

# **A Journey Unwanted**

## **#Chapter 71 - 69: Nice - Read A Journey Unwanted**

### **Chapter 71 - 69: Nice**

#### **Chapter 71: Chapter 69: Nice**

[Verdantis]

[Emberekach]

"Nice!" Mirabella blurted out as she took a bite of a slice of cheesecake.

"It is pretty good, so your reaction is warranted," a chuckling Isabella stated.

"Too exaggerated," Agatha murmured as she took a bite of her own piece of cake. She clearly shared the same opinion of the cake as the princess but did well to hide her own.

"It is indeed a slice of heaven," Lucinda murmured with a bright expression. It seemed all were captivated by the savory cake.

Currently, the four were seated at a rather large café area located in the heart of the city, a hub of activity. They were seated outside, unaffected by the cold. The outer area was a chaotic mix of snow-covered tables, half-buried chairs, and patrons huddled together in thick coats and scarves, sipping steaming cups of coffee and hot chocolate.

"But I must say, Lucinda, you have quite an important number of friends," Isabella started, sipping on a cup of her coffee. "A princess and an heir of a noble house. I'm feeling kind of like I don't fit in."

"Status means little," Agatha surprisingly mumbled.

"Blondie being thoughtful?" Mirabella snorted. "The world must be ending." All she got was a dry glare. Lucinda saw fit to intervene before another argument broke out.

"Agatha and Mirabella here are also going to be participating in the festival of Octavia," Lucinda smoothly changed the subject.

"Oh?" A surprised look adorned Isabella's face. "But you're both still so young."

"Doesn't matter," Mirabella cut in again, eating another slice of her cake. "I'll still be kicking ass, starting with those cultist scum," she declared boastfully.

"You're quite the confident one, princess," Isabella noted with a smile. "In any case, I do wish you luck."

"None will be needed," Mirabella waved off her words.

("She sounds as boastful as Mikoto,") Agatha noted, amused. ("Has he really rubbed off on her in such a short time?")

"And what about you, Agatha?" The blonde perked up as the actress called out her name. "What are your thoughts on the upcoming festival?"

"Hmm..." Agatha pondered about an answer. If she were being completely honest, she had not been thinking much about the festival of Octavia. Her attention was on what the professor had spoken of on the ship. Arcane Ascendance, a technique that could help you reach the next peak of power.

Normally, her only motivation to gain power would have been to appease her father. But ever since she had seen that massacred village, her perspective had changed. There were powerless and innocent people out there who got caught up in things out of their hands. As naïve as it might have seemed, she wanted to save those kinds of people.

("But only those kinds of people,") she confirmed to herself. ("I'll save unequally.")

"I suppose the festival will be quite the endeavor," Agatha finally answered. "Alas, I shall try my best." Isabella gave her a smile.

"Then I wish you luck as well," the girl offered before turning her eyes to Lucinda. "But I fear the topic of the festival will go rather dull quickly. Let us change it," she declared. Lucinda tilted her head.

"To what?"

"Well, we're all young ladies here, so there really is only one topic to turn to," Isabella stated matter-of-factly with a smile.

"And just what would that be?" Mirabella asked with a questioning look.

"Love!" The actress exclaimed, drawing a few gazes from other patrons.

Lucinda gave her a confused gaze, Agatha gave a dull one, and Mirabella looked at her as if she were an idiot.

"Love? I do not follow," Agatha stated.

"You know? Do any of you have companions? Lovers? Boyfriends? Girlfriends?" Isabella asked, turning to glance at Mirabella. "As a princess, you must receive a lot of suitors."

"All of them are a pain in the ass to deal with," the princess stated with an annoyed frown as she reminisced. "Only old perverts and annoying guys my age offer me proposals, all in hopes of someday maybe being king when my older sister's reign is over."

"That does sound rather annoying," Isabella hummed with a look of understanding. "But there's always a soul mate for everyone out there," she reassured.

("Soul mate, huh?") the princess internally chuckled. ("Love is such bullshit.")

"And what about you, 'oh great spawn of Octavia'?" Isabella questioned in a joking tone. "Any boys caught your eye? Maybe that one who used to write you poems?"

"W-well, I hardly ever have any time for romance," Lucinda quickly explained, slightly flustered.

"Oh, come now, a girl can't stay alone forever," Isabella lightly chastised. "With your looks, you could swoon any man or woman." Lucinda just blushed further; it seems she did not respond well to compliments that were genuine.

("Romance,") Agatha mulled over the word. ("I never held romantic feelings for a boy my age; however, there is interest.") Mikoto, she held a keen interest in the boy. Nothing romantic, more scientific. Mikoto was odd, prideful, nice, unhinged, and quiet. He somehow managed to embody all of these conflicting things. Hence the interest, though she would want to know him better. His words in that village were comforting and showed a new side.

"And what of you, Agat-" Isabella seemed to want to direct the question to her now, but the numerous rapidly clanking footsteps cut her off. The four girls looked beyond the railings of the café to see a large number of knights running through the streets of Emberreach and towards the main gate. They seemed in a state of urgency. Lucinda shot out of her chair as she rushed over the railings. Stopping one of the knights with a puzzled expression, she spoke.

"What's going on?" She asked. The knight was in a hurry, but he must have noticed who and what she was, so he quickly relented with an answer.

"Damned cultists hit another town," the knight bit out. Lucinda's gaze grew serious as the knight continued. "Our scouts told us it was a town near the sea, Briarwick." And then it grew horrified.

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"The moon goddess," Mikoto frowned at Archbishop Percival's words. Asaun and Professor Eugene seemed confused, and Dante's expression was hidden from all. "Most odd, Rhea the moon Goddess has no spawns as she is a new God, yet you have her scent."

("Seriously? Scent?") Mikoto mentally questioned incredulously. As absurd as it sounded, it did seem somewhat plausible. Mikoto had made sure to hide his mana well with layers of illusions on top of suppressing it. When Rhea had given him the mark, some of her mana had mixed with his own. Yet still, it would be impossible for anyone to detect it. ("Yet supposedly this guy can smell it?") He looked at the calm expression of the archbishop. Opening his mouth to speak, he was interrupted when the doors to the cathedral were slammed open and heavy clanking followed.

"I apologize for the intrusion!" He heard a muffled voice, and they turned to face a knight, one of Asaun's.

"Speak, what is the matter?" Asaun questioned. The knight immediately filled him in.

"Captain, our scouts report that multiple towns are being attacked by those damned cultists." Asaun's eyes widened.

"So soon?" He whispered with a frown as he turned to the Archbishop. "I apologize, Archbishop, but I must leave." The man just gave him a serene smile.

"Worry not, Ser Asaun, Godspeed," the Archbishop offered.

"If you are alright here, Mikoto, then I shall also take my leave and assist the knights," Professor Eugene stated. ("Mikoto is tense; when the Archbishop spoke of the moon Goddess, it started. I do not wish to burden him by staying here; he clearly has his secrets. And his trust is not easily gained.") The professor surmised.

"It's fine," Mikoto nodded with a silent sigh. He really would rather not be here at all, but it could not be helped. The professor gave him a nod as he turned to leave with Asaun, who barked some orders to the idle knight.

("I hope that will change, Mikoto.") The professor and knight captain left the cathedral as Mikoto turned back to the smiling Archbishop.

"Why do I have the moon Goddess's scent, huh?" Mikoto murmured. Percival quirked up an eyebrow as he awaited for the boy to continue. There were many things Mikoto could say here, but he opted for a few simple words. "No clue," he shrugged. The archbishop tilted his head. And then he gave a small chuckle.

"Apologies, it was a strange thing to say," Percival stated. Dante was still here, quiet like some statue. Was someone even in that suit of armor?

"I see, well, we should probably get this whole thing over with. You have more important things to do, no doubt," Mikoto had nothing important to do himself other than getting this whole tedious mission over with. "The Vel'ryr empire is involved. I fought the fourth princess; go ahead and confirm by re-"

"There is no need," the archbishop cut him off. "I believe you."

"Huh?" Mikoto blurted out, confused.

"I am a good judge of character," the man brightly proclaimed. "Is that not right, Dante?"

"..."

"He agrees, I think," Percival spoke with a pondering look. Mikoto just looked more befuddled beneath his mask. "On a different note, would you like some tea?"

This guy was a weird one, alright.

## **Chapter 72: Chapter 70: Another Massacre**

[Verdantis]

[Briarwick]

The metallic-like smell of blood permeated the chilly air. It clashed horribly with the smell of burnt flesh; the sound that dominated the air was that of blades slicing through flesh. And the sound of a bursts of plasma tearing through the air, melting snow.

Lucinda's hand tightly gripped onto a blade of her own, a simple traditional katana. Her eyes glossed over the bodies of some townspeople; plasma had ripped through their flesh, and their expressions were stuck in that of horror. The buildings and houses of Briarwick remained relatively untouched. Though that was surely soon to change with the violent battle that took place.

The Knights of Emberreach battled cultist after cultist. They were heavily outnumbered, but that did not matter.

"Die heretics!"

"To the deepest parts of the seventh hell to you!"

"Death to the heretics!"

"For the Gods! For Verdantis!"

When it came to physical might, the knights of Verdantis were unmatched. The few knights in Briarwick weaved through plasma fire as they cut down the cultists without a shred of mercy. The knights were ruthless and perfectly coordinated, but even so, the damage to Briarwick was already done. It's townsfolk were mulled down safe for a few, and Lucinda was praying to every God she knew that Zavier, Lily, and Lucy were unharmed. Apparently, Briarwick was not the only town that was under attack, as the knight scouts had reported that multiple towns and other villages were under attack. So she thought it wise to disperse with Agatha and Mirabella.

"Move!" Five cultists blocked her way to the inn as she drew near it. They leveled their rifles at her, but with a gesture of her hand, an invisible force seemed to slam into them, sending their bodies flying like projectiles to the side. She neared the inn, but a familiar voice stopped her in her tracks.

"I'd advise you not to go in there." Her head snapped to the source of it. A Chaosmaw, more specifically the one she had met back in the attack on the academy, Nybbas. She glared at the demon with a snarl.

"Are you behind this, demon!?" She shouted as she tensed her body for action. "Answer me!"

"My, my, how entertaining it is to see the spawn of Octavia so riled up." Nybbas mused as he stared at those brilliant, bright red eyes that glared bloody murder. "Alas, I am merely here to collect sufficient souls."

