

Evil 221

Chapter 221 - 221: Disunity.

After the banquet-like meeting, Thalior and the representatives from the Alliance finally decided to start the real one. Everyone went to the throne room, and everyone took a seat at the table.

Xena was the first to speak and inform everyone about the current situation in the revolutionary parties. She revealed there were four parties that were distancing themselves from the others.

The Fesilis party was the one that the Servil faction took down. The remaining three were the Yagesliv party, the Bornalis party, and lastly the Durant party.

"We managed to take down one of them. The chance of them banding together is more likely to happen. We sent a scout team a week ago to check any movements from these three parties," Xena said and stared at everyone at the table.

Before Xena could continue her report, a knight from the Servil faction came in with a scroll in her hand. She gave the scroll to Xena and immediately left the room.

"It appears they have decided to band together," Xena said as she passed the scroll to Thalior. "There have been movements from those three parties, and they seem to have gathered in the Mildferd Kingdom and centered their forces there," she added.

"50,000 soldiers..." Thalior raised his brows, surprised by the amount of enemy forces. "They have a strategic terrain that makes it possible for them to leave two nations unoccupied since the Mildferd Kingdom is the only way to reach those two nations because they were surrounded by mountains."

"Yes, and with our current forces and the evil that lurks in the shadow, we can't risk fighting them until we are sure that our surroundings are safe before we advance," Xena nodded in agreement as she looked at the map on the table.

Thalior stared at the map for a moment before he decided to speak.

"They're not a threat," Thalior pointed out.

Everyone at the table was surprised by Thalior's words, all eyes were on him.

"They can't risk their current position to invade us. The moment they try to attack us, it will make their home vulnerable by leaving their safest place to invade us. They're not a threat to us, but we are a threat to them," Thalior explained as he pointed at the map.

"And what are you trying to propose, Your Grace?" Astrea asked as she stared at the map.

"A treaty with them. Our goal is to eradicate revolutionary parties, but now it has slightly changed. These three parties aren't an immediate threat, the remaining are," Thalior looked at everyone at the table. "The remaining parties have decided to side with demons. They're the ones that we should be focusing on," he added.

"If we decide to do that, I'm thinking of deploying Commander-in-Chief Uriel with her trusted knights at the border near the Mildferd Kingdom. Even with the treaty, we can't lower our guard," Thalior continued as he tapped on the map.

It was a solid plan, and no one could argue with Thalior's logic.

"It won't be just us who think of this as an opportunity, Your Grace," Rasmus said as he looked at the map. "It was as you said that they have the support from the terrain that makes their home safe. But those mountains are the best places for demons to live. The moment they realize that those three are gathered in the Mildferd Kingdom, what will happen to the two nations that they leave behind?" He asked as he made a circular move with his finger at the mountains on the map.

"It's good that we are minimizing problems, but it's not going to work when there's a third party that might gain something from our decision," Rasmus said as he looked at the map with a serious expression. "What we believe is a great plan, it might bite us later on..." he sighed.

"That's why I propose that we should use what His Grace had suggested. Make a treaty with those three parties in exchange for their safety and the people. We have seen how dangerous the Corrupted are,

even a boy who got turned into a Corrupted would be impossible to kill. If their pride is more important than the lives of others, then we get rid of them before the demons occupied those two nations," Rasmus suggested as he stared at everyone at the table. "We don't make half-baked plans. We can't afford such a thing in this kind of situation," he said with a serious expression.

"You want us to pressure them, Count?" Xena asked with her brows furrowed. "If they decide to go to war against us, they still have 50,000 troops behind them. The moment we clash with them, that also gives the demons a chance to gain the upper hand from that," she added.

Everyone nodded in agreement with Xena's argument.

"I know that you don't want that, so why don't you let me meet them in person? I can assure you that they will agree with the treaty and prioritize the safety of the people. They don't want to side with demons in the first place, and we can use that to bargain," Rasmus said calmly.

"Or..." Rasmus sighed as he looked at Astrea. "Her Holiness can do it in my stead. After all, she's not a part of the South Neva Union or the Alliance. She's a Saint, and I believe they would listen to her."

Nobody dared to ask Astrea to do that for them since they would be asking too much. Astrea came to assist them to deal with demons, not to help them in politics.

"Now, Count. I would help, but in exchange, I want something from you," Astrea said with a gentle smile. "It's not something grand, and I won't ask you to do it now. Let's just say it's a favor," she crossed her arms on the table and stared at Rasmus.

Rasmus knew that Astrea might say something like that and used the opportunity to bind him.

"Of course, Her Holiness. Since it was my idea after all," Rasmus nodded with understanding. "I will come with you, Your Holiness."

Astrea was a bit surprised that Rasmus agreed with her demands without hesitation. She expected him to be reluctant to agree with her demand and had planned on pressuring him later if he did. At that moment, she felt like it was her who fell into his trap.

"Thank you, Count," Astrea nodded and smiled.

"I should be the one thanking you, Her Holiness. We are the ones who forced you to help us," Rasmus said.

After that, they began to create plans for the next moves they should make. Since Astrea and Rasmus were the ones who dealt with the Mildferd Kingdom, the others focused on the revolutionary parties that had sided with demons.

Since the Alliance was still recovering from their losses, they decided to stay behind. It was a good thing for the South Neva Union since they would maintain their status in South Neva. The Servil faction had decided to collaborate with Thalior in eliminating their next targets.

The faces of the Alliance's representatives were sour, hiding their frustration. They were planning to be on top once it was over, but ended up being left behind. They were powerless, and was unable to demand anything thanks to Astrea's presence at the table.

Thalior thought of the possibilities that might happen to the Alliance. He was grateful that the South Neva Union's position would stay strong, but the dissatisfaction of the Alliance might raise conflicts in the future.

He glanced at Rasmus, and the moment their eyes met, his gut told him that Rasmus was thinking the same thing as him. He then remembered Garret's role, and he knew it would be best to use Garret to prevent disunity among the Alliance leaders.

Once the meeting was over, representatives from the Alliance left the room first. Thalior immediately wrote a letter to Garret about the current situation and asked him to begin his move. Garret was an opportunist, and the Alliance's current situation would make it easy for him to slip in and become their savior.

"Count, shall we?" Xena looked at Rasmus with a serious expression.

Rasmus nodded and then looked at Novia and Astrea. He had already told Astrea about what Xena had found in the records. She wanted to come along since she wanted to know what kind of things demonic cult members had done.

Rasmus pulled out his armor from the ring and immediately put it on. Thalior didn't join them since he had to stay behind and keep an eye on the representatives.

"I have prepared the carriage, Your Holiness, Count, Lady Novia," Xena said as she put on her helmet.

"Shall we?" Astrea asked as she put on her black robe and looked at Rasmus and Novia.

Rasmus and Novia nodded.

Chapter 222 - 222: Taming a fire.

Astrea walked out of the carriage and immediately covered her nose with the back of her hand. Her gaze was cold as she stared at the forest in front of her. She could sense and feel the ominous atmosphere coming from the forest.

"Your Holiness?" Novia stared at Astrea with a worried expression.

"I'm fine..." Astrea immediately put a smile on her face as she shook her head. "Let's head in," she said as she walked toward the forest.

Rasmus walked in the front while Novia and Xena were in the back. They wanted to protect Astrea from any kind of threat since she only brought four paladins with her.

"That tree over there, we go right from there," Xena pointed at the tree with a few cut marks on the bark.

Rasmus looked at the ground and there were trails of horses and even wheels of carriages. The trails looked old and preserved because of the extremely cold weather.

"So this place is their secret hideout?" Astrea looked at Xena.

"Yes, Your Holiness. Based on the record, this organization was founded a hundred years ago, and it has been active since then," Xena answered as she looked around, keeping an eye on every small movement.

Rasmus closed his eyes and released Mana to use his perception magic throughout the forest. In less than a second, he felt the Mana that he had released become uncontrollable until finally the Mana disappeared. He looked in the direction of where he felt it, which was the northwest from where he stood.

Astrea and Novia watched as Rasmus used Mana to detect his surroundings, which was something that they had never seen before. They both knew Lenin well, and they never saw her do something like that. Lenin used detection through Mana traces and smell, which was quite different from Rasmus's method. They were amazed that Rasmus's limitation to seeing Mana didn't stop him from achieving something extraordinary.

"Did you feel it as well, Count?" Astrea asked out of curiosity.

"Yes, this is exactly what I felt back then when we explored the mountains near the Airedale port city. We encountered possessed humans and something that could turn corpses into Corrupted," Rasmus nodded as he kept his eyes on his northwest.

"I see, that means we are going to encounter them here," Astrea hummed and nodded.

As they went deeper into the forest, they saw a hidden village in the distance. They saw bandits taking the village as their base, and there was no sign of any villagers there.

Without wasting their time, Rasmus went to the east side of the village while Xena went to the west side of the village. Astrea, Novia, and the paladins stayed on the south side of the village, waiting for the scout that Xena sent to check on the village from up close.

