

GREED 341

Chapter 341 Screwed In More Ways Than They Know.

The limbs are dangerous to be around and because they are thin, it is easy for spells to miss them. Not everyone is like Helios who makes fighting a royal guard look easy.

"Hit its eye. Yes, hit its eye. That's how you do it." Harkam hollered at the top of his gruff voice as he watched the wonderful show.

The royal guards seemed tailored to hunt giants of order and yet, they are being pushed back. They fell back before the might of the demigods and it was exciting to watch. Harkam couldn't sit still. He rose from the cloud he is sitting on to cheer Tanya on.

Things are going well by the look of the fight. Harkam has forgotten about the impending reinforcements and he overlooked the fact that none of the royal guards have been wounded at all. Yet, they are losing.

The demigods are just strong and it is enough for Harkam that the royal guards are being pushed back. Each attack from the strike team is weak but many of them seemed to overwhelm the Goliath ants. Who wouldn't be overwhelmed when they are attacked from all sides? When quantity reaches a certain level it becomes its own quality.

The strike team is doing well and that's all that matters. They pushed the royal guards into the entrance of the ant mound. Harkam thought nothing of it. Where else are the royal guards going to be pushed back? Nothing seems suspicious. Even the absence of reinforcements for the royal guards. The fight has gone on for a long time and yet, there are no reinforcements.

Maybe the reinforcements are being delayed by something. But what could be more important than demigods who want to kill their queen at their very doorstep? Besides, what does it matter? The only thing on Harkam's mind is the current fight that is going well for the strike team.

"Something is finally going well for them." Harkam laughed heartily as the strike team entered the ant mound with the royal guards.

Tanya's PoV

The screen continued to show the progress of the strike team as they entered the ant mound. The tunnels in the ant mound are large but they can only allow two royal guards to stand side by side while the demigods can allow 5. It is restrictive but it restricts the ants more than the giants.

The members of the strike team have to funnel themselves into the ant mound but they can rotate the front-line positions so that all of them can engage the royal guards while the royal guards are limited in number. This means that the entire strike team of 85 is fighting the 3 royal guards with an advantage of 5 to 2. 5 to 2 is still dangerous for the demigods but the tight space is inhibiting the royal guards and making the fight easier. So it is not a wonder that they pushed deep into the ant mound pretty quickly and were about to approach an intersection.

"Intersection coming up." Someone shouted above the din of battle.

The intersection is a result of the cross-over of two tunnels. One runs from the entrance to the center of the room and another one runs across it from left to right. Numerous priests used sensory spells to scout ahead. They found nothing except for the usual worker and soldier ants.

"It is clear. Both sides are clear. No sign of royal guards."

The first priest to complete the scouting informed the others. Other feedback confirmed it to be true. By the looks of things, there are no royal guards around. It seems the royal guards are preoccupied with something else in the ant mound.

"My team and I will be splitting here. We'll take the right tunnel." Tanya informed the group.

Fighting in the tunnels is easy for the strike team. They don't have as much room to maneuver but the ants can't overwhelm them either. The small space is more of a problem for the royal ants than for them. The demigods will always be at an advantage no matter the number of royal guards they face.

The absence of danger means the absence of opportunity to shine. That's why Tanya hasn't exchanged her position from the front since they entered the tunnel but that cannot continue. Some others want to fight too. If there are not enough royal guards to go around, then it makes a lot of sense to split up. The heroic quest is a race anyway. The first person to reach the queen wins. So it is in Tanya's best interest to split and find her own way.

She ignored the strike team's reaction to her heads-up. She will do whatever she wants to do regardless of their opinion about it. She was just telling them so that they would be prepared. No one objected to the violent-looking female giant of order. They didn't need her to push back two royal guards and her absence will give them a better chance of winning the heroic quest. Another demigod also made his intention to separate known.

'Finally, some free space to fight and show my full power.' she thought in anticipation.

Tanya is looking forward to the separation. Her recent performance isn't satisfying enough for her. The other teams and her teammates were in the way of having a full fight with a royal guard. Their presence and interference didn't allow her to show her full power. What she wants is to fight a royal guard alone and see her limits but she can't have that yet.

So she will go her own way and hopefully encounter a royal guard or maybe two so that she can display her full power. The thought of the progress that Helios must be making within the ant mound chased her anger to rise and her lightning to become more potent.

The strike team pushed the royal guards past the intersection. Tanya and her team separated from the strike team and took the right tunnel. The tunnel is clear as the scouts said. She doesn't see any threat apart from the soldier ants which she can crush easily. She ran forward smashing her way through the ant horde. Then she suddenly fell back after running face-first into something. She was at the head of her small squad so she was the one to run into the invisible obstacle.

"What the fuck?" She cursed angrily.

"Are you alright, exalted demigod?" One of her teammates asked.

The priests were startled by her behavior and stopped to ask her. She didn't get to answer but they received their answer anyway. The invisible obstacle was an invisible barrier. It wasn't strong because it wasn't set up for protection. So it flickered after Tanya knocked into it. Then it fell to reveal a glaring royal guard. Its head was lowered menacingly at them.

The priests and Tanya were shocked by the situation. One of them managed to ask the question that was bothering them.

"How?"

How did a royal guard hide from them? They had used various sensing spells to scout the tunnel but nothing showed up. The priests happen to be more than faithful idiots, they are also smart so they know that they are in big trouble.

Divine spells are just like normal spells except that they are powered by divine power instead of mana. A normal spell can be trounced by a stronger spell. In their case, divine spells can be fooled by divine spells with stronger divine power.

What is mind-boggling is that it should be impossible for them to be fooled. They are not priests to weak gods and have never worried about their spells failing them. The only force stronger than the grand god of the sky and tempest will have to be a celestial god and there is only one in the entire plane.

The celestial god of order and justice shouldn't have done this. After all, this heroic quest was arranged by the Celestial Supreme. But if it were him that helped the royal guard hide from their sensing spells then they are screwed in more ways than they are aware of.

Even if they are priests of weaker gods like a low god, the fact that they were fooled means that a god is on the side of the ants. That should be impossible since the queen is only about to become a demigod. So it is either that they were lied to or a god is on the side of the ant and probably a very strong god too.

Either way, they are screwed. The involvement of a god is not a good omen. It is like a wolf playing among sheep. No matter how innocent or well-meaning the wolf is, something bad is bound to happen and it is highly likely that it will happen to the sheep. This mission is difficult already without the introduction of confusing factors that spell certain doom for them.

Chapter 342 They Were Pretending.

Tanya is smart in her own way, just not in the problem analyzing way. She is more of a doer than a thinker. So she wasn't frozen in terror like the priests after they realized how big of trouble they have found themselves in. She recovered quickly from her stumbling and roused her divine power. Her body brightened with sparks of electricity. She channeled the power into her rune, the hammer of the sky god. It lit up and resonated with her.

She raised her right hammer into the air and brought it down for a smash on the head of the royal guard. The head is already low to the ground and extra vulnerable. She aimed for an eye. Such a fragile organ will be squashed beneath the might of her hammer.

The head will be jostled and pushed to the left by the impact of the hammer. Then her left hammer which is in the process of being lifted up will smack the head in the opposite direction. She would go on to pummel the royal guard. She could already see it in her mind.

