

Summoning Millions of Gods Daily, My Strength Equals Theirs Combined #Chapter 3 -3-Enemies All Around Us - Read

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Chapter 3: Chapter3-Enemies All Around Us

William slowly lifted his head, his old eyes narrowing as he studied the young emperor before him.

Though Aurek's body still looked thin and frail, there was nothing weak about his gaze. His eyes gleamed with a hawk's sharpness, piercing and unflinching.

And in his hand—gripped with steady confidence—was the scepter of the Crossbridge throne, the symbol of imperial authority. It radiated an aura of command that Aurek had never possessed before, an imperial dignity that seemed to awaken the very air around him.

William's heart gave an involuntary jolt.

He was no ordinary man; he was the Secretary-General of the empire, long seasoned in the ways of power and politics. Yet at this moment, in the presence of his emperor, he felt something he had never felt before—pressure.

A suffocating, commanding pressure.

What in the world has happened to His Majesty?

Doubt flickered in William's heart, but decades of political survival had honed his instincts. He swallowed his questions. A ruler could have secrets. A ruler could change. And it was not his place to ask.

Instead, he lowered his voice and reported soberly:

"Your Majesty, the state of the empire... is not good. Especially of late. In the capital, gangs run rampant. The people suffer endlessly beneath their violence.

"The Minister of Police has petitioned for funds on numerous occasions, but little has changed. As for the rest of the situation... it remains much as it was before your accident."

Aurek gave a slow nod.

It was more or less as he had guessed.

Until Crossbridge had been completely drained of its wealth and marrow, the Ordon Theocracy would not allow any other force to seize it.

Still... Aurek's eyes lingered on William. He realized something else.

These past years, for the empire to have survived at all, must have required no small effort from this old man.

Compared to the memories he had inherited—of a tall, robust figure—William looked thinner now, a little hunched, his hair much whiter than before.

Even more telling was his aura. Once, William had reached the Expert Rank. But after years of neglect, his strength had eroded. Now, Aurek realized, William's presence did not even feel as sharp as the Elite Rank assassins he had just summoned.

The implication was clear.

This man had sacrificed his own growth, his own future, in order to prop up the crumbling empire.

Aurek let out a soft sigh in his heart.

After a long pause, he finally spoke.

"William... these years must have been hard on you."

He tightened his grip on the scepter, his voice gaining weight.

"Tell me. In the parliament, among the ministers—who can I trust?"

William's expression changed at once.

He straightened, his face solemn.

"Your Majesty, the Winston family has always stood with the royal house. You may trust us completely."

"Relax, William," Aurek said evenly. "Your family's loyalty—I have never doubted."

Turning, he gestured at the grand wall of the chamber, where the great map of the Crossbridge Empire hung, its once-proud borders now filled with cracks.

"Look around you. Crossbridge weakens with every passing day. We cannot simply watch it rot away. We must act. We must change."

He drew in a breath, his eyes cold as steel.

"So tell me, apart from your family... who else can I trust? I refuse to be remembered as the last emperor of the Crossbridge Empire."

William froze.

He stared at Aurek in disbelief.

So His Majesty... had seen through the empire's condition all along?

And not only that—he actually wanted to change it?

A sharp ache welled in William's chest, his eyes pricking with heat.

For so many years, he had silently wished for the revival of the empire's past glory. He had dreamed of a day when Crossbridge would once again shine.

But reality was a cruel and merciless thing.

Just keeping the ship afloat had drained him of everything.

To hope for revival? To hope for change? Impossible.

The water already spilled could never be gathered again.

It was too late.

The empire had entered its twilight.

Deep in his heart, William had already accepted this fate.

He had resolved to spend his remaining years preserving what little dignity the empire had left, to steer the ship of state gently into its grave, and to sink alongside it when the end came.

Even dealing with the vipers in parliament had left him utterly exhausted. And beyond parliament, there were still gangs, corrupt nobles carving up their fiefs, and foreign empires lurking hungrily just beyond the borders.

Even as Secretary-General, William felt himself powerless.

And he was not alone.

The entire Royalist Party, those who had once shared his loyalty, had fallen into the same despair. They no longer dreamed of victory. They only hoped that when the empire died, they could die with honor, their families remembered as loyal unto the last.

He wanted to tell this truth to Aurek—to open the boy's eyes to the bleak reality.

But in the end, he bit down on the words.

