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Jonas frowned upon hearing that. "Are you suggesting that we do the same thing?" he asked. Elara nodded, and Jonas shook his head.

"Doing something like that is against what our kingdom stands for, especially when you consider my position in our kingdom. If word got out that someone from the royal family did that, what would our people think?" Jonas said, shaking his head.

Gesturing at the other kingdoms, Jonas continued, "They are all small kingdoms. Doing something like this has no repercussions for them. How can we, the second-largest kingdom on this continent, stoop to such a low level, especially in our rival kingdom?"

Elara said nothing as she kept looking at Jonas. Turning around and walking away, she said, "Then we should inform the others that we are leaving since we are never going to get an audience with the Sun King."

Jonas, watching Elara walk away, was flabbergasted. He had honestly expected Elara to argue with him, but seeing her walk away, he couldn't bring himself to follow her immediately.

Closing his eyes to think for a moment, Jonas said loudly enough for her to hear, "So how do we go about the worship?"

Elara, with a small smile on her face, turned around. "Your Highness, I know it may seem unorthodox, but if this is what it takes to be heard, we must respect their customs. It's the only way to gain the audience we've been waiting for."

Jonas sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Very well, Elara. Lead the way."

They entered the temple, the air inside heavy with the scent of incense. Golden sunlight streamed through stained glass windows, casting vibrant patterns on the marble floor. Priests in flowing robes moved gracefully around the altar, where a large statue of Crepuscular stood, its arms outstretched as if welcoming worshippers.

Elara approached one of the priests, bowing respectfully. "Excuse me, we are from the Northern Kingdom. We wish to pay our respects to the sun god Crepuscular and make an offering."

They were led to a smaller shrine within the temple, where they were given candles and a small bowl of golden coins. The priest instructed them to light the candles and place the coins in a basin at the foot of the shrine.

As Jonas and Elara completed the ritual, they could feel the eyes of the other worshippers upon them, a mix of curiosity and approval in their gazes. Once finished, the priest spoke again.

"Your respect for our customs will not go unnoticed. I will inform the Sun King of your actions. Please, return to your quarters and await further instructions."

Jonas nodded, gratitude in his eyes. "Thank you, we appreciate your assistance."

As they walked out of the temple, Jonas whispered to Elara, "That was it? I thought we would bow and sing praises to the sun god before getting some sign of approval from him."

Elara shook her head. "This isn't an official temple of the Sun Kingdom. This temple is mostly reserved for outsiders like us. A whole conversion to the sun god isn't needed, just a show of respect."

"If they forced a conversion, I am sure that would lead to conflict with other kingdoms and maybe among the gods themselves," Elara said, looking back at the church.

"I see," Jonas responded, bowing his head in thought.

Several hours later, as the sun began to set, a royal messenger arrived at their door. With a formal bow, he announced, "The Sun King will see you now."

Jonas exchanged a relieved glance with Elara. Their perseverance had paid off. They quickly made their way to the grand palace, their hearts pounding with anticipation.

The palace was even more opulent than the rest of the city, with gold and precious gems adorning every surface. They were led through a series of lavish corridors until they finally stood before the massive doors of the throne room.

As the doors swung open, Jonas took a deep breath and stepped inside, ready to face the Sun King and present their case.

Because of their limited understanding of the Sun Kingdom, Jonas and Elara decided it was best if only the two of them went to the palace.

Walking inside the throne room, they noticed that it was gold-plated, and the reflection of oneself could be seen clearly as one walked across the room. Jonas observed others, whom he guessed were the council members.

They all wore the same attire, looking like the priests they had met in the temple. On the throne sat King Edward, whom Jonas saw and did his best not to react to.

His father had always been the most handsome man he had ever seen, but King Edward wasn't far behind with his long red hair that almost flickered like flames. His eyes burned with passion, and a small smile tugged at the side of his mouth.

"Finally decided to grace us with your presence, Crown Prince Jonas," Jonas heard Edward speak out before he could say anything.

Jonas knew he was being mocked, but he smiled in turn and responded, "We had a small setback, but hopefully it has all been fixed."

Edward caught Jonas's play on words and nodded. "That's good, but is the prince up to date on what has been happening on your side?" Jonas snuck a glance at Elara, who shook her head, prompting Jonas to look back at Edward.

"If I may be bold to ask, Your Highness, has anything happened on our side?" Jonas asked, bowing slightly.

"I don't mind. Bastian, inform the prince of the latest news we have from their kingdom." Edward leaned into his throne and gestured for one of the council members to speak.

Bastian nodded and began speaking. The more he talked, the grimmer Jonas and Elara looked. At first, they were ecstatic hearing about Silas's mishap with the harpies, but hearing of the possible attack on their kingdom caused their faces to turn pale.

It took some time before Jonas gathered himself. Looking at Edward, he said, "Your Highness already knows why I am here. I would like an answer, as it seems my people need every bit of help we can get at the moment."

Edward nodded before speaking up. "Regarding your invitation of alliance, I would like to inform you that I decline."

Jonas was stunned as he looked at Edward. "I would like to know why Your Highness declined the invitation. The demon is something we all should be working together to eliminate."

Elara stepped forward, her voice calm but firm. "Your highness, if I may. Our kingdoms have been on each other's throats for too long. The demon's power grows stronger each day, and it will soon be beyond any of us to stop it alone. We need each other now more than ever. Please reconsider, not for our sake, but for the survival of all our people."

Edward leaned forward and pointed behind him at his throne, where a statue of Crepuscular stood with wings stretched out, cradling Edward at the center.

"Your people attacked the children of our god. What makes you think we would side with non-believers like you?" Edward calmly asked. He looked back at Jonas, who noticed the king's eyes were now almost aflame.

Jonas, confused and trying to understand, took a deep breath before speaking again. "Your Highness, I was not aware of any such actions against the harpies. If this is true, I can assure you it was not sanctioned by my kingdom. There must be some misunderstanding or rogue elements at play."

Edward's eyes, still fiery, scrutinized Jonas deeply, searching for any sign of deceit. "Misunderstanding or not, the actions of your people cannot be ignored. Our trust was shattered before this conversation began, and it will take more than words to mend it."

After he said that, one of the council members left his position and whispered something into Edward's ear. The council member then returned to his position, and the palace fell into silence.

Edward looked at Jonas and Elara with distrustful eyes before speaking. "I am sorry for this, Crown Prince."

"Chains!" Edward roared. Before Jonas and Elara could react, the surrounding council members each produced a golden chain from their robes, binding Jonas and Elara.

One council member walked out, carrying a red book and chanting, walked towards the trapped prince and his envoy before shouting, "Cleanse!" From the priest's hand came a wave of golden flame that shot at Jonas and Elara.

Jonas and Elara closed their eyes, expecting pain, but nothing happened, surprising them and the other council members around. Edward, who had already left his throne and was standing close to the priest, looked down at the scared Elara and the angry prince with relief clear in his expression.

"Is this how you treat your visitors?" Jonas roared in anger at Edward.

Edward waved his hand, and the council members backed away with their chains. He stretched out his hand to Jonas, who hesitated but took it as Edward pulled him up.

"I apologize. There was a good reason for our actions, and it wasn't meant to hurt you," Edward said, patting Jonas's shoulder.

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Jonas nodded before asking, "Can I be informed of what that reason is?"

Edward nodded as he headed back to his throne. "A message came from the children of our god informing us about the attack."

"They claim that Silas is able to, in some way, grab hold of another human and turn them into his puppets. No magical signature or anything, they are still unsure if he can take over anybody he chooses," Edward said, observing Jonas and Elara closely.

Jonas's expression turned grim. "Then I was right, the attack on the Harpies was a hand played by Silas."

Edward nodded to him, only for Jonas to shake his head. "I now wish I wasn't right," Jonas whispered to himself before pointing at the council members who were back in their positions.

"Your previous action was to see if we were compromised and under Silas's control?" Jonas asked, to which Edward nodded.

"I could not take the chance and let you endanger my people after being informed that the possession is non-magical and can happen in an instant," Edward answered Jonas's question.

Jonas nodded before Elara, beside him, whispered in his ear, causing his eyes to widen as he looked at her. "Impossible, that's absurd!"

Edward, curious about what got Jonas acting out, asked, "What did your envoy say, Prince?"

Jonas shook his head in horror as he answered. "She asked if there is a possibility that the attack in our kingdom was caused by those who have been compromised by Silas."

Jonas's words seemed to open the minds of everyone present as Edward stood up from his throne, even his council members who had been quiet this whole time began chattering amongst themselves.

Edward looked at Elara. "That's quite a bold claim, and do you know what that means?"

