

Few Wives 161

Chapter 161: Bloodline Awakening Ritual?

"Woah... There's has to be at least one thousand beasts here" Jade spoke while looking down below.

The group had arrived at the source of the disturbance. Unfortunately, it wasn't some sort of treasure like they hoped it would be. What they saw, however, was even more surprising.

"That's your concern? You're seeing what we're seeing right? Probably even better than all of us yet that's what you thought to mention?" Emily spoke with bewilderment in her voice.

Jade had always been rather eccentric. Even before the apocalypse she was just different from the rest in how she did things. However, Emily never thought that she would be built different to such an extent.

"What do you mean? Is there anything around here more significant than the tone of beasts that are pretty much our key to Rank 3?" Jade replied, clearly as bewildered as Emily, though for the opposite reason.

"What do you mean by what do I mean?!. There's literally a dragon there! They are all gathered around a real Eastern Dragon and all you are ignoring it?!" Emily exploded with her reply. She almost felt like beating Jade up, especially after seeing her genuinely bewildered expression.

That's right, the beasts that had come from all over the place were gathered around a dragon. Well, at least it looked like a dragon, and with the fanfare, it had to be one right?

Dragon head, antlers, obsidian body, pure white fur running down from its neck to its tail, and long sharp claws, among other draconic features. It also stood at a height of about 10 metres tall. It's yellow eyes looking around the place intelligently. Seemingly unmoved by the many beasts.

"So what if it's a dragon? Haven't we been seeing weird creatures since day one? What's so special about it?" Jade, who didn't quite grasp the majesty of a real dragon being before them, replied nonchalantly. In her mind, it was just another source of KP if she could kill it.

"You know what, I'm done with you. If I keep talking to you, I'll probably develop PB problems while still a teenager," Emily replied in a disengaging tone. She no longer wanted to deal with the crazy girl called Jade.

"Tsk, whatever" Jade replied nonchalantly again. She still didn't understand what Emily was on about nor was she trying to understand.

"Can I go down and start killing now"? She asked then proceeded to ask Muku a question while cracking her knuckles.

"Let's wait and see what going on first. We can't just rush into a situation like this or we might not come out alive. Many of those creatures down there are as strong as the Spider Queen after all. Not to mention that we don't know what's happening with that dragon," Muku, who, unlike Jade, first thought before acting, spoke. He obviously stopped her from doing such a reckless thing.

"Aww, come on! I'm sure we can avoid the stronger ones while taking apart the weaker ones. I'm so close to reaching R3, just a few kills away. You're rank-blocking me!" Jade exclaimed in a complaining voice.

While it was somewhat understandable that she found it hard to control herself when her breakthrough was before her eyes. Muku still stood firm, the risk was too large. It was never a good idea to be the one to set off the fuse in such settings. Not to mention that he still couldn't understand how a dragon was there.

While they had seen quite several different beasts since the apocalypse began. They had yet to see any "mythical" beasts. So the dragon's appearance so suddenly was more than unexpected.

"Has anyone spotted anything worthy of note"? Muku asked the others, completely ignoring Jade. Sometimes the best way to deal with her was to just ignore her. Especially when there were more pressing matters to deal with.

"Umm, I noticed that the mana around the dragon isn't too stable. It's almost like It's trying to break through something" Audrey was the first to express her observation. She had been quiet since she was ignored before. She was slightly annoyed with Muku for it but she knew when to be petty and when to cooperate.

"And the beasts, no matter which side they are or what strength they have seem to not be able to go beyond a certain point. Maybe there's something they can send or sense that we can't" Layla was the next to speak, immediately after Audrey.

"I don't know if I'm correct or not, but I think I can see both greed and reverence in their eyes. They also seem to be waiting for something" Hope spoke after Layla. She's had activated her best skill to the max. Which was the legendary observation ability she had which she has displayed a few times before. Due to how reliable it was, the others were keen to believe her.

"Well... I was actually just randomly asking. I didn't know there were so many observations. Anyway, thank you all. From your statements, I think the best option, for now, is to lurk in the background and see what happens," Muku spoke; he was half joking and half serious when he said he didn't expect them to actually have something to say. After all, they had practically just arrived,

However, that didn't stop him from believing them and making a decision based on what they said. He trusted them completely.

And so, the group practically joined the beasts in waiting. Albeit, they were the only ones floating conspicuously in mid-air. Even the beasts that could fly hand landed on the ground as they looked on.

....

A few minutes...

Just when Jade was about to complain, the sky darkened. A majestic and oppressive aura completely different from the one in Iris' case descended. They could only describe the aura with one word and that was "heavenly". It just felt divine. Like it didn't belong in the world of mortals like them.

Muku and his girls, along with the beyond one thousand beasts all bowed subconsciously. They couldn't stop themselves, it just felt so natural to them. It was like what they were doing was the most natural thing in the world.

However, there was one exception to the trend. That exception was the dragon. The creature was defiantly looking at the sky. There was zero respect in its eyes. All that blazed in them was a determination to overcome. As for what it wanted to overcome? Only it knew.

The darkened sky immediately got darker until it was pitch black. Then strong winds started raging all over the place. If all the beasts that were present weren't R2s, then many would have been blown away. The phenomenon didn't stop there, purple lightning started to spackle in the clouds. It was like nature was expressing its dissatisfaction with the actions of the dragon.

"ROOOOOOAR", as if the blatant disrespect in its actions wasn't enough. The dragon even had the nerve to roar at the sky.

"Hhm?" Freya suddenly made a sound while her head was still lowered like the rest.

"What is it?" Muku asked. While they couldn't raise their heads for whatever reason. They could still talk and do other things. They were still in control of every other action they did. So asking a question was pretty easy.

"Oh, uh... Iris just told me that we have stumbled upon a bloodline awakening ritual. If it fails then we might have a chance at gaining some major benefits, though the situation would become very chaotic since that's why those beasts are gathered here" Freya proceeded to tell the others about what Iris said to her.

"Oh, is that so... But what is a bloodline awakening ritual?" Muku replied then asked Freya a question clearly directed at Iris.

"Umm, she said, and I quote, "Hmph! Why would I help you after what you did to me? All you got from me was all you're getting. One day I will have my revenge?" End quote" Freya replied with her best Iris impression. Which was pretty decent since the last time Iris spoke to them, she was using Freya's body. So Freya already had the voice on point without trying.

"Oh... How petty of her" Muku spoke with an annoyed tone.

"Honestly, I understand where she's coming from", Freya, who ended up feeling some of the pain meant for Iris, couldn't help but defend her a bit.

"Well, whatever. At least she gave us something to work with. Now we know that this is some kind of ritual that either awakens a beast's bloodline or strengthens it. Also, that there is a chance it might fail. Which should be what all these beasts are hoping for so that they can reap some benefits that will likely improve their bloodlines that probably wouldn't have a chance at improving otherwise" Muku who had been mostly taking a backbencher approach in thinking recently to allow the girls to think for themselves exposed a little of his power.

Iris, who was hearing everything from Freya's mindscape, couldn't help but feel a chill go down her spine. How could she not when everything he said was spot on? It was so correct that she felt creeped out.

"From the little yelp, Iris let out after you finished speaking, I think you might be correct", Freya, who hadn't completely forgotten who her real teammates were, told Muku about Iris' reaction.

"Oh? While that is good news. I'm sure there's some significant information that can't be deduced so easily. Tell you what, why don't you tell Iris that I have a proposition for her... Though I'm sure she's listening on right now," Muku, who didn't want to leave things to chance based on his guesses, set a plan into motion.

He had thought of a deal Iris definitely couldn't refuse...

Chapter 162: Monarch's bloodline?

"You can go ahead and say it. Like you said, she's listening on. If she has something to say, I'll tell you" Freya replied cooperatively.

"That's great, I'll just say it like this then. To you, Iris, who's looking on and listening to what I'm saying. If you tell us something significant to this moment that can help us gain extra benefits. We wouldn't have figured out ourselves. I Muku, will owe you a favour. Of course, you can only ask for something reasonable" Muku didn't delay as he immediately laid out his proposition for Iris.

"I agree. However, I don't know if the right situation is going to appear or not. So, as a way of keeping it fair. The deal will only be effective if the situation presents itself, and I won't say anything before then"

Surprisingly, Freya just let Iris take over her body to directly speak to Muku after thinking about it for a bit.

She wasn't as averse to it as she thought she would be. Maybe because she had finally grasped how much power she had over Iris. In a way, Iris was like an autopilot function she got for free with some benefits. With such a train of thought, she didn't mind letting Iris take over for a bit.

"Well... Wasn't expecting you to come out in person, but okay. I accept your deal. It's actually the most reasonable thing I've heard you say so far" Muku was slightly taken aback by Iris' appearance and willingness to cooperate. Her previous arrogance was gone.

He couldn't help but feel a bit suspicious that she might be planning something sinister. As someone who wanted her help, he could only put aside his suspicions.

"Great. As a show of good faith, let me tell you a bit more about what a bloodline awakening ritual is beyond the obvious information you can get from the name. That is if you're willing to hear it, you might not understand it..." Iris then offered more information which again surprised Muku and the girls.

