

Evil 461

Chapter 461 - 461: The one that's feared.

Rasmus was standing still in the middle of the hallway, his eyes focused on the people in front of him. Lazarus, Arthor, and Nior were on their way to the main hall while Rasmus was on his way to leave the palace. There was only silence, no words were exchanged, and none of them were trying to avoid this situation.

"You have recovered, young man?" Lazarus asked, his hands behind his back.

"Recovered?" Rasmus asked.

"Yes, everyone in the palace knew what happened to you. Your previous room, it's still covered in ice and nothing could melt it," Lazarus answered, his eyes stayed on Rasmus' eyes.

Rasmus didn't know that everyone knew what had happened to him because Aris didn't mention that at all. He had just woken up from his sleep not too long ago, and he was trying to get some fresh air after what he had been through.

"Yes, I just needed a bit of rest. Thank you for your concern," Rasmus answered.

Lazarus smiled softly as he nodded with understanding.

"Do you care to join us at the main hall? I remember you promised us valuable information," Lazarus asked with his brows raised slightly.

Rasmus closed his eyes and nodded with understanding as he moved to the side to let Lazarus, Arthor, and Nior walk past him. When Lazarus bowed his head out of respect, Arthor and Nior followed suit. Rasmus then followed them from behind without saying a word, without making a noise, and without any presence.

Lazarus glanced to the corner of his eyes, noticing how Rasmus hid his presence and his footwork was like an assassin. He found out that Rasmus unconsciously did all that out of habit.

When they entered the main hall, everyone was already there, waiting for Lazarus. However, they didn't expect to see Rasmus join them because they only knew that he was unconscious. Even in the face of powerful figures from four continents, Rasmus was as calm as always.

"Count, we heard that you were unwell," Aurelia looked at Rasmus, a bit anxious to have him in the same room as everyone else.

"Yes, it has been happening a lot. It's not the first time I was unconscious for days," Rasmus answered as he pulled the chair. "That's unimportant right now. I'm here to fulfill my promise," he said as he sat down and made himself comfortable on the chair, unbothered by the cold gazes toward him.

Everyone looked at each other then looked at Lenin since she was the one who summoned everyone. Not long after that, Carrion, Serena, Erlina, and Aris came into the hall. Aurelia had prepared a spot for Serena to sit beside her, however, Serena chose to sit beside Rasmus. Aris was sitting on the chair beside Rasmus as well while Carrion and Erlina chose to sit beside Serena.

Rasmus looked at Aris, and didn't expect to see her join the table. Aris didn't need to say a word and only used her eyes to answer his question. She came because she found out that he was brought into the hall, and she decided to join Serena and Erlina.

"Thank you everyone, for coming. Our discussion was postponed three days ago because we had to welcome Count Blackheart and his companions," Lenin said as she pulled out the reports from her spatial ring. "There have been more reports in the past three days. The most devastating one is that the Ruzia Empire has fallen, along with three other nations around her," she revealed.

Everyone mourned for a moment to pray for the fallen soldiers and all the lives that were taken. For Lazarus, Arthor, Nior, and Monica, it wasn't surprising because they had witnessed nations fall in just a matter of days before during their battle against the demons. The others on the other hand, they could see the clock above their heads that they were running out of time or had so little time to prepare before the demons knocked on the front door.

"The time is ticking ladies and gentlemen," Lenin said as she stood up and fixed her robe and looked at everyone at the table. "We have lost one continent, and to lose another, it will be a disaster, a loss in opportunity in defeating the enemy of humankind," she said with a serious expression.

"We are still in a preparation stage, and we are definitely not ready for what's to come. Less and less power that we have here while at the same time the enemy gains more and more power. We need your experience in this, Lord Arthor, Elder Lazarus, and Saint Moriganne because all of you have faced this crisis before while we are all inexperienced in this," Lenin said and looked at those figures with a concern written on her face.

Arthor nodded with understanding and decided to share what everyone experienced in the north. He warned everyone about danger that none of them could imagine, and how powerless they were even with the help of Orthias. On the other hand, Rasmus' mind was somewhere else, he wasn't facing at the table like everyone did, he was facing sideways with a troubled expression because he was still trying to understand the power within him and the past he saw when Aristoria received the Overlord's power.

Eveline glanced at Rasmus and noticed that he wasn't paying attention. She was the only one that seemed vocal in disliking Rasmus after what she found out.

"Count Blackheart, if you're uninterested in this discussion, you might leave," Eveline said with a serious and cold expression.

Everyone went silent suddenly, looking at Eveline's expression before they turned to look at Rasmus who was deep in thought. Monica looked at Rasmus, and she also began to question the man that taught her. Everyone else, they were waiting for Rasmus to say anything because they wanted to hear his answer.

"I apologize if I looked uninterested, but you're correct, Lady Eveline. I'm uninterested in this discussion," Rasmus answered without denying it. "There's one thing that we all should consider first before we fight the enemy," he said as he looked at everyone at the table.

"And what's that exactly, Count?" Moriganne asked.

"Their goals," Rasmus answered. "Of course, they want power, but that's not the only reason... especially here," he pointed out.

Everyone raised their brows in unison.

"After almost a year I traveled around this continent, I found so many things. Every dark secrets that everyone hid from the people, those things are also what they're after," Rasmus revealed as he stared into Julius' eyes. "What kind of dark secrets? The Zevrathi family, the family that once ruled Neva. I found out there are families who know about their existence and choose to protect them," he added.

The moment Zevrathi's name was mentioned, some of them flinched.

"So, if you think you can't win against them, why don't you make a deal with them? Give them what they want," Rasmus suggested with his brows raised.

"To make a deal with them? We don't have the leverage to make ourselves stand equally with them. Demons are powerful, and they're cunning. What makes you think if we give them what they want, they will agree to leave us alone?" Arthor asked.

"You do have leverage, me," Rasmus answered with a serious expression. "They know that I'm a threat, and they better be. They will back off once you give them what they want, and they won't dare to do anything. Just like in the north, they didn't attack the Orthias, didn't they?" He asked back at Arthor.

Arthor had a few men that stayed behind to keep an eye on the enemy, and it was as Rasmus said that the demons suddenly stopped invading after they conquered the nations, especially after they all left.

"Your silence means I'm right," Rasmus said as he sighed. "They fear the Orthias, and they also fear me. Why? Because they have witnessed the capability of my companions. They won't risk sacrificing their force, their power at the moment. They want to build more, not the other way around," he explained.

Lenin narrowed her eyes, knowing that there would always be a but, an exception.

"However, all of you will owe me something in return. Let's just say, I'm the reason that all of you are alive," Rasmus said with a stoic expression. "Would you choose to owe me something in return or to fight the enemy now, losing half of the people that are sitting right here, making your survival chance even lower in the future," Rasmus stared into Lenin's eyes.

Rasmus' words brought their anxiety to the surface, especially the second part because it was a fact that they would lose half of the power if they chose to fight. However, they were skeptical about the first half of his words that didn't make any sense except for Julius and Arandil who had seen it with their own eyes.

"Are you always this arrogant, Count? Do you believe you're that special that?" Eveline asked.

"I'm not, but my friends here, they're the special ones," Rasmus answered with a straight face as he stared at Eveline who had been showing her hostility toward him.

"Of course, so are they your tools? You said that before, tools. Without them, what are you? You're not special. You're just like us, powerless. If you treated them like tools, soon enough they all would leave you," Eveline said with a hint of despise in her eyes.

Serena was about to say something with that playful smile on her face, but Rasmus slightly raised his hand, signaling her not to.

"Yes, I treat everyone as tools, and they all know that as well," Rasmus answered without denying it. "But, let me ask them one thing," he paused as he leaned back. "Am I a tool to all of you," he asked without having to look at Aris and the others.

"Yes," Aris, Serena, Carrion, and Erlina answered at the same time. Suddenly a puff of black smoke appeared behind Rasmus and Rullein appeared from it, placing her hands on his shoulders with a smirk on her face as she stared at everyone at the table. "Yes, he's a tool to all of us as well," Rullein answered as she chuckled mischievously.

Everyone at the table were surprised, especially Eveline who suddenly felt embarrassed.

"They're following me because I let them use me, and at the same time I'm using them. It's a mutual interest, a mutual benefit. There's no trust, and yet it's more powerful than a mere trust and loyalty," Rasmus said, staring right into Eveline's eyes. "And what am I without them? I'm still going to be the one the demons fear," he answered with a cold expression.

Chapter 462 - 462: Tools.

The hall became quiet after Eveline tried to confront Rasmus in front of everyone. Lenin and Novia were the only ones that weren't surprised by it because they knew that Rasmus and the people that followed him weren't in the same framework as them. Those people didn't use morality to work on their goals, they all chose effectivity and practicality to achieve them.

"If that shocked you, believing that it's not right, maybe I should make you understand," Rasmus said as he stood up and fixed his suit. "Lady Nior, what's that on your waist?" He pointed at the sword on Nior's hip.

"This is a sword, Count," Nior looked down and tightly gripped on the handle.

"What's a sword?" Rasmus asked again, leaning his hands against the table.

"It's a weapon, Count," Nior answered again, confused as to why Rasmus asked those questions.

"And a weapon is a what?" Rasmus raised his brows, staring at Nior with a straight and unreadable expression.

"It's a tool..." Nior answered, slowly getting to understand what Rasmus was trying to say.

"Yes, and how do you treat your sword if I may ask?" Rasmus smiled softly at Nior.

