

CLEAVER OF SIN

#Chapter 31: Reactions - Read CLEAVER OF SIN

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Clinton stood off to the side, intending to observe the sparring match from start to finish. He was keen to witness the Tenth Sun's performance firsthand, while remaining prepared to intervene at a moment's notice to prevent either Asher or Kale from sustaining life-threatening injuries.

He had never once believed Asher stood a chance. Clinton understood the nature of genius, he had witnessed monsters in human form, and had even been the one to train them.

After all, every Sun and Moon of the Wargrave family passed through this very First training ground, beginning at the age of fifteen and typically concluding by seventeen.

But this situation was different, two years of refined experience against none. Kale was no ordinary trainee; he was a slum-born orphan who had been tempered by hardship, forced to fight and steal from an early age just to survive. His battle instincts were forged in desperation, not drills.

Without hesitation, he gave the signal.

"Begin."

Clinton observed Asher intently, tracking every movement with the intention of offering corrections later. He analyzed his footwork, the fluidity of his rapier, and the rhythm of his stance, but found nothing amiss. The Tenth Sun moved with a precision that left little room for critique.

There was a distinct light in Asher's eyes, a quiet, calculating gleam. Clinton recognized the strategy: observe first, adapt later. But as the bout progressed, something shifted.

This wasn't mere observation. Asher wasn't simply learning; he was absorbing Kale in his entirety, his patterns, his movement, his very self, until the boy before him was no longer an opponent, but an open book laid bare.

Clinton watched in stunned silence as the Tenth Sun raised his rapier to block, before Kale had even launched his attack.

He could hardly believe what he was seeing.

This was supposed to be a novice, someone who had only awakened four days ago. A boy who had never once wielded a weapon. By all logic, he should have faltered. He should have taken hits. He should have been overwhelmed, outmatched, outpaced.

He was supposed to struggle.

He was supposed to survive, not compete.

He was supposed to try and keep up

He was supposed to....

Clinton had been briefed by Virek, Elowen, and Harold about Asher's remarkable feats during previous training sessions. Yet, he had never taken the time to witness them for himself.

Whether occupied with instructing the other trainees or honing his own skills, he simply hadn't prioritized it. Still, he had believed their reports, if only because of the astonishing swordplay Asher had demonstrated on his very first day.

Now, as he watched the boy in motion, that belief solidified into awe.

Asher flipped forward, sidestepped once, ducked, parried, blocked, and defended, all with seamless precision. Not a single movement was wasted, as though he had been doing it since the day he was born.

But Clinton saw more than just skill, he saw elements within Asher's movements. Echoes of familiar techniques. Echoes of himself.

Over the past three days in the First Training Ground, Asher hadn't simply swung his sword mindlessly during weapon drills. No, he had watched, absorbed, and internalized. And now, in the heat of battle, he was applying.

Clinton's eyes narrowed as realization struck.

He had been so captivated by the elegance of Asher's rapier movement that he'd overlooked the impossible: Asher wasn't supposed to move at this speed.

He wasn't supposed to be able to react this quickly.

By every measure, strength, speed, reflex, he should have been outclassed. And yet, even as Kale ramped up the intensity of his attacks, Asher matched him step for step, stroke for stroke.

'What has the Wargrave bloodline brought into the world?' Clinton couldn't help but wonder.

'It seems even the limitations of a third awakening can't restrain the Wargrave Bloodline,' he thought, just as Asher abruptly shifted from defense to offense.

His rapier moved with startling clarity, clean, efficient, and unhesitating. Then came a sudden mid-motion shift in attack, not a feint, but a deliberate recalibration.

Clinton's eyes widened.

He had executed that very maneuver just days ago against a trainee. Yet here it was again, replicated flawlessly, not mimicked, but mastered. Asher had taken the movement, dissected it, and then seamlessly adapted it mid-combat, adjusting his strike in real time to counter his opponent's defense.

'Such battle intuition' Clinton mused, eyes narrowed in disbelief.

He had heard of individuals capable of evolving mid-combat, those rare fighters who improved with every life threatening battle. The Primarch himself was said to be one of them, people who baffled stronger opponents by adapting faster than they could overwhelm.

But Asher... Asher was something else entirely.

His battle intuition didn't just rival theirs, it surpassed it by a staggering margin. Even among those gifted with instinctual adaptation, few, if any, could execute what Asher was displaying now.

Then it happened.

Asher struck first.

A thin crimson line opened across Kale's skin.

Another flash of movement, and blood bloomed from Kale's thigh.

And then, silence.

The rapier stopped at Kale's neck, just a breath away from slicing clean through.

The training ground fell into a frozen stillness, as if even the world itself paused to ask whether it could truly give rise to such a genius. Reality bent, and yet no one dared to accept it.

Every trainee had only joined the Wargrave family within the last month. None had yet qualified for the monster subjugation. All were still in preparation. And yes, they were talented, each of them chosen for potential, for promise.

But this?

This?

Three days. That was all it had taken. Three days for Asher to defy every standard, to upend every assumption, to surpass what any of them thought possible.

Clinton snapped out of his daze, the sharp sound of his boots striking the floor breaking the stillness that had gripped the training ground.

"Congratulations on your first victory, Tenth Sun," he said with a measured smile as he approached.

Asher's violet eyes shifted from Kale to meet Clinton's gaze, calm and sharp.

"It's thanks to your teachings, Instructor," Asher replied, a faint smile touching his lips.

Clinton's lips twitched ever so slightly.

'Teachings?' he echoed in his mind, almost incredulous. 'I haven't taught you a single thing.'

He had intended to guide Asher over the past three days. That was the plan. But each time he observed, he found nothing to correct, nothing out of place. And now, to be credited for something he hadn't done?

He truly didn't know what to say, he was left speechless.

Kale stood off to the side, stunned, bewildered. His entire sense of pride, the foundation of his identity, lay in ruins before the being known as Asher Wargrave.

He had always taken pride in being the strongest among the newcomers, those who had been here for less than a month. His talent had never been in question. Clinton himself had praised him on multiple occasions.

From the slums to this very moment, Kale had clung to the strength he'd cultivated with his own hands. He'd wielded a dagger long before his awakening, surviving on sheer instinct and grit.

But now, he understood all too clearly what had transpired.

He hadn't just faced a prodigy.

He had helped a monster take his first step.

He exhaled softly, pushing aside the remnants of shock and turbulent emotion. Though he had nurtured a measure of pride and confidence in his strength, Kale was not naive enough to believe he stood at the pinnacle of talent in this world.

He was well aware that monsters roamed this planet, some even within the very family he served.

What he hadn't expected was to encounter one so soon, let alone spar with one.

"Good match, Kale. Thank you for this," Asher's calm voice broke through the lingering silence.

Kale turned, his black eyes locking onto Asher, who approached with a faint smile and an outstretched hand. After a moment's pause, Kale took it and offered a small nod.

"Thank you, Tenth Sun. It seems I'll need to train harder if I hope to keep up with you."

Asher didn't reply. He simply nodded once, turned on his heel, and made his way to a quiet corner. There, he sat down, eyes closed, lost in his thoughts. This had become a ritual of sorts for him, a moment of stillness after every new milestone.

Minutes passed. Soon after, the day's training came to an end.

Chapter 32: Prideful Peacocks

Asher exited the training grounds in silence, with Lyra materializing at his side as if by instinct. Neither exchanged words, there was no need. An unspoken understanding had long been established between them.

Lyra knew Asher's routine well. After each session at the First Training Ground, he would return to his quarters to continue his relentless self-discipline. She never intruded upon his silence, never offered unsolicited counsel.

She simply observed, ever present, yet never overstepping her bounds.

As for Asher, once he discovered that his body could operate at peak condition with only four hours of sleep, he embraced the regimen without hesitation. Those few hours became his sole rest, every remaining moment devoted entirely to training.

That night passed in quiet intensity, with Asher honing his mastery over the lightning element before finally allowing himself sleep.

Dawn crept in gently, sunlight filtering through the room in golden shafts. Asher rose precisely on time. The first training session began at 7 a.m., and punctuality was non-negotiable. He knew he had to arrive early, Harold had no tolerance for tardiness.

From what Asher had observed, even his status as a Sun might not shield him from punishment.

Just as Asher prepared to head out, Lyra stepped into the room and spoke, her tone calm and composed.

"Good morning, Young Master. I've been instructed by Mr. Zarek to inform you that your training plans for today have been cancelled. You have other matters to attend to. The instructors at the First Training Ground have already been notified."

Asher paused, momentarily caught off guard. He hadn't even completed a full week of training, and now he was being pulled away?

'Are they assigning me a personal instructor because of my talent?' he wondered. It was the only explanation that made sense to him.

But why speculate when he could simply ask?

"Do you know what this is about?" Asher inquired, his voice calm but curious.

