

Darkness 611

Chapter 611 The Nomenclature

Kahn gave a thoughtful expression as he looked at the armors and weapons kept in front of him. Soon, Throk revealed two more weapons that he specifically made for him. But this time, he didn't dwell too much on their details as he already knew of their quality.

Drakos Armor & Lucifer stayed the same since they were only reforged and upgraded.

The two new weapons revealed by Throk were a Legendary rank Spear and a set of Brawler fighting gear that had Gauntlets, Shoulder pads and Greaves.

The black and golden spear was obviously given the name Gungnir.

As for the Brawler gear, there were some small nails coming out of the gauntlet that was made from the dragon horn but these small nails were made from the dragon's claw.

Kahn named this whole set that he might use in the near future as Beowolf.

After he was done with his own sets and weapons, he gave a serious expression towards the gears of the subordinates and started inspecting them since most of them were now infused with the generals' respective auras and elements.

Jugram's red giantsword that exuded scorching hellfire and raised the temperature of the room was named Ares.

Ronin's two daggers which were black and green with yellow patterns on them were named as Erebus.

Ceril's scepter which resembled a particular famous god's scepter was given the name of Anubis.

For Blackwall... his gear consisted of a dark gray colored shield and battleaxe. Kahn named the shield as Aegis.

As for the massive battleaxe that could cleave through a massive boulder in a single swing was named as Heracles.

Armin who finally got a legendary rank Healer class staff was inwardly excited when Kahn named his new weapon as Hermes.

Finally, Oliver received a sense of fulfillment after Kahn bestowed his bow with the name Neith.

Soon after finishing the names for the weapons of the generals, Kahn then moved next to their armors and robes that would assist them in a battle and save their lives.

Jugram's armor which consisted mostly of black parts due to horns, claws and hide of the dragon and had dark red hellfire around it was given the name of Balrog set.

Ronin's new black and yellow lightweight armor set that greatly emphasized design which allowed the user to make use of extreme agility and precision was named as Shinigami set.

Ceril's pitch black mage robes with golden outlines, chestplate and pauldrons all over it along with a hood was given the name of Hades set.

Blackwall's dark gray set which had a very bulky and sturdy build was now named as Atlas set.

Armin's green and white robes with a hood revealed the aura of life force and nature just from the first glance and now Kahn named the whole lightweight armor as Nirvana set.

As for Oliver, the one who was undefeatable while fighting in the sky, Kahn named this armor set which already revealed strong and sharp noises of a typhoon and gusts of winds as Shu set.

Now that everyone on the team finally had their special and custom-made armors and weapons, they all revealed a satisfied smile on their faces.

As for the trident with guardian dragon's remnant will aka Atlan, Kahn decided to keep it inside his space ring for the future as he promised Rudra.

To wrap things up... now there remained only one thing that had to be done. And that was the...

Blood-bind Ritual.

Unlike their time with Albestros, this time... Kahn and Blackwall also participated since Throk had already taught them how to perform this ritual that bound a weapon and armor to a particular individual and also connected their minds to it.

"Alright lads, now you all can rest assured that you'll be able to summon these armors and weapons back to you even if someone stole them. It exists as long as you all live." spoke the dwarven blacksmith master after they were done performing the ritual.

Everyone instantly summoned their armors and hid them in their respective space rings at will now that their gears had formed a sort of mental connection like that of between living beings.

The old dwarf then looked at Kahn and Blackwall as he spoke...

"If you ever decide to reforge them... make sure that you do it only when there are body parts available of higher ranked dragons like Superior or a Royal dragon.

You can also use other beings and monsters but I'd recommend making a new armor set because it will be a downgrade for these sets. Dragon bloodline is incompatible with all the other bloodlines so it's better to not ruin these perfect armors and weapons.

Do you understand?" questioned Throk.

"Yes, master." replied the disciples in unison.

"Good, now let me tell you what kind of additional upgrades I added to Pendragon Formation.

I perfected what that human blacksmith couldn't do because he wasn't a saint rank person." said Oakenshield with a smug smile.

Soon, he started elaborating his genius work and the new functions he added to the armor sets and weapons.

A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

"You're the best blacksmith of the empire!" shouted Blackwall vehemently.

"No, you're the best blacksmith in the entire world!" exclaimed Kahn.

The scenario in the room had completely changed in just a few moments after Throk revealed the final upgrade he made.

All of the attendees present in the forge were kneeling on the ground while their hands raised up, bowing while circling Throk as if they were worshipping a god inside a temple.

But instead of feeling overwhelmed by this reaction, Throk was reveling in it without hiding his smug smile as an aura of pure shamelessness was oozing out of him.

"Alright. Don't try to flatter me." he said and gazed at Kahn.

"If you want to repay... you know what to do." he said with a firm tone.

He had held the end of the deal from his side. And now, it was time for Kahn to show the results of his training so far.

Kahn in return gave a fearless and determined look. Because the next day was very important to him as well.

Because tomorrow was the day of the...

Blacksmithing Duel.

Chapter 612 Symbolic Duel

The next day, a grandiose scenario of celebration and festivities occurred throughout the entire Vulcan empire akin to their biggest cultural event. A few hundred thousand spherical projection screens that displayed the holograms of a particular arena's live feed to the populace had occupied all the major streets and gathering spots in cities, towns and villages.

At this moment, a grand colosseum in the capital Arkensan that was situated in Dvalin, the city which was also the main headquarters of the Dwarven Council. And the entire site that was displayed at this moment was called Thamur Colosseum.

In the annals of history, all the major blacksmithing duels in the history of the Vulcan empire were held in this very arena to pay respect to Thamur, an ancient and renowned blacksmith who was the figurehead in leading the dwarven race to reform the empire after the Firebornes overthrew their old rulers and freed their species from slavery.

And now, this place where the best of the best blacksmiths displayed their talent and decimated enemies with pure blacksmithing knowledge and skills alone. This was the battlefield of the craftsmans.

In the middle of the rounded colosseum that spanned 2 kilometers in perimeter and had over a hundred thousand spectators seated over different platforms and the arena was filled with people from different species and races. The Dwarves and Firebornes being the majority while Humans being the least in numbers.

In the middle, were two sections made of black hard stone by the best stonemasons of the empire. Each of these sections resembled a working place of a renowned blacksmith that had furnaces, racks to place the equipment, various devices and machines that aided in the forging and crafting altogether. All and all, it was no different than two separate forges specifically made for the two participants.

