

D. of Pride 971

Chapter 971- Acquiring Few Henchmen (5)

It made even less sense for the other party to be a madman, after all, he himself recognised Simon. As such, there could only be one possibility.

Simon stood still for a moment, then slowly reached up to the trinket hanging from his neck. He held the small, unassuming object in his hand, his fingers brushing over the intricate carvings.

The Trinket of Grimlock—a powerful artifact that had allowed him to mask his true identity and mingle with the humans and now, it was the time to unveil it.

He glanced at Vordanaz, a smirk curling at the corner of his lips.

"I suppose there's no need to keep this charade up any longer," Simon muttered, his voice was low but clear enough for everyone to hear him.

With a flick of his fingers, he dispelled the effects, and in an instant, the illusion covering him shattered. The room seemed to freeze as Simon's body shifted, reverting to its original form.

A tall and chiselled frame that was uncharacteristic of any human came into view. The figure wore finely tailored crimson clothes with golden accents. His eyes were heterochromatic—one a vivid crimson, the other a deep, unsettling gold.

Long, jet-black hair cascaded down his back, framing a face that was both handsome and sinister, exuding a devilish charm. And the smile on his lips—an evil, thuggish grin—was enough to make everyone stare in a daze.

His presence was so charismatic that he seemed to outshine even Vordanaz himself. The figure radiating power and command was none other than that of a Demon Noble. The moment the disguise fell away, the room was engulfed in shock.

Eyes widened, jaws dropped—no one could believe what they were seeing. Even Vordanaz, who rarely showed emotion, couldn't hide the look of surprise that crossed his face.

Simon's change might have been fast but it was striking enough to not elude the eyes of a Demon Duke. At that instant when Simon changed, he realised that the one standing in front of him was not a human but a bonafide Demon Noble.

Everyone in the room had varied reactions but the most pronounced reaction came from Melkan and his group. The Demon Earl's face twisted into an expression of utter disbelief, his mouth opening and closing as he tried to find words.

"You...! A demon noble... you were a demon noble in disguise all along?!" His thoughts were a jumbled mess. The realization hit him like a tidal wave.

"What does this mean? What are you playing at?"

Vordanaz finally asked, his voice low and laced with suspicion. Despite his outward calm, his fingers gripped the armrest of his throne tightly, betraying his unease. He was trying to piece together this new, bewildering puzzle.

"I'm not playing along, Vordanaz. I was serious the entire time." Simon replied. After that, He gestured toward the small object dangling from his neck—the Trinket of Grimlock.

In the dim light of the chamber, the talisman seemed unassuming and ordinary. If not pointed out by Simon, nobody would have even looked at it.

"The reason I was able to turn—or rather mask—as a human was because of this. It is called the Trinket of Grimlock. It allows me to morph my body and disguise myself as any being."

Vordanaz stared at the object, his brows furrowed as he processed Simon's words. Items that allowed one to disguise themselves were far from rare.

In the vast realm, there were countless tools, artifacts, and spells existed for deception. However, they all shared a fatal flaw: no matter how powerful the disguise, it was considered a low-level facade.

To high-ranking individuals, especially demons, such deceptions were trivial to detect. Aura, mana fluctuations, and even subtle shifts in presence were giveaways that no disguise could conceal.

And yet, Simon had walked into the heart of the Demon Lord's camp—into the presence of high-ranking individuals and a Demon Duke himself—and no one had sensed anything amiss.

The implications sent a ripple of unease through the room. Simon smirked as he saw the confusion deepen on Vordanaz's face.

"Judging by your expression, you've realized what that means. This is no ordinary item. The Trinket of Grimlock doesn't just disguise appearances—it eludes detection entirely. Your eyes, your aura, your senses... it allows one to mask their very presence causing even one next to the user to be unable to perceive them. That's why I could stand before you without raising suspicion."

Vordanaz stared at the trinket for a long moment, his expression growing darker. His eyes suddenly shrank and his body stiffened as he focused intently on the talisman. He raised a hand, pointing a finger at the object as if recognizing something.

"That aura..."

"As expected of a Demon Duke, your senses are indeed sharp. What you sensed wasn't wrong. This item was given to me by those existence" Simon affirmed causing the other party to be in a state of disbelief and... fear.

That's right, after hearing Simon confirm his suspicions, Vordanaz's composure cracked and his eyes looked visibly fearful when they stared at the locket.

The Duke's visible unease was clear to everyone in the room. His subordinates who had never seen their master falter like this before, stared on with astonishment.

For someone as powerful and composed as Vordanaz to show even a trace of fear—whatever Simon had revealed was far beyond the comprehension of the others here.

"But... how? No, why would they interfere in this matter?"...

"Why wouldn't they? In fact, I'm in the middle of a mission given by them when I encountered you"...

"What?" ...

"I'd like to explain further but are you sure you want me to disclose the details here, in front of so many... ears?"

With an extremely grim expression, Vordanaz thought about it briefly before dismissing his subordinates.

"Leave".

Just one word was enough, his subordinates immediately obeyed, bowing quickly and retreating from the chamber.

The hall emptied swiftly, Melkan and his entourage were the last to leave. Their steps were more hurried and frantic, as if fleeing for their lives. The Earl cast one last glance at Simon before hastening out, his thoughts a chaotic mess.

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"Now tell me," Once the doors closed, silence fell over the chamber, Vordanaz sighed and asked.

"Since you might already have an idea, I will reveal it directly. It's the Dragon Lords who stand behind me." With those words, the atmosphere in the room grew heavier.

"The Dragon Lords?" The implication of that term couldn't be taken lightly. Even a Demon Duke like him had his soul shuddering at this moment.

"No, that can't be. Why would they interfere? They've been neutral for millennias, guarding their sovereignty and refusing to involve themselves in the squabbles of other beings. Why now?"

"Because the battles between demons and humans have gone on for far too long. The conflict has upset the balance of the world itself."

Simon answered. He unceremoniously found a sit and continued "You and the demon kind might think of this as a war between two races, but its consequences ripple far beyond that. The endless battles have ravaged the lands, poisoned the seas, and disrupted the balance of Altahea"

"The ecosystems that once flourished have been torn apart by your destructive armies. Entire regions are barren wastelands now, incapable of sustaining life. Crops fail. Rivers dry up or run red with blood. The skies are choked with ash and magic residue, spreading decay and sickness far and wide."

