

Guardian gods 261

Chapter 261:

Erik's resolve hardened, his grip tightening on his spear. "I will not let that happen," he declared, his voice steady despite the exhaustion creeping into his limbs. He drew upon the last reserves of his strength, channeling the power of the enchanted forest into his spear.

Instead of a simple beam, Erik crafted a complex construct of light—a luminous green dragon, its scales shimmering with radiant energy. The dragon coiled around Erik with its wings spread out, its eyes glowing fiercely. With a roar, the dragon lunged at Silas, its jaws snapping with immense power.

Silas recoiled, raising his hand to summon a shield of darkness. The dragon's jaws clamped down on the shield, its radiant teeth gnawing through the dark energy. Erik pressed the attack, his spear striking in tandem with the dragon's bites. Each hit from the spear and dragon chipped away at Silas's defenses.

Silas snarled, summoning shadowy tendrils to lash out at the dragon. But Erik was ready, crafting a shield of light that intercepted the tendrils, deflecting them with ease. The dragon's tail whipped around, smashing into Silas and sending him sprawling.

As Silas struggled to rise, Erik formed another construct—a radiant phoenix that soared into the air before diving toward the necromancer, talons outstretched. The phoenix struck with a burst of light, its radiant claws raking across Silas's form, leaving trails of searing energy in its wake.

Silas screamed, the pain and light overwhelming his senses. But Erik did not relent. He crafted chains of light, binding Silas in place. While battling Silas, Erik noticed that Silas had done something to himself that made him hard to kill or disperse.

Erik was getting tired and his mana reserve was low. The only way he could currently think of defeating Silas was to seal him. Silas, who was caught in the chains, could be seen struggling before suddenly stopping.

Erik remained on guard, watching Silas. Outside the domain, back on the ground where the soldiers were still fighting, the female mage of Silas, who had been unmoving the whole time, suddenly wove a spell and took off into the sky with quickness.

Edward, who always had his eyes on her, followed. He didn't know what was going on but knew he had to stop it. As he flew closer to the female general, he heard her muttering as if casting a spell. The clouds gathered, followed by a huge gust of wind targeted at Edward, who was taken aback as he tried to push past the wind.

Finally breaking through, Edward saw the female mage going through a hole that appeared in Silas's domain before it closed.

Flying over to Erik's domain, Edward tried reaching out to it but was repelled. Inside the domain, Erik remained on guard, eyes fixed on Silas, whose struggles had abruptly ceased. Suspicion gnawed at Erik; this sudden stillness seemed unnatural. Just then, a piercing light broke through the domain, drawing Erik's attention. He saw the female mage, Silas's loyal lieutenant, entering through a tear in the fabric of the shadowy barrier.

Silas's body was limp, the chains of light holding him aloft like a marionette with its strings cut. Erik could sense the faint pulse of dark magic still emanating from Silas, but it was different now—muted, as if hiding beneath layers of deception.

The female mage landed gracefully beside Silas, her eyes burning with a mix of determination and desperation. She began to chant, her voice low and steady, weaving a complex spell that intertwined with the remnants of Silas's dark energy.

"No!" Erik lunged, spear poised to strike, but a barrier of shadow and light erupted between him and the mage. He slashed at it with his weapon, but it held firm, pulsing with a combined energy that seemed unbreakable.

The mage's chant grew louder, her words echoing with power. Silas's body began to glow with a sickly green light, his form shimmering and shifting.

The spear in Erik's hand began buzzing and shaking, leaving his hands to float midair. Erik's attention was torn away from Silas as he looked at the spear with tears falling from his eyes. "Please don't leave me," he said to the spear.

The spear was a weapon crafted by the world consciousness of his world in the hope of slaying the demon that was about to kill them. Sadly, that didn't happen, yet the spear made its way to this new world with him, and right now, a chance to kill that enemy was in front of them.

Erik knew that the spear was about to sacrifice itself to stop Silas from doing whatever he intended. Phantoms of elf souls appeared around the spear as they waved goodbye to Erik.

The spear, vibrating with an intense, otherworldly energy, floated higher, positioning itself directly between Erik and the barrier shielding Silas and the mage. Erik's heart ached as he saw the phantoms of elf souls surrounding the spear, their ethereal forms shimmering with a sorrowful light.

"No, please," Erik whispered, his voice choked with emotion. "We can find another way."

But the spear, guided by the collective will of the elf souls, seemed resolute. The spear began to spin, gathering energy from the phantoms around it. The air crackled with power as the spear transformed into a brilliant beam of light, piercing through the barrier with an unstoppable force. The mage's chant faltered, her eyes widening in shock and horror.

Silas, who had been silent, opened his mouth as he struggled to get free from the chains' hold, but the dragon and phoenix construct made sure he was held still.

"Nooo!" Silas roared as his body convulsed. The beam of light struck him, and the sickly green glow around him intensified before shattering into a million fragments. The female mage behind Silas didn't stop chanting as the light engulfed both figures, turning them to ashes and leaving nothing behind.

Erik watched in awe and sorrow as the spear's light engulfed Silas, tearing a hole in Silas's domain. The phantoms around the spear smiled one last time at Erik before dissipating into the ether, their mission complete.

The domain around Erik began to collapse, the shadows retreating and the light returning. Using the platform beneath him, Erik shot forward and grabbed hold of the spear's remnants as they fell toward the ground, now a simple, inert piece of metal.

Grabbing hold of the spear, Erik didn't create another platform to stand on. He allowed himself to fall, the weight of the battle and the loss of the spear's power heavy on his heart.

Edward saw Erik's falling figure, fearing that Erik was badly damaged. He rushed, flapping his wings with urgency as he flew to grab hold of his new friend.

As Edward flew toward Erik, he didn't notice the small dark seed that fell from the sky. Because he was up in the sky, his shadow wasn't around him but was instead spread out down to the battlefield on the ground. The dark seed fell from the sky into Edward's shadow.

As soon as the seed fell into his shadow, Edward's shadow squirmed and turned a bit darker. He was unaware of this as he reached Erik.

"Erik!" Edward shouted, reaching out to catch him. Erik, still clutching the remnants of the spear, felt Edward's strong arms wrap around him, steadying their descent.

"I've got you," Edward said, relief flooding his voice as he slowed their fall and floated in the sky, looking down on the battlefield below.

Erik looked at Edward, eyes filled with a mix of exhaustion and gratitude. "Thank you," he said quietly, his grip tightening on the broken spear.

Edward helped Erik stand. "Is it over?" Edward asked, scanning the battlefield in confusion, as Silas's troops were still moving like nothing had happened. For a moment, their formation faltered but quickly fixed itself.

Erik, already tired, clenched Edward's hands. "Please, I need you to act and take care of them personally before they spawn a new queen and grow even stronger."

Edward nodded, dropping to the ground and leaving Erik in a safe place on the battlefield. Taking off once again into the sky, his wings dispersed, forming a huge fireball. This time he wasn't alone, as his flying troops joined him, each losing their wings to merge with the huge fireball. Soon a large shadow covered the sky above.

Beams of different sizes and concentrations fell from the sky, targeting Silas's left army. Erik watched from his safe perch as Edward and his aerial troops formed the massive fireball. The sky darkened, and the battlefield below was illuminated by the ominous glow of the descending beams of fire. The enemy forces, caught off guard by the sudden assault, scrambled to defend themselves, but the relentless barrage was overwhelming.

The beams struck with pinpoint accuracy, decimating Silas's left army. The ground shook with each impact, and Erik could see the panic spreading among the enemy ranks.

The current attack seemed to push Silas's army to their limit as they began devouring faster, even those roasted by the fire. Soon, one parasite soldier grew and changed, its body covered in a mirror-like surface.

Chapter 262:

When a beam of light came close to this soldier, it was deflected, heading toward Erik's troops. Fortunately, it was momentarily bombarded away by the beams.

Almost on command, the dead body of the reflective soldier was shared among Silas's soldiers, who began developing the same characteristics. Edward, still in the sky, noticed this and frowned.

"A queen?" he thought in confusion as he scanned the battlefield from above, searching for the new leader.

Erik, observing the rapidly evolving enemy, knew they had to act swiftly. "King Edward, we need to focus our attacks!" he shouted, his voice barely audible over the cacophony of battle. "We can't let them adapt any further!"

Edward nodded and signaled his troops. They reformed, focusing their firepower on the newly emerged reflective soldiers. The sky lit up with concentrated beams, each strike precise and relentless.

Despite their efforts, the reflective soldiers proved resilient. Their mirror-like surfaces deflected many of the attacks, causing chaos among Erik's ranks.

Amidst the chaos, Erik's mind raced for a solution. He needed to find a way to penetrate the reflective defense. An idea sparked, and he quickly relayed his plan to Edward.

"Edward, we need to change our tactics! Aim for the ground around them, create a dust cloud to obscure their vision!"

Edward acknowledged the plan and relayed the orders. The aerial troops adjusted their aim, targeting the ground near the reflective soldiers. Explosions erupted, creating a thick cloud of dust and debris that enveloped the enemy.

The reflective soldiers, momentarily blinded and disoriented, began to falter. Seizing the opportunity, despite being tired, Erik rallied his ground forces. "Charge! Now is our chance!"

