

## Guardian gods 241

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As they stood there, enveloped in their shared grief, Jonas returned informing him of the gathered council members. Erik released his wife, his face a mask of resolve as he walked out of the office with Jonas.

Getting to the palace room, Erik sat down "let me first start by apologizing of my absence on the court, the last time we left off was when we learnt of the possible danger in our home"

"I am sure you all have noticed, a few missing members are not available. This is only because of two things which is, they have been killed Under Silas attack or because we recently learned of them being compromised".

Seeing the court surprised faces, Erik spoke to make it clearer "They weren't comprised willingly, a lot of them don't even know they are comprised and has become Silas puppet"

"For the past month, I have been looking for a way to solve our current problem and I finally did after a few sleepless night with my son"

Erik paused, letting his words sink in. The council members looked at each other, a mix of shock and concern etched on their faces. He could see the worry in their eyes, the dawning realization of the gravity of the situation.

"I understand this is difficult to accept," Erik continued, his voice steady. "But we must face this reality head-on. The parasites have infiltrated our ranks, and we have no choice but to take drastic measures to protect our kingdom."

One of the council members, a middle-aged woman with a determined expression, stood up. "Your Majesty, what exactly is the plan? How do we root out those compromised, without causing panic or harm to the innocents?"

Erik nodded, appreciating her directness. "We have developed a series of magical sensors that can detect the unique energy signature of the parasite. These sensors have been strategically placed throughout the kingdom. When activated, they will reveal the locations of the infected."

A murmur of apprehension spread through the room. Erik raised a hand to silence it. "I know this sounds invasive, but it's the only way to ensure our safety. Once we identify the infected, we will isolate them to prevent further spread. Our priority is to protect those who are still free from the parasite."

Another council member, an elderly man with a long white beard, leaned forward. "And what of the infected, Your Majesty? What will become of them?"

Erik took a deep breath. This was the hardest part. "The parasite is so deeply integrated into its hosts that removal or destruction of the parasite would result in the death of the host. We are working tirelessly to find a way to neutralize the parasite without harming those it has infected, but as of now, we have not found a viable solution."

The room fell into a heavy silence. Erik could see the pain and fear in their eyes, reflecting his own inner turmoil. "I do not make these decisions lightly," he said, his voice filled with conviction. "But we must do what is necessary to protect our kingdom and our people."

The woman who had spoken earlier stood again, her expression resolute. "We trust in your leadership, Your Majesty. We will do whatever it takes to protect our home."

One young member spoke up "Can we see the affected area?" ERik nodded as he waved his hand, and a huge hologram appeared in the courtroom.

"By the gods," the young man whispered, his voice filled with horror. "There are so many."

The room fell into a stunned silence as the council members stared at the hologram, the red pings spreading across the map like a plague. Erik allowed them a moment to absorb the gravity of the situation before addressing them again.

"Now that we understand the scope of the infestation," Erik began, his voice steady, "we need to discuss how we can isolate those who are compromised without alerting Silas or causing mass panic."

The elderly man with the white beard, whose name was Lord Greystone, spoke up first. "Your Majesty, we could use routine health checks as a cover. We've done them before to prevent the spread of disease. It wouldn't be suspicious if we initiated them again."

Erik nodded thoughtfully. "A good suggestion, Lord Greystone. We can use the pretext of a new health protocol to begin identifying the infected. But we need to ensure that our methods are discreet and that the results are communicated securely."

Lady Althea, the woman who had spoken earlier, added, "We should also consider the logistics of quarantine. If we suddenly start isolating people without a clear reason, it will raise suspicion. We need a cover story, perhaps an outbreak of a rare illness that requires immediate isolation and treatment."

"Yes," Erik agreed. "We can use the story of a rare, non-lethal illness that requires quarantine to prevent it from spreading. This way, we can isolate the infected without causing alarm. However, we must ensure that the quarantined areas are secure and monitored closely."

Jonas spoke up "Not to alarm anyone or demean the solution brought up, but will our people believe and listen to our words right now when it matters"

"We haven't been competent in our leadership for the past month, they all have question running through their mind that needs to be answered by us, question we can't really answer right now because of the situation"

"While the solution brought by lord Greystone and lady Althea sounds good, I find it hardly applicable because of our current relationship with our people" Jonas said as he slightly bowed his head to show his respect.

The council fell silent, the weight of Jonas's words settling over them. Erik looked at his son, appreciating his honesty and insight. He knew Jonas was right; their relationship with the people had been strained, and any drastic action might be met with suspicion and resistance.

Erik took a deep breath and addressed the council. "Jonas brings up a valid point. Our people need to trust us if we are to implement such measures. We must rebuild that trust quickly and effectively."

Lord Greystone nodded slowly. "Indeed, Your Majesty. Perhaps we should consider a more transparent approach, one that includes the people's cooperation rather than imposing measures upon them."

Lady Althea added, "We could start by holding public forums, explaining the situation to the extent that we can without revealing the true nature of the threat. If the people feel they are part of the solution, they might be more willing to cooperate."

Erik nodded. "Transparency and inclusion. We need to involve community leaders in these discussions. They hold sway over their respective communities and can help us spread the word and maintain order."

Jonas spoke again, his voice steady. "We could also use this opportunity to demonstrate our competence and dedication. If we show the people that we are taking decisive action to protect them, it might help restore their faith in our leadership."

Lady Althea suggested, "We could organize a series of public health initiatives, starting with a kingdom-wide health check campaign. This would not only serve our purpose of identifying the infected but also show that we are committed to the well-being of our citizens."

Erik turned to Sir Roland, the seasoned warrior. "Sir Roland, we will need increased security to manage these public gatherings and ensure they proceed smoothly without causing undue alarm. Can your men handle this?"

Sir Roland nodded. "Absolutely, Your Majesty. We can deploy discreet security teams to maintain order and protect both the public and the healers."

Erik addressed the entire council. "We must also prepare for the possibility that Silas will try to disrupt our efforts. We need to strengthen our intelligence network to monitor any signs of interference and be ready to respond swiftly."

Lord Greystone leaned forward. "And what of the infected who are identified during these health checks? How do we isolate them without causing panic or alerting Silas?"

Erik paused, thinking carefully. "We will need to establish quarantine zones under the guise of specialized treatment centres. These centres must be secure and equipped to handle the infected without revealing their true condition. We will also need to develop a communication strategy to reassure the families of those quarantined."

Lady Althea spoke up "Is communication between us and the family of those infected really needed in such a situation. No matter how we try to sugar coat what we plan on doing, it does not change the fact that we are planning to kill all those quarantined. Communication with family members will sure make this harder to do"

"I believe we should instead start thinking about how to break the news to the people that those quarantined aren't going to make it" Lady Althea said, looking around the palace room.

Erik felt a heaviness settle in his chest at Lady Althea's words. The stark reality of their situation weighed on everyone present. He knew that honesty and transparency were crucial, but the brutal truth could lead to chaos and despair.

"You bring up a valid point, Lady Althea," Erik acknowledged. "However, I believe we need to balance transparency with hope. We cannot allow panic to spread uncontrollably. Our people need to believe that we are doing everything in our power to save their loved ones, even if the reality is grim."

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Lord Greystone nodded in agreement. "We must tread carefully. If we reveal our inability to save the infected too soon, we risk losing the trust and cooperation of the people."

Jonas spoke up, his tone thoughtful. "What if we focus on finding a "cure"? We can present the quarantine zones as research and treatment centers, emphasizing our ongoing efforts to discover a way to neutralize the parasite. This way, we maintain hope and cooperation while buying ourselves time."

Erik looked around the room, seeing nods of agreement. "A sound strategy. We will frame the quarantines as part of a larger research initiative aimed at saving lives. This narrative will help maintain public trust and support."

Lady Althea sighed but nodded. "Very well. We will need to prepare our healers and researchers to support this narrative. They must be ready to explain the situation and manage the expectations of the families."

Sir Roland added, "We should also ensure that our security forces are trained to handle any unrest that may arise. If families become desperate, they might try to breach the quarantine zones."

Erik nodded, feeling the gravity of the situation. "Agreed. We will increase our security measures and prepare for any eventualities. But we must also ensure that our approach remains compassionate and humane."

Jonas looked at his father, determination in his eyes. "We need to act swiftly. The longer we wait, the more difficult it will be to control the situation."

"Indeed," Erik replied. "Let's outline our immediate actions. First, we will initiate the kingdom-wide health check campaign under the guise of a new health protocol. Next, we will establish the quarantine zones as specialized treatment and research centers. Our healers and researchers will be briefed on the narrative we are presenting to the public."

He turned to Sir Roland. "Increase security around these centers and prepare your men for potential unrest. We must maintain order without resorting to unnecessary force."

Erik then addressed Lady Althea. "Work with our communication teams to develop a strategy for managing the narrative. We need to convey hope and progress, even as we face this dire threat."