"I treat it carefully. I keep it sharp, I keep it in the best condition all the time. I treat it like it's my own body. By treating my sword carefully, I know that it will protect me and help me when the time comes," Nior answered, not wanting to lie just to invalidate Rasmus' points.

"So, is it wrong to call someone a tool when they treat them just like how you treat your sword?" Rasmus asked with his arms crossed. "You depend on each other, not out of trust, not out of loyalty. Yet, it feels right?" He added.

"Yes," Nior answered, nodding her head.

Everyone wanted to argue, but they all held their tongues back. Everyone took a moment to think, to try a valid argument against Rasmus, and yet the more they prepared their arguments in their heads, the more they agreed with him when they put aside their morality.

"I have said this many times, I would argue, but I believe we are in the wrong time and place for that kind of luxury. There are people here who aren't interested in this and they prefer to discuss how to deal with the situation we are in," Rasmus said as he looked at Lazarus, giving him a nod, knowing that Lazarus wasn't interested in this at all.

Lazarus responded with a nod, showing a little bit of gratification for stopping this pointless argument. When they saw Lazarus' response, they all decided to brush away their thoughts and focus on the issue in front of them.

Rasmus sat down and looked at Lenin, nodding his head, telling her that he was done making a scene. Lenin nodded and continued the discussion from where they had left off.

Lenin reported every preparation to defend the Holy Nation from the demon army. She personally thanked Carrion and Erlina who had provided the Mana stones. It was Erlina and Carrion's objective in the first place the moment they arrived at Central Neva, the plan that Rasmus suggested a long time ago.

Rasmus began to speak up as well about his speculation on Satan's plan. He revealed that the Holy Nation would be the last nation they would invade. He also revealed that the cult of the Zevrathi would take refuge here as well, and that was Satan's plan all along. It was as he said that the demons were hunting the Zevrathi and their only lead was in the hands of the cultists.

"Why don't you tell them the truth, Lord Julius? I believe you owe me that for scheming to make the Blackheart family disappear from this world, just because my father was so close to revealing that dark secret your family was hiding," Rasmus stared into Julius' eyes with a stoic and cold expression.

Julius stared at Rasmus and that was when it struck him when Rasmus said that he was a tool to Rasmus. He realized that this was the moment where Rasmus wanted him to be, and to be used by

Rasmus. He knew that there was no point in hiding it anymore either, so he began to explain the truth, the whole truth that his family, the Suncrown family hid from the world.

At that moment, everyone found out the dark truth behind everything. Julius revealed the truth behind the Great Era, and that the cultists had infiltrated major families in Central Neva and even in other continents. He also revealed the cultists agenda and schemes that involved the Blackheart family, the Angelis family, Serena's family, and other events that the world was unaware of.

Aurelia, Isador, Monica, Alexander, and Maximilian, the four of them were shocked deeply. The others, they were in disbelief that the truth was worse than they had expected that even the Angelis family who was involved in this was being played by the Suncrown family and the cult.

"I can be heartless, I can be harsh, I can be cold toward everyone. I don't dwell on emotions, I don't look back at the past for what everyone and even the world had done to me. However, if I do, do you think I would be sitting here in front of all of you? If I'm like any of you here, who dwells with emotion and ego, I would be on the other side, willingly to do anything to watch your heads roll on the ground. I have all the right to watch this world burn and wish for it," Rasmus said with a cold expression. "Fortunately I'm not. I don't care if the world burns, but I know for sure I don't want this world to be in the hands of those demons," he pointed out.

"What you're trying to say is that if you cared even a little, the world should have burn by now, young man?" Lazarus asked, staring Rasmus in the eyes.

Rasmus didn't expect Lazarus to involve himself in this conversation. He stared at Lazarus, and he had seen that kind of gaze before, someone who had lived long enough that everything seemed clear no matter how hard people tried to hide it.

"Yes, thank you for making it simple for everyone to understand," Rasmus nodded.

"All of you despise this young man for what he has done and for who he is. However, after listening to what Lord Julius had said, some of you were the ones who created this man to be who he was. You despised him, and yet you were the one who made him that way. Is this what the world down here truly

is? To hate a man and blindly look away the reason why the man is like that?" Lazarus asked with his brows raised, staring at Julius, Lenin, and everyone else that weren't from the North.

Rasmus stared at Lazarus with a stoic and unreadable expression, not even showing a shred of reaction. On the other hand, Lenin, Arandil, Julius, Thalior, Xena, and Uriel who had shown their dislike toward Rasmus.

"However, young man..." Lazarus turned his head to look at Rasmus. "Are you trying to play God here? To stir people toward the direction you want them to be? I have heard enough that everyone here believes that you're the one who's controlling the board while everyone else is your pawn. After listening enough from your words, I can see why they think so, and I have to admit that you're trying to do so," he asked with a calm expression.

Rasmus smiled as he shook his head, not surprised and appeared to be disappointed that everyone couldn't see the world as he looked at it.

"No, I'm just a cog in the wheel, just like everyone in here," Rasmus answered, tapping his finger on the table. "We are cogs with the same size, the same purpose, and the same function. We are all equal, however, some of them dwell on emotions and egos that it makes their cogs stop moving because they don't want to follow others. Some of them dwell on their beliefs and ideologies, making their cogs move faster than others. What will happen to the wheel if the cogs aren't moving in sync? It breaks, it fails, it destroying itself," he explained as he stared into Lazarus eyes with a cold gaze.

"Me? I'm just a cog who never slows down, never moves faster than it should be. No matter how hard they tried to rebel against their function, they would achieve nothing. The cogs are made with such precision, consistency, practicality, and efficiency, and that's who I am, the one who forces others to either keep up with my pace or to slow down their pace to function. They can hate me and despise me, but in the end, they can't disagree with me because that's illogical," Rasmus explained as he stared at everyone at the table.

"For your question, elder. Am I playing God? No, I'm the only one who's not broken in the system," Rasmus answered, staring into Lazarus' eyes.

Chapter 463 - 463: Rasmus' worldview.

Monica, who had grown a hatred toward Rasmus because she felt betrayed by her mentor, her teacher that taught her how to live. However, that hatred suddenly disappeared without a trace, finally understanding the man that always contradicted everything that came to his path. Aurelia, Maximilian, Alexander, and Isador, they all began to see the world just like how Rasmus had explained it earlier because Rasmus had planted the seeds within them.

"It was as you said, Lady Monica," Lazarus smiled as he looked at Monica. "This young man right here is a wise man with a dangerous mind. He's dangerous not because he was a threat, he's dangerous because he knows how to walk his path," he chuckled softly with his eyes closed.

In Arthor's whole life, he had never seen his father to even let out a chuckle because Lazarus was a man with such clarity and understanding that everything was clear to him. However, to see Lazarus chuckle like that, it revealed that Lazarus himself didn't expect there was something that he didn't know and failed to understand. It shocked Moriganne, Monica, Nior, and Eveline as well, and it was terrifying because Lazarus might have been fond of Rasmus and nothing could stop him.

"Count Blackheart, let us have a drink after this discussion is over," Lazarus said with that fire in his eyes.

Rasmus could see curiosity, a man who was willing to understand, to learn, and to see a world from his perspective. Rasmus slowly gave a nod, without showing any reaction, but he appreciated the curiosity and willingness from Lazarus.

"Now, Great Sage. Are you willing to let me lead this plan against the enemy?" Rasmus asked with a serious expression.

Everyone looked at Lenin, and some of them already showed disagreement in their expressions. Lenin took a deep breath as she closed her eyes, trying to not get affected by those gazes. She thought if she rejected or accepted Rasmus's request, what would be the risk and consequences, but no matter how hard she wanted to reject him, it would only prove him right that the system would stay broken if they chose to go against him.

"With all due respect, Count. Nobody here is a leader, we all share the burden and responsibility of everyone's survival. I don't hold power over others nor anyone else toward others. It is as you said, we are all Cogs in the wheel, we are all equal, and we are all functioning to achieve the same goal which is survival," Lenin answered, using Rasmus's logic to prevent him from taking control over everyone.

However, Rasmus' reaction made Lenin's eyes narrow because he was smiling at her with satisfaction in his eyes.

"That's what I want to hear, Great Sage. Finally, you understand my world view," Rasmus said.

No matter how what, Lenin felt like she just got played even though she managed to prevent Rasmus from taking control over the table. However, it felt like she was following where Rasmus wanted her to go. She knew that she was supposed to put her emotions aside, but morally she felt this wasn't the right thing to do.

"Now, let me share more of what I have found," Rasmus said as he stood up.

Rasmus revealed the cult's identity and what their purpose was in this world, which was to bring back the glory of the Zevrathi family. He also revealed the cult's position in this world, which wasn't in the side of humankind but also didn't side with demons similar to Rasmus. However, he told the difference between him and them, which was that the cult planned to bring the Guardian Angel.

"The Guardian Angel?" Moriganne asked with her brows furrowed.

"A being that protected the Zevrathi from danger, a divine decree that they're meant to survive in this world no matter what," Rasmus nodded. "They know about this day, they know that the demons will come to this world, and they're preparing to bring the Guardian Angel down to this world as a divine judgment, perhaps..." He explained as he stared blankly at the table.

"And that offering ritual that you mentioned earlier, it has something to do with that, Count?" Marina asked with her brows raised.

