

The battlefield was torn and battered. The grey stone and the cinder had been hit by two powerful spells in a row, and now craters buttered the surface of the Floor. In one of those craters, Finn Deimne raised from the ground and looked around.

Most of his Familia was down. Maybe hurt, maybe only stunned by the attack the monster had unleashed. Most were groaning, barely able to move, and clearly in pain. The second squad was already starting to pour out potions to heal the wounds of the one that had taken the hit in their place.

There was a singular exception: Rexen-san was kneeled in the same place he was before, his right arm still grasping his magic staff, while both his head and his left arm were dangling down. He was not moving nor emitting a sound, but he was breathing. The arm was broken, as the sound coming from it right before the impact could attest. Still, his last ditch effort had saved everyone.

Finn had not expected the monster to be so powerful. If not for Rexen and Riveria's magic, everyone would have died.

And they still could. The monster started to absorb magical energy from the air. It was going to come at them with another spell. The members of the Familia that could had sat, but now they were looking at the abomination in front of them with desperation in their eyes.

That will not do.

I grabbed his spear and walked in front of his Familia, staring at the monster that had almost killed them all.

"We will defeat that monster." He said.

The eyes of the Familia fell on him.

"What is 'courage' to you? What do you see right now? Fear? Despair? Destruction? I just see an enemy, one we need to defeat, and our victory.

We don't need a path to retreat. I'll carve one with my spear. I promise you all victory in the name of Fianna. Come with me, or... is copying Bell Canel too much for you?"

That seemed to give a big second wind to a number of members of the first squad. The Hyrute Twins, Ais and Bete suddenly looked far more alive then before.

"Did he cover his face in front of a stronger enemy? What about you, Bete?"

"You don't even have to ask." Growled the Werewolf, standing up.

"He fought with all he had. You did the same, Tione?"

"Not yet. I haven't yet, Captain!" Replied the Amazon, rising.

"He went on an adventure, and risked his life. Right, Tiona?"

"Right, we can't be losing either!" Tiona said, smiling again.

"Bell Canel... he surpassed his limit, Ais."

Ais smiled a little, then grabbed her sword and stood. "Yeah..."

Finn smiled. "Raul, your group will stay behind and support us. Lefiya, come with us."

"Got it!" "Yes!"

"And what about you two?" Asked Finn, sending a glance toward Riveria and Gareth, still down. "Is this the end of you? Continue to rest then. I'll go forward."

The two executives twitched, then rose up.

"Damn that conceited Pallum. Hey, loathsome elf! Is now the time to be sleeping?"

"Shut it you barbaric dwarf!" Replied Riveria, standing. Meanwhile Gareth stomped the ground.

"Where is my ax?" Demanded Gareth, before one member of the second squad launched it at him.

"I'm going to prepare my strongest spell. You guys cover me!"

"Yes!" Came the cry of the other elves of the Familia.

"From now, our attack will pierce the enemy!" Shouted Finn, pointing his spear at the monster. "Give your all!"

Then, as he just remembered something, he paused, and looked behind him. Rexen-san, despite all the ruckus, had not moved at all.

"Thank you, Rexen-san. You can rest now. Raul will take care of you."

The expression of the Familia, until now hard as the rock, mollified. Rexen had gone above anything everyone could ask for him. Without him, his barriers, and his enchantments, they could not have survived until now.

Then everyone froze when they heard a chuckle.

"I was starting to think you were forgetting about me." The voice of Rexen-san came, and everyone turned to see him raise his staff once again. "Don't assume I'm done for."

Then his staff slammed on the rock, and a wave of overwhelming healing magic crashed on the exhausted Familia. The pain and the fatigue evaporated as their wounds healed, and fear and apprehension magically disappeared from their mind. Everyone grabbed their weapons a little harder, their eyes returning to the monster that was waiting for them. The happy smile on her face seemed to have lessened somewhat.

Finn smiled as the man stood. "You have to forgive me, Rexen-san. I tend to forget that you're full of surprises. Are you able to fight?"

"I surely can cast a spell." He replied, touching his broken arm with his staff, a white light suffusing it. "But I'll need a minute to return in full shape. Charging at that monster with a broken arm will only get me killed."

"Good. Then..."

In that moment, something that nobody expected happened. The ground under the monster cracked, as hundreds of vines emerged from the ground contorting chaotically, sweeping the floor like in search of something. And then, the tentacles snapped.

Instinctively, everyone dodged. Rexen-san didn't, probably because there were members of the Familia slower than him behind. Instead, he raised his staff and summoned a barrier of some kind.

Several stones, not larger than a human fist, slammed against the barrier and were stopped, sparing the lower-leveled members of the Familia from a gruesome death.

