

A Journey Unwanted #Chapter 61 - 59: Briefing - Read A Journey Unwanted Chapter 61 - 59: Briefing

Chapter 61: Chapter 59: Briefing

[Galadriel]

[Luminare Academy of Arcane Arts: Headmaster's office.]

Seated behind his desk, Aleister stared at the smiling woman who stood across from it. She had a head of flowing lilac hair that only added to her beauty. Her attire was strange, but easily recognizable; she wore the upper sections of an ao dai, white in color and adorned in gold, while the rest of it was a tight black form-fitting suit showing off her figure.

"So General Mai, what is your verdict on Adrian, Ruby, and William?" The headmaster asked.

"Just Mai is fine, headmaster," the woman responded as a pondering look quickly adorned his face. "And as for the test, I uhm...may have started it a bit too early." She said somewhat sheepishly as she scratched the back of her head.

"How so?" Aleister questioned.

"W-well I may have killed the Astrothian before I could see how those three did against it," she said with a sheepish chuckle. Aleister deadpanned at the woman as he heaved a small sigh.

("I did not expect the person who inherited my post to be this airheaded.") He shook his head. "But you at least battled them? So you must have some measure of their strength." The woman merely glanced away with embarrassment.

"I-uhm might have knocked out the blonde boy too fast, resulting in the girl having to use healing magic, so I might...might have messed up," Aleister deadpanned at the woman once more as she hid her face in her hands out of embarrassment. "But well...I did manage to briefly battle the raven-haired boy," she defended, Aleister sighed.

"Well, it cannot be helped." There were always other opportunities, but if the children thought their lives were actually at stake, they would fight like their lives depended on it. But that element was now gone, so normal training would have to be resumed. "For now, tell me your evaluation of Adrian."

"O-of course, ahem! Well, his way of fighting is quite unique," she started, with some excitement in her tone. The boy, Adrian, had really managed to surprise her. "I fought demon tamers before, but even among them, that boy is unique. He barely expended

any of his mana with summoning demons or keeping them in our world. And he is quite skilled in utilizing the demons, first gauging what I can do with lower-rank demons and then immediately going for the kill once his analysis was done," she explained. Aleister hummed with interest.

"Yes, that's good. Adrian is a valued trump card; however, we have little combat data on him," Aleister stated.

"A shame, that boy is really special," Mai grinned. "I'd be happy to train the three of 'em, but...uh, best I can do is martial arts training. But I can help them master their Qi, since I'm not all that proficient in magic."

"Qi, huh? I've heard of the term before and of what it entails," Aleister muttered as he mulled over it. "It doesn't utilize mana, yet in some cases, it can give similar results, like strengthening the body to superhuman levels and more. I think it would be most useful, especially seeing as the crown prince will participate in this year's upcoming festival again."

"You mean the Vel'ryr prince?" Mai questioned with a pondering look. "I heard their royal bloodline is pretty resistant to magic, something about being related to dragons." Aleister resisted the minuscule urge to once again deadpan at the girl for her wording.

"Indeed, they are descendants of dragons. Dragons only existed in the age of Gods but have since gone extinct, yet their bodies were naturally resistant to any and all phenomena. You could most likely find a still fresh corpse of a dragon if you knew where to look." Mai gave a 'wow' at the statement as Aleister continued. "We only really have ancient scriptures, though it stated the average dragon was naturally resistant to magic. While Greater Dragons were completely immune."

"That's pretty scary," Mai stated as Aleister nodded his head.

"That is why the Vel'ryr empire will always be a threat; their vastly superior technology makes up for their lack of magic. Then again, any pure-blooded Vel'ryrians could be considered vague descendants of normal dragons, making them resistant to low-level magic and making them almost superhumanly strong. Though their strongest would be General Grimm, quite the foe that one. But I am babbling on here," Aleister smiled as he glanced out of the window of his office. "That said, I am confident in our chances to win this year's festival."

"Yeah, that's the spirit!" Mai exclaimed excitedly. "We'll win that grand prize for sure!"

"That we will," Aleister nodded. "For the kingdom of Galadriel."

[Verdantis]

[Briarwick]

Lucinda excitedly clapped her hands as she watched a small orb of fire come into existence in Lily's extended right palm.

"Haha! Way to go, Lily!" Lucinda chanted with a smile. The small girl, meanwhile, happily waved the small orb of fire around, much too excitedly.

"Hey, no fair! How come she's already got some fire?" Xavier whined next to her.

She was back in the inn along with the others, barring Mikoto. She was rather curious as to what the boy was up to this time of day. But that was neither here nor there; currently, Fiona, Victoria, and Professor Eugene were conversing near her at a table. Agatha and Mirabella were busying themselves with training. They were quite a duo; Agatha specialized in complex magic such as Creation Magic or utilizing her surroundings such as the vast nature.

While Mirabella was quite the opposite. She was quite the destructive girl; every kind of magic she used was meant to inflict destruction. She certainly lived up to her God's name.

"Don't worry, Xavier," Lucinda ruffled the boy's hair, much to his annoyance. "I'm positive you'll catch up." She stated as he pouted while his sister sent him a smug look, much to his annoyance.

"Oh yeah! Lucinda, I'm making a drawing for you and the princess!" Lily suddenly exclaimed as if just remembering it.

"Oh yeah? Well, Mirabella and I would be happy to see it when you're finished," Lucinda stated with a warm smile.

"Pshh, I can make something better than some drawing," Xavier huffed as Lily stuck her tongue out at the boy.

"Blegh! You're just jealous!" She defended.

"Nuh-uh!"

"Yeah-huh!"

"Now, now, you two," the voice of Lucy traveled through the inn as the two immediately stopped their fighting. "Don't go fighting in front of Lucinda when she's been taking the time to teach you magic."

"It is fine, Miss Lucy," Lucinda just smiled. "Seeing the two bicker is kind of cute." The two just blushed in slight embarrassment at the comment. Lucy chuckled at the two as she shook her head.

"Why don't you help your brother prepare a gift for Lucinda, dear," Lucy asked Lily, who just huffed.

"I don't wanna help a meanie," she said with a pout.

"Don't be like that, Lily; helping others is always a nice thing," her mother started, "It is what a 'hero' would do."

"Hero?" Xavier and Lily questioned.

"Yep, a hero is someone who helps others out of the kindness of their heart," Lucy smiled at the two's pondering looks.

"That sounds awesome!" Lily exclaimed as she took Xavier's hand. "C'mon, I wanna be a hero!"

"H-hey!" Was all he could blurt out before being dragged off by his sister. Lucinda and Lucy just chuckled at the sight.

"I must thank you, Lucinda; it's always nice to see those two in such high spirits," Lucy thanked the girl with a smile.

"There's no need for thanks, Miss Lucy. We weren't here all that long, but I quite enjoy their company," she waved off with a smile.

"You're an angel, Lucinda dear," Lucy complimented. The girl could not help but blush at the compliment. "You're like a big sister to those two munchkins."

("I'm used to people calling me an angel, but that's just because of my appearance and history.") Lucinda could not help but give a warm smile at the praise. It felt so genuine; most just threw compliments due to her status as the Spawn of Octavia, but none were genuine. They just wanted to get in her good graces. ("This is a nice feeling.")

