

DIMENSIONAL CHAIN

"The Chain is a place one can only
survive."



SEAN FRANCIS

I

“Transport complete. Welcome to the Wasteland.”

The weird feeling that crawled throughout my whole body faded away. I no longer felt as if I floating in air and sound returned to me in a flash. Not that there was much to hear.

I had been teleported into the Wasteland. At least, that was what I was told I would be doing. The servants in the room I found myself in only about an hour ago were not really helpful with their explanation on the matter. They managed to be vaguer than my mentor, which was something I did not think anyone would have been able to do.

In front of me was the statue of a beautiful woman. She was depicted rising out of the statue’s base with wind and leaves floating around her. The base was elegantly carved with waves moving along each edge and the floor it stood on flared out as if from the fire of the sun. And it looked like she was in the center of a small town.

Various towers, forts and water wells were spread out from the statue. There were three of each kind of building and they were positioned so it looked like they were defending the statue from the three gated lanes. The gates had two towers at either end and they all pointed out.

I was standing on what looked like a platform that overlooked the ‘town.’ Below my feet was a swirling void that was slowly being shut by stone coverings. Four more such voids curved to my sides with two to each side.

I stepped away from the spot and suddenly realized that I had all of my equipment on. My light armor clinched and scratched as

my body moved and my artifices were on my hands and feet like they would have been in battle. They had given me back my gear. To test that my artifices still worked, I activated my right gauntlet and watched as a blade made of pure fire flared to life. I did the same with my left artifice and a blade of ice frosted into existence.

Good. They still worked. I do not quite understand this multi world idea and this apparent ‘Dimensional Chain’ that I am on. But as long as I can defend myself I can start wrapping my head around everything.

I stepped down the stairs and moved to look at the statue. About five steps away from it, though, I ran into something solid and was flung back by some invisible force. My back hit the golden dirt of the Wasteland and the dust cloud that rose into the air ran up my nose and mouth. I coughed out the dust and bent up to look back at the statue. Disappearing from around the stone figure was a dome of translucent blue hexagons. Now that I saw it was there, even when it disappeared, I could still see some of the light’s distortion. Looking around me, I could see that all of the other buildings of the ‘town’ had that same energy except for the gate and the gate’s towers.

From my left, I could hear four lightning strikes boom. My allies were now here.

The one to the farthest left of where I was had a strange weapon on his back. It was longer than the largest greatswords I have ever seen. It was also thin, and had a strange cylinder reminiscent of a telescope. A long hooded cloak stretched down his back and a glowing metal tunic was strapped to his chest. The light on it pulsed rhythmically which let me see that his armor had the same kind of dome around it as the statue.

Next to him, a woman wore armor that was very similar to ones I am familiar with. Plate covered her torso, arms and legs.

Whatever the plate did not cover was covered with mail. A longsword hung at her hip and two weapons similar to the man's but smaller were at her arms. Her red hair was pulled back in a ponytail that reached her hips and her eyes were bright blue.

The third person over was a man who was muscled beyond anything I thought was possible. His clothes looked bulky and consisted of splashes of greens and tans. At his hip was a small weapon was similar to the ones the woman had, but black and blocky and the one at his back was wider but similar to the one the far left man had. His eyes were covered by glasses with black lenses and he seemed to be chewing on something.

Far to the right, was a woman who was very noticeable as she had wings on her back. She wore tight leather clothes with various belt-like straps that seemed more decoration than functional. What was also noticeable was the fact that she had no weapons. I did not even see any artifices on her. What did she use to defend herself then?

All four of them stepped down the stairs and up to me. The winged lady had a strut that was really hard to ignore but the others seemed to have variations of the confident walk.

"You must be the new guy!" She practically squealed and patted my head.

I tolerated it and said, "I am Quael."

"Such a cute name!" This time, she accompanied her joyous sentence with a tight hug. Which I did not mind at all.

"Calm down, Sylvus." The green and tanned man said with a deep growl.

"But he's so cute! I wanna hug him until he pops!" To prove her point, she tightened her grip on me even harder. Sylvus was stronger than she looked.

“Travis is right.” The armored woman sighed, “You react like this to every new person to the Dimensional Chain. Even me.”

So I was not unique? I could not help but feel disappointed at that.

“Aw, come on Yaelia!” Sylvus pouted, “You are no fun. Just like Rouge over there.”

The cloaked man just gave her a neutral look and stepped over to the middle gate.

