

## Guardian gods 331

Chapter 331:

Mala, a lean, black-furred werewolf with silver markings tracing her armor, smirked. "Let them have their fantasies, Korak. They'll need something to dream about when they're watching us from the loser's seats." She gave a teasing wink to the apeling crowd, which erupted into more jeers and cheers.

One particularly rowdy apeling, balancing a plate of snacks on his head, stood up and yelled, "Oi, Mala! How's that fur treating you in the heat? I bet you're dying to jump into a cold bath after wearing that heavy armor!"

Mala rolled her eyes playfully. "Please. This 'heavy armor' keeps me warm while you lot are shivering under your banana-leaf capes. But don't worry, after I win, I might toss you a fur blanket to cuddle up with."

The apelings laughed, their playful mocking continuing. "We'll need it after we bury you in the first match!" another one shouted, pointing a finger at Korak.

Korak pretended to stumble, clutching his chest dramatically. "Oh no, not the first match! Anything but that!" he howled in exaggerated fear, then shot a grin back at the apeling. "You should worry about making it past the first match yourselves, you little tree rats!"

The apelings reveled in the friendly banter, and soon they were all on their feet, mock-growling and howling like wolves, their voices blending into a wild, gleeful symphony. The crowd swayed and swirled, with some even beating their chests in mock ferocity, embracing the playful rivalry. The werewolves, despite their imposing stature, couldn't hold back their amusement. They exchanged toothy grins and exaggerated snarls, joining in on the lighthearted taunts with their own guttural chuckles.

Amongst the excitement, Wulv, like Drowz before him, made his way up to where Ikenga and Ursula sat, taking his seat beside the two demigods. His sharp gaze occasionally flicked down toward the arena, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

Ursula, however, was distant, her eyes narrowing slightly as she observed Ikem, who sat relaxed, an apeling attendant dutifully refilling his wine cup. She leaned closer to him, her voice low but laced with a note of concern. "You've changed, Ikem. What happened?"

Ikem turned toward her, his once piercing gaze now slightly glazed, as though he were seeing past her. "The same could be said of you, my love. You've changed too."

She sighed softly, wrapping her fingers around his arm as she looked down at the lively crowd. The apelingings were carefree, their joy unburdened by the gravity that seemed to hang over the demigods. "Do you think our change is a good thing?"

Ikem swirled his wine thoughtfully before taking a sip. "Whether it's good or not, it won't matter once we're gone. We can only trust them to handle things on their own, as they've clearly shown us." His voice carried a mix of resignation and calm acceptance, as if the weight of leadership had slowly lifted from his shoulders.

Ever since Ikem began considering passing the mantle to Zephyr, something had shifted within him. A restraint, long held, had been released. He no longer attend council meetings, no longer concerned himself with the mundane politics of the court. Instead, his days were spent in quiet leisure, either beside Ursula or lost in the depths of his wine goblet. To some, it might have seemed a dereliction of duty, but to Ikem, it was a newfound freedom. He had fulfilled his responsibilities as both a demigod and a king for centuries, guiding his people, protecting them from threats both internal and external, and avoiding the scourge of conflict whenever possible.

He had even allowed a demon, disguised as one of their own, to live amongst them for a time—choosing peace over war. But when the demon's true nature was revealed, Ikem had been forced to end its existence with his own hands.

He had shielded them from so much. But now, with the inevitable pull of godhood calling him higher, Ikem knew he couldn't protect them forever. Conflict was a force that could not be held at bay indefinitely. His people, however, had come to understand this. They had shown him that they were capable of standing on their own, no longer needing his constant protection.

That understanding had brought a subtle change to Ikem, an unconscious release of the power he had been holding back for so long. Now, he stood at the threshold of ascension, ready to move beyond this mortal plane—but he wanted to savor the world he had helped build a little while longer.

Across the arena, Wulv and Drowz, who had settled into their seats, exchanged a glance. Both young godlings couldn't help but notice the state of Ikem and Ursula. It wasn't unfamiliar to them. Their own parents had adopted the same distant, transcendent air.

An unspoken understanding passed between them as they watched the two demigods—Wulv’s brow furrowed slightly, and Drowz’s usual sharpness softened into something akin to sympathy. They knew, without having been told, that this day—this gathering—was more significant than it appeared on the surface.

The festival, the competition, and the excitement of the crowd... it all masked a deeper truth: This was their parents way of telling them that they are leaving and hope they can keep the comraderie they have built for the past centuries.

The air around the arena began to shift, the celebratory mood lingering but subtly giving way to anticipation as the next part of the festival loomed. It was time to introduce the main players—the cursed clans of the apelings, whose elemental prowess had earned them respect and reverence from all corners of the realm. They were the living embodiment of their elements.

A gift they received from their god Ikenga, a gift every apeling wish they had been blessed with. A hush fell over the crowd as the Ripple Clan made their entrance, the first of the cursed apeling groups to appear. Known for their striking beauty among all apelings, both male and female members of the Ripple Clan were admired for their graceful appearances. Their fur shimmered in shades reminiscent of water—deep blues and silvers—but there were a few exceptions, some having pure white fur. With their arrival, the air grew cool and damp, a subtle reminder of their elemental bond to water.

At the front of the clan was Ripple, their princess and leader. Her deep blue eyes, calm and confident, shone beneath her royal garb as she took her place with quiet dignity. The crowd erupted into cheers at the sight of her, their beloved leader. Ripple’s serene smile grew as she cast a glance toward Wulv, who returned her look with equal intensity, a silent connection passing between them. She made her way toward him, ignoring Ikem, who shook his head with an amused smile at the unspoken interaction.