"No, Young Master," Lyra replied, shaking her head lightly. "I did ask Mr. Zarek, but he offered no details, only that we would be informed in due time."

With no answers forthcoming, Asher made a quick decision. As much as he would have preferred to continue training, it seemed wiser to conserve his strength in case the day demanded something more... physical.

Without another word, he climbed back onto the bed and slipped beneath the duvet. Within moments, he was asleep.

Lyra watched in quiet surprise. She had expected him to wait in contemplative silence, not drift off so effortlessly. A faint smile touched her lips. Without disturbing the peace, she stepped out and gently closed the door behind her.

Though still early when he first returned to bed, just past 6 a.m., four quiet hours slipped by, and the time now stood at 10. A firm knock at the door roused Asher from his sleep.

"Come in," he said, rising from the bed.

The door opened, revealing Zarek with Lyra standing silently behind him.

"Good morning, Tenth Sun. I trust you rested well?" Zarek greeted with a slight bow.

"I did," Asher replied evenly. "Now, what's going on?"

There was no room for pleasantries, his tone was direct.

"You'll be briefed by the Primarch himself," Zarek answered with a faint smile before turning on his heel and exiting the room.

Asher exhaled through his nose, his expression unreadable. Without delay, he moved to follow, falling in step behind Zarek as they made their way to wherever the Primarch awaited.

They arrived at a location entirely different from where Asher had last encountered the Primarch. It was unfamiliar, yet grand in a subdued, authoritative way. Without hesitation, Asher stepped forward with calm, composed strides.

He felt no fear in the presence of the Primarch. The man's lack of warmth, his cold, unreadable expression, was nothing new. It was, after all, a common trait among his siblings.

"I greet the Primarch," Asher said, bowing with formal grace, his right hand placed firmly over his left chest.

Seated at the head of the chamber, the Primarch regarded his youngest son with golden eyes, piercing, steady, and unreadable.

"It seems you've made quite the progress since our last meeting," Azeron said, his tone devoid of emotion, his expression carved from stone.

But deep within, hidden behind his stoic mask, the father in him smiled, a quiet, invisible joy that only a parent could feel upon witnessing the growth of their child after tireless effort and expectation.

"As your son, that much is to be expected, Primarch," Asher replied smoothly, though internally he cringed at the formality of it all.

"I have a task for you," Azeron said, his tone as flat and composed as ever.

Asher remained silent, his posture steady. He knew better than to interrupt.

"The Emperor's Twins will be celebrating their birthday in five days. You are to attend the gathering and represent the Wargrave," Azeron stated plainly.

Asher's mind stirred. He was well aware of the Emperor, the sovereign of their vast Empire, but he had never met the man, nor anyone from the Royal Family. And now, he was being dispatched to what would likely be a grand, politically charged event.

"You will depart today," Azeron continued. "The journey to the capital will take three days. That will be all, you may leave."

No further details were offered. Just like that, the audience was over.

Asher gave a curt nod and turned to leave. Lyra, as always, followed silently, her presence a shadow behind him as they made their way back to his quarters.

Once inside, Asher sat on the edge of his bed, his thoughts drifting as silence settled around him. His gaze unfocused, fixed somewhere distant.

Royal gatherings like this rarely brought anything good.

Being a celebration hosted by the Emperor himself, it was all but certain that the other three Ducal families would be in attendance, alongside a host of nobles spanning every tier of the aristocracy. In Asher's mind, it was a congregation of prideful peacocks, each vying for power and recognition.

And yet... there was a part of him that looked forward to it.

All his memories, his entire existence thus far, had been confined within the Wargrave estate. As was tradition, no Wargrave was permitted to set foot beyond its borders until they had awakened their powers. Now, with that rite fulfilled, Asher was being sent out into the wider world.

For the first time, he would see it with his own eyes. And that, despite the pomp and politics of it all, stirred something within him.

"I suppose it's time to meet a parade of arrogant young masters who believe the world revolves around their titles," Asher muttered under his breath, a faint smirk playing at the corner of his lips.

His thoughts shifted again. In scenarios like this, an heir traveling to the capital for a high-profile royal event, the risk of an ambush was more than a possibility; it was almost tradition.

"I hope they assign enough guards to protect me on the road," he murmured, his tone more practical than fearful.

He hadn't suddenly become invincible overnight. There was no cheat or divine shortcut at play. Yes, he was talented, exceptionally so, but talent was only the foundation.

Growth required time. He was still at the very beginning of the path, still at the lowest Life rank.

Despite viewing the event as little more than a gathering of entitled nobility, Asher found himself anticipating it in his own way. He looked forward to witnessing their arrogance firsthand, to hear the boasts of young elites who believed themselves gods in human form.

Reading about such characters in books was one thing. Watching them strut and posture in real life... that was an entirely different experience.

Chapter 33: Leaving for the First Time

As Asher sat on his bed, lost in thought about the countless scenes of arrogant nobles being humbled that he might soon witness, a soft knock echoed from the door.

"Come in," he said calmly.

The door creaked open, revealing Lyra, who stepped inside with a folded cloth draped neatly over her arms.

"This is your attire for the party, Young Master," she said with a gentle smile, extending it toward him. "What do you think?"

Asher examined the garment briefly, then gave a faint nod. He didn't dwell on the details, if Lyra had selected it, that was more than enough for him. Her choices had never failed him before, after all, she had basically been picking Asher's clothes since his birth.

Rising from the bed, Asher walked over to the wardrobe standing silently against the wall. With a swift motion, he opened it, retrieved a few garments, and handed them to Lyra.

Without needing a word of instruction, she instinctively understood and transferred the items into her space ring.

Asher then began preparing a few personal essentials. He wasn't sure if they would come across a river or stream suitable for bathing during the three-day journey. The customs of this era were still unfamiliar to him, and he preferred to be prepared.

Once he had finished, Lyra quietly exited the room. Asher then settled onto the bed, crossed his legs, and began to cultivate, letting his breathing steady as he sank into focused silence.

Several minutes passed before another knock echoed from the door. Asher didn't need to ask, he already knew it was Zarek. He had long since learned to recognize people by the rhythm and weight of their knock.

Rising from the bed, he walked to the door and opened it.

Zarek stood outside, bowing slightly as he spoke with respectful composure, "Everything is ready, Tenth Sun."

Asher gave a silent nod and followed behind him. They descended the staircase and moved through a vast, echoing hall. Eventually, Asher stepped outside.

The estate slowly came into view, majestic and expansive. Twin water fountains flanked the entrance to the manor, one on each side, their crystal streams rising and falling in a rhythmic dance.

Neatly trimmed grass rolled across the land in soft, verdant waves, while towering trees spiraled skyward, their branches swaying gently as the wind whispered through them. The breeze added a touch of grace to an already breathtaking scene.

'How vast.' Asher mused inwardly.

In his previous life, even those within the top one percent of society would have struggled to afford a place of this grandeur. Perhaps only the elusive top 0.1% could claim such luxury. He exhaled softly and shook his head, dismissing the thought.

He approached the grand carriage stationed ahead, its frame imposing, its surface a striking blend of deep black and radiant gold plating. Asher didn't need to guess; this wasn't merely gold-colored paint.

No, it was genuine gold, gleaming under the light with unmistakable opulence.

'So this is how nobles live,' he thought, a flicker of surprise crossing his mind.

He tried to recall if anyone in his previous life had ever plated their cars in gold or diamonds. He couldn't think of a single one.

It suddenly struck him how little he had thought about Crymora's transportation systems. His time had been consumed entirely by relentless training. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he had expected the kind of basic wooden carriage he'd read about in books. What stood before him, however, was anything but ordinary.

Two imposing horses stood silently at the front of the carriage, exuding calm strength, as though awaiting a silent command.

Beside the carriage, Asher took note of five guards stationed vigilantly. Each was clad in polished armor, their long capes cascading down their backs in dignified folds. Embossed on their chests, and on the side of the carriage, was the unmistakable crest of House Wargrave: a blazing sun, rendered in exquisite detail, its flames seemingly alive.

Though Asher could faintly sense traces of aura seeping from their bodies, he couldn't determine their exact Life Ranks. Their strength was clear, but not easily measured.

He turned slightly to glance at Zarek, who stood silently behind him, composed as ever.

"Goodbye, Zarek. See you in a few days," Asher said, his tone calm.

With that, he stepped into the carriage with steady, purposeful strides. Lyra followed closely behind, her movements graceful and silent.

'The Youngest Master is finally leaving the estate for the first time,' Zarek thought, the ever-present smile on his face deepening slightly with quiet pride.

Across the estate grounds, several maids and butlers had paused in their duties, their gazes fixed on the departing carriage. It was a rare sight, Asher Wargrave, born into legacy and silence, was leaving the estate for the very first time since his birth.

"Let's move," came Asher's calm command from within the carriage.

