

Tyrant 64

Chapter 64: The Warden That Would Not Fall

The forest grew heavier with each step.

Mordrek now rode at the very front of the formation. He wasn't taking chances—not this deep into unknown territory. If something were to ambush them, it would meet the fastest blade among them first.

Trafalgar's eyes scanned the treetops, then the scorched earth below. The smell of burnt bark and rotting fur still lingered in the air.

"Could it be a wyvern?" he muttered. "The burns, the shredded beasts... Something that spits fire, maybe."

Mordrek responded without looking back. "Possibly. But it'd be odd. Wyverns prefer the snowy peaks. If one came this far down into forested lowlands... something forced it here."

The two-meter-tall captain, riding just behind him, tightened his grip on the reins. "My lord Mordrek... I can feel something ahead. A presence."

"I feel it too," Mordrek said sharply. He raised his hand. "Everyone halt."

The company came to a complete stop. Mordrek slid down from his horse in one smooth motion. His sword materialized in his hand—no flourish, no glow, just deadly weight.

"Eyes up. We don't know what's out there. Do not charge unless I give the order. I want no pointless deaths today."

"All understood," the soldiers replied in unison.

The tension was thick. Even the horses shifted uneasily beneath their riders.

Behind Trafalgar, he felt a tug on his coat. Syllis.

"You scared?" he asked quietly, glancing back.

"No," she replied too quickly.

Her hands were clutching his cloak, knuckles white. She was pale. Trembling.

"I don't think that's true," Trafalgar said softly.

"You're wrong," she whispered, refusing to meet his eyes.

He didn't push it.

'Still just a kid. Fourteen, maybe fifteen. It's normal to be scared out here.'

He lowered his voice. "Your father's with us. Nothing's going to happen, alright? Just stay close."

She nodded, but the tension in her fingers didn't ease.

"You've been on missions like this before?"

Syllis shook her head. "Only near the edges. Never this deep... not where the monsters are stronger than the people."

"...I see."

Then, the earth itself moved.

Roots burst from beneath the ground, snapping upward like spears.

The forest floor exploded.

Roots—thick as spears and coated in bark like armor—shot from beneath the ground with violent force. They tore through the air in jagged arcs, aiming straight for the riders.

"Defense!" the captain roared.

The soldiers reacted instantly. Swords flashed. Blades clanged against the charging wood, severing many of the roots mid-air. But not all.

Two of the horses weren't so lucky. One root impaled a mare clean through the flank; the beast let out a shriek, then convulsed violently before collapsing. Another root caught a second mount in the neck—blood sprayed as its rider barely leapt free in time.

Sylis screamed and clung tighter to Trafalgar's waist.

"Cover the bastard and my daughter!" Mordrek shouted. "I'll handle this!"

Trafalgar watched as Mordrek walked forward calmly, sword at his side.

'He's not rushing... he's analyzing. Just like before.'

Every instinct in Trafalgar's body told him to look away—to close his eyes, to shield himself from the inevitable pain of observation. But he didn't.

'This is going to hurt like hell... but I have to see it. If I want to surpass them—him—then I have to endure.'

Mordrek raised his sword and infused it with mana. The blade lit up, glowing a brilliant, crystalline blue—sharp enough to cut air itself.

With a single horizontal slash, he unleashed a wave of pure force. Trees ahead split cleanly in half. Thick trunks fell in synchronized thuds. A wide swath of forest had been erased in an instant.

Behind the falling trees, something moved.

It looked like a tree at first—massive, rooted, motionless. But its bark shifted. Its limbs twitched.

A face emerged from the trunk. Eyes of stone. A maw of jagged branches.

"A tree caused all this?" Trafalgar muttered.

Mordrek didn't take his eyes off the thing. "No. Not just a tree. It's a Verdant Stonewarden."

The monster roared—a guttural, creaking sound like trees breaking under snow—and launched a volley of razor-sharp limbs straight at Mordrek.

He didn't flinch.

And then—he vanished.

Trafalgar's eyes widened.

'Where—?!'

A familiar ping echoed in his head.

[Sword Insight] activated.

You have increased your understanding of [Morgain's Riftstep] by 5%.

Pain lanced through Trafalgar's skull.

'Shit, that hurts! That's not the same evasive step Mordrek showed me before... This one's different—more refined. It must be a family-exclusive technique. Pure mana, compressed into the soles... like a blink spell from those old games I used to play. Unreal seeing it in action.'

When Mordrek reappeared, he was behind the monster, sword gleaming once more.

He moved.

Mana surged through his body as he crossed his blades in an "X" pattern and swung with flawless precision.

[Morgain's Dual Crest].

Two slashes carved the air, forming a glowing symbol that shimmered for a heartbeat—then detonated with a sharp crack of compressed energy.

[Sword Insight] activated.

You have increased your understanding of [Morgain's Dual Crest] by 5%.

Trafalgar gritted his teeth.

'That one again... That hurt even more. If he keeps repeating them... I might learn them all.'

But something was wrong.

When the dust cleared, the Verdant Stonewarden was still standing. Its body had morphed—its bark now overlaid with rocky scales, interwoven with thorny vines.

The creature had reinforced itself mid-attack.

