

Gods Daily 145

Chapter 145: The Iron Hooves of the Empire Rise Once Again

Deep within the Valoria Palace, in the secluded chamber reserved for the emperor's contemplation, silence reigned.

Only the flickering of candlelight disturbed the stillness, the flames swaying gently, casting long shadows that traced the cold stone walls. The wavering glow outlined Aurek's sharp, unyielding profile as he sat hunched over a spread of parchment—an ancient sheepskin scroll stretched out before him.

With deliberate precision, he inscribed words across the vellum. But these were no mere letters. Each stroke seemed to tug at invisible strands of law and fate, threads of power that shimmered faintly in the unseen realm. When his pen left the parchment, the script burned faintly with the resonance of will. In the end, the decree carried with it a weight like a mountain—a concise command imbued with the spirit of an emperor.

When he was finished, Aurek handed the scroll to Angie, who stood silently at his side.

At the same time, the weapon seized from the rebels of Truva Province—the chaotic warhammer that pulsed with unstable force—was temporarily granted to the thunderous general Overthunder, to serve as his weapon for the interim.

Reports of the Truva campaign had long since been delivered to the emperor through swift couriers. Records of fallen strongmen had been stripped bare—secret manuals, mystical constructs, anomalous devices that gleamed with strange-colored light. Even the infamous assassin Bloodblade's crimson-cross longsword now lay secured within the deepest vaults of the imperial treasury.

When all immediate affairs were arranged, Aurek's thoughts turned inward, to the system that only he could see.

The figure displayed there was staggering: 2.4 million Emperor Points. Added to the steady flow pouring in from Truva and the four neighboring provinces, the total had already surpassed three million.

To refine these points fully into his being would take time, but the resources were monumental. They were more than enough to push his authority to an even loftier height.

Currently, Aurek stood at Master Rank Level 4. If he consumed these points in one sweep, reaching Master Rank Level 9 would be within his grasp. Yet even that peak was not the end. The true summit of the Master Rank still required a quantity of Emperor Points as distant as the stars in the night sky—almost unreachable.

But Aurek did not rush. He knew well that the summoned armies of soldiers—his inexhaustible legions—were the foundation of the throne. Patience and meticulous sculpting of this foundation were what would ultimately crown him in immortal glory.

Outside the palace, the rhythmic clamor of iron boots echoed through the dawn.

Grand General Rand, a noble whose bloodline had borne three generations of unbroken loyalty to the empire, held in his hand the emperor's decree. Soon he would ride forth to Revor Province, bearing the command of Aurek himself.

His faith and loyalty had already been tested. Prosecutor Heimerdinger had scrutinized him, searching for fault, and finding none. Now Rand stood elevated to the title of Grand General—an honor heavy with both responsibility and glory.

By his side stood the silent figure of Wak, the shadow-like swordsman, his longsword strapped at his back. Wak was not a man of many words, but his presence was a blade—sharp, watchful, and deadly.

And at the head of the host rode the thunderous commander Overthunder, the three-eyed general whose very name struck awe into those who heard it. Under his command marched 5,800 warriors, men whose strength was said to come from myths themselves, each one a being capable of slaying awakened foes. Together, they formed a mission delegation that was terrifying in its might.

"Grand General." Angie stepped forward, holding the decree reverently.

Rand bowed with utmost solemnity as he received it. When his eyes passed across the glowing script, his pupils contracted sharply—as though struck by lightning itself. He lifted his gaze toward Angie, shock flashing across his features.

Her lips curved into a faint smile.

"His Majesty's will," she said softly, "is as clear as the stars."

The light in Rand's eyes blazed. He closed the decree carefully, as though sealing a fragment of heaven itself, then turned and mounted his steed. His gaze lifted toward the dome of Valoria Palace, that towering symbol of supreme authority.

Then his voice cut across the air.

"Depart!"

Wak vaulted wordlessly onto his horse.

Behind them, 5,800 soldiers moved as one, their formation a wall of steel. Their boots struck the cobblestones in unison, shaking the ground beneath them. As they advanced through the wide streets of Paris, the sheer oppression of their discipline pressed down like a stormcloud. This display of power surpassed any martial parade the capital had witnessed in decades.

From the carved windows of a noble inn, Isabella—the elf princess of Frostvale—watched quietly. Her deep blue eyes lingered on the steel tide rolling through the streets. For the briefest moment, a flicker of unease passed through her gaze, though she quickly masked it.

In the alleys and shadows, spies from countless factions captured what they saw—through enchanted crystals, through memory scrolls, through the old methods of ink and paper. All recorded the terrifying might of the imperial procession before slipping back into darkness with grim expressions.