Instead, after a long moment of hesitation, he asked quietly:

"Your Majesty... what do you intend to do?"

Aurek turned, his gaze like a blade.

"You will see, William. In time, you will see for yourself."

"For now, I only want one thing from you: tell me who can be trusted. Who still stands with the Veynar dynasty?"

William fell silent, thinking carefully. Then he began to speak.

"Besides the Winston family, there is House Smith, Senator Heimerdinger, and Commander Gaia of the Imperial Guard.

"There are a few others, but those are the main pillars."

He paused, then continued, explaining the factions currently dividing the parliament:

The Royalist Party, led by the Winston family and House Smith. The Judicial Faction, led by the Minister of Police and the Chief Justice. The Military Authority Bloc, led by the Grand Marshal. And lastly, the Clerical Order, dominated by the priests of the Ordon Theocracy.

At the head of that final faction stood Cardinal Austin, the Theocracy's highest-ranking representative in Crossbridge.

When William finished, Aurek fell silent.

His thoughts churned, sharp and deliberate.

At last, he spoke.

"William. I have a task for you."

"First, pacify them. Make sure they remain patient and wait."

"Second, begin cultivating a new group of officials in parliament. I want them loyal to the crown, and preferably not from noble bloodlines."

William blinked, his brows furrowing.

Why?

Why would His Majesty want to do this?

Was it simply to strengthen the Royalist Party?

If only it were so simple!

His instincts screamed danger. He knew all too well that such moves would instantly draw the suspicion of every other faction. The moment they sensed it, they would unite to crush the royalists. The result could be disastrous, deepening the empire's fractures beyond repair.

After a long pause, William spoke cautiously.

"Your Majesty... are you planning to pressure them? To remind them of the crown's weight?

"If so, be careful. Their strength is considerable. If they are driven to desperation, it could spell catastrophe for the empire."

Aurek gave a cold, humorless laugh in his heart.

History has shown me this pattern a thousand times before. I know it better than anyone.

And this time, I have the system at my side.

Even the great Cardinal Austin, with his supposed Master Rank power, did not frighten him.

Soon enough, Aurek would show them all.

Master Rank? It was nothing.

All he needed was time—time to grow.

And when the time came, he would sweep them aside.

"William," Aurek said at last, his tone like iron, "you need not concern yourself with these things.

"Just complete the tasks I give you. That is enough."

William frowned, the urge to argue rising to his lips. But when he met Aurek's eyes—eyes blazing with imperial authority—he faltered.

His words died in his throat. Against his better judgment, he bowed and retreated.

What... what has come over me?

And then, as William withdrew, Aurek's voice rang out once more, firm and resounding, echoing through the chamber like a vow to the heavens:

"William. Grant me time.

"For the great Crossbridge Empire shall once more shine with glory!"

Chapter 4: Chapter4-The Night Before the Storm

After leaving Valoria Palace, William did not return home.

Instead, he headed straight for House Smith, his steps unceasing, his mind weighed down by urgency.

The drastic change he had seen in Aurek—and the dangerous task the emperor had entrusted to him—were not matters he could shoulder alone. He needed the counsel of House Smith.

Back inside the palace, silence once again fell.

Only Aurek remained within its towering halls, the vast chambers echoing faintly with the stillness of an empire on the brink.

But Aurek did not allow himself the luxury of idleness.

He pulled toward him the stack of briefings that William had most recently submitted, spreading the parchments across the desk. One by one, he read through them with sharp eyes.

A pattern emerged quickly.

The most frequently reported problem was the rampant spread of gangs in city after city, their lawless power grinding the lives of common folk into misery.

Time and again, the local police bureaus had attempted crackdowns. And time and again, their efforts had ended in failure.

So, naturally, they submitted petitions to parliament—pleading for additional funds from the treasury, claiming they needed more resources to recruit men and stamp out the gangs.

Aurek's jaw tightened.

He didn't need to be a genius to see through their ploy.

Even if the treasury granted those funds, how much would actually be used for fighting crime? The majority would vanish into private pockets. The so-called police would fatten themselves first—and as for the gangs, Aurek suspected many of them had been propped up by these same officials.

Vile parasites...

His hand clenched into a fist, knuckles whitening.

But the gangs were not the only matters of note.

Two other items in the reports drew his attention.

The first: his marriage.

His fiancée—Josephine, of House Tascher—was renowned throughout the empire. A beauty so radiant that countless young noble scions dreamed of claiming her hand.