Jonas gathered himself before responding, his tone heavy with the weight of realization. "It means, Your Highness, that the enemy is not just at our borders but within them. Silas's reach is far greater and more insidious than we feared. He could be manipulating key figures in both our kingdoms, sowing discord and distrust to weaken us from within."

Edward's expression turned grave as he considered the implications. "I highly doubt that, Crown Prince Jonas. Silas may dare to make a move on your kingdom, but he certainly would not dare lay a hand on our kingdom so as not to incur our god's wrath."

Elara rolled her eyes. "I have to disagree with you on that, Your Highness. If the Harpies are the children of the god like you said, Silas dared to make a move on them, what stops him from doing the same to you?"

Edward's face tightened at Elara's blunt retort. His gaze shifted to the statue of Crepuscular, seeking reassurance in its imposing presence. "Our faith has always been our shield," he said quietly, almost to himself.

Jonas stepped forward, his voice measured but insistent. "Faith is powerful, Your Highness, but Silas is a force that respects neither faith nor sanctity. He has already proven that by attacking the Harpies. We must acknowledge the possibility that he can infiltrate any of our defenses, sacred or otherwise."

Edward's eyes flickered with a mixture of anger and realization. "You speak as if you know him well, Crown Prince. What do you suggest we do, then, if you believe our god's protection is insufficient?"

Jonas took a deep breath, choosing his words carefully. "We must act together, combining our strengths and resources. A divided front is exactly what Silas wants. If we are to stand any chance, we need to identify and eliminate his influence within our ranks."

Edward's demeanor softened, the weight of the situation pressing down on him. "And how do you propose we do that, Prince Jonas? Our trust is fragile, and suspicion runs deep."

Elara stepped in, her voice clear and confident. "We propose a joint task force, Your Highness. Composed of trusted individuals from both our kingdoms, their mission will be to root out Silas's puppets and protect our realms from within. This will not only help us uncover the truth but also build the trust necessary for a lasting alliance."

Edward listened to their words before shaking his head. "The idea of an alliance does sound good after the recent information about Silas's capabilities, but we have never been known for our feeble belief and faith in our god just because of small mishaps. While your words sound good, I still believe in our god's protection over our people."

Jonas and Elara snuck a glance at each other before shaking their heads. Jonas then spoke. "I understand, Your Majesty, but I have a question."

"Go ahead and ask," Edward said, sitting back down and gesturing for Jonas to speak.

"It concerns the spell and Golden Flame used upon me and my envoy Elara. I would like to know how much you trust this technique to pinpoint someone being an imposter of Silas," Jonas asked.

Edward leaned back in his throne, his fingers drumming thoughtfully on the armrest. "The spell and Golden Flame, known as 'Crepuscular's Judgement,' is an ancient technique we learned after gaining a slight understanding of our deity. It is designed to expose any corruption or malevolent influence within an individual. Historically, it has never failed us."

"The Crown Prince should know of the Cursed Forest; this technique was invented for those who have ventured into it and made their way out," Edward explained.

Jonas nodded, absorbing the information. "I see. But in times like these, even the most reliable methods can be circumvented by an enemy as cunning as Silas. If he can possess individuals without leaving a trace, can we truly rely on this spell alone?"

Edward's eyes narrowed slightly, considering Jonas's words. "Your caution is warranted, Prince Jonas. However, without this spell, we would be defenseless against the threat of unseen manipulation. It is our first line of defense."

"But your words do have some sense in them, as we have never truly tested the spell on an individual we know has been compromised by Silas to see if it has an effect or not."

Elara stepped forward, her expression earnest. "Your Highness, while we respect your faith in the rite, we must consider additional measures. Combining your methods with our own could provide a more comprehensive safeguard."

Jonas and Elara exchanged a glance before Jonas spoke. "We suggest integrating our magical detection techniques with your ritual. Our mages have developed spells that can sense anomalies in magical and non-magical energies. Together, they might provide a more fool proof method of identifying those under Silas's control."

"That sounds good, but the method doesn't seem as subtle as I want it to be. While combining our spells will be beneficial, the attention brought by the spell will expose the current altercation to the common folks. I am sure Erik won't be happy with the method you suggest."

"I can't imagine what it would be like dealing with a panicking population and not being able to guarantee them that their husband, child, and friends aren't under the control of Silas," Edward said, pointing out the flaw in Elara's thinking.

Jonas pondered Edward's words, the gravity of their situation becoming more apparent. "Your Highness," he began carefully, "I understand your concerns about causing panic among the populace. However, we cannot afford to ignore the threat that Silas poses. Perhaps there is a way to refine our approach to be more discreet."

Not waiting for Jonas or Elara to say anything, Edward said, "I believe it would be best if you both head back to your kingdom for now. You have given us much to think about."

"As a gesture of friendship, I will have one of my priests go back with you. They will serve as a bridge for communication between us, and at the same time, it will be a great opportunity to test and see if our spell works on those compromised," Edward said, looking at Jonas and Elara, waiting for their answer.

Jonas and Elara exchanged glances, both understanding the significance of Edward's proposal. After a moment of silent communication, Jonas nodded in agreement.

"Your Highness, we appreciate your gesture of friendship and cooperation," Jonas said, his voice firm yet respectful. "We will gladly accept your priest's company. It is a wise move to test the spell's efficacy on neutral ground."

Elara stepped forward, her tone diplomatic. "We will ensure your priest is treated with the utmost respect and given full access to collaborate with our mages. This cooperation is crucial for both our kingdoms."

Edward rose from his throne, signaling the end of the meeting. "Then it is settled. Prepare for your journey. I will have the priest meet you at the castle gates at dawn."

Jonas and Elara bowed before making their way out of the throne room. As they walked through the grand corridors of Edward's castle, Elara spoke in a low voice, "Do you think this alliance will hold, Jonas?"

Jonas sighed, the weight of their mission heavy on his shoulders. "It has to, Elara. Silas's threat is too great for us to face alone. If Edward's spell works as intended, it could be a turning point in our struggle."

Elara nodded, her expression determined. "We'll make it work, Jonas. We have no other choice."

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As dawn approached, Jonas and Elara prepared to depart, accompanied by the chosen priest, a wise and serene figure named Father Aelric. The journey back to their kingdom was filled with discussions on the integration of their respective detection methods, strategies for discreetly testing high-ranking officials, and plans for the joint task force.

Back on the eastern continent, Ikem had already returned from his journey to his brother's realm. He could have stayed longer, but he had a kingdom to lead and protect.

At the moment, Ikem had put on his royal garb to look presentable to his cousins, the other demigods, as they were about to have an official meeting regarding the events on the Northern continent. What Ikem dreaded most was that his other cousins might have similar news or worse.

Snapping his fingers, his official throne appeared before him. He sat in it, looking at the seven huge floating mirrors. Almost as if they were sentient, the moment Ikem's eyes fell on them, they began humming. Soon, clear images of his other cousins appeared on them.

Ikem wasn't the only one prepared for the meeting; his other cousins were looking their best too. Ikem's eyes were drawn to Ursula, who smiled at him and said, "You look great, my love."

Ikem's smile widened as his eyes squinted. He smoothly answered back, "So do you, my lady."

Tide rolled his eyes. Among his other cousins, he was the only one tired of the two lovebirds always flirting with each other during official meetings. Of course, this wasn't because watching them reminded him that he had no one.

Tide shook his head at the thought. "No, he had plenty of maidens waiting every night, so he had someone," he thought. But looking at Ikem and Ursula sending air kisses to each other, Tide's eyes started twitching. "After all this while, you two lovebirds still haven't gotten laid?"

Ursula was about to snap back at him when she noticed his new look, even though he tried hiding it under his royal garb. "What happened to you, Tide?" she asked with concern.

Tide sighed. He couldn't hide this from them, so he sighed again. "The demon who has been pestering my sister and me all these years finally caught up with us." Bringing out his arm, which was wrapped in glowing healing seaweeds, he continued, "This was the result."

Ikem looked at Flowua, whose entire being was now radiating. Her previous tired and disturbed look was no longer there, so he asked, "Why isn't Flowua in the same state as you, or maybe wounded?"

Flowua rolled her eyes at Ikem's question. Before anyone could answer, she asked, "It seems our little cousin wants to see his big sister hurt. That saddens me." She pretended to hold her heart like she was hurt.

Ikem felt the impulse to stand up and shout, "I ain't little no more!" But he held himself back, thinking, "I am grown now, so I won't play her games."

Flowua seemed to notice this, and the other demigods had smirks at the edges of their mouths. From the very first time they met, Flowua had always been able to rile Ikem up by always calling him "little cousin." Others called Ikem and Maul that too, but when Flowua did it, for some reason, they couldn't

help but react. Even Maul at one point fell for her games, but now he no longer reacted to her words as he filtered them out. Only Ikem still reacted to her words.