The royal guard moved. It shook its head and moved its horn to intercept the hammer strike. The two of them met and the hammer was deflected harmlessly to the side. Another swift shake of the horns and Tanya lost an arm. The horn on the top of the ant's head had cut through both the flesh and bone of her arm. It was then that she finally felt shocked. Her eyes widened in disbelief even as her severed arm fell to the ground and blood started leaking out of the stub that her arm has become. She realized something critical to their survival. She had been incapacitated easily. Too easily.

Her defeat shouldn't have been that easy. If it is, then they are in big trouble.

"No more playing around." The voice of number 9 reached them through the divine sense.

Tanya's eyes widened further. They knew that a royal guard is not like a normal mindless ant. They have intelligence and they learn. But a royal guard with a divine sense is too strong and indicates a demigod ant queen. It was then that the possibility that they may have been tricked started to crop up in Tanya's mind. With it came the realization of a real possibility of death.

The priests were roused out of their frozen state when they saw Tanya get hurt. They have to keep her safe. They were told that the ant queen is about to become a demigod and yet there is obviously divine power at play plus the royal guard could communicate with a divine sense but it doesn't excuse them from their duty. This heroic quest stinks of a conspiracy that they have been caught in. But conspiracy or not, Tanya must survive.

It is not the first time that those on heroic quests have been tricked for the entertainment of the gods. The gods do it to make the struggle real. The direct involvement of a god has never happened before but they have to ignore it for now and fight for a chance to survive. It is either that or they accept death. Because if Tanya dies, then they will surely die and their souls will be tortured in the afterlife. That's the punishment for those that have offended a god. They shall not have peace alive or dead if Tanya dies.

The nine priests behind her rushed forward to save her. They shot spells of various kinds at the royal guard. It just shrugged them off and pushed through the firepower. It has its eyes locked on Tanya who is crawling backward in terror. The royal guard stalked her in an imposing manner. Its legs stamped the ground in quick succession as it gained on her. Then it attacked.

A priest jumped in front of her just in time to block an attack for her while another pulled her up. The priest that blocked her front took on the attack for her and is swiftly impaled by a giant horn.

The royal guard had rushed forward with the intention to pierce all obstacles. One such obstacle was the priest. The giant horn pierced through the barriers and into the body of the priest and out the back. Then the royal ant exerted its mandibles to shear the body of the giant. Tanya and the other priests were splashed with blood and were bestowed with the scream of pain from the suffering priest who was being split in half. The debut release happened at N0v3lBiin.

Number 9 tossed the priest aside after a quick work separating the chest from the waist. Then it crushed the skull of the screaming priest to make sure he is dead before moving on. It ran after the escaping team. The blood on the ground, splattered all over the shiny carapace of the royal guard, and the internal organs littered about are proof of the messy job that Number 9 had just done but it is still looking to do more.

The team didn't see these signs since they are running back the way they came, but they do not need the signs. The sounds the priest made were descriptive enough for them to know he didn't die painlessly. Even the silence that ensued after the skull was crushed only made the violent image in their minds more vivid. Even now, they can see a deformed skull with eyes popped too far out of their sockets and twitching legs still attached to an unnaturally independent waist.

Such sounds continued to be heard as more priests were overtaken and slaughtered. Their death was swift but very violent. Royal ants are very efficient killing machines. Some of the priests were overtaken and died unwillingly while the others sacrificed themselves to buy more time for Tanya to escape.

Number nine continued to rush after them. It quickly dispatched any obstacle before stepping over the spilled organs and broken bodies without care. It stopped once in a while to crush or impale skulls to ensure the deaths of its victims.

Tanya's team finally reached the intersection but they didn't find the salvation that they were hoping for. The main team had been pushed back. They have also suffered casualties. That isn't all. The team that took the left tunnel is also returning disgraced and beaten ragged with their tails between their

legs. Even their metaphorical tails didn't get away unscathed. It has been severed and is bleeding creating a bloody trail of shame behind them.

The sight that was waiting for them is not a good one, to say the least. There was blood, limbs, bodies, and more blood everywhere. Tanya shuddered as she caught the look of shock on the face of a dead priest. The priest's mouth is opened in shock which mirrors the hole on the forehead where the priest was impaled by a horn. Tanya was only pulled from her terror when a shout shook her.

The demigod who took his team to the left tunnel shouted, "We were ambushed."

Things had gone differently for them. They weren't as headstrong as Tanya's team. They had decided to stop and plan their next actions. The royal guard waiting for them in the tunnel was the one that got the jump on them after getting fed up with waiting for them.

One of the demigods in the main team shouted, "What do we do? They suddenly became violent and strong all of a sudden."

"You fool. They were pretending." Another one shouted back.

Tanya's group ignored the others and their shouting that helped no one. They have a royal guard hot on their tails so they are preoccupied with running away. The dead priests in their team had bought them time, so they will be able to make it away if they rush without paying heed to side chatter. They chose not to think about how they will get through the ant hoard outside. They will face it when it comes.

As they are right now, it is no use thinking about too much at all. Solving problems as they come is always the motto of the storm church. That motto also says that they should solve problems with pure might, but they are running away since they are out of might to solve this problem. Unfortunately, running away doesn't solve problems and neither will it solve the problems they're currently facing.

Two more royal guards are waiting for them in the tunnel they came from blocking the way to safety. The strike team is surrounded. They are in a situation that only pure might can get them out of. The ant horde didn't allow them to get within the ant mound so that they can let them escape, now do they? No, they got them here so that they can carry out their aim without interference. Now, an annihilator cannot rescue them no matter the amount that is fired.

Chapter 343 What's Worse Than Death?

The demigods began to realize a lot of things. First, they are not strong. It only looked that way because the royal guards were acting weak. Second, they didn't push the royal guards back. It only looked that way because the royal guards wanted them in the ant mound. And three, nothing was holding up the reinforcements for the royal guards. It only looked that way because the ants were waiting to ambush and trap them.

But these realizations only brought more questions about why the royal guards are so strong and how they were able to hide from them. It is all too late now to get answers to those questions anyway. The six royal guards pressed them from all sides and culled their numbers one by one. Their approach was careful and methodical almost like pruning shrubs. They cut down everything in front of them and made sure it is dead before moving on.

Tanya realized something odd as the walls of brute force cornered them. All 8 of the demigods are alive. The royal guards didn't kill any demigods. They might have chopped off limbs or given deep cuts that reached the bones but no demigod was fatally wounded. They were all bunched at the center of the intersection after a fight that took less than 10 minutes, there were no more priests.

The five priests that belong to the church of the sun and were supposed to be part of Helios's team also died. They shouldn't have entered this death trap and they died with that knowledge accompanied by an unhealthy dose of regret. It doesn't matter that regret in such an amount is bad for one's health because they don't have to worry about their health anymore.

"That should be it." Number 3 said.

"Not all of them are here. One of them isn't here." Number 4 added.

"This much is enough. It will have to do." Number 9 joined in.

The six of them were discussing while they towered above the demigods who are clustered between them like a bunch of frightened chickens or a group of mistreated war prisoners which is what they are. Their clothes have been shredded, blood has been spilled all over their bodies probably from the numerous wounds on said bodies or from the mangled body of others. Then there is the look of fright on their terror-stricken faces. It is not a wonder why they will be compared to frightened chickens. It is safe to say that they have seen better days.

They are helpless and won't even be able to escape the ant mound even if the royal guards are not present. They have lost all their priests so they don't have their force domain to push back the smaller ants. The tunnels are filled with worker and soldier ants in every direction. It is the instruction of the queen that is keeping them at bay from pouncing on the helpless demigods. Without their domains, the demigods don't stand a chance against the worker ants who will swarm them like a bug blanket and rip them to shreds.