Mordrek narrowed his eyes. "Tch. It hardened its body."

Then the Stonewarden began to emit a dull, vibrating hum. From its trunk's base, a yellowish-gray mist started to pour out—thick, heavy, and unnatural.

Trafalgar's eyes widened. "Is that... poison?"

Mordrek took a step back, frowning. "Yes. Everyone, hold your positions!"

He looked to the archer. "Set a fire arrow. Shoot into the cloud."

Without a word, the soldier on horseback materialized a special arrow, ignited it with a flicker of red mana, and loosed it into the spreading fog.

WHOOM.

The arrow struck the center of the mist.

A split-second later—

BOOM.

BOOM.

Explosions erupted in sequence, shaking the trees and throwing debris into the air.

Trafalgar shielded Syllis instinctively. "Is it over?"

Mordrek didn't even blink. "No. That was just its shell. Now it begins."

Trafalgar felt a chill run down his spine.

'Second phase? Like a boss fight...? Hehe this shit is fun, but dangerous too I need to focus.'

From the smoke, the creature emerged again—its form grotesque, bark peeled back like muscle, raw mana leaking from cracks in its body. Its eyes were glowing now.

This was no longer a guardian. It was a monster unleashed.

Mordrek didn't flinch. Instead, he calmly shifted his stance, placing his blade behind him.

Trafalgar's eyes narrowed. 'That stance...'

He remembered it. The same one Valtair had used during the fight against that thirty-meter beast. A single, charged strike that split the battlefield.

'No way... He's going to use it too?'

The forest held its breath.

Mordrek remained perfectly still, blade humming faintly behind his back. The mana around him condensed—visible, pressurized, wrapping his body like a second skin.

The creature snarled, crouching low. It prepared to strike again.

And then—Mordrek moved.

His sword carved upward in a diagonal arc, and the air screamed in response.

[Morgain's Last Dusk].

The world seemed to tear for an instant. A line of raw energy ripped through the battlefield, warping the space around it. Trees in its path cracked and fell. The very ground shook beneath their feet.

Trafalgar covered his face from the wind pressure. His body trembled—not from fear, but from the sheer weight of the technique.

'That was... incredible.'

The creature recoiled. A massive wound tore across its torso, spraying sap and glowing fluid. But it didn't fall.

It staggered.

Still alive.

Trafalgar's eyes widened.

'Wait... That wasn't like Father's. Valtair's strike... split a monster ten times this thing's size in half. Mordrek's hit hard, yeah—but not on that level.'

[Sword Insight] activated.

You have increased your understanding of [Morgain's Last Dusk] by 3%.

'Even Sword Insight felt it... The technique is the same, but the weight behind it—no, the mastery—isn't. Mordrek's strong... but he's not Valtair.'

The monster let out a twisted howl, unsteady, blinking as mana bled from the open wound.

But Mordrek wasn't done.

In a flash, his body vanished again.

[Morgain's Riftstep]

He reappeared behind the creature, perfectly positioned. His sword was no longer glowing. It didn't need to.

He slashed once—quick, clean, without flair.

[Morgain's Verdict]

The cut was nearly invisible. But it struck true—deep into the creature's core.

The Verdant Stonewarden froze mid-motion. A low, guttural groan escaped from its mouth as its limbs twitched—then fell still.

Its body collapsed to the ground with a dull, shaking thud.

Dead.

Trafalgar clutched his head. The pain from Sword Insight was unbearable now.

Mordrek had used too many high-level techniques in rapid succession—far beyond what his mind could digest.

But still...

'This is what it means to be a Morgain.'

The silence after the kill was absolute.

The Verdant Stonewarden's twisted body lay motionless among the shattered roots and scorched soil. Smoke still curled from its wounds, and the air was thick with residual mana.

The soldiers slowly approached, weapons still raised just in case.

The towering captain dismounted first, stepping beside Mordrek with careful reverence.

"My lord... is it over?"

Mordrek didn't answer immediately. He stood staring at the corpse, eyes narrowed. He lowered his blade, letting it dissolve back into nothing.

"No," he said finally. "That thing was dangerous, yes. But it wasn't the source of the disturbance."

He turned back toward the group. "The mana in the forest hasn't changed. The pressure is still here. Whatever's causing this... it's deeper."

Trafalgar, still rubbing his temples, grunted. "So we just killed a guard."

"No, this thing belongs here," Mordrek replied. He looked around. "We're splitting up."

A murmur passed through the ranks.

Mordrek raised his hand. "Three teams. We'll cover more ground that way."

He pointed toward Trafalgar. "You'll go with the captain and seven others. Stay alert."

Trafalgar nodded, still catching his breath. "Got it."

"Sylis, you're with me," Mordrek continued without looking back. "I don't trust you anywhere else."

Sylis flinched slightly but obeyed with a quiet nod.

Finally, he turned to the archer—the one who had ignited the mist. "You'll lead the third team. Keep your man and scouts tight."

The archer saluted. "Understood."

The soldiers began to form up into their assigned squads. Supplies were redistributed, and spells of detection and barrier were recast.

Trafalgar mounted his horse again, exhaling slowly as he looked into the dark forest ahead.