

The grin on Jinsei's face widened as Cynthia praised his opening assault. He appreciated that she wasn't treating him like some rookie.

Then she attacked.

Jinsei's eyes widened as crimson flames erupted from Cynthia's arm. The shape they took caught him completely off guard.

The elongated dragon of flame raced toward him faster than he could properly evade. Instinct screamed at him to move, but there simply wasn't enough time.

"Tch!"

Jinsei threw both arms up in front of himself.

The Radiant Dragon Fang slammed into him head-on.

Fire exploded around his body.

The impact felt like being struck by a charging beast. Heat engulfed him as the attack carried him backward across the battlefield, boots carving trenches through the stone before he finally tumbled and rolled to a stop.

Pain shot through his arms.

Smoke curled from his clothes.

Jinsei remained crouched for a moment, breathing heavily.

*THUMP.*

His heart pounded harder.

The lingering image of that flaming dragon burned itself into his mind.

*THUMP.*

The pain.

The danger.

The *excitement*.

It all fed into the same thing.

*THUMP.*

Adrenaline.

A laugh escaped him

“Now THAT’S what I’m talking about!”

Magic surged throughout his body. His pulse accelerated. His muscles tightened.

The familiar rush flooded his veins once more, only this time it was stronger. The air around him seemed sharper, movements clearer, his body lighter.

Faster.

Stronger.

Even the magic radiating from him intensified as excess energy poured from his body in flickering crimson currents.

Without another word, Jinsei launched forward.

The stone beneath his feet shattered.

A sonic crack echoed through the arena as he accelerated across the battlefield.

Fast. Much faster than before.

The first hidden pitfall Cynthia had laid activated beneath him—

Too late. He was already past it.

The earth burst upward behind him.

A second followed, then a third, again too slow.

Each trap detonated a heartbeat after Jinsei had already raced beyond it, leaving eruptions of stone in his wake as the Sabertooth mage closed the distance with terrifying speed.

But Cynthia had prepared more than a few.

Just as victory seemed within reach, the ground beneath Jinsei suddenly vanished.

“!”

The floor collapsed. His momentum carried him directly into the trap. A split second later the Earth Dragon’s Pitfall erupted. Stone exploded upward beneath him, and the blast launched Jinsei high into the air!

For an instant his body spun skyward amidst shattered rock and dust.

Then his instincts kicked in.

His foot planted against the peak of the rising stone pillar, and he pushed. The pillar cracked beneath the force.

*BOOM.*

Jinsei transformed his upward momentum into a devastating dive, descending toward Cynthia like a falling meteor. His leg rose overhead, then came crashing down!

The axe kick carried every ounce of momentum generated by his launch, amplified by his heightened state. His heel sought to smash directly into Cynthia.

And even if she blocked, the impact itself would crater the battlefield beneath her.

The instant the axe kick was thrown, Jinsei pressed the attack. The excess magic generated by his heightened adrenaline erupted outward from both arms.

Crimson energy condensed, compressed, then solidified.

Two enormous spiked fists formed around his hands, each larger than his own torso and covered in jagged protrusions of magical force.

Jinsei roared, and the giant fists came crashing down!

Over and over, again and again. Each blow carried tremendous strength as the magical constructs hammered relentlessly toward Cynthia's position, attempting to overwhelm her defenses and drive her deeper and deeper into the shattered earth beneath her!

The arena floor cracked. Stone splintered. Dust erupted in every direction.

And through it all, Jinsei could feel his heartbeat continuing to rise.