Next came the Terra Clan, their entrance heavier and more grounded. As they approached, the earth seemed to vibrate beneath their feet, reflecting their connection to the very ground they walked on. These apelings were among the largest and strongest of all, their broad shoulders and powerful builds marked with glowing cracks that resembled rich soil and stone. In their ranks, the Terra Clan was known for their towering figures—except in rare cases of mutation—and they carried a steady, unwavering presence.

Their leader, Terra, even larger than most of his clan, walked with a calm, easy grace that belied his size. Despite his immense bulk, there was no heavy thud to his steps. His air of steadiness made him

approachable, a quiet power that commanded respect without force. Suddenly, a young apeling girl, carried by the excitement, slipped from her mother's arms and tumbled toward the clan's entrance. Her mother screamed, but before panic could set in, stones gently formed around the child, cushioning her fall.

The little girl giggled, reaching out her hands toward Terra, who effortlessly lifted her and placed her on his shoulder. He raised his arms to the crowd, and they responded with a thunderous cheer, their admiration of their leader clear.

The final entrance was that of the Zephyr Clan, and their arrival was announced by a sudden gust of wind. The arena was filled with the sound of rustling cloaks and swirling dust, causing the crowd to tense, as if bracing for the inevitable prank. The apelings instinctively shielded their clothes as colorful dust fell around them in playful bursts.

As the dust cleared, the Zephyr Clan had already gathered in the arena, grinning mischievously. Known for their light-hearted nature and their playful affinity with the wind, the Zephyr apelings were difficult to pin down, always darting about like the very breeze they controlled. They were notorious for their pranks, but their charm made it hard for anyone to stay upset for long.

Zephyr, the clan leader, was already seated beside Wulv, Drowz, Ripple, and Terra, laughing to himself at the spectacle he'd created. His siblings rolled their eyes at his antics, though even they couldn't suppress their amusement at his playful demeanor.

#### Chapter 332:

As the cursed clans settled into their positions, a new energy rippled through the arena. The excitement heightened as the next group of competitors made their appearance—those who, in many ways, were the heart of the competition. The normal apelings, backed by the teachers from the academy, marched forward in disciplined rows. Their presence was a reminder that the Elemental Trials weren't just a stage for the cursed clans but an opportunity for the entire apeling race to grow stronger together.

The academy teachers, towering figures of respect, led the normal apelings with the quiet confidence of those who had honed their power through years of training and research. Among them, some had reached the fourth stage of power, and a few were even in the fifth stage—a level that could rival the natural strength of the cursed clans.

Their leader, a stern yet charismatic apeling named Master Kalim, stepped forward. His presence commanded attention, not because of any elemental affiliation, but through the sheer force of his personality and the respect he commanded from his students and peers alike. His fur, streaked with the scars of past battles, was a testament to the hard-fought experience of a life dedicated to learning and growth.

Beside him walked Lady Elara, a teacher who was known for her expertise in blending science and magic. Her innovations in crafting weapons and tools had given normal apelings an edge in many past competitions. With her silver fur and sharp eyes, she gave off an air of intelligence and precision.

The normal apelings' entrance was met with cheers from the crowd, but there was also a noticeable tension. They were seen as underdogs, but over the years, they had proven that they were not to be underestimated. The cursed clans watched them closely, knowing that despite lacking elemental powers, the normal apelings had become formidable in their own right.

"Look at them," Ripple murmured, glancing at the academy group. "They've come a long way. This should be interesting."

Nwadiebeube paced the halls of his grand castle, his hands clenched so tightly that his knuckles had turned white. His normally calm demeanor was shattered as he gritted his teeth, glaring at the enormous column of light piercing the sky from the distant horizon. The gate had been activated again—by the Apelings, no doubt. Those arrogant beings had always kept the gate's power to themselves, prohibiting anyone else from using it. But this time, the sight filled him with a deep, seething anger.

For centuries, his people had shared this vast eastern continent with the Apelings, yet not once had they been invited to the annual grand occasions the Apelings hosted. Despite their proximity, despite their history, despite everything, his people were always excluded. It felt like a deliberate slight, an insult Nwadiebeube could no longer ignore.

What fueled his rage even more was the fact that outsiders—people from other continents—had been invited before him and his people. Just weeks ago, the priest of Björn had approached him with a new proposal, one that promised a chance to connect his people with the wider world. Yet Nwadiebeube had turned it down, convinced that maintaining their strained ties with the Apelings would eventually pay off. After all, there was still some connection between them, however faint.

Now, watching the light shoot into the sky, that decision felt like a mistake. His trust in old ties was clearly misplaced. The Apelings had never shown him or his people the respect they deserved, and his patience was wearing thin.

A clearing of the throat quieted the crowd as Ikem stood up, his voice booming across the arena. "Today's joy has only just begun! After the competition is decided and we crown a winner, a week-long celebration will follow! No need to worry about work—drink to your heart's content, and find yourself a beautiful companion. I know I will!" He grinned, clearly pleased with his declaration. The crowd burst into laughter, with some of the apelings and godling races chuckling heartily. Meanwhile, Ikem's own children had their palms on their faces, embarrassed by their father's shameless proclamation.

Just then, a grunt escaped Ikem as Ursula, seated next to him, stepped on his foot with a smile so bright it could only mask a silent reprimand.

"Now, today's competition will be a bit different," Ursula announced, her tone authoritative yet cheerful. "As many of you have noticed, the Ember Clan is absent—they've been given a special task by the gods. But don't worry; today's Elemental Trials will be more challenging than ever. These trials are designed to push the unique abilities of each godling race while allowing them to face one another in diverse and unpredictable environments."

