

Tyrant 54

Chapter 54: Verdict

Trafalgar didn't move.

He crouched near the edge of the ridge, hidden behind a snow-covered branch, watching the clearing below like a ghost. The frost bit into his skin, but he barely noticed. His eyes were locked on the man standing at the center of the impact crater—unscathed, effortless, almost regal.

Mordrek.

Snow still drifted down around him, soft and slow, but the tension in the clearing was like steel wire.

Across from him, the hunter had landed lightly on the other side, bow already drawn again, feet spread in perfect form.

But even with that flawless stance... he wasn't smiling anymore.

Mordrek tilted his head slightly, inspecting the man before him as if he were a misplaced boot in a royal hallway.

"This is the private soldier Seraphine sent?" he said aloud, voice smooth and clear, not bothering to whisper. "Tch. I warned my brother to be careful who he marries."

He scoffed faintly, brushing a speck of ash from his shoulder with two fingers.

"He's older than me, but dumber by the year."

The hunter didn't answer. His eyes narrowed.

Mordrek just smiled, that glint of steel-gray amusement in his eyes. Then, with a casual flick of his wrist, a blade materialized out of shadowlight—forming in his grip as if answering a silent command.

"Alright then," he said, voice barely above the wind. "Let's see what you've got."

The hunter's smirk didn't waver. He spun his dagger once and tilted his head.

"So... the infamous little brother. You don't look like much."

Mordrek didn't respond. He simply stepped forward, dragging his foot lightly through the snow as if gauging terrain.

His sword—longer than most, slightly curved like a crescent moon—hummed softly with a dull, pulsing resonance.

The hunter took that as his cue.

In one fluid motion, he blurred to the side—mana surging through his legs—and loosed a triple-shot volley mid-dash.

Three arrows screamed through the air in a staggered arc.

Mordrek didn't flinch.

He pivoted once.

Steel flashed.

CLANG—CLANG—CLANG!

All three arrows were cleaved mid-air—reduced to splinters by a single circular sweep of his blade.

The hunter's feet skidded across the ground. "Tch. Fast reflexes."

He dropped low and vanished into the underbrush.

From his vantage point, Trafalgar barely blinked.

'He's fast... but Mordrek's faster. That move—he saw the flight pattern of three arrows and cut them in one sweep. That's... not human.'

A sudden ripple of mana burst from the right.

The hunter reappeared behind a tree, releasing a rapid-fire storm—six arrows at once, fanned out in a crescent spread.

[Scattershot Bloom]

Each arrow burned violet, whistling as they ripped through the air.

Mordrek stepped forward—once.

And vanished.

The arrows hit only wind and snow.

Before the hunter could blink, Mordrek was in front of him.

No warning. No sound.

Just—

"Too slow," he whispered.

SHRRRK—!

A sweeping kick to the side unbalanced the hunter, followed by a lightning-fast jab from Mordrek's elbow that cracked against his ribs. The air whooshed from the man's lungs as he stumbled back, gasping, but not broken.

He rolled, flipped, and pulled two curved daggers from shadow, both humming with compressed mana.

"I see..." the hunter grinned, blood in his teeth. "You're a monster."

"You're not the first to call me that," Mordrek replied softly.

He tilted his sword downward, the tip barely kissing the ground.

Mana surged through his body, the forest dimming slightly around him.

Trafalgar felt it too—some invisible shift in the pressure. Like the entire mountain inhaled.

Then—

Mordrek vanished again.

Trafalgar could barely follow what happened next.

Steel danced.

One second, Mordrek was a blur of motion, his sword carving graceful arcs that seemed to bend the shadows around him. The next, the hunter slipped beneath a horizontal slash, his daggers flashing in a crisscross strike toward Mordrek's chest.

CLINK-SHRRRK!

Mordrek deflected the first—but the second dagger scraped across his upper arm, drawing a shallow line of blood.

The hunter grinned. "Got you."

Trafalgar narrowed his eyes from behind the rocks.

And that's when it hit.

His head.

A blinding pulse of pain erupted through his skull. His eyes widened as fragmented visions—not of memory, but of movement—flooded into his brain. Each swing of Mordrek's sword, each foot placement, each recoil, each mana rhythm—

It was all being recorded.

Sword Insight (Lv. Max) triggered.

Trafalgar gasped and grabbed the side of his head, nearly toppling over from behind the boulder.

"Khh—!"

It wasn't just seeing. It was learning. Instincts he didn't own were being forcefully embedded into his body. Muscles ached. His temples throbbed with the rhythm of battle. Sweat poured from his brow despite the snow.