With Erik leading from the ground and with the support of Edward from the sky, Silas's remaining troops were quickly being taken out. Erik even began using the corpses of dead Silas soldiers as bait, making them easier to kill.

Erik and Edward stood side by side, watching as the battlefield fell silent. The echoes of battle faded, leaving behind a landscape scarred by conflict but victorious.

"It's over," Erik said, his voice weary but triumphant.

Not waiting for Edward to respond, Erik passed out, falling face-forward toward the ground but was caught by the weary Roland, who now looked haggard like a beggar, his armor in pieces barely hanging on his body.

Smiling tiredly at Edward, Roland took a deep bow and said, "In the place of my king, I would like to thank you for the help you offered in this way. Many of us will get to see our families because of you, your highness."

Edward nodded as he flapped his wings, followed by his men as they took to the sky. Before fully taking off, Edward looked deeply at the sleeping Erik.

Erik's current features were something he had never seen before. At first, he thought it was a transformation that came with using his full power, but that was wrong; even after using up his power, the features were still there.

As Edward ascended into the sky, his mind churned with questions. "What had happened to Erik? Was this change permanent? Is the change something Erik is aware of?"

The survivors began to regroup, tending to the wounded and gathering the fallen. Roland carried Erik to a newly built makeshift infirmary, where healers rushed to assess his condition. Despite his exhaustion, Erik's new appearance gave him an almost ethereal glow, one that the healers couldn't explain.

In the cursed forest, not too far away, the Jaguar closed its eyes in contempt as it thought to itself boredly, "This elf has no proper manners, to play in front of my yard and still dare to turn my meal to ash, nothing left."

Before the Jaguar closed its eyes, it looked off into the distance where the retreating form of Ursula could be seen penetrating the cloudy sky, disappearing.

Ikenga and Keles felt the sudden shift in the air as they were pulled into a vortex, a swirling mass of shadows and whispers that reached out and clawed at their divine essences. The disorienting sensation was relentless, their divine senses scrambled in the maelstrom. They could hardly find their bearings, tumbling through the chaos until it felt like the vortex drove them through something akin to a membrane.

When they regained their senses, they found themselves on a red burning cloud, quickly descending toward a ground that seemed to be on fire as well. Ikenga subconsciously tried to connect with his divinity, only to feel as if invisible heavy chains had wrapped around him. His divine power was still present but heavily suppressed.

Pulling on what he could, Ikenga turned into an eagle mid-air, flying with desperate strokes of his wings. Beside him, Keles morphed into a dark vulture, gliding as they descended rapidly toward the burning surface.

Morphing back mid-air, Ikenga landed on the ground with a hiss as his feet were seared by the intense heat. Raising his leg, he saw pieces of his skin left on the hot surface, quickly burning away. Instinctively,

he summoned wooden shoes imbued with fire elements, wrapping them around his legs to shield himself from the searing pain. He looked at Keles and waved his hand, causing similar shoes to appear on her feet.

Ikenga never thought he would have the opportunity to see hell as he began taking in the surroundings.

The landscape around them was nightmarish. The sky was a churning mass of crimson and black clouds, crackling with crimson lightning. The ground was a barren expanse of cracked, scorched earth, dotted with pools of molten lava. Rivers of fire snaked through the landscape, their banks lined with jagged obsidian rocks that jutted up like the teeth of some great beast. The air was thick with ash and smoke, making it difficult to breathe, and carrying with it the heavy stench of sulfur.

In the distance, they could see twisted spires of blackened stone reaching toward the sky, forming a grotesque skyline that seemed to mock the heavens.

Demonic creatures of various shapes and sizes roamed the land, their eyes glowing with malice as they hunted for any who dared to cross their path.

The ground beneath them trembled as if the very earth were alive and in pain. Flames periodically erupted from cracks in the ground, sending up showers of sparks and ash. The heat was unbearable, even with their divine protections. Every step they took felt like walking on a bed of hot coals.

As Ikenga and Keles moved cautiously through this hellscape, they realized that they were in a place where their divine powers were not just suppressed but actively resisted by the very fabric of the realm.

Keles spoke up, breaking Ikenga out of his thoughts. "It seems we are lucky."

Ikenga was confused at first but immediately understood what she meant. "This abyss layer has no Lord; otherwise, we would have felt a snapping sensation or something like a rejection."

Having confirmed that, Ikenga frowned as he noticed no longer had the sensation of being connected to things, so he had a hard time estimating or deciding how big this layer was.

"What do we do now?" Ikenga turned to Keles. Keles was looking around the layer, mainly down at the ground they were standing on.

"There is death everywhere; they may give us the information we need," she said as her hand, covered in a gray glow, gestured at the bones below, trying to wake them up.

Keles knew nothing of where she was, and what she was doing was equal to taboo, so Ikenga got on guard when he saw Keles frozen and her shell empty, meaning her soul was pulled out.

Keles had a different vision as she found herself in front of an ever-stretching river. Looking down at the river, she saw the phantom of a huge lady covered in a red dress looking at her.

The name of the lady was whispered to Keles from the void and the reason why this was happening. Keles, knowing she was at fault, took a deep bow at the lady as she spoke, "I apologize for my behavior, Lady Styx. I know nothing yet of the rules of the abyss."

A soft, motherly voice spoke to Keles, "There is truth to your words, child, as the abyss's breath on you is so little. Take this as a warning and be careful of your actions while in the abyss."

Keles's soul was pushed back into her shell, and she began heaving. Ikenga took hold of her, looking at her with worry. "What happened?" he asked.

Keles took a deep breath, steadying herself as she regained her composure. "We have to be more careful," she said, her voice tinged with the weight of the encounter. "I attempted to summon the dead for information, but instead, I was confronted by Lady Styx herself."

Ikenga's eyes widened in recognition but quickly were hidden. "Who is Lady Styx?"

Keles, having gotten herself together, said, "She is the mother of all demons or rather the guardian of the River Styx, where the demons are born from. She stretches to all layers of the abyss."

Chapter 263:

Ikenga frowned, the gravity of their situation sinking in. "So, what do we do now? We can't summon the dead, and our divine powers are resisted by the realm itself."

Keles nodded, her face still pale. "She warned us about our actions here. The abyss does not tolerate ignorance lightly. Every step, every action must be calculated and respectful of the ancient rules governing this place."

Ikenga looked around, his mind racing. "If we can't rely on our usual methods, we'll need another way to navigate and gather information. Perhaps we can find an ally among the inhabitants, someone who knows the lay of the land."

While Ikenga was thinking that, a resident of this abyss layer was already staring at them. A minotaur with four eyes and four hands could be seen standing on a hill, its nose twitching, trying to catch the sweet scent looming around.

It soon laid its eyes on Ikenga and Keles. Confusion flashed across the demon's eyes as the scent and its inheritance memory told it that those two were gods. "What are gods doing in the abyss?" the demon thought to itself as it licked its lips.

He didn't immediately act but kept watching. It took some time before it concluded that the two were lost or rather didn't know where they were going.

Ikenga, feeling an uneasy presence, turned his head slightly and caught sight of the minotaur. He nudged Keles gently. "We're being watched."

Keles subtly followed his gaze and spotted the creature. "What do we do? It might be our only chance to get information."

Ikenga nodded. "I agree, but it doesn't look like it wants to talk. Look at its mouth drooling."

Keles considered their options, glancing back at the minotaur whose eyes were now locked onto them with a mix of curiosity and hunger. "Let's try to communicate first. If things go south, we'll have to defend ourselves."

With cautious steps, Ikenga and Keles approached the minotaur. "We mean no harm," Ikenga called out, his voice steady despite the tension. "We seek guidance and information."

The minotaur's eyes narrowed as it disappeared from its place, only to reappear mid-air between Keles and Ikenga, its palm open, ready to slam them down.

As one of its palms was about to touch Keles' face, her features turned to shadow, the hand passing through her. At the same moment, she counterattacked by placing her hand on the minotaur's stomach. She was instinctively about to push the minotaur's soul out when she remembered her last encounter. Like a ghost, her hand went through the minotaur's stomach.

The minotaur froze, wide-eyed, mid-air. Its four eyes took in the cold looks of both gods. Pain flashed in its eyes as it looked down at one of its feet. The heated earth had grown a hand that held it in place—Ikenga's move when he saw the minotaur attacking. The rocky hand's grip tightened on the minotaur.

Ikenga and Keles suddenly shifted from their positions, a wise decision as a huge mouth filled with teeth erupted from where they had been standing, swallowing the minotaur. As the massive jaws closed, a creature resembling a shark burst from the heated floor. Mid-air, the shark's eyes locked onto Ikenga and Keles with hunger.

Anger flashed in Ikenga's eyes as he stretched out his hand, and a huge spike grew from the ground, piercing through the shark's stomach. Before Ikenga could react further, a team of gargoyle-like creatures flew in from the sky, tearing the shark to pieces. One flew in too fast as it slammed on the ground, Ikenga's shadow moved a bit as something was pulled from the gargoyle that was standing up dizzily.

Ikenga and Keles were too occupied to notice what was going on. A cacophony of barking sounds echoed from the distance, quickly approaching where the gods stood. Ikenga and Keles exchanged a glance, their expressions steely. They knew they were far from safe.