Meanwhile, at Professor Eugene's table, the man mulled over all of the information he had just received from Victoria and Fiona, who sat in front of him.

"The Vel'ryr empire with the Drah'lurahr cult. And empire troops on Verdantis territory fully armed," the man frowned. "If word reaches the main capital of Verdantis, there would certainly be an uproar, but with the festival on the horizon, no nation can afford to be at war now."

"This makes me think, have Vel'ryr troops been in Verdantis all this time or did they only show up when the festival drew near?" Fiona questioned.

"I presume the latter," Victoria stated. "The Vel'ryr empire's military might is exceptionally powerful, their technology being way ahead than any other nation, small or big. However, even so, they would not risk war with Verdantis, a country that holds five Inheritors. Even one could obliterate an entire army with little difficulty."

"True, this timing of their small invasion is no coincidence," Fiona agreed. "However, for what purpose was the cult established? Assuming most or all of their members are full-blooded Vel'ryrians due to their lack of mana, why establish it?" Fiona asked, confusion clear in her tone.

"That some members are Vel'ryrians might not be true," the two looked at Professor Eugene in confusion for his words. "It is a small chance, but I've read tales of individuals consuming the blood of a dragon in turn for 'greater' strength. But sacrificing mana, as dragon blood rejects it. Though it is rather far-fetched, and we would have to assume the Drah'lurahr cult has the corpse of a dragon in their-" Before he finished his sentence, he shot up from his seat as realization struck him, the two girls jumped at the action. "Mikoto had mentioned that some villagers might have been abducted due to the lack of corpses in that village he and Agatha had visited. Sacrifices, rebirth through a ritual." The two girls' eyes widened.

"Your saying they plan on resurrecting something through sacrifices?" Victoria asked, by her fearful expression she knew what it was.

"It's a hunch without much proof," Professor Eugene started. "Round everyone up and meet outside the town; *a dragon may be resurrected.*"

Chapter 62: Chapter 60: Counter

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

The name demon felt so insulting. Most of his brethren preferred their true names but he was quite content with being labelled as a demon.

A *demon's* life was a long one. The average demon could live for thousands upon thousands of years. But demons were complex creatures, even more so than Astrothians. They existed in the age of Gods along with the dragons when they were still *untainted*. And they have weakened since then; the age of the Gods was the golden age for Gods, Dragons, Ancestors and what the demons once were, alike.

But all grew lazy and weak, at least compared to what they could have been. Only a select few demons from the age of Gods still exist. The Chaosmaws, demons whose

very existence threatens mankind. It is no exaggeration to say Chaosmaws are a threat to most, if not all, societies.

Then again, what cemented them as just a mere threat were simple things such as pride. There used to be many of them that walked the realm in the past, powerful entities.

Pride prevented them from accepting that there were mortal creatures out there that were more powerful.

"I suppose this boy would be one of those rare cases." From on high while hovering in the air, the Chaosmaw Nybbas observed the scene below. It was the masked boy, the one who had nearly killed Asmodai. An impressive feat to say the least, Asmodai was one of their more experienced warriors. To be done in by some random human was quite the feat for the former and an embarrassment for the latter.

But currently, the masked boy and the fourth princess, Amaury, were engaging in physical combat. "Suppose that much makes sense, the bloodline of the Von Auerswald is naturally immune to magic due to their dragon descent." He mused, but the masked boy was putting up too good a fight. Considering he was matching one of the physically strongest people on the planet. "A spawn of the God of strength mayhap? If so, on top of all that, he possesses absurd magical talent."

Nybbas observed the battle.

Even if you were a seasoned warrior with the most keen senses, you would barely be able to see them move.

As Amaury leapt into the air, she aimed her blade at Mikoto's shoulder. But he was too quick. He ducked down, narrowly avoiding the strike. The blade sliced through the air, creating a whistling sound as it passed overhead.

Amaury spun around, her blade arcing through the air in a wide swing. Mikoto dodged to the side, his feet digging into the snow. He countered with a quick kick aimed at Amaury's knee. The girl saw it coming and jumped back, the force of the kick sent snow flying through the air, coating them both in a cold, wet layer.

("When it comes down to a battle of attrition, I am not sure which one of us will win.") Mikoto thought as he locked eyes onto her form.

Mikoto advanced, closing the distance between them. Amaury backpedaled, her eyes fixed on him. He followed close behind; he saw her close in on a frozen pond. As she reached the edge of the frozen surface, he lunged forward, his body colliding with hers. They tumbled to the ground, their limbs tangled in each other's grasp.

The impact shattered the ice beneath them, sending up a cloud of icy shards. They struggled to break free from each other's hold.

Finally, Amaury managed to free herself. She scrambled to her feet, her blade raised high above her head. Mikoto rose slowly, his bare hands balled into fists.

("This boy is matching me blow for blow, with just pure physical prowess.") Amaury could not help but grin; rare was such an opportunity that she could face an equal.

Amaury swung her blade in a wide arc, the metal slicing through the air with a sharp whistle. Mikoto ducked as Amaury leapt forward, her blade aimed for Mikoto's chest. But he was swift, sidestepping her attack and sweeping his leg out in a low kick. The prince jumped over his leg and landed gracefully, twirling her blade in a defensive stance.

"Tell me, boy, what is your name?" She suddenly asked, much to his confusion.

"Ah? Why do you want to know?" He questioned, his tone low.

"I deem you a worthy battle, and I'd like to know the name of a worthy adversary." She stated, her voice surprisingly sincere.

"Fine, the name's Mikoto. Remember it!"

Mikoto charged forward, his fists clenched, Amaury met him head-on, his fists colliding with the flat side of her blade and sending shockwaves through the air. Snowflakes swirled around them as they continued their battle, neither one able to gain the upper hand.

They fought with such intensity that the environment around them seemed to be crumbling. Trees were uprooted, rocks were split in half, and the ground was torn apart. But still, they couldn't seem to land a hit on each other.

Amaury swung her sword in a wide arc, creating a gust of wind that sent Mikoto stumbling back. Seizing the opportunity, she lunged forward with lightning speed, her blade aimed for his heart. But Mikoto was faster, dodging her attack and grabbing her wrist. Their eyes locked, and for a moment, time seemed to stand still.

Red orbs sunk into red orbs. Both could not help but momentarily admire the eyes of the other.

Amaury broke out of his grasp as she charged forward, her blade swinging wildly. Mikoto ducked and spun, using his momentum to launch himself towards a snow-covered boulder. He landed gracefully on its surface and propelled himself off it, aiming for her side. Amaury felt his body collide with hers, sending them both tumbling through the air.

They landed hard on the ground, the impact causing the snow to cushion their fall. Mikoto was quick to recover, rolling to his feet and facing her once more. He dashed towards her. Amaury rose to meet him, her blade clashing with his open right palm. The force of the impact vibrated through their arms, sending shockwaves through the environment. Snow flew into the air around them as they fought, their movements a blur.

They fought across the snowy clearing, leaving a deep trench in their wake. Trees were felled, snowdrifts were churned into muddy slush, and the once-pristine landscape was transformed into a battleground.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Amaury found an opening. She lunged forward, her blade aimed at Mikoto's chest. But before her strike could land, he ducked down and kicked up a cloud of snow beneath her feet. Amaury lost her balance, and then Mikoto seized his opportunity.