“See?”

Both Yaelia and Travis sighed. Travis looked to me and asked, “What can you do?”

I blinked at the sudden shift of conversation, “What?”

“What kind of abilities do you have?”

I opened my mouth in a silent ‘oh’ and stepped back a couple of steps. My gauntlet artifices glowed with red and blue energy before releasing in the blades I had before. I then activated my greaves and started running circles around the group faster than any normal person would have been able to. As a final show off, I used my greaves to launch myself in the air and slammed both gauntlets into the ground. Spikes of fire and ice spread out in a cone in front of me.

Sylvus seemed to swoon when I was done. Yaelia seemed impressed while Travis just crossed his arms and gave me a neutral look.

“Do you know your ‘Chain Ability’?”

I tilted my head in confusion, “My chain ability?”

Before the man could answer, a deep and rough voice echoed across the Wasteland, “Five. Four.”

“Shit.” Travis growled, “Sylvus, you’re with the new guy! Go bottom!”

The winged woman nodded and grabbed the back of my armor. I was then lifted into the air and plopped right in front of one of the gates.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“You were not told?” Sylvus asked.

“Three. Two.”

“No!” I almost yelled.

“One. Fight begin.”

II

When the voice finished its countdown, the three gates crashed down into the ground, yet a blue barrier remained. Beyond the barrier, I could see that, like the name implied, the Wasteland was nothing but flat land with the occasional hill. There were various campfires placed at various spots around the field and I saw two altars at the north and south ends of the area.

“Follow me!” Sylvus said as she started flying down our lane.

I activated my greaves and sped off after her. Despite the fact that my artifices could make me faster than most land creatures, I had a hard time keeping up with Sylvus. We passed another fort which had two towers on either side and a well. Then we passed through another gate and tower combo before she finally stopped. Seconds after we made it to our destination, two people ran through a red tinted gate in front of us.

The left one was a burly man that had way more upper-body muscle than lower. He only wore cloth around him and a necklace around his neck. The one on the right was a woman that held a bow in her left hand. At her back was a quiver and at her waist was a belt full of different kinds of vials.

As soon as she saw us, she took one of her arrows, dipped it into a vial of red liquid and fired it. The arrow burst into a comet of fire as soon as it was loosed from the bow and I had to duck to the side in order to avoid it. I then activated my gauntlets and sent an ice shard at her. Yet I could not see if I hit her because the man immediately rushed to me and slammed a fist into my face.

I stumbled back and managed to dodge another punch. My hand thrust forward and fire lashed. The force of the attack sent the

man inching backward. I then summoned my ice blade and slashed it in a diagonal. The razor sharp ice cut into his shoulder and he yelled out in pain.

“Pull back, Quael!”

Instinct took over and I worked my way into a fighting retreat. Using my mentor’s training, I focused on my defenses and inching my way back toward the gate. The man followed me for a few seconds, but then backed off himself when he noticed where I was going.

“Drink from the well!” Sylvus yelled.

She was in the air and sending down blast after blast of magic. For a moment, I was confused. How was she able to use magic without artifices? I growled and shook my head. Not important.

I activated my greaves and ran back toward the well. The bucket was out of the well and full of water. When the water touched my lips I could immediately feel the healing power flow throughout my body. That punch must have taken a lot out of me as when I was healed, I felt much better.

With that done, I returned to Sylvus to find that dozens of small wolves had joined us. Half of them had a blue tint to them and the other half had a red tint to them. Sylvus was currently attacking the red ones while the man attacked the blue ones. The archer was taking shots at Sylvus instead of attacking with her partner.

“Focus on the red wolves!” Sylvus yelled to me, “We have to get them to the gate!”

I was not sure what was going on and why, but I knew better than to not listen to someone more experienced than me. If my mentor taught me nothing else, it was that.

So, I ran forward, launched myself into the air, and fell down to slam my hands into the ground. The spikes of fire and ice shot out of the dirt and crashed into the red wolves. The blue ones were not affected at all by my attack and even took advantage of it by pressing their own offense with me. Within seconds, the number of red wolves went up from about a dozen to about five, which was then taken care of by Sylvus's strange magic.

The burly man had taken a couple of the spikes into his body and he snarled in annoyance. He sent a punch at me, but this time I was ready for it. I ducked below it, covered my fist in fire and curved it up into an uppercut. My fist connected with the man's jaw and he was sent into the air for a split second. Between him and the ground, I saw the archer pull back an arrow and let loose. I did not see her put the arrow in a vial, but it was currently frosting over and I could hear the ice crackling. I had no chance to move before it pierced through my shoulder armor and embedded itself.

