

## D. of Pride 951

### Chapter 951- The Man Named Itherion (5)

Verdia's beautiful eyes gazed at the distance, "Peace... it softens people, yes. But that softness is not a flaw; it's a gift. They don't need to carry the burden we carried. They shouldn't. And if that makes them weaker, then so be it. I'll gladly bear the weight of that weakness if it means they never have to experience the horror of war."

A powerful golden light flashed in her eyes and the room was bathed in a golden afterglow momentarily.

"Ah" flustered, she quickly realised her mistake and retracted her aura, donning the disguise of Verdia the academy teacher once again.

"Haha, if it's Her Holiness guaranteeing it, nothing can be more assuring than that. In that case, please allow me to fight alongside you when the time comes" Vincent or rather Itherion got up from his seat and got on one knee.

His posture was like that of a knight swearing his loyalty to his lord. If anyone saw Itherion assuming a humbling attitude like that, they would unmistakably rub their eyes in doubt.

The sight was that surreal after all, those who knew Itherion knew how high his position and status was in the Mainland. He was one of the most influential and powerful men in the world who even the current king of Solarion has to give face.

A person like him bowing to someone else, it made one wonder what sort of background, this beautiful looking woman had.

Verdia nodded her head accepting his answer. Normally she would ask him to behave like usual and treat her normally. However, the situation was so that she needed as many ally as she could gather.

It was also for this reason that she came to the Solarion empire to find...

"This reminds me, has any of the students here caught your eye?" Now standing upright, Itherion questioned.

"There are a few... unusual students who stand out among the others. A boy named Matthias—he's got a natural sense of leadership, and such a kind heart. And then there's Elira, who has shown an aptitude for magic I haven't seen in hundreds of years. Each one of them holds such promise."

"Matthias and Elira... I will have to keep an eye on them" Itherion repeated thoughtfully before asking the main question "But have you found the one you are looking for?"

Only a few people in this huge academy knew about the actual identity of Miss Verdia and among them only he and one other person knew about the actual real reason why she was here.

Verdia shook her head and sighed in regret.

"No, but I definitely sensed its powers earlier. It has appeared in the world again, it has to" After saying that, she started muttering to herself.

"The ominous moon has appeared which means that the seven sins are going to show their faces soon. We need all the virtues to fight the Great Evil"

That's right, the real reason why she was here disguised as a professor was to find the possessor of the great Virtues.

"Fragments of virtues... if the remaining ones have appeared as you say, then we need to find the possessors and protect them at all costs. In the upcoming great upheaval, they are the pillars that will lead humanity" Itherion spoke with a serious face.

Verdia nodded before looking at him "I must say you are a man of great vision Vincent. Did you foresee the world going through crisis once again and establish the Adventurer's Association and Solarion Empire?".

Itherion laughed shaking his head, the whites in his hair and creases gave away his age "You think too high of me your holiness. Truthfully, I am just completing the wishes that my friend failed to accomplish. It was his goal and vision, to protect this world at all costs. I am just walking on his road".

There was a faint happy yet sad tone to his voice.

Verdia nodded her head and did not dig any further. "In any case, the presence of the Adventurers guild, the Solarion Empire and the Main Land that it is built on would be a great help in the turbulent times".

The Ominous Moon—every time it appears, the balance of the world shifts. Dark forces stir, and fragments of great power surface. And this time the movement of the moons was out of the ordinary.

It not only raised many questions but also brought chaos along with it. If the signs given by the celestial bodies are to be believed, then something, something powerful was slowly stirring and gathering strength.

If nothing is done, the world would be in great danger. She needs to find the possessors of the Great Virtues before disaster strikes.

"We still need to find Fragments of Justice and Courage" Especially Justice which is said to be the strongest virtue rivalling that of Pride and Wrath.

Itherion nodded his head "The Strongest Fragment of Virtue is capable of great things. The possessor could become humanity's greatest savior. I shall aid you in any way possible"...

"Thank you Itherion, you are a great help as always"...

"By the way, do you have any leads? Did the Eternal Watcher and the All Knowing say anything about the other Fragments?"

At Itherion's question, Verdia's expression turned a little grim. Her eyes which turned golden glanced at the western skies before confusion dawned on them.

She replied "The old masters aren't saying anything yet. They seem to believe that nothing can disrupt the current peace and humanity dominance"...

"Is that so?" Itherion frowned, he found it weird that the two weren't making their moves when even he could sense that a great change was about to come.

Being masters who have reached the pinnacle of power and influence, they should be the ones to lead everyone at times like these. However, strangely enough, there are no signs of them making their moves.

"Strange... The Eternal Watcher, especially, is not one to turn a blind eye to subtle shifts. And the All-Knowing? It's unlike him to sit idle when threads of fate begin to tangle. In the past, even a hint of unrest would have brought the two out of their sanctum"

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"And yet now... their silence is almost deafening. They spoke as though the winds of change are merely a passing breeze, not a storm."

The two have lived through countless ages. They must sense what he sensed... So why? What are they waiting for?

Are they testing the people of this era? Or perhaps... they know something that others don't?

"Whatever their reasons, it seems they are reluctant to act until something more concrete happens. For now, it falls to us to stay vigilant"

Verdia exhaled, a hint of frustration threading her voice.

A heavy silence hovered in the room for a moment before it was broken by Itherion "At the least his Eminence, the Seraphim of Honor is busy".

The end of his words was laced with a sardonic edge indicating that he was being sarcastic. Additionally, there was also an unmistakable flicker of annoyance in his eyes.

Verdia gave him a small, helpless smile, already accustomed to Itherion's frustrations over her colleague's antics.

"Please excuse his actions, Although he is a Seraphim, he's overly concerned with worldly affairs. Sometimes... far too much. He has difficulty seeing the big picture—or the ripples that his actions create. I imagine it causes trouble for more people than just you."

She shook her head softly, her expression somewhere between fond exasperation and reluctant acceptance.

Itherion exhaled slowly, running a hand through his silver-streaked hair. "Trouble is an understatement. That man has been giving me headaches for centuries now."

"His recent movements certainly have been... ambitious, to say the least," Verdia chuckled.