She seemed unreal at the moment. She was basically rewriting the impression they had of her with just a few statements. Even though there was still a little sarcasm, she was definitely a lot better than before.

"Sure, we're willing to hear anything you want to tell us", Muku replied with a smile on his face, ignoring the slight sarcasm.

She held the higher ground at the moment, so they, as the lesser party, could only fold with a smile. He had noticed that she had an "I'm superior" complex. So, playing along with her would make her happy. Which would then make her even more willing to speak and say more.

"As you should. Anyway, the ritual is something that only descendants of the most ancient beasts, the Monarchs, can partake in. As for who the Monarchs are, you don't need to know. You won't ever meet them. Just think of them as the gods of beasts or something like that..." Iris paused for a bit, either trying to organise her words or letting her words sink into the heads of her audience.

"Anyway, a long, long time ago, the Monarchs gave a bit of their blood essence to a few of their best subordinates. After which, the subordinates gained the capability to potentially reach Monarch level themselves one day. Which is practically impossible for every other beast. However, there was a tradeoff. The lineage would forever have to go through continuous tests to slowly awaken their bloodline from Rank Two onwards..." Iris paused again, definitely trying to catch her breath this time.

"Another thing is that the ritual has a high mortality rate. Also, the corpses of the failed beasts would become a great elixir that could possibly give the rest of the beasts a chance to rise higher in rank than they were supposed to. In fact, it guarantees at least one more rank increase to what the beast's, potential was before consuming the meat. Wipe away that greedy look green-haired girl, it doesn't work the same on humans. At best, it would test better and have a few more benefits, and that's it" Iris rested again. Otherwise, a continuous paragraph longer than that wouldn't be fun to read.

She happened to notice the drooling Jade who she called out. To which Jade snapped out of her thoughts and wiped away her drool with an embarrassed look on her face.

"What you should be hoping for is that it survives the ritual. That's where the real profit is. I'll tell you the rest after it's about to start... Look", Iris only spoke a little before pointing in the direction of the dragon.

Everyone who had been lost in her words immediately snapped awake again. They then looked where she was pointing. The sky had gotten even darker without them noticing. Ominous purple sparks of lightning flashed furiously in the clouds. All of them could tell that something significant was definitely about to occur.

CRACKLE! BOOM! BOOM!...

Without further warning thick lighting bolts at least two times thicker than Chloe's best attack struck. The target being the dragon on the ground.

The lightning struck continuously nonstop. Even Muku couldn't help but feel a chill go down his spine looking on. He could tell that with his best defence and all his mana, he would probably only be able to take three to five of the attacks before being killed off. Yet there the dragon was, having taken more than a hundred in less than a minute. It looked completely fine on top of that.

"How strong is that thing?! I thought it was just a Half-step R3. How's it able to take such strong attacks so easily?!!" Jade exclaimed in shock.

"You didn't sense wrong. That is its power level. Just that beasts with Monarch bloodline are monsters in the same rank. It probably has the strength to kill PR3 beasts right now, and it will have a lot more if it survives," Iris replied with a little smile on her face. She quite liked seeing the group realise that while they were strong in their rank. They were far from being the strongest.

"Impossible! There's no way such a creature exists!" Jade exclaimed again in disbelief. The others, Muku included were just as shocked. Muku even felt like pride got hurt a little. He couldn't even beat a normal Half-step R3 beast like Spider Queen yet that dragon bastard!...

"Hehe... Little girl, you have no idea what's possible. Why do you think all these beasts don't dare attack it despite their large numbers? In fact, the reason you all can move around so freely is because you're in the outskirts, otherwise... Hehehe" Iris replied in a schadenfreudian tone. She was having the best time of her life breaking down their walls.

Nothing was better than the expression frogs make when they realise that they are at the bottom of the well. Especially when the frogs were more than certain that they were aware of the whole world.

"Can you stop for now? We'll talk about that some other time. Let's focus on the task at hand for now," Muku, who had somewhat recovered from the sudden bomb Iris dropped, intervened.

He didn't want the team's mental state to take such a strong hit before the chaotic event they were about to experience.

"Sure" Iris didn't argue as she immediately agreed. She had already gotten her fun. There was no need to push anymore.

"Now ladies, focus on the matter at hand. Remember, this is our chance to get stronger. Don't let the possibility of what could have been getting to you. We're here now, doing fine. That's all that matters" Muku ended up having to give the girls a little pep talk.

While it was rare, there were moments like this. It was also at such times he was reminded that they were all still little girls who could stumble and fall and needed someone else to pick them up. While Audrey could definitely handle such situations a lot easier than the rest. Her mind would become blank on what to do. So he had to step in.

Even if he said he would step back. It would be unreasonable to completely detach himself. It wasn't like he was planning to leave them one day or about to die after all.

"Look, the first round of the Tribulation is over. Two more left and it would be home free," Iris' voice was heard again.

While it did help Muku in snapping the girls out of their disbelief. It was a double-edged sword at the same time.

After all, any smart person would realise something obvious from the words. Which all the members of Muku's group thought.

{There's more?!} Everyone thought, their eyes widening to the max. The first wave was already way above their abilities, and yet there was more. Wouldn't those be even stronger too??

"Shut up!" Muku couldn't help but snap at Iris.

He could tell that she didn't intend the hidden meaning of her words. She must not have thought about it too deeply. But still, the damage was done.

"Hhm?... Oh, sorry! I didn't mean it like that!" Iris was confused for a bit before realising why Muku snapped. She immediately apologized. She was trying her best to change their opinion of her. So she had been doing her best not to go overboard, but the slip might throw her efforts down the drain.

Chapter 163: Soul Link?

The group ignored Iris' matter for the most part. There were more pressing matters that had to be dealt with. Which was the dragon about to face the second round of attacks.

The lightning bolts had seized. While the dragon seemed mostly unharmed. They could tell that it might not have been as easy as it appeared to them. Its aura had decreased in intensity by a slight margin. While it wasn't much. It at least confirmed that the lightning has an effect on it.

Just when they were starting to wonder when the next attack would occur. The purple lightning that was flashing in the clouds started to gather together.

Before, it would just strike as it formed. Now it was gathering together at the center. The aura getting more and more intense. The group couldn't help but hold their breath as they looked on. Even the beasts on the ground to some steps back.

Jade's danger sense was ringing like crazy as she looked at the clouds. She knew instantly that if such an attack was aimed at her, she would definitely die on the spot. There would be no resistance, just straight-up instant death. That's all one can do when faced with absolute power.

Even Muku agreed. Even before the first attack struck, he was certain he couldn't survive it.

The dragon looked up at the clouds unmoving. Its posture was still as strong as it was during the first round. However, if one looked closer at its eyes, to be more specific. They would notice that their arrogance and confidence had reduced by a large amount.

It wasn't too worried about the coming attack. What would come after that was what worried it. Unlike normal beasts, it, like all beasts with Monarch bloodlines, is completely self-aware from the start. Their intelligence rivalled that of adult humans from as early as Rank One. So, anything that humans like Muku can think of. It can as well.

It was even wondering if it had rushed to get the ritual done. The only thing that gave it a little assurance was the plan B it had prepared. While it wasn't perfect, at least it was better than the alternative.

WHOOSH!

BOOOOOOM!!!!!!

Just as it was stuck in thought. The first attack of the second round descended. The lightning had changed forms and colour. It took on the form of a black-coloured sphere that was around half the size of the dragon.

That's right, it had turned into a huge ball of distractive ball of lightning. The ground was devastated on impact and the dragon's body was charred. Its tough skin showed visible damage for the first time. Its back fur was burned off. Even the shine on its black scales decreased by a lot. It seemed the attack had gotten really close to breaking through them.

Some unlucky LR2 beasts that were standing in the front were hit by the crossfire. Just the energy wave from the attack killed some and injured the rest. Even the MR2s were somewhat affected. It was only the PR2s and the Half-step R3s that were fine. Though even they were mentally stunned by the attack.

Their being there wasn't because they had witnessed something like that before or they heard it somewhere. It was because that's how the heavens made it. Whenever a bloodline awakening ritual was held, beasts below a certain rank would gather.

It was part of the trial set by the other heavens. The Monarch bloodlines were so strong that the heavens didn't want to see any beasts successfully awaken them. So, while the ritual was survivable. Only one out of a thousand would survive it. There were various reasons as to why that was, but all that mattered was the final result.

BOOOOOM!

BOOOOOM!

BOOOOOM!

BOOOOOM!.....

Before anyone could recover from the initial attack. One after the other came. It went on until ten equally devastating attacks hit square on the dragon's body.

At the end of it. The formerly majestic dragon that stood tall was now panting. It could barely stand. Its body was almost unrecognisable. There were cracks all over its scales. It no longer had fur or horns. The lightning had destroyed everything.

However, it wasn't the only beast affected. The continuous attacks had incredible the intensity of the shockwaves. This time, it wasn't only the LR2s that were affected. Even the MR2s and the PR2s were affected. All the beasts from LR2 to MR2 that were dumb enough to still stand too close were killed. The PR2s were seriously injured.

The situation had gotten so distracting that more than a kilometre of land was levelled. Yet the beasts didn't run away. At best, they stepped back even more. It was clear to see that there was a force acting upon them. Otherwise, most would have split long ago or not even turned up.