Sylvus cried out and comets of some kind of purple energy crashed into both of our opponents. They were launched back and their bodies were limp as if they were rag dolls. Seconds later, they disappeared into blue hexagons that floated into the air before dissipating.

I stood aghast. What the hell just happened?

"Quael!" Sylvus shook me, "Focus!"

I blinked at her, "What was that?"

"They died, but there is no permanent death. They will be back. Focus on getting that gate down!"

She took word to action as she followed the wolves to the gate and started flinging spells at it. The top of the gate towers extended out into long cylinders similar to Travis and Rouge's weapons and started shooting out metal orbs. I would have

figured that they would attack Sylvus, as the most powerful creature there, but instead the towers just focused on the wolves that clawed and bit at the wooden structure.

I ran up to the gate and started slashing at it with my elemental blades. As I did, I asked, “Can you please tell me what the hell is going on? I am happy to defend myself against our foes, but I would like to understand this place.”

She grabbed the back of my armor and pulled me back. That is when I noticed the wolves were all dead and the cannons were aiming at us. The metal orbs crashed into the ground and I could feel the impact even though I no longer touched the dirt.

“What were you told?” Sylvus asked.

I planted my feet on the ground after she let me go, “That I had to win the match in order to return home. That I would be fighting with others.”

She paused as she expected me to continue. When I did not she tilted her head, “That’s really it?”

I nodded.

She sighed, “There is way too much to explain. Basically, you are standing on the Dimensional Chain, a core of the multi-dimension world. And you better get used to this. Because you are stuck here for the rest of your life.”

I blinked at her, “What?”

“Yes. There is no time here. No system of days, months and years. I could not tell you how long I have been here, but I have fought in at least twenty fights.”

III

Barking came from the enemy gate and we looked to see that our two opponents were back and they were following their red tinted wolves toward us. While they were far away, but I could still tell that they were itching for payback.

“Shit, they are back way too quick! We have to defend the gate!”

With that, she rushed forward and started her barrage on their path to our gate. But I could only stand in place. Was I lied to? Am I really stuck here? I am only really doing this fight to get back home, but if I was stuck here, then what the hell was I doing?

Sylvus was slammed back and collided into me. We both fell back and she started disappearing into the blue hexagons. As she did, though, she whispered, “I know you have doubts. I did too. But also know that if you lose here, you will be killed. There is a reason every fighter here has a winning streak.”

Her body completely vanished and her weight completely disappeared from me. I looked at where she was stunned. I was very confused. Yet, if she was right, I was just given my incentive to keep fighting. She could have been lying or just plain mistaken. However, I thought the risk of ignoring her was too large.

I rose to my feet and as the realization of the situation sunk in I grew furious. The flames and ice from my artifices seemed to pulse with my rising heart rate and my breaths grew heavy. My two opponents looked at me, gave me grins, and rushed for me.

Fire lanced forward from my right hand and crashed in front of the archer. She was sent back by the force but the man kept coming at me. Even when the shard of ice pierced his shoulder.

His fist swung at my head. I ducked under it and covered my hands in fire and ice. The man learned his lesson, though, and he grabbed my arms below the coverings of the elements. He then swung me around before sending me to the ground. My head cracked against the dirt and felt like I was spinning in a tornado. Yet, I managed to plant my feet on the ground and use my artifice to launch myself into the air.

The man did not let go. He even tried to pull me back to the ground. However, my momentum was too great and when I went over his head I could hear him growl in pain as his shoulders nearly popped out of their sockets. I felt him let me go and I immediately spun and swept his legs from under him. He fell onto the ground with a large thud but I had no time to celebrate.

The archer did not really have a clear shot of me with her ally in the way, but now she did and she took it. Three different arrows flew in a triangle pattern at my head. I threw myself into a roll over the downed man and slid into a spin.

The spin let me avoid two more arrows and I retaliated quickly by throwing a blast of both fire and ice mixed. Ice fused with fire into steam which helped increase the damage of the spell as it collided into the archer. She slid along the ground, holding her arms to her face as if trying to protect it.

When she pulled her arms down again, I was already in her face and my fist of fire connected hard. With a cry of pain, she flew back and landed on her back in front of her gate. More of her wolves were running out of the gate, but my wolves were already right at the cannon's range and there was little risk from them.

