

Summoning Millions of Gods Daily, My Strength Equals Theirs Combined #Chapter 31 -31-Someone Wants to Rebel - Read Summoning Millions of Gods Daily, My Strength Equals Theirs Combined Chapter 31 -31-Someone Wants to Rebel

Chapter 31: Chapter31-Someone Wants to Rebel

All of Jacoff's and Troy's schemes had been laid bare before Aurek. Every single plot, every hidden plan—they were now exposed in complete detail.

To Aurek, however, none of this came as a surprise. This was precisely the reason he had deployed the Imperial Knights in the first place.

If he wished, he could have chosen a more straightforward path. After all, with the Elemental Assassin under his command, he could have easily erased these conspirators in one decisive stroke. A single order was enough to cut down Jacoff, Troy, and their entire faction without leaving behind even ashes.

But Aurek had to weigh another factor—the will of the Ordon Theocracy. Compared to that colossal religious empire, Aurek's current strength was still far too insignificant.

And because of that, Aurek could not afford to clash openly with the Ordon Theocracy, not yet. That was why, instead of striking them down outright, he deliberately maneuvered the Grand Marshal and the Minister of Police into committing treason.

Once they rebelled openly, Aurek would be justified in killing them. Their deaths would no longer be acts of tyranny, but rightful punishment.

Just moments ago, William and Heimerdinger had worked together to deliver a complete dossier. Coupled with the intelligence the Elemental Assassin had gathered in the shadows, Aurek now possessed a nearly perfect understanding of the cards Jacoff and Troy held in their hands.

Jacoff, for instance, commanded an army of two hundred thousand stationed near the imperial capital. On top of that, he had raised nearly half a million private soldiers loyal to his banner.

And behind Jacoff lurked a shadowy power that had yet to reveal itself: the Killer Guild. This guild was no minor force—it was strong enough that Aurek, as he was now, dared not provoke it lightly.

Troy's situation was different. Though the number of soldiers under his direct control was not as great, the forces supporting him were tangled and intricate. Even the

Elemental Assassin had only been able to uncover a portion of his network. Yet that partial glimpse already revealed ties to numerous top-ranking noble families.

Worse still, Troy had the backing of the Leap Mercenary Corps, another troublesome force. The Leap Mercenary Corps was a rising star—a new power that had only emerged within the past five hundred years.

For such a new faction, the resources of the Crossbridge Empire were like an irresistible treasure trove. Gaining control of them would guarantee their rapid growth. That was why they wanted Troy on the throne. If Troy became emperor, they could devour the empire's wealth under the guise of legitimacy.

Still, because of the looming presence of the Ordon Theocracy, they had not dared make a reckless move yet.

Aurek's thoughts grew darker. If I could eliminate both Jacoff and Troy's factions, wouldn't that yield me an enormous haul of Emperor Points? Perhaps it might even be enough to raise the level of the Emperor's Scepter again. And if that happened... would a brand new type of military unit appear under his command?

The prospect made his gaze sharpen with anticipation.

Just then, Angie entered quickly to deliver a report.

"Your Majesty, Bishop Ramos of the Ordon Theocracy requests an audience."

Aurek froze for a moment. Then his eyes gleamed coldly, a flash of killing intent slipping out.

Bishop Ramos. This man had once treated Aurek's predecessor with open contempt, trampling him beneath his boots as if he were worthless.

And now, Ramos had dared to come calling again. Did he truly have no fear of death?

Killing him would be easy—ridiculously easy. But Aurek had no intention of granting him such a simple death. That would be too merciful.

His revenge was not something to be rushed. He would wait until the time was right—when the empire's internal chaos was settled, when the final confrontation with the Ordon Theocracy could no longer be avoided. Then, under the blazing light of legitimacy, he would tear Ramos apart. He would break every bone in the bishop's body, strip off his skin piece by piece, and make him pay a price far worse than death.

Suppressing his murderous aura with great effort, Aurek finally spoke two cold words.

"Not seeing him."

Outside the palace doors, Ramos's expression instantly turned ashen.

This was something he had never expected. The weakling emperor—this pathetic fool—actually dared to deny him an audience?

How bold! How insolent!

If not for the Ordon Theocracy, the Crossbridge Empire would have collapsed long ago. And yet, here was the emperor, daring to defy him.

Ramos seethed with rage, his pride wounded. Very well. If the emperor wanted to test his patience, he would give him a lesson that would scar him for life.

"You wait," Ramos muttered darkly to himself. "I'll make sure you regret this until your dying breath."

As the Imperial Knights mobilized, the imperial capital was gripped by a growing tension, like storm clouds gathering before a violent tempest.

Countless spies, long hidden in the shadows, began to stir restlessly. Eyes—unseen yet ever-watchful—focused on every ripple of change within the empire.

Everyone knew the truth: the Crossbridge Empire was like a slab of rich meat laid upon a cutting board. Every force hungered for a piece.

Within the capital, hidden powers began to move as well.

But amidst these factions, there was one unique presence: the Hyrule War Academy.

The academy was the crucible where the finest talents of the human race were forged. As one of the most prestigious institutions in existence, it had produced countless leaders, generals, and strategists for empires across the continent.

Inside the academy, the empire's Chief Justice, Zach, wore a face heavy with worry.

"Mentor," he said gravely, "the Imperial Knights have all been mobilized. The capital is already falling into disorder. I fear His Majesty intends to act. Once war breaks out, the Crossbridge Empire won't endure. At that time... I beg you, Mentor, please protect me as your student."

Zach's ties to Jacoff were far from ordinary. He was both a political ally and, more importantly, a proud graduate of the Hyrule War Academy.

The man he addressed as Mentor was none other than Rhys, the academy's principal.

Rhys's status was lofty beyond measure. Even Cardinal Austin, clad in his scarlet robes, would bow and respectfully address him as Principal Rhys.

At that moment, Rhys looked out across the city toward Valoria Palace, his tone distant yet heavy.

"This emperor..." Rhys murmured, "his lust for blood has grown far too strong. I fear he has stepped too deep into the mire, and turning back is no longer possible."

"In my judgment, the Crossbridge Empire is likely to perish in his hands. My advice to you, Zach, is to resign your post as quickly as you can and leave this land behind."

Zach could only give a bitter smile.

"Mentor, I can't retreat anymore. His Majesty's gaze is surely already fixed on me. My position makes me a marked man. You must help me, please!"

Rhys's reply was calm, almost reassuring.

"Do not worry. The academy will shelter you. For you are my student, and that is a bond no emperor can sever. A mere emperor, insignificant and soon to fall, would never dare to provoke me."

"And if he ever tried to touch a student of the Hyrule War Academy, he would first need to ask himself whether he truly had the strength to face us."

His words were not arrogance but truth. The academy's prestige was unparalleled. Empires across the world depended on its graduates to rule and maintain stability. No sovereign could afford to offend it.

Thus, in Rhys's eyes, the looming collapse of the Crossbridge Empire was a trivial matter, unworthy of concern.

Half a month slipped by.

The Imperial Knights, following Aurek's orders, took up their prearranged positions.

In that same span of time, Jacoff and Troy worked tirelessly, making endless deployments and countermeasures.

Yet the cruel irony was that every decision they made, every move they planned, was instantly laid bare before Aurek. Their efforts, their secrecy, all amounted to nothing more than a child's game before the emperor's gaze.

The board was set. The storm was ready to break.

Chapter 32: Chapter32-Royal Mercenaries, Imperial Vampires

It was no exaggeration to say that Aurek now held the reins of the entire situation. Step by step, through meticulous planning and unrelenting will, he had taken control of the imperial capital and forced his enemies into a corner.

During this time, he had also summoned an astonishing three hundred Elemental Assassins. Each of these assassins was not only formidable in combat strength but, when deployed en masse, became a terrifying legion of shadows.