There was no one in the Central Continent who didn't know about the Emyrean Empire and the Seraphim of Honor that was leading it. The rate at which it was growing with each passing day, subjugating every neighbouring kingdom with frightening efficiency was astonishing to say no less.

At a rough count, there are tens of thousands of empires and kingdoms on the mainland, and out of that, the number of nations that the Emyrean Empire has subjugated till now would cross a thousand, if not hundreds.

It's only a matter of time before the empire consolidates its power and sets its sights on the Solarion Empire.

"Oh, I know," Itherion spoke clocking his tongue. This was the first time he showed such rough behaviour.

"His banners are flying uncomfortably close to my borders. It's clear that he's eyeing the Solarion Empire, though he's taking his time for now. The way he's moving rankers and angels into position, it's only a matter of time before he starts poking around here too. Whether I like it or not, the man's ambition doesn't seem to have any limits."

"The Emyrean Empire..." Verdia murmured thoughtfully.

"It has become a formidable force—housing countless rankers, blessed warriors, and even angels willing to align themselves with him"

"His expansion might have been swift, but his focus on conquest leaves much to be desired in other areas. A leader must guide his people, not merely subdue others. He plays politics like a tyrant rather than a guardian. It's hard to believe someone with the rank of a Seraphim could be so—"

He cut himself off, but Verdia knew the word lingering on the tip of his tongue: immature. She gave him a knowing glance.

"I suppose that's a fault of his ego," she said softly. "And even one as powerful as he is not immune to it."

Itherion gave a wry smile "Ego. Yes, the man's pride is the root of most of our problems. He once even..." He trailed off, shaking his head. "Never mind. Let's just say he's crossed several lines before—lines even I thought sacred."

Verdia's expression darkened "I just wish he acted more maturely. He has such potential—if only he could step out of his own shadow and truly embody the virtue he represents."

"Agreed, But I will admit... For all his excesses and shortsightedness, his recent actions have been unexpectedly helpful."

"Oh?" She arched a brow.

Itherion explained with a rare smile "The Seraphim of Honor's aggressive campaigns may have caused plenty of headaches, but they've also flushed out a few unwanted pests. The Cerberus Association, for instance—those wretched worms that have plagued us for generations—were rooted out of several strongholds across the mainland thanks to his movements"

"Their laboratories, hidden networks, and deep-rooted influence were finally unearthed. Thanks to him, we were able to save tens of thousands of lives and finally get a clue to their headquarters".

"The Cerberus huh... It's hard to believe they could stay hidden for so long. The fact that even you have a hard time locating them, must mean that they have..."

"Yeah, some powerful being or group is supporting them" Itherion completed the sentence for Verdia.

"Cerberus is an inhumane organization whose existence cannot—must not—be tolerated. They need to be completely destroyed before they can spread their influence any further. I can't believe I'm saying this, but thanks to the possessor of the Fragment of Honor, we were able to effectively sweep them off the continent"

"A parasite that burrows into the heart of society... For years we tried subtlety to remove them, hoping we could tear them out at the roots. But it was brute force—reckless and unforgiving—that finally gave us the edge we needed."

The Adventurer's Association has faced its fair share of enemies over the millennia—criminal syndicates, drug cartels, and rival factions, to name a few.

Most of those groups caused nothing more than a nuisance. Each time they tried to rise, the association crushed them underfoot before they became a real threat. And yet... despite their vigilance, Cerberus was different.

Their rise was unlike anything the association encountered. Other organizations crumbled under pressure—either from lack of resources, infighting, or a misstep in the open. But Cerberus? No matter what they threw at them, they only grew stronger.

What's more unsettling is that they've only been around for a few hundred years. Barely a couple hundred years, and yet their influence runs deeper than many ancient kingdoms and powers.

Chapter 953- Seventh Trial

When they first surfaced, even the association struggled to repel them. The Adventurer's Association, with thousands of years of experience and countless rankers at its disposal, was shaken to its core.

And it wasn't just their methods—though those were extreme and ruthless enough to unnerve even veteran agents. No... What truly made them dangerous were the warriors they fielded.

Their fighters and agents... they weren't ordinary warriors. The skills they demonstrated weren't just refined—they were unnatural. Techniques unlike anything found in the conventional world.

It was as though they were wielding abilities not of this world.

Although an unknown at that time, it was later revealed that the powers of the warriors of Cerberus came from the modification their bodies had gone through. They experimented on their own people twisting them into something more—or less—than human.

Itherion spoke with a grim frustration "No matter how many operations we ran against them, they never seemed to falter. Cells we thought destroyed would resurface months later, fully operational and more dangerous than before. It was like fighting an enemy that couldn't die"

"Their roots were so deeply embedded that they touched nearly every corner of society—nobility, merchant houses, even temples. They spread their influence quietly and efficiently, infecting everything they came into contact with."

Verdia exhaled slowly, she knew what kind of a headache inducing existence Cerberus was. She asked "Is this why Bell and the other top rankers are missing from the Tower of Babel?"

"Your Holiness has seen right. Bell and the others have indeed gone out. We recently acquired a clue from one of our informants about the location of Cerberus's hideout. If things proceed as planned we might be able to find out where their real headquarters is this time"

"As such, given the severity and danger level of the mission, I can only assign rankera above rank 50. Since the others are busy with other missions, it was up to Bell and the others"

Itherion answered. His expression quickly turned happy and his eyes showed the appreciation he held whenever he talked about Bell and the other Top rankers.

Understanding his emotions very well, Verdia gave a small nod "Bell, Chloe, Glenn Jaegar, Sylphie, Dorne..." She mused "The tower's finest. If they're all deployed on this mission, then the stakes must be higher than I imagined."

"Yes, this time we plan to shut one of Cerberus's outlets down for good. As such, we cannot worry about reserving our strength".

Verdia sighed, her gaze softening as she thought of Bell and the others.

"They are the future of humanity. Each and every one of them possesses something extraordinary—whether it be their temperament, aptitude, or sheer nature. There is no other like them among all of humanity."



Her voice carried a wistful tone, and she leaned back slightly in her chair "If circumstances were different... I would have taken them into my Pantheon. They would have made fine additions, ones that could shine like stars among heroes. But..."

She trailed off with a trace of regret, "...due to the special nature of their bodies and the way my Pantheon's inheritance flows, I cannot take them. It would clash too violently with their nature."

