

## Vile 641

### Chapter 641 Prelude to Chaos: Slughorn Moves

House Slughorn's Estate. Lionhearts Duchy. Edinburgh kingdom.

A wide study room was full of ancient-looking scrolls, worn-out yet precious books, and array disks that contained volumes of information in different formats. Various books were kept open at various locations.

As if somebody was reading multiple books at multiple corners of the room all at once. The mahogany-looking furniture inside the room looked expensive. But that didn't stop the room from being seen as the messy space of a caveman.

The air in that room was stale and reeked of old paper. There was barely any light in the spacious study room that was cluttered with various things. Furthermore, the room contained a distinct presence who was reading from a scroll spread in front of him on a desk at one end of the room.

"Sir, these are the reports you requested."

An attendant in his 30s appeared out of thin air and placed an array disk on the desk in front of the old ranker. This old ranker was reading the content from the scroll. He then lowered his head and waited silently for the old ranker to react.

Sitting at the desk reading a scroll was a man who appeared to be in his 80s. His skin was wrinkled and his eyes looked old and hollow. The hair on his head was white and unkempt. It was as if the man had stopped caring about how he looked.

The man listened to the attendant and nodded. But he didn't raise his head and kept on reading through the scroll. He mumbled a few words to himself as if he was reading through the scroll and trying to remember the contents of that scroll. After that, he sighed and put the scroll away before bringing the array that had been delivered to him by the attendant.

The old man in his 80s activated the array disk using his mana and mana sense. A spectral screen with sheets of data appeared in front of the mana with additional information.

The old man kept looking through the sheet and narrowed his eyes on a particular detail. He scratched his scalp while looking at the attendant before asking.

"Who the devil's tarnation is White Raven guild?"

The attendant was expecting this question. So he cleared his voice before speaking out.

"This is a newly formed guild, Sir. It was registered in the Nightshade duchy not too long ago. It looked like the guild was a solo project of an Ace ranker at first.

But it turns out that the guild leader got the backing of House Derringer and House Montmorency all of a sudden.

Sir, do you remember the news about Minerva's Utopia opening up in Nightshade duchy not too far from the city of New Beginnings?"

The old man scratched some more and processed what his attendant was hinting at. He opened his eyes in shock after he understood the connotation. He then accessed the data from the array disk and studied it a bit before replying.

"Oh? This tiny guild holds the land that features the entrance to Utopia, is it?"

Hehe!

I may have gotten old but I'm not senile yet. I bet that his chosen guy is House Montmorency's pawn right from the start. May all those achievements be robbed from me if that turns out to be wrong."

He said this before he started coughing badly. He then took out a potion from his storage before gulping it down in one go. The old man's body started glowing as the potion's effects kicked in. His cough stopped and he breathed a sigh of relief before adding on.

"Be that as it may, we can always remain as bystanders when House Derringer and House Montmorency are making moves. Although the White Raven potions are not meant for regular use yet, they are starting to hurt our niche market."

The old man looked at the data on his spectral screen once again. The attendant was used to the old man's devious schemes in business by now. So he asked vigilantly.

"Sir, do you want me to contact our black market manufacturing line to start making counterfeits for White Raven potions? That would be the easiest way to cut down their growing market presence and hurt them."

The old Montmorency chuckled when he heard the attendant's line of thoughts. He had to admit that this thought did cross his mind briefly not too long ago. But then he scraped it away as quickly as possible. He spoke about the reasons for doing so.

"I told you to remain vigilant and not get paranoid over a newbie guild that may or may not survive till the next winter. It is difficult to stay afloat in the business when there are so many competitors. It is especially tougher for someone like White Raven guild who has no previous background or record to speak of.

Don't underestimate Slughorn potions' quality and their market presence either. The name has a strong foundation. We survived the debacle that lass had created for us..."

The old man stopped talking midway and sighed. He didn't want to partake in victim blaming. But he had to admit that Sienna had lost her way in potioning long before that dreadful incident happened to her.

Sienna was sent to LA to learn potioneering from the best. The old man had pulled a few strings and had arranged for her to attend Levine's lectures without having to pass the test.

The old man knew about Levine's state and what she was doing in LA instead of taking charge of her clan. This was a perfect opportunity for him to let one of his clan's scions benefit from her situation.

After all, he knew Levine's teachings would be pristine. Something House Slughorn would never be able to complete them with.

But the girl skipped those lectures and chose the easy way out. Finding a guy of her own and bribing him to pass her potioning tests. Instead of doing many things she could do in LA, she chose to cheat her way out. The incident that had happened to her also occurred because she had wanted to cheat.

Sienna's incident had hurt the Slughorns' market presence directly and indirectly. And it was just starting to recover. But suddenly a new guild had arrived trying to take over the niche market. The old man had to admit that the timing of this new rival was impeccable.

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The old man massaged his forehead with his wrinkled hands and scrawny fingers before adding on.

"My point is, we don't need to take extreme measures just yet. Lower the prices a bit on our niche products and increase them by a fraction for our regular concoctions. This way, we wouldn't take a loss and start giving tough competition to the White Raven guild.

Hmm? What else? We also need to observe the market in the City of New Beginnings. That market has the power to break or make new guilds and their products. It also weights to give us a substantial blow in our earnings.

We'll need someone from our clan to go to the city of New Beginnings. How is Sienna holding on these days?"

The old man asked, looking at his attendant. The latter straightened his back before replying.

"The illusion spell that we have cast on her is still working, sire. She has forgotten about the whole incident. But she still has nightmares and those can't be cured.

For the most part, she is behaving normally. Lady Sienna appears blank when someone asks her about "that" incident. Suddenly, she snaps back and resumes the conversation as if she had never been asked that question.

The Master Illusionist that had cast a spell on her has said that this is a normal reaction. And wouldn't bother her day-to-day affairs."

The attendant gave a detailed report about Sienna's current status to the old man. Rarely did this potioner from House Slughorn leave his cave-like home. For most of the year, he would be cooped up in his potion lab, lost in his studies. So it was natural that he didn't know about Sienna's current status.

"Hmm. Alright. it's fine for now, I guess. Tell her that she needs to go to the Nightshade duchy. Arrange a place for her in the city of New Beginnings.

She'd become our point of contact for our House. It would also serve as a change of scenery for her. A completely new environment and added responsibilities should give her less trauma. Maybe cure her of her nightmares."

The old man said while scratching his neck. Then he remembered Sienna's carelessness and her usual behavior. He coughed and continued.

"Also, send a few capable men from our house with her. If Sienna makes wrong decisions, tell them they need to guide her.

I'll also visit Nightshade Duchy in a few weeks. Hehe. I want to know all there is to know about a Utopia from a Sage potioner after all.

Cough cough cough. Never mind me. Just tell Sienna to get ready and leave for Nightshade Duchy in a few days. Tell her I'll join her after some time."

The old man concluded his decision and stood up from his position. He had a hunched back and inwardly arched posture when he stood up, making him look a lot shorter.