The lowest and closest levels in the sitting arrangement were filled with the nobles, military officials, influential business organization leaders, the top management of the six fireborne clans as well as some of the members of the imperial clan.

Additionally... A separate pavilion entirely made of marble for the judges and the top figures of the Dwarven Council as well as the Church of Hetrax was situated at the end of the round arena.

The three judges for the duel were none other than the Trinity themselves.

Master Ivaldi, Master Druvagar and Master Fili... the top 3 saint blacksmiths of the Vulcan empire were appointed as the judges who would inspect and give their opinions as true experts and decide the victor of this duel.

Above their platforms were 10 seats. 5 of them were occupied by the five High Elders of the Dwarven Council from the left side while the rest 5 had the Pope, two Cardinals and two Archbishops from the right side respectively.

These two institutes were the official organizers of the Blacksmithing Duel between the human and the dwarf disciples of Throk Oakenshield and Bifur Tawerik. In the beginning, it was only going to be the dwarven council but since the church also declared their support for Oakenshield, they had to be brought in as organizers.

With their help, the duel now reached a level where the whole empire knew about it and were looking forward to it. Because for the majority of the citizens, it wasn't just a duel between two people... But the matter of pride.

To Dwarves, Blacksmithing and Stonemasonry were their forte, something they were unrivaled in. The dwarf contending in this duel was representing centuries of history and pride.

And for humans who were just liberated because of the imperial decree and finally had a fair chance to live their lives equal to the other races... the human challenger was acting as the culmination of their freed spirit.

So in many ways, this wasn't just a normal duel between two individuals but a symbolic battle between two races as well as a matter of pride and heritage that played a vital role in the culture of the Vulcan empire.

And finally above the topmost part of the pavilion, was a room specifically made for the Imperial family. And the two individuals occupying different luxurious chairs were none other than Hector and Venessa, the first prince and the third princess of the Vulcan empire respectively.

Hector had an excited expression on his face. This whole arrangement with Throk after being advised by his secret helpers who contacted him during the events with Rogis, the second prince, had greatly benefitted him till this point.

Although Venessa had a great start and overall momentum in the race for the position of the crown prince or princess... a few weeks ago, she pulled out from the race for some reason and no longer wished to stake her claim for the throne.

As things stood... she no longer had any support from the nobles, the commanders, generals of the military and everyone who previously sided with her till now.

Thus, Hector was assured that he would now become the Crown Prince and the future emperor as well.

Hector glanced without hiding his elated smile as he laughed inwardly at Venessa because now, his decades of planning somehow resulted in Venessa giving up.

The third princess however, had a solemn expression but there was no longer a light in her eyes as if she was a defeated woman who had given up on her life while wondering if there was any meaning to her existence.

After learning of her fate told by the emperor... Venessa had simply broken down because there simply seemed no point to all of the hard work and training she did to become the empress. Her fate was not in her hand since birth from what Havi, her father told her.

At this same time, there was another pavilion exactly on the opposite side of the arena where a group of nobles and a few saints were seated. At the front of this group were 8 seats. These people were someone who were portrayed as the group who represented the empire's future...

The Hero's Party.

Axel snickered as he looked at Venessa's lifeless expression as a wicked smile appeared on his face.

While the whole empire was excited and expected a great match, two individuals were standing in the center of the arena.

For someone who had been the center of attention for billions of people for years in the Rakos empire, Kahn wasn't slightly dazed or nervous as everyone's gaze was pointed at him.

As a craftsman who had been mastering his skills for decades at this point... Helsi was as confident and full of battle intent as one could be.

Finally, a middle-aged fireborne announcer stood in the middle of the arena and explained the rules to the audience across the colosseum and the people throughout the empire.

After he was done, he loudly shouted and his stoic voice resounded in the whole Vulcan empire at the same time...

"Begin the Blacksmithing Duel!"

Chapter 613 The First Round

A red-skinned fireborne with an elegant outfit that was a combination of white and purple stood in the middle of the arena as both the challengers faced each other with eyes filled with competitiveness.

Soon, the fireborne announcer spoke in front of an indigo colored gem-like artifact that transmitted his voice to more than a hundred thousand spectators as well as the organizers.

"To our esteemed audience and the people looking through the projection screens throughout the empire... I would like to take a moment to explain the rules of the duel." he said in a calm and gentle tone.

In the past, not a single blacksmithing duel was broadcasted throughout the whole empire and only the people related to the craft and some big names knew about the rules. So the announcer took the liberty to explain them in simple words to the common populace.

"The duel will have 5 rounds in total.

Each round will have a fixed time limit set by our judges. This time limit will be different for each round based on the type of object to be forged.

At the same time... both the challengers will get the same set of materials for that particular round. Both of them will have to forge that equipment or a weapon and it should have the rank already decided on. The designs will vary based on the ability of the blacksmith and what shape they want to give it." he declared to the audience.

"Since not everyone is familiar with the blacksmithing craft and the grade or rank of the weapons and armors... let me enlighten you all." he iterated with a benign smile.

"Following are the ranks based on quality and their overall performance. Each one is better than the former.

Normal, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Rare, Epic, Legendary, Ancient and Divine.

The last three being the hardest to forge and even in our empire, there is only one Ancient Rank weapon." explained the announcer.

In reality, Axel had a Divine Weapon but this wasn't information people were supposed to know about Heroes no matter which empire it was.

To many, this was also the first time they heard about it because not everyone in the world was a warrior or could use mana and had invoked a fighting class.

Even the majority of the soldiers in any empire's army only had military training while those who could use the mana were treated differently as long as they were at least an Intermediate Rank in their respective profession.

Thus, this information was obscure and irrelevant to 95% of the population.

"In the end, the winner of that round will be decided on the quality of the finished weapon or armor.

The one who wins 3 out of 5 rounds will win the duel." he announced.

"In the first round, both the challengers have to forge a Silver rank shield. And the time limit is 2 hours." he revealed to the audience and came in between Kahn and Helsi

He raised a white handkerchief in his right hand and instantly threw it on the floor as he loudly shouted...

"Begin the Blacksmithing Duel!"

Rumblings noises filled the entire colosseum as people screamed in excitement. Meanwhile, Kahn and Helsi looked at each other, uncaring towards the ear deafening cheers.