Once they found out that there were no villagers but bandits with odd behaviors, everyone waited for the right moment to attack.

Rasmus pulled out his sword and immediately imbued it with Aura and Mana at the same time. The Mana that lingered around the blade suddenly turned into fire, catching the blade on fire. He knew that he couldn't use divine power, but he knew that possessed bodies weren't unkillable like the Corrupted.

As the fire devoured enough Mana and oxygen, making the flame hotter and fiercer, Rasmus swung his sword around and stabbed it to the ground. He released his Aura and the flame simultaneously, creating a massive wave of flame toward the village. The bandits who saw it coming couldn't do anything but to get devoured by the sea of flames that moved quickly.

It less than a minute, the whole village got burned down until there was nothing left of it. Astrea saw the demons in their spirit forms floating above the sea of flames, immediately clasping her hands together, releasing her divine energy and burning them until they disintegrated completely.

Rasmus walked into the village, releasing Mana and putting out the sea of flames as he walked past them. He looked at the remnants or remainings of the bodies of the bandits that had turned into crisp. He stood there at the center as the sea of flames calmed down as if he had tamed the flames with his presence while in fact it was what happened based on what Novia saw with her eyes.

"He can control Mana with his thoughts... like Sorcerers..." Novia muttered under her breath, shocked that Rasmus had become profound in both Mana and nature, something that she couldn't achieve. "He's really amazing..." she clenched her fists, feeling inferior after she witnessed what was Rasmus capable of.

Everyone was shocked because it was the first time they had witnessed Rasmus's skill in magic as a mage. They almost forgot that he was a Blackheart, a family that produced prodigies in magic. They couldn't believe that he could kill more than a thousand soldiers single-handedly with his swordmanship and was also a dangerous mage that could devour a village with a single move.

Xena approached Rasmus and looked at the damage he had caused, in disbelief that someone was capable of doing something like that. She then furrowed her brows when she saw something inside one of the houses. When she walked in to check, she slowly put the back of her hand to cover her mouth and nose as she looked away.

"Children..." Rasmus said as he stood behind Xena and looked at the bodies of children that were stacked up in the corner. "It's a shame that we came too late," he muttered.

Xena didn't say a word and then glanced at the other houses, wondering how many bodies that were hiding in those buildings.

"Don't think of something that you'll regret," Rasmus said and then walked away, looking at Astrea, Novia, and the Paladins entered the village.

Xena took a deep breath as she closed her eyes, steeling her guts before she walked out of the house and regrouped with the others. She tried so hard to not look around because she knew that she would regret it, and there was nothing she could do.

"We are getting closer," Astrea stared at the distance.

"Yes, let's not waste our time here. There's a chance that there are people there that we can save," Rasmus nodded and stared in the direction where Astrea was staring.

Everyone nodded and left the village to continue their investigation toward the hideout where nobles and demonic cult members had gathered in the past century.

The moment they got closer to their destination, they began to smell rotten flesh that struck their nostrils. It was so unbearable that even the cold couldn't prevent the smell from spreading. The bitterness in their throats reminded Astrea and Novia of Blackcliffs, the place where the dead ruled over the land of the living.

Novia released a wind barrier to prevent the unpleasant smell from reaching everyone's nostrils. The scarcity of Mana was a sign that something vile and evil was near, and it put everyone on guard. They didn't know what they were going to face, but to have each other on their side, it shouldn't be a problem.

Not long after they explored the forest, they found a big cave, and that was where the unpleasant smell came from. That cave was the one that Xena's scout team reported to her back then, and it was no wonder that they were afraid to investigate.

"Something is coming, something evil..." Astrea warned everyone as she furrowed her brows. "And there are a lot of them..." she added.

Novia stayed by Astrea's side while Xena and Rasmus stood at the front with their swords ready. The Paladins and Servil's knights guarded the rear and the sides as they kept their eyes at their fronts.

A dozen of the knights came out of the cave, but they were no longer humans as their faces had swollen and started to rot. They had become Corrupted, and based on their armor, it belonged to various families, and even the royal family of the Caldara Kingdom. It was enough evidence that the previous royal family that ruled the kingdom was indeed involved themselves with the organization that worshiped demons.

"This is just one of the many. There are more of them out there, unbeknownst to us..." Astrea said as she clenched her fists, realizing that her influence as a Saint wasn't enough to prevent people from going astray.

Chapter 223 - 223: Deceivers.

Xena and Rasmus clashed their swords against the Corrupted while Novia and Astrea supported them from the back. Because of the commotion, more and more bandits that got possessed by demons came to kill them. Thankfully, the Paladins and Servil's knights were capable of holding them back.

With Astrea's divine power, everyone's weapons were imbued with divine energy. Their weapons were capable of killing both the Corrupted and the possessed bandits. It made things easier, no matter how many of them out there.

The Blackheart Sword was so powerful and sharp that nothing could stop it. The Corrupted were strong compared to the possessed demons that Rasmus had encountered so far. However, he was still far stronger than them, and he could kill them with ease.

Xena showed her swordsmanship as the 3rd Swordmaster of Neva, treating the Corrupted like dummy targets. Her movements were swift and efficient, better than Rasmus's.

"Count, on your left!" Xena dashed and went to Rasmus's right side, clashing her sword against the Corrupted that tried to backstab him.

Rasmus glanced over his left shoulder and saw the Corrupted thrust his sword toward his back. He was in the middle of fighting two Corrupted, and he didn't have the time to stop the ambush.

Rasmus used all the Aura in his body and released it toward the sword that the Corrupted held. He imagined himself crushing the sword, and in an instant, the sword shattered into pieces. He then glared at the Corrupted and used the remaining Aura to push him away from him.

Xena saw it all happen, shocked by Rasmus's ability to control Aura. She realized that he could be on par with Uriel with that profound understanding. She was nowhere near those two, but it didn't discourage her because she knew she could still grow.

Once she dealt with the Corrupted, she went on to deal with the Corrupted that had tried to ambush Rasmus earlier. She swung her sword and released a powerful slash wave that cut the Corrupted in half.

Rasmus decapitated the two Corrupted with a single slash and watched the bodies melt with divine energy. He turned around and looked at Xena, who was finished dealing with the Corrupted on her side.

"Thank you, Lady Xena," Rasmus nodded his head.

Xena gave a nod back to Rasmus, and then she looked around as the Paladins and her knights managed to eliminate the possessed bandits. One of her knights was heavily injured, and she immediately approached her.

"She will live..." Astrea placed her hand on Xena's shoulder. "I will not let anyone die," she smiled at Xena before she walked ahead of her to heal the wounds on the knight.

Astrea used her divine power and healed all the wounds in almost an instant. The wounds that should have killed the knight disappeared as if nothing had happened to her in the first place. She no longer felt pain, and at the same time, her body felt lighter and refreshed.

"Thank you, Your Holiness..." The knight went down on her knees and lowered her head at Astrea.

"If God wills it, nothing is impossible. Don't thank me, I'm just the emissary of God," Astrea smiled gently at the knight. "However, this is far from over..." she wanted as she stared at the cave where Rasmus was standing in front of it.

Xena turned around to look at the cave, and although she couldn't sense the evil energy, her instinct kept telling her to leave. That feeling wasn't that different than those who could see different types of energies around them.

"What do you think, Count?" Astrea asked as she approached Rasmus. "The moment we enter that cave, Mana will be even scarcer. It will weaken us quite drastically," she said and stood beside Rasmus.

"Whoever or whatever is inside that cave, they're one of the limbs of Kiel. As long as we have divine power, we are capable of eliminating one of the limbs," Rasmus said as he held his sword tightly. "We took them by surprise, it would be a waste if we didn't finish this once and for all," he added as he pulled down his visor.

Everyone nodded in agreement, and that left Astrea with no choice but to support them.

They entered the cave, and it was nothing like they had expected. The cave was man-made, and it was made with precision to the point it looked like a hidden chamber rather than a cave. However, the pungent smell became so strong and overwhelming that even the wind barrier could barely get rid of it.

"Blood trails, some of them are fresh," Rasmus pointed out as he stared at the path. "Based on what Aris said, human flesh makes them stronger once consumed," he said as he kept walking.

"So we can assume whoever this blood belongs to, they're already dead?" Xena glanced at Rasmus.

"Yes. We are dealing with demons, so don't expect them to show any mercy to those they have captured," Rasmus nodded and then found a door made of stone that was slightly open that could fit a person in the gap. "Looks like they came from here, I'll go first..." he stood at the door and slowly went through the gap.

When Rasmus went through the doorway, he was inside a dark room with no light. He pulled out a torch and lit it up to brighten the room. He was surprised that the room he was in had so many bookshelves on the walls with scrolls and books on them.

The others came in and saw what Rasmus was seeing, surprised by the amount of books and scrolls. Based on the information, this cave was a meeting place for important figures in the organization from across nations. Novia and Astrea grabbed random books and scrolls to find any information about the place and what the organization had done.