By now, even an Expert Rank powerhouse could be brought down with ease if they faced the coordinated strike of so many Elemental Assassins. Watching these silent killers move like wraiths in perfect unison gave Aurek a rare sense of comfort. For the first time since ascending the throne, he felt genuine security.

His own personal strength, too, had increased at a startling pace. And yet, despite this progress, Aurek's expression remained grave.

Half a month earlier, he had dispatched fifty Elemental Assassins beyond the capital walls. Their mission was simple: purge the lawless gangs and malignant forces festering in the outskirts.

But now, half a month had passed, and not a single one of those assassins had returned. Instead, what reached him every day was a steady rise in Emperor Points.

What did that mean?

It meant that even on the very doorstep of the Crossbridge Empire's heart, there still thrived countless dark and violent organizations. Even with the ruthless efficiency of the Elemental Assassins, half a month was not enough to eradicate them all.

If this was the state of things in the imperial capital, then what of the empire at large? How many groups like the Blackfish Gang were festering in the shadows of the provinces, feeding like parasites on the nation's lifeblood?

The thought weighed heavily on Aurek's heart, a momentary fatigue pressing down on him. But that heaviness did not last long. Almost immediately, a spark of determination reigned in his chest.

Half a month ago, he had fewer than a hundred Elemental Assassins under his command. Now their number had tripled.

If he was given enough time, purging these dark forces would merely be a matter of course. It was not impossible, just difficult.

The real priority lay elsewhere. First, he had to deal with the contradictions and threats festering within the palace itself. Only once imperial majesty was re-established could everything else fall into place.

With this resolution, Aurek devoted himself to further strengthening his foundation. He continued to channel his Emperor Points into cultivating his own power.

At the Apprentice Rank, the most important task was to increase one's affinity with energy. Among most Awakeners, energy affinity was considered the ultimate factor in determining one's future path. The greater the affinity, the further one could go.

That was why Aurek, despite consuming vast amounts of Emperor Points, still lingered at Apprentice Rank. Had he not deliberately suppressed his advancement, he could have long since stepped into Elite Rank.

But Aurek was not content with a simple breakthrough. His ambition was far greater. He sought to push his affinity with energy to its absolute limit.

Because of this, he remained at Apprentice Rank outwardly—but in terms of actual combat power, he was not inferior to any Elite Rank fighter.

As his affinity deepened, however, Aurek encountered a new obstacle. His body could no longer absorb enough energy from the environment to meet his needs.

At this point, there was only one solution: Energy Stones.

The irony was bitter. He was the emperor of the Crossbridge Empire, and yet he possessed not a single Energy Stone for his own cultivation.

As for requesting some from the Royalist Party, Aurek dismissed the thought immediately. Such a move would damage his dignity and, worse, shake the party's confidence in his leadership.

But then a thought struck him. He remembered the stash revealed earlier by Butler Brown. Among the treasures, there had indeed been Energy Stones.

Without hesitation, Aurek retrieved them and began drawing their power.

As he expected, the pure energy sealed within the stones surged into him rapidly. His body drank it in like parched earth receiving rain.

His cultivation rose steadily. Apprentice Rank, level two... then three... until soon he had reached Apprentice Rank, level four.

Outside his residence, the sound of hurried footsteps echoed. Many palace guards bustled back and forth, clearly burdened with some urgent task.

Frowning, Aurek opened the door and addressed them in a cold voice.

"What are you all so busy with?"

Angie, flushed and sweating, hurried forward to answer.

"Your Majesty, we are preparing the monthly supplies for the mercenaries stationed at Valoria Palace."

The words had barely left his lips before Aurek's expression turned to ice.

"Stop everything. At once."

"Ah?"

Angie's face froze in shock. He opened his mouth as if to protest, but then caught sight of the emperor's frosty gaze. His courage melted instantly, and he bowed his head without another word.

"Stop everything," Aurek repeated firmly.

"Yes, Your Majesty... but what should I tell the mercenaries?" Angie asked timidly.

The mercenaries were not an insignificant detail. Their presence had been crucial in maintaining the peace of Valoria Palace. After all, there were twelve Expert Rank warriors among them—a force impressive enough to intimidate many would-be troublemakers.

If the royal family were to offend them, it would be a heavy loss for the empire.

"There is no need to explain anything," Aurek replied, his tone flat. "They will come to me themselves."

Without another word, he turned and returned to his chambers.

Elsewhere in the palace, the mercenaries soon received word that their subsidies had been cut off.

Their faces darkened instantly.

"What does this little emperor mean by this?" one of them spat.

"Who knows? Perhaps we should go ask him directly," another suggested with a sneer.

Without hesitation, the twelve Expert Rank mercenaries flickered out of sight, vanishing from their quarters and reappearing before Aurek.

"Emperor, what is the meaning of this?" one demanded, his voice sharp. "Cutting off our subsidies? Do you want us to leave Valoria Palace?"

Another added, his tone thick with threat: "I advise you to think carefully. If we walk away, what do you think will become of this palace? What will happen to you?"

Their combined aura pressed down like a storm. For most men, the oppressive weight of twelve Expert Rank fighters would have been unbearable.

But Aurek merely set aside the book in his hand and lifted his gaze calmly.

Indeed, their strength was impressive. Their presence alone could shake most factions. But in his eyes, they were nothing special—just twelve mercenaries fattened on imperial wealth.

"The empire has granted you much," Aurek said, his tone cool but heavy with authority. "But it seems you have already forgotten your true duty."

The mercenaries' expressions twisted with anger.

"What are you implying, boy?" one growled.

"Nothing more than this," Aurek replied evenly. "The empire's resources are nearly depleted. It is time for you to show some understanding."

The mercenaries exchanged incredulous looks.

"So what you're saying," one asked coldly, "is that the Crossbridge Empire will no longer subsidize us?"

"In that case, we have no reason to stay here."

"Exactly. Without support, you expect us to remain? Impossible."

Their voices rose, a tide of dissatisfaction rolling through the hall.

But Aurek's expression did not change. His eyes glowed with the unshakable majesty of a sovereign.

"In that case," he said at last, his voice calm but cutting like a blade, "then you can get out."

The words struck like thunder.

The mercenaries froze, stunned into silence. For a long moment, the room was deathly quiet.

Never—not once—had they imagined Aurek would dare to speak so.

This weak and spineless little emperor, the one they had long dismissed as a mere child, now ordered them to leave?

Had he gone mad?

Did he not understand that without their presence, Valoria Palace would have descended into chaos long ago?

What was he thinking? Surely he did not truly intend to drive them away?

It was absurd. It was laughable. And yet, the icy certainty in Aurek's eyes told them he meant every word.

For the first time, the mercenaries felt a shiver crawl down their spines.

Chapter 33: Chapter33-Leave or Die

"Aurek, are you truly going to drive us away? Do you understand what this decision means?"

The mercenaries spoke in unison, their voices filled with disbelief.

Aurek sat on the throne, his expression calm, his gaze steady as he looked upon the group. He did not raise his voice, nor did he show anger—only an indifferent detachment.

"If anyone wishes to stay," Aurek said slowly, each word carrying the weight of finality, "then when the empire rises again, I will not treat you poorly. You will be rewarded generously."

"But if you do not wish to stay, then be gone immediately. Do not linger here another moment."

His tone was strong, commanding, and even disdainful, as though these mercenaries were not even worth the effort of persuasion. He did not attempt to soften his words. He did not even bother to look at them twice.

What kind of joke was this?

There were twelve mercenaries in total, all of them so-called Expert Rank powerhouses. And yet, in Aurek's eyes, they were no better than parasites. Month after month they had taken rich benefits and resources from the Crossbridge Empire, yet they had hardly lifted a finger to fight for it.

Keeping them here was nothing but a waste of precious supplies.

