

Tyrant 63

Chapter 63: Into the Forest

Trafalgar climbed back onto his horse, adjusting the reins before falling into pace behind Mordrek and Syllis. The company resumed its march toward the center of the forest, the dense foliage overhead casting shifting shadows over their silver armor.

Though the Morgain family was known for their swordsmanship, Trafalgar quickly noticed that the group wasn't made up solely of sword-users. Among the twenty soldiers, at least one wore the robes of a mage, and another had a compact crossbow slung over his shoulder. There was even someone walking with a staff.

'This really does look like a raid party from a video game. The only difference is... this is my life now, not some damn game.'

The path narrowed, overgrown roots and vines crunching beneath hooves and boots alike. From time to time, wild monsters leapt out of the shadows — goblins with jagged knives, wolves with glowing yellow eyes — but they didn't last long. The soldiers moved in disciplined formation, dispatching each creature without even breaking a sweat.

Every time a blade clashed, a dull pulse hit the back of Trafalgar's head. A headache bloomed, triggered by Sword Insight, his passive skill that recorded and analyzed sword technique. It wasn't unbearable — certainly not as bad as when he'd watched Mordrek fight — but it still made him wince.

'The difference is clear. These guys are solid... but Mordrek's on a whole other level.'

He narrowed his eyes slightly, his gaze drifting toward his uncle ahead.

'Is he... stronger than Valtair?'

"Uncle," Trafalgar said, his voice steady as his horse trotted beside Mordrek's, "can I ask you something?"

Mordrek didn't look back, but his tone was casual. "Go ahead."

"Who's stronger, my father or you?"

A pause. Only the soft rhythm of hooves filled the silence. Then Mordrek let out a faint chuckle.

"If you gave me ten more years, maybe we'd be equals," he replied. "But no, your father's stronger. He didn't have an easy childhood either, and his talent is higher. SS-ranked. Mine's just S. The gap adds up."

Trafalgar's gaze darkened.

'A rough childhood? I seriously doubt anyone went through what this kid did... No mother. Abused. Powerless. Hated. Trained for twelve years just to fail and fall into despair. Locked himself away, living in silence and rot... It only changed because I took over.'

He cleared his throat. "What do you mean he had a similar childhood?"

Mordrek finally glanced sideways. "Maybe your father will tell you someday. Or maybe not. It's his story, not mine to share."

"I understand."

They rode in silence for a few moments longer. The wind carried the faint scent of pine and soil, but something heavier lingered between them — the weight of unspoken truths neither was ready to confront.

From behind, a soft voice broke the silence.

"You've learned [Morgain's Requiem]."

Trafalgar turned slightly in the saddle to glance at Syllis, who had remained quiet most of the journey because of what happened that morning.

"I have," he replied. "Lysandra taught it to me. I'm guessing you know her."

"Of course I do," she said, eyes narrowing slightly. "Do you realize how difficult it is to learn one of the Morgain techniques? I've only managed to learn Morgain's Blade, and that's just the prerequisite for even touching the real skills. And you—" she paused, "you've already learned one at sixteen."

"Is it really that rare?"

"It is," she nodded. "Techniques of Unique rank like those require months or even years. It depends on the user's talent, but... it's not something you just stumble into."

Trafalgar gave a faint, crooked smile. "Then consider me someone who doesn't follow the laws of nature."

Syllis blinked at that, then let out a quiet sigh. "How is Lysandra, anyway?"

"Dying under a mountain of work," he said dryly, "but otherwise fine."

"I haven't seen her in a long time."

"How long has it been since you last went to the main castle?"

Mordrek, listening in, responded before Syllis could. "We went for your father's birthday this year. But you were locked up in your room. I doubt you noticed—we didn't see you at the ceremony."

Trafalgar lowered his gaze. "I see..."

The silence returned again, heavier than before.

The horses slowed naturally as the terrain began to slope slightly downward.

A towering man clad in silver armor — the captain — rode forward from the middle of the formation. His voice boomed across the quiet ranks.

"Lord Mordrek, we are approaching the core of the forest."

Mordrek straightened in his saddle, scanning the dense foliage ahead. "Good. Let's finish this quickly and be back in time for dinner." He glanced over his shoulder at Trafalgar, a small smirk on his face. "You'll need to eat well before heading off to the academy, bastard."

Trafalgar exhaled slowly, unimpressed. "Yeah, yeah..."

As they neared the heart of the forest, the smell hit them first.

Rot. Blood. Burnt flesh.

The path ahead curved sharply to the right, and as the company emerged past the bend, the scene stopped them cold.

Bodies—huge, grotesque bodies—were sprawled across the clearing.

Dozens of ogres lay collapsed on the frostbitten earth, their grayish skin torn open in jagged lines. Blood had soaked into the roots, mixing with clumps of thick, matted fur. Massive bears were there too—direbears by the looks of their size—crushed or cleaved in unnatural ways. Some still had arrows or broken weapons sticking out of their bodies.

It wasn't a battlefield. It was a massacre.

Mordrek halted first and raised a hand. "Dismount," he ordered calmly. "Something's not right."

The soldiers obeyed instantly. Hooves thudded softly as each rider dismounted. The horses, already restless, were left at the treeline under the care of two guards who remained behind to watch them.

Trafalgar stepped forward, Maledicta shimmering faintly at his hip.

'This... wasn't done by regular monsters. These were apex beasts. It would've taken a whole company like ours to bring them down. And even then, not this cleanly...'

Sylis moved beside him, hand resting near her own blade. Her face was pale.

Mordrek knelt beside the charred remains of an ogre, his expression unreadable. Much of the creature's upper torso had been blackened, flesh melted and twisted beyond recognition. Its massive arm had been torn off — not cut, but ripped — and the edges of the wound were jagged, like something had bitten through muscle and bone.

He narrowed his eyes, fingers brushing the scorched ground. Burn marks stretched across the clearing, some still faintly warm.

"Not clean cuts..." he muttered. "These are burns. Deep ones. And look at this—" he gestured to the ogre's shoulder, "bite marks. Something big did this. And it was hungry."

One of the soldiers gagged as he looked closer. Another cursed under his breath. "What kind of beast burns and devours ogres like they're rabbits?"

No one had an answer.

Even the birds had gone silent. The only sound was the soft whisper of the wind weaving through the trees... like something was watching.