One, the size of a head, hit the barrier and broke it, before smashing Rexen-san in the middle of the chest, destroying itself in the impact. There was a sickening crunch as the armor of bones failed to completely absorb the force of the impact and cracked. And by the way the bone plates were bent inward, they were not the only thing to have cracked.

Rexen-san fell, his armor creating a terrible sound as it slammed against the cold rock of the Floor. He seemed to be alive. He was breathing, at least.

But it took only a second for blood to start pouring from under the mask.

"You are... annoying." Said the abomination.

Instantly, the mood of the Familia shifted from grimly determined to coldly furious.

"Raul, help him!" Shouted Finn, his eyes already starting to become bloodshot despite not having activated his Magic yet. "Everyone, charge!"

Loki Familia dashed forward with a blood-curdling scream. Before, the monster was only an enemy to be killed to return to Orario alive.

Now, it was revenge.

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"Rexen-san!" Shouted Raul, kneeling beside the fallen adventurer. "Hang on. We'll heal you. Potions!"

He was immediately granted one and, after removing Rexen-san helmet, he poured it inside his mouth. He seemed conscious enough to drink without aid, and he even opened his eyes a little, but it was clear that he was not going to be able to remain awake for long. That strike had completely demolished both his armor and ribcage. It was a miracle that he was still alive.

"More potions!"

"This is the last one!" Was the reply.

"We need to remove his armor, or he won't be able to heal or breathe!" Was the suggestion another one gave.

Raul nodded and he removed the chest plate. Pretty easy to do, considering that it was already broken. Then he froze. The sight of the caved chest was enough to make him want to puke, but he suppressed the feeling and, after having snatched the last potion, he poured the liquid on Rexen-san chest.

The ribs seemed to return to place, but not completely. No, absolutely not enough to even make any difference.

"Are you sure we don't have any other potions? He'll not survive if we don't stabilize him!"

"We cannot use more potions on him, or there will be nothing left for later! See if he has some on his body!"

Raul quickly checked, but as expected, he didn't find any. If he had, they were in whatever place he sent them with magic.

"Rexen-san, if you have potions with you, you have to bring them out now!" Called Raul.

The man's eyes were unfocused and barely open, but a spark of recognition flashed in them. His right hand, the one not broken, twitched, and suddenly, a dozen or so potions popped out of thin air. Some were Mind Potions, some were 'stamina potions', whatever they were supposed to be, but several had the telltale red color Rexen-san potions had. Immediately, Raul grabbed one and made Rexen-san drink.

As the last drop of potion got out of the bottle, Raul immediately picked up another. But when he tried to make Rexen-san drink, the man stopped him by grabbing the bottle.

"Rexen-san!" Cried Raul. "I'm happy that you feel better, but you have to drink. You're not completely healed yet."

"I have... to help them..." Gaspd Rexen-san.

"Later. Now you have to heal-"

"If I... pass out... my magic will fade..."

Raul's eyes widened in sudden realization. Champion's Might had been an exceptionally powerful magic. It had never occurred to anyone that there was a price for using it. Evidently, the price to pay was that in exchange for power, it lasted shortly, and Rexen-san had to continually fuel it with his Mind. Since he seemed to possess near infinite Mind, it was not normally a problem, but if he passed out for any reason, his magic would quickly dissipate.

And the people fighting the monster right now would die.

"That's another reason you have to drink! C'mon Rexen-san!"

But it was too late. It was clear that Rexen-san had used most of his energies just to talk to him. Filling him of potions will save his life, but there was no way he was going to remain conscious for long.

Rexen-san closed his eyes and Raul feared the worse.

"Hear my call, friend on the other side."

Raul blinked. A Chant? Now?

"My strength is fading, my body is broken, but my will is strong.

Come to my side, across the vastness of the void, to fulfill my wish.

I surrender to you my power, so you can defeat my enemy. Come."

And with a last breath, Rexen-san called a name.

"Dur. Neh. Viir."

Durnheviir? What name was that? Raul had never heard of someone called in that way.

Then the Dungeon shuddered.

“What’s happening? Something enraged the Dungeon?” Asked someone.

No, that was not the case. Because, right in front of him, there was a crack.

In the air.

Another shudder, and the crack widened. Purple light started to flow from the crack as it started to rapidly spread, becoming several meters tall, with minor cracks expanding to the side.

“What has Rexen-san called?” Muttered Raul, terrified. He had never seen such a thing, not even during the fight with Evilus, seven years before, when a Level 7 mage had returned from the dead.

The answer came a second later, when a shadow obscured the purple light coming from the crack. Something massive was coming.

And when it came, it came in the form of a giant dragon.