The Paladins were ordered by Astrea to explore the cave even further on their own to secure the parameter. It would give Astrea and the others time to gather information about the cave and the organization before they decided to continue their exploration.

"The Three-eyed..." Novia muttered as she read a scroll. "A being that will guide people to reach Elysium, the land of happiness and pleasure..."

"So they believe in Elysium rather than the Heavens," Astrea flipped through the pages to find anything interesting. "It's an old belief called Samsahakh, a belief where people live in the world to suffer, and the only way to find Elysium was to find that being called the Three-eyed," she explained.

"That's the first time I heard something like that, even though the Magic Tower has all the knowledge about the history of Neva," Novia looked at Astrea with a curious look written all over her face.

"Because it was a belief that only a minority of people in South Neva believed in, and most of them were royal families and high-rank nobles. There were a lot of beliefs out there, but they were long forgotten," Astrea answered.

"Is there any connection between Samsahakh and the demonic cults, Your Holiness?" Novia raised her brows.

"Demons are deceivers, they will become what people want them to be. In this case, demons might have used what people believed in and made them their followers and slaves," Astrea answered as she shook her head. "Just like our current situation. The third Saint has appeared, and she's deceiving the people," she added.

"Does that mean that a demon pretended to be the Three-eyed and has showed themselves and turned the believers into demonic cult members?" Novia asked as she kept reading the scroll.

"That's the only explanation so far, but we have so many books to read and find the answer ourselves," Astrea closed the book and looked at the bookshelves around her.

Rasmus glanced at Astrea, wondering if she knew anything about a Saint that he had found inside a lake. Based on what Astrea said earlier, she appeared to have vast knowledge about the beliefs of the people followed in the past.

While they were observing the bookshelves, they heard a faint scream. Astrea recognized the scream, and it was one of her Paladins. They immediately followed the path that the Paladins took earlier and checked what was going on.

They saw a light in the distance and decided to approach it. When they turned to a corner, they saw a massive hall in front of them. Astrea, Novia, and Xena gagged because of the strong pungent smell that came from that hall.

They saw hundreds of decayed and rotten bodies, bowing down on their knees. Their heads touched the ground while their arms were stretched forward above their heads as if they were worshipping something. That was when they saw a massive statue that was carved from the cave wall, a three-eyed man sitting with his legs crossed and stared down at those corpses with his glaring gaze.

"What is this place..." Novia's voice muffled because she had to cover her mouth with her hand.

"I don't know, but we know that the royal family is dead..." Xena stared at the corpses at the front, one of them wearing a crown and cape with the crest of the Caldara Kingdom. The corpses seemed fresh enough compared to the rest of them.

"At least they died to what they believe in," Rasmus said as he looked at the queen and the children that bowed down beside the king. "What a sight to see," he sighed, disturbed by what he was seeing.

Rasmus stared at the statue from beneath his helmet, and he felt uneasy by the way the statue glared down at the corpses with his three eyes. He had never felt disturbed by a dead object before, but something about the statue made his heart race.

Suddenly a ray of light lit the hall, and it blinded everyone in the hall. They couldn't see a thing but whiteness no matter how hard they tried to cover their eyes from the source of the light.

"Don't open your eyes!" Astrea shouted. "That statue is the source of evil! I'm going to cleanse this place, and I don't know what's going to happen, but I suggest you to be ready!" She warned as she kept releasing ball of light using her divine powers.

As the light became brighter and brighter, they could hear faint screams and shrieks from around them. The screams and shrieks were right on their ears, forcing everyone to cover their ears tightly. It wasn't the first time Rasmus heard something like that, it was similar to what Videl did, the screams of the souls of the dead and the demons.

The cave suddenly trembled heavily as if it was collapsing, making everyone panic. Rasmus immediately reached the wall and tried to prevent the cave from collapsing. He used the Mana that got purified by Astrea's powers and controlled it to strengthen the structure in the walls. Novia did the same by creating a powerful Mana barrier that pressed against the walls and ceiling, supporting them and preventing them from collapsing.

The earthquake became stronger, but because of Rasmus and Novia, the cave was secured. Suddenly Rasmus and Xena felt something was approaching them from the back. They both turned around and pulled out their swords, running toward Astrea to protect her.

They swung their swords without knowing what it was since they were still blinded by the light. The sound of steel clashing against another steel was heard, it wasn't their swords that clashed with each other, it was their swords that clashed with another sword.

Astrea who noticed what was happening, immediately released the ball of light and let it explode into small light particles that got blown by the shockwave. When she turned around, she saw a knight in black armor clash his sword against Xena's and Rasmus's swords. The knight wore a full plate armor and a helmet that covered his whole face, but the glowing red light of his eyes was visible beneath the helmet.

"A demon!" Astrea glared at the knight as she clasped her hands.

Xena and Rasmus imbued their bodies and swords with Aura to overpower the demon. However, they still couldn't overpower the demon with Aura in their bodies, shocked by the demon's strength. Rasmus who noticed that the demon didn't get affected by divine power, it only meant one thing.

"He's not an ordinary demon, divine power won't hurt him enough!" Rasmus warned as he imbued his body with Mana, turning it into electricity to boost his speed and strength two folds.

Novia couldn't help them because she had to reinforce the cave with a more powerful Mana barrier or the cave would collapse and crush them. She could only watch from the distance and was focused on her task.

The Paladins came into the hall after they saw the light particles, and saw the demon who was clashing his sword with Rasmus and Xena. They decided to join in, but suddenly the demon pushed himself back and swung his sword at all the paladins, releasing a strong slash wave of Aura at them. The paladins could barely react to it and got thrown onto the walls really hard, making some of them unconscious.

Rasmus found an opening and dashed toward the demon, imbuing his sword with Aura and lightning. He swung his sword at the demon's back, but to his surprise, the demon turned around and repelled his attack. He was in the open, and the demon used his free hand to punch him right on his chestplate.

Rasmus was thrown onto the other side of the hall and hit the wall really hard. Fortunately, he had imbued his armor with Aura, making the punch less deadly. He groaned in pain as he tried to stand up and watched Xena clash with the demon.

Astrea created a focused ray of light toward the demon's face, and it was enough to hurt the demon. Xena took the opportunity to swing her sword at the demon's head, but the demon stopped her sword with his bare hand. She was shocked, but she immediately threw a left kick to the demon's side, kicking him to the wall.

Rasmus swung his sword rapidly, releasing powerful slash waves of Aura at the demon from the distance. The slash wave ripped and tore the wall of the cave into tiny debris. He immediately cast wind magic to disperse the smoke, but to his surprise, the demon barely had any scratches on his armor.

The demon broke free from the wall and sucked Mana, turning it into demonic energy. Astrea who saw it, didn't hesitate to release a surge of divine energy in the shape of light arrows. She released the light arrows and pierced through the demon's armor, hurting him badly.

Xena charged in and tried to cut the armor, however, even with a strong Aura she used, her sword couldn't pierce through the armor. The demon then grabbed her by the neck and threw her away onto the wall. The demon turned his head toward Astrea, and dashed toward her.

The Paladins blocked his path and swung their swords with all their might, but it was futile. The demon swung his sword horizontally, cutting the paladin's bodies in half, killing them instantly. Paladins were the strongest knights that could be said to be right below Swordmasters in strength and skill, but they were powerless against him.

The Servil's knights took the chance to stab the demon in the back, and it was enough to distract him from Astrea. The demon roared and pushed the knights onto the walls, unable to withstand his overwhelming Aura.

Rasmus didn't hesitate to absorb more Mana into his body and turned it into an extremely dense Aura. He pushed himself beyond his limit, but his vision became blurry and dizzy at the same time. He gritted his teeth as he kept absorbing Mana into his body, but this time he turned it into sparks of lightning to keep him awake and focused.

The sparks appeared all over his armor, and with every move he made, sparks were released around him. He dashed toward the demon, creating a massive crater on the ground and a strong shockwave of Aura that cracked the ground, walls, and ceiling. He swung his sword down vertically with all his might at the demon.

When the demon blocked Rasmus's attack, the demon's sword shattered into pieces, and oddly enough, the shattered pieces floated because of the magnetic field because of the sparks that Rasmus released. The demon knew that he wouldn't be able to survive from the attack, and there was nothing he could do.

Rasmus's sword cut through the demon's head and down to the crotch like cutting air. For the others, it all happened in the blink of an eye from the moment Rasmus cracked his surroundings to the point of him cutting the demon in half.

The demon fell to his knees, then his body got split in half, revealing the body inside the armor. Astrea created a divine barrier around the hall, preventing the demon from leaving. She then shrunk the barrier until she managed to seal the demon within the barrier like a cage.

"Die you evil creature!" Astrea screamed as she glared at the demon inside the cage of divine energy and clasped her hands tightly.

The demon resisted while the cage was shrinking and tried to kill him. The cage struggled to contain the demon as the demon tried to reach out his long fingers. The demon growled in pain and glared at Astrea with anger and hatred. The growl was enough to make Servil's knights faint.