"Yes, sire."

The attendant left his position after saying this. The old man wasn't there to listen to his attendant's response. He was also absent from his position, leaving the large study room empty of all things living once again.

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Arthur Renar's Dukedom.

The gigantic fort served as Arthur's palace that was fortified from every corner with steep perimeter walls etched with fortifying runes. This was his home and also his base of operations.

A large audience hall in which there was only one chair placed on the platform that was raised higher on the floor. Arthur was sitting on the chair with his head resting on the palm of his folded right arm.

Oliver was kneeling in front of his Duke Master. There were other runners present in the audience as well. Wearing the same combat armor and gear as Oliver. They seemed to be Oliver's squad he was in charge.

"Did you find anything about that damn homunculus? My Seer tells me she's out of Purgatory."

Arthur had a blank expression on his face. But Oliver could tell that his lord was angry. He felt like he was created for all the work he had done creating an artificial demon beast.

Eliza had never stood in front of Arthur. She had always talked with him through Layla, making her the face of Purgatory's lone permanent dweller. So according to the duke, Layla was in charge of Purgatory. And he couldn't contact her during these months using his normal means no matter what.

That's because Layla had given him a spatial-bound communication method that would work over long distances. But it was not something she could use outside of Purgatory. Neither Eliza nor Garvin Karr the Seer could talk to him without exposing her identity, thanks to Garvin Karr the Seer by his side.

Arthur had received various awards after he had supposedly handed over the demon beast to Layla. But what he needed the most was Sin Series Mark. And he felt like he was being ignored after his part of the deal was ended.

"My lord, we looked into the recent conflicts between Illuminati and Beast Bloods like you asked us to do. There may be someone that got out of Purgatory and clashed with either of these cultist organizations.

But we don't know anything after that. We also conducted independent searches throughout the kingdom and outside it. But so far the results aren't substantial.

As for the other task you had given us. We have found Isen Osan's family located in the kingdom of Layos. But it is heavily guarded. The most we can do right now with our current manpower is keep tabs on him.

It would be helpful if you could point us in the right direction and tell us what to do."

Oliver said humbly as he knelt. Arthur tapped the fingers of his other hand on the armchair and pondered a bit before commenting.

"The conflict between those two cultist organizations was a lead that was given to me by Garvin. If it doesn't pan out, just let it be."

Arthur sighed and looked up before adding on.

"Good job on Isen's case, Oliver. You have never disappointed me. We can never be too sure about that wretched old man. Keep an eye on him for now."

Arthur said as he got up from his throne-like chair that was eerily similar to the real throne in Edinburgh. He scratched his stubble and looked at all his subordinates before declaring.

"As for the clue regarding that homunculus. I have come across one clue. She is likely active in the Nightshade duchy.

There are no more clues about that little runt, who has kept her profile very low till now. But this is enough as well.

Oliver, prepare your men. We will go to Nightshade Duchy."

Chapter 643 Prelude to Chaos: Demonmir

The crack of dawn. 5.45 AM.

Nightshade Duchy. House Montmorency estate.

A muscular man in his late 40s was swinging his two double axes in empty air. He was practicing his weapon arts atop a relatively small mountain top that had a small house at its other end.

This man had long white hair that was tied behind his back. His face was like that of a hawk, with his sharp nose, sharper eyes, and even sharper jawline. His muscular and well-defined arms looked intimidating. Through his pants, his legs appeared equally pumped.

His musculature was that of a man who lacked any fat in his body. This white-haired man was not wearing anything to cover his torso. As if he was proud of the way he looked and wanted the world to see his pro-testosterone physique.

The house he was used to living in was small and only had basic amenities. He didn't wear or flaunt any fancy artifacts either. It looked like the man was used to living a simple life. A life meant for warriors.

Yet only those who knew him knew how much power he held over his clan or its wealth. In a sense, he was a fine specimen of a human male that seemed void of any worldly attachments. A serious and upright-looking man.

Yet if Levine was asked what she thought of this man, she would describe him as the most conniving son of a bitch. She would then curse the person who had asked her this question which made her talk about him.

This man who was wielding dual Labrys and practicing his weapon arts in silence was none other than Ottoman de Montmorency. He was called something different by his subordinates though. A kingdom-bonafide title that served as his unique identity.

A man who was riding a condor-type demon beast suddenly appeared in the sky before jumping down from his mount. He landed a few meters away from where Ottoman was practicing.

He kneeled before his Lord and spoke up.

"Lord Demonmir, We found out that Lady Levine was up to some unusual activities these days. I'm here to inform you of the same."

When Demonmir AKA Ottoman heard the name Levine, his wind and lightning element duality manifested around him. He was practicing his weapon arts without the use of mana till now. So the guy who had taken the knee hadn't felt threatened after landing a few meters away from Demonmir.

But now the condor-owning messenger felt like maybe landing this close to the Demonmir was a terrible idea. Because he felt threatening vibes coming from him as he swung his dual Labrys with a tinge of mana that leaked from him unwittingly.

Wind and lightning elemental fusion.

A gust of blue wind was generated all around the Demonmir before it took the shape of a flying attack. This attack closed in on the condor-type demon beast owner so fast that he didn't have a chance to react despite being an Adept rank.

The demon beast would have turned berserk and launched a suicide attack on the Ottoman if the beast owner had died in front of him. Thankfully for both of them, Ottoman quickly took control of his inadvertent attack and dispersed it in thin air before it could hurt his subordinate.

The Demonmir did not own any fancy artifacts for the most part. However, his ancient-looking dual Labrys set was the only exception to this rule. The white-haired man looked at his weapon set and pondered a bit as if revising what he had just done. He then closed his eyes while putting this set back into his storage.

Demonmir only replied when he was ready.

"Hm? What is my dear cousin up to these days?"

Demonmir flashed a cunning smile after he had said that. That smile completely broke the earlier image of him as an obedient yet upright man. His voice was deep and produced subtle vibrations in the surroundings due to his attainment in the wind element.

The listeners would feel the vibrations and electric discharge in the air whenever Demonmir spoke to them. Similarly, his recent achievement in the elemental fusion of wind and lightning should not be ignored. Despite his serious looks, the guy was very happy with the fruits of labor his isolation had brought him this time.

Practicing his weapon arts was Demonmir's way of celebrating his success.

The flying type demon beast owner quickly got over the life-threatening crisis he had just faced and turned to his Lord obediently.

"Lord Demonfir, Lady Levine had taken a few substantial steps while you were busy in your isolation. I came to meet you as soon as you got out.

Lady Levine has gotten herself and her faction of the Montmorency clan involved in a tri-party deal. This deal is regarding the management of land that hosts the entrance to Minerva's Utopia.

Here are the details."

A runic scroll was made to approach Demonmir as it levitated in the air. The latter caught it effortlessly and imbued his mana into it while closing his eyes.