"The smaller races—those without the strength to fend for themselves—have been the most affected. We demons expand endlessly, consuming lands and enslaving entire populations. The humans consumed by their greed, retaliate with their own weapons and magic, turning fertile territories into war-torn husks".

"And caught in the crossfire are the beastfolks, elves, dwarves, halflings, and others. They lose their homes, their livelihoods, their lives. And where do they turn?"

The answer was obvious, Vordanaz did not even have to think about it. His crimson eyes flickered with a mix of realization and denial. He could see the truth in Simon's words—the scars of war weren't just on the land, but on the fabric of life itself.

"The Dragon Lords, the only beings who have remained untouched by the chaos. Rulers of the three stratum and protectors of the sovereignty, the Dragon Lords have always remained neutral and aloof in Altahea. But when race after race comes seeking asylum, begging for protection, even their patience has its limits."

"And so, the Dragon Lords have taken their stand," Simon concluded, "These noble and proud beings—beings who could obliterate entire armies if they chose to—have decided to act. Not as conquerors, but as arbiters, restoring the balance that demons and the humans have shattered."

Absolute silence fell over the room, its occupants unable to make a single sound. While Vordanaz was busy digesting all the information, Simon looked at his changing expression with a concealed smirk.

Of course, whatever he said just now was all bullshit and something that he had come up with while on his way here. He had been wrecking his brain over how he could manipulate the Demon Lord's army.

It was then the idea came to him. It was all an excuse that the Dragon lords were behind him and more so the things he said after that. Everything was nonsense he cooked up to put some fear and pressure on the duke.

Thankfully, his words carried some credibility due to the aura still lingering in the trinket. The trinket was a gift from Adalinda, a powerful Dragon whose strength and wisdom were nothing short of legendary.

Even now, years later, her aura clung faintly to the artifact, resonating with the primal might of a true dragon.

"Although it was just a guess," Simon mused inwardly, "the master and disciple really were incredible figures."

Be it the time when she barged into his dungeon, the time she saved him and when he met Valdris. Time and time again he was reminded of how incredible she was. His thoughts drifted back to the time when the mischievous Lucine and her uncompromising master Adalinda had crossed his path.

Who would have thought that while on a mission to subdue the Lightning Draconic Serpent, he would encounter a young woman who had snuck out of her sanctuary to explore the world?

Through her, he learned the Ancient Draconic Compel, a skill that had proved invaluable in his battles. It was also through Lucine that he'd met Adalinda, the one who had granted him the Trinket of Grimlock after witnessing his resourcefulness and determination.

Although their meeting was quite short, it was very meaningful. Simon wondered what the two were doing about right now.

It had been a long time since he'd parted ways with them. Knowing Lucine, she was probably dragging Adalinda across the world, pestering her to visit every interesting place they came across.

"Guess you can really take it leisurely when you're that strong." That said, although the story he told to Voranaz was all made up, it did indeed hold some truth.

Or rather, the lie he concocted was based on the based on historical knowledge he'd pieced together through his inherited memories and the information he collected. He knew how the the second apex war, the earth shaking event that still left its mark on the world, went down thousands of years ago.

The war that had been a clash between the greatest powers of the time—demonkind, humankind, and various other races vying for supremacy.

The battles were cataclysmic, each faction wielding destructive magic and weapons that left vast swaths of the world scarred and barren. Entire continents were reduced to wastelands, and ancient civilizations vanished into history.

That said, it was not the victor of one side or the loss of another that brought the end of the war; no, according to what was recorded in the history, it was the intervention of the dragon lords that brought an end to this world ending war and the treaty that the Dragon Lords enforced on everyone.

Faced with a world on the brink of collapse, the Dragon Lords finally broke their silence and descended from their sanctuaries to enforce a ceasefire.

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The Dragon Lords introduced what came to be known as the Treaty of Valmyr, named after the valley where the Dragon Lords gathered the leaders of each faction to dictate terms.

Simon did not know much about the treaty but from what little information he had, it enforced territorial boundaries, the ceasefire of assault, restriction of forbidden magic and sanctuary for minor and weak races.

The Treaty of Valmyr brought an end to the Second Apex War, ushering in an era of uneasy peace. The balance it enforced allowed the world to recover, but the scars of the war remained.

Of course, all of this was in the future, in the current timeline none of this had happened yet. That said, knowing the information about the future gave Simon an advantage that allowed him to manipulate the situation the way he did right now.

And while his story about the Dragon Lords interfering might have been a clever ruse, it was based on the future events and could be said to be somewhat true.

Simon looked at Vordanaz, seeing that the latter still showed some suspicions, he decided to bring out the ace in his sleeves. He held a yellow crystal marked with several runes in front of the Demon Duke's face.

"Duke Vordanaz since you still doubt me, then can you tell what this is?"

The latter looked at the crystal and in that instant, it was as if his soul left the body. He got up from his seat approached the crystal and looked at it the crystal as if it was some kind of supreme artifact.

"This... how is this possible? This crystal clearly contains the blood essence of a high ranking dragon. What's more the runes it's engraved with are also not ordinary. Normally, an item like this can only be made if the user is willing to shave a portion of the strength to create it. Once it shatters, it would alert the being who created it".

Vordanaz was a Demon Duke for a reason, one look was enough for him to completely grasp the utility of the item.

After he was done checking the crystal, his eyes fell on the demon again. However, unlike earlier when they still held some suspicions and doubts, this time it was completely covered with reluctant acceptance and even some fear.

"Do you believe me now? This item was given to me by one of the elder dragons as a sign of respect and friendship. I don't need to tell you what this means".

With the crystal that Valdris gave him, he had complete credibility over his story.

"So the dragon lord have started to make their moves and you've been planted here... to judge us? To decide our worth in this war?"

Simon shook his head "Not quite, The Dragon Lords are impartial, but that does not mean they will tolerate evil. Humans and demons alike have blood on their hands. Both are at fault for this endless conflict"

"But when it comes to preserving balance, they will not hesitate to act—even if it means forging a justice of their own design."

"For the sake of the world's balance and its survival, the Dragon Lords will not hesitate to uphold their vision of justice, even if it is something they must enforce through their might. They are not blind to the suffering caused by this war, nor will they allow it to continue unchecked."