Rasmus nodded and explained it in detail to its very bottom so everyone would understand it completely. After they found out that the offering was meant as a form of gratification and obedience toward God, they realized those cultists were extremists and fanatics.

"There's another thing that they mentioned," Rasmus said as he sat down and looked at Monica and Moriganne. "That they have recorded all the Zevrathi's bloodlines for centuries. They revealed that the

Sancticus family is one of the many families that shared the Zevrathi's blood," he revealed with a straight expression.

The hall became quiet and everyone's eyes widened slightly when they heard the revelation. They slowly turned their heads to look at Moriganne, in disbelief that the blood of the Zevrathi ran through the Sancticus' veins. Moriganne was as shocked as everyone in the hall while Monica was stunned that she shared the same blood as the family that hunted the Orthias.

"The other family is the Valentine family," Rasmus looked at Serena.

Serena glanced at Rasmus with her brows raised, not really caring about that since the real Serena had long gone and her body belonged to Lilith. However, Serena finally found out why the divine power within her was different than Aurelia's. Her divinity was purer, and similar to what the angels possessed.

"Are you sure about this, Count? You sure that this is the truth?" Thalior asked with his brows furrowed.

"Why would I lie? I can assure you it was the truth because Rullein could see memories," Rasmus answered. He was in fact having Rullein see through Luke's memories without Luke knowing to make sure that Luke was revealing the whole truth. "I also know their location, the remaining Zevrathis," he pointed out.

Lenin stared at Rasmus and once again said that he had something that they needed. She knew that he was telling the truth when he didn't feel superior to others, and yet he always held information that others didn't, making them depend on him. She brushed that thought away because the most important part was the fact that the Sancticus family shared the same blood as the Zevrathi.

"There's another thing that I want to share with all of you here, but I don't think this is appropriate," Rasmus said, his eyes staring right into Aurelia's eyes.

The way Rasmus stared at Aurelia, everyone knew that it had something to do with her. Aurelia on the other hand, she felt the cold begin to creep to her feet and up to her knees, knowing that something would make her uncomfortable and disturbed. However, she realized that Rasmus would rather speak about this matter privately and perhaps with Astrea as well since Astrea's condition had worsened and needed to be treated, which she wasn't with them in the meeting hall.

"The reason why I want all of you to know the reason the demons are invading this continent is to understand their goals, the things they want from this world," Rasmus said with a serious expression. "To win this war is possible, but to stop them from getting what they want, that's a different story. What they want, it's here, and they will do everything they can to get them, especially when their master is here now," he explained.

Everyone looked at each other and thought for a moment about the demons and their purpose. However, their curiosity was pointed at something else, and the one who mentioned it was no other than Lazarus.

"Are you planning to help us fight them, Count?" Lazarus asked with a serious expression.

Rasmus crossed his arms, leaning back with his eyes closed when all eyes were on him.

"Aris, do you want to fight this battle?" Rasmus asked without looking at Aris.

"Yes, I have unfinished business with that demon who took Illidan," Aris nodded.

"Do you want to fight this battle, Rullein?" Rasmus asked, feeling the mischievous smirk behind him.

"Yes, our fight with that demon was too short. I want to have a rematch with her," Rullein answered as she chuckled mischievously.

"What about you, Serena?" Rasmus asked, still with his eyes closed and arms crossed.

"I promised Aurelia that I would help her cause. I have been staying here and being treated so importantly, so I also want to give them a hand," Serena nodded with a smile on her face.

Rasmus nodded with understanding as he opened his eyes and looked at Lazarus and the others. They were waiting for his answer even after hearing his people's answers that should have been sufficient.

"Since everyone here wants to fight, then my answer will be the same. I'm joining the fight, and I'm not going to stay still like I always have been," Rasmus answered with a stoic expression.

Chapter 464 - 464: Treat it with such clarity.

Rasmus sat on the chair next to the bed where Astrea was resting with Sisylia and Garcia taking care of her wounds. Daryus was helping those two understand Astrea's condition and told them about Sima the divine physician. Daryus himself admitted that both Sisylia and Garcia might be on par with Sima based on their knowledge. However, Daryus was a bit skeptical because Astrea's condition was different from anything, especially that Serena couldn't even heal Astrea's condition.

"Count..." Astrea slowly opened her eyes to look at Rasmus, her face pale and tired like someone who was ready to face their deaths, the face of acceptance.

"Lady," Rasmus nodded his head, his expression calm and non-judgmental, especially with the horrible smell that the wounds all over her body produced. "You look worse than the last time I saw you," he said and looked at the open wounds.

"Yes, it is..." Astrea muttered weakly. "My time is coming, Count," she slowly closed her eyes.

Daryus, Sisylia, and Garcia listened to Astrea's words and their hearts clenched. They were the kind of people who would do anything to achieve their goals to make people's lives better. They wanted to assure Astrea that they were still trying and that she shouldn't give up, but they couldn't.

"Nothing? Not a single word?" Astrea asked Rasmus, slowly raising her brows and having a smile on her face. "You're truly a heartless man, Count," she jokingly said.

Aurelia, Maximilian, Monica, Alexander, and Isador were in the room as well. They came because after the meeting was over, Rasmus immediately excused himself to meet with Astrea. They wanted to follow him and wanted to know the reason for his visit.

"If I'm heartless, I won't be here, Lady Astrea. However, here I am," Rasmus answered.

Aurelia clenched her fists, knowing what Rasmus was implying. What Rasmus said was basically that he knew that Astrea was dying, and his visit was to show his concern and respect while he could.

"I know you're here not just because you want to see me, Count. Please, speak your mind. There's no need to hold it back because I might die before you could even finish your intention here," Astrea opened her eyes, glancing at Rasmus with that same dark joke coming out of her mouth.

"This is about Aurelia," Rasmus said with a serious expression. "The cult wants her, they want her power, her ability, and her body," he revealed.

Monica, the future Saint of the North and the others looked at Aurelia with the same gaze. Aurelia on the other hand felt weak from the waist below that Monica immediately wrapped her arm around Aurelia's arm. Isador and Alexander immediately placed their hands on Aurelia's shoulders to tell her that she wasn't alone and that they had each other.

"Why?" Astrea asked weakly, with a frown written on her face.

Before Rasmus answered Astrea's question, he had to explain everything about the cult to her so she could understand the big picture. Astrea listened silently, and she never thought there was a person who could bring bad news with such calm and straightforward, making her feel disturbed and somehow a little bit at peace. There was something about Rasmus' presence that gave her both the unnerving and peaceful feelings.

"Aurelia is special, and we both know that," Rasmus answered, looking into Astrea's eyes filled with fear and concern. "Her body is a perfect vessel for an angel to reside in. The cult, they want her for that. They need bodies like Aurelia's so the angels can descend and fight those demons," he explained.

Astrea didn't know what to say, and she felt guilty because of her ancestors, the Angelis family who made a deal with the Zevrathi, the day of paying the debt had finally come. She could only stare at Rasmus as her only pillar to keep herself from collapsing even more.

"NO!" Aurelia shouted, her voice was trembling and her breath was shaking. "I don't want that!" She shook her head repeatedly.

Monica immediately wrapped her arms around Aurelia, hugging her tightly. Aurelia trembled in Monica's arms, hiding her face in the crook of Monica's neck. Alexander, Isador, and Maximilian could only watch because they didn't want to be inappropriate to hug her or to touch her. They could only watch and gave all the burden to Monica to comfort Aurelia.

Rasmus glanced over his shoulder, listening to Aurelia's quiet sob and how much it scared her.

"You heard her, Count..." Astrea's voice was quiet and filled with sadness that she couldn't stand to comfort her daughter. "Please, Count..." She reached Rasmus' hand and held it weakly.

Rasmus looked at his hand where Astrea was clinging onto it like a lifeline. He slowly flipped his hand and allowed Astrea's hand to hold his hand more firmly.

"Isador, do you remember what I taught you about manipulation?" Rasmus asked.

Isador was startled that suddenly Rasmus called him out like that. Isador wouldn't forget about Rasmus' teaching about manipulation, and he would never forget that. He remembered that every choice whether for the greater good or for personal reasons, was counted as manipulation. Manipulation in its purest form where one side will benefit and the other side will be harmed.

"Yes, Count," Isador answered as he nodded his head. "Manipulation in its purest form where one side will benefit and the other side will be harmed. If we chose to protect Aurelia, then we would sacrifice those other candidates. Or to be exact, offering those innocent lives to the cult..." He clenched his fists, realizing that he was finally having to face this dilemma. He despised manipulation, and yet here he was, planning to use manipulation for what he believed it was the right thing to do.

"Would all of you ready to carry that guilt and burden?" Rasmus asked without looking back at Aurelia and the others, his former students.

They all wanted to answer the question with confidence and without hesitation, however, they all held back, they used the silence to think. They knew if they answered the question without thinking of the risks, the consequences, the weight of their answer, Rasmus would look at them like he always did, dissatisfaction.

"Count, we can just prevent the cult from taking the candidates or everyone. We can prevent this from happening from now on," Alexander said as he looked at Rasmus' back.

"What makes you so sure that the cult won't be of any help to us in the future? What makes you think that we alone can defeat the demons? What makes you think that the future will be as easy as you think if you think like that?" Rasmus asked, his expression calm as he looked at Astrea, waiting for her to give her answer.