Finally, he looked at Jonas. "You and I will oversee the implementation of these plans. We must be visible and proactive, showing our people that the royal family are committed to their safety and well-being."

The council members nodded to Erik's words. Erik seeing everyone in agreement said "Now we all have come to an agreement, where should we use as the quarantine area"

"A place big enough to take in all those quarantined," Erik said as he looked around.

A lord who has been silent spoke up "I would like to offer my territory as a place of quarantine, it's big enough to take in all those infected and since it's developed, it will better convince our people that we really are trying to help them"

The room fell silent as everyone turned to the lord who had spoken. Lord Eldric, known for his vast and prosperous lands in the northern part of the kingdom, met their gazes with a determined look.

Erik considered his offer carefully. "Lord Eldric, your generosity is appreciated. Your territory is indeed well-suited for such an endeavor, both in size and infrastructure. Are you prepared for the potential risks this entails?"

Lord Eldric nodded solemnly "I understand and I am doing all this for my own selfish reason. My brother should have been in the one sitting in this seat but he unfortunately met his end with his family during Silas attack. Since we are planning of killing those dead, I want it to be done in the land my brother led"

Erik nodded "I am sorry for your loss" Looking at everyone, Erik said "Since lord Eldric has offered his place, we are responsible for the safety of those not infected, we are to make sure that they are led away safely from Eldric territory before we begin moving those found infected".

Lady Althea spoke up, her voice steady. "We need to organize an evacuation plan immediately. This will require the cooperation of local authorities and a clear communication strategy to avoid panic."

Sir Roland nodded in agreement. "I'll dispatch my men to assist with the evacuation. We need to ensure that those leaving do so in an orderly manner."

Jonas added, "We should also provide temporary housing and support for those displaced. Ensuring their well-being will help maintain public trust."

Erik then addressed Lord Eldric. "Your leadership will be crucial during this transition. Your people will look to you for guidance and reassurance. Make sure they understand the necessity of these actions."

Lord Eldric bowed his head. "I will do my best to honor my brother's memory and protect my people."

As the meeting concluded, Erik turned to Jonas. "You did well, my son. Your insights were invaluable."

Jonas smiled slightly, a look of determination in his eyes. "Thank you, Father. We will get through this together."

Erik nodded, placing a hand on Jonas's shoulder. "Yes, we will. Now, let's get to work. There's much to be done."

a scout approached and bowed. "Your Majesty, the first group of evacuees is ready to depart from the outskirts of the capital."

Erik took a deep breath. "Very well. Let's ensure their journey is safe and orderly. Lady Althea, please accompany the healers to oversee the relocation. Jonas, coordinate with the local authorities in the capital to manage any immediate concerns."

Lady Althea and Jonas both nodded and set off to their tasks. Erik watched them go, feeling a mixture of anxiety and determination. This was only the beginning, but the wheels were in motion.

Later that day, Erik joined the first convoy of evacuees at the city gates. He saw families clinging to one another, faces etched with worry and uncertainty. He approached a woman holding a small child and placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

"We are doing everything we can to keep you safe," Erik said softly. "Your cooperation and bravery are vital to our efforts."

The woman nodded, tears in her eyes. "Thank you, Your Majesty. We trust you."

Erik hearing her word, clenched his fist hard as he showed her a smile before turning away, his steps heavy.

As the convoy began its journey, Erik mounted his horse, riding alongside Sir Roland at the head of the procession.

They traveled through the kingdom, passing through towns and villages where more evacuees joined the procession. At each stop, Erik spoke with the people, offering words of encouragement and reassurance. The presence of the royal family provided a beacon of hope amidst the uncertainty.

Finally, as they approached Lord Eldric's territory, Erik saw the preparations in full swing. Temporary shelters were being erected, and healers were setting up their stations. Lord Eldric stood at the entrance, greeting the arrivals with a somber yet welcoming expression.

"Welcome to my lands," Lord Eldric said, his voice carrying over the crowd. "We are here to support you and find a way through this crisis together."

Erik dismounted and approached Lord Eldric. "Your leadership is invaluable, Lord Eldric. Together, we will see this through."

Lord Eldric nodded. "For my brother and for our kingdom."

In the same continent, Silas who has been healing up since his encounter with Ursula can be disguised walking around his whole territory.

Ashes can be seen trailing behind him with each step he takes, moving like living things and seeping into the earth, leaving no trace.

Crepuscular, who was paying attention from his realm, sees something different with his divine eyes. Silas's walk around his territory isn't random but deliberate.

Almost like he was drawing something on the ground, "A magic circle?" Crepuscular thought to himself in confusion.

"What does he plan on doing with a magic circle that big?" Silas's territory, while not as big as Erik's, was still large, so a magic circle this size isn't a good thing, no matter how you look at it.

Every time Silas took a step, he muttered something. This went on for days. With Silas's speed, he walked all the way back to his capital city.

The site where his previous home stood had become a place that aroused greed in those who saw it from afar only to be disappointed once they got closer. After the fire burned out, it turned the scorched land into glass.

It looked like a diamond mine as the sun rays shone down, sending out glitters. Above the hole was the new floating home of Silas.

The door to the castle opened before closing again as he walked inside. Before the door closed completely, Silas looked back at the sky, where the sun was still shining bright.

"Not yet," he said as he walked further into the castle, filled with purple-colored flames acting as a source of light. Sitting on his throne in silence, Silas smirked evilly.

"The young elf has grown up. It is quite the right time and moment to savor this dish that has been cooking for a long time," Silas said out loud to the empty palace.

He knew it was only a matter of time before his method was figured out after he noticed how the harpies were helping Erik. Fast forward to last week, he began noticing movement among his puppets.

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They were no longer scattered as before; instead, he noticed how they were being clumped and guided together in one place, far away from ordinary people.

He was very tempted at the time to command the puppets to cause chaos and break the fragile trust Erik had built with his people.

But after some consideration, he didn't do that. Instead, he adjusted his plan, one which worked even better for him and one that would bite back at Erik's plan.

This plan included the walk he took over his territory. Opening his mouth, a big worm the size of a hand crawled out. After clawing out, the bug squeezed together and fell asleep.

This bug is the queen and birth mother of all the parasites. Parasites born from other parasites all hold a strong connection to this bug. As Silas stated before, these parasites in the abyss were beings being stomped over, and no demon or existence in the abyss paid attention to them.

Yet there is always an exception, which is a parasite that has managed to host a demon at its weakest moment, showing the abyss demon and race the exceptional talents of these parasites.

These parasites, after taking a host, gain the ability to devour each other to grow stronger. Of course, if this was all, then the demons wouldn't be impressed as devouring is the basic ability of all abyss residents.

What impressed them was how, with numbers, the talent of these parasites shows its full capability. Elites can be grown in a day as long as there is enough energy, and these are not the usual cannon fodder elites, but elites with high battle IQ and decisive strategic decisions. This level of coordination and intelligence was unheard of among the lower life forms in the abyss, and it was this very trait that allowed the parasites to stand out. They were not just mindless creatures; they were an organized, ever-adapting force.

Now the question is why such a race is taken for granted in the abyss. It all stems from the inherited memory, as at one point, a parasite queen was close to becoming an abyss lord but unfortunately fell, and memories of this race were grafted into the inheritance memory.

After the memory appeared, the weakness of this race became apparent to the demons, which was that if there was no element of luck, the parasite would continue being a parasite as it normally had no power to take over a demon on its own.

The demons, being a race that adapts, learned from the memory, so it became even harder for the parasites. Now, even at the moment of weakness, most demons ensure that the existence of the parasite is never close to them.

But that wasn't the case for humans, which Silas took advantage of. The ashes he dropped all over his territory was a magic circle he was going to activate once the moon came out. This magic circle with the cooperation of the parasite queen will induce the state of devouring all the parasites in the circle.

Even his army will be involved in this process, only his generals were left out in this process.

The magic circle is set up in stages, the outer part will include all those humans who have been parasitized but their parasite is laying dormant in them when the magic circle activates so will the parasite and the devouring will take place.

The inner part of the circle includes the elites of the human in his kingdom, in the world power setting these include those of the second and third stage.

The last part of the circle is for his army, where those stronger can become stronger, if he is lucky a new general will grow out of it, possibly reaching the fourth stage like other generals.

This magic circle is also half sentient and can make accurate judgment, for example a normal human who has grown to the elite level will be pushed up a stage where he can continue evolving, So this time everyone has a chance of going to a higher stage.

Seeing that the sun was about to go down, Silas closed his eyes with a smirk on his face.

Back in the territory of lord Eldric. One of the humans stationed to be quarantined stood up and began walking, the same happened as another group of humans stood up as they began walking irregularly.

This caught the attention of those who were stationed to keep an eye on those quarantined. Erik and Jonas have long made their way back to the kingdom as their station can't be left open for long.