After explaining all that, he started smiling "My role in all of that is simply an observer. Through me—and others like me—they watch. The Dragon Lords' eyes are on every corner of this war. I am not the only one. There are countless others placed strategically across this conflict, monitoring every move, every decision, and every atrocity."

Gulp... Vordanaz gulped traces of concern could be seen on his face. This was a serious matter, according to what Simon said, the dragon lord were observing them without them even realising it.

In this war where the balance had been maintained by the demon lords, Seraphims and powerful sovereigns of other races even a single mistake or decision could decide the battle.

If in a situation like this the dragon clan decided to join the fray, it would completely break the balance and decide the outcome of the war forever.

In a war, one side will lose, and one side will win. But the victory is not simply determined by swords or spells alone. What the demon was trying to tell him was the side that causes the most destruction, that reaps the most death, will become the greater evil in the eyes of the Dragon Lords.

And that side—be it humans, demons, or both—will face the full force of their intervention.

The chamber fell into an uneasy silence, the only sound the faint crackling of the torches. Vordanaz leaned back in his throne, his expression grim. It was clear he was grappling with the implications of Simon's revelation.

Having said everything, Simon stood up to leave. "I have said all I needed to, Vordanaz. I revealed myself to you for one reason: to warn my own kind—this one time. I have no intention of interfering directly, nor will I take sides. I have given you a chance to understand the stakes, and perhaps, to seek redemption in my own way."

"Redemption, you say?" Vordanaz's lips curved into a sarcastic smile "A demon like you? Do you truly think I would believe something like that?"

Demons by far were whimsical creatures who mostly cared about their own interest. The thing about redemption or kinship although not foreign was not important to most demons.

As such, when Simon said that he was doing this for redemption or to warn his kin, he couldn't believe the latter. However, after seeing the completely serious face of the Demon Noble, Vordanaz was forced to reconsider.

"You have my gratitude for sharing such information".

As if remembering something, Simon turned around to face the Demon Duke "I'm sure you know this, but you cannot speak of what I told you to anyone".

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"My identity must remain a secret—not only for my sake but for yours as well. If the demons suspect you knew of the Dragon Lords' interference in this war and failed to act... Well, even a Duke's standing is not invincible."

Vordana narrowed his eyes, he was well aware of the consequences if he were to reveal it. Simon had explicitly told him that he was not the only one who had been placed to monitor the war by the dragon lords.

There were many others, perhaps there were even some high ranking demons in the demon lord's army who might have been monitoring the situation for the dragon lords. If he carelessly leaked the information, it would spell disaster for himself.

"Then why me? Why did you disclose this to me?" Vordanaz questioned.

'It seemed easier to deceive you rather than the others'... there was no way Simon could say that. He racked his brain and continued spouting his bullshit.

"As I said before, it is for my own redemption. If you hadn't found me back there in the human camp, then perhaps I wouldn't have come here to reveal all this information to you. I hope you will make the right judgement"

With that, Simon exited the room.

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"Sir Melkan... there is no need to blame yourself. Nobody expected that human to turn out to be a Demon Noble"

In a dark corner of the demon camp, far away from Vordanaz's stronghold, Melkan and his group finally stopped for a breather.

They leaned against jagged rocks and trees, their breaths uneven, and their faces pale. The oppressive tension from the confrontation in Vordanaz's chamber still clung to them, suffocating their throats.

After a while, one of Melkan's henchmen spoke "Sir Melkan, there's no need to blame yourself. No one could have expected that... that human to turn out to be a Demon Noble!"

Others chimed in, nodding fervently... "Yeah, who could have known? And besides, we didn't actually do anything to him. You held us back in time."

Melkan's expression darkened, his glowing eyes narrowing as he shot them a furious glare.

"Do you think I don't know that?!"

He snapped, his voice cutting through the silence like a whip. The henchmen flinched, falling silent under his wrath.

"It's a good thing we stopped before we did anything untoward to him. Who knows what consequences might have followed."

He snorted, crossing his arms and leaning against the rock as though to dismiss the situation entirely.

"So what if he's a Demon Noble? I'm a Demon Earl. Even if he's noble-born, there's no way he outranks me," Melkan declared, his tone filled with confidence.

His henchmen exchanged glances, their uncertainty slowly fading as Melkan's words began to sink in.

"You're right, my lord. A Demon Earl like you stands leagues above a random noble. That guy just got lucky!"...

"Exactly, no way someone like him could ever compare to you, Sir Melkan."

The tension in the air eased slightly as the group began to relax, but that illusion was shattered in the next moment.

"Oh? You really think so?" The voice was calm yet carried an unmistakable edge. It was much too familiar, chilling their blood.

Though it was foreign, the reason it rang so familiarly in their ears was simple: they had heard it just moments ago.

The laughter died abruptly and Melkan and his lackeys quickly turned around towards the direction of the sound. There, sitting casually atop a jagged boulder not far from them, they saw the Demon Noble.

His posture was languid, one leg resting over the other as though he had been waiting for them all along. His heterochromatic eyes gleamed faintly as they stared at them.

Since when? This was the first thought that arrived in everyone's head.

"You—since when did you get here?!" Melkan questioned stammering midway.

"?" Simon tilted his head "Oh, I've been here for a while. I couldn't resist sticking around after that touching hospitality you all showed me".

The group froze, it was they expected the demon noble resented them for their earlier conduct.

Faced with the other party's clear hostility Melkan forced himself to stand tall, "Hah! So what if you're here? You may have fooled Duke Vordanaz, but you don't intimidate me. I am a Demon Earl, and I don't bow to anyone of lesser rank."

Simon raised an eyebrow, clearly amused.

"Lesser rank?" he chuckled "Is that what you think?"

Melkan's jaw tightened "That's exactly what I think. A demon who mixes with the humans like you may have some tricks, but you're nothing compared to me."

Unable to see the difference between him and his opponent, Melkan was exactly the demon Simon thought he was.

"I was hoping to avoid this but I guess it cannot be helped... [Demon Marquess' Intimidation]"

He sighed and stepped down from the boulder. The moment his feet touched the ground, a wave of pressure swept over the area.

At that very instant The air grew heavy, crackling with invisible power as Simon's aura began to bleed out.

