

Tyrant 115

Chapter 115: Isn't it too quiet?

The tunnels seemed endless. Two hours had already passed since they first stepped into the mine, and Trafalgar's blade had carved through more creatures than he cared to count. The leathery bats from before had returned in smaller swarms, mixed with other beasts—lizardlike crawlers with serrated jaws, and hunched, ape-bodied fiends that swung from stalactites.

Each battle had drained him piece by piece. Now, as their footsteps echoed through another damp corridor, Trafalgar could feel the strain in his core. The dark hum of Maledicta in his hand only emphasized how much mana he had poured into every swing.

He stopped briefly, closing his eyes to measure himself. 'Thirty percent left. If I keep burning mana at this pace, I'll be dry before we reach the depths. Even with the Primordial Body accelerating my recovery, I'll need time if I want to fight without limits again.'

A faint memory of suffocating stone and crushing darkness flickered in his mind—the mine of the Zar'khael, and how close he'd come to never walking out alive. His jaw tightened. 'Not again. I need to conserve. Garrika can take point for now.'

"Garrika," he said aloud, lowering Maledicta, "you take over for a while."

The wolf-girl blinked, a sharp grin spreading across her lips. "What? Done already? I was enjoying the show. Don't you want to fight a little longer?"

Trafalgar's eyes narrowed in silence.

She chuckled, lifting her hands in mock surrender. "Relax, I'm kidding. I'll handle it."

Trafalgar exhaled through his nose, storing Maledicta away. This would be the first time he had seen Garrika truly fight. Despite all her confidence, he realized, he had never witnessed what a lycan could do in combat.

'A wolf lycan... will she transform? Or something in between? And... does she howl at the full moon? Maybe I'll ask later.'

He stepped back, letting Garrika take the lead as they continued deeper into the mine.

The echo of boots and claws against stone carried faintly ahead of them. Soon, the dim light of lanterns revealed another group further down the tunnel. Ten figures sat in a loose circle on the ground, their packs open and rations spread across cloth. The smell of dried meat and spiced bread drifted into the corridor, strangely domestic in the depths of the mine.

Trafalgar slowed his pace. "People?"

Augusto snorted softly. "Did you forget this place is public? Of course there are others. Don't let it surprise you."

"What surprises me," Trafalgar replied, brow furrowed, "is how calmly they're eating when there are monsters crawling in every direction."

"They'll be watching their surroundings," Augusto said dismissively. "Better worry about yourself instead."

"Yeah," Garrika added, her tone light but edged with amusement. "Stop being such a worrier."

Their trio walked past without greeting. The adventurers didn't raise their heads either, too focused on their meal. Only one pair of eyes followed them—a young man with brown hair, no older than Trafalgar himself. His gaze locked not on Garrika or Trafalgar, but squarely on Augusto.

A quiet murmur slipped from his lips. "Augusto? What's he doing here...?"

One of his companions, an older man with sharp eyes, turned toward him. "Something wrong, young master?"

The boy straightened quickly, waving a hand. "Nothing. Finish up. We're moving deeper."

The older man frowned but obeyed, rising to gather his things. The rest followed suit, murmuring quietly as they packed away their food. Their glances flicked again and again toward Augusto, suspicion lingering in their expressions.

But Augusto never slowed, never even glanced back. He carried his heavy pack with the same ease as before, smoke from the cigar in his mouth curling faintly in the lantern light.

Trafalgar noticed, though, the way the boy's eyes lingered. 'He knows him. And judging by that reaction, it's not a friendly recognition.'

The three pressed on, leaving the adventurers behind in the dim glow of the tunnel.

Time dragged on. Another hour slipped away as the three advanced deeper into the mine. The tunnels grew narrower, the walls slick with condensation, but not a single monster crossed their path. The usual screeches and rustling wings were absent; only the sound of their boots and the occasional drip of water echoed through the dark.

Trafalgar's brow furrowed. It wasn't natural.

"This isn't right," he muttered. "Isn't it too quiet?"

The words slipped out before he could stop them. His eyes went wide, and in the same motion, he slapped a hand over his mouth.

'FUCKKKKKK! Why did I say that out loud?! Every time I've thought or spoken something like this in this world, it happens. I'm a cursed idiot...'

Garrika's ears perked. She tilted her head, staring at him as though he'd just sprouted horns. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," Trafalgar said quickly, lowering his hand.

Her green eyes narrowed. "You look like someone caught stealing bread. What's wrong?"

"I said it's nothing," he insisted, forcing his voice to stay calm.

Garrika studied him for a moment longer, then smirked faintly, her tail flicking. "You're weird, you know that? Relax—we're almost there. You'll get what you came for."

Trafalgar exhaled through his nose, his thoughts still racing. 'If this place suddenly bursts alive with monsters, it's my fault...'

Augusto's voice broke the tension. "We've arrived."

The tunnel widened abruptly into a massive cavern. The ceiling stretched high into the dark, vanishing beyond the glow of their lanterns. The walls shimmered faintly with a strange luster, veins of pale purple light running like cracks of lightning through stone so dark it looked black. The very air vibrated with mana, heavy and oppressive.

Trafalgar slowed to a halt, his deep blue eyes widening at the sight.

"Mythril..." Trafalgar breathed, gray eyes widening. The veins looked like frozen lightning, pale purple etched across obsidian-black rock. "Beautiful. This is what's used in items?"

"Exactly," Augusto said with a grin, shifting the heavy pack from his shoulders. "Light as a feather, stronger than steel, and a perfect mana conduit. It's priceless—and it's right here."

He rolled up his sleeves, claws lengthening with a faint crack. "Now, let me work."

Trafalgar raised an eyebrow. "You're mining it with your claws? That's really how it's done?"

Augusto shot him a look, lips curling around the cigar still clenched in his teeth. "Are you the professional here?"

"...No."

"Then shut up and let me concentrate." With that, Augusto sank his claws into the wall, scraping away chunks of black-violet ore with practiced precision.

Trafalgar exhaled and sat down on a nearby rock, Garrika dropping beside him. She stretched, tail brushing lazily against the ground, while Trafalgar leaned back and let his gaze wander upward.

The ceiling was impossibly high, jagged with stone and shadows. For a moment, it was just darkness. Then—he saw them.

Tiny red sparks. Not one. Not ten. Hundreds. No—thousands.

His breath caught as the dots sharpened into pairs of eyes, glowing faintly in the black above. They stared down, silent and unblinking, like a sea of embers scattered across the cavern roof.

"Shit..." he whispered.

Beside him, Garrika straightened, ears twitching as she followed his gaze. Even Augusto paused, claws embedded in the wall, realizing something was wrong.

The cavern air grew colder. The silence that had followed them for the last hour pressed heavier, oppressive, suffocating.

Trafalgar's lips curled into a grimace as he muttered under his breath, almost to himself—words that sealed the Chapter's end.

"It was too quiet indeed..."