

## Evolution 144

Chapter 144: A Piece of Your Soul.

Some days ago...

Mantis and Demetris found themselves called to Sir Alaric's office... Mantis had a feeling it was related to his ploy to retrieve the Sensebound Pearl from Levi during the expedition.

However, when they went inside the office, they found Lord Darius sitting on a couch while holding a cup of coffee. He was gazing into the cup in silence... His expression was unreadable.

"Lo... Greeting, my Lord!"

In an instant, Mantis and Demetris bowed their heads deeply, startled by his attendance. Mantis had spent close to three years in the Sunstrike Agency... This was the first time he was this close to its head.

Yet, he didn't feel delighted. His heart was pounding out of his chest, believing that Lord Darius must have figured out their ploy and was here to punish them for it.

Fortunately, before he and his brother suffered a heart attack, Lord Darius slowly lifted his head and showed them a courteous smile.

"Please, join me for a cup," he offered, ever so humbly.

"This..."

Demetris and Mantis glanced at each other, confusion clouding their expressions. Lord Darius was known to rarely interact with lower-ranked combatants... For him to offer them a seat and a coffee, it made them a bit concerned.

Still, they went forward and sat in front of him, Demetris picking up a newly made coffee cup, his hands shaking a little.

"Don't worry, I am here to make you a proposal," Lord Darius smiled, assuring them.

"Proposal? Please, my Lord, just order away," Mantis swiftly established his allegiance to accept any kind of mission offered.

"That's the kind of attitude I welcome in my agency," Lord Darius laughed, his tone leveled like he had practiced it for years.

"Me too, my Lord!" Demetris swiftly joined in, wanting nothing more than to get praised by his Lord.

Lord Darius did more than that.

"You, my child, will have a different task... A task only you can fulfill," Lord Darius smiled. "I have watched some of your achievements in the assembly and training center. We are indeed lucky to have you... Without you, our mission wouldn't be possible."

Demetris' heart pounded in happiness with each word, feeling like a starved child for love being hugged by their parents since forever.

"My body bleeds for the agency, my soul burns for its betterment," Demetris tapped three fingers on his chest as he uttered sternly. "Put me in."

He still had no idea what the mission was, and Demetris didn't truly care... As long as he received appreciation and praise from his leader, he would have no regrets.

"Good, your tasks are really simple," Lord Darius leaned forward and said. "I need both of your help in weakening our rivals, The Blood Hunters Agency."

"..."

"..."

Mantis and Demetris' smiles froze abruptly.

Weakening The Blood Hunters Agency? What does he mean by that? Also, aren't such actions punishable by eternal torture in the Solar Aegis Sanctuary's Dungeon?

Gulp.

Mantis and Demetris could only gulp a mouthful in dread, realizing that they were about to get involved in matters way above their level.

"Don't be scared, your tasks won't get you too involved or found out... Especially for you, Demetris. You won't even lift a finger."

Sir Alaric joined in, leaning against his desk with his arms crossed.

"Mi... Mind if I ask what we will be doing?"

Mantis grew some balls and asked at last, this time not offering his full support.

"No."

Lord Darius rejected with the same polite smile, leaving the Bane brothers somewhat perplexed. How could they accept their tasks without learning about them first? Especially with such terrifying consequences.

Lord Darius stood up and walked to the window, peering above the entire capital city. Then, he said, "Let me tell you a story,"

He turned slightly, voice steady.

"There was a man. No title, no power. But he wanted everything... Power, fame, glory, the legacy, the crowds chanting his name. Riches, women, a statue with his face carved into stone."

"He trained. He worked. Thought he was the best. But so did a thousand others. And most of them were better. Stronger. Smarter... Or just luckier."

Lord Darius took a slow breath, watching them both.

His words threw Demetris and Mantis to the depths of their minds and hearts, seeking the buried memories and emotions of their defeats... The attacks on their confidence that they would one day make a name for themselves.

Alas, the scenes weren't pretty... Humbling, embarrassing.

"He started losing. Again and again. No one noticed his name anymore. The world moved on, casting him aside."