The runic scroll established a connection with Demonmir's mana sense and started painting the recorded visuals of a city under construction. The visuals also contained distant footage of spatial tear and the golden gates around it, which served as the entrance to Minerva's Utopia.

"Minerva huh? She was a Sage, right? What do we know about her?"

Demonmir didn't flinch after he saw the visuals of Levine's faction getting so active these days. He liked challenges anyway. And he loved breaking people's confidence when they thought they were at the peak of their life.

A new scroll was given to Demonmir. This scroll contained information that was related to Sage Minerva. Ottoman had a surprised expression on his face as he browsed through the information with his eyes closed.

"Hoah! My dear cousin has landed on a gold mine it seems."

Demonmir scratched his white stubble as he said that. He then walked toward his subordinate and asked him.

"The report mentions the White Raven guild and Eren Idril. But there's not much information about them. Why is that, Colton?"

Colton, the condor-owning demon beast tamer sighed and spoke truthfully.

"The report doesn't have much on those two because they don't have anything on them in their official or non-official records, my Lord. Eren Idril is the founder and guild master of White Raven.

If I had to guess, Eren must be the pawn of House Derringer. Maybe House Derringer had internal conflicts of its own. And hiring some unknown guild to be the face of this thing is a way for one of their factions to keep the profits to themselves."

Colton gave his conjecture to Demonmir that he had come up with after studying the information related to this case. Not knowing that the one who he had called a pawn was the mastermind behind the whole thing.

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Demonmir listened to Colton's analysis of the White Raven guild and agreed with him. This was too big a pie for a small guild to get its hands on. Ottoman scratched his white beard some more before thinking of something significant.

"How did White Raven come to possess this land? Did that land belong to someone else or was it owned by the kingdom?"

Colton didn't take long to answer.

"The guild happened to buy the land that once belonged to Huse Remus. I contacted people to find out how much House Remus agreed to sell the land. I couldn't get the exact number. But they say that it was sold for a dirt cheap price because the land was barren from the get-go.

Then House Derringer and Master Levine's faction of House Montmorency got on board this project and immediately dispatched their powerhouses to the scene. They have also hired some mercenary help for the time being. The place is as secure as it can get."

Demonmir started pondering as he listened to further details given to him by his subordinate. He was a cunning man with high ambitions. So of course he thought of taking over Levine's faction while keeping House Montmorency's interests intact.

"Hm. We need to shake things and see what tickles. Set up a meeting with House Remus. Those old fogies from House Remus must be infuriated right now because of the price for which they must have sold the golden goose.

They can be turned into our allies. Contact House Derringer and ask them how the overall profit margin of Utopia's resources has been divided. Tell them we are willing to offer a tad bit more if they get my faction onboard and ditch Levine's."

Demonmir came with a two-pronged approach on the spot after he heard most of the details regarding Minerva's Utopia. Colton nodded at his Lord's decision. But he couldn't help asking him about Eren's guild.

"My Lord, what about the White Raven guild? Do we take action against their members?"

Demonmir chuckled before answering.

"Of course. Big or small, I don't give a damn. Pests need to be taken care of as soon as we find them."

Demonmir said with his eyes gleaming with cruel intentions.

"Slaughter them all," he said effortlessly.



Colton felt firsthand the bloodlust hidden in that statement as Demonmir's mana signature leaked out. His elemental fusion was stimulated by his emotions, wrapping his body in a gust of dark blue wind that buzzed with particles of lightning.

"That being said, I'm sure my dear cousin must have anticipated my actions and taken a few precautions. So we don't want to burn our hands doing something that could be solved with money.

We don't have to get our hands dirty to take care of the pests. We pay for pest control. Find us reliable pest control. Do you understand?"

Colton bowed a bit more than he already was to show his agreement. He was about to get up. Then he thought of something and asked her out.

"My lord, are you entering into isolation once again?"

Demonmir was about to resume his practice of weapon arts when he heard Colton's question. He replied to him while getting his weapon ready.

"No. My ranking progress will stagnate if I stay cooped up in my house. I guess I'll have to check out Minerva's Utopia with my own eyes soon. Maybe I'll meet up with my dear cousin as well. Hehehe. I'm dying to see her face."

Saying that Demonmir started swinging his weapons in an artistic form. It was as if the weapon sets had become a part of him.

Thanks to Demonmir's superb elemental attainment, he unwittingly created a zone of up to 20 meters around him that was filled with Demonmir's weapon attacks. This was without using any of his mana. This was a purely physical force of destruction that was laced with his elemental fusion.

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Somewhere in the kingdom of Layos.

Isen Osan's Abode.

"Expert Isen, what do we do with the Edinburgh's spies that are keeping an eye on you?"

An army officer in a simple military uniform asked Isen Osan casually. He was speaking to him from the position of equality. That was because he also ranked as an Expert.

Isen and the army officer were currently on the terrace of Isen's current villa. It was located in the middle of dense vegetation that would tell the onlookers that the patch of Badlands was not too far from here.

And yet, this was the most secure place Isen could have asked for. Since this place was near the border of the Kingdom of Layos and the Asikha empire. Which was furthest away from the kingdom of Edinburgh.

And since the place was near the border, the kingdom of Layos had offered Isen Osan military protection. It was because it was easier to do so.

"Hehehe! Expert Saisha Goren, those are not Edinburgh's spies. We are too far away from Edinburgh for it to send its spies here. They are my close friend Arthur's spies.

What can I say? The guy's crazy about me. Hahaha!"

Isen laughed off the fact that he and his family were being spied on. That's because he knew that those spies wouldn't dare to do anything here. The Layos kingdom's military presence was too strong here.

In fact, Isen marveled at the fact that Arthus could dispatch the spies here without worrying about the official repercussions if they are found out to be linked with him and Edinburgh's royalty by proxy. The guy had stopped caring about cross-border politics it seemed.

"Alright. I was just asking. Since you want to keep them around, I'm sure you must have some plan. Just remember, the date is drawing closer. We need to use anything and everything against Edinburgh for what we are about to do."

Isen nodded at Saisha Goren before asking him a simple question with curious eyes.

"How's the talk going on?"

Saisha Goren's deadpan expressions suddenly changed and he looked at Isen with intense eyes before replying to what he knew.

"Our side has already talked with the Asikha empire and some of the nearby establishments that are near our two kingdoms. The Asikha empire is willing to sit on the fence when we launch our campaign in exchange for some trade deals in their favor.

Some of those with whom we are in talks will also come around eventually. They might even join the fray if we decide to "share" the gains. We hope that all of us can work together in this campaign to cause the most damage to Edinburgh.

Isen smiled joyfully when he heard Saisha Goren's response which depicted the kingdom of Layos' progress. Starting a war campaign wasn't easy. The kingdom had thought of a lot of things before deciding to proceed with the plan Isen had come up with.

Isen looked outside and narrowed his eyes. He appeared to be looking at the spies who were watching him intently for a long time before saying to himself.

