

Full-Moon 1021

Chapter 1021 Rex's True Intention

It was an unfortunate tragedy that happened in the Dark Elf Kingdom.

Korvak crossed the line and became living proof of the doom one would be punished with for attacking the Luna of the Silverstar Pack. A punishment that was carried out the instant he laid his hand on Luna.

Now he was crucified and placed at the front of the castle's gate.

Bevryth survived the damages she suffered from Flunra, albeit severely injured, and she was quickly brought away for treatment. Other Elders didn't voice out their disapproval anymore since now they had seen the strength of the Silverstar Pack directly.

However, for the sake of settling the problem, Evelyn still continued with the initial plan.

A second King will be chosen when the time is fixed.

Appointing a second King would work with both sides as King Jorik would still retain his seat as King, while the Elders gained some influence. Even though it wouldn't be equal, with King Jorik still having the majority's side, it's still an improvement.

Currently, Evelyn and Flunra are walking through the regal hallway.

Both of them were given a private room to talk inside the castle by King Jorik himself.

Several concerns swept across Evelyn's mind as unfortunately, Lady Lauren was in a critical condition from defending her and taking most of Bevryth's blow. No matter what, she was still at the eighth-rank realm, a realm lower than Bevryth.

It was miraculous that she still survived the attacks.

Had the fight gone even a tiny bit longer, Lady Lauren wouldn't have made it out alive.

Despite the dangerous situation, it's good that she survived.

Additionally, Evelyn now could see the loyalty and extreme resolve that Lady Lauren has.

Without any hesitation, she willingly sacrificed herself.

'I should really give her some form of a deserving reward. Maybe I should ask the factory to make her and her children a custom-made armor, and also tell Rex about her loyalty' Evelyn pondered, recognizing the importance of acknowledging such loyalty

Upon arriving at the room, it turns out to be a simple room with a round table and chairs.

Both Flunra and Evelyn walked inside.

Only when the door was closed by the escort did Evelyn turn toward him and reassure him.

"I'm unharmed, just a scratch. You can go on ahead and continue what you're doing. With the display you showed earlier, I doubt that the other Elders would try and do anything to me. It's done" She said, convincing Flunra that she was fine.

Even though she said that, Flunra who was facing away didn't form an answer.

He kept looking outside of the big window.

Not knowing what was inside Flunra's mind right now, Evelyn paused for a second before she continued, "Also, do you really have to go that far? I reckon that killing Korvak is enough, the latter part is not quite needed. You'll only sow fear in the Dark Elves by doing that"

Listening to what Evelyn was saying, Flunra's body trembled.

It seemed what she said elicited a strong reaction from him as his body turned stiff.

But with a deep breath, he calmed himself down.

Judging from his reaction, Evelyn could tell that her words earlier made him angry, but that made her frown as she didn't know why he would be angry at that. It's quite reasonable for her to say that the crucifixion part was not needed.

"I'm doing them a favor," Flunra eventually said with a vexed sigh.

He then turned around to look at Evelyn, "If I hadn't taken decisive action or heeded your counsel, sparing Korvak, the Dark Elf Kingdom would be in peril. What do you think Rex would do if he knew what happened here?"

Upon hearing this, Evelyn was muted, knowing full well what Flunra was saying.

Surely, Rex wouldn't be as kind as Flunra.

It was an obvious answer at this point that Rex is utterly brutal to his enemies.

"Be careful. Your presence is massive and could have repercussions on your surroundings. If any harm befalls you, anyone linked to it will feel Rex's wrath" Flunra cautioned Evelyn with a clear gravity. "Matter of fact, don't tell Rex about this. I don't think the crucifixion that I did to Korvak is enough"

Taking a seat for himself, Flunra trained his eyes towards the wall.

He interlocked his fingers in front of him in scrutiny, "But I didn't bring you here for that"

"Then what did you bring me here for?" Evelyn asked, also taking a seat.

Pausing for a solid moment, arranging the thoughts in his mind, Flunra squinted his eyes.

"When we separated, I was thinking deeply," He started, letting out his thoughts. "I was one of the people that Rex told his plan against the Executor to, and because of that, I couldn't help but find that something was amiss"

Evelyn, who learned of this information frowned, "Did he not trust me?"

"No, it's not that" Flunra shook his head. "I couldn't give you the answer, as I was forced to make an oath to the Origin by him. But all I can say is that you need to follow along for now and trust him fully, he will need it"

Flunra knew the real reason why Rex didn't tell the others, but he kept it to himself.

Although reluctant, Evelyn decided to trust Rex.

It was a habit of his that he only shared his plan with a very small amount of people.

A good habit that is.

Nodding her head, she then asked, "So, what did you find amiss?"

"To start off, I started to think about this when you mentioned the Dark Elves' significance. I presumed you meant for the fight against the Executor" Flunra answered, he was suspicious of something. "But, upon reflection, I couldn't recall Rex ever explicitly advising us or other allied Kingdoms to prepare for the impending clash with the Executor"

"All of us are only preparing based on assumption" He cast a peculiar look at Evelyn.

Upon hearing this, Evelyn raised one eyebrow in confusion.

"Of course, we are all preparing. The Executor is aiming for us. It becomes even more urgent when Rex is summoned by the Executor. We're not preparing based on assumption, Flunra, we're preparing based on what we see" She replied, explaining her logic.

But this made Flunra point at her, "Yes, but that's still an assumption based on your view"

"What are you trying to say here, Flunra?" Evelyn swiftly asked back.

In the wake of their earlier dispute, and considering that Flunra had never consumed a single matter to her, the gravity of this matter became apparent. She became more impatient by the second, a fervent desire burning within her to unravel what Flunra meant.

Eventually, Flunra gave away the answer.

"All I'm saying is that Rex never told us specifically to prepare for the fight," He said.

Making intense eye contact with Evelyn, he continued, "He was only saying that we would need to prepare in case of an attack from the Executor's forces. He never once said that we should prepare for when the time to confront the Executor came"

"Wait..." Evelyn's eyes widened in horror at the realization. "You don't actually mean—"

Finding that she realized what he meant, Flunra nodded grimly.

"I think—I think Rex is planning to take on the humans and the Executor all by himself"

...

"King John!"

A military man rushed over to King John who was mounting a mutated war horse.

Hearing his name being called, he turned to the military man.

Standing right beside him, the military man panted in exhaustion before he quickly saluted, posing his fist above his heart, "I'm here to report to you, Sir, that the west supply line has been ambushed by the Supernaturals. We lost another supply line, and if this kept on going, we wouldn't be able to continue marching"

"Hmm... They are trying to stall us, but for what?" King John muttered silently.

Currently, the armies were marching at a steady pace.

Bit by bit, the army was closing into the Symposium, their destination. However, similar to the Shifting Realm that was fortified with traps by the Supernaturals, the path forward was also filled with numerous obstacles prepared for them.

Not one big army from them could be seen.

It was skirmishers, a group of a hundred or so Supernaturals, causing disruptive chaos.

At this point, it was very clear that the Supernatural was stalling for time.

However, it still remains a mystery for him, the real reason for this attempt of stalling.

Upon receiving the news, King John quickly throttled his mutated war horse to the Executor.

Located at the very heart of the armies was a big and regal palanquin, a monument of dark elegance. Its deep purple roof contrasts sharply with the rich black curtains. Intricate and detailed carvings adorned its dark wood, and stylized dragon horns rose from the corners, declaring its noble purpose.

Gold accents subtly marked its luxurious heritage, and it was also pulled by tanks.

The Executor was inside of it throughout the journey.

Jumping onto the palanquin, King John knocked on the wood before he stepped inside.

Sitting on soft cushions at the center was the Executor.

King John averted his gaze, purposefully avoiding eye contact, yet for a fleeting moment, his eyes intercepted the Executor clasping a radiant gem. He couldn't help but notice it due to the divine aura it possesses.

Swiftly, the Executor put it within an unusual, closed case.

It was then that the aura vanished completely.

'Isn't that...'

For a moment there, King John was detached from reality when he saw the gem.

He was dwelling inside his mind, stunned at what he saw.

Even though the Executor was looking at him, and called him two times already, he was still latched inside his head. Only when the third call came that he blinked his eyes, and quickly realized that he had dozed off in front of the Executor.

"Do you have a private place, John?" the Executor suddenly asked.

Upon hearing this, King John turned to look at him, still dazed, "Eh...? A private place?"

"Yes, a private place, like this palanquin of mine," the Executor pointed at the entire place, he then stood up from his seat, exerting his tall stature. "I really like private places, you know. It was just something about the silence it provides, and the knowledge of this place is yours and yours alone. It brings peace, don't you think?"

Nodding his head, the Executor then approached King John with steady steps.

At the sight of this, King John's heart rate began to increase.

"This palanquin is layered with numerous formations and spells, meticulously crafted to keep the peace intact. I made them myself, you know," the Executor nodded proudly, almost as if he was signaling to King John to nod too. "So they were very good. It gave me the time to abide in my own mind without any interruptions. Yes... without interruptions"

However, in the next instant, his countenance twisted hideously.

"WITHOUT INTERRUPTIONS!" He bellowed.

The vehemence of his outburst echoed in the air, depicting the anger within him.

Grab!

Following that, the Executor grabbed King John by the head.

With one light move, he hauled King John off the ground as if he was nothing.

"So tell me, why did you interrupt me and even dare to drowse?" He asked raspily.

King John has some suspicion of this outburst when he realizes that he dozed off, but he doesn't know how severe it is, as the Executor is unpredictable. But the rage in his tone, it caught King John completely off guard.

Quickly after that, he conveyed, "Our—Our supply lines are being destroyed again"

"I understand the urgency of reaching the Symposium, but relentless advancement without securing our supply lines jeopardized our armies' capacity to operate. I'm here to ask your permission to allocate additional personnel for the safeguarding of our remaining, vital supply routes" He hastily explained, trying to get out of this sticky situation.

Upon hearing this, the Executor threw King John to the side roughly.

"Bunch of useless puppets," He mused whisperingly, letting out his frustration. "Don't bother, I'll personally deal with it. Such a simple task and you can't even handle it, pathetic. None of you are up to my standard"

After cussing King John, the Executor walked out.

Left behind, King John who was on the ground had his expression darken.

He cast his gaze toward where the Executor had left before his eyes glistened with a firm light, 'Yes, he was only using me. All that talk of being glad that I'm a descendant of the ancient bloodline is nothing but farce'

Clenching his jaw, King John glanced at the closed case at the center of the room.

A firm decision has formed inside his mind.

Chapter 1022 Inconclusive of Sides

Reaching outside, the Executor swept his fierce eyes to his surroundings.

He looked at the thousands upon thousands of soldiers under his leadership with obvious mockery. None of them dared to look in his direction as the sharp aura he emitted was enough to tell that he was in a very bad mood.

King John ruined his peace, all because of such a small matter.

Since he was the second leader of the entire army, he should've handled this himself.

But instead, he came inside and asked for permission.

'It's a cost that I must pay for gathering an army of this size with multiple regiments. Had the Passue Matriarch didn't survive the test of time, I wouldn't have needed them. No matter, I'll do what I have to do to gain the sacred weapon' the Executor pondered and nodded.

He stretches his hand forward before he casts a spell.

An incursion of Chaos that summoned an entity of the dark void to do his bidding.

Catching sight of an immense surge of chaos mana, the tank operators abruptly brought the palanquin to a halt. Within, military personnel quivered as they beheld the chaos mana taking the shape of a creature, coalescing into a creature none of them had ever seen.

Even in the codex Supernatural, there were no creatures with similar features as this one.

From that, it was clear that this creature was definitely not of a Supernatural.

It was a hulking abomination of war as if it was ripped from the very bowels of the darkest corner of the void. Mounted upon a behemoth, the rider stood armored in serrated plates and spikes, each piece interlocking with the next in a perfect symphony of defense.

Amidst the predominant sheen of iron, an eerie purple aura adorned the edges of its armor.

Poised in its hand is a halberd, as dark as a moonless night.

It bore a blade that thirsted for the light, a handle filled with thorns, and furnished with fully intricate carved runes along the shaft with a menacing purple hue. Just the sight of this creature alone sent peril to the surroundings.

Not one soldier could stand their ground at the sight of this fierce being.

Had any Supernatural seen this creature, they would find their essence of being tremble.

Surely, what the Dread of the Shadowtorn Legion, Lisnguanx had done to them in the past was very hard to forget, remembered even throughout thousands of years of slumber. It was one of the most used soldiers of Chaos, summoned by the Executor on a battlefield.

