

## Evil 631

Chapter 631 - 631: Preservation and Flow.

"Oh, look at this flower over here. I would never expect to see this flower to bloom in my lifetime," a very old man with a long white beard and hair said, smiling with his eyes closed with wrinkles on the corners of his eyes and lips. He slowly knelt on the ground, unbothered by the expensive silk robe he wore that got dirtied by the soil. "It's a shame that I can only admire it with my eyes..." He said as he chuckled and opened his eyes slightly to admire the colorful petals of the flower.

A man with slick black hair staring at the old man while holding peacock feathers hand fan. His gaze then moved from the old man to the flower, a unique flower that only existed in the Immortal Mountain of the Heavenly Alliance.

"If you want it to be preserved, I know someone who's a master flower preservation specialist, Alliance Leader Ma," the man pointed out, standing not too far and not too close from the old man.

"Hohoho, you really know how to make people fall for temptation, Master Strategist Ogun," the old man responded as he kept admiring the flower. "But I must decline. Such beauty of nature shouldn't be preserved. Let it wither and die, then it will grow and bloom once again. Preserving it only shows the beauty, but you killed the nature of it," he pointed out as he slowly stood up.

Ogun smiled softly as he closed his eyes and nodded. The moment he opened his eyes, Ma's expression hardened when he looked at the vast garden of flowers that the previous leaders had preserved for centuries.

"So, Master Strategist, what news you're carrying with you?" Ma asked as he put his hands on his back, his expression grew serious.

"There are a few unpleasant news, Alliance Leader," Ogun answered and watched the hummingbirds move around to feed on the nectars that the flowers produced. "Allow me to serve you a cup of tea, Alliance Leader," he requested as he stared at the pavilion at the edge of the cliff next to a natural spring that was surrounded by trees and rocks.

"What an offer that I could never decline," Ma laughed as he nodded and then walked toward the pavilion.

Ogun filled the teapot with spring water and pulled out the tea he kept under his robe sleeves. Ma watched Ogun use his ability to control Mana and boiled the water inside the teapot before Ogun put the tea leaves into the teapot. The smell of tea filled the small pavilion, giving a relaxing effect to both Ma and Ogun. Ogun then poured the tea into Ma's cup carefully and then into his own cup.

"Are you ready to tell me the news, Master Strategist?" Ma asked as he took the cup and took a sip of the tea. He closed his eyes and hummed with a smile on his face when he tasted the fragrant and both hints of sweetness and bitterness of the tea.

"The Emperor seems to have moved to the third phase, Alliance Leader. The war seems to be inevitable now even with our effort and the Asghar family to prevent it," Ogun answered as he looked at the green tea in his hand. "With the new weapons that the Imperial family invented, the casualties might be more devastating than what I have calculated. But what I fear the most is the aftermath," he added before he took a sip of the tea.

"The aftermath? You're talking about the sultans that might work together for the first time to fight the empire?" Ma asked with a serious expression.

"Yes, Alliance Leader. We might understand the progress of the Emperor's military growth, but the sultans, we know nothing about their true power in the military. The Sultans have all the wealth that influenced the other continents, and it would be weird if they didn't have something hidden under their sleeves to protect it," Ogun nodded.

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influenced the other continents, and it would be weird if they didn't have something hidden under their sleeves to protect it," Ogun nodded.

"Is there anything we can do about it, Master Strategist?" Ma asked with his brows furrowed.

"If I have to be honest, Alliance Leader, the most efficient way is for you to protest directly to the emperor himself. Even then, we are still subjects and the people of the empire. If the emperor dismissed our protest, nothing would backfire to the imperial family due to the imperial system where we can self-sustain and survive without the influence or need of the outside power," Ogun pointed out as he sighed and rubbed his nose bridge.

"Our nation is so great that nothing can threaten us. But the moment that realization bloom into a desire for more, this is the fruit that ripened from it," Ma nodded in agreement and took another sip of the tea. "I will meet with the emperor and do my best," he revealed.

Ogun didn't say a word but lowered his head in gratitude because not only did he care about the lives of the people, he was also wary of the gaps that would appear because of the war. Those gaps could be taken as opportunities by powerful figures that had been lurking in the dark.

"To think you would convey the most bitter news first is something that I wouldn't expect, Master Strategist Ogun," Ma said with a soft smile on his face.

Ogun didn't say a word and kept sipping his tea, and that alone was enough to make Ma realize that something far more bitter was about to come. Ma closed his eyes as he took a deep breath and let the fragrance of the tea fill his lungs and brain.

"There's a message from the Nuwan Clan," Ogun revealed.

"The Nuwan Clan? It's a surprise to hear the most notorious unrighteous clan to send a message to us," Ma narrowed his eyes, already knowing where it only led to.

"They said that the Demonic Cult is preparing for a war, Alliance Leader. They said they encountered a Grandmaster of the Demonic Cult, a beautiful woman in black. They called her as Queen of the Night

because when she appeared, daylight turned to darkness," Ogun revealed, his voice filled with anxiety. "They believed even experts wouldn't be able to defeat her," he added.

"Also, the Nuwan Clan might go on an all-out war with the Senan Clan due to their recent conflicts that led to the death of dozens of their people," Ogun continued before Ma could say a word.

Ma closed his eyes and he never expected that the demonic cult would make a move in his lifetime. There were too much coincidence that was happening, and whether one connected to each other or not, it didn't change the fact the Heavenly Alliance had to deal with them all.

"Lastly..." Ogun paused, his hands clenched on the table. "Anastasha Asghar has been seen wandering around Khan Empire in the past week, Alliance Leader. She's not alone, and those guests of her are categorized as an unstoppable danger. Those are the words of the Patriarch Gang of the Ganyi Clan," he revealed.

Ma brushed his long beard with his fingers, he didn't show any expression and it was the worst kind of reaction he could ever show. Ogun knew how expressive Ma was, and the moment Ma didn't show any, it meant it was too much to handle.

"Alliance Leader?" Ogun asked when Ma hadn't said a single word for minutes.

"Summon everyone," Ma said, his gaze sharp and cold when he stared at the distance.

"Understood," Ogun lowered his head as he slowly rose from his chair and excused himself.

Chapter 632 - 632: Zenith.

Alliance Leader Ma sat on a simple wooden chair in the meeting hall while Master Strategist Ogun stood beside him. There were seven people in the room with them, old people from different big clans that had devoted themselves to people beyond their own clans. Most of them were former patriarchs and the rest were former elders of the clans. They were chosen not only based on their pure hearts and scholar-like personality, but also on their way of thinking. However, the most important part was that they had to achieve something called enlightenment, ascending them from normal martial arts and becoming Grandmasters. They were called the Seven Zenith.

Ogun had shared all the reports that could shake the whole continent with the Seven Zenith. The issues were too much to handle even for them because each issue had a big enough impact to bring instability. The inevitable war between the empire and the Sultans, the appearance of a Grandmaster from the Demonic Cult and the moment of Demonic Cult, Anastsha Asghar who had roamed the empire, and the guests she brought with her.

"As I have stated before, I will ask for an audience with the emperor and try to persuade his Majesty to delay the war. With all these issues appearing one after another, the war should get affected if the Demonic Cult made their moves and the appearance of an Asghar family member. I hope that His Majesty will reconsider his decision to wage a war with the Sultans," Ma said as he looked at everyone in the room with a serious expression.

Most of the Zenith weren't convinced, they still found the solution was lacking. However, they would do the same if they were in Ma's shoes because that was the best solution they could think of at the moment.

"Alliance Leader, the emperor wouldn't even consider the Demonic Cult as a threat. All this time the officials have never done anything to them because the Demonic Cult still obeys the laws and understands their position in the empire. The imperial family never made a fuss about them because the Demonic Cult still seen as loyal subjects to the imperial family," Jin said as he looked at Ma with concern. Jin was the former patriarch of the Sanggu Clan, one of the five great clans among the big clans. He was bestowed the title as Sword Emperor, the Gentle Swordman Jin.