The coachman responded instantly, snapping the reins with practiced precision. The horses surged forward, and the grand carriage eased into motion. The armored guards fell into formation around it, their movements synchronized and silent, like shadows escorting nobility into the world.

Asher had anticipated an uncomfortable ride, jolting up and down with every bump in the road, but to his surprise, the carriage glided forward with remarkable smoothness. It was clearly engineered for luxury, every detail crafted with comfort in mind. Of course, it made perfect sense.

There was no world in which nobles of any status would endure days of travel in discomfort without devising an elegant solution.

The journey remained smooth, the only sound accompanying them the whispering roar of wind as the carriage sliced effortlessly through the air. A gentle breeze drifted into the cabin through the open window, where Asher sat, his gaze fixed on the passing landscape.

Then, without warning, his hand shot out, gripping the edge of the carriage with extreme ease. In one fluid motion, he pulled himself upward, his body twisting midair with a natural grace. He vaulted through the window and landed atop the carriage roof with effortless ease, as if gravity itself had chosen not to interfere.

Asher was fully aware of the risk of what he just did, an arrow loosed from the shadows could end his life in an instant. But he also understood the nature of such threats.

Assassins rarely struck so close to their target's home; they preferred to wait, often days into the journey, when reinforcements would be far out of reach and escape routes limited.

The wind lashed against his skin, sharp and wild, yet strangely invigorating. Around him, the world blurred in motion, a rush of color and speed that danced at the edges of his vision.

Tilting his head upward, Asher's eyes settled on the sky. Wisps of white clouds drifted lazily across the expanse, streaked against the soft blue canvas above.

For a moment, he simply watched, silently admiring the vastness, the freedom, and the quiet majesty of the heavens.

'These horses are far faster than any ordinary breed,' Asher observed, eyes fixed on the blur of their powerful strides. The speed was extraordinary, yet unsurprising. After all, Astra had catalyzed the evolution of nearly every living being in this world.

Despite the wind resistance, Asher remained steady, his body instinctively adapting, balanced against the rush of air. For a while, he simply watched in silence, taking in the ever-shifting landscape that stretched out before him. Eventually, he lowered himself to a seated position atop the carriage, his expression calm, contemplative.

'Jennifer would love this view and probably the party I'm headed to,' he thought, a small smile tugging at his lips.

At least at this gathering, he bore the title of a Duke's son. There would be no tired cliché of being dismissed for lacking noble blood, not this time.

'Though some might still look down on me for awakening so late,' he admitted inwardly. But the thought barely lingered.

'Let them.' The smile remained, undisturbed.

Chapter 34: Before Dawn

As the carriage rolled steadily onward, a mounted guard finally broke the silence.

"Tenth Sun, forgive the intrusion, but it isn't safe atop the carriage," he said with a respectful tone.

Asher, eyes closed in quiet thought, slowly opened them. He turned to the guard and gave a slight nod. With effortless grace, he slipped back into the carriage, his movements fluid and unhurried.

"How was your moment of peace, Young Master?" Lyra inquired from her seat opposite him, her voice calm.

"Refreshing," Asher responded briefly.

He had little else to add, though he had genuinely enjoyed the wind's gentle caress and the fleeting glimpse of the vast world passing by.

The sun dipped beneath the horizon, and the cloak of night began its slow descent, casting the world into shadows. Not once during the journey had they paused for rest, but with darkness now reigning, they had no choice but to halt.

Asher stepped down from the carriage, the silver light of the moon catching in the strands of his purple hair, giving them an ethereal glow.

The moment his boots touched the earth, Lyra positioned herself a single step behind him to the right, while a guard mirrored her on the left.

Asher made no remark about the added vigilance. Night had fallen, caution was no longer a courtesy, but a necessity.

Asher's gaze drifted to the horses, a flicker of curiosity in his eyes. They had been running since morning without pause, yet even now, they showed only the faintest signs of exhaustion, just a soft panting as they lay gracefully upon the grass.

Around him, the guards moved with practiced efficiency, their motions fluid and precise, as though they had performed this routine a hundred times beneath a hundred different moons. Under the quiet silver light, tents began to rise.

With a faint shake of his head, Asher turned away and stepped inside his tent. Lyra followed silently, her presence a constant shadow. Two guards took position at the entrance, their silhouettes standing firm against the backdrop of the night.

With a graceful wave of her hand, Lyra summoned a large bed that materialized in the air before descending gently onto the mat a guard had laid out earlier.

"You brought this with you?" Asher asked, genuine surprise flickering in his voice. He hadn't expected such comfort out here in the wilderness.

"Your comfort is my priority, Young Master," Lyra replied with a serene smile.

Another wave of her hand, and a polished table appeared, accompanied by a spread of elegantly arranged dishes, warm, aromatic.

Asher blinked. "When did you even have time to prepare all this? We barely packed anything after the Primarch announced our departure. The chefs couldn't possibly have cooked this on such short notice."

He sat on the edge of the bed, pulling the table closer, his curiosity still lingering even as the scent of the food pushed him to dig in.

"On the day of your awakening, Young Master," Lyra replied calmly. "Since you spent the entire day in solitude, I took the opportunity to visit the kitchens. The chefs prepared a wide array of dishes from morning until night."

Asher took a bite, his expression thoughtful. "Why go to such lengths?"

"Because your awakening marked a turning point," she said matter-of-factly. "It was only a matter of time before we left the estate. I needed to be prepared, for nights in the forest, or inns whose food may not meet your standards."

Asher chuckled softly, a smile tugging at his lips. "I have to hand it to you, Lyra. You really are too good."

"It's my duty, Young Master," she replied, returning his smile with quiet pride.

Asher, noticing Lyra standing silently like a statue while he ate, felt a quiet urge to invite her to join him. He knew what her answer would be, she would refuse.

But still, he asked. Better to offer and be turned down than to say nothing at all.

"You don't have to just stand there like a statue. Join me, at least for tonight," he said, his eyes focused on the dishes laid before him.

Lyra turned her head toward him, surprise flickering in her eyes. The suggestion was almost unthinkable, servants did not dine with their masters. Still, she answered with composure.

"I appreciate the offer, Young Master. But given my Life Rank, I can go several weeks without nourishment."

Asher didn't press the matter. He simply gave a small nod, her response was exactly what he'd expected. Despite the closeness they shared, there were invisible lines drawn between them, boundaries that Lyra would never cross, no matter the circumstance.

'So it's not as exaggerated as those novels claim. Characters with high cultivation going years without food, or abandoning it altogether, sustaining themselves entirely on energy.'

Asher thought silently. The reality, it seemed, was far more grounded.

The tent settled into a tranquil silence, broken only by the soft clinking of cutlery as Asher finished his meal. A gentle golden light flickered within the tent, casting warm shadows along the fabric walls.

Asher dabbed a napkin across his lips. Without delay, Lyra gave a small wave of her hand, and the dishes vanished soundlessly into her space ring.

"Good night, Lyra," Asher murmured, settling onto the bed, the duvet still neatly draped over him.

"Good night, Young Master," she replied softly.

With a subtle motion, she extinguished the light, and darkness embraced the tent like a velvet curtain.

But she didn't step outside to stand guard by the tent's entrance. No, she remained within, quietly shifting to a different position. Her presence seemed to melt seamlessly into the darkness, as if she were part of it.

Lyra wouldn't risk leaving Asher's side, not here, not in a forest swallowed by night. This was the kind of place where silence breathed danger, where the right set of skills, abilities, or elemental affinity could turn an assassin into a ghost.

And with that, only the soft rustling of leaves remained, whispers in the dark, swaying to the rhythm of the wind's quiet song. Outside, the guards stood silent, their senses honed to a razor's edge, prepared to react to even the faintest disturbance.

They all knew one truth, if the Tenth Sun returned with even a single strand of hair out of place, the Wargrave family would tear the Empire apart to find out why.

The Wargraves might wear cold expressions and speak with veiled hostility toward one another, but that coldness was reserved for themselves. Should anyone outside their bloodline dare show the same indifference, or worse, hostility, toward a Wargrave, it was considered nothing less than a death sentence.

Yes, the Suns and Moons of the Wargrave House may wage quiet wars among themselves, vying for the seat of the Primarch, but those battles ended at the family gates. Beyond those walls, they stood as one, unshakable and merciless.

But Asher didn't know this. He didn't know that if an assassin were to strike tonight, even if it were killed before reaching him, silenced by a single guard, the Wargraves would still hunt down the assassin's organization and raze it to dust before dawn.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Note that only a few among the Suns and Moons display cold demeanors toward one another as they vie for the position of Primarch. The Elders and Great Elders, having nothing to gain from the conflict, remain largely detached, there is little to no strife among them. Yet, even in their detachment, they consistently wear expressions that are either impassive or cold.

Chapter 35: First True Battle

The morning sun crested the horizon, gradually dispelling the veil of darkness that had draped itself over the forest. Within the quiet stillness of the tent, Asher's eyes fluttered open, their purple hue catching the soft rays that slipped through the fabric.