So except for the general Roland, his few selected soldiers who were disguised as healers, since it was already understood that there was no saving of those quarantined. It was all just an act to calm their family and them down so the process of elimination can be done quietly and humanely.

General Roland stood on a makeshift platform, his eyes scanning the quarantined area. He noticed the strange behavior of some individuals who had started moving with an eerie, purposeful gait.

"Lieutenant," Roland called out, his voice laced with concern, "have you noticed those people? The ones moving differently?"

Lieutenant Mara, a sharp-eyed officer, followed his gaze. "Yes, General. They've been acting strange for the past hour. It's as if they're being drawn towards something."

Roland frowned. "This isn't normal. We need to understand what's happening before it spirals out of control, also informing your highness of this. I am guessing this has something to do with Silas"

Roland relayed an order to his soldiers who immediately took action as they tried to stop those moving weirdly. The movement of the soldiers caught the quarantined humans' attention who began murmuring amongst themselves.

"What's happening?" a worried voice asked.

"Are we in danger?" another voice chimed in.

Roland raised his hand to quiet the crowd. "Remain calm! We are investigating the situation. Stay where you are, and we will ensure your safety."

"Damn it" Roland cursed after he distanced himself. This was exactly what Silas wanted. He knew not to take over all the quarantined humans, instead he selected a few to disrupt the peace depending on the actions we take from now on.

Roland was tempted to order his soldiers to cut those moving weirdly down but Looking at the scared look of the humans looking at him. Roland looked toward the capital city, all he could hope for is that the king makes the right decision.

The selected humans continued their eerie movements, their paths becoming more synchronized and deliberate. Despite the soldiers' efforts, they seemed almost unstoppable.

Mara approached Roland, her face tight with concern. "General, they aren't responding to our commands. It's like they're in a trance."

Roland frowned as he looked toward the humans, he enhanced his eyes with mana. It was small but he noticed the mass of the humans were thinning the more they walked also from their body, dust like particles falling to the ground.

Roland frowned, he knew something was going on and it was not good. "This isn't good," Roland muttered. "We need to stop them before they complete whatever they're doing."

He barked orders to his soldiers, who attempted to physically restrain the selected individuals. But as soon as they touched them, a surge of energy repelled them, sending the soldiers stumbling backward.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, by now it was a new group of humans walking strangely as those from before all of a sudden fell down dead with their body thinned out like it was sucked dry. Almost on command another group took over what they were doing.

Back in the capital city, Erik who already got the message tried contacting Roland to immediately suppress the humans. This wasn't time to be naive or nice but this time the communication between them was cut off.

It was one way, he could only receive what they were saying but he could respond back. Knowing that Silas was doing something, Erik immediately suited up and mounted his horse.

The whole kingdom was taken back when they saw their king speeding through the street heading for the gates, before he left. Erik managed to leave a small message behind, hoping for Jonas and the queen to take over.

Back at Eldric territory, One of the soldiers, a young man named Aiden, approached Roland with a report. "General, I've been monitoring the movements of those affected. They're creating a pattern—a circle, I think."

The moment, the soldier's word's fell. Roland was no longer in his position, scream can be heard as heads flew to the sky. Eerily one of the head halted mid air looking at Roland who was covered in lightning holding his sword.

"I like you, decisive, but you were too late" the head said before dropping down. By now the whole city fell into chaos and screams as people were backing away, scared that Roland and his soldiers would attack them next.

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At that moment, a loud hum filled the air, and the glowing patterns began to rise from the ground, forming a dome of light around the city. The murmurs from the crowd grew louder, filled with fear and confusion.

Roland clenched his fists. "We need to hold our position and wait for reinforcements. Keep everyone away from that dome. We don't know what will happen next."

As they waited, the dome of light pulsed, the energy within it growing more intense. The quarantined humans inside remained motionless, their eyes closed as if in deep concentration.

Back in Silas territory, he looked up to the moon with a smile on his face. As the moon rose high in the sky, the magic circle began to glow with an eerie light. Silas stood at the center, his eyes closed, chanting an incantation that resonated with the very fabric of the abyss. His voice echoed with an otherworldly timbre, the ancient words weaving a spell of immense power.

"Light of the abyss, awaken the parasites. Seize the strength, surpass the limits. Devour the flesh, let renewal begin."

The parasites, sensing the activation of the circle, stirred within their dormant hosts. The incantation continued, growing in intensity as Silas called forth the full power of the magic circle.

"Moon's glow, unite the forces. Perfect the transformation, let hosts transcend."

The outer ring of the circle activated first. Humans who had lived seemingly normal lives, their minds long overtaken by their parasitic masters, began to transform. Their skin cracked and peeled away, revealing new, stronger forms beneath.

Ordinary humans with latent physical strength transformed into Adapted Warriors. Their muscles expanded and their reflexes sharpened. Their skin took on a tough, leathery texture, offering increased protection.

Some humans, particularly those with a natural resilience, turned into Symbiotic Brutes. They became larger and more imposing, their bodies covered in a thick, armor-like carapace.

Humans with latent magical abilities were transformed into Mystic Adepts. Their bodies glowed with a faint, ethereal light, and they could manipulate basic elemental forces.

Some humans developed lighter frames and membranous wings, Humans with precision and dexterity turned into Bone Archers. Their arms elongated and became more flexible, allowing them to use their own bones as projectiles.

Next, the inner ring came to life. The elites of Silas's kingdom, already formidable, underwent a similar transformation. Their bodies shed their old skins, emerging as even more powerful versions of themselves. The parasites within them had adapted uniquely to their hosts, resulting in a diverse array of enhanced abilities and appearances.

Some of the larger, more physically robust hosts turned into Colossal Behemoths. These giants towered over the others, their muscles bulging and skin turned to thick, stone-like hide. Their strength was unmatched, capable of crushing foes with a single blow or tearing through fortifications with ease. They had multiple eyes scattered across their bodies, granting them an almost 360-degree field of vision.

A more upgraded version of the humans that got wings appeared, Their claws and fangs dripped with venom, and their wings emitted a sonic screech that could disorient and paralyze their enemies. Their speed and agility made them difficult targets to hit.

Hosts with a natural resistance to toxins and diseases became Plague Bearers. Their forms oozed with corrosive substances, and their breath spread like a deadly plague that weakened and killed those nearby. Their touch could infect and decay.

Hosts with strong mental capacities turned into Mind Reavers. These entities had enlarged craniums, pulsating with visible brain activity. They could project psychic attacks, controlling the minds of weaker

enemies and causing hallucinations or mental breakdowns. Their tentacle-like appendages could both physically attack and tap into the psychic energies of their foes, draining their will to fight.

Finally, the innermost ring activated. Silas's army, the backbone of his kingdom, experienced the most intense transformation. The parasites within these soldiers began taking form.

Some hosts, particularly those who were once soldiers, transformed into Bladed Sentinels. These beings had limbs elongated into sharp, metallic blades. Their skin took on a hardened, almost armor-like texture, and their eyes glowed with a cold, calculating intelligence.

Hosts who were previously stealth operatives or assassins became Shadow Stalkers. Their forms became sleek and almost insubstantial, able to blend into shadows and move silently. They could phase through solid objects and strike with poisoned claws.

Hosts, especially those who were adept at ground combat, transformed into Spiked Crawlers. These creatures had multiple, spiked limbs that allowed them to scuttle rapidly across any terrain. Their bodies were covered in sharp protrusions that they could shoot as projectiles, and their jaws could unhinge to swallow enemies whole.

Crepuscular, who was looking from his realm, watched all this happen with calm eyes.

His view changed to show the harpies, who were living their lives happily, unaware of what was going on in their backyard. Closing his eyes, Crepuscular adopted a technique he saw Ikenga use.

This was when Ikenga connected with the weapons of the King and Queen of the Silver Kingdom because they were once cursed by him. Crepuscular didn't have any of that, but his daughter had a piece of him she held dearly and even prayed to.

Ursula sat in her room. In front of her was a plan for the experimentation ready to be carried out by the demigods. At the small altar in her room lay a feather from her father's divine form.

The dormant feather began glowing golden. The small energy emanating from the feather began melting the altar. Her room soon caught on fire.

Ursula's domain unfolded as the phoenix appeared behind her, covering and protecting her from the heat. Ursula, with eyes filled with excitement, knew her father was present and watching her.

Kneeling down, Ursula watched as the feather floated in the air before pointing to some place. Following the trace of the feather, Ursula soon understood and sprang up, "Silas."

Waving her hand, a huge mirror appeared. Soon, the figure of Silas's territory could be seen, but as soon as she zoomed in, the picture in the mirror shook, disrupting the image. Ursula frowned as she tried again, yet she got the same result.