("Magic negation is not invincible.") He extended his right palm. ("I need a continuous flow or a constant supply of mana or power that surpasses her body's canceling speed.") A small orb of fire came into existence above his palm; it spun rapidly as its heat increased. ("Using a constant regenerating attack or if I have an attack that is, in actuality, composed of a bunch of tiny attacks, then she can't cancel in time; she would feel a physical push from the attack; depending on the quantity of the attack, it would result in her getting damaged by magic.")

("Magic again?") Amaury questioned, somewhat disappointed. ("What is it he hopes to accomplish?") She thought with a frown as the orb of rapidly spinning fire accelerated towards her exposed abdomen. But she was not worried; once the attack ultimately failed, she would counter and end this battle.

But then...

"Grah!?" Blood violently erupted from her mouth as the orb of fire tore through a section of her stomach, the intense heat washed over her as her body shot backward under the force of the attack. ("What!?") Her body collided with a snow-covered boulder hard enough to shatter it into pieces as if it was glass.

("Brilliantly simple.") Mikoto mused as he saw her shakingly rise to her feet. But he frowned as the steaming hole in her stomach stitched itself up, cell by cell, and fiber by fiber in quick succession. ("High-speed regeneration too, huh?")

("How!?") Amaury mentally questioned as she clutched her stomach. ("I only know of one person capable of such a feat.") She stared at the masked boy, Mikoto. Her view of him completely changed from a potential threat to the most dangerous one. ("I've no choice.")

Mikoto's body instinctively tensed as a malevolent aura engulfed Amaury's form. It was foreign and otherworldly; a lesser man would have been overwhelmed by the strange aura, yet Mikoto just prepared himself for action. Amaury opened her mouth, her voice holding a distant echo.

"Para-"

"Now, now, there is no need for that." Both turned to the sudden voice that came from on high. Mikoto narrowed his eyes at the hovering form of Nybbas, whose feet touched down onto the destroyed ground almost leisurely.

Chapter 63: Chapter 61: Help

[Verdantis]

In the heart of a winter landscape, nestled among a blanket of snow, lay a sprawling city, architectural grandeur that was seemingly for religious devotion. The silhouette of towering structures and buttresses pierced the sky. The city was encased within stone walls, weathered somewhat. Turrets decorated with gargoyles stood at regular intervals, their menacing glares carved in detail.

Beyond the walls, the city was a maze of narrow streets and winding alleyways, lined with timber-framed buildings with elaborate carvings and colorful pictures. The rooftops were dusted with a powdery layer of snow as well.

At the heart of the city rose the majestic cathedral, a towering colossus of stone and stained glass that dominated the skyline. Its structure reached towards the skies, crowned with filigree and decorated with statues of saints and Gods.

As you ventured deeper into the city, you would pass by a multitude of chapels and shrines, each one dedicated to a different deity of the pantheon. Some were small and humble, little more than stone alcoves tucked away in quiet corners, while others were grand and opulent.

Statues of Gods and Goddesses stood tall in every square and plaza and despite the chill in the air, the city bustled with life and activity.

"Whoa, it's been so long since I've been here," Fiona could not help but look at the city in wonder as she walked with Professor Eugene and Victoria. "Emberreach sure has changed," the girl commented, her tone excited as her eyes swept over a statue of the moon Goddess Rheya.

"It's impressive," Victoria spoke as her eyes glazed over a large cathedral. "Though it is smaller than the capital city back home, it certainly houses many more places of worship to the Gods. Everywhere one looks, there is a statue of a God or Goddess."

"Indeed," Fiona agreed. "Verdantis as a whole seems way more religious than Galadriel. Though they seem to favor some Gods above others." She observed, "I can not help but wonder how vast the capital of Verdantis is. But it is contrasting how much more religious Verdantis is to most."

"It is only natural," Professor Eugene stated. "The history of the Gods differs nation from nation, in some nations Gods are painted in a different light making some more favorable than others." Not to mention different nations sometimes worshipped different Gods.

"Makes it all the more amazing that Octavia is highly praised all over the world," Victoria mused. Hearing the name of the magic goddess just now reminded Fiona of something.

"Mikoto, I am still worried about him," she stated with a frown. "We've waited at Briarwick for a few hours yet he still has not shown up."

"Honestly Fiona, this is not helping your case," Victoria stated with a forced sigh, causing Fiona to look at her confused. "You are like a worried wife," she chuckled.

"Nonsense!" Fiona blurted out, causing some passersby to throw her glances. Growing more embarrassed, she still sought to defend herself. "I am merely worried about a friend, that is all!"

"Sure," Victoria teased further with a grin. Fiona was about to retort, but Professor Eugene spoke up.

"As a student, Mikoto does take priority, however for now we have to trust in his prowess," he started. "But this situation has escalated, which is why we are here."

"Indeed, this is our best bet," Victoria spoke as she lowered her tone. "If there is even the slightest chance that the cultists plan to use a sacrificial ritual to resurrect a dragon, then we would need support from the knights in Emberreach." She stated grimly, a lesser dragon on its own was quite the problem.

"This could be a citywide atrocity," Fiona frowned with a worried tone. "With the help of the knights, we could cover a lot more ground in the outskirts. Lucinda, Agatha, and Mirabella will not be enough."

"Indeed, if only Agatha had complete mastery of her Creation Magic," Victoria mused, "we'd have no problem scouting all over Verdantis."

"Even if she did, she would need a monstrous mana pool to cover all of Verdantis," Fiona stated. She opened her mouth to continue, but her eyes perked up as she took note of something.

"We have arrived at the knights' headquarters," Professor Eugene stated.

[The depths of the moon]

It was like standing in the vast expanse of an interstellar void, where the fabric of space itself seemed to stretch endlessly in all directions. Above him, an absurd panorama unfolded as countless stars dotted the canvas that was space, their brilliance casting a glow on the surrounding darkness. Galaxies, like distant islands in an ocean of infinity, swirled and danced in beautiful patterns.

In the midst of this, a solitary moon hung suspended, its surface bathed in the soft luminescence of distant suns. This moon, larger than any one would have ever seen, dominated the sky with its majestic presence. Its craggy surface was etched with scars.

The sheer vastness of this space, the infinite beauty of the stars and galaxies, would fill one with a profound sense of humility and insignificance.

"The hell?" Despite the vastness of this grand and mythical cosmic place, those were the only words uttered by Mikoto Yukio. Had the absurdness of being seemingly torn from his current reality settled in? Yes, it had.

When that Chaosmaw had made an appearance, Mikoto had already prepared a spell to finish off both it and Amaury. But he was so rudely interrupted.

He was torn away and placed in this absurd mash of cosmic wonder. Galaxies and stars, along with an enormous moon. The word 'absurd' did not begin to explain this place. And everything had happened so very swiftly that he did not even have the time to react.

"Mine apologies, spawn of Octavia," a soothing voice filled his ears, he turned around to face the source. 'Ethereal' was the first word that came to mind when he glanced at the woman. Her hair was long and smooth, a pale blue in color. She had gleaming dark blue eyes that seemed to hide untold knowledge. She was unparalleled beauty, thin but lushful lips, and a set of eyes that could captivate anyone. Her attire was much more plain, a simple white dress that tightly hugged her body showing off all her curves and a white veil on her head. "I hope thy journey here was of no consequence," she continued.