'You'd pay for ruining my plans, Arthur. The Kingdom of Edinburgh. Soon, I shall engulf you all in the biggest war you have ever seen. And you don't have anyone to blame but yourself for it.'

Chapter 645 Prelude to Chaos: Ill Omen P1

Somewhere in the Lionheart Duchy.

Inside the fort of a Renar clan. One of the branches of Renar royalty that had been kept out of the contest for official royal seats at the royal court.

A royal-like bath house that had a giant pool, fake mountains, a large jacuzzi that allowed for bubble baths, and an array-created waterfall.

The dense volume of steam had compromised the visibility of this space intended for bathing and leisure. There was a sound array that produced sounds of birds chirping and other nature-like acoustics.

A lone woman was bathing in this lavish bath house. Just unwinding her troubles by half-immersing herself in the jacuzzi. She was all naked. Even the dense steam could not seem to hide her feminine features. They were too prominent.

This lady had voluminous crimson red hair. Her hazel eyes created a subtle contrast against her red hair. The shape of her eyes was akin to a lotus petal, enabling her gaze to have a sharpness she desired.

Her cherry red lips complimented her hair. Her rosy skin was as soft as the word soft describes it. Yet, being infused with Expert rank mana had made it deceptively resilient.

She had a huge scar on her left cheek. But that didn't diminish her beauty. In fact, the scar had enhanced her appeal by a notch.

Now that this lady was not wearing anything, one could clearly see the tribal tattoos she had recently gained on the right side of her body. Her right arm and right leg were partially covered by the blue tribal tattoos.

Her bosom was ample and would give her deep cleavage whenever she wore something enticing. The heavy breasts were now exposed. Her pinkish red nipples were in an erect position, suggesting that these heavy-looking breasts were enjoying the freedom she was giving them.

Her waist was slim. But the slimness ended there. The curves became prominent around her hips. Her thick thighs and her rotund derriere were a sight for the sore eyes.

This lady-in-bathing was a tall mademoiselle. After working under the illustrious Illuminati, her ambitions were even higher. Her recent breakthrough into C-Rank had allowed her to enjoy the perks that came with the rank.

A femme fatale.

Being a member of a large cross-kingdom cultist organization that was known for corrupting people who were in the status of power was certainly not a bad idea. Especially once one had reached her rank.

This was her relaxing time. She had just broken into C-Rank. As a result, her 40ish looks had been drastically altered. She still carried the aura of a mature woman. But her looks would tell the onlookers that she was a woman in her early 30s. As if she had taken a dip in the fountain of youth before relaxing in the bath house.

Suddenly she frowned. "Let them in." She said briefly to someone on voice communication after thinking for a moment.

Clomp. Clomp. Clomp.

The seductive and mature-looking lady heard footsteps coming from behind her. As she sat in the jacuzzi, she didn't glance back and sipped the glass of wine she was holding.

"Lady Zee, this is the new recruit you had asked me to bring."

A young woman in her early 20s and lustrous blue hair addressed Lady Zee. She also had a seductive figure. Her bust size had Lady Zee beat.

And yet, the blue-haired girl knew that Lady Zee's charms exceeded hers. She was bolder and more assertive than her. And her Expert rank had made her even more intimidating than she was.

"Jules, you came back so soon? Did you perhaps leave your job as a professor in LA?"

The blue-haired young woman, Julie Ekhart smiled mirthlessly after listening to Lady Zee's interpretations. She had to admit that she was right on point.

'Why... Why isn't Lady Zee asking me anything or looking at me?'

The young elf girl who looked to be in her early twenties asked Julie Ekhart with a bit of worry in her eyes. Her name was Tara Faelar and she was a high elf.

She had shoulder-length pink hair and round-like violet eyes. Her elf ears were longer than normal elves, allowing the onlookers to recognize that she was a high elf.

She was relatively tall, standing at 5.9ft tall. She had ample proportions despite her lean build. But the two women she was in contact with were giving her an inferiority complex.

'Don't worry, Tara. Lady Zee often does this. Just let me talk to her a bit okay? Relax.'

Jules consoled Tara before answering Lady Zee's question.

"You guessed it right, Lady Zee. I quit being an assistant professor in LA under that guy Lin Karr as soon as he gave us a clear indication that nobody was targeting us anymore. First, it was Isen Osan. Then it was Arthur. Both wanted to get information about Osan Woods Butcher from us when we had barely solved the case.

But things have changed now. Ivor Osan has been declared as Osan Woods Butcher. Isen Osan is in the kingdom of Layos. And Lin tells us that Arthur has his hands dipped in a lot of pies these days. So we are free to do what we please now."

Lady Zee chuckled when she heard Julie's response. She had guessed that Jules wanted to quit LA for a long time ever since Ron had disappeared.

Lady Zee guessed that Jules wanted to quit Illuminati too and start looking for Ronny. She was just waiting for the right time.

"What's your name, little girl?"

Lady asked in a soft voice before slowly turning around and getting up from her half-immersed-in-water state. She smiled at Tara as soon as she saw the young elf.

'This... this is also a first-time experience.'

Elves craved new experiences. So she stopped herself from looking away when she watched a seductive woman like Lady Zee get up from her position and stand proud in her naked form.

"Tara Faelar, Lady Zee. it's a pleasure to finally meet you."

## Chapter 646 Prelude to Chaos: Ill Omen P2

"Tara Faelar, Lady Zee. It's a pleasure to finally meet you."

Tara wanted to say more than just a name. Perhaps a formal introduction to her class. Just to serve as an ice breaker between her and her newly appointed boss and Expert ranker.

But her attention was divided when she saw the light scar on Lady Zee's flawless face. And she was left speechless when she moved her gaze away from her scar only for it to land on her naked body. This was even though she was a girl herself.

'She... she is such a show-off.'

Jules pursed her lips and shook her head in denial as she watched Lady Zee's exhibitionist behavior.

Her seductive figure looked even more enchanting because of her drenched-in-water looks. The droplets of water were still running down from Lady Zee's crimson red pubic region which had a darker hue than her normally visible hair.

Tara thought Lady Zee's thick thighs had the same size as her waist. She regretted not eating enough at that time. As if eating enough was the answer to gaining thick and shapely thighs.

Lady Zee nodded at Tara while wearing a mild smile on her face. She then channeled her mana through her body and generated black flames around her.

Lady Zee was just trying to dry herself and get dressed. But she observed that her action had spooked her audience right after her black flames had made an appearance.

"Um... You'd have to forgive me. I broke through C-Rank recently. But I'm not in complete control over my rank's mana yet."

Lady Zee had failed to keep her mana signature in check when she allowed her black flames to manifest themselves. As a result, the lower-ranked Jules and Tara were exposed to her erratic and intimidating mana signature.

'\*Sigh. Effects of forced breakthroughs.'

Lady Zee sighed and dropped the matter. She quickly got herself dressed in front of her subordinates while talking a bit with Jules. By now, Tara had also started opening up. The recruit in the Illuminati had come to realize that although Lady Zee was known to be fierce and bold, she was very considerate to her juniors.