"Good morning, Young Master," came Lyra's gentle voice from the side.

Asher offered a faint nod before asking, "Is there a river nearby where I can bathe?"

He had assumed a stream would be close enough for that purpose, but Lyra shook her head with a knowing smile.

"No, Young Master. I've already taken care of it," she said, gesturing ahead.

Asher stepped out of the tent, the warmth of the morning sun brushing against his face like a silent welcome.

"Good morning, Tenth Sun," the five guards said in unison, immediately bowing in respectful greeting.

Asher gave a brief nod. "Did anything happen during the night? Any disturbances like an assassin?"

"No, Tenth Sun," one of the guards replied, his voice steady and respectful.

'So, nothing then,' Asher thought silently, his eyes scanning the tranquil forest clearing where they had made camp.

Three tents stood in the quiet morning light. The first belonged to Asher himself. The second, slightly smaller and more modest, housed the coachman, an ordinary man among warriors. The third tent, before which Lyra now stood silently, was unfamiliar to Asher.

Without a word, he began walking toward it.

As he drew aside the flap and stepped inside, he was greeted by the sight of a large, basin-like structure, his makeshift bath, prepared and waiting. Neatly arranged beside it were his bathing essentials and the clothes selected for the day.

Asher shook his head, a faint smile tugging at his lips. 'Of course... there's no way these nobles would ever bathe in a stream or river.'

With that thought, he bathed swiftly, changed into the clothes laid out for him, and stepped back outside. Returning to his own tent, he had a simple yet well-prepared breakfast before boarding the carriage once more.

Without delay, their journey resumed.

'Second day already. We should reach the capital by tomorrow night,' Asher thought, his gaze drifting lazily out the carriage window, his expression steeped in boredom.

The silence, the stillness, it all pressed in on him.

'Am I truly meant to sit inside a carriage for three days, doing nothing but stare at trees and sky?'

The thought lingered like a haze. This stretch of the journey felt endlessly dull, as if time itself had slowed to a crawl.

Hours slipped by unnoticed, the sun now perched high at its zenith, casting sharp rays through the forest canopy. The carriage rocked gently as it moved along the uneven path, and for the first time since the journey began, Asher noticed Lyra's gaze shift toward the window.

A voice from outside broke the stillness.

"Stop the carriage," one of the guards ordered.

Without hesitation, the coachman obeyed, pulling the reins and bringing the carriage to an abrupt halt.

Asher turned to Lyra, whose posture remained unchanged, calm and unshaken.

"Is it an assassin?" he asked, his tone casual, almost indifferent.

Then, a moment later, he blinked and let out a soft breath, mildly amused.

'Why did that sound like I was hoping for an assassination attempt?'

A wry smile crept onto his face at the thought.

"No, Young Master," Lyra replied calmly. "Merely a cluster of low-level monsters, creatures too dull to know when to attack and when to flee."

At her words, Asher rose from his seat and stepped out of the carriage. A quiet curiosity stirred within him. Since his transmigration, he had yet to see a single monster, had yet to witness the world's dangers firsthand.

Not even an Emovira, a creature he'd read about, had crossed his path. He hadn't experienced a single battle, not yet. He still has to wait over three weeks to see any action within the First training ground.

Lyra followed closely behind, walking just behind Asher with the silent grace of a shadow.

As he approached the guards stationed ahead, Asher's gaze swept across the forest, but saw nothing. The clearing remained still. No movement. No sound beyond the rustling of leaves.

Yet he was certain, they were coming. He trusted that the guards, and Lyra, had sensed their presence from a distance away.

Only one guard dismounted, the others remaining astride their horses, clearly, the threat did not warrant full mobilization.

"What rank are the monsters approaching?"

Asher asked, standing near the carriage, his gaze fixed in the same direction the guards were watching.

"They're merely Whisper-ranked beasts, led by a single Echo-ranked pack leader, Tenth Sun," the dismounted guard replied, already preparing to intercept them.

Asher folded his arms, his expression contemplative. 'So, Whisper rank monsters, with one Echo.'

He recalled the hierarchy he had read about.

'In this world, monsters are classified across ten tiers: Whisper — Echo — Veil — Fang — Mark — Grave — Crown — Myth — Void — End.'

But then, a thought struck him, sharp and clear.

This was an opportunity. His opportunity.

Back in the Wargrave First Training Grounds, he was bound by protocol, forced to wait an entire month before being allowed to face a monster. But here, beyond those regulated walls, such restrictions held no power. Out here, the world was untamed.

True, he had never killed before. Even these Whisper-ranked creatures had been fighting to survive since birth. They would be more experienced, more instinctive, more ruthless. But Asher had something they didn't, superior stats.

'There might not be another chance like this,' he reasoned. 'Even if I get critically injured, there are five guards here ready to wipe them out and pull me back. Lyra too, she wouldn't let me die.'

And while there were no healers present, the passive regeneration from Virelass' Crimson Pact would restore his wounds if it came to that.

The decision solidified in his mind. He would face the monsters.

With his current strength, he could likely dispatch them in an instant, leave not a single one standing without taking a scratch. But he didn't intend to. That wasn't the point.

He would fight them like he fought Kale.

Deliberately. Purposefully.

Experience was what he lacked most, and nothing, not stats nor talent, could replace that.

He would observe. Wait for openings.

No matter how weak the enemy, he would draw everything he could from each battle... until his foundation was forged.

But that didn't mean he planned to get injured.

With that thought solidified, Asher turned to Lyra, who stood silently behind him. He removed his coat and handed it to her. She accepted it wordlessly, her brows faintly furrowing in confusion, but she said nothing, choosing instead to observe in quiet curiosity.

Without another word, Asher strode forward, stopping just a step ahead of the guard who had been preparing to engage.

"I'll handle them," he said, his voice calm and steady. "If anything goes wrong, you're free to intervene. That is an order."

He didn't look back as he spoke. His tone left no room for debate.

The guard parted his lips to object, but the words never came.

It was a direct order from a Sun.

Even so, if the Tenth Sun were to be injured under his watch, the consequences would be severe.

He hesitated, torn between duty and obedience, then slowly stepped back. At the very least, Asher had granted him permission to intervene if things took a turn for the worse.

The moment his foot retreated, the rest of the guards followed suit, dismounting swiftly from their horses. Their hands hovered near their weapons, eyes sharp, muscles tense, ready to spring into action at the slightest sign of danger.

Lyra moved forward as well, positioning herself a few steps behind Asher. Her expression remained unreadable, but her aura had shifted, silent, watchful, prepared to protect.

No one spoke. No one dared.

All eyes were fixed on the young man who stood at the front of the group.

They were about to witness it, the Tenth Sun's first true battle.

Chapter 36: First Bleed

Asher stood in composed silence, his heartbeat measured, each breath drawn with a focused calmness. In a blink, Virelass materialized in his palm, its blade resonating with a quiet hum, an eager whisper, as though thirsting to taste real blood and cleave through living flesh for the first time.

His gaze remained steady as he listened, leaves trembled in warning, rustling with increasing urgency. Whatever was approaching was fast, and it was drawing near.

The instant they emerged from the forest's shroud and stepped onto the open path, Asher saw them.

'Wolves? How predictable. It's always wolves or goblins, first to appear, first to die.' The thought edged with irony

The first wolf lunged, its jaws wide open, fangs gleaming as it aimed to tear through Asher's neck in a single, savage bite. But Asher moved, effortlessly, precisely, his body shifting sideways at the final instant, matching the creature's speed with unnerving ease.

The beast's maw snapped shut with a sharp crack, biting into nothing but air where Asher's throat had just been.

Then, before it could even recover, a silver flash arced across its vision.

The wolf froze mid-step.

A breath later, its head slid cleanly from its shoulders, severed with such elegance it barely registered the strike before falling to the earth.

But Asher was already gone.

In the blink of an eye, he was on the move again. The wolves came in waves, surging from the front, flanking from the sides, closing in from behind. A coordinated hunt.

Yet Asher didn't flinch. He didn't panic. His body responded on instinct.

He bent slightly at the knees, muscles coiling tight, then released like a spring unbound, launching into the air with explosive grace.

Mid-flight, his body twisted. Virelass sang once more, its hum rising with anticipation.

Then, guided by gravity and precision, Asher descended. With a single forward thrust, the gleaming rapier pierced clean through the skull of another wolf, silencing its snarl before it ever reached him.

The moment Asher's feet touched the ground, claws filled his vision, from the left, the right, all at once.

But Virelass moved faster.

With a single, fluid motion, he parried, his rapier slicing through a wolf's extended forelimbs, severing them cleanly. The beast shrieked in agony, but the cry was short-lived.

Before it could even collapse, Asher was already in motion, his blade cleaving through its torso, splitting the creature in two. A crimson spray followed, dyeing Virelass red as he pressed forward.

