

The Witch 661

Chapter 661: The Worst Possible Situation

'In the past two days, we have noticed the members of the Delarosa Household have been paying visits to the Sacred Tirtha with increasing frequency. Although we have yet to learn the reason, we have also discovered that they were all people of high status in the Sacred Tirtha, Supreme Leader.'

'Not surprising, considering the Great Shaman is a Delarosa. In a sense, the Sacred Tirtha can be regarded as an extension of the Delarosa's power.'

'Speaking of the Great Shaman, Kuvat found something interesting while digging into the history of the Delarosa Household, Supreme Leader,' Chaezi suddenly recalled.

'Oh? Let's hear it then,' Vaan replied with intrigue.

'Yes, Supreme Leader,' Chaezi faithfully reported, 'According to Kuvat, Leimana Delarosa, the current Great Shaman who controls the Sacred Tirtha, encountered a problem during the fetal period and was born with an innate defect called the Broken Meridians Defect.'

'Supposedly, her meridians weren't evenly formed. Dozens of small areas within her meridians were either thinner or thicker than usual, leading to irregular blood flow and an overall weak constitution.'

'Someone with this kind of innate defect was supposed to be destined for a very short life. However, what's interesting is that not only is Leimana Delarosa still alive, she's not even a witch.'

'Leimana Delarosa...' Vaan contemplated.

According to the information they had gathered from their investigation, Leimana Delarosa was the previous matriarch of the Delarosa Household and the youngest daughter of Laeticia Delarosa.

Although Laeticia Delarosa was only the Fifth Elder in the Delarosa Household 300 years ago, the Supreme Elder, Galen Delarosa, was her father.

After Gehenna descended, Laeticia's father continued to hold the position of Supreme Elder in the family until the Sacred Tirtha was founded.

Once the status of shamans and witch doctors was established, Galen transferred his position of authority to his daughter and retired from household management over 270 years ago.

The Delarosa Household did not produce any outstanding warriors in its history, but it did train the most excellent shamans and witch doctors every generation.

Under Laeticia's management as the Supreme Elder, the Delarosa Household accumulated merit through its acts of life-saving grace and garnered respect from everyone, allowing it to become one of the top families in the empire despite its lack of power.

Laeticia's contributions allowed her daughter, Laemana, to replace the original head of the Delarosa Household and become the new matriarch 200 years ago.

Since then, Galen's family line has been the main branch in the Delarosa Household.

Moving forward, Laemana only led the Delarosa Household for a short fifty years before handing the matriarch position over to her daughter, Laelana, and then joining her mother, Laeticia, at the Sacred Tirtha.

After Laemana became the Great Shaman a hundred years ago, Laemana and Laelana's positions in the Sacred Tirtha and the Delarosa Household had not changed.

However, Laemana's grandfather and mother, Galen and Laeticia, had seemingly faded into obscurity.

Most people in the empire wouldn't find anything strange if they had read through the Delarosa Household's history. But when Vaan learned about it, he discovered one major point of alarm and suspicion.

While it seemed like the Delarosa Household had been in quite the spotlight, it had, in truth, been quite low-key.

After all, given the Delarosa Household's financial strength, how could it not produce any excellent warriors to guard their family's interests against exterior threats?

The Delarosa Household had made the whole empire believe it had given up power to entirely focus on playing a pivotal supporting role. Thus, in the eyes of the public, the Delarosa Household had no military power.

Many people even believed the Delarosa Household delved into the art of healing because of their strong desire to save ill-fated lives through life-prolonging means, and the reason why the current Great Shaman could live so long despite her innate defect was due to the fruit of their labor.

However, for any big family or clan, especially one as big as the Delarosa Household, it was nearly impossible for them not to care about power and the security it provided.

As such, if the Delarosa Household had been accumulating its strength in secret all these years without anyone knowing, it could only be described with one word – terrifying!

Furthermore, even if people knew or suspected the Delarosa Household had secretly raised a private military force, they still wouldn't believe it had anything to do with demons and Gehenna.

After all, the Delarosa Household was full of excellent shamans and witch doctors.

It was common knowledge that witches and demons were mortal enemies. They couldn't co-exist, let alone join hands and work together.

But...was that truly the case?

This so-called common knowledge of the bad relationship between witches and demons mainly referred to the Seven Witch Kingdoms and Gehenna, which wasn't much different from any other countries and their hostile neighbors.

The conflict between the Seven Witch Kingdoms and Gehenna was only much worse due to the differences in their races, beliefs, and power.

Besides the witches from the Seven Witch Kingdoms, most of the witches in other countries had not seen a demon from Gehenna, let alone killed one.

Since no prior hatred had been formed with the witches of other countries, who could confidently say the demons of Gehenna wouldn't try to recruit and convert them?

Nothing was definite.

In fact, it would even be easier for demons to convert the witches outside of the witch kingdoms into devil worshippers due to the persecution and discrimination against witches in other countries.

Vaan felt a chill when he thought of that.

'There hasn't been another great war since the first Holy War three hundred years ago, only small and medium skirmishes...' Vaan pondered with concern.

He couldn't imagine the consequences if these constant skirmishes only served as distractions for the Great Devils while their emissaries infiltrated Pangea to convert believers on their behalf in these past three hundred years.

Logically speaking, it had a very high possibility of being true. After all, the Great Devils fed on negative emotions, and faith power strengthened their divinity. It was the worst possible situation for humanity.

'We're fucked,' Vaan thought.

He couldn't stop the frogs from catching fire if they had already jumped into the ponds of burning oil.

Chapter 662: Hecate the Mystical

Of course, when Vaan thought they were fucked in passing, he meant the human countries that had yet to fall under his control. That said, the situation in the Great Ratholos Empire wasn't completely unsalvageable.

After all, he was here.

The only difference was that there would be a lot more deaths compared to his original plan.

However, there was no other way around it. Devil beliefs had taken root in the empire and propagated to a threatening size like cancer. The only way to save the empire was to remove all the cancer cells from the main body.

That said, if one wanted to do that, one had to identify all the cancer cells first, which was also the most tricky problem to tackle.

After all, a contaminated body was easy to identify, but a poisoned mind was difficult to determine.

None of the shamans and witch doctors trained by the Sacred Tirtha seemed to possess the slightest hint of demonic aura. They were neither demons in disguises nor fallen witches.

Moreover, Vaan knew fallen witches weren't necessarily on the side of the demons.

As such, unless the shamans and witch doctors were seen acting suspiciously in favor of Gehenna, it was hard to determine whether they had betrayed humanity.

'Hex magic...' Vaan recalled.

Laemana, the current Great Shaman of the Sacred Tirtha, was the youngest daughter in her family.

Although little was known about Laemana's elder siblings, as if a portion of her family history was purposely hidden, it wasn't difficult for Vaan to guess that her elder sisters were Belline Delarosa and Adeline Delarosa.

Laemana's unnaturally long lifespan was undoubtedly related to the hex magic draining Belline's life force.

However, Vaan didn't believe Laemana herself was the one who learned and invoked the vicious hex magic to leech off her elder sister's life. The biggest suspects in his mind were their parents, who had seemingly disappeared off the face of the earth.

Galen and Laetitia's disappearances were too suspicious. They might even be the ones with direct ties to the demons.

