

## Shota 281

### Chapter 281 Meeting Nobles (3)

I just calmly sipped on my coffee since I knew that the ones that would truly suffer were these nobles in front of me.

By maintaining this silence, I would be able to slowly pressure them until they finally gave a response.

In the end, it was the balding middle aged man who spoke first by saying, "It is not convenient to say who I represent, but you can be assured in knowing that it is someone of high status. If you're ever troubled, they will certainly be able to provide you with assistance."

The way that he said this with a smile on his face would make one think that he was being amicable, but I could hear the slight threatening tone in his voice.

"My master is someone powerful, you should submit."

That was the hidden message of these words.

But of course, I didn't feel any threat since I had plenty of information.

After all, neither of the princes had kept their hands clean during this time. There were skeletons in the closets of both of these princes, so if they were to be accidentally released...

Of course, unless they came for me, I had no reason to do anything to them.

The muscular man knitted his brows after hearing what the balding middle aged man said.

Then he cleared his throat and said in a firm voice, "I cannot reveal who I work for either, but I can guarantee that they are a righteous and powerful person. They will help you with anything that you might find yourself troubled with."

This time, there was no underlying message, but the contents were about the same.

Though, there was a much friendlier tone to this content this time.

At the very least, there was no threat if I didn't choose to go with them. That is as long as I didn't go to their enemy's side.

After they said this, both the muscular man and the balding middle aged man looked at each other with narrowed eyes.

With the way that they stared at each other, one could almost see the sparks flying through the air.

But I just calmly took a sip of my coffee before saying, "Then is there a point coming to see me today? I have just arrived in the capital and I have no plans to leave that soon, so there's plenty of other chances to meet again in the future. If you wish to meet me again, please send an invitation."

This wasn't so much as a question, but rather a simple statement that was meant to send them on their way.

Both the muscular man and the balding middle aged man knitted their brows again, but in the end, their expressions relaxed and they began excusing themselves.

But before leaving the balding middle aged man took something out of his chest pocket and placed it on the table. As he stood to leave, he looked at me with a smile and said, "This is a small gift for Baron Zwein to celebrate our first meeting."

Though his body was positioned to leave, he didn't move as he watched me.

Before I could do anything though, the muscular man also took something out of his chest pocket and placed it on the table. In a calm voice, he simply said, "A present." I think you should take a look at

He too turned to leave, but it was clear that he was also waiting for my reaction to this.

I just calmly took another sip of my coffee before reaching out to take both of these gifts. After bringing them over, I said with a smile, "Please thank the ones behind you for these gifts."

Both the balding middle aged man and the muscular man gave a nod in response to this.

With one last glare at each other, they turned and headed off in separate directions.

When the other nobles around us saw this, they thought that it was their chance. There were a few of them that started standing up, as if they were about to come over to our table.

But before they could do that, I also stood up and started heading out of the restaurant.

Seeing this, all of the nobles could only watch me leave with bitter smiles on their faces..

After all, I had already sent off those two that had a higher status than them...so how likely would it be that I would talk to them?

At the very least, they had gotten some information that they could report back with, so they wouldn't waste any time in reporting back to their masters.

It seemed that the capital was about to become much busier.

...

When we sat down in the carriage, Scar suddenly asked, "Was it alright to take their gifts?"

He didn't ask about any other part of that since he had been quite impressed by how I had handled those two.

He knew the identities of those two, so he knew that they weren't easy to handle.

The balding middle aged man was Count Westwood, one of the ministers in the department of revenue. Since he was trusted with the revenue of the kingdom, it could be seen that he had an important role in the kingdom.

The muscular man was Earl Reiner, the head knight of the Flame Knights, one of the four knight orders of the kingdom.

Both of them were powerful people in this kingdom, so they definitely weren't easy to deal with.

When I heard this, I just gave a simple nod and said, "Since they are gifts, there is no reason not to accept them. Not to mention, I accepted them both for a reason. It should send a proper message to the others watching."

Scar was confused at first, but when he thought about it, he understood what I meant and he looked at me with an impressed look.

But I didn't mind this as I simply asked, "Where are we going right now? Or rather, who are we about to meet?"

Chapter 282 Secret Tunnel

Scar revealed a bitter smile as he said, "I can't hide anything from you, can I?"

I just looked at him with the same narrowed eyes that were filled with doubt.

Scar gave a sigh and said, "We're going to report into headquarters. We're going to see all of our bosses."

The moment that I heard this, I couldn't help knitting my brows.

The Shadow Garden headquarters, I did know that it was in the capital, but I never knew exactly where it was since I had never been a part of this organization before. Then again, this organization had already been destroyed in the game, so most people wouldn't be able to join it in the first place.

Then I asked, "Weren't we going to see the king? Why are we taking this detour?"

Scar revealed a bitter smile and said, "You think that we can meet the king whenever we want? The king is a busy person."

I also revealed a bitter smile when I heard this.

I was still in the game mindset where NPCs were available whenever I needed them. After all, there was no concept of waiting in the game world unless a NPC was unavailable because of some kind of quest or scenario.

But this wasn't the game world and an actual world based on the game.

They were no longer NPCs and they were able to move based on their own lives, so it wasn't as if the king would be waiting for me to come visit him.

The king was a busy person, there was no doubt of that just based on the fact that he was a king alone.

A king was the person that ruled over this kingdom, so there would be many things for him to do during the day.