Putting the mirror away, Ursula noticed that the feather had already fallen to the ground after absorbing all the flames lit in the room. Picking up the feather and feeling the small heat on it, Ursula whispered, "I miss you, Father."

The feather hummed in response to her words. The wall of the room was broken through to show Bernard covered in deep red flames. Rushing towards Ursula, he immediately asked, "Mother, are you alright?"

The feather couldn't be stored away in a storage space, so all Ursula could do was hold the feather in her hand as she smiled at Bernard. "I am fine, no need to worry. I have just been visited by Father."

Hearing that, Bernard's eyes widened. Hearing their creator was here meant a lot to the harpies, but Bernard was old, so the excitement died away quickly. He quickly asked, "That doesn't normally happen. What made him react?"

Ursula walked over to the altar, which was now a melted mess. "Father's feather pointed towards Silas's territory. But when I tried to see more, the image kept distorting. Something, or someone, is interfering."

Bernard's brows furrowed. "Interfering? That could mean danger."

"Exactly," Ursula nodded. "We have scouts out there already, but we've heard nothing from them. That silence is troubling."

Bernard's eyes widened slightly. "You think something might have happened to them?"

"Yes," Ursula said, her voice grim. "They might have been blindsided or worse. We need to find out what happened."

Bernard, ever the warrior, stepped forward. "I'll take a team and head out immediately. We'll find our scouts and get to the bottom of this."

"Be careful," Ursula warned. "If there is something out there capable of disrupting our vision, it won't hesitate to strike again."

Bernard nodded and turned to leave. As he exited, Ursula turned back to the feather, now cool in her hand. She whispered another prayer, hoping her father could hear her thoughts.

Back in Eldric territory the same thing was happening, only this time the magic circle wasn't sentient and divided into levels. Instead, it turned into a feast of who could grab the most.

Roland and his men initially retreated to the castle gate wall, where they got a full view of the pandemonium taking place. At first, Roland's soldiers and lieutenant were happy as this meant they were no longer burdened with killing their fellow humans, so they didn't mind them killing each other.

But soon, their smiles turned to terror as Elites began appearing, some even overriding the instinct to devour, working together to strengthen each other.

The Elites were no longer throwing themselves out like beasts. Instead, they were making use of their surroundings, even creating quick weapons with what they found.

Roland, who was watching all this with cold eyes, suddenly turned his head as he saw a figure coming closer to them. Roland squinted, strengthening his eyes with mana to see who it was.

"My king," Roland thought to himself when Erik, feeling the horse was too slow, jumped down from the fast-moving horse. Taking two quick steps, he surpassed the horse before the ground sunk in as he jumped to the sky.

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Erik from the sky got a full view of what was going on inside the city. Sadness flashed in his eyes as he lost momentum and began falling. With a loud thudding sound, he landed on the city wall where the soldiers were.

Roland quickly walked towards Erik. Taking a knee, he said, "What are your orders, my king?"

Erik said nothing as he clenched his hand. No trace of the people in the city ever being human remained; it was like this was what they were all along, instead held back within human flesh.

There were over more than hundred thousand people quarantined in this city. Now, all hundreds of thousands had turned into monsters, killing each other and reducing their numbers.

"Get up," Erik said to Roland, who stood up and looked over the city with Erik.

Nothing was said as the two watched in silence. Soon there were only Elite-level monsters left, and now they were actively dividing themselves, taking positions, ready to start another bout of slaughter.

Erik's spear appeared in his hand. A loud sound followed by a cloud of dust was raised on the city wall. Roland waved his hand, clearing the dust. Erik was no longer in his position.

Looking down into the town, Erik appeared at the center of the parasites. On his spear was the huge form of an Elite symbiotic brute hanging on it.

His long blond hair was scattered, covering his face. Only his piercing blue eyes filled with anger and rage could be seen. Almost on command, the parasites immediately dispersed, distancing themselves from Erik.

With a flick of Erik's spear, the brute was thrown away. Erik's figure once again disappeared, followed by the scared cries of the parasites as he appeared among them, quickly taking their lives.

Roland, seeing that, immediately drew his sword, his body covered in lightning. "Protect the king," he said to his soldiers as he turned into a bolt of lightning that fell from the sky, shocking a flying symbiotic parasite that was aiming its bone spear at Erik.

Back in Silas's kingdom, the ritual was already done on his side. A view of what was happening in Eldric territory was seen, so he smiled before whispering an order, "Retreat."

In Eldric territory, the parasites who got the order immediately grouped together as they made their way to retreat. Erik and Roland frowned as the parasites quickly formed a formation.

Covering each other's weaknesses, nothing was said as if they all shared the same mind. The brutes worked with the warriors to hold back the soldiers and Erik. The magic parasitic adepts used their elemental talents to create obstacles, like a stone wall suddenly appearing, blocking Erik and his men.

While a new path was created for the parasites to go through, how was this possible? The parasites had no problem throwing themselves at Erik and his men to create opportunities for the others.

After the whole massacre, the number was taken down to about 80 thousand Elites with different talents. Erik and his soldiers combined together totaled in number to 23.

23 against enemies who were ready to sacrifice themselves wasn't looking great because five soldiers were already lost, bringing the number to 18. Soon the city was filled with mazes built by earthen raised walls.

Parasites with flame and water talents came together, bringing about mist that was guided by the wind-talented parasites to fill the maze walls.

With their connection, the parasites had no problem walking among the maze. Erik and his men, who were bulldozing the walls in front of them, in the process lost another 5 soldiers.

This continued for a while as the parasites got to a wall that was soon broken through, the brutes and warrior parasites, they soon all quickly made their way out of Erik's territory. To make matters worse, they didn't hesitate to leave about 200 parasites behind to hold off Erik and his men while the others escaped.

Erik, seeing this, roared in anger as he once again took to the sky, where he pointed his spear at the city. Around him appeared exact replicas of the spear that began descending on the city.

In his anger, Erik forgot his men were there. Thankfully, Roland's voice, enhanced with lightning, called out, "Your Majesty!" That momentarily brought Erik's attention back, and he took control of the spears, guiding them away from his men.

Falling to the ground, Erik and his surviving men were surrounded by dead bodies and the smell of blood. It was still hard to see clearly because of the steam; mana was needed for better sight.

Erik, whose mind was clouded with anger and rage, looked at Roland and his soldiers. He knew they must have been shaken up as this was their first real battle, and to make matters worse, they faced off against suicidal enemies.

Thinking of that made Erik even angrier as this situation reminded him of his past work and their encounters with the demons. It was the same tactic, where the enemies were suicidal and threw themselves at you to create opportunities.

It was a very torturing experience. At first, you will like it as it seems easier that the enemy is suicidal, but the more it went on, it would start to bother you.

Even the anger you feel for the enemy in the beginning will be gone, only to be replaced with disgust and disturbance.

True to Erik's thoughts, Roland was experiencing the same. The psychological burden of facing such enemies was immense. Each encounter with the parasitic and suicidal foes gnawed at the edges of Roland's sanity. These weren't mindless beasts; they were sentient beings, capable of thought and emotion, yet willing to obliterate themselves for a cause. The realization that their enemies had once been rational beings, now reduced to mindless drones, was a harrowing thought.

In the initial clashes, there was a grim satisfaction in seeing the enemy fall so easily. It seemed almost too good to be true, watching them throw themselves onto the spears and swords of his men. But as the battles dragged on, that satisfaction turned to unease.

There was something profoundly disturbing about watching the light leave the eyes of an enemy who could have been reasoned with, who could have had a family, dreams, a life. He was brought out of his thoughts when he heard Erik speak.

Taking a deep breath, Erik tried to calm himself. "We must regroup and tend to the wounded," he commanded, his voice steady but laced with lingering anger. "Roland, take a squad and scout the area. We need to ensure no more of those parasites are lurking around."

Roland nodded and quickly organized a team to follow his orders. As they moved out, Erik turned to the remaining soldiers. "We will honor the fallen, but first, we must secure our position."

The men, though weary and shaken, responded with a determined nod. Erik knew this battle was just the beginning.

Bernad took with him a small group of harpies as they made their way to the areas where their scouts took station to overlook Silas territory.

Once they got close enough, Bernard from the sky above Silas kingdom looked down to see if something was going on but like before he found his view blurry at the same time dizzy so he looked away.

Turning to the harpies behind him who were already affected, Bernard snapped his finger causing them to look at him "Don't observe or take any closer look anymore, I believe the demon has done something around this place so we take caution"

One of the Harpies nodded as he pulled out a device before pointing forward "They should be a bit up further"

Bernard nodded, as they took off once again, lying down in the forest on a tree. One harpy body can be seen laid out unknown if he was dead or unconscious but Bernard noticed he was alive as there was slight movement in his chest.

Flying towards the harpy one of the men who came with Bernard rubbed his fingers together creating a small spark as he placed his hand on the unconscious harpy chest.

