

Chapter 394: Battle, Shockwave

This time, from the very beginning, Kalpas sensed that something was different.

He had been blown away—right in their very first clash.

Zzzzt!

Lightning flared. Electric arcs crawled across the ground. Raiden Mei gripped her sword with both hands, currents coiling around her oni armor in a blinding torrent of light.

Kalpas was hurled back hundreds of meters before he twisted in midair, landing and gouging a long scar into the ground. He lifted his head, eyes narrowing behind his mask.

“Oh? So you’re no longer suppressing yourself, Herrscher?”

“No need. This battle will prove the results of my training. I’ll fight with everything I have. Please grant me your guidance, Mr. Kalpas.”

“...Interesting. Hahahahahaha!”

Kalpas let out a low growl that turned into wild, unrestrained laughter as the sea of fire surrounding him surged higher.

Then he burst through the flames, fist like iron and steel, carrying enough force to pulverize a mountain.

BOOM!!!

The ground erupted.

Raiden Mei retreated three steps, then swung her blade in a fierce counterattack.

Fist wind and sword aura. Fire and lightning. Two different powers clashed without yielding even an inch, shredding the earth beneath their feet and steadily carving the ground lower with every exchange.

Faster... stronger... Use electricity to drive a Herrscher's body. Use electromagnetism to amplify each strike. My limits... are nowhere near this!

With each accelerating exchange, Mei's gaze hardened like steel. Everything she had reflected on and understood during these recent days—she now projected all of it through the full force of a Herrscher.

And in one particular moment, as though she had broken past some invisible barrier, the corner of her lips rose.

Her figure vanished from Kalpas's sight.

“What—?”

Kalpas's punch hit nothing. Before he could react, a streak of thunder carved past his flank.

Swish!

One clean strike sent him flying skyward.

The next instant, Mei's figure disappeared entirely from space. Only Kalpas's rising body could be seen—assaulted from every direction by

rapid impacts. One blade mark after another appeared on that otherwise indestructible body.

Kalpas tried to counter, but the paralysis of the lightning and the suppressive force of the electromagnetic field slowed every one of his reactions—by only a fraction of a second.

But in a fight of this level, being a fraction slow meant forfeiting resistance entirely.

“Just a moment, Kalpas... Mr. Kalpas, this entire sequence is a technique I copied from you.”

After her storm of attacks, Mei stopped beside him in midair, her hand poised in a draw stance as she spoke calmly.

Kalpas ignored her comment. He seized that single instant of opening and unleashed a punch wrapped in violent flame.

BOOM!

A blast wave shattered the air itself.

Unfortunately, it tore through nothing but residual arcs of lightning. There was no sense of striking a real target.

“An illusion?”

Kalpas narrowed his eyes, then snapped his head upward.

As expected—high above him, Raiden Mei hovered in the sky, still posed in a draw stance. Even the massive arms of her Herrscher armor mirrored her, gathering power for the final stroke.

“What comes next is the finishing strike—a technique born of my own understanding. Please face it with utmost caution, Mr. Kalpas— One Blade: Thoughtless.”

Mei lowered her gaze. Lightning bloomed wildly around her like a radiant white flower.

Then, both the smaller and the colossal blade unsheathed simultaneously, their brilliance nearly blinding Kalpas.

Swish!

RUMBLE!

The Thoughtless strike carried Raiden Mei’s complete grasp of the four essences—heart, form, meaning, and soul—of Taixuan Sword Art. Although she had never broken through to the final stage, Eminence, just those first four, combined with her Herrscher-tier energy and the profundity of her authority, made this blow a pinnacle of physical attack.

Thus, Kalpas now lay deep within a freshly carved abyss, a long, narrow blade mark running across his torso—nearly cleaving him in half. Blood seeped endlessly into the shattered soil around him.

High above, Raiden Mei hovered in the air, beginning to regulate her breathing.

“Haa... haa...”

From the first strike until now, only a few minutes had passed. Yet the amount of Honkai energy she had unleashed easily surpassed her total output in any previous battle.

Even a Herrscher... is not a being that cannot grow tired.

“It’s over. My path was the right one. Rather than obsessing over sword techniques, it’s better to pursue pure speed and strength. With the Herrscher’s power behind me, I can reach realms I never imagined...”

Her murmuring stopped abruptly as Raiden Mei’s gaze sharpened.

From the deep ravine carved across the land, flames surged upward—spreading rapidly through the entire fractured valley.

Out of the rising inferno, wrapped in writhing red matter like a humanoid demon, a figure shot toward Mei in an instant.

BOOM!!!

A brutally violent impact.

Caught completely off guard, Mei only managed a hurried block before she was blasted backward. The skin at the base of her thumbs split from the force—no, not only that. She could clearly *feel* the fractures in her fingers and wrists.

“—Ngh!”

Mei let out a muffled groan—surprised, but not shocked.

In fact, *this* was exactly what she expected of one of the Thirteen Flame-Chasers.

Kalpas possessed an undying, feral will to fight, and the more wounded he became, the more terrifyingly he exploded in strength. In theory, he could use that “the weaker I am, the stronger I become” trait to grind down a Herrscher with infinite energy—whether by physically destroying them, or by mentally crushing them. Either path was possible.

Everyone acknowledged: Kalpas *could* kill a Herrscher.

As Mei considered this, Kalpas—no longer even sounding human—charged her like a maddened beast.

“Hhhh—!”

Mei drew in a sharp breath. Wrapped in arcs of electricity, she zigzagged rapidly through the air, narrowly evading Kalpas’s relentless assault.