"Give it your best. I don't want to win by default just because you're incompetent." said Helsi with a look of disdain.

He trained for more than 3 decades at this point and now... he was forced to challenge a human who wasn't even worthy to be an apprentice in Throk's company... All because of the bet made by two saint blacksmiths.

For Helsi, it was like a tiger forced to face a small chicken. Everyone knew who was the stronger among the two. And there was no glory in winning such a fight.

That's why he urged Kahn to at least make some effort before losing miserably.

Kahn, who was now wearing a white cotton shirt with his forearms exposed and brown leather pants, had his arms folded.

"What a coincidence..." said Kahn with a smile and continued in a hushed voice.

"I was about to say the same to you."

Shock!

Helsi was surprised to hear these words from Kahn. An ant was telling a giant to be careful of him. What a joke!

But instead of responding, Helsi scoffed scornfully and headed towards his side of the arena as he quickly started forging while Kahn walked towards his end.

The metal provided for this round was Abysmithium. A metal that had high ductile properties and could also absorb the shock of higher momentum and power.

This metal was very popular because if a skilled blacksmith made a shield out of it... it could be a lifesaving piece of gear in an all-out war or in a dungeon raid for Tanks and Knights.

Both sides quickly started their forges and took out the tools. The first procedure was melting the metal and casting a thick sheet that they would use to make the design outlines which would decide the final shape of the shield.

While they started their procedures, the audience went into chattering mode like a default setting. This content is taken from Freewebnovel.com.

"Who do you think will win? Maayhh!!" asked a white goatkin to a purple orc sitting beside him.

"Isn't it obvious? The dwarf for certain.

I heard rumors that this human named Kahn hadn't even held a hammer in his life before the duel was agreed upon." he said in a carefree tone.

"Yeah, I heard the same. Maayyhhh!

I wish there was some sort of better system like those warrior battle arenas. I would've made some good harlen. Mmaayyhh!!" said the goatkin with two red horns as he bleated.

"As if! The money would depend upon how many people bet on the other side. In this case..." spoke the orc and snickered...

"Everyone would've bet on the same guy. Ha ha!" he laughed.

"Damn it! Ha ha! You're right. Mmaayyhhh!!"

Similar scenarios occurred where people started discussing things and expressed their opinions about the duel.

Soon, dozens of new remarks landed on Kahn's ears. His expression turned ugly and full of rage while he was smelting the materials.

The petty comments from spectators didn't bother him in the slightest but rather a different matter. He looked at the metal ingots being melted in the furnace as he cursed inwardly...

[These motherfuckers gave me low-quality materials!]

Chapter 614 Probing Situation

Kahn sneered inwardly in contempt as he looked at over a hundred abysmithium cores that sized that of a grown man's fist. At this moment, he was barely controlling his anger and tried to maintain his calm. Because this act of messing with the forging materials wasn't as easy as it seemed.

If Kahn chose to retaliate... there would be too many questions raised regarding the duel but as an effect, he won't be able to pinpoint the main culprit either.

Someone wanted him to lose even if everyone was under the impression that he'd lose regardless because he was a duck facing a crocodile inside a pond. And the only merit he had in this fight was that he could choose to fly away in order to flee. Which would eventually declare his loss.

But still... It was a better choice to probe the situation first than making a scene and blatantly point fingers at people when he didn't even know who was the real guilty party that orchestrated this ploy.

Also, if he said the duel was rigged from the get-go, many people would use that against him, saying that he was just making an excuse to justify his incompetence as a blacksmith.

The only proof he had was the ores he received but if he said it was intentional, the responsibility could be easily shirked away by saying that it happened by mistake or some other bullshit excuse.

Kahn couldn't even use his subordinates to find out the truth because every single one of them was hiding inside his shadow at the moment just to be safe.

Because the highest authorities of the church, including the Pope himself were present among the audience along with over a dozen or so people who were above 5th stage saint rank.

His situation now was different from when he participated in the emperor's chosen competition where all the eyes were focused on different participants and no one was looking for monster auras.

Back in Rakos, nobody cared who was among the audience and there were no people from the church who excelled in detecting anomalies like his subordinates among the crowd.

Naturally, the Pope, Cardinals and Archbishops would be able to detect the auras and nature of his subordinates if his gang was exposed and sat in the open. Thus, he had already prepared beforehand and everyone was doing their best to perfectly mask their aura in Kahn's shadow.

Nevertheless, Kahn understood that making any sort of move at this point would turn futile given the circumstances. Hence, probing the situation first seemed like the smart thing to do.

So regardless of the outcome... Kahn decided to play along in this first round.

Soon, Kahn decided to carry on with the forging and first, he put all the ores in a big crucible and later put it in a big furnace to start heating the metal ores.

He patiently waited till the ores started melting and all the slag started accumulating above the hot liquid with time.

"Tch! Look at the galls of that human. Acting as if he knows how to make a shield.

Since when can humans even come close to standing in the same room as skilled dwarven blacksmiths in our empire?" said a dwarf on the 5th layer of the audience seats.

Many who heard it nodded in agreement because they too shared the same opinion. To them, Kahn was only putting on some airs to not look like he didn't know a single thing.

"He's just putting on a facade. Just accept your loss and spare us the most obvious result!" shouted a gray tigerkin among the crowd.

These words were loud and thousands of people could hear them, but how could a true blacksmith just get wavered from simple provocative attempts? So Kahn only focused on the job at hand, his mind and body not responding to these petty slanders.

Once the metal was liquified properly, Kahn used a 4x5 cast and poured the molten liquid. He then used a machine that used mana ores to start crystallizing the abysmithium metal. A crucial step while dealing with this metal because the longer it took to cool down, the weaker it will become.

In the following minutes, he started framing and marking the design of the shield and then cut apart the metallic sheet that was 5 centimeters in thickness, very big and heavy based on earth standards. But in Vantrea, it was very easy to lift by anyone who was a Beginner Rank individual.

After the shape was cut, he started hammering it down to create a bulge at the center which he would later use to expand into a hyperbole shape that was good to face enemies in a battle.

Afterward, Kahn used a grinding tool similar to ones on earth and smoothed the edges which would give it a decent look. Later, he started hammering to perfect the remaining edges and reformed the entire shield matching that of a Knight. Compared to Tanks, their shields were medium-sized and could be used by anyone as long as they had the strength.

Kahn then started finishing as he refurbished the whole shield and added handles in the back to properly hold it while bearing the brunt of a spell or a physical attack.