Tide shook his head at his sister's games before answering Ikem's question. "The demon somehow was able to create lesser clones of itself, which attacked Flowua to keep her busy while the main body attacked me and my people."

"He was powerful, but not something I couldn't deal with. It became a problem when..." Tide paused as he looked at Ikem.

"It became a problem when he could access the other world, and when the fight was nearing its end, he gained a power that was able to neutralize my most powerful weapon against him," Tide said as the other demigods frowned. Even Flowua, who already knew about it, looked serious.

Tide continued "An after review of the battle, made me entertain the possibility that the demon may have contacted our parents look alike that reside in that world. It was the only explanation I could come to after the demon became less affected by my weapons"

The air in the room thickened as the gravity of Tide's words settled over the gathering. Each demigod felt the weight of the implications, understanding that this was not just an isolated incident but a potential threat to them all.

Ursula, her playful demeanor now replaced with a solemn expression, spoke up, "If this demon has indeed made contact with our parents' counterparts, it could mean they're gaining knowledge and power from a source we've barely begun to understand. We need to address this immediately."

Xerosis spoke up. "That is disturbing. We haven't personally experienced it, but from Ikem's description, it sounds horrible. They are already hard to deal with, and their ability to access the other world has raised their difficulty level."

Looking around, Xerosis asked, "Have you guys also met other demons that can access that world?"

The other demigods, including Ikem, shook their heads. Tide sighed as he started massaging his forehead. "I thought it was an understatement when Ikem said their life signature, scent, and even

sound disappear completely once the other world is accessed. The only way is to guess where they would appear or attack from to be able to react to it."

Ikem and Maul looked at each other before Maul spoke up. "I have news on the demon on my side, and I can only beg for forgiveness for not informing you all of such important news."

The other demigods looked at Maul, who sighed before speaking up. "There was a war on my side between the demon and the humans there. Mother even made a short appearance at this war."

The end result was the demon is now an ascended god. The demigods fell silent at Maul's news. A demon accessing another world and now a demon ascending to godhood was something they weren't ready for.

An image flew out from Maul's mirror. A picture of the starry sky appeared before the demigods, and Maul pointed at the small shining red star. "You all who have been paying attention to the night sky will probably have noticed the new red light in our sky. I recently learned from Ikem that it's called a 'god's throne.'"

Roth was looking at the red dot before asking, "Why didn't you inform us of this earlier?"

Maul told them the exact same thing he had told Ikem before finally saying, "I also welcomed a new daughter to my home."

The female demigods all had a look that basically demanded Maul bring Lunara out immediately. Ikem coughed before pleading, "He can get her out after we have concluded our meeting."

The demigoddesses nodded before Maul gave Ikem a look that said, "Thanks."

"While his ascension seems to be a problem, he can't do much to our world just like our parents who are not able to affect the outside world. The problem with his ascension is that it brought about a new troublesome faith that poses a danger to our world and the peace we have had for a long time," Maul said as he got quiet, anticipating a question.

"What does his divinity entail, and how is it a problem?" Ursula asked.

"He is known as the god of battle fury and madness." Maul noticed how the demigods frowned hearing the name, which in turn caused him to smile.

"Doesn't sound that pleasing, I know. His divinity is self-explanatory from its name, and after a long discussion with Ikem, we deemed his divinity and church to be something bad for our world," Maul said.

"We all know from past experience that we are not able to put a stop to the expansion of something new, especially if it interests people," Maul sighed as he looked at Ikem.

Ikem took over, asking, "Does anyone else understand how Björn's divinity is something bad for our world and people?"

Xerosis spoke up. "From Maul's explanation and his people's interest in this new religion, I can begin to see where this new expanding church would become a problem. Our world, on the surface level, has known peace for a long time. Even our battle with the demons is unknown to many mortals."

"It's rare we hear of a mortal kingdom being in conflict with each other, not because they are such peaceful people but because most of these mortal kingdoms each have one of our parents as their main worship, and so, in fear of angering the gods or facing repercussions from a group like the Cult of Ikenga, peace became the only option for them."

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Ikem nodded as Xerosis continued, "This said peace could have gone on for a long time, but now with the factor of Björn and his church expansion, the said peace is now at risk of being broken. I can only imagine if Björn's background is exposed, most mortals will have an excuse for the chaos they are about to unleash."

Ikem nodded, appreciating Xerosis's insight. "Precisely. Björn's divinity thrives on conflict, chaos, and madness. His followers will seek out battles and bloodshed, disrupting the fragile peace we've maintained. This new religion will encourage mortals to abandon their fear of the gods in favor of a more aggressive, warlike lifestyle. The balance we've fought to keep for centuries is at risk."

Flowua picked up quickly on Xerosis's thought process as she began speaking. "Learning of the demon's background and relationships with the gods and us demigods will give many mortals an excuse for the chaos they are going to cause."

"There is also the factor that in the case of the godlings, a lot of things and emotions suppressed by them because of our presence will matter no more as they can do as they want once they fall under the influence of Björn's belief." Flowua said, causing every demigod to frown.

Maul, his expression somber, added, "This means we must also consider the possibility of mortal kingdoms allying with Björn's followers. Those seeking power might see his chaotic doctrine as a means to gain an advantage over their rivals. This could lead to a chain reaction of conflicts, destabilizing entire regions."

Roth, who had been quiet the whole time, asked, "So what are the solutions that you and Ikem came up with?" Maul shook his head.

"After a long discussion between Ikem, my son, and myself, we concluded that this is unstoppable unless we take a heavy hand by eliminating everything or everyone who has learned or knows anything about Björn's faith."

"And doing that means we will have to be under constant watch in case someone finds out about our past transgressions, which in turn will cause everyone to turn against us. Like Ikem said, the past has taught us a great lesson: whenever we try to hide something from our people, even under the righteous cause of it being for their own safety, it has never gone well," Maul said, shaking his head.

Ikem had a look of hesitation on his face, and Ursula noticed that, so she asked, "Is something troubling you, my dear?"

Ikem heard her voice, looked at her, and then closed his eyes. "Maul and I thought of a third solution, Only that this solution pushes our moral boundaries"

"This solution stems from deliberately letting our people experience bloodshed and indulge in a few negative activities."

Before anyone could say anything, Ikem continued, "We thought of this because we believe that if our people get a taste of some bloodshed and madness, they won't be easily led astray once they come into contact with Björn's religion."

Ikem raised his hand, pointing at himself as he said, "I say this because I, myself, like the feeling of being in a state of battle. I thoroughly enjoyed myself when I was dealing with the demon that took over one of my apelings. We have all this power, yet there are few moments we are able to use it."

"Our world is filled with individuals with powers ready to test them out in battles but can't do that because of the current peace we maintain. I feel this lust to battle and use my power however I want, yet I can suppress it because I see the overall picture, but can the same be said for others?"

The room fell silent, each person processing Ikem's radical proposal. Most demigods understood Ikem's words as they too sometimes entertain the thought of using their power however they want. A lot of things would go much easier for them if they can forcefully impose their power yet they are stuck with playing things out mellowly for the betterment of things in the long term.

Ursula's face contorted with worry as she tries to find the right words. Finally, she spoke, her voice barely above a whisper.

"But Ikem, deliberately inciting bloodshed and chaos among our own people? Is that truly the path we want to take? We have always strived to protect and guide them, not lead them into darkness."

Ikem met her gaze, his expression unyielding. "I understand your concerns, Ursula. But consider this: if our people experience controlled chaos, they may develop resilience against Björn's chaotic doctrine. They will learn to navigate through disorder and emerge stronger, less susceptible to his manipulations."

"Björn is an outlet for all those superpowered individuals to let go, and it is easy to get lost in the sweetness of battle, especially when you haven't experienced one in a long time. This led to our third solution: letting our children and people get a taste of all this so that they can still maintain some reasoning when it hits them."

A murmur of concern rippled through the group of demigods. The idea of allowing their people to indulge in bloodshed and negative activities was contentious, and Ikem could sense the growing unease.

Tide was the first to voice his dissent. "Ikem, deliberately inciting bloodshed and chaos is a dangerous path. We have worked so hard to maintain peace. Encouraging violence, even with the intention of preparing our people, could easily spiral out of control. It could do more harm than good."

Flowua nodded in agreement. "I understand your reasoning, Ikem, but I fear this approach might backfire. We risk becoming no better than Björn if we resort to such tactics."

Ikem nodded. "Yes, it's a risky plan, but it might be the only way to inoculate our society against the allure of his doctrine."

Maul sighed deeply, rubbing his temples. "Ikem and I debated this extensively. It's not a decision we take lightly. The idea is to introduce conflict in a controlled manner, to temper our people without destroying them. But the risks are immense."