"Well... I'm glad I'm not a beast" Jade couldn't help but speak in relief while looking in from the distance.

Even they had distanced themselves after things started getting real. They had done it before the beasts even. After all, their actions were completely under their control, unlike the beasts.

"Hehe" Iris let out a little ominous laugh after Jade spoke.

"Don't you dare..." Muku immediately intervened before she dumped even more information they didn't want to know on them.

"What? I wasn't going to say anything" Iris replied with a slightly smug look on her face. Clearly enjoying being in the know while they weren't.

"Right... Whatever" Muku felt really annoyed by her. He even wanted to randomly tell her how they actually knew one Monarch and were enemies with him. It would definitely shock her into silence for a while.

However, he thought that it wasn't the time to be petty. That can be saved for later. Letting her enjoy her fun for then was okay.

"It's beginning already?... What's that?!!!" Just as Muku was thinking about how he would make Iris regret it. Chloe exclaimed, stealing his attention. He immediately looked toward the clouds above the weakened dragon again.

That's when he saw it. The lightning had changed colour again and taken a new form. This time he was certain that it was going to be just a single attack.

The attack was silent, stable and descended slowly. It didn't seem like lightning at all. For it was a humongous white palm even bigger than the dragon. It was twice as large as the dragon.

The beasts that were under the control of the heavens got so scared that they froze. All of them froze. From LR2s to Half-step R3s. None could move, they could barely breathe.

"Oh my! This one must be really something special... I don't know if it's going to survive, though," Iris spoke in an impressed tone, which turned disappointed soon after.

"What do you mean?" Muku asked what Iris meant but his eyes didn't stray away from the palm. After all, it wasn't every day one saw a humongous white palm made of lightning slowly descend on a dragon.

"Hmm, let me put it like this. The third-round attack during a bloodline awakening ritual is like a mirror of the beast's potential. The stronger the attack, the more potential the beast has. If we had to scale this one from 1 to 10. Od say it's a 12. That's why I said the beast is special but it won't survive. It's about to be crushed by its own potential. How poetic don't you think?" Iris explained; at the end, it kinda seemed like she was gloating a little.

"Oh, is that so? Can you tell me the information you were going to use in the deal now? While from your words I can sense that it's likely useless now. I'm still willing to do you a small favour for it" Muku expressed his interest in knowing the information Iris had.

He felt that it was a shame for such an amazing creature to die even if it was from the opposite camp. Which reminded him about the deal maybe there was a way to help the beast and gain some benefits.

"Well... While I think there's nothing you can do now since even a LR4 wouldn't be able to help with that attack. I'll tell you since I'm not one to turn down a free favour. The information I wanted to use for the deal was Soul Link" Iris spoke a little before pausing. She really liked being dramatic after all.

"Soul Link?" Muku repeated what she said as a way of telling her to continue.

"Yes, Soul Link. You see, during these rituals. When a beast going through the ritual cannot take it alone. It will seek out a Soul Link with any human willing to assist it. Which will be shown by a glow on its chest. Whoever can manage to touch that glow will immediately linked to the beast.

"Then they will have to do everything in their power to help the beast since from then on they would be partners for life..."

"The drawback is that if one of them dies before they reach Rank Nine, the one left alive will lose half their strength forever and won't be able to continue improving from then"

Iris didn't delay anymore as she explained everything. Muku and the girls all went silent thinking about what she said.

"Oh look! It's finally about to fight back. I thought it was going to arrogantly tank everything and die. It seems it was saving its strength for the last attack. What a smart beastie!" Iris exclaimed, and again, all eyes focused on the dragon.

Chapter 164: It shouldn't exist

"ROOOOOOOOOOAR!"

Just as the group looked at the dragon. They saw a scene that can only be described as magical.

The dragon let out a terrifying breath attack as big as it. How it did such a thing was the amazing part.

A huge black magic circle formed just above its head. It then targeted its black breath attack at the circle. The circle took the attack and was undamaged. Then it released it from the other side in an amplified state. Both in power and size. The attack then charged at the giant palm that was descending slowly on the dragon.

The scene kind of seemed like a divine being trying to strike down a devil. The devil resisting with all its might. Even if it wasn't as strong as the divine being. It still resisted with everything it had.

"BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

An earth-shaking explosion, even more intense than the one involving Iris and the four beasts, went off. Anything and everything within two kilometres of the explosion was wiped out of existence. No matter what rank the beasts that were around were. They were killed off. Nothing survived.

It seemed the heavens had underestimated the might of the dragon. It might have been even more special than Iris thought.

"It can use magic circles?? What kind of monster is this?!" For the first time since the beginning of the event, Iris completely lost her composure.

How could she not lose her composure when she, at her peak strength, still couldn't use magic circles? Hell, she wasn't even close to being able to do it. It was an ability for legit Monarchs after all. Just having the Monarch bloodline didn't qualify someone to be able to use them. At least that's what she thought until she came across the dragon.

"What? What's wrong? Is it not supposed to do that?" Muku asked. His eyes still didn't move from the dragon, though. He was wondering how a creature that was supposed to only be Half-step R3 could do that.

"No, it's not! I was mistaken when I called it a 12 out of 10. That thing is at least a 100 out of 10. An anomaly! No wonder the heavens want it gone. Such creatures shouldn't exist in the current world. The world can't handle them." Iris spoke hysterically. There was even a crazy look in her eyes. It was almost like she wanted to attack the dragon as well and help the heavens get rid of it.

The only thing stopping her was the fact that her host was too weak. She probably wouldn't even survive the lingering chaotic energy in the area.

"Well... I don't know anything about whether it should exist or not, but I will be taking it home with me today. No matter what..." Muku replied to the hysterical Iris, his eyes still glued onto the battle scene that was starting to clear up.

"What?!" Iris was taken aback by his words. How could he say such a thing after seeing all that?!

BOOOOM!

Before she could say anything else, Muku's aura exploded. Then he flew off into the distance. They were three kilometres away from the dragon for obvious reasons. So, while there was a little distance between them and it to normal people. To Evolvers that distance was nothing.

So, within a few seconds, Muku was already beneath the large dragon. He did it so quickly that none of the girls managed to say anything to stop him. Maybe he knew that they would try something, so as he flew away, he made the platform descend to the ground simultaneously.

So, the girls had to focus on their balance as the platform descended quickly. By the time they looked up again from their feet, Muku was gone.

Of course, some wanted to go after him. That's when Muku's second-in-command stepped in. She stopped them from following. While Audrey never liked any of his crazy plans, she would do everything in her power to support him in them. Which she did. With the authority, she held in the group that was second to Muku only. She could easily stop the girls from following him, which she did.

"Is he really going to take the chance?" Jade asked a rhetorical question while pointing forward. They were standing in a place that allowed them to see the dragon's chest. So she, with her better than most eyesight, immediately noticed the dragon's chest light up in a golden light. Which signified that it was seeking a Soul Link.

Which was understandable; after all, it had used all it had clearly used all its strength in the last attack. Yet it had only managed to disburse around 70% of the palm's power. It had no other option but to seek out a Soul Link or it would just watch as it died.

Oddly enough, its eyes had been on Muku from start to finish. From when he was with the rest to how he came to it. Almost like it was expecting him there.

However, in the chaotic moment, no one noticed it. There was so much happening that even the observant Hope and the knowledgeable Iris missed it.

"HEY! I'M HERE TO HELP, WILL YOU LET ME?" Muku took a chance and crazily flew in front of the dragon then shouted his intentions.

The dragon looked at him oddly for a bit. A look of amusement appeared in its eyes soon after. As expected of the human it chose. So crazy. It didn't delay anymore as it nodded to Muku then gestured at its glowing chest with its head.

"GREAT! WE'LL BE PARTNERS FROM NOW ON!" Muku said then flew to its chest. He then placed his hand on its chest. His chest exploded out in a light of its own instantly.

The light from their chest then gathered together forming what seemed to be a thread made out of light. The dragon's thread and Muku's grey thread then came together and linked with each other.

A blinding light followed after before quickly disappearing into the nothingness of space. Luckily, the link didn't take too long, or the palm that was around 500 hundred meters above them would have hit them before it formed. It seemed the dragon's attack had slowed it even more, giving them more time.

{What now?} Just as Muku was trying to get used to the unfamiliar new connection he felt after the link. A youthful female voice rang out in his head.

{Well, that's obvious. I save you and we get out of here} Unlike many who would have been spooked by the sudden voice in their head. Muku immediately knew who it was. The soul link might have played a part in that, too, though.

{O...Kay, how?} The voice asked curiously. However, from how it sounded. Muku couldn't help but wonder why it seemed so confident that he would be able to help.

He couldn't help but look at the dragon before him. The sight of it was rather sad. Most of its scales were gone. It was bleeding all over. Wounds everywhere, some of its bones were even visible from the deeper wounds. Smoke was coming off of its charred body. It was breathing heavily, almost like it was about to breathe its last. Honestly, the dragon looked really pathetic at the moment.

If Muku failed to assist, then it would be doomed to die on that day. Yet, it seemed so nonchalantly. Almost like it couldn't feel the pain from its horrific wounds. Muku couldn't help but think that it was quite the bad*ss.