And finally... the part that would ensure the quality of the end product... The Runes.

He took out a glowing yellow Chisel. This wasn't a normal chisel tool but Artificing equipment that was the equivalent of runebrushes in the Vulcan empire. But these runes won't be painted like how he practiced during his training when he was performing something akin to Calligraphy.

Rather, the blacksmith had to engrave the rune markings on the shield using the chisel while infusing a bit of their mana into each of their strikes.

Like how an artisan would perform their work, Kahn engraved the runes effortlessly, Kahn went layer by layer without messing up and finally finished the last job as an artificer as he drew basic level runes but was very efficient.

The end product was supposed to be a silver rank shield so there was no need to expose his skills too early in the game.

Two hours passed and finally, both sides presented their finished works and the three judges walked towards their presentations.

Kahn didn't know how much time it would take on earth to make these kinds of shields but here, only 2 hours were more than enough.

He and Helsi stood proudly as they placed their shields on a wide marble table in front of the judges. Their eyes filled with confidence as both the challengers did their best. And finally, it was the time...

To decide the victor of this round.

Chapter 615 First Round Result

Both Helsi and Kahn placed their respective shields on the big white marble table in front of three saint blacksmith judges. The opponent's shield had green and beige patterns here and there while the center

had a head and horns of a ram. The shield made by Kahn on the other side had black and silver coloring with the shape of a demonic head in the center similar to a yokai.

Although both the shields were only of Silver rank... they emitted a faint glow because of the attributes added to them via the runes by their respective makers. Helsi's shield gave off a faint blue aura while Kahn's glimmered with a yellowish green aura.

"The Judges will check the quality of the finished shields by themselves now. We will hear about their expert opinions soon." commented the announcer of the duel.

In the following moments, Master Ivaldi dressed in red attire, Druvagar in blue and Fili in yellow started with Helsi's shield first.

Back in the day when Throk and Kahn visited the Dwarven Council where the High Elders tried to intervene in the matters of the two blacksmiths, these three saint blacksmiths also appeared that day.

Master Ivaldi, the number one blacksmith of the Vulcan empire and Throk as well as Bifur's former mentor sided with Kahn's master during that skirmish.

Master Druvagar, the number two blacksmith took Tawerik's side. Kahn had an impression of this dwarf as someone who greatly hated humans and opposed Throk taking in a human disciple.

Master Fili on the other hand had chosen to take a neutral. He wasn't associated or familiar with any of the parties involved and he already declared his intentions to not pick a side back then.

And now these three top blacksmiths were going to judge the quality of their shields and decide the winner of the first round.

Master Ivaldi, the long white-haired bearded dwarf took a Punch and banged it against the shield made by Helsi.

Tanggg!!

The loud noise resounded in the arena and the empire through the screens. He nodded in approval after inferring the built.

Master Druvagar used his world energy to lift the shield high in the air and in the following moments, 3 orbs containing three different elements such as fire, wind and lightning came to be. Their size was very small but the power concealed in these orbs could be felt by everyone.

BOOM!!

Right in front of the audience, he bombarded the shield with all three orbs at the same time.

Sizzle!

Sizzle!

Smoke from the point of impact subsided and he put down the shield back to its place.

All three masters nodded in approval after seeing that the shield was unscathed and had no cracks over it.

Master Fili finally took his turn and started studying the engraved runes and using his own saint pressure, he tested the shield's capacity to absorb the damage and how the rune helped it successfully alleviate it based on the type of rune.

The three masters did not give any type of statement or remarks, only giving each other an understanding nod.

And without waiting for another minute, they moved towards Kahn's shield.

One by one, they repeated the same actions and started discussing among themselves using an artifact.

While their solemn expressions on the screens throughout the Vulcan empire piqued everyone's curiosity and attention... the three masters finally came to a collective conclusion.

The announcer walked close to the masters and held the mic close to their mouths since it was the moment of truth.

"Both are equally durable and can easily withstand a lot of damage." spoke master Ivaldi.

Gasp!

Millions of gasps were heard regardless of the location within the empire. This reaction came because nobody expected Kahn to be in the same league as Helsi. Just the fact that both shields were equally matched in durability meant that the challengers also were equal to each other in terms of crafting skills.

"The built, as well as the ability to maintain its shape and structure despite the bombardment of three different elements speaks for itself.

In my eyes, both the shields made by the challengers are top-notch work among the Silver rank shields." spoke Druvagar like a true professional.

He gazed at Kahn with an indignant expression that expressed his acknowledgment toward Kahn's shield even if he abhorred him because of the latter being a human.

And finally, Master Vili stated his opinion.

"I have inspected the runes on both the shields so I will make a thorough comparison." said the old dwarf in yellow attire.

Soon, he started pointing out flaws in both shields without holding back.

Like how the size handling is catered to only heavy and strong build people and not universal use for Helsi's shield.

As for the one made by Kahn... it was very handy despite the shape in that manner but also prone to getting bludgeoned. Not too sturdy compared to Helsi's shield.

"Quality is equally matched in many aspects but then it all comes to runes." said Ivaldi with a somber expression.

The first shield by challenger Helsi is made for sustaining great damage but not only it can absorb it while facing attacks in a frontal clash but also would expel it on the enemies after a specific interval.

This shield is extremely good for an offensive approach in a battle." said Druvagar with a stern expression.

Then at last, Fili decided to give his expert opinion on Kahn's shield.

"This shield is lighter compared to the first one and also, the maneuverability is more flexible and also can be used by anyone regardless of their position in a battle formation.

The runes engraved on it will help increase defense by absorbing damage with time.

This is a fine shield specially made for a battle of attrition. Even a Tank can benefit from using it." spoke the number 3 saint blacksmith as he gave his honest analysis.

"Both shields are good but in a battle, the one made by challenger Kahn is lacking only in total defensive capacity for this weapon after taking everything into account.

While it can accumulate and improve its defense over time... it's not ideal to face a sudden and unprepared onslaught." said Ivaldi.

"In the end, although the quality is equally matched for both the shields..." spoke Druvagar.

"It depends on the response time and the position of the user in a battle formation. So if we were to personally choose the most preferred one... I think we have a common consensus." said Fili and all three saint blacksmiths declared the result.

"The winner of the first round is..." they took a moment of pause and their loud voice reverberated throughout the entire Vulcan empire at the same time.