Roth, who had been listening intently, finally interjected. "So, we have three options: we eliminate everyone with knowledge of Björn's faith, risking exposure and betrayal; we let our people face chaos deliberately, hoping they build immunity to Björn's influence; or we do nothing and potentially watch as Björn's followers spread their chaos unchecked."

Maul nodded. "Yes, those are our choices. None of them are ideal, but we must decide which path is the least destructive for our people and the realm."

Xerosis spoke up, a thoughtful look on her face. "Ikem's proposal has merit. Controlled exposure to conflict could indeed help our people build a tolerance to the allure of Björn's teachings. If done carefully, it could serve as a necessary preparation rather than an outright endorsement of chaos."

Maul nodded in agreement. "Exactly. The idea isn't to create anarchy but to allow a structured environment where our people can understand the consequences of unrestrained power. It's a preventative measure, one that could potentially save more lives in the long run."

Roth, still skeptical, shook his head. "But what if this backfires? What if, instead of preparing our people, we end up breeding more followers of Björn? What if this lust for battle you speak of becomes uncontrollable?"

Ikem looked at Roth, his expression grave. "That is a risk we must weigh against the certainty of doing nothing. If Björn's followers grow unchecked, they will bring the battle to us, and our people will be unprepared. At least this way, we can guide the process and hopefully limit the damage."

Ursula's eyes darted around the room, seeking reassurance. "What if there is another way? Perhaps we can find a means to educate our people about the dangers of Björn's doctrine without resorting to violence or secrecy. Knowledge can be a powerful weapon."

Ikem's stern expression softened slightly. "Education is important, Ursula, but knowledge alone might not be enough to counter Björn's allure. His teachings exploit the darker sides of emotional creatures that are normally held down by societal norms. We need to be realistic about what we're facing."

Maul leaned forward, his voice steady. "We need to prepare for the worst while hoping for the best. Let's continue to explore every possible solution. Perhaps a combination of education and controlled conflict might work."

The group fell into a contemplative silence, each lost in their thoughts. The weight of their decisions hung heavily in the air.

Ursula sighed as she said, "This might be a good time for me to bring up how one of the demons on my side has been acting up lately."

"This demon is different from the others, almost like the one on the southern continent. The demon seems to prefer playing mind games. It tried dragging my people into its war games with another interesting individual, Erik, whose race I still haven't identified."

"As for the demon's strength, I can't give an accurate estimation. When I retaliated, I had a blessing from my father, which made my attack stronger than it normally would be, yet somehow the demon survived."

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"Normally, knowing about the demon, I would make a move to halt whatever it is he plans on doing. But the kingdom the demon Silas leads has been recognized as a human kingdom, and humans on my continent know for a fact that we Harpies never make a move against other human kingdoms," Ursula said, sighing.

"There is also the fact that one of my council members did something that would be frowned upon by the humans. For now, it is not yet widespread, but once I make a move with my people, the issue will soon be found out by those curious about our sudden movement."

Maul listened intently, nodding slowly as Ursula spoke. "It seems that the complications are piling up faster than we can manage them," he said, his voice heavy with concern. "This demon, Silas, could pose a significant threat, especially if he's capable of surviving attacks bolstered by divine blessings."

Ursula shook her head. "While it was impressive that he managed to survive, the attack wasn't meant to kill him, only to serve as a warning not to take my people as his pawns."

"The most troublesome thing about him is that he somehow can bypass magical detections and control an individual like a puppet. Everyone on the western continent who has been attacked by his puppets is now working overtime to find out how he does all this."

Ursula continued, "He doesn't dare pull something like that with the harpies. I only worry about the mortal humans. With his manipulation, he can subtly sway their opinions, and if left undetected, it can be a problem in the long run."

Ikem nodded before asking, "Can we retrace our steps and think of a possible solution to all the problems we've laid out, with Ursula's problem being the last, as her situation is somewhat less urgent compared to the rest?"

Ursula and the other demigods nodded in agreement before Roth spoke up. "So, how do we go about solving the problem of the other world?"

Flowua spoke up after him. "There is no solving that other world since we know nothing about it."

Ikem nodded in agreement. "We know nothing of that other world, and I don't think any of us are ready to venture there to find out relevant information about it."

"When I was young and was mistakenly dragged into that world, I had never felt the sensation of certain death like I did there. Even the panther with me at the time was scared to stay much longer in that world, which was one of the reasons I was able to escape," Ikem said, shaking his head.

Tide, almost as if his memory was refreshed, stood up with wide eyes and looked toward his sister before addressing Ikem. "Your words reminded me of how, after my sister appeared, the demon tried using that other world to escape but was scared back out, exposing his location and enabling my sister to deliver the final blow."

Maul spoke up, shaking his head. "All this shows that we aren't ready for that world. Whatever is there that brings such a sense of danger is already a big problem. What about our parents' look-alikes residing in that world?"

Ursula shuddered. "If they, for whatever reason, have the same amount of power as our parents, then this is certainly beyond us and not something we can deal with."

"Then what are we to do about the demons having access to that world? Tide already suspects a potential alliance between the demon and our parents' look-alikes. For now, it was only one demon. What about the others? Have they been in contact with other look-alikes?"

Roth leaned back in his chair, deep in thought. "We need more information, that's clear. But how do we get it without venturing into that other world ourselves? Sending scouts is too risky, and we can't afford to lose more people to that place."

Flowua sighed, rubbing her temples. "We might not need to go there physically. There are other ways to gather information remotely. Divination, scrying, and other forms of magical surveillance could help us learn more about that world and its inhabitants. We just need to find someone skilled enough to perform these rituals."

Ikem nodded, looking relieved. "That's a start. But we need to proceed with caution. We should also consider looking into beasts like the panther that attacked me when I was young. The panther showed a talent for being able to appear in that other world. What if there are others out there with the same talent?"

Maul leaned forward, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "Ikem, that's a good point. If there are beasts capable of traversing between our world and the other, we need to find and study them. They could hold the key to understanding the nature of the rift between the worlds. Additionally, if we can tame or communicate with these creatures, they might be able to gather information for us."

Tide, still pondering Ikem's earlier words, added, "We should start by seeking out those who have shown talent in communicating with beasts. They might have knowledge about how to find such creatures and, with their help, we could tame them."

Ikem, with a smile on his face, said, "There is a new uprising profession among my people called druids. The research of my father's divinity in turn gave birth to this new profession. I don't mind sending out a few capable druids to each of you so that you can get your hands on those beasts, if found, and carry out your own research."

Maul nodded approvingly. "That sounds like an excellent plan, Ikem. Having your druids among us will certainly be helpful. They can be the bridge for our communication with these creatures, which could be crucial in our efforts to gather information."

Xerosis leaned forward, a thoughtful expression on her face. "We should also consider creating a dedicated task force. This group can focus solely on locating and studying these interdimensional beasts. They can work closely with the druids and report back any findings."

"That is good, but where should their headquarters be, and how do we bridge the distance gap between the continents to ensure the group works efficiently?" Flowua asked before continuing, "If we use the gates, it will draw attention, and if we use spell transportation, it will take a lot of mana going back and forth."

Maul nodded, recognizing the logistical challenges Flowua pointed out. "You're right, Flowua. We need a central location that's accessible yet discreet. We also need a more efficient way to bridge the distance gap between continents without drawing unnecessary attention or exhausting our resources."

Ikem, deep in thought, suggested, "What about setting up the headquarters on neutral ground? Like an island out in the deep sea. It will be hidden yet accessible to all of us since we all already are capable of building ships and traversing the sea."

Flowua smiled, mimicking Ikem's expression from earlier. "As for transportation, my people have been researching the gates built by the dragons. They've made great progress, and I believe they can soon create a small gate that can be stationed on whatever island we choose as our headquarters."

Maul's eyes lit up with newfound hope. "An island headquarters sounds perfect, Ikem. It's isolated, naturally defensible, and using ships for transportation is low-profile. Plus, if Flowua's people can create a small gate for quick travel, it solves our logistical problem without exhausting our mana resources."

Ikem nodded in acknowledgement. "Tide, we'll leave the task of finding a suitable island to you, as the sea is your domain and finding one should be easy for you. Please ensure it's well hidden and a place most beings would think twice about venturing into."

Flowua added, "I'll accelerate our research on the dragon gates. I'll assign my best mages and engineers to create a prototype that we can deploy on the island. This gate will only be accessible only to those we trust."

Maul chimed in, "While Tide searches for the island, I can coordinate with my navies to ensure we have safe passage and supply lines. We should also think about setting up decoy routes to confuse any potential spies."

"Good, now for the next issue," Ursula said, and everyone's appearance turned sour.

"After all this, I should be looking into the next stage and ascend as soon as my daughter begins to understand things," Maul whispered to himself, or so he thought, as he felt everyone looking at him through the mirrors.