'Is there a way to detect everyone who has practiced hex magic, Chaezi?' Vaan inquired.

'I'm terribly sorry for not being able to provide a satisfactory answer, Supreme Leader,' Chaezi replied apologetically, adding, 'Even if such a method exists, I do not know of it. In fact, I doubt anyone in the clan knows.'

'Is that so?' Vaan calmly responded, neither surprised nor disappointed.

'That's right, Supreme Leader. Hex magic has a very ancient and primitive application of the runic language. It's overly complicated and not very systematic, making it chaotic. It's not easy to learn and even harder to master,' Chaezi explained, expressing a slight disdain towards hex magic.

Vaan could see why Chaezi was disdainful of hex magic.

Hex magic only involved runic characters and odd materials to invoke. It didn't need a magic-capable person to cast. However, although anyone with knowledge could use it, it was demanding in terms of time and resources.

It was a very roundabout method of creating array magic, which dragons could cast directly and instantly.

Nevertheless, Vaan had to admit hex magic also had its advantages.

In a world without mana, hex magic would have been regarded as the witchcraft or black magic of that world.

Hex magic was binding and long-lasting due to the power of laws in its inscribed runes. Furthermore, since a minority of beings were willing to study it, those without the necessary knowledge had an even harder time countering it.

In truth, Vaan was ill-prepared to deal with this elusive demon-worshipping group.

'I don't know much about hex magic, and the Red Dragon Clan also has little to teach me. Thus, a certain level of risk is involved in dealing with this elusive group,' Vaan mused.

Given his current strength, he wasn't sure if the Delarosa Household's hex magic could threaten him. However, he was certain the Great Ratholos Empire was bound to suffer during this period of chaos.

That said, there was one thing Vaan couldn't comprehend.

'This elusive group has hidden themselves in the Great Ratholos Empire for countless years. Why have they chosen to expose their tail now?' Vaan wondered.

He only threw out a small bait, and this elusive group immediately bit it.

This didn't seem like something the cult leader would have done. It seemed rather rash on their end.

Perhaps another person made the decision?

As Vaan pondered, Chaezi suddenly mentioned, 'I don't know what it was like for the senior generations of the clan living in Chaos back then, but I feel like hex magic is something rare, even there.'

'Is that right?' Vaan felt enlightened and silently agreed with Chaezi's opinion.

Although Vaan has yet to experience the countless cultures spanning the infinitely vast Chaos, he could infer that practically everyone there could wield magic. As such, beings that knew hex magic were rare; those with extensive knowledge of it were even rarer.

Only someone with magic disabilities or a peculiar hobby would study hex magic extensively.

As Vaan compiled his information on the elusive demon-worshipping group, a Great Devil came to mind – Hecate the Mystical.

Hecate the Mystical was a female devil with a half-human, half-black-winged fairy demon bloodline. Supposedly, Hecate the Mystical was originally a pure human, like Balmodan the Undying, at birth.

Nevertheless, that wasn't important.

What's important was that Hecate the Mystical was the number one expert in the field of magic among the seven Great Devils, having the most diverse magical abilities and knowledge.

Among Hecate's magical abilities and knowledge, Hecate was mostly known for her illusion, witchcraft, darkness, light, necromancy, and moon expertise.

Ignoring Hecate's other magical abilities and knowledge, just her list of expertise alone already seemed diverse enough. However, Vaan also noticed that most of Hecate's specialties could further support her illusion-related abilities.

As Vaan recalled this information, he realized the elusive demon-worshipping group in the Great Ratholos Empire was most likely backed by the Hecate the Mystical.

After all, it would be far too easy for the elusive demon-worshipping group to hide itself if it had Hecate's blessings and knowledge.

Chapter 663: Absurd Power

Although Vaan felt confident the elusive demon-worshipping group had Hecate's blessings and knowledge, he couldn't be completely certain. After all, far too little was known about the Seven Great Devils.

Thus, how could he easily guess the thoughts and choices of a Great Devil with his limited understanding?

Moreover, according to some historical books, Hecate the Mystical was also known to be the most enigmatic and eccentric among the Seven Great Devils.

It was said that in Gehenna's long years of existence, Hecate the Mystical had shown three faces. Sometimes, she was evil. Sometimes, she was good. And sometimes, she was just neutral in her judgment.

Her change of nature had no rhythm; she was simply unpredictable.

That said, Hecate had shown little-to-no malice towards humanity in the past three hundred years.

The Holy War of three hundred years ago was mostly initiated by the Great Devils – Balmodan the Undying, Helcan the Mighty, and Abaddon the Sinister.

On the other hand, Hecate the Mystical, Astarte the Charming, Mephistopheles the Cunning, and Thanatos the Supreme had little participation in the Holy War—at least, according to the words of some gossiping people in the imperial capital.

Even the Red Dragon Clan did not know about this.

Although the dragon lords knew about Gehenna, their knowledge was limited to the past. And since they had been isolated from the world, it wasn't farfetched to say their knowledge was outdated.

On the other hand, the Great Ratholos Empire was a hotspot for warriors from all over Pangea. Although its network was inferior to the Holy Knight Empire due to its lack of trade with other countries, the information flowing into it wasn't any less.

That being the case, it was surprising to learn that the Great Ratholos Empire knew more about Gehenna and the Seven Great Devils than even the Seven Witch Kingdoms, which had been fighting them for the past three hundred years, from one large war to small skirmishes.

However, it wasn't all that surprising once one learned the truth.

The reason the Great Ratholos Empire and possibly the rest of Pangea knew so much about Gehenna and the Seven Great Devils had to do with the past generations of Devil's Contractors.

If some of the past generations of Devil's Contractors had not spilled the secret in the beginning, the world would not have even known who they had been up against, let alone become aware of the existence of Devil's Contractors.

Of course, such Devil's Contractors had long since paid the price with their lives for breaking the contract with their Great Devils.

However, they were forever remembered as heroes.

Agnar, the first-generation Devil's Contractor of Helcan the Mighty. Gunnar, the first-generation Devil's Contractor of Abaddon the Sinister. Balgus, the third-generation Devil's Contractor of

Helcan the Mighty. Evander, the first-generation Devil's Contractor of Astarte the Charming. And Sigmund, the fifth-generation Devil's Contractor of Abaddon the Sinister.

These were the Devil's Contractors Vaan had found after he had the dragon elites secretly scour through the historical records for him.

In other words, in the past three hundred years, merely five people had received the blessings and powers of Great Devils, only to betray them for the greater good of humanity.

Nevertheless, Vaan felt a little helpless when he thought about the Devil's Contractors. Even if he killed them, they would just be replaced by new ones—as seen in the course of history.

That said, the only thing Vaan felt fortunate out of this was that only six out of the seven Great Devils had given their divine blessings and power to humans.

'There has never been a Devil's Contractor of Thanatos, and honestly, I hope it stays that way,' Vaan mused.

Among the Seven Great Devils, Vaan dreaded Thanatos the most after learning about him.

Thanatos was not only the publicly-recognized strongest among the Seven Great Devils but also commanded the power of the Death Law. He could kill any being beneath Rank 7 with a mere thought, and that was why he was considered supreme among the Seven Great Devils.

Against such an absurd power, there was nothing anyone below Rank 7 could do to resist it.

Death was the only outcome.