"You can't kill us. Our parents will have your heads if you kill anyone of us." Tanya shouted at the royal guards.

She has taken on more injuries apart from the arm that was lobbed off. There's a cut on the side of her face that just missed an eye by a few inches.

It felt beneath her to succumb to threatening others with the might of her father so as to secure her life, but she loves her life and is also sure that the god of the sky won't sit still while something bad happens to her. Unlike the others who are probably here for entertainment, she is important to her divine father. She is currently the only demigod of the sky god and he doesn't have a divine lord yet. So she is very important to her father. The fact that the royal guards haven't killed any demigods also gave her hope.

Number 9, the royal guard that killed her teammates replied scornfully, "Stupid girl. You're threatening us with death when you were sent here to kill us. What could be worse than death?"

Tanya couldn't answer that question. There's punishment in the afterlife but according to their culture, non-giant races don't have an afterlife. So she can't scare the royal guard into involuntary servitude. She slumped down dejectedly.

Number 3 joined in the conversation. "As you might have noticed, we didn't kill any demigod. That's because we are kidnapping all of you."

It looked around into space for a while before continuing. "I'm sure the gods can see and hear us. The pantheon will need a representative to negotiate with us. We will inform you of who we want in a few days. As of now, the gods should call off the hunt of our colony and they shouldn't try anything. We will notice."

Then he turned to the demigods, "As for you guys. Start moving. We are going down to the center of the ant mound. Move it."

The demigods had to move when the royal guards threatened them with more cuts from the blades on their limbs. All eight of them were herded like cattle to the center of the ant mound where the ant queen will see them before being sent to a jail where they will be imprisoned and probably tortured.

The situation made the demigods have mixed emotions. The fact that they are being kidnapped means that they have a chance of survival. Their heroic quest can be considered a bust. They may be going to the central room of the ant mound to see the queen, but they won't be going as her vanquishers as they planned. They will be prisoners of conquest to be displayed for the queen's amusement or worse.

Back to Harkam.

He had to switch the display of his screen to the tunnel so that he can follow Tanya's progress. This is why he didn't see the ant horde retreat from the front lines en masse as soon as the strike team entered the ant mound. Other gods who were watching alone and don't have a demigod in the heroic quest saw this bizarre and sudden retreat. But they didn't care.

The reason why they saw the retreat is that they couldn't watch the fight within the ant mound. They don't have any person with their divine power within the tunnels to extend their divine vision to the tunnels. The fact that they don't have any person within the tunnels with their divine power also means they don't have any vested interest in the heroic quest. So they didn't care.

The fact that they aren't watching with those with vested interests in the heroic quest means they probably don't get along with them or they don't move in the same circle. So it is even less reason for them to care. The ones that cared rationalized the behavior as the ants rushing back to protect their home from the invaders.

Those ones mocked the ants, "Stupid ants. It is too late now. They have entered your home."

The tunnel structure means that the ant horde won't be able to use their numbers advantage to overwhelm the strike team. As long as the team has their force domain to support themselves, then they will be fine. It would have been useless even if they cared and warned the others. It would also be

useless if Harkam noticed the odd behavior and suspected foul play. He can't interfere with the heroic quest. Even if he could, things had gone too far to be stopped.

"That's a good idea. Go your own way. You'll stand a better chance of winning this thing that way."
Harkam was in agreement with Tanya's decision to separate.

He needs her to win the heroic quest and gain a heroic feat. 11 more heroic feats and she will be a guaranteed divine lord. So he is in support of her separating.

Tanya separated and they happened to run into an invisible barrier.

"What the fuck is this?" Harkam asked in confusion.

The sight of the royal guard confused him as much as the priests. He may be a god, but he was struck with the same perplexing confusion of the mortal priests.

"Could a god be on the ant's side?"

He had seen the use of observation spells and they came back negative for royal guards. But unlike the priests, he has a method to make sure. He went through the feedback of divine power he has experienced recently. His mind bypassed prayers whether they be prayers for help or thanksgiving and focused on the use of divine spells that occurred with his divine power. He found his answer. The divine power that fooled the scouting spells is much stronger than his. It can only mean one thing.

"This can't be. What game is the Celestial god of Order playing?" He asked slowly with fury evident in his voice.

Chapter 344 Betrayal Of The Highest Order.

He came to the same conclusions as the priests except he is very certain of it because there is only one person stronger than him in the entire plane.

He feels like shouting out in anger but he held himself back. The celestial supreme isn't Stelios. He can't say whatever he wants to say and get away with a painful slap on his wrist. He can't be rash. He hasn't

even seen what will happen. Maybe he shouldn't accuse the celestial god when he hasn't done something bad yet. Surely the celestial supreme didn't add something crazy to the heroic quest.

"Maybe he has a plan." He struggled to say and sat back in his seat.

He didn't question whether it was the celestial god of order and justice. He definitely felt a greater divine power override his. And the only celestial god in the plane is the celestial supreme. No grand god has ascended to become a celestial god recently. Such a development wouldn't escape the notice of the gods. Plus, it is the celestial supreme that planned the heroic quest. There's no way a god will interfere with it without the permission of the celestial supreme.

Even if a grand god ascends to become a celestial, the celestial supreme will have them killed. He has been known to kill new celestials as soon as they finish their ascension so there is no other Celestial apart from him in the entire Zargoth plane. Such a guy that can't share his power is not a guy to be bad-mouthed without a care in the world. Harkam still cherishes his life. So he reasoned himself to calmness.

That calmness was seriously threatened when Tanya lost an arm but he remained calm and tried to find a reason why the royal guards are stronger than they should be. His patience went on to be tested again and again when the royal guard spoke and as he watched his priests being butchered by the royal guards.

"My priests. Those are my priests." He said through gritted teeth.

He felt pain as he watched his priests die. Their cries of pain and suffering didn't get to him. What he is concerned about is the fact that he is losing good priests when he only recently recovered from that devastating loss that he incurred in the divine war with Stelios but won't admit to.

"I can get other priests." He said to calm himself down.

Never before has Harkam's patience been tested like this. He is not a patient god but he has to keep his calm since this involves the Celestial Supreme. His patience was tested by the brutality that occurred. He watched members of the strike team become playthings to the royal guards.

All he could think of as he saw the massacre is that it occurred because the royal guards are stronger than usual. Their power hasn't reached the transcendent stage yet but they are strong enough to take on ancient giants of order. If he had known, he would never have allowed Tanya to go. She might be a demigod but she is just a young giant and is in no way fit to fight against something like that.

"It seems he hid their strength from us. What else did he hide?" He asked while pacing about.

He tried to remain calm but it is only a facade. He is not happy. His mood is getting worse and so the lightning in the divine kingdom responded with lightning storms. He is on his way to becoming angry. Things will get worse then. He usually becomes violent after anger. But he can't stop now because he feels he has a right to be angry.

The royal guards aren't supposed to be this strong. And most importantly, a god shouldn't be helping them. Worst of all, the god that is helping them is also the one that called for the heroic quests. It stinks of a plot by the Celestial Supreme to delay the changing of gods for a couple of origin cycles by killing off demigods.

"If the celestial god of order and justice hadn't sensed the fluctuations of divine power in the ant mound, they wouldn't be sent there in the first place. There has to be a reason for it. It doesn't even need to be good, but Tanya has to be safe."