Something wrapped around my body and I was lifted off of the ground. I kicked and struggled but all I accomplished was to give him more incentive to squeeze harder. Air escaped my lungs and then was not allowed to return. My struggles were more frantic and his squeezes tightened harder in response. It was an endless cycle that with my strength I could not escape from. And he was smart by keeping a position where I could not use my greaves to blast myself away.

My rescue came from behind.

I heard a loud boom that nearly took out my left ear. But a split second after, the crushing weight around my body immediately vanished and I fell to the dirt sucking in as much air as I possibly could. The breaths came out in coughs which wracked my body completely. I looked up to see Yaelia pointing one of her barrel-like weapons at the burly man and running over to me.

“Can you stand?” She asked.

I rose slowly to my feet and rasped, “Yeah. I’m fine.”

She started messing around with her barrel weapon, “Good, cause this fight is not over.”

To make her point, she swung that weapon around, aimed at me, and fired. I nearly jumped out of my skin and there would have been no time to get out of the way. However, I felt whatever the thing shot fly past my shoulder and heard the sound of something hitting flesh.

I turned and found that the archer was clutching at her shoulder and gritting her teeth against the pain. She was hesitating. Yaelia gave me an opportunity.

I started up my greaves and flashed toward the woman. My gauntlets summoned two elemental blades and I quickly swung them in diagonals. She flinched with the swings and I knew that

she was about to ‘die.’ If nothing else, the burns would exhaust her.

Yet, she managed to pull off one of her vials and slammed it into my belly. Immediately, I could feel the burn as if she set my skin on fire. I mouth opened in a cry of agony and I could feel my life start to fade.

“Don’t worry!” Yaelia said, “You’ll be back! Look around the field!”

My final thoughts were, What the hell did she mean by that?

IV

I felt nothing. There was no air, no heat, no sight and no pain. Only emptiness. I was not sure how to take that. I knew Sylvus said I would not be dead permanently and our two opponents came back. Yet, the doubt still lingered. Especially when the only thing my body could register was my own thoughts.

Then, my vision exploded in blue light and suddenly the whole battlefield flashed into existence. Tiny figures ran across the lanes of the field. I could see Yaelia hold her ground against the burly man at the bottom lane. Both of them looked exhausted, but Yaelia had the upper hand against him. Looking to the middle lane, I could see Rouge hiding in the shadows of our middle gate firing in rhythmic bursts at a woman who held a shield in either hand. She was deflecting each shot with the shields, but she could not gain much ground as Rouge kept pounding his shots into her. I could see that the enemy's gate on that lane was untouched except for a couple of dents here and there probably from the wolves. Yet, our gate there was also untouched. So, Rouge was just holding the enemy back.

Explosions drew my attention to the top lane. Travis and Sylvus were bringing down heavy fire against their opponents. Travis held his large weapon and fired shot after shot after shot into the gate. Sylvus was holding back their two opponents from attacking Travis.

One of their opponent was a man who held a sword larger than anything I have ever seen. It was taller than he was! Yet, the man handled the weapon expertly and the only reason Sylvus was not sliced in half was because she kept her distance from the man.

The other opponent was a petite woman that looked like she was only about two feet tall. Yet, she handled magic with a way that I had never seen before. With one hand, she mixed two different spells together. With the other hand, she held onto three different kinds of defense spells. Yet, looking closer, I could see that she had her eyes closed and that she stood in place. So, she had great power and skill, but it required her to hold a massive amount of concentration. I honestly did not think that she had any awareness of anything going on besides her target.

“Respawning in thirty seconds.”

I nearly jumped out of my skin. The voice echoed all around me, even though there were no surfaces to reflect sound. What did it mean by respawning? Was I about to be sent back into the battlefield? Where would I be placed and where do I go? I could go to the top, but Sylvus and Travis seemed to be holding their ground well. Rouge seemed like the kind of person that would be annoyed if someone tried to come and help him. Which meant that the only option was to go right back down to the bottom.

“Three. Two. One. Respawning.”

Similar to the feeling I had when I was ‘teleported’ into the Wasteland I returned to the battlefield. I opened my eyes to find that I was on the same platform that I started the battle on, and started running down the stairs. When I got to the base of the statue, I felt the earth start rumbling.

Shocked, I turned to the source of the shaking. The statue of the wind woman was glowing a bright green. And from within the statue, I heard the most beautiful voice.