Looking up, he saw them watching him. He chuckled and said, "I said that out loud, didn't I?"

The other demigods nodded, causing Maul to sigh as he stood up from his seat and began walking around.

"I'm not scared or anything, just tired of all the politics. Like Ikem said, we all have this power, yet we have to restrain ourselves to avoid endangering others or creating further problems for the future."

"After my talk with Ikem, I began to realize how this method of restraint helps our children in the long run. Soon we will all ascend to godhood, leaving this mortal realm to our children, leaving them vulnerable."

"The only protection they will have is how well we prepared them and our past actions as their leaders. Our restraint has made us be viewed positively by humans. We never used our power to enforce our will on them, which gave them the freedom to do as they wish."

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"If we had done the opposite, then as soon as we ascended, we would have to worry about humans joining forces to ensure our people and children are no longer safe. I say all this to emphasize that when it comes to Björn's religious issue, I personally would rather be unrestrained, but that isn't optimal in the long term, which is where my eagerness for ascension stems from," Maul said, sitting back down and looking at the other demigods, his cousins.

The room fell into a contemplative silence after Maul's words. Each demigod seemed lost in thought, pondering the balance of power and responsibility they held.

Ursula, who had remained silent during Maul's monologue, finally spoke up. "Maul, your perspective is valid, but we must remember that ascension doesn't absolve us of our responsibilities. We have a duty to our children, who will inherit these problems no matter how we try to avoid them."

She paused, letting her words sink in. "Björn's religious issue isn't just a matter of restraint or freedom. It's about the legacy we leave behind. If we handle this poorly, it could lead to strife among humans and demigods alike. We've seen how fragile peace can be."

Maul sighed again, leaned back, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "So, how are we to go about dealing with this problem?"

Xerosis spoke up, "I still agree with Ikem's thought on exposing our children and people to a controlled level of bloodshed and madness so that when Björn's religion comes forth, its effect won't be as extensive as it should be."

Tide shook his head. "I don't agree with this method, but it seems like the only way forward for us."

Ursula, in agreement with Tide, had no other choice but to ask, "How do we go about creating a controlled environment of bloodshed and madness for our people?"

Maul's eyes glinted with a mix of determination and unease. "A controlled environment of bloodshed and madness," he echoed Ursula's words, the gravity of the suggestion weighing on his tongue. "We need to simulate conflict, but in a way that allows us to manage the consequences and learn from them without tearing our society apart."

Roth nodded, a sinister smile creeping across his face. "Precisely. Think of it as a grand experiment. We create scenarios that test our children's abilities, their leadership, and their resilience. We could stage conflicts, orchestrate betrayals, and unleash controlled chaos to harden them."

Ursula frowned, her usual calm demeanor shaken. "We'd be playing with fire. How do we ensure it doesn't spiral out of control? How do we make sure our children don't get lost in the madness?"

Tide, who had been silently observing, finally spoke. "We need safeguards. We must be the unseen hands guiding these events, ready to intervene if things go too far. We can use illusions, controlled adversaries, and strategic planning to simulate these scenarios. But most importantly, we must ensure our children understand the purpose behind these trials."

Flowua, seeing everyone in agreement, asked, "How and where should these scenarios be created without drawing attention?"

Maul's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "We'll need isolated locations, places far from prying eyes where we can control the environment completely."

Xerosis nodded. "Agreed. We should also consider creating artificial realms, using our powers to craft spaces tailored to specific trials. Illusions can mask these places from the outside world, ensuring secrecy."

Roth shook his head at his sister's words. "None of what you said is achievable by us right now. Maybe possible in the future, but right now it is impossible."

Xerosis, hearing her brother's words, calmed down before apologizing. "Sorry, I got too carried away."

Ikem smiled at that before his expression turned serious. "You all seem to have a different idea and understanding of what I meant by bloodshed and madness."

"With our children having knowledge of what they are about to do, putting them in these so-called isolated locations won't give us the result we wanted. None of them will take it seriously; some might get carried away and start trying new things since they know it just isn't real."

Maul looked at Ikem. "So what do you propose, brother?"

Ikem closed his eyes before opening them, his expression cold and determined. "I propose we carry out a real live experiment, with the human kingdoms as our main location for the test."

Ursula's expression was filled with horror as she looked at Ikem, who noticed but hardened his heart. "We each find a human kingdom on our continent, send out a batch of our people to that kingdom, and at the same time have a time limit for how long they are to stay in the kingdom before heading back."

"During this process, we can have our people pay attention to the batch sent out. They can watch their performance and decision-making along the way. If there are some among our people who don't agree with the methods of the batch sent out, we can have those in disagreement sent out to deal with that batch."

"We can pick capable watchers who will make sure things never spiral out of control. What do you all think?" Ikem asked as he looked at all his cousins.

The room fell into a tense silence after Ikem's proposal. Each demigod contemplated the gravity and potential consequences of such an experiment.

Maul broke the silence, his voice measured. "Ikem, your idea is bold, but it carries immense risk. Involving human kingdoms means we're not just dealing with our children's reactions but the reactions of entire nations. The potential for chaos is enormous."

Xerosis, now more composed, nodded in agreement. "Maul's right. If we're not careful, we could incite wars, destabilize regions, and create enemies on a scale we can't manage."

Roth added, "We must also consider the ethical implications. We're essentially using humans as pawns in our experiment. How do we justify that to ourselves and to our children when they find out?"

Ikem's gaze remained steady. "The human kingdoms are already on the brink of conflict with the coming of Björn's religion. Our involvement could be seen as merely accelerating the inevitable. And as for the ethical implications, we must remember our primary goal: to prepare our children for the harsh realities they will face. A controlled, real-world environment will teach them far more than any simulation could."

"Besides, I think it is better that we are the ones who incite the conflict, rather than Björn and his worshippers," Ikem said with conviction.

Ursula, her face pale, interjected. "But Ikem, we're not gods playing with pieces on a board. These are real lives at stake. The pain, the suffering—can we truly justify that by saying it's for our children's education?"

Ikem's expression softened slightly as he turned to Ursula. "I understand your concerns, Ursula. But consider the alternative. If Björn's influence continues to spread unchecked, the conflict will come regardless. Wouldn't it be better if we could control the circumstances and mitigate the worst outcomes?"

Ursula, her initial horror giving way to a contemplative resolve, finally spoke. "If we are to proceed with this plan, we need to establish strict rules and boundaries. The watchers must be chosen with great care, ensuring they understand their role is to observe and intervene only when absolutely necessary."

Roth nodded, his brow furrowed. "It's a start. We could choose locations already prone to conflict, where our involvement might not be as disruptive but still offers a significant learning opportunity."

After Roth's words, Maul looked at him and said, "I couldn't help but notice, but Roth and Xerosis have been quite attentive to the meetings compared to the past. Is there something you both aren't telling us?"

Roth, hearing Maul's words, laughed out loud. "Something good has indeed happened."

Looking at his sister Xerosis, Roth said, "A bit late, but just like you guys, we have started our own path to the creation of a new race. For now, there are only ten of them called 'vampires.'"

Looking at Maul, Xerosis said, "Recently, we had a new enlightenment for the rapid expansion of our creation, and your mother, the Lady of the Moon and Motherhood, is required for her blessing."

"At the moment, our race isn't born naturally. Instead, we are limited by the number of humans captured and transitioned. If things work out, we will have a whole new race different from the vampires."

The room fell into silence, the implications of Roth's revelation settling over them, before smiles blossomed across the demigods' faces as they sent their congratulations.

Maul raised an eyebrow. "Vampires, you say? And you wish to involve my mother in this creation process?"

Xerosis nodded. "Yes, Maul. Your mother's blessing is essential for the rapid and natural propagation of our new race. Without it, we're confined to transforming existing humans, which is neither efficient nor sustainable for long-term growth. We want to see if the current vampire can procreate with a human female, and with your mother's blessing, the chances of that can be significantly improved."

Ikem nodded to Roth's words before stating, "Then you and Xerosis won't be carrying out our new plan/experiment. It's better you focus on your new growing race and leave the rest to us."

Xerosis spoke up this time. "We appreciate your concern, cousin, but we still would like to oversee this plan. It isn't useful to us now, but that doesn't mean it won't be in the upcoming future."

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Ikem looked around before asking, "I take it you all are in agreement with this solution?"

Maul nodded his head. "We have no other choice than to agree with this method. It is the best option we have."

In response to his words, the other demigods nodded in agreement. Tide looked towards Ursula before saying, "As for Ursula's issue with the demon Silas, at the moment it is still a problem for the humans, not us godlings."

"After your retaliation and warning, I am sure the demon knows better than to make a move against your people. At the moment, we can each offer help by having our best thinkers come up with solutions or ideas on how he is able to take control of people with no magic signature."