"Wha- " Her words were cut off as the door of the inn behind her swung open. She glanced behind her.

That long pitch-black hair and gleaming red eyes, coupled with that slim yet heavy, finely crafted armor. She knew very well who this was: Selwyn Von Auerswald, the crown prince of Vel'ryr. But what was someone like him doing here, out in the open? Why was someone this important risking being in Verdantis?

"It seems the demon was right." He spoke smoothly as his eyes locked into hers. "Worthy prey has presented itself." She wanted to question him, but her eyes were on his blade. It was finely crafted in black steel with silver outlines; its handle was curved, and the blade gave off an ominous energy. But that was not what she was focused on; no, it was the blood that stained the fine blade.

"No..." Her eyes stayed on the blade for what seemed like an eternity. The grip on her own blade tightened hard enough that it almost shattered. She failed the townsfolk, the children, and everyone else. Her teeth grinded together so hard that it was apparent to all.

There was no need for further words.

The moment their feet shifted, the world blurred.

Steel flashed in the waning sunlight as their blades met in a violent, ringing clash. The sheer force of their swings sent a shockwave through the narrow streets, snow erupting into the air like a blizzard. Sparks scattered from the grinding of metal against metal. Selwyn's sword carved through the air with monstrous force, Lucinda was faster.

She twisted her body through the narrowest gaps, her sword moving as an extension of her will. When his blade cleaved downward, she sidestepped and countered with a sharp thrust. When he swung in a brutal arc, she ducked beneath it, feeling the wind from his sword howl over her head. She parried, deflected, and redirected—never taking a hit, never letting herself fall into his rhythm.

Yet Selwyn was relentless.

He advanced with calm, each strike heavier than the last. The force of his attacks was like an avalanche, and even as Lucinda dodged and countered, the pressure mounted. Her blade felt lighter against his, her stance threatened to break under the sheer impact. He was pushing her back, cornering her with every step.

Lucinda narrowed her eyes, her mind racing. ("He's testing me. Measuring my strength.")

Her heels dug into the snow as she disengaged, flipping backward to gain distance. She landed lightly, her breath misting in the frigid air. But Selwyn did not give chase immediately—he simply smirked, tapping his sword against his shoulder, watching her with the curiosity of a predator that had not yet decided whether to devour its prey.

She knew what he was thinking. ("He doesn't see me as a threat.")

Her teeth clenched, fury bubbling beneath her skin.

Selwyn's figure blurred.

Lucinda barely had time to react before he was upon her again, his sword slicing in a vicious diagonal arc. She twisted to the side, feeling the gust of wind from the blade's path whip against her cheek. Before she could counter, his off-hand lashed out—his gauntlet-clad fist slamming towards her ribs. She pivoted on instinct, the blow grazing past her armor, but Selwyn had already adjusted.

His knee shot forward like a hammer.

The impact struck her midsection, knocking the air from her lungs and sending her skidding back across the snow. She barely managed to roll with the force, preventing herself from collapsing outright.

("Damn it... I can't overpower him. Not like this.")

Selwyn tilted his head. "Running away already?" he mused, stepping forward leisurely.

Lucinda's mind raced. ("I need to turn this against him.")

She turned on her heel and sprinted, dashing between the ruined buildings and the chaos of the ongoing battle. Her form became a streak of color, slipping through the wreckage. Selwyn gave chase, his movements deceptively relaxed, but every step of his closed the distance with ease. His presence loomed behind her.

She vaulted over a shattered market stall, landing lightly before twisting around a corner. Selwyn followed.

The chase wound through the devastated town, through the bloodied snow and burning structures. Each time he struck, she evaded—flipping over fallen beams, weaving through collapsing alleyways, maneuvering through the urban wreckage as though the town itself was her ally. Selwyn did not falter. His strikes shattered the environment around them. A single slash tore through wooden walls like paper. A downward cleave split the cobblestone beneath his feet, sending shards flying in every direction.

Despite her speed, despite her skill, she was still on the defensive.

The moment Selwyn caught her in an open space, she knew she had made a mistake.

His sword came down like an executioner's blade.

Lucinda barely raised her weapon in time, and the impact sent a tremor through her entire being. Her knees buckled, her arms quivered, and she was sent flying backward. Her body crashed through a wooden balcony, shattering through the support beams before she tumbled onto the rooftop of a crumbling house.

She landed hard, coughing as debris rained around her. But before she could recover, she felt it—his presence.

Selwyn descended from above, his blade gleaming.

Lucinda rolled away just as he landed, his sword plunging into the roof where she had been mere seconds ago. The entire structure groaned beneath the impact, fractures spreading like veins beneath their feet.

They clashed again.

The fight took to the rooftops, their blades striking in midair as they leapt between structures. Selwyn's blade came down in powerful, earth-shaking swings, forcing

Lucinda to weave between each strike. Her feet barely touched the surface before she had to move again, each moment spent narrowly avoiding devastation.

Then—he read her movement.

Selwyn feinted a downward slash, but instead of following through, he kicked off the rooftop—adjusting in midair to intercept her. Lucinda's eyes widened as his fist crashed into her stomach.

The force sent her flying.

She spiraled uncontrollably before crashing through the roof of a house, her body slamming into the floor below with an impact that cracked the stone beneath her. Pain exploded through her ribs, her vision blurring for a split second. The cold air filled her lungs, but she had no time to recover.

Selwyn landed through the same hole, his armored foot aiming to crush her.

Lucinda rolled aside just as the ground where she had been lying caved in.

She scrambled to her feet, only for his blade to come for her again. She raised her sword in a desperate block—the impact sent her hurtling through the wall, out into the open street. She crashed against the frozen fountain at the town's center, her body aching, her breath ragged.

Selwyn loomed over her, his blade raised for the killing blow.

"Why not use that Arcane Ascendance?" His voice was calm, almost lazy. "It would make things somewhat entertaining."

"Shut up!"

Lucinda lunged forward in a last-ditch effort. Her sword lashed out, slicing across Selwyn's shoulder plate in a glancing blow. A shallow cut—nothing substantial. Nothing that would stop him.

Selwyn's counter came immediately.

His sword crashed down, the impact sending her to the ground. The earth trembled beneath them. The air quaked with the force of the collision. The surrounding buildings groaned, some even collapsing from the sheer power behind his strike.

As Lucinda lay there, battered and dazed, Selwyn raised his blade once more.

"How disappointing," he muttered, his voice dripping with boredom.

Lucinda gritted her teeth, pushing past the pain. She was going to lose.

But even in defeat, she would not give up.

### **Chapter 73: Chapter 71: A true monster**

[Verdantis]

[Briarwick]

Corpses of the cultists littered the streets of the town, their blood staining the pristine snow. Among them were bodies of townsfolk mixed in; it was a slaughter.

"Casualty report," Asaun ordered with a grimace as he stared at the state of the town known as Briarwick.

"We have suffered none, captain," one of his knights informed. He gave a nod of pride as the man continued, "These lot, however, seemed to be reanimated corpses and not pure Vel'ryrians; our keener knights had detected a hint of mana from them."

"I see, these damned heretics..." Asaun murmured in disgust. "They would not even leave the dead be." He shook his head. "But what of survivors?" He could not see the knight's face, but keen perception and instincts told him it turned grim.

"By the time we arrived here, many townsfolk were already dead," the knight grimaced as he continued. "We've managed to round up the last few survivors, but we will sweep the town once more. We've yet to check all locations."

"I see, most unfortunate." A deep sigh left the knight captain's lips. "I shall assist in the search for more survivors. Where have you yet to look?" The knight gestured to a lone, slightly worn-down wooden building.

"The inn remained untouched by us and the adversaries," the knight explained. Asaun opened his mouth to speak but was stopped when a large tremor resounded through the entire area. Buildings that still stood quaked and threatened to tumble over, along with that, an enormous wave of snow in the distance was kicked up. Asaun's keen eyes narrowed in that direction; he saw a distinct and enormous mana signature.

"The spawn of Octavia is battling someone?" He asked.

"Aye, a monster in the skin of a man," the knight shuddered. "He wielded strength that surpassed us and even the spawn of Octavia."

"An Von Auerswald mayhap," Asaun murmured in thought. "Stay clear of that area; we would only get in the way if we were to intervene. But tell me, barring our little

songstress and Ser Dante, is there any other Inheritor in this side of Verdantis?" The knight hesitated before speaking.

"T-there is only Lady Lyraeth," the knight informed. Asaun winced as soon as he heard the girl's name. "Captain, would it not be better to get Ser Dante here? Among the Inheritors, he is the most powerful, no?"

"He is, but currently he is bound to the archbishop as his guard," Asaun stated with a shake of his head. "It would not do us well to take away a personal guard from a member of the governing body." The knight nodded in understanding at his words. "For now, send word to Lady Lyraeth and have her support the spawn of Octavia." More tremors rebounded through the area as Asaun stared into the distance. "If she has not yet bested her opponent, it could only mean it is someone formidable; she might need support."

"At once, captain," his knight parted with a quick salute. Asaun, meanwhile, ignored the various tremors as he moved through the town, giving silent prayers to the bodies of the unfortunate souls. It was not long until he reached his destination: the inn his knight had informed him of. His senses were not detecting anything beyond those doors, not anything living at least.

He pushed past the door and immediately heard the creaking of wood as his armored feet touched the wooden floor. His nose twitched; the familiar scent of blood filled his nostrils. Though the scent led upstairs of the inn.

"Blood drops also lead upwards," the knight captain muttered, his tone low. His armor's clanking was the only thing heard throughout the inn as he made his way up the creaking wooden stairs. The scent of blood only further intensified as his gaze locked onto something: the body of a child.

Messy brown hair and emerald eyes wide and frozen in horror. There was a large and deep gash on his back; mercilessly he was cut down. Asaun kneeled down to the body, reaching out a hand, he closed the boy's eyes.

"May the Gods guide your soul," Asaun stood up, glancing to the side where an open door was. Beyond that, a stronger scent permeated the area. Entering the room to a more tragic sight, a mother's body was protectively over the corpse of another child, perhaps a sibling of the boy. Asaun grit his teeth as he approached the two. The sight of Death was not new to the knight captain.

He has witnessed it a number of times; however, the Death of children was too much even for him. He looked at the two's expressions: the mother had a blank look upon her face, and the girl's eyes were puffy, closed in fear. But then he noticed something. Reaching out, he took it; it was a piece of paper. A rather crude drawing was on it.