Mikoto narrowed his eyes at the woman. "Who are you?" Suspicious would not begin to describe his state, he was more tense than suspicious at the moment. Since coming to this world, he had not met a single person with a mana quantity even half as much as his. But this woman's mana was absurd, it was almost scary. Furthermore, it stretched endlessly, he was not even able to perceive most of it.

"I am Rheya," she introduced, placing a hand on her chest. "I am known as the Goddess of the moon. It is mine pleasure."

"A God?" Mikoto questioned, his confusion only growing further. As far as he was aware, interactions with Gods were almost non-existent. ("What would one even want with me... could she know?")

"I doth know about thy situation," she suddenly spoke. "Though the Divine Principals limits mine interaction with thou, I shall be quick."

"You can read my mind? Fantastic," he scoffed. Though he could not complain, he doubted a Goddess cared about the nature of privacy.

"I meant no offense," she spoke, her tone still so soothing yet blank at the same time. "I shall refrain if it is something thou doth not fancy I shall stop."

"Appreciate it," he dryly responded, there was probably not the right way to talk to a God. "But I am guessing you wanted something of me."

"I've had mine eye on thou since first thou crossed into this realm." She stated. "I watched thy actions closely and I was easily able to determine that thou could be of help. I've more sway in Verdantis so I could only summon thou hither now."

"Help?" Mikoto interrupted, his tone still confused. "With what?"

"I want thou to collect something for me," she started.

Chapter 64: Chapter 62: The deal

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

Amaury could only look on in confusion. The boy named Mikoto was just standing there a moment ago, but now he was suddenly gone. As if he were never there in the first place, simply vanished just like that.

"Did he flee?" That seemed to be the most accurate assumption, though he did not seem like the type. She was very sure of that fact; they barely spoke, but she knew his character well. Usually, after most sorcerers saw their magic was all but useless on her, they would just give up and resort to fleeing like cowards.

("That boy was different; even after he saw how useless magic initially was, he merely continued the fight.") She reminisced on their brief battle. ("He fell back on physical prowess and matched me until he found a way to damage me with magic.") Not many could boast such a feat. She glanced at the Chaosmaw, Nybbas, who had a pondering look adorned on his face. "You were not needed here, demon," she spat. She was quite enjoying her bout with Mikoto.

"Come now, it is not my fault that the boy vanished," Nybbas defended. "Some magic was evoked to summon him someplace."

"Regardless, I am certain it was made clear to Aegraxes that you lot were not to interfere with this operation," Amaury stated, seemingly still annoyed despite the demon's words.

"It was your older brother, Selwyn, who bid us to come hither," Nybbas clarified, his tone annoyingly amused. Amaury looked at the demon, confused. ("And this whole operation is to my kinds benefit, girl.") He left that last part unsaid.

"Selwyn?" She questioned with narrowed eyes. "For what purpose would he have need of you demons?"

"The message we received merely told us that he was tired of how slow the gathering of sacrifices was going," he could not help but smirk as he saw Amaury's deep frown. "He wanted us to use our magic to speed things along."

"And how would you go about doing that?" She asked with a frown. "We only need the mana of these people; there's no need to kill so many. Yet that bloodthirsty fool is slaughtering village after village with his men," she spat out in slight anger.

"Now is not the time to develop empathy, dear princess," Nybbas advised. "While true we only really need their mana, but the average non-sorcerer has but a laughable amount. Yet everyone in this world, save for a few, has the potential for magic. The mana is ingrained into the soul and lies dormant within it. So killing the sacrifices is more beneficial and greater serves your empire's goal in Verdantis." Amaury could only look at the smiling demon with a glare. How these demons irked her to no end...

If it were her choice, then she would have never chosen to conspire with demons of all beings. Some of her siblings no doubt held the same distaste, but none were as vocal as her. She did not know what possessed her father to conspire with these demons.

They were plotting something, no doubt; them helping the Vel'ryr empire was just a guise to their true intentions. But regardless of her distaste, she had a duty as a princess. But even so...

"As if you demons care about what furthers the Vel'ryr empire's goals," she scoffed. "Regardless, I want no part in this operation anymore. I will prepare myself for the festival, but that is all." With not another word given, the girl's body blurred and vanished from her spot, kicking up a thin layer of snow.

Nybbas shook his head with a sigh. The siblings of the Von Auerswald bloodline were quite the bunch, he would admit. Were it not for their striking resemblance, you would swear most of them were not even related. As hateful as they were towards demons, it

was always fun to see what they brought to the table. But unfortunately, Amaury was one of the more boring ones.

"How disappointing," he laughed.

[The depths of the moon]

"You want me to find something?" Mikoto asked the Goddess before him. Suffice it to say he was only growing increasingly more confused as time went on. Or confusion was most likely not the right word; he was just plainly surprised more than anything. He had long come to accept how absurd some things could be.

"That is right, I found thou most worthy for this tasks," Rheya answered. Her tone seemed still blank, though at the same time, it was just so soothing, like it could put you to sleep.

"Could you not just do all of this yourself?" Mikoto questioned. "You are a God, after all."

"Unfortunately not, I am confined to this space, and were I to step into thou star, I could tear down reality there with mine presence. I would have need of a vessel, and the Divine Principals forbid me from doing so," she explained. Mikoto hummed, only catching half of what she was trying to convey.

She was a God; if he had to hazard a guess, this space she was in was of higher dimensions than a normal world. He did not even know how he was able to perceive anything in this place. Though maybe he was not accurately perceiving anything. Mikoto shook his head; now was not the time to think of these things. This was a rare opportunity after all. If all his other plans did not work, then this was a good chance.

"What is in it for me if I find this thing you are looking for?" He asked. Many would probably not blatantly ask a God 'what was in it for them,' but Mikoto Yukio was not like many. He would seize any opportunity that would help with his goal of returning home. And this was one hell of an opportunity.

"Worry not, I would not hast thou doth do labor for naught," she quickly clarified. "I shall assist thou in finding a way back to thy realm, it is what thou desires, no?" Mikoto slowly nodded his head.

("Doesn't seem like she would be able to just 'poof' me back home, but I was hardly that optimistic.") He held back a sigh. Some help would be better than no help, especially when it came from a God. But that just now reminded him of something important. "Right." Mikoto's hand reached towards his mask before pulling it off, his form reverting to its original state.

His delicate doll-like face came free, his luscious lashes falling over his red eyes as he regarded the Goddess.

"You know about my situation, but I was not originally a spawn of Octavia. This change only happened when I was dragged to this world; I had some theories on how that was, but I'm guessing it was Octavia's doing, right? Crossing universes should be easy for a God of magic." Rheyra nodded her head.

"Indeed, 'twere Octavia's doing. Mine brethren and I never wot her intent for doing so. Even amongst us, Octavia is highly unpredictable, yet there may be a clear reason," she explained. Mikoto's rosy lips curled into a frown at his theory being proven correct. "If thy desires, I shall converse with her, if there could be a chance for thou to be sent back to thy realm." She stated, and she even seemed to make an attempt to be comforting towards him.

"Thanks," Mikoto spoke with blank eyes. "Then if you don't mind, could you fill me in on what I'm supposed to find?" The Goddess nodded as she approached him with a slow but graceful stride. Mikoto's delicate brow arched upward as she stopped in front of him. Though he slightly jumped as she cupped his face with both her hands; they were cold yet still soft and comforting. It was almost like he was in the embrace of his mother once again. Mikoto watched as her face closed in on his before a kiss was planted on his forehead.