Ursula nodded in agreement to his words. Maul looked at everyone, seeing that they were already a bit tired from the brainstorming, and said, "We should end the meeting here for now. Let's meet up again in two weeks' time. I believe by then we all will have picked out our site of experimentation and candidates for it."

The demigods agreed as the mirror screens started flickering and turning dark. Before Ursula's screen could go dark, Ikem called out, "Can I have a moment with you, Ursula?"

Ursula, hearing Ikem's words, had shame flash in her eyes for a second before she nodded, leaving the call open.

Ikem got down from his throne and walked towards the huge mirror before placing a hand on it. Nothing was said by him; instead, he waited.

A breath of relief left his mouth when he saw Ursula do the same, laying one of her hands on the mirror. The mirror did its magic as they both felt the warmth from each other's hands.

Ikem looked into the eyes of Ursula, who looked like she was standing close to him yet so far away, and asked, "Did I disappoint you today?"

Ursula wanted to look away in shame, but she stopped herself as she knew doing that meant she hadn't grown. She didn't want to disappoint the second male figure in her life.

So she held on as she looked into Ikem's green eyes, staring at her with emotions such as regret, hope, and most importantly, love. Finding herself lost in his gaze, she said, "You didn't disappoint me. Rather, I am the one who disappointed you."

Ikem wanted to say something, but Ursula shook her head to stop him. "Your solution, while extreme, was good. Our children have been sheltered by us for centuries. Our existence has given them a sense of security that will be detrimental in the long run, so this experience is good for them."

Hesitating for a bit, Ursula said, "I have always known you as one who deeply cares for his offspring, so it was a surprise to me seeing you propose such a solution. My reaction to your solution is what is laughable in this situation."

"As your lover, I should have been in agreement with you and trusted you. Instead, I stood opposite of you, making you think that I was disappointed with you," Ursula said, her eyes filled with tears threatening to fall down her cheeks.

"Ursula," Ikem's deep voice called out, causing Ursula to once again focus on Ikem, who was now smiling at her. "You know of my relationship with my dad, just as I know yours."

"My dad clearly loves me, but sometimes his actions make you question if he truly does. At one point, you see him catering to his son's needs; the next, you see him take actions and make plans that will scare you, and the only sense of security you have is that you are somehow related to him."

Ikem paused before looking at Ursula. "Today, I found myself acting like my father. I should have been proud since I have always looked up to him. Yet, when I saw your response to my actions, no matter if I was right, it brought me no happiness if the one I care for feels hurt by my actions."

Ursula's tears began to fall, but she didn't break the connection. She leaned into the mirror, as if trying to bridge the distance between them with sheer willpower. "Ikem," she whispered, her voice breaking slightly, "our fathers' shadows are long, and their legacies heavy. But we are not them. We can learn from their strengths without repeating their mistakes."

Ikem nodded slowly, his gaze never leaving hers. "You're right. We can chart our own path, find our own way to lead and protect our offspring. But we need to do it together, Ursula. I don't want to be a ruler or a lover who makes decisions without considering you, without valuing your perspective."

Ursula's fingers pressed more firmly against the mirror. "And I don't want to be a partner who doubts your wisdom or your intentions. I trust you, Ikem. More than anyone else in this world. It's just... sometimes, fear gets the better of me."

Ikem's eyes softened, his voice gentle. "Fear is natural. It's a sign that we care deeply. I don't fear enough, so I am happy to have you who can fear for the both of us."

Ikenga, watching his son connecting with Ursula, had a bright smile on his face. Suddenly, he heard his brother Crepuscular's voice in his head. "Your son isn't bad."

Ikenga scoffed at his brother's words before responding, "Your daughter isn't bad either."

Crepuscular, his tone prideful yet tinged with sadness, said, "It seems, brother, we haven't been the best parents."

Ikenga frowned, acknowledging the painful truth in his brother's words. "Indeed, we haven't, brother. Yet, they are still growing and trying to leave our shadow. I am happy they found each other."

Crepuscular said nothing more, only a hum of agreement before his presence left Ikenga's mind. Ikenga, looking at his son, shook his head.

Ikenga had had time to reflect on his behavior as a parent during the long time he spent sleeping and watching his son's journey. He could have handled Ikem's training much better. The way he had instilled his own ways of thinking in his son might have been helpful, but it also hindered Ikem from truly developing his own perspective.

Even the current state and outlook of the Apeling Kingdom was exactly how Ikenga had envisioned it. Perhaps Ikem had a different idea of how he wanted the kingdom to look, but Ikenga would never find out as he had never given his son that option.

Ikenga thought about using the excuse of it being his first time as a parent, but he decided that didn't help much. For his son to talk the way he did with Ursula meant that he was growing and was now able to find his own voice, which Ikenga truly appreciated the most.

Red seemed to know of Ikenga's inner turmoil as he patted his shoulder. "You did your best, friend."

Ikenga nodded to his words.

Red looked around the realm before turning back to his dragon form. "I have stayed long enough. If I stay any longer, I might no longer be able to leave."

"Leaving so soon, Red?" Ikenga asked, turning to Red, who nodded.

"I have to, but since I now know the way, I will be paying you regular visits."

Ikenga nodded as a huge portal appeared, into which Red flew. "Take care," Ikenga whispered as the portal closed.

Ikenga sat in silence when, all of a sudden, he felt a calling from the mortal plane. The calling or pull instinctively told him that his physical body could be brought with him.

Using his omniscient view of the planet, he locked onto where the calling was coming from. Seeing who was calling him caused Ikenga's eyes to widen in surprise, as that was the last person he expected to be calling.

"What are you up to?" Ikenga said as he answered the call before his body was pulled away from his realm.

Back on the western continent, it had been a week since Jonas and Elara returned to the human kingdom with the priest. Erik was happy to see the priest, considering it a sign of a possible alliance between him and the Sun Kingdom.

He did what he had done for years, bringing his son in for a big hug. Jonas was happy nonetheless, pleased that he didn't disappoint his father.

Erik made use of the priest immediately, as he no longer felt safe in his own home after his encounter with Silas. Every maid and servant that walked past him was under suspicion.

It got to the level where he was cooking his own meals and serving himself to avoid a jump scare from Silas like the last time. Gathering all the maids and servants that worked under him was easy.

Soon the priest began the long process of cleansing to find out which maid/servants that was compromised. It took two whole days for the priest to finish, yet at the end of the second day, both Erik and the priest had frowns on their faces.

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None of the servants who had been cleansed showed signs of being compromised, which Erik immediately denied as a possibility.

The priest was skeptical too, as he had been informed of the attack on Erik's kingdom. He had even been allowed access to the nobles' homes that were massacred during the incident. The gore and blood were one of the reasons he took his new assignment seriously, as he knew an enemy capable of this wasn't good for their own kingdom.

Both the Priest and Erik stood stunned, looking at the servants.

"I think I should try again," the priest said after a while.

Erik had a look of disappointment on his face "No need, trying a second time will just make us look like fools unable to accept the reality of the situation"

"But how do we find out who is the demon's spawns? I cannot let such an existence do whatever it wants to my people" the priest said, causing Erik to sneak a glance at him before looking away.

He gestured for his son Jonas to join him as he walked away "What are we to do now father?"

"Are you going to live the rest of our lives distrusting everything we see?" Jonas asked Erik who sighed as he looked back at the priest.

"I was hoping the priest spell would work too, Son" Erik said with some hesitation as he stared at his son while thinking to himself "Can I trust my own flesh and blood?"

"What if he is part of Silas plan? But if I don't trust him how can I keep him keep the priest entertained enough to continue his stay without raising suspicions"

All of a sudden Erik stopped walking "Is this really me, thinking this way? Erik looked down at his shaking hands "Am I scared?"

Clenching his fist, Erik turned to his son "I have something important to share with you son, after that do as you will with the information"

Not waiting for Jonas to say anything, Erik continued "During Silas attack on the nobles, I was paid visit by Silas himself in a borrowed body of one of our servants"

"A long talk with him showed that his hand has been behind a lot of events in our kingdom even our steadfast belief in humans power over the powers of the divine"

Jonas stopped as he looked at his father "What does that mean?"

Erik looked back at the priest, this time Jonas joined him "It means that because our kingdom has no main god we worship, Silas has no problem with planting his spawns all over our kingdom. He is offending no god in doing that"

"As for the Sun kingdom, Silas doesn't dare pull off the same trick he does with us as he will anger the sun god" Erik said looking back at Jonas who immediately understood the meaning of his words.

"If what you said is true, then our reason for the alliance with the sun kingdom has been nothing but a lie all this time"

"The main reason they sent the priest to us is because they too were skeptical of Silas playing a hand on them. Also to see if their spell works so they can carry it out on themselves" Jonas said looking at his father who nodded.