For now, she still held a clear speed advantage. That bought her precious moments to let her hands recover and revise her strategy.

After a prolonged chase through the sky, Mei finally used her superior speed to widen the gap. She glanced at the sword in her left hand, Setsuna, then at the distant Kalpas rampaging like a monster.

Should I continue? Yes... Yes, I must. To walk away now would betray all the hard training I’ve done.

Resolve flashed in her eyes. Mei lifted her head toward the endless crimson sky above.

“Mr. Sigurd. May I have... my sword?”

“.....”

The sky gave no verbal reply.

But a black meteor suddenly plummeted straight toward Mei.

Her eyes sharpened. She raised a hand and caught the descending streak of darkness.

The next moment, a long blade with a crimson hilt and an obsidian-black edge appeared in her grasp.

At her thought, lightning leapt from the black blade—then quickly darkened, becoming the same deep black as the sword itself.

So smooth... whether it's Honkai energy or electricity, it flows as if it were part of me...

This is the sword Mr. Sigurd prepared for me...

Mei's lips curved upward, a gentle warmth blooming in her chest.

Then she swept the black blade downward—splitting the earth with a fresh crack.

Left hand: Setsuna.

Right hand: the black blade.

White frost on one side, black lightning on the other.

She let out a soft laugh—then launched herself into the sky like a streak of light.

Kalpas charged at that very moment.

BOOM!!!

Another direct collision—both were sent flying back, and the earth below erupted outward in concentric shockwaves like repeated meteor impacts.

After that, the two figures plunged into a clash of even higher intensity—god and demon in wild combat, the heavens and earth losing all color under their blows.

. . .

Outside—Rest Chamber.

Sigurd lifted the tea Fu Hua had just prepared, gently blowing across the steam. His expression was neutral, but anyone who knew him could tell—he was in a very good mood.

Fu Hua walked along the long table, pouring tea into the cups of Kiana, Bronya, Elysia, Senti, and the Book of Fuxi. After filling her own, she finally sat down and looked toward the battle feed playing at the center of the table.

A warm smile softened her face.

“Without realizing it... Mei has grown so much. Do you think she can win, Sigurd?”

“Doesn’t matter. Winning or losing isn’t the point. What matters is that she’s finally acting like a proper strategic asset. At least the trip here wasn’t wasted.”

“You’re right. Beating Kalpas doesn’t prove anything by itself—but the fact that she’s truly stronger now... that’s what counts.”

Fu Hua smiled with genuine relief.

Senti shot Fu Hua a sideways glance, grumbling under her breath:

“Seriously? I’m way stronger than she is, but I’ve *never* heard you praise me like that.”

Fu Hua replied gently:

“When someone who can only walk a hundred miles pushes themselves to walk a thousand, that effort deserves praise. But when someone capable of a thousand miles walks only a hundred, it is simply expected.”

“Senti, it’s not that I don’t want to praise you. It’s that your foundation is strong—you can accomplish far more. I’ll save that praise for when you truly reach those heights.”

“ㄟ(ˊ ˋ ^ ˊ ˋ) ㄟ Hmph! You’re just biased. I’m used to it!”

“Uh... sorry. Fine, fine—you’re really amazing too, Senti.”

“Liar! What a half-hearted compliment!”

“.....”

Accused so directly, Fu Hua rubbed her nose, then silently lowered her head and sipped her tea—completely unsure how to respond.

At the head of the table, Sigurd and the Book of Fuxi (sitting on its little blanket on the table) both turned their gaze toward Senti.

Their expressions were identical: cold, flat, merciless.

Senti's indignant expression froze.

She lowered the finger she'd been pointing at Fu Hua... and quietly sipped her tea.

Not another word.

Sigurd placed a small plate of pastries in front of the Book of Fuxi. With a wave of his hand, the battle feed vanished from the air above the table.

"Praise without achievement behind it is just empty flattery," Sigurd said calmly.

"She withholds it because she genuinely wants you to grow. Sure, you *can* force her—she'll soften, and she'll indulge you. But if you actually had any sense, you'd earn that praise through your own effort. Think about that, you immature little brat."

"Who are you calling an immature brat!? I—I obviously understand what that Old Timer is thinking! I don't need you lecturing me!"

"I certainly hope so," Sigurd replied mildly.

“Fu Hua’s had a hard road. As her Herrscher personality, you know that better than anyone. Which means you should be helping her—lightening her burdens—instead of running around causing trouble all day long.”

“—And yes, I’m saying the same thing to you as well, Kiana.”

Kiana, who had been stuffing pastries into her mouth, froze.

Then she choked.

“Mmff—! *Cough cough cough!*”

She grabbed her teacup and downed it in one gulp, barely managing to swallow the stuck pastry. Then she shot Sigurd a wounded glare.

“Hey—scold her if you want! Why drag *me* into this!?”

“Do you truly lack that much self-awareness?”

Sigurd frowned.

Kiana opened her mouth—then remembered her own track record.

She remembered all the times Sigurd sighed because of her.

Her shoulders slumped. She nodded miserably.

“...Yeah, I do.”

“And do you have an objection?”

“...No.”

Kiana shrank into herself, fully deflated.

Her excitement over Mei's performance—so bright a moment ago—vanished instantly like a splash of cold water.

The atmosphere grew awkward for a few seconds.

Only when Elysia chimed in with a cheerful smile, effortlessly shifting the topic and teasing everyone, did the tension finally melt away.

Soon enough, the afternoon tea returned to its usual lively, pleasant mood.