"Your Holiness underestimates them" Itherion chuckled softly at her words, shaking his head. "Blessings or no, Bell and the others will forge their own path. I've trained them myself, after all. Their talent is unparalleled, and their will is resolute. Even without divine gifts, they'll grow beyond anyone's expectations."

His eyes gleamed with quiet pride as he added, "They'll find their own way to reach heights no one has ever imagined before. And that is a path that belongs to humanity alone."

At his words, Verdia gave a small warm smile showing that she too agreed with him and believed in their potential.

At the talks of Bell and the others, the atmosphere became quite vibrant. However, just like all things in this world, this lively atmosphere didn't last long and dimmed when the conversation shifted to another topic.

"By the way, has her Holiness heard? There are rumours going on that one of the three primordial demon lords, the demon Lord of lust is holding a Tea Party?"

Verdia nodded her gaze growing distant. "Yes, I heard that too. That woman is holding another tea party tea era. Considering how disastrous the last one was, I didn't want to deal with another one if possible".

Itherion added with a bitter smile "We're still dealing with the aftereffects from her last Tea Party. Half of the central continent was affected by her 'gathering.' It's been a nightmare trying to clean up the mess."

The whims of a demon lord might just be time pass for long living beings like them but to humans, it was nothing short of catastrophe, one like a natural disaster but on a global scale.

Unfortunately, their Adventurer's Association was too short-handed to intervene right now. With Bell and the others deployed, and so many of their forces scattered across missions... they don't have the manpower to keep watch on the event, let alone stop it if something goes wrong.

"That 'Woman' she really knows how to stir things up" Verdia bit her lips, for the first time since the beginning one could see her composure breaking.

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In the War-Torn Fields of the Crimson Expanse. The ground trembled beneath the thundering of synchronized boots. A row of soldiers stood at rigid attention, their breaths misting in the cold, smoke-scented air.

Shields rested against their thighs, swords and axes glimmering dully in the dim, amber-tinged twilight. Above them, the sky was a bruised canvas of ash and smoke, streaked with blood-red light.

The occasional flare of distant explosions painted the clouds with eerie bursts of fire and shrapnel. The smell of iron and dirt hung heavy in the air, intermingled with the acrid scent of burnt wood and charred leather.

Clearly, this was in the middle of a warfront where even the sun was hidden by the rising dirt clouds.

Chapter 954- Seventh Trial (2)

Amidst this chaos stood a figure, towering over the rest, a presence that demanded respect without having to ask. His armor was a patchwork of scars and dents, each one telling stories of battles survived, and wars endured.

Across his shoulder was slung a massive longsword, its blade nicked from overuse, but no less menacing for it. This was Knight-Marshall Dravik Kaldor or otherwise also known as 'Ironjaw'.

His voice was like thunder, deep and heavy and vulgar words flowed out of his mouth like water thus giving him his nickname.

"Listen up, you pack of soft-limbed greenhorns! I don't care if your daddy was some two-bit lord or a bloody pig farmer!"

His voice roared across the training grounds like a landslide crashing down a mountain. The soldiers snapped to attention, their spines stiffening under the weight of his gaze.

"Out here, you're all just one damn thing—meat that hasn't been cooked yet! And it's my job to make sure the enemy don't turn you into a meal."

He stalked down the line of soldiers, inspecting each one like a butcher selecting cattle for slaughter. Whenever he found one unsatisfactory, a barrage of insults would fly towards them.

The man's eyes gleamed with the kind of intensity that only came from a lifetime spent on the battlefield.

"Look at you lot," Dravik snarled, a sneer curling his lip. "Bunch of rabbits thinking you're wolves! You think the enemy's gonna give you a kiss on the cheek and send you home to mama? HAH! Not bloody likely!"

Suddenly when he was passing through a row of soldiers, He stopped abruptly and slammed his gauntleted fist into the side of a shield, making the soldier holding it stumble back a step.

"This? This is your bed. Your lover. Your gods-damned life now! You keep it close, you feed it with your sweat, and maybe, just maybe, it'll keep you breathing one more day."

Right after that, he spun on his heel and glared at the rest of the soldiers.

"Now, here's what you're gonna do for me today, ladies and gentlemen!" His words dripped with sarcasm and challenge.

"You're gonna give me one thousand horizontal swings, One thousand vertical swings and one thousand cross swings. Repeat each of the sets three times. That's right, three times".

Hearing his unreasonable command, some of the soldiers groaned but Dravik didn't have any of it.

"Did I hear complaining? Who the hell said you could whine, huh? You have to ask for my permission to even utter a peep here. In the first place, do I look like I give a shit?"

"The only thing that matters is that sword in your hand and whether you can use it when the bastards come knocking at your door. Now stop crying and start swinging! SWING, DAMMIT!"

At Dravik's roar, the already cowered soldiers started swinging their swords. The clang of steel meeting air filled the training grounds as the soldiers began their drills, gritting their teeth with every motion.

Swords sliced through the air with relentless passion, shields braced at their sides. The repetitive sound of a thousand swings began to build into a rhythm—a dull symphony of metal, sweat, and effort.

"ONE!" Dravik bellowed, stomping through the rows, checking form, glaring down anyone who faltered.

"TWO! Put your backs into it, you maggots! Do you think this is a tea party? Swing like your life depends on it—because one day it will!"

The soldiers grunted with exertion, muscles already burning from the intensity of the drill, but none dared to stop. Meanwhile, Dravik continued to hurl out abuses.

"Swing faster you pipsqueaks!!"...

"What's the matter, huh? Forgot to drink your mama's milk this morning? Or do you want me to fetch a teat for you?"...

"You call that a strike?! My grandmother could hit harder, and she's been dead for twenty years!"...

"Put some muscle into it, you sad sacks of pig shit! You're swinging that sword like it's a broomstick! If the enemy saw you now, they'd laugh their asses off!"...

"I swear to the gods, I've seen drunk tavern brawlers with better form! You lot better shape up or I'll have you scrubbing latrines until you dream of shit-stained buckets!"

After what felt like an eternity, the soldiers completed their thousand swings. Their limbs trembled, their breath came in desperate gasps, and they flopped onto the dirt like marionettes with their strings cut.