{Just look and you'll see} Muku replied in his mind. Like the legit one he was. He then took advantage of the dragon's damage to the beasts all around.

He then summoned Mithril middles. They were a lot easier to create than a sword. Obviously, their power would be practically nothing if compared to the sword. However, they were enough to finish off half-dead beasts.

Which was exactly what Muku was planning to use them for. He targeted any injured beast that was close enough to him with them. Since all the beasts were R2s. He'd get something from every kill. He randomly killed for ten seconds.

Killing from LR2s to Half-step R3s. His KP quickly reached the required amount. The dragon just looked on quietly. It was letting him cook.

"Hehe," As soon as he killed enough, he let out a little laugh. It was time for the girls to realise something they didn't know.

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

His already significantly strong aura spiked up in an instant. The eyes of the girls who were looking at it and could sense it immediately widened.

However, could they not when he had directly stepped into Rank Three instead of the Half-step R3 they were expecting? It was understandable since the last time Muku told them about his mana control level,

it was around 50%. Which wasn't too long ago. The rest were still around 60%. How has he already reached 100%?!

Jade, who thought she would be the first one to step into R3, felt the hit the most. There was also Layla, who was secretly happy about receiving the R3 core, which would help her get to 80% at least. Then she'd be ahead of everyone that wasn't Jade. Her hopes of being in the top two were dashed along with Jade's of being number one.

The rest were mostly just surprised. They didn't have much hope of being the first or second so...

What bothered them was how Muku didn't say anything. Which he would definitely have to explain after everything was over.

....

Back at Muku's side...

"Okay, Mr Giant Palm in the sky. Let's talk..." Muku spoke excitedly while feeling his R3 strength. It honestly felt like he went from earth to heaven. That's how strong he felt at that moment.

"I guess I can try that now..." He spoke to himself as he thought of a crazy idea...

Chapter 165: Silver Giant

"Mithril Giant!" Muku shouted the name of his spell.

That's right. He was going to use the same Mithril that even Ares' avatar couldn't fight back before.

Of course, it won't be pure Mithril. It would, at best, be 5-10% Mithril due to the time constraints. However, it would still be a lot stronger than a giant completely made out of normal metal.

As soon as he spoke. Liquid metal started appearing out of nowhere. Circling his whole body all over. Soon his body was completely covered up by silver metal that had a faint grey in it from the Mithril mixed in.

The shape of an eight-metre-tall giant was already forming. As for why it wasn't bigger than that? Well, he was still new to R3 and going beyond that would have made the giant unstable.

"He can make metal giants?!... Why didn't he do that before?" Jade exclaimed.

"I really want to say that what he's doing is impossible... But I've already met my shocked quota for the day. So I'll just say it's impressive" Iris commented apathetically.

She couldn't find it in herself to express emotion anymore. She had realised that Muku's group were weird. Always finding themselves in situations they shouldn't be, doing what they shouldn't be doing.

Which in retrospect, should have considered earlier. From how they woke her up and stayed for the battle when normal people would have run away. Then Freya, who was aware of her mindscape when she shouldn't have been. Not to mention Muku's Telekinesis which never appeared on random people.

Well, whatever. What mattered was that she learned her lesson. Otherwise, she might have become the first being to have a heart attack in someone else's body and kill them with it.

"What do you mean?" Emily, who was standing beside her, asked. While Emily knew that Freya could take back control whenever she wanted. She just couldn't trust Iris with Freya's body. That's why she had been standing close to her from the start, in case Iris thought of running or something like that.

"Oh, nothing... Just that newly ascended R3s shouldn't be able to use their domain immediately. Even if it's just an embryo of it. In fact, this is the first time I've seen or even heard of such a case. The field that metal is circling in is his domain. Which allows him to do basically whatever he wants with the metal. Controlling it in a more precise way" Iris responded as nonchalantly as she could.

The light in her eyes had long dimmed. From the dragon to Muku, they had both made her realise how blissfully ignorant she was. The reputation she once had as a young fairy of being a genius who didn't need to bond with anyone was bull. She and those who praised her were frogs at the bottom of the well.

Maybe it wasn't that bleak and times had just changed. As they say, "The new generation always surpasses the old". So, maybe it was just the standards that had increased and not that she had gotten an undeserved reputation.

Which made sense. However, even that thought didn't make her feel any better. She, who has always been young, was now the grandma she always looked down on. Depression hit her hard. It would have been worse if the fairies aged like humans.

Who gets to the point where you can tell they are old by just looking at them? She, however, looking like a lady in her late twenties, was as old as she was going to look until she died. Her mood got better again.

"...Well, he wouldn't be my Big Brother if he stuck to the norm now would he?" Hope was the one to respond. She hesitated at first after seeing Iris' constantly changing expression showing mental turmoil.

Her pride in her brother got the better of her, however, so she couldn't help but say something. She was feeling a lot better about his new strength. She was so happy she no longer cared about the blood chains Audrey had used to tie her down in place.

While in normal cases, she would listen to Audrey every time. She was untrustworthy when it came to Muku. So with the approval of everyone. Hope locked Hope in place. Blood chains that linked them were deployed. They were long and light enough to not impede Hope's movements... But short enough that she couldn't go anywhere close to Muku.

She had tried to fight them off at first. That's when Audrey threatened her with a full-body suit and reported her to Muku. So she begrudgingly stopped fighting. Now, however, all that was forgotten after seeing Muku's strong and cool display.

"This brat... So, what you're saying is that he's only able to create the giant because he now has a domain?" Jade rolled her eyes at Hope's fangirl disposition whenever Muku did anything. Then she asked Iris something, trying to understand more. She also had some ideas she wanted to try in the future that she had failed to do in the past. So maybe a domain is what was missing.

"Yeah... Can we talk about this another time? I'm sure the readers want to go back to Muku's side..." Iris replied lazily. Saying something stuff Jade couldn't properly grasp for some reason.

"Oh, okay. We'll talk later then" Jade replied. She couldn't completely understand what Iris was talking about, but she understood the key point.

That also happened to be the time Muku's giant was almost fully formed. So she also wanted to watch what was about to happen...

...

Muku's side...

"Finally! Luckily, the palm is super slow. Otherwise, this slow-as-hell attack might have gotten me killed!" Muku spoke to himself.

However, his body was already out of sight. All that could be seen was an eight-metre-tall silver giant with grey linings all over its body. Two glowing silver eyes, with no other facial features. Long silver hair flowing down to its knees.

The body was toned and detailed like that of a human. If one looked closely they would notice that, except for the long hair, it resembled Muku's real body, eerily so even. Either he was a narcissist or he was a narcissist. After all, everyone knew he was a narcissist.

It was not as big as the dragon, let alone the lightning palm. But the aura coming off of the giant was really up there. Maybe not as strong as the dragon or even close. However, it was above half of the dragon's aura. Which should be enough for the situation, since most of the palm's energy had already been expended

"Sky Splitting Blade!" Muku's voice was heard clearly within the chaos.

As the voice rang out. The giant made a grasping action. As soon as it did, a large sword, even larger than the giant itself, appeared. The blade was around Sixteen metres tall.

After it completely formed, the giant flew up and slashed at the white lightning palm, which was less than two hundred meters away from the five hundred of a few moments before.

The move seemed quite reckless. Considering that the palm was still a force to be reckoned with. So there was no way Muku's attack could do too much damage to it right?

Wrong! Only Iris thought that. The dragon and the girls knew something that Iris didn't. Which was the existence of Muku's bloodline.

There was no way he wouldn't play such an important card in such a situation after all. It was actually the base for everything.

While it was OP, it was slow to act. He didn't have time. So, he came up with an idea to make it work.

He created a giant for defence when he gets closer to the palm, which would obviously make the area around it unbearable for humans despite its calm appearance. Then, create a sword that will have his erasing effect applied to it. Which was something he had recently discovered he could do.

So, while Iris saw a huge blade with an ominously glowing grey edge that wasn't going to do anything, the dragon, which was in the know for some reason, along with the girls, saw something else.

They saw an attack that was sure to end things with zero resistance from the palm.

"Haaaaaaa.....!" Muku screamed as soon as the blade came into contact with the palm. He then cleanly split it in half, like everyone but one expected.

"IMPOSSIBLE!" Iris, who thought she was over getting shocked, found herself getting shocked again.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Another earth-shaking explosion ensued. Muku's attack had destabilised the palm leading to an explosion.

Fortunately, due to the reduced power of the palm by the first attack. Along with the fact that it was only the palm's power that was exploding without any additions from Muku. The explosion wasn't as destructive as the first one. Which was also in part due to it occurring in the sky.

However, Muku and the dragon went as lucky as everyone else who went unscathed. The two were too close to the explosion. So obviously they had to pay for it.

Fortunately, Muku hadn't stuck around after slicing it in two. He had instantly flown down to the dragon. Where he created the thickest dome he could with all the mana he had left.

While that didn't manage to tank all of the energy wave's force. It tanked most of it.

Muku's giant tanked the rest for him and the dragon with a little help from his Telekinesis.

After it was all said and done. The silver giant was left blackened, and a red-skinned Muku came out of it.

"Why did I think encasing myself in metal while facing something hot was a good idea? And you! Stop drooling! You're the reason I got cooked!" Muku came out of the giant with a belly full of complaints he had to express.