The crowd's excitement grew, roaring with anticipation. Ikem raised his arm to quiet them once more. "I'm pleased to show you the collective handiwork of all the godling races. The ingenuity of every group played a role in making this competition possible."

At the center of the colosseum, the ground began to shift, revealing a small but intricate replica of a planet. This model hummed with energy, shimmering with the elemental powers of fire, water, earth, wind, and more, each section of the miniature world reflecting the essence of different elements.

As the model rotated, beams of light shot out from it, streaking toward each participant—ten on each side. Those touched by the light caught it in their hands, revealing small badges. An unseen voice passed instructions to them, and each participant carefully placed the badge on their chest.

Suddenly, the seats where the participants had been seated transformed, becoming more comfortable, almost like beds. A thin, protective shield formed around them, glowing softly. The crowd watched in awe as the competitors' eyes closed in unison, signaling the start of the competition.

One by one, small dots of light emerged from the center of each participant's forehead, drifting upward toward the planetary prop. This light connected them, linking their consciousness to the elemental realms they were about to enter.

The Elemental Trials had begun.

The inside of the planet replica, where the Elemental Trials take place, is a simulated world crafted from the raw powers of nature itself. Each environment within the replica reflects a different elemental force, creating unique biomes that mirror the strengths and challenges faced by the competitors. To the competitors these aren't mere simulations; the environments are alive, constantly shifting in response to the energies of the godling races involved.

The flamboyant apeling spoke up this time "Place yours bets, get your snacks while I explain the happening inside the planet's replica"

"First the elemental zones, The planet is divided into several zones, each dominated by a specific element. These zones blend seamlessly, creating both stark contrasts and gradual transitions from one elemental environment to the next.

"Water Zone is a vast ocean with crystal-clear water that seems to stretch endlessly, dotted with floating islands and powerful underwater currents. The atmosphere is cool and damp, with waves constantly lapping against the shores of islands made of coral and sea grass"

"Earth Zone is a jagged mountains, deep valleys, and forests of stone trees define this rugged landscape. The ground is solid, but tremors ripple through it periodically, causing rocks to shift and cliffs to crumble, making traversal difficult and dangerous".

"Wind Zone. The sky dominates this zone, with floating islands of land suspended in the air by powerful winds. The environment is always in motion, with gusts of wind carrying leaves, dust, and even competitors from one island to the next. Moving through this zone requires agility and balance, as the constant wind makes it hard to stay grounded".

"Fire Zone is an active—a scorched landscape filled with lava flows, volcanic eruptions, and ash-filled skies. The heat is intense, and the ground itself seems to shift and bubble under the competitors' feet.

Other Elemental Zones: These could include areas influenced by light, shadow, ice, or other exotic elements, each presenting unique trials and environments that test the competitors' adaptability".

Take a sip of his drink, the announcer continued "as for the challenges within the Zones: Each element presents its own set of challenges. In the Water Zone, competitors might have to navigate treacherous tides or face sea creatures born from the elemental energy. In the Earth Zone, they might need to survive sudden earthquakes or navigate through crumbling tunnels. The Wind Zone could force them to leap from island to island or resist powerful storms. The environment isn't just a backdrop—it actively responds to the participants, testing their mastery over their own abilities. Each elemental Zone will have a flag and an irregular timer count to it where the flag has to be captured before the zone changes"

"Team Dynamics is also important, while individual skill matters, the trials are designed to test teamwork as well. Competitors must work together to overcome the elemental challenges in each zone. For instance, a Terra Clan member could create stable ground in the Wind Zone, or a Ripple Clan member might create pathways across lava flows in the Fire Zone. Cooperation between clans is crucial for survival and success"

Chapter 333:

"Last but not the least, The planet replica is in constant motion, and the boundaries between zones shift unpredictably. A competitor might find themselves suddenly transitioning from the serene calm of the Water Zone to the fiery heat of the Fire Zone, or from the solid ground of the Earth Zone to the endless sky of the Wind Zone. This unpredictability keeps the competitors on edge, testing their adaptability and strategy"

A hologram of the event inside the replica appeared for everyone to see. Then, the announcer spoke again, "Look under your seats. You will all find a prop that will allow you to view the competitors of your choice."

"Let the game begin!" Fireworks shot up into the sky, followed by the sharp sound of a whistle.

Inside the game, as the announcement echoed, everyone was on high alert, expecting to be dropped into a dangerous zone. To their surprise, they found themselves in a favorable location—though they were not alone.

The mermen, upon seeing the ocean, wasted no time and immediately dove into the water. The Ripple Clan, aware that they could never outrun the mermen in the sea, quickly reacted. They used their

mastery of the water element, which gave them an extra bounce to their steps, allowing them to run across the surface of the water toward an island where they spotted a large flag.

The third group, the werewolves, were also dropped into the ocean zone. Upon seeing the Ripple Clan in motion, the werewolves howled and dropped to all fours, leaping towards the sea. But as they landed, the water froze beneath them, giving them solid ice to run on.

Hearing the crackling of ice behind them, the Ripple Clan glanced back to see the sea freezing over, rapidly catching up to them. Without hesitation, every Ripple Clan member followed the mermen into the ocean.

From beneath the sea, the Ripple Clan watched the ice form above them, with the werewolves running across it. Once the werewolves passed, the Ripple Clan broke through the ice and climbed up.

A Ripple Clan member with a white fur raised her hand, and instantly, her fellow clan members received ice-skating shoes. They immediately began skating on the frozen surface left behind by the werewolves.