Keles pulled from the void where a scythe made of pure darkness appeared in her hand. She tightened her grip, eyes scanning the horizon. "Looks like more trouble is on the way."

Ikenga nodded, his muscles tensed for the next wave. "We need to find somewhere safe, quick. We have no idea how many more are to come."

Before they could strategize further, a pack of hellhounds, their eyes glowing with infernal light, burst into the clearing. Each hound's maw dripped with molten lava, their growls vibrating through the air.

Keles moved first, her shadowy form flickering in and out of sight as she danced among the hellhounds, her scythe a blur of movement. Each strike was precise, and the hounds fell one after another, losing their necks to her dark blade.

Ikenga wasn't idle. One of his hands turned into tendrils of red wood, drilling into the dead bodies and heads of the fallen hounds. "Get on," he said quickly to Keles as his hand turned back to normal. At the same time, his body fell on all fours as he morphed into a huge hellhound.

Keles, in her shadowy form, got on Ikenga's back. He immediately kicked off, springing into the distance. Ikenga's speed left everything behind, but as they thought they were safe, a shadow loomed overhead. They looked up to see a massive figure descending from the sky—a winged demon, its body covered in scales and its eyes burning with malevolent intelligence.

The demon reached out its claw to grab hold of Ikenga and Keles. That same scythe appeared in Keles's hand, growing in size as it slashed at the claw, cutting it clean. Red molten blood fell from the cut, drenching Keles and Ikenga. Except for the slight warmth, both gods didn't mind. Ikenga kept moving until he saw a deep trench ahead, which he had no hesitation diving into.

The huge shadow above them had long since flown off once it lost its claw.

As Ikenga landed in the trench, Keles got off of him, and he turned back to his humanoid form. A seat grew out from the ground for both him and Keles as they sat in it in silence. The thought that they might be here for a long time before finding someone ready to talk hovered in their minds.

Ikenga's shadow squirmed, causing his eyes to flash purple. "Come out," Ikenga said to his shadow.

Keles was surprised, but when a figure swam out from Ikenga's shadow, she understood. The arch-cursed Spotlight Phantom, who made his place in Ikenga's shadow, appeared as he took a knee before both gods.

Ikenga, looking at the cursed being in front of him and asked, "You said you could be of help in finding out information. How?"

Phantom bowed as he said, "Earlier, when your grace took the appearance of the hound, it reminded me of one of my abilities I got from the fame seeker."

Ikenga looked thoughtful before asking, "You mean chosen facade?"

"Yes, your grace," Phantom responded to Ikenga.

"What difference is it from my earlier transformation?" Ikenga asked, still not comprehending how Phantom was to be of help.

Phantom hesitated, unsure if he would offend Ikenga with his words. But looking at the two gods who were eagerly waiting for his answer, Phantom bowed his head and said, "While your earlier transformation was great, your highness, it lacked authenticity. Those creatures are different; they all have an air around them that can hardly be replicated by just looking like them."

Ikenga's eyes narrowed in thought. "So, you're saying this chosen facade can make you indistinguishable from the real thing?"

"Yes, your grace," Phantom replied. "The chosen facade not only replicates the appearance but also the essence, the aura of the creature. It makes me one of them, at least for a time."

Keles leaned forward, her interest piqued. "And this will allow you to move through the Abyss unnoticed?"

Phantom nodded. "Yes, my lady. It will give me the guise of a native, allowing me to gather information and move more freely."

Ikenga looked thoughtful, "He was the god of curses so such a thing should be possible for him, right?" At the same time, Ikenga hesitated to use a curse on himself, remembering what happened the last time he did so.

After his short bout with his brother, Ikenga realized his curse was borderline bending rules and reality around him to achieve its purpose. With Crepuscular, he was at a disadvantage because of Crepuscular's speed, so he cursed himself to be untouched. The curse took effect immediately; for a moment, no matter what happened or how fast something happened, he couldn't be touched.

But a curse was no ordinary power and came with a price, in earlier cases it was Isolation. Isolation that extended to even cutting off his connection with Nature. Right now, Ikenga was tempted to curse himself with the chosen facade but couldn't, as the price for such an ability was right in front of him.

Chapter 264:

After Phantom appeared, his facial features had changed about ten times. Ikenga could bet all his money that Phantom might not even recognize his own face anymore. Unlike Phantom, Ikenga could cut off the usage of the ability, but that was something he wouldn't be able to do once he used the ability to go out and move around in the Abyss, as once he cut it off, he would be swarmed from all sides.

The isolation didn't last long as Ikenga pulled back on the curse. Ikenga didn't even dare think of the last effect if he had left it on.

Ikenga sighed, looking at Phantom. "Then you will be our scout. Use your chosen facade to move through the Abyss and gather the information we need."

The Phantom bowed deeply. "As you command, your grace."

Keles placed a reassuring hand on Ikenga's shoulder. "We will find a way through this. Trust in Phantom's abilities. We can strategize based on what he discovers."

Ikenga nodded, his resolve strengthening. "Very well. Phantom, prepare yourself. We need to know everything—safe passages, potential allies, and any threats that lie ahead."

Phantom's form shimmered briefly, his features shifting as he activated the chosen facade. His appearance morphed into one of the gargoyles they saw before.

"I will return with the information you seek," Phantom said, his voice now a guttural growl that matched his new form. His wings flapped as he took to the sky.

As Phantom disappeared, Keles and Ikenga sat in silence, the weight of their situation heavy upon them. They had a plan, albeit a risky one, but it was their best chance to navigate this treacherous realm.

Right after, Phantom was gone. Ikenga stood up and waved his hand at the surrounding stones, commanding them to come together to form a house.

When the house was finished, Ikenga approached it and placed his hand on the stone wall. His cursed tattoo flashed as he uttered, "Veil of Oblivion."

As he opened the door to walk in, Keles moved to follow, but Ikenga stopped her. "I want to test the effect of the curse placed on this new house," he said.

Keles nodded and stayed behind, watching as Ikenga entered and closed the door behind him. Immediately, the house disappeared from Keles's perception. The more she tried to focus on the house's location, the more the memory of its existence seemed to slip away from her mind.

Frustrated, Keles stopped searching and let her divinity radiate around her. A cracking sound, like something breaking, echoed in her mind. As she turned back, the house reappeared before her.

Ikenga opened the door with a smile and gestured for her to enter. Keles walked in, and Ikenga closed the door behind her.

Ikenga knew exactly what had happened to Keles. As soon as she began searching for the house, he felt a significant drain on his divine power as it worked to combat and deceive her godly senses. When Keles used her divine power, Ikenga had the option to expend more energy to continue hiding the house, but he let it go. He had already obtained the answer he wanted.

Keles had only persisted in searching because she knew the house should be there. If others had been present, they would not have bothered to look for the house, as they would have no memory of its existence.

At the sametime Ikenga understood the price for this curse. If someone inside the house is seen leaving it, it would expose the secret of the house being there. Also if an active search was carried around the place, it would put a cost on his divine energy to prevent the house from being seen.

A large seat made out from darkness was crafted by Keles as she laid in it, her pale legs faintly visible. Looking at his sister, Ikenga noticed he hadn't seen what she looked like apart from her bony facial feature hidden under the cloak hoodie covering her head.

A seat crafted with woods, Inlaid with the stones on this layer of abyss was crafted by Ikenga as he sat in it, enjoying the warmth it brought.

In the open air, Ikenga waved his hand. The surrounding of the house changed like it was covered by a huge screen. In the screen, the sight of a red cloud can be seen, which is the sight seen by phantom.

Keles watched intently, her eyes reflecting the crimson glow of the cloud. "He's moving fast," she murmured. "Let's hope he finds something useful."

Ikenga nodded. "Phantom knows the risks. He'll be cautious. We just need to be ready when he returns."

As the minutes turned into hours, the screen displayed the harsh and chaotic landscape of the Abyss. Phantom's form darted through shadows and crevices, avoiding larger, more dangerous entities while seeking information.

In the screen, Keles and Ikenga both squinted as they saw something like a mountain moving, Phantom saw the figure too as he swooped in to see what it was only to meet with a giant made of stone with cracked crevices that flowed with hot magma.

Phantom seemed to have caught the giant's attention as its huge eyeball stared at him, Phantom overwhelmed immediately took to the sky with quickness.

Along the way he occasionally pauses to observe gatherings of demons. Phantom, disguised as a gargoyle, soon found a group of similar creatures perched on a rocky outcrop.

As Phantom landed among the gargoyles, he blended seamlessly into their ranks, his disguise perfect. The gargoyles, perched on the rocky outcrop, were engaged in a low, guttural conversation. Their eyes, glowing with a sinister light, flicked to him briefly before returning to their discussion.

"Did you hear about the two gods?" one gargoyle rumbled, his voice a gravelly growl. "Apparently, they've been spotted wandering our layer."

Another gargoyle, larger and more menacing, sneered. "Gods, here? They must be desperate or foolish to enter the Abyss. This is an opportunity for us. Think of the power we could gain by feasting on divine flesh."

A third gargoyle, her wings twitching with excitement, added, "It's been ages since we've had prey worth the hunt. These gods will be no different. We need to find them before the other factions do."