As soon as the cage shrunk, it exploded and turned into light particles. Rasmus couldn't find the demon everywhere, and he didn't feel his presence anymore. The earthquake stopped, and Novia immediately ran toward Astrea to protect her.

"He ran away..." Astrea collapsed to her knees. "But he should be heavily injured, and nothing can help him... he will die because of the injury... I hope..." she muttered.

Rasmus released the Aura and the lightning within his body, releasing a powerful shockwave. If Novia didn't create a Mana barrier, Astrea and her would get hurt by that shockwave. Rasmus then lost consciousness and collapsed to the ground.

"Count!" Novia shouted as she ran toward Rasmus to check his condition.

Astrea slowly turned around and stared at the statue of the three-eyed man.

"We will hunt you down... God will not let you do as you pleases..." Astrea muttered under her breath as she clenched her fists.

Chapter 225 - 225: Formidable.

"His body is really stiff like a rock..." Astrea put her hands on Rasmus's body as she healed the internal wounds in his body. "His injuries, I have never felt anything like it. It's like his whole body is clenching."

"Those sparks that appeared around him back then. If a human body is being electrocuted repeatedly and rapidly, their bodies are stiffened," Novia explained as she looked at Rasmus, who was unconscious.

"He did that on purpose? Why?" Astrea glanced at Novia with a confused look.

"I'm not sure either," Novia shook her head, not understanding the reason behind Rasmus's decision to electrocute himself. "He's a genius, and I can confidently say he's the greatest mage in this era. If we want to know why, he's the only one who can answer our question. However, one thing that I know is that no humans can handle or endure that amount of lightning within their bodies. He's an Orthias, and it's the only reason he could withstand it," she continued as she noticed the Mana depletion in Rasmus's body.

Astrea looked to her left at the Servil's knights who were carrying the dead bodies of the Paladins. She was heartbroken to see people die in her stead because she was a Saint. Deep down, she always hated it when people died for her because she believed they undervalued their lives.

"Lady Xena, how are you feeling?" Novia looked at Xena, who had just woken up.

Xena looked down at her armor and noticed fractures in it. She didn't remember anything after that demon threw her onto the wall. She was lucky to be alive because that throw was enough to crush a human body into pulp.

"I'm fine..." Xena answered as she stared at Rasmus, lying on the table, unconscious. "Is he okay?" She approached Rasmus at the table and looked at him from up close.

"He should be okay. He just needs some rest..." Astrea answered as she removed her hands from Rasmus's body. "Let me check your body one more time," she said as she reached out her hand toward Xena.

Xena placed her hand on Astrea's palm as she nodded and lowered her head. Astrea began to use her divine power and placed divine energy into Xena's body. It didn't take long until Astrea removed her hand from Xena.

"You're exhausted. I can heal your fatigue, but it's better for you to recover it yourself by resting," Astrea said with a gentle smile.

"I'll do that, Your Holiness..." Xena nodded and took a seat.

Novia explained to Xena about what happened after she fainted during the fight. Xena looked at the dead bodies of the Paladins and her knights. She felt responsible for their deaths because she could have prevented them from dying if only she hadn't fainted back then.

Astrea assured Xena that it wasn't her fault or anyone's fault. Everyone was too weak to be able to survive against that demon. It was all because of Rasmus that they were still alive and safe.

"He's a formidable swordsman and mage. I have to admit that I'm not even close to his level, and I believe he's on par with Lady Uriel," Xena said as she rubbed her arm and stared at Rasmus. "And I can see that he's still growing. I also sense that he has no limitations because of his lineage."

Astrea and Novia looked at Rasmus for a moment as they processed Xena's words.

"We should destroy this place, Your Holiness. This abomination needs to be destroyed and erased from this world," Novia suggested as she stared at the cave they were in.

"Yes, but we need to take all these records. We need to learn everything that they have done and all the secrets they have," Astrea looked at the bookshelves thoroughly.

"I have my storage ring with me, Your Holiness. I can take everything into the ring, and we can leave this place immediately," Novia showed the ring on her ring finger to Astrea.

Astrea nodded and let Novia store all the records in the room. Once Novia stored all the records, she left magic formations on the walls and the ground.

"We have checked the remaining areas in the cave, and there's nothing else. I guess it's time for you to destroy this place, Lady Novia," Astrea said and stared at the cave mouth.

Novia nodded and activated all the magic formations that she had left in the cave. The cave exploded and collapsed after she blew it up with powerful fire magic. She made sure everything exploded into tiny debris, especially the three-eyed statue.

The cave was completely shut by boulders which should have been impossible for anyone to enter. Even if anyone could get rid of the boulders, there was nothing left inside, so it would be a waste of time.

Once they made sure the cave was completely destroyed, they left the forest and went back to the capital city. They got valuable information that they could share with Rasmus and Thalior.

...

They arrived in the capital city and went straight to the royal palace. They left and arrived at the city unnoticed by anyone except for Thalior.

Thalior watched as the knights carried the bodies of the paladins and Servil's knights from the carriage. When he saw Rasmus's body being carried by a Paladin, his eyes were wide open, and he hurriedly walked toward them.

"He's fine, Your Grace. He's just exhausted," Astrea smiled at Thalior, and knew that he was shocked by Rasmus's condition.

"I see... I thought—" Before Thalior could finish his sentence, something landed right in between him and Astrea.

The shockwave was enough to knock everyone down. Thalior lifted his head, and he was startled by a Paladin that flew right past him. He then saw Aris, standing at the center of the crater she had caused and carrying Rasmus in her arms.

"(How did she...)" Thalior was shocked by Aris's presence. "(She wasn't supposed to be here... Wait... Did she come here because she knew about Rasmus's condition?)" He furrowed his brows.

"(It took us three days to get here in a carriage... How did she come here this fast?)" Thalior stared at Aris, who kept her focus on Rasmus.

"What happened?" Aris stared coldly at Astrea and Novia.

"A powerful demon, stronger than what we had encountered beyond the Blackcliffs, Lady Aris..." Novia answered nervously. "Even with Her Holiness's power, that demon is strong enough to withstand her divine power," she explained.

"And he killed it?" Aris asked.

"The demon escaped... But it was all him, we barely did anything," Xena answered as she got up. "If it wasn't because of him, we wouldn't be here..." she added.

"I tried to kill it, but I failed. The demon is too powerful that even my divine power can't contain it..." Astrea said, feeling guilty of her incapability. "But I'm certain that the demon is dying because I could sense how weak its presence was."

Aris noticed the divine energy that lingered in Rasmus's body, and she got rid of it from him. Astrea who saw it was deeply shocked by Aris's action of removing the divine energy within Rasmus's body.

"Once again, you're being useless..." Aris stared coldly at Novia and Astrea.

Aris walked past Thalior and went straight into the palace to put Rasmus on the bed. Everyone looked at her anxiously because they could sense her killing intent through her gaze. They couldn't imagine what would happen to them if Rasmus ended up badly injured or dying.

"We should be careful next time," Novia said as she looked at Astrea and Thalior. "We don't know why Lady Aris is attached to Rasmus, but it doesn't matter because if we did something to him, she won't stay quiet," she explained with her fists clenched.

"Yes, I didn't expect her to be fond of him. I guess it's because Rasmus is like a miracle in itself. To be born as a human and an Orthias at the same time, there's no record about that ever," Thalior nodded in

agreement as he watched Aris enter the palace. "Let's get you all inside. I believe it's wise for you to rest for now," he looked at Novia, Astrea, and Xena.

"I will rest once I give the fallen knights a proper goodbye, Your Grace. I have to burn them," Xena said as she looked at the bodies on the ground.

"I don't think it's necessary for you to do that, Lady Xena. We aren't in a place where demons lurk around. You can give them a proper burial," Thalior responded with his brows raised.

"No," Xena shook her head. "I don't want to be treated differently, or my knights. It's unfair for those who had to watch their comrades burned to ashes," she explained.

"I understand," Thalior nodded.

Astrea decided not to burn the bodies of the fallen Paladins because she was responsible for bringing their dead bodies back to their families. She made sure that their bodies were preserved and that no demons could touch them. However, she chose to join Xena with Novia to give the fallen Servil's knights a prayer. Thalior decided to join as well while they waited for Rasmus to wake up.

Chapter 226 - 226: On the same page.

Aris put Rasmus down carefully on the bed, and then she glanced over her shoulder, coldly stared at Videl. Videl slowly raised his hands as he walked toward a chair and then sat on it.

"Didn't you say that you'll keep an eye on him?" Aris asked as she turned around and crossed her arms.

"I did," Videl nodded as he crossed his legs and leaned back, making himself comfortable on the chair. "I watched everything, and I let him handle everything since I knew that he could deal with that demon," he explained and stared at Rasmus.

"So? Did you eat that demon?" Aris asked as she sat on the edge of the bed.

"I did. It was quite a catch since it was my first time devouring a demon Duke, and it was all thanks to him. I wouldn't be able to find any of them if it wasn't because of him," Videll smiled as he crossed his arms and stared at Aris.