"Fine! You said it yourself!" one mercenary sneered, turning sharply. He addressed the others with a mocking smile.

"Everyone, you all heard it clearly. Since His Majesty has issued a decree to cast us out, then there is no reason for us to linger here. If the empire will no longer provide us resources, what purpose does it serve to remain?"

These words resonated with most of the mercenaries. After all, twelve Expert Rank warriors were indeed a formidable force no matter where they went. Countless smaller kingdoms and organizations across the land would gladly welcome them as protectors, paying them handsomely just to sit in residence.

Why should they stay in a collapsing empire?

Crossbridge Empire was trembling on the verge of collapse. Even outsiders could see the cracks widening by the day. These mercenaries were no fools; their sharp eyes had already discerned the looming fall. Why be dragged into the whirlpool?

They had thought they might stay a while longer, leech a few more benefits, but Aurek's blunt dismissal made it clear—the time had come to leave.

Yet not everyone shared the same view.

One man, dressed in scholarly robes, spoke in a calm, measured voice. "His Majesty Aurek has his difficulties. I can understand that. And besides, I have received much from Crossbridge Empire. It is only right that I repay some of what I owe. It is time to contribute."

Another, a man gripping a longsword, shrugged with a placid expression. "I'm too lazy to move again. If you want to leave, then leave. I'll stay here."

Aurek's eyes flickered with mild surprise when he heard this. Two of them had chosen to remain. But the surprise quickly faded. It mattered little either way. If they stayed, he would not refuse their loyalty.

The remaining ten, however, did not hesitate. They turned at once, ready to walk out the doors without looking back.

Aurek said nothing to stop them. He watched their retreat in silence, his composure unbroken.

Such a scene, if witnessed elsewhere, would surely shock people to their core. Ten Expert Rank mercenaries—an entire company of them—being dismissed, cast out as if they were nothing? Any ruler would tremble to lose such strength.

But Aurek did not even blink.

Perhaps stung by pride, one mercenary stopped before leaving. He whirled around, his face twisted with anger, and shouted toward the throne.

"Aurek! Crossbridge Empire is doomed to destruction! Without us, there will be no one left to even collect your corpse. I swear, your end will be miserable!"

His words rang in the hall like a curse. Then he threw back his head and laughed, triumphant in his scorn, and turned again to leave.

But before he could take more than a step, a faint breeze stirred through the chamber. It was so slight, so subtle, that it might have been mistaken for nothing at all. And in that instant, a dagger pierced cleanly into his chest.

The man froze, his laughter cut short, and crumpled to the ground. Dead.

A mighty Expert Rank warrior—slain in an instant, without even a chance to resist.

The other nine mercenaries went rigid, their faces paling, expressions tense with shock. Even the two who had chosen to stay, the scholar and the swordsman, fixed their gazes on the doorway, their pupils shrinking.

None of them had seen what happened. None of them had caught the faintest glimpse of the killer. All they remembered was the faint brush of wind.

What kind of power was this?

In their minds surfaced ancient tales of ghosts and assassins, the kind that killed unseen, leaving no trace but death itself.

The death of their comrade brought an immediate change. The others, once arrogant, now stood frozen in silence. Their eyes turned back to the throne, and for the first time, they truly saw the emperor sitting there. That figure, slender and unassuming, suddenly seemed terrifying—ruthless, merciless, inhuman.

They recalled the annihilation of the Blackfish Gang, the destruction of Minister of War Nock and his entire household. They had dismissed those events as coincidences or the work of hidden assassins. But now, seeing it firsthand, they began to understand.

Could it be that all of this was the emperor's own doing?

They had thought themselves the empire's strongest card, the supreme force in Aurek's hands. But reality struck like ice—they had been mistaken.

If the emperor possessed such power, what use were they?

Was Aurek planning to slaughter them all?

Uneasy thoughts rippled among the mercenaries, and their faces grew dark.

Then Aurek finally spoke again, his head lowered slightly, his voice calm and cold.

"If you wish to leave, I will not stop you. I will not force you to remain." His tone was steady, almost gentle, yet the air froze with each word.

"But if you dare to spout arrogance before me, do not blame me for what happens next."

"The man just now—his fate was the price for his insolence."

The mercenaries' expressions turned grim.

"So," one spat bitterly, "we underestimated you after all."

"But even if you have such tricks, what does it matter? You cannot kill us all. You cannot hold us here forever."

Another sneered, his eyes flashing cold light. "Little emperor, aren't you afraid for your own life? If you provoke us too far, you won't live long enough to regret it."

He spoke with conviction. In his mind, the slain mercenary had simply been careless, too relaxed to defend himself. He would not make the same mistake. His spirit power sharpened, locking tightly onto Aurek, ready for the faintest movement.

Sensing danger, the scholar and the swordsman who had chosen to stay moved closer, placing themselves protectively before Aurek. Their faces were grim as they watched the others. The tension between the two sides thickened, sharp as blades.

But Aurek seemed utterly unconcerned.

He lifted his eyes briefly, his gaze sweeping across the nine remaining mercenaries. His tone was light, almost dismissive, when he gave his command.

"Since you refuse to leave... then kill them all."

To him, they were nothing but Expert Rank warriors. Did they think themselves mighty? Before him, they were nothing.

A cold smile tugged at the corners of Aurek's lips.

At his signal, the Elemental Assassins hidden in the shadows stirred to life. Invisible blades slipped silently through the air.

The nine mercenaries, alarmed, instantly unleashed every skill and technique they possessed. Energy surged, skills flared. But for all their efforts, they could not sense a single trace of the assassins.

Frustration turned to desperation. At last they focused their mental power entirely on Aurek himself. If they could restrain him, force him into their hands, then everything else would crumble.

Nine Expert Rank fighters striking together—how could one emperor withstand them? As long as they captured him, all problems would vanish.

So they lunged, nine figures bursting with violent energy, converging on Aurek like a tidal wave.

The hall shook with their combined might, their intent clear: to seize control, to crush the emperor with overwhelming force.

But before their attack could even fully land, blood spattered across the floor.

One mercenary, on the outer edge of the charge, had his head severed cleanly from his shoulders. It rolled across the stone, leaving a trail of red.

Gasps filled the chamber.

And before half a second passed, another head flew high into the air, the second mercenary falling lifeless to the ground.

The silent assassins had struck again, swift and merciless.

And the massacre was only beginning.

Chapter 34: Chapter34-Begging for Mercy

In the span of mere moments, two Expert Rank powerhouses had already been decapitated.

The speed of their deaths, the absolute gap in strength revealed in that instant, made the seven surviving mercenaries lose all thoughts of pressing Aurek further. The courage they had mustered evaporated. Not one of them dared to attack the emperor again.

Instead, they made the only choice left to them—flight.

Their bodies surged with energy, feet pounding against the stone floor, desperate to rush toward the great doors of the palace. The only thought left in their minds was

escape. But they had overlooked one simple truth: Aurek had already given the command. Since the emperor had decreed their deaths, how could they possibly flee?

A faint breath of wind stirred. It was almost gentle, like a whisper. But as it passed, another mercenary's head was severed cleanly from his shoulders, his corpse crashing heavily to the ground.

"Who is it?!" one of the survivors shrieked in panic. "Where is the enemy?!"

Their cries rang with terror. The sight of their comrades falling so easily, one after another, broke the iron-hard nerves of these men who had long prided themselves as the apex of hired strength.

They had never imagined—never even dared to imagine—that they themselves would one day be driven into such fear and despair.

When had Expert Rank powerhouses become so fragile? So utterly helpless?

It was the wind. It had to be the wind!

Again and again, the faintest of breezes whispered through the air, and each time, it heralded death. The mercenaries snapped their heads about, searching the empty space around them, every nerve straining. Yet no matter how desperately they looked, no matter how they probed with their senses, they could not glimpse their killers.