Phantom listened intently, noting the eagerness in their voices. These gargoyles saw the presence of Ikenga and Keles as an opportunity to grow stronger, not as a threat.

"We need a plan," the first gargoyle said, his eyes narrowing. "The gods might be powerful, but if we catch them off guard, we can overpower them. Imagine the strength we'll gain."

The second gargoyle nodded, his claws digging into the rock. "We should gather more of our kind. A coordinated attack will ensure our victory. Spread the word—gods have entered our domain, and we must be the ones to bring them down."

A gargoyle in a robe spoke up, silencing the others. "It seems you all are eager to meet your end, or have you forgotten about the two demon kings in this layer fighting for the throne of the demon lord?"

The gargoyle's words struck a chord, causing their expressions to change as memories of the past flashed in their minds.

A female gargoyle stood up, a mix of excitement and fear in her voice. "An expedition?"

Murmurs began spreading among the gargoyles. The robed gargoyle conjured a fireball in its hand and shot it into the sky, followed by a loud explosion.

The murmurs quieted down. "Gods' presence in the abyss is quite rare, but memories of the past have shown us that each appearance of a divine being is followed by the birth of a demon lord, depending on the abyss layer the divine being is found in."

"It can be said that the divine beings are a gift presented to the son of an abyssal layer by the abyss itself, to push this son towards the throne of a demon lord."

The robed gargoyle's gaze hardened, and his tone grew more intense. "By now, the initial excitement brought by the appearance of the two gods will die down. The larger picture will emerge for all to see."

The air grew tense as the implications of his words settled. "Those two gods mean a great deal to every demon in this abyss layer, especially the two demon kings. For them, the gods are the key to securing the throne of a demon lord. For us ordinary demons, it represents a chance to rise to demon king status and even vie for the position of a demon lord."

The robed gargoyle's demeanor shifted. His calm facade cracked as he began to chuckle darkly. "This abyss layer has already chosen its son, the 'Flaming Imp.' According to the abyss's law, he would be the one to first find the gods and take them under his wing, as the abyss wills it."

His eyes gleamed with a dangerous light. "But this is a rare opportunity for us to stand against our father and creator, the abyss itself. An opportunity many demons have sought but never been fortunate enough to seize. Our father loves his disobedient children, and we would be a disappointment to him if we don't defy, twist, and seize his grace forcefully from his hands."

Chapter 265:

A murmur of agreement rippled through the crowd. The robed gargoyle's words had ignited a spark of rebellion in their hearts.

"News of the two gods will soon spread across the abyss. Every resident will seek them out. Madness, blood, and flesh feasts will descend upon this layer. This is an opportunity for growth, for fame, for power. And we must ensure we grab our share of this colossal prize."

He raised his arms, as if embracing the chaos to come. "We will not wait idly by. We will seize the moment. Our ambition will carve a new path in the abyss, and we will rise above the rest."

The assembly roared in approval, their voices blending into a unified chant of rebellion. Phantom, who was among them, joined the chant but at the same time he was terrified, from the gargoyle words they are not the only one thinking the same thing and to confirm his words.

From a distance away from the gargoyle group, a three headed dog is also barking and howling with the hell hounds around it joining in to do the same.

Back in the safe house, Ikenga and keles no longer had their relaxed demeanor. Ikenga looked at his hand to find it shaking, confusion and excitement flashed in his eyes "Am i scared?" He thought to himself.

"Brother" He heard Keles call out from beside him, bringing him out of his thoughts.

Both siblings' eyes met, at the same time widened as they both began chuckling. "We truly are a lot more similar than I thought" Keles said to Ikenga who nodded.

Ikenga's eyes were filled with a strange, almost feverish excitement. The pandemonium around him stirred a profound, unsettling eagerness within him. He craved to immerse himself in the chaos, to actively participate and influence the course of events. It was as if the turbulence of the situation was a forbidden knowledge he longed to grasp fully.

"This excitement," he said softly, "it's not about wealth or power. It's a yearning to be at the heart of it all, to understand every facet of this chaos and mold it to my will."

Keles, too, has the same feverish excitement in her eyes. She was drawn to the idea of being deeply involved in the power struggles and the frenzy of the abyss, not as an observer but as a key participant. The chaos ignited a desire within her to actively shape the course of events, to engage with the power and influence in a way she felt she was currently denied. "It's not just about what they have," Keles admitted, her voice tinged with frustration. "It's the desire to be in the thick of it, to have a role and influence that others seem to command so effortlessly. I envy their active participation, their ability to shape the chaos around them."

Ikenga took a deep breath to calm down. "Let us analyze what we heard from those demons."

"Son of Abyss, ascension to demon lord, and expedition," Keles said, a thoughtful look on her face.

"The 'Son of Abyss' part can be understood as the demon favored by the Abyss itself to take the seat of the demon lord. I believe the role we both play in this is to increase the chances of the Son of Abyss, which is a hand played by the Abyss. This could mean one thing: our landing on this layer was planned," Ikenga said to Keles, who nodded.

"I have a feeling that our goal is already known by the Abyss, and this is its way of making us pay the price. If we think of it this way, then the Son of the Abyss or the other demon king holds the key to the knowledge we seek," Keles said, to which Ikenga nodded in agreement.

"There is some truth to your words, as the robed demon stated that the appearance of gods in an Abyss layer leads to the birth of a demon lord. What if those previous gods had the same purpose as us and were laid out the same way by the Abyss?"

Ikenga's eyes darkened with a mix of realization and dread. "So, we might be nothing more than pawns in the Abyss's grand scheme," he mused. "The Abyss has orchestrated our presence here, setting the stage for a greater conflict and using us as catalysts for its own ends."

Keles clenched her fists, her nails digging into her pale palms. "But if we're aware of this, we can use it to our advantage. We're not mere pawns; we can be players in this game. We just need to understand the rules better and find ways to bend them."

Ikenga nodded, a steely look settling over his features. "Agreed. Our first step is to learn more about these two demon kings. If we can understand their strengths and weaknesses, we might find a way to navigate this chaos to our benefit. The Son of the Abyss, the 'Flaming Imp,' is crucial."

"I don't know how long it will take for the Son of Abyss to find us. Knowing that the Abyss is playing a hand in this conflict, I have begun to have doubts about the capabilities of my curse. For an ancient being like the Abyss, my curses may not be of much use," Ikenga said as he looked back at the screen showing Phantom's view.

"We need some cards of our own so we won't play into the hands of the Son of Abyss when he finds us. I believe we should start with the group of demons that Phantom is currently involved with," Ikenga said to Keles, who nodded.

Keles's eyes sparkled as she asked, "And what about the other demon king? We can't ignore him either. If he's a contender for the throne, he'll be just as important."

"Of course he is," Ikenga replied. "But as things stand now, the chances of him finding us are next to impossible compared to the Son of the Abyss."

Keles stayed silent before Ikenga spoke up again. "Sister?" Ikenga called out.

"Yes?" Keles replied.

"The robed demon's words and Murmur's last words keep ringing in my mind. Murmur said that the Abyss is where opposites are the cause, and the robed demon stated that the Abyss hates obedient children, which is wrong in all senses but here makes sense."

"Disobedience is expected of them, which is why they go against the Abyss and its chosen son. For their disobedience, if it works out, they will be rewarded greatly."

Ikenga's eyes were now overwhelmed with greed as he looked at Keles. "How about a third demon king created by us? We should, like disobedient children, ignore the path laid out for us by the Abyss. If it were any other being, I would be scared to play this way, but for the Abyss, this is what entertains it."

"I wonder what reward it will bestow upon us if the demon king we create ascends to the throne of the demon lord," Ikenga asked, perhaps to Keles or the Abyss itself.

Keles's eyes widened, a mixture of shock and excitement flashing across her face. The audacity of Ikenga's plan was staggering, yet it held a strange allure, an allure she envied and wanted for herself. Creating a third contender for the throne could indeed disrupt the Abyss's carefully orchestrated game and potentially earn them a reward beyond their wildest imaginations.

"Do we even have the means to accomplish such a feat?" Keles asked, her voice tinged with disbelief.

Ikenga's smile was confident, his mind already racing with possibilities. "We have knowledge and cunning on our side. We can manipulate, deceive, and empower a demon of our choosing. Our children play similar games in our world; we shouldn't be lacking in that as their parents. Phantom could be the perfect trap to find the one we need. He's already embedded within that group, and his loyalty to us is unquestionable."

Keles considered this, her mind working through the implications. "If we succeed, we'll not only have disrupted the Abyss's plans but also placed ourselves in a position of significant influence. However, we must be cautious. The Abyss is ancient and much older than us, even older than Mother. Any misstep could lead to our destruction."

"Precisely," Ikenga replied. "We'll need to tread carefully. Our first task is to establish Phantom's position within the group of demons and subtly begin to elevate his status. We must also gather as much information as possible about the existing demon kings and their followers. Knowledge is our greatest weapon."

Keles nodded, her excitement tempered by a steely resolve. "Then let's begin. We'll need to communicate our plan to Phantom without drawing attention."

"Leave that to me," Ikenga said as he closed his eyes. Sinking into his divinity, mostly the cursed divinity, he visualized his consciousness. At the center, countless purple lines extended into the distance.