Some lay flat on their backs, staring at the bleak sky, while others doubled over, coughing and wiping sweat from their brows.

Dravik watched them collapse with a half-satisfied grunt. Then, with a sly smile, he turned on his heel and strode away from the field, his armor clinking softly with every step.

Dravik entered his personal tent. Inside, the air was warmer, with a faint musky scent lingering around.

A brazier glowed softly in the corner lighting the place. Seated at a wooden table, going over maps and reports, was General Rothgard, another high-ranking official in the military.

When he heard the sound of incoming footsteps, Rothgard raised an eyebrow and gave a half-smirk.

"So? How are they? Are these fresh recruits any good?"

Tossing his sword onto a rack, Dravik spoke bluntly "What can you expect from serfs and peasants? Strength they've got, but finesse? Discipline? Strategy?"

He shook his head and scoffed "Not a damned bit of it."

He poured himself a cup of stale tea from the kettle and continued "They're tough—I'll give them that. A lifetime of tilling fields or hauling carts makes strong backs. But they're no soldiers. Hell, half of them couldn't tell you the difference between a longsword and a plough handle."...

"Hmm," Rothgard pressed his temples, his body leaning forward towards the map on the table, eyes grim.

"The fight ahead won't be easy".

Dravik closed his eyes briefly, the tea tasted like ash on his tongue and the heat from the brazier suddenly felt suffocating.

Outside, the low rumble of the earth was a grim reminder of what lay ahead—the Black Army of Vael'Zoth, an unholy tide that blotted out the horizon like a gigantic black cloud.

### Chapter 955- Seventh Trial (3)

Reports described their march as an endless, suffocating swarm—soldiers in jagged black armor stained with ichor, twisted beasts dragging along war engines as large as castles, and demons whose forms defied nature, slithering, crawling, and flying in unnatural movements.

Their advance was like a relentless flood, armor clattering and monstrous roars resonating like thunder. Their footsteps shook the land like a drum beating growing louder and louder, each beat as if heralding their obliteration.

Dravik and Rothgard were both clear of one thing, this was not a fight, but a one sided slaughter. Whether it be number or level of their soldier they were completely outmatched.

This was nothing short of marching towards their death. These serfs and peasants turned into soldiers would not even last long and will be trampled underneath and eaten alive by even the lowest ranking monsters.

In front of an army that even veteran and elite soldiers would find themselves cold feet and backing down against, how in the hell are they supposed to hold the enemy down until help arrives?

That said, this was a matter of their survival, backing down was not an option. Even if the order was no different than suicide, even if it meant scarping for a single second by piling bodies, they had to keep marching.

Dravik knew his mission very well; however, just that when he glanced at the exhausted soldiers, lying down in the middle of the field, he could not help but wonder if this was truly the right choice and if there was no other way.

All of these people had families and loved ones who were waiting for them. Sending them to their deaths was something that even he a battle hardened warrior felt regret for.

Seeing him make that kind of expression, Rothgard spoke with a grim voice.

"If we don't make a stand here—if we don't delay them long enough for the realm's knights and heroes to arrive—there's no hope left. The capital will fall within days, and then... it's over. You should know that"...

Dravik chuckled bitterly sipping down his tea in one gulp.

"I Dravik am loyal to Her Majesty and will follow her orders till my last breath, you should already know that. What I wanted to remind you is that we already lost most of our best men to that cursed horde. You should not expect much from these farmers" He gestured vaguely toward the training ground outside the tent.

"I've done my damned best with them, but they're still lacking—lacking in skill, lacking in levels, lacking in numbers. You can't train a soldier in a week. Once the monsters hit us, they'll be swallowed whole within minutes."

Rothgard leaned heavily on his chair with an exhausted look on his face.

"There's nothing to be done. We had no choice. Most of our elite warriors are fighting the Legions of the Demon Lord of Greed on the western front. If we don't hold him off there, his alliance will push straight into the heart of our kingdom. And if that happens—well, you might as well start writing your will."

"So in the end there is no other way, it's all on us to stop this horde, huh?"

Dravik grunted, suddenly he paused for a moment thinking about something before asking "What about the Angel of Principality and Dominion? Can we get any assistance from Valhalla's armies?"

"Unlikely" Rothgard shook his head "The angels of Dominions and Principality from Three Star scripture are locked in battle with Greed's forces and his damned Sea Tribes. That winged lot wouldn't lift a finger if their feathers are too ruffled, especially not while they're knee-deep in another war."

"As for the north..." Rothgard's expression darkened further. "The Three ancient Demon Archdukes—Zantheros the Plague-Caller, Khaveth the Iron Maw and another mysterious ancient archduke—are leading their own invasion with millions of monsters and numerous Demon Dukes from there."

No one's heard from our northern legions in weeks. If those two beasts get a foothold, we're finished."

"And the east..." He trailed off, his expression bleak.

"Already gone" Dravik finished the thought for him.

"Vael'Zoth's forces swept through the eastern provinces like wildfire. What's left of the survivors are either refugees... or corpses." ... The room fell into a heavy silence, the weight of reality pressing down on both men.

Rothgard's voice was grim when he spoke again. "No matter how we look at it—if we don't hold the line here, if we let the Black Army push through—it's game over" ...

"I understand, I will relay the orders. They'll fight because they have no other choice. But if you're expecting knight-level precision from a bunch of farmhands, you're setting yourself up for disappointment. Still... they've got heart. Sometimes, the heart is all you need to survive."

Rothgard gave a slow nod at Dravik's reply "Knight level precision huh. That reminds me, how are the mercenaries we hired? Although I didn't pay much attention, there seems to be one or two who stand out from the crowd. Especially that guy with crimson eyes. What was his name again? Ce..." ...

"Simon," Dravik didn't need a moment to think—he knew exactly who Rothgard meant.

"That guy... he's in a league of his own. Head and shoulders above the others. His swordsmanship is not just refined—it's masterful, surpassing even seasoned knights. The first time I watched him fight, I was stunned. His swings... there's a precision, but also a ferocity, that makes you stare in awe."

Rothgard raised an eyebrow in surprise. For Dravik, who was notoriously famous for being harsh in his judgments, to praise someone was very rare.

"That good, huh?"



