

Evolution 151

Chapter 151: Release The Hound.

Meanwhile, hundreds of kilometers away, up north of Heliodor's region...

Lord Darius rode at the front of his army, wearing silver armor in pristine condition. Their direction... A corrupted imported forest from the Shadow dimension.

The forest around them was twisted... huge trees with thick black leaves blocking out the sun and leaving everything in a heavy, cold darkness.

The ground was sticky, and the air smelled of mold and rot.

Every step deeper felt wrong... Yet, Lord Darius, Sir Alaric, and his troops were taking big strides.

This might be a Shadow Castle Nest, but everyone was still being extremely careful. Lord Darius had told them that the nest's head was a powerful tier 5 nightcrawler with poison powers.

His nest might not be as big as Grave'Maw's, but he was slowly on the rise to upgrade it, desiring to turn it into an Abyssal Lost Nest.

Suddenly, Lord Darius paused for a moment.

-Release The Hound.-

A dimensional message arrived, short and straight to the point. Yet, it conveyed everything that Lord Darius was waiting for.

Sir Alaric glanced at his lord, his heart skipping a beat, realizing that it was about to begin... He waved his hand, and everyone stopped at once.

Not telling them much, he waited in silence until Lord Darius finished with his work.

Meanwhile, Lord Darius had switched to his wisp within none other than Mantis. Then, he uttered calmly, "David... It's time."

Mantis flinched after he heard his lord's voice in his mind. He lifted his head, exposing his anxious face under the hooded cloak.

He was hiding far, far away behind the Blood Hunters' army, outside of their detection zone. Mountain Thurnak was barely visible to him... Yet, this was better than getting too close to comfort.

"Yes... Yes, sir."

Mantis bit his lips hard and took off rapidly toward Mountain Thurnak on top of his nightmount... After some time, he arrived at the borders, and still, he continued going deeper, his eyes roaming the devastated ground like it had been hit by a tornado.

After reaching the decided spot, Mantis sealed his nightmount and stood behind a shattered boulder; no one had a clue about his presence.

Even Levi was clueless since he was using his abilities to spectate the ongoing conflict inside the mountain.

Also, he wasn't foolish to waste his energy on keeping his echolocation active over many kilometers.

As for Seraphis and the others? Mantis' spot was carefully chosen to be the closest to them and yet, far away from their detection skills.

'Am I really about to do this... How the hell did this happen... I just wanted to build the Bane family lineage...'

Meanwhile, Mantis was having second thoughts on the heinous crime he was about to commit.

His hand shook nonstop as he pulled out a sinister, deathly wooden totem in the shape of a circular portal... The totem was dried out and constantly emitting a vile black mist.

If the solar totems represented life, light, and hope... Then, the totem in Mantis' hand represented death, darkness, and despair.

Mantis couldn't even hold it properly without decent gloves due to its corruptive and deathly aura... Yet, he still hesitated to use it.

Suddenly, Lord Darius' calm voice resounded in his mind.

'David... One of the many faults a man can make is to be indecisive... You have chosen your path, your side, make amends with it, and prosper... That's the only way forward left for you.'

'You know it, I know it.'

Lord Darius gazed calmly at Mantis' quivering lips, already anticipating such resistance from him... Especially when the Bane Brothers had no idea what they were signing for when he first brought them to his office.

Weeks ago... Sir Alaric's office.

Demetris and Mantis had just been branded by the two dark red hexes... It burned them for a moment, but besides that, nothing much felt different.

"Is this like a contract?"

Demetris inquired, his eyes gazing at the strange, magical hex stamped on his right arm.

"Better... It's an admission branding to the Duskbound Order." Lord Darius answered with a faint smile, "Welcome."

"..."

"..."

Demetris and Mantis felt their hearts sink to the bottom of their stomach at once... Their breaths quickened as they stared at Lord Darius in stunned silence.

They knew that Lord Darius was about to make them do something unholy to destroy the Blood Hunters, but they assumed that it was from an angle of rivalry.

Not this.

"I... I..."

Demetris started stuttering, his heart beating out of his chest in fear... As a human, he was taught from a young age that the Solar Aegis Sanctuary was the Savior, and the Duskbound Order was the Villain.