Most of the purple lines looked bleak; only one stood out. Grabbing hold of the thread, Ikenga noticed it belonged to Phantom. "It seems the others are in a bleak state because we are so far away or maybe because of the suppression of this layer."

Chapter 266:

Establishing a connection with Phantom, Ikenga began to relay his message. Phantom, in the midst of the demon assembly, felt a familiar tingle in his mind as Ikenga's presence made contact. He subtly shifted away from the group, finding a quiet corner where he could focus on the connection without arousing suspicion.

Ikenga's voice resonated in Phantom's mind. "Phantom, we need you to rise within this group. Your influence is crucial for our plan. Subtly gather support and establish yourself as a leader. Be wary of the chosen Son of the Abyss. If there is any chance of contact with him, stay away. We suspect he can pinpoint us and will find us soon, but we need to be prepared."

Phantom's eyes flickered with determination as he absorbed the instructions. "Understood, your grace. I will proceed with caution."

Ikenga continued, "We also need information on the two demon kings. Find out their strengths, weaknesses, and any potential allies or enemies. This knowledge will help us navigate the chaos and position ourselves advantageously."

Phantom nodded imperceptibly. "I will start immediately. Is there anything specific you want me to focus on first?"

Ikenga's tone was thoughtful. "Focus on solidifying your place in the group first and understanding the dynamics within your group. Slowly begin to show your talent and rise in the ranks. Identify potential allies and threats. Once you have a stable footing, gather information about the demon kings."

With the message conveyed, Ikenga slowly withdrew from the connection, leaving Phantom to his task. He opened his eyes and met Keles's gaze.

"It's done. Phantom is aware of the plan and will start working on elevating his status and gathering information."

Keles looked at Ikenga before nodding. "I believe, brother, the Abyss is having an adverse effect on us. Mother did say we are endowed with these sins, but it hasn't been as prominent as it has been since we landed in the Abyss."

Ikenga's eyes were calm hearing Keles's words, and he smirked. "I know that, sister, but since our birth, we have rarely had moments like this. I don't mind letting my guard down a bit and indulging. Isn't that the same for you?"

Keles gave no answer back, only a chuckle. Ikenga waved his hand, and part of the house expanded to look a bit like a garden. With another wave, he threw different seeds into the soil.

Back at the rocky outcrop, Phantom, who had received his new mission, didn't move from his spot. Instead, he used this opportunity to observe the group of gargoyles with his talent, aiming to determine who to approach.

Hidden but deep in Phantom's eyes, a yellow glow flashed as he looked at the gargoyles. Confusion soon filled Phantom's eyes as he took a closer look, only for his facial features to change as he could hardly control himself. Thankfully, none of the gargoyles paid attention to him. After merging with the Flame Seeker, Phantom acquired a new talent called "Light of Ambition."

This talent enables him to find those with deep-seated ambition and their eagerness to be in the spotlight. Phantom rarely had time to use this talent on normal humans, but he understood that not everyone should have that light burning in them, as people are different.

The sight before Phantom subverted his thoughts, as every gargoyle, big or small, weak or strong, had the same burning ambition to be in the spotlight, meaning each and every one of them believed they could come out on top.

The gargoyle form Phantom was currently using as a facade was chosen based on his own talent during the demons' attack on Ikenga and Keles. A gargoyle flying too fast had crashed face-first when they swarmed in, arousing feelings of shame in the demon, which Phantom seized upon. This was why he was able to take the gargoyle's form.

His talent gave him a glimpse of the gargoyle's memory, enough for Phantom to understand why these demons, regardless of how delusional their ambitions seemed, made sense.

Phantom's limited understanding of demons made him realize how powerful and broken of a race they are. His best explanation would be that demons are the clones of some ancient mighty being.

No demon is more talented or insightful than another, but experiences are what set them apart. As long as a demon lives long enough and encounters opportunities, it is guaranteed to become something great.

So, while it came as a surprise to Phantom to see the light of ambition in the gathered gargoyle, the surprise was short-lived once an understanding of the race was taken into consideration.

This made things easier for Phantom and, at the same time, harder. Any of the gargoyles could be chosen by him as an ally, but it also meant that his allies couldn't be trusted.

With the amount of ambition oozing from them, Phantom wouldn't be surprised if they sacrificed or tricked each other to achieve their goals.

The full extent of the creator's plan is yet unknown to Phantom, but he knows it is something big, so he has to be careful about whom he first approaches.

Pushing himself off the wall he was leaning on, Phantom began walking around the outpost. He made sure to stay out of sight during his observation.

Phantom suddenly stopped as he felt a familiar pull call out to him. He was truly surprised as the emotion he felt pulling him was something he believed to be rare among this group of ambitious demons.

Following the pull, Phantom was halted in his path as he saw a new group of demons. No, not a new group of demons but the same gargoyles—only these ones were without wings.

"A mutation?" Phantom thought to himself as he walked closer. The closer he got, the more he saw how they were scared of him as they lowered themselves and tried not to meet his eyes.

Sadly, Phantom wasn't fooled by their weak appearance. The group of mutant gargoyles had two emotions strong in them: "Ambition and Shame."

Pulling the emotions invisible to others but himself, Phantom took a deep breath as memories began flashing in his eyes. Looking back at the mutants, a flash of understanding appeared in his eyes.

Phantom was right in his observation of them being mutants. For the demons, mutants aren't something new; they even look forward to it as it shows uniqueness, but their favor for this uniqueness is limited.

For demons, as a mutant, you are expected to take on a new path and progress, showing how unique you are. It can be said that for a while, demons do something they are truly against: showing kindness.

Kindness will be shown to the mutant, and many demons will help the mutant grow, but all that kindness and favor are washed away once, after a while, no uniqueness or growth is shown.

The treatment of the said mutant will become bad, and they will be demoted to nothing but a slave. The mutants in front of Phantom are in the same state.

Being the creatures they are and their origin, even after being demoted to a slave, ambition still hides deep in their bones, which is why Phantom knew their current weak appearance was because of circumstances.

At the same time, another emotion very present in them, which attracted Phantom, was "Shame." In their case, the reason for shame can be many: not meeting expectations, and how a noble being like them is branded with slave status.

Phantom chuckled and smiled to himself as he knew he had found his allies. Unlike other demons, he would show these mutants kindness not because he expected something great of them, but because his kindness would be the greatest price to be paid to the demons as they would serve well as pawns for his creator.

Phantom continued his slow walk towards the group of mutant gargoyles, his mind working rapidly as he considered his next steps. The combination of ambition and shame made these gargoyles ideal candidates for his plan. They were downtrodden and overlooked, yet brimming with a desire to prove themselves—a potent mixture that Phantom could exploit. At the same time, Phantom knew kindness wasn't enough to win these mutants.

If he truly believed that, he would only make a fool of himself, as he knew there was a chance one of these mutants would take this as an opportunity to curry favor with another gargoyle for a greater status than a slave.

As he approached, the mutants' fear was palpable. They cowered, avoiding eye contact, their bodies tense with the expectation of harsh treatment. Phantom stopped a few paces away, adopting a calm and non-threatening posture.

"Rise," he commanded gently, his voice devoid of the usual harshness these gargoyles were accustomed to, yet still with the sternness of being commanded. "I have no intention or interest in harming you."

The mutants exchanged wary glances but slowly straightened, still cautious but slightly less fearful. Phantom took a moment to observe each of them closely, his talent allowing him to sense the depth of their emotions and aspirations.

Chapter 267:

The mutants exchanged wary glances but slowly straightened, still cautious but slightly less fearful. Phantom took a moment to observe each of them closely, his talent allowing him to sense the depth of their emotions and aspirations.

"I understand your plight," Phantom began, his tone empathetic. "You have been cast aside, your unique potential ignored because you have yet to show results. But I see more in you than just failure. I see untapped strength and a burning desire to prove yourselves."

The gargoyles' eyes widened in surprise. It had been a long time since anyone had spoken to them with such respect and understanding. Phantom's words stirred something within them—an ember of hope.

"I offer you a chance," Phantom continued. "Join me, and together we will rise. I will help you unlock your potential, and in return, you will have the opportunity to regain your honor and status. We will achieve greatness together."

Before the mutants could respond to Phantom, a robed gargoyle came beside Phantom, looking at the mutants with disgust.

Looking over to Phantom, the demon asked, "What are you doing?"

Phantom was taken aback but felt the eyes of the other demons on him. Feigning ignorance, Phantom responded, "Huh, am I missing something?"

Now it was the robed demon's turn to be confused as he tilted his head, "Miss what?" he asked.

Turning to the robed demon and flaring his wings, Phantom said, "Did I miss when we made you the leader of this gathering?"

Hearing the word leader, the robed demon and the other gargoyles had different reactions. Most of the gargoyles turned their eyes to the robed demon, filled with ill-intention and questioning gazes, waiting for his answer.

The robed demon, meanwhile, was now panicking as he realized he had overstepped. He was strong, but so were many of the other demons gathered around. He had been carried away by his previous actions, making him think he was greater than he was, which is why he dared to question Phantom.

Phantom seemed to know what he was thinking as he pushed forward, "Because of your insightful speech earlier and everyone cheering with you, you think you have suddenly risen to the status of questioning us?"