He tried to rationalize and prevent himself from raging out. The situation is yet to fully play out. It might not be a betrayal of the highest order after all. It was then that the royal guard made their intentions of kidnapping the demigods known. He sighed in relief. So the demigods aren't in danger. The Celestial Supreme might just be trying out something new that he didn't inform them about. In that case, there's probably nothing to worry about.

He sat back down in his sit with relief. "He almost had me. The God of Order is becoming fun. I just wish he had told me about it before. But what fun will that be?" He began to laugh after dispelling his worries.

The celestial supreme usually informs them of such things because he doesn't like confusion. But this spontaneity is good too because it will add more tension to the entertainment. He was still laughing when his screen suddenly went dark.

He grumbled uneasily. "What is going on now?"

His eyes search for the cause of the blackout but he didn't find anything wrong on his side. Next, he tried to recover the vision of the tunnels but he couldn't get anything no matter how much or what he tried. Then he switched his vision to the front lines. The screen lit up and he saw the confused army without any living ants in sight.

"Where are the ants?" He asked totally baffled.

He was looking at the battlefield which has been littered with the carcass of ants. The ant mound has also become visible on the screen. It stood tall like a looming mountain. Something else that wasn't there before also appeared on the screen. A cover of divine power is surrounding the ant mound. He can see it as a film of divine influence covering the ant mound. It is what is preventing him from seeing into the ant mound.

"What bullshit is this?" He cursed out loud.

The major reason why they don't want the ant queen to become a demigod is that she will be able to wield divine power. She can use that divine power to obscure her ant mound and block their divine vision. The gods won't be able to know what is going on within the tunnels that way.

He yelled at the top of his non-existent lungs, "I have had it already. He has to tell me what is going on now. Or I will raise a lot of chaos."

His voice shook the divine kingdom. Lightning strikes increased and so did the heavy sound of thunder that they made. The divine kingdom lit up again and again due to the flashing light of lightning. The wind picked up speed and a storm began brewing. If he remains angry, all these changes will start to happen in the mortal realm.

He lost his grip on his anger. He chose to ignore the fact that the celestial god didn't inform them of this situation which is unlike him. The odd thing is that even if the ant queen succeeded in becoming a demigod, she will need a lot of divine energy to cover an ant mound that large. Which means she got divine energy from somewhere else. Someone is helping her with resources. Probably from the same god that helped the ants, which is the Celestial Supreme.

Harkam doesn't care about the games that the Celestial Supreme is playing. It is the fact that he can't see what's going on in the ant mound that finally made him snap. He can lose priests but he mustn't lose Tanya. She is his last remaining option after losing Tyke.

He was about to fly and leave his divine kingdom so that he can have a serious conversation with the celestial supreme when he received a notification for an emergency divine council.

He nodded his head in satisfaction. "So he has decided to inform us of what he is doing. I shouldn't have doubted him. I'm sure he has everything planned right."

He took a moment to straighten himself and calm down before he crushed the flashing rune in front of him. A portal opened up in front of him. It is a large hole with smooth edges and a calm surface. The entire portal resembles a large glass panel. He can see his destination through the portal. He didn't bother to admire it. He stepped through it swiftly, impatient to get to the bottom of the Celestial supreme's plan.

He doesn't plan to be nice about it. He will get to the bottom of it and will have his demigod safe or there will be hell to pay. If this is a betrayal, then it will be met with the highest retribution possible.

Chapter 345 Who Did It?

Harkam appeared in the council room. It is a large room with an open sky that shows the constellation. The seats are arranged in a semi-circle opposite the single high seat that the celestial god seats on. This room is called the council room but it might as well be called the Celestial Supreme's court of law because he makes the final decision after listening to different opinions.

As usual, the celestial supreme is there in his seat to preside over the matters of the council. He looks like any other giant of order except he is dressed in neat white armor. There are patterns of the celestial god's symbols drawn on the armor. There is the image of his scales and his hammers. The white armor forms a stark contrast with the Celestial Supreme's black-as-night skin. His eyes and hair alternate between white and black color.

Harkam found a seat and chose to observe the celestial supreme while he stewed before the meeting starts. The meeting will start soon because the celestial supreme hates tardiness and punishes it. But Harkam doubts he will be able to survive the short wait without hurling abuses at the celestial supreme. Even now, the calm look on the celestial supreme's face is already getting to him. He just feels like jumping from his seat, vaulting over the desk in front of the Celestial Supreme, and punching that ridiculous face.

'Stuck up prick. If I were not so benevolent, I would be the one up there making all the decisions.'
Harkam grumbled inwardly.

He didn't grumble that out loud. Apart from risking the ire of the celestial supreme, his statement is also wrong. It is not because of benevolence that he is not challenging the celestial supreme. For the first real reason, he doubts he can beat the celestial god of order and justice if he ascends. For the second and most important reason, he won't be able to switch to the path of perfection if he becomes a celestial god.

If the gods were that motivated to become Celestials, they will organize a coup. They will fight and kill some grand gods and ascend in bulk. The celestial god of order and justice won't be able to take them on if they work together. They also have a secret weapon.

But grand gods are not interested in becoming celestial gods because it is impossible to switch then. They have no pressing reason to ascend. The ones that do also have to fight the celestial supreme, so only desperate fools will ascend.

The hall became filled pretty quickly as all the gods arrived. No one wants to get a scolding and a punishment from the Celestial Supreme for being late. What's odd is that there are two empty seats that did not get occupied as time passed by.

"Who is missing?" Harkam asked impatiently.

There should only be one empty seat belonging to the god of fate. That guy is even more antisocial than Harkam and nobody wants to be around him. The god of fate also doesn't care for the company of others and doesn't respect authority, so he doesn't come to divine council meetings.

The god of fate stopped hanging around gods all of a sudden and won't show up even if the Celestial Supreme calls a meeting. The gods have gotten used to the god of fate's absence, but it is the other unaccounted empty seat that is making the situation odd.

Harkam wants the meeting to start as soon as possible but there is someone apart from the god of fate missing. Harkam doesn't know how he does it but the god of fate manages to get away with being tardy. Which is a good thing too. He doesn't enjoy the presence of that caustic bastard either. But he doubts

the god that is imitating the god of fate will get away with it. What is more important to him is that this missing god is delaying the start of the meeting and he doesn't like it.

The more astute gods noticed that all the known gods in the pantheon have already arrived. Which means the tardy god is unknown.

"What's going on?" They whispered amongst themselves.

Is there a new god that they don't know about? That's unlikely. There's no way a new god will ascend without their knowledge. In fact, no new god has ascended for thousands of years. Divine positions have been inherited but no new god has ascended or new churches allowed to be established.

The celestial supreme is a control freak. He has banned the ascension of new gods just like he banned the ascension of new celestial gods. He personally kills new celestial gods while his church in the mortal realm wipes new churches and religions to stop the ascension of new gods. That hasn't changed in several Origin cycles as far as they know. So why has he suddenly allowed a new god to ascend?

"This divine council is hereby called to order."

The Celestial supreme ignored the whispering. He declared the meeting officially started. Everyone became quiet immediately.

Harkam stood up immediately. "I have a very important issue that needs urgent resolution and can only be resolved by the celestial supreme."

He should have raised his hand and only stand up when he is allowed to by the Celestial Supreme but he is too angry right now to follow what he considers stupid protocols.

"You may state your issue." The celestial supreme allowed him to continue despite the transgression.