"Question your question, question your answer, question your confidence, and question your hesitation because in the end, reality won't question your decision and it will send back all the consequences and risks of your choice without a warning," Rasmus said as he glanced over his shoulder at Aurelia and the others. "Reality will treat you like how you treat reality. It's a mirror of what you choose. Treats it arrogantly and you will be punished, treats it with fear and you will be overwhelmed, treats it with confidence and you will be disappointed, treats it with clarity and you will survive," he warned.

Everyone went silent, including Daryus, Sisylia, and Garcia who suddenly learned something new from Ramsus' worldview. Sisylia and Garcia heard a lot about Rasmus from Monica, but this was the first time they saw him in person. They realized why Monica had changed ever since she came back from the academy, and that man was the reason she could think more maturely.

"I want to protect her, Count," Monica said as she kept hugging Aurelia tightly. "I don't care if others have to suffer from this, but to turn Aurelia into someone else's tool, we are giving power to them and that will cause more damage and problems in the future. People die, but I want to choose who will die. We are going to be leaders, we will choose soldiers to die, what make this different? We are choosing who will die the moment we inherit our family names," she said with such conviction.

Maximilian and the others finally looked at it like how Monica looked at this situation. At first they believed this was wrong until they looked at it from a different perspective. At that moment, they felt relieved because they had been doing that without them even knowing, without guilt, so they thought why they should feel guilty when they had sacrificed others to protect others.

"Finally you see it, Monica," Rasmus said with a smile on his face, looking at her. "I believe all of you begin to see it as well?" He raised his brows.

Maximilian and the others nodded their heads, understanding what Rasmus meant when he said to treat reality with clarity and they would survive without a burden of guilt or regret. They finally saw the

core of Rasmus' worldview and that was to see things with such clarity and nothing would bother them anymore.

"So? What's your choice?" Rasmus asked.

"We will protect her, Count. In your eyes, she's also a valuable asset, right? You wouldn't let the cult to take her away because of that," Maximilian responded with a serious expression.

"Yes, you're correct," Rasmus nodded.

Astrea suddenly held Rasmus as tight as she could, taking his attention to her.

"Thank you, Count... I'm grateful," Astrea smiled weakly as she closed her eyes.

Rasmus watched Astrea release his hand from her grip before he pulled his hand away and got up from the chair. He knew that Astrea needed some rest, and both Sisylia and Garcia lowered their heads, thanking her for understanding that Astrea needed rest. He then left Astrea's chamber on his own, and knew that he had a plan to have a drink with Lazarus.

"What a day..." Rasmus muttered to himself as he walked in long hallway.

Chapter 465 - 465: Dangerous mind to humankind.

Rasmus looked at the big jug made of a mammoth's tusk in front of him, filled with a warm ale. He listened to Rullein chugging the whole jug beside him, enjoying every last bit of it while Aris, who sat beside him as well was drinking it moderately. On the other side of the table, Lazarus, Arthor, Maximilian, Monica, Moriganne, and Nior were sitting and enjoying their fair share of the beverage.

"This is a tradition in the north, Count. If you can drink the whole jug in a single breathing, you're a true northerner," Lazarus said with a stoic expression.

"Oh? Then give me another one. I'll chug the whole jug in a single breathing," Rullein slammed the emptied jug as she wiped off the ale on her lips. "This is just a piece of cake for me," she smirked as she stared at Lazarus.

Lazarus gave a smile and then signaled to the knight to refill Rullein's jug. Once the knight refilled the jug, Rullein began to take on the challenge, trying to empty the whole jug in a single breathing.

"But I'm not a northerner, elder," Rasmus said and didn't even bother to touch the jug. "I'll drink it when I feel like I need it," he added as he put the jug aside.

Lazarus was trying to see Rasmus' true color from that because from the earlier discussion in the meeting hall, he saw that Rasmus didn't show any desire, emotion, or even ego. To see that Rasmus wasn't interested in the tradition, or to even participate in it unlike Rullein, who seemed to dwell on ego and desire. He glanced at Aris, and he also noticed that she wasn't interested in the tradition as well, but he knew she wouldn't because she was an Orthias like Sanya. However, he could see that Aris had the tendency to have interest, a curiosity toward something new. On the other hand, Rasmus was completely uninterested with it, not even bothering to consider it.

"Liars won't reach high, do you agree, Count?" Lazarus asked as he took a sip of the ale.

"I have seen liars reach a peak because they were consistent with their lies, and those lies somehow became reality," Rasmus answered.

"You have? Can you tell me one example of that?" Lazarus asked with his brows raised.

"Aren't we currently inside a place where this family gained followers and became a major religious figure in Central Neva through lies?" Rasmus asked back, reminding Lazarus that they were in Central Neva, inside the palace of the Holy Nation.

Lazarus once again tested Rasmus, and he found the same consistency in Rasmus' character and personality that Rasmus had shown during the meeting hall. Lazarus wanted to see what kind of man Rasmus truly was, and so far, Rasmus had shown nothing but the truth toward his words and toward himself.

"Elder, with all due respect, there's no point in using mind games against me. I understand that you're curious, and that's why I'm here, to satisfy your need. However, I don't need to be tested for my genuinity because I can assure you, I wouldn't be here if I'm not," Rasmus said as he stared into Lazarus' eyes.

"So you agree that liars can't reach this high?" Lazarus asked with a smile on his face.

"If there's one, then I would say no. But since I'm the only one here that you recognize, then yes, I agree," Rasmus nodded.

The others were only listening because they had never seen Lazarus to be interested in any individual. This was the rarest event more than anything in this world, and they wanted to be witnesses to this event.

"You did say that the demons should fear you, but I still don't grasp that logic of yours, Count. What makes you believe they should fear you even without Lady Aris or everyone in your group?" Lazarus asked out of curiosity. "I have thought about this, and it bothers me more than it should be. I can't fathom the reason behind your confidence," he added.

"Because if I'm not, I wouldn't be here, Elder," Rasmus answered vaguely. "There are things that I cannot share, something that's personal," he explained with a serious expression.

Lazarus lifted his chin slightly, curious with Rasmus' answer. However, he saw no lies in Rasmus' words, and there was a hint of burden that he could feel from those. Lazarus chose to respect Rasmus' privacy and secrecy because only a fool could reveal everything to anyone, even to their trusted ones. He had a fair share of experience that there was a burden that he would never share with anyone, not even a dying person that he fully trusted.

"Your confidence? Can I ask you that at least?" Lazarus asked with a serious expression.

"It's similar to what we know about them. They're confident because we know so little about them and their plan. It also applies to them, we should be confident because they know so little about us. That big empty gap of information, I'm using it to create something that the enemy won't expect. It's not that I'm confidence in who I am, but I'm confidence in what I can do in this situation," Rasmus answered, his expression mirrored Lazarus.

"From your words alone, you're trying to say that you're preparing for all kinds of outcomes, consequences, risks from that big gap you're going to fill. You're confidence that every possible outcomes can be used as an opportunity?" Lazarus asked, trying to understand if that was what Rasmus was trying to say.

"Yes, I have said it many times before, to my students, to my companions, and to everyone who had this conversation with me. Every outcome can give an opportunity. Be aware, be cautious, be sharp, and keep a clear mind all the time," Rasmus answered as he nodded. "In this kind of situation, people tend to fail to see things through a clear mind. Fear, they have consumed enough fear to make them lose hope, but that's in human nature, and that gave me an opportunity to manipulate them. I was confident not because I knew I could manipulate them, I was confident because they were scared and overwhelmed by the fear that they would cling onto something they wanted to hear because that was the truth," he explained, using fear as an example.

Lazarus finally saw the true color of Rasmus, and that was the fact that Rasmus exploited the flaws in human nature. However, there was something about Rasmus that it didn't fit well with him when Lazarus thought that Rasmus was exploiting human nature because something else was amiss, but he couldn't grasp what it was.

"Are you exploiting the flaws in human nature, Count?" Lazarus asked, wanting to reaffirm his uncertainty. "You sound like you're exploiting it, but I don't see it that way. If you used exploitation, you wouldn't be hated by many and loved by some," he pointed out, finding the contradiction in Rasmus as an individual.

Rasmus suddenly smiled as he looked down, expecting that even someone like Lazarus would fail to see or to understand him. Lazarus on the other hand, seeing that smile on Rasmus' face, it felt a bit unnerving, something that he had never felt before from a mere conversation.

"Because I'm not exploiting human nature, elder," Rasmus shook his head, still looking down at his hands below the table. "That's what a narrow-minded people would do, but I'm not one of them," he answered as he slowly lifted his head and stared at Lazarus in the eyes.

"What I'm truly exploiting isn't human nature itself, it's reality," Rasmus revealed with a cold gaze.

At that moment, Lazarus who felt like he was standing on the same ground as Rasmus suddenly saw himself sink deeper into the abyss while Rasmus rose into the sky. Lazarus felt a chill down his spine, not knowing, not understanding, and not predicting that such a thing existed, to exploit the flaws of reality. He thought he was wise, but in the scale of Rasmus' mind, he was just understanding the basics.

Rasmus suddenly stood up from his chair that made Lazarus snap back to reality. He looked at those figures that had been listening to the conversation, and they were all staring at him like an alien, a being that wasn't born from the same world as them.

"I believe to have any more conversations after this will be pointless, elder. We will excuse ourselves, and I hope we will have a chance to converse without any agenda behind it," Rasmus lowered his head at Lazarus before he walked away.

