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Chapter 431: The Mad Witch [Pt 1]

"Thank you for your efforts, Lu. You may leave us be."

The Fairy seemed like he wanted to protest, but he changed his mind midway and simply nodded.

Lu glided away from us, smiling like an idiot, most likely because he received words of praise from the woman he liked.

'I know how you feel, buddy. It's too bad she'll never look at you that way.' I almost felt bad for the dude.

After all, I knew the one Jane Ursula loved more than anything in the world.

—Magic!

According to her, I came second—though the gap was too wide to be called a competition.

Compared to such a grand cause that Jane was obsessed with ever since I had known her—no, even before—someone like Lu never stood a chance.

I almost let out a chortle as I smiled at her and she did the same to me.

Instantly, we understood one another. Even without speaking, our emotions were strong enough to reach each other.

There was no need for such a concept as words between two best friends.

Silence enveloped the room, and we once again locked eyes, ignoring everyone else around us.

'I'm back, Jane. I've missed you more than you know!'

"Jaaaaannnnneeeeeee!!!" Someone from our group lunged at the Fairy's desk, banging it with all her energy.

"W-whoah... Lemi, is that you? You're here? Hold on, that makes sense. Wait, your body... it's been healed! How is this..."

It appeared Jane was very well acquainted with Lemi indeed. Knowing the kind of personality she had, I didn't find it hard to believe.

Jane would have stayed close to Emilia and her family even after I was out of the picture. It made me wonder if she was aware that Emilia was pregnant before I died.

'I'll have to ask her.'

"Jared did it! He healed the Miasma Poisoning!"

"Oh? He did, uh?" Jane smiled in my direction.

From her expression, I could deduce the fact that she was giggling internally. She must have realized the kind of awkward situation I was in.

'Lemi is my daughter, but...'

It was too late for me to take up my role with the large gap in our age. Still, I was trying my hardest, wasn't I?

What I was actually curious about was the relationship Lemi had with Jane.

"Jared, why did the Que—I mean, President, call you Lewis? Does she mean Lewis Griffith?"

I looked beside me, watching Maria's curious gaze pierce me. It felt like those eyes could see past my facade.

Thankfully, that wasn't the case.

"No. She's probably just basking in nostalgia. She's called The Mad Witch, after all. Don't expect her to be mentally stable." I partially snickered when I said this.

"Hey! I heard that!" Jane sharply cut in, glaring in our direction.

"J-Jared, why would you annoy the President?"

Maria's hushed whispers contained hints of worry and surprise.

I was usually very courteous when addressing those in Authority. It was the only way to get what I wanted.

Since we were delegates in a strange land, it was expected that I would act cordially. But, I had caused quite the stir.

"You're being rude to Jane, Jared. Apologize." Lemi blurted out, looking at me and our group from the Fairy's desk.

"Shouldn't you be here with us? You came here as a delegate, not a friend."

"What's the matter? Jealous much?" This time it was Jane that attacked me.

Did she think I felt intimidated by her relationship with my daughter? Well... maybe I was a little bit.

'But, it's mostly because I don't want her to learn weird things from you!' I nearly blurted out, but held on to my self-control.

Jane would be a terrible influence on Lemi, and I could already see traces of the Fairy in my daughter.

'She isn't interested in Marriage. She has no one she's currently seeing. She stays holed up in her research. She sees everyone as test subjects. Ring a bell, Jane?' I narrowed my gaze at the President of The Fairy Sanctuary.

I never expected her to be the one, but it was a fortuitous turn of events.

"I would like to speak to your leader personally. The rest of you can go take a tour... or whatever."

'Your flippant attitudes to unimportant things haven't changed.' I smiled, turning to my comrades.

"You guys can go take the tour you've been asking for. I assume Lu is waiting for us beyond those doors. Just tell him where you want to go."

My group members were excited—enough so that they left without batting an eye.

"Will you be alright?" Maria asked, though, at least having the heart to care about me.

"I will."

"Okay then." And then, she too vanished with the others.

They opened the door and shut it behind them as they excitedly departed.

Freya turned to look at me one final time before leaving, but I pretended not to notice.

The only ones left were me, Jane, and the stubborn Lemi that refused to budge.

"You too, Lemi," I spoke sternly.

"No."

"Uh?"

"I'm not going anywhere. Since she said that the leader should wait behind, I choose to be the leader for the Elves."

"But, you're a Half-Elf, though. Besides, isn't Freya more suited for that role?"

"H-hey! Don't bring that up. I'm older than her, you know? Age means more experience."

"It sure doesn't look like it to me." I sneered, almost bursting out in laughter.

"Hey! What did you say?!"

"You heard me. Now scram!"

"Uwu... Jane, you see what I mean? He's so mean to me." The girl began pouring to the Fairy beside her.

Jane's fairy self was still on her small seat and slightly bigger desk.

"You guys are incorrigible. It almost feels like I'm watching you and Emilia argue."

"Ah..." Why didn't I notice it too? Still...

"Emilia wasn't as ano—"

"Oh, she was annoying. I keep telling you, love makes you see only what you want to see. I'm sure you only have an image of a kind, gentle woman whenever you think of that bitch."

As expected, even till now, Jane hadn't changed a single bit.

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Chapter 432: The Mad Witch[Pt 2]

"H-hey...!!!"

Yes, how could I forget? Jane and Emilia never got along well in my past life.

I didn't know exactly why, but it probably had something to do with me—as well as a conflict of interest.

They both wanted me to dedicate an unlimited amount of time to them—Emilia was my lover, and Jane was my best friend at the time.

I cherished them both, and found the time spent with both of them rewarding, in their respective ways

But, unlike me, they didn't seem to like the idea of sharing—causing bad blood between them.

"You still think she was purely a saint, don't you? But, she was nothing like that in reality. You didn't notice that because you're not a woman. I know these things, you know? I was the oldest among everyone back then..."

Lemi seemed lost in our conversation—how we were talking about her mother so brazenly.

I thought she would have protested when Jane called her mother a bitch, but Lemi didn't. It was probably due to the fact that she was simply confused about what we were saying.

"W-what's going on...?" She murmured.

'The advantage of using Fast Speech is tremendous.' I smiled.

"Okay, that's enough of that." Jane snapped at the young girl with her business-looking expression.

"I'll play with you later, Lemi. Go hang out with your other friends."