Harkam continued talking after receiving the go-ahead. He started from the very top. He complained about the changes to the heroic quest and the lack of information about it. He asked to be informed of the plans and for the surveillance of the heroic quest to become available. He made his case by saying it

shouldn't affect the behavior of the demigods since the gods can't contact them and that while the lack of information adds tension to the entertainment of the gods, it is too dangerous.

He was being given strange looks while he was speaking passionately. Especially Stelios who is looking at him with that look that Harkam knows to be saying, "You're an idiot."

He could see that irritating face from the corner of his but he didn't allow that to distract him. He will take care of one slight after the other in due time. Nothing will distract him from this. He still didn't stop even though some gods were coughing and holding back their laughs as he spoke. One god stood up and interrupted him.

"Sky god. You should calm down. This matter is not as it seems."

Harkam shot back immediately. "I know it is not as it seems. The celestial supreme obviously knows what he is doing. He can't involve himself with the ants like this without a plan. I am not calling him stupid or saying he is trying to kill our demigods. I just want to know what his plan is. I deserve to know that."

The god that tried to stop him sat back down. Harkam became confused by their reactions. He expected to be joined by other gods whose demigods are involved in the heroic quest but they are not angry like him. He might be thick in the head but he began to realize that something is going on that he doesn't know about.

'Do they know something I don't know? Could the celestial supreme have told them but didn't tell me?' he asked himself.

He started to get angry as he tried to figure out why he is the only one making a scene about not being informed. He knows he isn't popular with others, but to be left out in such an important matter is making him very angry.

The sun god couldn't take it anymore.

"Sit down you idiot," Stelios shouted at him.

"I will not sit down," Harkam shouted back.

He chose to hold his ground against this injustice.

"Stop embarrassing yourself. Usually, I am one for you making a fool of yourself. If the situation isn't so serious, I'll even pile on, but the situation is serious. It wasn't the celestial god of order that did it."

Harkam paused at that. What Stelios said sounded credible because it sounded like the truth. If he is embarrassing himself, Stelios will pile on. That is the truth, but how is he to be sure that Stelios is not piling on right now? Plus that excuse is just silly. It shows that Stelios didn't put much thought into it. Who would believe that it wasn't the celestial god of order that did it?

He grinned smugly at having caught the fault in that argument. They must think he is stupid and will believe anything but he will show them that he isn't easy to fool.

He asked Stelios with that smug grim still on his face. "Then which celestial god did it?"

Chapter 346 Uncertainties And Misdirections.

Harkam asked Stelios, "Then which celestial god did it?"

That is the pertinent question. Stelio's answer to it will surely crack this facade for what it is. Then he will have a field day mocking the sun-brain idiot for trying to pull one over him.

Stelios pointed at the empty seat. Every god's gaze turned to the seat just like Harkam's. Harkam laughed. He laughed so hard he was shaking. He slapped his seat as he guffawed. He would have rolled over the place because of how funny he found the entire thing to be. Stelios really fucked up trying to fool him. It is pleasurable on so many levels that he can't hold himself back from laughing.

He laughed for almost a minute before he straightened himself. Then he coughed awkwardly after his unsightly bout of laughter in the council room.

"I am so sorry for that display. I made a fool of myself. But it is not as bad as Stelios's stupid lie right? Who would believe that there is a new celestial god? And that celestial god also happens to be a new god." He smiled as he spoke.

"That is so hilarious. Isn't it?" He asked the other gods but no one spoke up in agreement.

It is not that there's no other god that agrees with him. In fact, there are a lot that agrees with him. They just don't want to speak up for one reason or another. The gods are mostly confused by the situation. They aren't as sure of themselves as Harkam is and they don't know the celestial supreme enough like Stelios does to know that the celestial supreme doesn't behave like Harkam thinks he did.

The fact that two grand gods are on opposite sides of things also means the other gods are better off spectating. If they join a side, they may have to join the divine war that ensues after. So it is better to watch on the sidelines. It is not worth it to join a side when they are so many unanswered questions.

"I have heard your issue and will address it immediately. It is the major reason I called for this council."

The voice of the celestial supreme put an end to any more arguments. Harkam sat down reluctantly and waited for the explanation that is due forward to him.

The celestial supreme spoke calmly. "I don't have anything to do with the situation of the heroic quest. I didn't deceive you or interfere in it in any manner. An unknown power caused the situation we are currently in."

Stelios asked. "Is it the new god?"

"That is highly likely. I am not sure because even I am in the dark. I don't know how a new god ascended without any notice. It should be impossible for there to be a new god since all Godhood and divine positions have been accounted for. The fact that it happened without the slightest fluctuations of ascension or a church as a source of faith should also be impossible. But it has happened."

The celestial god of order is someone very conversant with rules. This situation has defied so many rules, and that's why he is confused. There are only two ways to become a god. Either you create a church of faith and ascend or you absorb the Godhood of a former god. The first option means the creation of a new divine position and the second option is the inheritance of a divine position.

The first option leads to the creation of a new seat within the council of the gods. Such a thing will be witnessed by the entire pantheon of gods. The plane will inform all the gods of the new arrival. But this god, who it is, became a new god without anyone knowing and without a church or faith. A new god needs faith to be ascended.

The only way it can be feasible is if a new Godhood is brought from another plane. But that is also impossible. Godhoods can't leave the plane they came from just like gods can't leave the plane. Even if such a thing were to happen, he would have noticed it as soon as an external Godhood enters the plane. He isn't the celestial supreme for nothing.

'Even if I didn't notice, there's no way I wouldn't notice the ascension of a new god.'

The celestial supreme tried to figure out what is going on. The only notice and sign that he got of a new god is the new seat in the divine plane. As the celestial supreme, he was informed of the addition of a new god but only that. He should have been informed of the ascension of the new god, but he wasn't. Not unless the god ascended instantly. Which is also Impossible. Even if the god ascended instantly, he should at least know the god's domain and other information.

Another impossible thing that has happened is that there is no new divine kingdom for the new god. A new divine position means an additional divine kingdom in the divine realm but there is none. This can only happen if the new god is a landed god which is also impossible. The Authority of the divine realm has decreed that there has to be a divine kingdom in the divine plane for a god.

He didn't even consider the ant queen to be the new god because he can tell with certainty that she isn't a god yet. There are a lot of things he doesn't know about the new god but what he knows for certain is that it is not a celestial god and it is not the ant queen.

The ant queen used her divine power to cover her ant mound. He might not be able to see what's going on with it, but he can sense that the divine power used is only at the demigod level. So he doesn't care about the ant queen. The one that is important is the god that is helping the ant queen.

That is another disturbing thing. A god is helping the ants. That god is unknown. It could be a known god or the hidden god but what are the odds that the arrival of a new god coincided with the ant queen getting divinity to become a demigod? If it is truly the new god that is helping the ant queen, it is obvious that this new god is hostile to the pantheon of giants.

So this situation is filled with impossibilities upon impossibilities. It is enough to drive a god angry but more than that is the lack of control which is something the celestial supreme doesn't like. There isn't even information about the new god. He doesn't even know if the new god is a giant of order or not.

If not for the extra seat, he wouldn't know that there's a new god. How can he make this god adhere to the order of the plane if he doesn't even know anything about them? He was about to spiral down a mental abyss of obsession when he heard a question.

Harkam had come out of his state of shock. He doesn't know what's right or not. The only leads he has is that Stelios is right or that he is working together with the Celestial Supreme to fool him. It is a debate he will have to have another time. For now, he can only assume that they are speaking the truth and as mind-boggling, as it is to believe that a new god has tampered with the heroic quest, Harkam also realized something very important.