The Taschers were among the most powerful families in Crossbridge. By all accounts, the wedding should have already taken place.

But when Aurek had first arrived in this world, his predecessor had still been in a coma.

The Taschers, clearly, had other designs in mind. And so the marriage had been delayed again and again.

Aurek's lips twitched faintly.

Others might envy him for being betrothed to the famed beauty. But in his memories, Josephine was nothing more than a snot-nosed girl running around the palace gardens. Hardly the dazzling flower of noble society.

Frankly, he didn't care much.

The second matter, however—this he cared about very much.

Because it concerned the capital itself: Eryndor.

According to the briefings, a gang had risen in Eryndor unlike any other. They called themselves the Blackfish Gang, and unlike common thugs, they counted awakeners among their ranks.

Once established, the Blackfish spread like a plague.

They extorted and terrorized. They preyed upon the weak. Their usurious loans drove families into ruin. Men unable to pay were sold into slavery; women were dragged into their dens and taverns, reduced to toys for their patrons.

Worst of all—they operated Eryndor's only tavern open to beastmen, a den infamous for its depravity.

There, they offered human flesh as delicacies—human flesh prepared as "special dishes" for beastmen to devour.

And as for where that meat came from? No one dared say it aloud.

Aurek's entire body trembled with fury. His fist clenched so tightly that his nails cut into his palm.

Monsters. They're worse than monsters.

Yet even through his anger, a sliver of caution stirred.

For the presence of awakeners within a gang in Eryndor raised troubling questions.

By all rights, the capital was under the direct eye of Cardinal Austin, the Theocracy's supreme bishop in Crossbridge.

How, then, had awakeners managed to worm their way into gang life so brazenly? Surely such things could not have gone unnoticed.

Was some greater force backing them? And if so... which faction?

Aurek's eyes narrowed.

No matter. Whoever stood behind them, it made no difference.

If they dared cause chaos in his capital, then they would be eradicated—root and stem.

Rising to his feet, Aurek strode from the palace chambers to the battlements.

From the high walls of Valoria, he gazed far across the sprawling city.

His eyes pierced beyond the inner city, stretching to the outer rings of Eryndor, where the gangs held sway.

And there, his voice rang out, sharp as steel and heavy with imperial authority:

"Exterminate the Blackfish Gang with the cruelest of means.

"Skin every last one of them alive, stuff their hides with straw, and mount them upon spears for all the city to see!"

At once, his assassins stirred.

Two remained at his side to guard him. The other eight melted into the shadows, vanishing like mist before the morning sun.

The order had been given.

The hunt had begun.

But Aurek's thoughts did not stop there.

The gangs could not have flourished so easily without protection. It was inevitable that they paid bribes to the Prefect of Police.

And the Prefect, Aurek knew, was no ordinary official. He was one of the closest confidants of the Minister of War, Nock.

Could it be, then, that the Blackfish Gang's shadow stretched back to the Minister himself?

His jaw tightened.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the city...

Imperial Guard Headquarters.

Commander Gaia sat in stern silence, his face set in hard lines as he turned to his deputy.

"Harland," he said gravely, "reports say the outer city is boiling with gang activity. And this Blackfish Gang... their excesses grow bolder by the day."

"What is your opinion?"

Beside him, Harland's brow furrowed deeply.

"Commander... don't you think something is strange about all this?"

Gaia's eyes narrowed, his mind racing. He said nothing, waiting for his deputy to continue.

Harland leaned forward, voice low and tense.

"By rights, with Cardinal Austin himself residing in the capital, no awakener would dare cause such public unrest. And yet here we are. The Blackfish Gang flaunts its crimes openly.

"This... this cannot be simple.

"And more than that—have you noticed how quiet the other factions have been? Too quiet. Their silence is too convenient.

"It's as if everyone has agreed to turn a blind eye."

Gaia clenched his fists, his voice tight with fury.

"You're right. These wretched beasts... for the sake of their own profit, they trample the common people as if they were nothing.

"Do they not understand? If unrest breaks out in the capital, they will be caught in the flames as well!

"Short-sighted fools!"

His voice echoed through the hall, hot with rage.

The commander's fury burned bright, but Harland's weary sigh cooled it.

"Commander... you know as well as I do.

"The Imperial Guard is strong, yes. But if we act without orders, the Grand Marshal will seize the chance to strike at you. She's been eyeing your position for years."

