

A Journey Unwanted

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Chapter 81: Chapter 79: Goal

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

The snow-covered landscape trembled and shook as the ground cracked and splintered beneath the feet of the two combatants.

In the midst of this chaos, Selwyn clashed head-on with Mikoto. The air was filled with the cacophony of cracking ice, shattering rock, and the screams of terrified creatures fleeing from the devastation.

Selwyn, his sword raised high, struck at Mikoto with a swing of his sword. Mikoto raised his arm and reinforced it with a surge of mana. The sword sliced through the air mere inches from Mikoto's face, but he held firm, his arm glowing red as he absorbed the blow.

The force of the impact sent shockwaves through the landscape, causing nearby snowdrifts to slide and tumble down mountainsides. The earth cracked and fissured as if rent asunder by some titanic force. Selwyn, his sword still raised, stumbled backward as the ground gave way beneath his feet.

Undeterred, Mikoto seized the opportunity to strike back. He leapt high into the air, his feet leaving the ground as he propelled himself upward. A dozen circular glyphs materialized around him, each one pulsating with mana. Beams of crimson light shot forth from these glyphs, streaking through the air with insane speed.

Selwyn, anticipating this attack, dodged with ease, his sword slicing through the air in swift arcs as he avoided the onslaught of magical projectiles. However, the sheer force of the attacks caused immense destruction to the surrounding environment. Snowdrifts collapsed, trees toppled, and boulders shattered into rubble.

As Mikoto started to descend back to the ground, Selwyn launched himself into the air with incredible force, breaking through the earth itself as he soared toward his opponent. His sword flashed in the night as he aimed a powerful blow at Mikoto's head.

Mikoto maneuvered mid-air to avoid the blow. Using levitation magic to launch himself high above Selwyn's strike, using his momentum to carry him upward. As he landed back on the ground, Selwyn found himself several paces away from Mikoto.

In an instant, thousands of new glyphs erupted around them, their pulsing mana bathing the surrounding landscape in a glow. Streaks of pure blackness shot forth from the glyphs, each one imbued with a destructive force that could shatter and implode everything they struck.

Selwyn danced through this barrage of magic with ease, his sword flashing through the darkness as he dodged and parried each attack. However, despite his incredible agility and reflexes, he could not help but be battered by the sheer intensity of Mikoto's magic.

As Selwyn dodged another blast of dark energy, he felt a sudden jolt. Mikoto had appeared behind him, his eyes blazing with an intense red light behind his mask. Selwyn reacted swiftly, swinging his sword in a wide arc to strike at Mikoto.

However, Mikoto was too quick. He leapt over Selwyn's blade, soaring upward into the air and performing a mid-air flip that sent him spinning high above Selwyn's head. As he landed back on the ground, the prince turned to face him once more.

With a burst of speed and power, Mikoto extended his hand, and a devastating blast of energy struck Selwyn with immense force. The warrior stumbled backward as if struck by a lightning bolt, his sword flying from his grasp.

The resulting shockwave sent Selwyn tumbling through the air like a rag doll. He crashed into a nearby snow-covered mountain with such force that it shattered into a thousand pieces beneath him. The mountain came tumbling down in a massive avalanche of snow and ice that buried everything beneath its deadly weight.

("He's definitely stronger than that Amaury chick.") Mikoto mused as a tremor shook the ground. ("But he keeps dodging through any attacks, and even if they do land, I'm feeling like they aren't doing much.")

The ground shook once more, and moments later, Selwyn emerged from the wreckage of the mountain unscathed. His eyes blazing with that eerie excitement, he rose to face Mikoto once more. The man's body blurred and disappeared as he appeared beside his fallen blade. He picked it up and smiled.

"I did not think I would come across someone like you." For the first time they fought, Selwyn spoke. "I was convinced I would be plagued by weaklings since coming to Verdantis. Barring the one known as Dante, not even the Inheritors would satiate my thirst." He looked up at the night sky. "You fight to kill."

"And?" Mikoto frowned, just hearing this guy speak was telling him a lot. "You're a crazy animal, and I aim to put you down. I won't stop at just completely eradicating your body;

"I want your soul too." He had the means to destroy one now. Selwyn chuckled much to his confusion.

"Yes, come at me with everything you have. Fight and fight." Selwyn raised his blade even from the distance Mikoto could see the tip of the blade was aimed at his chest. "I must say I enjoy that look in your eye; your mask does not hide it." Before Mikoto could retort, his body instinctively tensed.

His eyes dilated as a foreign energy engulfed Selwyn; he could not 'see' it, but his eyes told him something was there. An energy entirely different from mana, a kind of energy that should not fundamentally even exist. Mana coursed through Mikoto's body as he reinforced it ten times over on top of using various defensive charms. Even a shower of nuclear bombs would not have scratched him. Even so...

"My name is Selwyn Von Auerswald, and the one who chose me is the dragon of the end." Then a simple word left Selwyn's mouth. "Eviscerate."

And something tore through Mikoto's defenses as if they were nothing. Blood splattered from his mouth and out of his mask as he found a gaping and jagged hole in his chest.

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

Lucinda frowned as immense tremors assaulted the ground beneath her feet; it was so immense that buildings and structures all around her threatened to crumble down.

("What is causing all these tremors?") Lucinda briefly questioned, but she remained focused on the opponent in front of her, her blade still firmly in her hand. Ezerald stood atop the broken remnants of a small broken building; judging from the mannequins spread about, it used to be a clothing store, but now it was naught but rubble. The demon stood leisurely, a hand atop her hip and not a scratch on her. Granted, Lucinda herself was not injured.

"Hmm, what monsters this era has." Ezerald murmured as she stared off into the distance. "All the more reason to wipe you lot out."

"Wipe us out?" Lucinda furrowed her brows. "You mean to eradicate all humans and demi-humans?" She questioned.

"It is my kind's goal." She admitted casually as if she were not speaking of mass genocide; the absurdness of their supposed goal was failing to sink in. "You all have grown much too relaxed in this world that does not belong to you, nor the Gods and dragons."

"What are you even talking about?" Lucinda blurted out as she glared at the demon. "Wipe us out? Have you gone insane, demon?"

"Mayhap, but it is entirely possible. And do not call me a mere demon." Ezerald said with an empty smile. "Of course, we'll be starting with wretched spawns such as yourself before moving on to others." She declared, her tone low and eyes unnerving. "If I am being quite honest, your existence vexes me the most." Her words were ones of anger, yet still that eerie smile and blank eyes remained. "Octavia, Octavia." She muttered. Lucinda just found herself more confused at that name being uttered, but for now, she could maybe pry for information. Ezerald was much too evasive and quick; strong as Lucinda was, it would not do her good to drag this battle out.

"Your purpose here was to gather more souls, right?" Lucinda surmised as she continued. "Since you lost the soul of the dragon, you've all grown desperate in your goals, and that's why you attacked this large a city." Lucinda waited for her words to sink in, but Ezerald merely tilted her head.

"The dragon's soul is not lost; it's quite fine." She answered almost innocently. Lucinda's eyes widened before they turned serious.

"You're bluffing." She accused. "I used the Divine Blade Fate sealer."

"Ah, the Fate sealer, what an irksome weapon." Ezerald looked at the night sky as if recalling a memory. "A blade that can influence fate, reality, and destiny itself. You no doubt used it to alter the blade's own personal reality to be able to destroy both body and soul when you dispatched the dragon. Fortunately, I was there to release the dragon of its soul before you destroyed it."

"Then why attack Emberreach!?" Lucinda demanded; in her anger, her mana flared higher.

"The prince was bored." Confusion spread across Lucinda's face as Ezerald spoke. "In his words, he wanted more sport before leaving Verdantis. Though me and my brethren are here to collect more souls for personal purposes."

("Prince....Selwyn!") Anger could not quite describe her state of emotions; she never wanted more to kill another person. She would have to apologize to Mikoto, but she needed to handle Selwyn. He was no doubt here causing mayhem. ("I have to beat her here and now before I can reach Selwyn.")

She would avenge those that have been unfortunate enough to die at that monster's blade.

Chapter 82: Chapter 80: My insanity

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

Selwyn watched as a gaping hole was torn through Mikoto's chest. The wound was large enough to rid him of his heart, lungs, esophagus, trachea, and thymus. Naturally, Mikoto Yukio would have died were he not himself; his brain was undamaged and running at full speed. He could immediately deduce that he had lost important organs and which organs they were. Furthermore, he deduced that healing magic was, for some reason, unaffected.

Healing magic was derived from Creation Magic. If you were advanced with it, you could create your cells and heal organs and limbs with ease. Mikoto possessed the height of healing magic thanks to being a spawn of Octavia. Even so, he could not repair his organs no matter how much he tried. So he settled for something inferior, using his mana, he shaped it delicately into replacements for each missing organ. Of course, he had to account for each individual cell, atom, and whatnot, but this was all only temporary.

Naturally, all of this occurred in less than a few seconds. Mikoto did not know what kind of ability Selwyn had used. But even so, it might not have been magic, but still, his eyes were in the process of dissecting this foreign ability. The Chthonia, a passive Familial Art of spawns of Octavia, helps understand magic on a deeper scale, no matter how complex said magic is. And it can analyze a spell in an instance. However, what Selwyn used was not magic but an ability. And his eyes would treat it as such. For now, he deduced Selwyn had to actually see his target to unleash this odd ability. So blocking his vision was required for now to grant himself temporary respite.

So with his absurdly large chest cavity, Mikoto ignored the pain and focused his magic. His eyes fixed intently on his opponent, he raised his hand and summoned a colossal wall of rock to erupt from the ground. The sheer scale of the barrier was breathtaking, towering above them like a monolith. Selwyn, however, merely raised his sword and spoke a single word: "Eviscerate."

The rock wall seemed to shimmer and writhe, as if alive, and then simply ceased to exist. Mikoto's eyes narrowed, his mind racing to comprehend the implications of Selwyn's ability. But before he could react, Selwyn's gaze snapped up to meet his, a cold hunger in his eyes.

Mikoto vanished from view, only to reappear high above Selwyn, his palm extended towards him. A blast of compressed mana erupted from his hand, a laser-like beam that hurtled towards Selwyn at speeds that looked instantaneous. Of course, necessary calculations were made so the beam of pure light launched at that kind of speed. The air around him seemed to distort and ripple as the beam approached, its path illuminated by a faint blue glow.