The boy blinked in confusion as he felt a slight stinging sensation on the upper left side of his face. "Mine benison, should'st thou join close to mine object, it shall react," she explained, noting his confusion.

"I see," He murmured, his small hand absentmindedly rubbing his face.

"This is farewell, mine dear Mikoto," her soothing voice stated. Then Mikoto blinked.

The expansive mess of a cosmic space was no more; it was all replaced with the expansive snowscape of Verdantis. Mikoto ran a hand through his face as he approached a nearby frozen pond. He looked at his own reflection; on the left side of his face was an array of black markings. They resembled something akin to the long-dead tree branches of a withered tree; they crossed over his left eye and connected when he closed it. It expanded from his forehead to his cheek. He could not help but frown as he stared at his reflection; a sigh sat on his lips.

"And here I thought a tattoo would make me look more manly," he sighed dejectedly before placing his mask back on his face. "I'm sensing Agatha's, Mirabella, and Lucinda's mana signatures nearby; I'll regroup with them and see what I missed."

Chapter 65: Chapter 63: Knight

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

The building, constructed of sturdy stone blocks, rose proudly, there was a towering gate, adorned with metalwork, that greeted you. The gate, flanked by torches covered ground, led into a spacious courtyard. Here, the sound of horses' hooves on cobblestones mingled with the distant clang of armor being polished and the murmurs of knights engaged in conversation.

The courtyard was bordered by buildings on all sides, each one bearing the unmistakable insignia of the knights of Verdantis. Snowflakes danced in the air, settling softly on the roofs and windowsills. Tall banners, displaying the colors and symbols of different knightly orders, flapped in the breeze. Beyond the courtyard, narrow alleys wound their way through the city, their pathways lined with quaint houses and shops.

Within the headquarters, the atmosphere was one of solemnity and purpose. At the far end of the hall, a raised dais served as a platform for the leader of the knights to address their brethren. A massive round table, carved from oak and surrounded by carved chairs, dominated the center of the room.

As you made your way through the headquarters, you came upon the office of the head knight. The room was expansive, with high ceilings and tall windows. The walls were decorated with maps and charts, detailing the city's defenses and strategic points of interest.

At the center of the room sat a large wooden desk, strewn with parchments and quills, behind the desk, a high-backed chair, decorated with the emblem of the knights.

Bookshelves lined the walls, filled with tomes. Armor stood proudly in the corners and a hearth, smaller than the one in the main hall but no less welcoming, crackled merrily in the corner, filling the room with warmth.

Sitting in the chair was a rather 'exotic' looking man. He had a head of smooth and neat silver hair, a pair of striking blue eyes, and a sculpted face. He wore a suit of heavy silver armor that fit his frame perfectly. Yet all of that hardly stood out from his most striking feature, sharp and long pointed ears. Furthermore, on the gauntlet of his left hand, there was a silver ring on his ring finger, blending in perfectly with his armor. If one were to pay close attention to it, they would take note of the almost ethereal patterns woven into it.

The man smiled as he looked at the three individuals before him.

"Professor Eugene," the silver-haired man greeted. "Now what brings you to Emberreach?" He glanced at his company. "And with such lovely company."

"Sir Asaun," Professor Eugene gave a slight bow as Victoria and Fiona followed suite. "Apologies for the short notice on requesting a meeting." Asaun shook his gauntlet hand.

"No, no, it is quite fine," he reassured. "See, I was quite curious as to who Galadriel would send to support us with the Drah'lurahr Cult." His blue eyes scanned over Victoria and Fiona. "I am quite surprised to see a Solkari; your kind are quite rare. And what extraordinary mana control you have. I may be no sorcerer, but us knights have a keen eye."

"Your words are too kind, Sir Asaun," Fiona stated with a small smile. "Though they are much appreciated." Asaun gave the girl a smile as he glanced at Victoria.

"And you are a spawn of Almeric, correct? You look like quite the charming young lady, and I see knowledge behind your striking eyes. I have heard tales of quite the extraordinary young spawn of Almeric attending Luminare Academy."

"Yes, that would be me," Victoria shamelessly admitted with a confident grin. Fiona could only send her a dry glance.

"Quite the duo, I look forward to seeing the others that were sent," Asaun said with a smile of anticipation. "But I suppose we should be getting down to business. Professor Eugene, if you would."

"Right, this meeting was requested because of the Drah'lurahr Cult," Asaun paid keen interest as Professor Eugene continued. "We have reason to believe the cult is conspiring with the Vel'ryr empire or that they are one and the same." Asaun hummed as his gaze grew sharp.

"That is quite the leap, Professor," Asaun frowned. "Though I highly doubt you would go about making such claims for no reason."

"His words are true," Victoria spoke up. "Myself and Fiona had encountered a group of mutilated and unconscious cultist members. And there were two things that stood out about the group. Firstly, they all lacked mana. They were not concealing it or keeping it hidden via a magical object; we had checked. And they were all outfitted with Vel'ryr weaponry." She explained.

"I see, that is certainly a lot to take in," Asaun admitted. "However, at most, this proves that those few were Vel'ryrians who had access to their kinds of weaponry."

"Initially, those were our thoughts as well," Fiona stated. "But when we prepared to move the bodies of the cult members, we were stopped. They were Vel'ryr military troops, outfitted with armor and all, and to top it all off, they had a magitech unit." She spat out the last word with hate. Asaun's eyes widened; this did change things. Vel'ryr

magitech was a complex thing, and there was simply no stealing such vast technology or even operating it.

"Yet that is not the worst of it. Though it is a mere theory, there might be something bigger at play," Professor Eugene stated, Asaun's brows furrowed.

"Please, continue."

"The Drah'lurahr Cult has been destroying village after village. Though we have recently noted that they had also kidnapped a number of said villagers," Professor Eugene started. "It is extremely far-fetched, but we believe these cultists plan on implementing these kidnapped villagers in a ritual. Rituals have very different outcomes and steps, though considering there are kidnapped individuals, we can assume they will be used as sacrifices."

"Sacrificed? For what purpose?" Asaun questioned. Victoria obliged him with an answer.

"Normally, sacrifices are used to appease demon summonings, as they see the mana within normal beings as appetizing. Yet we fear that it is not as simple as merely summoning a demon." Victoria's gaze grew serious. "We believe they intend on resurrecting a dragon."

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

"Tch, this punk was useless too," Mirabella spat out annoyed as she looked at the unconscious cultist whom she gripped by his cloak. She clicked her tongue as she tossed his body aside, it colliding with the snowy ground.

"That may not be the case if you were good at interrogation," leaned against a tree, Agatha gave her input as she gazed over the various unconscious forms of the cultist members.

"It ain't my fault all these idiots keep spouting nonsense about dragons!" Mirabella defended with furrowed brows.

"They are quite the fanatic few," Lucinda murmured as she examined the rifles they were carrying. "But this is definitely Vel'ryr weaponry. And these lot are definitely pure Vel'ryrians."

"What are these Vel'ryr bastards thinking?" Mirabella scoffed with a shake of her head. "They really want to start a war with Verdantis?"