They were no longer predators. They were prey. And somewhere in the shadows, unseen hunters stalked them, striking with impossible precision.

Faces twisted with hopelessness. The mercenaries' eyes widened as the weight of their doom settled upon them. They could not fight what they could not see. They could not resist what moved too swiftly to comprehend.

Even the scholar and the swordsman who had remained loyal to Aurek stood frozen, their expressions filled with horror. Relief mingled with fear in their hearts. Relief that they had chosen to stay by the emperor's side... and terror at the methods they had just witnessed.

Four Expert Rank warriors had fallen within arm's reach of them, butchered before their very eyes. And yet, neither of them had seen so much as a shadow of the killers' faces. At most, they had caught a fleeting blur, a suggestion of motion carried on the breeze.

It was enough to shake their convictions.

It was clear now: everyone had underestimated this emperor. Aurek was no fragile sovereign clinging to mercenaries for strength. He was the true terror in this hall. Even Expert Rank warriors were no more than ants beneath his gaze.

At last, the shattered mercenaries collapsed to their knees. Their pride, their bravado—all of it crumbled before the looming specter of death. Snot and tears streaked their faces as they pressed their foreheads to the floor, begging for their lives.

"Your Majesty, I was wrong! I see now, I was wrong! I am willing to serve Crossbridge Empire! Please, spare me, I beg you!"

"Mercy, Your Majesty! I will devote myself to you! I will be your sword, your shield! Grant me one chance to live!"

Their voices cracked with desperation. Dignity no longer mattered. To live, that was all that mattered.

But Aurek did not answer.

What surprised him instead was the realization of just how fearsome the Gold Assassin truly was. Of the four mercenaries who had just been slain, all of them had fallen beneath the hand of the Gold Assassin. The strikes had been swift, merciless, and utterly precise. Every attack was a killing blow, inevitable and absolute.

At the same time, Aurek could feel the rewards pouring in. With each death, Emperor Points flowed into him in abundance.

The groveling pleas echoed in the palace, but Aurek paid them no mind. He gave no order to halt the slaughter. The Gold Assassin, receiving no command to stand down, continued his work. The other Elemental Assassins remained still, concealed in the dark corners of the hall, waiting.

The mercenaries had no way of knowing that over three hundred Elemental Assassins lurked unseen in the palace. Three hundred silent blades, waiting for Aurek's signal. Even if a Hero Rank powerhouse appeared here today, they would surely be broken, drowned in blood. What chance, then, did a handful of Expert Rank warriors have?

Did these mercenaries truly think themselves untouchable, that by calling themselves "hired blades" they could defy the emperor?

The slaughter raged on. One after another, the mercenaries fell. Heads rolled across the marble floor, the hall echoing with the wet sound of bodies collapsing. The smell of iron grew thick in the air.

Still, the survivors begged. They howled, promising anything—wealth, loyalty, their very souls. But Aurek remained unmoved. His expression was as calm as stone, his silence unbroken.

It did not take long. Within minutes, the last of the mercenaries who had dared to raise their blades against Aurek lay lifeless. Their severed heads scattered across the chamber told the grim tale.

The emperor stood among the corpses, his robe unstained, his composure unshaken. And with their deaths, his Emperor Points soared.

Then something unexpected happened.

A gleaming notification appeared before his eyes:

[Emperor Points have reached 10,000. Emperor's Store successfully unlocked.]

Aurek blinked, then allowed the faintest smile to cross his lips. An unexpected delight amidst the carnage. He had not anticipated this reward.

But he did not open the store immediately. Instead, he turned his gaze back to the scholar and the swordsman who still stood frozen, minds reeling from what they had witnessed.

They were both pale, their eyes wide, their thoughts racing. They had never imagined matters would escalate so far.

Before tonight, they had believed that ten Expert Rank mercenaries were a formidable force, the kind of presence that could shift the balance of power in any land. They had thought Aurek needed them desperately.

Reality had proven otherwise.

Aurek spoke, his tone level, almost casual. "Since the two of you have chosen to remain, I will not treat you poorly. But understand this—I need people who can truly serve me. Do you understand?"

The words jolted them from their daze. Both men bowed deeply, nodding fervently.

"Your Majesty, rest assured. We will serve you faithfully, with all our strength!"

...

With that, Aurek turned, his robes sweeping softly as he walked toward the palace doors. His footsteps were calm, steady, unhurried, as though he had not just overseen a massacre.

And as he stepped into the light outside, his voice carried back into the hall, calm and clear.

"What happened today never happened. Crossbridge Empire still has twelve mercenaries."

The meaning was obvious. The presence of twelve Expert Rank mercenaries was a deterrent, a symbol of strength. There was no need for the outside world to know that ten of them had been slaughtered here tonight. Spreading the truth would only bring unnecessary trouble to Valoria Palace.

Yes, this emperor was shrewd. Ruthless, but shrewd.

And most astonishing of all—he was barely in his twenties.

"Your Majesty! Are you all right?"

Angie was the first to rush forward, her face drawn with worry. Behind her came a tide of soldiers and Royal Guards, weapons at the ready, eyes sharp.

The disturbance had been immense. The energy released by Expert Rank warriors in combat was impossible to conceal. Angie had feared the worst, yet she had been powerless to intervene.

Aurek waved her off lightly. "Do not worry. I am fine. Go and arrange for the mess inside to be cleaned."

Angie blinked, hesitating. Clean... the mess?

But when she stepped into the palace, her breath caught in her throat.

The sight before her nearly made her collapse.

Ten mercenaries—all of them Expert Rank—lay headless on the ground.

"This... this isn't real..." she whispered. "It can't be real..."

Her mind struggled to grasp the scene. Expert Rank warriors were supposed to be unmatched, invincible to ordinary men. Yet here they were, butchered in Aurek's hall like animals in a slaughterhouse.

If this truth ever spread, the capital would erupt in chaos.

Just then, the two surviving mercenaries spoke, their voices grave.

"His Majesty has already given his command. What happened here ends here. It must not leave these walls."

As they said the words, a heavy silence fell.

But in their hearts, both men trembled with a different thought:

If they had chosen differently earlier, if they had turned their backs on Aurek... then they too would be lying in pools of their own blood, their heads rolling across the marble floor.

Chapter 35: Chapter35-Unicorn Trading Guild

The next actions went much more smoothly. Angie quickly arranged for people to thoroughly clean up the bloody scene inside the palace. At the same time, they collected the treasures carried by the ten mercenaries.

At that moment, Angie's heart could not have been more elated! Those mercenaries, who once acted so high and mighty, turned out to be nothing special after all. Sure enough, His Majesty was truly powerful! Angie thought this with delight, her admiration for the Emperor already reaching the point of fanatical devotion.

After making all the arrangements, she immediately went to the Emperor's residence.

At this time, Aurek was reclining against the sofa, studying his panel. At present, his points had already surpassed the 10,000 mark, and they were still continuing to grow. The power of the Elemental Assassin was indeed formidable, but Aurek believed he had to raise his own strength as well. After all, the entire burden of the nation now rested upon his shoulders.

With the massive consumption of points, Aurek's strength had also advanced further.

One night passed without incident, and soon it was already noon. When Aurek finished his meditation, his level had risen to Apprentice Rank 9, just one step away from reaching Elite Rank.

If it were only that, it wouldn't be anything too shocking. But the key point was that Aurek's Apprentice Rank 9 had already been compressed to the extreme, refined to the utmost degree of affinity. To put it simply, the energy he could command was already no weaker than that of an Elite Rank awakener. And yet Aurek was still only an Apprentice Rank awakener.

The gap between different ranks of awakeners was like a vast chasm, an impassable gulf. That meant Aurek's true strength was actually terrifying.