Anyone joining them was considered an instant Fallen Daywalker, a traitor of humanity, a scumbag worse than nightcrawlers.

Even if Demetris and Mantis were pieces of shit with selfish desires and crooked morals, they never had any thought of betraying humanity.

Such a grave sin went beyond morals... One could betray his friend, his family, his nation, even his planet, but to betray one's race was different.

Because once they betrayed their own, there was no going back...

And when it was all over... when the world burned... They would find no home in the ashes, no mercy from the victors, and no forgiveness from the dead.

They would be remembered... not as brave, not as right... but as the crack in the wall that let the darkness in.

While Demetris might not be wise enough to know this, his big brother did... He felt like the world was flipped upside down, leaving him staring silently at Lord Darius.

But then... he broke into a short laughter, his eyes dripping with hope.

"My lord, are you testing our loyalty to humanity? We know, we know that someone like you can never be part of that vicious organization."

Demetris' pupils widened in delight as he chimed in.

"Yes! My lord has been fighting for our region's safety for decades. I was raised on your legendary stories... Stories filled with nothing but heroism... I..."

Just as Demetris was about to keep going, his eyes landed on Lord Darius's stone-cold eyes. They were unflinching, unchanging... unhuman.

In an instant, both of them knew... They were in the presence of either a Fallen Daywalker or a Sleepwalker.

No test, no joke, this was real.

"Children, what's done is done... You have accepted the branding; you are now part of the Duskbound Order." He spoke, at last. "Rejection is no longer an option... You can either tread on your new path and enjoy the same kind of riches and authority as I, or..."

He looked up and down at them once, but it was enough for them to understand.

Rejection meant elimination.

Demetris and Mantis looked at each other, their eyes reflecting nothing but a silent despair.

Death or Betrayal.

The worst kind of options.

Yet, to make it much worse, it came from the mouth of Lord Darius, their revered leader, whom they adored and admired more than their own father.

If it wasn't for this kind of worship they had for him, they would have posed more questions before getting branded... But they never expected such a betrayal from their cherished leader.

"Don't think that he won't kill you to avoid having your data unlocked by the government and investigated." Sir Alaric warned calmly.

This thought did cross Demetris and Mantis' minds, believing that their Astra AI was recording everything... Thus, if they were to be killed, the truth would come to light.

Sadly, Lord Darius wasn't a fool.

With a snap of a finger, Sir Alaric's office collapsed, akin to a cardbox.

Mantis and Demetris' pupils widened in disbelief as they turned their heads around, staring at the colorful skies, the breathtaking garden, and the milky white mansion.

Heliodor's capital city was nowhere to be seen, for they had been sitting all day long, in Lord Darius' Boundless Domain!

Behind them, the supposed door to Sir Alaric's office was a dimensional portal disguised as a mere door!

"You are familiar with the rules within the Boundless Expense, correct?" Lord Darius asked calmly.

"Yes..."

Mantis and Demetris knew that it was checkmate... They had been had, and nothing could save them.

In one's Boundless Domain with decent authority, Astra AI's recordings could be manipulated to show anything the owner wanted... Technology could only marvel at the Omnipotent authority.

"Good, now what will it be?"

Mantis and Demetris went silent for a few moments, and then they nodded, accepting their fate.

As for their contracted nightcrawlers? The moment the Duskbound Order was mentioned, they were already in.

"What do we need to do?" Mantis asked, his eyes soulless.

Back to the present...

'Do it... Release The Hound... Release the tide and walk away, your job is done for now... They will take care of everything.' Lord Darius whispered, akin to a devil.

'...If I knew I was signing a pact with the devil, I wouldn't have done it... I wouldn't... But, regret is nothing but the price you pay when you've already sold your soul.'

Mantis had resisted his morals enough and realized that the only path he had was to keep moving forward, embracing his new destiny regardless of where it took him.

His life came first, always...

Mantis gazed at the vile dark totem in his hand, and then he started murmuring an incantation under his breath.

"Swallow the light... Starve the gate... Stretch the night... Delay their fate." Mantis paused one last time, and then uttered coldly, "By the will of the Stygian Lockstone... activate."