As such, Vaan felt fortunate that Thanatos had never shown any active interest in Pangea for the past three hundred years.

Thinking back, Vaan found it quite naive of the Red Dragon Clan to believe their Fire Dragon God could deter the Seven Great Devils.

After all, even if the Great Devils' powers were suppressed to the Demigod rank, Thanatos could still kill everyone else with a thought and then fight the Fire Dragon God with the other six Great Devils.

More importantly, even if the Fire Dragon God were still alive, it wouldn't necessarily be a Rank 6 Divine Being like the Red Dragon Clan originally believed.

Vaan's soul only reached the Peak Demigod level with the complete inheritance, so the Fire Dragon God must have hidden the truth from its kin.

'Something else must have happened during the Holy War period... Some other factors that deterred the Great Devils from pressing their invasion and forced them to adopt softer approaches...'

'Their lack of invasion in the past three hundred years couldn't be explained otherwise... Is it truly because of Pangea? Or something else? What could it be...'

'I feel like I'm about to uncover the truth, but I'm lacking just that little bit of crucial information...'

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While Vaan was in deep thought, Chaezi suddenly informed him, 'Supreme Leader, I've just received words from Kuvat – Emperor Varan has begun mobilizing his imperial forces to surround the Delarosa Household and apprehend every shaman and witch doctor in the imperial capital!'

'Oh?' Vaan was slightly surprised before thinking, 'It seems Emperor Varan has been wary of the Sacred Tirtha and the Delarosa Household for a long while... Did he finally find concrete proof of their affiliation with Gehenna and decide to act with haste?'

'However, this timing seems rather abrupt...' Vaan had a vague sense of suspicion before he solemnly instructed, 'Have Kuvat come talk to me, Chaezi. I have some questions for him.'

'As you command, Supreme Leader!' Chaezi complied without hesitation.

However, Chaezi didn't even get the chance to leave and carry out Vaan's task before Kuvat's deep voice was shortly heard.

'There's no need, Supreme Leader. I am already here,' Kuvat announced as if he had anticipated Vaan's summoning.

Chapter 664: Kuvat's Understanding

Vaan was quickly intrigued by Kuvat's timely attendance.

Considering Kuvat showed up shortly after relaying the news to Chaezi, which was subsequently passed on to him, it was clear that Kuvat had purposely withheld some information to make a personal report.

'Tell me, Kuvat. The emperor's sudden action against the shamans and witch doctors had something to do with you, right?' Vaan calmly inquired.

'That's right, Supreme Leader,' Kuvat honestly admitted before continuing, 'I've made contact with the Red Wyvern Clan and indirectly told its Red Wyvern Ancestor about their connection to the demons of Gehenna.'

'The Red Wyvern Ancestor must have passed my words on to Emperor Varan, which led to his current actions,' Kuvat guessed afterward.

'What did you just say, Kuvat?' Chaezi suddenly scowled at Kuvat with anger as she criticized him, 'How dare you act on your own, Kuvat! The Supreme Leader never ordered you to contact the Red Wyvern Clan!'

'And yet, not only did you do that, but you even talked to its ancestor! That's two offenses! Just you wait for the Supreme Leader's punishment!' Chaezi snarled.

But despite Chaezi's harsh criticism, Kuvat didn't feel the slightest concern or fear regarding the possible repercussions of his actions; he was still calm and collected, and that was because he believed the Supreme Leader wouldn't be mad at him.

Kuvat's feeling was correct.

If Vaan could smile, he would already be smiling when he heard Kuvat admit to his independent actions.

This was because Vaan had once told all the young dragon elites to learn to think for themselves and make their own decisions. They didn't always have to report first and then act after; they could act first and then report after.

He didn't need a puppet army.

As such, if he didn't give the young dragon elites certain levels of autonomy and freedom, they would never truly grow.

Alas, it was a little disappointing that up until now, Kuvat was the only one who have learned to think and act on his own.

'That's enough, Chaezi,' Vaan calmed her down before pleasantly saying to Kuvat, 'I don't believe that's all you did, right? Furthermore, your actions must have been related to something of significant importance that you discovered.'

'As expected of you, Supreme Leader. Your wisdom is as vast as the starry sky; nothing can be hidden from you,' Kuvat indirectly admitted with praises, full of reverence.

'The Red Wyvern Ancestor is the guardian beast of the Great Ratholos Empire and Peak Transcendent-rank being. For a lesser dragon with an inferior bloodline to reach this level of strength in this world is honestly very difficult and praiseworthy.'

'Considering the Red Wyvern Ancestor was nearing the end of its lifespan and was teetering on the edge of life and death, I thought it would be a great pity if we just let it die and miss out on the chance to obtain a powerful ally or subordinate.'

'As such, I sacrificed some of my blood essence to help the Red Wyvern Ancestor advance to the Demigod rank, significantly increasing its lifespan and saving it,' Kuvat explained.

'You helped the Red Wyvern Ancestor advance to the Demigod rank...?' Chaezi repeated in disbelief before asking, 'Do you have any idea what you have done, Kuvat? Even a few of our dragon lords have only just barely reached this level of power. By creating such a powerful rival, you are threatening the interest of our clan!'

'It's fine if this wyvern ancestor has good morals, but what if he is not? What if he is greedy and demands more of our true dragon blood essence? Does our clan's younger and future generations have to keep supplying them with our precious blood essence and harm our future progress?'

'You've taken a huge risk for a mere possible ally or subordinate that we may not even need. That doesn't seem like a wise move to me. Otherwise, why didn't the Supreme Leader order us to help the Red Wyvern Ancestor much sooner?' Chaezi pointed out.

Everything Chaezi said was reasonable, but Kuvat's emotion wasn't affected. He could see her point of view, but he didn't agree with it.

'That's where you are wrong, Chaezi. The Supreme Leader didn't order us to help the Red Wyvern Ancestor sooner, not because he deemed it risky and disadvantageous but because he was giving us a chance to take the initiative, which I did,' Kuvat argued with a soft chuckle.

'And as a direct result of that, the Red Wyvern Ancestor and his clan had sworn their loyalty to me. Not to our Red Dragon Clan, but me alone.'

'The Red Wyvern Ancestor and his clan really did that?' Chaezi uttered in shock and disbelief.

Kuvat was only a Low-level Transcendent. How could an Early Demigod and his clan swear their loyalty to him just like that? It didn't make any sense.

'Of course, they did, but it's no surprise that you find it hard to believe, Chaezi,' Kuvat calmly replied, 'Our clan's long years of seclusion and hiding from Gehenna have made you mentally weak and fearful. You have greatly underestimated our clan of true dragons.'

'Our Red Dragon Clan might have one of the lowest true dragon bloodlines within the whole true dragon race, but to lesser dragons, we are no different from royalty. This is especially so after we absorbed some of the Fire Dragon God's blood essence, the blood essence of a Rank 6 Divine Being.'

'Otherwise, how could my blood essence help the Red Wyvern Ancestor advance to the Demigod rank? Even if it is just a single drop, our true dragon blood is a peerless limit-breaking elixir for these lesser dragons. Of course, it still wouldn't have been possible for the Red Wyvern Ancestor to advance to the Demigod rank if he didn't already have such a firm foundation.'

