

Gods Daily 99

Chapter 99: A Scheme Laid Ten Thousand Years Ago

The royal palace, within the Tulip Garden.

Angie led the brother and sister from the Hammer Guild—Cardinan and Amy—through a corridor draped in enchanted roses that glimmered with faint magical light.

The floral archways opened onto a pavilion of white jade, intricately carved with divine motifs.

There stood Aurek, garbed in a simple yet incomparably fine robe of white velvet. He stood with his hands clasped behind his back, gazing across the garden where an endless sea of "star-flowers" bloomed eternally, never withering, shining like fragments of the night sky.

His tall, broad-shouldered figure seemed like a sacred mountain that radiated a natural aura of majesty.

The pressure was so great that Amy instinctively held her breath, her chest tightening with awe and unease.

"Your Majesty, the two from the Hammer Guild have arrived," Angie whispered respectfully, bowing low.

Aurek did not turn around. He merely lifted his hand slightly in acknowledgment.

Angie understood at once and silently withdrew into the shadows of the blossoms.

"Cardinan of the Hammer Guild, pays his respects to Your Majesty!"

Cardinan executed a flawless bow, the kind demanded by royal protocol.

At the same time, he discreetly nudged his younger sister with his elbow, reminding her to follow suit.

Amy blinked, startled out of her daze.

She quickly imitated her brother's posture, her clear, bell-like voice carrying across the air:

"Pa... pays her respects to Your Majesty!"

"I hear you claim to bear certain tidings concerning the Empire?" Aurek's voice flowed calmly through the garden, deep yet steady, like the quiet current beneath ice.

"Yes, Majesty. Matters concerning the Crossbridge Empire... and some old tales long buried beneath the dust of ages."

"Old tales?"

For the first time, Aurek turned his head. His gaze fell upon the siblings, heavy as if it were made of iron.

Cardinan possessed a handsome, resolute face.

His strength had already reached Hero Rank, Level One.

By his side, however, his sister's power was even greater—Amy had already broken through to Hero Rank, Level Two.

Her large, luminous eyes darted curiously as she studied Aurek's every movement.

"Speak, then," Aurek said indifferently, though the cold gleam in his eyes was sharp enough to strip away all falsehood.

The instant Cardinan met those eyes, his heart seemed to seize in his chest. He forced himself to steady his spirit before continuing.

"Majesty is surely already well aware of the current state of the Empire," Cardinan began. "But I wonder... have you ever reflected on why the royal house today commands no more than eight hundred thousand imperial cavalry? Why the once-radiant glory of the Crossbridge Empire has been diminished to such a fragile remnant?"

Aurek's eyes narrowed, glinting like twin blades.

"Continue."

Cardinan took a deep breath.

"I once heard an elder in my clan speak of this. According to him, the Empire's predicament was not a sudden occurrence of recent centuries. No—this decline began brewing ten thousand years ago.

At that time, the founding emperor—Aurek the First—stood peerless in the world, a grandmaster whose strength knew no equal.

With the backing of the Ordon Theocracy, he rose to power with unprecedented speed, annexing countless city-states, suppressing all rivals, and carving out this vast dominion of two borders and sixteen provinces.

But the territory was far too great, so great it stirred envy in every surrounding kingdom.

Aurek the First knew this truth well.

Thus, after securing his rule, he abdicated and retreated into the High Tower, attempting to ascend to the fabled Stellar Rank—a height of power that could break the Church's shackles forever.

Yet fate betrayed him.

His attempt at Stellar Rank failed.

He then set sail across distant seas to seek the legendary Heart of Sage.

From that day onward, he vanished... eventually falling into mysterious ruin."

Cardinan's voice grew heavier.

"Without Aurek the First's overwhelming might to deter them, the control of the Ordon Theocracy tightened around the Empire. Meanwhile, the wealth and vast lands of our realm lured the greedy stares of countless forces.

Even weakened, the royal house still endured beneath the shadow of the Theocracy's dominion.

Few dared to challenge openly. Yet how could anyone resist the temptation of sixteen entire provinces?

So it was that countless hidden factions began weaving schemes that spanned millennia.

For ten thousand years they have plotted—chess masters moving their pieces upon a grand board, seeking to bleed the Empire white.

They cursed the bloodline of kings, extinguished heirs, corroded the forces loyal to the crown.