Selwyn tilted his head to one side, avoiding the blast by mere inches. The laser screeched past his face, leaving behind a trail of ionized air that crackled with mana. It

struck the ground behind him with explosive force, sending shockwaves through the snow and sending Selwyn stumbling forward.

The resulting blast sent snow flying in all directions, creating a miniature blizzard that reduced visibility to near zero. When the cloud finally cleared, Selwyn was seen springing upward, his sword at the ready. He uttered another word: "Eviscerate."

Mikoto's left arm simply vanished, severed from his body as if it had never existed. His expression remained impassive, but his mind was racing with calculations and deductions. He realized that Selwyn's ability was not just destruction – it was erasure from existence itself.

("About how he does that, he has the ability to influence reality to a minor degree.") Mikoto's mind raced. ("He's forcing reality to follow a specific order or he's enforcing a law onto reality, and that law is the end all things he wants to. My heart, lungs, esophagus, trachea, and thymus; they were in essence erased. I can't heal them with restoration, hell even if I had a full understanding of time magic reverting my body back to how it was might be impossible. And recreating my cells with healing seems impossible because even basic healing is either derived from Time Magic or Creation Magic, however the latter is a solution.")

"Creation Magic." He murmured, but it would be best to put a few chants with it to boost the spell further. "Birth of a God, from nothingness to everything, prosperity to all." He chanted. Naturally, any and all spells had their own unique chants, including Familial Arts. It was a good thing he had asked Agatha what those chants were.

So with newfound understanding, Mikoto focused his magic on recreating his missing limb. His chest cavity began to glow with a soft blue light as his heart, lungs, esophagus, trachea, and thymus were reformed from nothingness. His arm grew back in an instant, the cells, bone, muscles, and skin knitting together seamlessly. He flexed his arm for good measure. His old man may have been scum, but forcing the knowledge into him was seeming to prove very useful. Understanding human anatomy only made creating new organs and limbs all the more easier.

As Selwyn landed back on the ground, Mikoto teleported above him once more. With a burst of mana, he created an orb of darkness that coalesced into a sphere before hurtling toward Selwyn with incredible velocity. The orb struck the ground mere inches from Selwyn's feet, unleashing an explosion that rocked the very foundations of the landscape. The blast sent snow flying in all directions, creating a massive crater that stretched for thousands of feet. The force of the blast could most likely be felt all the way to Galadriel.

However, when the dust settled, Selwyn emerged from the wreckage, half his armor chipped away and bearing only minor injuries that healed themselves. His blade was firmly gripped in his hand, and that eerie glint still in his eyes. He was enjoying this.

Mikoto would comment on how insane he was, but he was in the process of trying to kill him.

Thousands of glyphs suddenly came into existence and swirled around Selwyn like tiny tornadoes, each one emitting a stream of white light that hurtled toward him. They pierced the air with unseen speed and a whistle. However, Selwyn merely raised his sword once more and spoke the same word: "Eviscerate." The glyphs vanished in an instant, as if they had never existed at all.

Mikoto reappeared behind him, fists clenched as he prepared to strike. He reinforced himself with strengthening charms, amplifying his physical prowess to incredible levels. His strength without any charms was quite absurd, adding them only boosted it all the more.

The punch connected with devastating force, striking Selwyn's stomach with such violence that it sent him flying upward like a launched rocket. The shockwave generated from the blow was cataclysmic, shaking the very earth as if an earthquake assaulted all. Selwyn's body pierced the stratosphere before Mikoto teleported above him once more.

With another burst of mana, he unleashed another punch that sent Selwyn plummeting toward the ground like a falling star. The impact when he landed was enormous – the ground shuddered beneath their feet as Selwyn crashed into the snow with incredible force. Waves of snow were kicked up high into the air as a shockwave spread the snow widely about. The destruction Mikoto was causing would have outside parties debating whether he was any good.

But despite the ferocity of the blow, Selwyn emerged from the wreckage relatively unscathed – battered and slightly bruised perhaps, but still standing tall. Though all those minor wounds healed themselves at a near instance. It seems he had high-speed regeneration like Amaury.

("For real?") Mikoto internally questioned. ("All those spells and this all I managed? Something's missing with my magic, it's destructive but still I'm missing something.")

"What ecstasy." The grin that split on Selwyn's face was inhumanely wide, and eerie would not do it justice. "Sorceresses have stood against me, knights have stood against me, and many a beast have as well."

"Your point?"

"It has been years since I was injured." The prince admitted. "Magic with such ferocity and disgust directed at my very being." Selwyn chuckled. "But beneath that untamed hate you feel it too, no? The excitement. The ecstasy. The fun derived from this battle." Mikoto scoffed.

"Don't compare me to you." Mikoto sneered. "Filthy animal who can't even use magic, I don't derive any fun from this. I'm gonna kill you out of necessity." Despite his words, Selwyn merely chuckled once more.

"So you say, but tell me, enemy of mine, what is your name?" How odd that a destructive battle like this would have led to a simple introduction. Even so, the least Mikoto would do is let the animal know the name of his killer.

"Mikoto," he uttered. "I'd say remember it, but you'll be a corpse in a minute."

"We shall see." Selwyn gripped his sword tightly as the foreign energy engulfed him once more. "Now come, my enemy, share in my insanity and enjoy this battle."

Chapter 83: Chapter 81: Ascendance

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

A Spark of Divinity:

It begins with a mere spark, a flicker of divine essence nestled within the mortal of the God spawn. The essence, pulsating with the potential of creation. At this nascent stage, the God spawn may be unaware of their heritage, yet they are drawn to moments of awe and wonder, inexplicably attuned to the rhythms of the universe.

Awakening to Destiny:

The awakening is a pivotal moment, an ascendance that reverberates. It often manifests in a profound revelation or a cataclysmic event, where the God spawn's latent powers surge forth like a tempest unleashed upon the mundane world. Whether through a battle of titanic proportions, an epiphany amidst the stars, the spawn's destiny becomes irrevocably intertwined.

Trials of Ascension:

Ascension is not a journey for the weak. It is a series of trials, both internal and external, that test the spawn's resolve and understanding of their place in the vast cosmos. They must navigate treacherous realms where the boundaries between reality and the realm of God blur, confronting manifestations of their deepest fears and desires. Each trial is a crucible that refines their essence, forging their spirit into a vessel capable of bearing the mantle of divinity.

Communion with Celestial Forces:

Central to the ascension is the communion with forces beyond mortal comprehension. The spawn must seek guidance from elder beings of wisdom, converse with entities that dwell between the stars, and confront embodiments of principles personified. Through these interactions, they glean fragments of divine knowledge and imbibe the essence of the celestial realms, transcending mortal limitations.

Transcendence and Metamorphosis:

As the spawn progresses through their trials and communion, they undergo a metamorphosis of spirit and form. Their mortal shell becomes a vessel of radiant light, suffused with the essence of divinity that blazes like a supernova. This transformation is marked by a fusion of mortal and immortal qualities, where the spawn's consciousness expands to encompass their heritage.

In the end, the ascent of a spawn of a God is not merely a transformation—it is a collection of creation and transcendence and something she would have to go through in this short, short moment. So Agatha ignored all else, ignored the severe tremors that assaulted the very earth, ignored the battle between Asmodai and Asaun. She focused inward, her being close to Death moments earlier was the key.

She focused on that spark of divinity, ignoring the sharp shard of ice that scraped by her face. She focused on the shield she created when she was close to Death, a shield capable of fending off the dark and powerful magic of the Chaosmaw Asmodai. Her magical prowess was never like that, her Creation Magic was never so potent. The explanation Asaun gave was wide and confusing and with Asmodai battling them, it was hard for Asaun to get any words out, even so Asaun had merely bid her to focus. The Goddess Isadora would take her to her realm if his words were to be believed. She just had to be lucky enough to actually be chosen.

She focused and focused more and more.

And then she heard not more and she felt naught more. Raging tremors were nowhere to be felt nor was the battle between Asmodai and Asaun. She opened her emerald eyes to find herself standing at the edge of a shimmering lake that seemed to stretch into infinity. The air was crisp yet warm, carrying with it the sweet scent of blooming flowers and the gentle rustling of leaves from trees. She stood upon a soft carpet of lush green grass, each blade vibrant and alive beneath her feet.

Looking around, Agatha realized she was surrounded by a breathtaking landscape straight out of a fairy tale. Towering trees with bark that shimmered like silver stretched their branches towards the SKY, adorned with leaves. Sunlight filtered through the canopy above, casting a BLUR of dancing lights upon the forest floor.

("The realm of a God?")

But it was not just the flora that enchanted her; the fauna seemed equally fantastical. Butterflies of iridescent colors flitted gracefully from flower to flower, their wings shimmering in the sunlight. Birds with plumage of gold and silver sang melodious tunes from branches that seemed to bend under the weight of their beauty. Creatures she had only read about in fairy tales—like gentle deer with coats that glowed like moonlight and foxes with eyes that twinkled like stars—moved gracefully through the underbrush.

As Agatha wandered deeper into this enchanted realm, she came across a meadow where a crystal-clear stream meandered lazily through banks adorned with wildflowers of every kind. The water sparkled with light, reflecting the azure sky above and the fluffy white clouds that sailed serenely overhead. Along the stream's edge, she spotted elves with skin like porcelain and hair that shimmered with a sheen, weaving patterns with vines and flowers that seemed to obey their every command.

Further on, she discovered a grove where stones stood sentinel ON a carpet of moss that glowed with a luminescence.

In the heart of this magical place, Agatha found a majestic tree unlike any other. Its trunk was as wide as a castle's tower, adorned with runes that shimmered with a light. Its branches reached towards the heavens, adorned with leaves. Beneath its boughs, a circle of beings—elves, faeries, and creatures both familiar and fantastical—gathered in quiet reverence, their eyes alight with kindness.

Overwhelmed yet inexplicably drawn to this place of prosperity and life, Agatha felt a sense of belonging she had never experienced before. She stood in awe of the enchanted realm, a soft melody began to drift through the air, harmonizing with the rustling leaves and the bubbling stream. The melody grew clearer and more enchanting until a figure emerged from the dappling sunlight, gliding gracefully towards her. She had never seen this woman before, but she was sure of it, she knew who this was.