The announcer's voice boomed through the arena once more, filling the air with excitement as the audience leaned forward in anticipation, eyes glued to the holograms showcasing the unfolding action. "And look at that! The competitors are already adapting in unexpected ways! The Werewolves' freezing tactic has backfired—turning the ocean into an icy racetrack!"

The Ripple Clan, now skating with remarkable speed, expertly navigated the frozen expanse left behind by the werewolves. Each member maintained perfect synchronization, the ice skates their fellow clan member conjured enhancing their fluidity. They glided swiftly, eyes locked on the island ahead, where the first flag fluttered in the distance.

"Now that's the ingenuity of the Ripple Clan, folks!" the announcer roared. "They're using their water mastery to flow like the ocean itself, even on ice!"

Meanwhile, the mermen had already disappeared into the depths of the ocean, their sleek forms cutting through the water like blades. They had a significant advantage in this zone, and their swift movement through the underwater currents brought them closer to the flag. However, beneath the surface, dangers loomed. Giant, elemental sea creatures—serpents made of pure water—had begun to stir, drawn to the sudden flurry of movement.

"Watch out, mermen! The elemental beasts are waking up!" the announcer warned as the audience gasped, watching serpentine shadows dart beneath the waves. The creatures' glowing blue eyes shone through the water, and the mermen's momentum slowed as they prepared for combat.

Back on the ice, the werewolves were gaining ground rapidly. Their enhanced senses and raw strength made them fearsome competitors, and they closed the gap between themselves and the skating Ripple Clan. One werewolf, larger than the others and covered in silver-gray fur, let out a powerful howl. His pack responded in kind, leaping higher with each bound. The frozen surface cracked under their sheer power as they hurtled forward, aiming to take down the Ripple Clan.

But the Ripple Clan was ready. The lead skater—a young woman with streaks of frost woven into her hair—thrust her hand forward. Ice shards shot from her palm, creating obstacles that sprouted across the ice. The werewolves, though fast, were forced to dodge and weave, slowing their advance.

"And it's a battle of wits versus strength now! The Ripple Clan is using their environment like true masters. But will it be enough to hold off those ferocious werewolves?" the announcer teased, the crowd roaring in response.

Suddenly, a deep rumble echoed across the zone. The ground shook, and from beneath the frozen sea, the mermen burst upwards, riding massive waves they had summoned from the depths. Water crashed onto the ice, sending chunks of it flying into the air, and momentarily throwing off both the Ripple Clan and the werewolves.

The Ripple Clan, caught off guard, struggled to regain balance, while the werewolves growled in frustration, scrambling for footholds. But the mermen, having successfully diverted the sea creatures' attention elsewhere, now rode atop powerful jets of water. With momentum on their side, they surged toward the flag.

"Unbelievable!" The announcer's voice cracked with excitement. "The mermen are pulling off an incredible comeback, using the ocean itself to propel them toward victory! But look at the Ripple Clan—they're not done yet!"

In a desperate move, the ice-clad leader of the Ripple Clan raised both hands, and the frozen ocean below cracked, forming massive glaciers. These jagged icebergs shot up from beneath the waves,

blocking the mermen's path as the Ripple Clan surged forward once more, using their skates to zip between the towering structures.

But before they could celebrate their clever maneuver, the ground shifted again. Without warning, the boundaries between the zones fluctuated, and a wave of heat hit the arena. The sea began to boil, and a thick cloud of steam rose, obscuring the view.

"The zones are shifting!" cried the announcer, his voice rising over the noise. "Water gives way to fire—who will survive the transition?"

Everyone in the water zone sensed the shift. The appearance of flames in the distance sent a ripple of tension through the competitors. As beings with water attributes, they knew that fire would pose a serious problem. No one spoke, but a collective understanding passed through them.

The Ripple Clan huddled together, their faces tight with focus. Slowly, the seawater around them began to swirl and rise, gathering into a massive sphere that encased the entire clan. Suspended within, they floated higher and higher, their water orb lifting them into the air.

The mermen acted in unison as well. The gentle waves they had been gliding on started to ripple and change when the mermaid on their team began to sing. Her voice was haunting and powerful, weaving through the air, and the water responded. It surged upward and solidified, morphing into a colossal water elemental octopus. The giant creature's tentacles stretched beneath the mermen, lifting them as it ascended into the sky, cradling the group as they prepared for whatever came next.

On the other hand, the werewolves were visibly uncomfortable. The rising heat from the fire zone was starting to affect them, their thick fur and heavy armor causing sweat to glisten on their brows. Unlike the others who worked as teams, the werewolves chose to act individually. As the temperature rose, frost began to form around their bodies, encasing them in armor made of ice. Each werewolf stomped on the solid ice beneath their feet and leapt into the air, propelled high above, waiting for the moment the zone would change.

The air grew tense as the entire water zone began flickering, fire creeping into view. Every competitor held their breath, hoping to land safely when the transition occurred. All were airborne now, and the moment the zone flickered again, the fire was gone—replaced by thick, rolling white clouds.

Panic surged through them. Their meticulous preparations, tailored for the fire zone, were now useless. None of them could fly, and they were now free-falling from the sky.

Meanwhile, in another section of the arena, the Earth Zone was alive with activity. The Terra Clan, Harpies, Zephyr Clan, and Apeling students found themselves in a rocky, mountainous region interspersed with thick forests.

Without hesitation, the Harpies launched into the air, their feathered wings slicing through the sky with a single goal in sight: the highest mountain, which stood proudly with a flag at its peak. Their eyes locked onto the prize, and they beat their wings harder, pushing toward the summit.