The monster smashed the crack open with an head-butt, literally opening a hole into reality. The creature, the size of a Valgang Dragon, stepped outside the hole of purple light. As it did, Raul started to notice things.

The dragon, while similar to a Valgang, was really different once you looked at it. For starters, it was sickly greenish grey instead of the reddish orange of the Valgang. On top of that, it was quadrupedal instead of bipedal, its wings functioning as front legs. Its maw was thinner and longer, and had two sets of curled horns instead of the two burly, rear-facing spines that the Valgang sported.

Of course, those were minor differences. The major difference was that the dragon looked dead. Its wings were full of holes, its rib cage was exposed and there was nothing under the sternum, leaving a gaping hole where the stomach should be. A clear liquid dripped from the dragon, as two milky eyes looked around, scanning the area.

Then the creature's gaze dropped and Raul found himself staring inside those white wells.

The eyes of the dragon were different from anything he had ever seen. Monster’s eyes were filled with bloodlust, rage and hate. There was nothing inside them aside from maliciousness and negativity.

The eyes of the dragons in front of him, despite being clouded, were incredibly more expressive. There was curiosity, doubt... and intelligence. That dragon was smart, he could tell just by looking at it. Even if they were clearly different, they held the same consciousness of the monster they were fighting. That dragon could think, even if he didn’t know to what degree.

Then the eyes of the creature fell on Rexen-san, and Raul felt his entire body shiver. If the dragon was a creature loyal to Rexen-san –he had called him friend, after all- there was no way that it was going to take the current state of his summoner well. He just hoped that the dragon was smart enough to realize who the real enemy was.

Apparently, he did, because its eyes quickly darted between Rexen-san, Raul, and the healing potion still in his hand. Then it raised its head, looking at the monster the rest of the Familia was fighting.

The maw of the dragon, filled with sharp teeth, opened slightly, releasing a deep, cavernous growl. To make everything a little worse, a thick strand of the same clear liquid dripped from its jaw, and Raul was assaulted by the smell of stale air, dust and *death* that one should associate with ancient tombs, not creatures able to move.

And the stench became ten times worse when the dragon opened its maw completely –the skin in the rear of the mouth was as tattered and ruined as the skin of the wing and even more infested with that clear liquid, making it look even worse– and released a powerful, heart-shattering roar. That attracted the attention of... pretty much anything on the entire Floor. If the monster and the executives could have ignored the new arrival, now it was impossible.

Then the dragon... spoke? It was difficult to be sure, because it *sounded* like a growl, but every sound the dragon made sounded like a growl. If it was speaking, the language was unintelligible for Raul. Not happy to drop the possibility of an intelligent monster on him, the dragon decided to *shout*. Again, the words were unintelligible, but they sounded something like *dilqotzam*, and it was clear that they were special because the air shook when it pronounced them.

Black fog started to cover the ground, barely tall enough to cover the knee of a human and too thin to cause problems of visibility... but the Dungeon went completely, absolutely crazy.

The Dungeon *roared*, using the voice of the dragons of the Dragon Vase as the entire Floor shook like hit by an earthquake. "The Dungeon is angry!" Shouted someone, and Raul noticed the undead dragon –because what could that thing be?– looked around, like thinking about something. It sent a glance toward the battle that the Familia was fighting, then to the access to the Fifty-eighth Floor. Finally, with an unsatisfied growl, it turned toward the exit and with a flap of its wing, it was flying toward it as several Valgang blasted the stairs open with their breaths, creating an opening big enough for them to pass... them and a flock of wyverns.

"We have to keep the wyverns away! That dragon will not stop all of them!" Shouted Raul, as the first wyverns started to appear. But nobody heard him, because several screams covered his orders.

Focused as he was on the dragon, he had failed to notice what the black fog was doing.

Skeletons with black bones and orbit filled with cold azure light had emerged from the mist, literally clawing out from the ground like they were always there, buried from ages. Most were armed with melee or ranged weapons, made of a dark steel with markings that remembered dwarven crafting. Others didn't have weapons and lacked legs too, instead floating on their misty lower half, their hands releasing frozen vapors in the air. Others, the most formidable-looking, had thick plates of heavy metal and wielded two-handed weapons made of dark metal and... bones?

Most of the members of the second squad had their weapons ready and pointed at the undead. The skeletons, however, didn't even notice them. Instead, as wyverns started to fly inside the Floor, the ones armed with bow and the ones without legs raised their weapons and hands, and with a sound that remembered a creaking door, they shot.