Stick figures, one with a wild head of seemingly white hair and large red eyes—a woman judging by the assets. Then in the middle was a small girl of smaller proportions, brown hair and green eyes, and finally a figure with a head of long blue hair. Asaun heaved a deep and heavy sigh.

The world was a cruel place, as was reality.

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[Outskirts]

The sharp whisper of steel slicing through air came within a hair's breadth of Lucinda's face. The moment she registered the glint of the blade, she jerked her head to the side, just narrowly avoiding a deep, fatal gash. Yet even her swift reflexes did not spare her completely—the cold bite of metal kissed her cheek, parting skin. A hot, searing pain followed as crimson streaked down her pale face. But there was no time to acknowledge it.

Selwyn pivoted on his heel, his motion fluid, his sword carved an arc through the air, the sheer force of his swing howling. Snow erupted in a gust, sent cascading outward in an explosive shockwave. Lucinda reacted instinctively, pushing off the ground in a sudden burst of speed. Her body twisted, coiling midair as she narrowly evaded the sweeping slash. The power behind it was enough to carve deep trenches into the frost-covered earth.

She landed several paces away, her boots sliding slightly across the ice-packed ground. Without hesitation, she raised a hand to her cheek, magic flaring to mend the wound.

Selwyn sighed, exhaling a misty breath into the frigid air. His crimson eyes, filled with something akin to disinterest, flickered toward her.

"This is getting rather tedious." His voice carried the same flat, unbothered tone as always, as if the battle itself was nothing more than a dull inconvenience. He rolled his shoulders slightly, the motion languid and relaxed, before shaking his head.

"I even moved the battle outside the town so you could use that 'Arcane Ascendance,'" he continued, his tone edged with something close to disappointment. His red gaze locked onto her with scrutiny. "Yet you still disappoint."

Lucinda grit her teeth, fury flashing through her like an electric current. His words cut deeper than any blade.

"I care not for your enjoyment, monster!" she spat, her voice seething with raw anger. Without hesitation, she flicked her hand forward. A sphere of searing flame coalesced in her palm, the fireball whistled through the air like a speeding comet, aimed not at Selwyn, but at the ground before him.

The impact was immediate. The moment it struck, a violent tremor rippled through the frozen land. The explosion sent a hail of snow into the sky, a wall of white swallowing the battlefield whole. The storm of frost swallowed sight, but Lucinda had already begun her next move.

("In my Inheritor form, my magic would be effective... but there's a change in plan. Tier 5 magic should work—Familial Arts will suffice.")

She exhaled, steadying her thoughts as she reached deep into the reservoir of power that coursed through her being. Then, she spoke.

"Familial Arts: Seraphic Chorus."

The temperature dropped even further as the air around her warped and distorted. An eerie hum reverberated across the battlefield, a resonance that did not belong to this world.

Darkness twisted and coalesced before her, a vortex of writhing mana forming in the heart. From its depths, shadows emerged—shadows clad in gleaming black armor, their forms indistinct yet undeniably menacing. They stood in formation, a phalanx of warriors, each bearing a massive blade. Their helmets lacked visors, their faces swallowed by emptiness.

The first soldier stepped forward, its advance swift without hesitation, it lunged, its sword carving through the mist.

Selwyn's gaze sharpened. His fingers tightened around his blade.

The clash came like a thunderclap.

His sword intercepted the strike, steel meeting spectral metal in a collision that sent a shockwave rippling outward. Sparks scattered like stars against the snow. The dark soldier pressed forward, undeterred, swinging again—then another followed, and another.

Lucinda did not stop.

More warriors materialized, their ranks swelling, until dozens of black-armored figures filled the battlefield. They moved in unison, an unstoppable tide of converging upon Selwyn.

Selwyn exhaled through his nose, his patience visibly thinning.

Then he moved.

His blade flickered, a blur barely perceptible to the eye. The lead soldier barely had time to react before its torso split in two, its form unraveling into wisps of fading black.

Another soldier lunged. Selwyn pivoted, parrying effortlessly before twisting his wrist and driving his sword straight through its core. He kicked the fading remnant aside and turned to the next.

Their coordinated attacks should have been overwhelming—should have been inescapable. Yet Selwyn wove through them easily.

Lucinda clenched her fists, pouring more mana into the spell.

Dark tendrils slithered across the area, creeping along the ice, twisting and coiling. They lunged at Selwyn, seeking to ensnare him in their grip.

For a moment, it seemed they had caught him.

Then, with a single fluid motion, Selwyn severed them.

The tendrils screeched as they recoiled, but they did not stop. They reformed instantly, striking again, relentless in their pursuit.

Lucinda's soldiers pressed their attack, their black blades flashing. Selwyn moved between them, his sword a blur in speed. One soldier fell, then another. A third tried to flank him, only to be met with a swift backhand strike that sent its form scattering into the wind.

Yet he was still untouched.

Lucinda grit her teeth.

Her eyes dropped towards her fallen army. Her magic faltered for a moment before she summoned forth a blast of dark mana that seemed to sweep away her defeated soldiers like leaves in a breeze.

The blast expanded rapidly, exceeding a range of 200 meters as everything in its path was eradicated. From any distance, all anyone would see was the enormous explosions that eradicated all. It tore through the terrain, engulfing boulders, trees and everything in its path.

The shockwave that followed seemed to rattle the lang, sending debri high into the sky. Fissures and cracks spread about on the already devastated ground. Slowly but surely the explosion waned, closing in on itself, then it was gone.

What was left before her was naught but devastation.

Selwyn was nowhere to be seen.

But she knew her magic had not reached Selwyn. He had simply left; his interest in her was no longer there. She was not even worth killing.

Not felled. Not wounded.

Just... gone.

Lucinda stood there, trembling, her breath ragged and uneven as she stared at the emptiness where her adversary had once stood. Every fiber of her being screamed in protest—how could he simply leave?!

How dare he?

She had thrown everything at him—her power, her summoned legion—and yet he dismissed her like an insect, like nothing.

The weight of it crushed her.

She staggered forward, her body drenched in cold sweat despite the frigid air. Her heartbeat pounded in her ears.

"Raaaaaaaaaaaagh!!"

Her scream shattered the silence. It carried across the desolate land, twisted by the winds into something raw. Her knees buckled, and she collapsed, her trembling hands digging into the ice-laden ground.

"Damn it! Damn it! DAMN IT!"

Her fist slammed into the frozen earth with brutal force, the impact sending painful shocks up her arm, but she didn't stop. Again. And again. And again. Cracks formed beneath her clenched fingers, the ice splintering under the sheer force of her rage.

Her body trembled violently. Her teeth ground together, her breath hitching as she choked on the weight of her own inadequacy.

"Why are you so damn useless!? You're the spawn of Octavia! THAT'S ALL YOU ARE!"

Her voice cracked.

Blood welled from her clenched fist, dark droplets staining the icy ground. Her nails dug into her palm, carving deep, stinging crescents into her flesh. Her entire body felt like it was caving in, her mind drowning in the suffocating storm of failure.

And then—

Something within her snapped.

The air grew thick.

The world seemed to bend under an invisible weight as a sudden, suffocating force pulsed outward from Lucinda's trembling form.

"Damn it..."

### **Chapter 74: Chapter 72: Conclusions**

[Verdantis]

[Briarwick]

"What a darn mess," she muttered to herself. She had been contacted because there had been a rapid increase in attacks from these fanatic cultists. They had grown more bold and were attacking larger towns randomly. She had been called because there was a dangerous foe among the cultists, someone even Lucinda was having trouble with. Oh, how excited she was to have such an exciting fight alongside the spawn of Octavia. Alas, it was not meant to be, it seems.

When she arrived, Lyraeth was subjected to quite a somber atmosphere. What looked like civilians of the now ruined town were being escorted on carriages, presumably to Emberreach. They all seemed so down, or maybe that was too light a word; their town was completely ruined. Friends and family were killed, so their expressions were warranted. The spawn of the Sun Goddess walked through the destroyed town until she spotted a familiar face.

"Yo, Asaun!" Her cheery greeting to the knight captain clashed horribly with the atmosphere. She seemed oblivious to this fact.

The knight captain in question turned to face her, a frown tugging at his lips due to her lack of tact.

"Lady Lyraeth," he greeted with a small bow. "It's good to see you." She just waved him off.

"Come on, I already told you to drop all that 'Lady' crap." The girl's crudeness of words was to be noted. "Now, what the hell even happened here?"

"The cult of Drah'lurahr attacked here as well," Asaun briefed before gesturing somewhere. She took note of a trio of familiar figures. The first one she noticed was naturally Lucinda. Numerous cuts decorated her uniform, but she had no clear injuries.

She looked physically well, at least. But seated atop a crate, her head was hung low, while her eyes were puffy with a distant look to them.

There was the familiar and brash princess as well. The girl looked downright furious, glaring at the ground as if it had somehow wronged her. Clearly, she had heard some news that warranted such an expression. There was also the blonde, who looked more disturbed than usual.

There was also some weirdo with a mask and another man, but they seemed hardly worth any kind of attention.

Lyraeth smiled as she moved to approach the trio of girls, but she was stopped by Asaun, who placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Best not to," he advised as she quirked up an eyebrow in confusion. "They happened to know some of the people here, the ones who were part of the casualties suffered here."

"Ah," the girl just nodded. Her seeming lack of empathy was worrying, but for now, Asaun ignored that. The Inheritors of Verdantis were an odd bunch; there would be no use in trying to figure them out.

With Professor Eugene and Mikoto, the two stood close to a run-down house, courtesy of the cultists.

"So his name is Selwyn, huh?" Mikoto murmured.

"If Lucinda's account of events is to be believed," the professor informed.

"And that guy was strong enough to beat her." Lucinda was hailed as all-powerful, but that did not seem to be the case. Though there was a reason for her loss. ("She probably hasn't figured out how to use magic on these greater animals.") He glanced at the sullen girl. "So how strong is he, Selwyn?" A few seconds passed before Professor Eugene answered him.

"He is an absurdly powerful man," the professor started. "When it comes down to pure unadulterated physical prowess, then no one is his equal. He is a feral man who does not even listen to his own father, the emperor of Vel'ryr. Despite the 'peace' experienced by varying nations, Selwyn is known to conquer smaller nations around the world."