'However, there's something else you are mistaken about, Chaezi. Even if the Red Wyvern Ancestor reached the Demigod rank, he is not qualified to rival our Peak Transcendant-rank Dragon Lords, let alone our newly ascended Demigod-rank Dragon Lords.'

'The Red Wyvern Ancestor only has a Demigod-rank body. He is no match for our Dragon Lords, who are strong in both body and magic. And even if, for some reason, our Dragon Lords are no match for the Red Wyvern Ancestor, we still have our Supreme Leader, the Progeny of the Fire Dragon God.'

'That's why the Red Wyvern Ancestor was so readily and willing to swear his loyalty to me, a member of the younger generation. It is because I, for one, have a noble status in the eyes of lesser dragons. Two, I saved the Red Wyvern Ancestor's life, a favor that can never be repaid. And three, my potential is limitless compared to the Red Wyvern Ancestor and everyone in his clan.'

'The Red Wyvern Ancestor is no fool. He knows he couldn't just jump over my head and swear his loyalty to any of the Dragon Lords or the clan itself, not after I did him such a great favor. And like I said before, this is the opportunity the Supreme Leader left for us,' Kuvat stated.

However, Chaezi was still confused as she asked with a frown, 'What do you mean, Kuvat?'

'You still don't get it? After everything I said so far, Chaezi?' Kuvat replied, feeling a little exasperated at Chaezi's inability to comprehend.

Chapter 665: Accepted Will

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After listening to Chaezi's silence, Kuvat had no choice but to explain further, 'As you should know, our Supreme Leader has peerless wisdom and is destined to rule all under the heavens one day.'

'However, even if the Supreme Leader rules everything under the heavens, he doesn't have the time to manage all of it. That's where we step in – to carry this burden. How could we let something like territorial management hold our Supreme Leader back?'

'Now that I have the Red Wyvern Clan's allegiance, it's not farfetched to say that I already control half the Great Ratholos Empire. Do you see it now, Chaezi? That is why it seems like the Supreme Leader is using such a roundabout method to takeover this human empire.'

'Given the Supreme Leader's wisdom, there was no way he wouldn't know about this shortcut to taking over the Great Ratholos Empire. He left this opportunity to us on purpose.'

'Even if none of us realized the Supreme Leader's intention in the end, the Supreme Leader would have ultimately saved the Red Wyvern Ancestor at the last moment to maximize the Red Wyvern Ancestor's gratitude to the Supreme Leader,' Kuvat said.

Chaezi gradually understood everything and was awed by Kuvat's ability to read the Supreme Leader's veiled intentions.

However, even if the opportunity were presented again, she still wouldn't take it like Kuvat did.

After all, even if she did end up in a position of authority, ruling over the Great Ratholos Empire and the Red Wyvern Clan and enjoying all kinds of service and resources, it still paled to serving the Supreme Leader at his side.

Managing a piece of territory for the Supreme Leader was a great honor, but directly serving the Supreme Leader was the greatest of honors.

'I'm impressed as much as I am gratified, Kuvat. I was beginning to think there wasn't a single dragon that understood my wish. You will go far in life,' Vaan praised before adding, 'Also, your sacrifice and merit are deserving of a reward. I can only give you this reward later, but you certainly won't be disappointed in it. Look forward to it.'

'Thank you, Supreme Leader! Your kind words and appreciation are more than what I deserve. I do not require a reward,' Kuvat said humbly, but he couldn't hide his joy and anticipation.

Vaan's words had certainly aroused his curiosity and expectation.

He wondered what he would be rewarded with.

'Hahaha, there is no need to be so humble, Kuvat. If I said you deserve a reward, then it means you definitely earned it. Do not reject it,' Vaan said half-chuckling, half-seriously.

'Yes, Supreme Leader!' Kuvat answered, feeling more overwhelmed by the honor.

'Nevertheless, I still have to correct you on one thing you got wrong, Kuvat,' Vaan suddenly mentioned.

'Even if no one offered the Red Wyvern Ancestor some of their true dragon blood essence, I still wouldn't intervene. Thus, if you hadn't done so, the Red Wyvern Ancestor would have likely perished three days later!'

'Ah?'

Vaan's claim left Kuvat completely shocked.

On the other hand, Chaezi's eyes beamed with delight as she imagined Kuvat's dumb, surprised look. Kuvat made her feel stupid, but it seemed he wasn't as smart as she thought; he still got some things wrong.

As such, Chaezi felt like she had gotten back some of her face.

'You see, just as Chaezi previously said, we don't necessarily need the Red Wyvern Ancestor and his clan. It's fine if any of you were willing to part with some blood essence for them, but I would never ask any of you to sacrifice your blood essence for them,' Vaan firmly stated.

'In my eyes, the Red Wyvern Ancestor and his clan aren't worth a single drop of your blood essence. Their little bit of power and influence are some things we can do without.'

'Don't forget, I am your Supreme Leader, the Progeny of the Fire Dragon God. While some of you might not accept that I, a human, became your Supreme Leader from the bottom of your heart, the fact that I am still your Supreme Leader will never change.'

'Thus, even if I want to help humanity resist Gehenna and save more human lives, I would never let any member of the Red Dragon Clan suffer injustice for it. The grace and debt I owe to the Fire Dragon God isn't something I can ever hope to repay. As such, his descendants will also be my descendants,' Vaan said with a heavy heart.

Although he had gained the Fire Dragon God's inheritance with his own abilities, it did not change the fact that he absorbed the Fire Dragon God's complete, pure soul energy.

Until recently, he had not truly understood what it meant to leave behind a complete soul energy orb. As such, he had never fully seen the depth of the Fire Dragon God's sacrifice.

The Fire Dragon God had given up the chance to reincarnate forever and accepted true death. He erased every possibility of continuing his existence in any and all worlds—all to leave behind a chance for his descendants to survive the cruelty the future holds.

However, this chance had fallen into Vaan's lap.

As such, since he had accepted the Fire Dragon God's inheritance, he would also accept the Fire Dragon God's will.

'Supreme Leader...'

Chaezi, Kuvat, and several other eavesdropping dragon elites in the area felt deeply touched and moved to tears by Vaan's words.

While they were all loyal to a fault and willing to heed Vaan's every command, it didn't mean they never had their concerns.

After all, Vaan was a human.

They were uncertain whether Vaan would only use their clan for his personal interest or the interest of humans.

Only now did they truly understand that Vaan would always have their clan's best interest in mind. He wasn't just their new Fire Dragon God in name; he was truly their Fire Dragon God, their ancestor, their sky.

'The Supreme Leader... I must never disappoint him!'

'I want to live up to the Supreme Leader's expectations!'

'I want to have the Supreme Leader's child—!'

'—Huh?'

Chapter 666: Startling Realization

'Who just said that?'

Wild gazes darted around in the hidden skies above the Black Mountain as Chaezi, Kuvat, and the other confused dragon elites tried to locate the source of the last voice.

Although everyone had thought out loud, the last thought had truly shocked and surprised them all.

Even Vaan's fortified mind was shaken by the earth-shaking thought.

If it had been a normal person in his shoes, such thoughts directed at them wouldn't just be a ripple in the lake; it would be a whole damn tsunami drowning them – They would choke on their own spit.

Forget whether copulation between a human and a true dragon was possible; it would already be fortunate if the male human didn't get swallowed whole by the female dragon's cave.