So I just gave a simple nod in response to this.

Scar then said with a sigh, "We'll be seeing the commander and reporting to him. You'll need to tell him everything that happened in Bright Water City, so are you ready?"

I gave another simple nod in response to this.

I had figured that this would be the case, though I was expecting to report to the king. So I had already prepared everything that I would need to say and prepared for every question that I thought I would be asked.

No matter what happened, I was certain that I was prepared.

Scar didn't say anything after this and just gave a sigh as he looked out the window.

The look on his face really made it seem like he was exhausted by all of this.

The carriage didn't have to travel long before we arrived at our destination...which was the castle in the center of the capital.

I couldn't help being surprised when I saw this, but Scar explained, "The Shadow Garden is an organization that reports directly to the king, so naturally we would be based on the castle."

There was a part of me that thought, "Since we're here at the castle, why not just meet with the king as well." But I knew better than to say that out loud after seeing the look on Scar's face.

However, after arriving, we didn't head right into the castle. I think you should take a look at

Instead, we went to a small building outside of the castle that seemed to be some kind of old store. In a sense, it seemed like it was out of place with the rest of this street.

When we came in, there was someone at the counter that immediately glared at us.

Scar just calmly showed them the same token from before and the person behind the counter waved for us to follow before heading into the back.

Scar gave a nod to me and we followed this person deep into the back.

This person led us to a special room and waiting for us in that special room was a hatch. This hatch had a ladder that led us into some kind of basement, but it was too dark for me to see exactly what this place was.

That was until Scar suddenly lit a torch for us.

I saw that it was some kind of tunnel that was under the store.

Without a word, Scar moved forward and we could only follow since he had the only torch.

Based on the direction that this tunnel was heading in...it seemed like we were heading towards the castle.

But why would they do all of this?

One minute, Scar was saying that we reported directly to the king and the next, we were sneaking into the castle.

Scar saw the look on my face and said, "Well, we are secret agents in the end. We should enter the castle in secret, shouldn't we?"

I revealed a bitter smile.

If you wanted to be secretive, why would you enter through that place that was clearly some kind of secret entrance?

It was an old store that was out of place with that street, so it was clearly hiding something...

But I didn't say anything since I knew that I wouldn't get the answer that I wanted.

I knew that this most likely had something to do with the game.

I would even bet that there was a developer who had thought 'this would be cool' when he designed this!

But that made me even more depressed since these were all things that I had never discovered in the game.

It was clear that this was some kind of quest from the game and for me who had thought that I had unlocked everything, this was a large blow. I couldn't call myself a completionist anymore if it turned out that I hadn't finished every single quest.

After walking through the tunnel for a bit, we arrived at the castle as I had expected.

We arrived in a place that seemed to be an office, but there wasn't anyone that was inside.

The only thing that was in this room was a stuffed bunny that was sitting on the chair behind the desk.

Chapter 283 Boss Of My Boss

After seeing this stuffed bunny, Scar went in front of the desk and bowed to it.

Shaka only hesitated a bit before doing the same thing as him.



I was the only one that just stood there in a daze, not understanding what was happening.

Scar saw this, so he turned around and said, "This is our boss."

"Huh?" That was all I could say when I heard this.

I looked at the stuffed bunny in front of me before looking back at Scar, but I could see the serious look that was on his face.

It didn't seem like he was kidding about this...

But that just didn't make any sense at all...

After all, how could the stuffed bunny be the one that we were here to see.

This confused me until I heard a voice say, "So you're the one that I've been hearing about."

I looked around for the source of this voice, but it seemed like it was indeed coming from this stuffed bunny.

Seeing the way that I looked at it, the stuffed bunny gave a laugh before saying, "What's wrong? Are you disappointed with my appearance?"

Hearing this, I revealed an awkward smile before saying, "Not so much disappointed as confused why you're like this."

The same laugh rang out again before the stuffed bunny said, "Well it's an interesting story. Are you willing to listen to it?"

I didn't know what to say, but the stuffed bunny didn't mind as it started telling the story.

"Simply put, I am a person that likes making puppets. So I've been making puppets for a long time. But I've always wanted to take things further with my puppets, I've always wanted to give them life." The stuffed bunny stopped to give a sigh after saying this.

I couldn't help looking at the stuffed bunny with a strange look when I heard this.

After a pause, the stuffed bunny continued, "In my pursuit of this, I dived into many different books that contained many different kinds of . I tried all of these spells in an attempt to bring my creations to life, but in the end...the results were a bit different than what I had expected."

The stuffed bunny stood up to show off his body before saying, "As you can see, it isn't quite right."

Then after sitting down, the stuffed bunny continued, "In the end, what happened was that my soul was taken out of my body and it was put into this stuffed bunny that I was testing the spell on. My body is still there, but it's slumbering because my soul was extracted and put in this stuffed bunny."

I raised a brow and looked at the stuffed bunny, but I didn't doubt his words.

After all, I knew that this was a world that was filled with all kinds of different .

Something like this...was probably possible as well, even if it was very unlikely.

When the stuffed bunny saw that I didn't have any doubt as I looked at him, he couldn't help being surprised.

After all, of the few people that knew about this, most of them did reveal doubtful looks at first.

This was the first time that someone didn't doubt his story the first time that he told it to them. I think you should take a look at

He didn't know why, but he couldn't help feeling grateful to Zwein.