Just as Aurek was about to examine the newly unlocked store function, he sensed that Angie had been waiting outside the door for quite some time.

"You may come in and speak now," he said.

Angie immediately entered the room, presenting a storage ring to Aurek. "Your Majesty, these are the items we obtained after the cleanup. Please take a look."

Aurek took the spatial ring and immediately probed it with his spiritual sense. Inside were many skill books, various medicinal herbs, some unidentified materials, and a huge pile of gold coins!

But what caught Aurek's attention the most were the 5,000 mana stones!

What kind of joke was this? Even as Emperor, he never had this many mana stones available for meditation. And yet a mere mercenary had been squandering resources more extravagantly than him?

In that moment, Aurek gained a clear understanding of what these mercenaries had been demanding all these years. They had extorted countless resources, never content, always growing greedier. They did not wish to bear any obligations, only to reap benefits. Truly, they deserved death!

In fact, these mercenaries could be likened to a miniature version of the Ordon Theocracy. Of course, the resources they demanded could not compare to the scale of what Ordon Theocracy had seized.

But considering the vast territory of the Crossbridge Empire, and the resources accumulated over tens of thousands of years, it was a staggering amount—beyond imagination. And yet, those resources had ultimately fallen into the hands of Ordon Theocracy.

Now, Ordon Theocracy was even considering abandoning the Crossbridge Empire altogether. Such a vast empire, its fate entrusted to vampires.

Thinking of this, Aurek felt nothing but boundless fury.

Meanwhile, at the southern gate of the imperial capital—

A caravan swaggered into Eryndor City. They exuded a powerful aura, making it clear to all that they belonged to a great force and were themselves strong awakeners.

"It's the Unicorn Trading Guild!"

Soon, some factions recognized the caravan's identity. But they did not understand why the Unicorn Trading Guild would appear here.

Could it be that they had come to avenge Butler Brown? That Butler Brown had been a highly promising steward of the Unicorn Trading Guild, yet he had died in the capital. So then, were they here to deliberately cause trouble for the Emperor? And how would His Majesty respond to break through this crisis?

"One Expert Rank level 9, one Expert Rank level 6, and eight Elite Rank level 9." "A caravan like this is already a force that cannot be ignored!" "It seems the Unicorn Trading Guild is here with hostile intentions." "The young Emperor is in for serious trouble!"

The arrival of the Unicorn Trading Guild's caravan immediately drew the attention of countless factions. Whether they supported the Emperor, opposed him, or simply watched from the sidelines, everyone focused their attention on the Guild.

Because all were curious—what exactly did the Unicorn Trading Guild intend to do?

Although they were not as powerful as the Ordon Theocracy, the difference between them was only one tier. Within the Unicorn Trading Guild, there were many Hero Rank powerhouses. They were a force that could not be underestimated.

And the reason they had come to the capital was simple: they were here to demand justice!

Yet what surprised everyone was that, after entering the city, the caravan did not head straight for Valoria Palace. Instead, they found an inn and lodged there temporarily.

"Go investigate the latest news in the capital," the leader ordered. "If there's nothing unusual, we'll enter Valoria Palace tomorrow morning."

When Troy heard of the Unicorn Trading Guild's arrival, he could not have been happier. His thinking was simple—the more chaotic the situation became, the better. So he immediately arranged for someone to deliver a message to the Guild: that Emperor Aurek had killed Butler Brown.

Scenes like this played out in countless households across the capital. They all provided "evidence," directing the blame squarely at the Emperor. Everyone wanted to sit back and watch the tigers fight, hoping to profit as the fisherman.

As for Ordon Theocracy, Bishop Ramos had already made up his mind—he absolutely would not interfere in this matter. Perhaps, he might even seize this opportunity to exact revenge against the Emperor.

In the Winston family estate, William was restless. He knew all too well how troublesome the Unicorn Trading Guild was to deal with. So he quickly resolved to go to Heimerdinger's home to discuss the matter.

At Sapphire Bank—

Josephine had already resumed royal business. But when she learned of the Unicorn Trading Guild's arrival, she couldn't help but feel worried for Aurek.

In her office sat a voluptuous woman across from her."It seems the Unicorn Trading Guild really does intend to cause trouble for your Emperor this time."

Chapter 36: Chapter36-The Power of the Unicorn Trading Guild

"Do you know something?"Josephine furrowed her brows and looked at the voluptuous woman across from her.

"I do know a few things. Everyone knows that the true reason the Unicorn Trading Guild came to the capital was because of Butler Brown's death. But what they don't know is that someone has actually been stirring them up from behind the scenes."

"Let me put it this way—compared to Butler Brown's death, the Unicorn Trading Guild is even more curious about the methods Aurek has at his disposal."

Hearing this, Josephine frowned lightly. But the voluptuous woman continued,"So, in my judgment, this move from the Unicorn Trading Guild is most likely to test your Emperor's abilities. And if they find an opportunity to destroy him, they definitely won't show any mercy."

It was obvious that this woman's intelligence was deeper than what many major factions possessed.Josephine wasn't surprised though, because she knew that behind her stood another massive force—Black Dagger.

Many people thought assassins were mainly about killing. But such an understanding only revealed how shallow they were.True assassins always prioritized information gathering above all else.

"It seems all these groups want to probe His Majesty's methods.""That's right! Your little Emperor revealed his hand too early. And because it's so mysterious, he has raised many concerns. That's why people want to test him."

"Since you've chosen to stand on his side, I advise you to tell him this matter.""But as your old friend, I suggest you leave the capital as soon as possible. A little Emperor cannot possibly hold up an entire empire."

Josephine gave a faint smile, suddenly turning to the woman."Natasha, why don't we make a bet?"

"If Aurek can withstand this matter, then Black Dagger must lend him some help!""Ah, women in love always lose their sense of judgment."

Natasha sighed softly, though her eyes glimmered with a trace of interest."I understand you like the little Emperor, but there are some things you should see even more clearly than I do. In the face of greater tides, no one can stop them."

"So? Do you dare to bet with me?"

Seeing Josephine's serious attitude, Natasha chuckled lightly. "Alright, since you're so confident, I'll gamble with you. But if you lose, then Sapphire Bank must cooperate with Black Dagger in business. ""No problem!"

Inside the Grand Cathedral—

White-robed Bishop Ramos listened to the servant's report, and a cold smile spread across his face. "Aurek, you never thought retribution would come so quickly, did you? Now that the Unicorn Trading Guild has come to trouble you, without our Ordon Theocracy's support, let's see what you can do."

"I'll be waiting, waiting to see you come kneeling to beg for forgiveness."

"Spread the word—close the cathedral doors. We will see no one!"

What no one knew was that every movement in the imperial capital was already under Aurek's control.

Unicorn Trading Guild? Aurek frowned slightly, but he felt no worry.

What he was really considering was how to turn the passive into the proactive—how to use this incident to push the Grand Marshal and the Minister of Police into making their moves.

Just then, Angie's voice came from outside the door. "Your Majesty, two mercenaries request an audience. ""Let them in."

Moments later, the Scholar mercenary and the Longsword mercenary appeared before Aurek. They bowed respectfully. "Greetings, Your Majesty."

"You've come to me now—what is it? ""Your Majesty, we heard news outside the palace that members of the Unicorn Trading Guild have arrived in the capital. They seem to be here over Butler Brown's death. Do you know about this?"

Although they asked, the Scholar mercenary already had his answer. He was one hundred percent certain that Butler Brown had died by this Emperor's hand. The factions in the imperial city must have already guessed the same. Which meant that the Unicorn Trading Guild would very likely focus their attention on the Emperor.

Faced with the pressure of such a great force, how would His Majesty respond?

"If they want to investigate, let them investigate." Aurek's tone was calm, his expression unbothered.

In truth, he did not take this matter to heart at all.