The empire's fangs were baring themselves, sharper and more vicious than ever before. What they saw was not the decline of a giant, but the awakening of a nightmare.

Many had schemed to tear away their disguises at the coming Firstfall Festival, to declare independence openly and split away from Aurek's dominion. But now, watching the imperial might unfurl before them, doubt wormed into their hearts.

They had treated the empire as a dying beast, ready to be carved apart for spoils. But they had forgotten—forgotten that a giant, even when wounded, still clutched an axe large enough to cleave the heavens.

Already, the empire commanded over ten thousand of these extraordinary soldiers—not farmers conscripted into battle, but true warriors, each capable of standing against awakened fighters and slaying them. Walking disasters.

This was no longer a military levy; this was a force that rivaled the hidden Ninth-Rank Factions that had long dominated the continent's underworld.

For lords such as Grand Duke Sentino, who reigned like kings over their domains, this was no small thorn—it was a sword suspended above their very heads. To ignore it was to invite annihilation.

The number alone—ten thousand—was enough to freeze even the bravest hearts.

The citizens of Paris, peering out from their homes, from taverns, from shops, now understood a portion of the truth. Their emperor was not merely a sovereign bound to a crumbling order. He was a ruler holding in his grasp a power that made the old order tremble.

The road to Revor was long. Even using the fractured remnants of the empire's teleportation network, leaping from node to node, the journey consumed time.

Far to the east, within Revor Province, the jagged peaks of the Venus Mountains loomed, cloaked in the shadow of the Morningstar Order.

This faction, ranked among the Ninth Orders, had endured for over ten millennia. Like vast roots burrowing deep into leyline nodes, it had anchored itself to the mountains and siphoned energy without pause.

At the founding of the empire, they had been forced to bow—to Aurek's iron cavalry, and to the holy radiance of the Ordon Theocracy. But even humbled, the Morningstar Order's foundations had not been uprooted. They endured, retreating into shadow. With centuries of recuperation, they had reestablished their strength, more entrenched than before, spreading like parasitic vines across the land.

The Venus Mountains, one of the empire's four great leyline arteries, were littered with energy nodes. Such places were paradise for awakeners, sanctuaries for mighty orders.

And the Morningstar Order was not alone.

Here also resided the Violet Rose Institute, a Seventh-Rank power whose depth of heritage eclipsed even the famed Holy Sword Alliance.

The Monden Shrine, an Eighth-Rank sanctuary steeped in faith.

The Muwen Mountain Fortress, a Sixth-Rank bulwark carved from stone.

And countless smaller sects and brotherhoods, tangled together like vines upon a colossal tree.

The balance was precarious.

Until news spread—rumors of an Energy Stone vein, vast enough to shake the entire continent. The revelation was like a boulder cast into a tranquil lake, sending waves in every direction.

Who had first discovered it? How had the secret leaked? No one knew. But the knowledge spread like plague, and now every hidden power hungered for it.

Within the core of the Order, the Hall of Dawn stood shrouded in dim radiance. Colored light streamed through stained glass, painting the cold stone floor with fractured patterns.

A senior officer, clad in the Order's ceremonial robes, stood with head bowed, delivering his report to the shadowed throne at the chamber's center.

"Master, Governor Henry of Revor seems to have obtained results. His messenger has already reached the palace of Grand Duke Sentino."

Upon the throne sat Ross, the ruler of the Morningstar Order. His robe, woven with nebula-like patterns, draped across his tall frame. His face was carved with cold austerity, like an ancient glacier—expressionless yet filled with a menace that chilled the soul.

Along the walls, several elders sat in high-backed stone seats, their presences heavy as abysses.

One, his right cheek marred by claw scars, his violet robe dark as dusk, rasped out in a hoarse voice:

"No further details?"

"None, my lord," the officer replied carefully. "Their secrecy rivals the dwarves' vaults. Yet their movements suggest they have already pinpointed the approximate location of the vein."

"Hmph. That governor's appetite is large indeed," another elder sneered, his face withered like parchment. "We have extended the olive branch many times, offered him partnership, yet he rebuffed us. He would rather cling to Grand Duke Sentino's skirts than share in true power. His ambition is poisonous."

"Behind Sentino," a third elder's voice drifted through the hall, mocking and spectral, "stands the shadow of the Skypeak Tower. And the Grand Duke himself dreams of carving land and crowning himself king. Henry's choice is predictable."

Ross's voice, low and measured, rolled through the hall like thunder wrapped in velvet. "Predictable, yes. But choices that threaten the foundation of the Order cannot be tolerated. A timely and unforgettable reminder is necessary."

The hall fell silent, and in the shadows, the plotting of titans began to stir.