Especially when the dragon he did it all for, was looking at him like it wanted to eat him...

Chapter 166: Might of the Beast Empress!

"Hehe. Sorry, and thank you for stepping in" The dragon's jovial voice rang in his head again. He could tell that it wasn't anywhere near as sorry as it was saying.

What was amazing was how it could still be so happy when it's battered and bruised. Its scales are mostly gone, drained of all its power. If it was only that, one could maybe still understand that it was happy about the victory, but...

"Why the hell are you happy when the beasts that survived are slowly approaching us?!" Muku exclaimed hysterically. He couldn't help but wonder if its brain had been turned to mush by all the attacks it took.

{Oh, that's simple actually...} The dragon replied, then trailed off at the end.

What happened after made Muku almost curse out loud. The dragon's humongous body turned into a black light, and before he could react, it had drilled into his forehead.

The scene was eerily similar to when Iris drilled into Freya's head. The only difference was that Iris didn't need to first bond with Freya before gaining access while the dragon did. Then again, the act of entering someone's mindscape for a fairy is also their way of bonding so the situation really wasn't too different.

"OMG! You snake! Was this the real reason you wanted to form a Soul Link with me?! How sinister! I want out! I want out I say!" Muku immediately shouted out complaints while wishing he could recover as quickly as possible.

His mana was almost completely drained from the ordeal. He couldn't even float. He had consciously left a little bit of mana to support his body function. Otherwise, he would have been paralysed on the ground at that moment.

{Hehe. No, no, no. I'm not being a snake as you put it. I'm just letting you handle it like you wanted to. Now if you'll excuse me. I have to rest now. Please survive this. If you die now I'll also die. Which I'd rather not...} The dragon's voice sounded in Muku's head.

While it still sounded as jovial as before. He could tell that it was very tired and drowsy. It trailed off at the end, likely having fallen into a deep sleep to recover.

"Sigh, me and my big mouth" Muku complained to himself. Unlike Freya, he didn't have access to his mindscape. So he couldn't go bother the dragon even if he wanted to. Though he wouldn't have done so even if he could. He had seen what it went through and could sense how tired it was. So, while it was a pain, he really had to deal with the situation without it.

"Here" A voice suddenly popped up beside Muku.

"Ah! Oh. Don't just randomly appear next to people like that. Also, what do you mean "here"... Layla, I love you!" Muku was obviously spooked by the sudden voice in such a tense situation.

He had long forgotten that Layla could travel through shadows since she seldom did it. The current situation where dark clouds covered the sky turned out to be the best situation for her. She could easily bypass the beasts that were inching closer and get to Muku's side.

As for why Muku suddenly confessed while giving her a hug? No, it wasn't because he suddenly realised his love for her. It was because she had come to give him what he needed most at that time. A beast core he could use to recover his mana. She gave him the purple beast core from the Three-tailed fox.

"O...oh" Layla only managed to say that as she stood frozen in place. Her face was red from embarrassment. She was not expecting the sudden confession.

Her mind was instantly overloaded with all kinds of thoughts. When they will have their wedding. Who will be her maid of honour? Where they will have their honeymoon and how many children they will have. Along with the names of the children and a lot more. Her face getting hotter and hotter the more she thought.

BOOOOM!

"WHAT?!" Jade, who had been eavesdropping, instantly lost it, and her aura exploded out. She wasn't expecting the sudden confession either.

"Roooooar!" And so, like the Beast Empress, she was. She unleashed her anger through violence.

She immediately launched her breath attack at the unsuspecting beasts that were still focused on Muku.

Unfortunately for the beasts. The stronger ones were the ones in front, while the weaker ones were in the back. So, taking Jade's beyond PR2 attack(even though she wasn't PR2 yet) as a LR2, MR2 or PR2 from the back wasn't easy.

"BOOOOOOM!"

The breath attack exploded out on impact. More than twenty unsuspecting beasts were killed, most being MR2s since most LR2s had already been killed off in the carnage. There were a few PR2s that died as well.

BOOOM!

Another explosion ensued. This time, it wasn't an attack, though. It was Jade breaking through into Rank Three!

All the beasts immediately froze. The Wolf that had been observing from a distance about to strike immediately turned tail and ran. Its whole body shook in fear. Horror practically oozing out of its eyes. One thought in its mind: "Impossible!".

"What are you all waiting for? Kill them, they won't dare fight back. If they do, I will kill them myself," Jade, who seemed to have lost it, suddenly spoke.

That's when the confused bunch who didn't know what was wrong with her finally moved. Their confusion was understandable since they didn't hear what she did. All they saw was Jade randomly exploding out in a fit of rage.

However, an opportunity for easy kills had presented itself. There was no way they would let it go. Everyone immediately jumped into action.

Even Layla put her chaotic thoughts aside and started a mad slaughter. However, she didn't go too far away from Muku, who seemed to have entered a trance. It was clear to see that something more than recovering mana was happening. Which was obvious from the dragon aura he was emitting.

Comically enough, even Freya, who had gotten her body back, and Elsa had gotten into the mix. They were targeting the gravely injured beasts that were close to dying already.

Of course, it wasn't for fun. Well, at first it was. Until they both got a prompt that said that the kill points would be saved and come into effect when they reached R2. So, if anything they were reducing the work they will have to do in the future. Even if it was only by a little bit...

Interestingly enough, true to Jade's words. None of the beasts fought back as they were getting killed. They would show savagery and anger in their eyes but wouldn't dare move.

Such was the capabilities of the Beast Empress. She was finally starting to bud after ditching mana. Gaining the ability to completely suppress lower-ranked beasts. Her passive ability even had an effect on same-ranked beasts. It weakened them by a lot of their bloodline wasn't strong enough. Which was the reason the wolf ran away despite being technically a lot stronger than Jade.

She had turned into the name of all beasts. A legend feared by beasts everywhere in the days of old.

Soon all the beasts in the area were killed off. Jade had to weaken the defences of the stronger ones, but she didn't personally kill any.

Some rebelled, choosing to fight for their lives. However, their rebellion was short-lived, as Jade's mere gaze drained them of all their strength. If the beast still showed signs of rebellion after that, she would break all its legs and beat it up. Only leaving it a little bit of its life, which would be snuffed out by one of the others.

Seeing how pointless the struggle was. The rest gave up on trying. Hoping that they get killed off as quickly as possible without having to suffer as much as their comrades...

"So, what are we going to do with all this meat? And I have to say, this whole thing was quite a letdown after the dragon event. I thought we were in for an epic battle or something" Jade immediately asked about what she cared about most...meat. Then expressed her disappointment in how things ended.

"Shut up! You're literally the one who sucked all the fun out of it. Why are you complaining?!" Emily snapped at Jade.

She really wished she could beat Jade up in the moment. However, she wouldn't seek her own demise by attacking a R3 while only being a Peak R2. That's right, she and the other girls still had some distance to go before breaking through. Their mana purity was still in the 60s-70s.

"And I can't store any of the meat in my Shadow Pocket. It's already full. We can, however, take some of it back, and I'll put it on ice. R2 beast meat doesn't rot quickly anyway. So it should be fine for three months or so, even without my ice" Layla spoke after Emily.

She was trying to keep her mind off of certain things by interacting with the others.

"...Okay", Jade replied after a moment of silence, still thinking about Muku's confession every time she looked at Layla. Her eyes immediately trailed off in his direction to express her discontent, however she was puzzled as soon as she looked at him.

"Hhm? What's wrong with him?" Jade exclaimed.

The others instantly looked at Muku. They were shocked to see his body getting thinner and thinner in front of their eyes.

"Give him another core!" Audrey shouted hysterically.

Chapter 167: Hidden Desire...

"Okay," Layla immediately did what she was told. She took out the earth-brown core and handed it to Muku, who grabbed it without opening his eyes.

The purple core hand long turned into dust after being sucked dry. The moment he grabbed the earth's-brown core. It's energy started to visibly get sucked into Muku's body. Oddly enough, none of it was getting wasted. Which should have only been possible if Muku had the earth element. Which he didn't. So the correct guess would be that it was linked to the dragon in some way.

"Freya, can you ask Iris if she knows what's going on?" Audrey spoke to Freya

While she had been quick to act and Muku's body was already recovering because of it. It wasn't because she was informed of what was going on. She was just able to quickly realise that he was going through an energy deficiency from a past experience.

The experience was when she turned into a Lesser Vampire who was always hungry. Her body at that time lacked proper methods of retaining energy so she was always seeking it out from blood

unconsciously. Which was something she figured out when she got the memory from the incident later on.

So, while her case wasn't as severe as Muku's. She was able to recognise it quickly and act. However, he still didn't know the specific reason why it was going on. They could all guess that the dragon likely had something to do with it, but they didn't know the "how and why". Which was where the knowledgeable Iris came in.

"She said that the dormant dragon must have sensed the beast core. So it unconsciously started sucking in the mana to recover itself. Which couldn't facilitate the recovery of both of them. So he received a backlash of losing his mana to it. With the second core, the situation should stabilise soon," Freya told the others what Iris told her.

"Wait, so what if we didn't have enough cores? Would he have died?" Hope asked a question that everyone was thinking about. The hate in her voice toward the dragon was clear as day. Which was understandable considering how important Muku was to her.

