

## Gods Daily 143

Chapter 143: The Backbone of the Old Crossbridge Men

This development had gone far beyond Aurek's expectations.

If he could subdue them, binding them as the Empire's guardian magical beasts, the prestige and fortune that such creatures would bestow upon the Empire would be immeasurable.

As the Waterwave Griffon and the Flame Griffon slowly paraded down the main avenue of Eryndor City, the entire city was thrown into a frenzy of awe and excitement.

Even the spies from various factions—whether from the Kafka family, the Kazek family, or other powers lurking in the city—hurried into the streets. They stared in shock at the sight before them.

"Waterwave Griffon and Flame Griffon... truly, the Truva expedition yielded astonishing rewards!"

Inside a smithy, a burly man with muscles like knotted steel paused his hammering and glanced toward the street. His eyes widened slightly as the pair of beasts strode past.

Creatures of such rare potential—magical beasts born with extraordinary bloodlines—were so scarce that even the most dominant powers of the continent would feel their hearts burn with envy and desire at the sight of them.

Deep within the palace, in the depths of Aurek's sea of consciousness, the system interface shimmered once again.

[Emperor's Scepter energy reserves sufficient. Would you like to nurture attribute warriors?]

[Yes] [No]

Aurek's thoughts moved, and the Emperor's Scepter responded at once.

In an instant, he had gained four hundred Elemental Assassins—each one with combat strength comparable to a master rank expert—and four hundred Doomsday Warriors, all newly born, each armed with a fresh skill called "Judgment at Dawn," likewise at the master rank level.

These newly created warriors required no commands. Silent, disciplined, and efficient, they marched away on their own, heading toward the designated barracks encircling Eryndor City. There they would await the Empire's call, ready to be deployed at a moment's notice.

At the same time, the hundred Life Sorcerers that had also been nurtured were guided directly toward the Kazint Palace sector.

"Eight hundred new master-rank battle units every single day... that should be sufficient for the Venus Mountains campaign." Aurek thought to himself.

The Venus Mountains, one of the Empire's four great ranges, were ancient in their geology. Legends held that their foundations were linked directly to the Empire's ancestral lifeblood and geomantic energy. It was inevitable that multiple Earthvein energy nodes were hidden there.

Needless to say, countless forces already lurked within that territory. The situation there would certainly be far more complex than in any ordinary land.

Moreover, the Grand Duke Sentino's faction entrenched itself within those mountains. Alongside them, other titanic forces such as the Cloudpeak Tower and the Venus Cult might also be present. Without sufficient power, no campaign there could even begin to succeed.

Still, whether the current strength was enough or not, Aurek had already decided. More warriors would be dispatched in the coming days. By preparing in advance and planting sufficient forces in that area, when the time came to finally eradicate Grand Duke Sentino's threat, the Empire's legions would face far fewer obstacles.

At that very moment, a chamberlain rushed in.

"Your Majesty! Steurn of Truva Province has returned from suppressing the rebellion!"

The grand hall was vast and solemn.

Stearn knelt upon the cold, polished jade floor. His weathered face carried the dust of countless battles, but his gaze was filled with reverence deeper than the weariness of war.

"Your most loyal subject, Steurn of Truva Province, pays homage to His Majesty!"

"May Your Majesty's radiance endure with the Empire, everlasting!"

He bowed until his forehead touched the ground, offering the most solemn of rites.

"Rise."

A voice resounded, heavy with majesty and imbued with an absolute will. It descended like thunder from the heavens themselves.

The sheer authority contained within those two syllables crushed every shred of resistance in Steurn's heart. He trembled in spirit, not daring to even raise his head—much less meet the gaze of the figure enthroned before him.

"Your Majesty! The provincial capital of Truva has been completely pacified. The traitorous governor Charles and his entire family have been executed. All officials who aided his rebellion have met their punishment. Rebels in several towns of the province have been eliminated, while the cleansing of the remaining cities is still ongoing."

As he gave his report, Steurn raised in both hands the Sacrospring Sword—the symbol of royal authority and the Emperor's trust—offering it high.