A very powerful entity with every inch of it made for the purpose of war.

"Edward..." the Executor called.

In an instant, Edward appeared, kneeling beside the palanquin, ready to service.

Looking down at him, the Executor then instructed, "I believe there were only three supply routes left. You guard one until I call you back, and you bring this friend of mine, Lisnguanx with you to guard the other two. Begone now"

"As you wish, my Lord" Edward replied before he stood up and looked at Lisnguanx.

Nodding his head, he vanished from his spot.

Under the onlookers' gazes, Lisnguanx who was as big as small or medium-sized houses also vanished from his spot. It was not that it was able to teleport, but it was moving so fast for their eyes to see.

Despite boasting a huge stature, Lisnguanx is abnormally fast.

Clearly, this soldier of Chaos is easily at the very peak of the ninth-rank realm.

Gazing into the horizon following the dispatch of Edward and Lisnguanx to address the persistent challenges with the supply routes—repeatedly skirmishes and assaulted by Supernatural forces—the Executor crosses his arms and squints his eyes.

'We're late to get there. It's still about three to four more days' He pondered in distaste.

Due to the Shifting Realm, they were severely behind schedule.

He also hasn't taken into account the time it would take to go through his enemies.

Judging from the Supernatural forces—desperately trying to stall him and prepare for a fight at the Symposium, it was obvious that they were going to put everything to try and stop the Executor from getting what he wanted.

It would be a long bloodbath.

Many lives would be lost, but the Executor is prepared to sacrifice everyone to win.

Glancing in the west direction, he also thought of another thing, 'Hmmm... I believe that what I forced the Royal Black Prince to do would sever any form of cooperation between him and the Supernatural races. I wonder, what is he doing now...? He must still be in utter shock at what I did'

The Executor chuckled at the thought of this, pleased with his trap.

Surely, the mental effect caused by his unexpected trickery was devastating for Rex.

'Regardless, I need to be vigilant. He's not going to stop' He mused.

Although he was reveling in the favorable turn of events and commending his unparalleled wits, he abruptly shifted his attention to the entrance of the palanquin with an evident frown marring his face, 'What is he doing inside? Why hasn't he come out yet?'

Dwelling in his mind for a bit, the Executor just now realized King John was still inside.

He hasn't come out of the palanquin yet.

Owing to the intricate formations and spells he cast, even he couldn't sense what was King John doing inside. He would need to open the door to ascertain what he was doing inside, thus, he quickly strode towards the entrance.

Concern could be seen plastered on his face.

But when he was about to open the door, King John came out, seemingly in pain.

It seemed what the Executor did earlier still hurt him.

Not even saying anything to King John, the Executor went inside again and closed the door.

Just as soon as he did that, King John turned to look at the door.

His pained expression vanished before he swiftly jumped down from the palanquin and headed in a direction. Along the way, he took a military helmet from one of the soldiers, causing the said soldier to look at him with a frown.

Realizing who it was, the frown on the soldier's face vanished and he didn't say a thing.

Soon enough, King John reached another palanquin.

Compared to the huge one that the Executor has, which needed to be pulled by tanks, this one is much smaller, only fits three people, and is being carried by four Awakened. Despite the size difference, this one bore the weight of modest majesty with ease.

Its curtains, a rich velvet purple are perfect for the esteemed royal woman it was crafted for.

King John stood on the side and said, "It's me, Gistella. May I come in?"

A long pause happened as Gistella didn't reply back.

King John furrowed his brows, she should be inside this palanquin as the Executor ordered.

"Yes..." then, a hurried yet soft and dulcet voice replied back to him.

Upon hearing this, King John climbed the palanquin, opened the curtain, and settled within.

Beside him, Gistella graciously made space by shifting to the side. An unusual silence draped over the two figures as the palanquin swayed in harmony with the rhythmic steps of those who were carrying it.

For once, Gistella looked at him with slight confusion.

Since he came inside, he must have something to say to her, or else he wouldn't be here.

However, she soon realized that King Jork trying to say something.

Additionally, there seemed to be anger etched on his face, one that was not directed toward her. In the end, he managed to force out what he wanted to say, "I want you to be perfectly honest with me, Gistella. Are you really here to make a deal with the Executor?"

Not expecting the question, Gistella was stunned for a second.

"Yes, I want him to kill Calidora, you know about-"

"I said be honest with me! I'm really, fucking undecided right now, and you're the only one that can help me" King John intervened with a shout, his mind was in a mess right now. It was a very shaky situation he was currently in.

Realizing that he was being loud, he took a deep breath, calming himself down.

"Please, I want you to give me an honest answer. Before we departed, Mavenna came to my place and told me that Rex was giving me a choice to be on his side" He continued, but with a more relaxed tone.

Gistella looked at him and found that he was also looking at her in frustration.

He was clearly not in the right state of mind.

But judging from his looks, he seemed to be serious about this and was telling the truth.

'Rex did want King John on his side, so I don't think he's lying right now' Gistella pondered.

Swish!

Before she answered his question, she waved her hand, using her light blue energy to create a bubble surrounding the palanquin, blocking their conversation from being heard from the outside,

"If I were you, I would take that offer. Unlike Rex, the Executor has no true ally, and his arrogance would guarantee his demise"

"How did Rex know about the price I had to pay to the Executor?" King John asked again.

Upon hearing this, Gistella opened her mouth, seemingly wanting to answer.

Despite wanting to say something, she closed her mouth again, refraining from giving the initial answer that she was about to give. It was caught by King John's attention, she was clearly hesitating.

In the end, she averted her gaze away and said, "I don't know..."

Knowing that she wouldn't cave in and say what she was initially about to say, King John trained his eyes forward again, "So, your advice for me is to take Rex's offer. Is that really what I'm supposed to do?"

"Forget about your pride. You're a leader, act like one" Gistella replied harshly.

Needing that slap to his ego, King John nodded his head convincingly, he decided that it would be best for him to do as Gistella told him. "But even if I want to accept, how can I inform Rex about my decision? How can I find him?"

"As long as you accept it in your heart, Rex will know" Gistella assured.

Reaching a decision, King John wiped his face with his hand roughly with a long, heavy sigh.

"Thank you," he said before he left the palanquin again.

Just as he exited the palanquin, drawing the curtains closed behind him, a subtle smile crept to Gistella's face, signifying her satisfaction with King John's decision. "Everything is set. Now, it's your turn, Witch," she murmured with a hint of anticipation.

...

It was a brand new day, and Rex woke up even more refreshed than before.

Even though he found it hard to fall asleep, especially with the nightmare he had during his brief nap, he surprisingly managed to fall asleep. A miracle for him as he was quite sure last night that he wouldn't be able to fall asleep.

But maybe the blessing from the Vampire Origin—increasing his luck helped him sleep.

Calidora is right, I need this once in a while.

Feeling that his mind was clearer and his physique felt stronger, Rex was somewhat glad that Calidora forced him to take a rest day. Had it not been for her, he wouldn't be able to rest as his mind will always haunt him.

She was capable of giving peace, which made Rex have mixed feelings towards her.

Not to mention, they ended up kissing last night.

Rubbing his forehead when he was reminded of that moment, he groaned and stepped out of bed to change into better clothes. Now that he was more refreshed than ever, it was time for him to get back to what needed to be done.

While he searches for Calidora to resume his training, his mind wanders to other things.

I don't know the situation with the Executor right now. But since Nezera and Viscardi came and met me, Elder Nolacula should know that I'm here. I should be expecting an envoy to fill me in on the situation.

Aside from thinking about the Executor, he also found a bad problem.

Since all of the System's features were down—including the inventory feature, which means that he couldn't use his one Invincible item and also Jar of Malice to increase his epiphany as quickly as possible.

Both were not some light problems, it's very bad for Rex.

Rex couldn't help but frown as he would need to be prepared for these shortcomings, but for the latter part, he hoped Calidora would know of a method that would match or even surpass the Jar of Malice given by the Witch of Chaos.

I doubt it, but who knows? It's Calidora.

Chapter 1023 Last Step

Instead of going to her bed chamber, or drawing room, Rex went straight to the throne room.

His senses picked up a couple of people in there.

Nearing the throne room, his ears perked up as he could hear subtle discussions from there.

Vampires? Is it the envoy?

Picking up his pace, expecting that the envoy sent by Elder Nolacula to inform him about the progression of the Executor's march has arrived, he walked into the throne room from the left wing and saw three Vampires clad in royal armor, kneeling before the throne.

Calidora lifted her gaze when she saw Rex stepping inside.

"Good work, keep me updated. All of you are dismissed for now" She waved her hand.

Bowing deeper, the three Vampires then stood up to leave.

Seeing that the infamous Rex Silverstar was walking toward the throne, the three Vampires also bowed to him in respect before walking past him and going to the exit. No matter what the current circumstances are, his presence demands respect.

Moreover, technically albeit unofficial, Rex has become a part of the Royal Family.

"Who are they?" Rex said when the Vampires left.

Calidora leaned back to her throne and replied gracefully, "My protectors. I got news from them about the situation of the human army led by the Executor. I reckoned you wanted to know about it, so I assigned them to do that"

Upon hearing this, Rex's eyes flickered.

It was exactly what he needed, and Calidora seemed to have taken the initiative.

Now that he had cut all contact with the others, he also became blind to the progression that had taken place. His sources usually came from the Dark Elf scouts that were sent to monitor what had transpired on the battlefield.

But now, he couldn't talk to them, so he's completely blind.

"Let's move to another room first before we talk about this" Rex said and pivoted around.

Calidora stood up from her throne with a chuckle.

Naturally, she knows that Rex's ego isn't going to let him talk with Calidora who was on the throne, an elevated platform that made her eye level way higher than his, "Forgive me for being inconsiderate, your Majesty"

Rex clicked his tongue in displeasure.

Clearly, Calidora read through him and teased him for it.

Moving on to another empty room, Rex raised his eyebrow, "Where's Mavenna?"

"I think she was spooked by the thing inside of you and left the castle. But don't worry, I told her to not wander too far lest she gets into trouble" Calidora replied, shrugging her shoulders nonchalantly as Mavenna wasn't going anywhere.

Judging from her behavior, it doesn't seem like she wanted to go back to her home.

Soon the two sat inside an empty room.

Not wasting a single moment, Calidora instantly conveyed what she had learned.

Based on the Vampires who reported to her earlier, the Executor and his massive army were advancing very slowly and were located about twenty miles away from the Symposium. If no obstacles were in the way, he would arrive around two to three days.

However, it was unlikely for that to happen as he was met with hard resistance.

It was from the Supernatural forces.

So far, only the Vampires and Demons had joined the fray in resisting him.

Contrary to an upfront resistance, clashing against the Executor and his army, they adopted to instead stall him by attacking the supply routes, chipping the split forces, and even as far as destroying the terrain.

Anything they did was aimed at stalling the Executor.

Not being directly involved with the talk of strategy against the Executor's march, Calidora thought that the reason they were doing this was to make more time for them to prepare a countermeasure against the Executor.

After all, killing the Executor is not an easy thing to do.

Killing such an entity would require Origin-level weapons or even forbidden spells.

But Rex knew the real truth about why they were doing that.

Seems like they are sticking with their promise, to give me a chance against the Executor. Huh. I am not naive enough to believe that they gave me this chance out of honor, but it's completely fine. As long as I have my chance.

It was clear that they were stalling to wait for Rex.

During his fight against the Supernatural Elders, he demanded to be given a chance.

A chance to beat the Executor fair and square.

Naturally, given the temporary relationship he had with Elder Nolacula and Elder Tilrith, they were doing this to fulfill their promise. Giving a chance to Rex associate them with no actual risk whatsoever, it was completely risk-free.

If Rex won, then it was good for them. If Rex lost, nothing changed.

From the Supernatural Elders' point of view, Rex's proposition is a very good deal for them.

Since they were doing their part, I can't fail my part.

"What about the Executor? What is his response to this?" Rex asked.

Calidora pondered for a moment, recalling the discussion she had before she replied, "I don't think he seemed troubled with the obstacles. Earlier, he was spotted summoning a creature. I reckon he did that to deal with the skirmishes on the supply routes"

"Since it was vital for their march, he took matters into his own hands" She added firmly.

Upon hearing this, Rex couldn't help but frown.

How many powers does his Chaos element give him? He could suppress Supernaturals with his presence alone, he could corrupt all spells directed at him and return them to the caster, and now he could also summon unknown creatures.

