Drake, the countdown's almost over. Bella urged me through a private message. *Wherever you are, it would be best to hurry up and get back.*

I read the message and nodded my head, deciding that my preparations were as good as they would get. Behind me floated an enormous orb of black energy, like a ball of demonic flames that pulsed with every breath. And in front of me sat a desolate wasteland, the sky a murky grey and the land a blackened mass.

My final preparation for this war required me to 'charge up' the Infernal Hellstar for a while. And where better to do so than in Pyrrhos, where there are natural flames as far as the eye can see? What was once a boiling ocean of magma had become a black island, while the sky was devoid of its usual flames within a large area.

I was sure that these would both return to normal soon after I left, but that didn't matter to me for the moment. I wanted to see just how much energy I had absorbed from Pyrrhos. These were natural flames, so their primary purpose with this skill was to help me recover, but I could also shape them into various constructs.

I focused on Fallcry, and my surroundings warped until I was standing on the outer wall of the city, watching the draconic armies ahead. For the moment, I was hiding the Infernal Hellstar by carefully deploying my Wraith Zone skill to encompass only the ball of energy.

From my left, I heard Bella calling out to me, and I looked over at her with a small smile. "Sorry it took so long. I had to make sure everything was ready."

Bella smiled brightly, clearly glad that I had made it back on time. Behind her, I saw Kelly walking over, her gaze drifting towards the general direction of the hellstar. "I'm not sure what you did, kid, but it's really heating up around here. I'm going to guess that's part of your plan, but I'll just ask anyways. How confident are you in your plans? Remember, there's a lot riding on this."

I nodded my head, well aware of the stakes here. "As long as they don't have a world boss as backup, we should be fine. And if they did try to bring one out, I'm sure our friends are watching somewhere. Just to be clear, though… are we allowed to attack their city as part of this war, or would we have to declare our own against them?"

Kelly perked a brow, grinning slightly. "A war's mutual, kid. The only reason the attackers are usually safe is because they set up their camp close enough that it's foolish to attack their city. So if they start losing, they can just surrender, and the defending party has little choice but to accept it. Otherwise, while they split their forces to go for the enemy base, they leave their own city wide open."

"Good to know," I responded calmly, looking at the dragons as the countdown ticked down. "Do you know if any of them have the World Walker skill?"

Kelly lout out a light laugh. “They shouldn’t. That skill’s not very easy for dragons to train in the first place. When the time comes, just tell me what you want me to do.”

“For now, just fight. Once they’ve been pushed back, we’ll enter phase two. Just make sure that they can’t get to the palace.” In the event that neither party was willing to surrender, a war would be declared automatically lost if a few key structures were destroyed, with the most critical of such structures being the royal palace.

As the final seconds passed, I could see the angry dragon from before already charging up, preparing his meteor skill. The moment the timer hit zero, it appeared above the city. I glanced up at it, and the flames surrounding the meteor were rapidly snuffed out. Meanwhile, Kelly lifted her hand, creating the same giant projected hand that had slaughtered a raid boss.

Kelly grabbed the meteor with this hand, and then took a pitcher’s stance, throwing it back to the dragons. The draconic army scattered, flapping their wings to avoid the meteor. Those unable to evade it were crushed beneath its giant weight, while Kelly and I lunged forward. Kelly made a beeline for the meteor-spewing dragon, seeming to have a grudge for the previous day’s events, so I went after Dryax, the blue dragon notorious for his perception.

Dryax sneered at my approach, blasting out with countless blades of wind. “You’re overestimating yourself!”

In response, I activated my Forest Titan skill, briefly tanking the hits as the ground cracked around me. Behind me, the invisible hellstar pulsed with every attack I took, immediately regenerating the damaged regions. Even when one of my arms was lopped off, the pain was only momentary before the arm was restored.

Dryax’s eyes widened, watching as I grew larger and larger, surrounded by countless rocks and twisted trees. After a certain point, the wind blades could no longer penetrate the natural armor that I had generated, so he switched tactics. His wings expanded, conjuring a massive spiral of wind that descended from above me.

I could feel my body resisting the tornado, but I knew that this wasn’t all he could do. He was forced to hold back, since a stronger tornado would sweep away their own army. However, I had no such considerations, as the only one fighting on the front lines aside from myself was Kelly.

I summoned my Ki General, which commanded its minions to indiscriminately attack the nearby dragons. At the same time, I stretched out my hand towards Dryax, conjuring a giant hand of energy much like the one Kelly summoned. This hand grabbed Dryax by the neck and dragged him to the ground.

As we were fighting, I could sense my turrets activating, shooting black bolts from their invisible positions at the approaching dragons. This was one of the main reasons that I targeted Dryax first, so that he could not as easily coordinate the troops to deal with my stealth tactics.