The Half-Elf began looking dejected the moment Jane spoke those words. Her sulking face looked at both of us.

"T-they're not my friends..." She also murmured.

"Yeah. Yeah. Now go. We'll catch up later, don't worry."

As a result, Lemi dragged herself out of the room.

>SLAM<

"Weren't you a bit hard on her?" I asked, watching how Jane didn't even soften her face when the girl gave one final glance behind before leaving.

"Na. She's old enough to handle toughness. Besides, that child needs to begin acknowledging people as friends. She won't properly develop that way."

'Look who's talking.' I nearly rolled my eyes as I simply smiled at the words.

"H-hey, you just thought about something very rude, didn't you?"

"Why don't you check for yourself? Oh, wait, your connection has weakened. Pfft."

"Y-you..." The Fairy gritted her teeth, causing me to laugh even more.

Still, I was very pleased with how she handled Lemi.

'Emilia and Aurora spoiled that child, but it seemed Jane is giving her tough love. I guess she's also sort of a good influence.'

In any case, I could already tell how close Jane and Lemi were. She was a mother figure, and also a close friend to my child.

"It appears I have yet another thing to be grateful to you for."

"Pssh. Do you suddenly realize that?" She tilted her round glasses, balancing them properly.

Seeing someone no taller than my fist doing that simply made me snicker slightly.

"You... at this point, I have nothing to say. Your daughter is a handful, but it's the least I could do for you." She shrugged, floating from her chair.

"Besides, with you out of the picture, Emilia and I sort of got along a bit. I suppose I felt bad that you jilted her so hard. We girls have to stick together since rogues like you exist." Jane shot me a disgusted look.

For a moment, I felt worse than dirt.

"H-hey! Isn't that simply too much? This is our first time meeting in centuries, you know?"

"And? I'm simply stating the truth. You haven't become allergic to that, have you?"

"N-no..." I murmured.

"Yeah. So, you should hear it. You were a jerk who abandoned that woman who loved you with everything. I mean, we didn't have the best relationship, but I know she loved you dearly. The sort of love you guys had was exceptional. For a while, I too felt... never mind." Jane sighed, drawing closer to me.

With every distance she covered, I felt even more aware of my guilty past. I truly made that grave mistake, didn't I?

"Bottom line is, you messed up. I had to handle your mess. Your child is brilliant—so I consider her as a keepsake from you too. I have dibs, so you're too late to claim her back now."

"H-hey, hold on... what?"

Was that the bottom line? This was the point she wanted to make? Why did she make me feel like shit, then?

"Yep. I have dibs on Lemi. Of course, if you convince me... we could share..." The Fairy smiled naughtily.

"You little—!" I growled, reaching out for her swiftly.

"Hehe. Too slow." She fluidly glided away from my reach.

"Tch. You... just how and why have you not changed?"

"Hahaha! What can I say? But really, you think I haven't changed at all?"

I sighed, staring at her intensely. Her mannerisms and naughty smile suggested she wanted me to notice something about her.

'Hmm. Her breasts are a bit larger, but Plas-gic Surgery is a trend here. I can't trust that...' My eyes narrowed a bit more.

That was when I finally noticed.

"Your wings. They're a shade duller than before. The colors aren't as sharp. They're also smaller."

"Bingo! Hehe!" She giggled, twisting in the air to show them off.

"How is that something to be proud of? It just shows how immature you are. Hold on... what the...?"

Jane let out a massive grin, staring at me with pride and secrecy.

"So, you've finally started thinking, uh?"

I noticed the same thing with Lu, but these guys had more immature wings than what I knew them for in the past.

Age was progressive, so how were they having Wings that should have belonged to a younger version of themselves?

I was able to give an excuse that Lu could have simply been a descendant of the one I knew—but judging from how he interacted with Jane, it was really him.

And then, even Jane had the same bizarre set of wings.

What the heck happened?

"Oh, my sweet Lewis! There's so much you don't know."

In the five hundred years that I wasn't present, just what had Jane been up to?

'What in blazes did she do?'

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Chapter 433: A Fairy's Grief

"I think this is the first time..." A voice softly permeated the Fairy's ears.

As she hovered in the air—above the clear floors, luxurious bed, and the one who was laid atop it—she could feel an overwhelming emotion overtake her.

"... The first time I've seen you cry." The soft voice contained hints of sadness, but his words were intended to tease her.

This Fairy was Jane Ursula. The being who was on his deathbed at that moment was none other than Lewis Griffith—her best friend.

His grey hair, shriveled body, and wrinkled face made him look like a stranger compared to the man she knew decades ago. Still, he was one and the same.

He had just grown old.

"I'm sorry, Jane. I truly wanted to explore more with you." He smiled.

Out of everyone who was supposed to come for Lewis' last moments, she was the first to arrive.

Due to the kind of man he was, several important people would be arriving. Still, Jane wanted to have her private moment with him.

Seeing Lewis like this, though, was too much for her little heart to bear.

"You... you idiot. Then don't die! Don't die!" She cried even more.

Jane was an oddball through and through, but she was also a tough cookie.

Nothing seemed to faze her except for Magic. Even when Dom—one of their comrades—had died decades ago, she wasn't particularly shaken.

Sure, she really respected him as a comrade, and they were also trustworthy friends. However, she still viewed his death as part of the inevitable cycle of life.

It couldn't be avoided.

But... why was this case different?

Her heart felt like it would burst—hurting beyond what she had the capacity to bear.

Jane was an expert on Soul Magic, so she could clearly tell that he didn't have much longer.

Even though Lewis was fortunate to have lived a full life—even knowing where and when he would die—Jane Ursula couldn't accept his death.

She just... couldn't!

"I... can't live past this point. You know that, Jane." Lewis said with a soft smile.

He was seeing such a delicate side of his friend. Watching the tiny fairy make cure expressions as she cried—Lewis felt like it was more than good enough for a farewell present.

Though... his heart was also pained. If it was only for the sake of his friend, he would have loved to live a bit longer.

But, they both knew the truth.

"I don't have Magic. There's no way to surpass my physical limitations."

One of the things the both of them worked together on was how to lengthen the lives of the Races that didn't have long spans of life.

Elves lived very long, the same as Fairies. In contrast, humans had short lives. The average lifespan ranged from 80-100 years.

For Beastfolk, it was even worse.

Dwarves lived a bit older, but ultimately, none of them could cross 150 years.