The space around him erupted with motion.

Slash. Thrust. Weave. Sidestep. Footwork.

Each step was precise, every movement deliberate.

Even with his stats suppressed, Asher moved like a predator among prey, a silver wolf amidst a flock of startled hens.

Corpses fell in his wake. Crimson blood soaked the earth, staining brown soil and green grass alike. But Asher didn't slow. He didn't falter.

He was still moving. He kept moving.

A wolf lunged from behind, aiming for a blind spot, but Asher had already seen it. Omni Perception had marked its presence long before it struck.

Without hesitation, Asher dipped to the side, his center of gravity shifting seamlessly with the motion. In a single, fluid twist, he pivoted to face the beast's flank.

His arm moved, Virelass moved as one with him.

From below, a brutal upward slash arced forward. With a wet, sickening rip, the rapier's edge tore through the wolf's abdomen, flesh and muscle parting like silk beneath Virelass' teeth.

Asher rose slowly, his posture composed, his breathing unbroken.

His white shirt, once pristine, was now drenched in red. Blood stained his arms, splattered across his frame, but his eyes remained calm.

The remaining wolves had already halted their assault, their snarls fading into whimpers.

Instinct screamed at them, they had chosen the wrong prey.

Now, they stood frozen, tails tucked low, eyes wide with primal fear. Their pack formation unraveled, hesitation spreading like wildfire.

Asher's purple gaze swept over them, cold and unblinking.

He saw it clearly, the fight had left them. Their will to battle was gone, crushed beneath the weight of a single human's presence.

There was no need to suppress himself any longer. Nothing left to gain from holding back.

So... why not test something else?

The wolves barely had time to twitch before Asher vanished.

His form blurred into a streak of purple, lightning laced his body, crackling with raw intensity.

A sharp, thunder snap echoed through the forest, searing the air, crackling in everyone's ears

Asher had moved, no, he had erased the space between them, crossing the distance in an instant, as though it had never existed at all.

Before the wolves could even blink, their existence had already ended.

A single thrust. A single slash.

That was all it took. But Asher didn't stop.

He moved through the pack like a living storm, a blur of steel and purple lightning. Virelass danced with him, clean, efficient, merciless.

Blood burst into the air like ink spilled on canvas. Innards scattered. Heads rolled. Limbs fell with dull, wet thuds as he carved through them.

In less than three seconds, it was over.

Asher stood exactly where he had been before, as if he had never moved at all. The purple lightning crackling across his body slowly receded, quieting into a hum before vanishing completely.

There was nothing more to gain from these creatures, not power, not knowledge, not growth. He had simply used them to test his lightning in real battle.

Whisper-ranked monsters were the lowest of the low for a reason. They had no true abilities, no elemental control, no innate powers. Just claws, fangs, and basic senses like heightened smell and hearing, which they'd already possessed even before Astra's touch had evolved them.

They were little more than upgraded beasts, predators to most, prey to Asher.

As Asher stood in silent thought, something breached the edge of his Omni Perception, a presence deliberate, heavier than the others.

He didn't need to guess. He already knew. The Echo ranked pack leader had arrived. He hadn't forgotten about it, he was merely waiting.

Unlike Whisper-ranked creatures, some Echo ranked monsters had awakened abilities. Others remained mundane, relying on brute strength and instinct. But this one... Asher had already suspected it possessed something more. It was a pack leader, after all.

Without hesitation, Asher spun around, Virelass flashing forward like silver lightning to intercept the incoming strike.

Then he saw it — wind.

It coiled around the wolf's extended claws, sharpening them into whirling blades of compressed air.

The collision came with a soft yet forceful boom, like thunder behind silk. The impact echoed out, spiderweb cracks rippling across the ground beneath their feet.

Asher's eyes narrowed.

The wind-infused claws slammed into his body, not deep, but sharp enough to tear through flesh. Blood welled from the tears, and mild pain flared in his nerves.

Still, he didn't yield.

Instead, he increased the strength behind his guard, forcing the beast back, just a few steps, but it was enough to shift the momentum.

"It seems I was careless," Asher murmured, his voice quiet but edged with clarity as his gaze fell to the shallow cuts carved across his chest and shoulders, thin lines drawn by wind based attack.

This... was the difference.

The difference between one who had lived through battles and one who hadn't.

Experience.

A seasoned fighter wouldn't have fallen for such a thing. Would have read the wind before it ever struck. But Asher didn't mind.

This was why he was here, to earn that experience with blood, steel, and pain.

From the edge of the field, Lyra's eyes narrowed. The moment she saw the wounds, her posture shifted. She prepared to move, hand instinctively brushing the hilt of her weapon. There were no healers among the guards. If the Tenth Sun sustained another hit, especially one deeper, he could bleed out before the battle even ended. She couldn't allow that.

But before Lyra's thoughts could fully form, she saw it.

The blood on the ground, spilled from slain beasts, began to stir. It rose in thin, twisting strands, as if possessed by will, slithering through the air toward Virelass.

The rapier pulsed faintly, its silver teeth edge absorbing the crimson threads like a starving relic. The blade shimmered, and in that moment, the wounds across Asher's chest and shoulders snapped shut with unnatural speed, torn flesh knitting together in seconds as if time itself bent around him.

A small smile touched Asher's lips as he watched the final traces of blood vanish from his skin.

But the wolf wasn't watching. It moved, fast and feral, lunging to capitalize on what it perceived as a moment of distraction.

A fatal mistake. Asher didn't need to look.

Omni Perception had already mapped the wolf's every twitch, every violent intention. Even without turning his head, he saw it, clear as day.

The moment it sprang, he was ready. Asher's form blurred, a sudden, violent streak of motion.

The claws came again, slashing through the air with lethal force, but this time, he didn't block. He dipped low, fluid and effortless, the attack sweeping harmlessly overhead.

Then Virelass screamed through the air as it moved.

With a single, devastating thrust, the rapier tore through the beast's hind limb. The wolf howled in agony, but Asher didn't slow.

In the same breath, he moved, cutting low, and in one clean motion, severing the second hind limb.

The wolf crashed to the ground, its rear legs now nothing but ruined flesh and bone. But Asher was already gone again, only to reappear in front of the creature like a ghost stepping through time.

Virelass was already mid-descent.

With surgical precision and terrifying ease, the rapier cleaved through both of the wolf's front limbs, no resistance, no struggle, just flesh parting beneath divine steel, like a blade through butter.

Four limbs gone.

The wolf's howl rose in pitch, a piercing, agonized cry, as it lay limbless in the dirt. Its body trembled, blood pooling beneath it in thick, steaming rivers. And then, it looked up.

Fear now filled its eyes.

Not rage. Not pride. Just the cold, primal fear of a predator realizing it was nothing more than prey.

But Asher didn't flinch. He moved, twice.

Two quick thrusts, like flashes of silver lightning, and Virelass pierced both of the beast's eyes. Blood and darkness swallowed its vision, leaving it blind in its final moments.

Virelass slipped from Asher's grip, not falling, but floating. It hovered above the wolf's ruined form, humming low and sharp with a metallic resonance.

In a flash of silver, it arced downward in a full, graceful swing. A clean decapitation. The wolf's head dropped from its neck with a soft thud, rolling gently before going still.

For a moment, Virelass lingered there, suspended in the air, as though gazing down upon the creature that dared harm its master. It hovered in silence, judgmental, almost sentient, before drifting back to Asher's side.

It hummed contentedly now, like a weapon that had fulfilled its vengeance.

Asher smiled faintly at the display. He said nothing, simply letting Virelass float beside him, its blade still faintly warm with blood and retribution.

Asher cast one final glance at the corpse, then turned away, expression unreadable, mind already shifting beyond the battle.

Unlike humans, monsters didn't have to train to use their abilities. They were born with them, raw, instinctive, natural. From the very first breath, they wielded their abilities as easily as they breathed.

The wolf had been able to coat its claws in wind without effort.

But Asher... he couldn't yet coat Virelass in lightning.

Not yet. He was almost there.

But he could channel it through himself, let lightning wrap around his body like a second skin, crackling along his frame, heightening his speed, sharpening his reflexes.

Chapter 37: Ender

High above Asher's location, nestled within the drifting white clouds and the vast expanse of blue sky, a figure stood silently atop a colossal bird. The figure bore striking golden eyes and hair that shimmered like sunlight. Yet, the creature beneath him was no mere monster, it was an Emovira.

Emovirae are enigmatic creatures, divided into two distinct types: positive Emovirae and negative Emovirae.

Negative Emovirae are born from emotions such as fear, sorrow, and despair. They are aggressive by nature, attacking anything they perceive on sight. In contrast, positive Emovirae emerge from emotions like love, hope, and joy.

Unlike their darker counterparts, they do not attack unless provoked. Though cautious, they are inherently docile, capable of forming bonds with humans. However, taming one is no simple feat; it requires besting them in battle first.