With a slight chock, the harpy woke up screaming in fear, wind blades shot out from him scattering around him. Berard had a flame of shield covering himself and his men as he looked at the Harpy.

It took some time before the Harpy calmed down. "Calm down," Bernard said gently, lowering the flame shield. "You're safe now."

The harpy, still panting, nodded. " Elder Bernard... It's the field around Silas' territory. It's an illusion trap."

Bernard's expression hardened. "What do you mean?"

"We were watching the borders, as instructed," the harpy began, his voice shaky. "Then, suddenly, everything went blurry, and we felt dizzy. We tried to hold on, thinking it would pass, but the dizziness grew worse. Then, we were drawn into illusions, and we couldn't escape. It was like being trapped in a nightmare. One by one, we fell unconscious."

Chapter 246:

Bernard clenched his fists. "So, it wasn't an attack. It was a passive effect of Silas' defenses."

The harpy nodded. "Yes, and it's powerful. We couldn't see through it or break free."

Bernard nodded, turning to his men. "We need to move carefully as we make sure the others are okay and alive. Stay alert and avoid looking directly at the territory."

As they took off, Bernard looked back at Silas territory with a frown on his face. This level of passive defense was new and troubling. They needed to prepare for the worst.

Back at Ursula's domain, Ursula paced back and forth, worry etched on her face. She could only hope that her children are okay, if not she will have to turn Silas home and territory to ruins regardless of the consequences.

When Bernard and his team finally arrived, she rushed to meet them.

"Mother," Bernard said urgently, "we have news."

Ursula listened as Bernard relayed what they had learned. Her expression grew more serious with every word.

"It seems he really doesn't want to make any move on us, this situation can be said to be our fault" Ursula said as she looked at Bernard.

Bernard nodded his head "He really is a smart demon, with such a passive defense on his shield, it seems like we are the one looking for problem with him"

Ursula showed a thinking look "The only conclusion we can draw now is his battle with Erik is about to start, it seems our action of helping Erik made his caution against us so he now hides his move incase we leak them to Erik"

Bernard frowned. "If that's the case, what should we do next?."

Ursula nodded. "We need to tread carefully. Our priority is to ensure the safety of our people while keeping a close watch on both Silas and Erik. We can't afford to be blindsided by either of them."

Bernard crossed his arms. "We should strengthen our defenses and reinforce our scouts with protection against illusions. If we can counter Silas' passive defenses, we'll have a better chance of monitoring his activities without falling into his traps."

"Agreed," Ursula said. "I'll consult with the mages and see if we can develop a countermeasure against the illusions. In the meantime, I want you to keep a close eye on Erik. If Silas is preparing for a battle with him, we need to know when it will happen and how it might affect us."

Bernard nodded. "I'll inform the scouts on Erik's side to be more vigilant. We'll stay informed and be ready for anything."

As Bernard left to carry out his orders, Ursula turned back to the feather, now resting on her desk. She could still feel the faint warmth emanating from it, a reminder of her father's presence and guidance.

"Father," she whispered, "give us the strength and wisdom to navigate these uncertain times. We must protect our kingdom and our people."

Back at the southern continent, Yuki and Finn have healed up after the encounter with the chilling gaze and their army have digested the gain from the battle. While they may have lost, for those of Björn's people it wasn't seen as a loss.

To them, it had been a feast of flesh and blood, a brutal banquet that made them stronger. The only regret was that they had not delivered the taste of victory to their lord.

Today, they were preparing to march out once more. For a time, the entire kingdom of Björn was silent, broken only by the sound of blades being sharpened and weapons being readied. Twisted, bloodthirsty smiles were visible on everyone's faces, and even the children, far from being frightened, mimicked the adults by picking up sticks and pretending to sharpen them.

Yuki, Finn, and Olaf gathered at a table, discussing their next sortie and target. Yuki, standing by a window and gazing out over the silent kingdom, frowned. She turned to face the two current leaders of Björn's kingdom.

"We need to address the excitement and behavior of our soldiers when it comes to war," she said, her voice steady but firm.

The atmosphere around Finn and Olaf shifted as they regarded Yuki with a mixture of confusion and caution. Sighing, Yuki clarified her point.

"I understand that this way of living is your culture, but in today's world, it won't take you far before nothing remains to remind people of your existence. You are not unlimited in number. Even though every one of your people is talented and can be used in war, you are still not unlimited. It disturbs me that your soldiers fight in this way."

Finn leaned back in his chair, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "What do you suggest, Yuki? Our people thrive on the battlefield. It's where we find our strength and purpose."

Olaf nodded in agreement. "Changing our approach might weaken the very foundation of our strength."

Yuki met their gaze steadily. "I'm not suggesting that you abandon your way of life entirely. But there must be a balance. Reckless aggression without regard for losses will only lead to your downfall. There must be strategy, caution, and a consideration for preserving your people."

A tense silence followed as Finn and Olaf mulled over her words. Finally, Olaf spoke. "Perhaps you are right, Yuki. We cannot afford to lose our people in endless battles. We need to find a way to temper our ferocity with wisdom."

Finn nodded reluctantly. "We'll consider your advice. But know that changing the mindset of our people will not be easy."

Yuki smiled slightly. "I don't expect it to be. But for the sake of your kingdom's future, it's a change worth making."

Finn and Olaf exchanged glances, their expressions a mix of determination and contemplation. Finn leaned forward, breaking the silence.

"Yuki, if we are to temper our people's aggression with wisdom, we need actionable steps. What do you suggest we do first?"

Yuki nodded, appreciating their willingness to consider her perspective. "The first step is education. Your people need to understand the value of strategic thinking and the long-term benefits of preserving their strength. We should start with the leaders and seasoned warriors. If they adopt a more measured approach, the others will follow."

Olaf rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "We could hold councils where strategy and tactics are discussed in depth. Bring in experts who can teach our warriors the importance of patience and planning."

Finn added, "And we should integrate this mindset into our training routines. Emphasize not just the physical aspects of combat but also the mental. Teach them to evaluate situations, to see the bigger picture."

Yuki smiled. "Exactly. It will be a gradual process, but over time, it will become part of your culture. Another crucial aspect is to develop a reward system that values not just victories, but smart decisions and minimized losses."

Olaf's eyes lit up with an idea. "We could start by honouring those who show exceptional strategic thinking in battles. Create new titles and rewards that recognize and elevate these qualities."

Finn nodded in agreement. "And we must ensure that these changes are communicated clearly. Hold gatherings where we explain the importance of this new approach. Make it a point of pride."

Yuki could see the spark of determination in their eyes. "I'm glad to see you both embracing this. Remember, it's about balance. Your people's strength comes from their fierceness, but it can be enhanced with wisdom."

Björn in his realm listening to Yuji's idea nodded but at the same time he had a frown on his face. Yuki lately has been good for his kingdom and people especially with the ideas she comes up with.

At the same Björn was cautious of Yuki's move as it may all be a part of Murmur's plan to slowly integrate his way into his people's way of life and diminishing his own influence on them.

"I need a priest," Björn thought to himself as he set his eyes on the lion lieutenant who impressed him in the last battle. If opportunity arises Björn doesn't mind having him as priest to act as his voice on the mortal world.

For the past week, Yuki's idea has been carried out but there was hardly any change, which was of no surprises to Yuki because she understood it would take time.

The next target Yuki picked was another harbour developed by another smaller kingdom who had no hope or chance of getting into the big league and trading with the demigods.

Yuki planned on leading her men to take over the port which she believed would go very easily as the demigods doesn't have their hand on this harbour.

As Yuki army made their way to the harbour, a guard on the wall built around the harbour could be seen holding a scope where it caught sight of the approaching army.

The guard immediately ran down from his position as he began running toward the centre of the harbour where the owner stays.

Chapter 247:

Because he was in a hurry, the guard didn't bother to knock as he opened the door to the office to find the harbor owner butt naked with a noble woman bent over his table.

The sound of the door opening scared the two as they immediately shuffled to get dressed, It was only when the owner saw who came in that he sighed before his face was cloud with anger as he asked "What is it and you better have a good reason else the sharks will be having a good meal soon"

The guard swallowed hard as he bowed before answering "The army of the people of Björn is on their way here"

Hearing that, the office turned silent before teh harbor owner shouted "Get out!!" The guard nodded quickly as he turned to get away but the harbor owner stopped him "Not him, you woman, get out now"

The woman had a look of anger on her face but seeing the red eyes of the harbor leader she stayed silent as she made her way out slamming the door behind her to show her dissatisfaction.

Looking at the guard, the harbor leader said "You know the plan, Inform your captain of the approaching army"

Yuki and Finn were once again in the sky, soon their army got close to the harbor when all of a sudden the gate to the harbor opened up to show a middle aged man walk out of it with his hand in the air to show his surrender.