For Lewis Griffith, a regular human, to live to the ripe age of 120 years, he had indeed reached his apex.

There was nothing that could be done.

Even though he and Jane had worked on this project together—achieving a breakthrough—they realized that it could only apply to those who had Mana Cores.

By utilizing one's Mana Core as a secondary heart, as well as using the Mana within to strengthen the body, it was possible to lengthen a person's lifespan.

Lewis Griffith was inept. Such a principle didn't apply to him.

And so, his death approached at a fast rate.

"You know... if I were to use human terms, I've only known you for like....a month?" Jane said, slowly trying to cheer herself up.

Still, sobs escaped from her.

"You never did tell me your age," Lewis responded with a slight smile.

"And I never will!"

Fairies lived far longer than Elves did. Some lived beyond a thousand years and were referred to as Grand Fairies. I was certain Jane was among the longer-lived ones.

She never confirmed my suspicions, though.

"Even if I've known you for a short while—considering how long I've lived—I..." She stopped herself from saying any more.

Then, just as Lewis was about to tell her to proceed, the doors opened and more people entered.

That was the end of their conversation—at least, the ones that ears could hear.

But, Lewis heard a voice within his soul. It was soft and warm. The comfortable feeling that permeated his insides made him smile softly at her.

And she did the same.

What were the words he heard within him? Lewis Griffith could never forget them.

~I... liked you most of all—second only to Magic. You mean the most to me, Lewis!~

Even as he finally fell into eternal slumber, surrounded by those around him whom he loved and cherished more than anything else, the Great Sage never let go of those words.

They were the sum total of his relationship with her.

Fortunately, just before he died, he also responded.

~You were my best friend. I'm happy... that we were the Insane Duo. Have a full life, Jane.~

Then, death took the man.

The Soul Brand dissipated along with Lewis Griffith's soul, and he vanished beyond what Jane could sense.

That was their final farewell.

BUT—

"No! Not like this. Not ever again."

—The Mad Witch didn't forget the despairing feeling that assailed her that day!

And so, she trod a path that even dwarfed her other crazy endeavors of the past.

This was truly the path of insanity.

She dedicated her years to curing the source of her greatest grief. It was what every living creature desired, but none were able to achieve.

—Immortality!

Despite the impossibility, Jane never gave up. The voice of her best comrade was with her every step of the way.

"Magic makes the impossible possible."

Internalizing that principle, she pushed on.

And so, after nearly a century of such a tasking endeavor, the brilliant Jane Ursula finally arrived at the answer.

Body Swapping!

By creating an organic body through cutting-edge technology and intricate Mana, she was able to construct an exact replica of a Fairy's body.

And then... using her Soul Magic—alongside what she learned from The Hanged Man Arcana, she was able to transfer her Soul to a new, younger body.

As a result... she attained immortality!

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Chapter 434: The Soul Project

"I call it the Soul Project. I was eventually able to organize it on a large scale, implementing it as a public policy when I became President.

There were so many things I wanted to ask, but I was simply too astounded to speak.

Jane always had a knack for surprising me with her exceptional talents and borderline supernatural wits, but this trumped everything.

"I-incredible..."

"Hehehe. Impressed by my great feats, are you? Puehehe. That's right! Just as we once promised, I changed the world with my Magic—well, at least among my people."

According to Jane, she was able to initiate the whole process on a national scale.

She had capable subordinates working with her, so they constructed organic bodies for the Fairies who desired the same eternal life she possessed.

It became a public luxury, similar to how the Fairies utilized Plas-gic Surgery.

Of course, there was one particular step in the procedure that required her aid—the Soul Transfer.

By using Soul Branding on all the Fairies that consented to the procedure, Jane would surgically remove their Souls from their original bodies and place them into their new bodies.

That way, the Fairies could replace their old and dying bodies with new ones.

Rinse. Repeat

As a result, it produced a metropolis where no one had to fear death.

"But, weren't there people who resisted it? What was the reception rate?"

Certainly, Fairies were open-minded, but what of the other Races? There was a reason I had never heard of this Soul Project before meeting Jane.

Besides, even among her own people, there had to be people who didn't agree with the concept.

"A hundred percent! Everyone in this Republic has consented to the procedure. Some have even had their procedures done twice already."

"Eh? Really?" I was a bit surprised.

I was sure that at least a few would object.

"The only reason people accept death is because they have either fulfilled their purpose in life, or they do not have the power to change it." My friend explained.

Someone who had spent his life as a researcher could die in peace once his experiments finally bore fruit.

They would see their life's purpose as fulfilled and would see nothing wrong with leaving the realm of the living.

However...

"I designed this Republic with Policies geared toward multiple choices and career paths. The Fairies could spend an eternity and still not reach the limits of their achievements. This drives them to keep striving for more. Their desire to live burns even stronger than before."

I was taken by storm. Jane Ursula basically designed a system where people could love forever without boredom or lack of purpose.

Every single Fairy was recognized by her through the Soul Brand, and she was able to ensure smooth transitions of her citizens so that all of them kept going about their businesses.

"No one wants to die, Jared. At least, not if they can help it." Jane concluded with a soft smile.

"W-wow, Jane. You've... far exceeded my expectations."

"Hehe! Of course!" She puffed out her chest.

Jane's small size just made her posture look weird.

"Immortality, eh? Who would have thought..."

"It's not as grand as it seems. Besides, stubborn idiots like Gawain rejected the prospects."

Yep, I expected that from him.

According to Jane, after I died, she tried to convince Gawain not to give in to the same path.

Since he had a Mana Core, he could strengthen himself so he could live longer—pending the time she could unlock the secrets of immortality.

But...

"Na. I'll live and die as a human. There's no need for anything grand like being alive forever. Living a fleeting life is what living is all about."

... Gawain rejected that prospect.

Emilia was the same as well.

Dom died earlier than I did, and Ford also died before Jane could complete her experiment.

In essence, she was the last of my comrades that I had in the past.

"You know, I actually tried to conjure your Soul several times."

"Eh?" I was surprised by this new revelation.

"Yeah. Sigh, I was stupid back then. After attaining immortality, everyone that mattered to me was dead already. I felt awfully lonely, so I decided to try calling you back."

Jane told me how she resorted to so many things to bring me back—all in vain.

