

Tyrant 53

Chapter 53: Through the Crosshairs

Trafalgar was screwed.

He hadn't moved in minutes. Hadn't breathed loud enough to fog a mirror. His entire body was pressed against the cold dirt, half-covered in frost, hidden behind a crooked tree stump and a snow-capped boulder.

Not that it mattered.

'Shit... Valtair, are you really going to let your only generational talent die out here like this?'

He scanned the treeline slowly.

Snow. Rocks. Branches. Pines weighed down by ice.

No sign of the private soldier Lady Seraphine had sent.

And that was the problem.

Trafalgar inhaled quietly through his nose, then reached down and laid Maledicta beside him.

His fingers touched the snow. Ice clung to his gloves as he pressed together a small orb of compact frost.

He didn't aim.

He just tossed it high—straight up.

Fwsssshht—!!

The sound ripped the air apart.

The snowball exploded mid-air, torn to shreds by a mana-charged arrow faster than his eyes could follow. Ice particles scattered in a thousand directions, catching the light like crystal shrapnel.

'Fuck... He's fast. And he knew where I was. He's just playing with me.'

The realization hit like a hammer to the gut.

This wasn't just a pursuit. It was a performance. And Trafalgar wasn't the hunter in it—he was the test subject.

Carefully, he began to shift—sliding his body across the snow like a wounded fox. Every motion slow. Every breath controlled. His coat scraped across frozen bark as he rolled behind the next boulder, never fully rising.

His fingers burned from the cold. His breath fogged in tiny bursts. He moved like prey. Because that's what he was now.

'Don't give him a target. Just keep moving. Think like bait.'

He paused under the low branches of a collapsed pine. The scent of damp earth and old blood mixed with sap and cold.

Another memory hit him—his grandfather's voice during a hunting trip years ago.

"You want to outlive a predator, boy? Don't be faster. Be quieter."

He blinked slowly.

Then smiled faintly—cold and bitter.

'Old man, I hope you're watching this.'

Because this time, he wasn't hunting rabbits.

He was the one being tracked by something far more dangerous.

Trafalgar kept moving—inch by inch, step by step.

He no longer tried to run. That had already failed.

He crawled from shadow to shadow, from snow to stone.

No sudden movements. No straight lines.

But every few minutes, he paused. Listened. Watched.

Nothing.

Not a breath. Not a footstep. Not even a flicker in the treeline.

'Where the hell are you...?'

The answer came not with sound, but with instinct.

The kind of instinct born from near-death experiences and sharpened by fear.

He closed his eyes briefly and imagined the reverse—where he would be if he were the killer.

High ground.

Angle to shoot.

Wind direction.

Stable footing.

No line of escape.

He peered between the trees, eyes narrowing at the distant ridge above.

Was that a shimmer?

He focused harder. No movement.

'He's a fucking profesional.'

Trafalgar's hands tightened into fists.

He wasn't just dealing with a soldier. This was someone who lived and breathed the art of the hunt. Whoever Seraphine had sent was not some expendable pawn—he was the kind of weapon you kept hidden until the job really mattered.

'Even if I know where he is... I can't touch him. I don't have spells or something to even hit him. My body's too slow. My cover's too thin.'

It didn't matter how sharp Maledicta was.

This fight wasn't being fought with blades.

It was being fought with distance, patience and terror.

And Trafalgar was losing.

Badly.

He bit his tongue hard enough to draw blood, trying to stay grounded.

"Think harder," he muttered under his breath.

Another memory surfaced—hazy and soft. His grandfather again.

"You can't win every fight. But you can ruin the bastard's aim."

He glanced at the trees behind him. An idea sparked. Dangerous. Reckless. But better than waiting for another arrow to punch through his skull.

He grabbed a sharp stone and sliced a tear through the side of his coat. Blood stained the fabric. Then he tore off the piece and tied it around a broken tree branch.

He threw it behind him—over a ridge—far and high.

The moment it left his hand—

FWUUUSHK—!!!