"Duke? If I remember correctly, they're in the middle?" Aris asked with her brows furrowed.

"Yes, Lesser Demons, Soldiers, Nobles, Dukes, Kings, The Prime Lords, and lastly the Fallen Watcher or the Fallen Angels. One Duke is equal to ten thousand Soldiers in power or one hundred Nobles. Their strength is beyond human, but there are humans who are capable of killing them, especially here in this world," Videll explained, refreshing Aris's memory about the demon hierarchy.

"What about the Kings?" Aris asked out of curiosity.

"Ten Dukes, and I think the strongest humans in this world if work together, they might be able a Demon King," Videll answered with a shrugged mouth. "But the Prime Lords, they're on another different level. They're a hundred times stronger than Demon Kings, they're fallen guardians angels. No humans can hurt them, and there are hundreds of them."

"Maybe the Orthias can deal with the Prime Lords or perhaps on an equal footing with them. However, the Fallen Watchers, they're in a different league. The only one that I can think of is you. You might be on par with them since you're an Aristoria, a rare breed of Orthias," Videll continued as he stared blankly at the ceiling. "However, you said that you're not in your peak form. Something about becoming a dragon?" He raised his brows as he looked at Aris.

"Yes, it will make me ten times or even more stronger than my current self," Aris answered and nodded. "I don't want to talk about it. I want to know what's your rank now after almost a year," she glanced at Videll.

"I was close to becoming a Duke before I devoured the Duke that Rasmus almost killed. Now that I have devoured one, my rank is automatically a Duke since killing one makes you one. However, since I was close from becoming a Duke, you can say that I'm stronger than a single Duke but not stronger than ten Dukes combined," Videll answered and rested his arms on the armsrest.

"And you need to devour nine more Dukes to become a Demon King?" Aris raised her brows.

"Yes, or devour one Demon King, but we know they're hard to find since they're hiding under the Emissaries' wings. Or I can devour a hundred thousand human souls which is the easiest one," Videl answered as he nodded. "It sounds impossible to become one of the Prime Lords, but I was wrong. I even thought that it would be impossible for me to reach where I am right now when Rasmus proposed this idea, but I was wrong, and I have never wrong about anything, just this one time," he said as he stared at Rasmus, amazed and annoyed at the same time.

Aris hummed as she kept staring at Rasmus with a stoic expression.

"I'm curious, you made quite a scene back there. Is there a reason why you acted that way? I thought Orthias didn't dwell on emotions or feelings. What is it that makes him so special in your eyes?" Videl narrowed his eyes and stared at Videl. "You're willingly help him, be by his side, and even protect him," he tilted his head and kept staring at Aris.

"Any Orthias would act similarly as I am if they met with him. He's different from any of us, he's not a human and not an Orthias. I'm just curious as to how far he can grow. Will he become an Orthias? An Aristoria? Or beyond that," Aris answered as she stared at Rasmus's face. "It's just curiosity, and I will do anything to see how far he can grow. I want to be there to see it, and whoever tried to stop him, I'll stop them before they can do it," she added.

"So it's nothing like your predecessor?" Videl raised his brows.

"What do you mean?" Aris glanced at Videl.

"Your predecessor married a human and had a child, and that child is the one over there sleeping next to you," Videl pointed at Rasmus. "She could do it and she did it."

"No," Aris answered without hesitation as she shook her head. "I don't think so," she added.

Videl was intrigued by Aris's answer because she didn't seem to hesitate and said it with confidence as well. He was only teasing her, but now he was interested as to why she didn't see him that way.

"Well, I don't think Rasmus even considers you or anyone as his partner in life. He's not the type to get tied down to someone since he doesn't have anyone he cares about," Videl sighed as he stood up and

approached Rasmus. "Not here... not back then..." he muttered under his breath as he stared down at Rasmus.

"What about you? You're into both men and women. Seeing that you're sticking with him and even though you can be free right now, you choose to stay by his side, why?" Aris asked and stared at Videl, arching her brows.

"Oh, if he heard that, he would kill me," Videl scoffed as he crossed his arms.

"I love to see that," Aris said with a cold and stoic expression, but then showed a faint smirk.

"Joke aside, I choose to stay by his side has something to do with him. Let's just say that I have a similar reasoning as yours. I want to see him thrive and get wherever he wants to be while I protect his back from people who will try to stop him," Videl answered with a serious expression.

"Then we are on the same page," Aris nodded and stared at Rasmus.

"Yeah, we are," Videl nodded in agreement.

Rasmus suddenly groaned and moved his hands slowly toward his face. He felt dizzy, thirsty, and sore all over his body. He fluttered his eyes open and noticed Aris and Videl were staring at him with their brows raised. He furrowed his brows, and didn't expect to see either of them as soon as he woke up.

"Finally, you're waking up. How long are you planning to sleep?" Videl asked. "Do you know that you have been sleeping for three days?"

Aris furrowed her brows as she glanced at Videl, and then she realized that Videl was trying to make fun of Rasmus. She decided to stay quiet and put on a stoic expression as she looked at Rasmus's reaction.

"Three days?" Rasmus was a bit shocked as he tried to sit up.

"Yes, three days," Aris nodded, and decided to play along.

Rasmus looked a bit confused, furrowing his brows as he rubbed his face. He didn't expect to be unconscious for three days, but he brushed it off and slowly got up from the bed. He then noticed the armor he wore, and realized it would be weird to sleep in an armor suit for three days straight.

"I see, so you're going to act like Videl now?" Rasmus slowly turned around to look at Aris with his eyes narrowed.

Aris slowly formed a smile and let out a chuckle, but then Videl began to laugh at Rasmus. They could finally make a fool of him, something extremely rare. Rasmus was unamused by them, but he decided to scoff and shook his head, in disbelief by how childish they were.

"That was fun," Aris said with a smile on her face as she looked at Rasmus.

Chapter 227 - 227: Peace of mind.

"You're awake, Count..." Thalior looked at Rasmus, who was standing at the door. "Where is Lady Aris?" He asked.

"She left already," Rasmus answered as he walked in and looked at Astrea, Novia, and Xena at the table with so many books and scrolls scattered on it. "What did you find?" He asked and joined them.

"Lots of things, and we don't know where to start..." Novia sighed as she looked at the scroll in each hand. "Slavery, corruption, murder, conspiracy, you name it. Everything is here," she put down the scrolls and grabbed another one.

Rasmus looked at the books and the scrolls on the table. Judging by their expressions, it appeared that they hadn't found out about the Saint's body that he had found.

"So, who are they?" Rasmus asked, asking the most important and basic question.

"The Nine Crowns. The core members are the nine kings from the nine kingdoms. They had fifty members, and they were all high-ranking nobles," Xena answered and looked at Rasmus's face, wondering about his condition.

"During the previous war, before South Neva got united, these kingdoms were one of the dominant factions. They also funded the South Neva Union..." Thalior added, his disturbed expression couldn't be hidden. "They were right under our noses..." he sighed.

Rasmus knew there would always be someone in any group who was wicked or corrupted. He then glanced at Astrea, who had been so quiet and stared at the book in her hand.

"Your Holiness? What's the matter?" Rasmus asked.

Astrea didn't show any expression, and yet she was amazed that Rasmus could tell something wasn't right. She took a deep breath and gently put down the book she was holding.

"One of the Cardinals, he was a part of the Nine Crowns..." Astrea answered and stared blankly at the table. "He... Partook in all these sinful deeds during the previous wars," she exhaled deeply as she massaged her nose bridge.

Rasmus glanced at the books beside Astrea's left hand, but she didn't have the courage to look at them. She looked disturbed and shocked, contemplating what she had just discovered.

"Think about Aurelia, Your Holiness. If you want what's best for her, do what you must do," Rasmus said with a serious expression.

Astrea snapped back to reality and immediately thought about Aurelia. She slowly glanced at the books in front of her and realized that Rasmus was right. She had to get rid of all of the evil within the Holy Nation so Aurelia could be a better Saint than her.

"Thank you, Count, for giving me the strength..." Astrea smiled gently at Rasmus. "I will get rid of all evil within the Holy Nation once and for all," she said and slowly reached her hand toward one of the books.

Rasmus didn't respond to her words and focused on gathering information from the others.

After Rasmus listened to Novia, Thalior, and Xena, he found out that there were six other hideouts across South Neva. The Nine Crowns had a lot of branches with different names, and that increased the number of hideouts by multiple times.

"They're everywhere, however, we know most of their locations and it's a good thing," Thalior crossed his arms and watched Xena's knight spread the map on the table. "We can get rid of them while they have no idea that we have found their hideouts."

"The Holy Nation won't be able to give all the support, Your Grace. You should realize by now that even with Her Holiness's help, we could barely kill a demon," Rasmus said and stared at Thalior. "We need a better approach, and right now we don't have any because we still have to focus on the Revolutionary parties," he added.

"You're right, but this is still good news for us. We know where the threat might come from," Thalior nodded in agreement as he marked the places where the hideouts might be.