"With no repercussions?" Mikoto questioned.

"None; many fear risking the ire of Vel'ryr as a whole by resisting him."

"Guy sounds nuts; how did Galadriel even deal with him in previous festivals?" From a physical standpoint, he might be unmatched, but Mikoto doubted he was unbeatable.

"He rarely did participate in any festivals," Professor Eugene added. "But not all our festivals are combat oriented." Mikoto hummed at that..

"But still, something's bugging me here," Mikoto frowned as he scanned the ruined town. "We recovered the dragon they wanted to resurrect; why bother killing more people now?"

"It could be possible that they were merely petty, but I doubt that," the professor spoke, his tone on edge.

"So there's a chance they've got another dragon corpse?"

"It's very possible," Professor Eugene stated with a frown, his mind thinking back to something.

"But that gets me thinking, why go to all the effort to summon some dragon?" It had been something nagging him. "There are Inheritors here in Verdantis; the most damage a lesser dragon could do is partially destroy some city before being put down, no?"

"Victoria was of the same mind as you," Professor Eugene murmured as he thought back to a conversation.

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[Flashback]

It was a spacious room, cluttered with tables and shelves laden with alchemical ingredients, tomes, and various contraptions. The walls were a dull grey in color. The occasional candle flickered in sconces mounted on the walls.

At the center of the room stood a large, heavy iron operating table, scarred by countless experiments and spills. Its surface was littered with glassware of various shapes and sizes—beakers, flasks, retorts—each containing mysterious substances in various states of transformation. Atop it lay a pale human body with various tubes prodding out of his body, a male around his mid-twenties, with a head of dark hair and a defined jaw.

Victoria studied the body of the man with a critical eye. Her dainty hands were adorned with gloves, and she had a medical mask on her face, more of a professional courtesy.

"So what have you learned, Victoria?" a bit of ways opposite her stood Professor Eugene, with the ever-blank look in his eyes.

"Well, this was definitely a Vel'ryrian," she answered. "His body was naturally resistant to any substance with mana."

"He was one of the reanimates, so this must mean they are using dead cultists and reviving them so their ranks do not suffer," the professor surmised.

"Indeed, but there was something I took note of with the reanimated specimens that weren't put down for good yet," Professor Eugene perked his head up in interest as she continued. "Necromancy involves summoning back the soul of the subject from the ninth plane or wherever else it ends up. Dragging the soul back damages it extensively, resulting in a mindless husk being brought back. Though these few fit the criteria, they lacked a soul; it was more so they were puppets being controlled rather than being brought back through necromancy."

"Those souls were most likely harvested to resurrect the dragon for whatever reason," the professor murmured thoughtfully. "But still, what did they hope to gain with a lesser dragon?"

"Perhaps it was a means to an end for them," Professor Eugene quirked up an eyebrow at Victoria's words, not gauging their meaning. "The Vel'ryr empire is not stupid; they have magitech far more superior to a lesser dragon. It had me thinking. Maybe they want to resurrect a dragon to gain its soul."

"Hmm, with Chaosmaw within their ranks, it's entirely possible to keep the dragon's soul after its resurrected form has been dealt with," Professor Eugene mulled over the prospect. "But for what purpose would they need something as powerful as a dragon's soul?"

"There are many things that see souls as a delicacy or beneficial. Powerful things, a demon, or even an Astrothian," Victoria murmured. "Perhaps they seek to bring forth such a thing."

"A thing more dangerous than a dragon?"

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[Present Time]

"I see, that would make more sense," Mikoto murmured. "They probably have an extra dragon corpse lying around. They probably want us to do the dirty work and kill it so they can harvest its soul."

"Indeed," Professor Eugene agreed. "Which means once the dragon comes, we must completely eradicate it, in both body and soul. A task Lucinda would be best suited for, and she needs it." Mikoto hummed as he stared at his brethren; she did need this. She

probably felt useless; those kids were like little siblings to her, and they practically admired her. She needed something to take her mind off this massacre.

"But still, with this festival coming up, do you guys have a plan for dealing with Selwyn?" If Professor Eugene's words are to be believed, then he was quite an enigma, a strong one.

"We have none," the professor admitted. "But maybe that has changed now."

"What do you mean?" The boy questioned.

"Are you strong, Mikoto?" The professor's question just elicited a head tilt.

"I am."

"You already fought a Von Auerswald, one of the stronger ones, and came out alive," the professor started. "Do you think you could defeat a stronger one?"

"Well, that Amaury chick I fought wasn't all that difficult; I'm positive I could've killed her," Mikoto murmured thoughtfully. "She seemed to have a trump card, though, but still, I'm sure I could adapt to whatever it is; I'm me, after all." Mikoto smiled as he gazed at the cloudy sky. "If I and that Selwyn were to fight, then I'm positive I could win."

## **Chapter 75: Chapter 73: Attack Planning**

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The air was thick with machinery, heavy with the scent of burning wires. The room was a vast, space, with walls that seemed to stretch on forever, lined with rows upon rows of humming machinery. The only light came from a series of flickering fluorescent tubes.

At the center of the room, a massive dragon corpse lay sprawled out, its body as long as a city block, its scales glinting like black diamonds. The air was heavy with the stench of the corpse, and yet, despite the overwhelming sense of decay, there was something almost majestic about the beast.

Selwyn regarded the dragon with a dull gaze while Nybbas wore his ever-present grin.

As Selwyn approached the dragon's corpse, Nybbas spoke in a low, rumbling voice, his words echoing off the walls of the room. "Ah, Selwyn, you've come just in time."

Selwyn nodded, his eyes never leaving the dragon's corpse. "Just be quick about it, demon. I grow more bored by the day."

Nybbas chuckled.

"Being bored seems just natural to you," the demon mused. "But oh well, let us get this over with."

With a gesture, Nybbas summoned a small orb of swirling energy that hovered in front of him. The orb pulsed, and Selwyn noted it began to take shape, forming into a series of glowing threads that seemed to stretch on forever.

"These are the souls we have gathered thus far," Nybbas said, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "And with them, I shall bring this beast back to life."

As he spoke, Nybbas began to weave the threads together, forming a complex pattern that seemed to pulse with dark mana. The air around him grew hotter and more intense.

The dragon's corpse began to twitch and shudder, the air was filled with the stench of Death and decay, but beneath it all was a faint hum of mana.

And then, in a burst of blinding light and mana, the dragon's corpse erupted into life. Its scales glinted as it sat up, its eyes glowing, the air was filled with the sound of its wings beating against the darkness.

As Selwyn watched, the dragon rose to its feet, its body towering over them like a mountain. Its eyes burned as it regarded Nybbas and Selwyn.

Nybbas spoke in an excited tone. "Behold! I have brought you back to life, great beast. And now, I shall give you purpose."

The dragon's eyes narrowed as it regarded Nybbas and Selwyn. And then, in a voice that rumbled like thunder beneath their feet, it spoke.

**"I am reborn,"** it said. **"You, human, you might possess the blood of my kin, but do not be mistaken. I shall serve no one but myself."**

As Selwyn watched in boredom, Nybbas merely chuckled. "Ah," he said. "A noble spirit indeed. And one that will make our next meeting most interesting."

With that, Nybbas turned and vanished into the darkness of the room, leaving Selwyn alone with the reborn dragon. The air was thick with tension as they regarded each other across the vast expanse of the room.

"I care not what you do, dragon," Selwyn stated. He had hoped the dragon would be more powerful, but this was disappointing. "Do what you want."

And then, without another word, Selwyn turned and followed Nybbas into the darkness.

And from there, a great roar resounded through all of Verdantis.

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[Verdantis]

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The space was vast, and it was a dimly lit chamber that stretched out before her like a labyrinth, the air was thick with the musty scent of dust, and the flickering torches. Amidst this, a woman with porcelain skin and raven-black hair, dressed in a flowing black gown, paced.

Her eyes gleamed with an unnatural red intensity, a characteristic of her kind, as she surveyed the sprawling area. Before her lay the scattered remains of a dragon, its body parts arranged like a puzzle. The woman's name was Lyra, a sorceress renowned for her mastery of the arts among that she also held the possession of court mage for Verdantis.

As she walked, Lyra's gaze darted from one gruesome fragment to the next. Her eyes lingered on the scaled torso, where the flesh seemed to have been torn asunder by some invisible force.

"Ah, the core," Lyra murmured to herself, her voice low and husky. "The core are always the key. If I can understand how they absorb and deflect magic, in the Eternal City I never did get the chance to properly examine it, I'll be able to—"

She stopped before a section of wing membrane, its iridescent sheen dulled by the dust and grime that coated it. Lyra reached out a delicate hand, her fingers tracing the patterns etched into the surface. As she touched the scales, she felt a surge of energy course through her body, like a gentle electric shock.

"Ah, yes...the resonance frequency is still present," she whispered, her eyes closed in concentration. "If I can attune my own magic to this frequency, I might be able to—"

Lyra summoned a small burst of crimson mana, which danced across the wing membrane in a pattern. The air around her seemed to shimmer as she worked her magic, weaving a spell that resonated with the dragon's own essence.

Next, Lyra moved on to the dragon's head, its eyes vacant and dead, yet still seeming to stare into some distant realm. She examined the scaly ridges above the eyes, searching for any clues as to how the dragon's power had been structured.

"Fascinating," she breathed. "The dragon's resistance is tied to its cognitive processes – it's almost as if it's using its own consciousness to manipulate reality."

Lyra's fingers hovered above the scales as she pondered this revelation. She had long suspected that dragons possessed a unique connection to reality, but now she had

concrete evidence. She most likely could have proved it earlier, but then again, she never had this chance to study a fresh corpse of a dragon, only the bones. Dragons were frightful creatures, she knew that to be true.

As she reached the final section of wing membrane, Lyra felt a shiver run down her spine. She knew that she had reached a crucial moment in her research – one that would determine whether her obsession would ultimately lead to triumph or disaster.

"This is it," she whispered, "This is where I'll unlock the secrets of Dragonic Resonance once and for all."

With a deep breath, Lyra focused all her mana on the wing membrane. The air around her began to distort and ripple as she wove a web of magic – threads of crimson mana intertwining with threads of silver light.

The chamber seemed to grow darker still as Lyra's spell took hold. The torches flickered wildly as a result.

And then, in an instant, everything was still. The air was silent; the only sound was Lyra's breathing as she stood frozen with a frown.