"And just when he was about to give up... something came to him... Quiet. No fanfare. Just a voice, and a choice."

He stepped closer, eyes locked on Demetris and Mantis.

"It said: Give me a piece of your soul... and I'll give you everything you begged for."

A pause... Silence held the air like frost. Demetris and Mantis' heartbeats pounded akin to engines in the room, waiting for the rest... Waiting for the answer.

The answer that spoke to them on a personal level.

But Lord Darius remained silent, taking slow sips of his coffee... Seconds went by, which felt like hours to the Bane brothers. Each second felt unbearable, their curiosity eating them alive until...

"What was his choice?" Demetris asked, his eyes inflamed with desire to know.

Lord Darius smiled and said, "You are looking at the answer."

"..."

"..."

The Bane brothers were stunned... Their widened eyes affixed on their Lord, unable to believe what he had just said.

Lord Darius, ranked within the top five strongest Daywalkers in the Holy Heliodor region, was a weakling loser in his youth? They refused to believe it.

His legacy, his legends, his life was too much of a main character movie for him to be the protagonist of that story... But as they gazed into his eyes, they failed to notice an ounce of deceit.

That, if he would even bother to lie to nobodies like them.

Lord Darius ignored their doubtful looks and continued.

"He took the offer. Gave up the piece. Just one. And what followed?"

"The world remembered him. They chanted his name. He got the riches, the fame, the victories... and the fear. The kind that made people bow their heads when he walked past."

Lord Darius stepped back, letting the echo settle.

"But he never got back what he gave up. Not in this life. Maybe not in any... But it has never bothered him, for he knows the truth..."

He let that hang and then sat down on the couch... Then, he manifested two peculiar small circular hexes in front of them.

They were filled with Ilthorien writings and pulsing faintly, resembling minimized arrays, similar to Ash'Kral's ones.

Lord Darius stared into the Bane brothers' eyes and added, his voice undisturbed.

"Now tell me... Do you want to win clean? Or do you want to win?"

The Bane brothers understood the implications hidden between sentences. If they chose to fulfill their missions, they would be awarded with support from Lord Darius himself.

The glory, the fame, the legacy, the power... Everything would be covered by him.

Such support suggested that their missions might have implications for the fall of the Blood Hunters Agency... Only something as grave would warrant such attention from Lord Darius.

While they were told their part of the mission would be minimal, it would still be considered active participation in the destruction of one of the greatest and most powerful agencies in their region.

If they were to succeed, their agency would be amplified, but their region's strength would be hit immensely, even causing them to drop many ranks in the Global Holy Region Ranking.

This would affect the Daywalkers and civilians simultaneously in a negative way.

Mantis shifted uncomfortably. His nightcrawler Ti'nna curled in the spiritual bridge of darkness. She couldn't listen to their conversation, but Mantis was relaying everything telepathically.

"You already know the cost..." she whispered. "And yet you listen."

Mantis didn't answer.

He glanced at Demetris, who sat stiffly, fingers tightening into fists. There was something in his brother's eyes... Not fear. No hesitation.

Desire.

The kind that burned... That look sealed their decision.

"I accept," Demetris said, voice low.

Mantis turned sharply to look at him.

His brother didn't glance back. His eyes were on Lord Darius... And in them, Mantis saw it clearly now.

His little brother didn't just want greatness... He wanted to be like Lord Darius.

Mantis' chest tightened.

"You would let him go alone?" Ti'nna asked.

No.

He couldn't... Not like this.

His little brother meant the world to him. The amount of time, effort, and resources he had invested in him was unimaginable.

That's because he genuinely believed that his little brother would write the surname Bane legacy on everyone's minds.

He reached out and placed his hand on the table under the white hex.

"Then I'm in too."

Only then did Demetris glance at him with a look of gratefulness, believing in his choice.

The moment passed without a word.

Across the table, Lord Darius gave a slow, knowing nod... His smile small, but unmistakably pleased.

"Good," he said. "Then let's begin with the branding."