BANG... the ground ran with cracks for several meters and within seconds a pressure visible to the naked eye descended onto the place.

Facing that kind of pressure head on, the henchmen fell on their butts, their faces aghast and froth coming out of their mouths, about to faint any moment.

As for Melkan, the moment the pressure settled on his shoulders, His breathing grew laboured, and his knees threatened to buckle. His eye which were clouded with arrogance and superiority complex, cleared up allowing him to finally realise what; no, who he was up against.

This feeling... the sensation that generated from the core of his being, raw, untainted, and far purer than his own, told him that the being he was facing was no low ranking demon.

"You!?!... This... this isn't possible, No ordinary Demon Noble has blood like this. This... This is...!"

Melkan didn't have the courage to say it out loud after all, the feeling he was having was clearly the bloodline suppression.

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That's right, it was not an explosion of power, nor a visible display of force. Instead, it was an ancient, primal resonance that seemed to pulse from Simon's very veins.

The sensation wasn't just oppressive; it was invasive, seeping into the very marrow of those present, touching their instincts and awakening a buried, ancestral fear.

"You feel it, don't you? The vast gulf between us" Simon's voice cut through the silence, his tone was mocking but it carried an unshakable certainty. "This isn't something that you can resist just because you want to".

The invisible pressure that was weighing down on their soul, intensified like a primal command that they were unable to resist.

Now face to face with the clear reality, Melkan's delusion finally shattered. His head snapped downward and his knees finally gave way. The pride he was trying to hold onto, was ruthlessly stomped down.

He couldn't stand before the weight of that blood, a bloodline so pure and potent that it could strip away the will of those who dared defy it.

There was no mistaking it, Melkan instinctively understood what the being standing in front of him was— Demon Marquess.

Behind him, his henchmen had already collapsed to the ground, their foreheads pressed to the dirt, their bodies trembling uncontrollably. They didn't even dare to look up, their instincts screaming at them to bow, to submit, to acknowledge the presence before them as something far beyond their station.

Finally, after a while Melkan gathered his courage and spoke in a weak voice.

"P-please..." stammering, he continued "Please spare us. We didn't know... We didn't mean to offend. We beg your forgiveness."

Simon continued to remain still, watching them with an expression of detached satisfaction. The pressure coming off of him continued to weigh down on them.

"I was wrong, I had eyes but failed to see your majesty. Please just forgive me once"...

At this, Simon's lips finally opened and he uttered. "Forgiveness? Forgiveness comes with a price, Melkan."

"What... what do you want from us?" The Demon Earl's body quaked, forced himself to look up while still kneeling on the ground.

Simon flashed a wide grin, revealing his fangs "Your loyalty, swear it to me, and I will spare your lives. Refuse, and this place will become your grave."

At the end of his sentence, his heterochromatic eyes glimmered with a murderous glow. The demon camp although has strict rules and regulations, can be unexpectedly primitive.

Here committing murder to establish one's domination was not out of the ordinary. Even if Simon killed Melkan here, the high ranking demons and beings would not bat an eye.

Plus he was already aware that the Demon earl didn't have much of a standing or backing in the Demon camp.

Melkan didn't have to look up to know that the other party was completely serious, his instincts were already warning him, telling him that a single mistake here would cost him his life.

And thus, to preserve his life he made his decision.

"I... I swear it. My loyalty is yours, Lord Simon."

Behind him, his henchmen echoed his pledge, their voices trembling as they prostrated themselves fully.

At least he is self aware, Simon drew a glyph in the air with a single motion of his finger. The thing drawn resembled a serpent devouring its own tail.

The eyes of the serpent glowed crimson and on Simon's command, latched onto Melkan and his entourage. The next second, a glowing sigil appeared above all of their hearts, something that was only visible to them and the invoker Simon.

Melkan understood what the sigil represented; however, he didn't raise any resistance and simply accepted his fate.

The sigil above his; no, above all of their hearts was a brand, constraints that tied him and his followers irrevocably to the one in front of him.

Invisible to the eye but ever-present, if under this brand Melkan and his subordinates ever tried to betray him or even have the slightest ill intent towards him, the sigil would transform into a snake that would dig into their hearts, crippling their strength and drain away at their strength.

Exclusive to the demon race, it was known as one of the most cruel and absolute forms of loyalty or otherwise known as the Demon Contract.

"There, it's all done" Simon pointed with his finger "You are all now bound by the oath of the serpent, so you all better discard your thoughts about betraying me"...

"We will never.." Melkan tried to speak up but was stopped by Simon.

"I know you won't, that's why I made sure of it. Now then, since you have all become my loyal subordinates, it is time for your first mission"...

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Inside a vast and imposing room, supported by columns carved with demonic murals, several square platforms could be seen rising towards the ceiling in a circular fashion.

Each platform bore the sigil of a Demon Noble, grand and imposing. The platforms circled a large platform in the middle where a single being stood.

Each of the platforms was currently occupied by demon nobles and generals, as well as formidable entities from other races. However, all of them had their auras restrained in front of the being in the central pedestal, the reason being— the one in the middle bore the sigil that represented the peak of power and authority, the Sigil of the Demon Lord of Envy.

"Reports have confirmed that the humans have regrouped at the abandoned fortress of Mount Gorgor. It appears they've fortified their position and are gathering forces."

The being spoke. He had a large frame that could be compared to an ogre and had three menacing eyes. His hair jutted upward like jagged spikes of obsidian, matching his obsidian like body.

He was Garvex, one of the five most powerful subordinates of the Demon Lord of Envy and a being from the fearsome Mak'thar race, an [S]-rank species renowned for their raw power and unsettling unique powers.

However, the world knew him by a different name, the Triumphant Eye. This title alone was enough to send shivers through both ally and foe alike.

Chapter 976- Battle of Mount Gorgor (2)

Even the high ranking Demon Nobles had to restrain their auras before him.

Garvex's voice reverberated through the chamber causing the place to be silent for a while before murmurs began rippling through the area.

"They dare regroup so close to our domain?"...

"A mere platoon of the Southern Alliance? Pathetic, They should be crushed for their insolence."

Whispers of curiosity and disdain spread among the demon nobles and other beings gathered in the room.