“I have arrived my heroes.” The glow of the statue pulsed with her words, “Destroy Helgath’s altar so I may return nature to this land.”

With her command done, a magical echo of the statue rose and shot toward the center of the battlefield. Following in her wake, the land quickly flourished in green plant life and somewhere to my right I could hear the gurgling of a stream.

However, since the Wasteland was very flat, I could also see another magical echo similar to the one that came out of our statue but black fly toward the center. They collided with each other and I could feel the earth under my feet start pulsing as if it was fighting with itself. I also noticed that the two altars I saw before were glowing. The one to my left was pulsing the same bright green as our statue. The other one was pulsing a dark and oozy black.

I activated my greaves and ran to Yaelia. I arrived to find her attacking the enemy's gate and getting close to tearing it down. She noticed my arrival and said, "Just in time."

"What is going on?" I asked as I summoned my spells to help with the gate.

"Ignore the gate!" She said, "We have to destroy the altar! Yeria will help us push forward if we can weaken Helgath!"

I blinked at her, but then nodded. Turning toward the altar, I could see that the battlefield was split in half. On our half was the greenery that appeared before, but the other side was covered with dark cracks and skulls. As if the Wasteland was decaying. Also, around the altar, no matter what side, was decaying.

My fire and ice blades formed in my hands and I started hacking at the altar. With each chip I broke off of the structure, I could see and feel the area around me growing with plant life. It took me about a minute of hard work, but I finally destroyed it.

"Thank you, heroes."

I turned around and saw the two echoes still struggling. Yet, the black echo started fading out of existence. The green echo took

the opportunity and completely enveloped her opponent into her. She then started compressing upon herself and within seconds the black echo was gone. As soon as it was, the whole land became as lush as our half of the field. And with that, I felt faster and healthier.

“Good job!” Yaelia yelled to me, “Time to push forward!”

V

The fight went on for an hour. And it was not looking good for my team.

I was at the top lane with Travis. Our outer gate was completely destroyed, and the fort between the outer and inner gate was almost destroyed. The support cannon for the fort was destroyed and the healing well had been demolished about fifteen minutes ago. We were being pushed really hard by three the enemy team here and were barely hanging on.

Rouge was still in the middle lane and was able to move forward. His opponent for the whole fight moved up to the top lane with us and so his area was empty save for the wolves. He managed to get their outer gate destroyed, but with it being only him the fort and cannons were still intact. Yet, he slowly pushes on. Because of his defense, though, our gate on that side was still undamaged.

Yaelia and Sylvus were at the bottom lane and they miraculously turned a heavy assault into a rout. The enemy pushed their way all the way to the inner gate. We had three of us trying to defend that lane, yet we were held back at every avenue. The pair of them, though, used Sylvus's flying to their advantage and fought the enemy off with their Chain Abilities. They now had the enemy's outer gate destroyed and were working on the outer fort.

The problem was that the battlefield was in their favor in all aspects. Not only did they have more of our structures destroyed than we had theirs, but they also managed to get our goddess's altar destroyed and so they were getting their goddess's benefits. All around us, the land was dry, cracked and decaying. We had to

make our defense perfect or else they could take advantage of our hole and end us quickly. And they knew it too.

I ducked under the massive greatsword from the man in front of me. He then spun around, keeping his momentum, and slammed it downward in a hammer-like motion. My knees popped up in a side leap and I swung my elemental blades. They managed to catch him in the side but he ignored it as he followed my motion with his weapon. I intercepted his attack with my elements but the pure force sent me crashing against our fort. I could not damage it, especially with my own body, but I was stunned by my head cracking against it. When my vision recovered, I saw that greatsword about to skewer me against the stone fort. I flung my weapons up in pure reflex and got the blade to slice my shoulder on its path to the fort instead of my insides. With his weapon useless to him, I rushed forward and slashed my weapons into him.

As he scattered into the blue hexagons, I moved on to my next target. The small woman once again had her eyes closed and all of her attacked were focused on Travis who was still moving through sheer force of will. She did not know I was coming.

It took me about half of the fight to realize what Travis meant when he mentioned my ‘Chain Ability.’ Apparently, somewhere along the way I learned how to do a new move. It was something I was pretty sure I would not have been able to do at home. Or if I was, it would have taken decades of practice and honing. Yet, because I was a fighter in the Dimensional Chain, I was able to figure it out within half an hour. This was going to be the first time I tried it out.