It was the Goddess of Creation and Prosperity, her presence was commanding yet gentle, radiating an aura of boundless power.

The Goddess had flowing locks of liquid gold that fell down her back in waves, shimmering with every step she took. Her eyes were pools of deep emerald, sparkling with the light of a thousand stars, and her skin glowed with a luminescence that seemed to emanate from within. Adorned in robes that flowed gently, she moved with grace.

"Agatha," the goddess spoke, her voice soothing, "you have wandered into the heart of my realm, where the forces of creation and prosperity converge. I have watched over you as you discovered the wonders of this place, for you possess a rare spirit touched by the essence of my divinity."

Agatha's heart raced with a mixture of reverence and curiosity as she bowed her head before the radiant goddess.

"Goddess," she murmured, "I am humbled by your presence and grateful for the beauty and abundance of this realm." She tensely stated.

The goddess smiled warmly, her gaze unwavering yet tender. "You stand at a crossroads, Agatha. Within you lies the potential to ascend to new heights, to become a conduit of divine energy and wield the power of creation itself. Granted you can but use creation through magic, but you shall grow and then you shall wield creation in its purest form. But first, you must undergo a trial—a journey of transformation and enlightenment."

Agatha listened intently, her senses heightened by the goddess words.

"What kind of trial must I undergo for Arcane Ascendance?" she asked, her voice filled with determination.

The goddess emerald eyes gleamed with a knowing light.

"The trial will test your courage, wisdom, and compassion," she explained. "You must venture deep into the heart of the enchanted forest, where the boundaries between reality and dream are blurred. There, you will face challenges that will mirror your deepest fears and desires, confront truths that have been hidden within your soul, and forge bonds with beings both mortal and immortal."

Agatha nodded, her resolve strengthening with each word.

"I am ready," she declared, her voice steady despite the butterflies fluttering in her stomach. "I will embark on this journey."

The Goddess's smile widened, a gesture of approval and encouragement.

"Know that you do not walk this path alone, Agatha," she said softly. "My blessings will be with you, and the denizens of this realm will offer guidance and aid when you need it most. Embrace the trials ahead with an open heart and an unwavering spirit, and you shall emerge transformed."

With a graceful gesture, the goddess extended her hand towards Agatha. As their fingertips touched, a surge of energy pulsed through Agatha's being. She looked into the Goddess's emerald eyes, feeling a profound connection that transcended words and understanding.

"Go now, Agatha," the Goddess murmured, her voice a gentle caress. "May the light of creation illuminate your path and lead you to the heights of your true potential."

With a final nod of gratitude, Agatha turned towards the heart of the enchanted forest, her heart brimming. The goddess watched her go, her presence a beacon.

("Please Ser Asaun hold out until I am finished.")

Chapter 84: Chapter 82: The power of one dipped in divinity

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

Asaun, clad in his now battered armor, stood atop a small, destroyed building, his sword at the ready. Below him, the demon Asmodai seethed with malevolent mana, his eyes blazing with a ferocious intensity.

Asmodai raised his hand, and a bolt of crackling lightning shot towards Asaun. The knight reacted with lightning-fast reflexes, leaping off the rooftop to avoid the attack. The lightning strike hit the ground mere feet away, sending a blast of mana that ripped through the surrounding buildings and sent debris flying in all directions.

Asaun landed gracefully on the snowy street, his boots sinking into the powdery surface. He charged towards Asmodai with fierce determination, his sword glowing with a wave of green mana. The demon, unfazed by the knight's sudden attack, dodged to the side with eerie agility.

Asaun recovered quickly and launched a swift slash at Asmodai's exposed flank. The demon's eyes flickered with surprise, but he was too quick to avoid the blow entirely. The blade bit deep into his arm, leaving behind a trail of smoldering green magic.

Asmodai reacted swiftly, erecting a barrier of mana around himself to defend against further attacks. Asaun didn't hesitate, following up with a powerful slash infused with even more mana. The attack was so potent that it shattered Asmodai's barrier and sent him stumbling backward.

Seizing the opportunity, Asmodai unleashed a wave of fire that would have incinerated any ordinary foe. The flames engulfed the surrounding buildings, reducing them to ashes and sending plumes of smoke into the frigid air. Asaun leapt high into the air to avoid the inferno, his movements fluid and effortless despite the danger.

As he cleared the flames, Asmodai sent another attack hurtling towards him – a piercing mana beam that threatened to incinerate the knight on contact. Asaun dodged again, this time mid-air, using every ounce of skill and agility at his disposal to twist his body out of the way.

Finally landing back on the ground, both warriors paused. Another tremor assaulted the earth, some buildings toppling over as a result.

"What monsters are the cause of these tremors?" Asaun frowned, but he kept his eyes on Asmodai. "At the rate they're fighting, they no doubt destroyed an odd village or

town. Though morbid, it's fortunate the towns down that side were run down by the cultist. Even so, should that monstrous battle continue, Emberreach is at stake."

"Seems that arrogant prince found himself a suitable playmate," Asmodai mused. "But I must say, even I would not want to face a monster capable of satiating his thirst for battle." The demon shook his head as he focused his attention back on Asaun. "But still, I find it surprising that one loyal to Verdantis would disclose the secrets of ascendance. You do realize there is a chance that girl would participate in that festival, a spawn of Isadora with a spawn of Octavia plummets your chances at victory."

"Mayhap, but there is no secret to ascendance," Asaun stated with a chuckle as Asmodai furrowed his brows. "Agatha was always going to be an Inheritor, the same goes for that princess. Though there is no harm in telling you, all Inheritors have a distinctive mark to their mana. And it is impossible to detect if you are no knight, despite sacrificing the use of magic, we are far more in tune with mana. It's how I distinguished young Agatha and Mirabella."

"So what you were spouting to that girl was naught but rubbish?" Asmodai frowned. "No, it was a guide all the same."

"Mayhap, but Isadora no doubt heard Agatha's pleas. The Goddess will help her, and once the young lady reaches ascendance, she'll make short work of you," Asaun confidently stated. He had witnessed the power Inheritors wield, so he was sure of his own words. Asmodai scoffed as his tone lowered.

"It will not make a difference. I've walked this star for eons upon eons," he declared. "I've fought numerous battles, and I shall not be done in by rabble like yourself."

"Then it is a good thing I am here to assist," Asmodai's gaze sharpened as his eyes snapped to the side to see a figure emerge from the darkness.

"Ah, Isabella dear. Right on time," Asaun greeted as the figure of Isabella became all the more clearer. She walked to his side, her resolve steeled.

"Apologies, sir Asaun. I know I was ordered not to engage in battle prematurely, but I cannot stand by while this city is directed to ruin," she stated with steely determination in her eyes. Asaun merely smiled.

"Worry not, Isabella, your determination is admirable," he complimented. "Yet I fear even with your help, this foe will not be bested. However, we can hold him off. Young Agatha is set to undertake the same journey you did, our efforts hinge on her." Isabella, momentarily surprised, quickly shook it off as she prepared for action.

"Understood, sir. I'll support you as best as I can," she declared with conviction. "Arcane Ascendance: Serenade of the Harmonic Essence."

Channeling the depths of her magic, Isabella invoked the ritual of Arcane Ascendance. Mana surged around her in vibrant tendrils, weaving lines of energy that shimmered with hues of blues and purples. The air crackled with power as her form began to transform.

Isabella's silhouette expanded, her body elongating as if being stretched by an invisible force. Her eyes blazed with a radiant salmon hue. Her simple garments shimmered and morphed into flowing robes adorned with glowing patterns. In her hands materialized a harp of pure light, its strings humming with a melody that resonated.

From the ground beneath her feet rose a pillar of mana, swirling and pulsating with the intensity of a supernova. Isabella ascended upon it, her presence now towering over the battlefield like a deity descended from the heavens. Her eyes, now glowing with an inner light, locked onto Asmodai with.

Asmodai's eyes widened as Isabella's transformation reached its climax. The very air seemed to shimmer and dance around Isabella's new form, as if reality itself was bending to accommodate her newfound power.

"Such mana, such pure power," he was momentarily left stunned. Asmodai watched as the semi-deity began to move.

The harp strings sang out, and an exhilarating mana coursed through Asaun's veins. He felt his strength surge, his senses heightened to unnatural levels. With renewed vigor, he charged forward, his sword flashing in the pale moonlight. Asmodai raised a hand, summoning a barrier of mana to defend himself.

The two clashed in a blur of speed. Asaun's sword sliced through the magic barrier with ease, striking against Asmodai's arm. The demon howled in rage as his limb severed at the elbow, falling to the ground with a sickening thud.

Asmodai's face twisted into a snarl as he launched a wave of destructive black fire at Asaun. The flames engulfed the warrior, but Isabella's music fell silent, and a soothing hum was heard as the song imbued him with an unnatural resistance. The fire danced around him, burning away at the snow and debris surrounding them without touching Asaun.

In that moment of protection, Isabella's music fell silent. The black flames continued to rage on for several heartbeats before finally dying down, revealing Asaun standing unscathed amidst the fire.

Asmodai's eyes narrowed as he turned to Isabella.

"Seems I have to deal with you first!" he spat, his voice dripping with malice. "You meddling..." He took a step forward, only for Asaun to seize the opportunity.

With blurring speeds, Asaun closed the distance between them. His sword sliced through Asmodai's other arm with deadly precision. The demon stumbled backward, one arm already severed at the elbow and now another at the shoulder. He began to retreat down the street, but Asaun moved to pursue him. Just then, he glanced back.

Isabella's transformation began to wane, her form dissipating like mist in the sun. She collapsed to her knees, exhausted from expending all her mana in that spectacular display. Arcane Ascendance really did burn through one's mana.

Asmodai's gaze lingered on Isabella before focusing on Asaun once more. His eyes blazed with dark intent as he began to chant. Dark mana coalesced around him.

Asaun knew better than to underestimate his opponent. He sprinted toward Isabella and yanked her back onto her feet just as she was about to fall completely limp from exhaustion.