Garvex's third eye swivelled toward the speakers, silencing them with a single, unblinking glare. He continued "They've chosen their position wisely, the fortress at Mount Gorgor is defensible and strategic. Their intentions are clear: they mean to stall us, perhaps even to bait a response."

Even the lowest ranking Demon Baron could see that the opponent human army was not a match for their forces. So the human suddenly trying something different was either a bait or deliberate attempt to slow them down.

The question was do they fall for it or not?

"A bait? Hah! Do the humans think we don't know what they are up to? A show of force is overdue" a demon noble clad in blood-red armor spoke.

Gavrex's three eyes turned towards that Demon Noble — "And what would you suggest, then? Should we mobilize the full might of the Demon Lord's army to deal with a mere platoon? The Demon lord's orders are precise, we need to march straight towards the south of the central continent, trample any obstructions and regroup with the Demon Lord of Greed's army"

The room fell silent again though not for long.

"Garvex is right, The humans at Mount Gorgor aren't worth the attention of our full army. Their strength and numbers are insignificant, a distraction at best."

"And what would you propose?"...

Vordanaz answered feigning a smile "A detached unit. The key is time, we don't want to make the Demon Lord angry. A show of overwhelming force would be a waste. Let the humans see just a fraction of our power—and let them tremble."

The demon nobles murmured in agreement.

"Very well," Garvex said after a moment "We will send a detached force..."

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In a few hours, the first light of dawn crept across the battlefield, the rising sun painted the world in hues of crimson and gold. The sky was heavy with dust, and the air was thick with the lingering stench of blood and ash.

Shadows moved like phantoms across the war-torn landscape in an organised way. From his vantage point atop a cliff, Vordanaz gazed down at the assembled detached force.

It was a modest force compared to the full might of the Demon Lord's army, but it was more than enough for the task at hand. At the forefront were Infernal Hounds, trolls, golems, minotaurs and centaurs, their glowing eyes filled with predatory hunger.

Most were around level 400, their strength formidable but far from the apex of what the demon army had.

Leading the force was a Demon Earl who although exuded a formidable aura, lacked charisma. He was aided by several Demon viscounts who followed him around like baby chicks following a mother hen.

The band of demons were none other than Melkan and his group.

Melkan strode confidently at the head of the detached force, Pride swelled in his chest as he surveyed the army at his command. Behind him was an army that could flatten anything, as they marched in unison, he basked in the aura of authority they granted him.

This was it, this was his golden opportunity. To be tasked with destroying the humans occupying the fortress at Mount Gorgor—it's more than a mission. It was his chance to rise.

What initially seemed like a disastrous encounter with Simon, had turned into an unexpected boon. He had narrowly avoided humiliation and instead found himself leading this force.

If he crushed the humans at Mount Gorgor, his success would elevate him within the Demon Lord's ranks.

"Perhaps even Garvex himself will take notice of me."

Melkan glanced at the distant fortress, victory seemed inevitable with such a powerful force at his command.

"I'll ensure these wretched humans are obliterated. No one will doubt my worth after this."
Drowned by the sudden power he held, he was completely unaware of the fact that he was being used as a disposable both by Simon and the Demon Lord's army.

As the detached force drew closer to the fortress in Mount Gorgor, high up in the sky Vordanaz was suddenly distracted by an abrupt change in air. The sky darkened without any indication and the temperature dropped sharply.

A presence approached, from the darkened sky a figure of a person descended. Wrapped in crimson winds, ever changing and turbulent, the figure looked like they had no physical body.

The newcomer arrived behind Vordanaz in an instant.

"Why are you here, Gareth?" Still standing in his place with his back facing the newcomer, the Demon Duke asked.

The malleable body covering the figure faded and the silhouette of the being could finally be seen. A prominently handsome face, short black hair, crimson eyes and horns that curved backwards, his features were the very definition of how a Demon Noble should look.

Donned in an extravagant suit and fur cloak over, he exuded authority and power. This was Gareth, one of the most feared Demon Dukes in the Demon Lord of Envy's faction.

"Why, nothing much," The demon duke referred to as Gareth replied. His sharp teeth glinted as he chuckled. "I was just curious about this little detached force. Why would you Vordanaz, of all people, involve yourself in such a trivial matter? Surely, a platoon of humans isn't worth your time."

Of all demons, it had to be Gareth, Vordanaz clicked his tongue inwardly. This was the worst possible outcome he wanted to avoid.

He had been attempting to tread carefully after Simon's warning, trying to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and give the humans a chance to retreat without escalating the conflict.

But with Gareth here, it didn't seem like his plans would come to fruition anymore.

Chapter 977- Battle of Mount Gorgor (3)

Although Vordanaz was frustrated in his mind, outwardly he maintained his calm and replied "Garvex saw fit to delegate this mission to one of my subordinates. I am merely ensuring it proceeds without incident"...

"Subordinate you say?" Gareth raised a brow "Since when can a piece of trash like that join your faction? Come now, what are you hiding from me".

No matter how low Melkan's position was in the Demon Lord of Envy's army, he was still a Demon Earl. However, he also had a point. The position Vordanaz was in, even an average Demon earl wouldn't catch his eyes.

"You're no babysitter. You wouldn't be here unless you had a vested interest. Could it be that the humans at Mount Gorgor are more dangerous than they seem? Or perhaps... you have your own reasons for involving yourself?"

Gareth was no ordinary Demon Duke. Under the five supreme commanders of the Demon Lord of Envy, he was a rising star, one of the most powerful and influential. His cunning, charisma, and sheer strength had earned him favour from the highest echelons of the faction.

Rumors even had it that Gareth, had reached the pinnacle of his rank and was half a foot into the next rank—Archduke. Given his power and acumen, it wouldn't be long before he figured out Vordanaz's plan.

"Nothing to say, old friend?" Seeing that Vordanaz wasn't saying anything, the smile on Gareth's face widened.

"You've always been good at keeping your motives close to your chest"...

"Mind your own business. What I do and why I do it is none of your concern, Gareth."

"Oh, but it is. Everything that happens in this faction concerns me. You see, I've made it my mission to ensure the Demon Lord's will is carried out... without interference from those with hidden agendas."

At those words, the already dark sky darkened even further. The clash of two energies divided the sky and even land into two halves.

Vordanaz narrowed his eyes "Are you doubting me? You of all people should know that I am one of the most stalwart followers of the Demon Lord".