As for the negative Emovirae, they cannot be tamed. It is a brutal exchange: either you die, or they do. There is no middle ground.

A crimson cape cascaded down the man's back, billowing gently in the wind. Vambraces adorned his forearms, while leather gloves encased his hands. His legs were protected by polished greaves, and his torso was clad in a radiant golden breastplate that gleamed beneath the sunlight.

This was Azeron Wargrave.

Behind him stood Zarek, unchanged in appearance, his attire as pristine as ever. He remained dressed in his classic black butler suit, complete with immaculate white gloves, a silent shadow at Azeron's side.

At that moment, a broad smile played on Azeron's lips as he gazed down upon the battlefield below. When Asher had departed from the Wargrave estate, Azeron had followed, silently, from the skies above.

He had initially intended to abstain from attending the event altogether. But then came a personal message from the Emperor himself, urging his presence.

With such a summons, refusal was no longer an option.

And so, Azeron moved. Yet before heading directly to the venue, he chose to shadow his son's journey, curious to see what would unfold.

As he looked down now, pride flickered in his golden eyes.

His last son had not disappointed him.

"Ehh? Azeron, are you sure that little monster is truly your son? Even you weren't this much of a genius, despite being hailed as a prodigy reminiscent of the ancient days," Zarek remarked, his gaze fixed on Asher below.

His tone was casual, far removed from the respectful demeanor he always displayed within the Wargrave estate, especially in the presence of the Primarch.

But this was the nature of their bond.

Despite the vast difference in their status, one a butler, the other the Primarch of House Wargrave and one of the most formidable men in the Empire, their relationship transcended titles.

In public, Zarek addressed Azeron with the reverence expected of any servant toward their master. But in private, all formality fell away. He spoke as an equal, as a trusted companion, one who remembered the man behind the title.

"You're just jealous he's not your kid," Azeron said with a teasing smile, his eyes still fixed on the scene below.

"Why would I be jealous of that?" Zarek replied matter-of-factly. "Even if I did have a child, I doubt they could compare to a Wargrave."

In House Wargrave, the rules were clear, maids and butlers were permitted to have families. The 'no birth' decree applied only to those of the bloodline, not the retainers who served them.

"I've told you before, go have a child already, so I can be an uncle. I'd even guide him a little. You know, everyone dreams of being mentored by me," Azeron added, his grin widening.

"You already have ten children, Azeron. Not everyone has your stamina," Zarek said calmly. "Besides, would I even have time for my own child if I'm always stuck at your side?"

Azeron chuckled at that, but said no more. He didn't press Zarek about fatherhood again.

"So, what do you think?" Azeron asked, his voice light, yet laced with curiosity.

"Think about what?" Zarek replied without turning his gaze.

"Now that you've seen his talent, are you considering resignation? Ready to start serving him instead?" Azeron said with a smirk.

Zarek let out a thoughtful hum. "What he has is talent and potential, not power, not yet. Certainly not like yours. Besides, why would I give up the privilege of serving the Primarch? Do you realize how much authority and access to resources I'd be forfeiting?"

"Oh?" Azeron's golden eyes shifted toward Zarek, a playful gleam within them. "So you've been using me to amass influence and power, is that it?"

Zarek chuckled, unfazed. "It's only fair. After all, I handle half the responsibilities that should be yours."

Azeron gave a small, amused shake of his head. His gaze drifted downward once more, catching sight of Asher's rapier as it floated beside his son, humming softly.

"Don't they remind you of us after our first real battle, Ender?" Azeron said softly, his voice carrying a hint of nostalgia.

As he spoke, a long spear materialized beside him, its shaft black as night, its edges streaked with crimson. It hovered silently at his side, humming with a low, resonant tone, as though acknowledging his words. Its unseen gaze, too, was locked on the battlefield below.

This was Azeron's weapon — his spear.

He had named it Ender, a name chosen with intent. Azeron had vowed that he and his weapon would bring an end to anything, and anyone, who dared to stand in their path.

The spear hummed again, deep and resonant, as if speaking in its own ancient tongue. A moment later, Azeron's voice followed.

"Indeed, it's a remarkable ability. Drawing strength by drinking the blood of the fallen to heal his wounds... I wonder if that rapier has any other abilities."

Ender drifted around Azeron, its soft hum intensifying briefly.

"True," Azeron said with a nod and a smile. "With talent like his, there's no way that blade only has a single ability."

Then, as if moved by curiosity or amusement, Ender turned toward Zarek. It floated toward him and began to circle, humming softly as it did so.

"It's nice to see you too, Ender," Zarek replied with a light chuckle. Though he responded, he understood none of what the spear conveyed. Only the bonded master could comprehend its voice, its language was not made for others.

Ender hummed again, its sound low and insistent. This time, Zarek didn't respond. He couldn't understand the weapon's language, so he simply turned his gaze toward Azeron, waiting for interpretation.

"He's telling you to convince me to return and hunt down the Sins," Azeron said dryly, sensing Zarek's stare on his back. "Apparently, he's had enough of us sitting around for over a week."

Zarek wasn't the least bit surprised. Ender had always been battle-hungry. Whenever they weren't fighting, the spear would constantly badger Azeron, urging him to spar with the Dukes or find a new enemy worth its edge.

Azeron didn't respond to the spear's complaints. He simply continued watching his son below, allowing Ender to pester Zarek in his place.

Though pride filled his heart as he observed Asher, Azeron had sighed more than thirty times that afternoon alone. He had no interest in attending yet another empty celebration.

Of course, his wife Lily occasionally dragged him to such events, but that was different. That was her. This, however, was just another gathering of bloated egos and idle chatter, where men flapped their tongues instead of swinging their weapons.

Chapter 38: Borrowed Splendor

Asher turned and walked back toward Lyra and the guards, all of whom stared at him as though he were a monster cloaked in human flesh. What they had just witnessed defied all logic, utterly impossible by their standards.

The Tenth Sun had actually emerged victorious?

And not just victorious, he had triumphed without a shred of formal training or battlefield experience. It hadn't even been a full week since his awakening, and by protocol, he still had more than three weeks to go before he could be deemed eligible to face a single monster in the First Training Ground.

What they had witnessed left them speechless, stunned into silence. None more so than Lyra, who stood frozen at the rear, still clutching Asher's coat in her hands.

She had been by his side every day, before his awakening, and even after. And yet, she had never explicitly seen him train. She knew he was a genius; that much had been clear when he ascended two sub-Life ranks as if it were nothing.

But she had neither seen him personally train in the First Training Ground nor watched him train privately in his room afterward.

Her gaze remained fixed on her charge as he approached. His breathing was steady, his stride composed. Those calm, purple eyes and hair, made all the more vivid against the backdrop of crimson blood splattered across his form.

The guards immediately stepped forward, speaking in unison. "Congratulations on your first battle and first kill, Tenth Sun."

Asher turned his gaze toward them and offered a faint smile. "Thank you. My safety is in your hands. However, if we encounter any weak monsters along the way, leave them to me."

For a moment, the guards stood in stunned silence.

'Did the Tenth Sun just say... thank you?'

The thought echoed in their minds, disbelief written across their faces.

One of them quickly composed himself and responded, "Rest assured, Tenth Sun."

He then turned to another guard and issued a swift order. "Set up a tent for the Tenth Sun to freshen up. We'll resume the journey once he's ready."

With practiced efficiency, a guard broke from formation and began assembling the tent without delay.

After bathing and changing into a fresh set of clothes, Asher made his way back to the carriage.

'Thank goodness I made Lyra pack a generous amount of my wardrobe into her space ring,' he mused, recalling how he had selected some clothes for himself, only for Lyra to store them with her usual efficiency.

The moment he settled into his seat, the carriage began to move once more. Up front, the coachman wore a far-off look, quietly lost in his thoughts as he guided the horses along the path.

He was clearly fantasizing, perhaps imagining himself in battle. After all, who hadn't dreamed of standing on the battlefield, weapon in hand, forging their legacy?

But reality had been less kind. He had failed all three of his Awakening attempts. No Astra, no ability, just a regular man in a world of powers beyond reach.

Inside the carriage, Asher had already settled into his usual routine. Eyes closed, his breathing steady and measured, he slipped into a meditative rhythm. His mind replayed the battle from beginning to end, each movement, each decision, each strike.

He analyzed every moment with sharp focus, searching for flaws, missed opportunities, or anything he could have executed more effectively. This was his process, refining himself, even in stillness.

Yet, despite his scrutiny, everything appeared seamless, flawless, even, save for one moment: the pack leader's initial strike. That single exchange lingered in his mind, a slight imperfection in an otherwise immaculate performance.

Lyra watched Asher intently as he sat in a lotus position, eyes closed, lost in quiet concentration. Her mind was ablaze with questions. She wasn't afraid to voice them, but she knew better than to interrupt what appeared to be training.