"Are you still worried about Ronny? Still looking for him, Jules?"

Lady Zee asked Jules after talking about organization-related stuff. Jules was expecting this question from her superior. She responded honestly to her.

"Yes, Lady Zee. But not for getting back with him. I just want to know what happened to him. That guy just upped and disappeared into thin air without leaving anything to track him. I just want to know if he is alive or... or dead."

Jules said while controlling her emotions. But Lady Zee could see worry lines on her face that weren't visible to anybody that didn't know the ex-assistant professor of LA.

Lady Zee had taken a scroll out by now. She was reading blocks of texts that seemed to be ever-changing on the scroll. It was more of a communication artifact that was limited to text messages.

"Hm. Having closure is a good thing. But finding him might take some time, Jules."

Lady Zee smiled at her junior before reassuring her.

"Don't worry. I'll help you look for that bastard when we finish our next mission. If you find him and want to settle a new life with him, I'd talk to my seniors and allow you to walk out of Illuminati too.

Contrary to what one may think, the Illuminati is perhaps the only cultist organization that isn't bloodthirsty or revenge-seeking. We'll let you be just fine. Maybe with a severance package too, if you perform well in the next mission.

Or we can convince Ronny to join our fold. Hehe. The possibilities are endless if you know where to look for them."

Jules felt gratified that she had someone like Lady Zee as her superior. Although she had tried to hit on Ron a few times, Jules knew she liked to tease all her juniors.

"Thank you, Lady Zee. Hehe. Let's find that guy before making plans. Also, what is the mission this time?"

Because she was no longer associated with LA, Jules could now actively carry out the missions that were available to Illuminati.

As Lady Zee had said, the Illuminati was a profit-seeking organization. So of course, all its missions were highly lucrative for even low rankers like her.

"Hm? They want us to check out a newly appeared Utopia in Nightshade Duchy. You know, the usual stuff. How can we gain access to the Utopia? Things like that.

We'll be heading out as adventurers. You'll be you. And I'll have to make some changes to my presence. That's where Tara comes in."

Lady Zee explained the details of the mission briefly before commanding.

"It should still be a few days before we move to the Nightshade duchy. I cannot use kingdom-controlled arrays. So I'll have to look for some other alternatives. Some illegal teleportation arrays maybe."

Lady mumbled to herself before closing the scroll and putting it away in her storage. She smiled as she walked toward her subordinates and addressed them.

"You girls can use this bathhouse here. Stay here in this place. Nobody would bother you.

I'll have to finish some work and be back in a few days. We'll leave for Nightshade duchy after that. You can also use this time to prepare."

Lady Zee had already walked past the duo when she finished her statements. Tara breathed a sigh of relief when Lady Zee was absent.

"She... she is so scary Jules. Nothing like what you described her. Were you trying to prank me?"

Tara asked while pouting. Jules chuckled as she looked at Tara and then around her. She liked taking such relaxing and fun baths too.

Jules chuckled and started undressing after scanning the whole place with her mana sense. She quickly got into the pool and almost completely submerged herself, saving only her head before answering Tara, who also seemed to be following her lead and undressing.

"Lady Zee becomes unfettered when she is comfortable with people around her. And I think you'd soon get used to her after she starts interacting with you more. Hehe."

Jules said to Tara as she watched her get into the same pool with her. Tara started diving deep and swimming across the wide pool while Jules stayed where she was, relaxed and a bit nostalgic. The pool reminded her of her date with Ron after all.

"Jules... Why is Lady Zee called Lady Zee? Doesn't she have a name?"

Tara asked from the other end of the pool while imbuing her voice with mana. Julie was expecting this question to arrive sooner or later. She quickly got over her nostalgia and replied.

"Hehe. I had the same question so I asked around. Nobody knew anything at that time. But I once met up with a higher-up from Illuminati and they told me about this.

Some higher-up in the Illuminati had objected to Lady Zee's name, saying that it was an ill omen. He had forced her to change her name or face some severe consequences. He was also spooked by her black flames it seems.

So the Illuminati gave her the name Lady Zee.

Of course, Lady Zee was not happy. But the higher-up who had forced her to change her name was a B-Ranker. So she has decided to reach B-Rank as fast as she can and challenge the guy.

Hehe. Lady Zee is planning to change that ranker's name to something really funny when she defeats him in an open duel."

Jules replied and reversed the roles of follower and followed. She too started swimming leisurely in water that seemed to be just the right temperature.

Tara was lowkey impressed by lady Zee's steel-like temperament at that time. If it was her, she would have quit such an organization if someone had forced her to change her name. Lady Zee was nonetheless trying to regain her honor while remaining within the organization.

The young elf's curiosity grew even further when she learned the term ill omen. She couldn't help asking her now-senior.

"Jules, what is Lady Zee's original name?"

Jules swam some more and got close to Tara. she stopped swimming when she heard her question and pondered a bit, mumbling a few names that sounded identical. A few attempts to get the name right.

"That's right.

Eliza!

That's Lady Zee's real name. The Z in Eliza makes for Zee in Lady Zee. But don't call her by her original name. We are prohibited from doing so."

Jules chuckled as she saw the puzzled expressions on Tara's face. She added up further.

"Hehe. Don't worry. You are not the only one. It makes no sense how this name can also bring bad luck. High-ranked entities can be so weird sometimes."

Jules said before diving into the pool. Her junior also followed her and started enjoying her free time.

A few days from now, the trio would arrive at the Nightshade Duchy. They needed a relaxing time like this before they started on their upcoming mission.

Chapter 647 Prelude to Chaos: The Last Blood Bastion P1

The Lufthansa Duchy. Westernmost region of Edinburgh.

Untamed wilderness. Near Badlands. Around 2 PM.

Mana-harnessing redwood trees have made it almost impossible for the sunlight to reach the ground even at the peak of the afternoon.

There's one such giant tree in the middle of the monstrous vegetation that has a trunk with a circumference of up to 100 meters. The tree is not special because of its unusually large trunk. It is special because it serves as a gateway to another subspace.

This subspace is called The Last Blood Bastion by its denizens.

There's a giant city hidden in this subspace. As large as the city of New Beginnings. Even larger if one were to consider the patches of urban settlement outside the city walls.

This subspace has its own ecosystem. It is as big as the Lufthansa Duchy. Compared to the subspace's spatial dimension, the size of the city and its smaller settlements are insignificant.

This urbanized settlement as a whole is known as the city-state of Ancient Blood, run by an organization called the Ancients. An organization that is known outside the subspace as a cultist organization.

The city was established for half-blood residents of the Anfang continent. The subspace and the giant city it featured were accessible from several entrances scattered across the continent. The giant tree trunk found in the Lufthansa region near Badlands is only one of many entrances.

Only half-bloods have access to the entrances to enter this space. The mutagen in their blood serves as their key to getting into the only haven that has been left for Half-Bloods in this era.