"Good doesn't even describe it. I've seen knights train all my life, but that guy... his technique is refined, razor-sharp. There's no wasted movement, no hesitation. Every swing feels like it's meant to end something. it's like watching a predator, tearing through his enemies"

"He fights with a bloodlust you only see in someone who's seen a lifetime of battles... and survived them all. If I had to compare, his skill would be well beyond a knight captain, bordering on the strength of a Grand Knight."

Chapter 956- Seventh Trial (4)

That last statement made Rothgard's eyes widen. A holy knight was no small comparison—those were warriors blessed by destiny and reached a realm that could change the tides of war.

"A holy knight, huh?" he repeated softly, "If he's that skilled, why have we never heard of him?" this question appeared in his mind.

It was common during the war for certain individuals who had performed excellently and who stood out among the rest, to spread like wildfire.

Soldiers discussed these legends during their meals taking them as idols or goals. However, he had never heard of the mercenary named Simon before. If his strength was really comparable to that of a holy knight, then his name should have been very famous.

"He claims to hail from the demi-human continent" Dravik answered shaking his head.

Just as the two were discussing that, the sounds of footsteps approached near before a voice came knocking in. Both men exchanged glances... "Speak of the devil".

At that moment, the entrance to the tent was swung open and a tall man possibly crossing 2 meters, stepped in. He had crimson eyes that gazed at his surroundings sharply, long black hair that was neatly tied back, fair skin and features that would make him the prince charming of every woman's dream.

That said, one should not make the mistake of taking him for another pretty boy as the aura he carried with him, possessed the weight of countless battles.

His presence alone was so strong that the air thickened simply by his arrival. Rothgard's eyes immediately locked onto the mercenary's eyes.

There was something unsettling about the way those eyes seemed to glow faintly under the torchlight, a feral intensity that hinted at more than just mere skill—it was the gaze of someone who was not looking at the present moment but peering into something far beyond in the future.

"You summoned me?" The mercenary asked.

"Yes, we were just talking about you" saying that, Dravik inclined his head toward the seat, silently inviting the mercenary to sit.

The latter accepted without a word and sat unhurriedly.

"You've had time to observe the soldiers we're working with. So what's your take?" once seated, Dravik asked.

"There's nothing to think about. With this lineup, there's no way we can stop the enemy army."

The mercenary didn't hesitate, his words were brutally honest, devoid of tact or embellishment. Dravik gave a slow nod as if the mercenary had only voiced what he himself already knew.

"Pushing these men into battle would be the act of a desperate leader. A smart one would look for another way."

Rothgard's brow arched slightly "What are you saying, Dravik? I thought we had already settled on a strategy."

"General, hear me out, A few days ago, Simon came to me with a strategy. At first, I dismissed it—thought it was just a madman's dream. But now, seeing that endless swarm gathering on the horizon... I can't help but wonder if that dream could be turned into reality."

Rothgard turned his gaze back toward the mercenary, intrigued. What sort of strategy did this guy tell for even Dravik to dismiss it as farfetched? The mercenary named Simon gave a curt nod and began explaining.

"The enemy is massing their forces directly in front of us, expecting us to meet them head-on. If we follow their script, it will be a massacre—our soldiers are too few and too scattered to withstand the assault. But... we won't give them the fight they're expecting."

He paused for a moment, letting the idea take root in their minds. "We move eastward, toward Mount Gorgor."

Rothgard frowned. "Mount Gorgor? That fortress has been abandoned for decades. It's crumbling."

"True, but it still sits in a narrow mountain pass, surrounded by cliffs. The terrain there will do what our soldiers cannot—choke the enemy's advance. We don't need to outfight them. We need to outmaneuver them."

The mercenary leaned back slightly, a faint smirk crawled on his lips giving him a very devilish look.

"We'll split our forces into two groups. One will move east under the cover of night, securing Mount Gorgor and fortifying what remains of it. Meanwhile, the second group will remain here, creating the illusion that we are preparing to meet them head-on."

"A decoy force," Rothgard murmured, his eyes narrowing in thought. "To draw the enemy in."

"Exactly," Simon confirmed. "Once the enemy fully commits to the main assault here, the first group will launch a surprise ambush from the east, blocking the pass behind them. The cliffs will trap the bulk of their forces between two fronts—our soldiers at the fortress and the decoy force pressing from behind. With nowhere to retreat, they'll be sandwiched between two sides"...

Rothgard stroked his chin thoughtfully, running through the plan in his mind.

"But moving sideways, toward the fortress, leaves us exposed. How do you ensure the enemy won't detect your manoeuvre?"

"We stagger the movements, breaking into smaller units that travel through lesser-known paths in the forested hills to the east. Each unit moves at a different time, reassembling at Mount Gorgor just before dawn. It'll take coordination and discipline, but it will keep us off the enemy's radar."

"Even if you say that, the enemy will still realise what we're doing?"

"By the time they notice, it will be too late. If they try to pursue us into the mountains, they'll lose their formation in the narrow paths, making them easy prey for ambushes. The terrain will fight for us."

Rothgard fell silent, it was no wonder that Dravik dismissed the idea as a farfetched dream because it was. The mercenary's plan was too risky and full of flaws and factors that need to align for it to work.

"It's risky," Dravik hummed from the side "but it's far better than sending these men to their deaths in a direct confrontation."

Simon nodded his head agreeing with the knight commander "War is always a gamble. But this way, the odds are stacked in our favor. At the very least we can stall for time and wait for help to arrive".

Chapter 957- Duke Vordanaz

Rothgard sat back in his chair, mulling over the plan. It was bold—dangerously so. No sane person would think about adopting such a tactic especially when it ran the risk of getting half of the army obliterated in one go.

But it was also brilliant. A typical general would never dream of abandoning a fortified position to race toward an abandoned ruin. And that, Rothgard realized, was precisely why it could work.

He now understood why Dravik summoned the mercenary in here and wanted him to hear the strategy.

"Very well," Rothgard said slowly, nodding "We'll discuss your plan further. For now, step outside. We'll call you back shortly."

Without protest, Simon rose from his seat and left the tent. As the heavy flap fell behind him, he exhaled a quiet sigh, the tension in his shoulders easing slightly.