Just the news about the Executor's power alone bears heavily on Rex's mind.

It only gets worse and worse the more Rex learns about him.

Knowing that the Executor's power was extremely versatile and also overwhelming, Rex felt a shiver running down his spine at the thought of other Executors. If the Fifthborn is already so strong, then the others would be invincible.

But he couldn't get sidetracked for now.

He must refrain from thinking about future problems until he secures his future now.

"Based on what you said, I have more time than I expected, more time to become stronger. It should be four or five days max before the Executor arrives at the Symposium, and I need to be ready at that exact time" Rex said, his eyes glistening with determination.

Calidora nodded her head and stood up, "In that case, let's not waste any more time"

"Where are we going?" Rex asked, seeing her standing up.

Giving him a peculiar smile, Calidora's eyes glowed, "What else? To hunt, of course"

...

A moment later.

Since everything to prepare has been completed, the only thing left to do is to increase Rex's epiphany to the required realm. One might think that it's impossible for him to reach the ninth epiphany with him now only being at the fifth.

But anything becomes possible with enough grit and dedication.

Especially when now the time to reach the appropriate epiphany has been expanded.

Rex and Calidora went east and onward.

"So what's the plan here, Calidora?" Rex asked while walking side by side with her.

Upon hearing this, Calidora explained, "We would be aiming for weaker creatures until you reached the seventh epiphany to avoid any injury to your fragile cursed source that might make you unable to progress further. It's better to be safe than sorry"

Although it would probably take longer, Rex couldn't rebut her plan.

If he lost his cursed source, it would be game over.

Relying on his elemental prowess and King Marks wouldn't be enough to defeat the Executor.

Like what Calidora said, it would be better to take the safer route.

"Are you taking me to a similar place to the Humming Damned Forest, teeming with abundant cursed creatures?" Rex inquired once more, recognizing that finding a place like that was not going to be as easy as finding another forest.

Oddly enough, Calidora shook her head with a mysterious smirk.

It made a frown appear on Rex's face.

"Who said we're hunting cursed creatures...?" She replied, her smirk stretching wider.

Since Rex has always been hunting for cursed creatures in order to gain more cursed energy and advance his epiphany, he initially thought that it would be the same with Calidora. But it seems that was not the case.

Trailing her eyes forward again, she explained, "I'm sure the Witch doesn't know about this,"

"As the Witch of Chaos, she holds every knowledge of curses through her grimoire. However, her understanding of curses remains largely theoretical. She doesn't have the experience of all previous Witch of Chaos. In practice, if you want to increase your cursed epiphany faster, you would need to actively provide your curse with the sustenance it craves"

Rex listened to this attentively.

But at the end of it, he raised one of his eyebrows, "Sustenance it craves? What is it?"

"Yes, a sustenance that the curse desires" Calidora nodded.

Glancing sharply at Rex, her purple eyes gleamed with a mysterious luminescence, "In our case, I already deciphered what our Eternal Curse wants. It wants Life Essence, it feeds on the Life Essence of living being..."

Upon hearing this, Rex frowned in contemplation.

However, following that, his expression turned fierce, "Who did you kill...? And how many?"

Calidora reached the ninth epiphany with blazing-fast speed.

According to her explanation earlier, then she must've absorbed a massive amount of Life Essence, and that sustenance could only be taken from living beings. Rex could guess that it would take a lot to reach her cursed epiphany.

Naturally, there was concern in Rex's mind.

For all he knows, Calidora might've killed a lot of innocent people, especially children.

Regardless of whether they were Humans or Supernaturals, it would be crossing the line to do that consciously and unprovoked. Rex would not approve of that. In his case, he always has no choice but to fight.

But for Calidora, she was doing this for power, and that's different.

Seeing the strong reaction, Calidora chuckled.

"You know, I can charm animals..." She replied, a daunting smile playing on her lips. "A single cry from me, and all animals would come to me. No predatory animals can resist my charm, and sadly, they became my prey instead"

After saying that, Calidora pointed to the surroundings.

Both of them were a mile or so from the castle, surrounded by dead and hardly alive trees.

"Can you notice anything from the surroundings?" She asked lightly.

Rex scanned his eyes around their vicinity, trying to see what Calidora was talking about.

It didn't take long for him to take notice of something.

Since he had a lot in his mind, he was not focused on the surroundings. Now that he did, he instantly noticed that he could sense any living being for miles in radius from the castle. Not even a single normal or mutated animal.

Calidora nodded, noticing that Rex had already realized what she meant.

"I obliterated the mutated animals and animals around the castle and also two forests in the Elven Kingdom. I'm sure if Aunty Shanaela knew, she would be furious. But until now, she hasn't said a word, so she must've been busy" She explained nonchalantly.

Life Essence doesn't have higher scaling from one living being to another.

Due to that, there was no difference between the Life Essence of animals and other beings.

At the end of the day, it was the same, and Calidora exploited that.

"Aunty Shanaela?" Rex muttered questioningly.

In response, Calidora waved her hands in hubris, "My mother is close with Queen Shanaela, so I'm used to calling her aunty. What? Do you think only humans could have a relationship like this? How condescending of you, Rex"

"What? I didn't even say anything like that" Rex retorted in aghast to Calidora's conclusion.

He was only asking that out of curiosity.

Both of them argued jokingly and even played chasing through the landscape.

Even though the atmosphere started to melt between them, and in accompanied each other, nothing seemed to matter, deep down, both of them knew that the storm would only keep on brewing faster and bigger starting from now.

And their little argument and joke were only their ways to lessen the burden.

It was only a matter of time before the black cat came, bringing catastrophe alongside it.

Chapter 1024 Life Essence

It took a considerable amount of time to reach their destination.

Since most of the animals and mutated animals near the castle were vanquished—their Life Essence taken by Calidora, she brought Rex to a deep, narrow gorge that winds its intricate path through the craggy terrain.

A ravine called the Red Border.

Crimson lichen stained the ravine's walls, and a meandering of blood-red water flowed through its depths. Perilous stone bridges span the chasm, providing the only means of crossing. It's the border of the capital city of the Vampire Kingdom.

Based on Calidora's description, this is the first line of defense for the capital city.

Looking at the place, Rex nodded in inspiration.

Dargena City, as fortified as it was, only has the Humming Damned Forest as the first line of defense. It was stationed very close to the city itself, unlike this ravine. In order to make the city impenetrable, he may need to manipulate the natural terrain on its edges to something like this ravine.

Knowing the System, there should be something that could make that happen.

After all, Dargena City was made in a blink of an eye.

Rex pledged that after confronting the Executor, his foremost priority would be precisely that. He realized his naivety in assuming Dargena City's location was secure, it wasn't as secure as he had initially believed.

Upon reaching halfway through the Red Border, Rex noticed two stone structures.

Both were facing each other.

Judging from its layout, it was akin to a huge entrance leading to nothing. He pointed at them, wanting to know more about the place as he might gain more inspiration to fortify Dargena City by learning from the Vampires.

"Those two structures, what are they for?" He asked curiously.

Calidora shifted her eyes to the stone structures.

Looking at them, she answered, "It's a place for the watchers, a golem made of blood. Most of the time, it would remain completely still like a statue and act as a sentry, but it could also come to life and become a soldier in case of emergency"

"Since the population is relocated, the golems were also relocated" She explained further.

Gaining the answer renders Rex into contemplation.

Hmm... Currently, Dargena city's sentries are the Dark Elves according to the deal I made with them, who were placed across the Humming Damned Forest. But as reliable as they could be, an inanimate entity like the golem might be better.

Exactly as he predicted, he gained more inspiration from asking about the structures.

It tempted him to make a golem of his own.

After all, there was an incident not too long ago where the Dark Elves' sentries fell victim to the Witch's pets. Not only were they outmatched completely, but they were also vulnerable to potent mind spells and soul attacks.

On the other hand, the golems are completely immune to those kinds of attacks.

Surely, it would be way better to have golems as sentries.

"Oh—We're here" Calidora muttered and stopped, looking down at the blood-red river.

Rex's gaze descended, revealing a forest nestled beside the river, where his heightened senses already detected several mutated animals. He was surprised by the abundance, which means that the inhabitants of this woodland were very strong.

Had not it been for the First Breath, most of them would be at the sixth or seventh.

Swoosh!

Not giving a heads-up, Calidora jumped down.

Currently, the sun was still up, its radiance was glowing bright in the sky.

Due to that, and coupled with the fact that Calidora was only protected by the black ring on her index finger, she wanted to quickly get into the forest and be protected by its canopy. It was a behavior that remains puzzling for Rex.

Since she was protected, the sunlight shouldn't matter.

But even then, Rex assumed that it was her biological needs as a Vampire to like the dark.

Even he, himself has that kind of urge as a Werewolf.

Putting those thoughts in the back of his mind, with the same motion, he also jumped down.

Jumping from the stone bridge to the forest was quite a deep fall, gravity pulled him hard as he penetrated branches and trees that got into his path, and landed gracefully on the land, scanning the vicinity with sharp glances.

Rex found himself inside the forest, a dimly lit forest.

Only a speck of sunlight was able to penetrate through the thick roof of the forest.

However, even a normal person could see fine in this place.

Near his landing spot, he could see Calidora crouching behind a tree. Her eyes were trained forward in a watchful gaze, and she seemed to be hiding from something. Approaching her, Rex looked in the direction where she was looking at.

When he got close, Calidora suddenly pulled him down, forcing him to crouch beside her.

"What is it? Why are we hiding?" Rex asked with a raised brow.

Considering that the two of them were very strong—not threatened by any of the mutated animals in this forest, there was no need for them to hide. Even if several mutated animals prowl and ambush them, none of those animals would be able to hurt them.

Naturally, Rex found it weird for them to hide like this.

"Stop asking questions and follow my lead, I'm trying to teach you something here"

"Okay..."

Following Calidora's lead, he looked to his front.

Beside the water puddle, a mutated animal sipped cautiously, its vigilant eyes scanning the surroundings for potential threats. In a forest fraught with perpetual dangers, every mutated animal in this forest had to maintain a constant state of alertness.

Always poised to defend against any looming danger.

For all they learned from experience in life, one moment of weakness would spill their death.

Looking at the mutated animal, Rex knitted his eyebrows together.

I've never seen the mutation an animal had so format but obvious at the same time.

Rex was surprised to see its appearance.

It's a creature with the majestic stripes of a tiger and the dorsal fin of an ancient fish prowled silently. A muscled yet graceful creature, the size of a rhino with gleaming amber eyes which held the weight of a prehistoric world, and a lizard-like tail.

Never has he ever seen something remotely close to it.

Keeping her gaze firm on the mutated tiger, Calidora leaned to him and whispered.

"You are going to take that creature's Life Essence," She stated. "But you can't use your raw strength, at least not yet. I want you to learn to take Life Essence normally before forcing it out. It would help you get accustomed to it"

"One wrong move and you might lose a portion of your Life Essence" She added seriously.

Upon hearing this, Rex nodded his head.

He stares at the mutated tiger seriously as the consequences are quite severe.

Even though he doesn't know exactly what would happen to him if he lost his Life Essence, he could tell that it's going to be bad. For now, he would be a real student, listening to what Calidora said word for word.

Calidora lets him grasp the bad side of failing first.

When he understood, she continued, "In order to take its Life Essence, you can do it in two ways. You can coax the target to willingly give their Life Essence to you—a hazardous path, or you can take it by surprise. I'll teach you the spell, and I want you to take it by surprise"

"Okay, I'm ready. I'll do exactly as you said" Rex nodded in understanding.

Nodding her head, Calidora taught him the simple, yet complex spell.

A moment later.

Stealthily, akin to a predatory hunter, Rex edged his way to the side, concealing his aura to the point of being untraceable. He moved carefully, making sure that no sound was made that might alert the mutated tiger that was still drinking from the pond.

Rex has an immensely superior physique, so this should be easy to do.

Flickering on his fingertips were his black lightning.

Commanding the unnatural control he had over the lightning element, he manifested a small bolt on the opposite of his hiding spot and directed it to the side. It streaked past the forest foliage, making a loud rustling sound that immediately captured the attention of the mutated tiger.

Growl...

Baring its fangs, the mutated tiger becomes alert, looking at the bushes.

However, what comes out of it is a mutated hound.

It was a mutated hound that was comparably way weaker than the mutated tiger.