"Does this mean that the demigods have been really kidnapped?" He asked out loud.

He is not concerned about the potential ramifications and complications of the existence of a hidden god or why a god will choose to hide and help the ants. He is more concerned about his chance to get a divine lord.

"Unfortunately it is true." The celestial god answered grimly.

He asked again. "You're telling me that a new celestial god has kidnapped my daughter?"

"There is a lot I don't know about this god but I do know two things. This god is not a celestial god and this god is very good at hiding. That might be the power of the divine position of the new god."

If a new celestial god appears he would get stronger because of his Authority as the celestial supreme. The more celestial gods there are, the stronger he gets. And since he didn't grow stronger, then this new god must not be a Celestial god.

Stelios agreed, "That's true. The only reason we suspect a celestial is because the divine power was able to overrule ours. If the god specializes in stealth or secrecy, it would have worked too."

They have managed to narrow down some of the powers of the god that is helping the ants. It is not much, but it is progress.

Chapter 347 Kidnapped For Real.

Now they are certain that the god is not a Celestial and has a domain related to stealth or secrecy. They can use that to narrow down the possible culprits and track the new god. The other gods joined in the conversation. A common point has been established, so they could join in. It is also important to be active in trying to catch the culprit. Being silent right now will not look good for them.

The hall became noisy as the gods gave suggestions and corroborated information.

"Enough of that. What do we do about the kidnapped demigods?" Harkam shouted to get everyone's attention.

He doesn't care about the new god. Some of his fears have been alleviated now that he knows it is not a Celestial god but something has yet to be done to improve the situation. The situation might not be as bad as he thought, but it is still bad.

"Calm down. We can't do anything as of yet. The ant queen will get in touch with us in a few days as they said. Until then we wait." Stelios spoke.

Harkam did not like that solution. "Wait, that's what you want us to do? When did we become tolerant of terrorists holding the entire pantheon back?"

Stelios began to get annoyed. He snapped at Harkam, "What do you want us to do? They have a god and the ant queen is a demigod. They will surely know if we try anything. Should we send our full force? Or don't you care about losing your opportunity for a divine lord?"

Harkam had to relax after hearing that. There is a lot that can be done to the ant colony. Even though they can't send the really strong mana entities, they can send in transcents. The old and strong mana entities are at least 50 meters tall with some of them reaching 100 meters. They are too big for the tunnels. But transcents can modulate their size and will fit in perfectly. Then they will be able to destroy every resistance.

A demigod ant queen is not a threat to the pantheon of giants. Even the god on their side is not a threat. It is just a grand god. One grand god cannot cause much impact on the pantheon or else that god won't be hiding. Even a celestial won't matter because the celestial supreme practically kills them for sport. It is the things that have become possible because of an ant demigod that is a threat to the gods. But taking rash actions right now can lead to the death of the demigods.

"Just relax. The fact that they haven't been killed means that the ants want something. We will find out and then we will decide then." The grand goddess of power and might said to him.

Harkam calmed down only because she is right. He isn't a fan of staying down and doing nothing, but if it will guarantee Tanya's life, he will do it.

He didn't get to calm down for long before another god dropped a bombshell.

The god of knowledge spoke. "Don't mind them Harkam. Stelios isn't as worried as you because his demigod managed to escape."

The god of knowledge is a giant made out of folds of paper. Even his fingers are constructed with layers of paper. The individual sheets of paper are white but aren't blank. They are filled with written knowledge. All the knowledge that the god of knowledge possesses is written on the sheets and they are a lot. One will be to get access to all that knowledge as long as they have the sheets of paper, can decipher them, and can read the language of the deciphered content.

"What? That dwarf sun god escaped? How did that happen?" Harkam asked hurriedly.

He is stunned that someone escaped but not that it is Helios. If anyone can escape, it had to be him, and Harkam knows that too even though he won't admit to it. The fact that someone escaped also means they might be able to get more information about the situation of the ant mound.

Stelios didn't get riled up by the god of knowledge. He knows that the know-it-all is trying to sow discord but for the sake of the important information that Helios has, he will keep his calm.

Except he doesn't know what happened to Helios. Helios didn't go with his team so Stelios couldn't spy on him without his priests around. But he can't tell the gods that or they will start suspecting Helios of being unique. He gave them an excuse for his lack of information.

"He was shrouded by the divine power of the hidden god when he entered the ant mound so I don't know what happened to him. I haven't spoken to him. Let us all meet him and hear what he has to say about what he experienced."

That surprised them. What Stelios said made it seem like the hidden god had targeted him. Apparently the hidden god had gotten his attention on Helios as soon as killed a royal guard. That feat wasn't considered much back then but it has become special in light of recent events.

None of the demigods killed a royal guard. They still didn't kill one as a group when all 85 of them fought 3 royal guards at the entrance of the ant mound. The son of the sun god managed to do something none of them could do. He had been shrouded from view right from the start and still, he escaped. They found it to be an impressive performance on Helios's part and want to know what happened in full. They prefer a live feed of the situation but they will have to do with his report.

Helios's POV.

Helios took the long way into the ant mound. His blazing figure streaked through the air. He knew which entrances are supposed to be unguarded. His aim is a particular one that is out of the way and won't be easily noticed. He found it and descended. Then he entered the large entrance and continued to his objective within the ant mound.

He was swarmed with ants as soon as he entered. They were so packed tightly like a living wall of ants. He didn't panic. He activated another set of runes on his body. The divine power of his core flowed into his body and activated the runes.

He said, "Let there be light."

A golden sphere appeared around him. It expanded into an area 10 meters away from him. Every ant that crossed the boundary of the golden ring turned to ashes. Then he continued pushing his way through the ant blockade.

The golden ring is his domain. A mana entity should have an innate domain but giants of order don't have normal ones. Instead of a domain that helps a mana entity to perceive, control, or communicate with mana better, giants of order have a domain that negates the activity of mana. Thanks to divine power, they are able to acquire special domains through the help of Stigmata and runes.

While priests sort for that divine power from Gods, he looked into his own divine core for his own source of divine power. It might be weak compared to priests but having a superior knowledge of runes and a large supply of mana to his core has made his domain more powerful than those of priests.

It needed complete harmonization with his core but he has already achieved that the first year after his birth. That achievement is old news to him. If not for the law fragments in his body, he would have already achieved harmonization with the world.

"I wonder how the strike team is doing?" He asked himself.

An image of them pushing the royal guards past the opening of the entrance and down the tunnel of the ant mound appeared in his mind. It is the current development of the strike team.

"All of them and they can't take care of three royal guards. Either these demigods are too weak or the royal guards are stronger than I estimated." He shook his head in pity.

He knows that the royal guards are stronger than normal. He also knows that they are pretending to be weak in their fight with the demigods. If the demigods are strong enough, they should be able to actually threaten the lives of the royal guards which will make them show their full power to protect themselves. But since there is no danger to their lives, the royal guards will continue to pretend and draw the demigods in towards the trap that they have planned at the first intersection.

"And they are older than me too."

It's not the demigods' fault for their poor performance. Most of them are less than 200 years old. Even the ones that can harness the divine power in their core like Tanya are only average among giants of orders that are mana entities. Meanwhile the priest of the church of the sun that is more than 1000 years old couldn't match him.

Chapter 348 Meet Number 1.