Rullein and Aris followed Rasmus without even saying a word, and that was when Lazarus realized. He should have known that the moment those beings followed Rasmus willingly. He failed to understand, to see it until Rasmus revealed it or otherwise he would never be able to see it.

"That young man, his mind is dangerous to humankind," Lazarus said, warning everyone in the room with him.

Chapter 466 - 466: Neither obedience nor rebellious.

A few days had passed, and there was no good news that had happened, only bad and devastating news. The last report they got was that there were only four remaining nations in Central Neva that hadn't fallen to the demons excluding the Holy Nation. However, there were good things that had happened in the Holy Nation, and one of them was the final shipping of the Mana Stones that Erlina and Carrion had promised had finally arrived.

Isador was unable to sleep because he was worried about his older sister, Visika. However, last night there was a carriage that entered the Holy Nation, and inside the carriage was Visika, on her own, running away from the grasp of Nemu and his followers. It was another good news, but it was something trivial that it didn't affect their survival chances.

Rasmus had been isolating himself because he wanted to understand the power within him. Nobody entered his room, not even Aris or Rullein because they respected his request to be left alone. He

wanted to trace the power within him through meditation, which was clearing his mind and only focused on what was within him.

"You're not going to tell me what the hell happened to you ever since you left us?" Videl's voice could be heard from behind Rasmus, who was sitting on crossed legs on the floor.

Rasmus slowly opened his eyes, his eyes glowed with the draconic pupils, but then they turned back to normal in an instant. He knew the only one who didn't care about his need for solitude was no other than the devil himself. He wasn't bothered, and he also knew that Videl would confront him sooner or later.

"You can ask Aris or Rullein about this matter, why bother asks me?" Rasmus asked, looking over his shoulder at Videl pouring himself a full glass of expensive wine.

"I did, but none of them were saying a word about it. Their lips were tightly sealed, you know?" Videl smiled as he swirled the glass of wine and whiffed it before he took a sip of the wine. "Aren't you proud? Two powerful beings are so loyal to you that they would keep a secret even without having you to tell them to," he glanced at Rasmus with his glowing dark red eyes and a smirk on his face.

Rasmus didn't say a word and tried to concentrate on his meditation again, but suddenly a glass of wine was floating in front of him. He stared at it for a moment before he took it and knew there was no point of ignoring the devil when he wanted something because the devil would bother him nonstop.

"You just came back, and you didn't even take a moment for your oldest friend?" Videl arched his brows, leaning against the wall as he kept swirling the glass of wine. "Well, if I have two gorgeous women like those two, I wouldn't even bother to care for you," he stared into Rasmus' eyes with a smug look on his face.

"What do you want to know," Rasmus said as he put his glass on the table and pulled the chair to sit on. "You want to know what's inside me or do you want to know about this cult thing that I found?" He asked with a cold expression.

Videl grinned widely as he approached Rasmus and then sat on top of the table, crossing his legs and staring down at Ramsus with such excitement in his glowing red eyes. On the other hand, Rasmus could

see that Videl might have also grown stronger because Videl's presence reminded him of when he was brought into hell by him, and it gave him a similar feeling.

"Everything, my friend..." Videl leaned down, his face right in front of Rasmus.

Rasmus didn't hide a single thing from Videl, he explained what he encountered, experienced, and knew to him. Unlike explaining things to humans or even Aris or Rullein, Rasmus didn't need to repeat his words to make Videl understand because Videl was an intelligent being that required no detailed explanation. Talking to Videl was similar to transferring Rasmus's memories into Videl's.

"What a fucked up world that He made, don't you think so?" Videl chuckled and then took a sip of his wine. "Satan is here, the traces of the angels are here, and they all knew about both of us and why we were here. Another stage made for us so we could entertain Him..." He suppressed his laugh by pressing his left hand on his lips.

Rasmus was unbothered by what Videl said because he already grasped that far about this whole situation. However, there was something that bothered him more than anything, and Videl could see it in Rasmus' eyes because he had known Rasmus for far too long, long enough that Videl had read through Rasmus' past as Kyros from the moment Kyros climbed his way up.

"What?" Videl asked, placing his glass of wine on the table.

"I don't understand why God placed me in this body that possessed such power. Something otherworldly that even it's a mystery, a myth to the Orthias race. Why God gave me this body when I could use this body to make us win the bet?" Rasmus asked as he stared into Videl's eyes with his brows furrowed.

"No, I don't think you understand..." Videl jumped down from the table and walked toward the window. "God loves to give fairness to every being and their existences. However, that fairness sometimes didn't seem to be fair at all," he muttered, crossing his arms and leaning his left shoulder against the wall, staring out the window.

"Your days were numbered, Rasmus," Videl glanced at Rasmus.

Rasmus furrowed his brows when Videl used the past tense on that revelation.

"When you came to this world, possessing Rasmus' body, you were a week away from passing away if you didn't make a move. I was forbidden by God to tell you that nor was I allowed to encourage you, to help you to move forward. You were meant to die in that week," Videl said with a cold expression that slowly turned into a mischievous smirk.

Rasmus remembered his conversation with Aris about fate, and he already grasped that fate wasn't playing a huge part in life. It also reminded what Videl said earlier that God's fairness could be seen as unfair to other beings.

"You're telling me, God's fairness is this? I could possess this body that hid a powerful and otherworldly power within this body if only I could survive?" Rasmus asked, trying to affirm his conclusion.

"I know you're too smart for this complex conversation," Videl turned toward Rasmus, leaning his back against the wall. "Yes, is it fair? Only God knows, but for me, for Satan, for everyone in this world, is it fair? Fuck no," he laughed quietly.

Rasmus had deep knowledge and understanding of religions back when he was still Kyros from Earth. Every religion taught that God was fair to all beings, the most just omnipotent being. However, in the eyes of the demons, the evil, the beings made of fire, and others that came from similar lore, they were treated more harshly, a single sin equal to banishment from the heavens while humans received many chances to redeem themselves by repenting while those other beings were given none.

"Funny, right?" Videl stared into Rasmus' eyes with a stoic expression, knowing that Rasmus had understood what he was trying to say to him. "Satan was banished from heaven and came down to the world of the living to test the humans. I was banished down to Hell to torture all beings while at the same time being imprisoned for eternity for not wanting to kneel to humans. Lucifer was banished for rebellion for injustice. We were wrongly treated the moment humans were created," he explained, and yet there was no resentment or hatred in his voice or in his eyes.

Rasmus stared into Videl's eyes and he knew why Videl and the other beings that were equal to Videl were dissatisfied with God's treatment. He knew that Videl and those beings had the knowledge to understand what was right and wrong, knowing all the risk and consequences of their actions would be banishment. However, they were all created with ego, the same thing that caused them to lose their place in heaven. On the other hand, he would argue why creating beings with an ego when God knew they would feel dissatisfied. Was it a test? A failed product?

"Don't try to probe the mind of God, Rasmus," Videl stared right into Rasmus' soul, knowing what was inside Rasmus' head. "You'll never be able to, never," he warned with a cold expression.

Rasmus' mind suddenly erased all the deep thoughts he was having when Videl warned him.

"Do you know what will happen if you tried to probe the mind of God?" Videl asked as he approached Rasmus and then pulled the chair, sitting beside Rasmus. "You'll end up like all of us, banished. You passed the first test, to survive from dying. You passed the second test, to not show arrogance or confident after knowing the truth. Now this might be the third test, to stop questioning God," he said with an unreadable expression.

Rasmus nodded with understanding, listening to Videl's warning because he knew if he dared to take another step forward, divine intervention would happen. If Videl didn't pointed it out, he might have made both of them lose the bet with God.

"You are strong enough to provoke God's attention. Don't..." Videl said with a serious expression.

Rasmus had listened to countless words coming out of Videl's mouth, especially God. However, in this moment, Videl's words when he mentioned God made Rasmus realize that he was nothing, not even a speck of dust in the universe. Rasmus knew that, but he never understood the scale of it until Videl said those warnings to him.

"I understand," Rasmus nodded.

Chapter 467 - 467: New members.

Rasmus walked out of the bathroom as he rolled his shirt and wore his wristwatch. He leaned next to the window and noticed the dark clouds had grown darker and thicker. He hadn't seen the sun for three days because of the dark clouds. He knew it was Satan's work to inflict fear, and it worked really well because people were anxious and some of them had been praying to God, asking for forgiveness and repenting for their sins.

The walk in the hallway felt eerie because it was dark and quiet. Everyone was preparing themselves for the final battle in their own ways. On the other hand, Rasmus' mind was stuck with what Videl said last night about the Ice Dragon. He was still trying to grasp what Videl had said about those creatures back on Earth, the creatures that appeared at the end of time.

"God loves to show his authority through fear and destruction. It's always the same, He created those creatures, hid them in the core of the world he created, and then released them at the end of those worlds. This world isn't an exception."

"This Ice Dragon that you mentioned, and what you heard from that past. It matched with what God had done before, many times. A creature that wasn't born from this world, a creature that descended to the world of the living, and then it was hidden, not dead, and it would appear at the end of the world."

"You're possessing that creature within you. It's both a good thing and a bad thing. The good thing is that the creature is powerful, so powerful that it can't be defeated. The bad thing is that the creature is inside you, and you can't win against it."

"Either you fulfill your role by destroying this world, or God has His little secret, little game just for you to play. Either way, both might have something to do with God's involvement."

Those words from Videl were stuck in Rasmus' mind, and after all those conversations with Videl, it made him feel a bit disturbed. While his mind was wandering elsewhere, he didn't realize he had arrived, standing in front of the wooden door.