The oppressive silence hung in the air, a suffocating tension that seemed ready to ignite at the slightest spark.

Gareth's ember-like eyes scanned Vordanaz, his aura pressing down on everything around them like an invisible storm. Then, just as abruptly as it had descended, the pressure dissipated with a sigh.

"Let's hope that is the case". shrugging his shoulders with an air of nonchalance, he said nothing more and stood there as if he had nothing else in this world to do. His stance betrayed the deadly power he showcased a moment ago.

Vordanaz said nothing, his gaze returning to the detached force far below.

The sun had risen fully now, its light illuminating the battlefield without prejudice—shining equally on the living and the dead, on shattered bones and blood-soaked earth.

The fortress loomed ahead, its appearance exactly what one would expect of an abandoned stronghold. Crumbling walls, overgrown moss, and deep cracks in the stone gave it an aura of desolation as if it had long been forgotten by time.

Yet as the detached force approached closer, signs of human touch became apparent. Barricades had been hastily erected over breaches in the walls, and piles of rubble had been cleared to make narrow pathways.

The gates, though weathered, bore fresh iron reinforcements. The signs of makeshift repairs made it clear: this fortress was no longer abandoned.

"They're here," High atop the fortress walls, Rothgard and Dravik stood side by side, their gazes fixed on the approaching demon force.

The latter spoke grimly, his hand tightening on the hilt of his sword.

Rothgard with his weathered face, nodded and calmly ordered "Sound the bell. Alert everyone."

DING.. DING... alarm rang on all corners of the fortress rousing the human forces within. Soldiers and mercenaries rushed to their positions, shields and spears at the ready as they mounted the walls.

Their movements were rhythmic but clumsy, a sign of practice rather than experience. Clearly, these men had drilled these manoeuvres since arriving at the fortress, preparing for this inevitable moment.

Rothgard and Dravik busily handed out orders. Standing near them were several others—captains and vice-captains, the best fighters and leaders of the South Wing forces. Among them was Simon, disguised as a human mercenary once again.

"The fact that we could reach here and stand a chance to deadly the demon lord's army no matter how short, it's all thanks to you" Dravik glanced at Simon and thanked.

At this moment when the end was almost near, even a person as foul mouth as him spoke words of gratitude. The close officers and captains laughed.

"We owe you. Truthfully we couldn't have done this without you. If by miracle we survive this war, I will recommend you to Her Majesty to give a suitable position and reward. It applies to everyone here, so fight with all your strength. This will be our, the South wing army's final battle" Rothard commented raising everyone's morale.

HONK... The demon war horn sounded, its deep, guttural tone reverberating across the battlefield like the call of an ancient beast awakened from slumber. The war had begun.

One side stood at the top of the wall, with nervous breaths and shield and arms ready while another side surged forward like a black tide, their guttural snarls and bestial roars blending into a cacophony of bloodlust.

The moment the two forces collided it was a gruesome sight. From high up in the sky, the demon army looked like a dark sea of shadows and fire, crashing against the fortress walls with relentless fury.

Infernal Hounds leapt and clawed at the stone, their flaming bodies lighting up the base of the stronghold. Behind them, waves of centaurs and war runners hurled themselves forward, their bloodthirst palpable even from a distance.

The first impact was bone-rattling. The fortress walls shuddered under the reckless charge of the black tide.

Chapter 978- Battle of Mount Gorgor (4)

Arrows rained down from above, spears thrust forward from the parapets impaling and piercing multiple monsters.

"Hold steady!" Dravik's voice roared over the chaos, his figure commanding atop the wall "Don't lose your balance! Hold the line!"

Yet, even as he roared out orders, the soldiers scrambled to maintain their footing. Using this chance, the agile demonic beasts began scaling the walls.

The snarls grew louder as the distance was closed and the screams of desperation rang all around the walls.

Arrows were loosed, spears thrust, claws raked, and fangs bit down, the sound of metal clashing against flesh and bone creating a horrific symphony.

Sparks of magic erupted like a twisted imitation of fireworks, mingling with the blood-red hue that blossomed around the fortress like a field of roses.

It was a beautiful sight—enthraling, even—but make no mistake: it was also grotesque, each bloom of crimson a life extinguished. The battlefield below became a vision of hell.

War was cruelty incarnate, a stage where screams of agony composed a demonic symphony. Blood painted the ground and walls alike, mixing with the dirt to form a ghastly slurry.

The acrid stench of burning flesh—both human and demon—hung heavy in the air, and the flashes of magic only added to the disorienting chaos.

Common sense dictated that the south wing army consisting mainly of barely trained conscripts, would have stood no chance against the power of the detached demon army. But thanks to the fortress which provided them with an edge, they were able to barely hold on.

With their elevated position on the walls, they could see the enemy first and shoot their arrows down. Plus, even though the walls were barely stable and unmaintained, they provided adequate defence and also slowed down the enemy.

Back in the demon lines, Melkan clicked his tongue in half amusement half frustration. His sharp eyes observed the battlefield, the infernal hounds which he thought would completely obliterate any obstacles, were held at bay.

"These humans... they are more resilient than I thought."

The powerful breath attacks of the Infernal Hounds were even capable of incinerating metal and reducing flesh to ash.

Yet most of the soldiers were unharmed, managing to shield themselves with well-timed magic barriers, while others had used the terrain to their advantage, luring the hounds into traps.

It was not only the infernal hounds, the monsters and lineup of the demon army met with similar obstructions almost as if the enemy knew the weaknesses of these monsters.

"I don't know how but they are putting up quite a fight" Melkan's smirk widened as his amusement turned to impatience "But that won't last long."

"What are those Demon Barons doing?" he snapped, turning to one of his adjutants.

"Tell them to fly over the walls and attack the command chain. Without their leaders, these humans will scatter like headless chickens."

The adjutant relayed the order, and moments later, many Demon Barons spread their wings and took to the skies. Though the lowest of the demon noble hierarchy, their wings and sharp senses gave them a distinct advantage over the ground-bound monsters.

Demon nobles even the false ones like Demon Baron with their impure bloodlines, possessed superior intelligence and combat prowess compared to mere monsters.

The flight skill allowed the Demon barons to bypass the fortress's defences entirely. Hovering over the walls, they cast novice-level fire and other basic attribute magic, raining destruction down on the human backlines.