My greaves activated, and my gauntlets replaced my blades with orbs of fire and ice. When I was about five feet from my opponent, I immediately turned and rushed in a diagonal around the woman. Behind me, following the path I just made, a wall of

ice rose up about ten feet. Within the ice I could see a blazing fire as if the ice was just a cage for the true power of the spell. After less than a second of running, I sharply turned and rushed again. I did this six times and the woman did not have enough time to react before she was surrounded by frostfire walls.

With her prison created, I launched into the air, flipped inside of the prison and slammed my gauntlets into the ground. Spikes, orbs and shards of ice, fire and frostfire shot out of the ground within the prison like the projectiles from Travis's weapon. I was unaffected by the shots, yet I could hear the woman screaming from about a foot away from me. I pulled my gauntlets out of the ground and watched as the shots then returned back into the prison and pierced through the woman again. When the dust cleared, the prison was gone and the woman was nowhere to be seen.

I fell to one knee n exhaustion. My vision pulsed black with my heart rate, which was high with the effort I just made, and I could do nothing but stare at the ground. That took a lot more out of me than I thought it would. Fire and ice burned my hands and my feet felt really soft. I looked at my artifices and found that they were overworked. The magic was pouring out of them like heat from a fireplace. That was the first time that happened. I was usually careful not to overspell my artifices as they took so long to repair if done too many times. Yet, I went into that Chain Ability effortless. I had to be careful. Doing that move at the wrong time could really screw everything up.

A hand placed itself on my shoulder, "Can you hear me?"

I looked up at Travis and said, "Yeah. That took a lot out of me."

"Look." His head tilted toward somewhere behind me.

I turned around and looked at where he indicated. It took me a couple of seconds to realize what he was telling me.

Our bottom lane inner gate was on fire and a second later was blown back from some large force. The enemy was in our town.

VI

“Shit!” I growled.

“Sylvus and Yaelia must have fallen.” Travis said, “You need to keep the enemy back until they get back.”

“What about you?” I asked.

“I will follow you when I make sure this top lane will be safe.”

I sighed but nodded. My legs shook with exhaustion but I pushed through it and activated my greaves. It only took me a minute to get back to the town and the other team was only just getting to the fort. I got there in time.

Fire and ice covered my fists. I rushed forward and slammed my hands into the ground and spikes of fire and ice traveled the distance toward the two remaining enemies. They were forced back by the attack and I was able to get in between them and the fort. A disk sailed toward me and I had to duck under the shield which curved back around toward the shield woman.

With that distraction, though, I was unprepared for the burly man to hammer me down with his two fists. I fell to a knee and was then lifted by an uppercut to the chin. My back hit hard against the fort and I had to roll away from another punch.

Damnit. At this rate, I’ll let them get the fort!

I thrust my palm into the burly man and let loose with a hard hitting fire blast. He was launched into the air and away from me which allowed for a shield to be thrown. It sailed under the man and was aimed right for my face but I swung my left hand up and created an ice wall. I heard a metallic thunk as the disk hit ice and I flung myself up and over it.

The shield woman had the same idea and when I got over the wall I met her face to face. Reflex was the only thing that saved me. My hand opened up and caught the metal disk. Through my gauntlet, I could tell that the disk was razor sharp and if I had not blocked it my neck would have been sliced open.

However, she was not ready to let me walk away without some sort of injury. As I held back the shield, she lifted her knee up and slammed it between my knees. The pain from that knee at that specific spot raced throughout my body and I curled into myself for a split second. The woman took that second to crash her fist into my face. Pure power sent me flying toward the fort again and it felt as if I actually crashed into it.

When I returned to consciousness, I felt stone all around me. As if I was in the middle of a collapsed building. Faintly from somewhere to my left I heard someone yell out a garbled order. Seconds later, what felt like vines wrapped around my arms and hauled me up. Dust filled my lungs and I spent the next couple of seconds trying to cough it out.

“They’re at the core!”

“Push them back!”

I dazedly looked up to see a four against five fight around the statue. There was no longer a barely visible dome around it and the storm that was kicking up around it gave the whole town a dark and severe tone.

My brain snapped into focus and I unsteadily rose to my feet. If they destroy that core, we lose. They were obviously stronger than us, yet we have managed to keep our defense up for over an hour. We should be able to keep them held back long enough to gain some sort of opportunity to push back.