Yuki and Finn looked at each other in confusion, Finn nodded to Yuki who swooped down turning into a dark shadow that fell from the sky, before the harbor could blink, Yuki appeared in front of him hovering with her feet off the ground, her bat like wings spread out behind her.

The harbor seeing her immediately got on his knee "I have been waiting for your presence your honor"

Yuki, confused, asked "Do you know me?"

Hearing Yuki's question, the harbor leader shook his head "I know nothing of you but I have heard great things about you. The lady of scourge leading the army of beast bringing fear to any who crosses part with them"

Yuki's eyes glowed pink as she got closer to the harbor leader as she asked "If you know of this, why aren't you in fear shaking in your boots" Pointing at the eager army behind her.

The harbor leader had a sweat dripping from his head which he nervously wiped off as she shakingly said to Yuki "I believe we can help each other, your past action has shown that for some reason. You are in need of a harbor and all it took was a little bit of thinking to know that my harbor will be your next target"

Yuki hovered closer as the harbor leader took a step back "Since you know all this, then you should know that I have the power to take over this harbor regardless of what you think"

The harbor leader let out a self defeating chuckle "That's true your grace but I believe we can be of help with each other"

Yuki thought for a second before looking at Finn who was hovering in the sky before nodding. Finn immediately flew down to the army, said something to his lieutenant before joining Yuki and the harbor leader.

The harbor leader, seeing that took a breath of relief as this shows that they are safe for now and they are ready to hear him out.

The gate to the harbor opened up as the harbor leader led Finn and Yuki to the office, along the way those who were close didn't dare look up to meet the piercing gaze of Yuki and Finn who were vigilant in case they were being set up.

Finn sat at the harbor leader seat while Yuki sat on his table, the harbor leader turned into a servant in his own home but he never stopped smiling.

"Speak," Yuki said to the harbor leader who nodded.

"First I go by the name Erik, a noble of a small kingdom on the sunny part. As you both know, a small kingdom like mine doesn't always get opportunities like those of the bigger kingdom. Meaning our growth is limited and meanwhile the other bigger kingdom will keep expanding, sooner or later we would lose our kingdom to those of higher power"

Yuki's eyes narrowed as she studied Erik, her glowing pink eyes reflecting his apprehensive expression. "And what does this have to do with us?" she asked, her voice cold and demanding.

Erik took a deep breath, steadying himself before he continued. "Our harbor is strategically located, a crucial point for any kingdom looking to expand its influence across the seas. If you were to take over, you would not only gain a vital stronghold but also access to trade routes and resources that could fuel your army of beasts."

Finn leaned back in the harbor leader's chair, his wings twitching slightly. "We already have the power to take what we want," he said, his voice a low rumble. "Why should we negotiate with you?"

"A lot of us have guessed that the children of the gods have a hand on the harbor you previously attacked. This harbor is one of the cooperation the small kingdom have banded together to create"

"We know and understand we can't compete so we have set our eyes on your group, the new upcoming religion that dares stands against the children of gods"

"Also your grace, while you may have the power, maintaining control is a different matter. My allies are very trustful of me. They won't resist if I am still in charge. If you were to take over by force, there would be unrest, rebellions, and sabotage that could weaken your position. But if we work together, you gain

not only the harbor but also the loyalty and cooperation of its inhabitants." Chris said as he looked at both Yuki and Finn.

Yuki's eyes narrowed as she listened to Chris. She could sense the desperation masked beneath his smile, the fear that had driven him to seek her out. She leaned back, wings folding slightly as she considered his words.

"You want our protection," she stated, her voice icy. "In exchange for what, exactly?"

Chris cleared his throat, trying to steady his voice. "In exchange for our allegiance. Our resources, our men, and the strategic advantage this harbor provides. We offer everything we have to support your cause against the children of the gods."

Finn, who had been silently observing, leaned forward. "And how do we know you won't betray us the moment the children of the gods offer you a better deal?"

Chris's eyes widened. "We would never—"

"Save your breath," Yuki interrupted. "We've heard promises before, and we've seen them broken. Your loyalty is not something we take lightly."

Chris' face paled, but he held his ground. "I understand your skepticism. But consider this: our lives, our homes, everything we hold dear is at stake. The children of the gods have no place for small kingdoms like ours in their grand design. Aligning with you is not just a choice; it's our only chance for survival."

"We all know a change is about to happen and take place, only by joining your team can we have a place in the upcoming future, we don't want to be used and dropped away in the grand scheme of things"

Yuki's gaze softened slightly, but she remained guarded. "Very well, Chris. We will consider your offer. But understand this: betrayal will not be tolerated. The moment we sense any treachery, you and your people will face the full wrath of the Scourge."

Chris nodded vigorously. "You have my word. We will prove our loyalty to you."

Yuki stood up, her wings stretching out behind her. "We shall see. For now, prepare your harbor. Finn and I will return to meet all the other allies you talked about, we will have a talk and see your sincerity. Any sign of weakness, and this harbor will fall."

With that, Yuki and Finn left Chris's office, their presence lingering like a shadow over the harbor. As they made their way back to their army, Finn glanced at Yuki.

"Do you trust him?" he asked.

Yuki shook her head. "No. But we need allies, and he seems desperate enough to be useful. We'll keep a close watch on him and his allies. The moment they falter, we'll remind them why we are feared."

Back in the Mahu realm, Ikenga, who was cuddling with Mahu, suddenly woke up. Mahu followed right after. Looking at Ikenga with a look of understanding, she asked, "It's time?"

Ikenga nodded and pecked her on the lips. "It's time."

Silence followed before Ikenga stood up from the comfy bed. Looking at Mahu, Ikenga said, "Keep an eye on our sons, and remember to keep your cool at all times." Mahu pulled Ikenga in for a hug, planting her face on his chest as she took a long, deep sniff before pushing Ikenga through the portal that opened behind him.

Chapter 248:

Ikenga smiled as he returned to his realm, a gentle hum spreading throughout, welcoming him back. As he surveyed his domain, he sensed how much it had expanded. Ikenga noticed that when he began receiving worship, it not only increased his strength but also expanded his realm. However, recently, this growth had slowed down, and his strength had also plateaued.

Faith brought him immense power, a level that would have taken hundreds of years to achieve otherwise. Yet, this influx of power had diminished, seemingly reverting to the levels from before he began receiving worship. It wasn't that he was no longer receiving worship or faith energy; he was still receiving a substantial amount every second. However, the faith energy had shifted from quality to quantity.

Initially, Ikenga thought the issue might be that his followers weren't pious enough. But he soon dismissed this idea because his realm contained an altar that refined faith energy. Regardless of whether the faith came from an ordinary believer or a devout one, once the faith energy reached the altar, it was refined into divine energy before being transferred to him.

After meeting with Murmur, Ikenga's perspective changed. He realized the limitation was due to the level of his world. The faith provided by the believers in his world had reached its maximum quality. For the faith energy to improve further, the world's origin would need to be elevated, pushing every race to a higher level. Only then could the nature of the faith energy change.

Ikenga knew it was the same for the other gods. The excessive amount of faith energy they have now just acts like a battery to quickly replenish the divine energy spent. The long journey he is about to undertake with Keles will change everything for everyone. Ikenga was ready to find out the limit of his power. He could only instinctively guess that he was now planetary, as he had this feeling at the back of his neck that all he needed to do was plant a seed on this world and watch it go boom.

Of course, when the thought appears, Nana always cautions him to hold off on that thought, as all he will gain is momentary satisfaction of his strength before feeling the impact of what he has done.

Sending a quick message to Keles to meet up with him, Ikenga once again sensed Murmur calling, which he dove into, appearing in the cage of golden light.

Keles, in her realm, received Ikenga's message. A quick sweep of her realm's condition brought a smile to her face. It was slow, but the underworld was beginning to shape into a world of its own, as souls who had regained their intelligence were beginning to develop the underworld in their own way.

Keles stood up from her throne and stepped into her realm, marveling at the changes taking place. Souls that once wandered aimlessly were now building structures and forming communities. The underworld was transforming from a barren wasteland into a thriving, dynamic world.

Near the River of Reflection—a name made up by the souls after they regained their senses—souls had constructed a series of bridges and walkways, allowing easy passage across its ethereal waters. These structures, though simple, were elegant and sturdy, a testament to the ingenuity of the souls who built them. Some souls were even setting up marketplaces, trading memories and experiences as if they were tangible goods.

Further along, in the Fields of Remembrance, souls had begun to cultivate gardens. Flowers of forgotten dreams and trees of lost hopes grew here, their spectral forms shimmering in the perpetual twilight of the underworld. Keles noticed a group of souls working together to tend these gardens, their faces serene and content. The plants they nurtured thrived on the essence of memories, each one a symbol of growth and renewal.