"Challenger Helsi!"

Chapter 616 The Decision

A loud cheer echoed in the Thamur colosseum as soon as the judges declared the winner of the first round. Billions of people varying from different races had victorious expressions on their faces as if this was their own win.

What caused this great reaction? It was obviously due to their lingering hatred towards the humans of the empire. Helsi may be a dwarf but the majority still abhorred humans and thus, his victory represented their notions of being superior to this species.

The humans of the Vulcan empire however felt an invisible sense of pressure as the majority of the populace cheered and laughed. There were many scornful gazes towards humans among the audience whether it was the colosseum or any city in the empire.

'Humans should know their place.'

This was the type of contemptuous look they received from everyone else even though no one openly spoke those words because of the fear of going against the imperial decree in public.

As for the winner of the round... Helsi raised both his hands, making a victorious pose as he strolled around the arena with an elated expression. The loud cheers and words full of praise became music to his ears as he reveled in his victory.

Not just him but his new master, Bifur Tawerik was loudly applauding his disciple as so were the people from his company.

The members of High Elders from the dwarven council as well as the six fireborne clans also shared the same enthusiasm and did not hold back while uttering flowery words.

Kahn, the loser of the first round had a solemn expression as if he wasn't slightly surprised or bothered by his loss at all.

However, Throk and other skilled dwarven blacksmiths, including the 3 judges of the duel had a somber expression on their faces at the same time.

Although Helsi won, it was because of certain conditions the judges stated based on the usability of the shield he made. His shield won because it was preferable in a battle as the judges concluded.

But this did not null the fact that Kahn was already on the same level as Helsi. And he was someone who only started training in Blacksmithing Craft one and half years ago.

At best, he should've made a decent shield that lacked compared to one made by Helsi in many aspects. But the fact that the three judges couldn't find any major flaw despite his inexperience also symbolized that Kahn possessed a tremendous talent as well.

To normal people, a win was a win... but to the experts of the trade, they saw too many possibilities instead of just a win-loss situation.

[That kid isn't simple. Even I'm amazed by his growth.] said master Druvagar as he conversed with the other saint blacksmith judges.

Druvagar hated humans... but when it came to blacksmithing; he had his own honor and respect for his craft. Thus he did not shy away from admitting Kahn's talent.

[Indeed. And I didn't see any signs of cheating either. For someone under the age of 30 years and exceeding our expectations by this much even though he barely trained for a year and half...

This human is indeed not someone who should be looked down upon.] spoke master Ivaldi.

[To reach this level in such a short time... How great was his talent?

Even though I'm not familiar with Throk Oakenshield, I must say he found a diamond in the rough.] praised master Fili without restraint.

Hundreds of dwarven blacksmiths also shared the same opinion as they discussed among themselves. They had their pride as members of the dwarven race so they were happy for Helsi.

But they were also loyal to their craft. And would never shy away from giving credit where it was due.

At this moment, Kahn did not show any expression on his face which caused Helsi to stop celebrating. To him, it felt like Kahn was already aware of losing.

The opposite challenger however, was inwardly happy that despite the bad materials, he could make a good shield that was on par with Helsi's who had more than 3 decades of experience.

And all of it happened because of his doppelgangers which greatly raised his experience. And in the past 1 month, all 15 of them were at work instead of just 5. So his shield being on the same level as one made by Helsi meant that all that hard effort during his tireless training wasn't in vain.

And Kahn was able to bridge the gap between himself and his opponent by a huge margin.

But the result also raised some suspicions in his mind.

Mainly because of the reason the judges gave to declare Helsi as the victor. Obviously, the situations to use both shields were different.

Helsi made a shield for Tanks while Kahn made for Knights. So of course it lacked defense compared to the one made by the former.

And Knights don't directly face and defend against the enemies. They're the 2nd line of defense who protect the middle part such as healers and mages and fight alongside the swordsman or other melee class during a battle.

It was made for a war of attrition. Helsi's was made for quickly ending battle while his shield would increase defense over time in a long war.

But the judges still chose Helsi as the winner. And because of this... A complicated feeling arose in Kahn's heart.

[Were the judges also part of this ploy?] wondered Kahn.

Still, he couldn't reach a conclusion because of two reasons. One, because although the decision didn't go in his favor, their reasoning was also sound.

Two, Ivaldi supported Throk while Druvagar supported Tawerik. But master Fili was neutral. And during the evaluation, none of them spoke ill of his shield either.

The first round Kahn fought didn't give him any desirable evidence or hints to find the real truth about who the real culprit was.

Finally, after one hour break, the 2nd round officially started but soon, Kahn's face turned constricted.

[Again? These guys are too unscrupulous!]

Because for this round too, the materials were of trash quality. It felt like the culprits weren't even trying to hide it.

[Since they're being too shameless. Looks like I too need to use the same method as well.] spoke Kahn as he firmed his resolution.

From the results of the first round, Kahn knew that he was already a capable blacksmith on his own.

Since the playing field was already rigged and Kahn was no saint either who would simply take it down when someone was punching him in the face... So it was time for him to play this biggest card as well.

At this moment, Kahn decided to do what he was best at. And that was...

Cheating!

Chapter 617 Defying Expectations

While the spectators who were vocally and vehemently expressed their support for Helsi didn't stop... Meanwhile Kahn, the loser of the first round had a tranquil expression as a devious plan hatched in his mind on the spot after receiving another set of trash materials for the 2nd round.

Now that everything was evident about the intentions of the organizers, Kahn also didn't mind discarding his ethical values as a Blacksmith in this competition. Since they didn't plan to play fair and square... he had no reason to follow his moral code either.

Kahn then looked to the left, his gaze landing at Throk sitting in a pavilion among the other high valued audience group. He gave a look at his master and nodded.

Sigh!

Throk let out a sigh and understood what Kahn's gaze meant. And in return, he raised two fingers. This was a code between him and his disciple.

Before the blacksmithing duel started, there was a sort of agreement between them. That Kahn wouldn't go all out from the start.

As for the factors of him receiving trash materials or some sort of disadvantage, Throk already predicted that something like this might happen. And once it did... he would allow Kahn to use his real skills without holding back.

At this moment, Kahn understood the signal and quickly started forging. While everyone was under the impression that he would fail again... without anyone noticing, Kahn finally decided to use his 3 gifts given by the Blacksmithing Deities aka Eitri and Brokkr.

