacity, treating this as a training exercise rather than true combat. Arjuna was technically on loan to Jilk, but his primary loyalty remained with the royal family.

And their prince had just given them permission.

They shrugged in unison.

The air changed.

Folkvangr was suddenly engulfed in an oppressive wave of mana—pressure so intense that several students in the distant stands collapsed to their knees. The sky itself seemed to darken as the legendary pair stopped holding back.

Karna raised his spear.

The weapon transformed—elongating, expanding, becoming something that shouldn't exist in mortal hands. A pillar of divine armament that blazed with solar fire.

Leon's blood ran cold. He'd seen this before. In his cosmic dungeon, against the second-floor boss.

'Oh no—'

A concentrated beam of pure destruction erupted from the spear's tip. For a split second, it was merely light—and then it became a wall of annihilation that swept across the battlefield, vaporising everything in its path.

While Karna's devastation swept the battlefield, Arjuna moved.

He simply *vanished*—reappearing behind Illya in the span of a heartbeat. The small guardian spirit had been providing gravitic support from above, raining blasts down on the enemy formation. She never saw him coming.

Dense balls of dark energy materialised around her—dozens of compressed mana orbs that hummed with killing intent. Illya tried to raise her defences,

tried to escape, but Arjuna's expression remained utterly cold as he closed his fist.

The orbs compressed into a single point.

A flash of teleportation light. Illya was gone.

Meanwhile, Karna's beam of solar destruction carved across the battlefield—and Sella and Leysritt were directly in its path.

The twin maids moved to shield each other, their coordination perfect even in desperation. Leysritt raised her halberd to intercept while Sella attempted to pull them both clear.

It wasn't enough.

The wall of annihilation swallowed them whole. Two more flashes of teleportation light—bodies whisked to safety a fraction of a second before true death.

"THE TRIO OF LUNAR SISTERS HAS RETIRED FROM THE BATTLE!"

The announcer's voice boomed across Folkvangr, and for the first time since the battle began, the audience in the distant stands erupted into thunderous applause.

Three of Olivia's guardian spirits. Gone in seconds.

The legendary pair had finally stopped holding back.

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**To be continued...**

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