Ancient Blood has many regions and their respective deputy representatives. Each deputy is in charge of their own region as well as additional responsibilities provided by the Ancients.



Fenris province, inside the Ancient Blood. Governed by the Fenris clan.

Fort Fenris. A spacious hall that serves as a meeting room. There's a long table that can be used for both dining and holding meetings.

There's one high chair at one end of the table, which is reserved for the clan's head, who is also serving as the duke of the Fenris region. There's a man currently occupying this chair.

This man has black hair and wolf-like eyes that are vertical. He looks to be in his early 30s. But looks are often deceptive when it comes to rankers. It becomes even harder when these rankers are turned out to be half-bloods.

This man is surrounded by a wild beastly aura. He has uneven stubble on his face, indicating that the man doesn't make an effort to groom his beard.

This half-blood man has a muscular physique semi-hidden underneath his open fur coat that serves as the only piece of clothing for his torso. His well-defined chest and abs are out in the open for everyone to see because he has not buttoned his fur coat. To be precise, there are no buttons on his coat. He doesn't need it.

This man is having an afternoon lunch in silence. There's nobody to serve him anything. He is picking things he likes straight from the vessels they have been served in and eating them voraciously without leaving anything behind.

"Alright. Don't just wait outside. There's no right time. Come in and tell me what you came here to discuss."

As he ate his fill, he said. He had picked up another leg piece of an unknown ranked beast that was still imbued with mana. He brought that roasted leg piece to his mouth but stopped himself from taking a bite.

The young man watched as the only entrance to the hall was being used by a young woman. She had been waiting for him to finish his meal for quite some time now. He saw her bow in front of him before speaking up.

"Clan Head Sirius, I'm sorry to bother you while you were eating."

Seeing Sirius Fenris, the young woman said and bowed a bit. She then looked at the roasted leg piece he was holding near his mouth and had a peculiar shine in her golden eyes. Sirius shrugged his shoulders before telling her.

This young woman's name was Fiona Fenris. She had a shapely figure, black hair, and golden eyes. She had worn leather pants and an exposed-shoulder top. She also had a hood attached to the top, giving her a mysterious appeal whenever she raised that hood over her head.

Fiona had olive skin that wasn't tan at all. It meant that she was most active at night, whether she was inside Ancient Blood or not.

"Take a seat, Fiona. Grab yourself something to eat while you tell me your report."

Fiona was surprised by her clan head's offer. She gave the reply that was expected from her.

"I... I wouldn't dare, lord Sirius."

Sirius sighed when he heard Fiana speak about not wanting to dare. Yet for some reason, her eyes couldn't look away from the roasted leg piece he was holding. He coughed before speaking to her in a domineering voice.

"I, Sirius Fenris, head of the Fenris clan in the city of Ancient Blood, order you to sit with me and share a meal with me, Fiona.

Haah! This should be enough of an excuse for your gluten brain. Now sit and start eating before I get angry."

Sirius said while taking a bite from the roasted leg piece that was covered with various spices and herbs. He feared that if he kept his food dangling in front of this gluten subordinate of his, she would be driven mad by hunger and then would forget what she was supposed to do.

Her Lord offered Fiona the food for a compelling reason, and Fiona grinned in satisfaction. She bowed in front of him one more time before grabbing a seat beside him.

She followed her Lord and picked straight from the roasted-leg piece basket. Then she remembered that she was a lady and shouldn't show any ill mannerisms in front of Sirius' presence. So she coughed and thought of grabbing a dish first.

'Oh yeah, the report.'

Chapter 648 Prelude to Chaos: The Last Blood Bastion P2

'Oh yeah, the report.'

Fiona smacked her head after she realized that she had almost forgotten about her purpose for coming here after she saw the food. She coughed and looked at Sirius before speaking up.

"Lord Sirius, it seems our diligent work is starting to pay off. My sources tell me the war between the kingdom of Edinburgh and the kingdom of Layos is almost imminent."

Sirius observed Fiona keenly and chuckled when he saw her reaching for the plates. He snorted his nose before commenting.

"Hmph. Fiona, my dear, no need to act like someone you are not. I have seen you eat dirt in your childhood. Why are you acting all fancy now? Have at it, kiddo."

Fiona bit her tongue when she heard her Clan Head criticize her for acting polite. She flashed another grin at him before taking the roasted leg piece straight from the basket.

"You were saying?"

Sirius seemed to have dark spots under his eyes when he watched Fiona getting busy with her eating. He then blamed himself for offering her food.

Fiona smacked the back of her head with her hand before continuing as she ate.

"Aaah! Forgive me, Lord Sirius. Where was I? Oh yes.

My sources tell me the kingdom of Layos has contacted the Asikha empire and has struck a deal. Better trade deal in exchange for the empire not getting involved in a war campaign against Edinburgh.

The kingdom of Layos is also approaching other kingdoms, big and small, that surround the kingdom of Edinburgh and asking for a contribution from them in the war campaign. From the looks of it, things are progressing well for Layos."

Sirius nodded after hearing Fiona's report from outside the Last Bastion. Half-blood clans would only keep a few of their members active outside the subspace at any given time. Additionally, the mode of communication was always isolated.

While on their respective missions, the half-bloods outside the subspace would keep their identities hidden. They would keep the communication channel open mostly within themselves. But to make news reach inside the subspace, they'd have to send one of their members inside the subspace again.

The Last Blood Bastion had many points of entrances and exits throughout the Anfang continent that could be used to dispatch half-blood squads efficiently.

"That's good to hear, Fiona. But things will only get better for us half-bloods when the entire Anfang continent is engulfed by flames of war. Not just the kingdom of Edinburgh or its neighbors.

That being said, it is always welcome news for us when a war breaks out. Our missions can be carried out in kingdoms undergoing war, and we can eliminate the important officials and people of status in those kingdoms. The blame would always be placed on the opposing forces. Hahaha.

This is the right time for us to get active in the Edinburgh kingdom once again. And in the continent of Anfang outside this subspace as a whole as well."

Sirius cackled after he said what he had to say. But then he pondered a bit before adding something else.

"Hmm. Fiona, I don't think it's our efforts that have borne fruit. I think it's the Osan Woods Butcher fiasco that keeps getting uglier. It's a gift that keeps on giving for Edinburgh royalty."

Burp!

Sirius stopped eating when he burped loudly. His hunger was satiated after eating plenty of food. He got up from his seat and walked towards the only balcony the hall had, which also served as its light course.

This balcony also sported a giant clock over it from the outside of the fort. And the view it provided was that of the region in the city-state that was under the clan Fenris.

Fiona got up from her seat. But she wasn't done with her food. So she picked the basket that had roasted the leg pieces of the ranked beast and followed her Lord into the balcony.

"Heh! It doesn't matter who caused the war to break out. What matters is the fact that it is going to break out. The Ancients will play an active role in the war. As a clan, Fenris shouldn't be left behind.