"Wow, calm down, calm down. I was just curious about what you plan on doing with the slave mutants," the robed demon said, turning the question to Phantom, who frowned as now the other demons were staring at him.

His actions indeed could be considered weird in the eyes of the demons as such situations rarely happen. He needed a convincing answer to get everyone off his back, even then he was sure many would keep an eye on him to see what he was planning.

Ikenga and Keles, who were watching and now eating fruits grown from the seeds Ikenga had thrown out, stopped as they watched silently. They understood that Phantom was now facing a big problem and was possibly at risk of being found out.

Phantom was truly tempted to change his facade, as he had one perfect for this situation. Not showing any emotion outwardly, Phantom began speaking.

Patting the shoulder of the robed demon, he said, "You yourself already stated how the situation in this layer is about to change. The two gods mean a lot to all demons, especially the two demon kings."

Phantom pointed at the mutants as he continued his speech, keeping his tone authoritative yet composed. "I believe we need every bit of manpower we can get if we want to have a chance in the upcoming conflict. These mutants, despite their current state, possess untapped potential that could be harnessed for our benefit."

The robed demon hesitated, sensing the shift in the atmosphere as the other gargoyles turned their attention back to Phantom, curiosity piqued by his reasoning. Phantom seized the moment, his mind racing to solidify his stance.

"Think about it," Phantom urged, addressing the entire group now. "We are on the brink of a significant upheaval. The arrival of the two gods has thrown everything into chaos. To survive and thrive, we must be strategic. We cannot afford to discard resources, especially when they can be molded into something valuable."

There was a murmur of agreement among the gathered demons. Phantom could see some of the gargoyles nodding thoughtfully, reconsidering their initial disdain for the mutants. He pressed on, reinforcing his point.

"These mutants," he said, gesturing to the group behind him, "may have been demoted to slaves, but their ambition remains. With proper guidance and training, they can become a formidable force. They have something to prove, and that makes them dangerous to our enemies. It's a risk, yes, but one that could pay off immensely."

The robed demon's expression shifted from confusion to reluctant acceptance. He could see the logic in Phantom's words and recognized the potential advantage in having more allies ready to fight. "Very well," he said grudgingly. "But know that if this fails, the blame will fall on you."

Phantom nodded, maintaining his calm demeanor. "I accept that responsibility."

With that, the robed demon stepped back, and the tension in the air began to dissipate. The other gargoyles returned to their activities, albeit with newfound respect for Phantom's behavior and strategic

thinking. The mutants, now standing taller with a spark of hope in their eyes, looked at Phantom with a mixture of gratitude and determination.

Ikenga and Keles, watching from their secluded spot, exchanged glances. "He handled that well," Keles remarked, a hint of admiration in her voice.

Ikenga, meanwhile, had a frown on his face. Contacting Phantom, Ikenga said, "What you did was very risky; you put yourself at risk of being exposed."

"Why are you in such a hurry that you forget to look around where you are? How arrogant of you to solicit power in front of other gargoyles when you could have done that from the shadows and slowly achieved your goal."

Calming down, Ikenga added, "Good job, but next time, think about your actions." Phantom felt the sting of Ikenga's rebuke in his mind, but he kept his face impassive. The mutants were looking at him with newfound hope and determination, and he couldn't afford to show any sign of internal conflict. He gave them a reassuring nod before turning away and walking to a secluded spot where he could respond to Ikenga in private.

Phantom nodded, both to himself and in his mind. "I will heed your advice. We must proceed with caution from here on."

Ikenga's voice took on a warmer tone. "Good. Now, continue building your base of power. We are relying on you."

With the connection severed, Phantom took a deep breath and returned to the mutants. They were waiting for him, eager for guidance.

"Let's move forward," he said, his voice steady. "We have much to do."

Over the following weeks, Phantom focused on training the mutants and integrating them more effectively into the gargoyle ranks. He took Ikenga's advice to heart, working more from the shadows and ensuring his actions were less conspicuous.

He carefully selected a few trusted gargoyles, slowly building a network of "loyal allies" without drawing too much attention.

Today, as Phantom was about to exercise with the mutants, a female flying gargoyle flew into the sky and screamed, "The hounds are on the move!"

Almost on command, all gargoyles with wings took to the sky, following the female gargoyle. Soon, only Phantom and the mutants were left in the camp.

"Armor up," Phantom said to the mutants. "We can't fall too far behind." The mutants immediately reached for their weapons.

Flapping his wings, Phantom slowly took off into the sky. The mutants followed behind as they quickly climbed down the mountain.

With Phantom flying slowly in the sky and the mutants following closely behind as they sprinted to catch up, they soon began seeing other demon figures who seemed to have the same plan: trailing behind a large group of hellhounds.

In the Abyss layer, hellhounds are known for their extremely sensitive noses, and this was what all demon parties were relying on. They were waiting for the hellhounds and their three-headed leader to catch a whiff of the gods so they could benefit from it.

The demons didn't know how the two gods did it, but since their first appearance, no news or sight of the gods had been seen, leading some demons to believe that the gods had either found a way into the next layer or were long gone from the Abyss.

The hellhounds' current movement indicated that the gods were still in this layer. Phantom followed behind as his expression turned grave. He noticed that the hellhounds had led most of the available demons to where Ikenga and Keles were.

The three-headed leader of the hellhounds was sniffing at the place where Ikenga and Keles had been sitting before sending off Phantom. Confusion flashed across the hound's eyes as it strongly sensed that the scent was still there but couldn't find the gods.

Chapter 268:

Ikenga and Keles, in a hidden house not too far away, were both biting into apples as they watched the demons running around, looking for them.

Ikenga noticed a small drain of his divine power, and the hounds contributed the most to it. He was confident they wouldn't find the house, but the hounds' noses were too good. Even though they saw nothing, their instincts and noses told them that what they were seeking was near.

Suddenly, Ikenga and Keles turned serious, as did every available demon, when two heavy presences descended into the valley trench where everyone was gathered.

Ikenga and Keles were tempted to spread out their divine senses to see which demons had made their appearance.

Thankfully, they had Phantom for that, who was now observing the two new demons that had made their appearance.

The first demon that caught Ikenga's attention was the son of the Abyss, known as "The Imp Demon."

This imp was small in stature, typical of its kind, standing no taller than a child. However, what it lacked in height, it compensated for with an intimidating presence. Its eyes glinted with a malevolent intelligence, hinting at a cunning far beyond its size. The dark feathered wings, a stark contrast to the leathery or bat-like wings of its brethren, gave it an eerie, almost angelic appearance, twisted by its malevolent nature. These wings, although not vast, were powerful and allowed the imp to hover menacingly above its victims.

Clutched tightly in its clawed hand was a pitchfork, its prongs glistening with a dark, ominous sheen. It took a slow glance at the demons gathered around, its senses spreading out like radar, trying to locate the hiding place of the two gods.

Not far behind the Imp Demon was another demon perched on a wall. She stood with an otherworldly grace, her form undeniably humanoid but laced with unmistakable spider features. Her skin was a pale,

almost luminescent hue, accentuating her ethereal beauty. Delicate patterns, reminiscent of a spider's web, traced intricate designs across her flesh, glistening subtly as she moved.

Her eyes were perhaps her most striking feature—large, dark, and multifaceted like those of a spider, yet capable of expressing a haunting, almost hypnotic allure. Those eyes, set above high cheekbones, shimmered with a mixture of intelligence and malevolence.

Her hair cascaded down her back in thick, glossy waves, as black as a moonless night, often appearing to move with a life of its own. Extending from her back were several slender, segmented legs covered in fine, velvety hairs. Despite her monstrous aspects, her beauty was undeniable—a captivating blend of human allure and arachnid mystique.

Like the Imp Demon, she spread out her senses, accompanied by unseen thin webs spreading across the trench valley. Yet it gave no result as the gods weren't found.

Ikenga and Keles paused mid-bite, their senses on high alert as the oppressive presence of the new demons descended upon the valley trench. The air grew thick with tension as every demon present turned their attention toward the newcomers.

Phantom, hidden among the shadows, observed the arrival of the two formidable demons and relayed what he saw back to Ikenga and Keles.

Ikenga's grip on the apple tightened. "This complicates things," he muttered to Keles. "Their abilities to sense us are far superior to the others."

Keles nodded, her eyes narrowing as she tried to gauge the situation. "Whatever it is, maybe it's the Abyss itself, but the demons gathered in this trench truly believe that this is where we are."

The Imp Demon spoke first, its voice a low, guttural growl. "I know they're here. Their divine scent lingers. This realm isn't large enough to hide them from me."

The Spider Queen's voice was smooth, almost hypnotic. "Your arrogance will be your downfall, Imp. If they are here, I will be the one to find them."

The Imp Demon snarled, glancing at the Spider Queen. "Don't think for a moment that I will let you claim them, Spider."

The Spider Queen's lips curled into a sinister smile. "Likewise, Imp. The throne will be mine."

While the two demons were arguing, Ikenga took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Outside, where Phantom was, his body shook slightly as Ikenga took over. Calmly observing the two demon kings, Ikenga, using Phantom's body, reached out into the void.

The presence of the two demon kings put heavy pressure on every available demon. Even those who had claimed to grab a big piece of the pie were restrained as they bowed their heads.