A few moments later, several questioning gazes fell on Fraegar, causing the latter to feel embarrassed.

'Hey, don't look at me like that. It's not like I said anything weird, right...?' Fraegar defended herself.

'You don't think so?' Chaezi felt exasperated before she suddenly blinked with enlightenment. 'No... You might be right. The Supreme Leader possesses the Fire Dragon God's purest blood essence and soul energy.'

'It only makes sense that we, with the best talents in the clan, serve the Supreme Leader to maintain the Fire Dragon God's strong bloodline in the clan,' Chaezi thought seriously.

The offspring produced from their copulation with the Supreme Leader would definitely possess the strongest dragon bloodline in the history of the Red Dragon Clan.

'Hey... Aren't you forgetting something? To do that, we must first consider whether it is even possible. Do you think it is even possible?' Verun asked pessimistically.

Verun admired their devotion to the clan and the Supreme Leader, but he felt they were delusional in their idea.

However, Kuvat suddenly interjected after careful consideration, 'Actually... It's not impossible for us dragons to adopt human forms and potential while retaining our dragon bloodline and talents...'

'However, it won't be as easy as the time when our clan still lived in Chaos. Back then, any dragon could adopt a human form with Transfiguration Magic upon reaching Rank 6. But now?'

'We'll probably need at least a Divine Stone of Humanity and a Rank 5 or higher quality beast core from a Thousand-Face Chameleon, among other simpler supplementary ingredients, to refine the Divine Human Pill,' Kuvat figured.

'The Divine Human Pill... I think I've heard of this divine pill before... Oh! I remember now!' Fraegar suddenly exclaimed with excitement.

'What is this Divine Human Pill?' Chaezi inquired.

'The Divine Human Pill is a miraculous pill that can grant any race the ability to shapeshift into a human form and freely change between the two,' Fraegar explained energetically before suddenly becoming dispirited, 'However... This Divine Human Pill is so popular throughout Chaos that the Divine Stone of Humanity and Thousand-Face Chameleons have become exceedingly rare.'

'Even if they were found and auctioned to others, their prices would be astronomical. It's not something we can afford,' Fraegar sighed.

Somehow, the young dragon elites ended up engaging in a full-blown serious discussion about human-dragon copulation and how to make it possible.

As Vaan quietly listened, he learned more about Chaos and the humans' situation there.

Since the Lord of Chaos Albion was human, it went without saying that the humans' situation in Chaos wouldn't be bad. After all, humans were one of the ruling races of Chaos.

However, humanity was both the strongest and the weakest race. Even among the countless human factions in Chaos, there were powerful and weak ones.

Still, one thing that all of Chaos couldn't deny was that the human growth potential was limitless.

Humans were born weak and seemingly without any distinctively strong traits. They were like a blank slate with nothing at birth. But it was also precisely because of this that humans were the most malleable and easy to change.

Because they were born with nothing, they could become anything.

That was the human potential, something every race in Chaos wanted, and the Divine Human Pill was developed for the sole purpose of acquiring it.

Everyone wanted to become like the Lord of Chaos, a being at the pinnacle of existence.

...

Nevertheless, it was clear that acquiring human forms was something distant for Fraegar and the others.

It was fine if they somehow pulled it off; Vaan wouldn't reject their advances in that case. But until then, he had no intention of exploring any dragon cave. He didn't want to develop claustrophobia from the experience.

'That's enough,' Vaan cut the dragon elites' discussion short before solemnly reminding, 'Kuvat, you have yet to finish your report. What big discovery did you find?'

'My deepest apologies, Supreme Leader,' Kuvat made no excuse for his mistake and quickly turned grave with Vaan's reminder as he replied, 'I found out a weird, large-scale hex magic had been cast on the whole imperial capital.'

'Oh?' Vaan's mental tone turned serious before he asked, 'I suppose you haven't found out what it does yet?'

'Unfortunately not, Supreme Leader,' Kuvat replied regretfully before adding, 'However, I have a very terrible feeling about it – as if something extremely bad will happen if we allow it to serve its purpose.'

'I see...' Vaan wasn't surprised by Kuvat's answer.

After all, they knew too little about hex magic.

Shortly after, Vaan fell into deep contemplation as he recalled every piece of information to determine the purpose of the weird hex magic.

Large-scale hex magic... Big enough to cover the whole imperial capital... The rising flames of conflict being fanned... Numerous deaths... Blood?!

Vaan's mind was suddenly shaken.

'Quickly check the main areas of conflict! See if there are any changes to the quantity of blood being spilled in those areas!' Vaan immediately ordered every dragon elite.

Blood sacrifice!

Kuvat quickly thought of the possibility, and his expression instantly turned pale in horror.

In fact, Kuvat had also thought of the possibility and checked the quantity of blood earlier. However, he didn't find any changes to the spilled blood throughout the imperial capital.

That said, since even the Supreme Leader suspected it, then the hex magic must truly be the type that required a blood sacrifice!

But what kind of blood-sacrificing magic required it to be on such a large scale?! What was its purpose!?

Kuvat didn't dare to imagine the consequences.

Chapter 667: Elderly Man

Imperial Capital, Delarosa Household

"Matriarch! I-I-It's bad! Very bad! W-We've been surrounded by imperial troops!" a female servant stuttered with shortness of breath as she brought urgent news.

Inside the family council room, Laelana was just having a meeting with the highest-ranking family members of her household when the female servant abruptly barged in.

Laelana didn't immediately condemn the female servant's act but frowned nonetheless. The sudden news disrupted the meeting and threw everyone off-topic as the high elders quickly mumbled with wild guesses in alarm and worry.

"Speak clearly!" Laelana barked before demanding answers, "What kind of imperial soldiers are outside? How many are there? And why have they come? Have they stated their intentions?"

"We don't know yet, Matriarch!" the female servant shook her head and reported, "They haven't said anything. Right now, they are still rallying troops outside of our territory."

"There were only around eight hundred surrounding us at the moment, but we could see countless thousands more on the way! Furthermore, they were carrying siege-like weapons with them!"

"A-also! Many wore gold scale accessories among the imperial soldiers outside!" the female servant added with fright.

Gold scale accessories!

The expression on Laelana and the family elders' faces all changed when they heard of the gold-scaled imperial soldiers.

Wearing gold wyvern scales was a symbol of status within the imperial army. Only the elites of the imperial guards were mostly qualified to wear them. And yet, there were hundreds of them outside?!

That was practically all of Emperor Varan's imperial guards!

Just as the female servant had claimed, Laelana and the high elders of the family also silently agreed that the situation was very bad.

"Matriarch, if it were only ordinary imperial soldiers outside, then they would only be suspicious of us. However, Emperor Varan sent all of his imperial guards to surround us! Our secret has most likely been discovered!" Second Elder spoke gravely.

"I agree with Second Elder," Third Elder chimed in, inserting his thoughts, "The imperial soldiers wouldn't be gathering their numbers like this if they only had their suspicions. They would have announced their arrival and made their demands already."

"Since that wasn't the case. They must be gathering enough strength to take us down in one fell swoop," Third Elder added.

"Those were my thoughts exactly," Matriarch Laelana acknowledged before saying, "It seems we cannot hide ourselves any longer; the time to prove our strength to the world is nigh. That said, we won't be the one to tear the final piece of façade."