"We received our freedom and the imperial family is generous enough to bestow on our clans and other clans so many lands to maintain and develop. Anything that happens within those lands, we are the ones who are responsible for maintaining its peace. Everyone is proven innocent until proven guilty, Alliance Leader. If the Demonic Cult only hunts martial artists, the official will turn a blind eye because of that agreement with the imperial family," Magura added. Magura was an elder from the Isagani Clan, one of the five great clans just like the Sanggu Clan. He was bestowed the title as Crescent Moon, the Invincible Spearman Magura.

Everyone nodded in agreement with those two because they all had the same opinion about Ma approaching the emperor. Of course, Ma and Ogun already knew about that, and the issue with the Demonic Cult wouldn't even make the imperial family bat an eye. However, it wasn't the main factor in persuading the emperor to delay the war.

"Alliance Leader, I believe you have something under your sleeves that will help you solve this situation. Mind if you shared it with us?" Yuna asked, her voice was quiet that almost hard to understand even when the room was quiet. Yuna, the youngest among the Zenith, and she was neither a former matriarch or elder of a clan, she was the daughter of the former patriarch of the Guma Clan, one of the big clans, not one of the great clans. She was the youngest to reach enlightenment in her era and was known as the Moon Lady, Empress of the Blades Yuna.

Everyone looked at Yuna and before they turned their heads to look at Ma who seemed to already know the issue before Jin and Magura mentioned it.

"As I have mentioned earlier. Any of you know who the guests that came with Anastasha Asghar are? Especially when I mentioned the name Rasmus Blackheart?" Ogun asked.

All the Zenith looked at each other and they were unaware of that name, not even in the slightest.

"Everyone here is well-known, respected and even feared by some. In this continent nobody who doesn't know all of you, but outside this continent, the names might not even mean anything to them," Ogun spoke gently, using his hand gestures to emphasize his words. "On the other hand, Rasmus Blackheart is a name that has reached every continent," he revealed as he stared into everyone's eyes. "Forgive my bluntness for saying this, but even with everyone's reputation here, comparing to him, you are all just frogs in the well," he added.

The Zenith made various expressions, some narrowed their eyes, some raised their brows, some furrowed their brows. They were surprised that Ogun would say something like that toward them, but they knew Ogun and his peerless knowledge that they didn't find it insulting but humbling.

"Enlighten us, Master Strategist," Tenzin lowered his head to Ogun. Tenzin was an elder from the Sihan Clan, a clan who was respected even among the unrighteous clans that even criminals would find themselves unpleasant when they were around the people of Sihan Clan. Sihan Clan was known for their selflessness who helped everyone without questioning their background. Tenzin was an elder, and he was given a title as Hand of Light, the Monk Tenzin.

Ogun pulled out a scroll from under his robe's sleeve and read the information he had gathered from merchants that had spent their time on different continents. It wasn't an easy task, but he could manage to gather all of them so effortlessly. He then began to reveal every known achievement of Rasmus Blackheart from being the Hero who saved South Neva from complete destruction to demons with power that could take over the continent in a single night. The achievement where he fought Satan and prevented the annihilation of Central Neva, the being that made the demons who threatened South Neva become pale in comparison. The achievement where Rasmus defeated the resurrected True Dragon in West Neva and put Demonic Beasts almost in extinction that had threatened West Neva for centuries.

Each achievement was spoken by Ogun, the Zenith and even Alliance Leader Ma slowly felt smaller and smaller until they felt like their achievements were like a child who was proud of themselves from creating a lump of dirt believing it was a castle in their backyards. After Ogun finished reading all the information he had gathered, he looked at everyone in the room.

"There's another thing. He's not alone, he came here with his wives, at least that was what people called those women. They're Aris, the Aristoria of the Orthias race, a Saint of the past, Serena, and a woman whose origin remains unknown, yet whose power is said to rival Lady Aris and Rasmus Blackheart," Ogun revealed before everyone could even breathe after holding their breath for too long. "And they're here with Anastasha Asghar, a family that has known to control the continent even with that small piece of land they sovereign," he added.

The Zenith finally understood and knew it would be enough to convince the emperor if Ma decided to reveal this information.

"The Emperor wouldn't look over this matter once mentioned, not when the scale is this big," Sunni muttered as she put her fingers under her chin. Sunni was the former matriarch of the Somachi Clan, one of the Great Clans. She was known as Peerless Sky, the Hidden Blades Sunni.

"Do we even need to worry about the emperor's opinion anymore when we already know who are these people are?" Woon looked at Sunni with his brows furrowed. "Knowing them is one thing, but knowing their intentions is another thing entirely," Woon was nothing like the other Zenith, he wasn't affiliated with any clans, and he belonged to no clans, he was a man who had climbed the walls and gained reputation across East Neva with his achievements and martial art from a mysterious Grandmaster. He was known as the Shapeless Blade Woon.

Everyone nodded in agreement because the matter was bigger than Khan Empire could handle.

"Wouldn't it be wise to invite them here and find that out ourselves?" Rukan suggested. Rukan, the oldest Zenith, a former patriarch and elder of the Guan Clan, the most powerful clan in Khan Empire. He was known across East Neva, and even the imperial family acknowledged his martial art and mind, known as the Sword of Heaven Rukan.

Alliance Leader Ma cleared his throat to get everyone's attention.

"We should focus on one thing at a time. With the information you all have received, we need to prevent the war from happening first. The war is the biggest opportunity for all the variables to make a move, and if we can prevent the war, there will be no unpredictable moves from them," Ma concluded as he looked them in the eyes.

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Chapter 633 - 633: Limitation.

Ogun was in his office, writing letters with his favorite jade brush when he heard someone knock on the door. He glanced at the candle on his desk, noticing it had been at least six hours since the sun was setting. It was in the middle of the night, and he wasn't expecting anyone to visit him at this hour.

"Come in," Ogun said as he put his brush down and grabbed his black peacock hand fan.

It was Yuna, her white hanfu dress with a gradient of light blue color on the hemline and the long straight black hair that reached her ankle. She wasn't young, she was in her mid sixty, and yet she looked half her age.

"Master Yuna, has something bothered your thoughts?" Ogun asked as he walked around his desk and pointed his hand at the small round table near the door.

"I apologize for bothering you at this hour, Master Strategist. I was wandering around the mountain, thinking about the meeting. When I stopped, I noticed I ended up near your annex, and when I saw the



light from your office, I decided to pay you a visit," Yuna answered as she walked toward the round table and took a seat.

"It would be even concerning if nobody found these issues troublesome," Ogun smiled softly as he prepared the tea. "Which issue that has occupied your thoughts the most, Master Yuna?" His voice was gentle and quiet as his hands carefully measured the tea leaves before he put them into the teapot.

"Demonic Cult, among all the issues that we have discussed. The war won't affect us that much, Anastasha Asghar and those who are with her, they're a threat, but they're not an immediate danger because their intentions are unknown. The Demonic Cult on the other hand, they're both a threat and a danger knowing they're preparing for war," Yuna answered, her hands placed on her lap and watched Ogun's mastery in brewing the tea.

"A Grandmaster that suddenly showed herself and defeated experts by removing their Mana so easily by a flick of a hand. That's not something you hear every day..." Ogun nodded with understanding, acknowledging Yuna's concern. "How many Grandmasters that we currently have, Master Yuna?" He asked as he poured the tea into Yuna's cup and his cup before he sat down beside her with the small table that separated them.

"Nine of us here. Alliance Leader Ma, the Seven Zenith, and you, Master Strategist Ogun. You might not be a skilled martial artist like us, but your skill in Array formation is on par with His Majesty the emperor strategist," Yuna answered and took a sip of the tea while staring at Ogun. "But outside the imperial forces and us the Heavenly Alliance, the Fist Emperor, the Sword King, and the Spear God from the great clans. If we also count the unrighteous clans, there are Mountain King, Ice Empress, and Thunder God," she revealed.