"I do not see the reasoning behind that," Agatha frowned. "Is the Vel'ryr empire merely looking to expand their territory by invading Verdantis?"

"If what Professor Eugene surmised is true, they might be planning to use a resurrected dragon to gain more power," Lucinda started. "Vel'ryr was always ambitious, not content with their own nation; they would seek to rule the whole world. With a dragon, that would not be a far-fetched goal. Granted it would have to be a Greater dragon."

"Then this is a much bigger problem than we realized," Agatha frowned with a sigh. "Alas, it would not do us well to dwell here. We must stop as many cultists as we can and hope the knight reinforcements Professor Eugene has called for will be enough to locate the cultists."

"What a pain this turned out to be," Mirabella huffed in annoyance. "So what now?"

"I believe our best course of action is to split up once more," Lucinda advised. "These cultists have numbers and advanced weaponry, and of course, there is magitech, but either one of us should be able to handle anything they throw at us." Lucinda stated confidently with a smile.

"You seem really confident in our abilities," Agatha noted.

"Well, of course, I can tell that out of everyone in our group, you two are training the hardest," Lucinda informed. "It is quite admirable and inspiring." The girl stated with an all-too-bright smile.

"It ain't no big deal," Mirabella could only look away from the smiling girl.

"You seem embarrassed," Agatha noted with a ghost of a smirk. "It seems you're quite bashful."

"Tch! Shut it!" The princess merely blurted out as she looked for something to change the subject. "We shouldn't be standing around talking anyway."

"I don't really mind it, but I suppose we should get a move on," Lucinda agreed, raising her right hand. The bodies of the cultists started floating to one spot before blue chains came into existence and wrapped around their forms, binding them. "We can collect these few later; for now, we should split up once more to cover better ground."

"Very well," Agatha spoke up as a large blue circle formed under her feet. "I shall head north to look into any cultist activity." The two other girls nodded in confirmation as Agatha's body vanished.

"I will go and look eastward; we've yet to explore anything there," Lucinda gave a wave as her body vanished in an instant. Mirabella could only huff.

"Must be nice to teleport willy-nilly." Normally she could muster something complex as teleportation, but that was only when she was in Galadriel; her blood was bound to the nation, making it her domain. Some magics were easier to use in one's domain, but that was neither here nor there. She prepared to head west on foot but was stopped by a voice.

"It seems we meet again." Her head snapped backward as her eyes widened on the individual she saw.

"Amaury!?"

Chapter 66: Chapter 64: Warning and lesson

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

Mirabella looked at the girl with narrowed eyes. Amaury stood silently, her blade sheathed at her side by her hip. The tension was thick, and Mirabella seemed ready to spring into action at any time. Mirabella studied the girl with caution, briefly taking note of the scorch mark that tainted her clothing and the various slight bruises and marks littering her uniform.

It seemed she had been in a battle not long ago. Though Mirabella would have liked to know who could have put up such a fight, her thoughts were currently more preoccupied with something else.

("Fuck!") She could not help but mentally curse as she gazed at the blank-faced girl. ("Why the hell is it her of all people!?") she mentally questioned.

"Calm yourself, Mirabella," Amaury smirked in slight amusement as she brushed a strand of hair behind her ear. "I've not come to seek battle," she clarified. Mirabella scoffed.

"You expect me to believe that?" Mirabella gestured to the chained cultist members. "These are your buddies, right? Vel'ryrians all of 'em. Words all around that the Vel'ryr empire is involved here with the Dra'lua- whatever cult."

"Indeed," Amaury admitted without pause. Mirabella could not help but look at her incredulously at the confession. "Come now, Mirabella, what is with that look? We've known each other for quite some time; you know I am not one to lie."

"So what?" Mirabella grimaced. "Come to kill me?" Amaury rolled her eyes.

"Please, I knew you since you were a babe," granted she herself was five at the time. "And besides, I'd rather not incur Astrid's wrath."

"Huh!? Then why the hell are you here!?" Mirabella demanded. "You and your buddies have been eradicating village after village! And for what exactly!?" Amaury sighed.

"To be honest with you, I never wanted it to go this far," Amaury stated, her fine lips curling into a snarl. "Alas, I am not in charge of this operation. And I've come to warn you."

"Warn me?"

"Chaosmaw's are involved." Mirabella's eyes widened at the statement as Amaury continued. "They'll be targeting more villages all around Verdantis. And they will be going after much larger towns now," Amaury stated coldly.

"Seriously? Chaosmaw's and Vel'ryr?" Mirabella scratched her head in frustration. "Seriously, what the hell is going on!?"

"I would like to answer you, alas I cannot directly intervene and take action against my own country," Amaury stated, a deep sigh left Mirabella's lips. "However, I will not be participating in this operation anymore. Farewell for now, Mirabella."

"Hold on-"

Mirabella's words fell on deaf ears as Amaury's form vanished in a burst of speed. The spawn of Aragorn sighed.

"At least give some more information," Mirabella shook her head. ("But seriously? First these cultist bastards and now Chaosmaw's? What the hell is the Vel'ryr empire up to? Are they really planning to resurrect a dragon like Professor Eugene thought?") Her train of thought could not continue as she suddenly felt a hand on her shoulder. She jumped as she swiftly backed away, turning on her heel to face the bastard that nearly gave her a heart attack.

"Figures you two would know each other," immediately her eyes had zeroed in on the eerie grinning face of a mask. "The both of you *are* royalty," Mikoto mused. Mirabella blinked in confusion momentarily before her lips curled into a scowl.

"Bastard! Where the hell were you this whole time!?" She demanded, more annoyed than angry that he had ditched her. Mikoto had the gall to shrug.

"I saw some suspicious guys and investigated," he jabbed a thumb at the restrained cultist way. "They were cultists like those guys."

"And you couldn't have just told me you were going after them?" She questioned annoyed.

"Eh, it would have been quicker for me to handle alone," he stated before getting back on track. "Anyway, from that conversation with you and that Amaury chick, I'm guessing you're up to speed with everything." Mirabella resisted the urge to click her tongue for what seemed like the hundredth time at Mikoto's lack of tact.

"Yeah, yeah. The Vel'ryr empire was in bed with the cultists," she stated with a deep frown tugging at her lips. "And what Amaury said, about the Chaosmaw's...." Her words trailed off as she just now registered something. "But hold on, you mentioned her name, you already met her?" The girl questioned. Mikoto nodded his head in confirmation.

"Yeah, I fought her briefly," he stated. Mirabella looked at him in confusion.

"You fought her? And you're still alive?" She did not seem to believe that even when gazing at the various cuts on his uniform he had yet to repair. Mikoto just shrugged.

"I'm pretty strong, and she wasn't that much trouble once I got through that pesky negation of hers," he murmured thoughtfully. Poor Mirabella only grew more and more confused.

"You ain't making any sense; the only person who can affect Vel'ryr royalty like Amaury is that hag Guinevere, that or you've gotta use Familial Arts," Mirabella stated. "You expect me to believe you went up against someone like Amaury and came out unscathed?"

("Well, I did lose an arm.")

"Eh, it doesn't really matter if you believe me or not," Mikoto shook his head as he felt a slight stinging sensation from his mark. "Though you should, see I am pretty strong."

"Right..." She dryly commented. Him stating he was strong seemed to be something he liked to point out. Truly few were as cocky as Mikoto Yukio, but maybe he could back all of that up.