He used Blacksmith's Intent and Prometheus' Forethought, two of the three gifts.

The former was a passive ability that allowed him to figure out characteristics of the metal or material and decide the most optimal temperature to use the said material in order to refine and forge a weapon out of it.

The latter was an active skill that allowed Kahn to focus and predict the quality of the end product. It was more of a guide that would help him decide on the final outcome of weapon or armor by carefully showing Kahn the possible outcome of his forging techniques.

There was another gift called Mimir's Eyes that could help him appraise any material's quality, grade and purity, a crucial part that would decide the rank of the product. But currently, he didn't need one as this was just a basic level forging.

The weapon for this round was a Halberd and the metal was turquoise jadeite. This metal was mostly used to make ice elemental weapons and armors. As for the rank of the weapon, the judges decided to go for Gold Rank.

Kahn had already mastered using the three gifts during his training so this wasn't his first rodeo either. Without anyone knowing, the iris in his black eyes turned faint golden but it was well hidden due to red and yellowish glistening light coming out of the furnace. Thus, not a single soul including the saint blacksmiths noticed this change in his eyes.

One by one, Kahn went through the process of melting, casting, sweltering, tempering, elongating and finishing. These were the necessary steps in forging a halberd while creating three different pieces.

He joined them all later by performing welding and finally, he refurbished them and started with the rune encrypting process.

As the pole, he used a bone of a monster that was sturdy, lightweight and 2 meters long. Any trained halberd user would prefer it over some random wooden pole to support the blades of the halberd.

4 hours passed in a blink of an eye. And finally, the judges decided to assess the finished weapons in front of the eyes of the audience.

Just like before, they inspected Helsi's halberd first, decides its quality and tested its damage output by pitting it against a wooden block.

Crack!!

The entire wooden block was slashed in two with a single swing while traces of ice shards appeared on the area that was separated after receiving the attack.

Afterwards, Kahn's turn came and the judges did the similar test.

This time, it was Druvagar who used Kahn's weapon in combat by moving it in the air via his saint aura alone.

BANG!!

A loud noise resounded in the colosseum as not only the audience but even the judges had their eyes wide open.

Because unlike Helsi, the halberd forged by Kahn not only cut apart the wooden block but also froze it entirely to the point it crumbled in seconds.

Thousands of splinters fell on the ground like broken glass shards after the swing was made.

"What kind of rune did he use?" questioned master Fili and quickly infused his saint aura in the halberd.

A well-polished golden rune was perfectly inscribed over the flattened blade of the halberd that glowed golden. To normal onlookers, it appeared as a single rune but to true experts like the Trinity... they found the real cause in just 10 seconds.

[Hehe! Looks like they noticed. Let's see which side they pick now.]

At the present moment, all three judges quickly noticed that there were a total of 4 different runes interwoven perfectly on the blade without hindering each other in the slightest. And their collective power completely exceeded the expectations of the judges.

The judges tried their best to hide their surprise and looked at Kahn with eyes full of amazement. Because what this human blacksmith just achieved now was something only an experienced individual of their profession could do.

The Trinity conversed between themselves telepathically and reached a common consensus.

"The winner of this round is..." spoke master Fili and his sentence was completed by master Ivaldi as they declared the result in front of the whole Vulcan empire.

"Challenger Kahn!"

Instantly, the audience went silent as they gasped in surprise. Whether it was the colosseum or people watching from different corners of the empire.

But before their shock and bewilderment subsided, the judges quickly chose to reveal the reason.

"The materials provided for this round should've allowed both challengers to create a gold rank weapon.

But the one created by challenger Kahn is of..." said master Druvagar and rose the halberd in the air using his aura as he revealed why they declared Kahn as the winner...

"Rare Rank Halberd!"

Chapter 618 Top to Bottom

Everyone watching the blacksmithing duel throughout the vulcan empire was too perplexed to even react to this new information quickly. First, it was Kahn winning the second round, the one no one thought about happening. Secondly, his forged weapon being of higher rank than the expected one.

These two surprises hit them in succession and billions of people were left flabbergasted on the spot. This progression was something not even the judges of the duel expected to see.

"Impossible! How can that be? The materials were clearly suited only for a gold rank weapon! He must have cheated?!" shouted Tawerik who sat on the right side of Kahn.

Even in the pavilion of the imperial clan, Hector and Venessa were also left speechless. Even though they had no grasp of the blacksmithing craft, they knew how hard it was to make quality weapons with limited grades of materials.

While everyone was unable to accept this fact, Kahn gave a command to his subordinates hidden in his shadow.

[Note down everyone's reaction and give me reports from now on. This round was to gather enough attention and see all of their reactions.] he ordered.

[Yes, master.] all of them replied collectively.

"Hmph! Do you think we are fools?"

He has no space ring or an artifact on him.

How could he have cheated? And all of us were keenly watching both the challengers. If he cheated, then a majority of us would've noticed a long time ago." rebuked master Druvagar, clearly feeling offended after the decision of the judges was questioned.

Tap!

Tap!

The next second, master Ivaldi walked forth, gazing around the quiet colosseum as he revealed his wisdom to those who couldn't decipher how Kahn's halberd turned out superior.

"The secret lies not in the materials but the Runes." he spoke in a gentle tone.

"Challenger Helsi could make only two runic inscriptions on the limited space on the halberd while challenger Kahn made four." he calmly revealed this information.

Gasp!

Even someone with two brain cells could piece information together after this revelation. They could easily guess why Kahn won this round.

But among the experts including the dwarven blacksmiths, another wave of discussions rose instantly. At the same time, Tawerik also shut up and Helsi had his eyes wide open.

He was a semi-saint blacksmith himself. He too could make 4 runes on the halberd. But the issue wasn't the number of runes but how Kahn managed to balance their effects.

Weapons and Runes were different identities in the end. One used Runes to add additional effects to a weapon such as an element, some type of attack buff or a boost that helped the user to perform desirable moves and techniques.

In terms of crafting... the difference between the quality of the weapon and grade of the runes differed greatly.

Each rune was like an infinity stone. Not everyone could wield it. Thus, the more stones added to a weapon aka the wielder in this case... the greater the burden on them will be. This pressure was enough to explode the user itself. A gold-grade material would not be able to sustain a rare rank rune according to this logic. One had to be either Hulk or Thanos to wield them all at once.