Helios is an outlier when it comes to strength because of his strong body and the runes he carved on his body to take advantage of that strength. It makes him much stronger than his real age. His rune alone makes it such that only ancient giants that have reached 100 meters tall can hope to match him.

He didn't lie to Stelios about what his rune does. The runes use his divine power but what they use it for is why they are special. He took rune-making to the next step. Giants of order can take advantage of the law fragments to create items. It also means that giants of order can modify their divine ability. This in turn means that giants of order can have any divine ability as long as they have divine power that allows for it. Yet, they are limiting themselves to weapons.

He cruised unstoppable through the tunnels turning here and there without getting lost. He doesn't know everything about the tunnels but he has knowledge about the general location of where his aim should be. He didn't get this knowledge from the giants of order or their maps.

His speed is fast but the turning makes him slow occasionally so it took a while to get to his target. He found someone waiting for him at the last turn he should take to reach his target. This entity does not look friendly.

A royal guard is waiting in the center of the intersection. This royal guard is about 70 meters tall, more than two times taller than Helios. It is so wide and big that another royal guard cannot share a tunnel with it. Just its legs are almost taller than Helios.

'This is unexpected. We knew it was hiding something from us. Who would have thought it would be this one and here of all places.'

Number 1 spoke, "What are you?"

Helios slowed down. Then he tried to control his landing but he failed. He smashed into the ground 50 meters away from the royal guard.

"Gotta fix that." He muttered as he stood back up.

He is able to accelerate pretty quickly in his child of the sun mode by manipulating his gravitational field but deceleration is a problem for him. He can't control his speed when he is flying, that's why he doesn't

want to use it in a fight except for short bursts. He might just run headfirst into something which is the kind of mistake that dooms you in a fight.

"Don't mind me. I'm just looking around. I'm just an innocent guest." Helios answered leisurely.

He even made a show of looking around as if he really came here for sightseeing.

"You're not welcome here." Number 1 said while informing the ant queen about Helios's position.

Helios ignored the hostility and asked, "What is your name?"

He had to crane his neck to look up at the ant but he doesn't feel fear. He already knows the royal guard's name he just wants to him say it.

The royal guard answered proudly. "I am number 1. The best royal guard under the service of the queen."

"I bet you didn't use to be number 1. What happened to the previous number 1?" Helios asked as he examined the royal guard.

"That's none of your business." Number 1 shot at him.

"Actually it is, that's why I am here. To free the others. Just let me go and we can behave as if we didn't see each other."

He estimates the royal guard to be at the top of the strongest among mana entities. It will take a lot of time and effort to take him down without killing it. Legion has decided it is in their best interest not to kill this royal guard.

Helios would like to achieve his objective quickly so that he can get away from here early enough. It is already difficult if he can't kill this obstacle and he still has to leave the ant mound before the ant colony

is done with the demigods or he would have the entire royal guards on him. So it will be great if the royal guard will let him go. That is why he trying for diplomacy.

The royal guard went silent as it contemplated what to do. It stood there as a giant ant while Helios looked like a bright golden torch. The soldiers and workers ants left the tunnels for them creating an open space for them. Helios is optimistic about the answer the royal guard will give him. He didn't expect to be allowed but the fact that the royal guard is considering it means it is likely to work.

Number 1 finally answered. "I can't. That will be defying the orders of the queen. You will have to get past me and I have to put in my best in stopping you."

"Well so much for sympathy. Let's do this quickly then."

This royal guard is ancient. It is not the oldest royal guard in the ant colony just the oldest in the current service of the ant queen but it is still old. Its carapace is thicker and it is stronger plus there are protective coverings around the joints that will prevent Helios from taking advantage of its weakness.

The tunnel is also too small for him to maneuver enough to take full advantage of the joints even if there were no protection for them. All of these means the fight will be challenging more than his previous one. It also means it will be more exciting.

He smashed his fist together in anticipation. By the time they met, they have been covered with golden gauntlets. The gauntlets are constructs of light but they created a loud sound of clashing metals as they collided. More pieces of armor continued to appear around his body until he is fully covered. Then two pairs of golden arms formed beside him.

He transformed into a golden armored giant 33 meters tall with 6 arms. Shining white runes can be seen moving on the armor pieces. The armor covers his entire body. Even his face has been covered leaving only his eyes and his flaming hair. Only two of his arms are really. The other four aren't attached to his body. They are floating beside him with one above and the other one below his real arm.

This transformation is very powerful. It consumes a lot of energy and shouldn't activate for more than 10 seconds because of the natural pool of divine power in his sun core. That's why he made the runes capable of using divine power and mana to make good use of his uninterrupted supply of mana.

He began running toward the royal guard. The royal guard dashed to him too. It lowered its head and put its horn forward. Helios grabbed the horn that has been prepped like a lance for him to impale himself on. The horn has sharp edges that are used for cutting and slicing but his gauntlet protects his hands.

The royal guard shook its head to get him off and Helios almost lost his hold on the horn. The smooth surface of the horn makes it difficult to grip and it is made extra difficult by the swinging of the royal guard. So he directed his other four arms to help him. The four arms floating beside him gripped the horns tightly and helped to secure his hold.

"You're really worthy of being number 1. You certainly have the strength." He commented in admiration.

All six of his arms are holding on to the horn while the royal guard buckled, but no matter how much it resisted it couldn't get away. That didn't stop it from pushing Helios back though. It couldn't move Helios side to side or up and down. So it began to push Helios back. Its six legs found purchase against the ground and propelled it forward despite Helios's resistance.

Helios's two feet created two gullies in the ground as he is being pushed back. This is the first time he has met a mana entity that can match him in strength and even more. He can't deny that number 1 is much stronger than him. Strength is not his forte anyway. His runes are what give him his advantage.

He expanded his domain and pumped more divine power into it to damage the ant. The golden sphere around him spread out 20 meters away from him. It extended past its long horn and covered the whole head of the royal guard. Then the domain set out to do brutal work.

The situation turned from a giant trying to compete with a royal guard in strength into a small star trying to compete with a royal guard in strength. The first situation is a bad idea for the giant while the second is a bad idea for the royal guard because anything that comes near a star gets burned. It gets worse if the royal has his head within the star.

Chapter 349 Two Can Play At This Game.

The royal guard increased its efforts in subduing its opponent and is rewarded for it. The ground began to heat up and melt making it easier for Helios to be pushed back but it came at a cost. Its eyes and the other delicate organs in its head suffered each moment the deadlock continues. Helios held on no matter the struggle of the royal guard. He has already confirmed that the diamond carapace can resist almost all types of damage except for heat from light and fire.

Number 1 began to try other methods to get rid of Helios. Its large mandibles increased the frenzy of their snapping but they couldn't reach its target. Its horns were created for long reach but have become a disadvantage to it. Then it extended its first two front limbs to scratch at Helios. It resisted the pain it felt when they entered the domain and used the blades on them to cut at Helios's body.

The blades cut harmlessly against his armor making sparks fly. They couldn't get past his defense.

Helios said to number 1. "Give up. You tried your best."

It might be stronger than Helios but it can't use its strength properly. It will die as the domain continues to burn it and Helios doesn't want to kill it. It is not his mission.

Number 1 sighed and answered. "I can't give up. And I haven't tried my best."