Rasmus took a deep breath, closing his eyes for a moment to push aside all the heavy thoughts in his head. He slowly opened the door and everyone became quiet in almost an instant. This feeling was similar to the one time everyone gathered before everyone took their separate ways to achieve their goals.

Carrion and Erlina managed to monopolize the Mana stone mines in South Neva with Anastasha's help. They also managed to monopolize the Mana stone market in both South and Central Neva. Those two had powerful figures in their palms, and they could become a new pillar in the business world.

Daryus, Serena, and Videl chose to stay in the Holy Nation, gaining both Astrea and Aurelia's trust. Daryus learned a lot in medicine and learned a lot about the reality he was living in. Serena got her

freedom, or perhaps Lilith who got her freedom as Rasmus had promised, and she enjoyed every second of it. Videl had been silently using his minions to infiltrate the demon armies, gathering information without anyone knowing.

There were new faces in the group, Rullein and Yur that immediately blended in really well. There was another figure that some of them hadn't met yet, and it was Aider.

"Who's that man beside you?" Erlina asked, pointing at the man in squire attire with her folded fan. "I don't remember meeting him, and I assume the others haven't met this man either," she tilted her head, staring at Aider's eyes, feeling a bit uneasy by his presence.

"You can introduce yourself," Rasmus moved to the side, making Aider the center of attention while Rasmus went to pour himself a glass of whiskey.

Aider looked at each one of them in the eyes with the eerie gaze of his. He slowly pulled the face he wore, shocking everyone even Serena and Videl. Aider wore another face beneath it, a face he always wore, his jester's face.

Aider began to spin around before he raised his hand, pulling out his jester hat out of thin air. He kept spinning until his squire attire turned into jester attire in just the blink of an eye. Once he was done with his performance, he put his jester hat on before he bowed his head down in front of everyone. When he grinned widely, none of them found him disturbing, not even a flinch.

The way they stared at Aider was similar to how Rasmus stared at him for the first time. They all had the same scalpel-like sharpness of gaze that tried to dissect the identity beneath the mask of skin that Aider wore. He planned to see what kind of people that followed Rasmus, and yet he felt like he was in the position as what he wanted them to be.

"Greetings, my name is Aider Sullivan. I'm a..." Aider paused, his pupils looked up for a moment, thinking. "A slave? I'm a jack of all trades but master of none," he giggled eerily.

Carrion, Erlina, Daryus, Serena, and Videl raised their brows, slowly moving their gazes toward Rasmus. Rasmus was unbothered by their gazes, still taking a sip of his whiskey while facing the wall.

"A bit of warning, don't take his words too seriously or you would dance on his palm without you knowing," Rasmus said as he walked to the window, slowly opening it widely. "As for you," he glanced at Aider as four figures entered the room through

The window. "You're standing in front of a tough crowd. One wrong word, if they want you dead, I don't need their permission to do so," he warned, and then his focus shifted toward the four figures kneeling in front of him.

Javi looked at those four figures wearing all-black attire, masks that covered the lower half of their faces. He was interested in Aider because of his unique body movements, but his interest shifted toward those four figures. He could tell they weren't second-rate assassins, but they weren't as skillful as him.

"These four are the ones I appointed as the heads of the Black Hands. One report to another, creating a chain command from the organization or unit that my father left for me," Rasmus said as he stared down at those four.

Ayla was the first to introduce herself, then Joshua, Erdinand, and then finally Herman. The four of them were the ones Rasmus could rely on when it came to gathering information since they used to lead the Black Hands in four different missions, infiltration, gathering information, assassination, and observation. Ayla was specialized in infiltration, Joshua was specialized in observation, Erdinand specialized in gathering information, and Herman was specialized in assassination. However, all Black Hands were capable of doing those four things, but these four people were the ones that were better than the rest.

"Javi, you're now going to become the leader of the Black Hands. Can you do it?" Rasmus asked with his brows raised. "I want you to teach them your abilities, make them better, become the best of the best," he added.

"Yes, Count," Javi nodded with understanding.

"All of you, if you need the Black Hands' services, you can request it to Javi," Rasmus looked at everyone in the room.

Everyone nodded with understanding, knowing they might need their services in the future.

"So? What's our plan now? We are stuck here in this city and soon the demons are going to attack us. What do you want us to do?" Serena asked, crossing her legs and resting her head on her fist.

"We will fight them. Aris, Rullein, Serena, Videl, and I are going to be at the frontline. The rest of you, you can stay here and do whatever you want. Or you can watch if you dare," Rasmus answered as he poured whiskey into his glass.

"Well, Videl and I had another plan in mind," Serena glanced at Videl with a smirk on her face. "We want to take the corpse of the Zevrathi. After all, the demons want it as well, and the cult also wants that, so we will take it for ourselves before they could do it," she explained.

Rasmus looked at the two of them for a moment before he gave a nod.

"Speaking of the cult," Rasmus looked at Erdinand. "Have they finally arrived?" He asked.

"Yes, My Lord. Luke and Harot have arrived the city, and we came here to inform you about them," Erdinand answered as he lowered his head.

"Perfect," Rasmus muttered as he looked outside the window. "I want to meet them now, so can you lead me to them?" He asked.

Erdinand nodded and then Rasmus followed the four of them out of the palace. Serena and the others were curious why Ramsus wanted to meet them, so they decided to follow them as well.

Erdinand led them to the east side of the city on the outer layer of the city. The house Erdinand pointed at was an ordinary house, and they had observed the people that stayed in the east side were all refugees, and they believed some of them were cultists.

Without having to wait, Rasmus barged into the house and it startled a few people that were inside the house. They were shocked when they saw Rasmus, and they hurriedly informed Luke about him and his people. Look came out of the room and he looked a bit anxious when Rasmus was there, especially with all the people behind him. Harot became extremely pale when he saw Videl, and his hands trembled in fear when Videl stared right into his eyes, knowing his origin.

"Good evening," Rasmus smiled coldly at them.

Chapter 468 - 468: Negotiation.

"What's the reason for your visit, Count?" Luke asked, his heart was beating fast and he wondered if anyone could hear his heartbeat.

"Let's make it quick because I know the demons might come at any time..." Rasmus sat down on the dining table, waiting for Luke to sit down with him.

Luke glanced at Videl, terrified by his existence because he knew who Videl truly was. He glanced at Harot, and even Harot couldn't look at Videl in the eyes anymore. He then took a deep breath, calming himself down as he sat at the table. He knew if he panicked and showed his fear, Rasmus would take advantage of his fear.

"There are four parties on this continent right now. The first party is Satan and her demon army. The second party is humans. The third party is us here. Lastly the fourth party is you and your cult, including your lord," Rasmus tapped his fingers on the table with his eyes stared right into Luke's eyes. "None of us are siding with each other. However, the three parties are interested in one party," he leaned forward, resting his arms on the table, clasping his hands together.

Luke swallowed his saliva and his throat was so dry that it almost hurt to swallow. He knew that Rasmus was right that the cult was the only party that the other three parties were interested in. Each party had different intentions from their interests, but none of them were good for him or the cult.

"One party wants you and the cult to disappear because I just told them the whole truth you told me. The other party, they want to devour your cult so they could grow even stronger," Rasmus said with a calm and unreadable expression. "However, the third party, I'm not sure what the third party wants from you yet. Although the third party has not decided what to do to you and the cult, I suppose we can have a negotiation," he suggested.

Luke narrowed his eyes, clenching his fists under the table. Once again, Rasmus was right that the humans would hunt him and the cult down while the demons wanted to devour them as they were connected to the Zevrathis and the angels. However, for the third party whose intentions were still unknown, it was more dangerous than knowing the danger that came from the other two parties.

"Negotiation, Count?" Luke asked as his fists clenched even tighter until his nails dug into his palms.

"There's no reason to be nervous, Lord Luke. Right now, the only one you could use your words to get you out of this mess is me. I wouldn't do any harm without a reason, but I wouldn't protect without a reason either. I'm a man you can use reasoning to talk with," Rasmus said as he leaned back and his eyes never left Luke's.

Luke's clenched fists loosened up a bit, but he knew he shouldn't feel relieved as the man in front of him was the man that wanted the world to burn. He closed his eyes, thinking that at this moment, everything he said would affect the future of the cult and the Lord he served.

"I know that we have no choice but to agree, but if the negotiation didn't give me or my party any benefits from it and I chose to renegotiate, would you listen or would you force us to accept it? I know you're a man of your word, and negotiations should benefit both parties," Luke asked, trying to not look away from Rasmus' cold gaze.

"Of course," Rasmus closed his eyes and nodded. "I wouldn't waste my time talking with you if I wanted something else. I would have sent someone else instead," he opened his eyes, his glowing draconic eyes making Luke and Harot froze.

Rasmus closed his eyes and rubbed his nose bridge, trying to avert his attention to the feeling of his fingers rather than the pain in his eyes that felt like thousands of needles had stabbed his eyes from the inside. He didn't mean to use his draconic eyes, but something primal within him was trying to rip his body open to free itself.

"Let's negotiate..." Rasmus said as he opened his eyes, his eyes turned back to normal. "You need the bodies to possess the angels, and you have all the list of people that could be candidates. My only request is for you to erase one name in that list," he calmly said as the pain inside his eyes faded away.