He had been posing as a human mercenary using the Trinket of Grimlock. Thankfully no one was able to find out his true identity. However, this wasn't the reason why he was so conflicted. His crimson eyes flicked upward to the quest board hanging ominously in front of him, as if mocking his efforts.

~~Rewrite the Historia~~. Written across the board were several quests—some crossed out, others looming over him like unfinished business:

—Increase your reputation among the Alliance... (Completed)

—Join the Mercenaries... (Completed) —Scout the Gorgor Mountains... (Completed)

—Gain favorable standing with Dravik... (Completed) —Stop the southern alliance from being obliterated... (Ongoing) Only the last quest remained unchecked. Every sub-quest, difficult as they were, had served as steps leading toward the overarching goal.

That said, as easy as they sounded, the one to complete them, Simon understood how daunting of a task each of these was.

Every time he looked at these objectives, he couldn't help but grit his teeth. Especially at the last of the objectives of this sub quest.

Prevent the obliteration of the southern alliance at the hands of the Demon Lord of Envy.

"How the hell am I supposed to do that?"

Simon clicked his tongue, frustration creeping in as he stared at the questboard. Stopping the Demon Lord's army with the ragtag force of peasants and mercenaries currently with him felt like trying to fight giants with toothpicks.

The difference in strength was overwhelming—like standing against a tidal wave armed with nothing but sandbags. No weapons, no armor, no chance. No hope.

His gaze drifted back toward the horizon, where the Demon Lord's army marched relentlessly toward them, blotting out both the land and sky like an endless black tide.

Although there was a considerable distance between here and that place, the sheer scale of the enemy force sent chills crawling down his spine. The columns stretched so far that he couldn't see where they began or ended.

The landscape itself seemed swallowed whole by the approaching legion, and the oppressive sense of inevitability hit him like a fist in the gut. This was a stark reminder to everyone how powerful and incredible the Demon Lord of Envy and his army was.

He was no minor threat, but a colossal powerhouse capable of changing the fate of a continent.

Compared to this, the shows of power Simon had witnessed from the current possessor of the Fragments of Envy, the Demon Lord at Hexennacht felt quaint—like a child flaunting his toys.

There was no comparison between the previous Demon Lord of Envy and the current one. And the worst part? This was only one of many obstacles standing in his way.

His head throbbed as he recalled the final, most impossible quest written at the top of the board:

**—The Main Quest. Stop Itherion and the Seraphim of Humility from slaying the Demon Lord of Envy.**

That was the main quest. The real mission. The one that made his stomach churn every time he thought about it.

Seriously, How the hell was he supposed to clear such a quest? It was not like the previous trails were easy, they were dangerously hard, impossibly even and there was even a risk of losing one's life.

However, it was still somehow manageable and under his power level. But this, the seventh trial, surpassed all of it and was in a league of its own.

This was impossible, this was simply playing with his intentions.

Stopping the southern alliance from getting obliterated was hard enough as it is—but after that, he also had to prevent two legendary figures of this era, Itherion and the Seraphim of Humility, from slaying the Demon Lord of Envy?

Let's be clear on one thing, the characters mentioned here weren't just any run of the mill character. They were mythic figures whose deeds were etched into the very fabric of history.

The idea of standing in their way was madness—whoever designed this trial had to be insane. Simon's jaw clenched as frustration boiled within him.

What sick game is this? Whoever or whatever had placed him in this cursed scenario had left no room for retreat.

There was no option to back out. He was stuck in a historical event so ancient that even the most comprehensive records barely mentioned it. And yet, somehow, here he was—forced to live it.

Two weeks. It had been two gruelling weeks since he had arrived in this place and received the quest chain.

In that time, Simon had slowly come to understand the terrible truth of his situation: the events unfolding around him were not just random happenings.

This was history—a forgotten piece at that—an event buried so deep in the past that only a few historical records remained in the present timeline. As he pieced together the clues, and thanks to his [Memories of the World], a chilling realization dawned on him.

This wasn't just any skirmish or historical event. No, what he had stumbled into was far bigger than anything he had imagined.

The events unfolding before him were a part of the Second Apex War.

Simon leaned against a nearby bark of a tree, his eyes still looking at the hovering questboard, his breath heavy. The realisation of the weight of the event he was caught in weighed heavily on his shoulders like a gigantic mountain.

Chapter 958- Duke Vordanaz (2)

The Second Apex War—one of the most cataclysmic events to ever scar the world—was unfolding right in front of his eyes. A war so devastating that its very existence was nearly erased from history, leaving behind only whispers in ancient texts.

And here he was, expected to navigate through it, survive it, and somehow rewrite the course of fate.

He let out a bitter laugh under his breath. Yeah, no pressure. Yet, despite the enormity of the task, he knew he had to go through it. The only path was forward, through blood and fire. The only question that remained was how.

Thankfully, scouting the Gorgor Mountains had yielded one potential solution: the abandoned fortress perched on the mountain pass.

The ruins were ancient, yes, but defensible. If used correctly, they could serve as the foothold needed to slow the Demon Lord's forces.

It wasn't much. Hell, it might not even work. But it was the only chance he had. A chance to buy time. And in this trial, time was everything.

"They are taking quite a while" Simon muttered.

In this subquest, the hardest part was convincing Rothgard and Dravik to commit to the plan. Moving the entire army eastward—sideways across the battlefield—was not a decision leaders made lightly.

Soldiers needed clarity and structure, and moving in an unexpected direction could easily lead to confusion, desertion, or worse. But if they followed the conventional way and moved the way they did in the historia, they would be doomed.

If Rothgard followed the standard approach that is meeting the Demon Lord's army in open battle—they were all as good as dead.

Just as Simon was agonising over the difficulty of the trial, a voice came from inside the tent and he was called in.



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Inside, Rothgard and Dravik sat at the table, their expressions grim but determined. It was clear from their demeanor that the discussion had been long and serious.

Rothgard steepled his fingers as Simon took his seat again, "We've considered your strategy, Taking the fortress at Mount Gorgor is our best chance to halt the advance of the Demon Lord's army."

"But," Dravik added with a heavy tone, "for this to work, we'll need to move the bulk of the army without the enemy noticing. If they catch wind of the maneuver... it's over."

"The problem is, moving an army of this size—even in the dead of night—won't go unnoticed. Their scouts are everywhere. A force this large leaves tracks, churns the ground, and makes noise even if we split them into smaller units."