Ogun tapped his forefinger on the armrest as he nodded in agreement because he also thought there were only that many Grandmasters outside the Heavenly Alliance.

"Do you think that would be enough to fight the Demonic Cult, Master Yuna? We know there are at least five Grandmasters from the Demonic Cult who served the Demon God himself called the Five Penances, and we haven't counted the elders of the Demonic Cult and the elders of the five families that belonged to the Five Penances," Ogun looked at Yuna with his brows raised.

"Assuming we are working together, we have no synergies due to our differential of our roots that will put us in a difficult situation. Even if we have more power, the Demonic Cult is moving and acting as one, like the limbs of a single entity," Yuna revealed as she shook her head.

Ogun's expression hardened, his brows began to furrow, and his gaze was fixated on the spot on the wooden floor. Yuna looked at him and it made her smile because she had seen him like that all the time, a mind of a genius who could see possible outcomes like branches on a board he could take a peek at and play around with them.

"Have we grown too soft by the peace, Master Strategist?" Yuna asked. Knowing that she had just given him another load of problems to think about, she wanted to change the subject to ease his mind.

The question snapped Ogun back to reality, and his expression softened before he reached for his cup and took a sip of his tea. He gave it a thought at the question for a moment before he shook his head.

"No, Master Yuna. At least not for you, the Alliance Leader Ma, or the rest of the Zenith. Peace is temporary and so is chaos. We treat peace as a time to prepare, and I believe most of the clans think the same way," Ogun answered after he took another sip of his tea. "It's not the weakness that concerns you, Master Yuna, it's the limitation of each individual. It's not that they appear weak, it's that they're unable to grow anymore," he pointed out.

"Limitation..." A bitter smile appeared on Yuna's face. "If the enemies haven't reached their limits, then sooner or later we are going to be replaced..." She muttered as she closed her eyes.

"Some trees grow larger than the rest even if we took care of them with the same care. Instead of waiting for those smaller trees to keep up with the rest, we just need to put more seed and grow more trees because many of them will outgrow the previous ones. That's why we have the annual martial art tournament, Master Yuna. We look for potentials that can outgrow us, not just simply finding someone like us," Ogun responded with a gentle smile on his face.

Yuna's eyes fluttered open and she realized that Ogun was right. She chuckled softly as she nodded in agreement, realizing that she also had to focus on her disciples.

"Speaking of the tournament, isn't it about time we announce this year's tournament, Master Strategist? I heard we have a lot of younglings that are said to be as rare as the rarest aligning stars of the century," Yuna asked, her shoulders loosened up the tension that had been building up since the morning.

"Yes, I already have people putting the notice across the cities and villages. By tomorrow, I believe everyone will see it and prepare for the tournament," Ogun answered as he nodded. "And yes, I have been keeping my eyes on some individuals that are extraordinary that never appeared in the past decades," he added.

"I suppose we will have a great tournament this year based on your judgment, Master Strategist," Yuna said as she took a sip of her tea before she slowly stood up. "Thank you for your time, and I believe I have taken your time quite a lot, Master Strategist. I'll excuse myself," she did the hands gesture before she left the annex.

Ogun watched Yuna leave before he continued to write the letters that would take his resting time.

The morning came, Rasmus and the others rested in an inn when they noticed a crowd surrounding the notice board. Rasmus was curious because the people that surrounded the board weren't just normal people, but martial arts with decent Mana around them. He decided to check what made them interested, and when he saw the notice made by Heavenly Alliance Leader Ma.

"Annual Heavenly Alliance tournament," Rasmus muttered as he narrowed his eyes.

"Are you interested in that? It said to be the most prestigious event in Khan Empire," Anastasha said as she walked toward Rasmus. "All the powerful martial arts would be attending that event, either to watch or to participate," she pointed out.

"Is that so? I guess it's a good way to see what people of Khan Empire is capable of," Rasmus nodded in agreement. "Looks like we know where to visit next," he looked at Aris and the others. "You guys don't mind it?" He asked.

"Looks fun to me," Rullein grinned.

Aris and Serena nodded in agreement because they also wanted to see the strongest people in the Khan Empire.

Chapter 634 - 634: Lively.

Everywhere Rasmus went, people were talking about the tournament, and to his surprise, information was easily spread from one ear to another. He knew that East Neva, especially the Khan Empire took recognition, fame, and reputation seriously more than their own lives. Information about powerful individuals including their backgrounds were easily obtained because those individuals wanted themselves to be known.

"I'm surprised that those rising stars are quite young. They're younger than us and yet their skills sound like they're already beyond a Swordmaster from other continents," Serena said as she listened to the travelers that sat below them on the ground floor in the restaurant.

"Well, they're called the rising stars for a reason," Anastasha responded and stared at the juicy and oily whole roasted duck on the table. "In a world of martial arts where many people die young, those who grow old are either powerful or just lucky. Their fates had been decided by their parents the moment they were born. They're like horses with blinders, their focus is only at one thing, and that's to become the strongest," she added and struggled to use chopsticks to pull off the duck thigh from the breast.

"Since anyone can join the tournament, do you think the older stars are going to compete again?" Aris asked Anastasha as she watched Rullein take the whole roasted duck to her plate and then rip off the thigh with a bare hand then put it on Anastasha's plate while grinning.

"Yes, and most of the time it ends with conflict between clans," Anastasha stared at the steaming duck thigh on her plate with a mild surprise. "But that's how it is, there's no such thing as mercy in this nation. Just because they're young doesn't mean they will be shown leniency," she muttered and tried a piece of the juicy meat that immediately melted in her mouth.

Rasmus' focus was on the people below them who were talking to different individuals but they all tend to get along well with strangers to comparing their favorite martial artists with each other. One group talked with the other like it was a normal thing to do, turning the restaurant to grow warmer and more lively by not only sharing information but also alcohol. However, when he turned his head to stare at two men who looked ordinary, his gaze was fixated on them without blinking even once. He knew he was being observed because he felt their gazes pointed at him ever since those men came into the restaurant.

"What's the matter?" Aris stared at Rasmus, who was sitting across from her.

Rasmus didn't say a word, his gaze turned colder when he stared at those two men. When Aris finally looked at those men, she was confused as to why he was staring at them like that. However, that was

when those men suddenly stood up and paid for their food before they left. Even when they walked away, Rasmus' eyes still followed them until they left the restaurant.

"Everyone was talking about the tournament when those two were just eating so peacefully and unbothered by it. Those two were observing us," Rasmus pointed out before his focus moved to the people at the tables and listened to their conversations again.

"Are they bad people?" Serena asked with her brows raised, eating her stir fried vegetable even though she struggled to use the chopsticks to grab the food.

"Their attention never left our table, and they didn't seem like martial artists," Rasmus shook his head.

For the first time, Anastasha wasn't bothered to ask and enjoyed the juicy duck meat with the smooth alcohol that made her taste buds explode from deliciousness. She knew that those people were interested in Rasmus not because of her but because of his existence that had slowly gained recognition.

"I'm curious about something," Rullein looked at Rasmus and the others as she held the half-eaten duck drumstick. "Since anyone can participate in the martial arts tournament, why don't we participate as well?" She asked with her brows arched, staring at Rasmus and Aris.

"It would feel wrong. I'm not interested in competing in something that I'm not qualified, and I'm more interested in the people that lived in the Immortal Mountain, the Heavenly Alliance," Rasmus shook his head and took a sip of his alcohol.

"Me neither, I want to admire the skills of each individual from the side. I want to see how advanced the people here in fight compared the other continents," Aris shook her head and then looked at Serena who offered a piece of stir fry cabbage in between her chopsticks to her. She didn't hesitate and leaned in, tasting the rich flavor of savory, spicy, and a hint of bitterness and sweetness with the crunchy texture.

"I guess you both are right..." Rullein sighed as she chewed on the bone of the drumstick.