After a sigh, the stuffed bunny said, "In the end, I ended up with this body. However, at the very least, my daughter is happy about the fact that I ended up like this."

That was the point where I wasn't able to hold myself back as I said, "You have a daughter?"

The stuffed bunny looked at me with what seemed like a strange look before giving a nod and saying, "That's right, I have a daughter. What's wrong with that?"

I looked at the stuffed bunny with a very strange look as I said, "You have a daughter, really?"

The stuffed bunny couldn't help feeling a bit insulted as he said, "I was human, so why couldn't I have a daughter?"

I slowly nodded in agreement to this.

That's right, he had said in his story that he had been human before being turned into this stuffed animal...

But how could someone like him get a daughter?

After all, it was clear that he was obsessed with puppets since he had even managed to turn himself into a stuffed doll...

I had heard of people who were obsessed with dolls, I had even heard of people who were obsessed with 2-D waifus since I came from a world that had that kind of culture.

But in most cases, those people didn't have a significant other, let alone having children...

This really was a different world if someone like this could find a wife and have children.

The stuffed bunny narrowed his eyes to look at me before saying, "You just thought something insulting, didn't you?"

I jolted when I heard this before quickly saying, "No, no, definitely not."

The stuffed bunny kept glaring at me as if he could see through my thoughts, but then he gave a sigh and said, "Forget it, it's not the time to talk about that. For now, let's talk about what's important. Give me your report."

It was at that moment that I remembered that this stuffed bunny wasn't just anyone, he was also the boss of my boss, the head of Shadow Garden...

If someone like this could even become the head of Shadow Garden, it was no wonder this organization would fall later...

It was really amazing that it didn't fall even sooner...

The stuffed bunny seemed like he could see through my thoughts, so he glared at me once more.

Even though he was just a stuffed bunny, I could feel the pressure coming from him which pulled me out of my thoughts.

At the very least, he had the aura of a boss and could pressure his subordinates.

But as for the rest of him...

I could only say that it was a bit disappointing.

Chapter 284 New Information

After taking a deep breath to calm down, I gave the report that I had already prepared to the stuffed bunny.

As the stuffed bunny listened to this report, the only response that he gave was his expression changing from time to time.

Finally, when it was finished, he just sat there in silence as if he was lost in thought.

A long silence followed before he said, "So do you think that this is one separate incident or do you think that there's more connected to this?"

I couldn't help knitting my brows when I heard this.

It seemed like a simple question, but I couldn't help feeling that there was more to the question that met the eye.

It was almost as if...he already knew something that I didn't know.

So instead of giving an answer, I asked, "Do you think that there's other incidents related to this?"

The stuffed bunny didn't seem angry when he heard this and instead took out a folder from the table. He placed this folder in front of me, as if waiting for me to look through it.

I took it and started reading, but as I read through it, I couldn't help knitting my brows more and more.

As the top information organization in this kingdom, Shadow Garden received information from many different places. At the same time, all of these reports were very detailed because they were specialists in gathering information.

What was in the folder were reports from many different places.

These weren't exactly reports of demon encounters, but they were reports of strange things happening in the surrounding areas.

There were reports from places like cities which was to be expected, but there were also reports from towns and villages. As well as areas that were even more remote than these towns and villages.

It seemed that whatever was happening, it was much deeper than I had even thought.

I had played through the demon quest line as well in the game, so I had some ideas of how deep the demons had infiltrated, but I never thought that it was even deeper than I thought.

At the same time, something that caught my attention was that there were signs that the princes were involved in this matter.

It wasn't the first or second prince, but some of the younger princes were involved in this matter.

Based on what I could see, it was very likely that these princes had gotten involved with the demons for one reason...they were trying to use the influence of the demons to help them win the succession war.

They didn't have much hope of winning when competing with the first and second prince, so they had to turn to unconventional methods to help them win. They were planning on using the demons to give them an edge in this fight.

But it was clear that they were underestimating how powerful the demons were...

Not to mention, the fact that they had been colluding with the demons had already been noticed by Shadow Garden.

Shadow Garden was an organization that was under the king, so there was no doubt that the king also knew about this. It was only a matter of time before the king took action to suppress this.

So there was already no hope for the princes that were involved.

But there was something that was related to me here. I think you should take a look at

The princes that were involved with the demons were among the ones that had sent people to come and invite me to meet them.

Scar had told me who those other nobles sitting around us were and who they most likely served.

So this was an indirect warning from the stuffed bunny about what I should do.

I couldn't help revealing a grateful look when this thought passed through my mind.

Seeing the way that I looked at him, the stuffed bunny said, "It seems that you've finished reading. So what do you think?"

I gave a nod before saying with a calm look, "It seems like the situation is much more serious than I thought."

The stuffed bunny gave a nod before saying, "You're an unknown factor that has been thrown into this, so I want you to know to take care of yourself."

What he was talking about wasn't just the demon situation, but also the succession race.

It was clear that the succession battle was much more fierce than I had thought. The princes were even going as far as cooperating with the demons to try and get an advantage.

I was someone who was considered very important now because like Scar said, I was the only one who could communicate with the elves. If I went under one of the princes, one could be certain that they would have a large advantage in the succession race.

So my position...was very dangerous now.

I gave another nod before saying, "I will."

As I said this, even more gratitude appeared in my eyes.