On the other hand, the Longsword mercenary could not hold back. "Your Majesty, we mainly worry that some ill-intentioned people will guide the Unicorn Trading Guild's focus onto you, deliberately stirring conflict between you and them."

"Actually, I know a bit about the Unicorn Trading Guild. Among them are several Hero Rank powerhouses. And rumor has it, there's even an old monster close to Master Rank watching over them. Their strength cannot be underestimated."

Close to Master Rank?

Aurek narrowed his eyes, carefully studying the Longsword mercenary before asking, "Is your information accurate?"

"I've only heard rumors. But judging from their current actions, I suspect they must indeed have a powerhouse backing them."

"That's even better."

Aurek smiled faintly, a thoughtful look crossing his face.

His reaction left both mercenaries stunned. Wait—was that the right reaction? That was a being close to Master Rank! And His Majesty wasn't worried at all?

The Scholar mercenary couldn't help but ask, "Your Majesty, what are your plans? Should we accompany you tomorrow?"

"Why wait until tomorrow?"

Aurek's voice remained calm as his gaze drifted toward the distant sky.

The two mercenaries were dumbfounded. What did His Majesty mean by that? He couldn't possibly be planning to meet the Unicorn Trading Guild tonight, could he?

They exchanged glances. After a moment's thought, they seemed to vaguely guess at something.

"You may withdraw. If I need you, I will send for you."

The two mercenaries did not hesitate further and withdrew.

After returning to their quarters, they could not help but discuss. "Do you think His Majesty might really be planning what we're thinking?" "It's hard to say. We'll see tomorrow. Right now, we can't be sure of anything."

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to anyone—

That night, a gentle breeze drifted across the imperial capital, carrying a soothing, refreshing feeling. It was the kind of beautiful night most suited for going to bed early.

Except that for some, once they fell asleep, they were destined never to wake again.

Chapter 37: Chapter37-Something Happened

Inside the palace, Aurek leaned lazily against the sofa and casually opened his panel.

At present, his Emperor's Scepter was still at level 6. After one round of spending, he still had 2,900 Emperor Points left.

If he were to convert them all into levels, he could raise the Emperor's Scepter up to level 36.

But what was the use of level alone? Sure, it would increase the number of units he could summon each day, but that wasn't what truly mattered.

Aurek believed what he lacked now wasn't more numbers—it was stronger troops.

At that thought, he instinctively turned to look at the shop interface.

Currently, the shop had only one item for sale:

[Special Unit Enhancement Potion]

Cost: 4,000 points

Effect: Increases the strength of a special unit by one full major rank. Note: This potion is effective only on special units.

The Gold Assassin belonged to the special unit category.

If its strength were to be raised by one major rank, that would mean Hero Rank lv9!

Realizing this, Aurek couldn't help but draw in a sharp breath of cold air.

With the Gold Assassin's current abilities and its affinity with elemental power, defeating enemies of higher rank was not impossible! The unit's description even specifically mentioned a chance of over-rank kills.

And a Hero Rank lv9 Gold Assassin might even have the ability to kill a Master Rank powerhouse!

That meant Aurek would truly possess the power to contend with the red-robed Archbishop Austin.

Unfortunately, when Aurek still had enough points earlier, the shop had shown "Restocking." Now that the item had appeared, he no longer had enough points. It was nothing short of frustrating.

But Aurek wasn't worried. Just moments ago, he had ordered the Elemental Assassins to hunt down members of the Unicorn Trading Guild.

So tonight, he was certain he would harvest a wave of Emperor Points.

Unknowingly, night had fallen.

In the capital city, within a certain inn, a sudden chill wind drifted through the hallways.

The inn servants quickly prepared a pile of blankets to offer the honored guests from the Unicorn Trading Guild.

But when they carried the blankets up to the second floor, all of them dropped their bundles to the ground at once!

"Boss! Something terrible happened! Something terrible!"

"Damn fool, why are you shouting so late at night?!"

"What if you disturb the guests from the Unicorn Trading Guild? I'll tear your head off!"

"It's not that, boss—their honored guests from the Unicorn Trading Guild... they're gone! Their heads are all gone!"

"Stop spouting nonsense!"

The innkeeper cursed loudly, not even bothering to put on a coat as he rushed upstairs.

What a joke! The Unicorn Trading Guild's guests were all extraordinary experts—how could they possibly die?

Yet the moment he stepped onto the second floor, the scene before his eyes froze him in place.

Blood—blood was everywhere!

Headless corpses lay strewn across the floor like discarded dolls.

The most chilling part was that none of the severed heads bore expressions of pain or rage.

What did that mean?

It meant they hadn't even realized what was happening before their heads were cut off.

Ghosts. It must have been ghosts!

And something was wrong with the numbers—several of the Unicorn Trading Guild guests' bodies were missing.

"What on earth just happened? Why didn't I hear a single sound?"

The commotion upstairs quickly drew the attention of other lodgers. They followed the noise to the second floor, and when they saw the carnage before them, their faces turned ashen with terror.

Damn it, who could tell them what on earth had happened here? Where were the rest of the Unicorn Trading Guild people, and why weren't they here?

Word spread quickly, and soon the entire capital was in uproar.

"The ghosts have struck again! And this time, they targeted the Unicorn Trading Guild's elites!"

All factions immediately mobilized their forces, desperate to uncover even the faintest clue behind this massacre.

At the blacksmith's shop, the burly blacksmith was just as stunned.

Never in his wildest dreams had he expected that the little emperor inside Valoria Palace would act with such terrifying ruthlessness.

Meanwhile, Troy was in high spirits.

The presence of the Unicorn Trading Guild's experts had greatly lessened the direct pressure on him. He had even planned to use them to cause some trouble for Aurek.

But at that moment, several of his spies rushed in with urgent news.

"Minister! Something terrible has happened!"

"The Unicorn Trading Guild members... some of them were decapitated, and the others are missing."

Hearing this, Troy leapt straight out of his chair.

"What the hell are you talking about? Tell me clearly!"

The spy lowered his head and quickly reported:

"Minister, we just got word from the inn. The Unicorn Trading Guild members have indeed vanished.

They left behind some corpses in the rooms, but not all of them. At the very least, the body of their leader was not among them.

Moreover, we questioned confidants stationed near Valoria Palace. Their report is that none of the Unicorn Trading Guild members entered the palace."

"Something like this happened!?"

Troy cursed viciously, his face turning dark as night.

What on earth was this Unicorn Trading Guild playing at?

Why were some of them dead while the rest had simply vanished?

Did they really encounter ghosts, or was it some kind of internal strife?

The leader of this group was an Expert Rank lv9 powerhouse!

A being that strong couldn't just disappear into thin air.

After a moment's thought, Troy made his decision at once.

"Prepare a carriage immediately—I'm going to that inn myself!"

"Half dead, half missing?"

At the Clover Auction House, President Kafka frowned deeply upon hearing the report.

"And the missing ones? Not a single trace?"

"At present, none. Some suspected they went to Valoria Palace, but there is no sign of them there.

Others speculate they were slain by the ghosts. But there's doubt, since in all previous incidents the ghosts only killed—never abducted."

President Kafka nodded slightly, falling silent.

The whole affair was riddled with mystery.

Had the Unicorn Trading Guild truly fallen victim to the ghosts, or had internal divisions torn them apart?

The most crucial point was that the Expert Rank Lv9 leader had disappeared without a trace!

If it really was the work of ghosts—then how could such a powerful man die without raising the slightest alarm, when even Butler Brown had caused such a commotion?

Chapter 38: Chapter38-Royal Council

Many people suspected that this incident had been orchestrated by the emperor.

Yet, the problem was—they had no evidence.

And within this entire affair lay a glaring mystery: how could the leader of the Unicorn Trading Guild, a mighty Expert Rank Lv9 powerhouse, die so silently?