Simon nodded. It was not like he didn't anticipate this obstacle.

A large army's movements were like waves across a lake—impossible to conceal. To overcome this, they would need...

"A decoy" Rothgard continued. "We'll need a smaller force to stay behind and give the illusion that we intend to fight here—head-on. A distraction to keep the enemy's scouts focused in the wrong direction."

As he had thought, things came down to this after all.

After finishing his piece, Rothgard and Dravik both looked at him. Although they didn't make it obvious, it was clear from their gaze what they intended to say next.

Dravik sighed, feeling a little conflicted he said-

"Not only it is a very important role, but it is the most dangerous. The decoy will have to engage the enemy first. They'll have to hold their position long enough to convince the enemy that this is our main force. If they fail..."

He didn't need to finish the sentence—if the decoy broke too soon, the entire operation would fall apart, and the army retreating toward the fortress would be exposed mid-movement.

"Normally, it should have been me taking on that role. However, I cannot leave those greenhorn on their own. As such, it would have to be either..."

Simon's crimson eyes flicked for a moment. He could already see where this was heading.

"I'll do it" he spoke accepting his role. Since the moment he came up with this strategy he knew that he would had to be the bait.

As such, it came as no surprise to him that the two of them wanted him to be the decoy.

Rothgard arched his eyebrow, surprised by how quickly the mercenary accepted the role. He was prepared to step in if needed but it seemed like it was not needed.

Dravik, on the other hand gave a small, approving nod—he had some understanding of the mercenary named Simon and knew that the other party would accept the role given the stakes.

"Here is the plan we have formulated. you'll form the decoy from the mercenaries and light infantry, a force small enough to move quickly, but large enough to look convincing.

"You'll need to stage skirmishes along the way to draw attention—harass the enemy scouts, make them believe the main army is here."

"You are asking a lot given the level of the soldiers here but... I'll do my best"

Rather, he had to do his best if he wanted to complete this ridiculous quest.

"So How long do we need to hold them for?" Simon questioned looking up from the map.

"Until dawn, That's when the bulk of our forces will reach Mount Gorgor and begin fortifying the fortress. If the enemy realizes we've moved before then, we'll be overrun."

It was a plain answer but one that was given after much thought and deliberation. Rothgard's face looked grave when he said that.

"Can you do it? Can you last that long?"

Whether he can do it or not, there was no reason to even judge it. He must simply do it.

"Understood," Simon said. His voice was calm, as though he were discussing the weather. But the truth was, he knew exactly what this mission entailed—suicide.

But someone had to buy time for the larger force to reach the fortress. If Simon didn't do it, the entire southern alliance would collapse under the weight of the Demon Lord's horde.

"Then it's settled," Rothgard said. "We move tonight."

Chapter 959- Duke Vordanaz (3)

The moon was a thin, pale sliver in the sky as the two forces began to split. The soldiers moved quietly, speaking in hushed whispers and muffling the clinking of armor.

The main force—led by Dravik—began their eastward march toward Mount Gorgor under the cover of night. They moved in short groups, each unit slipping through forest paths and shallow valleys to avoid detection.

These people were barely half a soldier, much less a ranger who could traverse these mountains and forests easily. As such, each step they took had to be measured and slow which ate up significant of their time.

Meanwhile, Simon's decoy force stayed behind, lighting campfires and raising tents to create the illusion that the entire army was preparing to engage the enemy at dawn. As wooden barricades and fake fortifications were being set up, he noticed something.

The mood in the decoy camp was heavy, almost suffocating. The mercenaries left behind—or chosen, more precisely forced—as the decoy looked at Simon with a mixture of fear and resentment.

Some glared at him, their eyes filled with bitterness, while others gripped their weapons with white-knuckled hands. A few were already trembling nervously, their spirits shattered before the battle even began.

All of them were blaming Simon for their situation after all, they were caught in this mess because their leader chose to volunteer for this absurd role.

When it was first announced that the army would be moving eastward and a decoy force would be left behind to attract the enemy's attention, everybody realised that the ones who will be behind are the one who have been forsaken and sacrificed for the greater half.

Nobody wanted to become that much less volunteer for it. So when Simon raised his hand for the job, his mercenary team and the soldiers he led were disappointed, horrified even. Morale was at rock bottom.

Simon surveyed them silently. Most of these men knew what was coming—and many believed they would not survive the night. They weren't entirely wrong.

"We're already dead... there's no way we can hold them" One of the mercenaries whispered to the man beside him, his voice cracking.

It was not only him, many had the same thought as this mercenary. Their words spread like poison in the air, choking what little hope or fight they had within them.

Seeing this scene, Simon clicked his tongue in frustration. It's not like he chose to be the decoy because he wanted to, the trial was forcing his hand. He wanted them to stop glaring at him with eyes full of resentment.

"Ahem" he gave a cough before gathering their attention. "What you all are thinking might be right. Yeah, we are going to die tonight."

SILENCE~ as soon as those words left his mouth, The camp fell silent, every face turning toward him. Some looked confused, others angry.

Just as they were about to explode into curses, he continued—

"But not just anyone was chosen to be here. You see, it takes more than ordinary soldiers to be left behind. No, only the strongest of the strongest are given this kind of mission. That's who you are. Warriors who have been recognized for their strength."

His words hit the men like a splash of cold water. "Do you think they would leave just anyone behind for a job like this? No. They chose you because they knew you could handle it. Only the most seasoned, the most trustable warriors were left behind for this mission"

"So ask yourself—how many men out there can say they were chosen to hold the enemy at bay, alone, and live to tell the tale? The ones who fight tonight—right here—are already legends. And legends don't die easy. So men are you going to fight with me?"

At his roar, the mercenaries and the soldiers began to straighten their bodies, their grips on their weapons firming.

Others exchanged glances, murmuring quietly among themselves. Soon The tension in the air began to shift.

The fear didn't vanish entirely, but one could definitely feel it losing its grip on these men. Some of them grinned in determination, others chuckled darkly. They roared... "Yeah!!!".

With morale steadied, the men got to work. They reinforced the barricades along the camp's perimeter, piling up wooden stakes and sharpened logs to create obstacles.