As they stood together once more, Asmodai unleashed his spell. A blast of mana shot toward them, but Asaun was ready. With Isabella clinging to his back for support, he launched himself and Isabella to the side, avoiding the blast of mana that shot through multiple buildings, bringing them down as if they were naught but building blocks.

"A mere five minutes, hm?" Asmodai noted as in a morbid display his arms regenerated, starting from the bones to each muscle fiber and cell to eventually his flesh. The demon smirked as he watched the now unconscious Isabella clinging to Asaun's back. "And how surprising, it was thought there were only five Inheritors: the Fire Goddess's spawn, the two of the Times God, one for the Lord of all that lies in the darkness, and the spawn of the God of Strength. To think Verdantis had a sixth Inheritor."

"Arcane Ascendance truly is a trump card that should only be used as a last resort," Asaun frowned deeply. "Most of our Inheritors could only use it for about ten minutes. It burns through mana and makes it impossible to fight afterwards. Even the spawn of Octavia can only manage thirty minutes I've heard." But even when the situation was tense, Asaun smirked.

Behind him, a beacon of blinding light sprang forth, engulfing buildings and stretching high into the air, piercing the very atmosphere.

Agatha had succeeded.

Chapter 85: Chapter 83: Trials?

[???

Inside, the atmosphere was thick with the scent of aging wood and hearth smoke, the crackling fire casting shadows across the expensive rugs and paintings adorning the

walls. This was Agatha's home and the mansion back in Galadriel—a place where her father had trained her relentlessly in the arts of both magic and combat.

Agatha's earliest memories were of the sunlit mornings that streamed through the leaded windows, illuminating the dust motes that danced in the air. It was in the dim glow of dawn that her father would awaken her, his voice gruff and cold.

"Agatha, rise," he would command, his presence looming over her small bed like a specter. "Today, you will learn."

And so her days began, with exercises that tested both her physical endurance and her burgeoning magical abilities. The training room, adjacent to the main hall, was a cavernous space filled with the scent of sweat and old leather—a place where tomes lined the shelves and magic symbols were etched into the stone floor.

Her father's lessons were unyielding, demanding perfection in every gesture and incantation. He would stand behind her, his voice a low rumble in her ear as he corrected her stance, adjusted her grip on any weapon she would use, or chided her for the slightest falter in concentration. His training was relentless, the hours stretching into days and weeks of unending repetition and exertion.

Agatha would wield her magic with the same determination she used to swing a wooden sword, her movements becoming fluid and instinctual over time. But it was not just the physical trials that shaped her; her father's teachings delved into the depths of her mind, probing the recesses of her memories and emotions.

In one particularly vivid recollection, Agatha stood in the middle of the training room, her father's voice echoing off the stone walls as he pushed her to summon her inner strength.

"Focus, Agatha," he urged, his words cutting through the haze of exhaustion that threatened to overwhelm her. "You must learn to channel your emotions, not be controlled by them."

She closed her eyes, drawing upon memories of loss and sorrow—moments when she had felt utterly powerless and alone. The emotions surged within her, and with a flicker of concentration, she unleashed them in a burst of magic that sent ripples of mana crackling through the air.

Her father nodded approvingly, though a small frown still tugging at the corners of his lips.

"Good," he murmured, his voice softening for just a moment before he resumed his stoic demeanor. "You are beginning to understand."

But for every triumph, there were countless setbacks. Agatha would stumble in her incantations, her spells fizzling out or misfiring with disastrous consequences. There were moments of frustration and tears, nights spent staring into the embers of the hearth as doubts crept into her mind like tendrils.

Yet through it all, her father remained steadfast in his desire to watch her grow. He never relented in his expectations, pushing her to surpass her own limits time and again. The nights were often the hardest, when the weight of failure and fatigue threatened to crush her spirit. But each morning dawned anew, bringing with it the promise of another day to strive, to learn, and to grow.

Agatha stood and watched, there she saw herself, she was younger. Sweat dripping off her younger form's brows as she tried to focus her magic. Her father stood there, gaze as cold as ever and words as stern as ever. She was reliving a memory, she noted, and at least it was not one where she was being beaten within an inch of her life.

"This is supposed to be the trial?" She questioned with a murmur. Though her younger self and her father did not react to her words. "Just what am I supposed to do?"

This was all so confusing, one moment she was conversing with Isadora herself and the next moment she finds herself back home for this supposed trial. But what was that trial even? She kept asking that question but no clear answer presented itself.

"It should be obvious, duh!" Agatha blinked as an annoyingly squeaky voice assaulted her eardrums. The girl blinked twice, scanning the memory of the training area but saw nothing. "Up here!" Following the voice's instruction, she gazed upwards and there she saw it.

"A fairy?" She blurted out, she was small. About ten centimeters tall, she wore a small green dress and lacked any footwear, of course, there were her wings. Translucent with detailed and beautiful golden patterns adorning them. Her small head had luxurious golden-blonde hair and a pair of emerald eyes along with a button nose and a doll-like face.

"Congratulations!" The small fairy clapped her hands, though Agatha did not think she was sincere in said gesture. "You got eyes!" She stood corrected.

"Why are you here?" Agatha chose to ignore her pompous attitude and gauge for an answer. She had seen numerous creatures including fairies in Isadora's realm but what was one doing here? The small fairy rolled her eyes, as if she found the question annoying.

"I am the guide to the children of Isadora who have been chosen to inherit her will." She declared, a hint of pride in her squeaky tone. "I am Cor'nella, and I will help you realize your true dreams."

("A guide?") Agatha mentally mused. ("This is all so confusing.")

"Now, now let us not waste any time!" Cor'nella exclaimed. "You no doubt want to get through this as fast as I do."

"I do." Agatha nodded her head. "But I'm not even sure what it is I must do."

"There is nothing to do." The fairy declared much to the girl's confusion. Noticing Agatha's confused expression, she heaved a sigh as if she was somehow exasperated.

"The power is already yours, child." Agatha jolted as the sudden voice, whirling her head she saw Isadora once more. Her form shrunken to match her own.

"Goddess Isadora." Agatha mouthed, confusion still plaguing her.

"Greetings once more, my child." The Goddess gave a warm smile, Agatha could not help but feel safe as she gazed at Isadora. It was not the kind of comfort she could even derive from her own mother, staring into the orbs of the Goddess was just a whole other feeling. "Your trials begin here but they are not hither." The Goddess explained as she cast a gaze at her younger self and her father. "Your journey will be a long one, Agatha."

"And that is why I am here!" The voice of the fairy Cor'nella interrupted. "In your realm, yours truly will be serving as a guide, so make sure to respect me, hm!"

"Now, now Cor'nella, I'm sure you'll find Agatha a compatible partner." Isadora stated before turning to Agatha. "Now, my child, go forth with my blessing and forth what you desire."

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

As Asmodai stood amidst the city, a sudden change rippled through the air. The atmosphere crackled with a strange energy, and the ground beneath his feet trembled slightly. From the very fabric of the icy air, a blinding, piercing light erupted suddenly, dazzling even the demon's senses. It was as if a star had descended from space, casting a glow over the broken city. He saw the knight Asmodai smile as he retreated with the downed Inheritor in tow but he paid them no mind.

He was more focused on the luminous spectacle where something emerged, a giant figure of breathtaking beauty and divinity towering over all. She floated forward, radiant and majestic—a deity of celestial proportions. Her form glowed with an otherworldly

light, her long golden-blonde hair falling around her gracefully. Eyes the color of deep emeralds glinted.

Clad in a gown that seemed woven from the very essence of nature itself, her dress was a clash of greens and gold's, adorned with detailed patterns that seemed to dance and shift as if alive. Each movement she made sent ripples of mana through the air, and the snowflakes around her seemed to hesitate in their descent.

His crimson eyes narrowed, a mix of curiosity and wariness stirring within him. The ethereal figure halted before him, the air around them humming with an almost palpable energy. Her voice, when she spoke, echoed.

"Demon," her voice carried a melody that was soothing, "I shall expunge you."

His lip curled into a sneer, his pride pushing back against the overwhelming presence before him.

"Do not grow cocky, child." He scoffed. "You may have overwhelming power at your disposal but you are but a novice."

Asmodai glared at the one who ascended as he raised his hands to the sky. The air around him began to distort and ripple. Buildings nearby began to tremble and shake, and then suddenly, they were lifted off their foundations by some invisible force.

The first structure, a grand cathedral with carved stone gargoyles adorning its walls, was hurled towards Agatha like a projectile. It was followed by several more buildings, each one larger and more imposing than the last. The ground shook beneath Agatha's feet as she levitated, her eyes fixed on the incoming barrage.

("What a feeling.") Agatha heaved a breathless sigh.

She raised her hand, and from her palm burst forth a torrent of swirling, ethereal mana. From this mana coalesced several spears of pure white light, each one spinning rapidly as they hurtled towards the approaching buildings.

The first spear struck the cathedral with a blinding flash of light, obliterating it in an instant with not even rubble remaining. The other spears followed suit, tearing through the structures with ease as if they were made of paper. The buildings crumbled to dust and rubble, sending plumes of snow and debris flying into the air.

("My knowledge, my power.")

Asmodai's grin faltered for a moment but he swiftly began conjuring another spell. However, before that, the ground beneath his feet began to churn and writhe like a living thing, and then he felt himself being lifted off the ground.

He was forcefully transported across the city in an instant, leaving behind the ruins of the buildings she had destroyed. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself standing in an open expanse of a snowy landscape that stretched out to infinity. Agatha hovered meters away from him, a serene expression on her face.

With a simple gesture of her hand, roots burst forth from the ground beneath their feet. They sprouted like twisted vines from hell itself, stretching out towards Asmodai with an unnatural speed. Asmodai retaliated by summoning thousands of dark circular glyphs that swirled around him. From these glyphs burst forth beams of powerful mana that shot towards the approaching roots like arrow after arrow.

But despite their ferocity, the roots showed no signs of slowing or halting their advance. They wrapped themselves around Asmodai like living chains, ensnaring him in an impenetrable cocoon.

Agatha's eyes gleamed as she raised her hand once more. A blindingly bright golden light erupted from her palm, illuminating the snowy landscape and casting long shadows across the frozen terrain. The light grew in intensity until it seemed to have a physical presence all its own.