Upon spotting the mutated tiger, one of the apex inside this forest, the mutated hound—as strong as it was quivered in apparent fear, sensing its undeniable inferiority. Meanwhile, the mutated tiger, recognizing its dominance, eased its vigilance and approached the trembling hound.

Evidently, it smacked its lips, savoring the meal of the day that had come its way.

Subconsciously, the mutated hound knew that it would die today.

No matter how much it could try to escape, its accelerating speed was not comparable to the mutated tiger. At most, it could only take two or three steps to escape before the apex, the mutated tiger catches up.

Backing away slowly, it started to whimper, hoping for a chance to escape.

However, its eyes saw an even fiercer predator appear.

A predator that leaped from the bushes.

Rex used this opportunity to come out of his hiding spot and instantly made a very fast dash toward the mutated tiger. He manages to reach the mutated tiger without even realizing that his hand is about to reach it.

In quick succession, Rex grabbed the mutated tiger's head with both hands.

Forced to face Rex, the mutated tiger's eyes widened.

"Drain touch..."

Swish!

Almost instantly, the mutated tiger felt a chilling sensation being injected by Rex's hands, jolting its mind awake as it tried to break free. A reddish light could be seen flowing from Rex's fingers into the mutated tiger's skin.

Caught off guard, Rex started to harvest his very first Life Essence.

Under his gaze, the mutated tiger's muscles and skin were slowly becoming decrepit.

It was as if it was becoming older and older by the second.

Rex's plan for his first absorption of Life Essence was a success thanks to his superiority.

Earlier, Calidora taught him the spell which she called a neutral spell.

Based on her explanation, the neutral spell is a spell that could work through the use of any energy in the whole entire world. Thus, it could be used by anyone who possesses energy, basically, anyone aside from civilians.

Moreover, she also explained that taking by surprise meant the target shouldn't be alert.

If the target is alert, it would be too hard to take their Life Essence.

Due to that very reason, Rex made a simple plan of luring another weaker mutated animal into the fray. He used the black lightning earlier to make a rustling sound near the mutated hound, acting as if there was a prey in the bushes.

Following the rustling sound, it was met with the mutated tiger instead of prey.

Rex did this as he knew that there was no better way to make the mutated tiger not alert aside from seeing a helpless food coming its way. Its hunting mode would be activated, and thus, it wouldn't be as alert to danger.

Using the opportune moment he created, Rex came in for the strike.

So this is what happens when Life Essence is drained from a living being.

Growl...!

Failing to break free from Rex's iron grip, the mutated tiger started to whimper weakly.

It was almost pitiful to see that it was rendered weak.

Since it was nothing more than a mutated animal, Rex felt bad for it as death through having its Life Essence drained was quite gnarly. He could feel his cursed source feeding at the Life Essence he gained while the mutated tiger was drained until skin and bones.

Eventually, it was not moving anymore, leaving behind only its thick and hard skeleton.

Rex pulled away and looked at his hands weirdly.

Calidora is right. No wonder her cursed power climbed very fast. I can feel a huge amount of increase in my cursed energy just from taking the mutated tiger's Life Essence. If it kept going at this pace, reaching the sixth epiphany wouldn't take long at all.

Chapter 1025 Multi-tasking

Rex observed through his Awakened's eyes and saw that the Life Essence was handled and turned into cursed energy at a rapid pace by his own cursed source. He could see the task being done automatically and ended in mere seconds.

Its product was an immense amount of cursed energy.

Even though Rex had already up his expectations, this was still going beyond.

He reckoned that the cursed energy acquired from the Life Essence absorbed from the mutated tiger equated to the results of him relentlessly hunting cursed creatures in the Humming Damned Forest for two or possibly three days straight.

Naturally, as Calidora said, knowing his own curse is the best way to become stronger.

At this pace, the Jar of Malice is incomparable to this.

Seeing that he managed to absorb his first Life Essence, Calidora landed beside him.

"How was it?" She asked with a confident smile.

Upon hearing this, Rex couldn't help to admit that coming here to be with Calidora is the best possible choice he could've made. Without her, reaching his goals would be more hazardous or even quite impossible.

"Now I know how your cursed epiphany could reach that high so fast" Rex replied with a sigh.

Had he known about this earlier, he could've been as strong as Calidora.

Despite the success, there was still a long way to go for him to reach the ninth epiphany, the target that he had already set, so there's no time to waste, "Until when do I have to lower the target's guard first as opposed to forcefully absorbing their Life Essence directly?"

"Until you are ready. Don't get ahead of yourself" Calidora replied warningly.

Albeit his eagerness, he decided to heed her warning.

Following that, Rex and Calidora scoured the entire forest, hunting for Life Essence.

Since it doesn't matter where the Life Essence came from, Rex should be able to receive help from others. But Calidora was an exception as the two of them were linked, and if she hunted in order to help Rex amass Life Essence, it wouldn't work.

The Eternal Curse could sense if it came from another bearer of its power.

Due to that, she couldn't help much aside from teaching Rex the way to be more efficient.

Roar!

Growl!

One by one, Rex aimed for the strongest mutated animals inside the forest.

Fully immersed in his hunt and also trying out the tips that Calidora was giving him, the time moved faster, and it didn't take long before the night came. Insects buzzing and humming in the background were akin to music as the night got darker.

Thud!

Holding a muscular mutated bull in his hand, Rex lets go and drops it to the ground.

It was already drained to skin and bones.

Savoring the revitalizing taste of his cursed energy being increased and fill the empty space of his cursed source, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He had been going at it for hours, and the cursed energy he amassed was insane.

Even then, there was no happiness on his face.

Glancing at Calidora, who had a playful smile on her lips, he could only cross his arms.

"I guess you're going to lose the bet" She chimed in triumphant.

Just earlier, Calidora showed that there were levels to absorbing Life Essence. She displayed that the Drain Touch spell would only allow Life Essence absorption depending on the user's mastery over it.

For instance, Rex could only absorb 20% of the total Life Essence the target has.

On the other hand, the other 80% was absorbed back by nature.

Despite the cursed energy he gained was a lot, it was nowhere near the spell's full potential.

Calidora was able to absorb 50%, and knowing that, Rex made a bet with her that he would be able to reach her mastery before the day was over. But turns out, even until this moment, he only reached 30%.

In the last hour, the percentage didn't increase at all.

No matter how much he tries, it wouldn't budge, so he's most likely going to lose.

"Don't worry slowpoke, you're going to get to my level some day" Giggling sweetly, seeing the competitive side of Rex for the first time, she approached and tapped his shoulder in a playful encouragement.

But Rex could only click his tongue in displeasure, not expecting to lose.

Had the System been active, I'd easily beat her.

Just as he was about to continue his hunt, Calidora stopped him and asked, "I think you're going to need to increase your epiphany first. I bet your cursed source is full, so you have to make up your mind which path you choose right now"

"I already chose a path and I'm already at the sixth epiphany" Rex replied nonchalantly.

Upon hearing this, Calidora was stunned.

She looked at Rex in utter confusion, "When did you break through to the sixth epiphany? I didn't see you meditate at all—Wait, don't tell me that you are able to meditate while hunting at the same time?!"

In response, Rex could only give her a meaningful smirk.

Out of everything, his control of energy and mastery of meditation is top-notch.

He may even go as far as saying that he is unrivaled.

Calidora couldn't hide her surprise anymore as this was something that she never thought was possible, '30% of mastery over the Drain Touch skill is already above me, I need about three days to reach that level of mastery. But, on top of that, he was also able to do this. I really want him, he's going to be mine!'

A flicker in her eyes could be seen as she gazed at Rex sternly.

It was a stare of unflinching desire.

"So, what path did you decide to choose?" Calidora eventually asked curiously.

Upon hearing this, Rex averted his gaze away, "Nope, not a chance, Calidora"

"Aw—Come on, are you really going to hide your path from your master?" She retorted lightly, using words that would elicit a reaction from Rex. But even then, he doesn't seem to budge and is clearly firm in not telling her the path he chose.

However, when she was about to pursue further, the two turned their heads to the side.

Sitting on a tree branch near them was a shadowy figure.

Even though the figure was completely covered in the darkness of the night, both of them didn't seem to be worried as they recognized this figure instantly, "Whatcha doing here? I hope I'm not interrupting something"

"Mavenna, why don't you go away and leave us alone" Calidora barked back in annoyance.

It was not a regular thing that she got to spend time with Rex.

"Where have you been, Mavenna? I thought you were going to go back to your home already. I don't see a reason for you to stick around" Rex chimed in. His deal with her was to help her get away from the Executor, and he did exactly that.

But she chose to stick around instead of going back.

Upon hearing this, Mavenna leaned against the tree trunk and shrugged, "I was going to the other side because there were no animals with teeming Life Essence for me to devour in this territory. And as for my response to yo—"

Just before she could finish, Rex raised his hand, signaling for her to stop.

"Wait a minute... Are you saying that you devour Life Essence?" He asked questioningly.

Mavenna nodded her head.

She was confused by the oblivious expression that Rex and Calidora were wearing right now, "Succubus in general devours Life Essence, what are the two of you acting surprised for? It's common knowledge, and there's no way you two don't know about that"

Listening to her rant, Rex and Calidora exchanged glances and smiled wryly.

How in the world did I forget about her?

Due to the problems and pressure that were filling his mind, he forgot to consider that there was a Succubus amongst them. Mavenna, a Rosadonna Succubus, should have better skills to take Life Essence from other living beings.

Realizing this could only make Rex rub his forehead with a heavy sigh.

In the end, he raised his gaze to look at Mavenna.

Upon gaining that gaze from Rex, a foreboding sensation could be felt crawling up her spine as there was a hidden purpose behind his gaze, "What—What are you looking at me like that for? I didn't do anything wrong, did I?"

"No, but you're going to if you refuse to help me right now" Rex replied with a smile.

He would be venting his frustration by making Mavenna work extra hard to gather as much Life Essence as she could for him. Even though it was not her fault and was mainly his, she was going to be the black goat, and she could feel it already.

...

Meanwhile, the Silverstar Castle.

It was completely silence inside the castle except for the occasional presence of extremely diligent workers fulfilling their duties to maintain the castle's cleanliness. In the background, the light banter of vigilant guards echoed as they stood watch at every entry point into the castle.

Since Kyran's condition was still uncertain, Gelmar had taken the initiative to do this.

He figured that he would do anything to maintain the castle while the others were away.

Aside from that, a few muffled grunting sounds could be heard.

Giana was currently following these sounds and headed to its source. She soon found that it was coming from the training hall with its door slightly open, directing her to one conclusion, she already knew who was inside.

Intruding into the training hall, her eyes could see a topless figure at the center of the arena.

"How long has he been training for—I think 2 days straight?" Giana muttered.

Standing at the heart of the arena with a heavy steel hammer in his hands, drenched in the sweat of hard work was none other than Ryze. He was not slacking around and was heavily training so that he could contribute more.

Rex told him that if he wanted to help, then he would need to grow up.

He was not a kid anymore.

Despite that his mind was nothing but a kid, he had the body of a Heavenly Dragonman.

Possessing this blessing, he decided that he would not waste it.

"Ryze, it's time for you to take a rest," A shout suddenly came from the side, it was Giana who was standing near the entrance. She was the one who helped him create a very hard regiment, altered to match his Heavenly Dragonman body. "A couple of hours is enough if you want your training to be optimal"

Splash!

Upon hearing this, Ryze straightens his body and puts the hammer down on the ground.

Its heavy weight splashed the sandy ground of the arena when it landed.

Wiping the dripping sweat across his forehead, Ryze gave Giana a nod as he decided to do as she said and rest. Averting his gaze away as Giana walked out, he then looked at his own hand and summoned his deep red fire.

"Now, I think I could use 60% of my power without hurting myself" He mused inwardly.

Despite his constitution, the fire he possessed was still hostile.

Ryze would need to tame it first before he could fully utilize his fire, and nobody knows about this but himself. He understands that if he masters his fire, his potential will skyrocket, and he might be able to become a key player and contribute more.

A moment later.

Deciding to rest, Ryze headed to his own bed chamber to take a shower and freshen up.

But it was then he sensed something beneath the ground.

Looking at the ground ten meters in front of him, his eyebrows knitted together when he saw a figure emerging. Akin to a ghost, this figure seemed to levitate out of the ground and gaze at Ryze with her unsettling eyes.

Even though he hadn't seen her face-to-face, he recognized this cursed woman.

"You must be the Witch of Chaos inside the underground chamber," Ryze squinted his eyes.