Even if he was a stuffed bunny, he was a boss that took care of his subordinates...

Perhaps I had been wrong about him before...

It was just too bad that I immediately retracted this when I heard his next words.

"You'll be meeting with his majesty tomorrow." The stuffed bunny suddenly said.

"Huh?" All three of us were surprised to hear this.

After all, not a single one of us had expected the king to set up a meeting for us this soon...The king was supposed to be an important person and not someone that was so easy to meet.

The stuffed bunny just said with a shrug, "His majesty was very interested in meeting you, so there's nothing I can do about this."

I couldn't help revealing a bitter smile.

It seemed that I was thinking too much.

He didn't care about me, he just cared about how to present me to his majesty.



After all, if I caught his majesty's attention, the Shadow Garden organization would naturally benefit from it since I was a member of this organization.

#### Chapter 285 Royal Audience (1)

When I woke up the next morning, I took a moment to sit in bed and gather my thoughts.

After a moment of just sitting there, I let out a sigh.

That was because today was the day that I was getting a royal audience.

I had heard about this from the stuffed bunny yesterday.

Speaking of which, it was still hard to believe that the stuffed bunny was our boss...

When I was taught on how to address the stuffed bunny, he had told me vehemently to just call him boss like everyone else. However, when we were leaving, Scar told me that his unofficial codename was actually Boss Bunny.

I almost burst out in laughter when I heard that.

But to come back from that digression, when we had left, Boss Bunny had said that we should be careful at the royal audience tomorrow since it wouldn't just be the king that would be meeting us.

There would be several ministers and generals that would also be at the audience.

From what he had heard, they would bring up the topic of the elves while at this audience since they were the ones that were most affected by this.

They had many concerns regarding the elves that they wanted solved and the best person to solve these concerns was naturally the one who had contact with the elves. So it was certain that they would try to talk to me about this during the royal audience.

They would even try to use the pressure of his majesty to try to get me to go along with what they wanted.

But Boss Bunny wanted me to be careful about this since this would be in front of his majesty.

If I made a mistake, it wouldn't be bad just for me. If I made a mistake, this mistake would reflect on everyone that I was connected to.

That included the Shadow Garden organization and even Baroness Rose who was my wife.

For a baron like me, it would be easy for his majesty to take care of us...

So he wanted me to be careful.

But of course, I knew that he was mainly thinking about Shadow Garden.

Still, I wouldn't let anyone that was important to me be harmed because of this.

Thinking about it, I couldn't help giving a sigh again.

This kind of thing wasn't just in this world, even the world that I had come from had this kind of culture. Whoever had offended the emperor would always suffer heavy consequences.

It was like treading in front of a sleeping tiger when standing in front of a ruler.

I just hoped that I would be able to get through this without any harm.

After taking some time to gather myself, I went down to have my breakfast.

As I had expected, there were nobles that were already waiting there for us.

Some of these nobles were the same as the ones that I had seen yesterday and some of the ones that were here were new faces. The ones that were sitting at my table today were new faces that I hadn't seen before. I think you should take a look at

Before we sat down, Scar told me who they were.

They were nobles that were under the third and sixth prince.

When I heard this, I couldn't help giving a sigh of relief.

There was one prince that I didn't want to deal with, so as long as I didn't encounter the subordinates of that person, I didn't have anything to worry about. That was because once I got involved with that person...I would be pulled into a very tedious battle.

At the same time, I knew what that person's endgame was, so it was impossible for us to become friends.

This was all because of the knowledge that I had gained from the game.

These two nobles naturally tried to convince me to meet their masters, but they quickly backed down when I said that I would be having a royal audience today.

The moment that they heard this, they immediately left their gifts and excused themselves.

It seemed that everyone feared his majesty, it wasn't just me.

This was both a good sign and a bad sign.

The good part of it was that I could use the excuse of an audience with his majesty to avoid meeting the nobles. The bad part of it was that this meant that his majesty was someone that was worthy of being feared like this...

So would I be able to survive today?

Once we finished our meal, we headed to the royal palace.

Instead of taking the secret entrance, we went through the main entrance this time since this was an official royal audience.

After arriving at the palace, we were immediately welcomed by one of the butlers of the palace.

When Shaka and Scar saw this person, they couldn't help being surprised.

Seeing the inquisitive look that I had on my face, Scar explained, "This person is Sebastien, the head butler of the castle." Then in a lower voice, he said, "He is someone who has been with his majesty since his majesty was the crown prince and is said to be one of the people closest to him. He is not someone that one can look down on."

I couldn't help looking carefully at this butler called Sebastien.

He was the perfect example of a butler.

This was an old man who still had a sharp look in his eyes even if his hair was graying. He stood tall and straight in his butler uniform, without a single bit of slouching, showing that he was a powerful man.

He was definitely not someone that could be looked down on.

Since someone like him was even sent to greet us, just how much importance did his majesty put on this matter?

Or was it because of something else that he sent someone as important as this to greet us?

I couldn't help feeling that this matter definitely wasn't as simple as it seemed.

#### Chapter 286 Royal Audience (2)

Though we were greeted by Sebastien, we weren't brought into the throne room right away.

Instead, we were brought to a waiting room where we were told to rest for a bit before the royal audience.

This did make sense since it wasn't as if someone as important as the king would be waiting for us to arrive for the audience. It should be us who should wait until the king is free to give us this audience.