And then it struck Asmodai with incredible force. The demon let out a deafening scream as he was enveloped by the light, which seemed to burn away his very essence. The light illuminated all, the night sky seemed to wash away as a result. It was as if day had forcefully invaded.

When the light finally died down, Agatha's form began to glow once more as she surveyed the transformed landscape before her. The snow-covered terrain had given way to lush green grasses and vibrant flowers that swayed gently in the breeze.

But even as she basked in the radiance of her creation, Agatha's eyes narrowed as she realized that Asmodai had teleported away before her attack could land. A disappointed sigh escaped her lips as she felt her body begin to shrink back down to its normal size.

Her eyes dimmed slightly as she collapsed to one knee, her exhaustion evident on her pale skin. She had expanded too much mana with keeping that form, and now she felt it contracting back down to its normal limits.

As she struggled to catch her breath, Agatha sighed.

("My mana is completely exhausted.") She adjusted her body to sit on the now grassy field. ("But that demon won't be returning any time soon, that last spell injured him no doubt.") She looked at the night sky in contemplation. ("How odd Arcane Ascendance is, when I'm in that form my power, my mana increases to an absurd point. Even so maintaining that form takes away from my base mana, when that runs out I'm back to this form.")

As her thoughts ran, she felt an enormous tremor assault the ground. It seems someone else was waging a battle.

Chapter 86: Chapter 84: A conclusion

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

He flew through the air, courtesy of Mikoto, and a flurry of white engulfed Selwyn's vision as he looked at him. The boy was on the snowy ground still; he drew back his hand and gripped onto something that was not there, and in the next instance, a large chunk of the ground was ripped from the earth, approximately the size of a small house. He launched the colossal chunk of earth skyward. Reacting with lightning reflexes, Selwyn twisted his midsection, his red eyes locking onto the hurtling projectile. With a grin not befitting the situation, Selwyn raised his sword, aiming the tip of the blade at the oncoming projectile. He didn't deflect, he didn't dodge. He erased.

"Eviscerate." The air seemed to crackle with his power as Selwyn slammed his blade forward. A wave of pure annihilation rippled outwards, disintegrating the earth chunk into a million shimmering motes of dust. The shockwave buffeted even him, sending a shower of snowflakes spiraling below him. But there was no respite. A flicker of movement caught his eye. Mikoto materialized behind him with a pop of displaced air. His fist, encased in a crackling aura of mana, connected with Selwyn's armored abdomen with a sickening thud as it broke through.

The impact drew a metallic taste that filled his mouth. A sonic boom erupted as his body rocketed forward, a streak against the endless white. The ground rushed to meet him, the impact registering as a bone-jarring tremor that traveled up his body. Snow exploded outwards, a monstrous crater forming around his point of impact. But Selwyn grinned, laughing deep in his throat. He didn't stay down. He was back on his feet in an instant.

("What a tenacious guy.") Mikoto thought, unamused.

Mikoto landed gracefully a few meters away. Kneeling, he slammed his hand onto the snow, and an eerie transformation began. The white flakes writhed and churned, a metallic sheen overtaking them. In mere seconds, a forest of razor-sharp spikes, as black and deadly as obsidian, erupted from the ground, lunging towards Selwyn with a collective hiss.

Selwyn merely smiled as if having the time of his life. He brought his blade around in a blur of speed, the black light of the blade tracing a deadly arc. The clang of metal on metal ripped through the air as Selwyn cleaved through the spikes, each swing sending showers of molten metal spraying outwards. The sonic boom from the shattering metal echoed across the frozen landscape, momentarily dwarfing the sound of the wind. With

a final, earth-shaking swing, Selwyn shattered the last of the spikes, the shockwave flattening the surrounding snow into a glassy expanse.

He didn't pause to admire his handiwork. In a display of inhuman speed, he pivoted on his heel, the world blurring around him. He reappeared in front of Mikoto, so fast that the boy's eyes widened in surprise for the briefest of moments. Selwyn's blade moved too fast; not even the blur of the outline could be traced. His blade cut through the air as it whined in protest. Not even a second passed, and a thousand cuts littered Mikoto's body from head to toe.

Mikoto didn't flinch. His uniform snapped and billowed with each blow, but he remained unbothered. Finally, with a movement so fast it appeared Selwyn's blade had snagged on something invisible, Mikoto caught the edge of his sword with his bare hand. The metal seared his skin, a plume of acrid smoke rising, but his grip didn't falter. He retaliated with a simple punch, his fist connecting with Selwyn's stomach with a sickening crunch.

The impact sent a shockwave rolling outwards, pulverizing the glassy expanse of snow around them. Selwyn was thrown backward, crashing through a towering ice formation, shattering it into a million glittering shards. Trees, uprooted by the sheer force of the blow, went flying like matchsticks. The impact carved a new crater into the landscape, smoke and dust rising upwards as if a weapon had been used. Mikoto watched as he was blown away, and in a near instant, the thousands of cuts decorating his body mended themselves, closing, the crimson blood disappeared, and his uniform mended itself. And now it was back to the offensive, Mikoto locked onto Selwyn's raising form.

The air was filled with raw mana as Mikoto raised his hand. Five enormous spears, their tips glowing an ominous red and crackling with erratic mana, materialized above Selwyn. They plummeted downwards with earth-shattering speed. Selwyn threw himself to the side, barely avoiding the first spear that slammed into the ground with a force that split the earth open like a rotten melon. The remaining four spears followed in quick succession, each one detonating in a blinding flash and a deafening explosion. The ground trembled violently, cracks snaking outwards like angry veins. The snowscape was now nothing but a smoking crater.

Dust and smoke obscured the battlefield, momentarily shrouding Selwyn from view. Burns from the mana explosion decorated his body, and he had a gruesome stump where his left arm used to be. But Selwyn did not frown or even grow the least bit frustrated. From within the crater, that odd energy from before engulfed him. Then, with a sickening snap and tear, new flesh and bone knit themselves together. Selwyn emerged, his missing arm reformed, the burns on his body fading like bad symptoms.

But Mikoto waited, contemplating with a frown hidden behind his mask.

("Regenerating a limb like it's nothing.") He heaved a sigh. ("On top of that, his natural strength and speed far surpass my own base stats. I have to use mana to enhance

myself just to deal any physical damage. Even so, I feel like he's holding something back, a trump card maybe? It would be a pain to deal with, but I'll try not to draw this out.")

"You're a tenacious one," Mikoto said with some annoyance. Selwyn let out a humorless bark of a laugh. Mikoto was not sure how to take that.

Then Selwyn blinked, and Mikoto was no longer there. One moment he was standing across the crater, the next he was a blur, appearing behind Selwyn. His fist, wreathed in crackling mana, slammed into Selwyn's back with a bone-shattering crack.

The impact sent Selwyn rocketing forward, though before he could properly be flung away, he felt a vice-like grip on his arm. And in the next instance, his body was flung upwards. He breached the atmosphere in a heartbeat, the thin air whipping at his ragged armor. The world below grew smaller, swirling into a mass of white and black, the curvature of the planet becoming more evident. He soared higher, past the wispy clouds, until the black of the sky deepened into the inky blackness of space. Stars, pinpricks of light against this odd endless void, winked into existence. Selwyn, for a fleeting moment, was suspended in an eerie silence, the only sound gasps escaping his lungs. But the respite was once more short-lived.

A streak of black rocketed towards him from the distance, growing larger with each passing moment. It was Mikoto. Selwyn raised his blade towards the boy, but it was too late.

With another pop of displaced reality, Mikoto appeared behind Selwyn. His fist, a battering ram of pure mana, connected with Selwyn's back, sending him hurtling back towards the planet. The acceleration was brutal, the thin air screaming in protest as Selwyn re-entered the atmosphere. He became a burning meteor, a streak of fire.

The impact with the ground was nothing short of a cataclysmic event. The force of the blow triggered a shockwave that leveled entire forests, carved canyons into the earth, and sent tremors rolling across continents. A colossal crater, miles wide and deep, formed at the point of impact, the earth itself buckling under the force.

Selwyn, however, was far from finished. Deep within the crater, amidst the smoldering debris and superheated rock, Selwyn emerged from the molten rock, his body battered but unbroken. He coughed, a plume of smoke and ash billowing from his lips, but his red eyes burned with an eerie excitement still.

He looked up, his gaze scanning the horizon. In the distance, a figure descended from the sky. Mikoto landed gracefully on the rim of the crater, his expression hidden behind his mask. The silence stretched.

"I can feel it through your ferocious attacks, you know?" The prince spoke, his tone calm despite being a human falling star moments ago.

"What are you spouting?" Mikoto spat out, annoyed. Their fight had not been going on for that long, maybe thirty minutes or more. Even so, Mikoto was not used to having this much trouble with anything since coming here. No matter how much punishment Selwyn took, he would stand back up, eerie grin and all.

"You feel it too." The prince stated. "That rush of exhilaration."

"You think I'm deriving fun from beating your ass?" Mikoto scoffed. "Like I told you, don't go comparing me to you. This is nothing but a necessity."

"So you say, Mikoto." Selwyn seemed unconvinced. He gestured to the destruction all around them, the collapsed mountains, the enormous fissures, and craters. "Such destruction with such little regard, an odd village or town was no doubt destroyed."

"Yeah, about five." Mikoto replied blankly. "Luckily your cultist buddies attacked, and the knights back at Emberreach deemed it too dangerous to leave undefended villagers or townsfolk behind."

"Even so, you were lost in the moment, were you not?" Selwyn smiled on. "Your mask mirrors your expression, no doubt. You are not like all these prey; I've met all the kinds of prey this boring star has to offer. The prey who lack power and resolve. The insignificant prey. Then there is the prey with power at their disposal but lack the motivation for a truly grueling battle." Selwyn chuckled, laughing deep in his throat as he shook his head.

"There really a point to this?" Mikoto raised a hand and pointed it at Selwyn. "Fighting is a waste of time, do you know what I derive enjoyment from?" Selwyn said nothing, merely awaiting an answer. "Seeing filthy animals like you being put down, like the trash you are."

"I would ask that you two stop that." And just then a voice cut in, halting Mikoto's attack. "Any more, and all of Verdantis may suffer."