'H-He's on a completely different level—! Fucking hell it really hurts when someone way stronger performs...'

He bit down on his glove, trying to muffle the pained groan.

'Shit—if I keep watching, I might pass out... But if I look away now—'

Another flash of silver caught his eye.

The hunter lunged forward again, twisting mid-air in an acrobatic flourish and activating a dagger technique.

[Veinpiercer Thrust]

One of his blades extended with mana, turning into a near-transparent spike aimed directly at Mordrek's throat.

Trafalgar's vision blurred from the impact of Sword Insight's processing speed.

But even through the agony, he saw it.

Mordrek sidestepped half a second early. He predicted the timing, not reacted to it.

And with that step, he left a faint afterimage of shadow behind him—a trick of the light, or something else.

Then came the counter.

Not flashy. Not grand.

Just a twist of his shoulder, and a clean, controlled cut that opened the hunter's side.

The clash ended in a blink.

Blood splattered the snow.

The hunter stumbled back, clutching his ribs.

Trafalgar, still clutching his head, hissed through clenched teeth.

Another pulse hit his skull, this one so intense it made his vision go white for a second.

Then—calm.

Trafalgar collapsed to one knee behind the rocks, gasping, eyes wide.

'Sword Insight... recorded it. All of it.'

But his body was trembling.

His mind? Overloaded.

His nose bled.

His fingers were numb.

And Mordrek hadn't even used a skill yet.

The air shifted.

A sudden pressure—like the sky itself tensed above them. The trees no longer rustled. The wind paused mid-breath. Even the snowflakes stopped falling, suspended like specks of ash in the air.

Mordrek exhaled slowly, sword pointed low.

A deep, black glow crept along the length of his blade—an inverted crescent forming at its edge, pulsing with unnatural weight. The shadows around his feet curled inward as if bowing to the steel.

"Let's finish this," Mordrek said, voice low and calm.

The hunter didn't move. Blood dripped down his side, staining his leathers. His bow had snapped in the last exchange. He held one dagger forward, the other reversed along his forearm.

Still defiant.

Still dangerous.

But slower.

Breathing harder.

Sword Insight triggered again—forcefully.

"GghHHK—!" Trafalgar doubled over, screaming silently behind his clenched teeth. His vision pulsed in waves of red and white. Veins throbbed at his temples, threatening to burst.

The information surged—Mordrek's exact mana channels, the muscle tension in his shoulder blade, the slight twist of his hips before unleashing a cut. His core placement, his stance, his breathing rhythm.

It was being burned into Trafalgar's nervous system.

'It's too much—too fast—he's too refined!'

His hands trembled.

His eyes rolled slightly before snapping back into focus—only to see again.

Mordrek moved.

One step forward—graceful.

Then—

[Morgain's Final Crescent]

Mordrek vanished from Trafalgar's sight.

One second, he was standing. The next, mid-swing.

The arc of the slash tore reality itself. A crescent of pure shadow mana exploded from his blade, sweeping horizontally across the clearing like the reaper's scythe. The trees behind the hunter warped and cracked from the wave. The snow burned black where the arc touched.

The hunter barely raised his dagger.

It didn't matter.

The [Final Crescent] tore through his defense like wet paper. His body convulsed mid-air as the force sent him flying—bones cracking, his back slamming into a tree hard enough to break it at the base. He collapsed onto the snow, twitching violently.

His body steamed. His core glowed for a moment—then dimmed.

Mordrek landed softly, boots crunching in the ash-coated frost. He approached, sword still humming softly with residual power.

The hunter coughed blood, trying to crawl away.

Mordrek tilted his head, amused.

"You really thought that would work?" he asked, raising the blade again.

"I might not be Valttair," he whispered, "but I don't play with my food."

He drove the sword downward—straight through the assassin's spine.

CRACK.

A sharp twitch—and then silence.

The body went limp. Smoke rose from the impact site. The snow hissed around it, evaporating into steam.

Trafalgar's legs gave out.

He collapsed fully to the ground, chest heaving, blood trickling from his nose and ears now.

Every nerve felt like it had been struck with lightning. Every heartbeat brought a spike of raw agony. His mind was full—too full—of movements, stances, techniques, understanding he didn't earn but now possessed.

He gasped like he'd drowned.

'So that's... what mastery looks like.'

His vision swam.

From above, Mordrek looked over his shoulder, still calm.

"You like that, didn't you?"

Trafalgar blinked once.

Mordrek grinned. "Try not to pass out. I'm not carrying you."

The younger Morgain turned back toward the trees.

"Let's go little bastard."

And behind him, bleeding but alive, Trafalgar let out a shaky laugh.

"...What the fuck was that."