Suddenly Astrea dropped the book in her hands and she began to breathe heavily. She was in shock by the look of her expression, making everyone confused and worried. She tried to stand up, but her legs were too weak and made her collapse to the chair again.

"Your Holiness?!" Thalior hurriedly walked around the table and stood beside Astrea. "Your Holiness, what's the matter? Are you okay?" He asked, but he didn't dare to touch her.

Novia and Xena stood beside Astrea, looking at her with a confused look on their faces. Rasmus, on the other hand, stayed still and stared at her from his seat.

"I need..." Astrea cleared her throat and held the book tightly. "I need some time alone," she said as she tried to stand up.

Rasmus got up from his chair and approached Astrea. He offered his hand to her since nobody dared to touch her.

Astrea looked up at Rasmus and took his hand to help her stand up. She excused herself and then left the room with Rasmus escorting her.

"What did you read, Your Holiness?" Rasmus asked, keeping his eyes to the front.

"Something that would shake the whole world..." Astrea answered as she looked at the book in her hand.

"Something about the previous war? Or something that happened during that time?" Rasmus asked.

"Yes, that Cardinal. He was the one behind it," Astrea said coldly, suppressing her anger.

Rasmus wondered if it was about the Saint's body that he found in the lake. He didn't want to reveal it to Astrea since it would blow up one of his plans.

"We have arrived, Your Holiness," Rasmus stood in front of the door.

Astrea looked at the door and then looked at Rasmus.

"Would you like to have tea with me, Count?" Astrea asked as she stared into Rasmus's eyes.

Rasmus noticed the uneasiness in Astrea's eyes. She looked scared, worried, and angry at the same time. However, the obvious thing that was visible was fear.

"Yes, Your Holiness," Rasmus nodded and opened the door for Astrea.

Astrea's personal maids were preparing the tea while Astrea and Rasmus sat on the couch. She never averted her gaze on the book she was holding, and she didn't want to let go of it.

"I'm not the right person to give any kind of comfort, Your Holiness," Rasmus said and watched the maid put the cups on the coffee table.

"If I'm looking for comfort, I won't be looking for you, Count," Astrea smiled faintly as she stared at Rasmus. "The reason why I invited you over for a cup of tea is because I wanted to hear your opinion, Count. I want to know what you think about this whole thing, the demons, the false prophet, the powerful being..." she stared blankly at the table with her brows raised.

"It's a cycle of life," Rasmus answered and watched the maid pour the tea into the cups. "Humans aren't the first to live in this place, and humans aren't the last either. What's come must go. You might think it sounds absurd or pessimistic, but I'm not saying that this moment might be the end of humankind. Perhaps this is a trial to see how far humankind can go rather than God condemn humankind to extinct from this," he explained as he took the teacup and took a sip of it.

"What are you trying to imply here, Count? Are you trying to say that I should let it flow while I'm doing the best I can or are you trying to say that I have to tread carefully and plan everything for every breath I'm going to take?" Astrea raised her brows, leaning back and making herself comfortable.

"Which one do you prefer, Your Holiness? Every choice has its own consequences. The choice is always yours, it always is and it always be," Rasmus answered with a smile. "What I'm trying to imply is that it's impossible to drink three cups of tea at the same time no matter how skilled you are. Take one cup at a time, Your Holiness," he added and took a sip of his tea.

"That sounds soothing to hear, but do you really think that I can do something like that, Count? Prioritizing one thing while letting the other things wait in the back of my head? It's as you said, every choice has its own consequences, but I don't know what's the best choice is," Astrea scoffed and smiled as if she was mocking her incapability.

"Best choice for who or for what kind of situation, Your Holiness? Pick one and then pick the other best choice once you're done with the first choice you made," Rasmus responded and put the teacup on the table.

"I don't know, Count... I really don't know..." Astrea shook her head, smiling pitifully at herself.

"If that's the case, why are you wasting your time thinking about it, Your Holiness?" Rasmus raised his brows. "Sleep over it, calm your mind, and be free for a moment," he said as he got up.

Astrea watched Rasmus stand up with a confused look, her brows furrowed and her head slightly tilted.

"What you need isn't someone to have a tea with. All you need is a peace of mind. Something that nobody can give but yourself, Your Holiness," Rasmus said calmly and gave a gentle smile at Astrea. "Have a good day, Your Holiness," he bowed his head and walked toward the door.

"You said that you're not the type who gives comfort, Count. I guess you were wrong," Astrea looked at Rasmus. "Thank you, Count. Good day to you too," she added and smiled at him.

Rasmus nodded and left the room quietly.

Chapter 228 - 228: A graceful dagger.

Two days had passed, and it was time for everyone to go back to where they should be. Rasmus, Novia, and Thalior were about to go back to the north side. It was also the time for Astrea to proceed with the plan that they had agreed on, to bring the Revolutionary parties that were against the other parties that had sided with the demons to their side. Xena would accompany Astrea since she could be said as a neutral party in South Neva.

"Count," Astrea approached Rasmus before he got into the carriage.

"Your Holiness," Rasmus bowed his head at Astrea.

"I took your advice, and it didn't help," Astrea chuckled as she crossed her arms. "However, it steeled my heart even though my mind still think that there might be better choices out there," she continued as she looked up at the sky with a smile on her face. "Thank you, Count, I really mean it," she slowly looked down and stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"I have done nothing for you, Your Holiness, but I also have done enough for you," Rasmus responded as he nodded.

Astrea furrowed her brows, observing Rasmus's expression for a few seconds.

"How can you be so humble and understanding while at the same time you can be so overbearing and harsh. Which one is the real you?" Astrea asked with her eyes narrowed.

"There are two sides of a coin. You can't get rid one because it's no longer the same coin," Rasmus answered and showed a faint smile at her. "I treat people appropriately, Your Holiness. That's all I can say," he continued.

"Appropriately, huh? That's an interesting way to say it," Astrea chuckled and smiled at Rasmus. "Well then, Count, have a safe trip, may God protect you," she bowed her head and then walked away.

Rasmus bowed his head slightly and watched Astrea walk back to the palace with the Paladins. He then walked into the carriage and left the city with Thalior and Novia.

Astrea and Xena, with fifty Paladins behind them, went to the Mildferd Kingdom to meet with the Revolutionary parties. They rode horses, and even Astrea rode a horse rather than using a carriage because she didn't want to be seen as an envoy. By doing so, she also made herself equal to the Paladins and Xena rather than being superior if she sat in the carriage.

Astrea's appearance in the Mildferd Kingdom shocked all the revolutionary parties. The revolutionary knights didn't dare to do anything to her even though they had prepared to wage war against the Alliance and the South Neva Union.

The barricades they had made around the capital city were useless against Astrea. The revolutionary knights watched her, and the Paladins entered the city without any problem.

Once they entered the capital city, the people couldn't believe their eyes. They tried to get near Astrea, but the knights prevented them from getting near the street. She waved and smiled at them, showing no hostility toward the revolutionary parties.

"Your Holiness, my name is Herden, I'm one of the commanders of the revolutionary army. I'm here to escort you to the palace, Your Holiness," an old man in full plate armor said as he went down to one knee in front of Astrea's horse.

"Please, tell your leaders that they don't have to prepare anything. We came here to have a talk; perhaps a cup of tea would be sufficient," Astrea smiled at Herden.

Herden bowed his head and told the knight to convey Astrea's message to their leaders. He then escorted them to the palace, making sure nobody blocked the roads.

Astrea and Xena entered the throne room and saw the three revolutionary parties' leaders waiting for them. The leaders lowered their heads once they were in the presence of Astrea. They walked to the side and guided her and Xena to the table.

They introduced themselves to Astrea and Xena in a humble and respectful way. Yagesliv, Bornalis, and Durant were their names, however, Astrea already knew about them from Xena.

"I can see that the people here are living peacefully, and most importantly is they're living happily," Astrea said and watched her Paladin pour the tea into her cup. "But that's not why we came here, and I believe you might have realized it by now of our sudden visit," she looked at the three leaders across the table.

"We don't dare to assume your visit, Your Holiness," Durant said as he lowered his head.

"A treaty. I came here not as an envoy, but rather someone who wants nothing but to avoid unnecessary suffering of humankind," Astrea said with a gentle voice.

The three leaders looked at each other and didn't expect to hear something like that. They didn't know how to react to that proposal.

"We are here because we don't want those demons to corrupt humankind. Since we have heard that all of you are against the other parties that have decided to side with the emissary and the demons, I believe we can put our differences aside, and let us through so we can prevent them from growing stronger," Astrea said in a calm and soothing voice.

The leaders understood Astrea's intention for saying those words. However, they were one of the many who had decided to turn their backs against humanity. They had raised their weapons, killed many lives, and forcefully took away the peace from those who were innocent.

"What would happen to us once you did that, Your Holiness? What would happen once you got rid of them?" Bornalis asked.

"Would you die for something that you believed in?" Astrea asked back, her gaze was soft and her voice was gentle.

The three of them were confused by her question because it sounded like a threat, but they believed it was nothing like that. They looked at each other once again, thinking about the question thoroughly.