Chapter 1026 Indebted for Peace

Despite being new in the castle, he heard the Witch of Chaos being mentioned several times.

He also knew that she was the one responsible for Kyran's condition.

It was safe to say that Ryze harbored a distinctly unfavorable impression of the Witch, his sentiments leaning decidedly towards hostility, and his impression was depicted evidently through his unfriendly expression.

Regardless of what her circumstances to be here are, Ryze doesn't like her one bit.

"Aren't you supposed to stay in your chamber?" He asked.

A scoff escaped the Witch's mouth as she looked at Ryze in blatant amusement.

Even though this was the first time they encountered each other, she could already see right through him through her cursed eyes, "Let's not do this, kid. I can see that we are in a similar situation—trying to find our place here, so drop the hostility"

Upon hearing this, Ryze couldn't hide his frown anymore.

Surprisingly enough, the Witch was able to know that he was a kid in an adult's body.

It was as if Ryze was naked with his secrets exposed in her eyes.

Moreover, it seemed she could also sense the fact that Ryze was still doing his very best to be the person that Rex wanted. He didn't know how the Witch was able to do that, it was as if she could read or even probe his mind.

Ryze breached steadily, keeping his composure in check.

Learning to be more mature in confronting a situation such as this is a must since he knew that if she was here, then Rex must've had a use for her, "Okay, I'll let you pass. But before that, I want you to tell me where you are going right now"

At Ryze's demanding tone, the Witch chuckled in hubris.

"Go along, now. Where I go is none of your concern" the Witch replied and advanced.

Thump!

However, at that moment, several heat waves brushed against her skin.

Raising her gaze again, the Witch halted in her tracks and stared at Ryze's burning eyes.

Upon receiving the Witch's contemptuous response, devoid of any hint of respect, Ryze's expression contorted into a grimace. His heart, infused with his powerful heavenly flames started to surge, radiating waves of intense heat—a clear warning sign.

His bearing as the successor of a Heavenly Dragonman was exposed to marvel.

It was clear that he wasn't going to be a pushover.

'He has the soul and power of Zaddrass, interesting...' the Witch mused inwardly.

On the other hand, Ryze kept his gaze fixed on her.

"Evelyn informed me before her departure that if you came out of your chamber, then that means you are going to the Executor. Are you, indeed, on your way to him?" He asked again, his tone was clearly even more demanding than before, giving the Witch another chance to answer respectfully.

Seeing that he was serious, the Witch smiled and nodded, "Yes, I am"

"If that's the case, Evelyn has a message for you," Ryze said lightly. "She said don't die..."

Receiving the message, the Witch was stunned for a second.

But she quickly recovered from her initial surprise, letting out a hearty laugh as she strolled past Ryze, still chuckling at the message. "You tell her that I'm honored to have her concern, but I don't need it. To kill me, it would be a lot more challenging than she thinks,"

"After all... I'm quite resilient" She added, casting a glance to Ryze behind her.

Just before she could leave, Ryze stopped her.

Pivoting his body around, he said, "Maybe you're quite resilient, but not for the Executor"

"We'll see about that..." the Witch replied before her body evaporated.

Now that she left, silence enveloped the hallway again.

Ryze looked down and clenched both of his fists firmly. His mind traveled back to when he was with Rex in the Executor's encampment and remembered the sharp and overbearing aura that the Executor had.

An aura that could make his entire being feel insignificant.

It was as if he was an ant while the Executor was a hulking, ancient elephant.

"Despite my clear dislike for her, I do hope that her self-assessment was right this time"

...

Meanwhile, outside of the castle, in the central region of Dargena City.

Founding members of the city were located in this region, the Elves, Dryads, and Fairies who were some of the first inhabitants of the city were placed here. It was near to the castle, and the houses had quite a majestic design.

However, the street was not completely deserted.

Some citizens could be seen as this place was also nearest to the business district.

It was evident that the city was growing more and more.

Even though there wasn't any evident monetary system in place, the volunteering citizens who had specialized skills such as brewing alcohol and knitting clothes already made up a place for themselves to help provide a place for citizens to relieve their stress.

On the main street, there was a less crowded bar with only a few people inside.

A blend of magic and technology was the theme of the bar.

Just then, two figures came inside the bar and scanned their eyes around the interior.

Casting a glance at the door, intending to greet the visitors, the bartender was taken aback as he instantly realized who these two figures were. But then again, it wasn't abnormal for him to recognize the two as they were none other than Dindora and Linthia.

Approaching the bartender, Dindora poised to ask a question.

But as if the bartender had anticipated her purpose of coming here, he gestured towards the door, "He drank 3 bottles and left five minutes ago after taking another bottle with him. I can tell that he's not in the right mind, and is probably sitting somewhere outside right now"

Upon hearing this, Dindora and Linthia exchanged glances.

"Thank you,"

With the information from the bartender, the two headed out and scoured the vicinity.

Soon, they found who they were looking for.

Gelmar sat by the bench on the street with his eyes trailing towards a couple of naughty kids who were still playing catch even though it was night already. He seemed to be drowning in his own thoughts, undisturbed by his surroundings.

He was wearing a black hooded cloak so as to not be recognized by anyone.

Even with Dindora and Linthia came and stood beside him, he remained completely oblivious.

But then, he suddenly opened his mouth.

"How long has it been since you saw kids as happy as them?" He asked lightly.

Upon hearing this, Dindora and Linthia shifted their eyes on the trio of human and elven kids within the park, joyfully frolicked with a big smile on their faces that seemed to light up the darkness of the night, unaffected by any trace of fear.

A sight that was completely foreign to their past experiences.

Coming from a low-rank Supernatural race, the three of them knew the horror of the world.

It was already so long ago since they saw such a scenery.

Back home in their own respective territories in the new era, children couldn't play around without the supervision of their parents. One wrong move, and they might offend a person from the high-rank Supernatural race that was visiting or governing their territory.

Even as much as looking at them wrong, their kids might be punished with death.

Gelmar, Dindora, and Linthia flee their homes because of that.

All of them seek refuge in the small villages within the human territory out of desperation to find a sanctuary that could provide them with much-needed peace. Gelmar then smiled with joy, "Despite the uncertainty that loomed around the city, the uncertainty whether Lord Rex and the Silverstar Pack would win against the Executor,"

"It was undeniable that at this very moment, there was peace" He added whisperingly.

Dindora nodded, "Shouldn't we protect this peace then? Why aren't you in your post?"

"Just before Lady Evelyn departed with Sir Flunra, she informed me that Lord Rex decided to not go back to the city in the meantime. He went to the Executor and didn't come back, while Lady Evelyn and Sir Flunra went out to seek ways to help" Gelmar swiftly replied, he tilted his head down, hiding his darkened expression.

Pssh...

Out of nowhere, Gelmar's body slowly heated up with a heavy dark green energy.

Despite the First Breath, his power was evident and surreal.

Crack!

Under the weight of his nature power, the bench that he was sitting on cracked.

It was now clear that he had broken through to the seventh-rank realm, nearing the peak.

"Contrastingly, we, the ones who were enjoying the peace the most stayed behind and did nothing except to safeguard the city. I understand it was our duty, to follow the command given to us, but I just can't help but feel like we could've done more to help" Gelmar added, his jaw tensing with unresolved frustration.

Listening to his poured emotions, Dindora and Linthia knew where he was coming from.

"We can't, Gelmar. We have to guard the city" Dindora shook her head.

In response, Gelmar clenched his fists even harder as he already knew that, but he felt bitter as the ruler of the land was the one who always made the sacrifices. On the other hand, the ones who were indebted to them were not doing anything.

Taking a seat beside him, Linthia placed her hand on her shoulder.

"Our time will come, Gelmar, I can feel it. But in the meantime, we must prepare so that when the opportunity for us to help comes, we can do our all to use it" She advised, giving him the strength to keep on going.

...

Somewhere far away from Dargena City's territory.

A reddish portal was opened and two figures jumped out of it and landed outside gracefully.

It was Adhara and Ugrok who decided to leave the Fire Elemental's place.

Now that she had spent some time meditating and getting accustomed to her new elemental prowess, Adhara decided that it was time for her to come out. She couldn't stay for too long inside as there were things she needed to do.

Just when she felt that it was enough, she permitted herself to leave.

Glancing over to the portal, she waved her hand goodbye at the Fire Elementals.

Adhara was filled with nothing but good things for the Fire Elementals who had helped her to not only become stronger but also warm hospitality. Moreover, they were also kind enough to give her their sacred spell book.

It was a gesture that she would definitely remember and repay in the future.

"You ready to depart, Flamy?"

Sitting on her shoulder was the small Fire Elemental she named Flamy who decided to stick with her surprisingly. But then again, it seemed like Flamy had taken a liking to Adhara and also her violet fire.

Rubbing Flamy with her finger, it replied enthusiastically by flickering its body.

A gesture that it was ready to depart.

Giving Flamy a smile, Adhara then said, "Come on, Ugrok. We'll go to the Tigerman now"

"O- Okay..." Ugrok replied, slightly out of breath.

Upon hearing the weak reply, Adhara looked towards him and found him completely pale and seemed to be out of energy. She frowned for a second before she remembered that Ugrok wasn't able to endure the Fire Elemental's place as well as she did.

Naturally, he was completely drained right now from staying inside for days.

He was only too prideful to admit that.

"Guess we're going to take a breather before we move, how long do you need?" She asked.

Knowing that they were going to rest for a bit, a flicker of light returned to Ugrok's eyes but he quickly hid it when he realized he was reacting too much, "A couple of minutes, Ugrok is fine with a couple of minutes"

"Yeah, right..." Adhara sighed, he obviously needed more. "We're going to rest for an hour"

Chapter 1027 Dispute of Losses (1)

An army of feline ferocity and pride, perched menacingly on the border of the Dwarves.

Knowing the reason behind the spite from the Tigerman Kingdom—offended by the thorny path their kind have to go through in order to be a part of the alliance, the Dwarves found themselves in a precarious situation.

One that couldn't be avoided due to the circumstances.

It was obvious that the Tigermen were instigating conflict, luring the Dwarves to attack.

Under the situation, the tension in the air grew and grew.

Naturally, the Dwarves didn't succumb to their provocation, knowing that it would not end well for them. Aside from being comparably weaker overall against the Tigerman who had their Elders Awakened, the first one to attack would be the loser.

Regardless of the instigator, the one to attack would lose in the eyes of the Silverstar Pack.

Dwarven generals—ordered to be on alert at the border attempted to engage in diplomacy, but the Tigerman welcomed them with evident condescension in their attitude. One of the War Chieftains receives them.

He rationalized their actions, saying that they needed more land for their people.

Contrary to the Dwarves, they still have the older generations.

It was a statement that acted as both a mockery and a blasphemous rationalization.

Even in comparison, the Tigerman Kingdom's territory is bigger than the Dwarven Kingdom.

So it was obvious that the War Chieftain's rationale is a complete and blatant lie.

Just at the rising light of dawn, the borderlands became a stage of tension. On the boundary line—pushed to wherever they liked, the Tigerman created strongholds to host their soldiers in case the Dwarves decided to attack.

A few overbearing Tigermen paced the border and roared a clear challenge to the Dwarves.

Speaking with a Dwarven accent, a dignified Dwarven figure came.

"How was the situation...?" the Dwarven general, clad in sturdy armor, stepped forward and swept his gaze across the borders. His beards, symbols of age and wisdom, bristled as he inquired about the situation to the Dwarven soldier beside him.

From the looks of it, the situation has gotten a lot worse.

Upon hearing this, the Dwarven soldier frowned, "It was getting worse by the day,"

"Our border has been pushed by them by about half a mile—covering the Iron Forest and a couple of other crucial locations. Moreover, their stronghold count is on the rise. As of now, there are about four strongholds, housing an estimated three thousand soldiers," he added, his voice filled with concern.

Regardless of the taken border, the worst part is that they couldn't do anything.

If the Dwarves tried to stop them, a fight would definitely break out.

Keeping his eyes fixed forward, the Dwarven general let out a deep, vexed sigh.

Noticing the Dwarven general's frustration, the Dwarven soldier decided to bear some good news to at least lessen the burden, "We got confirmation from the Silverstar Pack's emissary, Lord Daniel that he was in the process of dealing with the situation. We could only hope that he could end this soon"

Despite the good news, the Dwarf General shook his head.

"If this keeps on, it will still be our loss, regardless if the Silverstar Pack intervened," He said.

It didn't take a genius to guess what the Tigerman was doing.