"Seems it is not to be that easy." Her soothing voice lacked any frustration. She had all the time in the world to examine the dragon corpse; she would easily come up with more counters to dragon kin and by extension those with dragon blood running through their veins. Before her mind could race once more, her ears twitched as the large oak doors to her laboratory opened, and she was quite aware of who it was already.

"Reynard." She glanced at the one who entered her domain. He wore a grey outfit consisting mostly of gray and decorated with navy blue, furthermore there were black gloves connected to his attire, and he wore heavy black boots. He had a handsome face where two bright blue eyes sat and had a head of light blue hair. "To what do I owe this displeasure?" Lyra asked as she turned her attention back to the dragon parts.

"Come now, is that any way to treat one of Verdantis' most prized people?" He rather pridefully stated as he made his way further into the spacious room.

"Your only purpose lies with the festival and war," Lyra stated blandly; the boy scoffed.

"Please, the position of Inheritor is much more important than court mage!" He argued.

"Keep your voice down; this is a place of study," Lyra shot back unbothered. "And do not go saying that so loudly; your unique position is meant to be secret. It would not do our nation well if it is found out we have more than five of you."

"Yeah, yeah." Reynard did not seem to heed her words as he walked up next to her, looking at the various parts of the dragon. "But you must be having the time of your life. Finally having a dragon specimen to study."

"What is it you wanted here, Reynard?" She asked, getting tired of the tedious conversation. She felt a hand grip gently onto her chin before it was turned to the side, to him. Her brilliant red eyes bore into his mellow blue ones.

"Mayhap I want to warm my bed with you." He flashed a charming smile that would have melted the hearts of most. "You're quite old, but it won't do to let that beauty go to waste." Her response was to merely slap his hand away.

"Speak your business, or I'll forcefully remove you," she threatened in a low tone; the boy relented with a sigh.

"Fine, fine, it is about Reylthorn." Reynard started, Lyra quirked up a brow in interest.

"He used his Familial Arts, no?" She surmised.

"That's right, and we've come up with a new number one threat!" He proudly proclaimed as if it was his doing. "Apparently from the kid's own words, this guy is supposedly more powerful than that spawn of Octavia."

"Fascinating," Lyra murmured; it was indeed something troubling. Where had Galadriel acquired someone more powerful than the spawn of Octavia? Before her train of thought could continue, a loud roar resounded throughout everything. It was loud and seemed to cause the very walls to quake. "Seems some things are occurring outside."

## **Chapter 76: Chapter 74: Quick dispatch**

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

The snow-capped walls of the city stretched high above the frozen streets, forming a fortress for the city of Emberreach. Perched atop the battlements, Lucinda stood alongside Mikoto, her eyes fixed on the distant horizon. The wind whipped her white hair into a frenzy, and her breath misted in the chill air. Before her, the landscape unfolded, a frozen expanse that seemed to stretch on forever.

Mikoto could not help but internally lament, ("What a pain in my ass. I thought Lucinda was supposed to do this crap alone.") Professor Eugene, while entrusting the job of killing the dragon to her, was still wary of her mental state. He seemed to have trust in Mikoto's power, for whatever reason.

("Not sure I can destroy the soul just yet,") Mikoto hummed as he glanced at Lucinda's distant eyes. ("Killing the dragon should be easy though, but I'll wait and see what she does.") Lucinda was releasing her mana constantly; despite lacking mana, some dragons saw mana as a delicacy, and her mana was quite potent.

Speaking of the girl, Lucinda was obviously still affected by her failure. She let Selwyn get away, and she could not even save the kids and Lucy. If he were in her position, he would have been of much the same mind, or maybe not.

("Something's wrong with me too,") Mikoto frowned. It's something that became more apparent as days go by. ("Hmm, I might be going insane. This situation should have gotten me riled up too. I mean, what kind of scum would kill children?") He tried to find the rage, but there was none. ("This is troublesome. I need to get that ring asap to Rheya so I can get the hell away from this world.")

But was the longing for home truly the cause of this mental state of his? He might become a sociopath at this rate. Wait, he was already one. ("But it was self-defense, honestly. The guy was scummy,") he shrugged to himself as he suddenly heard Lucinda's voice.

"Useless," Lucinda spat, her voice low and venomous. Mikoto did not react to her words; he expected her to start venting right about any time, if he were being honest. And who better to vent to than the guy she barely knew?

"I can't believe how completely useless I was. I've failed to save them," she gestured wildly, her hand trembling with frustration. "Can you believe it? I'm the spawn of the Goddess Octavia. I'm supposed to be a kind of hero, an angel, and a beacon of hope in these times. But no, I'm just a failure. A useless girl who can't even save some children. How sickening," she grit her teeth in frustration.

Mikoto's gaze remained steady, his hidden eyes locked onto Lucinda's as if he were drinking in every word. His expression beneath his mask remained impassive.

("I underestimated how much the Death of those kids affected her,") Mikoto shook his head. He could hardly relate to her in any way.

"But it's not just about me," Lucinda continued, her voice rising in anguish. "It's about everyone who's been hurt, who's been mercilessly killed. Those innocent people who had nothing to do with this, any of this. I could not even defeat that damned man. That bastard is still roaming around freely!"

Mikoto weighed what to say; he was not one for pep talk.

"So dumb, one person can't save anyone," his voice was low and even, yet she had heard him all the same.

Lucinda's eyes flashed with anger, her cheeks burning with indignation. "How can you say that? I've seen the devastation firsthand. I've smelled the smoke and tasted the fear. I've failed to do anything about it."

"And what would you have done differently?" Mikoto asked.

Lucinda's laughter was bitter and humorless. "I would have saved them all. I would have stopped those cultist monsters from destroying everything. I would have—"

"You're trying too hard with this hero shit," Mikoto interrupted, his voice bland but commanding. "Those kids are dead; there's nothing you can do about it now. Focus on the future or whatever, save the people you can or something." Mikoto sighed. "If you were hoping for a pep talk, then you should forget it. My old man once taught me only cold hard facts mattered. Scummy as he was, there was truth to his words."

Lucinda's gaze dropped, her shoulders slumping under the weight of her own guilt and shame. She felt a lump form in her throat as she struggled to find the words to respond.

"But what about my obligation?" she whispered finally, her voice barely audible over the wind.

Mikoto's expression turned confused. "Obligation, huh? Right, all that spawn of Octavia crap, how meaningless." She looked at him, her crimson eyes wide.

"But I'm the spawn of Octavia," she reasoned.

"Your obligation is what you choose, honestly," he said blandly. "Your obligation is to be yourself. Or to be this wannabe hero. I don't really care; just stop being emo, dude. Focus all your attention on beating the shit out of that Selwyn guy." Mikoto smirked as he jabbed a thumb at himself. "Or actually, you're kinda weak, not gonna lie. I'll take care of him." His words were meant to be hurtful, a blow to her pride, but they were very foreign. Someone was offering to fight her battles for her?

Lucinda's eyes searched Mikoto's mask, seeking some glimmer of understanding or reassurance. And for a moment, she found it – a spark of compassion that ignited within her a small flame of hope.

Perhaps she wasn't useless after all.

As they stood there, the snow falling around them, Lucinda felt a minute and newfound resolve begin to take shape within her chest.

"We barely know each other," she murmured lowly as she glanced at him. "Would you truly fight for me?"

"I'm strong, so it should be easy," he stated. A small smile found its way onto her face, a newer warmth in her chest.

"You're odd..."

"How rude," Mikoto snorted.

But just then, a loud roar shook the foundations of the city and echoed throughout. The large dragon drew closer and closer, ever more; it seems their method of attracting it had worked.

Lucinda, her eyes fixed intently on the horizon, stood slightly more motivated. The dark shape of the dragon could be seen hurtling towards them, its wings beating the air with a deafening roar.

As the dragon drew closer, its scales glinting, Lucinda's eyes flashed with a fierce glare. She raised her hand, and a shimmering light began to emanate from her palm. The air around her seemed to thicken and distort, as if reality itself was bending to accommodate her will.

From the swirling mist of light, a sword began to take shape. Its blade was long and spotless, its otherworldly metal gleaming with an otherworldly sheen. The large radiating hilt was adorned with runes that seemed to pulse with a thick mana that seemed to blend in with a light.

"Divine Blade Fate sealer," Lucinda said, her voice low and husky.

Mikoto's eyes zeroed in as Lucinda grasped the hilt of the sword. The dragon was now mere feet away, its jaws wide open as it prepared to strike.

With a swift motion, Lucinda launched herself at the dragon, the blade flashing in the fading light. The sword bit deep into the dragon's scales, releasing a blast of mana that sent a reeling shockwave through everything.

As Lucinda swung her blade in a great arc, a brilliant explosion of light erupted from the blade's tip. The mana was so intense that it seemed to bend the fabric of reality, causing the air to distort and ripple like water.

The dragon howled in agony as the blade carved through its body, its scales shattering like fragile glass. The creature's wings beat wildly as it tried to escape, but it was too late.

With one final swing of the blade, Lucinda unleashed a blast of mana that seemed to shatter the very soul of the dragon. The creature's body began to disintegrate, its flesh melting away like wax in a furnace.

As the dragon vanished into nothingness, Lucinda stood tall, and she seemed exhausted. Mikoto could now see her mana was all but diminished.

"Familial Arts," Mikoto noted as he stared at the destruction the blade had caused.

The snowy landscape around them seemed to be shifting. Mountains crumbled into dust, rivers boiled away into nothingness, and the earth itself seemed to writhe and twist like a living thing. The blade still pulsed with mana, its blade glowing with an otherworldly light. Lucinda held it aloft, her eyes burning. And she must have taken note of his confusion.

"This sword," she said, her voice. "It is said to have been wielded by Octavia herself, fate, destiny, reality, and the end itself. Things that bind it together." She heaved a heavy breath as the sword dissipated into brilliant golden specks. "I can't use it to its full extent, but as you can tell, it burns through mana, more so than Arcane Ascendance."

Mikoto stared at Lucinda with a grin of gratitude, Familial Art learned.

As they stood there, bathed in the eerie glow the blade's power left, Lucinda spoke again.

"The sword's power is not limited to that," she said. "As I cannot use it to its full potential, but it was the only option I had to destroy that dragon in both body and soul."

"I see, but how are you feeling now?" He questioned. "Mentally, I mean." She shook her head.