The attendant Angie stepped forward, receiving the sword reverently.

"Your humble servant thanks His Majesty for his boundless grace!"

Stearn once again bowed deeply.

"If I did not act, the true blood and loyalty of the 'Old Crossbridge Men' might vanish from this land altogether," Aurek murmured inwardly, his voice tinged with an unnoticeable sigh.

Now, those who still guarded this broken land... were perhaps only these old soldiers, men who had once bled and buried their bones for the Empire.

Even many members of the Veynar family had chosen to flee. Yet these aging veterans remained steadfast.

"Your Majesty's dignity is boundless! Under Your Majesty's guidance, the Empire will surely regain its glory!"

Stearn's voice trembled with excitement.

"Your servant has always believed this. Every single citizen still guarding the Empire's frontier believes this as well!"

"The blood of the 'Old Crossbridge Men' has never grown cold. It merely slumbers within many bodies. We old men are willing to burn our withered bodies as torches to awaken that blood once more!"

"This Empire will never disappoint those who remain loyal to it."

Aurek turned, gazing at the grand carving of the imperial eagle emblem upon the wall of the hall. His eyes gleamed with cold, domineering light.

"And neither will it disappoint its enemies."

"With Your Majesty's words, this servant's life is fulfilled!"

Stearn fought to steady his emotions. At last, he remembered another matter.

"Your Majesty, beyond the palace walls stand a pair of Waterwave Griffon and Flame Griffon. They are wondrous magical beasts, born of heaven and earth. Perhaps they may serve as steeds for Your Majesty's imperial chariot, displaying Your divine might. I humbly await Your Majesty's judgment."

Aurek's mind power had already examined them thoroughly. Slaying them would not grant him many Emperor Points. But as mounts to manifest imperial authority, they were indeed a perfect choice.

"I accept them."

Stearn bowed, then finally summoned the courage to lift his eyes.

Perhaps he thought that in this life he would never again stand so near to the sun of the Empire. He wished, at least once, to engrave this figure upon his soul.

What he saw was a back—upright, towering, as though it alone could support the entire firmament.

That mighty presence, vast and overwhelming, crashed into his heart like an invisible mountain, like boundless oceans pressing down upon his soul.

It was enough.

That was enough.

He had not seen the Emperor's face. Yet to behold this back, carrying the Empire's future, was more than sufficient.

"By mandate of heaven, by decree of the Emperor!"

"Stearn, loyal and patriotic, whose sincerity is witnessed by heaven and earth. With a hundred years of age, he has not failed the honor of the 'Old Crossbridge Men.' For his merits in quelling rebellion, he is granted imperial favor. He is hereby enfeoffed as Guardian of Truva Province, to be venerated by all the people."

"He is further granted the 'Chapter of the Commoners,' bearing the protection of imperial fortune. His descendants shall be blessed: peasants may become scholars, scholars may become heroes, and talents shall emerge in abundance."

"The Jasper family of Truva Province, house of loyalty and sacrifice, is posthumously honored as the Empire's Family of Loyal Valor. Their deeds shall be inscribed upon the imperial tablets, revered for generations by all subjects of the Empire."

The proclamation thundered outward from the palace, echoing across the skies above Eryndor.

At the William residence, beneath a vine-covered pavilion, Prince Toby Veynar sat with William. The booming words of the imperial decree rang clearly in their ears.

"'Old Crossbridge Men'..."

The aged prince let out a bitter laugh at himself, the corners of his lips trembling with regret.

"I... am not even equal to an old soldier guarding the frontier."

This was their home, their land. Others were using their very lives to guard it. Yet they, who bore the noble blood of Crossbridge, had chosen abandonment.

William spoke quietly.

"My lord, His Majesty's path to this moment was not easy. Troy and Jacoff's rebellion, the assassination attempts of the Dark Order, the infiltration of master rank assassins into the palace itself... Each wolf and tiger encircling him was a mortal threat."

"And through all these years, has anyone ever once returned to check on His Majesty?"