The Terra Clan, in stark contrast, moved without sound. Though their heavy steps usually shook the ground, this time, they sank into the earth with ease, their bodies melding with the rock and soil. Like fish through water, they swam underground, racing upward toward the same mountain at speeds that rivaled the harpies.

Chapter 334:

"Over in the Earth Zone, the Terra Clan and Harpies are locked in a race to the top of the mountain!" the announcer's voice boomed through the arena. "Who will claim the flag first? The Harpies dominate the sky, but the Terra Clan has the ground on their side!"

The Zephyr Clan, seeing the dense trees, executed their own strategy. They wasted no time, leaping from tree to tree, the wind at their backs speeding their movements. With expert precision, they swung between branches, using the momentum of the wind to boost their speed.

Meanwhile, the Apeling students, realizing the race had begun, immediately shifted into their animal forms. Cheetahs, panthers, eagles, and ravens all emerged from their ranks, each adapting to the terrain. The big cats bounded ahead with incredible speed, while the birds soared above, scanning the landscape and calling out directions to their comrades below.

It wasn't long before all the clans converged at the base of the towering mountain. The Terra Clan was still pressing with their advantage as they continued swimming up the mountain undisturbed.

Above, the Harpies screeched in frustration, swooping down toward the Terra Clan as they tried to reclaim the high ground. Suddenly, a blast of wind from a Zephyr Clan member disrupted the harpies' flight pattern, sending a few of them tumbling through the air before they could regain their balance.

The Apeling students weren't far behind. Their panther and cheetah forms moved with grace, clawing their way up the mountain with feline agility. Overhead, the eagles and ravens circled, calling out strategies to those still climbing below.

"And now, all the clans are converging at the mountain!" the announcer's voice rang out again. "It's anyone's game at this point, folks! The Zephyr Clan is using the wind to disrupt their competitors, but can they reach the flag before the Terra Clan digs their way to the top? And don't count out the Apeling students—they're moving like a well-oiled machine!"

High above, the Harpies, realizing they couldn't stop the Terra Clan from below, pushed themselves even higher, determined to secure the flag. The leader of the Zephyr Clan, seeing this, frowned. He knew that if the Harpies gained the upper hand now, the flag would be lost to them.

Sensing the shift, the Zephyr Clan leader acted quickly. He stretched his hands skyward, summoning the winds to their full power. "With me!" he commanded, his voice cutting through the roar of the oncoming storm. His clan members followed suit, and the sky above the mountain began to churn. Dark clouds swirled into a vortex, and the winds began to howl with ferocity, bending trees and kicking up debris. The harpies faltered, their flight patterns disrupted by the violent gusts. Several of them tumbled through the air, wings struggling to stay open.

Yet the Terra Clan remained undisturbed, burrowing deeper into the stone beneath their feet, while the Apeling students slowed their progress, having to battle against the powerful winds.

Meanwhile, the Zephyr Clan laughed, the storm their ally. Their bodies became light as feathers, and they rode the winds effortlessly, gliding through the storm toward the summit, passing by their competitors with ease. But they had underestimated the harpies' resolve.

Anger flashed in the eyes of one of the harpy leaders as she raised her arm toward the swirling clouds. Her wings shimmered and began to transform, turning into clouds themselves. With a single command, she manipulated the weather, bending the storm to her will. It wouldn't have been possible for her alone but the Zephyr clan already gathered the clouds for her.

Seeing their leader's intent, two harpy students with wings crackling with electricity soared into the sky. Lightning flickered around them, and with a coordinated strike, they unleashed bolts of lightning directly into the heart of the storm.

There was a moment of eerie silence before the sky erupted in a deafening thunderclap. The heavens opened, and torrential rain began to fall in sheets. The heavy downpour combined with the turbulent winds turned the storm into a living nightmare for the Zephyr Clan. The rain disrupted their flight patterns, making it increasingly difficult for them to maintain control of the wind.

The Terra Clan, hidden beneath the surface, initially thought they were safe from the chaos above, but the soaked ground betrayed them. As the rain soaked into the earth, the once-solid soil turned into mud, making it difficult to move freely. Worse, the Terra Clan's presence disturbed the underground balance, drawing the attention of subterranean creatures that were native to the Earth Zone. Eyes glowing in the darkness, massive worm-like beasts with armored scales turned their attention to the moving intruders.

The Terra Clan leader, sensing the danger, swallowed hard. "To the surface—immediately!" he barked, but it was too late. The creatures lunged at them, forcing the Terra warriors to hastily retreat to the surface, abandoning their stealthy underground advantage.

Above, the Apeling students remained steady, even as the storm grew more violent. Though slowed by the weather, their teamwork remained flawless. The panther led the way, creating a path with sharpened rocks, allowing the others to follow closely behind. The cheetah's speed allowed them to scout ahead, while the eagle and raven transformed back into their humanoid Apeling forms, finding that flight had become a liability in the storm.

Despite the odds, the Apelings adapted to every challenge thrown their way. As they continued their ascent, the other clans found themselves locked in their own struggles. The harpies, though partially controlling the storm, were hindered by the sheer power of the rain and lightning they had summoned. The Zephyr Clan, once dominant in the air, now found themselves grounded by the storm they had called forth. And the Terra Clan, once sure of their mastery over the earth, now had to contend with the vicious creatures beneath the surface.

The race was far from over. Each clan fought not only against each other but also against the mountain itself, with its harsh weather, treacherous terrain, and deadly creatures.

"And now, it's anyone's game!" the announcer's voice boomed, barely audible over the chaos. "The Apelings are pushing through, the Terra Clan is forced back to the surface, the harpies are struggling to maintain their control, and the Zephyr Clan is grounded by their own storm! Who will take the flag?!"