"Sigh, looking at you right in front of me, I have so many questions. A part of me wonders if one of those failed attempts actually triggered something."

"Hmm. That's impossible, though." I replied, rubbing my chin.

According to her, the last time she tried conjuring me was fifty years ago. I didn't even exist back then.

Plus, even she admitted that it was a failure. With no strong link to my Soul, or a portion of it, trying something like that was useless.

"Then... how are you here? It makes no sense. Your body, even though it has been enhanced, is purely human. How were you able to return? You look nothing like your past self too."

I smiled at the curious Fairy hovering around me as she observed every minute detail of my body.

"Your body isn't very mature too... especially down there. Hmm, looks smaller than last time."

"H-hey! Boundaries!" I covered my groin in reflex—though doing that didn't really change anything.

"Urgh, please. Do you know how long I've been staring at it? You think there's a point hiding it at this point?"

Jane had a nasty habit of undressing anyone she met with her Magic Item—the Glasses she wore.

During our first meeting, she burst out saying something like;

"Holy shit! You're big down there!"

It was so embarrassing, especially since I was directly beside Emilia and the other comrades I had made at the time.

I actually felt Emilia's gaze move downward at that point, but that was probably my imagination... right?

"You still haven't changed. Come on, Jane! Grow up."

"Can you blame me? Everyone is so small and predictable around here. I can't resist trying to explore new things." She narrowed her gaze as she giggled.

"Oh, stop that." I laughed in response.

"On a serious note, though... How are you here, Lewis?" Her face was close to mine at this point, almost touching my bare skin.

Her large eyes stared into mine, waiting for an answer—if only I had one.

"I... I don't know."

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Chapter 435: The Fairy's Revolution

I told Jane everything—up to the last detail.

The first thing I remembered when I awoke from my slumber in the darkness.

The assassin that came for my life, as well as the organization who wanted to eliminate me.

I told her about the Invasion of Kahn—even showing her his current status as one of my Familiars.

I explained how I returned to our base and trained there for three years—or more like a hundred—before returning to end the War.

"Ah, I did get an alert that someone entered the Base. But, since we wanted to hand it over to those belonging to the future generation, I decided to let it go." Jane retorted after hearing this.

Once I was done revealing everything, the Fairy sighed and collapsed on her sofa.

We were already in a lounge where—to my relief—there were Sofas big enough to sit on.

"And? The goal of those guys after you... is to gather the Arcanas, right? I'm surprised they already have so many already." Jane shared my sentiment.

It meant that the organization was just that formidable.

"Seeing as how they're the ones most likely behind this War, It's best to assume that they have even more power than we can comprehend," I added.

"And this whole Singularity stuff, it must have something to do with your Reincarnation. Oof, I've also never heard of it before. This is quite a peculiar case."

Regardless, that did not sully Jane's brilliant smile in the slightest.

No, it was actually the opposite.

"Hehehe! Finally, there's something fun we can crack together!" She giggled.

"I'm not sure I should be excited about this, though. I mean... these guys want to kill me, you know?"

"Bah! You can't die, not if I can help it!"

I smiled once my friend basically offered her full support.

"Thanks, Jane. I appreciate the help... and this seat as well. It's quite comfortable." I bounced on the sofa with a burst of laughter.

"I get visits from the Dwarves, Beastfolk, and the Elves. Of course, I'll have decent seats." Jane sighed in exasperation.

I could tell she just wanted to show off her achievements again.

Apparently, my Fairy friend had lots of connections with almost every nation. The Eastern Kingdom was simply an exception.

The Alliance she established was merely for business transactions, so she was receiving benefits from them and vice versa.

"There's nothing really beneficial in the Eastern Kingdom."

She wasn't completely wrong.

In terms of Technology, Dwarves were better.

In terms of power, Beastfolk were superior.

In terms of Magic Aptitude, Elves were better.

Humans were not the best in any department. So, in order to be efficient in her ventures, Jane excluded them from her partnership.

"How did things even turn out this way, though? I'm surprised by how much this King—sorry, Republic—has changed."

"Ah, that? It would have happened much earlier if not for that stupid geezer."

The geezer she was referring to was none other than The Fairy King.

"Ah, that idiotic misogynist! That self-centered bastard. That narcissistic excuse for a ruler! Urgh, just thinking about him makes me want to throw up."

The only person Jane disliked more than Emilia was the Fairy King—and for good reason.

Even I could not stop her from raining those hardly appropriate words on him.

Beruel wasn't exactly a bad guy, but his ideals and personality left much to be desired.

He had a close-minded personality, and his philosophy on certain things shaped the Fairy Kingdom into the way it was in the past.

For one, he was a misogynist. He believed women should be relegated to certain roles while men had the dominant positions in the Fairy Society.

The Escorts, Ushers, and Immigration Offers were all females—meant to woo visitors with their charms, or provide entertainment to the males.

Positions of power belonged to males as well. Even though competent people like Jane existed in the Fairy Kingdom, she was never the head of her department until much later.

This was all thanks to Beruel, the Fairy King.

He was also extremely self-centered and selfish.

The decision for an Alliance against the Demons at that time—even though it would affect his subjects greatly—was agreed upon only by Beruel once I was able to satisfy his personal desire.

He wanted certain blueprints and models to create a specific kind of golem... and I delivered.

I provided the answers to certain nerve reactions and movement patterns.

Once Beruel was pleased with this little gift, as well as others to come, he readily agreed to mobilize his troops for war.

While I was happy about his consent, I was also able to see just how much of a terrible monarch he was.

"Many Fairies died in that war—all participating because of that idiot's selfishness! He should have consulted us first!" Till date, Jane still held the death of a lot of her comrades against him.

After the war was over, Jane was able to secure certain rights for the female Fairies, so life was bearable.

Though she kept telling me how annoying the King could be anytime we spoke, I saw that she was fighting him off in her own way.

Even when I died—though the two were in my room as I drew my last breath—they were still at loggerheads.

"After I was done with my Soul Project, he tried to gain access to it forcefully. That was when I had enough of his annoying antics!" Jane was seething as she spoke.

According to her, she basically caused a rebellion within the Fairy Kingdom and organized a coup.

The Fairy King was dethroned within a week.

Even the males whom Beruel had supported so avidly, with the exception of the few who closely stuck to him, abandoned the Fairy King at that point.

Since he had an unstable and dissociative personality, he was banished from the Fairy Sanctuary along with his close supporters.