"I won't ever forget about Zavier, Lily, and Miss Lucy," she heaved a deep sigh as she planted her rear on the snowy ground. "But I will focus on the future, on taking down Selwyn." She stated with a determined gaze, but quickly a small smile took hold. "Or maybe I should leave that to you, Mister Strongest."

"Damn right," he gave a hidden smile back.

"But I thank you, Mikoto." Lucinda murmured. "You're quite harsh but your words hold true."

"That's right, just listen to my wise words," Mikoto nodded, satisfied.

Both failed to notice the figure that hovered high into the air.

## **Chapter 77: Chapter 75: A brief respite**

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

The snow-covered streets of the city were aglow with the soft light, casting a warm, golden glow over the festive atmosphere. The air was crisp and cold, but the magical charms woven into the city's architecture defied the harsh winter weather, keeping the revelers warm and cozy.

At the center of the city square, a grand celebration was underway. The sound of laughter, music, and merriment filled the air as the citizens of the city gathered to celebrate the defeat of the dragon that had terrorized their lands for so long. At the heart of the festivities was Lucinda, known as the brave girl who had slain the dragon, her uneasy smile shining like a beacon amidst the sea of joy.

Isabella stood beside her dearest friend. She was dressed in a vibrant red gown, her skirts fluttering as she moved. Her face was flushed with happiness, and her eyes sparkled as she gazed around at the festivities.

"Lucinda, dear Lucinda!" Isabella exclaimed, flinging herself at the spawn of Octavia's waist. "You never fail to impress! Dispelling of a dragon on your visit here, how like you!" Lucinda laughed and hugged Isabella back, pleased by the girl's enthusiasm. The comfort of a friend was much needed and appreciated, seeing as what she had witnessed.

As they chatted, Agatha strolled over. Her eyes were narrowed, her expression unsmiling. She was dressed in her uniform still, her entire demeanor radiating a sense of annoyance; she most likely did not want to go through the effort of dressing up.

"Congratulations on your victory," Agatha said gruffly, her voice devoid of warmth. "I suppose it's fitting that you're being celebrated." Lucinda smiled politely, but Isabella's eyes grew wide with dismay.

"Oh, Agatha, you're not being very festive!" Isabella protested. "It's a night to celebrate! We should be having fun and dancing and making merry!" Agatha snorted.

"Fun? You think this is about having fun? I'd rather just be reading or sleeping." The young girl murmured.

Lucinda intervened with a smile.

"Agatha, it might be due for some rest, no? The cultists have been warded off and the dragons are no more." Agatha's expression remained unyielding, but she nodded curtly.

A click of the tongue was heard as Mirabella made her way to the group; it seems she was going to where the familiar faces were.

"What a pain!" Mirabella bellowed, drawing the attention of some to herself. "I'd rather be kicking ass."

"Uncouth once again," Agatha commented.

"No one asked your opinion, blondie!" The princess shot back.

"Whoa, the two of you are like sisters with how much you argue," Isabella noted with a chuckle.

"Not a chance/ Like hell!"

Lucinda watched as they bickered and smiled. But a constant thought plagued her.

("I wonder if it's okay to be lax like this.") Sure, the knights had taken care of most of the cultists and the dragons were dealt with, but still. She withheld a sigh as she bid the small group farewell; she needed to get her bearings.

As she made her way through the crowd, Lucinda's gaze scanned the faces around her, searching for other familiar ones. Her eyes landed on a figure sitting alone at the edge of the celebration, his dark hair standing out in contrast to the bright colors and warm atmosphere. It was Mikoto.

Lucinda's feet carried her towards Mikoto without conscious thought, as if drawn in. She reached his side and gently sat down beside him, her eyes locking onto his masked face.

"Mikoto, I wanted to thank you once more," Lucinda said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I know I've been feeling pretty down, but your words, harsh they were, made me feel a little better."

Mikoto's expression beneath his mask didn't change, his eyes remaining as serious as ever. He nodded slightly.

"Don't mention it," he said. "Like I said, just focus on saving who you can."

Lucinda smiled softly.

"Thank you," she said again. "You seemed so mysterious and odd back at detention, but you're actually a nice guy." She chuckled a bit. "You just seemed so out of this world."

"What can I say? I'm just that special," Mikoto said with a snort. "But I expected you to be more pompous the first time I heard of you."

"Really?" She blurted out. "How come?"

"Being the 'only' spawn of Octavia would get to most people's heads," he reasoned. "You're surprisingly grounded." The girl smiled once more.

"I'm glad you think that." Mikoto was surprisingly nice to talk to, as were most of this little group of hers. It felt nice being just normal.

The two sat in silence for a moment, enjoying each other's company. The music and laughter of the celebration continued around them, but they were lost in their own respective little world.

Just as Lucinda was about to speak again, a loud commotion erupted from the edge of the celebration. A knight burst into view, his armor gleaming in the torchlight as he shouted something in a voice that echoed across the street.

"Demons and Vel'ryr soldiers are attacking! They come in all forms! Please retreat to the inner gate!"

The crowd around Lucinda gasped in shock as they turned to stare at the knight, but luckily they all seemed to react quickly enough. All who enjoyed the brief celebration moments ago shuffled on their feet and ran in a panic, Agatha, Mirabella, and Isabella meanwhile made their way towards the two.

"What the hell are these bastards doing!" Mirabella exclaimed. "They don't actually mean to attack this city, right?" Something akin to an earthquake shook the foundations of the city.

"There's your answer, I propose we cut short on talking and get rid of as many demons and soldiers as we can." Agatha let her words hang in the air for a moment before bolting off in the direction with the most commotion, Mirabella cursed to herself before following after the blonde.

"Wait!" Isabella yelled out to no avail.

"They're right; we cannot risk any casualties." Lucinda took a deep breath before clasping both her hands together. "Seraphic Chorus." Mikoto watched in interest as shadows expanded from her position and morphed into what looked like armored soldiers; their armor was black, and their weapons varied. There were about a dozen of them, and with a mental command, the soldiers split off in a blur of speed. "Mikoto, please look after Isabella." Leaving no room for protest, the girl herself vanished in a bout of speed.

"That girl." Isabella heaved a deep sigh. "She always goes straight to the source of the problem." She heaved another sigh for good measure before turning to Mikoto with a smile despite the situation. "Oh, this is our first time meeting, though I wish it was under better circumstances. My name is Isabella, and I have a passion for acting and singing."

"Mikoto, nice to meet you," Mikoto murmured before clasping his hands together. "Technique Development: Creation Magic." He murmured lowly.

All around the two, brilliant sparks of light further illuminated the night sky. The light particles began to take form, morphing into two dozen human figures. Armor began to take shape and various weapons; once the light died down, Verdantis knights surrounded them. Isabella looked on in wonder as Mikoto gave a mental command, and the knights spread out and ran into different directions.

("Creation Magic is complex; the most I could manage in such short notice was empty armor sets, though reinforcing them with mana makes them durable enough.")

"Whoa! Amazing!" He heard the Isabella girl exclaim. "It was almost like Lucinda's Familial Arts, but not quite."

"It's just a bit of conjuring," he brushed it off. "Anyway, you should probably retreat; demons and the animal soldiers aren't the merciful type." She just shook her head defiantly.

"No, no. I have an obligation to help here, and I won't run away," she stated with what he registered as a hero complex.

"Hmm, fine then." Mikoto turned on his heel and walked. "Do what you want."

"Hold on, you're leaving me alone?" She questioned a bit befuddled.

"You're weak; you'll just get in the way," Mikoto stated. "And besides, the amount of animals crawling around is nauseating."

"W-weak!?" She pouted. "That is not a nice thing to say!" Her words were not heard as the boy vanished in plain sight. "What a meanie!"

Meanwhile, Mikoto appeared atop a church; he overlooked the city. Some sections were burning and filled with soldiers battling demons and Vel'ryr troops. In such a short time, the animals had caused so much destruction. They were most likely here to gather some souls; seeing as the dragon was killed, they had to start from scratch. This situation, though, felt odd as a whole, but the archbishop and Dante were no longer here. He had heard that Dante was the strongest among the Inheritors, so this must have been planned.

"What a pain."

## **Chapter 78: Chapter 76: Kill**

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

The snow-covered streets of the city were a mess of chaos, with the sound of clashing steel and screams of terrified civilians filling the air. Lucinda, her long white hair blowing back in the wind, her eyes shining with determination, ran through the midst of the battle.

As she turned a corner, she saw a group of Knights of Verdantis, their armor gleaming with a faint mana hue, fighting off a horde of demons. The creatures were twisted, nightmarish beings with razor-sharp claws and teeth, their eyes glowing with an otherworldly energy.

The knights were holding their own against the demons, but they were vastly outnumbered. Lucinda could see that they were starting to tire, their movements slowing as they fought to keep up the pace. That was when she spotted a group of Vel'ryr troops, their plasma rifles blazing with a bright red light as they fired off shot after shot at the knights.

Lucinda's eyes narrowed as she took in the scene. She knew that she had to act fast if she was going to help the knights.

"I don't want to cause further damage to the city, I'll stick with ice magic then." With her mind made up, she reached out with her magic, feeling the familiar surge of mana as she summoned a blast of cold air. The wind howled and buffeted the demons, freezing some in place. But it was just a temporary reprieve - the creatures were too numerous, and soon they would be closing in again.

With a swift motion, Lucinda conjured up a wall of ice crystals, sending them hurtling towards the demons. The creatures screeched and recoiled as they were hit by the sharp, frozen projectiles. But even as they stumbled back, more and more demons kept coming, their numbers seemingly endless.

She spotted a group of demons clustered around a particularly large and terrifying creature - its body a twisted mass of scales and tentacles, its eyes blazing with an eerie green light.

"That one could be troublesome." With a swift motion, Lucinda summoned a burst of frosty mana, freezing the ground beneath the demon's feet. The creature let out a deafening roar as it stumbled and fell, its tentacles thrashing wildly as it tried to regain its footing. But Lucinda didn't give it a chance - she conjured up another blast of cold air, this one targeted specifically at the demon's eyes. The creature let out a pained scream as its vision was frozen over, its tentacles thrashing wildly as it tried to see.

The knights took advantage of the distraction to launch a counterattack. They surged forward, their swords flashing in the pale light of the snow-covered streets. The demons were caught off guard, and for a few moments at least, they were able to hold their own against the knights.