"You can go, but you can't go like that. Try to look like people from here and don't use your power, strength, and speed at all. If you think you can't win without them, then forfeit," Rasmus looked at her

with a smile on his face. "Also, it's to avoid you being recognized as the Queen of the Night of the Demonic Cult," he added and let out a short chuckle.

"Alright, I can promise you that," Rullein grinned and crunched on the bone, chewing it before she swallowed it like it was nothing, which still shocked Anastasha whenever she saw Rullein chewing and eating the bone.

The atmosphere in the restaurant from cheerful to gloomy was almost jarring. They listened to the people below about the rumor about Demonic Cult preparing for a war. Somehow the rumors had spread in just a few days, showing how fast news traveled, everyone wondered about the Queen of the Night's appearance, the Grandmaster of the Demonic Cult.

Rasmus had asked about the Demonic Cult to Anastasha, but even she couldn't find anything about them because of secluded they were. She mentioned that the Demonic Cult might be hiding in plain sight or that they had masters in Array, or magic formations that created illusions around them that made their territory invisible to the naked eye. However, it had been confirmed easily by Aris in a matter of minutes, and she knew where the Array was since nothing could be hidden by her draconic power.

"We know their location," Rasmus looked at Anastasha. "They're quite significant if you want to take them under your plan," he pointed out.

"Yes, I have been thinking about it since Lady Aris found their location," Anastasha nodded. "I just need more information about them. I can't just walk in offering gold when they're starving for meat, right?" She smirked playfully.

"If the infamous Anastasha Asghar doesn't know about them, how are you going to gather information about them?" Serena turned to look at Anastasha with a playful smile.

"Do you remember the handsome man during the gathering back then named Cyuren?" Anastasha asked as she looked at Serena.

"Yes, the foster son of the most trusted eunuch of the emperor," Serena nodded.

"That's right, and since the Demonic Cult is still a subject of the imperial family, everything about them must be reported and checked by officials even if it's in secret. So, that means I can just ask him," Anastasha answered and smiled at Serena, mirroring her smile.

"You sound so confident that he might give you such classified information," Serena tilted her head and raised her brows.

"Well, I can give him what he wants in exchange for that information, no? The fact he showed interest in me, that alone was enough indication that he had something that he wanted from me," Anastasha explained and took another bite of the juicy meat. "I will get what I want no matter what," she added as her eyes fixated on the food on her plate.

#### Chapter 635 - 635: Dignified Gentleman.

Rasmus, Aris, and Serena watched Anastasha leave on her own in her carriage. She had decided to meet with Cyuren in the capital city after she wrote a letter to him. Based on her prediction, she should have arrived when the letter came to Cyuren's hand. The three of them were left alone and Anastasha wasn't worried about them in a foreign nation, it was quite the opposite, she was worried that the whole nation would fall by their hands.

"I wonder if Rullein is still waiting in line to register the tournament," Serena looked at the distance at the Nuan Clan estate where warriors and martial arts in this city compete for the qualifier for the tournament. "I didn't expect the registration to be so thoroughly even at this stage," she talked about the physical examination to avoid Demonic Cult from entering.

"It is interesting that they can play with Mana around like that. To think their martial arts and cultivation can affect the Mana inside their bodies, revealing if their martial arts are pure or corrupted," Aris responded and watched the long line. "This is what happens when spirits are involved. I wonder why Sanya allowed this to happen," she muttered, trying to figure out the oldest Orthias and the one who sat above even the elders of the Orthias, someone that she spent most of her life with.

"Both Sanya and Aristoria have their own plans to prepare for the threat of the past that might come back. For whatever reason, their plans might have clashed and that was how Aristoria decided to walk her own path," Rasmus assumed, knowing his mother after he spoke to her in his dreams.

"Yes, it seemed that way," Aris nodded, wondering if Aristoria was listening to her deep within her body.

"Shall we check on Rullein? I honest a bit worried that she might cut the line and fight everyone doesn't want give their spot to her," Serena put her hands on Aris and Rasmus' backs as she suddenly stood in between them.

Rasmus saw a beggar lazing on the side of the street, lying down so comfortably on the dirty floor and damp wall. He noticed the beggar's eyes that didn't seem drained or empty, and there was no sign of stress in his expression.

"Give me one moment," Rasmus said as he walked away, walking toward the beggar.

Aris and Serena tilted their heads when he watched Rasmus stand in front of the beggar and pull out a gold coin out of his pocket before he put it in the bowl. They watched him squat in front of the beggar and said something that made the beggar look at him dead in the eye.

"Beggar by choice, suffer for something," Rasmus said as he stared at the beggar. "Without suffering, you'll achieve nothing," he continued, rephrasing the slogan of the Poor Man's Hands.

"And so I will suffer as my only choice," the beggar continued the phrase as he stared into Rasmus' eyes with a serious expression. "What is it that you want to know, Count Blackheart?" He asked.

"The Blackhands, my people," Rasmus answered.

"So those people are yours, it's no wonder they knew about us. They have made contact with the branch leaders of our society. They're currently working for us because they offered us their skills," the beggar revealed.

"Any of them in the Khan Empire?" Rasmus asked.

"None, they can't enter the empire with the current state of belligerent. They're foreigners with no backgrounds, they can't do anything about it," the beggar shook his head.



Rasmus pulled out a piece of paper, the most expensive currency that was created by the magic tower itself and used as an international currency. He pulled out one Ecler that was worth 500 gold coins and then put it in the beggar's bowl.

"Bring twenty of my people into the empire, help them gather any kind of information they need," Rasmus said with a serious expression.

"Understood," the beggar nodded.

Rasmus stood up and then walked away, but on the other hand, the beggar was surprised that Rasmus only asked about his people instead of the current situation. The beggar found Rasmus weird, but he brushed it off and went back to being lazy and yawned before he took a nap like nothing had happened.

Rasmus, Aris, and Serena then walked toward the clan estate, and they looked at each of them but they didn't find Rullein in her disguised appearance. They realized that she might have entered the estate and waited for the tournament to qualify for the main stage. They waited in a queue with other spectators that wanted to watch, and when it was their turn to be checked, Rasmus, Aris, and Serena offered their arms to the old man that no other than the elder of the Nuan Clan that checked the roots, or people from Khan Empire called it dantian to see if they were spies from the Demonic Cult.

"(Cold...)" The old man thought when he held Rasmus' wrist, and then he stared into Rasmus' blue gray eyes like a glacier. "(Foreigner?)" He thought as he checked Rasmus' dantian, his eyes blown wide for a moment. "(What's this?! The Mana is too thick that I can't even check his dantian. Could it be?)"

"May I ask your name?" The elder asked as he looked at Rasmus, Aris, and Serena.

"Rasmus Blackheart. We are here to watch because we are interested in martial arts," Rasmus answered.

The elder remembered the letter that came from Gang, the Patriarch of Ganyi Clan about Rasmus Blackheart. Gang sent letters to every clan, whether they were big clans or small clans about Rasmus, a man that they shouldn't offend but also told them that he wasn't a man without respect or dignity. Gang called Rasmus a dignified gentleman.

"You may come in," the elder nodded with understanding and pointed his hand at the gate.

"Thank you, elder," Rasmus did the hands gesture at the elder before he walked in, Aris and Serena also did the hands gesture at the elder.

They entered the training area with a huge stage in the middle, and many martial artists and spectators had gathered. It was hard to find a spot, and they had no choice but to stand at the far back. Because Aris, Serena, and Rasmus were taller than anyone, they had no problem watching from the back. Their eyes were looking for Rullein, but they only found martial artists stretching, checking their weapons, or warming up by doing a few moves until they saw a woman with long middle-parted straight hair standing still with her arms crossed with a black sword on her back and not moving a muscle.

"Look at her, she's a menace," Serena chuckled softly.