Some of the more experienced fighters dug shallow trenches to slow the enemy's charge. Others made makeshift torches and set them along the path they expected the enemy scouts to take.

The camp started started hustling and bustling. Simon moved among the camp, checking up on the soldiers and offering words of encouragement where they were needed.

Everyone saw him as a dependable leader, wise and strong. However, if they knew what was on his mind, perhaps it wouldn't take them to change their minds in an instant.

'Thank god these people are idiots. Had they more brains for brawns, I wouldn't have been able to manipulate them so easily. Since I have chosen to act as the decoy, I need them to properly play their part'

Many of them would die or perhaps their entire platoon would be annihilated. However, there was nothing he could do. He did his best to keep the death toll as low as possible to complete the sub quest.

From this point on, he just had to hope that luck would play out in his favour.

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The moon hung high above the treetops, casting a pale silver light over the decoy camp. A faint breeze stirred the leaves, and the forest around them remained still and unnervingly quiet.

"It was too quiet" Simon muttered looking at the moons. From its position, he could tell that they were halfway through the night.

In the distance, Rothgard's main force was likely still marching toward the fortress at Mount Gorgor. Every moment that he and his men bought here was another step closer to securing the alliance's foothold.

The only thing that mattered now was time. Simon looked up at the moon again, gauging its progress across the sky. Three hours until dawn.

Chapter 960- Duke Vordanaz (4)

Just as the camp finished its preparations, Simon felt a subtle shift in the air. His eyes narrowed. A chill slithered down his spine—a feeling that was all too familiar. Something was coming.

'Tch, this is too soon. I can't let them come too close to the camp'.

"Ring the Bell" Simon hurriedly gave the command.

The men scrambled to obey. They hurriedly got into formation and watched on nervously. The forest remained silent with only the occasional breeze rustling the trees.

But Simon could feel it as clearly as the blade at his side. There was no mistaking the presence—an enemy was near. Not just any enemy. Something far more dangerous.

"W-what is it? I don't see anything"...

"There is no one here?" the mercenaries and soldiers scrambled to grab a hold of themselves. Their inexperience was starting to surface.

Simon didn't bother explaining. They wouldn't be able to feel it anyway. Some of the experienced fighters might notice something but the majority of the men here were just peasants and commoners who had never held a sword before the war.

With stretched nerves, he looked at his front. The faint breeze that stirred the air suddenly stilled. The torches lining the camp flickered like crazy and for a brief moment, the sky seemed darker—as if the moonlight itself was being swallowed.

To be able to affect their surrounding with just their presence, it was the appearance of a powerful foe, someone who carried the scent of death like a cloak.

"Keep your weapons ready," Simon ordered sharply, gripping the hilt of his sword tightly.

For a moment nothing happened. The forest remained silent, the torches flickering weakly against the oppressive darkness.

The other mercenaries shifted uneasily, glancing around in confusion. It was then, from the shadows, a figure emerged. It was alone—but the sheer weight of its presence felt like an entire battalion.

Cloaked in dark armor that shimmered faintly under the faint moonlight, the figure moved with slow but heavy steps. A massive sword was strapped on their back, and a dark black aura like ink in the night sky, radiated from their body suffocating the very air.

The figure had two horns that crowned their head, a pale white body smooth as marble and utterly flawless and crimson eyes that stood out even in the darkness of the night.

They radiated an unsettling calm, like a predator that knew it stood at the top of the food chain, untouchable, unchallenged. It wasn't the gaze of a monster, nor even that of a soldier—it was the gaze of something noble. Something terrifyingly beautiful.

Looking at their appearance, Simon's heart sank. That outstanding appearance that made one think of a high aristocrat, that inhuman beauty with no warmth and only eerie stillness. It was a kind of elegance that could only come from immense power, something that they were born with and could not be replicated.

Simon knew, deep in his bones, what this was. That overwhelming aura that seemed to press down on him like a physical weight, that terrifying beauty.

No—it was something far deeper, something that resonated in his very blood. A gulf that cannot be easily crossed, a difference that could not be measured by strength alone.

It was the feeling of being lesser, being outclassed on a fundamental level. It wasn't just power he was facing—it was bloodline.

It was the feeling of being lesser, being outclassed on a fundamental level. It wasn't just power he was facing—it was bloodline.

Simon clenched his teeth, the figure standing against him was no doubt a Demon Noble and no ordinary noble but a Demon Duke at that.

Although the figure made no introductions and carried no banners, Simon had no doubt. A Demon Duke was a being that belonged to the upper echelons of the Demon Lord's court—a nightmare given flesh, a creature whose mere presence could break the will of armies.

Throughout history, Demon Dukes were whispered of only in terrified reverence. They were beings forged in ages long past, possessing strength that rivalled the most powerful of human kings and holy knights.

Stories said that Demon Dukes could command entire legions with a glance, bend reality to their whims, and cleave through armies with a single swing of their blades.



They were monuments of despair, each one carrying with them the weight of centuries of conquest and destruction. It was no wonder that the soldiers were frozen in fear the moment they laid their eyes on the figure.

'What do I do?' Simon's heart pounded in his chest, but his expression remained cold and composed, masking the storm of thoughts raging beneath.

He didn't expect a Demon Duke to show out of nowhere. Normally, high-ranking demons like this acted as commanders, seated far behind the enemy lines and the chaos of the battlefield.

They let their armies do the work for them, sending wave after wave of cannon fodder to probe the enemy's defences. That's what Simon had in mind when he thought about what kind of a being high ranking demon nobles are and that was what he was counting on.

The horde marching towards them was vast, but manageable as long as it was the low-level foes the high ranking demon sent towards them.

The mission was to buy time but that was now thrown out of the window with the appearance of the Demon Duke. If the latter reached the camp, and realized this was only a decoy force, the entire strategy would collapse.

The enemy horde would adjust course immediately, chasing the main army before it could secure the fortress. Everything would fall apart.

'Do I have no choice but to risk it all? No, there is still a chance.

"Listen carefully everyone" Simon roared unleashing his aura.

Thanks to his interference that subverted some of the pressure brought by the Demon Duke, the mercenaries and soldiers who were paralyzed with fear, frozen in place as they stared at the latter, were snapped out of their stupor.

One by one, they fell to the ground, their faces pale as if death had already claimed them.