Keles was hoping the next time she returned, they would surprise her. Looking beyond her realm, she saw Roth and Xerosis overlooking a small village of humans. It seemed that their experiment had gone well, as the first vampire was able to get a human female pregnant. The success made her son make a radical move as he ordered Ethan to go on a rampaging feast in the village.

In one night, all the males in the village were turned into vampires. With a slight memory manipulation from her son, nothing was noticed. Only strange thing was that men were no longer seen during the day in this village. Things were mostly being handled by the women during the day, while night was a time for the turned men.

Keles squinted her eyes. Things were good for now, but she worried that if things continued going her son's way, he might get carried away. Now that she would be gone with Ikenga for a while, her presence wouldn't be protecting her child for much longer.

Looking away, her eyes penetrated the spirit realm where Wardenwild was sleeping under a glowing tree. She whispered, "Take care of my children," before walking through the dark portal in front of her.

Ikenga looked to his side where Keles appeared. He nodded to her but noticed she didn't respond back. Instead, she was looking at the well-dressed skeleton beyond the golden cage holding both of them.

Murmur noticed her looking intently at him. A look of anger flashed in his eyes but was quickly hidden as he stood up from the floating throne he was on and bowed towards Keles. "We meet again, Lady of Death."

Keles scoffed as she responded, "I like your new look better. You looked distasteful before with flesh on."

Murmur's bony hands clenched as he remembered the pain caused by the one in front of him. The feeling of his flesh being eaten away slowly was a pain he had never felt before. When it was happening, he wished he was one of those demons he used to look down on—those that enjoy torture not only of others but also of themselves. These demon types are known to have a huge nail piercing through their skull to feel pain and have their skin inside out.

The aesthetics of these demons used to be unsightly to Murmur, but at that moment when he was losing his flesh slowly, he wished he was born as that type so that he could at least experience joy from the pain being dealt to him.

Murmur's skull cackled as he sat back down on his throne, which brought him close to the golden cage. Looking at Ikenga, Murmur said, "I take it you have decided to accept my proposal."

Ikenga nodded to Murmur, who began laughing out loud. "Good, and since you are both here, I am guessing you are both ready to go."

Murmur got no response back, which he didn't mind as he looked at Keles before looking back at Ikenga. For some reason, Ikenga frowned at that as he felt nothing good was going to happen next.

True to that, Murmur began speaking. "Before I send you both off on your journey, I believe it is best if I inform you of the cons of traveling to the Abyss the way I plan on sending you off."

"This being the only option is because we all don't want the position of this world leaked or being noticed. So for this reverse summoning, you both will be taken to the Abyss, and in the worst-case scenario, you will find yourselves in a very unfavorable Abyss layer."

Ikenga frowned upon hearing that. "Elaborate," he said to Murmur, whose shoulders at this point were shaking not in fear but in an attempt to hold back his laughter and glee.

"The Abyss layers are uncountable. In some Abyss layers, there are beings called 'Abyss Lords' who have mastered the layers they are in. These mastered layers are the same as the realms/domains of the gods."

Ikenga and Keles both frowned. Murmur caught that and began laughing. "It seems you both already understand," he said, his glowing purple eyes staring at both of them.

Ikenga began pacing around. If what Murmur said was true, finding themselves in such a layer would mean possible doom. As a realm owner himself, Ikenga understood what it implied if someone unfriendly was stupid enough to enter his realm. Such a situation is the same as the opponent giving up their life to the realm owner, who at that point is omnipotent in their realm. For example, when Mahu enters Ikenga's realm, he has to mentally keep his realm's consciousness from suppressing her; the same can be said when he goes to her realm.

Ikenga looked at Keles, who was also staring at him. Keles seemed to know what he was thinking as she said, "I really don't like him."

"That is obvious, but you could have kept yourself from antagonizing him until we leave," Ikenga said with clear exasperation. He was now about to get thrown into a situation where things were no longer in his control.

Chapter 249:

Looking at Murmur, Ikenga said, "You should think carefully about every action you take from now on. Will it benefit you in the long run?"

"There might be a chance that we make it back. By then, you will have amassed another origin god who will see you as an enemy," Ikenga said, staring at Murmur.

Murmur stayed silent before pointing at Ikenga. "Is that god you?"

Ikenga gave no answer, instead keeping his stare. There were a few moments of silence before Murmur spoke up. "While it may seem I have a hand in deciding which Abyss layer you find yourselves in, that is a misconception."

"Because of the nature through which you are going to the Abyss, the element of choice is gone. All you can hope for now is to land in a layer that hasn't been conquered yet," Murmur said, looking at the two gods.

"Because of our relationship, it works best for me if you both land in a conquered layer. It gives me great satisfaction and a playground I can use to my advantage."

Ikenga's eyes narrowed at Murmur, his displeasure evident. "So, you are hoping for our demise or, at the very least, our capture."

Murmur chuckled, his laughter barely restrained. "Not hoping, just anticipating. There is a difference. This scenario benefits me in ways you can't begin to imagine."

Keles, having heard enough, interjected, her voice sharp and cold. "And what exactly do you gain from this, Murmur? Enlighten us."

Murmur leaned forward, his eyes glinting with amusement. "Influence, dear Keles. Influence and leverage. Should you both fall, I gain favor with the Abyss Lords. If you survive, it will take time for you to return. By then, I will have gained much. Either way, I win."

Ikenga's fists clenched, his frustration growing. "You play a dangerous game, Murmur."

"And you are all pieces on the board," Murmur replied smoothly. "But do not misunderstand me, Ikenga. This is not personal. This is merely survival."

Keles shook her head, her eyes full of disdain. "Your 'strategy' is a gamble with our lives."

"True," Murmur acknowledged with a shrug. "But then again, isn't every action we take in this existence a gamble? You two are no strangers to risk."

Ikenga stopped pacing and faced Murmur, his expression hard. "We will return, Murmur. And when we do, there will be consequences for your actions."

Murmur's eyes flashed with a mixture of excitement and challenge. "I look forward to it. Now, shall we proceed?"

With a final glance at each other, Ikenga and Keles nodded. Murmur began the incantation for the reverse summoning, his hands weaving intricate patterns in the air. The air around them crackled with energy, and a dark portal began to form, its swirling depths heavy with dark energy.

As the portal stabilized, Murmur's voice took on a more serious tone. "Remember, once you land in the Abyss, forget every notion of normality you have known. In the Abyss, weirdness is the norm and the very place that opposite cause is the rule."

The portal, like a huge mouth, swallowed both gods before disappearing. The golden cage flickered before dissipating, the humans in charge of holding the cage all turning to dust, leaving only their souls behind.

Seeing those souls, Murmur opened his mouth, and they were sucked in. Closing his eyes to savor the taste of the souls and feeling himself recover, Murmur raised his bony hand to see flesh growing out bit by bit.

Murmur could hardly hold himself back as he began cackling loudly in his underground palace. Wardenwild, in the spirit realm, noticed the few souls missing. He wasn't fast enough to recover them.

Wardenwild stood up, sighing. He knew he wouldn't be able to enjoy sleeping for a long time. With Keles gone, he would be working overtime. As for Murmur, Wardenwild would inform the gods so they could keep an eye on his behavior.

A week had passed since the situation in Eldric territory. This time, the incident couldn't be hidden any longer from the people. Thankfully, Erik was prepared for that as he used a device he built to record everything that happened inside Eldric territory.

Three days after the incident, Erik, with the help of his council members, released the video record to all territories. For a time, there was a nationwide broadcast of the incident.

Everyone was silent watching the tape, seeing their loved ones and friends turning into monsters. This confirmed for those doubtful about the royal family's claim of a deadly disease spreading throughout their kingdom.

The scene of Erik and his men fighting off the parasites wasn't shown. Instead, the video changed to show Erik on his throne, where he began addressing them.

The hall was filled with an uneasy silence, a thick tension hanging in the air as Erik's image flickered onto the screens of every territory under the kingdom's rule. His expression was stern, eyes reflecting the weight of the revelation he was about to share.

"People of the Humanity Kingdom," Erik began, his voice steady yet carrying the gravitas of the situation, "what you have witnessed is but a fraction of the horror that has been unleashed upon us. The monstrosities you saw were once our loved ones, our friends, our family. They were victims, not of a disease, but of a sinister plot orchestrated by a single entity—Silas."

Gasps and murmurs rippled through the crowd as Erik continued, "For too long, we have fought among ourselves, doubting each other, and even questioning the integrity of our own kingdom. This discord has only served to weaken us, playing right into Silas's hands. His parasitic creations were designed not just to destroy us physically, but to erode the very fabric of our unity."

Erik paused, allowing his words to sink in. He knew the next part would be the hardest for his people to hear. "The quarantine zones we established were a desperate measure. We sought to contain the threat, to protect the uninfected. But the truth is, we could find no cure. Those taken by the parasites were beyond our help. It was a decision born of necessity and the desire to prevent further spread of this insidious plague."

