

Tyrant 114

Chapter 114: Into the Depths

An hour's ride brought them to the mine. The path had wound through rocky hills until the earth itself split open into a jagged mouth, reinforced with timber beams and glowing crystals embedded in the rock. The entrance loomed like a wound in the mountainside.

Only a handful of people milled around—no more than ten, split into two groups or perhaps one large party. Voices drifted in low tones, the clink of armor and the creak of packs betraying their preparations.

"This is it," Augusto muttered, pulling a folded map from his coat pocket. He spread it open, pointing a clawed finger at the entrance. "Here's where we stand. And we'll be heading..." He dragged his finger deep into the parchment, far past the marked tunnels. "...all the way here."

Trafalgar's eyes narrowed. "Mythril?"

"Exactly." Augusto's eyes gleamed. "The most valuable ore this mine holds. Light as air, stronger than steel, and a perfect conduit for mana. It resists corrosion, channels enchantments better than anything else, and lasts for centuries without wear. Every legendary weapon or artifact worth its name carries Mythril at its core. That's what you want, yes?"

Trafalgar replied. "Yeah."

He already knew this ore would serve as the backbone of Selara's craft—but hearing it said aloud only reinforced the weight of their task.

"Don't worry about supplies," Augusto continued, patting the massive backpack on his shoulders. "Food, drink, tools—I've got it all. You two only need to fight. A Morgain and a lycan should be more than enough. I want to see it with my own eyes. You beat someone as promising as Alfons back at the Council."

Trafalgar's brow twitched. "You've got too high an image of me."

"Not really," Augusto said easily. "You're a Morgain, aren't you? Sixteen years old and already strong enough to defeat Alfons—you should be near Flow Core at least."

Trafalgar tilted his head, voice calm but edged. "You missed one detail. Alfons had locked himself at the first core."

Augusto froze, stunned. "First... core?" Augusto's mouth hung open for a heartbeat. "First... core?" he repeated, as if the words themselves refused to fit.

Trafalgar gave a humorless chuckle. "How could you not know? If you've really attended the Council, you should've heard the rumors. The bastard of House Morgain—the weakest heir, useless even for breathing." His tone was flat, but the weight of the words hung heavy.

"I don't pay attention to petty gossip," Augusto replied with a shrug, though his ears flicked uncomfortably. "Still, that complicates things..." His eyes sharpened suddenly, and he thrust the pack toward Trafalgar. "Fine. You carry the bag, then."

Trafalgar's gaze hardened. "No. I want to test how far I've come. I'll fight. Garrika will cover me if needed. You stick to business, not guessing at people's strength."

For once, Augusto had no quick comeback. He studied the boy in silence, then muttered, "...Fine. Follow me."

Beside them, Garrika stifled a laugh, her wolf tail swishing with amusement. "You two are like an old married couple."

Trafalgar ignored her.

The mine swallowed them whole.

Lanterns embedded in the walls glowed steadily, their light reflecting off damp stone and half-polished crystals. The air was cool, heavy with the scent of wet earth and iron. Echoes of dripping water carried down the tunnels, merging with the distant clang of picks from other groups already at work.

Trafalgar exhaled, steadying his focus. With a thought, Maledicta materialized in his hand. The blade hummed faintly, its surface catching the lanternlight in sharp glints.

"Show-off," Garrika teased, but her eyes followed the weapon with interest.

Augusto adjusted the straps of his backpack and nodded toward the path. "Stay sharp. The deeper we go, the more dangerous the monsters become. Our prize lies far below."

As if on cue, a faint screech echoed through the tunnel, sharp enough to prick the skin. Shadows stirred above them—winged shapes clinging to the ceiling, their throats glowing faintly with pulsing light.

"Bats?" Garrika muttered.

The creatures detached from the ceiling in a rush of leathery wings. Each one was the size of a large hound, with elongated muzzles and glowing throats that pulsed like lanterns. A shrill cry split the air, followed by a wave of sound that reverberated through the stone walls.

The blast made the cavern spin for a heartbeat. Garrika flinched, ears flattening. Augusto staggered back a step. But Trafalgar's expression hardly changed—he had lived with the headaches Sword Insight inflicted, and this dizziness was tolerable.

"Mine," he muttered, lowering Maledicta.

The first bat lunged, jaws snapping. Trafalgar stepped into its path, swinging horizontally—[Arc Slash]. A dark-blue crescent burst from the blade, cleaving straight through the creature's chest and carrying on to slice another from the sky.

Two more dove at once, their throats glowing as another sonic burst erupted. Trafalgar blurred, body twisting in a precise diagonal cut—[Severing Fang]. The strike split one monster clean in half, and the stone wall behind it bore a perfectly straight scar, as though carved by a master mason.

The third came from behind, but Trafalgar vanished in a curving shadow—[Severance Step]. He reappeared behind the creature in an instant, Maledicta already driving through its spine. Dust drifted from the disturbed floor, untouched by his movement.

More shapes swirled above, surrounding him. Trafalgar's eyes narrowed. "Fine."

He spun, blade flashing. [Morgain's Requiem] burst forth. Five chained slashes tore outward, black arcs expanding like shadows given form. Each cut left a lingering crescent of energy, raking through wings and flesh alike. The cavern filled with shrieks as the bats dropped, torn apart mid-flight. The sequence ended with a final slash—an enormous crescent wave that split the air in front of him, scattering dust and bodies alike.

Silence fell, broken only by the drip of water. Corpses littered the floor, their glowing throats dimming to darkness.

From the sidelines, Garrika raised an eyebrow, her tail flicking once. Augusto's jaw tightened, his amber eyes wide.

"...This kid..." Augusto muttered under his breath.

The cavern lay quiet, filled with the stench of blood and dust. Dozens of leathery corpses sprawled across the stone, their glowing throats fading to cold darkness. Trafalgar stood at the center, Maledicta dripping faint streaks of ichor that evaporated quickly into the air. His breathing was calm, but inside, he measured himself carefully.

'I can do this a few more times... but after that, I'll need to recover my mana.' The thought grounded him, a reminder that even precision had its cost. Each skill had cut clean, but the drain on his core was unmistakable.

A faint screech snapped his attention upward. One of the creatures had survived, its wing torn but still beating furiously as it fled into the deeper dark.

With a flick of his wrist, a different weapon materialized—Widow's Whisper, the dagger's curved blade almost translucent in the dim light. He poured mana into it, the weapon humming with a low, predatory resonance.

He drew back and let it fly.

The dagger sliced through the cavern air with a whispering hiss. A heartbeat later, it embedded itself in the creature's skull with brutal precision. The bat's body crumpled mid-flight, crashing against the stone with a dull thud. Widow's Whisper dissolved into motes of shadow and returned seamlessly to Trafalgar's inventory.

Garrika let out a small whistle, impressed but unsurprised. Her tail swayed lazily as if to say, I knew you could do something like that.

But Augusto's reaction was different. His amber eyes were wide, the cigar in his mouth forgotten as ash dropped to the ground. "You... you have some of the best sword technique I've ever seen."

Trafalgar rolled his shoulder, resting Maledicta against it. His tone was dry. "That's why you keep carrying the backpack."

Augusto blinked, then barked a laugh, shaking his head. "Alright."

Trafalgar's gaze lingered on the corpses, his thoughts sharpening. 'Makes sense. With Sword Insight, I memorize every movement I witness. And with my talent, copying them is easy. The more I fight, the stronger I'll become. No way I'll let someone else take these monsters—they're my training and my precious battle experience.'

He turned toward the deeper tunnel, Maledicta still at his side. "Let's keep moving."