"...She said no. While it would have left him in a terrible state. It wouldn't kill him and he'd recover after a while. After a certain threshold, the dragon would be forced to wake up and stop the process. After all, its own life is linked to his. All this was a mistake. It wouldn't have happened in a normal situation. Just bad luck" Freya replied after a moment of silence when Iris was answering the question.

"Oh, but still. How can it be so careless? Big Brother saved it and this is how it repays him?" Hope was still not happy. Even if she clearly understood everything. Facts didn't matter when her brother was hurt. To her, that was the biggest fact of all.

The others didn't say anything against her. After all, they agreed. The dragon was a new element in their lives while Muku was practically their world, so there was clearly no comparison between the two.

"Where are the beast?!" It was at that tense moment that Muku's confused voice rang out.

To him, he had only closed his eyes for a few seconds to recover. Yet when he woke up. He was met with dead bodies everywhere. Reasonably, he had to ask what was up.

"Big Brother! You're okay!" Hope instantly turned to Muku and practically buried herself in his chest. Luckily, Muku had recovered somewhat from the energy the dragon didn't take after having its fill. Otherwise, he would have been knocked to the ground by the enthusiastic girl.

"Yeah... What did I miss?" Muku instantly realised that something significant he wasn't aware of had happened. It seemed he was so entranced before that he didn't even feel his body getting sucked dry.

"You don't know? Okay. It went like this..." Audrey told him after noticing that Hope, who was the primary receiver of his question, was so lost in his hug that she might not have heard him.

"Oh, so that's what happened. Well, as long as it all worked out in the end, I guess," Muku replied neutrally. While it surprised him a bit after being told about what had happened.

He took it for granted for obvious reasons. He the one who went through it, didn't feel anything. And he was okay when he came to. So, to him, it practically didn't happen. There was no reason to think too deeply about something like that.

"So... Do you feel any changes on you?" Chloe suddenly chimed in. Her gaze focused on Muku like she was seeing something fascinating. Which wasn't too different from how the others were looking at him.

"Hhm, I'm not sure. I hadn't gotten used to my increase in strength yet, so I'm not sure if there's an increase in that from what I got after reaching R3. I do feel a lot lighter, though, which I definitely didn't feel after ranking up" Muku ignored their odd gazes, thinking that it was likely due to him being shirtless. His shirt had long been burnt off by the heat from the event before.

As for his pants?. Obviously, like any good story, that makes perfect sense. They were still there, a bit tattered and torn here and there. However, they were still covering everything that mattered well.

"Really? Is there nothing else?" Chloe pressed on.

"You know, this would all go a lot faster if you just pointed out what you mean to me", Muku, who had instantly realised that there was something else she was trying to bring his attention to, chose the quickest way to get it done. Which was to get her to tell him whatever she was talking about.

"Can't you just go by the script like any normal person would? Shouldn't you start observing yourself closely until you realise what she's talking about?" Jade interjected while rolling her eyes.

It always rubbed her the wrong way when Muku did something like that. They'd be expecting a certain kind of show, only for him to change the script.

"Geez, you're the ones that are bothered by whatever you're talking about. So why are you getting angry when you aren't going straight to the point?! Does that seem reasonable to you?" Muku snapped back.

"They are talking about your long hair, increased height and bigger muscles. You probably got a little more handsome as well" Before the situation between Muku and Jade could develop into a fight, Jade would definitely regret it soon after. Hope intervened without unsticking herself from Muku.

Like a little pervert, she was even sniffing his body ever so slightly. She thought she was being discreet about it and no one would notice. However, she had overlooked the fact that she was surrounded by superhumans. So her subtle actions were quite loud to their enhanced senses.

They just chose to not embarrass her by saying anything. Well, Jade wanted to, but Emily stopped her. Freya was so embarrassed by what Hope was doing that one might even think that she was the one doing it.

"What do you all...Oh! When did this happen?!" Muku replied while creating a silver mirror in front of him. While he couldn't create glass, he could create a metal shiny enough to mimic it. He was shocked by what he saw.

While it still looked like him for the most part. His height had increased by at least twenty centimetres. He was no longer as lean as before, having gained a significant amount of muscle. Then there was his once short hair he had been grooming every chance he got.

The girls had been hounding him about it every time it got a little longer to cut it. Saying that their leader shouldn't look unkempt or something like that.

Now, however, it had gotten so long that it could reach his back. With his refined facial features. The hair just made sense. Audrey was even drooling slightly while looking at him. Desire radiating out of her eyes.

She even felt a little dampness in between her legs. Luckily for her, the others were focused on other things, or she would have been in for a rather embarrassing time. Also, the smell of smoke, blood and whatnot covered the whole area. Jade wasn't able to pick up the special scent she was releasing.

She wasn't sure what was going on with her. While Muku has always looked great to her, she had never been so crazy about him. She could vaguely tell that if she was alone with Muku at that moment. She would have definitely pounced on him.

Maybe the ocean of sexual desires she had been ignoring for thirty years was finally getting to her. She wasn't sure how long she could hold on. Especially when the one she desired most was always in her line of sight. Smiling at her from the bottom of the heart. Almost like he was inviting her to do something.

"We only noticed it after you woke up. So it's safe to assume that it happened during the time we weren't looking. As for the reason..." Chloe replied to him while still blatantly checking him out. Which again, most of the others were doing as well. She trailed off at the end as she shifted her focus from Muku to Freya.

Her meaning is obvious. She was pretty much asking Iris to tell them what was going on.

"She said, 'I'm not your Ghoogle!'" Freya replied with a statement from Iris that left everyone dumbstruck.

Chapter 168: Lady of Culture!

"Wait... How does she know about Ghoogle?!" Chloe exclaimed in surprise. The others were also shocked. She was an ancient fairy from a time before the recorded history they knew. So, how tf did she know about Ghoogle?!

"Hhm? Oh, that. I let her take a peek into a few of my most common memories as one of our deal sweeteners. While she mostly looks at the Kdramas ones among others of that nature. She sometimes goes through the general life ones that include our world's general knowledge. So, her knowledge of the times before the apocalypse is equal to that of an old grandma who knows a few things. She'll probably become more knowledgeable as she looks into more memories" Freya explained.

She almost laughed at the funny expressions the others had when she told them what Iris said. While she could understand why that was, that didn't keep it from being funny.

"Oh... I didn't know that was possible. Well, at least it explains everything" Chloe replied mechanically while still trying to wrap her head around it. As were the others.

They couldn't help but feel like the one edge in information they had over Iris was slowly disappearing. Even if it was mostly useless information. People generally wanted to be in a similar position to the other party if not a better one. So, losing the little information they could brag about, didn't feel too good.

"Oh right! I forgive to mention that everything I see it learn is automatically captured and stored in my mindscape. So, I can technically remember everything that has happened to me, or that I've seen since the first day I learned of my ability. I just have to retrieve the disc from the shelf... Which, of course, looks like that because I made it so" Freya explained why Iris could say what she was saying.

There was even a slight touch of pride in how she was speaking. Clearly, she was finally starting to get used to the rest of the gang. So, she was getting more and more casual. Which the others noticed, and they weren't against it. They even silently supported it. That way, their team can be a lot closer.

"O...oh, is that so?. I kinda feel even more jealous than before now..." Chloe replied with obvious jealousy written on her face. There were some things about her past she cherished but couldn't remember properly. So, it would have been great if she could just look for the disk or file of it and watch it. Then maybe, she would be able to clearly remember the face of her mother she didn't even have a photo of. Which was the work of her father who had destroyed them all trying to forget.

For reasons of their own. The others also felt as jealous as her. Muku was one of the most jealous. He couldn't remember anything that happened before he came to the orphanage at eight years old.

While he didn't particularly want to know things he shouldn't. Like Ares' origins, or the being that wanted to kill Iris's origin. He definitely wanted to know about his own origin. If it was simple and he just suffered from memory loss that is. If it was troublesome... His personality- type would definitely opt not to know.

"I'll owe her another favour..." After a moment of silence when everyone was stuck in their own thoughts.

Muku offered another favour. He was one of those people who didn't like owing anyone anything. However, the moment they owed one, they wouldn't mind owing a little more. A classic case of the "If you're already dead and buried. What's a little more dirt?" mentality.

"Deal, and don't worry. I know the drill. It can't be anything too outrageous. Just know that you now owe me two favours. The reason your appearance changed like that is because of the dragon as you all guessed. The phenomenon is called synchronization. It's when the compatibility between you and the Soul-linked beast is perfected. So both of you will go through some changes to suit the others. It's a fifty-fifty type of thing. So the dragon will also go through some changes. It will be more apparent on it than you though. You'll definitely be surprised the next time you see it. And there should be a little gift for you at that time as well" Iris, who had been given control by Freya, instantly agreed to the deal and gave Muku all the information he wanted.

"Oh, so that's why?" Muku only replied with a brief rhetorical question.

"Yeah. That's why you feel lighter. It improved your physic in more than just appearance. You're probably as strong as this little lady here now" Even though she knew he wasn't actually expecting an answer. She answered him anyway. She was in a good mood after obtaining another favour so she didn't mind. To her, the more favours she squeezed out of Muku, who clearly had a bright future alongside his whole group, the better.