Understanding the situation, the Dwarf General was well aware that the Tigerman intended to keep on pushing the border as much as they could until the Silverstar Pack stepped in and stopped them. However, by the time they intervened, it would be too late to take back their lost territory.

Since it will be the Silverstar Pack's first meeting with the Elders, they couldn't do much.

Going as far as telling them to give back the taken territory would sour the new relationship.

Naturally, their transgression would be pardoned.

In the end, the Dwarven Kingdom would be the only one who would bear the complete loss.

"General! Where are you going?" the Dwarven soldier exclaimed.

Seeing that the Dwarven General went ahead to the border himself with the War Chieftain fixed in his sight, the Dwarven soldier signaled to the others to back him up. About a group of twenty Dwarves were immediately assembled and chased after him.

Each of them rode a mutated war bear, boasting with muscles and claws.

Noticing the approaching party of Dwarves, a playful smile played on the War Chieftain's lips.

"These short cragdwellers are quite persistent,"

"Hahah~ No matter how much they tried to talk, it wouldn't be of any use"

"Chieftain, when can we kill them already?"

As the other Tigerman vocalized their untamed opinions, the War Chieftain waved his hands dismissively and turned his body toward the advancing Dwarf general. He crossed his arms assertively, depicting his dominance and asserting his upper hand in the situation.

"I thought I made myself clear already," the War Chieftain mused nonchalantly.

Halting at a good distance away, the Dwarf general frowned.

Calming his boiling nerves due to the mocking Tigermen behind the War Chieftain, the Dwarf general poised his gaze straight, "What will it take to stop this? If you want, I can help talk to the Silverstar Pack and help your kingdom get better treatment"

"Hmm...? I already told you, we're only asking you for some land" the War Chieftain replied.

Despite his seemingly genuine answer, he had a smirk on his face.

Upon hearing this, the Dwarf general clenched both of his fists in utter frustration, "If that is what you wanted, then you can have a discussion with our King. Why do you need to create strongholds along the border like this?"

"Strongholds? What strongholds?" the War Chieftain asked back, pretending to be oblivious.

Glancing over his shoulder, he jokingly came to a realization, "Ah—I think you're getting us wrong, those are not strongholds, it's homes for us old people. I hope you can understand, that most of us lived in war encampments, so this style fits us better than regular homes"

Other Tigermen laughed at the War Chieftain's joke.

It was clear that they were making fun of the Dwarves, not taking them seriously.

Contrary, the Dwarves, including the Dwarf general had their expressions soured when they absorbed the words. Anger flared within them, pushed to their limits by the mockery, and it was only a matter of time before their patience would burst.

Noticing their change in expression, the War Chieftain tilted his head.

Giving no warning at all, his expression contorted into a savage one as he eyes the Dwarves.

"What? Are you going to do something...?" He asked in a low, baritone voice.

A golden, steaming aura began emanating from his body, dense enough to put him at the very pinnacle of the eighth-rank realm. Such power for a mere War Chieftain was nothing short of jaw-dropping since there were many others like him.

But that just shows the disparity in power that the older generation had.

Moreover, it was worth mentioning that their martial arts were also different than the regular.

Better than the martial arts the Tigerman of the new era trained in.

"Do you really think that we're pushovers?" the Dwarf general uttered, his expression also twisted into a savage one. His patience is running thin. "We are under an allied agreement. But if it comes to it, we will not stand and watch you invade our territory openly"

"For someone who has it good, you have no say in this" the War Chieftain replied brazenly.

Upon hearing this, the Dwarf general turned around.

Knowing that it would only escalate if he stayed here any longer, he decided that the best course of action right now was to go back, "Move any further, and we will not tolerate any further. Our King will surely understand if we retaliate"

"Hah! Better yet, tell your nameless King to come here. I'll see what he could do"

Reluctantly, the Dwarves head back again.

Another attempt at diplomacy failed, and the solution of a battle became more enticing.

...

Meanwhile, Klaigan City.

It has been a couple of days since Daniel confronted him regarding the border attack on the Dwarves. Drakar had been indulging in the luxuries of the new era, taking time for himself to relax and recuperate.

Not that he was injured, but his mind was fatigued from all those years of slumbering.

He was currently on the balcony, looking at the sunrise.

On his hand was a small cup of tea, its warm water and fragrance sizzled to the air.

Judging from his scarred body, it was odd to see that such a brute was able to appreciate the savor of a cup of tea in the bleak morning. But then again, with all the horrors he had survived, the small things became even more important.

Even though the border was getting more tense, he was resting calmly in his abode.

Clank...

Putting down the cup of tea on the balustrade gently, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath of fresh air. A couple of seconds later, the wind blew weirdly, brushing against his deep red furs gently.

In response to this, he opened his eyelids and exposed his serene eyes again.

"My apologies for not holding a formal procession for you," He said.

Upon saying that, another voice replies to him from the back, "I don't mind. I didn't announce myself either, so there's no need for any procession. Anyway, I thought I'd let myself in. Can't I do that?"

Turning around, Drakar smiled, "Of course, you can. Our Kingdom will always welcome you"

Standing on the roof was a woman with exquisite beauty.

She stood atop the roof with her curly brown hair cascading like a silken waterfall, catching the light. Her hazel eyes hold the word in their gaze, radiating a blend of femininity and the epitome of unyielding strength.

Around her is an air that commands attention.

Just standing there alone depicts the primal power lying dormant with her.

Moreover, the flickering ember across her body alongside the small fire creature—sitting on her shoulders, and the unnatural silver star mark on her neck fully confirmed Drakar's guess that she was one of the Silverstar Pack members.

With a graceful movement, Adhara jumped down and landed before Drakar without a sound.

Her eyes kept staring at the Tigerman before her.

Unlike the ones that she saw along the way here, Drakar's power was evident, and there is also the fact that his furs are a very deep hue of red. Out of the fur colors possessed by the Tigerman, red is the rarest one.

Adhara could tell as there were only a few red-furred Tigmans she came across.

"Would you like some tea?" Drakar asked lightly.

Refusing to go with the flow of his conversation, Adhara tilted her head a little, pausing for a solid minute to increase the tension between them. Eventually, Drakar smiled and placed his hand over his chest, "My apologies, where are my manners?"

"I am Drakar, the Chieftain of the Red Claw Clan, pleased to meet you" He added.

Listening to this, Adhara raised one eyebrow.

'He's good with words, a mastermind' She pondered silently, observing Drakar meticulously.

"I am Adhara, the Female Alpha of the Silverstar Pack," Firming her stance, she introduced herself.

"Drakar, do you know what was going on at the border? I came here out of sheer coincidence—because I was nearby, so I'm surprised to see it"

Upon hearing this, Drakar paused for a second.

It was clear that he was taking a careful step in uttering words to say to Adhara.

"Of course," Smiling widely, Drakar replied. "Some of the older generations had a small and minuscule conflict with the Dwarves in the past, a misunderstanding. I believe that with you here, the conflict would be resolved immediately, I can even bring you there myself"

"If that's the ca-"

"However, I propose that you follow me to meet with the Council of Elders. I believe meeting them is more important. Right this way..." Drakar cut Adhara's sentence short before he went on ahead and walked past her.

Listening to this, Adhara couldn't hide her frown anymore, 'He's buying time...'

Chapter 1028 Dispute of Losses (2)

Adhara and Ugrok came across the commotion on the border earlier.

A distant commotion reached their ears as they made their way to the Tigermen Kingdom to check their situation, remembering what Dokhur said to her. Investigating the source of the commotion, they surprisingly discover a confrontation unfolding between the Dwarves and the Tigermen.

Both factions had assembled their forces in anticipation of a clash.

It was clear to see that the Tigermen were the ones instigating this tense standoff.

On the other hand, the Dwarves were only making a barricade line.

Sensing an anomaly in the situation—as they shouldn't be fighting with one another, Adhara told Ugrok to stay behind and observe. He was to intervene only if the tense confrontation escalated into an actual fight.

Meanwhile, Adhara went ahead and sneaked into the Tigermen Kingdom.

Oddly enough, she managed to sneak in rather easily, there were no protective measures.

Reaching inside the capital city, she went straight to Daniel who are tasked to keep an eye on the Tigerman Kingdom as the Silverstar Pack's emissary. If anyone could explain what had happened, it should be him.

From him, Adhara learned that Drakar had issued their army to invade the Dwarven territory.

He also told her about his encounter with Drakar.

Just from his report alone, Adhara could tell that Drakar was a cunning Tigerman as he was using a loophole in the alliance agreement to his advantage. He needs to be addressed, and the only one who could do that is a member of the Silverstar Pack.

Daniel couldn't make it work himself.

It was true that he was the emissary, but he was not a part of the Silverstar Pack directly.

Naturally, Drakar doesn't feel like he has to abide by his words.

Upon meeting with Drakar himself, he was exactly what Adhara had expected.

Adhara was now following Drakar closely behind as he guided her out of the capital city and into a dense, artificial forest, evident from its isolated location and modest size. Her face is showing signs of unease, she had no time for a meeting with the Council of Elders.

If Drakar didn't say the words, a fight might break out at any moment.

'Even if I want to stop the fight myself, I can't. I had to admit that the Tigerman's forces are overwhelming, and are too much for me to handle alone. Moreover, most of them were from the older generations, and they would not recognize me' She mused, her expression marked by a thoughtful frown.

Going there herself had a big chance of being attacked too.

None of them would realize who she was, especially in the heat of a fierce fight.

Looking at Drakar's back, she let out a deep sigh.

Adhara had no choice but to follow him, but she would bring up the matter if it took too long.

Following the carved path in the forest, the two eventually reached a solitary building at the heart of the forest. Nestled within the dense foliage of the Tigerman territory, the Council of Elders' hall rose with a regal presence.

Its grand wooden architecture depicts the traditional style they adopted.

"Welcome to the Sanctum of Strength, the Council of Elders' hall" Drakar introduced.

Stopping right before the majestic building, Adhara looked up at the building with a slight bit of awe. She could see intricate carvings adorned its facade, each a storied emblem of past heritage with multi-tiered roofs pointing towards the heavens, topped with totems that stood as silent sentinels.

Before her was the entrance, flanked by towering columns and stoic stone-carved tigers.

It led to a wide staircase, thick with ancient grandeur.

Ascending the staircase, she was greeted by the gate into the hall guarded by two Tigermen that she reckoned to have an aura equivalent to the peak of the eighth-rank realm. Both of their bodies were marred with battle scars, a sign of vicious and elite fighters.

Opening the gate, Drakar and Adhara stepped inside with steady steps.

Upon entering, both were greeted by a spacious circular room.

Drakar led Adhara to stand at the center, right beneath the natural moonlight that came from above. Looking around, Adhara didn't see anyone inside, but she could feel that there were a couple of strong auras within this hall.

However, pinpointing their location is quite difficult.

It was almost as if there was a disturbance inside this place that blurred their auras.

Even though she had an outstanding sense as a Werewolf with the addition of the night's blessing, the disturbance blurred the direction where the auras came from, making it hard even for her to locate the source.

Soon enough, the torches on the wooden pillars flared one by one, lighting the entire place.

Only then that Adhara realize that they were not alone.

Gazing up to the second floor, she found that there were three Tigermen present.

Each of them was slightly hunched, showcasing that they were quite old even for the long life a Tigerman could attain. However, this doesn't diminish their bearing but adds a wise air around them instead.

At the sight of the Elders, trailing their gaze to Adhara, Drakar stepped forward.

"Esteemed Elders," He began, bowing his body slightly. "I've brought with me an important guest, a guest that you might want to meet. Behind me is Lady Adhara, the Female Alpha of the Silverstar Pack"

Upon hearing this, Adhara nodded and said, "Greetings to the Elders,"

Before the Elders could formulate a response to the unexpected visit, Adhara pressed on, her words direct yet diplomatic, "Forgive my bluntness, but I seek your understanding. I propose that our meeting be postponed a bit longer. A pressing issue has arisen at the border, your forces are invading Dwarven territory. I urge you to issue a command promptly to appease the situation"

One of the Elders frowned, "Invading the Dwarven territory? On whose order?"

Adhara looked at the Elder in confusion.

However, it was then that she quickly picked up the situation and turned to look at Drakar.

Drakar was silent, and he had a sanctified look on his face.

'So the Elders don't know about his ploy? I can use this...' Adhara pondered.

Now that she knows that Drakar didn't consult the Elders first about his issue, it gave her the perfect opportunity to bring it to light to the Elders. Judging from his body language, it was obvious that the Elders were of higher standing than he was.