Explosions erupted sending soldiers and mercenaries flying. Some relatively lucky ones managed to come out with only light injuries while those that fell down, were squashed underneath the hooves and hurled to their deaths below.

"Hehehe.. Frontline monsters to batter the defences, and Demon Barons to wreck the backline. Let's see how long these pitiful humans last" Melkan chuckled, watching the chaos unfold.

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Back on the walls, Dravik watched the scene of carnage unfold before him. Bloodied and panting, his sword flashed as he decapitated a climbing beast before turning his gaze skyward.

"It was going well... until those damn Demon Barons showed up."

The Demon Barons weren't too formidable of a foe, with adequate preparation, a group of soldiers could take them on. However, what made them a threat was their cunning and powerful magic.

The humans, already stretched thin, struggled to deal with this new aerial assault. The flying demons swooped overhead, their spells wreaking havoc on the defenders' coordination. Archers fell, barriers faltered, and the soldiers' morale began to waver.

"Rothgard! We need to handle those bastards in the sky, or this fortress will fall!" Dravik clenched his teeth and called out.

"Yeah I know, you all get ready" On Rothgard's command, the elite soldiers of the South Wing Army, those who had fought alongside Dravik for years—stepped forward.

Unlike the green conscripts manning the walls, these were hardened soldiers, seasoned by years of battle. Without hesitation, they separated from their teams, rushing toward the areas where the Demon Barons were wreaking havoc.

"Snort, weak humans you dare oppose Lord Agramon... die"

The Demon Barons hovered in the air like wraiths, cursing and laughing at the agony of the humans. Their cunning eyes gleamed with malice, scanning for opportunities to wreak havoc.

Despite being the lowest of demon nobles, they were far from weak, wielding a combination of martial prowess and novice magic, they were a formidable opponent in a war like this.

Noosgard continued to laugh in twisted pleasure casting large scale AOE novice magic and showcasing his large mana pool.

Until today, he was one of the lowest ranking demons in the Demon Lord army, someone who had spent their entire life being looked down upon.

However, that all changed yesterday when Melkan, a Demon earl came looking for him. Not only had he joined a new faction, but he was also given an important role in the war.

Noosgard was itching to bring out results. He cast a relatively large fire spell on one of the human teams which was most vulnerable, expecting them to scream miserably when a sword slash cut his spells in two causing it to miss entirely.

Chapter 979- Battle of Mount Gorgor (5)

"Why don't you play with opponents of your own level?"

Standing in front of him was a lean swordsman with a full armor that had seen its fair share of days but still glinted magnificently.

"I Theron will be your opponent" Saying that, the man named Theron attacked. His big bastard sword glinted in the sunlight and he moved with agility honed from years of guerrilla warfare.

"A mere human dares to stop me?" Nusgard snarled, raised his twisted hand and hurled forth a fireball at him. Theron positioned his body and adeptly deflected the magic.

"[Enhanced Strength], [Tower Slash]" Next he used his augmenting and power skill to hack at the enemy.

Nusgard used his claws but was still sent crashing down on the ground from the pure force of the attack. The moment he picked himself up from the ground, he was in disbelief. The human managed to bring him down... this was a humiliation and more so a blotch at the result he wanted to achieve.

"You damn human... you dare!!"

Outraged, he sent forth numerous spells. However, that was a mistake in itself. Previously, he was airborne and out of reach from most attacks but now that he was on the ground, there was no way a veteran like Theron would miss this opportunity.

"[Enhanced Agility]" Putting all of his strength into his feet, he closed the distance and slashed forward. All the spells that were in the midst of being conjured, were all dispersed and Nusgard suffered a fierce backlash.

Blood spurted from his mouth and he was sent flying again from the kick that dug into his solar plexus.

"This..." observing the battle, the average soldiers were amazed and their morals increased when they saw one of their captains kicking the butt of a demon noble.

"We can do this, we can drive them back" the soldiers and mercenaries shouted in excitement. It was not only Captain Theron, but vice captain Nera, Mercenary warlord Halford, Vista and the others were all able to tie their opponent down.

Perhaps there was a chance that they could win this war.

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Back in the demon lines, Melkan anxiously bit his thumb, his gaze locked on the distant fortress walls. The scene before him was not going as planned. For a brief moment, it seemed like the Demon Barons had this in their pockets.

Their flight and magic had disrupted the humans' defences, creating chaos within the fortress. However, who knew the humans had their own force capable of fighting the demon barons toe to toe.

With their involvement, the battle at the fortress had once again reached a deadlock.

"Useless... tsk, useless, all of them. These humans... They're supposed to be weak, fragile and yet they've turned this into a fight." Melkan growled.

He looked at the battlefield which had come to a kind of a stalemate for a while before making up his mind.

'There is no choice but to use them' Melkan glanced at his adjutants who quickly understood the meaning behind his gaze without needing a word to be said.

"We'll see to it Sir Melkan" his adjutants nodded and quickly left to carry out his order.

"Hehehe, I'll admit you are strong. How about this then, try to deflect this" High on the walls of the fortress, Demon Baron Noosgard and Captain Theron were locked in a brutal duel.

The former used his flight ability and sharp claws in a series of brutal thrusts and strikes to impale his enemy. Theron met him head-on, his sword a blur as it parried the attacks, deflecting them with precision.

Sparks flew with every clash, the sound of metal-on-metal ringing out amidst the chaos.

"Feel the power of a human" Theron roared increasing his strength and speed of his attacks even further. He rolled to the side, dodged magic and even performed somersaults and mid air attacks completely shutting down Nosgard.

The Demon Noble wasn't even able to fully conjure his magic or target properly before he was mauled to the ground. For a moment, it looked like Theron was in complete control when... the ground suddenly started quaking.

The trembling started as a faint rumble, almost imperceptible amidst the chaos of battle. But within seconds, it grew into a full-blown quake, the ground shuddering so violently that stones began to dislodge from the fortress walls.

Soldiers and demons alike stumbled, their balance thrown off as fissures opened in the earth.

"What now?" Dravik quickly disposed of a group of infernal hounds that managed to climb over the wall and looked around. That was when his face paled.

"The ground..." he muttered "No, it's not the ground. Look!"