"One name?" Luke asked, his voice almost cracked as he gulped. "You want Aurelia Angelis to be erased from the candidates?" He asked.

"Yes, that's the only thing I want from this negotiation. In exchange, you'll be safe, your cult, your Lord, and your purpose. I'm also not the only one who doesn't want Aurelia to be taken away, meaning they

will do anything to make it happen. So, as you said earlier, you actually have no choice. However, you can choose to let go of her and walk away," Rasmus answered, nodding slowly.

Aurelia was the most important candidate in the list because she could be the only suitable body or vessel for Archangel Michael. To remove Aurelia from the list, that was equal to failing their plan to bring back the world like how it used to be, without evil in this world.

"If we chose to refuse?" Luke asked because he shouldn't be the one to decide in this matter. "I'm not the one who should make this decision, Count," he explained, his fists tightening once again.

"Then take the risk and be ready for the consequences," Rasmus answered with a calm expression. "Some people choose their goals over their survival. But your situation isn't that simple, is it? To choose goal over survival toward the only party that gives you survival while the other two want you and your cult to disappear is quite foolish," he pointed out.

Luke sighed, not hiding his frustration anymore because he felt it was the only thing he could do, to show his frustration. He didn't know why, but to show his frustration to Rasmus felt seen more than anyone could ever be, not even his own people.

"Then that part is unnegotiable?" Luke closed his eyes, waiting for Rasmus' answer.

"I only have one thing to negotiate. Removing it, there won't be negotiation, Lord Luke," Rasmus answered as he shook his head.

Luke lowered his head, rubbing his brow with a troubled expression, something he had never shown to anyone, not even his people. He was the one that everyone called the family of Kingmakers, such a reputation and how he was raised, to show his own emotions would be their downfall. However, at that moment, he didn't care anymore because the choices would either bring the fall or the rise of the thing he believed in.

"You wanted to negotiate..." Luke slowly opened his eyes and stared into Rasmus' eyes. "You don't want me dead or the cult to disappear. You used this approach to gain something else along the negotiation," he pointed out, trying to track back and put aside the dilemma for a moment.

"You want to create a connection with the cult. You're after something else entirely, something more important to your goal than this mere negotiation," Luke said, noticing the thing he almost missed entirely. "I'm not trying to change the topic, but I want to know your intention before I can give my answer," he explained as he sat straight, trying to regain his composure.

"Yes, because I see your cult and the Zevrathi to be as valuable as anything else. I'm not naive, I'm not a hypocrite, and I don't care with which side I'm making a deal with," Rasmus answered as he nodded. "Your cult and your lords, the Zevrathis, they're going to be one of the pillars that will push the demons back to where they belong. I know I have powerful beings behind my back, but I don't like to make a bet where the chance of losing is greater than a certain point," he explained.

"That means you won't let us die?" Luke asked.

"No, and we can work together in the future," Rasmus shook his head. "Of course, if we want to work together, there's a requirement to show each other good intentions. I already showed mine, coming here to negotiate, giving you a way out. Now, it's your turn, don't you agree?" He asked back.

Luke sighed as he furrowed his brows, knowing there was no escaping it especially after Rasmus said that. He finally decided to accept the negotiation and let go of the only thing that could bring the cult to its glory and gave back the Zevrathi to its glory as well.

"We will agree to the negotiation, Count Blackheart. We will remove Aurelia Angelis from the list, and I believe our Lord will understand this decision," Luke nodded with understanding as he stood up and offered his hand for a handshake.

Rasmus stood up as he buttoned his suit before he shook Luke's hand firmly. Luke tried to look at Rasmus' expression, but he saw nothing, not pleased expression, no pride, no arrogance, no desire, nothing, just a man staring at him with something similar to sincerity.

"You can sleep in peace now, Lord Luke. Have a good evening," Rasmus said before he left with the others behind him.

Erlina glanced at Rasmus with a smirk on her face, fascinated and never got tired when seeing Rasmus in action.

"Another one falls into your palm," Erlina chuckled softly.

Chapter 469 - 469: Sharing.

Nior's hands trembled, she could barely lift her sword anymore. She looked down at her hands, and she had never experienced something like this before. Her whole body was still capable of fighting, but her wrists and hands had given up. With a heavy heart, she stabbed her sword to the ground.

"I lose..." Nior said as she looked at Uriel with the seven rapiers floating around her. "I'm no match for your skill," she said as she clenched her fists, frustrated by her limitations.

Uriel grabbed the floating rapiers around her one by one, sheathing them on her back. Although she looked fine, her hands had started to numb as well. She had trained nonstop ever since the war ended in South Neva. She had grown stronger, a lot stronger than before.

"No, Lady Wolffein. If it was me from a year ago, I wouldn't be able to win this spar. I'm being honest," Uriel said as she approached Nior, seeing the frustration written all over her face. "I wouldn't win if I only used two swords against you. That's the truth," she added.

Nior scoffed as she massaged her right wrist, looking at Uriel with a smirk on her face. She nodded as she looked at the sheathed rapiers on Uriel's back that almost looked like a crown from the front. She didn't expect Uriel to be smaller than her because she thought that Uriel would be as tall as her.

"We both are holding back because we don't want to cause any damage to this place. I believe in real battles, you might win against me," Uriel lifted her head to look at Nior's sharp face and black hair that looked like a black wolf.

Nior's expression darkened so suddenly as she looked down, letting her black thick wavy hair cover her face. She remembered about her brother because they both had a wish to meet with the Queen of Swords and spar with her.

"If my brother is still alive, you might not stand a chance," Nior slowly lifted her head with a bit of a smirk on her lips.

"Your skill alone has convinced me that I would lose if your brother was here with you," Uriel answered, slowly offering her hand for a handshake. "Lady Wolffein, there's something that I want to suggest," she said.

"Suggest?" Nior stared at Uriel's hand.

"To share what we learned in swordsmanship. We are at war against an enemy that we can't defeat easily. I believe, if we shared what we learned, we could grow stronger together," Uriel suggested, her hand still waiting for Nior to shake it. She noticed that Nior's swordsmanship was unique and there were certain moves and techniques that she had never seen before.

Nior thought it was a good idea as well because there were a lot of things that she wanted to learn from Uriel. The thing that she was curious about was the way Uriel controlled the floating swords with Aura, making them look like her own limbs.

There were no words needed for Nior to shake Uriel's hand, only a nod. They both showed determination and flames in their eyes, agreeing to learn each other's technique.

"Is there room for one more?" Arandil asked as he approached them.

Uriel and Nior turned to look at Arandil. Nior was surprised that Arandil was there, and wondered if he had been observing their spar. On the other hand, Uriel narrowed her eyes, showing a bit of a displeased expression to see him. However, she knew she had to push her feelings aside since they were in a crisis.

"You're willing to teach us your swordsmanship?" Uriel asked with a serious expression.

"Yes, everything," Arandil nodded, answering without hesitation. "It's not the time to hide anything from each other. To not reach each other's swordsmanship, that's the same as letting ourselves lose against the enemy," he explained, standing in front of them.

Nior looked at Uriel and she gave her a nod, telling Uriel that there was no reason to not let Arandil join them since he was the First Swordmaster. Uriel nodded, agreeing with what Arandil said.

"Might as well bring the others, and I can ask Elder Lazarus to teach us as well," Nior suggested as she looked at both of them back and forth with her arms crossed. "Maybe if we all come together, Elder Lazarus might consider it," she added.

To hear Lazarus' name, both Uriel and Arandil couldn't hide the excitement in their eyes. In the world of swordsmen, everyone knew about Lazarus and his achievements. Nobody denied that Lazarus was the strongest man alive, especially in swordsmanship.

"That would be like reaching a star and touching it with barehand. Everyone would love that and it would be like a dream come true," Uriel nodded, appreciating Nior's thoughtfulness.

Arandil nodded in agreement, and then the three of them left the training ground. They went straight into the palace to meet with Lazarus and informed the others to join them.

Lazarus listened to the three of them, and Arthor was there as well. They thought Lazarus would take his time to think, but to their surprise, he agreed and immediately told them to gather in the training ground.

All the Paladins from both saint families gathered in the training ground. Arandil and his disciples were there as well because Lazarus wasn't just a swordmaster, he was a grandmaster in all weapons. Uriel, Thalior, and Xena were there as well since they were also Swordmasters, but the three of them had shared their techniques already. Arthor and Maximilian were there as well since it had been a while since they both received a lesson from Lazarus. Alexander, and even Isador also joined them because it would be a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Lazarus looked at everyone standing in front of him, seeing various reactions and expressions. He nodded after he found out enough of everyone's desire to grow stronger. He walked to the weapon rack and grabbed a simple iron sword, swinging it around to understand its weight and flexibility.

Everyone waited for Lazarus to speak or to do something since everyone was so eager to learn from the best. However, they were shocked when he dropped the sword that he had just taken from the rack.

"Let's learn from the very basics, the state of mind..." Lazarus tapped his head as he stared at them with a serious expression. "Your path of learning swordsmanship was only one path of the many. I will add a

different path to make all of you see swordsmanship in a different light," he explained as he looked from the left all the way to the right at everyone's faces.

Hours had passed and everyone had been enlightened by Lazarus' teaching. They also began to learn about stances, how to swing a sword, and how to move their bodies. Those things should have been simple, and yet they struggled to keep up with his movements.