If Adhara could make the Elders angry at him, then the situation would be over soon.

Just when she was about to direct the blame to Drakar, a frail voice echoed inside the hall.

Another Elder on the left squinted and said, "It is customary in our race, passed down from the ancient time that the representative of a new ally would undergo the rite of passage, to obtain the blessing of our ancestors before anything else. Drakar, call the Seer of the Feline Spirits, and tell them to prepare for the ritual"

Upon hearing this, Adhara's eyes widened, caught off guard.

"Esteemed Elder, we can postpone this ritual, there's a pres-"

"You stand not above our sacred traditions!" the Elder's frail voice thundered, his aging finger pointing accusingly at Adhara. His eyes gleamed with a sharp intensity. "We already heeded your

Alpha's call, we have already extended aid to the Dwarves, even before the completion of our sacred ritual. We shall not entertain any further delays, do you understand?"

Shocked by the loud voice, Adhara was tongue-tied.

Out of anything, she was not aware that the Tigerman had delayed their tradition for Rex.

Now, there wasn't any wiggle room for the Elders to delay any further.

"Pardon the Third Elder's fervent tone, Lady Adhara," the central Elder, silent until now, spoke with measured calmness. "However, as he stated, our tradition holds utmost importance, and further delays are untenable. The choice is yours—will you persist or honor our traditions"

Being put in the spot, Adhara clenched her jaw.

She understands now that if she refused, then she would be dishonoring their tradition.

Additionally, her refusal would not only dishonor the Tigerman's tradition but would signify a clear bias towards the Dwarves. Since she, at this moment, was the sole representation of the entire Sivlerstar Pack, it would also portray the entire pack as favoring the Dwarves.

This could lead to a loss of respect and trust from the Elders, jeopardizing their alliance.

Under the current circumstances, that couldn't happen.

If that happened, then they would lose a very powerful ally under them.

Rex even decided to spare the Tigerman Kingdom knowing full well that their forces were quite strong, and that alone shows that the Tigerman is not a joke. So losing them right now is not an option that Adhara could handle.

'It was his plan all along...' Adhara gritted her teeth and clenched her fists.

Casting a subtle glance at Drakar who was still slightly bowing down, hiding his face from the Elders, she could see an obvious smirk plastered on his lips. 'He deliberately brought me to meet with the Elders, and trapped me in this tradition, allowing more time for his people on the border to invade further'

Surely, Adhara walked straight into his trap.

But then again, this situation is unavoidable, it was too well thought out.

Had she refused to come with him to the Council of Elders, Drakar would still be able to stall.

He has all the power in this situation, it was only he who could stop the Tigerman forces at the border to stop invading the Dwarves. No matter what Adhara does, he won't budge and calls quit to his forces.

Due to that, the only answer was the Elders.

Now, even choosing to meet the Elders was the wrong move for Adhara.

It's simply unavoidable, she could do nothing to stop this.

A moment later.

Adhara and Drakar went to the other room, a private room to wait until the Seer of the Feline Spirits finished preparing the ritual. It had been ten minutes, and Adhara who was sitting on a chair couldn't stop her leg from moving in a repetitive, up-and-down motion.

Obviously, she was restless as she didn't know what was going on at the border.

Even now, the fight might already started.

If that happened, then it wouldn't only be the Tigerman that she needs to think about.

Looking at the other side of the room, leaning on the wall with crossed arms was Drakar, and he seemed to be meditating while standing. He hasn't said a word, even though he was the one who orchestrated this to happen.

"You set me up..." Adhara uttered in a whispering tone.

On the other hand, Flamy also darted a glaring look, showing its dislike toward Drakar.

Upon hearing this, Drakar opened his eyes, "I don't understand what you meant"

"Don't act like a fool—I know you lied about the misunderstanding and brought me so that I couldn't do anything to appease the fight on the border. Just what is it that you want? If you have any demands, you could pass them through to us. At this rate, you would still be punished by the Elders for sending your forces without their consent" Adhara replied, trying to probe his mind.

When the ritual is over, Drakar would certainly be exposed.

Adhara would make sure of it, so she was confused as to why he was doing this.

In response, Drakar only shrugged nonchalantly, "Everything I do is for my people. We've taken losses helping the Dwarves in their personal matter against the Demons, so what I want is to recover those losses"

"We, the Silverstar Pack, can compensate!" Adhara replied, raising her tone.

But this only made Drakar scoff.

He wasn't the least bit troubled by her evident anger, "I am not the kind of person that would ask and beg. I have the pride of a Tiger, and I'd rather do it with my own hands compared to asking your pack for compensation. Also, there's only so much disrespect I can take"

Listening to this, Adhara's expression grimaced.

Turns out, Drakar has a problem with the losses they suffered against the Demons.

However, in the following moment, a spark illuminated Adhara's eyes as she conceived a solution that could potentially resolve their ongoing conflict. "I understand that you wanted to do it with your hands, and you've achieved that. So, how about a bet...?"

Chapter 1029 A Duel with an Expert

Adhara knew that at this point, Drakar was already on the winning side.

Regardless of how long he could stall and occupy her here through the ritual, his plan has already worked. It was clear to see that the Tigerman had already taken a good portion of the Dwarven territory.

Even if he issued the army to stop right now, they already got what they wanted.

Due to that, a thought came to Adhara's mind.

Having the Dwarves suffer more loss would be a big problem for her, it would be a huge deal and she doesn't want that. On the other hand, Drakar was stalling to give his army more time to occupy more of the Dwarven territory.

At this point, for the Tigerman, it was how much they could gain from this.

So, instead of letting the Dwarves take the fall, Adhara thought that she could mediate.

"A bet...? What bet?" Drakar mused with his arms crossed.

In response, Adhara stood up from her seat and explained, "You already won, you already did it with your own two hands. Stalling for a couple of hours of time is not worth it, it would only give you so much. But I, on the other hand, have a better offer,"

"Since martial arts is a substantial essence in your kingdom, how about we have a duel? If I lose, I will talk to the Alpha to compensate you more. But if I win, you will leave and tell your forces to stop right now and keep what you have taken from the Dwarves" She added.

Upon hearing this, Drakar tilted his head with an amused smile.

Challenging a Tigerman into a martial arts duel is nothing short of a foolish move.

Among the other major lower-rank Supernatural races, the Tigerman race doesn't have the luxury of having innate energy. Even though they are connected to Mother Nature, they are unable to use her power in the same way as the Elves or Dark Elves.

It was more of a spiritual connection than a supernatural connection.

But to make up for this, all Tigerman are born with exceptional physiques, even stronger than some of the high-rank Supernaturals like the Undead. Recognizing their strength, the pursuit of martial arts in their tradition was born.

One and the only way they could make use of their innate strength.

With their focus on training in martial arts, they were able to keep up with the other races.

Now, their dedication helped them tap into the power of Force.

Even compared to the high-rank Supernaturals or even Humans, the Tigerman possess more Force users across their population. Most have reached yellow force already while some are in the door of the realm of red force.

Spell attacks were not the Tigerman's forte, but they were experts in close combat.

"Hmm... you sure are confident in your skills, Female Alpha" Drakar mused.

Adhara was well aware that the Tigerman was unparalleled in close combat among the low-rank Supernatural races bracket, a prowess exemplified by the deceased King Samobas, a Tigerman who was able to give Flunra a hard time.

It was a clear testament to the Tigerman's unparalleled combat skills.

Gaining this proposition, Drakar was quite interested as his martial arts side was ignited.

Removing his outer layer of clothes and putting them on the table while chuckling in hubris, Drakar then said, seemingly accepting the proposition, "No energy, no spells, no nothing... I want this to be purely a duel of martial arts"

"Done, I'll comply with that" Adhara replied as she also did the same.

Putting the furniture to the sides, Drakar stepped to the center of the room bare-chested. He reveals his muscular torso, and abdominal perfection with his deep-hued red furs, adding the air of majesticness to his presence.

On the other hand, Adhara put Flamy down and tapped its head, "Cheer for me, alright,"

Swoosh!

In response, Flamy formed a thumbs-up with its own flame.

Adhara redirected her attention back to Drakar and stepped to stand before him. She calmed her breaths for a moment before her violet flame enveloped her entire form, and as the flame dissipated, her attire underwent a dramatic transformation.

Now, she wore an aubergine crop top with short sleeves and a pair of wide-legged pants.

Her crop top has a high neckline and is form-fitting, while the pants seem to be high-waisted and fit loosely, draping over the feet which are visible and bare. Both the top and the pants feature golden accents, adding a touch of elegance to the outfit.

An outfit entirely made of her own mana.

Looking at her briefly, Drakar slowly raised both of his hands, into a composed stance.

On the other hand, Adhara also did the same and went into her stance.

Having used to always using two daggers in a fight, one of her hands was stretched further than the other. Knowing the stake of the bout, her eyes flashed with fiery determination, and her body coiled like a spring, ready to unleash her fury.

'Like Rex always does, the first one to gain the momentum is the winner' Adhara pondered.

Despite not being an expert, her close-quarter combat is practical.

Adhara might not learn in the ways of martial arts like Drakar did, but her fighting style is not to be underestimated. Her fighting style is self-taught, forged, and tempered through actual battles and has always been polished to become better.

Moreover, she also has the luxury of watching Rex fight countless times already.

It would be a lie if she hadn't gained some insight from him.

Adding those factors to her fighting style, she could be argued to be an expert as well.

"Three hits, the one who landed three hits is the winner" Drakar chimed.

Upon hearing this, Adhara nodded her head and remained in her stance, looking at her opponent meticulously, aware of any sudden movements. For a solid minute, there was complete silence in the room with them staring at each other.

Even Flamy could feel the tension reaching a choking level at the last second.

But in the next second, Adhara exploded into action.

Lunging forward, her fists and feet moved in a blurry motion, aiming a rapid succession of strikes at Drakar to gain the momentum of the fight. He, in turn, started to move like water, effortlessly sidestepping and parrying her attacks.

He adopted a perfect defense, a dance of burst movement and stillness.

In their exchange, the world around them blurred.

Both fighters were lost in their own world, engaged in a ballet of contrasting styles. Adhara's aggressive offense was relentless, directing each of her strikes precisely at every vulnerable defended point on Drakar's body, determined to secure the initial blow.

Doing a perfect dragon tail, Drakar raised his leg to dodge it.

Just as he was about to prepare for the next strike, a hit landed unexpectedly.

Adhara's foot swept in a wide arc, a follow-up attack from the dragon tail. She did it without stopping her body, catching Drakar off-guard and tapping his shoulder. It made him stumble back a couple of steps.

In response, Adhara went back to her initial position, returning back to her stance.

Under her immaculate offense, the score settled at one-nil.

Looking at his shoulder that got tapped, Drakar directed his eyes back at Adhara, but unlike earlier, there was a peculiar light in his eyes. "Good. As expected of the Female Alpha, your attacks dripped with intention and lethal. I can tell that you fight a lot", he said as he lowered his stance again.

Despite the compliment, Adhara didn't reply and kept her focus at the maximum.

Talking only made her lower her guard, and she didn't want that.

Knowing that he would now go right at her seriously, Adhara's muscles tensed instinctively.

Adhara's eyes flashed as she still kept with her original battle plan—she made a quick dash to make the momentum favor her again but this time, her eyes widened seeing that Drakar met her right in the middle.

Quickly adapting, Adhara clashed against Drakar.

Contrary to the initial clash, Drakar began to meet Adhara's aggression with his own. It was almost as if he wanted to increase the intensity of the fight, his strikes becoming more direct and more forceful.

At that moment, their confrontation intensified into a fierce clash.

A clash of raw strength and combat skills.

Even though she tried to keep up with the offense, Adhara was surprised and found herself on the defensive. Drakar's aggression was more refined, it was backed by an unimaginable amount of experiences.

In a brief moment, Adhara turned to look at Drakar directly in the eyes.

Her surroundings slowly morph, almost as if Drakar's offense was capable of altering reality.

Under her vision, Drakar turned from a Tigerman who was fighting a friendly bout into a lone soldier in a devastating battle, filled with bloodbath. His eyes were darting left and right as if he was fighting more than one person, and his limbs moved to attack while simultaneously in preparation to block.

For a moment, Adhara found herself comparing Drakar to Edward or even Rex.

'Nobody could learn his style through training, it could only be achieved through experiences'

She couldn't fathom the harrowing situations he must have endured in the past in order to be able to develop such a fighting style. It must've been extremely daunting as his body moved as if he was surrounded from all sides.