But what Kahn did was he used 4 of such infinity stones and gave them to a normal human. And somehow, he managed to achieve synergy without obliterating that user itself.

This level of mastery only meant one thing to all the experts. That Kahn was at least a semi-saint blacksmith. A very experienced one in using Runes at that.

At this moment, some of the top-level Elven artificers of the Vulcan empire who were seated in pavilions of VIP guests also gave an incredulous look at Kahn, completely out of their wits.

Because if he could achieve that level of skilled rune casting on a weapon of lower grade which resulted in rising one rank above in terms of quality... It meant only one thing.

That Kahn was already a Semi-Saint Artificer!

[This human... Where the hell did Oakenshield find this monster?!] thought the head of the Elven Artificing Association of the empire.

Many people tried to question the quality of the weapon, still unable to accept the fact that Kahn won. But as soon as the Trinity revealed their angered saint pressures, all of the displeased voices stopped.

Going against the decision of the top 3 saint blacksmiths... even the Dwarven Council will have to choose their words carefully lest they end up offending these three mighty figures.

Thus, the second round concluded and after an hour break, the third round began.

Soon, the sound of clangings against metal reverberated in the surroundings as the spectators could feel small vibrations from each of the hits made by the challengers when they hammered down the weapons being forged.

This time, the expected weapon was a Rare Rank war Scythe. The materials given to Kahn this time were also trash quality again but he showed no qualms or even a surprised expression as if he didn't even care at this point.

But inwardly... he was laughing like a maniac.

[Good, good, good. You idiots are walking into my trap just like I expected.] he thought.

4 hours later, both sides were finished with their weapons...

Many people in the audience had indignant and anxious expressions just like that of Tawerik and his people.

The judges didn't beat around the bush and followed the same order of inspecting and personally testing the weapons.

Just from the glimmering aura alone, Kahn's scythe seemed superior to the one made by Helsi. And during the testing, the scythe made by the latter exuded a sharp and deathly aura as it instantly slashed apart an iron pole like a hot knife through butter.

And there wasn't a single bulge or scratch on the edge of the blade. This was enough to assess how well made this scythe was.

Finally, the judges tested the scythe made by Kahn, the one they had even more expectations from after Kahn revealed his talent in Artificing.

But in the following moments... even the three judged had their jaws dropped on the ground as soon as they tested the scythe against the iron pole.

Forget cutting through the pole... as soon as they made the strike and the scythe touched the target...

It shattered into small pieces!

Chapter 619 The Trick

The atmosphere of the whole empire turned silent. Whether it was Kahn, the judges, the people present in Thamur Colosseum or numerous places across the empire... all of them were rooted on the spot as soon as the scythe made by Kahn shattered into small pieces.

"No!!" bellowed Kahn in disbelief as he ran close to the testing area and tried to run his hands over the shattered pieces of the scythe's blade.

Even Throk was taken aback because he had no idea why things took this turn so suddenly.

"Hah! Can't even make a sturdy weapon and wants to compete against a dwarven blacksmith." one of the spectators spoke loudly, mocking Kahn openly.

"What a joke... his weapon broke apart as soon as it touched the target... putting shame to all the blacksmiths of our empire." said a dwarven noble.

"What a shame... and here I thought he had some skills." chimed in one of the leaders of the fireborne clans.

"He must have overexerted the blade with higher grade runes to raise the rank of the weapon just like before.

But this time, his attempt completely failed.

Sometimes being over ambitious can ruin you." said an elven artificer in one of the pavilions. His voice resounding in the whole colosseum, thus reaching the ears of all the people of the empire through the live broadcast.

This explanation from an expert was more logical and acceptable to everyone and thus, all of them instantly believed it to be the cause.

Soon, a barrage of mockery and words expressing disdain landed on Kahn's ears. And he did not even hide his anger towards this blatant verbal bullying either.

The three judges, on the other hand, were questioning themselves.

[What is this? Did he lose this round on purpose?

Even if he messed up a few steps, the weapon shouldn't have shattered like a clay pot.] asked Fili to the other saint blacksmiths.

[With his talent, his weapon should be on par with Helsi in this round as well. So why did he mess up?] questioned Druvagar.

They were experts, even better than Throk and Tawerik in this field... so they naturally had their suspicions. This notion was shared by many others among the Blacksmithing community because Kahn went from 100 to 10 real quick.

"The winner of this round is challenger Helsi." declares master Ivaldi, the number one blacksmith of the Vulcan empire.

Helsi won the 3rd by default. However, his face had no sense of joy or accomplishment. He felt like this victory wasn't achieved with his own skills.

Among the audience, Tawerik was fully berating Kahn and Throk and so were his people for this unacceptable display.

Even many Humans across the Vulcan empire were cursing Kahn loudly. Saying that he's a shame to the entire human race.

Throk on the other end kept his mouth shut.

Because given Kahn's skills... He couldn't mess anything up even if he was just woken up from sleep.

Means there was a reason why he chose to lose this round. Something that he didn't know. But given how crafty his disciple was when it came to planning and putting machinations... he chose to stay silent and endure the trash talking from Tawerik and others.

This surprised Helsi who was stunned on his side of the arena. Because knowing his former master, the old dwarf would've already burst out in rage and cursed everyone's mothers already. But for some reason, he was quiet.

Normal people couldn't guess anything at this moment but experts like the judges and many renowned blacksmiths were aware that something was wrong in this situation.

Meanwhile, while Kahn showed a dejected face in front of the whole empire while bearing mocking words and berating from billions of people from their respective places... inwardly, he was laughing.

[How many?] he asked his subordinates.

[12 people.] reported his subordinates.

[I see. Helsi and the judges also don't know anything. Means it they aren't part of it.

Alright then, we will find everything in the next round.] he replied and carried on with their next forging round.

In reality, he used Mineral Transmutation skill to ruin his own scythe. This was a skill he received from the Mountain Titan in Verlassen during their hunting spree.

This skill had two main uses. One was to transmute different metals and minerals while at the same time, it could also break them during that process in order to level up their composition.

Kahn first created the scythe to the best of his abilities. But while imprinting the runes using the chisel, he used mineral transmutation skill to break the strength of the body from the inside.

This way, no one suspected that he was doing the job half-heartedly and couldn't see how the weapon got damaged either...

And right when the judges used it during the testing, it shattered like a thin layer of hollow glass and instantly shattered into small pieces.