"She is. Everyone seems to prepare for a fight, she seems to prepare to kill," Aris shook her head, smiling in disbelief. "Are you sure it's okay to let her join the tournament? It's not too late to drag her out of this place," she looked at Rasmus with her brows raised, obviously joking.

"Well, if she ended up in a big trouble, that would be none of our business," Rasmus smiled.

Chapter 636 - 636: Different Priority.

Dozens of martial arts from different clans or individuals who didn't affiliate with any clans fought with everything they got on stage. Some of them were overwhelming and some were underwhelming that it was one-sided. Aris was the one who observed every move, finding the art in those moves, but her expression was telling otherwise.

"What's wrong?" Rasmus asked with his brows raised, seeing the furrow of Aris' brows.

"Most of their moves are exaggerated, and there are a few moves that don't seem to be necessary," Aris pointed out as she kept watching.

"Is that what you think, young lady?" A voice of an old man could be heard behind Rasmus, Aris, and Serena. "It's such a refreshing perspective, coming from someone from a different continent," he added as he laughed softly.

They turned around and found the same elder that checked their dantian from earlier. He looked so pleased when he heard Aris' observation.

"Elder," Rasmus smiled gently as he did the hands gesture at the elder. Aris and Seren did the same.

"I apologize if my words offend you since you're also a martial artist," Aris said, and Serena looked at her with her brows raised because to her, Aris sounded just like Rasmus.

"Ahahah, don't be! Don't be!" The elder waved his hand in front of his face with a huge grin on his face. "Seeing that you can see that the moves are exaggerated without knowing martial arts. To notice that much with a single glance... your eye for combat is exceptional," he pointed out.

The elder looked at Aris' fingers and then at Rasmus' fingers, but he didn't see any callouses, no roughness on their palms. He knew what happened to the Ganyi Clan from Gang's letter, but to think that the one who could withstand the strongest formation of the Ganyi Clan and performed by the elders and the patriarch had no sign of hardship in his hand, it was a bit suspicious.

"(I know about the Magic Tower and the one who controlled it, is he also a mage? A powerful one at that?)" The Elder thought as he stared at Rasmus.

"But I understand from your stand point, young lady. They are exaggerated as you have mentioned, but there are reasons behind it," the elder said to Aris. "There are so many variations of attacks in a single martial art. To do so, they tend to have many different stances before they do the variations. A basic attack can lead to many variations to follow and so forth, and that's when the stances are required to channel the Mana and the cores to do the moves properly. However, they're exaggerated when you observe these martial artists because they're not masters. Once they have become a master, the exaggeration turns into a deadly trap for those who believe it's an opening for an attack," he explained.

Aris realized her standard and the humans were different, and she also noticed that these martial art fights were different from her training that required her strength and speed as the main things. She

fought to protect the world, humans fought to protect themselves, the motivation and the purpose were different.

"It seems you see the difference between your skill and ours, young lady," the elder smiled gently at Aris.

"Yes, thank you for your insight, elder," Aris nodded and then looked at the stage again.

"Next participants, Ruen and Lai!" The stage announcer shouted as he looked at the list in his hands.

Rasmus, Aris, and Serena raised their brows in unison when they heard Ruen. Since Rullein couldn't use her real name and she was disguising herself to be like the people of Khan Empire, she used Ruen as her stage name. She stood on the stage still with her sword wrapped in bandages, making it look mysterious.

"Oh, that young man over there is quite famous in our region. He's known as the Bandit Slayer, and he doesn't belong to any clans and works in an escort agency. He's feared by bandits from this region, and because of his existence, the amount of problems with bandits have been reduced greatly," the elder pointed out as he put his hands behind his back.

Rasmus and Aris weren't interested in the backstory of Lai because they were currently pitying him for facing Rullein.

"The rules are simple, do not kill and if you hit your opponent after they forfeit, you will be disqualified," the stage announcer looked at both of them. "Now, let's begin the duel!" He shouted.

Lai unsheathed his sword and readied his stance, his stance was for counterattacks. However, when he saw Rullein standing still and didn't move a muscle, he furrowed his brows. He immediately changed his stance and charged toward her, finding her lack of interest insulting.

When Lai thrust his sword toward Rullein's head, she tilted her head to the side at the last moment, making him miss. Lai knew he hesitated when he thrust his sword toward her because he didn't want to hurt her, but after he found out she could dodge his attack so effortlessly, he knew there was no need to hold back.

Lai pulled his sword halfway and then swung horizontally with the intent to cut Rullein's throat, but she took a step back that made the tip of his blade miss by an inch. He was stunned that someone could predict his movements, and that only pissed him off, oozing a killing intent.

Everyone watched from the side with their mouths gaping because Rullein only moved her head and feet for a whole minute while Lai was screaming his lungs out with each swung of his sword. The elder was stunned by the skill that Rullein showed, and he knew the duel was over the moment she read Lai's movements. Until finally Lai stopped attacking, his sword trembled and made a rattling sound because of how tight he gripped on the handle as he gritted his teeth together from frustration.

"It's my loss..." Lai admitted as he did the hands gesture at Rullein.

Rullein didn't say a word and did the same hands gesture toward him before she walked away. The spectators found her mysterious, and they noticed that her sword was as mysterious as the owner. They loved to make-up stories of warriors they deemed worth the tale, and at this moment, she had become their favorite martial artist and gave her a title as the Soundless Beauty.

"What do you think of that woman, elder?" Rasmus asked as he glanced at the elder beside him.

The elder snapped back to reality because he was still stunned by the duel. He cleared his throat and took his moment to think.

"Lai isn't an expert, not even close, but he's not some third-rate or even second-rate martial artist. There are thousands of people who can do what Ruen did earlier, or at least based on what she had shown. However, I can confidently say that she's at a first-rate martial artist that maybe close to becoming an expert," the elder answered with a serious expression.

"I see," Rasmus nodded with understanding. "Do you think she's qualified to enter the Heavenly Alliance tournament, elder?" He asked.

"Most definitely," the elder answered without hesitation. "But as I said earlier, someone like her is uncommon, but not rare," he added.

Chapter 637 - 637: Unrealistic.

"Have you heard about the Soundless Beauty?" A man asked his friend as they waited in line to enter the estate of the renowned clan to watch the qualifier for the tournament.

"No, where is she from?" His friend asked with his brows arched.

"I don't know where she came from, but she single-handedly defeated first-rate martial artists from Bein province," the man answered as he shook his head.

"Everyone from Bein province?! There are so many great martial artists from that province and you told me that they all got defeated by this woman? Who is she? What's her name?" His friend asked with his eyes blown wide.

"I know what you're thinking, and I also thought that was exaggerated that someone could defeat everyone from the Bein province. However, I heard the same thing from merchants and travelers. They said that the Bein province only brought one person due to them all losing to the Soundless Beauty, and her name is Ruen," the man explained with a serious expression.

"That's hard to believe..." the friend muttered.

While everyone was waiting in line to enter the estate to watch the qualifier, everyone was startled by a loud cheer from inside. Those who were waiting in line immediately knew what was going on, and they all complained at the guards for not letting them in immediately because they were there to watch a single person.

"That must be him on the stage right now," the man smacked his lips in annoyance. "We are missing the fun! Guards! Let us in already!" He shouted, joining the others.

The elder came out of the estate and told the guards to let everyone in because the reputation of the clan would be tarnished. Everyone hurriedly walked into the clan's estate and went to where the qualifier was being held. As soon as they looked at the stage, they saw a young man with long and straight black hair, wearing a white robe with a gold rose embroidered on the back.

"That's him, Sando of the Somachi Clan, the direct disciple and the grandson of one of the Zenith of the Heavenly Alliance, Sunni the Peerless Sky, the Hidden Blade," the man's smile widened and his pupils dilated in excitement. "One of the Rising Stars of this era, the Noble Prince..."

"Oh, but look at his opponent. Isn't that Maoyu, the Swift Blade? Aren't they similar in terms of martial arts?" The friend furrowed his brows, looking at the man with a messy gray hair bun. "This is so exciting! I didn't regret going all the way here, leaving my son and my wife for this!" He grinned as he clenched his fists.