Caught in a trance, Drakar landed a solid kick to Adhara's thigh, evening the score.

It was only then that Adhara snapped out of her trance.

Each fighting pushed their limits in the next second, and Adhara regained her momentum, as he managed to land a spinning heel kick to Drakar's lower ribcage. Two-one. But Drakar was undeterred and responded with a swift combination.

His fist connected with Adhara's chest, right above her heart. Two-Two.

A solid hit like that sent her five steps back, hitting a chair in the process. Breathing heavily, both circled each other, waiting for an opening. Knowing that they didn't have much time, it was time for the final exchange.

Resuming their clash, the two exchanged a series of aggressive strikes.

Flamy was in the edge of its seat, and even closed its eyes, fearing that Adhara might lose.

Both dodged and weaved each other's attacks, and it was always a close call.

Eventually, Adhara found her opportunity when Drakar overextended in his fervor, missed a big punch, leaving himself open. She managed to dodge underneath, and her eyes fixed on his completely exposed torso.

'Now is my chance!' Adhara's eyes glistened fiercely as she drove a punch.

In the process, her eyes were pulled up, and saw Drakar's elbow descending at her.

Upon seeing this, she gritted her teeth as Drakar was way faster than her. It was her plan to lure her for an attack when his missed punch earlier was nothing but a cover for his elbow, axing down towards the back of Adhara's head.

'Damn it, I lost...' Adhara closed her eyes.

Bam!!

A moment passed, and surprisingly, Adhara didn't feel any impact on the back of her head.

Realizing this, she opened her eyes and found her fist connecting with Drakar's abdomen, while Drakar's elbow was a hair's length away from hitting her head. It caught her off guard as this shouldn't happen.

Judging from Drakar's elbow, his attack is much faster than hers.

But it was she who landed the attack first.

"You won fair and square, Female Alpha. Congratulation..." He said before pulling away.

Grabbing his clothes again, ignoring Adhara who was still at a loss for words, he went over to the door and grabbed the handle, "Since I lost, I would honor the bet. I'll pull back my forces from the Dwarven territory" He continued before leaving the room.

Only when the door was opened did Adhara snap out of her trance.

It was still surreal to her that she managed to win against such a formidable opponent.

An opponent with a myth-long of experiences in battle.

While Flamy hopped over to her, celebrating her victory, she turned to look at the door with mixed feelings. But eventually, a frown crept to her face, 'He stopped mid-way... He lets me win. But why did he do that?'

Chapter 1030 Rite of Passage

Adhara looked at the closed door as her mind wandered to the realm of confusion.

It wasn't supposed to end up this way.

Sure, she planned to win the duel against Drakar as that would end the dispute on the border calmed down, but she never really expected that Drakar would deliberately lose the duel. He should've been pressing to win.

Knowing that this dispute started due to his kingdom's losses, it was weird for him to do this.

Had he wanted to win the duel, he could've at that last moment.

'I don't understand, why did he do this...? Is there something that I didn't see through?'

Despite the fact that she should've been glad, she felt like something was amiss, and it felt like she was missing a piece to make this situation clear. Adhara lifted Flamy and rubbed its head while she pondered about the matter in silence.

But as of this moment, she decided to be glad that it ended the way she wanted.

Soon enough, she was called as the ritual was ready.

Under the guidance of the seers who were the ones in charge of the ritual, she went through the entire traditional rite of passage of the Tigerman. Since their tradition is still thick in their culture and has taken the form of a tribal tradition, the ritual is quite traditional.

Although it was called a rite of passage, it was not the actual thing.

It was tailored for external leaders.

Some parts of the ritual were akin to the one done by the Elders when they were appointed.

However, the time to do the trial was toned down a lot.

Changing into a new set of clothes that were prepared for her to do this trial, a vibrant cloak coupled with a leather chest piece with symbolic engravings, and a ceremonial headdress, she blended with the Tigerman that were present to witness her ritual.

Firstly, Adhara went through the Trial of Hunt.

Armed with the Tigerman race's traditional weapon—a ritual-blessed wooden spear—she was tasked to hunt down three Vajra, mutated tigers that were blessed with the lightning elements and formidable power in the seventh-rank realm.

She couldn't use her elemental prowess, she needed to do it raw with the wooden spear.

Nevertheless, she did it without much difficulty.

Completing the trial, she was immediately placed at the center of a totem formation while several female Tigermen initiated the Inking of the Stripes ceremony—skillfully adorning Adhara's body with the sacred black stripes of a tiger.

It consists of being donned with the stripes while the seers do the ceremonial dance.

Using the Vajra's carcasses, they were summoning ancestral spirits to bless Adhara.

A ceremony that lasted hours long.

However, when the ceremony was finished, she was brought to a grand feast that was solely prepared for her—the star of the ritual. Adhara was congratulated by the people which was quite surprising, considering that the Elders were quite hostile towards her.

But then again, it must've not been her as an individual that was the problem.

It was the fact that their tradition was rejected.

Now that Adhara went through the tradition willingly, they were starting to open up to her.

Even the Elders came to talk to her one by one, giving her their blessing.

Among them was the Elder who was angry at her earlier, and he surprisingly apologized for his rude behavior and explained that the tradition is very sacred to them. It was natural that he would've reacted that way.

On the other hand, appreciating the honesty, Adhara didn't press the matter and let it go.

Just like that, the feast went by smoothly without hiccups.

Despite knowing that she was a part of one of the strongest factions in the new era, the one that Rex was leading, she never really felt like she was in one of the strongest factions. More likely than not, they were always battered and attacked.

A perilous journey to reach the top of the food chain.

But at this moment, looking at the Tigerman cheering around her, she now felt it first-hand.

It was true that she had power as an important individual in the Silverstar Pack.

However, while looking around at the cheering Tigermen, fully accepting that they were now an ally of the Silverstar Pack with equal standing, a frown appears behind her smiling face as she couldn't shake the unease.

Drakar's face flashed inside her mind.

'None of the Elders brought up the topic of the losses they suffered to me' Adhara turned to look at the Elders to her sides. 'Also, they seem to be very reasonable. I can't imagine these Elders going as far as invading the Dwarven territory, potentially jeopardizing the alliance...'

'Was it really only him who was bitter for the losses?' She pondered heavily.

Since she was aware that the Elders knew nothing about the border dispute, then it must've been Drakar who was going behind their back. However, the man she clashed with earlier, the one who chose to let her win the duel and withdraw his force did not strike her as an unreasonable man.

Adhara is specifically good at reading people thanks to her innate emotional sight gift.

From that, she could tell that Drakar was also not unreasonable.

Due to that, she was curious as to the reason that made him invade the Dwarven territory.

Initially, Adhara thought that she would meet a problem here.

Specifically, she foresaw potential issues arising, particularly with the Tigerman Kingdom not wanting to be a part of the alliance anymore from learning that Drakar was bitter with the amount of losses they suffered defending the Dwarven Kingdom from the Demons.

Unlike the Tigermen from the new era that was fine, he woke up and was met with this.

Naturally, it's understandable if he's not fully on board.

But from the look of things, it doesn't seem to be the case as Adhara expected.

Now, she wanted to ask Drakar what was the reason behind his invasion, but she would have to wait for that until the entire ritual was finished. Eventually, after the feast ended with the entire population eating to their fullest, the last step started.

It was an oath that was led by the Elders himself.

Adhara only needs to solemnly make an oath to always care for the Tigerman Kingdom.

Even though promises or oaths could be broken, for the entire Tigerman race, the pledge she uttered here transcended the fragility of mere words. Standing atop of a platform, she raised her fist over her pulsating heart and chanted the oath.

"I, Adhara Alpenore, the representative of the Silverstar Pack, solemnly swear to always bore good intentions to the Tigerman Kingdom, and to never bring harm to my allied kin and also their kindred spirits"

Upon hearing this, the Elders gave their marks on Adhara's forehead with their own inks.

Four line marks with different colors were left on her forehead.

A sign that she has been accepted by the Tigerman Kingdom and its people.

Despite the bad instances she experienced earlier, the Silverstar Pack's reputation managed to transcend even higher in the eyes of the Tigerman Kingdom, something that even Adhara could feel directly.

...

A moment later.

It was already night again when she finished the rite of passage ritual.

Returning to the border to inspect Ugrok, who had been assigned to stand guard, she found him reclining on the ground, seemingly sitting dormant in wait. Drawing closer, she gradually pick up her pace with concern plastered on her face.

She noticed several scratches marring Ugrok's body.

"Ugrok!" She exclaimed, jogging towards him with evident concern.

Upon hearing this, Ugrok slowly opened his eyes and saw Adhara crouching before him.

Scanning his body with her eyes, trying to see whether there was a grievous wound that she would need to be worried about, she asked, "I'm too late, am I? The fight already started. Tell me what happened"

Following that question, Ugrok recounted what had happened.

Just as she expected, the fight already broke out for a good moment on the border.

Despite the provocation from the Tigerman, the Dwarves were standing on guard without a sign of aggression. But based on what Ugrok said, their generals suddenly raised their signal and charged at the Tigerman.

It was vicious, and dead bodies were piling up on top of each other.

Even Adhara could see some of the corpses scattered around near them, victims of the fight.

"Ugrok came, Ugrok tried to stop them, and Ugrok shouted at them that you were here, and fighting a fight is not tolerated," Ugrok said weakly, trying to catch his breath. "The Tigerman stops, but the Dwarves..."

Listening to what he had to say, Adhara gasped.

Going into detail, Adhara learned that when Ugrok came, the Tigerman stopped.

Since their plan was to push forward until Adhara or someone associated with the Silverstar Pack came, they naturally stopped when they heard Adhara was here. But the Dwarves on the other hand kept fighting, forcing the Tigerman to fight back.

In the heat of the battle, with their adrenaline high, the fight continues again.

Due to the fact that he was standing at the center, Ugrok was also pulled into the fight.

This explained why he was in this state.

Ugrok turned to the side and pointed in a direction, "I think they are around there"

"Wait, they are still fighting...?" Adhara frowned.

Not wasting any more seconds, she quickly harnessed her fire elements and enveloped her entire form in flames before executing a far leap toward the direction Ugrok indicated. While in mid-air, she discerned that the fight was approaching its conclusion.

But the casualties were already catastrophic, literal bodies scattered everywhere.

It was hard to see bodies littered everywhere her vision traversed.

More importantly, it was especially hard to look at since both sides should be an ally.

However, both sides were not aware of this.

Fully immersed in the world of a bloody fight, they didn't realize that they had already been reduced to a fraction of their numbers. In a grand entrance, Adhara's body lit up the entire sky, turning into a sun and catching all of their attention.

Even with her presence alone, a part of the fight temporarily stopped.

Swoosh!!

Landing gracefully at the center of the battlefield, her fiery eyes scanned the vicinity.

A slight anger emerged inside of her at the sight of this.

Knowing that they were supposed to be preparing for the final fight against the Executor's forces, she was angry at their impulsiveness in fighting against each other. It was Drakar's doing, and despite her view of him earlier, the sight made her mad at him.

Noticing that some still persisted in fighting barbarically, Adahra gritted her teeth.

She channeled her entire elemental energy, her new violet fire, and also her wind element into a tangible force within the clasps of her hands. In a decisive and rapid motion, she brought her hands down vertically.

Kaboom!

Two sky-high walls of flames appeared, separating the two sides perfectly.

Some that were engaged in a duel were blasted, snapping them out of their battle mode.

"ENOUGH!!!"

Adhara's roar thundered across the entire battlefield, surprising the two sides who were not expecting to be interrupted until the fight ended. But seeing her twisted countenance, all of them recognized that it was the Female Alpha.

It was also at that moment that they remembered that Ugrok warned them about her.

But the battle made them forget about that momentarily.

Looking to the side, she noticed a Dwarf wearing a more dignified armor who was bloodied across his entire form. One glance at him is enough to tell Adhara that she was one of the generals that were deployed here.

"Go back to your capital city..." Adhara muttered silently.

Upon hearing this, the general frowns as their territory hasn't been reclaimed yet.

Just when he was about to refute, not wanting to back away until the Tigerman left their territory alone, Adhara's eyes flared into a furious blaze, "I said go back and tell your King that I will be there, or are you going to disobey a direct order from me, general...?"

Despite his reluctance, there was no way he was brave enough to stay.

With a signal from him, the other Dwarves started retreating before the situation escalates.