"That is why, we can't let the priest or the sun kingdom find out that Silas isn't much of a threat to them to keep the current alliance going. I need some time to figure out a way out of our current situation.

Erik said walking past Jonas who had a look of hesitation on his face. Looking at Silas position, a thought couldn't help but spring up in Erik's mind "Was this also part of Silas planning, deliberately leading us to form a fragile alliance built on a lie and can be easily broken by the truth being exposed"

"No, that's giving him too much credit" Erik thought to himself as he shook his head "But what if?"

The rest of the week, Erik spent alone trying to come up with a solution yet couldn't come up with one.

He kept getting reports on how the priest hasn't given up and is still trying, at the same time reports of his people getting uneasy and looking for any answer of the incident kept springing up.

After the nobles were killed, Erik tried his best to make sure that it was kept under wraps and no civilians would take note of what happened.

Sadly that only bought him a week before rumors began springing up. Erik didn't know how but the people were now worried about the loved ones truly being the one that they have loved or loved them.

The rumors haven't been confirmed yet but reports on families, couples fighting each other because they suspect a slight change of attitude in their partner was increasing each day.

Erik knew that they were waiting for an answer from him but he also knew going out there will have the opposite effect.

No need of informing them if he truly has no solution, it will only increase the spreading fear and distrust they have for each other.

Erik himself hasn't been free of torture over the last past weeks, he feels himself losing his mind slowly. He tried playing it off but it wasn't helping.

He found it hard trusting anyone in front of him. The situation got so bad when his queen knocked on his room to accompany him for the night.

Erik found himself that night, facing the door to his room with his spear in hand like he was expecting an enemy.

The queen happened to come at a bad time so as soon as she knocked, Erik thrust out his spear ready to blow a hole through her.

Thankfully for the pendant he gifted her, a mana shield surrounded her blocking the attack but not before carrying her and breaking down the walls behind her.

Erik's action caused a lot of noise, the first to get there was Jonas who was taken back by the scene.

Jonas rushed to his mother's side as Erik stood frozen, the reality of what he'd nearly done hitting him like a ton of bricks. The queen's eyes widened in shock and hurt, but she quickly masked her fear with a forced calmness.

"Erik, what has happened to you?" she asked, her voice trembling despite her efforts to keep it steady.

Erik dropped his spear, his hands shaking uncontrollably. "... I don't know. I thought..." His voice broke, and he couldn't finish the sentence.

Jonas helped his mother to her feet, her mana shield dissipating as the pendant's glow faded. "Father, you need to rest. You're not yourself."

Erik shook his head violently. "Rest? How can I rest when our entire kingdom is on the brink of chaos? When I can't even trust my own mind?" His eyes darted to the priest, who was standing a few feet away, watching the scene unfold with a stern expression.

The priest stepped forward. "Lord Erik, you must let me help you. My spell may not have been of much help with Silas' case but it has no problem giving your mind the peace it needs. I can perform a purification ritual, but you must allow it."

Erik's face twisted in anger and fear. "No! I will not be a puppet to your spells. I need to think clearly, not be clouded by more magic!"

Jonas looked between his father and the priest, his own heart torn. "Father, maybe he's right. If there's any chance he can help, we should take it. For your sake, for our kingdom's sake."

Erik closed his eyes, fighting the internal battle within himself. After a long, tense moment, he finally nodded. "Very well. Do what you must, priest".

The queen still had a smile on her face seeing all this, Jonas went to her offering to help her back to her room but she shook her head and said "Your father needs you more now"

Turning around the queen made her way back to her room, Closing the door behind her. The smile on her face was wiped out as she fell to the ground with her whole body shaking.

The pendant on her neck at the moment made a cracking sound as it fell apart "I almost died" She said as she stood up heading for the window which she opened before taking a deep breath.

She made a praying gesture as she closed her eyes, Imagining a flaming bird. A golden hue covered the queen before a small bird covered in fire came out from her forehead before flying out of the window into the night sky.

"Please help my husband," She whispered before closing the window.

The flaming bird took to the sky. It took a while before the bird broke into the sky space owned by the harpies. The bird flew past a lot of Harpies cities seen on the clouds heading for the capital city.

Chapter 219:

The next day, the harpy left its home clad in his council member attire, as he made his way to the place.

As soon as he got to the palace, he saw that everyone was already waiting for him so he bowed before moving to the center to present his case "I got a message from our scout about the current situation of the humanity kingdom and the bad mental state of their king Erik"

The harpy proceeded to inform Ursula everything he knew before Ursula nodded "We have reimburse our scout for her hard work, Find her a pendant with similar effect that can guarantee her safety"

The harpy nodded as he went back to his position, Looking around the court Ursula said "It seems our subsidiary human kingdom the people of the sun were not of much help to Silas case"

Iris spoke up this time "I may have any idea after hearing the current report"

Ursula looked at her gesturing for her to continue "It has been proven to be a fact that Silas manipulation is something not detectable by magic, yet we all are stuck trying to use magic to solve something that already shows it isn't magical"

"This leads to my other hypothesis which is that his manipulation is something biological, innate within those that fall under his puppetry. What if in some way, he doesn't apply any manipulation tactics instead it is more like a natural thing for under his control to fall under it" Iris said as she looked at everyone's confused face.

Iris found it hard to explain her thought so she said "We always have thought that Silas manipulation strips the person of their will and mind, my hypothesis is the opposite of that, which is that he doesn't strip their will instead he commands them and they obey like he planted a switch inside of them"

"How is that possible, for the method you suggest to work that means that he must have had to take many away from their home with no one noticing to do whatever you are suggesting he did to them" Ursula said.

Bernard the stubborn old man also shook his head "That many people can't go missing without raising an alarm so while there is some sense in what you are saying, it's impossible for that to happen"

Kael the youngest council member spoke up "What if Silas didn't have to take people away from there home instead he helped added to the population of the humanity kingdom"

There was a moment of silence after Kael words even Iris was taken back as things began making sense to her as she looked at Bernard remembering his words "How can humans under the kingdom led by a demon be normal humans?"

The humanity kingdom in its early days took in humans from different parts of their continent to be able to grow to the size it was now. Erik and Silas enmity has been there since the Harpies learnt of the two existence, considering Silas race such an underhanded method isn't below him.

Iris's eyes widened as she absorbed Kael's suggestion. "That makes sense. Silas could have seeded his influence within the population from the very beginning. He wouldn't need to abduct anyone; he could simply let his followers integrate naturally into the society, unnoticed and undetected."

Ursula nodded slowly, her expression grave. "If Silas has had agents planted within the kingdom for generations, his influence would be deeply entrenched. These agents might not even be aware of their true allegiance until he activates them."

Bernard frowned, his stubbornness giving way to reluctant understanding. "So, these people would appear entirely normal until Silas flips this 'switch' and they start obeying his commands without question. But how do we identify them? How do we break his hold over them?"

Iris had a look of hesitation on her face which Ursula caught, Kael also did and he seemed to have an idea on what Iris was about to ask, all he did was narrowed his eyes looking at Ursula.

"Do you have an idea, Iris?" Ursula asked.

Iris looked at Ursula before sighing "I do have an idea but It may not sit right with your highness"

Ursula frowned but gestured for Iris to continue. Iris hesitated again before sighing before she spoke with her head down no daring to look at Ursula "Since we are in the thought process Silas issue being

biological, I request for a batch of humans, dozen or maybe less to dissect and finding out the root problem from their genetic makeup"

The silence this time was much worse than when Kael spoke up, Every Harpy here knew of their Queen/Mother kind and gentle soul, so they already knew their queen answer after Iris words but to everyone surprise they all got an answer that cause all of them to look at Ursula with wide opened eyes.

"Okay" Ursula said in response to Iris' request.

Iris, Bernard, and Kael were taken back by the response. They all responded with "Huh?"

Ursula rolled her eyes at their antics, "You heard me, I agree but"

Hearing but made all the Harpy took a sigh of relief but quickly paid attention to here Ursula words "The humans hand picked for your research must have a thorough background check on them, find those humans sinful and scorned by their own people, Leave any human proven innocent alone"

Iris nodded, a mix of relief and determination on her face. "Understood, your highness. We will ensure that only those deemed truly reprehensible by their own society are chosen."

"Now can you inform us on why you need humans to dissect?" Ursula asked.

Iris nodded excitedly "I have always wanted to dig deeper into the very make up of every being but till now I have only had access to the dead body of Harpies who agreed to the process, now an opportunity to learn of another make of a new race is hard to pass by" Iris was about to rant off but caught herself as she noticed the look on Ursula face.

Coughing to cover up her embarrassment, Iris said "It is so that I can find the possible switch left by Silas. If there really is a switch then it will will seen as the body of the compromise will show its difference from normal humans"

Ursula considered this for a moment before nodding. "Very well. Proceed with caution, Iris. This is uncharted territory, and we must remain vigilant."