A third party enters the battle?

Chapter 87: Chapter 85: One odd woman

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

Lyra Careworn frowned in annoyance; at heart, she was but a lazy woman. The title of court mage of Verdantis was forced on her, if anything. She would rather be in her study, researching the dragon corpse, rather than be out in the cold. And now there was this. She looked towards it; it wasn't a mountain anymore. Jagged peaks, once titans scraping the sky, lay toppled like broken teeth. The very earth itself seemed to have

been split open, a monstrous fissure that snaked for miles across the landscape, spewing residuals of potent and strong familiar mana.

The air crackled with unnatural energy, the taste of ozone sharp on her tongue. Enormous craters, some wide enough to swallow entire towns, pockmarked the ground. The snow that filled them wasn't pristine white but a sickly grey. What looked like the shattered remnants of a colossal glacier, cleaved in two by unseen parties, lay half-buried in the snow. Chunks of ice, larger than houses, were scattered around like the playthings of a giant.

The ground became treacherous, decorated with jagged rock teeth jutting from the shattered earth. The ground was littered with the charred remains of trees, some as thick as a seasoned oak, their once-vibrant bark now reduced to brittle black flakes. A colossal glacier in the distance, its peak sheared off like a giant had taken a bite from it, loomed precariously overhead.

"What unadulterated destruction," she mused as she picked up on some voice originating near an enormous steaming crater. "If I had not known any better, I'd think an Inheritor other than Isabella was here. Well, there is, but that mana was back at Emberreach; another Inheritor seems to have awakened." She placed that bit of information at the back of her mind as she reached the large steaming crater.

-a point to this?" She immediately locked onto the form of one of the individuals. He was of average height, with raven-dark hair and a black uniform adorned with gold, and of course, what stood out most was the white face of the mask. An eerie grinning face, Lyra narrowed her eyes.

("A masked boy, could he be the one that was seen in the vision? Judging from this destruction, that might be the case. Such peculiar subjects, it would be revolutionary if I could dissect them both,") she silently thought as the masked boy raised a hand and pointed it at a familiar figure, a tall figure in battered armor. The crown prince himself, Selwyn Von Auerswald. She watched the boy talk on. "Fighting is a waste of time, do you know what I derive enjoyment from?" Selwyn said nothing, merely awaiting an answer. "Seeing filthy animals like you being put down, like the trash you are."

"I would ask that you two stop that," she saw it appropriate to intervene there. "Any more, and all of Verdantis may suffer." That was no exaggeration; cataclysmic tremors shook the very earth when she was on her way to Emberreach. Even back at the capital city, magic was enforced to make sure the city did not fall apart, and seeing all of this destruction, she would be right in her estimate to assume it was the two of them who were responsible.

Mikoto frowned as he took a glance at the person who stood at the edge of the crater, a woman with porcelain skin and raven-black hair, dressed in a flowing black gown. She

could be considered someone with renowned beauty. But her eyes stood out most, gleaming red that bore into his very being. Dissecting him, her slit-like pupils only made her gaze all the more unnerving.

"Who are you?" Mikoto questioned as the woman walked over the edge, her body gracefully being guided downwards until she landed gently on the steaming hot ground.

"Lyra Careworn, court mage of Verdantis," she curtly introduced with a curtsy. Selwyn's gaze just grew uninterested as he gazed at the woman.

"Your appearance here is quite bothersome, woman," he rose his blade lazily and pointed it at her. "You interrupt my fun." The odd energy engulfed his form once more, Lyra merely cupped her chin in interest despite the danger. She looked at the prince with a scrutinizing gaze.

"Hmm, interesting," she merely murmured. "An energy so very different from magic, you're forcing it into reality like the Greater dragons," she gauged before continuing. "Anyhow, I do apologize for interrupting your fun. But you see, help was requested from the capital city, and seeing as this particular area has seen the most action, a good chunk of Verdantis knights are on their way. You could slaughter them all, no doubt, but all of that would just spoil the fun." Selwyn just looked at her with an unreadable expression. A few tense seconds passed, and he lowered his sword, casting a gaze at Mikoto.

"Tell me, Mikoto, will you be partaking in the festival?" he asked, the question so casual you would swear they were acquaintances under no context.

"I will," Mikoto answered, already gauging what Selwyn was getting at.

"Then we shall battle to the Death another day," he proclaimed. Mikoto shrugged.

"Makes no difference to me, but are you sure you want a funeral on the day of the festival?" Selwyn merely chuckled at his words as he turned away.

"We shall see, my friend," was all he stated before he bent his legs and leaped out of the crater in a mighty jump that kicked up a thin line of dust. Mikoto's eyes lingered, but he quickly turned his attention to Lyra.

"You've got a set, lady," Mikoto stated with an unamused chuckle. "You know that guy could kill a person by just pointing his sword at one."

"Mayhap," she uttered unbothered, as she rubbed her chin, her gaze piercing through him. It would probably have been uncomfortable for anyone else. "But I must say, most impressive for not dying against one such as him." She approached slowly, her gaze dissecting. "No injuries or tears in your uniform, advanced healing no doubt," she

murmured as she circled him like he was some specimen. "And a magical object to alter your appearance, but still..." She stopped in front of him, leaning in too close.

"Uh, what are you doing?" Mikoto questioned as she poked his arm.

"Such a firm body," she noted as Mikoto retracted his arm. "Impressive strength, and judging by this destruction and mana residuals, you are quite powerful when it comes to magic, but these residuals are mighty familiar."

("Crap, I really need to rein in.") Mikoto frowned as he studied the woman; she was unnerving, to say the least. ("I haven't really been paying attention to how much mana I was outputting; what a pain.")

"Say, you're quite the interesting specimen," her face zoomed in close once more, her eerie red eyes piercing through the slits of his mask. "What would I have to give you for a shot at dissecting you?" She posed the question casually, a bit too casually for someone requesting dissection.

"Na-"

"Come now, it will not hurt, and I am prepared to give anything," she emphasized by sticking out her assets. "Even my body may be a pr-"

"Listen, lady, you're creepy as hell. I just got done fighting a guy who would not die, so I'm not really down for your odd shit," Mikoto stated more annoyed than angry.

"Oh well, a shame," the woman easily relented. "Do let me know when you change your mind." Odd did not begin to describe this woman. "Anyhow, most of the Vel'ryr troops have been dealt with, and the two Chaosmaws are nowhere to be seen. And you played the most important role of all, fending off the ferocious Prince Selwyn. Quite a feat, one worthy of a reward." Mikoto folded his arms as he tilted his head.

"Reward? What does that entail?" he questioned. Lyra shrugged.

"Don't know, the knight leader of the first platoon will most likely give you anything you desire," she turned on her heel. "Come now, let us not dilly-dally," she stated, mana flooding outside her body as her feet lifted off the ground. Levitating out of the crater, Mikoto quickly followed with a simple leap. As he landed back on the upper level outside the crater, he spoke.

"What did you even come to do here anyway? Besides being weird?" Mikoto asked.

"I was forced to; I would much rather be back at my laboratory studying my samples," she heaved a small sigh. "Alas, I am the court mage for Verdantis and serve its governing body, and I have a duty to fulfill."

"Sounds like a pain," Mikoto murmured. Lyra hummed in agreement.

"You don't know the half of it," Lyra stated, her tone blank. ("But this trip may have been worth it.") A ghost of a smile sat at her lips. ("My intuition has been built up and honed throughout the years, and given all the evidence, you are quite the interesting specimen. How I'd love to explore your body and see what makes it tick.")

Mikoto, oblivious to her inner mind, just mulled over his own thoughts.

("A shame I couldn't kill Selwyn, but there would have been no point in continuing that fight. I have to expand my horizon on magic some more; absurd destruction is not cutting it anymore. Of course, there's always that sword Lucinda summoned... nah, I don't want a victory as easy as that.") A small smile crept onto his face. ("The bastard was right; I did enjoy most of that. To let loose like that was a thrill; I'll be looking forward to our final battle, Selwyn.")

Chapter 88: Chapter 86: Scheming

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

The attack from Vel'ryr was unexpected, to say the least. However, with the use of transportation magic, most civilians were safely evacuated. With the abundance of demons and the advanced weaponry of Vel'ryr troops, there were many casualties on the knights' end stationed in Emberreach. This is not taking into account the two Chaosmaw's that appeared. Nevertheless, despite the situation, she would be lying if she said she was not at least a bit proud of herself for driving off one of those Chaosmaw's.

The rush of power that came from Arcane Ascendance was surreal. It was out of this world, and she felt as if she could do anything. Her perception of the world had deepened to a fundamental level. She understood Creation Magic better than ever, and she was sure that if she spent more time in that form, there was nothing she could not do. Granted it would take some time before she could use just Creation and not have to mimic it through magic.

However, not all was dandy, which is why Agatha found herself sighing as she leaned her back against the walls of a destroyed building. Some injured knights were being tended to, but she was not focused on that.

"Now, now, I can tell by that expression of yours that you're getting cocky!" Despite the morbid state of most of the survivors of the attack, most eyes could not help but be drawn to the figure of the small ten-centimeter-tall fairy. Cor'nella folded her arms and looked at her with a judging gaze. "Most past Inheritors of the great Goddess Isadora

were much the same mind as you! Getting full of themselves after tasting a bit of power." The fairy got a dry gaze in return.

"I'm not getting cocky, fairy," Agatha blandly retorted. "You're simply imagining things." She got an annoyed glare in return.

"Not 'fairy,' you do! It's Cor'nella!" She angrily corrected. It seems she was easy to rile up. Agatha gazed away in annoyance. "And what's with that look!?"

("So loud...") And this was supposed to be her guide for the future trials she would have to face?

"Oh, good, you're still alright." Agatha perked up as a familiar voice passed her ears. Glancing to the side, she spotted a familiar head of pink hair and wolf ears.

"Miss Fiona..." Agatha noted as the assistant teacher came to a stop beside her, her eyes immediately drawn to her fairy companion.