Maoyu gave Sando the martial art salutation, and Sando responded with a greater amount of respect. Maoyu could be said as senior to Sando because Maoyu had become a martial artist longer.

"It's an honor to be able to test my skill against the one of the Rising Stars," Maoyu said as he unsheathed his sword.

"The honor is mine, Senior. I might be called a Rising Star, but nothing can beat experience, and I admit that I'm lacking in that. Please, teach this junior," Sando smiled and stared at Maoyu with utmost respect as he readied his stance with bare hands.

Maoyu saw Sando's stance and even with his experience exploring the empire, he couldn't see a single opening for an attack. He glanced at the white robe that Sando wore, and since everyone knew that Sando was the direct disciple of Sunni the Hidden Blades, the robe itself was a weapon to conceal the blades underneath. He narrowed his eyes as he readied his stance, and his plan was simple but impossibly hard to do, and that was to prevent Sando's hands from reaching out his hidden blades.

"Let the duel begin!" The stage announcer shouted.

Maoyu dashed forward, the tip of his sword pointed right in the middle of Sando's chest. Sando, who saw the intention, immediately hunched his back to give him more time to react while his hands were positioned right in front of his chest. Maoyu knew that Sando would react like that, and he was in range, instead of a thrust, he swung his sword upward, aiming at Sando's chin and face that were vulnerable due to his stance and posture. Sando narrowed his eyes and at the last moment, pushing his left hand across his face, pushing the sword away from his face. At the same time, Sando's right hand reached for his hidden blade under his left sleeve.

Maoyu smiled and suddenly used his free hand as a palm strike while Sando's vision was blocked by his own stance and defense. However, to his surprise, Sando grabbed Maoyu's left wrist and redirected the palm strike toward the air below his left arm. Sando immediately used his left palm to strike Maoyu's chest and it was a direct hit, pushing Maoyu back.

Everyone cheered in excitement even though their eyes could barely see the movements between those two. At the same time, Maoyu changed his stance, realizing that he wasn't the only one who could read his opponent's movements. On the other hand, Sando readied his stance once again, but this one was different from the previous one that showed so many openings in Maoyu's eyes. However, Maoyu knew it was a stance for offensive, not defensive, and if he was being uncareful, he would lose the duel.

Before Maoyu could think of a way to fight an opponent like Sando, Sando was the first one to make a move. Instead of dashing straight toward Maoyu, Sando dashed across toward Maoyu's right side. Maoyu turned toward Sando and was ready to block the attack with his sword, however, Sando kept moving toward Maoyu's right side. That one single mistake of footing was enough that Sando stopped moving to the side and just lunged forward with his fists.

Maoyu was about to block it but knew it was too late, and when he decided to dodge it, his footing was in the wrong position that he knew he was done for. Sando threw a sequence of attacks with his fists, the back of his hands, his forearms, and elbows, attacking Maoyu on his chest, his guts, his thighs, and then lastly his knees. It was a flawless combination of attacks until Maoyu collapsed to his knees and dropped his sword.

"It's my loss..." Maoyu groaned as he clenched his fists, staring down at the ground. "You knew my right side was my weakness, how?" He asked as he slowly lifted his head and looked at Sando.

"Your sword naturally drew your weight toward your right side. Once you turned to follow me, your left foot could no longer support a retreat. It's a human limitation especially when holding a sword with your strong hand which is your right hand," Sando answered as he offered his hand to Maoyu. "Maybe if the purpose of the duel wasn't a competition, the outcome might be different if you didn't hesitate, Senior. Your experience is still far superior than mine, I only won because the duel wasn't a realistic battle," he added.

Maoyu chuckled as he shook his head, and then looked at his sword on the ground. He grabbed his sword with his left hand and grabbed Sando's hand with his right hand.



"A loss is still a loss, congratulation, Junior," Maoyu stood up and sheathed his sword before he gave Sando a martial arts salutation.

Sando mirrored Maoyu's gesture, and this time he lowered his head slightly. The crowd cheered for him, and he only smiled at them before he walked down the stage.

Chapter 638 - 638: Elusive.

Ogun was reading reports of the numbers of martial arts that had registered for the tournament and the numbers that had passed the qualifier. Every name on the papers, he knew them, or at least heard of them and their achievements to verify their legitimacy. However, there were at least ten names that he was unaware of, and Ruen was among those names.

"These names..." Ogun wrote the names on the letter because he wanted to send the names to the official of each province where those names came from. "Let's see who you are..." He muttered and carefully folded the letter then sealed it with the Heavenly Alliance's seal.

Ogun tapped his desk two times and paused a bit for the third time. Not long after that, a man entered his office, a man with a porcelain black demon mouth mask and wore a dark blue ninja suit. He didn't say a word and approached Ogun to take the letter, but Ogun raised his hand, stopping the man from reaching for the letter.

"What about them? Your team has been keeping an eye on Rasmus Blackheart and Anastasha Asghar. Tell me the information you have gathered so far," Ogun said as he stared at the man's light brown eyes with miosis pupils that looked almost non-existent.

"It's hard to do close surveillance on them due to my team being spotted all the time, but we still managed to gather information about them from afar," the man answered.

"Your team being spotted? By them? Are they that skilled? Is this the second time your people got spotted during surveillance?" Ogun asked with his brows furrowed, mildly surprised by the fact there were other people who managed to spot the Heavenly Alliance's surveillance and intelligence team.

"No, we were spotted by Rasmus Blackheart. He spotted us within minutes of us beginning the surveillance. We tried different methods, but he always knew we were watching. So, we decided to do surveillance from a distance for the team's safety," the man revealed, his expression and gaze unchanged and stayed neutral.

Ogun couldn't help but chuckle as he leaned back, resting his elbows on the armrests and clasped his hands together against his lips. His eyes moved from one corner to another repeatedly in slow movements.

"You're an expert in this field, so do what you think it's the best for your team," Ogun's voice muffled by his hands. He took a deep breath and leaned toward his desk and rested his hands on top of it, "What did you find?" He asked with a serious expression.

"Three days ago, Anastasha Asghar left on her own in her carriage, leaving her guests behind. Based on the information we had gathered, the destination might be the capital city, Master Strategist," the man shared the intelligence he received from his team. "At the same time, the guests are interested in the tournament and have been watching every match in Bein province," he added.

"Anastasha left on her own? And her guests were watching the tournament in Bein Province?" Ogun tapped his finger and glanced at the report of the martial artists that qualified to the main stage. "Bein province..." he muttered to himself and saw Ruen's name, the one from Bein province. "Anything you found from there?" He asked and glanced up at the man.

"Yes, whenever they watched the qualifier, there were only three of them, one of the women always went missing but appeared after they left," the man revealed.

"Ruen might be one of them, disguising herself as someone else," Ogun pointed out with his eyes narrowed slightly. "Based on her appearance, there are similarities between the two. Although the height and the face look different, it's common for people who have mastered disguise," he added.

"Do you want us to gather information about Ruen?" The man asked.

"No, that would be unnecessary. Let me handle that one," Ogun shook his head. "And about Anastasha. How sure you are that she's going to the capital city?" He asked with his brows raised.

"Another team has been assigned to keep an eye on her, and we will find out in a few days," the man answered.

Ogun nodded with understanding, but he took that information as fact instead of speculation for the moment. He slowly stood up and walked toward the shelves behind his desk while muttered something under his breath.

"The capital city... what are you looking for there? Or who?" Ogun narrowed his eyes as he scanned the books of reports in the shelves. Suddenly, his head tilted to the side, and grabbed a book of reports of the guests that attended the gathering of the Asghar family. "Did I miss anything?" He muttered to himself as he read the report once again as he walked back to his seat.