We need more half-bloods. More the merrier.

How is the search and rescue operation coming along? Carry it more thoroughly in Edinburgh. We want to get half-bloods in our fold before the war breaks out. There should be enough time."

Fiona observed the change of voice and demeanor in Sirius' voice and knew that he wasn't fooling around anymore. So she gulped her bite, took the basket in her storage, and wiped her mouth with the back of her right hand before replying.

"Lord Sirius, we have managed to find 45 half-bloods within the last 6 months from Edinburgh kingdom alone. But it is more difficult to carry out these tasks when Edinburgh's Blood Punisher Force is active."

Sirius had expressions of controlled wrath on his face when he heard the term Blood Punisher Force from Fiana. "How many this time?" He asked while controlling his emotions.

Fiona shared the same sentiment with her lord. She clenched her fist while responding.

"23. They killed 23 confirmed half-bloods before we could rescue them safely. They had been getting a lot more effective with their search techniques as well. They are starting to pick on the dormant mutagen hidden in unaware half-bloods'."

Fiona said and dropped her head in front of her lord. Sirius was feeling the same calm evening breeze over his body as he looked ahead. He replied to Fiana without looking back.

"It's not your fault alone, Fiana. We all share the burden each time a half-blood gets killed by the establishments of Anfang just for being a half-blood. We are made to hide like rats, cover identities like cowards, or stay unaware of our heritage for the rest of our lives.

Heh! The half-bloods clan will soon start taking action against these bastards who think of us as nothing but mere cockroaches to be stepped on. We will take back the glory we had from the bygone era.

There's a change of era coming for the whole of Anfang."

Sirius said these words silently. Those words were more for himself than for his audience. But Fiana's mind was stirred after hearing her clan head's determination once again. She bowed to him and started to leave.

Fiona stopped in her tracks when she remembered something. She turned back and asked Sirius.

"My lord, concerning the special bloodline of the clan Adolphus that you had said we had to rescue. Unfortunately, the Force got to the family first before we could rescue them. The couple was among the 23 half-blood casualties."

He had unpleasant expressions on his face as he gripped the ledge of the balcony hard with both his hands. The limestone platform cracked a bit when he did that.

"And?" He asked, guessing there was something else Fiana wanted to say.

"The Force thought they were done with the family and left the place. But we used our own methods to find out that the couple had a girl child that wasn't part of the causality. We dug some more and found a name.

Agatha Adolphus.

We have a reason to believe that she may have survived. Should I prioritize her search and rescue before moving to our other missions?"

Sirius smiled when he heard Fiona's question.

"By all means." He replied simply.

Chapter 649 Prelude to Chaos: Last Ditch Efforts P1

Nightshade duchy. Badlands.

The only urban settlement from the current battleground, which was deep into the Badlands, was the city of Curar.

"Aaaaaargough!"

A monster howl could be heard from the only patch of open ground surrounded by dense vegetation. This patch was recently created. C-Rank and B-Rank spells being cast one after the other led to the creation of this battleground.

The residual mana signatures of mana spells and monster spells could be felt everywhere. It was an indication that a fight between powerful entities had taken place. Each side had their juniors too, who had battles of their own.

Suffice to say that the adventurers' side had almost won against the monster hordes. It was only the leader of the tribe that was alive and kicking to take care.

The monster that howled was a Gnoll King.

He had hyena-like facial features and a humanoid form. He stood at around 9 feet tall. His body was covered in fur. His tribal armor was barely clinging to his body. And he had wounds all over.

Swish. Swish. Swish.

The four wind shurikens homed in on the monster as he was running away from the ground zero he had helped create. But alas, his pursuers didn't want to let him go this easily after he had killed and eaten countless parties of adventurers dispatched from the city of Curar.

"Aaaaaargh! Vile adventurers, you'd pay for this."

The monster's words were meant as a threat. But they sounded pitiful because of his shaky voice and his current situation. His right arm was first to be chopped off. Then the left arm. Still, the monster didn't stop his retreat. And yet, the pursuers knew the monster wasn't heading anywhere.

After suffering these injuries, the monster's mana defense finally gave in. His injuries suddenly became much more severe than they should be. There was a dense plume of smoke coming from the injuries and the chopped-off arms that had fallen to the ground.

In the next moment, the monster's body started shrinking as if something was siphoning off his life essence from his body. The chopped-off arms dried and turned to dust as the life essence stored in them was extracted from them using a wind-element array spell..

This was the reverse of healing spells that had been cast on the Gnoll King, who was similar to a ranker in their B-Rank. The wind-element array was located in the sky, following the monster and his pursuers like an umbrella.

The spectral runic symbols on the wind-element array floating over the high-ranking entities' heads shined their brightest as they siphoned almost all of the life essence of the Gnoll king. It was spinning in a clockwise direction the whole time when it was siphoning the life essence. But suddenly it stopped and started spinning in the opposite direction.

The Gnoll King's body had been mummified by this point. He crashed to the ground and he had no energy to even howl and call for backup that even he knew was no more.

"Spare... spare me. I'll not eat humans, elves, or dwarves from now on. No adventurer meal for Jolo. I pro..."

Before he could complete his sentence, the wind shurikens that had zoomed in on the monster's fallen body had done their job. One of the shurikens cut his neck cleanly while the other attacked his remaining limbs. The ranker who cast this spell had dealt with the monster thoroughly so there's no chance for him to make a surprise comeback.

The wind shurikens and the unusual array floating in the sky were cast by the same ranker. She had a healer class. But she had shown that she could take part in fights just fine when the situation called for it.

She was a beautiful woman. In her early 30s. She had slightly tanned skin. She was a tall, slim, yet buxom mademoiselle, with dark gray hair and violet eyes. Her prominent feminine features made her exceptionally striking.

She had been injured in this monster hunt. And so were her squad members who had been following her closely. It was she who told them not to intervene. She wanted to test her limits. And that's exactly what she did by almost defeating a Gnoll King.

A healer class almost soloed a Gnoll King!

This news could create a buzz in the city of Curar. But the beautiful healer wasn't interested in this buzz. As the healing array over her head started spinning anti-clockwise, the refined life essence that was taken from the Gnoll King was given to the healer, mending all her injuries that she had suffered during the monster purge.

The healer prioritized her own safety first. Only when she was completely healed from her injuries did she send the refined life essence to heal her squad members' injuries.

"This... this was really a job well-done kiddo. I could have never imagined the Nirvana array would be mastered to this extent by you. We are really glad to have you on board."

A man who appeared to be in his 70s, in the solid stage of the B-Rank, praised the lady healer who had just managed to deal with the Gnoll King. He was also a healer, one of the elders and old members of Healers' Nirvana.

"That's right, Master Nina. You were so awesome. Hehehe! A healer taking care of a Gnoll King. The whole city would become crazy after hearing this news."

A young girl who looked to be in her teens commented. This Adept ranked young girl focused on swords and had a bunch of healing spells at her disposal. She was also a member of Healers' Nirvana. The other rankers who were with her standing behind the old man also chimed in and praised Nina a lot.