All eyes turned toward the demon lines. Approaching from the rear of the demon army were colossal figures—massive constructs that shook the earth with every step.

Their hulking forms were made of stone and dark metal, their bodies carved with glowing red runes that pulsed like a heartbeat. Siege engines or also known as Golems.

Towering monstrosities, each the size of a small building, their limbs reinforced with steel and jagged spikes. Designed for one purpose—to obliterate fortresses and armies alike—their power was undeniable.

Usually in the wild, a single golem was not too much of a threat, it could be easily destroyed by kiting around and bombarding with powerful magic from a distance. However, in a war, the large number of golems posed a massive threat.

Plus, the powerful magic required to bring them down also required a long casting time.

"Let's see the humans handle this," Far behind the battlefield, Melkan watched the golems approach with a smug grin. His earlier frustration melted away as he crossed his arms, exuding confidence.

This was the ace in his hole, the "Ruinbound Golems." As the name suggests, they were no ordinary golems but a creation of Lord Vordanaz himself. Gifted to Melkan by the Duke himself, they powerful constructs that cannot be underestimated.

What's more, being manned by his adjutants the demon viscounts the golems no longer had their usual weakness and cannot be kited around anymore.

Chapter 980- Battle of Mount Gorgor (6)

"Tear this fortress to the ground... Hehehe" Assured of his victory, Melkan's grin widened.

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"Damn it! Siege engines! They're bringing in golems!"

On top of the walls, one of the soldiers noticed the incoming golems and shouted in terror. His words caused the morale of the human forces to hit a rock.

Their eyes swept over the horde of monsters and towards the gigantic constructs who were marching their way over here.

"It's all over, we are dead. There is no way the fortress wall will be able to take an impact from those golems"

It was unknown who but after that soldier shouted, all the others also started to back down in fear. The spears in their hands trembling and their shields becoming loose. Just when it seemed like they would drop their weapons and run away, Rothgard shouted.

"Keep your wits together. We knew this wasn't going to be easy, do not lose your sight".

Dravik also chipped in "Don't falter, just do as practice. We already knew this was going to come".

Thanks to the efforts of the two leaders, the soldiers and mercenaries finally calmed down. The battle on Mount Gorgor continued and the trembling of the ground intensified with every passing second.

The golems continued their march and soon their towering figure could be soon looming over the walls of the fortress.

"Hehehe, it's all over for you humans. You might have bested me; however, you are no match for those golems. You are finished" Nusgard laughed. However, the response he got was not what he imagined.

Instead of fear or despair, the human in front of him simply smiled and flashed a mocking glance.

"I guess we will find out who is finished".

As the golems neared the fortress walls, their massive feet thundered onto the battlefield with deafening crashes. Then, without warning, the earth beneath them gave way.

The first golem stumbled as its foot plunged into a massive trench, its towering body lurching forward before grinding to a halt. Another followed suit, its leg sinking deep into another ditch hidden beneath the thin layer of debris on the battlefield.

Within moments, all the Ruinbound Golems were immobilized, their immense frames trapped in a network of cleverly hidden ditches.

"What?!" Melkan's jaw dropped, his eyes wide with disbelief as he watched the scene unfold. The Siege engines he had placed so much faith in, the instruments of assured destruction, were now helplessly stuck in the earth.

Their massive forms groaned and shuddered as they struggled to free themselves, but the more they moved, the deeper they sank.

"This... this can't be!" Melkan stammered, his voice tinged with both shock and rage.

"How did this happen? Where did those trenches come from?!" He clutched his head as if the pressure building in his mind was unbearable.

The golems—the ace of his force, gifts from Vordanaz himself—were being rendered useless. But no amount of confusion or disbelief could prepare him for what was about to happen next.

High atop the fortress wall, Rothgard exchanged a glance with Dravik, who gave a single nod and took out something from his pocket.

A piercing whistle rang out and right afterwards from behind the cliffs and boulders surrounding Mount Gorgor, sprang up from the shadows. Soldiers and mercenaries who had stayed concealed in the shadows now revealed themselves.

"Fight!!"

With a resounding roar, the hidden decoy force, led by Simon, surged forward. They had waited patiently for this moment, watching as the demon forces committed themselves to the assault on the fortress. Now it was their time to retaliate.

The decoy force on Simon's command shoved massive boulders down the steep slopes. Each rock was naturally formed, colossal in size, and given lethal momentum by the sheer height from which it fell.

The boulders tumbled with devastating force, crashing down into the demon lines and targeting the Ruinbound Golems trapped in the trenches. Any monsters unfortunate to be around the area, were all squashed into bloody pulp.

BOOM... BOOM... The sound of destruction echoed across the battlefield as the boulders smashed into the immobilized constructs. The first golem collapsed under the relentless assault, the second and third followed in quick succession, their stone bodies crumbling as the boulders battered their reinforced shells.

The Demon Viscounts controlling the golems chanted frantically, their voices hoarse as they poured every ounce of their mana into salvaging the situation.

"Move, damn it! MOVE!" with wild eyes they directed his construct to lift itself from the trench. But the golem's leg buckled under the weight of the boulders even further.

"...." Melkan's entire body shook as he witnessed the scene unfolding before him. His jaw hung open in pure disbelief.

"This... This can't be happening. The Ruinbound Golems... destroyed? Just like that?"

The golems, the ace of his force, the tools he had been so confident would secure his victory, were nothing more than shattered rubble now. His eyes darted to the hidden human force, to the massive boulders rolling down the cliffs, to the chaos spreading through his army.

"It's impossible, How did they know about the ruinbound golem's weakness? No, in the first place, how did they even prepare for it? It's almost as if... They knew what we were going to do. They knew my every move!"

"Now! Attack the enemy"

While the demon force was confused and disoriented, Simon who was leading the decoy force gave his command.

Without hesitation, he charged down the slope. Behind him, the mercenaries and soldiers followed, the resolve unflinching. After that fight against the demon duke, Simon had become more than a leader to them. he was a hero, a symbol of defiance against impossible odds.

"Damn it! Don't get ahead of yourselves, humans!" one of the Demon Viscounts roared. Enraged and unable to salvage the Ruinbound Golems, the Viscounts tried to unman the constructs, abandoning their control spells in an effort to retreat and regroup. But the chaos of the battlefield left them vulnerable.