"I haven't seen or heard of him since, and I certainly don't hope to. I just hope he rots in a corner and dies off." Jane concluded.

But, I had to wonder if things could be as simple as that.

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Chapter 436: Harsh Resolve

Considering the fact that Beruel was quite a young Fairy when I knew him, he would still have quite a while to live.

Knowing his personality, it was unlikely that he would simply let the matter die down. It was a matter of his hurt pride, after all.

Beruel was an absolute king who lost everything. There was no way he would just let it all go.

That was why I was so surprised—as well as slightly worried—that he had gone completely off the grid.

"Why do you think I have an alliance with the Beastfolk? He dares not try anything with this place!"

I gulped and nodded instantly.

Jane was right. Even an idiot like Beruel knew not to mess with those guys.

'I'm probably just overthinking things again.' I smiled, shrugging his image off my mind.

"You've done well to plan so far ahead."

"Well, it's not like there's anyone else who'll do the job." She sighed.

"Ah, so that's why you're still President, even after so long?"

My Fairy Friend nodded vehemently.

"Elections are supposed to be held every century. Yet, every time the campaign holds, no one desires to compete with me, so I end up being the one chosen."

She couldn't also refuse the position since it gave her enough leverage to continue her research unhindered.

"I'm sure those lazy bums just want to go around their business while leaving everything to me," Jane yelled in frustration.

Despite this outburst, I could still tell that she liked her position as President.

"Well, President of the Fairy Sanctuary... shall we get down to business?" I said, now clasping my hands together and staring at Jane with a serious look.

"Oh? You mean the Demon threat? Sure, I'll help you with all my capacity, but if we're going to be involving my citizens, there'll have to be a Public Poll." Jane said.

Apparently, her people voted for certain policies and privileges. This society was run with them in mind—providing for their comfort.

"Even your help alone is much appreciated, but the truth is that... I want to use this War as an excuse to unify every Nation."

And so, I began my explanation of how beneficial it would be if we had a unified Alliance between every single Nation.

Not only would it be useful for my means, but each Kingdom or Republic could learn from each other.

As long we were able to operate on general interests, as well as a unifying factor, it was possible to create a United Front—even for the future.

"Hmm. I see your point. So, the Demons aren't even the main issue?"

I slightly smiled at her question, shaking my head slightly.

"No. They're not."

People needed a sense of danger and urgency, which was simply why I used this invasion as an excuse.

It was true that I needed to take care of the problem arising from them, but forming an Alliance wasn't exactly the only way.

"I see. I see. In any case, you've convinced me. You just need to convince everyone else. I'm sure you can do that." I nearly laughed as Jane gave me a sly look.

"Don't underestimate me."

We both giggled together, drowning our unease and concerns into the fun of enjoying each other's company.

However, just as I expected... the question dropped once again.

"Lewis, what do you plan on doing with the Demons?"

My laughter slowly died down, replaced by a somber look. From my expression, Jane should have guessed what I was going to say.

"You mean, you're..."

"Yes. I'm going to be wiping out every single Demon from this world."

She looked shocked—no, probably even appalled—by my intentions.

"Weren't you the one who sought another way during the last war?"

"Indeed. But look where that got us. No more... I've given enough mercy to them."

Besides, it was too late for their Race anyway. The Organization was using them as pawns, so their very existence was a card that my enemies could use against me.

To properly defend myself and leave no loose ends, it was best to eliminate them.

"... Completely?"

"Yes. I'm going to kill every single one of them."

Innocents would be dragged into this mess, but it was the path I had chosen.

"I've gotten a bigger perspective from the last time. Hatred breeds hatred. Even if we spare the innocents, they will jump at the opportunity to bare their fangs on the Alliance who devastated their Nation, and killed their people."

Desperation was a dangerous emotion. It was also very unpredictable.

'If the Organization uses their desperate emotion for vengeance... they could utilize them in multiple ways that would be troublesome to handle.'

"The most straightforward approach is to tackle the problem head-on and annihilate their people."

"W-whoah... you've really..." Jane was still recoiling from shock.

I knew she didn't exactly feel pity for the Demons. She was probably just concerned about me.

"I've chosen to cling tightly to those I care about. I will never let them go. As for those against me... I will decimate them without mercy."

So far, I was fortunate that none of them had used underhanded means to target my family. There were countermeasures put in place, but I didn't know how powerful my enemies were.

It was the right call to chip off much as I could from the enemy's pawns.

"What of your memory of Karlia? You'd really kill her people?"

For a moment, there was silence. Jane's question hung in the air, and I bit my lip, returning to memories of the past that I abandoned.

"They did all those horrible things to her... all the more reason why I should decimate them all. They aren't worth my mercy."

It was very selfish and hypocritical, but I had strengthened my resolve.

"I'm no longer going to second-guess. I won't hesitate too. I'll simply do what I need to do."

That was the path I had pondered on greatly before finally choosing to tread.

"I see. Well, I'll be supporting you in your endeavor, Lewis."

"Of course. Do you have a choice?"

"H-hey!" Jane squealed once more, causing me to laugh heartily.

She really was too cute.

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Chapter 437: The Grand Demon Assembly

>CLACK<

>CLACK<

>CLACK<

Footsteps echoed all over the vast hallway as a few individuals made their appearance.

They all had peculiar appearances, and their features were bizarre, monstrous, and downright malevolent.

As they walked from various locations, the six individuals gathered at a single location.

Right before them was a massive door that led to the Throne Room.

The six beings present knew just who sat beyond the doors, and they had reverent expressions.

Having absolute respect, as well as unquestionable loyalty, were the traits of every member here—at least, almost all of them.

"You may all enter." A deep voice surged from within.

Upon hearing this, they instantly proceeded into the vast hall.

From their distance, they could make out the magnificent image of Abellion as he sat on his throne.

The females among them were already drooling over his magnificence.

As he elegantly watched them enter, the Demon King's eyes seemed to burn into their very soul, causing them all to shudder.

The moment they stepped into the appropriate distance, all six Demon Lords bowed to their absolute ruler.

"Raise your heads..."

They responded instantly.

"... Zenkiel of Vert. Lydia of Blanc. Serci of Jaune. Lubick of Bleu. Kyron of Noir. Desgarion of Rouge."

As he called each other their names, the respective people shook even more. They did their best to stay composed before their master.