Her saying that Muku was now as strong as Jade, who had gotten a lot stronger after ditching Mana, was quite surprising. After all, the new Jade was now at least two times as strong as Audrey physically. Which was quite a fit since the delicate-looking Audrey was quite a physical beast behind that ultra-feminine body.

So for Muku to be as strong as Jade? That seemed highly unlikely...

BOOOOOOOM!

However, they all unwillingly accepted it after Jade tried to punch Muku with her best physical attack. Which he blocked without using mana. The attack was so close it created a minor shock wave that made

the others protect themselves with their mana while holding down their skirts. Which was more out of instinct since the mana barriers blocked both the wind and force.

"No fair!... Why do you keep getting one absurd power-up after the other? When will it be my turn?!" Jade exclaimed in grievance while taking her hand back as if she didn't just try to sneak attack Muku with her strongest physical attack.

"Well, I'm the main character so... You either accept it or die!" Muku replied jokingly.

"Tsk, we'll see when I get my spinoff" Jade replied semi-jokingly.

"Can you two stop pretending like this is a novel written by a super busy virgin author? We've got things to do!" Emily chimed in while rolling her eyes. Her eyes were darkly looking around the place.

Everyone immediately realised what she was trying to hint at. Which was the hundreds of beast corpses that surrounded them. While they had Jade to tell which corpse had a core and which didn't. It would still be a mammoth task to look through everything. A boring one at that.

The gains would probably help some reach Rank Three if they find cores that are in line with their elements to consume. It was a thing of the future. A seemingly too-distant future at that moment.

"Wait! Before we get into this. Can I ask one thing?" Elsa suddenly spoke as everyone was about to grumpily get to work.

"No, there will be no synchronization process between you and your fairy. Fairies aren't beasts after all," Iris, who could tell from the start what the starry-eyed little girl, Elsa, wanted to ask, immediately replied.

"Oh..." Elsa's enthusiasm immediately deflated. While she could tell that she was giving herself false hope from how nothing had happened up to that point. She still couldn't help but ask. Like any normal kid, the idea of going through what Muku went through seemed cool to her. So she wanted it for herself.

"Don't be so down. When there will be nothing of that sought. You will get something you will like later on. Much later on, though," Iris tried to raise Elsa's spirit by telling her about something that would happen in the future without selling too much information.

"Really? What will happen?!" Elsa immediately got excited and acted out of character as she went up to grab Iris as she spoke.

"It's a secret. I don't want to spoil it for you. It will ruin the fun. Just wait for it while increasing your power. When it happens is completely up to your talent" Iris refused to give too much information.

From Freya's memories, she has learned about the concept of spoilers. Which was something she refused to do. Spoilers were the worst. Hints were fine but spoilers were pure evil!

She, a lady of culture. Refused to do such a thing. That's right, she had gotten into anime as well.

"Fine..." Elsa didn't push anymore. She was mature enough to understand where Iris was coming from. She also appreciated the way Iris said it. It added to her motivation to get stronger without actually spoiling it for her.

"Okay, with that taken care of. Let's get to business. The sooner we start, the sooner we finish. I don't want to do this either" Muku brought the group's attention to what they were trying to ignore.

And so, with bleak expressions, they got to work. As for when they would finish, it was unknown.

One certain thing, though, was their profit. Despite the undesirable task they were faced with. That day, was one of their most profitable days in the apocalypse.

Their team's strength would increase by more than double due to that single day...

Chapter 169: I'd die for you

An excruciating few hours later...

"Finally, we're done! I thought it would never end!" Jade spoke in a relieved tone. It was already dark out.

They had to work nonstop until they finished. The reason was that there were already beasts lurking in the surroundings, waiting for a chance to steal some benefits.

It was okay in the first hour or so since the battle's chaotic energy kept them away. However, the smell of meat was too enticing for them to resist for too long.

While the group didn't mind the tie beasts getting some meat. They did mind them possibly getting some beast cores along with that meat. Which they didn't want to happen. Beast cores were a very valuable and quite uncommon resource in normal settings.

So, they did two things. Scare the beasts away while gathering cores. At first, Jade's Empress Aura worked perfectly. However, since she had no real intent behind it. It wasn't as effective as it could have been.

When asked why she wasn't displaying it to its full effect. Her reply was, "I can't bring myself to show my best to weaker opponents like these. Even if I want to, I just can't".

While it did increase their work. They understood. After all, what adult would bring out their all while facing a toddler? It's just how things work. Without a certain level of feeling threatened or pressured in some way. Most normal people can't go all out.

"Yeah, we can finally go rest. I will definitely have nothing but good dreams tonight. That's how happy I am about our profit" Emily responded while looking at the 300+ beast cores that were filling up a large silver metal box that was floating behind them.

While most of the beasts didn't have cores. Which was to be expected. Having more than three hundred cores was beyond great news. Especially with the fact that the cores were mostly from PR2s and Half-step R3s. So were of a higher quality. It really seemed like the higher the level of a beast, the higher the chance it had to have a core.

As for what mechanisms or laws that worked behind that. They didn't care. As long as they got what they wanted. Everything else didn't matter.

"I refuse to rest before reaching Rank Three", Layla, who was probably one of the happiest ones at that moment, spoke.

She felt quite disappointed when she got the R3 beast core. Not because it was bad and she didn't want it, but because it made something apparent.

It alone wouldn't help her breakthrough. It would have gotten her to the threshold for her shadow element. However, her ice would remain unmoved. So, while she would have gotten ahead of the others briefly. They would still have a chance to catch up. Making everything pointless, in her head.

After the dragon's bloodline ritual, though, everything had changed. While ice cores were rare like lightning and poison. There were still a few of each that they found. So she now had Everything she needed.

Which meant that as long as she took some time to absorb the energy to refine hers. With the already filled KP count. She would break through within a few hours.

Of course, Hope, Chloe and Emily were in the same situation. However, the difference between them and her was that she wanted to do it instantly and they wanted to rest. They weren't as obsessed with being at the top as she was.

Which wasn't a bad thing. Different people just had different ways of leading their lives. This was why the group didn't judge her harshly for her tendency to be overly competitive at times.

"You can do that if you want. However, your fighting choices will be greatly reduced tomorrow," Muku spoke. His words confused Layla as well as everyone else. They didn't know what he was talking about.

"What do you mean?" Layla, being someone who wasn't afraid to ask questions, sought clarification immediately.

"Oh, seems you all have forgotten... Then again, the situation is a bit different from before. I'll explain after we're done with dinner" Muku replied in a way that didn't clear the confusion.

They had been talking while flying back to the mansion. Muku's statement happened to be right when they arrived. So he went inside with the cores without waiting for the girls to say anything.

"Tsk, always playing tricks", Jade complained, but she didn't run after him to make him talk. She had better things to do at that moment. Also, she knew that he wouldn't speak no matter what she tried to do anyway. Which made the other option even more enticing...

"...Why are you looking at me like that?" Layla couldn't help but ask feeling a little weirded out.

How could she not when Jade was looking at her with a hungry look in her eyes. The same one she has when she looks at meat. Given their difference in strength at the moment. Where she probably wouldn't even be able to defend herself. She felt even more unsettled by the stare.

"Oh, sorry. I got lost in thought for a second there. Anyway, can you give me some R3 beast meat? I'm R3 now, so you can't expect me to eat R2 meat with the rest of you right?" Jade, who had gotten lost in her fantasies, replied after being pulled back by Layla's question.

"Oh... Here. You know you'll need Emily's assistance to cook it right?" Layla replied with a sigh of relief after realising that Jade really was thinking about meat. She didn't delay giving it to her. Jade was now qualified to eat it, then not being able to wasn't a reason to stop her.

She then brought Jade's attention to a matter she had overlooked. Hearing the statement. Jade's expression instantly darkened as she looked at Emily. Emily gave her the brightest smile she was capable of. Which made Jade feel even worse.

She could instantly tell from that smile that Emily wasn't going to help. She was going to be petty and take the situation as a chance for revenge.

"Emily..." Jade being the seasoned soldier she was, still jumped into head first into the mission impossible.

"Yes?" Emily replied sweetly, her smile unchanging.

"You're my best friend right?" Jade continued, keeping her words as neutral as she could.

"Yes, definitely!. I'd even die for you" Emily replied with exaggerated conviction. However, the others could tell that she was being truthful. Emily and Jade were really the best of friends in the group despite everything.

"Great! I'd die for you too!" Jade replied with excitement. She felt like she was close to winning.

"Thank you. It's good to know we feel the same", Emily replied. Still smiling innocently like before.

"Totally... So you'll help me cook this meat right?" Jade finally got to the point. She felt like she had built the situation up enough.

"No" Emily gave a simple one-word answer, her expression unchanged.

"Come on! I thought you said you'd even die for me!" Jade immediately broke down in complaints.

"Yeah, I would. This is a completely different situation, and you know how petty I am" Emily replied. Her expression was still unchanged.

"God! Why did you give me such a petty friend! Fine! I'll get you back for this one!" Jade exclaimed in frustration before running upstairs.

"Hehe" Emily's fake expression finally fell. Showing how she was enjoying the situation.