The Healers' Nirvana guild was a healer-centric guild that focused on healer arrays and healing array spells. However, it didn't take healers as guild members exclusively. It had rankers that had other classes too. It was just that they would be equipped with their own set of healing spells and artifacts.

The guild was known for nurturing resilient rankers. From the guild's founding some 200 years ago, there has been almost no casualty. This was a huge achievement because the Badlands that was near the city of Curar was always in a constant state of war with monsters.

Other guilds would often make derogatory comments like the rankers of Healers' Nirvana were like cockroaches, never dying no matter if the mission turned out a failure or success. But the members of the guild took it as a positive sign for their efforts.

Chapter 650 Prelude to Chaos: Last Ditch Efforts P2

Praises followed by more praises.

Nina smiled when she received compliments from her guild members. She was really happy joining a healer-centric guild like Healers' Nirvana.

It was a low-key guild that would only take selective missions. They would always be high-risk, high-reward missions. The high-risk factor would be managed by their healing-specific arrays and the high-reward factor would be enhanced by properly harvesting their loot.

That's why Nina had only attacked the monster's limbs and neck and kept his torso almost intact. His heart and other organs could be harvested, enabling the guild and her to have an extra source of income.

Nina was really glad that she had listened to a certain little rat and came to this guild. Her healing array of talents had also started to shine after joining this guild.

"Kiddo, now that this wretched Jolo is taken care of, we can finally move on to purge the monster nest in the region near Kavas lake.

I'll tell the guild master that we..."

The old man was already moving on with his next mission that was going to be conducted by them in a few weeks. Nina, on the other hand, shook her head before replying.

"I'll only be here for a few more days, Master Amory. So I'm not sure whether I'll be able to attend the big mission. It would be better if you counted me out."

Nina bowed in front of her senior after she made her intentions known to the guy. The old man raised his eyebrows and pondered a bit before nodding at her.

"Alright, kiddo. Take some time off. You had been working hard for all these months. You deserve a break."

Amory sighed and massaged his forehead with his wrinkled hands after he thought of the complexities that would arise after counting Nina out from a few of their high-reward missions. He smoked his pipe as he mumbled something under his breath, thinking of counter strategies that would have to be employed.

However, he didn't stop Nina from taking her break.

Amory Stowage had a pronounced nose and sunken eyes. The bags under his eyes and his wrinkled skin were like accomplishments of old age. He had white hair and a long white beard.

Amory liked to smoke ranked herbs from the pipe he always used to puff on. Today was no different. He took out his pouch and filled his pipe with more of the stuff he was smoking before taking a long puff.

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"By the way kiddo, where are you heading?" Freewebnovel.com.

Amory asked while releasing smoke from his nostrils. One would wonder if his way of smoking pipes had anything to do with his big nose.

Nina and Amory were left alone after Jojo's tribe had been purged along with him. The members that had come with these high-rankers had started harvesting monster bodies and the resources the tribe had kept hidden.

Nina was watching over her junior guild members' progress from a hilltop along with Amory when she heard him ask the question. The smile she had this time was not something Amory had ever seen on her face as she spoke up.

"Well, I'm heading to the city of New Beginnings first. Then I'll take a detour to meet with someone I know."

Amory's eyes shined with a peculiar light when he heard about the city of New Beginnings. That's because the name of that city brings to mind Monster Canyon. A place that was supposed to be the last report for rankers stuck in their bottleneck. A place where rankers gambled with their lives to either win big or die trying.

"Uncle Amory, you should go with Nina."

A young feminine voice was heard from the two Master rankers' backs. Both turned to see a blonde woman approaching them from the sky with golden butterfly wings.

This blond elf lady had smooth and supple skin that seemed to glow with a golden hue. She had advanced way beyond her rank in elemental attainment.

She had topaz blue eyes and a pretty nose. Her lips were cuter because of their smaller size. And her cheeks looked like they were always exposed to the gentle morning light.



She didn't have an overabundance of curves. But her slim figure complemented her angelic looks while adding a sophisticated charm to her presence.

She was the guild master of Healer's Nirvana. Jina Jiang. She also had a kingdom-certified title— Goldy Wings.

As soon as the golden butterfly wings vanished into thin air, a small fairy-like existence appeared sitting on Jina's shoulders. She was a bit taller than an adult's ring finger. She appeared relaxed on Jina's shoulders as the latter safely landed on the ground.

Amory and Nina both bowed when Jina appeared from behind them. The latter smiled mildly and nodded at them before continuing.

"Try your luck in Monster Canyon, Old man Amory. With the way you are going, it won't be long before your hopes of breaking into Grandmaster Rank are completely extinguished.

I don't want that to happen to you. I know that you still want to try your luck. And that you'd always regret that you didn't strive for the Grandmaster rank when you had the chance."

Amory was left speechless when his guild master who was only in the liquid core stage of the B-Rank lectured someone like him who was close to breaking into the next rank. He was speechless not because he thought whatever she said was audacious. But because he understood that the guild master read him like an open book.

Jina was asking him to risk his life in an attempt to achieve a forced breakthrough into the A-Rank. If one looked from the sidelines, it would seem that Jina was telling him to embark on a suicide mission. But Amory knew that Jina would have kicked him out of the guild a long time ago instead of applying roundabout tactics like these. If getting rid of him was her end goal.

Amory was getting older. And he needed this kind of push to pursue his dreams. But he still had concerns of his own that came with his position in the guild. Jina smiled at him after reading his face and said.

"Don't worry, Sir Amory. I'll take care of high-profile missions from now on. You accompany Nina to the Nightshade duchy. She is the core member of Healers' Nirvana now. We should at least provide her an escort of your caliber."

Jina chuckled before looking at Amory keenly.

"Uncle Amory, I'm confident that you'll get to Grandmaster rank. Come back to us even stronger than ever before."

"Nina, please take care of our old man." She added, looking at Nina. The latter smiled and responded affirmatively.

"I'd like to go with Master Amory and Master Nina too, guild master. I just became an Adept. So I would like to travel a bit.

And I'd like to be near when uncle... err... Master Amory breaks into Grandmaster rank. Hehe."

The young girl who was cheering on Nina suddenly appeared where the trio was standing and made her intentions known. It was clear that she also had confidence in old Amory. The guild master didn't take long to approve the young girl's travel plans.

Old man Amory was emotional. He turned around instead of facing the ladies and kept his gaze fixed on his juniors who were wrapping up the scene.

"My... my eye allergies are acting up again."

He mumbled in a mosquito-like voice before rubbing his eyes. He then focused entirely on making the smoke from his pipe surround his face.

The ladies looked at each other and chuckled. They knew that old man Amory didn't have eye allergies. But they didn't try to call him out on it. They let the emotional Master ranker keep his dignity as he geared himself for last-ditch efforts of breaking into Grandmaster rank.