With surprising precision, arrows and shards of ice flew toward the wyverns. The monsters were not keen on getting hit, but the sheer mass of fire and the unnatural precision of the undead meant that at least some projectiles hit the mark... the wings. The wyverns dropped from the sky, and the skeletons armed with melee weapons were on them in a second.

Raul was the first to stop gawking at the show and take control of the situation. "We need to support the skeletons!" He shouted. At the looks that the rest of the Familia sent him, he scoffed. "I know it sounds crazy, but for now they're not trying to kill us, and the wyverns are! Take out the magic swords,

hit the wyverns if they come too close, and if you can, help the big dragon! I don't think he can take all the Valgang Dragons by itself."

Actually, it seemed like he could, especially since he was mauling one right now. But still, better not risk it.

"Move!" He shouted as the squad still hesitated. Meanwhile, he had to pour all the remaining potions inside Rexen-san's mouth before joining the fight. He would prefer to not know what the undead dragon and his army of skeleton monsters were going to do if he died while under their care.

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The assault at the monster restarted the moment it was clear that the giant, undead dragon that had appeared out of nowhere was not trying to interfere. Even the creature that once was a Spirit had stopped, waiting to see if the dragon would have joined her or them.

Once it had started killing the dragons of the Dungeon, the fight had started again.

Ais jumped forward the monster. It was clear to anyone that, if the Spirit used her magic, they all were going to die. It was for that reason that Finn had used his spear to hit her the moment she tried to use another spell. Of course, the power of the light beam he could summon from the weapon was not enough to actually pierce her defenses, so he had to resort to launching it. It had worked, at least, and Riveria had managed to burn the leaves that she used to cover herself. She had no protection now.

Her second attempt was blocked by Lefiya and the Hyrule Twins. The strength of the spell was so great that if not for Rexen-san magic, they would not have survived. But they had gained enough time.

Ais, Bete and Finn jumped toward the Spirit, which now was clearly panicking. Contrary to the Violas, who had extremely durable bodies but were weak to magic, she seemed to fear physical confrontation. Maybe, like the Virgas, she had an extremely fragile body for a creature of that Level, and compensated with raw offensive power. If they managed to reach her...

A wall of vines emerged from the ground, forming a wall of green in their path. They slashed, but they barely managed to scratch it.

Ais looked at the wall. Was that it? Were they going to die because they lacked power?

"You're in the way!"

But then Gareth arrived, swinging his ax toward the wall as the rune on the weapon shone with magical power.

The impact shook the entire wall, and the ax barely held against the enormous power Gareth used. But it had worked out... somewhat. There was a hole in the wall, barely larger than a human torso. Another strike and it would fall.

Not willing to take his time to swing again, Gareth dropped his weapon and grabbed the edge of the wall, before violently tearing them apart with his bare hands. The wall was now large enough to let everyone pass.

Of course the monster didn't let that pass. Numerous vines shoot toward the dwarf, piercing him several times... but Gareth didn't care. Instead, he grabbed all the vines he could reach and yanked, stopping the monster from reaching them. "Go!"

More vines came, but Bete and Finn jumped forward, deflecting them as much as possible, letting her jump high. If she could hit her with her maximum output...

A shard of ice appeared out of the Spirit's mouth, aimed straight at her face. But before anything could happen –either Ais hitting the Spirit, or the ice piercing her skull- a ray of light deflected the attack.

Before she could take advantage of the opening, the monster smashed her with one of her arms, sending her high in the air.

And while she was there, she felt Rexen-san's magic vanish.

For a single second, she worried. Had something happened? Did he die? Could she defeat the monster in front of her without his magic?

Then she narrowed her eyes as she called all the power of Aria. There was no time for questions. The monster, once a Spirit, would kill everyone if she didn't defeat it right away. There was no time to reflect on what could have happened. She had to focus on what she could do now.

"Tempest!" She called, using her wind to change direction mid-air, pointing at the human torso on top of the monster. She had just one chance at this. Once chance win... and free the Spirit from that body.

Of course the monster desperately tried to counter, but as strong as she was, there was a limit on how fast she could chant, and at how fast the spell could travel. As Rexen-san showed, no matter how powerful you were, if the spell was not designed to move fast, there was nothing you could do.

That was not a problem for her.

Ais launched herself at the monster as tendrils of light tried to reach her. But the spell was not fast enough. She slipped through them, ready to strike, and hoping that it would be enough.

It was. She pierced the body of the monster, and the wind did the rest, destroying the magic stone inside and killing the Spirit. For a second, the face of the creature became peaceful... then it dissolved into dust.

The rest of the power of the spell destroyed a large amount of stone, fortunately avoiding her Familia. Ais landed on the destroyed ground, and normally, this would have been the time to celebrate the victory... but she couldn't.

First she had to kill that dragon.