My greaves flashed as I rushed forward toward the shield woman. She did not see me coming until it was too late. I

stretched out my arm and slammed it into her neck. Her cry of surprise was interrupted by my punch to her back and then my leg sweep.

Before I could continue my assault on the fallen woman, a large force crashed into my side. I was flung away and then sent to the ground by a hammer like blow to my belly. This time, I handled it better and rolled away as soon as I hit dirt. The ground shook with the impact of the burly man's second attack and as I rolled I sent a frostfire blast toward his head. He ducked out of the way which gave me a chance to get to my feet.

Instinct yelled at me to move. I activated my greaves and launched myself into the air and saw a green tipped arrow fly between my legs. I turned around, ready to send a blast toward the archer behind me, but a shot from Rouge's weapon echoed throughout the town and whatever projectile it was pierced through her shoulder.

I turned my attention to the man with the large greatsword and threw an orb of ice at his feet. His attack on the statue turned into a slip and the weight of his weapon just made it easier for him to fall. Moving him let me see that there was a green glow coming out of the statue's cracks. That must be what they needed to hit in order to win.

I felt something rush past my head and turned just in time to see a metal disk curve around and sink itself into one of the larger cracks of the statue. A glass like shattering sound confirmed that the shield hit home and I could feel energy start collapsing into the stone.

Before any of us could move, the statue exploded outward. We were all caught up in the blast and I fell to my back. Everything seemed to go in slow motion as the realization hit me. The statue was destroyed.

We had lost.

VII

I felt nothing. I heard nothing. My world was complete darkness and my body felt as if it was floating in space. And I was not sure if I really cared. For all I knew, this could have been death. No Heaven and no Hell awaited. Just emptiness. If there were multiple worlds, like the others said, then maybe the worlds of 'Heaven' and 'Hell' are not a final destination but just normal destinations.

Something stopped my chain of thought. Well, it was the fact that I had a train of thought at all.

As if that idea was a cue, sounds started slowly oozing their way into my consciousness. Clicks of feet against metal, taps of fingers hitting surfaces and liquid boiling. Quiet conversation came through next and while I could not tell what they were saying I could tell where they were in relation to me. In front of me and about six or seven feet to my left.

The blackness surrounding me started fading. Not that it really helped. There was little light in the room. The only sources of light came from rectangular boxes lining the walls of the room we were in. Shadows moved throughout the room and it was hard to tell what was what.

Feeling returned slowly. My back was against something flat and cold. The same material was wrapped around my wrists and there was no way for me to twist them. Nothing was under my feet, so I must have been hanging on something. Yet, I could not feel any hooks on my back or anything of the sort. It was as if air itself was holding me up.

“Sir,” a woman said from my left, “He is awake.” Her voice was emotionless. Like a doctor who keeps herself detached from her clients. It was haunting. As if she was the embodiment of Death.

“Get another dose ready. Quickly.” That man’s voice was even deader. Which I did not think was possible. His voice sent a literal chill up my spine.

“Yes sir.” Liquid poured from one container to another.

If what I was thinking was true, then I did not have a long time to find a way out of this. I twisted my hands. Or at least tried to, but like I figured before I could not move them. They would not even budge. Amazingly, though, I felt the familiar weight of my gauntlets.

I then tried my feet. They were looser, yet it was still hard to move around. Struggling, I tried to plant the bottom of my feet against the metal surface I was up against.

“Stay still.” The man said. I felt a hand press against my legs.

My body started sweating in reaction to what my mind was thinking. While I could not see it, I could imagine something sharp inching toward me ready to inject whatever has been boiling into me. The fear that rolled throughout my system seemed to activate my greaves. A heavy blast of air shot down out of them and crashed into whoever was holding my legs.

A grunt of surprise traveled across the room and the sudden attack gave me an idea. I continuously activated my artifices. The power rocked me in all directions and started loosening the bonds on me.

“Hold him down!” The man’s voice barked.

However, it was too late. I was able to plant my feet on the metal surface and my greaves launched me forward. The bonds broke with the screeching sound of strained metal. I rolled on the

ground and came up to my feet. My gauntlets created orbs of fire and ice and the light allowed me to get a better view of the room.

It looked like some sort of alchemists room except made of metal and strange glass images that moved. Beakers of liquid boiled all around the room without fire and various men and women stood frightened in front of them. On the wall I was against hung my allies. They all had their equipment still and all of them were unconscious.

I rose to my feet and stood in the center of the room.

“Get ready.” I growled, “This is the end.”