"But I guess now is not the time for this kind of talk; where is the professor at?" Mikoto asked, changing the subject.

"He went to Emberreach, one of Verdantis' large cities," Mirabella started. "It's home to their knights' main headquarters apparently. Him, the Solkari, and the other blondie went there to request reinforcements for this operation."

"Makes sense," Mikoto murmured. "With Vel'ryr involved, this has gotten a lot bigger."

"Which is why we should cut the chit-chat and get moving to put down more of these cultist bastards," she spoke with a scowl directed at the restrained cultist members.

"Sure, guess you're right. The south is pretty much unexplored; shall we try our luck there?" Mirabella nodded at his words, but then something struck Mikoto. "Are you able to use teleportation magic?" he suddenly asked. "It's just when we were heading to that large explosion some time ago, you preferred to move on foot." Mirabella gave an audible and annoyed click of her tongue.

"No, I can't," she easily admitted, folding her arms under her chest. "I can't for the life of me manage complex magic, teleportation, or healing. I had some people tutor me on it, but that hag Guinevere made things too complicated, and Lucinda was too good at using magic that it came naturally to her, and she hardly had to train. Made it hard teaching me anything."

"Make sense," Mikoto noted. ("As a spawn of Octavia, magic should be like second nature; however, how I and Lucinda perceive and learn magic might be different. She might be able to use different magic types without fully understanding the fundamentals; I, however, first dissect the spell. My eyes take in how a spell exactly functions to the most minute details. With that being said.")

"I'd like a hand in teaching you the fundamentals of teleportation and maybe other complex magic's," Mikoto offered. Mirabella sent him a questioning glance.

"Huh? Why would you even want to waste your time with me?" She questioned.

"We'll be a team when the festival comes around," Mikoto stated. "And besides, it's no skin off my back." Mirabella just continued looking at him with an unreadable expression, her evaluation of him steadily changing. "We can leave the cultists to Lucinda and Agatha for now; it would be beneficial for you to learn teleportation magic."

"Right, you sure you wanna be wasting time with me?" She asked. "I barely absorbed any information, according to all my other instructors." Mikoto merely waved her off.

"Worry not, princess, I will be implementing something else into this lesson," Mikoto stated.

"Something else?" Mirabella questioned.

"A little thing called science; now pay attention because class is in session," Mikoto cleared his throat as he continued. "First, we will be looking at the Theoretical Framework. Teleportation, as described typically, involves the instantaneous transportation of an object or individual from one location to another without traversing the space in between. To provide a semblance of scientific grounding, we can draw from concepts in theoretical physics, particularly those related to quantum mechanics and space-time manipulation."

"Huh?" Mirabella blurted out in confusion. "Theoretical physics? Quantum mechanics?" She questioned in confusion as Mikoto obliged with an answer.

"Quantum mechanics is the field of physics that explains how extremely small objects simultaneously have the characteristics of both particles - their tiny pieces of matter - and waves - a disturbance or variation that transfers energy. Physicists call this the 'wave-particle duality,'" Mirabella still looked utterly confused, but some semblance of understanding passed her fair features as Mikoto continued. "Now we'll move onto Quantum Entanglement. One potential mechanism for teleportation magic would involve harnessing the phenomenon of this. In quantum physics, entanglement occurs when two particles become correlated in such a way that the state of one particle is dependent on the state of the other, regardless of the distance between them. By establishing and manipulating entangled particles, a teleportation spell could theoretically exploit this connection to transmit information instantaneously between two distant points." Mirabella said nothing as she tried to absorb as much information as possible. But with so many new words being thrown around, it was kind of hard, yet Mikoto still explained everything in such extreme detail that she felt as though she should have been taking notes.

"Now onto Space-Time Warping, another aspect to consider is the manipulation of space-time itself. In Einstein's theory of general relativity, massive objects warp the fabric of space-time, causing curvature that affects the paths of objects moving through it. Teleportation magic might involve bending or folding space-time in a controlled manner to create a shortcut between two points, effectively allowing instantaneous travel across vast distances." Mirabella raised a hand to ask a question. "Yes?"

"Who's Einstein?" She questioned, she received a chop on the head.

"Not important."

"Oi! What was that for!?" She exclaimed.

"Have you absorbed some of what I said?" Mikoto ignored her exclamation and posed his own question.

"Uuh, I got about half of what you said," she admitted in what seemed to be a sheepish tone, she felt him give her a questioning gaze. "Fine, less than half."

"It can't be helped; I'll finish my explanation, and then we'll review everything until you can craft your theory on teleportation," Mikoto spoke with a hum, and Mirabella saw the logic behind his words. While his way of speaking was extremely complex, he was not exactly speaking gibberish; some words were confusing, but he explained their meaning well enough. She attentively perked up as he continued his lecture.

"Now Spatial Coordinates and Destination Lock, to ensure accuracy and prevent catastrophic errors, teleportation spells would need precise spatial coordinates for both the departure and destination points. This would involve complex calculations to account for factors such as the rotation and movement of celestial bodies, gravitational anomalies, and the relative velocities of the two locations. Additionally, the spell may

require a 'destination lock,' a method for ensuring that the teleportation occurs only at the intended endpoint and not elsewhere. You getting this?" Mirabella nodded in slight understanding. She could discern his words clearly now without the extensive science crap.

"Good, now onto Quantum Uncertainty and Error Correction, teleportation magic would likely be subject to inherent uncertainties and potential errors. Quantum uncertainty, is a fundamental principle in quantum mechanics, dictating that certain properties of particles cannot be precisely determined simultaneously. Teleportation spells might need built-in error correction mechanisms to compensate for these uncertainties and ensure that the teleportation process is as reliable and stable as possible." Mirabella nodded in understanding, her view of the fundamentals of teleportation becoming all the more clearer.

"However teleportation can be a disorienting experience. From a magical perspective, teleportation spells might include enchantments or protective measures to mitigate the psychological and physiological effects of instantaneous displacement. That would be mental safeguards to prevent panic or confusion, as well as physical stabilizers to counteract sensations of motion sickness or vertigo. Of course, if you're built different like me, you don't have to worry about stuff like that," Mikoto shamelessly gloated. "But how did you find my explanation? Of course, this is just the fundamentals of my teleportation. Others might differ; some might be using the 14th dimension."

"You... you're not a half-bad teacher," she admitted, glancing away. She was not one who liked to give away compliments. "I don't think even that hag went into such detail. But I felt like I could understand the last parts. Though I still have no idea how this quantum physics crap functions."

"Don't worry, you'll have it down in no time at all," Mikoto confidently stated. Mirabella looked at him with slightly wide eyes. "You've got quite the mana quantity and Familial Arts, and talent too. I've got some high expectations. Maybe we won't have to stop at teleportation; I can teach you all kinds of magic."

Expectations? Expectations for her? Expectations that did not involve her talent for destruction?

("How foreign.") She mused as she stared at the strange masked boy. ("But nice.") She smiled.

Chapter 67: Chapter 65: Dragon

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

Mirabella took a deep breath, focusing her senses as she stared at the fifteen or so cultists. They were all equipped with rifles much the same as the others she had encountered, but these few were guarding an entrance to a cave. There was probably a reason for that, but for now, she just wanted to focus on kicking all of their asses.