"There were only a few here, but the demons will regroup eventually, and when they do, they will come back with even more ferocity," she cursed Vel'ryr.

That was when she spotted a group of Vel'ryr troops setting up a makeshift barricade in front of one of the city's buildings. They were using their plasma rifles to blast away at the walls, creating a makeshift barrier to protect themselves from the knights.

Lucinda's eyes narrowed as she took in the scene. Vel'ryr troops could be trouble, so it was best to deal with them now.

She targeted the plasma rifles themselves. She felt a strange sensation as her magic interacted with the technology - it was like trying to manipulate metal itself. But slowly but surely, Lucinda began to feel herself gaining control over the plasma rifles.

With a swift motion, she directed them to fire off blasts at strategic locations around the city - at key points where the other Vel'ryr troops were most likely to appear next. She heard some troop members let out pained screams as they were hit by bolts of superheated energy, their numbers beginning to dwindle as they stumbled back in confusion.

But this was only one section of Emberreach; Vel'ryr was no doubt deploying troops around every weak spot. Her mulling could not continue, however, as she heard someone clapping their hands. Turning on her heel, she was met with the sight of a rather peculiar humanoid demon.

At first glance, her form was striking, draped in a cloak that seemed woven from the very essence of the night itself. The fabric cascaded around her figure in fluid, shadowy waves, clinging to her curves. Her face was a portrait of beauty, framed by tumbling locks of black hair that fell in waves around her shoulders. Her piercing eyes were pools of molten gold that flickered. Her features were both delicate and alluring, with high cheekbones and lips, full and crimson, curved into a smile that was equal parts inviting and dangerous, and of course, there were the horns protruding out of her head. She looked peculiar because she seemed more human than demon.

"That was some impressive mana control," the demoness complemented, her voice soothing and low.

"You're another one." Lucinda's eyes narrowed as she studied the demon; all around them, knights began to surround her, looking to offer Lucinda support. "A Chaosmaw. That absurd amount of mana and your intelligence attributes to this."

"Indeed, *Chaosmaw* Ezerad, a pleasure." She did a small curtsy, not paying mind to the numerous knights that surrounded her.

("Two were confirmed back at the attack on Luminare Academy, and now a third?") Lucinda frowned deeply as her left hand flexed, sparks of red illuminated her palm as

her blade began to take shape. "What is your purpose here, demon? Do you mean to destroy all of Emberreach?" Ezerald gave an empty-eyed smile as she answered.

"Nothing that grand." She murmured. Lucinda tensed as she felt the mana of the demon spread rapidly before her eyes widened as she turned to the knights.

"All of you ru—" Her words were cut short as one by one the knights seemed to implode, armor shattered to naught but pieces as blood, guts, and organs decorated the icy city streets. Eyeballs and the odd tooth or finger were mixed in; it was instantaneous.

"I am merely here to rid the world of the spawn of Octavia." Ezerald gave a nasty smile at Lucinda's horrified expression. "So please do not resist, and die."

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The snow-covered streets of the city, once a bustling hub, now lay in ruins. The thatched roofs of the buildings were charred and blackened, the wooden beams splintered and cracked. The air was thick with the acrid smell of smoke, and the sound of screams and clashing steel echoed through the streets. She had split up with Mirabella to cover more ground so they could support the knights.

("But still why attack a city now?") She mentally questioned.

As she turned a corner, Agatha was met with a sight that made her frown. A group of demons, their twisted bodies writhing with dark mana, were attacking a group of Verdantis knights. The knights, clad in shining armor, were fighting valiantly, their swords flashing. But they were vastly outnumbered, and Agatha could see that they were beginning to falter.

The demons came in all shapes and sizes, from towering behemoths with razor-sharp claws to smaller, quicker creatures that darted in and out. But they were all united in their desire to destroy the knights.

As Agatha watched, a group of Vel'ryr troops emerged from the shadows, their plasma blasters firing rapidly. The knights were fighting bravely, but they were no match for the sheer number of enemies they were facing.

With a deep breath, she reached out with her magic, feeling the power coursing through her veins. She focused all of her mana on a single point.

"Creation Magic: Azure Wolf,"

A burst of magic erupted in front of her, and a massive white wolf materialized before her. The wolf was huge, its body longer than a horse's, and its jaws wide enough to swallow a man whole.

The wolf charged forward, its jaws wide open as it attacked the demons. It was a terrifying sight to behold, and even the Vel'ryr troops took a step back as it approached. It tore through demons with ease, its sharp teeth shredding them to pieces.

It was nimble on its paws as well, dodging blasts of light and the demons' efforts to harm it.

"Basilisks."

But Agatha wasn't done yet. With another burst of magic, she summoned a massive white serpent from the ground. The serpent was larger than the wolf, its body coiled and ready to strike. As the wolf and serpent attacked the demons and Vel'ryr troops, the knights were finally given a short moment of respite, but they would still need more help.

"Great owl."

Agatha summoned one more creature: a massive white owl. The owl dove down from the sky, its wings beating powerfully as it rained down wing projectiles on the demons and Vel'ryr troops. The creatures howled in pain as they were struck by the owl's sharp claws, and even the knights looked up in awe as they watched the battle unfold.

The demons and Vel'ryr troops fought back fiercely, but Agatha's creations held their own against them. The wolf's jaws snapped shut again and again, taking down demons left and right. The serpent coiled around its victims, squeezing them until they were nothing more than limp corpses. And the owl continued to rain down wing projectiles on its enemies.

Agatha took a step forward to partake in the battle, but she was stopped by a familiar voice.

"I was hoping for the mask child."

She turned to face it, and her eyes widened. It was a demon, and a familiar one, Asmodai.

## **Chapter 79: Chapter 77: Pleasure**

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

Boredom, often dismissed as a trivial emotion, ye att its core, boredom emerges from a disconnection between our desires and our current state of engagement. It signals an inner restlessness, a yearning for stimulation or purpose that is not being met.

Boredom raises questions about the nature of existence and the pursuit of meaning. It suggests that merely existing is not enough; we crave experiences that resonate with our deeper selves. Boredom challenges us to confront the fundamental question: What truly satisfies us and gives our lives significance? Is it the pursuit of pleasure, the fulfillment of duty, the quest for knowledge, or something else entirely?

Boredom was all he knew in life, since he was born and gained consciousness. But there was pleasure in the world to explore, not just from women or wealth. No, it was in battle, a test of might against an opponent. A fight to the death between two adversaries, where he could find this fading thing called pleasure.

He lived solely for his own pleasure, the joy that battle brought. He cared for nothing else. Who died and who lived was of no consequence to him. He was pure, unadulterated chaos given shape.

And so he watched, his tall figure perched atop a building, observing. The prince had no care, qualms, or reservations about good or evil. All that mattered to him was what pleasure he could derive, such a fleeting feeling it was. So he watched with his dull red eyes as civilians were shot down by soldiers under his command, he watched as demons devoured the innocents.

The smell of blood permeated the air, the iron-like scent reaching him as well, along with the smell of burning flesh. So he watched on, doing nothing but observing. He could participate in this slaughter, perhaps it would help ease his boredom, but killing the weak was no fun.

But then something caught his eye.

She ran through the partially destroyed streets, her magic destructive. Waves of flames eradicated tall buildings along with Vel'ryr troops and demons. Waves of rigid ice spread rapidly through the streets, killing all who attacked.

He knew very well who she was, the second princess, Mirabella. How odd that she was in Emberreach of all places. But perhaps this was an opportunity. Why settle for waging war on just Verdantis? Where was the fun in that? Killing a princess of Galadriel would no doubt put both Galadriel and Verdantis against them, especially if said princess was killed by him, the crown prince of Vel'ryr.

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The snow-covered streets of the city were bathed in an eerie crimson glow of mana as Agatha stood against the Chaosmaw Asmodai. The demon's eyes burned as he raised his hand, and a wave of pitch-black destructive flames erupted from his palm. The flames billowed forth.

As the flames engulfed the city, the sound of screams and panicked shouts echoed through the streets. The air was filled with the acrid smell of smoke and burning wood as the flames consumed everything in their path. Buildings crumbled beneath the inferno, their wooden beams crackling and splintering as they succumbed to the power.

Agatha clicked her tongue as she raised her own hands, summoning a barrier of mana. The barrier burst forth around her, a dome of light that deflected the flames and sent them careening harmlessly into the surrounding buildings. The heat was intense, but Agatha's magic held strong, protecting her from the raging fire.

"This is bad, really bad," she thought as her shield strained under the force of the magic. "Even with another person, this demon was impossible to defeat." She cursed her luck as the flames died down, Asmodai dismissed them with a flick of his wrist, and a new wave of destruction descended upon the city. Dozens of large, black arrowheads materialized in the sky, their tips gleaming with amana. The arrowheads hovered in mid-air, their motionless forms seeming to absorb the light around them.

With a sudden burst of speed, the arrowheads launched towards Agatha, their trajectory unerringly fast. The air was filled with the deafening sound of supersonic projectiles, their high-pitched whine piercing the air like a scream. Agatha's remaining creation, the Azure wolf, charged forward to defend her against the onslaught.

The wolf's jaws snapped shut around an arrowhead, but it was too late. The arrowhead exploded in a shower of sparks and mana shards, tearing through the wolf's body like paper. The beast let out a pained howl as its form burst into naught but particles of mana.

Asmodai cackled with glee, clearly enjoying the chaos he had unleashed.

"You're no match for me, little sorcerer," he taunted, his voice dripping with malice and, for some reason, a hint of anger. "I won't be playing around like last time. My only goal here is to kill that masked one."

("Mikoto? What could he want with him?") she thought as her face twisted with frustration. She summoned more of her magic to defend herself against the relentless onslaught of arrowheads. She conjured up a series of tiny shields, each one deflecting or absorbing an arrowhead with a burst of sparks and light. But there were too many to count, and Agatha was forced to retreat step by step across the snow-covered streets.

As she stumbled backward, Agatha could feel Asmodai's dark mana coursing through her veins like a poison. The onslaught momentarily stopped, but Asmodai was already preparing another spell.

Asmodai raised his hand and unleashed a bolt of lightning. The air seemed to distort as the mana erupted from his palm, striking the city with devastating force. More buildings

crumbled, their wooden beams splintering and shattering as the blast ripped through the streets. The sound of shattering glass filled the air.