An arrow whistled from above and split the branch mid-air.

The sound was instant. The timing perfect.

Trafalgar's heart sank.

'He's not just watching. He's reading me like a damn book.'

He crouched behind a dead log and forced himself to breathe through his nose.

'Okay. He's better than me. Stronger. Smarter. Faster.'

Trafalgar's eyes narrowed.

If the bastard wanted to play this game to the end... he would do it to the end too.

- Hunter's POV -

From the upper ridge, hidden beneath layers of snow-dusted foliage, the hunter crouched low, his breath steady, his fingers wrapped around the elegant black bow resting against his shoulder.

His eyes never blinked.

Below, about seventy meters out, the boy crawled like a wounded fox, hugging terrain as if it would save him.

The hunter snorted.

"Hah... look at the little bastard go. Moving like he thinks I lost him."

His voice was a low rasp, barely above a whisper. Not for fear of being heard—he knew he couldn't be.

"My Periphery Vision gives me a 100-meter read in every direction. I've been watching you this whole damn time."

He reached down and plucked another arrow from the quiver strapped to his back. The shaft pulsed faintly with violet runes—mana compression set to full burst.

"Let's see how long you can crawl before you start praying."

He nocked the arrow, drew the string halfway—and paused.

A grin tugged at the corner of his scarred lip.

"That's right. Keep squirming. Seraphine didn't say kill you fast. Just kill you well. Let you feel it first. Let you beg. That's the kind of performance she wants."

His eyes didn't shift from Trafalgar's form below.

But something in his mind suddenly twitched.

That instinct. That primal whisper in the base of the skull that told men not to look left or right—but behind.

His grip tensed.

His vision flashed.

A presence entered the edge of his detection radius—barely a flicker in his Periphery Vision, but fast, direct, and glowing red with mana.

"What—?"

A projectile was heading straight for him.

Not an arrow.

Not a spell.

Something else.

The hunter's body reacted before his mind did—he leapt backward from the ledge, twisting in midair, his bow half-drawn as he tried to identify the object barreling toward his perch.

But it was too fast.

A blur of steel and wind.

'That wasn't from the boy...'

He landed hard, skidding on the snow. His breath fogged from the sudden adrenaline.

Then he heard it.

A voice.

Smooth.

Unbothered.

Amused.

"Found you."

- Trafalgar POV -

The forest exploded with noise.

A shockwave rolled through the treeline—branches snapping, snow falling like mist, the echo of something heavy slamming into the ground just ahead.

Trafalgar froze.

His instincts screamed in unison.

Run.

But something deeper—the hunter inside, the one his grandfather taught to listen to the forest, not fear it—told him otherwise.

'That wasn't an arrow. That was... something else.'

Maledicta shimmered back into his grip as he crept forward, cautious, slow, brushing aside the snow-heavy branches. Every step closer heightened the air's tension—like the forest itself was holding its breath.

He reached the edge of a shallow cliff and looked down into the clearing below.

And there he saw him.

A man stood amid a small crater of displaced snow and crushed roots. Not a scratch on him.

Long, platinum blond hair, flowing loose like threads of silver under sunlight.

His back was turned, but even from here, Trafalgar could tell—tall, lean, power coiled beneath the cloak that fluttered gently behind him.

Not Valtair.

'Wait... they look almost identical... but this one's younger.'

Then the man turned his head slightly, revealing a pair of sharp, steel-gray eyes—eyes that cut through fog, through fear, through men.

Trafalgar's breath caught.

In his mind, something clicked. A name surfaced—one he didn't even know he remembered. From a blurry memory of the old Trafalgar, overheard once during a bitter family gathering.

'...That's Mordrek du Morgain.'

He swallowed hard.

Valttair's younger brother. Ten years younger. Said to be just as dangerous.

Just as brilliant.

The kind of man who made blood run cold when he smiled.

Mordrek glanced up toward the ridge.

And for a moment, their eyes met.

His mouth curled slightly—not quite a smile.

Just enough to say:

"You're late."