Kael once again spoke up "If this really is as we thought then the current alliance between the sun kingdom and the humanity kingdom will end very soon"

Ursula looked at Kael and asked "Why do you say that?"

Kael had a scholarly aura as he said "From our history book and origin of the sun kingdom, no human was accepted from other parts of the continent. The book states that we found an alliance of villages who were against the idea of Silas and Erik so we offered them up which happened that they grew to the current sun kingdom"

"If Silas manipulation really works by him sending out minions then there was no way for him to have sent one to the sun kingdom as they never took in other humans" Kael said, causing Bernard to look at him up and down before nodding.

Ursula sighed "We worry about that later, for now let us solve Silas problem"

Back in the human kingdom, Erik sat in his chambers, staring blankly at the reports and maps scattered across his desk. The priest had tried his best with the purification ritual, but it had only provided temporary relief. Erik's mind still felt like a battlefield, his thoughts a chaotic swirl of paranoia and fear.

Jonas entered the room quietly, carrying a tray with some food and a steaming cup of herbal tea. "Father, you need to eat something. You haven't had a proper meal in days."

Erik glanced up, his eyes haunted. "I can't, Jonas. How can I think of food when everything is falling apart?"

Jonas set the tray down and took a seat across from his father. "Because you need your strength to fix things. Starving yourself won't help anyone. We need you to be strong, to lead us through this."

Erik sighed, running a hand through his hair. "I don't know if I can do this, Jonas. I don't even trust myself anymore. What if I hurt you or your mother again?"

Jonas reached out and took his father's hand. "We're here for you. You don't have to do this alone. Let us help you. Let us be your strength when you feel weak."

At that moment, a soft knock came at the door. One of the guards stepped in, bowing slightly. "My lord, there are visitors from the harpy kingdom. They say they have come to help."

Erik heard that immediately perked up, as he ordered out loud "Have them wait in the place room, keep them entertained. I will be only my way after cleaning up"

Chapter 220:

Iris and her team sat in the palace room waiting, food and drinks were being served to them. Iris and her team didn't mind indulging in the human culture so ate and drank while sharing jokes among themselves.

All of a sudden, Iris and her team looked towards the throne, they could feel a powerful presence walking out from behind the throne. Seeing Erik for the first time in flesh confirmed Iris' suspicion that he wasn't really a human.

"King Erik, we come with the hope and intent to aid you in this dark time. We believe we have a way to counter Silas's influence and restore the so desperately needed"

Erik stood, his posture still tense but his expression one of caution. At first he was ecstatic of hearing that the Harpies are willing to help but as he went back to his room to prepare himself, the excitement died down as he began thinking clearly once again.

"If even the Harpies were able to solve Silas' problem for them. The discussion on their actions against his envoys still had to be brought up"

"Especially considering the fact that even after their bizzare action, they still proudly made their way into his home which was an insult to him and his kingdom"

"He could accept their help now but that means he will lose all credibility to hold them accountable for their past actions as they can simply overrule it by claiming that they were the savior of his people " Erik thought to himself.

After dealing with Silas, Erik was now able to see beyond the current situation. If this problem is solved, another problem will arise which will be his own people questioning him of his ability to govern their kingdom.

What will he say to the family of those envoys dropped from the sky, it may seem that that situation has been forgotten but that was only because of Silas issue which took everyone's mind of their fellow human being dropped down from the sky and turned into the red paint on the ground.

Meeting with the Harpies, Erik can find to kill two birds with one stone.

"I appreciate your willingness to assist us," Erik said slowly, "but we need to address past grievances before we can move forward. Your actions against my envoys cannot be overlooked. How can I trust your intentions now?"

Iris expression turned cold as she regarded Erik "You trusting our intentions means nothing to me or my people, you are the one in the desperate need for help"

"We just saw this as an opportunity to create countermeasures in the case our people face the same problem. As for our action against your people, you should be thankful that the might of the Harpies kingdom didn't descend upon your people for daring to make a move at our mother" Iris said in a cold icy tone.

Erik's eyes narrowed at Iris's words, the room growing tense with the weight of the conversation. Jonas, standing beside his father, felt the need to interject. "We understand the gravity of the situation, but you should be aware that the attack against your queen wasn't a deliberate action of ours, it was all Silas doing"

Iris was clearly pissed off at Eriks' tone at the beginning of their meeting so she snapped back at Jonas "Who's fault is it that Silas spawn was able to get that close to my people and our queen"

Looking at Erik she said "If you had been a competent leader, you would have known what was going on with your people and who to trust before sending them out to the opposite race to seek help. Silas is at fault still doesn't absolve the fact that you are responsible for the actions of those you sent out"

Erik's jaw clenched, his voice cold as he responded, "I don't need a lecture on leadership from someone whose people resort to threats and violence at the slightest provocation. We are all victims of Silas's machinations. Blame will get us nowhere."

Iris stepped forward, her tone sharp. "Do not mistake our caution for weakness. We defended ourselves against what we perceive as a threat. Your incompetence put us in that position."

Jonas, trying to mediate, raised a hand. "We need to focus on the present. The past grievances will only hinder our progress. Both sides have suffered. We must work together if we are to overcome Silas."

Iris regarded Jonas with a mixture of irritation and respect. "Fine. But know this: we will not tolerate any further incompetence. Our cooperation is conditional on your ability to manage your own affairs."

Erik's eyes burned with suppressed fury, but he knew she was right. "Agreed. But let me make one thing clear: any harm to my people in the course of your so-called "Help" will result in severe consequences. Do not underestimate our resolve."

The room was thick with tension as the two sides sized each other up. One female member on Iris' team touched her shoulder causing Iris to take a deep breath.

Looking at Erik she said "You might have spoken to early"

Erik looked at her confused, "What do you mean?"

Iris sighed once again as she said "Our help with Silas situation will involve in some lethal harm to the group of people you choose to give us for the research"

Erik's expression turned cold as he regarded Iris and her team. Jonas could hear the increasing heartbeat of his father, so he anxiously stepped forward and said to Iris, "Can you explain?"

Iris nodded. "It has become clear that Silas's situation can't be dealt with using magical solutions, which leaves the other option open."

Before Iris could continue, Erik interrupted, "Biological."

Iris raised a brow at Erik's words. "You are certainly full of surprises, King Erik."

Erik, not minding her words, was deep in thought. "How could I have forgotten this option? It clearly should have been the only option left after magic didn't work".

This brought Erik's memory back to his people, especially his younger days in school. The study of body structure and makeup wasn't a very popular topic for the elves since they all had magic, and studying magic was much more interesting for most elves. Yet, the study of body structure and makeup was an emerging field among the elves; it was even made a compulsory class needed to graduate.

Shaking off the memory, Erik regarded Iris, knowing he was about to face a new dilemma.

"We have reason to believe that at the beginning of your kingdom's foundation, Silas sent out a few humans with what we call, for now, 'a switch' inside of them to lay low within your kingdom. When it suits him best, the switch is activated," Iris said, watching Erik and Jonas's expressions closely.

Hearing Iris's words, Erik tried his best to stay calm, but the sound of his clenching fist was clearly picked up by Iris, who thought to herself, Interesting. Meanwhile, Jonas had a look of horror on his face as he looked at his father.

It began making sense to him, "his father's actions over the past weeks. He must have learned of this from Silas, which led to his paranoia".

Erik didn't know what was going on in Iris and Jonas's minds. But he himself knew what was going on in his mind "confliction". He could immediately agree to Iris's words and have her pick out a group of humans, but what kind of king would that make him? And what was he to say to the families and friends of those taken away?

Erik looked at Iris and said, "You need humans to find out those switches, but how can you guarantee that those picked out by you aren't just normal humans with no switches in them?"

Iris looked at Erik, remembering her discussion with Kael before she left. Kael had said to her, "There are some loopholes to your solution." That loophole was what Erik had just pointed out.

That was also the reason she chose to meet Erik upfront and not go about kidnapping humans from their homes. She could have taken a dozen humans away and dissected them, yet there was a high probability that none of the humans would be the ones she needed.

Kael had advised her to meet with Erik, as he could help her pinpoint certain individuals with a higher likelihood of having a switch inside them.

Taking a deep breath, Iris spoke, "That is precisely why I approached you, King Erik. Randomly selecting humans would be inefficient and unethical. You know your people better than we do. We need your assistance to identify those who might harbor Silas's influence".

Erik considered this, his mind racing. "So you want me to hand over my people to you based on suspicion? How can I justify that to my kingdom?"

Iris replied, "This is not about suspicion but about saving lives. If we identify the right individuals, we can potentially save your entire kingdom from Silas's grasp"