The Terra Clan had just resurfaced from the underground, narrowly avoiding the monstrous creatures lurking beneath. Their stone-covered bodies were drenched, and the wet, slippery rocks hindered their climbing abilities. But their leader, a towering figure of granite, would not be deterred. "Form the pillar!" he bellowed. The Terra warriors immediately sank their fists into the ground, pulling up chunks of rock to create a massive stone pillar that shot up toward the peak. They were going to launch themselves to the summit in one last attempt to grab the flag.

But the Apeling students were already ahead, their animal forms giving them the agility needed to scale the increasingly treacherous terrain. The panther, leading the charge, suddenly stopped. Its eyes glowed with sharp intelligence as it observed the Terra Clan's stone pillar rising from below. Without wasting a second, the Apelings shifted strategy. The panther roared to alert the others, and in an instant, the cheetah leaped ahead, its form blurring as it dashed up the side of the mountain with uncanny speed. The Apelings were aiming to intercept the Terra Clan at the summit.

Meanwhile, the harpies were battling against the storm they had partially summoned. Rain lashed against their wings, making flight almost impossible, but the lightning-wielding harpies were not done yet. "The flag is ours!" screeched their leader. She flapped her wings once, sending a burst of energy toward the mountain. Lightning crackled and struck the stone pillar the Terra Clan had created, shattering it halfway up, sending massive chunks of rock plummeting down the mountainside. The Terra Clan members, mid-ascent, were thrown into disarray, losing their grip as the mountain itself crumbled beneath them.

The Zephyr Clan, on the other hand, had adapted to the sudden downpour. Their mastery over wind allowed them to glide, even in the worst of conditions. "Push forward!" their leader yelled, his body floating with the swirling gusts. He extended his hand, and his clan followed his lead, riding the wind currents in a last-ditch effort to reach the top. But the turbulent winds became unstable as the rain intensified, making every gust unpredictable.

In a shocking twist, one of the Apeling students—a raven who had shifted back to their humanoid form—saw an opportunity. With the harpies distracted by their own storm and the Zephyr Clan struggling in the wind, the raven called out, "Now's our chance!" In a blur, they transformed into a snake, coiling tightly around a nearby boulder. In one swift movement, the raven-turned-snake whipped its body and launched itself into the air, shifting back into a raven mid-flight to catch the wind current.

The raven soared higher and higher, aiming straight for the flag at the summit. The Terra Clan was in chaos below, and the Zephyr Clan, though fast, was battling the storm. For a moment, it seemed like the raven might be the one to grab the flag, but then...

Chapter 335:

A massive boulder came hurtling down the mountainside, nearly striking the raven out of the sky. The ground beneath them shook as one of the subterranean creatures from below had surfaced, roaring in fury at being disturbed. The beast was enormous, a towering stone-shelled monstrosity with glowing eyes. It had erupted from the earth and was now wreaking havoc on the mountain, sending competitors scattering in every direction.

The Terra Clan, regaining their footing, controlled the earth around them to form a huge pike which was thrown at the huge creature. The Zephyr Clan was forced to retreat temporarily, caught between the raging storm and the monstrous creature. The harpies, already struggling against the wind, found themselves knocked from the sky by flying debris, and the Apeling students darted for cover.

But despite the chaos, the raven wasn't deterred. Its eyes locked on the flag, now just within reach. In a last-ditch effort, it dove straight for the summit. Just as it was about to grasp the flag, a lightning bolt from one of the harpy students shot out, narrowly missing the raven but causing the entire peak to shake violently.

Everyone held their breath, watching as the raven extended its wings, just inches away from the flag...

And then, everything stopped.

A loud, mechanical click echoed across the zone, and the ground beneath everyone's feet shuddered. The storm began to fade, the monstrous creature retreated into the earth, and the rain ceased. For a moment, everything was silent.

Suddenly, the mountain began to dissolve. The entire landscape shifted as the ground morphed into soft clouds and the rocky cliffs faded into mist. The contestants were no longer climbing the mountain—they were floating. The Earth Zone had transitioned into the Sky Zone.

With no solid ground beneath them and no one able to fly, all the clans found themselves suspended in mid-air, desperately trying to regain their bearings as they plummeted toward the clouds below.

Back a few moments ago when those in the water zone were brought to the sky. As the competitors in the Water Zone found themselves hurtling through the sky, the sudden shift to the Wind Zone caught everyone off guard. The werewolves, with their heavy, icy armor, struggled to adjust mid-air. The Ripple Clan, nestled within their protective water sphere, tumbled, the force of gravity beginning to break apart the ball. The mermen clung to the giant octopus they had summoned, which stretched out its watery tentacles in a desperate attempt to slow their descent.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the flamboyant announcer's voice echoed, "It seems our water-based competitors are free-falling into the Wind Zone! And none of them can fly—what a twist! Who will adapt first?"

The audience gasped as the Ripple Clan leader acted quickly, directing their gathered water to form thin jets aimed downward. The jets sprayed out like rockets, slowing their fall, but it was far from enough to bring them to a full stop. They tumbled toward the floating islands below, bracing themselves for impact.

On the other side of the zone, the mermen's octopus elemental lashed out its tentacles, grabbing onto an island's ledge. It swung the mermen onto solid ground just in time, before dissolving back into water. "And the mermen land gracefully, saving themselves from what could've been a disastrous drop! But look at those werewolves—they've got something else in mind!"