The silence grew heavier, the reality of Erik's words settling like a shroud over the viewers. Erik took a deep breath and pressed on, his voice filled with a resolute determination. "But now, we must turn our grief and our anger towards the true enemy. Silas has shown us his hand, and it is time we respond with our own. We cannot afford to let his machinations divide us any longer. Together, we are stronger than any parasite, stronger than any fear he can sow among us."

Erik's gaze swept across the faces of those gathered before him, as if he could see each and every one of his subjects through the lens. "I call upon you now, not just as your king, but as a fellow citizen of the Humanity Kingdom. Stand with me. Stand with each other. Let us root out the parasites that have infiltrated our lands and show Silas that we will not be broken."

Erik's speech gave those mourning hope; they were given someone to blame and take their anger out on. It also confirmed to the people of humanity that they were about to face a big war.

Erik took this opportunity to release a conscription request, which came after the extermination of those infected. The number of his army was affected and, most importantly, he had firsthand experience of what the war and the army they would face would be like.

People were eager to register after the order was released. At the same time, older members of Erik's army were taken aback when Erik made an appearance at the barracks, claiming to take over their training and leadership.

Before, it was known that their king had never paid much attention to his army and let them take care of themselves. So seeing this new behavior boosted everyone's morale.

Erik was happy to see this. Lately, due to his setbacks with Silas, he had been looking at his new life and situation differently, and he appreciated the changes he was experiencing.

Of course, Erik's action of taking over the army training had another purpose. After Erik figured out what type of enemy they would face, he knew that defeat was waiting for them if they treated this like a normal war.

Using his last world as a lesson, Erik decided to start training his army in a formation that had emerged out of desperation when they were facing off against the demons in his former world.

If they had had this formation earlier, they might not have won, but the demons wouldn't have had such an easy time winning against them. This gave Erik a glimpse of victory for his people, as Silas doesn't have an abyss gate open where uncountable numbers of demons pour out from. Silas's army is limited, which is the opposite of what the formation was created for: to hold off an uncountable number of enemies for a long time.

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The concept of this formation was for any army to become one—not to the extent of sharing thoughts but to the extent where the mana in everyone partaking runs in the same route. At the same time, the army would be able to use themselves as runes to achieve different effects.

For example, when the formation is deployed, and a rune for healing is drawn, for an extended period, you would have an undying army that can still fight as long as their head isn't taken off. The mana energy everyone is sharing would push the healing effect of the rune to its highest, meaning a soldier who lost an arm could immediately get a new one by paying the price of lesser energy.

The most important requirement for this formation is the generals, who are the focal points of the energy build-up. While they are the focal points and most important, they are also the ones in the most danger.

Remembering a scene from the past, Erik frowned. Out of desperation, when the formation was conceived, there was no time to test its credibility. Everyone just wanted to see another sunrise, so they used the formation.

Erik was no stranger to gore, but the scene of another being's blood and flesh being squeezed together with a sudden pop sound and shower of blood everywhere can be hard to take in.

The huge amount of energy built up had a huge requirement on the constitution of those at the focal point. If the general is unable to bear the strain from the energy, the pop will happen.

If the number of soldiers is limited to reduce the energy build-up, another problem arises: the mental burden on the general. If even a moment of weakness is shown, the energy will twist the bodies of everyone in the formation, like squeezing cloth to drain it of water.

At the time of life and death, all elves seemed to have become geniuses as ideas were being thrown out to solve the problem until one was decided upon.

This solution involved the general at the focal point bonding with an artifact. Artifacts are called what they are for a reason which is why it is required to share the energy with the general to reduce the strain. At the same time when the formation is applied, the artifact is placed at the center where every soldier will fight hard to ensure it remains untouched.

The Humanity Kingdom wasn't lacking in artifacts, so all Erik had to do was assign a perfect one for the general to bond with and have them perform the ritual of bonding.

It was during the training for the formation that Erik found he had thought too easily of the formation. A new problem emerged when the training began: the strain of energy wasn't the issue; rather, the formation couldn't even start.

Erik was taken aback by this, as he had no idea what went wrong. He had double-checked that they had met every requirement and that the army was in sync, but the formation still wasn't activating.

At the Humanity Kingdom barracks, shouts of soldiers training could be heard. Men half-naked and women in bras could be seen with serious expressions on their faces as they trained.

Erik sat in a tent with a huge block of ice hanging from the top, while a maid used a magical paper fan to blow gusts of wind across the ice. Erik himself was half-naked, sitting under the sun. Since he began the training of his men, Erik noticed an increase in temperature, which was unusual for this time of year.

It felt as if the sun itself had eyes and was casting its scorching gaze upon them. Erik thought of the sun god worshiped by the people of the Sun Kingdom. He had every reason to believe that the sun god was watching them. Initially, the heat was unbearable, and they could hardly get any training done. In desperation, Erik, who had never prayed to any god before, took a knee in his tent and prayed to the sun god for relief.

Surprisingly, it was effective as the heat lessened, but that was the extent of the improvement. Crepuscular, in his realm, watched Erik's training with interest. He understood what they were trying to achieve but noticed something was stopping them. As for the heat, he had already suppressed it as much as he could.

A chuckle escaped Crepuscular's mouth as he remembered Erik sweating and praying half-naked. "Hahaha, it seems the arrogant king has his limits," Crepuscular said, laughing. Then, looking into the distance, he requested his brother, "Help them."

Erik and his men noticed the sky darkening with heavy clouds gathering. One soldier immediately screamed in happiness, "Rain is coming!" A roar of cheers erupted as everyone saw the dark clouds, eagerly anticipating the cold drops of rain.

Soon, a heavy downpour followed, raining all over the western continent that had been heated up for a while. Erik, in his tent, heard the sound of rain. He stood up and walked out to see his generals and soldiers running around in the rain like children, laughing and smiling.

Erik looked up at the sky with a smile on his face and said aloud, hoping to be heard, "The gods of this world aren't that bad after all." Saying that, he looked back at his army, who were smiling and joyful. He felt an emotion rising within him that made him want to join them.

The emotion was so strong that he took a step before stopping, looking at the army with an unfocused gaze. He stood like that for a while before saying, "I see."

Erik finally understood why the formation wasn't working. It all came down to the emotions and will of the soldiers. When the formation was created, his world was in the midst of a world-ending war. Everyone had one thing in mind: survival. So when the formation appeared, it was quickly embraced by the elves, and no problems were faced.

The same couldn't be said for now. The situation was different. His army wasn't facing a world-ending attack, and monstrosities of different sizes and shapes weren't rushing at them to kill and maul their bodies. They weren't of one mind.

Even though Erik made it clear what Silas had done to them and was going to do to them to unite them in purpose, the fear and desperation necessary to fully engage the formation were not present. The soldiers were well-trained and disciplined, but they lacked the visceral drive that only an existential threat could provide.

As the rain continued to pour, Erik stood in contemplation, watching his soldiers revel in the momentary respite from their grueling training. He realized that the problem wasn't in the mechanics of the formation or the synchronization of his troops, but in their collective mindset. They needed to feel the urgency and danger that the formation was designed to counter.

Erik, losing his joy, immediately gathered his generals and key advisors in his tent, the cool air from the ice block providing a stark contrast to the humid heat outside. He shared his realization with them, explaining that the soldiers needed a deeper, more personal understanding of the threat they were facing.

"We need to create a simulation," Erik declared, his voice steady and commanding. "A scenario where the soldiers can experience the fear and urgency of a real battle. They must feel the weight of their lives hanging in the balance."

The generals exchanged glances, some nodding in agreement while others looked skeptical. One of the older generals, a seasoned warrior named Thrain, stepped forward. "What you suggest, Your Majesty, is risky. Simulations can help, but they can also break morale if not handled carefully."

"I understand the risks," Erik replied. "But without this, the formation will never work. We need to make them believe, to truly feel the stakes."

The generals weren't in complete agreement with Erik's advice as they strongly believed that the sudden input of fear would destabilize the peace they have now. Erik, curious why they thought so, asked, "Can you explain why you disagree?"

The head general, Roland, spoke, his gaze deep as he bowed to Erik. "Your Majesty, you have made it clear that this formation needs everyone to be of one mind, which is factually impossible as we all are different. The way I see and understand things isn't how my partner would."

"The simulation may awaken a lot of strong-willed soldiers who understand what they are facing, but that can't be said for the rest, in whom it may instill fear, which ultimately will lead to the formation not forming."

For the next few days, Erik sat in his tent, disturbed as he thought of ways to activate the formation. His stressed emotions became known to the generals and soldiers, who were immediately affected by that too.

The shouts from the training no longer had vigor behind them. Erik knew the effect he was having but could do nothing about it. He knew that without the formation, he would only lead his men to their deaths.