They sought by every secret means to strip away the Empire's power..."

"A game lasting ten millennia," Aurek murmured, his voice low, like thunder in the distance.

Yes, he understood.

This Empire was like a slab of meat too rich and too fat.

How could the jackals and vultures lurking in the dark not circle, waiting to strike?

They incited border skirmishes, nurtured ambitious lords within, poisoned the royal heirs, ensured the crown's armies dwindled year after year.

All to avoid direct confrontation with the Ordon Theocracy—until the day the Empire finally collapsed into ruin.

And when the Empire sank, the wolves would descend to feast.

As for the Theocracy itself?

By the time they truly grasped the game, it might already be too late.

They, too, would snatch what spoils they could from the carcass of the Empire.

Now, rebellion festered, traitors rose, and the crown's authority was but an empty shell.

Only a few frail Royalist Party nobles remained loyal, together with Aurek himself, a solitary sovereign, holding the last fragile façade of imperial dignity.

Cardinan's tone turned darker still:

"Those ancient houses and organizations, with foundations laid over ten thousand years, how could they ever accept eternal suppression? They crave resources, treasures, and dominion enough to ascend to supremacy. To gain them, they must shatter the present order."

"Shatter the order?" Aurek's lips curled into a cold smile.

"While the strong glut themselves on their bloody banquet, it is the masses—the innocent people of the Crossbridge Empire—who suffer endlessly. Their ambitions are built upon mountains of corpses."

Cardinan stiffened. He had not expected such words of compassion from the emperor famed for his iron-fisted rule.

"But..."

The warmth in Aurek's gaze evaporated in an instant, replaced by a killing edge so sharp it could split heaven itself.

"Though slaughter is abhorrent, it is also the most direct path to rebirth. This Empire must be reforged in blood and bone, only then will its radiance once again cover every inch of its lands."

"Majesty intends... to contend with them?" Cardinan asked solemnly.

Aurek turned back toward him, his smile laden with disdain.

"Contend? That word is far too gentle. This is no mere game of strategy. This is war."

"Majesty must also guard the eight hundred thousand imperial cavalry carefully," Cardinan added quickly, his expression grim. "Too many eyes mark them as a thorn. If not for Your Majesty's foresight in dispatching them to Dorine and other provinces, they might already have been annihilated."

Aurek's eyes flashed. In a heartbeat he grasped the truth.

The imperial cavalry—eight hundred thousand strong—were the core of the royal military, a bastion of loyal knights.

They were the keystone that kept the provinces from falling into chaos.

Should this force fall, the countdown to the Empire's collapse would truly begin.

So his earlier decision—to deploy them across four major provinces—had inadvertently sidestepped a meticulously laid trap meant to destroy them all at once?

Aurek's gaze hardened.

"And why does the Hammer Guild bring this knowledge to me?"

Cardinan met his eyes unflinchingly.

"Many centuries ago, the Hammer Guild clashed with the Killer Guild and nearly faced extinction. It was then that His Majesty Aurek the First granted us a weapon—the Sacrospring Sword—with which we weathered that storm. That grace, our guild has never forgotten.

We came today for two reasons: first, to warn Your Majesty regarding the cavalry's peril—though it seems you had already outmaneuvered it. Second, by command of our elders, to return this sword to the royal house."

From his hands, Cardinan presented a long sword, its scabbard etched with luminous runes of ancient enchantment.

The Sacrospring Sword, once merely a powerful enchanted armament, had been refined across generations of the Hammer Guild until now it had reached near SSS-class might.

Aurek accepted the sword.

His fingers brushed across the cold scabbard as he asked:

"Is it the Killer Guild alone who moves against my cavalry?"

"Not only them." Cardinan shook his head.

"To our knowledge, others include Count Blackcrow, the Chaos Apostle, the Arcane Warlock Order, and the governor of Landor Province. Likely they have been promised rewards too vast to refuse, tasked with eliminating the Empire's last true military claw."

"They believe that once they tear out the Empire's talons, its end is sealed?"

Aurek's hand slid along the scabbard. With a crisp clang, he unsheathed the blade slightly. A shard of chilling steel glimmered in the garden's light, casting reflections across his eyes.

His gaze burned with boundless fury.

"Utterly absurd!"

His voice struck like the gales of midwinter.

"This world, from the past to this present, and unto the ages to come, belongs only to the Crossbridge Empire!"