So we sat down, but relaxing was the last thing that was on our mind.

We were fully tense and focused, as if we were about to head to a battlefield.

Though in a sense, this royal audience was somewhat like heading to the battlefield.

As we were adjusting, there was a sudden knock on the door that caught us off guard.

Sebastien was still in the room with us, though he didn't do anything to serve us. It was almost as if he was just standing here watching over us to make sure that we didn't run.

But when he heard that knock, he went over to the door to open it to see who it was.

When he saw who it was, he couldn't help being surprised.

We didn't see who it was since Sebastien was standing in front of the door, but we did hear how he addressed the other side.

"Your highness, what are you doing here?" Sebastien said in a calm voice, but there was a hint of caution in his voice as well.

A voice from outside said, "It's just a simple visit. I'm sure that my royal father won't mind. I'm just here to give some advice to the ones that he's about to meet."

There was a moment of silence that followed this, but in the end, Sebastien said with a sigh, "Just a moment, you can't stay for long since the royal audience will be happening soon."

With a creak, the door opened and the person outside was allowed in.

When we saw who the person coming in was, we all revealed different expressions.

Scar and Shaka revealed surprised looks, but nothing further.

But I deeply knitted my brows when I saw this person.

After all, this was a person that had played a big part in the noble quest line. This was the person that could be considered the most dangerous person in the capital and now I was meeting him...

This wasn't a good thing.

This person came over and sat down in front of us before looking at me to say, "It's an honour to meet you. I've long heard of your fame, but it really has been hard to arrange a meeting. So I had no choice but to sneak here to get a bit of your time."

The way that he said this made him seem like a very friendly person, but I could tell that he was anything but friendly...

After all, I knew that this man was the final boss of the noble quest line.

He was the person who had gathered more power than both the first and second princes.

While the first and second princes had gathered supporters among the ministers and generals, the number of people that backed them was less than half of all the ministers and generals. The king naturally knew what kind of tricks these princes were playing, so he had moved to suppress them.

There were many ministers and generals that were still loyal to the king and would follow his will if he ever chooses a successor.

Or at least that was what it seemed on the surface.

There was also a neutral faction of nobles that didn't take any sides in this power struggle.

But in truth, most of those that were loyal to the king and those that were in the neutral faction were actually under the fourth prince.

The fourth prince was very sly and had used many secret ways to grab the handles of these people. There were some that he blackmailed, some that he swayed to his side, and some that he even threatened to fall under him.

So even if the fourth prince seemed like a friendly person, he was actually a very cruel, sly, and vindictive person.

He was definitely not someone that I wanted to get entangled with.

But since the fourth prince came all the way to see me, it wasn't as if I could just ignore him.

So I cupped my hands and gave a bow before saying, "Your highness is overpraising me. I am not worthy of such praise."

The fourth prince revealed a gentle smile as he said, "No, no, you're underestimating yourself too much. You are someone that I would very much like to befriend."

While others might see a friendly smile, what I saw was the demon hidden within the fourth prince.

I knew his true personality, so I knew that this was just one of my faces that the fourth prince could show.

But being his friend...that was the last thing I wanted. After all, there was nothing to gain from being attached to the fourth prince.

So I cupped my hands and gave another bow before saying, "Your highness, I am not worthy of such an honour. I am just a lowly servant of the crown, not someone that can become your highness' friend."

The fourth prince narrowed his eyes when he heard this, but he didn't show any signs of being offended.

Instead, he revealed an even wider smile as he said, "Sir Zwein is underestimating himself too much. You are someone much more important than you think, which is why I would very much like to have you as a friend."

I trembled when I heard this, but I forced myself to stay calm.

With an internal sigh, I said, "It would be an honour to be your friend, your highness."

The fourth prince gave a nod before saying with a smile, "It's an honour to be your friend from now on."

Chapter 287 Royal Audience (3)

Friend...

What a fake term that was.

In short, what the fourth prince did just now was threaten me.



After all, he had said 'I would very much like to have you as a friend'. But if one put it in different words, it would be 'I would rather have you as a friend than an enemy'.

When he put it in such clear words, it was impossible for me to refuse him anymore.

But even if I did become friends with the fourth prince, as long as he lost interest in me, then that would be that. So I would try to keep myself as lowkey as possible so that he wouldn't want to include me in any of his plans.

Not to mention, that was my intention in the first place.

After this trip to the capital, I would just hide myself in my town.

To my surprise though, the fourth prince didn't go any further than this.

After he said that it was an honour for him to be my friend, he suddenly stood up and said, "I have some other matters to take care of, so I'll be leaving first. If there is another chance, I hope that we will be able to talk again."

I said with a nod, "It's been an honour meeting you, your highness. I hope that there will be another chance as well."

But in truth...what I was really thinking was, "Get lost you monster! I hope that I never see you again!"

Of course, I would never say that out loud.

The fourth prince gave a nod to Sebastien as he walked out which immediately tipped me off.

I had already found it strange that Sebastien would let him in in the first place, but this confirmed it. It seemed that Sebastien had already fallen under the fourth prince and was supporting him.

This was an important piece of information, especially with what Scar had told me about Sebastien.

But I didn't remember this from the game...

No, there was a member of the fourth prince's group whose identity had never been exposed.

It was the man of shadows, the one that controlled his espionage group...