At that, Gaia's jaw tightened further.

He knew it was true.

The Imperial Guard was one of the few forces left that the royal house could still rely upon.

If his command were stripped away, the Royalist Party would suffer a devastating blow.

Harland pressed on, voice heavy with worry.

"And beyond that... the Blackfish Gang has awakers. If they have backers among the great factions, then even the Guard's intervention may achieve nothing.

"In truth... this may already be beyond our ability to resolve."

For a long moment, silence hung heavy between them.

Finally, Gaia exhaled sharply, his face carved with frustration.

"...Then we will not act rashly. Not yet.

"We wait to hear William's orders. Our first duty remains to protect His Majesty."

His hand clenched again, his voice low, bitter.

"But the Blackfish Gang..."

He could not finish. His words trailed off into a growl of helpless fury.

The night deepened.

And in the shadows of Eryndor, the storm gathered strength.

Chapter 5: Chapter5-The Terrifying Elemental Assassin

The imperial capital, Eryndor - in the outer city's crowded marketplace.

A heavy wooden door suddenly burst open with a thunderous kick.

A thug wearing a wide-brimmed hat swaggered in, his expression ugly with menace.

"Old Jack! It's already the second day. How much longer do you plan on stalling me?"

On a rickety wooden bed, an old fishmonger with a crippled leg struggled to sit upright. His hands trembled as he pressed them to the sheets. His eyes filled with desperation as he looked at the thug.

"Boss Harlin... you must be mistaken. I already paid everything yesterday! I gave the coins to your man Danny, and he said the debt was cleared..."

"Bullshit!" Harlin snarled. His brows arched sharply, his eyes flashing with cruel light.

"You think you can cheat me, old man? You dare?"

Without warning, he stomped down viciously, his boot grinding into the old man's face.

"Tell me! Where are you hiding the rest of your money?"

Old Jack screamed in pain, clutching desperately at Harlin's boot as he sobbed,

"Boss Harlin, I swear, I have nothing left! Please... please let me go!"

"When I first borrowed from the Blackfish Gang, it was only two gold coins. But I've repaid you twenty already! Isn't that enough?"

Harlin only sneered, his lips curling.

"Enough? Not for me."

His foot pressed down harder. The crunch of bone followed, and Old Jack's cry of agony tore through the shabby room.

But then—

A small shadow darted out from beneath the bed. With a scream of defiance, a little girl sank her teeth into Harlin's arm.

"Let go of my father, you bad man!"

Harlin winced in surprise. His gaze dropped, landing on the tiny figure.

"Well, well... Old Jack, I didn't know you had a daughter this big already."

His grin twisted into something vile.

"Fine then. Let me play with her for a few days... and we'll call your debt paid."

Ignoring Old Jack's desperate pleas, Harlin roughly seized the girl by her collar and dragged her outside.

The neighbors in the marketplace had been watching silently.

As Harlin emerged, holding the child in his grip, they all lowered their heads, pretending not to see.

No one dared speak. No one dared resist.

They knew too well what it meant to defy the Blackfish Gang.

And in truth, they hardly found this surprising. Such things happened every day in the outer city. If anything, they thought, Old Jack was lucky.

At least his family was still alive.

Usually, when the Blackfish Gang set their eyes on someone, the process was simple: seize the person, loot their house, slaughter the family. A one-stop service of terror.

Compared to that, Old Jack and his wife surviving could almost be called mercy.

Meanwhile, inside the Blackfish Gang's headquarters—

The deputy leader shifted uneasily, casting a nervous glance at the bald, scarred man seated at the head of the hall.

"Boss... don't you think we've gone too far this time?"

He swallowed, lowering his voice.

"This is still Cardinal Austin's territory. If we stir up too much trouble, won't we draw the Cardinal's wrath?"

The bald boss chuckled darkly, leaning back with contempt written across his face.

"What's there to fear? Do you really think the one who placed us here did so without preparation?"

"Do you think he doesn't know about Austin?"

He smirked.

"Either he's already made arrangements with the Cardinal... or perhaps the Cardinal himself is part of the plan."

"And besides—if they ever decide to crack down on us, how will they keep bleeding the Treasury for 'security funds'?"

The deputy's expression didn't ease. A shadow of worry lingered in his eyes.

"Boss, I'm afraid they'll use us until we're no longer useful. Then they'll cast us aside like trash."

"They won't care whether we live or die."