The werewolves, still armored in their icy frost, plummeted fast, but instead of panicking, they embraced the descent. Their leader let out a deep, echoing howl that resonated through the Wind Zone. His teammates doing the same as a moon phantom appeared behind them followed by the darkening of the sky where the outline of stars appeared.

Light from the stars fell, forming a starlight path that was flickering weakly, the werewolves knowing they didn't have much time hastened as they ran towards a floating island close to them.

The werewolves, now running along the fragile starlight path, barely maintained their footing as they bounded toward the nearest island. Their leader's howl continued to echo, each reverberation causing the stars to flicker, but the path was unstable, fading behind them as they sprinted. The leader barked orders, urging his pack to leap to safety as the island loomed ahead. With a final burst of speed, they jumped just as the last remnants of the path vanished, landing on the solid ground of the floating island with a thunderous impact.

"And the werewolves make it! Barely holding onto that shimmering starlight, they've managed to land safely—but for how long?" the announcer's voice boomed.

Meanwhile, the Ripple Clan, still plummeting, deployed their watery jets in a desperate effort to slow down. Their leader, eyes focused and calm, manipulated the water currents expertly, directing his clanmates to aim for an island beneath them. The impact was rough, but they managed to land in a shallow pool formed by their water, minimizing the damage.

"They've done it! Ripple Clan has slowed their fall with precision, though their water reserves are dwindling fast! Let's see how they fare now that they're grounded."

Not long after they landed, those on the earth stone were brought to the sky zone too. The harpies and Zephyr clan had no problem adjusting quickly as this Zone was meant for them.

The only that seemed to have a problem were the Terra clan and apeling student, but soon that changed as the Terra clan became the only one struggling.

The apelings students, those that could turn into birds, helped the other students as they flew towards an Island.

The Terra Clan members began to plummet through the clouds, struggling to regain control. Their leader, Garrock, grunted in frustration, feeling the pull of gravity taking them farther from the mountain and closer to the abyss below.

"Hold on to each other!" Garrock roared. His voice cut through the chaos as his clanmates reached for one another, forming a chain as they fell. Without earth to ground them, they were dangerously vulnerable.

Just then, one of the Zephyr Clan members, soaring overhead, let out a mocking laugh. "What's the matter, earth-dwellers? Having trouble in the skies?" The Zephyr Clan had the clear advantage here, gliding effortlessly through the winds, their light bodies floating like feathers on the breeze.

The Terra Clan had no time for taunts. Garrock's mind raced as he tried to think of a solution. He knew they couldn't manipulate the air or the clouds like the other clans, but they had one thing no one else had: resilience.

"We can't fall to our deaths," Garrock growled. "We've got to find something solid!"

Suddenly, Garrock spotted floating islands in the distance. They were small, rock-like platforms hanging in the sky—a rare source of solid ground in the Sky Zone. Though the distance was vast, it was their only hope.

"There! Head for those islands!" Garrock bellowed.

The Terra Clan, relying purely on their physical strength, swung their chained bodies, trying to alter their trajectory toward the islands. They had no control over the wind, but they used the momentum from their fall and their brute force to steer themselves closer. It was a harrowing task, with gusts of wind buffeting them from every angle.

A screech cut through the air as one of the sky beasts—a massive, bird-like creature with razor-sharp talons—dove toward them. Garrock reacted instantly. He swung his body like a pendulum, using the weight of his stone-covered arms to collide with the creature. His punch landed squarely on its side, knocking the beast off course, but not without the bird slashing one of his clanmates with its talons.

"Stay focused!" Garrock barked, as the Terra Clan pressed on through the chaotic sky. The injured clanmate gritted his teeth, blood trickling from the talon slash, but they all knew they couldn't afford to stop—not here, where gravity and the wind had turned against them.

The floating islands that Garrock had spotted were still distant, but they were inching closer with every swing of their bodies. Each member in the chain used the force of their heavy armor and natural strength to sway back and forth, trying to fight against the gusts of wind that threatened to scatter them. It was a slow, grueling process, but the Terra Clan was nothing if not persistent.

Above them, the Zephyr Clan danced effortlessly through the sky, light as air. The mocking grin of the Zephyr leader lingered in Garrock's mind as they spiraled gracefully toward the flag, their ease in this environment a stark contrast to the Terra Clan's struggle.

But Garrock didn't let the frustration of their disadvantage distract him. His eyes were fixed on their goal—the islands, solid ground, something that could give them a fighting chance.

"We're almost there!" shouted one of his clanmates, straining with the effort of keeping the chain intact.

Suddenly, another powerful gust of wind slammed into them. The chain wobbled dangerously, and one of the Terra Clan members at the end of the line lost his grip.

"No!" Garrock shouted, lunging to catch him, but the wind snatched him away too fast. The fallen clan member spiraled downward, disappearing into the thick clouds below.

Chapter 336:

Garrock's heart pounded, but he couldn't afford to mourn the loss. Not now. They were almost at the island.

"Keep moving!" he roared, his voice rough with both anger and determination.

As they finally neared the edge of the floating rock platform, Garrock let out a deep growl. With one last swing of their bodies, they hurled themselves toward the island. The impact was hard—stone meeting stone—but they had made it. Solid ground.

The relief was short-lived. Another screech echoed through the air as a second sky beast—a larger, more menacing creature—dove toward the Terra Clan. Its wings beat fiercely against the air, and lightning crackled from its eyes. Garrock realized it was coming in fast, aiming directly for them.

"We can't fight it here! Not like this!" one of the clan members shouted.

But Garrock knew there was no running. They had no other islands to jump to, and no time to evade the attack. His mind worked quickly, and a plan began to form. The island beneath them, though small, was made of solid rock.