Back then, even Butler Brown, who was merely an Expert Rank Lv1, had caused such a huge commotion when he fell.

How could an Expert Rank Lv9 be killed without leaving the slightest trace?

Was it truly the emperor's doing?

Everyone suspected, but no one had proof.

At this moment, in the minds of these great factions, the young emperor seemed to have become even more unfathomable.

Within the imperial capital, a rare silence loomed.

The major powers tacitly avoided discussing anything about the Unicorn Trading Guild.

The disappearance of an Expert Rank Lv9 instilled an even deeper sense of dread in their hearts.

All knew the Unicorn Trading Guild would never let the matter rest.

But for now, none of them wished to step into such muddy waters.

Ironically, the most frustrated were the smaller and mid-sized factions.

They had looked forward to the Unicorn Trading Guild clashing with the emperor of the Crossbridge Empire.

Had that happened, they could have reaped countless benefits amidst the chaos of the capital.

But now?

Before the drama even began, the curtain had already fallen—some of the Guild were dead, others missing.

What kind of outcome was this supposed to be?

Yule once again summoned the elders of House Tascher, and a heated discussion unfolded.

The conclusion, however, was simply: they would not discuss the matter, because they did not know enough.

Even so, they began reconsidering House Tascher's relationship with the emperor.

After all, House Tascher had already aligned itself with him—so they could not afford to remain in ignorance.

"We must find a way to understand the emperor's true strength," Yule decided.

The gathered elders agreed unanimously.

One even suggested: "I believe the upcoming coronation of the empress is an excellent opportunity."

Though no one said it outright, all tacitly believed that the Guild's fate had been sealed by the emperor's hand.

They themselves had experienced his methods firsthand before.

Thus, they were convinced this was his doing.

But if an Expert Rank Lv9 could be slain so quietly, then just how many hidden cards did His Majesty hold?

Everyone suspected that the emperor must command a Hero Rank powerhouse.

For only a Hero could so easily annihilate an Expert Rank Lv9.

"It seems the time has come to plan carefully. Perhaps the Crossbridge Empire still has a chance for revival."

When Josephine received the news, she was equally shocked beyond words.

Never had she imagined the emperor would be so decisive, so ruthless—and so powerful.

She had been worried about how he would deal with the Unicorn Trading Guild.

Who would have thought he would solve the problem at its very root?

William and Heimerdinger sat across from each other, both faces wreathed in grins.

"Hahaha! Who would have thought His Majesty would use such a method!"

"Indeed! The Unicorn Trading Guild suffered a heavy loss, and the best part is—they have no way to pin the blame. I can already picture their furious expressions."

Aurek's decisive strike had shattered countless schemes and petty calculations.

Those who still refused to give up swarmed to the inn, desperate to find some trace of what had occurred.

But after combing through every corner, they discovered nothing of value.

They had labored the entire night in vain.

The next morning, bleary-eyed ministers with dark circles under their eyes trudged into the Royal Council chamber.

The atmosphere today was heavy.

Jacoff and Troy looked especially grim.

They had invested so much effort into careful planning, only for it all to end before it even began.

Now they hadn't even figured out what their next move should be.

Worse still, one question gnawed at their minds: was the Unicorn Trading Guild's fate really the emperor's doing?

And if it was, just how terrifying was the power he commanded?

Troy's heart was restless, even faintly trembling with fear.

Among all the officials present, only the members of the Royalist Party wore faint smiles; the rest were dark-faced and uneasy.

It was amid this mix of emotions that Aurek's figure appeared before them.

He still held the scepter symbolizing imperial authority, radiating a supreme and unquestionable majesty.

His sharp gaze alone was enough to make no one dare meet his eyes.

This was the awe-inspiring dignity of the emperor of the Crossbridge Empire.

"Long live His Majesty!"

"Rise," Aurek said softly, then seated himself upon the throne.

"What matters are there to discuss today?"

At that question, silence blanketed the council hall.

Even the officials of the Grand Marshal's faction and the Minister of Police's faction chose silence without hesitation.

Aurek slowly lifted his head, his gaze sweeping across Jacoff and Troy.

Both men felt their hearts clench, as if stabbed by invisible thorns.

Though they had ample experience in political struggle, for some reason, before this young emperor, an instinctive fear rose within them.

At that moment, William spoke.

"Your Majesty, last night a grave incident occurred in the capital.

A portion of the Unicorn Trading Guild's caravan were found dead in the inn, while another portion vanished without a trace.

The Unicorn Trading Guild is of great importance to the Crossbridge Empire, being our partner in trade.

Therefore, I believe Your Majesty should swiftly consider how to handle this matter."

The moment William brought it up, the eyes of many officials darted secretly toward the emperor.

They were desperate to know—was this truly his doing?

"Such a thing has happened!?"

Aurek's expression turned stern in an instant, his eyes flashing with dangerous light.

"Gaia, you will investigate this matter. Get to the bottom of it and settle the unrest before it spreads."

Gaia immediately accepted the order, pounding his chest in solemn promise.

But in Troy's heart, a cold laugh resounded.

Little emperor, is this your game of crying 'stop thief' while being the thief yourself?

I truly underestimated you.

Chapter 39: Chapter39-A New Item

Inside the Royal Council chamber, under William's guidance, the assembly quickly moved to the next topic.

"Your Majesty, I've heard some rumors recently. They say that among our officials, many have been taking bribes, even colluding with one another."

The moment William said this, the hearts of the officials present all tightened.

With the Crossbridge Empire in its current state, who wouldn't take the chance to line their own pockets, unless they were a fool?

What William mentioned was not an isolated case, but rather something everyone knew yet never spoke of.

No one had expected William to throw out such an explosive accusation during today's Royal Council.

At the same time, Jacoff and Troy both sensed that something was amiss.

They wisely kept silent, waiting to see how the matter would unfold.

When Aurek heard those words, his face instantly darkened.

"Officials who betray the Empire by stealing from within—I, as emperor, will never tolerate such corruption!"

"In the Empire's current situation, the most important matter is to root out these parasites. The best way is to execute a batch of them immediately."

Such killing intent in his tone made the officials' faces turn pale.

At that moment, Aurek suddenly fixed his gaze on Troy.

"Troy, you are the Empire's Minister of Police. Investigating corruption is your responsibility. So tell me—why has the Empire fallen to this state?"

Caught off guard by the emperor's question, Troy hesitated for a moment.

But as an old fox of the political arena, he quickly came up with a reasonable excuse.

"Your Majesty, in recent years serious crimes have greatly increased, and the Ministry of Police has been overwhelmed with cases. We simply don't have the manpower. So—"

His intention was to shift the blame onto William's faction, implying it was their policies that had failed, resulting in the surge of crimes.

Yet to Troy's surprise, Aurek did not become angry. Instead, he smiled faintly.

"Troy, you've truly worked hard during this time."

"Since the Ministry of Police cannot manage everything, I will have Heimerdinger take the lead in establishing a Procurator's Office."

"From this day forward, the Procurator's Office's main duty will be to hunt down corrupt officials and bring them to justice."

Before Troy could respond, Aurek's eyes turned sharply toward Heimerdinger, his tone firm.

"Heimerdinger, I am entrusting this matter to you."

"I will see it done, Your Majesty!" Heimerdinger answered immediately.

By the time Troy regained his senses, his face was already twisted in frustration.

Without realizing it, part of his power had been stripped away.

Supervising the officials had always been the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Police.

And now, without even asking for his consent, a portion of that authority had been handed elsewhere.

"Your Majesty, this doesn't seem very appropriate..."

Aurek's expression remained calm as he replied with a faint smile.

"There is nothing inappropriate. Just now, I asked you, and you admitted your Ministry could not handle everything."