"It's fortunate that the imperial soldiers came to us instead of the Sacred Tirtha. We must buy as much time as possible for the grand magic to accumulate its required amount of energy."

"Nothing must go wrong with that!" Matriarch Laelana stressed with a firm look, then instructed, "Go... Open the treasury and arm everyone. A battle won't occur here until later, but we must be prepared for when it comes!"

"Yes, Matriarch!" the high elders answered resolutely.

...

After dismissing the high elders, Matriarch Laelana headed to the forbidden courtyard in the Delarosa Household's northwest area.

Inside the courtyard, dead leaves and dirt covered the ground, while dust and cobwebs covered the buildings. The place looked abandoned for many years, but only a few exceptions were permitted to enter it.

However, when Matriarch Laelana stepped inside, a completely different courtyard was revealed – one that was clean, neat, and regularly maintained.

"Dear Grandfather, we might need to rely on your strength later," Matriarch Laelana respectfully bowed to the elderly man in simple kemp clothing, quietly meditating in the courtyard's center.

She did not display any of her proud arrogance as the family head in front of this elderly man, who appeared to be as old as some of the eldest first-generation witches in Pangea.

It was nothing special for witches to live over 350 years. But for a human man to do so was as rare as true phoenix feathers.

Unless told and witnessed, almost no one would believe that a man from the pre-Gehenna era could still be alive to this day. Evidently, there was something very special about this elderly man.

"So that time has come, huh? Un, I got it," the elderly man acknowledged with few words.

Laelana didn't speak another word and respectfully took her leave, stepping back outside the courtyard.

Once she did, the courtyard scenery behind her changed again, returning to its old, dilapidated, and abandoned state with no one inside. Clearly, an illusion array had been set up around the forbidden courtyard to hide the real scene within.

...

Meanwhile, the elite imperial guards monitored the Delarosa Household for suspicious activities as more imperial soldiers arrived over time.

The Delarosas had no idea that even Emperor Varan himself had personally arrived at their doorstep.

"Your Imperial Majesty!"

The moment Emperor Varan revealed his presence in an inconspicuous location, several elite imperial guards nearby quickly greeted him on their knees after recognizing him.

"At ease," Emperor Varan calmly dismissed the formality before inquiring, "What's the situation?"

"We are still gathering our troops to storm the Delarosa Household, but the Delarosas themselves have yet to react to our increasing presence. It's as if they aren't aware of us, but that shouldn't be possible, Your Imperial Majesty," one person said.

"Any normal person would have long come out to ask what was happening if they saw the imperial guards outside their gates. However, we haven't seen a single Delarosa coming out to inquire about the situation. I find this quite strange," another imperial guard added.

"There's nothing strange about it," Emperor Varan coolly stated, further explaining, "The Delarosas are conscious of their sins and suspect we have learned about it. That's why they dare not open the gates and lower their defenses."

"It is also why we will storm their territory directly once we have gathered enough strength. We do not negotiate with sinners," Emperor Varan said with a cold glint.

"This..." several elite imperial guards appeared hesitant before one of them said, "If what the Red Wyvern Ancestor said was true, the Delarosas isn't our only enemy but possibly every shaman and witch doctor in the empire."

"In that case, wouldn't it make more sense if we had targeted the Sacred Tirtha from the beginning instead, Your Imperial Majesty?" the person asked.

Chapter 668: Eve of Battle

"Of course not," Emperor Varan calmly replied, not surprised at all by his imperial guards' doubts.

After all, the Sacred Tirtha was a very large piece of land, even larger than the Delarosa Household by ten times, and possessed countless shamans and witch doctors. If every Shaman and Witch Doctor were an enemy of humanity, striking the Sacred Tirtha first would deal them a serious blow.

On the other hand, targeting the Delarosa Household first would only alarm the Sacred Tirtha and give it time to prepare itself.

Moreover, countless warriors across the empire were indebted to the Sacred Tirtha for its gracious healing and treatment. Thus, the rallying power of the Sacred Tirtha would be quite frightening if they suffered injustice and decided to retaliate against the imperial family for a righteous cause.

Nevertheless, that still depended on the basis that the Sacred Tirtha actually had a righteous cause. Otherwise, their rallying power to rebel against a seemingly tyrant ruler would disappear like scattered smoke.

"You must know that we have always had doubts about the Delarosa and Sacred Tirtha but never had any proof to validate them. Not only are they good at hiding things, but their true power should be even greater."

"This could be seen from how they were able to assassinate the first-seated heirs of major clans to incite greater conflict between the ducal factions. They had certainly kept their strength well hidden."

"Unfortunately for me, by the time I ascended the throne, this demon-affiliated group must have long established their roots. Their influence is immense, both on the surface and in the dark. Not only will attacking the Sacred Tirtha have a low chance of success, but we will even encounter fierce resistance from our own people – those who don't know any better."

"That's why we are gathering all our strength to take down the Delarosa Household first. The Delarosas founded the Sacred Tirtha, and all their direct family members have occupied high positions. The Delarosas must have a secret ledger that records everything they had secretly done in the past few hundred years."

"As long as we can take down the Delarosa Household and obtain that secret ledger, we can expose their sins and have a righteous cause for destroying them. This will minimize our losses."

After Emperor Varan finished explaining, most of his imperial guards were awed by his wisdom. Even so, a few remained unconvinced by his reasoning.

"Your Imperial Majesty, you are the emperor of the Great Ratholos Empire, and your imperial authority is absolute. Who would dare to rebel against you if you take action against the Sacred Tirtha?" one of the imperial guards questioned.

"That's right, Your Imperial Majesty," another one chimed in, adding, "It's not too late to give everyone an explanation after we find the evidence from their corpses. Thus, in my opinion, the result will still be the same even if we attack the Sacred Tirtha first."

"More importantly, the sooner we do so, the more advantageous it is for us. Since they have chosen to emerge from the shadows this time, it means they are up to no good. The longer their intentions remain unclear, the worse the situation will be."

"I am aware of that," Emperor Varan calmly acknowledged before helplessly shaking his head, "However, it's too late to change my plans now. The enemy has already been alerted by our actions."

"Furthermore, my imperial authority is not as inviolable as you think. My imperial authority might seem absolute, but it is based on the fact that everyone respects and fears me. If I don't have the heart of the people, my imperial throne will be a shaky one."

"History has proven tyrannical rulers have never had good endings," Emperor Varan stated.

"More importantly, you are all underestimating the strength of the Sacred Tirtha too much. They have been patiently hiding their true power all this time. What's stopping them from continuing to do so for another three hundred years?"

"Since they had chosen to expose themselves this time, it must mean they are sufficiently confident in their ability to overthrow me," Emperor Varan solemnly stated.

Very quickly, the few unconvinced imperial guards sweated as they recognized the error in their thinking.

They had grown too arrogant after obtaining their positions of power and serving their emperor. They were gravely mistaken for believing no power was greater than the emperor's

Weren't the Great Devils of Gehenna even greater than their emperor?

And the one standing behind the Sacred Tirtha may very well be one of these Great Devils.

That's why the emperor himself had personally arrived at the Delarosa Household. He had to ensure their mission was successful, as there was no room for failure. They couldn't afford it.

"In that case, shouldn't we have also requested Lord Wyvern Ancestor to assist us in taking down the Delarosas, Your Imperial Majesty?" an imperial guard asked.