All of this... was part of the plan.

For the fourth round, the weapon to be forged was a greatsword and the crafting materials were Mythril and Adamantite. These two metals were extremely complementary to each other and thus, the grade expected for the weapon was Epic Rank at best.

But making an Epic Rank weapon wasn't something that could be done easily. Normally, it took days and an entire team of experienced people to make them.

Since they were competing individually, Helse and Kahn had to do everything by themselves and now that both of them were revealed to be at least Semi-Saint Blacksmiths themselves...

The judges gave them only 10 hours.

This was a long period for many. Soon, many people across the empire went about their lives, many people left and returned to the colosseum based on their own convenience.

Yet the judges, the organizers and the people from the Blacksmithing community didn't move from their seats. Even someone like Hector and Venessa didn't stand up.

Just 10 hours of wait was nothing to saints like them. And finally, the finished products were presented to the judges.

This time... both weapons were similar based on the aura they leaked.

But after checking Helse's greatsword, they moved to Kahn and without even testing it...

The judges declared in unison...

"The winner is challenger Kahn!"

Chapter 620 The Real Rank

Everyone was dumbfounded as soon as the three saint blacksmiths directly declared Kahn as the winner of the fourth round without even touching the greatsword he made.

For the first time, even the Pope himself was surprised and greatly paid attention to the results and so did his fellows from the Church of Hetrax. It was one thing if the Trinity inspected and compared the weapons first but they declared the result as soon as they saw Kahn's forged weapon up close.

"What nonsense is this?!" many people roared among the audience even if they had no direct connection to either of the challengers.

"Is this duel rigged? How can they decide the winner even without checking the weapon?" many suspicious queries arose throughout the empire.

But without heeding these unsatisfied voices, the three judges released their saint auras and picked up the greatsword, making it float in the air as the whole empire watched it.

"This is why we decided him to be the victor." spoke Druvagar and all three of them mixed their mana in the greatsword.

BOOM!!

A loud shockwave burst out of the greatsword that had a gray hilt and three different colored runes on the flattened surface of the blade while the edges from both sides glimmered white.

The three runes that exuded green, yellow and purple aura flickered on the blade from time to time. And the aura that burst out from the greatsword instantly revealed a great pressure from the blade itself.

"Impossible!" shouted one of the dwarven blacksmiths.

"He couldn't have achieved that. Unless..." spoke the head of the Elven Artificing Association with a bewildered expression.

[What kind of monster is he?! Don't tell me... he's already close to becoming a Saint Blacksmith!] thought Tawerik with an ashen expression.

The normal and uninformed audience couldn't make sense of this scene apart from the deduction of this weapon being very strong.

Helsi, the brown bearded dwarf opponent, was frozen on the spot as soon as he sensed the aura. This was a familiar aura to him and he experienced it more than a dozen times when he trained under Throk Oakenshield.

[Tch! Why is he revealing it so early?] wondered Throk who had both his arms folded and wasn't slightly surprised.

"Both weapons are of Epic rank and should be equal.

But the effects of the forged base weapon and the epic rank runes make too big of a difference." spoke master Fili.

"The greatsword made by challenger Helsi is an Epic Rank one. Worthy of praise and represents his capabilities as a semi-saint blacksmith.

But what challenger Kahn made is what we call in their trade as..." said master Ivaldi and took a deep breath before revealing.

"A Quasi-Legendary weapon."

Minutes passed but many people were still having a hard time digesting the fact that someone like Kahn, a newbie blacksmith who even had his weapon shattered to bits in the 3rd round suddenly made a Quasi-Legendary rank weapon.

No one needed an extra explanation about what that rank of a weapon meant even if they were not informed about the blacksmithing craft.

The weapon ranks were already explained to the common populace of the empire before the duel began and hence, there was no doubt about who made the superior weapon.

By making a Quasi-Legendary weapon... Kahn already proved his worth as someone capable to be in the top 20 blacksmiths of the empire.

If he ever made a Legendary weapon or armor... he would be one of the bonafide top 10 blacksmiths of the Vulcan empire.

At this moment, Kahn smiled inwardly because this was the first time when he went all out in this duel.

Previously, he used only two out of three gifts given by the blacksmithing deities.

The 3rd one named Mimir's Eyes had only 3 hours of activation period per day so he had been avoiding using that ability.

But for this round, Kahn used all three gifts along with the Mineral Transmutation skill. All four of them were his biggest cheat codes when it came to the blacksmithing class and finally, they shone the brightest in this round.

For the 4th round, he alleviated the quality of the minerals and metals to create a superior and 100% pure version of them. Thus, adding his Artificing skills and mastery over rune inscriptions ... the result was finally here...

A Quasi-Legendary greatsword.

This weapon was on par with Lucifer back when Albestros forged it for the first time using the Magma Drake's claws. The weapon itself had the confirmed potential to reach a Legendary rank weapon if reforged with higher quality materials in the future.

This was the best Kahn could do as things stood.

"Don't tell me... you're already..." spoke Helsei in a broken voice.

"Yes."

Kahn nodded in affirmation and walked closer to Helsei. He bent down a bit and spoke on his left ear in a hushed voice, no longer trying to hide the fact at this point.

"I'm already a Saint Blacksmith." he replied nonchalantly.

Shock!

Gasp!

As if his soul left his body, Helsei was rooted on the spot when Kahn chose to reveal the truth.

As for his rank... Because Kahn was already a first stage saint... he was already qualified to become a Saint Blacksmith.

Just one week before the duel... He reached Semi-Saint Rank in both Blacksmithing and Artificing. Meeting the two main conditions of a breakthrough as a Saint Blacksmith.

But he still needed much more accumulation of years in experience. That was why he couldn't make a legendary weapon.

People like Throk, Albestros and the Trinity were no joke. Unlike the warrior class, their ranks rose differently and the only restriction was their levels and comprehension.

Kahn could be titled as a beginner saint blacksmith and had much to learn and improve upon in the future. However, he had already passed the qualifications to surpass Helsi in every way.

Now, the score was 2-2 for both challengers and the one to win the final round will be the victor of this duel.

As for the last round... like no exceptions, he still received the trash quality materials. Even more so than before because the duel had reached the main deciding round.

And as soon as the round officially started, Kahn let out a wide grin and spoke softly...

"It's time." he said and then looked around the group of people who he deduced to be the main culprits.

"To give a grand performance."