Even in the game, that person never revealed themselves and only hid in the shadows. By the end of the quest line, I heard that this person disappeared, so there was no further mention of this.

If this person was Sebastien, was he truly working for the fourth prince or...was he still working for the king?

It seemed that I needed to pay more attention to this butler known as Sebastien...

But for now, that wasn't what was important.

The more urgent matter was to adjust myself to meet the king.

Right after the fourth prince left, there was someone that knocked on the door again. However, this time, the knock was very particular, so it was clear that they had a reason for being here.

When Sebastien heard this, he didn't even wait to ask who it was before opening the door. He just opened the door directly before saying, "It's time, his majesty is ready for you."

When we heard this, we didn't waste any time in standing up and following him out.

After all, there was nothing to gain from keeping his majesty waiting.

The king could keep us waiting, but we couldn't keep the king waiting, that was just how it was.

After walking for a bit, we were brought to the throne room.

As for how we knew it was the throne room, the door was more than enough to give it away.

What other room would have this kind of luxurious door?

It could only be the throne room.

Before entering, Sebastien had us wait outside as he went in to introduce us.

After the introduction, the other butler that had come to pick us up waved his hand for us to go in.

The moment that we entered, I could feel the pressure that came from inside.

This was the pressure that came from the weight of having to take care of an entire nation, so it wasn't a weak pressure.

As for the one that it came from, it was naturally the king of this nation.

This was the man sitting on the throne in front of us.

Without any hesitation, we stopped and fell to one knee as we lowered our heads.

In unison, we said, "We greet your majesty."

Scar had already instructed me on what to do, so I didn't miss a beat as I mimicked the other two as they went to kneel.

We didn't look up, so we couldn't see him, but I did hear a soft sound of acknowledgement before he said, "Rise."

With that, the three of us stood up again and I was able to see the king.

The appearance of this king was not a disappointing one.

This was an appearance fitting of the one that ruled this nation.

He wasn't young, but he wasn't that old either. He was a middle aged man, but his eyes were much sharper than a man his age should have. It was like he could see through one's soul just with a single glance.

This was the look that a man known as the wise king should have.

As for the rest of the king's appearance, he was a middle aged man that exuded dignity.

After we stood up, the king said, "I think you all know why we're here, so let's hear your report."

Scar and Shaka both looked at me, so I took a step forward and began telling him the story.

During this, the king just silently listened to me.

There wasn't even a single reaction on his face that made me feel a bit nervous, but I still continued my story.

When I finished, the king just gave a single nod before stroking his chin as if he was deep in thought.

Since he didn't say a single word, no one else here said a single word and the room fell to silence.

#### Chapter 288 Royal Audience (4)

The silence was very awkward and suffocating.

It wouldn't have been as suffocating if it was a different situation, but in this formal situation with no one talking, it was clear that everyone was suffering.

At the very least, I used this time to look at the people that were standing on the sides.

Based on the clothes that they wore, it was clear that they were ministers and generals that had been called for this royal audience as well. However, there wasn't a single one that I recognized, so it could be said that these ministers and generals weren't as important.

No, I suddenly remembered something.

The noble quest line was something that happened several years in the future, so by then, most of these ministers and generals had been replaced by their successors.

So the reason why I didn't recognize them was because this was the older generation.

The ones that I would recognize were still currently working as junior ministers and commanders in the army. They wouldn't make their way up to their positions until several years in the future.

So while I didn't recognize these people, that didn't mean that they weren't important.

I should at the very least try to remember these faces.

But before I could do that, the king suddenly said, "You did a good job."

It was just a simple sentence, but there was a heavy meaning behind it. Praise for the king wasn't lightly given, so receiving praise could be considered something very rare.

All three of us were caught off guard by this when we heard it.

Even the ministers and generals couldn't help feeling a bit caught off guard when they heard this.

It had been a long time since they had heard this kind of praise from his majesty.

Once again, there was silence that followed after the king gave this praise, but I quickly reacted and said, "Your majesty, your praise is too much. I and my comrades were just doing what was required of us. It was really Bright Water City's City Lord that handled the situation."

In my heart, I silently apologized to the duke, but...I really didn't want this credit.

The king narrowed his eyes before saying, "You're underestimating yourself too much. I've heard that it's not just this incident, but several other incidents that you've proven yourself to the kingdom."

I opened my mouth, but words failed to come out as I didn't know how to respond to this.

In the end, I could only give a nod and say, "Thank you, your majesty."

The king just gave a simple nod in response to this, almost seeming like he was closing this matter.

When I saw this, I let out a secret sigh of relief.

It seemed that this matter would end without much trouble. Now the only thing that I had to deal with was...

There was a silence that followed after the king's nod, but that wasn't because there wasn't anyone that had something to say. Rather, the ministers and generals looked like they all had something that they wanted to say.

The only reason they were hesitating was because they wanted to make sure that the king didn't have anything else that he wanted to say.

So there was a long silence that followed after this.

Then one of the ministers suddenly came forward with his mouth open, preparing to say something.

It was just too bad that the king suddenly said, "Since you have performed this kind of merit to the kingdom, naturally you should be rewarded. We have already prepared a reward for you, so step forward." I think you should take a look at

When they heard this, everyone in the room couldn't help revealing a shocked look.

The one that was most shocked was naturally me since I had never heard anything about this.

But since the king had already spoken, what could I do?