The bald man's smirk faded. His eyes grew thoughtful. He was no fool, and the possibility gnawed at him.

But before he could reply, a sharp, mocking laugh rang from the doorway.

"Bennett, you think too much!"

The voice was smooth, youthful, full of scorn.

"Cowling like pigeons... no wonder you're always afraid of dying."

The doors swung wide.

Three figures stepped inside.

All wore luxurious silken robes, their presence regal and refined. But beneath their elegance radiated something more terrifying—an invisible pressure that crushed down upon the gang members like an iron weight.

"L-Lords... why are you here?"

Both the bald boss and his deputy immediately bowed low, their foreheads nearly touching the floor.

These were no ordinary men.

They had never revealed their true origins, but the aura of awakers radiated from them like a storm.

In their presence, even the gang leader, a man feared throughout the outer city, dared not breathe too loudly.

It was only thanks to these three that the Blackfish Gang had risen so quickly, seizing territory and spreading like fire.

The leader of the trio—a boy with chestnut curls and an aristocratic face—spoke coldly.

"Your orders are simple. Cause chaos. Spread disorder in the outer city.

"When the time is ripe, you will be permitted to leave."

He waved a hand, his tone casual, yet filled with authority.

"Do as I command, and you will be rewarded. Defy me... and you know the price."

The bald boss forced a grin, nodding rapidly.

"Yes, my lord. Of course. We'll do exactly as you say."

The boy sneered faintly, arrogance written across his every feature. It was this aloofness—this pride—that made the gang leader obey him all the more.

He was no ally. He was a master, and they were dogs.

"From now on, escalate your actions," the youth continued.

"Stir enough chaos, and the treasury will be forced to release military funds.

"The Secretary-General is old and weary. When the empire can no longer sustain itself, he will be forced to extract resources from the palace itself.

"And the royal family... will be left dangling on the edge of collapse."

The bald boss laughed hollowly, eager to please.

"Yes, yes, my lord. We've already begun sending men out. Soon, you'll see the results. Please believe me—we won't let you down."

The boy's lips curled upward.

"The royal family is finished. They are nothing but toys now, pieces on a board to be moved and broken.

"And to toy with them, even for a little while... that, at least, is amusing."

The bald boss forced another laugh, preparing to flatter further.

But then—

A breeze stirred through the hall.

Soft. Almost unnoticeable.

And in the blink of an eye—

The deputy leader's head flew into the air.

Blood sprayed across the floor, scarlet rivulets staining the boards.

The room froze.

Every face turned white.

"What—what just happened?"

The bald boss stared, eyes wide, breath caught in his throat.

The hall was empty.

No shadows. No assassins. Nothing.

Yet his deputy was dead.

A second breeze swept through.

The chestnut-haired awakener stiffened. Terror filled his eyes.

"An assassin!" he roared, lightning crackling to life along his wrist. Sparks danced furiously, casting the room into jagged illumination as he lunged forward, chasing a phantom he could barely glimpse.

But before he could take more than a step, cold steel kissed his leg.

A single, razor-thin cut.

Then the pain hit.

"AAAAAHHHHH!"

He screamed as his leg split open, severed cleanly at the thigh.

Blood gushed out in a fountain, soaking the stone floor. He collapsed, writhing in agony, his screams echoing through the hall.

The other two awakeners panicked, calling forth their powers in haste. Flames and frost shimmered across their hands.

But before they could release their strikes—two shadows rose behind them like wraiths.

And in a heartbeat, both men were cleaved in half.

Their bodies crumpled, torn and broken, the light of their powers extinguished.

The bald boss, Bennett, dropped to his knees.

His body shook violently, drenched in cold sweat.

"What... what is happening?"

His mind reeled.

There were no assassins here. The hall was empty. No intruders, no shadows—nothing.

And yet his deputy, and the three awakeners, were dead within breaths.

These were no ordinary killers.

These were ghosts.

Phantoms that struck without warning, without sound, without mercy.

Panic surged through him. His instincts screamed at him to run.

With a desperate burst of energy, he seized the chance, scrambling toward the door.

But he had barely taken two steps when a flicker of silver light passed before his eyes.

A short blade pierced cleanly through his right eye, bursting out the back of his skull.

His body convulsed once, then collapsed lifeless to the floor.

The headquarters of the Blackfish Gang was silent once more.

Silent... except for the quiet footsteps of assassins unseen, slipping back into the night.