Agatha, her eyes fixed on Asmodai, gritted her teeth as her body tensed. With a swift motion, she raised her hands and conjured another barrier of mana. The barrier erupted around her, but it was too late. Asmodai's lightning bolt had already struck the city, its energy coursing through the streets like a living thing. The barrier was breached, and Agatha felt the blast's power wash over her. She stumbled back, her eyes widening in pain as she felt her body absorb the impact.

Agatha's vision began to blur, but she knew she couldn't just lie over and die. She glared ahead and focused on maintaining her magical barrier, determined to keep herself alive.

"No use, spawn of Isadora," Asmodai started. "You're more suited for support, not combat on this scale," he stated as he pressed his attack. He raised his hand once more, and a large circular glyph materialized behind Agatha. The air seemed to distort and ripple as a beam of dark, destructive mana shot forth from the glyph.

And then, something strange occurred. A spark of inspiration ignited within her mind, and Agatha's eyes began to glow. She raised her hands once more, and a lone, illuminating shield materialized before her. The shield pulsed with an ethereal light, its surface etched with runes that seemed to shimmer with mana.

The beam of mana struck the shield, but it held fast against the assault. The air seemed to crackle and hiss as the two energies clashed, Agatha's shield absorbing the destructive force of Asmodai's attack. The shield glowed brighter as it absorbed the mana, its runes pulsating with an intense blue light.

But even as Agatha's shield held strong against Asmodai's attack, it began to weaken. The beam of mana wore it down, slowly draining its mana until it finally dissipated into nothingness. Asmodai's eyes gleamed with triumph.

The demon raised his hand once more, unleashing another beam of dark mana towards Agatha. But just as it seemed certain to strike her down, a figure emerged from the chaos behind her.

Asaun, the knight captain, stepped forward with a stride. His sword flashed in the dim light as he brought it down in a precise arc, cutting through Asmodai's beam of mana like a hot knife through butter.

The blast of mana died down, its energy dissipating into the air as Asaun stood firm against its force. Agatha stumbled back, her eyes fixed on the knight captain in gratitude. Odd as he was, she knew she had to thank him for saving her life – but for now, she could only focus on staying alive.

Asmodai's eyes narrowed in anger as he realized he had been foiled once again by an enemy.

"Apologies for being late," Asaun spoke, his tone low and his gaze steely as he studied the destruction the demon caused singlehandedly.

"Captain Asaun," Asmodai spoke in acknowledgment. "Of the ten knight captains, you hold the title of the most unorthodox fighter."

"I fail to see if that is praise or an insult," Asaun murmured as he glanced at Agatha. "Tell me, can you still fight?"

"I-I can," she answered as she stood up. "I don't know how much use I'll be."

"Do not worry," Asaun gave a reassuring smile as he pointed his silver blade at Asmodai. "It is a closely guarded secret of our great nation, but there is a method to gain Arcane Ascendance."

"What?" she looked at the knight captain confused. "I thought it was something you needed to be born with."

"It is merely thought so, but it is a delicate method Verdantis holds close to their chest," Asaun gave a sheepish smile. "Given the circumstances, I'm sure they'll forgive me if I tell it to you. This demon is just too powerful." He glanced at Agatha. "You must have felt it, that bout of inspiration."

She did.

Her magic had randomly skyrocketed, she had created something. A shield that managed to ward off Asmodai. She was so close to Death so she did not question it, could that be the key?

## **Chapter 80: Chapter 78: Monster against Monster**

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

You know...."

**\*Splat\***

"Since I came to this world, everything I've ever known was magic. Everything has mana, humans, demi-humans, trees, the grass, animals, Astrothians, demons, hell, even rocks. But not you."

**\*Crunch\***

"You lot should not exist."

**\*Squelch\***

"I harbor nothing but disgust for you."

**\*Splatter\***

"You would not comprehend it. So putrid. So foreign. So disgusting."

**\*Crunch\***

"Disgust."

**\*Crunch\***

"Why the hell do I feel this disgust!"

His foot was brought down once more, an eerie crunch was heard as it broke through the armor of a downed Vel'ryr soldier's chest. It sunk into a squelch-like sound followed as his ribcage shattered. Mikoto heaved a sigh as he lifted his bloodied boot.

Corpses, demon corpses, and Vel'ryr soldier corpses. They numbered about a hundred each, their crimson blood stained the ground, walls, and buildings all around. The sight of so much Death must have been nauseating.

"I really am not right in the mind." Mikoto sighed as he walked towards a bench in the center of the massacre. A horrid fire-like demon crossed with a centipede decorated the bench with its guts and limbs, but Mikoto took a seat nonetheless, taking in his insanity.

("Is it truly wrong to kill a person? I'm sure if I were to ask anyone that question, then I'd get very different answers. At the end of the day, though, it all comes down to one single thing. Who is it that you killed and why is it that you killed them? Killing is frowned upon in the eyes of some. But some humans came together and agreed that some people were too vile to walk the earth. That is why the death penalty was created in some countries back home. Some people simply did not deserve to live.

But then again, who am I to decide who lives and who dies? Should that right not be given to a higher power? Should humans really dictate who lives and who dies? Could I really dictate?

Honestly, I do not care either way. I only saw that those who would murder and rape innocents deserve to die. Though I have often asked myself if I could kill them, if I were

to come across such a scumbag of a human being, would I be able to kill them if I had the power?

I always believed so, many would. Taking the life of a scumbag should be easy, no? In actuality, for me at least, it was very easy. But that is only because I happened to know the scumbag I killed.

And I knew him well; he was family after all. But that was neither here nor there. It is a simple fact that the old man was scum. Taking all his frustrations out by beating his wife and daughter. He prevented himself from beating me most of the time; he was convinced I could continue his oh so glorious legacy.

He deserved to die. And I never lose sleep over it.

But sometimes I ask myself, would I be able to kill again? It was so easy the first time, but if I came across another scumbag, would I be able to succeed in killing them? I've finally come to an answer, I would be able to kill.") Before he could better ponder on just what was happening to him, his eye caught something from afar. It was something barreling towards him with a vengeance, his keen eye could see what it was, or who it was.

Mikoto stood up from his seat and raised a hand. The person barreling towards him came to a halting stop as a red aura engulfed them. Mikoto directed them to him.

"G-godamnit." He helped said person by gently guiding her down to him, Mirabella all but collapsed on the ground before him not seeming to pay any mind to the numerous corpses, but there was a reason for that. Deep cuts decorated her body and uniform, deep gnashes that looked like they certainly hurt.

"Geez, what happened to you?" Mikoto questioned as he placed a palm on her head. Healing magic was actually a great deal more complex than some thought it was. It required intelligence and not just imagination; you needed to be able to visualize how the healing process was. The average sorcerer proficient in healing could only speed up the healing process. In other words, were someone else to heal Mirabella, then her body would have been decorated with scars. With Mikoto, however, the deep wounds closed and all but vanished in a semi-morbid scene, not even leaving behind any kind of scars. Most would think it restoration and not simple healing.

"M-mikoto, you sho-" Mirabella started sounding a tad shaken, but she was interrupted when something collided with the ground a bit of ways away from them. It collided hard enough to kick up a wall of dust along with a pressure wave that sent all the corpses flying like ragdolls. "Shit." He heard Mirabella curse as the dust started to clear.

It was a person, long black hair and gleaming red eyes set in dull boredom, along with that a finely crafted blade and armor of the same quality. A Von Auerswald, Selwyn by the looks of it.

"Mikoto, you gotta run, that guy's insanely strong!" He heard Mirabella's distressed voice. He merely raised a hand. "I-I don't think even you could beat him." She finished uncharacteristically.

"Nah, he doesn't look that tough, but you'll probably get in the way."

"Wai-" Before she could speak, her body vanished in a blur, simple teleportation.

He turned back to his opponent only to see Selwyn, his eyes blazing with a fierce sense of violence, charging forward with inhuman speed. His blade seemed to blur as he moved, its edge slicing through the air. A sonic boom erupted as he closed the distance, a shockwave that sent tremors through the very ground itself.

Mikoto locked his eyes on his opponent as he raised his right arm in a swift motion. Defensive spells and mana swirled around him, reinforcing his body with a shimmering aura. Selwyn's sword swung down, its tip aimed at Mikoto's chest. The blade bit deep into his arm, drawing a crimson line across his uniform. But Mikoto's defensive magic held strong, refusing to yield to the blade's force.

The impact of the sword's swing sent shockwaves through the ground, causing the buildings to shudder and quake. The very foundations of the city seemed to tremble beneath their feet. Mikoto's eyes never left Selwyn's face as he took a step back, pivoting on his heel, he stepped out of the blade's reach.

Mikoto summoned a bolt of lightning so powerful it seemed to tear the very fabric of the air. The electricity crackled, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. Buildings crumbled, their stone and steel structures reduced to rubble as the blast ravaged the cityscape.

Selwyn's eyes narrowed. Why did he dodge? Magic would not affect him, but he was a warrior first and foremost. And his instincts had screamed at him to dodge, though caught off guard, he had managed to dodge the brunt of the attack. His agility allowed him to avoid the worst of the destruction, but not without taking a glancing blow that sent him stumbling backward.

("It affected me?") Surprise was an afterthought, an eerie smile spread onto his face for some reason.

As he regained his footing, an unseen force slammed into him with brutality. The air seemed to distort around him as he was flung across the city, the force was so powerful that it parted the clouds themselves, revealing a glimpse of the night sky above.

Mid-air, Mikoto reappeared before Selwyn. He swung his right hand at his opponent with a speed that belied its power. Selwyn raised his blade, using the dull side to block the punch. But despite its lack of preparation, the force behind Mikoto's blow was immense. The impact sent Selwyn hurtling toward a nearby mountain, its snowy peak looming.

The collision was brutal, Selwyn's body crashed against the mountain's surface with a force that sent shockwaves through the rock itself. But somehow, he emerged from the wreckage unscathed, his eyes flashing with not boredom but some excitement.

Both landed on the snowy ground roughly.

Mikoto stood some distance away from Selwyn. For a moment, the battle paused as if both combatants were momentarily evaluating the other.

The two did not speak. Selwyn knew well that this opponent was fighting to kill. And Mikoto knew this man would show no mercy, so no words were needed. No banter or introduction, they would just fight.

It was odd; the prospect of fighting just seemed so exciting.