I had no choice but to take a few steps forward until I was in front of the throne and then I kneeled down in front of it, waiting to receive this reward that the king mentioned.

The king also stood up after saying this and walked forward until he was standing in front of me.

He nodded at one of his subordinates to the side and it didn't take long before two people came forward.

One of them was holding a sword that was clearly a ceremonial sword while the other had a pillow in his hand that had a scroll on it. Both of them came right up beside the king and then kneeled down before him.

The king took the ceremonial sword before nodding at the one carrying the scroll.

That person stood up and took the scroll off the pillow before putting the pillow under his arm. Then he unrolled the scroll and read, "For his merits to the kingdom, Baron Zwein will hereby receive the hereditary title of viscount. In addition, he will receive additional land near his current territory, as well as funding to support him in developing his new territory."

After he finished reading the scroll, the servant put it back on the pillow and presented it not to the king, but rather to me.

But I couldn't react to this at all since all I could feel was shock from what I had heard.

It wasn't just me who was shocked at hearing this, everyone else in the room was shocked by this sudden reward that his majesty gave.

After all, it was just too much!

This wasn't just a normal noble title, it was a hereditary noble title!

There was a large difference between a hereditary noble title and a normal noble title.

A normal noble title would be something that was only given to the person who had earned that title. That person's spouse and children wouldn't have the right to inherit it unless they performed merits of their own.

When that person died, that title would be revoked and returned to the crown.



This was a method of ensuring that there were no useless nobles that were draining the resources from the kingdom.

But it was different when it came to hereditary titles.

Hereditary titles were passed on regardless of merits, it would remain in the family forever. This was the kind of title that Baron Mordo had and he had only obtained it because of the merits of his ancestors back in the founding of this country.

Of course, back then, his ancestors had received the title of count and not just baron. He had been reduced to baron after generations of not contributing to the kingdom.

This kind of title was not something that was given that easily.

It was normally only given to those that had greatly contributed to the country, such as those that had helped found the country, or those that were greatly favoured by the king. That way, their family would remain in his service for many generations.

No matter how they looked at it, it didn't seem like Zwein was deserving of this title even if he had saved Bright Water City from disaster.

So that was why everyone was shocked to hear this.

But of course, no one was more shocked than me.

Chapter 289 Royal Audience (5)

I really wanted to look up and see what expression was on the king's face, but I knew that I couldn't do that in this situation.

After all, this was a formal ceremony and before it ended, I couldn't look up.

In fact, since this was a formal ceremony, I had no choice but to accept this title even though I really didn't want to.

If I were to reject this title in this public place, it would be like slapping the king's face and that was the last thing that I wanted to do.

So I had to say, "Thank you, your majesty for this grace."

The king gave a simple nod after hearing this before lifting the ceremonial sword in his hand.

He lifted this sword up and placed it on my shoulder before saying, "Baron Zwein, do you swear to uphold the laws of this kingdom and protect its people for as long as you shall live?"

"Yes." I said in a simple and firm voice.

The king tapped the sword on both of my shoulders before saying, "Then by my rights as the ruler of this kingdom, I grant the title of a hereditary viscount to you. At the same time, I grant you the right to bear a coat of arms."

When these words were said, there were even more shocked looks that appeared.

That was because the right to bear a coat of arms was not as simple as it seemed.

A coat of arms was a symbol that would represent a noble family, but that wasn't all that it was.

With noble titles came the right to gather forces, recruiting soldiers and guards to serve under the noble. However, there was a limit to how many troops one could recruit since the king wouldn't want nobles having too much power.

Nobles that had too much power were prone to think about betrayal.

So nobles that were given too much power would often lead to coups which the king wanted to avoid.

To limit their power, nobles could only recruit a certain amount of troops.

If they ever tried to recruit more, they would be punished.

A light punishment was a fine and a severe punishment would be having their title stripped, as well as having their entire family executed. All of this depended on the mood of the ruler.

So no noble dared to break this law.

But a coat of arms was a way around that.

Having a coat of arms was the only requirement needed to form an order of knights.

As long as one had the money, they would be able to recruit as many troops as they wanted into this order of knights. So this was one of the few ways that a noble would be allowed to recruit as many troops as they wanted.

However, a coat of arms was not something that could be given lightly. I think you should take a look at

Only to nobles that the king trusted could a coat of arms be given, otherwise who knew if the noble would rebel against the king.

So everyone was shocked when they heard that this Baron Zwein was being given a coat of arms. After all, in their eyes, this Baron Zwein was nothing more than a young upstart who no one knew anything about.

Even if he did a few things that could be considered beneficial to the kingdom, that was far from enough to be granted something like this.

After all, there was no knowing what kind of attitude he had towards the current royal family.

If he had his ambitions...then this was like feeding a hungry lion.

One day, it would come to bite the king in the butt.

But of course, not a single one of the ministers or generals dared to say anything here. This was a public ceremony after all and if they undermined the king's authority here, it would be equal to cutting off their future path.

So they would find a chance to talk to the king in private about this matter later.

I had no choice in this matter since the king had already made the declaration. The only thing that I could do now was graciously accept this title and coat of arms.

However, I too knew what being granted a coat of arms meant, so I knew that I had just been handed a hot potato.

With a bitter smile on my face, I tried to keep my voice as calm as possible as I said, "Your majesty, thank you for this grace."

