

Gods Daily 95

Chapter 95: The Black Dragon

After turning the matter over in his mind, Yule suddenly realized something of paramount importance: the Empress's coronation ceremony was not merely a courtly celebration—it was a defining event for House Tascher itself. The ceremony's success or failure would shape the family's standing for years to come.

Once that truth struck him, Yule immediately called for an update on every preparation.

One of the elders in charge stepped forward and bowed.

"Everything is proceeding according to plan, Patriarch. We are executing at the highest possible standard. As for the date—we propose holding the ceremony during this year's Firstfall Festival."

He added, "According to the arrangements we received from the Imperial Palace, their side is in agreement as well."

"Firstfall Festival?" Yule paused, then nodded with satisfaction.

Within the Crossbridge Empire, Firstfall Festival carried a meaning no other day could rival; it commemorated the very founding of the Empire. For that reason, it was the most sacred and momentous holiday on the imperial calendar. To choose that day for the Empress's coronation signaled beyond doubt how highly His Majesty Aurek regarded both House Tascher and Josephine.

In the Imperial Palace, Aurek stood tall upon the marble dais, his gaze stern as it swept across the assembled ranks of his summoned forces. From each unit he selected a cadre of elite soldiers to form the Palace Guard—the last line of defense around his person and the seat of power.

The Mountain Shieldbearers were, unsurprisingly, the perfect candidates. Loyal beyond reproach, they possessed an impregnable defense. With them stationed at key corridors and gates, the palace became a fortress. So long as nothing catastrophic happened within the palace walls, the greater situation of the Empire would remain stable.

Right on cue, according to the timetable he had set, Gold Assassin and Violet Thunder returned from their mission.

They knelt as one.

"We greet our lord!"

Gold Assassin's voice was cool and steady.

"The members of the Manhattan Legion have been utterly eradicated. Manhattan City lies destroyed."

Violet Thunder bowed his head and added, solemn and fervent, "Great lord, we shall carry out your will without wavering."

When they finished their report, they presented the spoils of the campaign—condensed into a compact pocket dimension, a portable storage space that looked like nothing more than a small, nondescript object in Aurek's hand.

Aurek turned it over, intrigued. It was, in fact, the first time he had handled such a thing. After a brief consideration, he extended a thread of mind power and scanned the spatial container.

His consciousness sank into the pocket dimension. Within, stacked like hills, lay vast quantities of resources: energy stones, rare materials, finely crafted weapons, and piles upon piles of gold coins. He even sensed crates of scrolls and miscellany tucked against the far edges of the space.

For a heartbeat, Aurek was genuinely taken aback. The sheer volume of loot vastly outstripped his expectations. To be frank, these gains were far greater than anything he had seized when he had confiscated enemy estates before—several times greater.

Among the treasures gleamed an item of especial note: an S-grade energy artifact, a sword with a baleful aura—Bloodthirsty Sword. Below it, the A-grade and lesser artifacts were so numerous one could hardly count them.

Even so, Aurek only gave the collection a cursory inspection and did not show much excitement. He understood well: while these things looked impressive, very few among them were truly precious. They would certainly enrich the imperial treasury, but as for elevating the combat power of his forces in a decisive way—the impact would be limited.

Then something caught his eye—two oddly shaped stones resting side by side.

One was crimson, vivid and glossy like fresh blood. The other was iron-grey, dense and heavy like forged steel. Probing with mind power, Aurek sensed a peculiarity within them—some kind of latent resonance or sealed property—but his current perception could not penetrate further to reveal their true nature.

He placed both stones into his personal coffer, reserving them for later study. The gold coins he sent directly to the national treasury.

As for the energy artifacts and rare materials, Aurek did not consign them to the public vaults. Instead, he ordered Angie to construct a Royal Repository, a secured armory under his immediate authority.

His reasoning was simple: artifacts and rare materials of real value must remain in his own hands. He harbored little trust for the public treasury when it came to such temptations. If money moved men's hearts, how much more so would energy tools of power?

Once the resource matters were settled, Aurek turned his attention back to Gold Assassin, Violet Thunder, and the soldiers who had participated in the operation. The campaign had tempered them; almost everyone had advanced in tangible ways.

Gold Assassin in particular radiated a cutting, oppressive aura—sharper than before. Aurek could feel it clearly: Gold Assassin had grown to the point where he could now confront an Advanced Master Rank directly without immediately being overmatched.

Violet Thunder, standing to the side, had also climbed to the pinnacle of Hero Rank, a single step away from Master Rank. Lightning seemed to sleep coiled beneath his skin, ready to awaken at a word.

And then, at that very moment—

A colossal shadow fell across Eryndor City.

A heartbeat later, a dragon's roar split the sky and hammered the earth. The very streets shuddered beneath the force of that ancient sound. Windows rattled. Loose tiles skittered across rooftops. People froze in place, terror chasing the color from their faces.

Countless citizens looked up as one.

High above the city—looming directly over the palace—floated an enormous Black Dragon. Its wings unfurled like thunderclouds, blotting out the sun. Its eyes, cold and predatory, locked upon the Imperial Palace with unmistakable intent.

The creature's length stretched well over a hundred meters. Its wings cast an ocean of shadow. Every motion of its body exuded raw, crushing power.

"A Black Dragon..." murmured Chairman Kafka, his brows knitting as he lifted his gaze.

He was not the only one. From every quarter, from hidden courtyards and secret windows, experts of various factions peered upward. Their expressions shifted between awe, alarm, and grim calculation.

They knew this dragon. Everyone of consequence in the Empire knew it.

This was a Black Dragon belonging to the Ordon Theocracy.

Each time one appeared, it bore the will and authority of the Theocracy itself.

In principle, all who saw a Black Dragon were required to bow in reverent obeisance. Even the Emperor of the Crossbridge Empire was expected to pay respects when a Black Dragon descended.

But appearing now, at such a charged moment—this could only mean one thing.

The Ordon Theocracy had come to make its stance known.

"Unexpected... The Black Dragon has finally descended upon Eryndor City," someone whispered, a tremor of excitement in their voice.

Many powers had waited for this exact scene for a long, long time.

Then a keen-eyed watcher pointed and shouted.

"There! In the dragon's mouth—a sealed missive!"

Within the Cathedral, where the sonorous chant of scripture rolled like waves, Cardinal Austin—robed in scarlet—suddenly opened his eyes. A flicker of light shot through his pupils. In the blink of an eye, his figure vanished from within the hall and appeared midair, directly before the Black Dragon's massive head.

Behind him, White-robed Bishop Ramos led other members of the Ordon Theocracy out of the Cathedral. They stood in the courtyard with heads raised high, pride stamped upon every face.

Do you see now? their expressions seemed to say. This is the vast might of the Ordon Theocracy. This is our authority.

The Black Dragon's presence alone was a proclamation. Whoever dared challenge the Theocracy's supremacy would face dragon-wrought annihilation.

The titanic beast lowered its head. Between its fangs, it carefully held out a sealed letter. Cardinal Austin received it with both hands, then returned a formal salute befitting his station.

A tremor pulsed through the air—the subtle quake of mind power—as the Black Dragon's consciousness brushed against Austin's.

A voice thundered within the Cardinal's mind, deep and imperious:

"Deliver this secret letter... to Aurek."