"Right now, stamping out corruption is a top priority for the Empire. Allowing Heimerdinger to create the Procurator's Office is simply helping you share the burden."

"But—"

Before Troy could continue arguing, Aurek's face suddenly grew cold.

"Minister Troy, are you questioning my decision? Or is it that you have no desire to punish corrupt officials?"

Though his voice was quiet, it carried the full weight of imperial authority.

Troy immediately lowered his head.

"No, Your Majesty, I didn't mean it that way."

"Good. Then this matter is settled."

Aurek's icy gaze swept across the chamber.

"If you voluntarily return your ill-gotten wealth before being investigated, I will pardon you from the death penalty."

"But if you are caught—then I will show no mercy."

His words, heavy as stone, instantly broke the officials' composure.

And so, with those final declarations, today's Royal Council drew to a close.

Jacoff and Troy watched Aurek's retreating figure, hatred smoldering in their eyes.

They quickly lowered their heads and left the chamber, their faction's officials following close behind.

It was clear to all that this matter would not end peacefully.

The Royalist Party's officials gathered together, their voices low in discussion.

"Is His Majesty preparing to move against them?"

"But I doubt it will be so simple."

"Even so, isn't this exactly what we've been waiting for?"

Though opinions differed, they all agreed on one point: since the emperor had chosen to act, he must have the strength to back it up.

Perhaps it was time for the Royalist Party to take the initiative and strike.

Back in his residence, Aurek's mood was at its peak.

Troy could never have imagined falling right into his trap, having his authority cut apart without lifting a finger.

Even more exciting for Aurek was the result of last night's strike against the Unicorn Trading Guild—he had harvested 3,000 Emperor Points.

Now he was even considering establishing an intelligence and assassination bureau, staffed entirely with the Elemental Assassins.

These assassins were one hundred percent loyal, and their abilities were perfectly suited for intelligence work. They were the ideal choice for such an organization.

Without hesitation, Aurek exchanged for a [Special Unit Enhancement Potion] from the shop.

He ordered the Gold Assassin to drink it.

A violent surge of energy coursed through the air, and the Gold Assassin successfully advanced to Hero Rank Lv9!

The strength it now radiated left Aurek deeply satisfied.

Even against Master Rank opponents, the Gold Assassin could hold its own.

At last, Aurek could set aside his immediate worries about the red-robed Archbishop Austin.

The remaining 1,900 Emperor Points he spent on upgrading the Emperor's Scepter.

The benefits were obvious—upon reaching level 25, the scepter allowed him to summon fifty Elemental Assassins each day.

Not only that, their base strength had also risen.

Freshly summoned Elemental Assassins now started at Elite Rank Lv9.

And those from the earliest batches had already reached Expert Rank Lv1.

At that moment, Aurek noticed a message flashing in the shop interface: stock replenished.

He immediately opened it, and there, he saw a brand new item!

[Random Unit Summon Card]Price: 10,000 Emperor Points

Chapter 40: Chapter40-A Beauty Trap?

Ten thousand points?

Aurek frowned slightly, but soon his expression eased.

Although ten thousand Emperor Points seemed like a lot, when he thought carefully about it, it actually wasn't so hard to obtain.

Killing bandits steadily earned him more, and if he managed to slay a true powerhouse, the reward in Emperor Points was enormous.

At this moment, Aurek's heart was filled with satisfaction.

And with such gains, he was even more eager to quickly improve his own strength.

Just as he ended his meditation, Angie's voice suddenly came from outside the door.

"Your Majesty, Annie requests an audience!"

"Annie?"

Aurek froze for a moment, then immediately replied, "Let her in!"

...

Moments later, Annie appeared before Aurek.

"Your Majesty, it has been a long time."

"Mm."

Aurek nodded, his gaze sharp as he studied the young girl before him.

She wore a luxurious court gown. Her cheeks were as tender as peeled eggs, smooth and glowing with youthful vitality.

Her blue eyes seemed to carry endless warmth, yet also hid a hint of calculation beyond her age.

This girl, Aurek knew all too well.

Before his former self fell into a coma, he had once pursued Annie.

But Annie, prideful and aloof, had despised him utterly. After repeatedly rejecting him, she had poured an excessive dose of narcotic into his cup.

That very drug had indirectly caused his coma.

And now, this same girl was here of her own accord in Valoria Palace.

Her elder brother was none other than the governor of the imperial capital, who commanded all of Eryndor City's defenses.

Yet, such a key figure had not pledged loyalty to the emperor.

For Annie to come on her own today, it was clearly at her brother's behest.

"What is it you want from me?" Aurek asked coldly after a glance at her.

"Your Majesty, I recently learned a foreign dance. It is very beautiful and is called the *Butterfly Dance*. I wish to perform it for you."

As Annie spoke, she cast a subtle glance at Aurek.

That very morning, her brother had told her the emperor had changed. With the methods he now wielded, he could rank among the strongest emperors in the history of the Crossbridge Empire.

Annie didn't fully believe such claims, but her curiosity had been stirred, and so she had come.

"Please, Your Majesty, grant me this chance. I promise not to disappoint you."

A flicker of interest passed through Aurek's eyes.

"Very well. Perform, then. I would like to see what is so special about this *Butterfly Dance*."

Truth be told, Aurek had been under great pressure these past days, his mind constantly tense.

Now, with the Elemental Assassins at his command, he could finally breathe easier.

It was time for him to relax a little—let others be the anxious ones. His role now was simply to wait.

"Please, Your Majesty, enjoy it well."

At her words, a few attendants quickly brought in musical instruments, filled Aurek's goblet with wine, and laid out food.

Aurek sipped the wine, its rich aroma spreading across his tongue.

Meanwhile, Annie prepared herself.

As the music began, her graceful figure started to sway.

Every movement was precise and elegant, highlighting her delicate frame.

Beautiful as she already was, with the *Butterfly Dance* her allure only deepened, like a butterfly fluttering among blossoms.

"Not bad," Aurek remarked, his eyes shining with appreciation.

This—this was what imperial privilege should feel like. This was the life of an emperor!

When the dance ended, Annie's face was beaded with sweat, her cheeks flushed red, her eyes shimmering with moisture.

"Your Majesty, I have another dance," she said softly. "But this one is meant only for you to see."

"In that case, you shall stay here tonight."

"Everyone else, leave us."

The attendants obeyed, filing out of the chamber.

Angie, however, upon leaving, glanced back at the door with unwillingness written all over her face.

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Troy returned home, his expression as dark as storm clouds.

Just then, Aris approached.

"What happened in the Royal Council?"

Troy's tone was heavy with frustration.

"Aurek has decided to begin rooting out corruption. And worse, he stripped this authority from my hands and handed it to that bastard Heimerdinger."

"If I'm not mistaken, Aurek is preparing to move against us."

Most of the Empire's officials belonged either to the Grand Marshal faction or to the Minister of Police's faction.

That meant if Heimerdinger took the Procurator's Office seriously, countless cases would surface—and all of them would point directly at Jacoff and Troy.

"This was to be expected."

Aris nodded calmly before continuing.

"In my estimation, the Unicorn Trading Guild's fate was very likely Aurek's doing as well."

"I simply hadn't thought he could kill even an Expert Rank Lv9—and silently, at that."

"This proves he holds a hidden power unknown to others. It is that power which has given him the confidence to turn against you now."

Troy's face twisted with fury at those words.

"We absolutely cannot sit and wait for death! We must not compromise or retreat!"

"You need not worry. I already anticipated such a development," Aris replied smoothly.

"Since our Leap Mercenary Corps has chosen to support you, we will not stand idly by."

"This time, we've arranged for three Expert Rank Lv9s, six Expert Rank Lv6s, and in addition, we have a powerful artifact."

"With these reinforcements, Minister Troy, you should be able to rest easy."

"But in my opinion—perhaps it would be better to strike first."