As she tried to focus her mana, a single bolt of lightning arced from her palm, sizzling through the frigid air like a streak of light. The cultists, in coordination, scattered quickly.

The bolt, however, streaked towards five of the cultists in the center of their formation. With a deafening crack, the lightning struck, engulfing them in a blinding flash of blue-white light. The ground around them erupted in a wave of snow and ice, flinging cultists through the air like ragdolls. The surviving cultists, their faces hidden, began to retreat, only to find themselves stunned by a massive, glowing glyph that materialized behind Mirabella.

The air grew thick with the scent of burning ozone, and the snow beneath their feet began to steam as the black mana within the glyph coalesced into a single, immense wave of mana. It shot forth like a spear, tearing through the air with the force of a hurricane, obliterating anything in its path. The cultists, unable to escape the onslaught, were incinerated where they stood.

"Fuck! This always happens!" Mirabella shouted out in anger, no trace of her usual annoyance. She heard the crunching of snow behind her as someone approached.

"I see, you're not even trying to be destructive," Mikoto noted as he looked upon the destruction just two measly spells of hers had caused. "It seems like a passive thing."

"This is why I didn't want to fight," she heaved a deep sigh. "I can't hold back, see I just ended up killing them," she finished, at the very least these ew were reanimated corpses. Her lips were curled into a deep frown.

"Don't sweat it, even if they were alive, they were scum, they kill men, women, and children. These ain't the type of people that deserve any mercy," Mikoto stated.

"I know that," Mirabella spoke, her acceptance of that fact did not seem to ease her in the least. "Doesn't mean I have to like killing, regardless if it's walking corpses," she stated as she threw him a weary glance. "You don't seem that bothered by it," she noted. He shrugged.

"I'm used to gore."

"You're a weird little freak," she deadpanned.

"Harsh, but true," he admitted before changing the subject. "Anyway, your magic is pretty destructive, but I can see that changing if you put in enough work."

"You place too much trust in my abilities, even someone like that hag Guinevere gave up," she frowned. "You're a good lecturer, but what makes you think you can help with my magic?"

"Cause I'm me," Mikoto confidently stated as he jabbed a thumb at himself. She deadpanned once again. "But you should have more confidence in your abilities, and at the end of the day, it all comes down to mana control. But that lesson is for later, for now, let's see what this cave leads to." Mirabella nodded her head in agreement as the two entered.

They ventured deep into the cave, the air grew heavy with the scent of damp earth, and the sound of their footsteps echoed. The cave was enormous, its ceiling disappearing into darkness high above them, stalactites hanging like jagged teeth ready to pierce them.

"You know," Mirabella spoke up, her voice echoing through the cave. "What do you make of this cult we're chasing? Worshipping dragons? Sounded like a load of nonsense to me the first time I heard it. And now they're working with Vel'ryr." Mikoto glanced at her, a bit surprised she even started a conversation. But who was he to not oblige?

Mikoto shrugged, his gaze still fixed on the path ahead. "I suppose it sounded far-fetched, but there are stranger things in this world."

"Yeah, but worshipping dragons?" Mirabella snorted derisively. "Those things aren't even among us anymore. And they went extinct to boot, why worship such things?"

"Haven't a clue," Mikoto conceded, but he quickly continued. "If I had to hazard a guess, it all comes down to the dragon's power."

"Power?" Mirabella questioned.

"Yeah, maybe the cultists are more interested in the dragon's power than the dragons themselves," Mikoto started. "Power is everything after all, to most anyway. With enough of it, you could do anything."

"You sound like some storybook villain," she dryly commented. "You look like one too."

"I should really get a new mask if that's the case," he spoke with a sigh.

"Seems you're not as stupid as I thought," Mirabella snorted. "You should take my advice a whole lot more."

"Gee, if this bullying continues, I might lose motivation to continue teaching you," Mikoto spoke in a singsong tone.

"I'll shut up."

Mikoto hummed as they ventured deeper into the cave, the darkness pressing in around them. Then, as they rounded a corner, they entered a vast space, the ceiling soaring high above them like the vaulted roof of a cathedral.

Cultists were all around, numbering at least into the hundreds. Though neither Mikoto nor Mirabella paid them mind. They were focused on something much more absurd than mere numbers.

In the center of the chamber lay the reason for their journey—a colossal corpse, black scales gleaming dully in the faint light. The dragon's wings were spread wide, the membrane between each fingered bone torn and shredded. Its long tail stretched out behind it, tipped with a wickedly barbed stinger. The creature's head was massive, its jaws agape in a silent roar, rows of razor-sharp teeth. Despite its lifeless state, there was a palpable sense of power emanating from the dragon's form.

Mikoto and Mirabella stood in surprise, barely registering that some of the cultists had taken note of them. For all their skepticism, there was no denying the reality of the dragon's presence.

"Holy... holy shit," Mirabella blurted out. "This ain't an illusion, right?" She wanted to make sure.

"It ain't," Mikoto confirmed, his eyes all but latched onto the form of the dragon. Surprise was present within him too, but there was something else as well. Hate, unexplainable hate at the enormous creature before him. He did not know why he felt that way, but his pondering would have to wait, the cultists were approaching them. Mirabella tensed for action, but he raised his hand to stop her. "I'll handle this, I'll show you what precise magic is." He stepped forward. Some of the cultists leveled their rifles on him.

As they unleashed a barrage of searing plasma bolts, Mikoto raised his hands, a barrier materialized around him and Mirabella, thick with mana, deflecting the onslaught with ease. "A charm that nullifies damage," he explained.

The bolts of energy struck the barrier, dissipating harmlessly into sparks of light.

Undeterred, the cultists continued their assault, their numbers seemingly endless as they pressed forward with zeal. But Mikoto remained bored, though he gauged the ebb and flow of their attacks.

With a deft gesture of his hand, Mikoto began to create glyphs in the air. The glyphs coalesced into existence around the cavern, their symbols pulsating with mana.

Suddenly, streaks of brilliant light erupted from the glyphs, lancing out like javelins to pierce the ranks of the cultists. The air was filled with the thunderous collection of

explosions as the blasts struck their targets with devastating force, sending bodies flying in all directions.

Mikoto barely moved as the destruction was unleashed wave after wave of attacks. With each gesture, he dispatched multiple cultists in quick succession, his power carving a swath of devastation through their ranks. With each passing moment, the cavern became a blur of light, the ground trembling beneath the onslaught.

But even as the cultists fell in droves, their numbers seemed to replenish endlessly. Yet Mikoto showed no signs of faltering; he was still more bored than anything.

"Let's finish up."

And then, in a final crescendo, Mikoto unleashed his gambit. With a hidden grin, he summoned forth a torrent of pure mana, a storm of light and magic that consumed everything in its path.

The cave shook with the force of the explosion, the walls trembling as if caught in the throes of some cataclysm. When the dust finally settled, silence descended upon the cavern, broken only by the soft crackle of fading energy.

"Whoa," Mirabella was in slight awe. ("So fast, and precise. The only other person I've seen use magic this way was Guinevere and Lucinda.")

"We should let the professor know about our findings here," Mikoto stated.

"Yeah, seems his theory on why these cultists were gathering civilians was true," she spoke as she gazed at the unscathed dragon corpse. "They really wanted to resurrect a damn dragon."