"Would you compromise your ideals in exchange for something greater? Because His Grace, Duke Thalior Ardentis is willing to compromise his ideals in exchange for the future of South Neva," Astrea said with a serious expression.

"Your Holiness?" Yagesliv tilted his head with his brows furrowed, staring at Astrea with a confused look.

"Duke Thalior is willing to give the three of you land to rule. Something like us, the Servil faction," Xena answered with a straight face. "You can build your own land, to have authority and the freedom to do so."

"In exchange to what, Lady Xena?" Durant asked.

"In exchange for you to let go of this nation and the other two nations that you occupied," Xena answered without hesitation. "This land isn't yours, the nobles you thrown away, the royal family that you took away, not all of them are in the wrong or deserve this," she continued.

They knew they couldn't do it, not after everything they had been through. They didn't want to compromise their ideals and goals after so many people died for the cause and fell victim to the cause. They had killed and watched their own people got killed for the position they were in at the moment.

"That's why I asked would you die for something you believed in. Would you let everyone die knowing that you wouldn't stand a chance against them?" Astrea asked, her voice had a hint of concern and sadness. "How far would you go before you admit it's enough?" She frowned and stared at them with sympathy.

The leaders lowered their heads, Astrea's words cutting through their hearts, bringing the unbearable guilt and future regrets that they couldn't bear. They didn't know what to say or what to think, they were in a deep dilemma that they began to see that they were the ones in the wrong.

"I understand it's hard for you to choose. It's no longer about what's right or wrong, it's more about what you should do and what you couldn't do," Astrea said with a gentle smile, understanding their dilemma.

"Your Holiness, are we a sinner?" Durant asked, his voice soft and quiet.

"Yes, you all are. You have killed people who have nothing to do with you or cause you any suffering. You killed knights and militia, you have caused their families to suffer, to hate you, to cause them pain and sadness. The children of theirs are grieving, praying to God that you and those who caused their pain to be punished," Astrea answered without hesitation as she nodded.

The leaders's chests were squeezed by the words that came out of the Saint.

"But I'm not God nor do I condemn you for all the bad deeds you have done. God is the one who decides if you deserve an eternal punishment or not. I don't know if what you have done is the right thing to do or not. I'm not here to judge your deeds, I'm here to prevent anyone from doing what God despise," Astrea continued with a calm and gentle voice.

"You have achieved this far, and you are heard," Xena said as she stared at the leaders across from her. "Is it really a waste of those who have sacrificed themselves to give up your position here where you can start a new journey as rulers in a vacant land? Without them, we wouldn't be here, offering you a choice, a solution, and a way to redeem yourself and prove yourself at the same time. You have shed enough blood, how many more do you wish to see?" She asked.

The three leaders lifted their heads, staring each other in the eyes.

"Their struggle won't go in vain, that's the truth," Xena said with a serious expression.

"We will think about it, Your Holiness, Lady Xena. We need time to decide, and we have to discuss this with everyone," Bornalis said.

"Of course, we understand. It's not only your ideals, it's everyone who follow you," Astrea smiled gently at them as she nodded. "Please, take your time," she said as she stood up. "May God be with you," she said and then left the room with Xena.

Chapter 229 - 229: Rejoin.

The news was heard by Thalior and the Alliance about the revolutionary parties that Xena and Astrea visited. They heard that the parties accepted the treaty, letting the South Neva Union and the Servil faction advance to the west of South Neva.

Rasmus and the others were summoned to the meeting hall by Thalior. Uriel had been staying in the palace since she arrived and had extended the border. There were two Archbishops that Astrea sent to assist the South Neva Union army as well.

Archbishop Pavius and Archbishop Theresa were the ones that Astrea entrusted to the South Neva Union. They possessed a lot of divine energy, so that they were qualified to become Cardinals. They were one step closer to becoming Cardinals, which meant they were no ordinary Archbishops.

"Lady Xena will join us in taking down the Ederlyn Kingdom. The reason is because of the route as you can see here on the map," Thalior pointed at the map and tapped his finger on it.

The Ederlyn Kingdom was on the north side of the continent. There were two nations behind it that weren't that far, the Rumansia Kingdom, and the Wieldon Kingdom. The reason that the Servil faction joined the South Neva Union forces was that they could immediately attack the Rumansia Kingdom, which was to the southwest of the Ederlyn Kingdom.

It was all because of the parties that had decided to accept the treaty. The route was blocked because they didn't want anyone to go through their territories. Thalior and Xena respected their concerns, which was why Xena took the north route with the South Neva Union.

"As we know, the Alliance doesn't have enough force to invade the revolutionary forces on their own. Once the Servil faction occupied the Rumansia Kingdom, they would go all the way to the south and ambush the Regnide Republic with the Alliance army," Thalior dragged his finger down on the map and tapped the Regnide Republic territory.

Everyone looked at the map as they nodded with understanding.

"Lady Uriel, we would like you to help us from here on out," Thalior looked at Uriel with a serious expression. "You have heard about the thing that Her Holiness, Lady Novia, and Count Blackheart had encountered. We would expect something similar to be there in every nation that the revolutionary parties occupied," he explained as he rested his hands on the table, staring down at the map.

"Yes, I understand, Your Grace. I will let my trusted knights guard the borders," Uriel said and nodded.

Thalior nodded and then pulled out a scroll from his attire. He slid the scroll over to Rasmus as he kept his eyes on Rasmus. He didn't say a word, and Rasmus didn't need to hear anything from him as well, as he took the scroll and read it.

The scroll contained the coordinates of the hideouts that they extracted from the records. There were six of them along the route to the Ederlyn Kingdom, and Thalior wanted Rasmus and his team to deal with them.

"Can you do it, Count? Have you recovered?" Thalior asked.

"Is this a request or an order, Your Grace?" Rasmus stared at Thalior as he put down the scroll.

Thalior almost forgot why Rasmus had decided to join the cause of waging war against the revolutionary parties. It reminded him that Rasmus wasn't an ally, but rather a man who had the same goal as him.

"It's a request, Count," Thalior answered. "We will give you what you want later on, Count," he continued with a serious expression.

"I didn't expect you to say something like that, Your Grace. I would do it for free, no matter if it was a request or an order, but to hear that you would give something in return, it's not bad," Rasmus said with a smile on his face.

Thalior could only nod, he didn't want to think about it anymore because no matter what, he would fall for Rasmus's trap. He was grateful enough because Rasmus would take care of the hideouts of the demonic cult.

"Is there anything that anyone wants to ask?" Thalior looked at Novia, Rasmus, Uriel, and the Archbishops.

"Do we have any information about the location of the emissary, Your Grace? I know that we might be able to win this war against the revolutionary army, but what if the emissary has decided to join the fight, catching us off guard?" Novia asked with her hand raised. "Since they have decided to join the demons, we can assume that they're going to ask for their help. I don't think they would hide it anymore," she continued.

"That's a good observation, but we don't know anything about the emissary's whereabouts. We might or we might not encounter them," Thalior rubbed his chin, staring at the map to make a guess of Kiel's location.

Rasmus didn't know where Kiel was, and Videl's information about Kiel's location was outdated as well. He couldn't trust that information anymore, and not to mention there was another emissary that Thalior and the other didn't know about, Yaza, the so-called leader of the Fallen Watcher.

"If I were them, Your Grace, I would put myself in a place where the enemy is at their weakest," Uriel pointed out. "And we all know where it is, and especially when Her Holiness is over there as well. Hitting two birds with one stone," she continued.

Thalior crossed his arms, thinking about the possibility of Kiel planning to attack the Alliance and to take care of Astrea. Doubts began to appear, and everyone was worried about it as well except for Rasmus.

"All we can do right now is send a message to Her Holiness, unless you want to go there, Commander Uriel?" Thalior looked at Uriel with his brows raised.

"I'll follow your command, Your Grace," Uriel said without hesitation.

"Let's discuss this matter later, for now, let's continue our discussion," Thalior said as he sighed and stared at the map once again.

"When are we going to move?" Rasmus asked.

"Two days. We will bring 5,000 soldiers with us, and we will rest for two days there before we continue our invasion of the Wieldon Kingdom. We have to make sure that there are no towns and villages that have demons hiding there. We will hunt them down, all of them," Thalior answered as he stared at the map.

"We have to bother Your Excellencies for this part," Thalior looked at Pavius and Theresa as he bowed his head.

"Please, Your Grace, we will do whatever it takes to get rid of evil," Pavius answered with a gentle smile, his eyes closed, showing his wrinkles on the sides of his eyes.

"Her Holiness entrusted the task to us, and we can't disappoint Her Holiness," Theresa bowed her head at Thalior.

Rasmus got up from his chair and excused himself before the meeting ended.

"Count?" Thalior furrowed his brows, watching Rasmus walk toward the door.

"I'm not going to wait two days, I'll be going tonight with Aris and Javi to get rid of all of the hideouts. You will find us in one of the towns near the capital city of the Wieldon Kingdom," Rasmus looked over his shoulder at Thalior and then left the room.