It detached its horn after saying so. Helios was caught off guard. He had been resisting the full strength of the giant ant through the horn but all that strength suddenly disappeared. He stumbled forward with the loose horn tightly held in his hands. He would have been able to stop himself quickly by redirecting his momentum so he wouldn't fall down but he couldn't stop himself from leaning forward for now. The royal guard had its mandibles wide open for him in welcome. Those diamond cutters are rumored to be able to cut anything. He is not looking forward to testing the validity of that rumor.

'I didn't see that coming.' Helios thought to himself.

It was unexpected but he didn't panic. He did three things at the same time. First, he calmly made two artificial arms to perform the light resonance shift. Those two arms phased out and suddenly appeared in front of him. They gripped the two mandibles and held them apart while he got his balance.

As it has been stated earlier, the royal guard is more powerful than him. The golden arms were crushed a split second later. It is enough time for the two other arms to finish the transformation he was doing with them while the first two tried to keep the mandibles away from him.

Two hammers smashed down on the ant's head. The hammers are weaker than what he used to smash Number 11 but they are easier to make and they succeeded in their current mission unlike the previous

failure to kill Number 11. The force of the smash lowered the mandibles and allowed Helios to use the horn in his hands to knock aside the mandibles. He regained his balance and jumped back.

"I didn't know that you could do that." He said as he watched the ant warily.

Another two pairs of golden arms formed beside him with the destruction of the previous ones.

The debut release occurred at N-ov3l=B(j)n.

Number 1 replied. "It is possible if I am desperate. I was desperate."

Helios had to admit. "This has changed things."

"Yes, it has. You are no match for me and there's no horn to keep you away from me. One snap of my mandibles and I'll maim you."

"That won't happen. I am desperate too."

The sun stigmata on his back lit up. He began to glow brighter and taller. His height increased from 33 meters to 45 meters. He got stronger and so did his golden armor. He didn't want to use the Stigmata unless he absolutely needs to but he is desperate too.

"Second round I suppose. Unless you give up." He said to the giant ant.

The royal guard eyed him before stating stubbornly. "This has changed nothing."

The two of them rushed forward again.

The royal guard prepped its mandibles like giant shears while Helios prepped the detached horn like a club. His attack reached the ant first. The horn is longer than the mandibles. The addition of his arm makes him have a longer reach. The thick end of the horn slammed down on the head of the ant. It was dazed a little but it continued to try and maim Helios.

Helios's two artificial arms grabbed the mandibles and used them to pull the ant forward but sideways. He has enough strength now with the use of his stigmata. Plus he isn't pushing the ant back. He is actually assisting it in its forward momentum. So he succeeded in destabilizing the ant, just a little. The ant lurched to the left of Helios. It missed him and lunged past him.

It couldn't turn because Helios's artificial arms held it back and it wasn't able to resist as Helios rammed his real shoulders against the side of the ant slamming it against the wall. He tried to use the horn to break the relatively thin limbs in but failed as the ant freed itself. It turned its head and snapped at Helios with those deadly mandibles.

The diamond cutters were only able to reach a few centimeters away from his head because he stopped them. Helios's artificial arms appeared beside him. Two of them took turns punching the head of the ant and smashing it against the wall. The other two pinned the ant down by its thorax while Helios wielded the horn like a sword and pierced the thorax of the ant. He pushed the sharp horn through the carapace past the thorax and into the wall. The ant struggled throughout it all but it is an endeavour in futility.

Chapter 350 Retired Royal Guards.

"That's done." Helios sighed in relief after successfully pinning the giant ant to the wall with its own horn.

It is a difficult thing to incapacitate a strong foe instead of killing them when it will be much easier to kill them. The ant calmed down after realizing it couldn't get out easily.

"That should hold you down. If you're desperate enough, you can push yourself against the wall but the horn won't go out gently. It will rip a giant hole in your thorax. I doubt you can survive that. Even if survive it, you will not be strong enough to stop me anymore. Are you desperate to stop me?" He asked the royal guard.

He is still pinning the ant down with four arms. If the ant refuses then he will kill it. He already tried his best not to kill it. He doesn't have much time on his hands to spare.

Number 1 replied, "I am not that desperate. I have done the best I can do without endangering my life."

"That's good."

He took away his hands and stepped away carefully.

Number one said to him. "Tell them that I am sorry."

"You tell them yourself when you see them," Helios said as he turned away.

Then he picked up speed. He is running out of time. He knows that the demigods have run into the ambush prepared for them. He won't have much time to create trouble. Reinforcements are sure to be coming too.

He found his target. It is a giant open cavern with no worker or soldier ant in sight. The only giant ants here are the moldy royal guards.

"Or should I call them former royal guards?" He shouted but they didn't move.

The cavern is filled with these former royal guards that are sleeping. Their minds and body have been frozen by the fungi growing on their bodies. It is what they get for their disobedience to the queen.

Royal guards are created from mutant grubs that were fed the flesh of giants. The very first royal guard is always difficult to make, but once one has been made, it becomes easier to make others. That royal guard will be able to hunt giants and supply the colony with the flesh needed to create more. But nothing about managing royal guards is simple, easy, and cheap. Apart from the amount of giant flesh needed for them to evolve and feed, there is also the problem of insubordination.

Royal guards aren't like mindless workers and soldiers ants. They have a mind of their own and it is intelligent. It makes it difficult for the queen to control them. They won't risk their lives to obey the queen even when they are under her control. It gets worse when they decided that they've had enough. The debut release occurred at N-ov3l=B(j)n.

So the queen created a sabotage protocol to control the royal guards. The protocol is a fungus that she implants into the body of the royal guards. She engineered the fungus specifically to target royal guards so it is very potent. The fungus is implanted when the royal guards are still young without a diamond carapace to protect them.

The fungus will attach its hyphae to the nerves of the royal guards and grow with them. This forms a connection between their minds to the queen through their nerves. It will allow the queen to have a strong hold on their mind. The fungi can easily go out of control, but the preventive method is a regular visit to the queen to have the fungi culled.

This necessity completed the doom of the colony. The presence of royal guards led to the creation of larger entrances and tunnels. Those giant tunnels don't need to reach the queen and endanger her, but the queen's control method of the royal guards necessitates that they come to her regularly for the fungi to be kept under control. If the royal guards can reach her, the giants can too. This created direct access to the queen for threats to reach her and sometimes the danger to the queen isn't worth it.

"All this for power. So unlucky." He commented as he began working on freeing the royal guards.

This is what he meant when he said the existence of the royal guards endangered their queen. The risk the queen is taking is understandable. Everything will be worth it too if the ant queen breakthroughs to transcendence. But the gods of the plane have been known to crack down heavily on transcendents of other races. If a race can't have transcendents, they can't have gods and they will never amount to much in the plane. This ensures that the supremacy of giants of Order remains uncontested.

Since the queen isn't transcendent, she has a limit on her control of the royal guards. They are mana entities just like she is. It is only because of her position in the hierarchy that she can control them and even that is very difficult. Sometimes, they become willful even with the fungus in them and decide to be independent.

The ant queen loses control of the willful ones. They get independence for a while before the fungus goes out of control and freezes their nerves because they don't go to the queen to update her control. They know that going to the queen to cull the fungus means they will remain under her control.

It's not like the queen likes what she is doing either. The royal guards want independence and she wants power to gather enough resources to become a transcendent. The giants of Order are in total control of the plane so the queen needs a group of ants that can fight them. It is the natural order of the world made manifest by competition and survival of the fittest.

"This should do it." He said as he created a ball of fire.

Fire burns a lot of things and one of those things that are especially susceptible to flames is fungi.