"No," Emperor Varan coolly replied.

"Lord Wyvern Ancestor has finally broken free from the shackles of mortality and taken half a step into the divine. He is now at an important stage of consolidating his powerful physique. Thus, we cannot rely on him. The Red Wyvern Clan is also guarding him, so we can't rely on the wyverns either."

"However, you don't need to worry too much. It shouldn't take too long. I believe Lord Wyvern Ancestor and the Red Wyvern Clan will be with us when we storm the Sacred Tirtha."

Shortly after Emperor Varan's reassurance, a commander-rank imperial soldier rushed forward to report, "The anti-magic siege weapons are all set in place, and our troops are all ready, Your Imperial Majesty!"

"Good!" Emperor Varan exclaimed, saying, "It's time to confront the Delarosas."

Within moments, everyone outside and inside the Delarosa Household became aware of Emperor Varan's arrival as he boldly strode to the Delarosa's front gates.

"Listen up, Delarosas! You are all under suspicion of betraying humanity and serving one of the Great Devils of Gehenna! Quickly open your gates, and let us search your land to prove your innocence! Do not force me to use force!"

Emperor Varan's loud and majestic voice traveled far and wide, ensuring everyone within the Delarosa Household heard it.

However, Matriarch Laelana sneered when she did.

"With the imperial capital in turmoil and everyone at each other's throats, there's no telling if you have also come to embroil us in this great conflict! So, forgive me for refusing to grant you entry, Your Imperial Majesty!"

"We'll be more willing to open our gates once the situation outside has calmed down! Now, please pull your troops back!"

"So, you have chosen to take things the hard way, have you!? Don't you regret it now, Laelana Delarosa!" Emperor Varan growled with a darkened look.

Chapter 669: Clash of Powers

Matriarch Laelana listened to Emperor Varan's threat before sneering with contempt once again.

"Since we have already reached this point, why speak so much nonsense, Your Imperial Majesty? I don't believe you've brought all these troops to merely 'search' our land!" Matriarch Laelana replied with ridicule.

Once activated, a grand magic barrier protected the entire Delarosa Household from outside threats. No one could enter or leave the dome-shaped transparent barrier unless it were deactivated or destroyed.

However, there were some exceptions – if the gates were opened, it was tantamount to creating a hole in the barrier, giving Emperor Varan's troops the chance to storm inside.

Matriarch Laelana was not so foolish.

"If you weren't feeling guilty, why would you even be afraid of a little search? Since you defied my orders, be prepared to face death. You and everyone with you will have to die for resisting imperial orders," Emperor Varan indifferently stated.

"Bring forward the siege weapons and fire at will! I want this bubble shattered!"

"Yes, Your Imperial Majesty! Do it, men! Blast this barrier open for His Majesty!"

Following Emperor Varan's orders, the imperial soldiers quickly pushed large magitech cannons forward under the lead of their superiors.

"Heh," Matriarch Laelana snickered coldly before boasting, "Do you think my barrier is something you can easily break? I'm not trying to shatter your hopes, but even a witch at the Transcendent Rank won't be able to break this barrier easily. You are wasting your time—!"

Boom, boom, boom!

The Delarosa's magic barrier faced several rounds of testing shots from Emperor Varan's magitech cannons, and the deafening impacts seemingly shook both the ground and air.

Matriarch Laelana's proud dome-shaped barrier quickly suffered numerous cracks across its surface. Still, it also repaired itself just as quickly.

Even so, the firepower demonstrated by Emperor Varan's magitech cannons was enough to wipe the smugness off Matriarch Laelana's face.

"Rank 5 Magitech Cannons!? Impossible! The Great Ratholos Empire had never openly traded with the Holy Knight Empire or Freedom Federation! When and where in Pangea did you find such powerful anti-magic siege weapons?!" Matriarch Laelana barked with a nasty expression.

"Heh, I don't need to explain anything to you," Emperor Varan replied uncooperatively before admitting, "Still, I must acknowledge your bubble is quite sturdy. I am unwilling to expend so much resources to shatter it entirely."

"Gather the siege weapons here and focus your fire on a single point! I want these gates blown open!"

"Yes, Your Majesty! Your Majesty is wise!" the commander-ranked imperial soldiers complied and praised, wiping their cold sweats.

Each cannon shell easily wasted away tens of thousands of mana stones. Even if the empire was unbelievably wealthy, they couldn't waste their precious resources like this.

After all, they still needed to attack the Sacred Tirtha, and god knows if that place also had such a powerful barrier set up.

Meanwhile, Matriarch Laelana's expression turned grave when she heard Emperor Varan's orders outside. She knew the magic barrier wouldn't last long under the concentrated barrage of Rank 5 Magitech Cannons.

So long as the magic barrier was compromised for a split second, the next cannon shell would easily blast away their front gates and leave a permanent gap in the magic barrier!

But at the same time, Matriarch Laelana understood where Emperor Varan got his Rank 5 Magitech Cannons.

"I see," Matriarch Laelana scrutinized Emperor Varan from the top of the wall and said with enlightenment, "These Rank 5 Magitech Cannons were secretly developed under your will!"

"Furthermore, it shouldn't have been done recently! Even the wise would take at least a hundred years to develop these on their own! It seems you have been wary of us since long ago!"

"Oh?" Emperor Varan smiled and said, "As expected of Matriarch Laelana, you've figured it out so quickly. That's right! These Magitech Cannons were developed to guard against your kind!"

"I knew allowing witches to develop themselves was a double-edged sword, but alas, it was my father's decision that permitted your growth! I could only prepare for the worst while making use of your medicines to develop the country."

"Even when I realized the threat posed by your growing influence, I've only ever suspected the Delarosas and the Sacred Tirtha were only trying to create a matriarchal society like the witch kingdoms."

"Who knew you all were actually aligned with the demons of Gehenna?" Emperor Varan said self-mockingly.

"You could say we both played our parts in developing a strong nation. However, we were never united; we were only using each other. And now, it is time for it to end," Matriarch Laelana coolly stated.

"We will lead the new world under the guidance of our master, while you, who condemn and resist the grace of the Great Devils, will fall without understanding anything."

"Prepare to face the enemy!" Matriarch Laelana barked as she retreated from the wall.

Throughout the conversation between the two leaders, Emperor Varan's Rank 5 Magitech Cannons continued their barrage on the barrier, whittling away its defense with each shot.

Finally, with the previous shot exposing the vulnerable front gates, the following cannon shell tore it apart, sending shattered stones and metal fragments flying everywhere.

The rune-engraved sea monster bones hidden within the stone wall were also destroyed, causing a section of the grand circuit that shaped the magical dome to disappear.

"The magic barrier has been breached! Apprehend all these fools for the suspicion of treason and sins against humanity! Kill anyone who resists!" Emperor Varan roared, drawing his silver sword, radiating terrifying sharpness.

"Charge! Do not give these Delarosas a chance to reform their ranks!" the commander-ranked imperial soldiers thundered as they led the assault.

Meanwhile, Matriarch Laelana stood behind rows of Delarosan Shamans and Witch Doctors, each of them equipped with numerous small totems made from high-quality beast and sea monster materials.

Everyone was decorated from top to bottom in totem-like accessories.