"I-Is that a fairy?" Fiona blurted out in confusion. And said confusion was justified. Fairies were rare creatures who very rarely showed themselves. They were reclusive for a reason, though. Fairies possessed a unique kind of magic many sought to exploit. That is not to mention how valuable their wings were, for alchemy or just to sell. They were like magical objects, absorbing and siphoning mana in any area they were. Due to their smaller bodies, they could not take in as much mana as the average human, demi-human, or demon. However, by constantly using *[Flight Magic]*, they used more mana than they absorbed. All in all, fairies were odd creatures.

"Haha!" What left Cor'nella's small mouth was what sounded like a triumphant laugh. "Yes, that is correct, hu-erm, Solkari. I am a mighty fairy, one who serves the Goddess Isadora faithfully!" She declared.

"A fairy that serves a Goddess directly?" Fiona looked at Cor'nella in wonder. "That is amazing! How did you come to find such a remarkable companion in such a short time?" Fiona asked, practically gushing over Cor'nella. "And one so cute!" Cor'nella nodded her head in smug satisfaction. She seemed to enjoy the praise.

"I'm sure you could sense my mana output drastically increase while you were busy helping civilians and assisting knights," Agatha started. Fiona nodded her head with a thoughtful expression.

"I did. The teachers back at the academy suspected you might be an Inheritor, as there was no spawn of Isadora who had claimed the title," Fiona explained. "Now, not to be rude, but I never expected something like Arcane Ascendance to be learned so quickly and by someone so young."

"I was surprised how easy it was to obtain this power, but I had spoken to Goddess Isadora briefly. She said I was always chosen, and that the trials I would face would be later down the line," Agatha clarified, an unreadable expression adorning her face as she glanced at Cor'nella. "And this fairy is to be my guide."

"That's right! My great Goddess has chosen me to be this child's guide!" Cor'nella confirmed. Fiona rubbed her chin in interest.

"Interesting. My knowledge of Inheritors is not all that impressive, but to think you get the chance to converse with a God. Well, Gods don't usually meddle that much in our affairs, safe for an event like the festival. But this is great news. Congratulations on becoming an Inheritor!" Fiona praised with a smile. A ghost of a smile sat at Agatha's lips.

"Thank you, Miss Fiona." Perhaps this was a new turning point, one she had been waiting for, for so long.

[Verdantis]

[Outskirts]

"You truly are pathetic, Asmodai," Eerald scoffed as she stared at her demon brethren leaning against a snowy tree. His attire was ruined and jagged, and he was missing an arm and an eye. "Losing to a newly awakened Inheritor? You shame yourself." The aforementioned demon snarled as he turned to glare at her.

"Hold your tongue, Eerald!" He spat out. "I was merely caught off guard!"

"Saving your mana for the human who humiliated you back at that magic academy," Eerald shook her head and started in a mocking tone. "Were you not the one who would boast about how weak the sorcerers of this era were, constantly? What does that make you?" Asmodai's mana flared dangerously as his remaining eye narrowed into a slit.

"Watch your tongue, lest I rip it out." Eerald merely sneered at him as she raised her head.

"I doubt you could even manage that much." Her own mana raised and clashed with his. "Mayhap Aegraxes should be informed about how useless you are."

"I've known Aegraxes for longer; he shan't listen to a filthy cur like you!" Asmodai exclaimed. Eerald opened her mouth to retort, but a new voice interrupted.

"Come now, fighting like this won't do." The two turned to the approaching figure of Nybbas. "But the two of you have always been like oil and water, a shame."

"Nybbas." Eerald folded her arms as she cast a dry gaze his way. "And where have you been lurking?"

"Aegraxes would have us attack the academy once more; he views it as an opportune moment," he replied. The two other demons frowned.

"Unwise; they would be prepared for another attack," Asmodai stated, drawing a nod from Eerald.

"Although he's an idiot, I agree. I am aware that the artifact of the God of Destruction is important to realize our goals. But we gain nothing from rushing in blindly," she inputted, but a bout of realization hit her.

"You see, rushing in is ill-advised, but such an 'opportune' moment will not come by again," Nybbas explained.

"You mean that spawn of Octavia not being at the academy gives us a rare opportunity?" Eerald questioned, her tone surprisingly conflicted. As if she did not really agree with her own words, her suspicion was proven when Nybbas shook his head.

"Lucinda and the headmaster; we naturally assumed they would be the biggest threats upon planning our first invasion of the Academy. The headmaster is but a washed-up sorcerer, a shell of his former self. And Lucinda, true, if we were to battle her one on one, we would lose even if we were to use our perfected unique magics, but even she would be hard-pressed to take down several of us. She is not invincible, unlike some like to believe." Eerald tilted her head in confusion.

"Then what makes this an opportune moment to strike?" She asked as a deep frown overtook Asmodai's face.

"It's him, the masked one," he spat the sentence out with all the venom he could muster.

"The one you suffered a humiliating defeat from?" Eerald snorted at the notion.

He nodded hesitantly. "That means nothing. Asmodai is hardly the strongest in our ranks, so this boy would not be that much of a threat."

"He matched the crown prince." The sentence left Nybass's mouth, and his demon brethren blinked in confusion. "You no doubt felt all those tremors; they traveled all around the world. The citadel of Vel'ryr had to encase itself in a force field just not to fall

apart. The same goes for all the other cities." Nybbas chuckled. "And you should have seen how they fought, monsters, the both of them."

"You mean to say some random masked child fought that monster Selwyn?" Ezerald scoffed at his words.

"It is the truth, and you can ask Asmodai; the masked one is not to be trifled with." She merely cast a degrading gaze at Asmodai, much to his annoyance. "At any rate, the masked one is the biggest threat; we'd be no match, which is why Aegraxes saw it fit that we capitalize on his absence at the academy."

"Aegraxes? Is that boy truly that powerful?" Ezerald questioned. "Suppose it matters not; should I participate in this raid?"

"No, Arne and Beatrice will handle it," Nybbas clarified. Ezerald chuckled.

"What an unlucky academy."

Chapter 89: Chapter 87: Realize

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

Mikoto walked through the remnants of what once was a bustling city, his footsteps echoing softly on the cracked cobblestones. Tall remains of buildings raised out like broken teeth, their wooden frames charred, and stone foundations crumbled. The air was thick with the scent of ash, mingling with the faint, lingering smell of incense from the many chapels and churches that once stood proudly.

To his right, the remains of a grand cathedral loomed, its stained glass windows shattered, the vibrant shards strewn across the ground like shattered glass. The spire, a beacon of faith, lay toppled, its pinnacle embedded in the earth. Statues of saints and Gods, now headless and armless, watched over the devastation.

Mikoto paused in front of a small chapel, its roof caved in and walls scorched. The door hung ajar, creaking on its hinges.

"This is partially your fault, you know?" Mikoto resisted the urge to sigh at Lyra's voice.

"Yeah, you already said that." Emberreach was naturally the closest city to his battle with Selwyn and it took the full brunt of it.

"Your destruction is befitting of a battle between two Divine Beasts." Lyra mused. "I do not think a single Inheritor, safe for Maerwynn or Dante, alone could have caused this much destruction by merely trading blows."

"Noted, now shut up for a sec."

Mikoto simply raised his hand and focused and expanded his mana, and the effect was immediate and in a way breathtaking. The shattered windows of a cathedral began to reassemble themselves, shards of colored glass lifting from the ground and slotting back into place with a chime. A fallen spire rose from the earth, its stones knitting together seamlessly as it ascended to its rightful place atop the cathedral. The statues of saints and Gods regained their lost limbs and heads, their features restored to their former glory.

Mikoto turned his attention to the small chapel. The caved-in roof lifted and reformed, the wooden beams straightening and the thatch weaving itself back together. The scorched walls became whole once more, their surfaces smooth and unblemished. The door swung shut with a gentle click, and the faint scent of incense filled the air anew.

He moved through the city, his magic working tirelessly. Chapels, buildings, and churches sprang back to life around him, their bells tolling once more. A fountain in the town square, dry and cracked, gushed forth clear water, its marble statues gleaming in the restored sunlight. Streets that had been choked with rubble cleared themselves, the cobblestones fitting back together with clicks.

As Mikoto walked, flowers bloomed in window boxes, vibrant and fragrant. Market stalls, once overturned and empty, stood upright and laden with fresh produce and wares. The city was alive despite the lack of people again.

He reached the center of the city, where a grand basilica stood. It had suffered the worst of the destruction, its massive dome collapsed and its columns reduced to rubble. Mikoto raised his hand once more. The air around him shimmered raw mana, and he focused on reconstructing rather than destruction.

The ground trembled as the columns rose from the dust, their marble surfaces gleaming white in the sunlight. The dome lifted piece by piece, each segment sliding into place with a thrum. The frescoes inside, once marred by soot and cracks, were restored to their brilliance.

There was still some work left to do, but for the most part, the city around him was whole once more, a gem of architecture and faith like it used to be. The people would return, life would flourish, and the echoes of hymns and prayers would fill the air once more or whatever else they did.

"Restoration? No, just simple reconstruction." Lyra looked at him, impressed. "You simply rebuilt everything from memory. You just keep getting interesting."

"I'm flattered." Mikoto flatly replied.

"You don't sound flattered." She noted. He resisted the minuscule urge to roll his eyes at her oh so astute observation. "You are quite the forward child."

"Sure, now what are you buzzing around me for anyway?" Mikoto questioned as he turned to the woman. "You're a court mage, right? You no doubt have more important stuff to be doing."

"I've already told you." She stated with a shrug. "You're an interesting specimen, I can't dissect you so I'd like to observe you."

"You're a woman of science, right?" Mikoto suddenly asked.

"I like to think so."

"What do you think about alternative realities or world travel?" Mikoto's question elicited a raised brow from the woman and a pondering look adorned her features.

"What a peculiar subject, world travel, hm?" Lyra smiled as she contemplated the subject. "My specialty does lie in biology, but that does not mean I lack knowledge in other fronts. Let's see, there is no clear spell that could manage that. At least in the tiers of magic a normal person is capable of."

"I'm guessing there are hypotheses and theories, right?" Mikoto surmised as he folded his arms.

"There are many, but magic such as world travel is mostly seen as obscene and useless, so most records of it are just abolished." Lyra informed, but she smirked as she tapped her temple. "But I've all said knowledge right here." She crossed her arms under her well-endowed chest as she continued. "But why are you interested in a subject such as world travel?"