To even my own surprise, I managed to hold Dryax down to the ground with little difficulty, the dragon struggling and clawing to try to escape. At first, I thought he might have weaker physical stats because he focused in the wrong area. However, I soon realized that this was the side-effect of Barbarian's Fury, which caused me to grow stronger the more damage I received. Even though it healed almost right away, being subjected to Dryax's wind blade barrage earlier must have given me a considerable boost.

Seeing how much I was overpowering my opponent, I created two more projections, these of ki spears, and buried them in Dryax's neck. Then, I immediately switched my target to another opponent, Cyranir. Just like in Ella's war, he was sitting near the back, releasing a cloud of poison that was beginning to creep towards the city. Not wanting to tolerate such things, I decided that it was time to try out my other new skill.

Behind Cyranir, a familiar figure emerged with shoulder-length black hair, his body rapidly growing as it was wrapped in shadowy auras. Soon, it was a dark titan every bit as large as my own forest titan form. "That's not very nice of you," the shadow titan remarked in a gravelly tone, sweeping a hand out.

Black tendrils lashed out from the titan's body, wrapping around Cyranir's neck as he widened his eyes in surprise. "Erebus?! You can't be here! This war is not your jurisdiction!"

However, Erebus merely grinned maliciously. "I'm not here. If this were the real me, you'd already be cut into five pieces." As he said that, he produced a rapier to match the size of his giant, stabbing it towards the green dragon's body.

Cyranir cried out in indignation, channeling a green energy in his mouth. However, 'Erebus' reached out and grabbed Cyranir's jaw, forcing it shut. "Just die already."

This was naturally not the true Erebus, but the result of the evolution of False Identity, Many Faces. In addition to letting me adjust my visible appearance and what people see of my status, I could release something called 'Identity Minions', which took on the appearance and persona of people I knew.

While it might look like I had copied Erebus's skills, in truth I could only use the abilities that overlapped between us, so I replicated Erebus's various darkness abilities with Dark King. Currently, I could only maintain a single minion, and only for less than a minute at a time. Presumably, these limits would increase as the skill increased in level.

Still, allowing me to effectively increase the number of Grandmasters on the field, both with my Ki General and Many Faces skills, was causing a visible effect. Not far away, Kelly had engaged

in a melee battle with her opponent, using her speed and his size against him. He released bursts of fire to try to blast her away, but she laughed through the pain, her body healing almost immediately as she appeared beneath his large body, kicking upwards.

The dragon grunted, its body lifting off the ground. Turning away, I focused on the nearby army. It would only take a minute for Dryax and Cyranir to fly back from their camp, so I had a limited amount of time to wreak havoc.

Lifting my hands, I revealed the giant hellstar hovering behind myself. I was well aware that these dragons had learned the Black Flame Aura thanks to the last war, but I was very familiar with that skill, and knew that there was a limit to how much damage that aura could absorb. Thus, I shaped the Hellstar into a massive serpent to sweep through the army, incinerating the dragons near the back line.

Those near the front line were being pelted by my turrets and the army stationed along the walls, frantically attacking the barrier that Diane had created while falling from the sky one by one.

Notably, I saw that Diane was no longer on the wall, and faintly sensed her sprinting through the battlefield. Then, she abruptly disappeared, only to reappear on Drake's back in the distance. "You never learn, do you?" she asked coldly, her blade glowing red. With one swift slice, she severed Drake's neck, disappearing to teleport back to the wall.

I looked south, towards the dragon army's camp. They must not have expected me to be able to bring out grandmaster level power. Now that they knew I could, they would have to reevaluate their strategy. If they didn't want to surrender immediately, the smart thing to do would be to focus their attacks on me all at once.

The real test of this war would be whether I would be able to withstand their combined assault. If they could kill me once, it would give them time to surround Kelly while I respawned. If they couldn't, they'd be forced to surrender until they could gather more reinforcements.

As I was thinking that, I felt a strong power rising from the south, and saw three pillars of light rising into the sky. Kelly landed on my shoulder, chuckling. "Wow, they *really* want to take you out if they're using a joint skill like this."

I pursed my lips, not moving from my spot as the dragons gathered their power. It wouldn't be hard for me to dodge their attack, or even charge at them to prevent them from releasing it. However, if I did so, that would leave the city behind me vulnerable. Even if I killed all three of them again, as long as they launched the attack and it hit the city, it would surely do more than enough damage to settle the war.

As for relying on Kelly to block it on her own? If I thought she could take on the three grandmasters solo, I wouldn't have spent five days mindlessly slaughtering monsters to train.

Just like the three grandmasters joined forces to attack, Kelly and I would have to work together to prevent the attack from reaching the city.