"Are you really not going to help her?" Audrey couldn't help but ask worriedly. While she didn't mind the girls bickering here and there. She didn't want them to go too far.

"I will help her. I'm just going to do it after we're done preparing everyone else's dinner. If I had agreed instantly. She would have hounded me until I prepared hers first. Which wouldn't be too good since it takes longer to prepare. Honestly. If it wasn't because I'm not a 60% Half-step R3. I wouldn't have agreed to prepare it at all. My past strength was just not enough" Emily gave an explanation, making everything clear to everyone.

"Oh, if that's the case. That's good" Audrey replied with a relieved smile.

The girls immediately went their different ways, to do their tasks. Other than Emily, for obvious reasons. The others all took turns in the kitchen. It happened to be Audrey's turn that day. So, she and Emily made their way to the kitchen.

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Upstairs...

"Oh, so that's your plan huh? Well, you'll be in for a surprise this time. I'll show you. Thinking you're so great because you're the only one who can cook my meat for me!" Jade, who had been secretly eavesdropping after running away, spoke to herself.

Her eyes then trailed onto Muku's door before heading there with nervousness and expectation written on her face. She wasn't sure if he would agree. However, as someone who likes trying something out first before deeming it impossible. She soldiered on.

Knock! Knock!

"Come in!" Muku's voice was heard from inside the room.

"He didn't ask who it was. Firstly he already knew from the energy signature. Plus, it didn't particularly matter who it was since no one other than their little group could go there. And he was fine with it being any of them.

"Okay," Jade replied in an unnaturally submissive voice. Which even made Muku raise his eyebrow a bit wondering what she could possibly want.

Jade first looked around to see if anyone saw her then went inside before closing the door softly...

Chapter 170: All for naught...

Around an hour later...

Knock! Knock!

"Jade! It's me, I can help you with your meat now. Hurry up before I change my mind," Emily spoke after knocking on Jade's door. She was done with everyone else's meat. So could finally help Jade out.

"Really? Thank you! Let's go to the kitchen then" Jade opened the door excitedly and immediately dragged Emily down the stairs to the kitchen. Meat in hand, in a pot Muku had made for her at some point in the past.

Emily, who expected such a reaction, just let Jade drag her along. What she failed to notice was the slyness that was flashing in Jade's eyes. Which signified that she was up to something.

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In the kitchen...

"So, how well do you want it done?" Emily asked Jade before getting into it.

"The usual, but before that. I want to show you something" Jade replied with a little smile on her face.

"... Sure, but if you do something to upset me. I won't help you anymore." Emily looked at Jade for a moment with suspicion in her eyes. She finally noticed that there was something up with Jade. So, she made her stance known before Jade did something dumb.

"What does that mean? Do you have such little trust in me? Don't worry, it's nothing bad. Here, watch..." Jade defended herself showing a fake, hurt expression. She knew her reputation so the others lacking faith in her in certain cases was something she understood. Not wanting to waste time, she moved on to what she wanted to show Emily.

Audrey, who was putting the last touches on everyone's meals, couldn't help but get curious. So, she paused what she was doing and looked at Jade. Waiting to see what she wanted to show Emily.

"Flames!" Jade cast her new and unexpected spell.

Green flame immediately appeared and covered both her hands. They burned fiercely, a lot hotter than Emily's too. Which was probably because of her higher rank. Otherwise, if they were the same rank, Jade wouldn't be in the same class as Emily.

The eyes of both Emily and Audrey widened in surprise. It wasn't because they thought it was impossible. Since they knew about Jade's ability to do such things. What was surprising was how sudden and unexpected it was.

Since they hadn't seen Jade consume a beast core to gain the ability. It naturally surprised them. To their knowledge, no one should have access to the cores yet. Unless...

"Wow! You can use fire now! Good for you" Emily exclaimed. Genuinely happy for her friend.

"Huh? Yeah... Thanks..." Jade was caught off guard by Emily's response. She was expecting saltiness from Emily or something like that. So she wasn't sure how to respond.

That's when she remembered how Emily was a goody-two-shoes at her core. So it should have been obvious how she'd react. The reason why she was thrown off was because of Emily's recent petty actions.

Unfortunately, for her. It seemed Emily's pettiness didn't run too deep. Leaving her feeling empty. Like she expected a cake only to get a muffin or something. It really didn't feel good. Especially after what she did to get the flame ability.

"Now you can help me with cooking. I can also have off days. I never thought this day would come despite knowing your ability. It just never came to mind. However, you, my best friend, thought of it"

"You just couldn't take seeing me doing all the work, could you? Thank you, thank you! I'm sorry about my pettiness from before. I hope we can get back to how we were before all that. I'm so happy. I have to go tell the others the good news. I'll let you get to preparing your meat then" Emily spoke nonstop while hugging Jade.

After she was done she immediately went out of the room. Skipping in happiness. Leaving the stunned Jade and the amused Audrey behind.

As she left, Audrey noticed a little cunning smile on Emily's face. Which likely signified how she knew all about Jade's real intention. She just refused to acknowledge the news in the way Jade wanted her to.

Being an onlooker to the whole thing. Audrey almost couldn't hold back her laughter. The girls were just so funny and cute. Moments like that were the ones she enjoyed most. She would forget all the struggles in the outside world during such times.

"This isn't how it was supposed to go... My favour!" Jade exclaimed in pain while squatting down and grabbing her head.

"What do you mean?" Audrey asked just to tease Jade a bit more.

She had pretty much already guessed what had happened. Muku tells her almost everything that happens between him and the girls. So she was basically always in the know.

"It's like this..." Jade, who was looking for a way to vent didn't mind telling Audrey everything.

So, she told Audrey everything. How she had gone to see Muku after Emily refused to help her. Her purpose was to secretly get a fire element core for obvious reasons. However, while Muku didn't refuse to help her. He only agreed to do so if she traded it for the favour he owed her.

His reason was that he was sticking out his neck for her by giving her the core behind everyone's back. So she had to trade it for something of equal value. While it was a struggle to decide. Her vengeful spirit obviously won in the end. Muku gave her the core with the happiest smile she had ever seen on his face. Which she didn't understand.

Audrey understood why he was so happy though. He had been racking his brain for ideas on what he could give her or do for her to settle the favour. However, nothing was coming up. He had even asked her for help in thinking of something, but Audrey refused.

She was still feeling a bit petty about the time she saw him patting Freya. She also wanted his pats but never got any. So why would she help him?

Not to mention the talk he had with the girls but didn't have with her. While she understood everything well. She wouldn't get paid for being so reasonable. So why would she be so?

Anyway, that was why he was happy when Jade came to ask for his help. He was starting to fear that he might really end up being her servant or something. With that, one of the two greatest headaches he was facing at that time was dealt with.

"Oh, is that so. I'm really sorry to hear that. However, isn't Emily's happiness as valuable as her saltiness to you.?If not even more precious? If you look at it like that, you didn't get short-changed for anything. You traded in an uncertain favour, for the happiness of your best friend" Audrey still tried to cheer Jade up despite how she found the situation funny.

Which was why her reasoning was a bit flawed. Jade would have likely gotten the fire element within a day or two. So, Emily would have ended up as happy as she was anyway. As for Jade, she lost a very valuable favour and didn't get the one thing she wanted on top of that.

So the situation wasn't as positive as Audrey made it seem. Which she knew very well. She was just hoping that the emotional Jade wouldn't notice.

"Yeah, you're right. I think I'm going to lie down for a bit. I'll prepare this meat tomorrow. You can serve some R2 meat for me as well. I'll come down soon" Jade replied.. Feeling a bit better after Audrey's words. Which was good news for Audrey who hoped such an outcome.

"Yeah, sure. You go rest. I'll serve you some and cover it. You can get it after resting. Don't take too long though. As you know Muku has something to tell us after the meal." Audrey replied with a smile.

Her gentle motherly voice really put the girls at ease. Even the rowdy Jade would always get tamed by it easily.

"Okay, I will be present", Jade replied, then left the room.

"It's never a dull moment with them running around..." Audrey spoke to herself softly after Jade left. She then returned to her task.

Soon, everything was ready, and everyone was called down for the meal. Other than Jade the others came and enjoyed their hearty meal.

Muku was all smiles from start to finish. Seeing him, Audrey couldn't help but roll her eyes. Did he really enjoy tricking Jade that much? Yes, he tricked her, because there were no stakes in him giving her the core at all.

The girls wouldn't really care that he gave Jade a core sooner than he should have. So, Jade practically exchanged her favour for nothing at all. Which was another loss. It was a literal "all for nought" situation.

Audrey couldn't help but wonder how Jade would react after she calmed down and realised what happened. That would definitely be a show to see. She kinda couldn't wait...

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After the meal...

"Is Jade really coming down?" Muku, who wanted to start their business talk, asked. Audrey had told them about how Jade wanted to lie down for a bit, so they had ignored her absence until then.

"I'm here, you can start" Before Audrey could respond. Jade appeared and spoke for herself while coming down the stairs.

"Okay. So the thing is..." Muku immediately got into it. Not minding that Jade was still a bit of distance away. After all, her ears were good enough.

His revelation left all of the girls excited. It was something that had slipped all their minds, but they liked it very much...