Then, as though he had read her thoughts, Asher spoke without opening his eyes.

"If you have any questions, feel free to ask. I'll answer them to the best of my abilities."

He opened his eyes slowly, adjusting his posture as one leg folded over the other with ease.

Lyra didn't hesitate. "Was that really your first battle, Young Master?"

She already knew the answer, but she needed to hear it from him.

Asher offered a small, confident smile. "I'm sure you already know it was, Lyra. But I'm just that talented. And I train hard enough to back it up."

Lyra nodded slightly, then asked what truly intrigued her. "And those blood threads from earlier, what exactly were they?"

She had her suspicions. The Wargrave family's weapons were known to possess unique and often terrifying abilities. But guessing wasn't enough. She needed confirmation.

"That's Virelass's ability," Asher replied calmly. "It's called Crimson Pact. It heals me using the blood of those I kill."

Lyra's eyes narrowed slightly in thought. She had never heard the name Virelass before, but she could safely assume it was the name of his rapier.

With that, Lyra continued, asking more questions, curious about the other abilities Virelass might possess. Asher answered each one with a calm voice, withholding nothing.

There was no real need to hide anything from her. After all, trust was the foundation of her role by his side.

That said, he wasn't the type to share his secrets simply because someone asked.

Openness didn't equate to carelessness.

Even now, everything he had shared with Lyra remained confined within the four walls of the carriage. In noble circles, discretion was a discipline.

Carriages were always reinforced with barriers or enchantments to ensure privacy, preventing even the most loyal guards from listening in. For nobles, conversations were as valuable as gold, and far more dangerous if overheard.

And so, the journey continued.

Asher passed the time in conversation with Lyra, the hours slipping by as their carriage rolled steadily forward. Whenever a monster was sighted along the way, Asher stepped out to confront it himself. For those beyond his current ability, a single guard effortlessly dispatched them.

Frequent stops were made so Asher could cleanse himself of blood, a necessity that, while minor, extended the journey beyond its intended duration.

Yet not a single complaint was uttered.

How could they complain? They were witnessing something extraordinary: the Tenth Sun's growth unfolding right before their eyes.

By the time they reached the capital, night had already fallen. The towering gates loomed ahead, bathed in the soft glow of enchanted lanterns. But the city guards stationed there made no move to halt the carriage for the customary inspection.

The moment they laid eyes on the crest emblazoned on the carriage walls and the armor of the accompanying guards, they stood at attention and stepped aside in silence.

Some insignias spoke louder than words, and this one demanded reverence.

Asher and Lyra arrived at the most luxurious inn in the capital, a place so exclusive that a single room cost one hundred gold coins per night. Without hesitation, Lyra paid for two rooms: one for Asher, and the other for the coachman.

She and the guards, however, did not seek rest. Instead, they took their positions outside Asher's door, ever vigilant, prepared to respond at a moment's notice to any threat or disturbance.

As for the coachman, he was living a dream. Never in his life had he imagined stepping foot inside such an opulent establishment, let alone sleeping in a room worth a hundred gold coins, for a single night.

Surrounded by silk sheets, golden fixtures, and velvet walls, he could only grin to himself.

At this moment, he felt nothing less than royalty. A prince in borrowed splendor.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The currency goes like this;

1 silver coin = 100 copper coins.

1 gold coin = 100 silver coins.

1 platinum coin = 1,000 gold coins.

Chapter 39: Balance

The following morning arrived swiftly. Asher's eyes fluttered open, greeted by the soft caress of sunlight streaming through the window. He sat up slowly, stretching with a yawn, savoring the tranquil comfort of the moment.

His gaze swept across the room, lavish in every detail, a testament to the opulence promised by its extravagant price of one hundred gold coins. Yet, even in all its grandeur, it still paled in comparison to his room in the Wargrave estate.

Asher remained seated on the bed for a brief moment before finally rising to his feet. Yet, the instant his soles touched the ground, a knock echoed sharply through the room.

'Can I at least take a step before you knock, Lyra?' he thought, exhaling mentally in mild exasperation.

"Come in, Lyra," he called out.

The door opened with practiced grace, and Lyra entered, her expression composed, her smile gentle.

"Good morning, Young Master. I trust you slept well?" she asked with quiet warmth.

"I did, indeed," Asher replied smoothly. "After all, sleeping in a forest and sleeping in a proper town are worlds apart, wouldn't you agree?"

Lyra's gaze softened, as though intuitively sensing the unspoken concern behind his words, the unease born from threats that lurked in the shadows.

"Whatever may come, Young Master, know that we will always be by your side to protect you," she said with quiet conviction.

Asher smiled faintly, a calmness in his eyes.

"That much, I know, Lyra. I have no doubt in your strength."

During one of their conversations on the road to the capital, a pastime Asher often turned to whenever boredom set in, given that weak beasts didn't appear with predictable frequency, he had casually inquired about Lyra's Life Rank.

To his surprise, she revealed she had attained the Flare Firmstar Life Rank.

Asher found it difficult to comprehend how someone of such strength served merely as a maid. The revelation stirred further curiosity in his mind, just how powerful must Zarek be, the man known as the right hand of the Primarch?

In truth, Asher had no real sense of their capabilities, whether it was Lyra, Zarek, or even the Primarch himself. None of them had ever demonstrated their strength in combat before him, let alone sparred.

With a quiet sigh, Asher shook his head, dismissing the thoughts. There was no point dwelling on what he could not yet grasp.

"What plans do we have for the day, Lyra?" Asher asked, settling himself before a mirror.

His gaze lingered on his own reflection, a confident smile curling his lips as he quietly reaffirmed what he had long believed, his face was nothing short of a jackpot.

"No plans, Young Master," Lyra replied calmly, standing with quiet poise at his side. "The Royal Party begins tomorrow. Until then, your schedule remains open."

"So, nothing to do but lounge indoors," Asher muttered, drumming his fingers lightly against the table before him. With a sigh, he rose from his seat and made his way to the bathroom for a quick rinse.

As always, Lyra had anticipated his needs, the bath was already prepared. After a brief wash, Asher returned and dressed in a fresh set of clothes. Just as Lyra raised her hand to summon breakfast from her spatial ring, Asher gently stayed her motion.

"I've just left the Wargrave estate for the first time since birth," he said, his tone thoughtful. "Let me explore what the capital has to offer, at least for today."

Lyra paused, then offered a small nod of understanding.

"Do we have a particular destination in mind, Young Master?" Lyra asked, her tone carrying a note of mild curiosity.

"Not really," Asher replied with a faint shrug. "We'll simply walk around for now."

In truth, he had no idea where anything was. But that hardly mattered. He intended to wander the capital aimlessly, taking in the sights before returning later.

He supposed he could be spending the day training, refining his skills and pushing his limits. But Asher believed firmly in balance. A life devoted solely to discipline, without moments of enjoyment, was hollow.

Staring at himself in the mirror, Asher's figure literally screamed nobility. Not just any noble, definitely a prince or close.

"Fetch me something simpler," he said, his voice calm, his gaze still fixed on the mirror.

He had no intention of spending the day fending off stares from every direction like some rare creature on display. Today was meant for leisure, not spectacle. Still, that didn't mean he would stoop to wearing the attire of commoners.

No, he would don garments befitting a noble, just ones of slightly lesser quality. Enough to tone down the overwhelming impression of status and presence... if only by a little.

He knew, of course, that his striking features alone would still draw attention. Some things, after all, couldn't be hidden.

A few minutes later, Lyra returned with a set of simpler garments. Asher changed into them with measured ease, and once dressed, he lowered himself into a chair.

"Call in the guards stationed outside," he said.

Lyra gave a small nod and stepped out, returning moments later with the guards in tow. Clad in heavy armor and armed to the teeth, their presence was imposing, far too conspicuous for the kind of day Asher had in mind.

The moment he saw them, Asher sighed inwardly. 'If I walk around like this, I might as well carry a royal banner while I'm at it.'

"I'll be exploring a portion of the capital today," he began, his voice even. "I understand your duty is to protect me, but I'd prefer not to attract the entire city's attention while doing so."

He let his words sink in for a breath before continuing.

"So today, you'll change into plain normal attire. You'll follow from a distance, discreetly, each of you positioned separately throughout the area. I want your protection, but without the announcement."

His tone was clear but not unkind, firm, yet trusting.

The guards understanding his words, nodded. Asher told them to head to the bathroom and change there.

Turning to Lyra he spoke "You too. You won't be wearing your maid clothes today. Also, you wouldn't walk a step behind me. You will walk beside me today"

Lyra gave a nod of acknowledgment, then vanished. Within three seconds, she reappeared dressed in an entirely different outfit.

"How much coin do we have to spend?" Asher asked, unwilling to risk emptying his pockets before the day was over.