At the same time, demons being what they are, still had reverence for the power of the demon kings they hoped to achieve one day. The arrogance and pride was exactly what Ikenga needed, Phantom was unable to exert this level of influence with his current strength, but Ikenga had no such restriction, even with the realm suppression. He still is able to do something like this.

Tugging at the arrogance and pride of the other powerful demons, Ikenga managed to provoke a reaction. One Balrog, known for its fiery temper, stood up in defiance, its flames flickering angrily.

"What makes you both think you can easily grab food out of our mouths?" the Balrog roared, its voice echoing through the trench. "You think you can come here and seize what we've already claimed?"

The Imp Demon's eyes flashed with irritation. "Insolence!" it growled, raising its pitchfork, dark energy crackling ominously at the tips.

The Spider Queen, unmoved by the confrontation, observed with a cold, calculating gaze. Her multifaceted eyes shifted between the Balrog and the Imp Demon, her lips curled into a smirk. She had her own agenda and cared little for the squabbles of lesser demons.

As the tension escalated, more powerful demons began to stand up, following the lead of the defiant Balrog. Gargoyles and other formidable entities, previously fixated on the search for the gods, now turned their attention toward the confrontation between the two demon lords.

The scene grew chaotic as the demons' attention shifted from hunting to the brewing conflict. The trench erupted into a cacophony of roars and shouts, as rivalries and grievances were voiced openly.

One of the powerful gargoyles, its eyes glowing with a mix of anger and defiance, stepped forward. "Both of you claim to be worthy of the throne, but neither of you can control us!"

The Imp demon snarled, dark energy crackling from its pitchfork. "You dare challenge me? I have the power of the abyss at my command!"

The Spider Queen's voice cut through the tumult, smooth and chilling. "Why waste your strength on petty arguments? We should be focusing on the true prize: the gods."

Seeing the tension rise, Ikenga reached out again, tugging at the small threads of animosity between the mutants and hellhounds. Almost like there was a long lasting enmity between both parties, and before anyone could react, a mutant's head was viciously bitten off and swallowed by a hellhound.

The sudden clash between the mutants and the hellhounds drew every demon's attention. Many demons, realizing the danger of losing their best chance at finding the gods, quickly moved to defuse the situation. The hellhounds, after all, were their most reliable trackers. But Ikenga wasn't about to let them regain control so easily.

With the emotions of the demons at his command, all Ikenga needed to do was pull a string slightly and wait for the chaos to explode.

A Balrog, one of the more powerful demons, stepped forward, intending to separate the mutants from the hellhounds. As it moved, a hellhound launched a fireball that exploded at the Balrog's feet, causing a small crater. The Balrog, caught off guard, stumbled into the hole.

Ikenga sensed the Balrog's embarrassment and shame, and with a subtle mental nudge, he amplified those emotions. The Balrog's pride turned to rage, and a long whip of fire materialized in its hand. Enraged, the Balrog began swinging the whip wildly, lashing out at any demon within range.

The valley trench descended into utter chaos. The once-unified pursuit of the gods shattered as demons turned on each other, driven by the amplified emotions Ikenga had manipulated. The two demon kings

noticed the abnormality of the situation. This level of chaos, this lack of control, was unheard of, especially in the presence of beings with their high status.

The Spider Queen, her usual calm demeanor replaced by tension, no longer wore the relaxed smile she had before. Her multifaceted eyes darted around, trying to make sense of the sudden madness. "Hey, Imp," she called out, her voice laced with unease. "This is the work of one of the gods."

When the Imp demon didn't immediately respond, still preoccupied with extending its senses to locate the gods, she repeated herself more urgently. "This is their doing."

The Imp demon, finally tearing its attention away from the search, met her gaze with a grim expression. "I know," it hissed. "But knowing doesn't help us. They're using our own against us."

Chapter 269:

The Spider Queen, her irritation growing, spat, "Then we must regain control, or we'll lose them. This chaos serves no one but the gods."

The Imp demon glanced around at the trench, now a battlefield of frenzied demons, each driven mad by their own emotions. It could sense the subtle influence at play, the invisible hand steering them all toward destruction. "Whoever is doing this is clever," it growled. "But they won't win."

But even as the two demon kings spoke, the chaos continued to escalate. The Balrog, now fully consumed by its fury, swung its fiery whip with devastating force, striking down demons indiscriminately. Other powerful demons, caught up in the madness, joined the fray, each convinced that they had to fight for their survival or dominance.

The Spider Queen's multifaceted eyes narrowed as she surveyed the chaotic scene. "This madness has gone on long enough," she hissed, her voice carrying a sharp edge of authority. She raised one of her slender, segmented arms, and with a swift motion, sent out a wave of webbing. The sticky strands shot out, entangling several of the battling demons, instantly binding them in place.

The Imp demon, recognizing the necessity of restoring order, slammed his pitchfork into the ground with a resounding thud. The dark energy that had been crackling at its tips now erupted in a shockwave, rippling through the trench and forcing the combatants to their knees. The power of the abyss radiated from the Imp demon, its mere presence demanding submission.

"Enough!" the Imp demon bellowed, its voice amplified by its abyssal power. The sheer force of its command cut through the din of battle like a blade, silencing the roars and screams of the enraged demons.

The Spider Queen's voice followed, smooth but laced with venom. "You are all fools, playing into the hands of the gods. This infighting serves no one but them." Her words were cold and calculated, designed to pierce through the cloud of rage that had enveloped the minds of the lesser demons.

The demons, now subdued by the combined might of the two demon kings, began to regain some semblance of control. Those entangled in the Spider Queen's webs struggled, but her grip held firm. The Balrog, still simmering with anger, found its fiery whip extinguished by the Imp demon's aura, its power nullified.

Realizing that their chance of locating the gods was slipping away with every moment of chaos, the demons began to back down, their previous fervor replaced with wariness and fear. The reverence for the demon kings, though momentarily forgotten, was now painfully evident as they cowered before the two rulers.

The Imp Demon, sensing the shift in the atmosphere, seized the opportunity to assert his dominance further. "You will all leave this place immediately," it commanded, its tone brooking no argument. "You have proven yourselves unworthy of this task."

The Spider Queen nodded in agreement, her voice dripping with disdain. "Return to your lairs, to your pits of despair. We will handle this ourselves." Her eyes flicked over the gathered demons, daring anyone to challenge her.

Ikenga immediately pulled back when he saw the two demon kings act. He could engage with them for a bit, but that would expose Phantom, and Ikenga had already achieved his goal.

One by one, the demons began to retreat, their heads bowed in submission. The Balrog, still fuming but now subdued, was the last to leave, casting a final glance at the two demon kings before disappearing into the shadows. The mutants, hellhounds, and other creatures that had been drawn to the trench quickly followed suit, not wanting to incur further wrath.

As the last of the demons vacated the trench, the Spider Queen and the Imp Demon remained, their attention now fully focused on each other.

The Spider Queen's body rose into the air as she took one last look at the valley. "I came unprepared; it won't be the same next time," she said before taking off, turning into a black dot in the sky.

The Imp Demon watched her fly away, the pitchfork in his hand disappearing. Soon, the body of the Imp morphed into a human dressed in formal attire.

Ikenga and Keles observed the demon's strange transformation, but soon Ikenga sighed as he stood. "We have a visitor," he said to Keles, who looked at him before turning her gaze back to the transformed Imp, who was now walking towards their hidden house.

Before the demon could knock, the door opened on its own as the Imp, with a small smile on his face, walked in. As soon as the demon entered, a dark scythe was placed at his neck.

Ikenga didn't stop Keles's action, as he himself felt a bit annoyed, thinking about how the demon had found their house. The only possibility he could draw was, "The Abyss itself."

The Imp Demon still had a smile on its face, but it faltered for a second as its nose twitched when it got a closer look at Keles and Ikenga.

"What a surprise," the demon said with a tone of happiness, "two origin gods, this couldn't get any better."

Looking at the scythe placed on his neck, the demon looked at Keles. "Can I please keep my neck?" he said mischievously, winking at her.

Waving away the scythe, Ikenga gestured for the demon to sit. The demon sat down, the smile on his face gone as he began to speak. "My name is Zrvok. It's an honor to be in the presence of two origin gods."

"How did you find us?" Ikenga asked, wanting to confirm his suspicions.

Zarvok looked at Ikenga before laughing. "My status as the son of the Abyss comes with a lot of benefits, in this case, advanced aided perception."

Looking around the house, Zarvok continued, "The hiding was clever, but it became a problem when my perception of things started warping after coming into contact with something unseen, which raised a lot of questions and speculation."

Ikenga's eyes narrowed as Zarvok spoke, the Imp Demon's casual tone doing little to ease his concerns. Keles kept her gaze fixed on Zarvok, the tension in the room palpable despite the demon's attempts at levity.

"You were able to locate us despite our precautions," Ikenga said slowly, "but you didn't bring the entire Abyss down upon us. Why?"

Zarvok leaned back in his chair, his eyes glinting with something between mischief and curiosity. "Because, unlike the others who believe that once they get their hands on you, they will win, I'm not here just to hunt you down. I have a proposition."

Keles's grip tightened on her scythe, and she shot a glance at Ikenga, who remained impassive but alert. "And why," Keles began, her voice dripping with skepticism, "would we be interested in anything you have to offer?"

