

Gods Daily 98

Chapter 98: Prodigy Youth, Strongest Foe?

Austin's figure vanished beyond the palace gates—along with it, he carried the Emperor's unshakable will out into the streets of Eryndor City.

What had transpired in the throne hall spread as if borne upon a wind-spell: secret words racing over avenues and alleys, slipping into the ears of all who had waited with bated breath. That single line—"The Empire has grown weary of the Ordon Theocracy."—was exactly the reply the lurking wolves had longed for.

This was it.

The moment had finally arrived.

In an instant, the entire city seemed to tumble into a boiling crucible. The agitation would not stop at the walls; like wildfire, it would sweep to the farthest frontiers of the Empire.

Aurek's will, like an invisible eagle, flew straight into the halls of the powerful.

"Let the banquet... begin."

In the top suite of a lavish tavern, Carl, Vice President of the Thunder Guild, stood with hands clasped behind his back. He stared toward the silhouette of the palace, his face still shadowed by the aftershock of imperial resolve.

Behind him, several Sanctuary-level experts struggled to contain their elation.

"No one could have predicted it—Aurek tearing up the pact himself?" chuckled a Hero Rank powerhouse.

"After today, there's no turning back between Empire and Church. All that remains is to see what verdict the Theocracy will proclaim."

"Do we even need to guess?" Carl's eyes flashed with a dangerous thread of lightning. He spoke quietly, but every word carried weight. "The Ordon Theocracy will not indulge the Empire's insolence any longer. And do not underestimate Sacco. The authority he holds now is enough to steer the Church's will."

"Sacco... who even is he?" another expert asked, curiosity sparking across the room. "I've never heard his name, and yet he's vaulted straight into the Theocracy's succession as Holy Son. It's absurd."

This continent produces "geniuses" year after year; but someone with enough force to sway the Church and shake the Empire's foundations? That should not be a stranger's name.

Carl was silent for a moment. He recalled the rumors, and when he spoke again, there was the faintest hint of awe in his voice.

"Sacco's rise was like divine revelation."

"One month to become an apprentice; three months to reach Elite Rank. He then crushed all competitors in the Church's harshest Trial of Sacred Flame, stepping directly into the inner circle."

"They say he acquired the inheritance of an ancient powerhouse during his travels, crossed into Expert Rank, and mastered a Theocracy taboo art no one dared touch for a thousand years—Sacred Radiance Seal."

"Later, in a demi-god ruin, he gained another boon, ascended to Hero Rank, received an SS-grade weapon—the Sunflame Holy Sword—and grasped the essence of sunlight and illumination. His first public strike felled a half-step Master-Rank assassin."

"In less than two years, he reached Hero Rank Lv.7. After that, he cut down four half-step Masters in succession, writing a record that borders on legend."

A collective hiss swept the room.

Such talent was terrifying.

In under two years he had crossed trainee → apprentice → elite → expert → hero, and now stood at Hero Rank Lv.7. Unheard of.

"At this pace, he may soon step into Master Rank," Carl admitted, unable to hide his own astonishment. "To be recognized by the Theocracy and anointed Holy Son... his gifts speak for themselves."

"To attain Sage Rank one day? Merely a matter of time."

"Three months from now, at the Empress's coronation..." someone lowered his voice, "if he comes in person—"

"—he may do more than bring a decree," another finished grimly. "He might strike at Aurek himself."

"Very possible," Carl said, tone turning heavy. "He suffered humiliation once at House Tascher. For a young powerhouse, that kind of stain is a barb in the soul—a seedbed for inner demons."

"So... you mean—" a Hero Rank expert probed, wary, "he needs the Emperor's blood to wash it clean?"

"The blood of a sovereign, my dear Felix," Carl spread his hands lightly, "that is the highest grade of purification."

"My estimate: at the Firstfall Festival, the Holy Son personally makes his move."

"But that's the Empire's founding day!" someone exclaimed.

"Indeed," Carl smiled thinly. "Which is why it might serve as both the celebration's opening... and the overture to its finale."

"We must inform the President at once!" a Hero Rank subordinate burst out, pulse quickening. "If the end is foregone, why not strike first? Why let others carve the roast while we lick the platter?"

"No. We continue to watch." Carl lifted a hand, the gesture as elegant as a conductor's—though his audience consisted of only a handful of fidgeting lieutenants.

"Why?!" came the chorus of impatience.

"Let me ask you," Carl said mildly, pouring a glass of wine the color of rubies. "When you see a cave spider hurl itself straight at a lizard's nest, what's your first thought?"

"...Admire its courage?" someone ventured.

"No. Wonder whether it's either gone mad—or is hiding a trump card we haven't seen."

He rolled the wine, watching the surface curve.

"His Majesty Aurek refuses the Church with iron assurance. On what basis does he dare defy a millennia-entrenched power?"

He sipped once, then added: "Better we not be the first to stick our necks out. Let the more eager wolves scout the traps."

Of course, he still ordered the Thunder Guild to full war footing. When it came time to divide the spoils, speed would be everything.

He gazed toward the palace, lips curving into a cold arc.

When the whale falls, the seabed blooms.

The Thunder Guild would not miss this feast.

Elsewhere, in a chamber draped with intricate tapestries, Kafka, President of the Clover Auction House, frowned.

They had waited for a result, but it hadn't come as an oracle from the Ordon Theocracy—it had been the Emperor's own royal bombshell.

"What is that young emperor thinking?" Kafka muttered. "Does he not know the space beneath the throne is packed with hungry men, elbows ready for the table?"

"His stratagems have impressed me—until now," he went on. "This time he looks like a gambler who pushed all his chips forward and walked away from a thousand-year shade-tree."

"Father!" Vivian rolled her eyes. "Why do you dissect every decision His Majesty makes? Maybe for him it was as simple as choosing milk or juice for breakfast—he just doesn't want juice anymore."

Kafka turned, blinked, then laughed.

"What?" Vivian asked, puzzled.

"You're right," Kafka chuckled. "Instead of over-guessing, we should simply await the Firstfall Festival. When the day comes, the truth will show itself."

"Uncle," a bright-eyed youth leaned in eagerly, "is this Holy Son Sacco really that strong?"

Kafka's expression sobered. "He is the Theocracy's brightest star in years. In two years, he rose from trainee to Hero Rank Lv.7, defeating four half-step Masters along the way. As Holy Son, his leverage exceeds your imagination."

Gasps from the youths.

"Then... compared to His Majesty Aurek—who's stronger?" the boy blurted, inevitably weighing the two on an invisible scale.

Kafka fell silent, considering.

"Aurek carries the weight of an empire. Sacco travels light—and draws endlessly from the Church's coffers. Aurek has only himself."

"So... doesn't that mean His Majesty's odds are low?" Vivian's voice dropped.

"Perhaps," Kafka said softly, eyes sliding toward the distant line of Eryndor City. "But who can say? The cards in his hand are always more than we can see."

Compared to Clover's caution, the Killer Guild, Unicorn Trading Guild, and others reacted like sharks scenting blood. The dinner bell had rung; none intended to sit politely.

Messages and analyses flew back to headquarters at breakneck pace. Without the mountain of the Ordon Theocracy looming behind the Crossbridge Empire, the state itself looked—to their greedy eyes—like an unattended cake. No one left to slap away their forks.

Revelry began.

This time, the storm they raised would sweep the entire realm.

And amid these surging undercurrents, a pair of siblings from the Hammer Guild arrived before the vast gates of the Imperial Palace...