"You have all done well to appear before this Grand Assembly. Now, then, shall we begin?"

They bowed deeply and agreed with Abellion.

Zenkiel was anxious.

"Serci, tell me your reports. Your agents have been dispersed all over, right?"

His King, Abellion, was asking concerning the affairs of the Invasion—just as expected.

He had already questioned Serci, Kyron, and Lubick.

Zenkiel knew that it would soon be his turn.

'What do I say? How do I say it...?'

His plan had gone up in smoke, and he sacrificed valuable resources for nothing. Though he had a way to spring back from the slump he fell into, he feared that he wouldn't get the chance to say it.

"My King. Indeed, my agents have infiltrated several regions of the Eastern Kingdom. The land of the Elves is too rich in Mana, so we can't operate there. My agents disguise as birds and simply hover above the area for observation."

The plain white woman spoke, but her body still looked as blank as possible.

"And? What have you learned?"

"The humans possess certain individuals who are powerful, but they're only a few. They call them Grand Mages, and only one is currently present in the Kingdom. The second is currently away on a diplomatic mission, and the last one is currently missing."

Lydia proceeded to explain the level of power of most humans.

From what she described, an average Demon would find it no problem to kill average humans in their multitude.

If Magic or Martial Arts got involved, Demons supposedly on the same level as humans would emerge as the superior ones.

That meant the Demons were actually superior.

"While no one really has an exact idea of how powerful the Grand Mages are, if we equate them to Demon Lords, then that should be more than enough."

Even such an estimation seemed far-fetched, but Lydia was never one to underestimate her opponents.

She had survived so long donning multiple identities because of this very fact.

"Finally, one of the most concerning matters is a place called Ainzlark Academy."

Everyone looked at each other with particularly displeased expressions.

They were all aware of the story of Kahn's failure there, and how mere students were able to fight back against the Demons.

"While the students there are no threats to us whatsoever—the strong ones have graduated—the problem lies with the staff.

There are quite a number of exceptional lecturers there. Plus, the Headmaster..."

Lydia was worried about the one called Neron Kaelid.

Though she had never laid eyes on him in person, the words she heard about him made her feel like he was probably as impressive as a Grand Mage—especially after he had a match with yet another bizarre existence.

"There are too many uncertainties involved, but I stumbled across something that would definitely be used as a great card against us." As Lydia said this, she used Magic to project a blueprint of something.

Using her sight to capture anything or anyone, Blanc could use Light Magic to turn them into projections.

That way, she could show everyone what she saw.

It took a while for the Demon Lords, and even the Demon King, to completely decipher the drawing and labeling displayed.

"T-this is—!!!" They respectively gasped the moment they grasped the meaning.

Indeed, it was an unexpected sight, but the device drawn in the projected blueprint was something that caused even the Demon King to shake slightly in his throne.

"A destructive weapon, uh? They probably intend to use it against us in the War." Abellion growled.

"Yes. After investigating the staff within the Academy thoroughly—especially a particularly risky, but dexterous, man called Maro—I came across the blueprint."

Apparently, the humans were using Ainzlark Academy as a cover to create a machine with enough capacity to destroy tons of Demons in one fell swoop.

"What do you think, Lubick? Just what kind of damage could this device wreak?" For a moment, Abellion's gaze went to the blue-skinned Demon.

"Ah, forgive me for my ignorance, but... I do not know. But, that only means one thing..." The Demon Lord of Bleu hardened his face as he spoke.

"... That thing has an unlimited capacity. As long as an appropriate power source is placed in, it could translate the energy into a purely destructive force."

That meant the capabilities of the device were only equal to the power source used for it.

"We don't know what the humans want to utilize as its core, but such a weapon is still too dangerous," Abellion spoke.

He would not tolerate any form of threat to his people.

"We should storm the Academy to destroy the weapon—or better yet, retrieve it."

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Chapter 438: The Path Of War[Pt 1]

"We should storm the Academy to destroy the weapon—or better yet, capture it for ourselves."

This suggestion was brought about by none other than Serci, the meathead.

Abellion hadn't asked for her opinion, yet she impulsively spoke. This caused everyone to stare at her with annoyance.

Once she realized her thoughtless actions, the monstrous Demon Lord profusely apologized.

"That's all right." Abellion, the merciful Demon King forgave her on the spot.

"My King, if I may..." Lydia, the one who brought this report, decided to raise her hand.

"What is it? You have a suggestion?"

"Yes, my King. Rather than storming the Academy, I believe it would be best to act discreetly. I currently have no idea where the weapon currently is, but it's also possible that they may transport the weapon to another location while we invade."

Lydia's words were filled with sense, so all her colleagues listened with rapt attention.

"I believe I should continue my investigation—one that involves me alone."

The Demon Lord of Blanc proposed to be allowed autonomy in order to investigate the device. Her plan was impeccable, as usual.

"I see. So, what would happen if you eventually find it?"

Ultimately, they had to decide on what they would do to the weapon.

"I believe it's best if we destroy it. A weapon made by humans can not be trusted enough to bring to the Demon Realm. Besides, they probably designed it with the concept of Mana in mind."

Since Demons utilized Miasma, such a device would be useless to them.

There were other risks involved, so it was better to simply sabotage the device.

"We have enough forces to destroy them, so I believe we should simply cripple their attempts at resistance." That way, according to Lydia, victory was ultimately certain.

Abellion loved her idea, and decided to implement it.

As a Demon Lord, she had just raised herself on a higher pedestal. While her colleagues had also been trying their best, none could argue that Lydia's role had yielded the most.

"Then, operate with the utmost discretion, Lydia. Destroy the device as discreetly as possible. If possible, beyond recovery. It would be entertaining to see the look of despair on their faces when they realize that the weapon they are relying on for salvation ends up being destroyed."

As always, the Demon Lords were in awe of their great leader's words.

"Now, then, Zenkiel... it's your turn."

The Demon Lord of Vert quivered a bit, clearly uncomfortable as he stepped forward.

Lydia of Blanc had just given a flawless presentation of her use to the King, but Zenkiel—who was usually so charismatic—now appeared timid.

"I approved of your two-pronged attacks on the respective enemy nations. Kyron also mentioned that you took four thousand Demon Beasts as troops. How was the yield?"

Zenkiel gulped as he pictured the disappointed expression of his master once he told him of his failure.