"Can't a guy be curious?" Mikoto rolled his shoulders. "Anyway, what do you want in exchange for those world travel theories and hypotheses?" Lyra opened her mouth to speak, but Mikoto quickly interrupted. "And no dissecting." She promptly closed her mouth as she began to ponder.

"A look at your face." She stated after a few seconds passed. Mikoto frowned as she continued. "You expanded an enormous amount of mana; usually your mana would be hidden as it is now. You are no doubt reining in your reserves and using illusions to alter and decrease your overall mana flow, making it dull and minuscule. But mana residuals do not lie, and from what I've observed, those residuals were mighty familiar."

("Well, it's my own fault really. I haven't been paying much attention. While fighting Selwyn, I let loose too much. Usually, I'd cloak any mana residuals with illusion magic so it would differ from my usual signature, which is identical to Lucinda's.") Mikoto

heaved a sigh but did not want to jump to any conclusions. "What are you getting at?" In response to his question, Lyra raised her right palm.

In existence came a bright, blinding orb of blazing red. Its light engulfed the entire area, and power was basically pulsating from it.

"That's-!"

"It is a simple spell able to feed off the mana and physical energy of others under certain circumstances." Mikoto's eyes narrowed as she continued. "Naturally, I am able to reign in mana from mere residuals; it's what I did to all the residuals left in that battlefield. This is only a small portion of said mana." She gave a humorless chuckle as the orb of mana dissipated. "A small portion, but it would dwarf the reserves of the average sorcerer."

"..."

"And the most surprising of all, it is identical to the spawn of Octavia's mana signature." Lyra stated as she rubbed her chin in thought, almost mockingly. "But said spawn was here in Emberreach; her signature in this city was constant. So how is it that a similar signature found its way into that destroyed battlefield?"

"Cloning?" Mikoto offered. She had all the facts, but she was not stating anything just yet. It would be unwise just to admit to something.

"Impossible. See, I've studied the spawn of Octavia extensively." Lyra quickly denied. "I know of every single minute spell she is capable of."

("A bluff.") Mikoto noted, but her expression did not change. ("Maybe I could turn this around.")

"How about a deal?" Mikoto spoke. "I want a detailed report on world travel, a thesis, a hypothesis, and theories. Do that, and I'll satiate your curiosity."

"Deal!" The woman exclaimed all too happily. And in the next instance, a large circular red glyph came into existence beneath them. "Teleportation, the location is my laboratory back in the capital city."

"Why the hell are we going that far?" He questioned.

"So I can record your information." She stated with a small smirk. "Don't be nervous now."

"Whatever. Do note if this teleportation is rigged, I can kill you easily." She just nodded wordlessly.

At least if anything, then this will be beneficial. The two then vanished in a flash of red.

Chapter 90: Chapter 88: Strongest knight

[Verdantis]

[Emberreach]

Lucinda frowned deeply as she walked through the streets of Emberreach. By all accounts, the city should have been in ruins due to the constant battles that had taken place there. But buildings, churches, and cathedrals that should have been destroyed were miraculously intact, with sunlight peeking through the clouds highlighting this supposed miracle. Curiosity lingered in the back of her mind about who had restored most of the city, but she was more concerned about something else at the moment.

"Damn it, where is he?" she murmured to herself as she walked through the restored structures. The streets were desolate as civilians had been evacuated, and knights from the capital of Verdantis were ensuring there were no more surprise attacks. At least Emberreach would have some protection as she and the others would have to leave today. However, there was an issue. Mirabella, Agatha, Fiona, Victoria, and Professor Eugene were all accounted for. A sinking feeling gnawed at her gut. She had witnessed firsthand the kind of monster Selwyn was. Even if her magic were effective against him, she knew it would make little difference. Could Mikoto truly win against such an opponent?

"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?

She remembered his words of confidence, however degrading they might have sounded. They probably were, but to her, they had a different meaning, a different point. He told her that she was weak and to leave it all to him. That was so foreign, but the meaning was clear. He said he would fight her battle, an offer she had never received. For she was not Lucinda; no, she was the spawn of Octavia. Mikoto Yukio was a rarity, and during their time in Verdantis, she had not figured him out yet.

What drove him? What were his goals? Why was he the way he was? Who is Mikoto? There was so much she wanted to know. Though even so, not knowing him well did not change the churn in her stomach or the anxiety she was feeling. What happened to Mikoto? The thoughts lingered, but she quickly turned her attention back to reality as she heard rapidly approaching footsteps from behind her and someone huffing for air. Turning, she saw a slightly out-of-breath Mirabella stop in front of her.

"I-I got nothing," she breathed out as she took one last gulp of air. "It's just north from here. It looked like something out of a damn nightmare, craters and fissures everywhere."

"A battle took place there, then?" Lucinda knitted her brows as she pondered. "The one that caused all those tremors, no doubt."

"It's that damn monster prince, fuck!" Mirabella cursed once more, clearly frustrated. "Where the hell is that idiot!?" Mirabella seemed to want to utter more curses, but maybe it was better if she didn't. "I'm too weak. That fucking bastard cut me up like I was some fish on a platter."

"Mirabella, you can't blame yourself here," Lucinda stepped in before she could continue with her self-loathing. "I was powerless against that monster too. Even if I could have used magic, the result would have been the same. It would be the same for most everyone who fights that monster."

"Then Mikoto...." Mirabella snarled to herself, disgusted at her weakness. It had been hours since Mikoto had last been seen, and considering who he fought, the implications were pretty clear. "If I wasn't so weak, then that damn bastard...."

"Listen, Mirabella, I know you're anxious, angry, and disgusted with yourself, but it isn't your fault that Mikoto had to fight Selwyn," the princess said. Mirabella just looked down in anger, most likely directed at herself. "But at this point, we both know what kind of person Mikoto is. Brash, cocky, and prideful," she chuckled.

"And an idiot," Mirabella added with a mumble.

"Well, that's maybe a bit too harsh," Lucinda sheepishly stated.

"It's his own damn fault for being labeled one," Mirabella said, looking to the side with an unreadable gaze as she continued in a lower tone of voice. "I told him not to fight that monster."

"I am sure Mikoto is still alive. He has to be," Lucinda stated with surprising conviction. "I might not know him well, but I do not think he is the type to simply give up and die like this!" Mirabella looked at her, her eyes wide. Lucinda sounded so confident, so sure of her words. Her voice was steady, and her gaze steely. It was hard not to find comfort in her words.

"Whoa, this Mikoto guy sounds damn interesting!" The two girls looked up to the source of the sudden voice and watched as two women approached them, both eye-catching.

The first woman had a head of silky gold-blond hair and dull red eyes that seemed to assess the two of them like they were prey. Her attire was rather unconventional. She wore a loose, wrinkled white shirt, the first few buttons were loose, showing off her

cleavage, and both sleeves were rolled up, as well as the lower part of the shirt to show a hint of her toned stomach. She also wore baggy grey trousers with one ankle rolled up and heavy black boots that clashed with her outfit. Overall, she looked like a homeless person who had had too much to drink and was suffering from a hangover. Not to mention, she had a droopy and lazy look about her.

The second woman was a lot more dignified in the appearance department. She had a serene and beautiful face like that of a doll, long, neat black hair that made her beautiful emerald green eyes stand out even more. She wore a heavy suit of finely crafted silver armor adorned in blue with a gem embedded into the chest.

"Soooo~ Who's this Mikoto guy, and why are we looking for him?" the blonde woman asked, a lopsided smile on her face.

"Who the hell are you?" Mirabella asked with narrowed eyes.

"Fufufu~ There's no shame in being oblivious," she said with an annoying smile. "I am Ysabel Lavinia, the strongest knight!" she proudly proclaimed.

"Who?/Who?" Lucinda and Mirabella asked in confusion.

"Gah!" Like an invisible arrow through the heart, Ysabel froze in shock. The other woman seemed to resist the urge to roll her eyes as she cleared her throat and spoke.

"Forgive her idiocy," the woman said with a dry gaze directed at Ysabel. "I am Ingrid Rosamund, second in command of the first platoon. This idiot is my captain, the self-proclaimed strongest knight."

"Hey! Not 'self-proclaimed,' I am the strongest knight!" Ysabel argued, but she only received an even duller gaze from her companion. "Come on, I am!"

"Sure, maybe if you were not such a bum, that might have been the case," Ingrid folded her arms. "And if you truly were the strongest knight, you would not lose as often against Lady Stark."

"Ugh!" Ysabel just pouted and looked away, having no response. "Stupid Ingrid," she mumbled afterward. Ingrid sighed as she turned to the other two, who genuinely did not know how to react to the situation.

"Apologies for this fool, but we are with the knights deployed from the capital," she started, a look of confusion spreading across Lucinda's face.

"They sent the captain and second in command of the first platoon here?" she questioned, finding it excessive.

"I, along with a few of our troops, were deployed here alone once we heard word of Vel'ryr and demons attacking," Ingrid stated as she jabbed a thumb at Ysabel.
"However, this fool invited herself along despite having more important matters."

"Hey! They said that Prince Selwyn guy was here. I thought I should tag along for better strength," Ysabel defended, once more receiving a dry glare.

"Is that the reason? Or did you just see an easy escape from all the paperwork that you needed to do?" Ingrid questioned with a raised brow.

"I-I don't know what you're talking about," Ysabel stated with a sheepish gaze.

"Anyway, me and this fool here..."

"Hey!"

"...we are merely looking for any stragglers. However, this fool here..."

"Come on!"

"...was curious about the two of you and came to converse. Apologies, I could not stop her."

"Come on, you've got to be curious too, Ingrid!" Ysabel stated, looking for some shared interest. "I mean, it ain't every day you see the spawn of Octavia and a princess walking around together. And talking about a boy, no less! Come on, spill, who's the lucky guy?"

"It ain't like that," Mirabella huffed out, annoyed. "He's missing."

"For real?" Ysabel sounded disappointed for some reason. "That's one weird guy..." She suddenly stated as she gazed behind them. Her droopy and stupid façade disappeared as a cold glare took hold. As Mirabella and Lucinda looked back in curiosity, they saw their missing person just in time for Ysabel's form to blur as she sped past everyone.

She appeared before Mikoto in an instant, her leg poised high and ready to strike.