Ogun had read the book countless of times like an obsession, but he still believed he might have missed something. All the guests said about the act of murder during the gathering that had something to do with Anastasha and Rasmus. That scene had been the main focus in the report, but it wasn't the one he was looking for until he saw one person who had stated something that the others failed to mention.

"Cyuren approached Anastasha..." Ogun muttered the report. "The foster son of the eunuch, Cien. Cyuren is working at the capital city..." He leaned back and exhaled deeply, staring at the ceiling with his brows furrowed. "Cyuren belonged to the faction of the second son of Zayn Asghar, Zeke. Is she going to meet someone that belongs to another faction?" He sighed as he closed his eyes, the possibilities were too elusive for his mind to grasp.

While Ogun was muttering to himself, the man stayed quiet and watched from across the desk. He knew how obsessive Ogun was with his own thoughts, everyone from the Heavenly Alliance knew that up until that point it wasn't a shock that Ogun ended up feeling unwell at least once a week.

"Should I report this to the Alliance Leader, Master Strategist?" The man asked.

"No... not yet. It's not yet proper to be reported..." Ogun muttered as he massaged his nose bridge. "Just keep an eye on Rasmus Blackheart, and you can send those letters to the officials. Make it quick, because in a week, the main event of the tournament will be held, and I need to know everyone who compete on the stage," he added.

The man took the letters and then left without saying a word, leaving Ogun alone with his thoughts again. However, the truth was his mind was blank, it was overloaded with thoughts that his mind went numb when silence took over the room. The reason behind it was Anastasha, because he had gathered a lot of information about the Asghar family, but the one he had never considered a threat was the one who was currently pointing the blade at his throat.

"Alliance Leader might laugh at this, but I think I need a raise..." Ogun muttered under his breath and stared blankly at the report during the gathering of the Asghar family.

Chapter 639 - 639: Camaraderie.

Anastasha's eyes fluttered open when the carriage stopped moving. The first thing she did was glance at the window and see the soldiers in golden armor surrounded her carriage. She smirked as she stood up and opened the carriage door. She saw a dozen soldiers on horses, staring down at her before they glanced at the inside of the carriage, finding out that she was alone.

"Occasion?" The captain of the soldier that guarded the entry to the capital city asked Anastasha without showing any sign of respect or fear. As a captain in the army of the Khan Empire, he held a significant position in the country that even patriarchs of great clans wouldn't dare to tell him to bow his head.

"I'm here to meet with Young Master Cyuren," Anastasha answered as she stared at the captain's face, remembering his facial features.

"I have not received any orders from Registrar Cyruen about having a guest. Do you have any proof of your words?" The captain asked with a condescending gaze toward Anastasha.

Anastasha didn't blink her eyes, and she didn't answer the question, only stared at the captain dead in the eyes. The captain knew he had no reason to fear her, but his instinct was poking at him to stop staring at her because she was an Asghar. The moment the captain averted his gaze for a moment, Anastasha smiled coldly before she shook her head.

"I suppose the letter hasn't been read. Is that alright if I stay near the gate until the sun is setting? I believe by today, the Ministry of War Registrar will received my letter," Anastasha requested, and then she glanced at the soldiers behind the captain, and they all immediately felt the same feeling as the

captain had earlier and then looked away. "I promise that I will leave by sunset if nothing happened," she assured.

"Do as you please. However, do not cause any trouble," the captain said before he kicked his horse and rode his horse away from the carriage.

Anastasha sighed as she walked back into the carriage and made herself comfortable. She glanced at the travelers and the merchants that were being checked as her carriage moved to the side. She yawned and glanced at the sun, realizing she only had four hours before she had to leave.

The sky turned orange with a blue hue, and she looked bored that she had been staring at her hand fan for a thousandth time. When she felt the ground tremble, she took a peek out the window to see, and that was when a smile appeared on her face. She walked out of the carriage and saw Cyuren riding his horse with dozens of soldiers and the General-in-Chief of the capital city himself escorting him.

"Your Highness the Princess, I have to apologize for being late. You should have told the guard to inform me about your arrival," Cyuren said as he slowly got down from his white horse. "You waited for hours..." He muttered as he stared at the sky before his gaze fixated on Anastasha.

"I could," Anastasha smiled softly. "But I want to make you feel guilty for making a lady wait for hours in the carriage," she chuckled softly.

Cyuren put on a bitter smile, and the guilt was already written all over his face.

"Don't worry, Registrar, I know how busy you are, especially with the current situation. It was presumptuous of me to ask for an audience," Anastasha said with utmost honesty.

"Please, Your Highness the Princess, don't be. Let's just call it even then," Cyuren suggested.

"Sounds fair to me," Anastasha nodded in agreement.

"Well then, please, follow us," Cyuren said as he walked toward the carriage and held the door open for her.

Anastasha lowered her head as she walked back into the carriage and watched Cyuren close the door for her before he went back to ride his horse.

Anastasha arrived at the central government office complex, where it was heavily guarded by elite soldiers of the Khan Empire called the Dragon Claw Unit. Back when she was still a child, her father mentioned something about them that a single Dragon Claw soldier was worth more than five hundred soldiers. In the Khan Empire, there was a list of the oldest martial arts, and most of them were held and owned by the imperial family, making them formidable and unknown even to the Heavenly Alliance.

Anastasha entered Cyuren's personal office, and everything was made of gold and the highest quality jade. She couldn't imagine what kind of place the imperial palace was if an official like Cyuren had already been treated like this, which was still fifth on the rank than the highest rank a person could reach in government.

"I have read your letter, but I didn't see any purpose of your visit, Your Highness the Princess," Cyuren said as he sat across from Anastasha while holding the letter she wrote to him.

"If I told you why I came, you might not want to see me. And please, just call me by my name, not my title," Anastasha smiled at Cyuren and watched him pour the tea into her cup.

"Then please, call me by my name as well, Anastasha," Cyuren smiled back at her and offered the cup to her.

"I'll go straight to the reason I came, Cyuren," Anastasha took the cup from Cyuren's hand. "I need information about the demonic cult," she said with a serious expression, her eyes staring directly into his.

Cyuren was in the middle of pouring the tea into his cup when he froze and pulled the teapot away from his cup. He furrowed his brows and stared at Anastasha with a confused and suspicion. He didn't expect someone would bring up the demonic cult, and the worst part was the one who wanted to know about them was an Asghar.

"Is this about your succession?" Cyuren asked, his expression losing its warmth.

"Mainly, yes," Anastasha nodded.

"Mainly?" Cyuren tilted his head, his brows furrowed deeper to the point he began to feel the soreness in his brows muscles.

"I know where they are. I know where they live. I even know about the arrays surrounding their hideout, they're pointless in the eyes of an Aristoria anyway. So, I'm asking you about them, or should I go there without knowing who they are? I'll lose nothing, but I can't say the same to you, right?" Anastasha revealed, her expression became neutral, but the arch of her brows was like a challenge, a warning.

Cyuren didn't bother to continue to pour the tea into his cup anymore. He fell right into the pit of snakes, and if he decided to escape, he would lose a leg or two from the venom, or worse, he wouldn't make it out far enough.

"I know you belong to my second brother's faction, Zeke. But I know you joined him because of his personality. He's impassive, and holds no control over his people, unlike his older brother, Zayn, who could kill his own people if they did something wrong or unlike Zeke's younger brother, Zoran, who knows people that will obey him without having to use violence. That made me realize you had no desire in the Asghar family, or maybe you even despise us. That means you were told or ordered by someone, and I suspect it was your father," Anastasha's stare was cold, and she kept staring at Cyuren like prey.

"By now, Zeke and Zoran have formed a treaty for succession. Their goal is me, and right now, if I just spread a rumor that you're helping me, I wonder how long until Zeke realizes being impassive is his weakness? And who knows if he would copy Zayn's method in dealing with..." Anastasha paused to take a sip of the tea. "A traitor," she muttered as she hummed, tasting the balance between the sweetness and the bitterness of the tea.