"Now..." Lazarus looked at his reflection on the blade of the sword he was holding. "I want all of you to attack me, and if you could disarm me, it meant that you had mastered my teaching. However, if you got disarmed by me, punishment awaited you," he swung his sword around as he looked at them with a serious expression before he suddenly disappeared.

Nobody could see Lazarus, but then suddenly some of them got disarmed, watching their swords flew into the sky. They didn't know what was happening until more and more of them got disarmed. Arandil and all the swordmasters could barely see the glimpse of Lazarus, and they tried to predict his movements, hoping it was enough to prevent him from disarming them.

They all spread and held their weapons tightly as they tried to dodge Lazarus' ambush attacks. The others could only watch from the sides as the only ones that still had their weapons in their hands were Arandil, Arthor, Maximilian, Nior, Uriel, Xena, and Thailor. However, it only took Lazarus a few minutes until all of them got disarmed and failed to disarm him.

"How could we even disarm him when we could barely saw his movements..." Xena said as she stared at Lazarus, standing in the middle of the training ground.

"If you failed to protect your sword from me, than your chance of winning this war is extremely slim," Lazarus said as he looked around at the Swordmasters. "All of you need to sharpen your senses, and I will push your senses from now on," he added and looked at all the knights and warriors that had joined the training.

Suddenly Lazarus' ears perked and noticed two people had just entered the training ground. When he looked over his shoulder and saw Aris and Rullein standing side by side, he put a smile on his face.

"What about you sparring with us? See if you can disarm us. If you couldn't, then you need to train more," Rullein smiled as black smoke wrapped around her hands that slowly turned into two greatswords. At the same time, Aris pulled the Black Swords from the spatial ring without saying a word.

Lazarus chuckled as he nodded in agreement as he reached out his hand toward Arthor.

"Can I lend the family heirloom for a moment?" Lazarus asked as he looked at Arthor.

Arthor, Nior, Maximilian, and everyone that from the North were stunned because the heirloom that Lazarus requested was a sword called Dragon Slayer. That sword was the sword that united North Neva and the sword that killed a powerful tyrant that even the three elders had to work together to kill him.

Arthor pulled the long sword with the hilt that was shaped like a dragon, wrapping the base of the blade and the tail that was the handle of the sword. He gave the sword to Lazarus, and then walked to the side, watching his father hold the sword that reminded him of the past back when Lazarus was the head of the Wyverncrest family.

"It has been a while since I hold this sword, I might get a little rusty," Lazarus said as he swung the sword around, trying to re-adapt with the sword's weight, size, and length again. "However, I will do my best to not disappoint the two of you," he readied his stance, his eyes as sharp as the blade itself when he stared at Aris and Rullein.

Chapter 470 - 470: A true warrior.

"How about we make it more interesting? How about we don't use Aura or Mana, only pure skill, technique, and strength? Of course, we would adjust our strength to match with yours," Rullein suggested as she pointed her greatsword that required to be held with two hands but she held it like a light wooden sword with one hand at Lazarus. "With that, it would be fair and more entertaining for the others to watch," she smirked as she swung her swords, creating heavy blows of wind around her.

"Oh? And how are we going to do that?" Lazarus asked with his brows raised.

"Just swing your sword as hard as you can, and we will adjust our strength based on that," Rullein answered, resting her sword on her shoulder.

Lazarus nodded with understanding as he closed his eyes, gathering his strength in his hands. When he swung his sword as hard as he could without Aura, it was enough to create a slash wave into the sky and crack the floor underneath his feet because of the sheer force of his attack.

Aris and Rullein were amazed by Lazarus strength, especially for his age. They weren't the only ones that were amazed by him, everyone couldn't believe it was possible to create a slashwave without using Aura, and that was enough to tell that Lazarus had such immense core strength. Arandil could create a slashwave with his pure strength, but it wasn't as devastating or as powerful as Lazarus. He knew that he was still far away from reaching Lazarus' level of mastery.

"Was that enough?" Lazarus asked in such a respectful way.

"That was more than enough," Aris nodded as she swung her sword upward, creating the same intensity and powerful slashwave as Lazarus. "We both now have the same strength," she added.

"I have heard from Lady Sanya that Lady Aris is the greatest Aristoria, and has the potential to surpass all of your predecessors. I'm honored to finally be able to be given a chance to spar with you," Lazarus smiled as he readied his stance, feeling a bit nervous mixed with excitement that he never thought still existed within him.

"Yes, because I inherited their essences and their muscle memories," Aris answered as she readied her stance, not interested in talking about such a topic. "Are you ready?" She asked.

Lazarus took a deep breath, calming his heart and removing all kinds of distractions from his mind. After a few seconds of controlled breathing, he slowly nodded, signaling that he was ready to fight against two powerful beings at the same time.

Rullein and Aris dashed toward Lazarus at the same time and at the same speed. Lazarus instantly swung his sword horizontally toward them, and blocked their attacks. For the first time in his entire life that he blocked an attack that made his whole body shook and trembled by the clash. One sword blocking four swords from two powerful beings made him regret his decision.

With no other choice, Lazarus let them overpower him and used that momentum to dash backwards away from them. However, Aris and Rullein didn't let him catch a breath, and increased the intensity of

their attacks rapidly. Clash after clash, Lazarus could see the massive gap between him and Aris or between him and Rullein. He had trained and held a sword ever since he was still a small baby, and he had never skipped a day ever since, but the skill gap was immense.

Lazarus felt what Nior felt when she sparred with Urile, his hands began to give up on him. He knew he should stop, but the excitement, to see the big wall in front of him that he couldn't overcome made him even more motivated. He was in pain, but he enjoyed it, and he wanted to see how far he could prevent the wall from crushing him down.

Everyone watched from the sides at them without even blinking their eyes once because they would miss it. They never thought that a human body could move like that and to learn every technique that those three showed. It was like an eye opening, an enlightenment of being a warrior, a fighter. The way Lazarus held his sword like his own life, to receive blow after blow that could make him kneel, he never let go of his sword and kept fighting. That moment was when they all realized what was the true meaning of becoming a warrior, to fight with no fear, no hesitation, no doubt in themselves, and to fight until their last breath because to fight it wasn't just to protect the weak but also for themselves to survive no matter the odds.

Aris knew that Lazarus wasn't planning to give up even though he had reached his limit. Out of consideration of his well-being and the fact that the demon army might come at any time, she disarmed him with such precision, thrusting her sword at his sword handle in between the small gap on his fingers. Lazarus was stunned when his sword flew off his hands and fell beside him because he didn't see it coming.

"It's unfortunate that you're not at your prime," Rullein said as she turned her swords into black smoke. "You could be three times... no, perhaps five times stronger than your current self?" She tilted her head as she looked at Lazarus massaging his hands.

Arthor was surprised that Rullein was right about Lazarus because back in the old days, when Lazarus was still as young as him. Lazarus was the strongest, most feared by his enemies, and most respected by his people. Arthor remembered that the other elders had revealed how strong Lazarus was back then. Back then, there was a solid frozen wall that no sword could even scratch, they called it the Crystallized Wall where no swords or anything could even leave a scratch for centuries. However, Lazarus was the only Northerner that could scratch that Crystallized Wall, and he did quite a deep and big damage to it. That site had become a reminder and a motivation for every child of the north that to become a great knight, they had to reach the same height as Lazarus.

"Perhaps, it was a long time ago and my memories about the past are getting hazier the older I become," Lazarus answered, bending his knees trying to grab his sword. "But I will remember this moment, to be able to spar with two powerful beings," he chuckled as he grabbed the Dragon Slayer and stared at it thoroughly, worrying if he had damaged the blade, but all he found was nothing, not even a scratch.

"If you survived this war, perhaps I'll teach you something," Aris said as she stared into Lazarus' eyes. "If you mastered it, you would receive longevity from it," she revealed.

Lazarus was surprised when he heard Aris' kindness, and to be able to learn something at his age by a being of an ancient race, he never thought he would be getting such special treatment. He lowered his head at Aris before he walked away to give the family heirloom sword back to Arthor since it belonged to Arthor, not his anymore.

Aris and Rullein had enough playing around since it was their request to Rasmus so that they could join the training, or perhaps to challenge Lazarus. They both left the training ground and Rasmus was waiting for them outside the building.

"You both had fun?" Rasmus asked.

"We did, but it was a shame that we couldn't spar with him seriously since the whole city might be in shambles," Rullein chuckled as she nodded, walking beside Rasmus. "Why didn't you join us though? Aren't you curious?" She asked with her brows raised.

"No, I'm not interested in that at the moment," Rasmus shook his head as he looked at the sky. "After all, I'm not going to use a sword in the battle later, mainly using my magic," he muttered as he looked at his palm as a cold mist came out of it.

Rullein and Aris looked at Rasmus' hand, slowly but surely the power from the Dragon's Blood began to spread all over his body. They were worried because if the Overlord, the Ice Dragon consumed him or took over his body, he would become a power that not even Orthias could stop, or even True Dragons.

"Are you going to utilize that power?" Aris asked.

"No, I'm not planning to use this power. I know the risks and consequences, and I don't think the power is worth the risk," Rasmus shook his head, suppressing the Dragon's Blood in his body by pushing it back to where it belonged, deep inside his heart. "If something happens to me, you two know what to do, right?" He asked as he looked at both of them.

Aris and Rullein nodded, remembering the agreement they had with Rasmus.

"We will make sure that you'll be fine, Rasmus," Aris said with a serious expression.

"I know," Rasmus nodded. "Thank you..."