There was a silence that followed before a soft 'un' sound rang out to acknowledge this.

Then the pair of feet in front of me turned around as the king walked back to his throne and sat down once more.

After he sat down, there was another silence that followed as everyone waited to see what the king would do this time. The last time, he suddenly pulled out this viscount title and this coat of arms, so they had no idea what he would do now.

However, the king just sat there without saying a word.

Since he had left, I was finally able to peek upwards at the king's face.

As I looked at his face, I tried to find anything on his expression that would give me a clue as to what he truly wanted. However, no matter how I tried to read the king, I wasn't able to find a single thing from his face..

It was as if it was an iron vault that locked up all of its secrets.

As expected of a ruler that had reigned over this kingdom for so long.

He was not an easy nut to crack.

After a long silence, the king finally said, "It seems that today's matters are concluded. Let's end this audience here then."

But before the king could make another move, one of the ministers suddenly said, "Your majesty, if I may, there's something that I want to bring up."

Chapter 290 Royal Audience (6)

When the king heard this, he narrowed his eyes to look at the minister who had spoken.

This minister was the current head of the foreign affairs department, Marquis Bloom.

When Marquis Bloom felt the king's eyes glaring at him, he couldn't help feeling a chill run down his spine. This pressure was so much that he even wanted to take a few steps and shrink his neck back.

However, he knew that he couldn't show any weakness at this point.

So Marquis Bloom just stood firm even under the pressure of the king.

Everyone looked at Marquis Bloom with looks of pity.

After all, they knew that he would be sacrificed for what they all wanted. The person that spoke first would naturally soak up the rage of the king for being interrupted like this, making it easier for the others to speak.

But no matter what, even if it meant enraging the king, they had to say something.

After all, there was something that this Baron Zwein...no, it was Viscount Zwein now...There was something that this Viscount Zwein had that they wanted.

But to their surprise, the king just gave a nod and said, "Say what you want."

Marquis Bloom couldn't help revealing a surprised look when he heard this since he was already expecting to be chewed out by the king for his sudden outburst.

Still, since he had received permission from the king, Marquis Bloom didn't waste any time in asking, "Viscount Zwein, I've heard rumours that you've been able to befriend an elven village. Can you confirm if that is true?"

When I heard this, I wasn't surprised at all since I had already expected this to happen.

I just calmly looked at Marquis Bloom who asked this question and said, "That's correct. I've been able to build a friendship with the elves that live in my territory and in my territory alone."

Marquis Bloom knitted his brows, especially at the latter half of my words since I was making something very clear to him with those words. But still, Marquis Bloom gave a cough to clear his throat before saying, "Then could it be said that you have a way of contacting the elves? As well as the ability to negotiate with them over matters?"

I could guess what he was going to ask, but to establish my position, I just simply gave a nod.

At this, the eyes of all of the ministers and generals lit up.

Once again, I wasn't surprised by this since Scar had already made it clear how important this connection to the elves was.

So I could already guess what they were planning on asking next.

Marquis Bloom said in a slow voice, "If it is possible, can you connect our foreign affairs department to the elves?"

I just narrowed my eyes to look at Marquis Bloom after this. I think you should take a look at

Marquis Bloom couldn't help feeling a bit of pressure coming from me, even though he couldn't understand why he was feeling this pressure from someone like me.

Marquis Bloom gave a cough to calm himself down before explaining, "You should know that it's not just your territory, but there are other territories that have elves in them. They just take up our land and keep to themselves, so it's hard for us to deal with them. Who knows if..."

Before he could finish, I suddenly said, "People like you will never gain the friendship of the elves."

When Marquis Bloom heard this, his face twisted before he asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"People that only care about material gains like you will never be able to connect with the elves." I said in a calm voice.

When they heard this, it wasn't just Marquis Bloom whose face twisted. The faces of the other ministers and generals twisted to varying degrees.

The room fell into a deathly silence after this was said.

But Marquis Bloom didn't allow this to bother him for long as he said, "Then since only you are capable of communicating with the elves, would you mind coming to our foreign affairs department? You should know that this is a matter of national security, so we would be grateful for any help that you could give us."

Since he couldn't communicate with the elves himself, he chose to get the next best thing...the only person that could communicate with the elves.

As long as he could control this person, it would be simple for him to manipulate the matters with the elves.

After he said this, Marquis Bloom then turned to the king and said, "Your majesty, I would like to make a formal request for Viscount Zwein to join the foreign affairs department. With his help, I'm certain that we will be able to create a working relationship with the elves."

His words sounded righteous, but it was clear that he was trying to pull me into the foreign affairs department that he was in charge of.

Once I was there, it would be easy for Marquis Bloom to use his influence to force me to do things for him.

He even tried to use the influence of the king to make this happen by making that request.

But before anyone else could respond, Scar said, "I would like to remind Marquis Bloom that Viscount Zwein is a member of our Shadow Garden. At the same time, I would like to point out that Viscount Zwein is currently on a mission for our organization, so he has no free time to spare for this matter."

After Marquis Bloom heard this, he deeply knitted his brows.



But he wasn't suppressed as he said, "I'm sure that Shadow Garden can spare one of its members at a time like this. After all, this is a matter that involves national security, so it should be more important than any other mission that you currently have."

Scar was about to open his mouth to refute this, but there was another voice that cut him off.

The king said in a stern voice, "Enough."