"I was entrusted with three platinum coins prior to our departure," Lyra replied with a calm tone.

Asher's steps came to an abrupt halt at the mention of the sum.

'Three platinum coins? Truly the mark of a Duke's household, to hand out such wealth as if it were common produce. Still, who am I to complain?' With that thought, he resumed walking.

"Don't forget to bring the coachman along," Asher said as he stepped out. "Our first task today is simple, sample the cuisine this hotel... inn has to offer. Everyone's ordering."

Lyra walked at his side with casual ease, just as he had instructed. The guards, for now, moved like ordinary travelers, unassuming, unremarkable.

But the moment they stepped beyond the inn's threshold, their roles would shift. From that point forward, their duty to protect would begin in earnest.

Chapter 40: Bloated

With Lyra walking gracefully at his right and the coachman at his left, Asher descended the stairs at a measured pace.

His eyes flicked briefly toward the coachman, noting with faint amusement the man's surprisingly improved hygiene and the unmissable smoothness of his skin, an overnight transformation that did not go unnoticed.

Upon reaching the front counter, the attendant straightened with practiced poise and greeted them at once, "Good morning, Young Master, Madam, Sirs. How may I be of service?"

The attendant's tone was exceptionally courteous, as expected. After all, anyone capable of affording a hundred gold coins per night was either nobility, closely tied to one, or simply wealthy enough to stand among them.

"Let us see the food menu," Asher said calmly.

With a respectful nod, the attendant lowered his hand beneath the counter, retrieved a neatly folded menu, and presented it to Asher with both hands.

Asher studied it for a moment, his gaze skimming over the elegantly listed options. Then, with a tone of quiet decisiveness, he began to order.

"For the main course, I'll have the Lamb Cutlets with Minted Pea Puree. As for the sides, bring the Rosemary and Sea Salt Flatbread. And for the wine... Aged Blackberry Mead should suffice."

Truth be told, he hadn't heard of any of these dishes before. But the countless memories embedded within him, filled with knowledge of exotic cuisines and refined palates, made the act of ordering appear effortless.

Asher passed the menu to the coachman at his side, who accepted it with a smile that bordered on familiarity. Normally, someone of his station would never stand so close, let alone behave so casually, around a Sun or a Moon.

But after three days in Asher's company, he had drawn his own quiet conclusion: this young master was unlike the others. Even the guards had come to recognize the subtle but undeniable difference in him.

Lyra, too, had noticed the shift. Ever since Asher emerged from his year-long lock up, there was something altered in his demeanor, calmer, perhaps, but also very different.

She chalked it up to his self-imposed isolation, to the scars solitude often leaves behind. Besides, what right did she have to question the change in him? She was, after all, merely his maid.

The coachman wasted no time, ordering a veritable feast without the slightest hesitation. Even Asher raised an eyebrow, mildly concerned whether the man would be able to walk after consuming so much.

As for himself, Asher had intentionally chosen something lighter, he intended to explore the city's streets later, sampling whatever local delicacies happened to catch his eye.

"How much?" Asher asked, his tone casual but measured.

"Breakfasts are included with your stay, Young Master," the attendant replied courteously.

With a slight nod, Asher turned without another word and made his way to a nearby table, taking a seat with the quiet assurance of someone used to being served. The others followed suit.

Within minutes, a procession of dishes began to arrive, each plated with meticulous care and aromatic finesse.

Everyone dug in.

The coachman, overwhelmed by the flavors, ate with such enthusiasm that he teared up at one point, a moment both comical and oddly touching. The guards, however, remained composed and unaffected.

It was clear they were accustomed to cuisine of this standard, likely a regular indulgence during their time stationed at the Wargrave estate.

Once the meal concluded, Asher rose from his seat, prompting the others to follow. His gaze drifted to the coachman, whose bloated stomach made each step a struggle. With

a faint hint of amusement, Asher offered a simple directive: Return to your room and rest. You've earned it.

Although Asher had initially considered slipping the man a gold coin and letting him explore the city on his own later, he thought better of it. Who knew what kind of trouble the coachman might stumble into? He might very well go courting death before sundown. It was far safer to have him remain behind, tucked away in his room for the rest of the day.

The coachman didn't object. With a contented sigh and a hand resting on his swollen belly, he turned on his heel and trudged back upstairs without protest.

Shaking his head in quiet amusement, Asher stepped out of the inn with a composed yet eager stride. Though calm on the surface, there was a spark of anticipation in his eyes, he was finally ready to see the capital for himself.

The moment he crossed the threshold, the world seemed to erupt around him.

The capital overwhelmed his senses. A cacophony of sound washed over him, animated chatter, the creak of wheels, the clatter of hooves, and the occasional bark of a vendor hawking goods. Voices mingled from every direction, a living symphony of life and motion.

People of all shapes, heights, and social standing wove through the crowded streets, merchants negotiating prices, nobles flanked by guards, children darting between legs with laughter.

Carriages rumbled past, some drawn by fine-bred horses bearing elegantly dressed passengers, others tugged by sturdy beasts of burden laden with crates, barrels, and sacks of wares.

The architecture was no less varied, houses and shops stretched outward and upward, crafted in an array of styles. Some were simple stone dwellings with timber frames, others boasted ornate facades with carved detailing and painted glass. The capital pulsed with vibrant diversity, each corner holding its own flavor.

Asher strode forward with quiet eagerness, Lyra walking in step beside him. The guards had already melted into the surroundings, dispersed among the crowd, their watchful eyes tracking his every move, poised to respond at a moment's notice.

His gaze swept over each building and stall, a flicker of curiosity dancing in his eyes and expression like a commoner who had just left the village for the first time and entered the capital by seemingly sheer luck.

"Come, Lyra. There's a world of flavors waiting," Asher said, his pace quickening with sudden enthusiasm.

'Since when did the Young Master become a connoisseur of cuisine?' Lyra mused silently, yet fell into step without protest.

Asher approached a roadside stall where the aroma of grilled meat lingered thick in the air. Skewers of various kinds sizzled enticingly over open flames.

Behind the stall stood a middle-aged man, clad in a well-worn apron, who beamed the moment he caught sight of Asher.

"Young man, what'll it be?" the vendor asked with practiced cheer. "I've got it all, Spiced Mutton Skewers, Chicken Liver with Onion, Pork Belly Bites. Two coppers apiece."

Asher's eyes danced across the offerings, each one more tempting than the last. Without hesitation, he replied, "I'll have two of each."

Wealth had its privileges, why limit himself with choices?

The vendor nodded eagerly, his morning already made. Twelve copper coins before noon, fortune was smiling today. He wrapped the skewers in parchment with swift efficiency and handed them over.

Fortunately, by some stroke of grace, Lyra had small change on her. Asher was spared the awkwardness of tossing a gold coin at a street vendor and waiting for change that likely didn't exist.

Skewers in hand, Asher and Lyra strolled onward, sampling as they walked. A smile bloomed on Asher's face, bright, boyish, unrestrained, as he moved from stall to stall, indulging in every delicacy that caught his eye.

At one point, Asher wandered into an adventurers' guild, more out of curiosity than purpose. He wanted to see the famed mission board and observe the so-called adventurers who seemed to spend more time drowning themselves in ale than accepting actual assignments.

Naturally, a few among them tried to assert dominance, throwing hostile glances and muttering threats under their breath. Asher, however, remained utterly unfazed.

He gave a slight nod to Lyra, who responded with casual brutality, putting a few of them in their place by smashing chairs and splintering tables over their heads. The guild hall rang with the clatter of collapsing furniture and groans of regret.

Wasn't fighting in the hall of the adventurer guild the hallmark of every reincarnated beginner adventurer. He was just placing his mark.

After a moment of studying the mission board, more to amuse himself than anything else, Asher stepped back out, satisfied. His next destination: the shopping and clothing district, a sector typically reserved for nobles.

Though his wardrobe was already well stocked, that minor detail didn't deter him. Today, Asher intended to burn through two platinum coins.

After all, tomorrow would be spent enduring the company of those pompous, jewel-draped peacocks called nobles. He would depart the day after, and saw no point in conserving the generous funds gifted to him.

Naturally, word of Asher's lavish spending didn't go unnoticed. Along the way, a few desperate souls, street thugs hoping for an easy payday, attempted to strike it rich at his expense.

Unfortunately for them, they never made it within striking distance. The guards, ever watchful though unseen, dealt with them swiftly and silently, leaving not even a ripple in Asher's peaceful excursion.

By the time he returned to the inn, night had already settled over the capital, its streets bathed in the soft glow of lanternlight.

He paid once more for his room, without hesitation or concern, before dragging himself upstairs, stomach bloated from a day of unrestrained indulgence, not unlike the coachman's earlier feast.

He collapsed onto his bed with the unbothered ease of a man who had conquered a kingdom of food and frivolity. A contented smile curved his lips as sleep claimed him, the day's memories still warm in his mind.