Thalior sighed as he sat down, however, he continued to explain the plans to the others.

Rasmus went to the stable to pick horses for him, Javi, and Aris. However, he didn't need to choose for them since they both came to him as soon as he left the palace. Not only them, Videl also came in the appearance of a woman in her early twenties.

"We already know everything, you don't have to tell us anything," Aris said as she looked at the horses on the sides. "And Videl is going to tag along from now on. His master is in the Wieldon Kingdom, so he's going to devour him personally," she walked toward the white horse and gently brushed its jaw.

"Is that so?" Rasmus stared at Videl.

"What? You don't miss me? Or are you enjoying your time without me around?" Videl crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes at Rasmus. "I know for sure your journey without me was boring since Aris can't even have a proper conversation," she continued as she stared at Aris.

"It was good while it lasted," Rasmus sighed and chose a black horse that seemed to act docile toward him.

Aris scoffed as she glanced at Videl, laughing at her. Javi still couldn't believe what he was witnessing, two Orthias and a mysterious man who mocked each other whenever they had the chance.

"Just you two wait..." Videl walked past Rasmus and approached a random horse for herself. "Once I regain my power, I'll treat you two like toys..." she chuckled mischievously.

Javi tried to not involve himself in the conversation and approached the furthest horse in the stable. He saw a brown horse and decided to take it for himself.

Once they put on their armor and put the saddles on their horses, they rode their horses. Rasmus looked at the map and marked the coordinates based on the information on the scroll.

"Everyone ready?" Rasmus looked over his shoulder.

They all nodded, and then Rasmus led them out of the city.

Chapter 230 - 230: Perish.

Rasmus stopped his horse and looked at the hills in front of him. He looked around and saw nothing but vast, peaceful land. He looked down at the map and made sure he went to the right coordinates.

"There's no need to recheck, it's here," Videl said as she stopped her horse beside Rasmus. "It's on that hill over there. The demonic energy is quite weak," she pointed at the third hill from the left.

Rasmus hummed as he stored the map in the ring and led his group toward the hill that Videl pointed at. It was nice to have Videl around since she could find demonic energy better than Aris, and to have someone else who could deal with powerful demons would make this task a lot easier.

They found a small village in the distance behind the hill where Videl was pointing. Rasmus looked over his shoulder at Javi, and Javi responded with a nod and got down from his horse. Javi disappeared into the night, leaving no trace of his presence.

"Do you know where Kiel and Yaza are?" Rasmus looked at Videl, who was cleaning her nails.

"Hmm..." Videl looked up at the sky, her expression blank. She suddenly squinted her eyes as if she were staring at an invisible monitor. "I'm not sure. I'll ask my minions once we are in the capital city."

"You're thinking about what Novia said? Back there?" Videl raised her brows and stared at Rasmus. "I know that they have mules in every rank, including amongst the Alliance army, so it's not impossible for Kiel and Yaza to make a move," she continued.

"Uriel will be there to assist Astrea, and that should be enough to make them rethink their decision," Rasmus responded as he caressed the horse's mane.

"You don't want the demonic army to grow stronger, so why don't we infiltrate their most important territory to shift their focus?" Aris raised her brows and looked at Rasmus.

Rasmus thought about the suggestion that Aris gave and considered the risks and consequences.

"It's not a bad idea, you know?" Videl pointed out as she glanced at Rasmus. "Why don't we put all the Fallen Watchers into one place? We are capable of kicking Kiel and Yaza out of South Neva," she continued.

"I know that you both are capable, but the issue isn't that we are capable or not, Videl. Your identity, my identity, her identity. If they find out that you, the Devil, are here and working with me, and I'm the one who's pretending to be their ally, it will destroy our cover," Rasmus explained with a serious expression. "We can move freely right now because they're unaware, not because we are capable," he continued.

Videl almost forgot that they were both being hunted by Satan and the rest of the demons. They were the key for Satan to gain favor from God, and it would make them lose the bet with God as well.

"Unless I do it on my own, you two won't have to worry about that thing you're talking about," Aris suggested as she stared at Rasmus.

"Is she capable of fighting both of them?" Rasmus turned to look at Videl.

"Her? With that weapon, I don't think they stand a chance. Not to mention they're still weak," Videl answered with confidence.

Rasmus thought about it, but Javi came back and landed behind him. He decided to put it aside for a moment and let Javi report what he found in the village.

"It's similar to what we found at the mountain, but something is different there. It appears that the possessed and the Corrupted are fighting against each other because of food," Javi informed as he looked at the three of them.

"That's our chance to kill them while they're busy with each other," Rasmus said as he pulled out his sword.

They nodded and followed Rasmus to the village. Once they were close to the village, they could see dried blood on the ground and dried blood trails into the village.

Javi informed the number of the possessed and the Corrupted in the village. He also pointed out their location in the village, making it easy for Rasmus and the others to hunt them down.

Rasmus, Videl, and Aris moved cautiously, keeping to the shadows as they approached the outskirts of the village. The air was thick with tension, and the distant sounds of conflict echoed through the night.

The possessed were busy cutting the corpses of the villagers before they shared them with the others. They didn't realize that they were being watched from the shadows. They were too focused on the meat in front of them.

Once they shared the meat, they heard a loud thud sound from behind. Before they could turn around, their bodies collapsed, and they saw their lower halves still standing while they were on the ground. They realized that they were cut in half without them knowing the person who did it to them.

They slowly looked up and saw Rasmus and Aris, standing still, staring down at them with a cold gaze, but then they felt their spines and brains being pulled out forcefully. It was painful, and yet they couldn't scream for help. The pain felt like an eternity until they lost consciousness for a moment.

They saw nothing but pitch black around them, and they couldn't feel anything, not even their limbs. It felt like a dream, but suddenly they felt heat sipping through their invisible bodies. The heat became hotter and hotter, making them all scream in pain in the dark.

Suddenly, the pitch black surroundings turned dark red. They didn't know what happened while they were being tormented by the heat. Slowly but surely, the dark red they saw formed into a massive glowing red eye. The eye was so big that it looked like the ocean and the sky combined, and they were under them.

They screamed their lungs out until they heard voices coming from within them. The voices were all saying the same thing, the words that shocked them.

"My Liege! Forgive us!"

"We will never betray you again!"

"We will serve you for eternity!"

The eye glared at them until they noticed they were no longer living beings. They didn't have a physical body, only translucent light. They looked to their left and saw grotesque and terrifying creatures, blowing on their knees.

They realized those things were the demons that possessed their bodies. They slowly looked up and saw the eyes staring right into their souls, and the feeling of being ripped apart began to overwhelm them.

Their screams and pain faded away as they began to lose themselves. They were placed in a world where they were no longer alive or dead. They had lost their existence and yet still existed in a place where every world rejected them. They never thought that they had the fear of not getting salvation, and that the God they had heard about so often didn't come to save them.

"Hmm, not bad..." Videl stared at the shadowy figures in front of her after she devoured the souls and the demons from those bodies. "More minions for me, thanks," she chuckled as she stared at Rasmus and Aris wiping their swords clean from the blood while Javi kept his eyes on the village from the roof.

"Can you use your usual appearance?" Aris asked as she stared coldly at Videl.

"Why? Am I too pretty? You're jealous, aren't you?" Videl smirked playfully, playing with her long wavy black hair.

Aris rolled her eyes and decided to ignore Videl, regretting her choice to speak to her. She then swung her sword and looked up at Javi with her brows raised, asking him where the rest of the possessed and the Corrupted were. Javi pointed at the north side of the village, and then he jumped from one building to another to guide them.

Rasmus and Aris hunted all the possessed silently, unnoticed by the others, even though the village was small. They took down dozens of the possessed in less than five minutes without making a sound while Videl took care of the rest by devouring the souls and the demons within the bodies.

They all stood on top of the roof and saw the Corrupted gather around a person. The person looked so old that he had no flesh under his skin, only bones and veins that popped under it.

"Huh, that's interesting," Videl muttered as she stared at the old man. "That guy is a warlock, and he's not being possessed by a demon as well," she pointed out.

"A human controlling the Corrupted?" Rasmus furrowed his brows, watching the warlock sit still with the staff made of human bones on his lap.

"I wonder as well..." Videl nodded.

Aris tapped Rasmus's shoulder to get his attention.

"I want to show you something. This is the final form of using an Aura. I want you to keep an eye on them," Aris said as she put down her sword and stared at the group of Corrupted.

The three of them stared at Aris and then glanced at the group of Corrupted. They didn't blink their eyes and kept staring at them until suddenly everything around the Corrupted got disintegrated into dust, including the Corrupted and the warlock. It happened in an instant, and they had no idea what was happening, and not to mention, Aris did it from a far distance.

"Now imagine if a dragon did it. A dragon the size of a mountain with ten times more power than me to do something like this," Aris said as she looked at Rasmus. "If a dragon wants this world to perish, it could do it in a single night," she continued as she stared into Rasmus's eyes.