"I-I apologize, my King. They were all wiped out easily. I was unable to gain even the littlest of Intel."

All the Demons in the great hall expressed immense surprise at what Zenkiel just uttered. Even though no Demon Lord would openly say it, they all knew that Zenkiel was the most capable of them.

For his plans to have gone up in smoke like that... was strange.

"Explain yourself, Zenkiel." Abellion's voice was calm.

It was that of a master trying to understand the failure of his subordinate. Zenkiel knew this well because he was the same to the members of his Nine Stars.

"My King, the Humans and Elves are too strong. Our original estimation of their power is too small. In fact, I currently do not have a full grasp concerning just what they are capable of."

Before any word could be spoken, Zenkiel used Magic to demonstrate his point.

Unlike Lydia, he could not utilize Projection through Light Magic. Still, Demons also had Magic Technology and Artifacts that were discovered during the previous war.

One of them allowed the recording and projection of certain occurrences.

Lubick and his team were able to replicate the item, making it capable of monitoring long distances.

One end would be the transmitter and the other served as a receiver.

Zenkiel brought four Receivers from thin air, using his Spatial Magic, and then activated them.

He displayed the footage of the four respective scenes simultaneously. This allowed everyone in the room to watch just how the battle had gone down.

Everyone was shocked beyond words.

From the strange swordsman in the mountains, to the crazy duo in the North, to the bombardment of the Elves with purely destructive power... and then the most bizarre.

"What the hell...?"

"Is that a Golem?"

"It's so big!"

"How does such a thing..."

The Demon Lords were initially puzzled by the size and design. However, after seeing what the construct was capable of, they fell into dead silence.

"A-as you can see... their capabilities exceed our expectations. In fact, I do not have a correct estimate of their strength."

Those who had limited strength were prone to hiding it. But, the fact that their enemies had shown such unrestrained power, it meant they still had reserve strength.

"I... see..." Even King Abellion was flustered.

Still, though, as the absolute leader of the people who were before him, The Demon King maintained his supreme aura.

"So, Zenkiel, what do you propose?"

"As for that, I discovered something after this failure of mine. The enemies have a brilliant strategist aiding them. That is why our efforts to ensure no Alliance could be formed went up in smoke."

The mastermind had countered the move of the Demons and utilized it to his advantage.

"He can see through our plans and counter them with a more sophisticated one. It is shameful for me to say, but based on what has happened so far, he is most likely more brilliant than I am."

Another barrage of gasps filled the grand hall. Zenkiel had the most experience and maturity among all the Demon Lords.

In terms of intelligence and strategy, he was unrivaled.

Yet, this great individual confessed that he was inferior to another.

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Chapter 439: The Path Of War [Pt 2]

"That is why... I have concluded that it is unwise to keep resorting to strategies and trickery. It would be a waste of time and effort."

That was the last thing anyone expected Zenkiel to say.

The Demon Lord who came before him was one who believed in impeccable planning and flawless strategy.

Zenkiel inherited his previous master's will, allowing him to be moderately cautious but also decisive in everything.

To have been capable of throwing aside the brilliant arts of war that his master entrusted to him was something no one saw coming.

But, the Demon Lord of Vert was no fool. His line of reasoning was completely justified.

"We should simply crush them with our numbers. That is the only way we can swiftly ensure victory."

The reason why the Demons had chosen to resort to strategies was so they could retain a good number of their forces, even after engaging in warfare with the Humans and Elves.

After all, the Fairies, Therianthropes, and Dwarves were still enemies to extinguish. However, with the current state of affairs, it was simply better to go all-out on the enemy.

"I realize that we do not have enough battle strength to challenge both continents—especially given their level of power—which is why I propose dealing with one Kingdom first, then proceeding to the next."

That way, victory was guaranteed, and the Demons would also have another stronghold to utilize.

"I seem You make a fair argument. Indeed, from the fact that the humans are capable of making such a devastating weapon—as Lydia said—as well as the sights we have all witnessed, it's safe to say that they have been hiding their strengths." Abellion spoke in a low undertone.

What didn't make sense was why they decided to reveal their hand. Wouldn't it have been better if the Demons underestimated them?

"Apparently, the mastermind in question also foresaw that I would make this move. He made preparations to checkmate me in this affair." Zenkiel stated, causing everyone to dread the existence of the person whom their respectable Demon Lord spoke of.

"Just how many steps can he think ahead? I have no idea..."

Not many could detect it, but the likes of Lydia instantly noticed traces of admiration in Zenkiel's tone.

He had something akin to a deep respect for the enemy who was smart enough to surpass him.

"Hmm. That puts us in a tight condition. But, how do you know this, Zenkiel?"

The Demon Lord smiled in relief, happy that he had come out of the thick forest of despair. If he played his cards right now, he could redeem himself.

"A member of the Cult is among the Delegates sent for the Alliance. In essence, he is on the same team as the mastermind."

"What? Really?"

"Yes. He was the one who brought me the intel. Apparently, he deciphered our moves and is also planning another one to checkmate us."

"What's the identity of that member?" Abellion rubbed his chin more intensity at this point.

"His name is Damien Lawcroft, Tenth Seat of the Cult. He was born and bred in the Eastern Kingdom, and he is an integral part of the Nobility there. So far, he had avoided all forms of suspicion, and also has the full support and trust of the Crown Prince."

Abellion nodded slightly, satisfied by the conditions the man fulfilled.

"I was a bit skeptical that such a mastermind wouldn't have discovered the existence of a mole on his team, but the man's portfolio protects him from suspicion."

Besides, the mastermind must have also been more focused on the threat of the Demon Invasion that he wasn't completely searching for moles.

'It's at times like this that a person relies most on comrades. I understand that he'll be more focused on the external than the internal...' Abellion gave a thought as he smiled wryly.

"So, this member told you of his plans, right?"

"Yes, my King. He knew we would be concentrating our Forces on a single Kingdom first. He also guessed rightly that I would choose to attack the Elves first."

The level of reasoning behind the Mastermind's logic and introspection was enough to make Zenkiel wonder if the opponent could read his mind.

"I see. While I don't like owning the Cult favors, they've done us a great favor for this piece of Intel." The Demon King murmured.

"Indeed. This turns the tables around for good. If we utilize the assumption made by their Alliance to our favor, we should be able to catch them off guard."