"Go! Show these barbarians the true might of our craft!" Matriarch Laelana commanded with a wave of hand.

"Kill!"

The Delarosan Shamans and Witch Doctors cried with frenzied desperation as they engaged in their first battle of life and death.

As the imperial soldiers poured into the Delarosa's territory, a group of Shamans with skull necklaces at the front stepped forward, screeching in an unknown yet seemingly ancient language.

"Alik, zhe, eruk, kui, fahli-fah!"

In that instant, the empty eye sockets on their skull necklaces lit up with powerful green light that seemingly resonated with nature as they formed sturdy light barriers.

The imperial soldiers thought they could steamroll over these weak-looking men and women with their powerful bodies. However, the moment they slammed into the newly erected barriers, they were actually repelled!

"What!" Countless imperials exclaimed.

Numerous pairs of eyes from Emperor Varan's side widened in shock and disbelief as they witnessed the might of Delarosan Shamans' totem power. It was the first time they had seen such strange magical powers, let alone fight against them and fail.

Matriarch Laelana coldly smiled as she found their reaction natural.

After all, the Shamans and Witch Doctors have only ever used the power of their totems to heal wounds and treat illnesses and curses.

Now, they will witness the true terror of their totem power!

Chapter 670: Clash of Powers (2)

"Shamans, push these barbarians back out! Do not let their filthy feet step inside this holy ground! Witch Doctors, give them a taste of your worst curses! Do not give them the chance to build up their momentum! Crush them! Break them!

Make them feel utter despair!"

Following Matriarch Laelana's commands, the rows of Witch Doctors behind the Shamans quickly chanted as they raised cross-shaped totems made from the finger bones of wretched creatures of darkness into the air.

"Rak, kuzu, xan, telik, qui, fiamir!"

"Guard yourselves with aura!"

Emperor Varan had no idea what the Witch Doctors chanted, but he didn't intend to wait to find out as he warned his troops.

In the next instant, clusters of eerie black light shot out from the Witch Doctors' cross-shaped totems, aiming straight at the imperial soldiers, who were pushed back by the Shamans' green barriers.

In a contest of pure strength, it was impossible for the imperial soldiers and guards to be pushed back by the scrawny Shamans.

However, the Shamans did not rely on their pitiful strength to push the imperial soldiers and guards back; the repelling force came from the green barriers.

These barrier-type totem powers were clearly extraordinary for being able to suppress even the Rank 4 Body-refining imperial guards.

Nevertheless, as the eerie black light approached them, the imperial guards all coated their bodies in aura as ordered. They acted decisively and without hesitation, and that saved them from the cruelty of the black light as it failed to penetrate their aura.

Unfortunately, not all imperial soldiers were aura users like the imperial guards; most of them were purely Body Refiners. As such, several unlucky imperial soldiers were struck by the black light.

At first, nothing happened to them.

However, moments later, these unlucky imperial soldiers all started screaming and squirming with horrified expressions.

"Ahh! Ahhh—! Don't get near me! Don't get near me!!!"

"Get away from me—! Die, die, die, you monster!!!"

The inflicted imperial soldiers completely lost their minds as they wildly swung their swords around as if to hack the illusory monsters within their hallucinations.

No one knew what these inflicted imperial soldiers saw, but it must have been an unimaginably horrible nightmare for these battle-hardened warriors to behave as they did.

Their violent panic easily broke formation and wounded their comrades as their swords could not tell friends from foes.

These strictly trained imperial soldiers and guards had never encountered such a situation. They didn't expect it either. As such, the chaos caused delays in their judgment as they hesitated on how to deal with their inflicted comrades.

"Hahaha! Look at their shock and confusion! That is the right expression to have! However, it is not enough! Witch Doctors, give them another taste of despair!" Matriarch Laelana commanded.

"Aura Users take the vanguard!" Emperor Varan thundered with a solemn, grim look.

The powerful curses demonstrated by the Delarosan Witch Doctor cleared one of his great doubts. It became clear to him that the curses cured by the Witch Doctors in the past three hundred years were most likely conjured by none other than themselves.

"What a good Witch Doctor! What a good Shaman! Such benevolence! Great scheme! Wonderful acting!" Emperor Varan spat with gloom.

"For many years, you made the whole nation think all the curses came from the witch kingdoms when, in truth, they came from your people! Your family has certainly played countless proud warriors for fools, Laelana Delarosa!"

"You must have viewed all of us as idiots!"

"Hahaha! It's good that you know! You don't know how many times I wanted to tell you the truth and laugh in front of your face, Your Imperial Majesty!" Matriarch Laelana addressed Emperor Varan without a hint of respect.

His status was a mere joke to her.

Following their exchange, the second wave of curses struck many more imperial soldiers outside the broken gate.

After the imperial soldiers and guards were forced out of the territory, the open space made them easier targets for the Witch Doctors' curses. As such, the number of victims increased by tenfold!

Having the Aura Users take the vanguard didn't necessarily stop the vulnerable non-Aura Users from getting inflicted with curses; the beams of black light flew around unpredictably to pick their victims.

Moreover, this second wave of curses came with more than one type.

Some victims experienced horrifying hallucinations and nightmares as their screams and cries resounded from within the ranks of the imperial army. Others encountered blissful dreams as they sexually assaulted other comrades; even the ground itself wasn't spared from their carnal stimulation.

However, these types of curses were considered mild among the curses inflicted upon the imperial soldiers. They only inflicted fear or bliss and didn't cause any real harm.

The most unfortunate victims were those trapped in purgatory hell, experiencing days of soul torment within the span of a breath. Time flowed differently in their caged dreamscape as scars were carved onto their souls.

The longer they were trapped within, the greater the danger to their life. It was a truly vicious curse.

The last type of curse inflicted was a physical kind – the inflicted victims were reduced to mere puppets, moving according to the bone effigies played by the Witch Doctors. It was no different from voodoo magic, used for physical torture.

"Hahaha! Instill fear! Shatter spirits! Incite torment! Provoke despair! Let these barbaric brutes tremble before the might of our totems!" Matriarch Laelana wildly laughed as she witnessed the effectiveness of the totem powers.

Against their fearsome curses, non-magic users were simply free targets.

The more wildly Matriarch Laelana acted, the more shaken the imperial soldiers and guards were.

However, the intelligent Emperor Varan eventually saw through Matriarch Laelana's false bravado. From her provocations to her wild behavior, they were psychological attacks, meant to intimidate and buy time.

Emperor Varan acknowledged the power of the totems was indeed troublesome. But besides inciting disorder in the ranks of his soldiers, actual harm was limited.

After Emperor Varan finished analyzing the situation, he immediately made his move.

"Everyone, step aside!" Emperor Varan thundered, charging forward with his sword drawn. "Your pretty tricks ends here, vile spawns! Die!!"

Ka-cha!

Emperor Varan slashed out with his aura-infused sword, and the seemingly powerful green barriers shattered like fragile glass.

However, his attack did not end there, as his sword wave continued on its path, slicing through several Shamans and Witch Doctors.

"Arghhh!!!"

Cries of pain and fear resounded as chaos quickly spread within the ranks of Shamans and Witch Doctors.

At the same time, Matriarch Laelana's face quickly paled as Emperor Varan's sword wave swept past her, narrowly missing her.

She had not been prepared to counter Emperor Varan's lightning-swift attack.