Zarvok shrugged, an easy smile on his face. "Because I have what you want—what pushed you to make this journey to the Abyss: knowledge of finding worlds."

Ikenga kept his face passive. Keles tried, but the slight leak of her divinity showed she wasn't calm. Ikenga made himself comfortable in his seat as a wood grew from the floor forming into a table that appeared between them.

Standing up, he conjured a wooden plate and went to the small garden he had created and started to pick off the fruits that grew there. "Join me, sister," he called out to Keles.

Keles, confused by his actions, hesitated but still stood up to join him. While picking the fruit, Ikenga asked aloud, "I hope demons have other appetites apart from flesh, blood, and souls."

Zarvok took a moment to answer, taken aback by the question and the gods' actions. Clearing his throat, Zarvok replied, "Of course we do, especially when it's grown by an Origin God."

Ikenga chuckled as he heard Zarvok's words, picking up the last fruit and walking back to the table where he placed the plate filled with fruit.

Ikenga made a welcoming gesture as he picked up a fruit and took a bite. Zarvok hesitated for a moment but eventually reached out and picked one as well.

"I didn't know our goal was that easy to guess, or is it something common when divine beings like ourselves visit the abyss?" Ikenga asked after Zarvok took a bite of his fruit.

Zarvok nodded at Ikenga's words. "You're right. Most divine beings only visit the abyss because they seek such knowledge."

"Is this the only way to get the knowledge we seek, or is there another way?" Ikenga asked as he handed a fruit to Keles, who took it.

Zarvok understood Ikenga's question. "There is another way, but it's much riskier than your current choice."

Zarvok smirked as he continued, "The abyss tends to be "kind" to first-time visitors, especially divine beings, as it subtly extends a hand to help them achieve their goals."

"But that's only for the first visit. The second time, you'll be on your own, relying on luck and knowledge. For example, if you're lucky, you might land in a layer like this one. In the worst case, you could end up in a layer ruled by a demon lord."

Chapter 270:

"In some cases, the demon lord won't mind, as their layer is hospitable to visitors and known across many realms where you can trade for knowledge or anything else with other civilizations working together with the abyss lord," Zarvok explained.

Ikenga's interest was piqued. "How do you find such an abyss layer?"

"As I said before, luck—or, in most cases, prior knowledge of the layer and its abyss coordinates, which allows you to go there directly," Zarvok said as he reached for another fruit.

"If the abyss is so helpful to first-time visitors, why do so many still fear visiting it?" Ikenga asked.

Zarvok paused at Ikenga's question. "The abyss doesn't exactly help its first visitors. It only places them in a layer where it's easier to achieve their goals. Whether the goal is achieved or not depends entirely on the visitor, not the abyss."

"In the other scenarios I mentioned, everything depends heavily on luck and the knowledge you have about the layer you're visiting. As an origin god, if you land in an abyss layer with a demon lord, death would be the least of your concerns. Your status is known, and death would do little to harm you, so you could be held captive indefinitely by the abyss lord, who would use every method possible to discover your world's coordinates."

"As for ordinary ascended gods, their fate is pretty much sealed. They might be taken as slaves, servants, or killed, leaving behind a godhead that contains their world's coordinates," Zarvok said with a smirk and an anticipatory look on his face.

"Killing gods? Aren't you afraid of 'Order'?" Ikenga asked. The demon stopped to look at him before laughing.

Finally catching his breath, Zarvok replied, "We demons aren't afraid of 'Order,' as they have no power over us. We can only be judged by the opposite force."

Ikenga wanted to ask more but was cut off by the demon. "This isn't why I'm here."

Ikenga stayed silent, while Keles took over. "Then what are you here for?"

"Since neither of you questioned me being a son of the abyss, I assume you know what that means," Zarvok inquired, and Keles nodded.

"Then you must also know about gods assisting with the ascension to demon lord status," Zarvok continued.

Keles wanted to nod but stopped when Ikenga placed a hand on her. "We do know about it, but not what it truly entails," Keles corrected herself.

Zarvok nodded. "When a divine being helps a demon ascend to demon lord status, it can be seen as paying the price required for the knowledge you seek. During the ascension process, you will obtain what you need."

"Expedition," Ikenga whispered aloud.

Zarvok looked at him and nodded. "For a demon king to ascend to the demon lord, an expedition to another world must be carried out. That world serves as the prerequisite for the ascension to demon lord."

"In this scenario, gods are the best allies for demon kings or sons of the abyss like myself."

Keles's eyes narrowed as Zarvok spoke, his words revealing the depths of the abyssal politics at play.

With a doubtful look, Keles asked, "With the demons in this layer, I don't see why you'd need the help of gods to conquer another world."

Zarvok stood up from his seat and began pacing the room. "That's where you're both right and wrong. Right in the sense that the powerhouses of this layer and their armies could indeed conquer another world. But wrong in thinking that all demons would work together to make that possible. You forget that I'm not the only one with the ambition to take over another world and ascend. Every demon harbors the same ambition."

Keles studied Zarvok carefully as he moved around, his words sinking in. The truth of his statement was undeniable; the Abyss was a realm of constant power struggles, where every demon sought to climb higher, often at the expense of others. Cooperation was rare, and alliances were fragile at best. She could see now that Zarvok's situation was more complicated than it first appeared.

"Ambition breeds conflict," Ikenga mused aloud, his eyes following Zarvok's movements. "You're saying that even with the powerhouses here, the likelihood of betrayal is too high for a successful conquest."

Zarvok nodded, pausing to look at Ikenga with a hint of appreciation. "Exactly. If I were to rally the demons of this layer, we'd spend more time fighting each other than actually conquering the world. Every demon king, every warlord, would see it as an opportunity to seize power for themselves. It would be chaos, and the world we target would likely escape or fortify itself before we could make our move."

"The worst outcome would be that the world becomes too damaged from the infighting and no longer meets the conditions required for ascension."

Keles remained skeptical. "So you think bringing gods into the mix will somehow change that?"

"Not somehow—it will change things." Zarvok tapped his skull as he sat back down. "Gods are like gifts to the son of the abyss, increasing their chances for ascension. When it comes to conquering a world, it can be done in many ways—not just by brute force, which my other brethren would have no choice but to use."

"As the son of the abyss, I have the option of non-violence and can maximize my benefits. Unlike demons, gods are much more acceptable to all life forms."

Keles remained unconvinced, though she couldn't deny the logic in Zarvok's words. The Abyss was a brutal place, ruled by might and ambition, but Zarvok was proposing something different—something more strategic, less reliant on sheer force. It was a novel approach, and one that clearly set him apart from his demonic kin.

Ikenga leaned forward, his gaze sharpening as he considered the implications. "So you're suggesting that by involving us, you can achieve your goal without the typical destruction that comes with a demon

invasion? You want to use us as diplomats or intermediaries to secure the world without turning it to ash?"

Zarvok nodded, his expression serious. "Precisely. With your help, we can approach this conquest with subtlety. Instead of tearing the world apart, we can manipulate events, weaken the resistance, and ensure that the world falls under our control with minimal destruction. This approach doesn't just meet the conditions for ascension—it exceeds them."

"It's similar to the stories of heroes and villains you find in many human tales. The demons like myself are the villains, and the gods are the heroes. When the expedition starts, this entire abyss layer will be involved, meaning that most of my brethren will pour into the world, ready to destroy and conquer."

"As the son of the abyss and with you gods by my side, I can choose to play the villain or the hero. In this case, I play the hero."

Keles raised an eyebrow, still skeptical but intrigued by Zarvok's unusual approach. The idea of a demon playing the role of a hero was almost laughable, but something about Zarvok's demeanor suggested he was serious.

"And what do you gain by playing the hero?" Keles asked, her tone probing. "What's in it for you if you're not the one leading the charge in the traditional sense?"

Zarvok's smile widened, though it held a hint of something darker. "Playing the hero doesn't mean relinquishing power—it means wielding it more effectively. By positioning myself as the savior rather than the conqueror, I gain the trust of the world's inhabitants, making them more likely to submit willingly rather than through force. This not only ensures a smoother conquest but also strengthens my claim when I ascend. A world taken by diplomacy and guile holds more value in the Abyss than one shattered by brute force. It demonstrates control, strategy, and, most importantly, superiority over my rivals."

Ikenga considered this carefully. Zarvok was clearly a different breed of demon, one who understood that true power came not just from might but from influence and control. This was a game of chess, and Zarvok was offering them a seat at the table—though it was clear he intended to make the final moves.

Keles still had doubts. "And you think the other demons will simply allow you to take this approach? Won't they see it as a weakness, an opportunity to undermine you?"

Zarvok's expression turned cold, his eyes narrowing slightly. "They will see what I want them to see. By the time they realize what's happening, it will be too late for them to stop it. The demons who join the invasion will be blinded by their own bloodlust, eager to tear the world apart. Meanwhile, I'll be securing the true prize—control over the world's hearts and minds. By the time my brethren realize that brute force alone won't work, the world will already be mine."

"And what of the world's inhabitants?" Ikenga asked, testing Zarvok's resolve. "If we play the hero, as you suggest, are we to protect them? Or are they merely pawns in your game?"