Cyuren suddenly smiled as he lowered his head, nodding his head with understanding. He let out a deep sigh, but his expression somehow became brighter, his shoulders seemed to be lighter.

"Now I understand why your brothers are so afraid of you joining the succession," Cyuren said as he stood up and walked toward his desk. "However, you're wrong about..." he paused as he pulled the drawer and grabbed a record book. "Well, a few things..." he revealed as he walked back to the table

and offered the book to her. "But I'm not confident enough to make those things matter when you have decided to bring me down," he added as he sat down and still offered the book to her.

Anastasha smirked and took the book from Cyuren's hand. The moment she opened the book, she found dozens of names in each page, the names of the people, every household that lived in Demonic Cult territory.

"You don't have to use threat with me, Anastasha. As you said, I have no desire in the Asghar family, and you're right about that as well. If I can see the Asghar family fall into ruins from the front row, I would love to see that," Cyuren smiled coldly at Anastasha.

"Then we have something in common. Nothing is stronger than loyalty until you found camaraderie with your enemy for wanting the same thing," Anastasha responded as she shut the book. "Well then, Registrar. I have taken your precious time, and so I'll excuse myself," she pointed out as she stood up.

"Then I have to apologize in advance for not being able to see you off, Your Highness the Princess," Cyuren kept that cold smile plastered on his face.

Anastasha lowered her head before she walked away and left Cyuren's office.

Chapter 640 - 640: Innocence.

"Those people have been following us since we left. Is there a reason you don't want to get rid of them?" Rullein looked at Rasmus with her brows furrowed. "At least let me have fun with them and find out who they are."

"They're not doing us any harm, or at least they're not hindering us in any way. We will take care of them once we don't want to be seen," Rasmus answered and looked out the window at the tallest mountain in Neva, the Immortal Mountain. "Sooner or later, your disguise will be exposed as well. When the time comes, what are you going to do?" He asked and glanced at Rullein, who was sitting beside him.

"What else? I'll challenge them all who are against it," Rullein grinned.



Aris shook her head, and there was no need to say anything to express her disappointment. She then suddenly furrowed her brows when she looked out the window at the crowd that blocked their path. She saw a group of warriors protecting the carriage from a group of armed bandits.

"There are people in danger ahead of us," Aris informed.

Serena took a peek out of the window and saw four escorts surrounded by twenty bandits. She slowly pulled her head back inside with a grimacing expression. Rasmus and Rullein tilted their heads back to pop their heads out of the open window.

"They're so dead," Rullein muttered.

"Which side?" Rasmus asked as he looked at the bandits, then the escorts.

"Those four. They're strong, but there's someone stronger on the other side that even the four of them fight together, they'll be no match," Rullein pointed out. "Even bandits are experts in martial arts, huh?" She arched her brows.

Rasmus looked at the group of bandits, and they didn't look like one based on how they held their weapons and by how the weapons were in great conditions. There was something else that stood out that made him believe they weren't bandits, and it was their postures.

"Should we do something about it?" Rullein looked at the back of Rasmus' head.

"No, if we kept quiet, they might ignore us," Rasmus shook his head and pulled his head back inside.

Rasmus told the coachman to stop the carriage and stay still. The moment the carriage stopped and the bandits saw the coachman raising their hands in fear, and the carriage looked ordinary like a rental carriage, they ignored him, especially since they had four escorts to deal with.

Rasmus and the others stayed quiet as they listened to the clash of steel, grunts, and shouts that followed. They were so quiet that they could hear everything clearly and imagined how the fight went until finally the battle was over. Aris had been using ears to listen to see if the bandits were approaching

their carriage or not, but the bandits had no interest in them, at least not yet. However, when they heard a high-pitched shriek of a woman, Serena winced slightly and closed her eyes.

They could hear a loud thud sound of a body being tossed to the ground from a higher ground. They could imagine the woman was being pushed or tossed out of the carriage. Then they heard the woman scream when she found out her escorts died and it was revealed one of them was her uncle and the other one was her older brother from the way she mourned in hysterical and the way she cried was genuine, heart-wrenching. Serena lowered her head, her eyes still closed, and her hands instinctively wanted to cover her ears but ended up settling around her neck.

"Do you want to save her?" Rasmus asked as he looked at Serena.

"She's an innocent child. I can tell..." Serena muttered.

"Then go and save her," Rasmus nodded with understanding.

Serena walked out of the carriage door, which was in the back. She took a deep breath and walked around the carriage. She walked slowly until she saw the bandits and the girl knelt with a sword on her throat that was ready to decapitate her. She released her divine energy until all of the bandits and the girl got enchanted and hypnotized by it. They all turned their heads toward Serena, and their eyes were blank like a drowning person saw a hand reaching out to them.

The bandits dropped their weapons, and Serena walked past them without batting an eye, her focus was on the girl. Rasmus and the others peeked their heads out the window and watched it all happen. Rasmus had seen the effect of uncontrollable divine power during his time teaching Aurelia in the academy back then. The divine power that could turn people mindless and saw her like nothing but the savior, their master to obey.

"Go to sleep," Serena knelt and cupped the girl's cheek.

The girl's eyes suddenly became heavy until they fluttered closed. Serena carefully placed the girl's head on her lap and wiped off the tears from the girl's cheeks while the bandits were staring at her with blank gazes. She looked over her shoulders at the bandits with a gentle gaze and then smiled at them.

"Kill yourself, all of you," Serena commanded.

The bandits reached their weapons on the ground before they all slit their throats. Serena didn't bother to look at them when they did it, her focus was on the girl. She knew the girl was innocent, and she was right because she could sense and smell the innocence from the girl with her ability.

The moment all the bandits collapsed and were covered in their own blood, Serena carried the girl and walked past the dead bodies without looking at them. She saw a puff of smoke appear beside her and Rullein came out of it, walking past her toward the dead bodies. She glanced over her shoulder to find Rullein touching the bandit's head, taking in the memories while he was on the brink of death.

Aris took the girl from Serena's arms so Serena could get inside the carriage. As soon as she got back inside, she already saw Rullein sitting beside Rasmus as if she had never left to begin with.

"We can go now," Serena commanded the coachman that was still affected by her power.

The coachman nodded slowly and set the carriage in motion, steering the horses around the carriage in front of them and avoided from getting any blood on the horses' feet. Rasmus and the others looked at Serena, who was already holding the girl, and let the girl lay beside her and put the girl's head in her lap. She slowly looked at the three of them with her brows raised, finding their stares to feel a bit uncomfortable.

"What?" Serena asked.

"You know, I thought I was the most sadistic in the group. Who would have thought," Rullein said with her brows raised.

"Being compared to you will never be a compliment, Rullein," Serena chuckled softly with a gentle smile on her face as she stared at the girl's face that was filled with grief and pain. "I'm sorry, Rasmus..." She muttered and lifted her head to look at Rasmus.

"Don't be," Rasmus shook his head. "There are no witnesses, nobody knows, nothing changed," he pointed out.

"But, this child. I brought her with us," Serena frowned.

"You have decided to make her your responsibility, and I don't see that as an issue for me," Rasmus responded.

Serena nodded in agreement, and she already planned to make this situation her responsibility, and she would handle everything on her own. However, she knew that Rasmus would get affected from this as well indirectly, but knowing that he had stated that it was fine, she knew he wouldn't mind it even if he ended up getting dragged into it.

"What did you find?" Aris looked at Rullein.

"Those bandits? They weren't bandits just like Rasmus said, they were hired assassins. I know who sent them, but I don't know who hired them and for what," Rullein answered as she shrugged. "And it's none of our business to dig even deeper," she added.

"Yes, I'll handle this myself if somehow I get involved in whatever this situation I'm in," Serena said as she looked out the window as she took a deep breath, already sensing what she had put herself into.

"On your own? You have us. Well, let's not include Rasmus in this, but you have the two of us if you need our help," Aris pointed out.

"Yeah, don't just hog all the fun to yourself," Rullein grinned.