The other Demon Lords joined their Ruler to nod in agreement to Zenkiel's sublime words.

"We will attack the Eastern Kingdom first, then... and we will decimate their continent beyond recovery." Abellion smiled wickedly.

And so, while the Allied enemies would be expecting an attack on the Elf Kingdom, concentrating their Forces on that end of the world, the Demon Horde would catch them completely off guard.

'Perfect.' Abellion's mind sparked with excitement.

"How long will it take for our army to be mobilized for the Eastern Kingdom?"

His words contained resolve, as well as a malevolent urge to tear down an entire civilization.

"I-if we consider the distance between their continent and our Army Base, it'll take longer than usual. I'd say six days." Zenkiel murmured.

It had been four days since the first invasion on the respective Borders of their enemies began.

Within Six days, if they mobilized their army and rallied for battle, it would be ten days. While it was awfully short for a war, considering the last one lasted for years, Abellion preferred things this way.

"We'll crush the Humans first... and then we will also decimate the Elves."

"I also heard that he's planning on involving the Fairies, Beastfolk, and Dwarves into the Alliance. Knowing him, it's possible that he might succeed."

Abellion growled when he heard this. It would be bad if all the forces of the world were to descend upon the Demons.

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Chapter 440: The Path Of War [Pt 3]

"Damien Lawcroft, our eyes and ears there, can not make any conspicuous moves, but... he'll keep us updated from time to time."

Once Abellion heard this, he was at least assured of a flow of information.

The Mastermind was more resourceful than he expected.

The Demons currently had the advantage when it came to the number of soldiers at their disposal.

However, that could change depending on whether or not the Alliance succeeded.

"Good. We'll be counting on him..." The Demon King spoke half-heartedly.

Ultimately, what they had to do hadn't changed.

'We'll just destroy them before they have a chance to rally together!'

Lydia would take down their device, tearing them apart from within, and then the Demon Forces would strike en masse.

Once they decimated the Human Kingdom, they would corrupt the whole area with Miasma, making it their second stronghold.

There were four major continents in the world, so if the Demons gained possession of two, then it would be much easier to strike the other Nations.

'It's perfect!' Abellion could already see victory within reach.

Still, something nudged at him.

It could have been curiosity or slight worry, but Abellion could not let go of the impression that was upon him.

"Zenkiel, do you know the name of this Mastermind?"

"Yes, my King!" The loyal Demon Lord responded instantly.

He had been shocked when he heard of his identity from Damien Lawcroft, so Zenkiel knew quite well that everyone would soon burst out in surprise.

"His name is Jared Leonard, a 15-Year-Old Noble from the Eastern Kingdom."

"WHAT?!" Surprised gasps filled the massive hall.

The Demon Lords were beyond dumbfounded that a mere child was able to outsmart their most brilliant strategist.

It was unbelievable, but Zenkiel wouldn't dare spout lies to the Demon King. That meant he was telling the truth.

Everyone stared at their absolute ruler, only to find his eyes bulging in shock. This expression seemed to exceed that of mere surprise. He seemed to be overcome with anger.

"T-this is..." Gritting teeth were displayed by the King, and his hands pressed on the throne quite tightly.

Yes, he was definitely upset.

'Legris Damien, that bastard!' Abellion's thoughts snapped.

He remembered when his human 'friend' told him not to harm a particular individual among the humans.

He should have researched the person, but Abellion simply let it go.

To think that the same human he was told to spare was the root source of their problems. Abellion also realized that Legris must have also been aware of the human's capabilities.

'So, this is how he wants to act, uh...?' Abellion realized that the man's actions had no bearing with the Cult they were partnered with.

After all, Legris had asked him for the favor outside official business.

Still, he couldn't accept the fact that his supposed ally withheld such important information from him.

'Jared Leonard... just how valuable is he?' Abellion didn't want to spare him, but he realized that for such a child to be at the center of everything, there had to be some relevance accorded to him.

'I will have to see for myself...'

If he was important to Legris, then capturing him would be the best way to handle the situation. But, considering how formidable this Jared person had proven himself to be, it was best to take care of him after they had solidified their victory over the Humans.

'He'll be at the Elf Kingdom alongside the Army of the Alliance. We'll use that opportunity to take down his home!' Abellion plotted evilly.

By the time Jared Leonard recognized what was happening, the Eastern Continent would be shrouded in Miasma—making it an extremely unfavorable battlefield.

In the end, victory would belong to him.

'After this war is over, I'll have to have a long chat with Legris...'

For now, though, they had to be busy with several things that warranted their attention. A full invasion required time, effort, and resources.

'I'll need to—'

"What about me? What will be my role in this war?" Someone among the Demon Lords sharply interrupted.

Everyone instantly knew who it was, and even though they were extremely displeased that he spoke in such an impudent way to the King, they couldn't say anything.

"Desgarion... are you that impatient?" Abellion muttered, staring at the Crimson Demon.

The Demon Lord of Rouge did not flinch. He simply stared back in defiance.

Being relegated to the sidelines had made him grow more brazen in his display of displeasure.

Everyone in the room felt the tension rise to an alarming rate. Beads of sweat and expressions of discomfort spread among all of them.

However, Abellion got rid of the decorum by speaking up.

"You will remain here—in the Demon Realm—while our Army marches out."

"What?!" Desgarion looked even more agitated now.

His bloodshot eyes that sought violence were beginning to twitch. Veins appeared in his head, displaying obvious displeasure.

Once it reached a climax, there was no doubt that Desgarion was going to challenge Abellion.

"It would be unwise to leave our front doors unguarded as we launch an all-out invasion. Think about it."

Everyone agreed with Abellion's words. Zenkiel was going to bring it up later, but their King was one step ahead—as always.

"And? What does that have to do with me? I should be on guard duty?"

"No. That's not it. If we begin invading the Eastern Kingdom, there's no way the people of the West will stay still. Even if it's just a dangerous struggle, they will do everything it takes to counter."

The land of the Elves was closer to the Northern Continent.

It was highly likely that they would strike the North rather than attempt to recover their lands in the Eastern Kingdom—especially if someone as efficient as the Mastermind was the one in charge.

Rather than relying on sentiment, intelligence would dictate that attacking the enemy's stronghold while it was defenseless would be the only way out.

"That's where you come in. Desgarion, you will be waiting behind to defeat the enemies that foolishly attempt to take down our Realm while we're away."