"Gather close!" he commanded, positioning his clanmates around him. "I have an idea."

They huddled together as Garrock dug his stone-covered hands deep into the island's surface, his muscles straining as he focused all his strength. The ground around them began to tremble.

"We can't manipulate clouds," Garrock growled, "but we can still manipulate the earth. And this rock—this is our territory!"

With a mighty heave, Garrock ripped a massive boulder out of the floating island's surface. His clanmates quickly followed suit, pulling out chunks of rock. Just as the sky beast dived toward them, its talons poised to strike, Garrock and the others launched their stones at the creature with all their might.

The rocks collided with the bird-like beast in mid-air, knocking it off balance. It screeched in fury, its wings flapping wildly as it tried to recover. The Terra Clan didn't waste a second. They continued to throw boulder after boulder at the creature, using the island's rocky foundation to their advantage.

Finally, with a pained cry, the sky beast flapped its wings and retreated, disappearing into the clouds.

Garrock stood tall, his breathing heavy but his resolve unshaken. "We may be in the sky," he said, "but we're not out of this fight yet."

The other contestant teams, meanwhile, were staring at the floating island with a golden flag on it. Their badges informed them that it was worth two points.

The Mermen, after landing gracefully, found themselves unable to do anything in the sky. There was an island favorable to them with a waterfall, but they hadn't landed on it, as they were disoriented after being suddenly dropped into the sky zone.

The Ripple clan was in a similar situation as the Mermen, as the environment was unfavorable to them. They watched the Zephyr clan, along with the Harpies and a few Apeling students, who were flying toward the island, battling to see who would get there first. Both the Mermen and Ripple clan were thinking of giving up, as it seemed all hope was lost.

Another clan facing the same problem was the Werewolves. Only their leader was in the fourth stage, while the others were in the third stage. It would take a lot of mana to summon enough starlight to create a path to the island with the flag.

Suddenly, there was a change. The Mermen, Ripple clan, and Werewolves looked back and saw a whole island moving, and it wasn't slow. This island was the one the Terra clan had landed on.

Upon landing, the Terra clan immediately formed a formation specific to their clan, merging with the island as if it were an extension of their bodies. With the will of the entire Terra clan, they began moving the Island to get to the flag.

The Mermen and Ripple Clan watched in stunned silence, their eyes wide as they saw the island move under the Terra Clan's control. Even the Werewolves, struggling with their own predicament, could hardly believe what was unfolding before them.

A low murmur rippled through the members of the Ripple Clan. "They're... moving an entire island?" one of them muttered in disbelief.

The Mermen leader, still fixated on the Terra Clan, clenched his fists. "We've been fools," he growled to his comrades. "The sky isn't our battlefield, but they've made it theirs. We need to adapt, or we lose."

The Ripple Clan's team leader echoed the sentiment with his own team. "Adapt? Easier said than done in this forsaken place. But... we can't just stand here. If we want a chance, we need to act."

Before the conversation could continue, the unmistakable screech of a sky beast rang out again. But this time, it wasn't targeting the Terra Clan. The Harpies and Apeling students, still locked in their frenzied aerial battle above, had drawn the beast's attention.

Meanwhile, inside the moving island, Garrock was formulating a new plan with his team. Moving the island might have seemed like a monumental task, but for them, it was far from exhausting. As a clan attuned to earth elements, merging with the island's soil replenished the mana they expended to move it. However, it still wasn't enough for them to secure a victory, as the other teams were closing in on the flag.

"Lift it," Garrock said abruptly.

The Terra Clan members turned to him, confusion spreading across their faces. "What?" one of them asked.

"Lift the whole island!" Garrock barked. "We've been pushing it forward, but we're not thinking big enough. If we lift it and throw it, we'll be there before they even touch the flag!"

His clanmates exchanged uncertain glances. The plan was reckless—bordering on madness. But Garrock's eyes were filled with unwavering determination.

Outside, the other teams could see the island rising higher and higher into the air.

Back with the Mermen team, the Sharkmen took a deep breath as they glanced at the clouds. The team leader, eyes focused on the sky, muttered, "They're not exactly water, but they'll do."

The tattoos hidden beneath their armor began to glow as their already imposing figures grew even larger. The spell they cast absorbed the moisture from the air, bolstering their strength. With their naturally immense power, this gave them an overwhelming boost.

A thunderous sound followed as the Sharkmen made their bold move, leaping from the island they were on to another. They left the Mermaids and Murlocs behind.

"They're... pulling water from the clouds?" one of the commentators outside asked in disbelief.

His astonishment quickly turned into admiration. "Clever bastards."

The Ripple Clan, renowned for their mastery over water, watched in shock as the Sharkmen of the Mermen team surged through the air, defying the very environment that had initially put them at a disadvantage. The Mermen had adapted, using the clouds themselves as a source of power.

"Well, if they can manipulate the moisture," murmured Drea, the leader of the Ripple Clan, her eyes gleaming with sudden inspiration, "then we can use the air and clouds to our advantage too."

Ripples of shimmering water began forming around the Ripple Clan members as they channeled their magic. They had been hesitant at first, stuck in the sky, far from their natural element. But now, seeing the Mermen tap into the atmospheric moisture, Drea saw potential.

"Focus! There's water in the air, and there's plenty of it," she called out, her voice cutting through the winds. "We can't move islands like the Terra Clan, but we can move ourselves!"

The Ripple Clan members nodded in understanding. With graceful motions, they began weaving streams of water from the surrounding mist and clouds, shaping them into long, winding ropes of liquid. These ropes lashed out like tendrils, connecting one floating island to the next. The Ripple Clan wasn't about to leap blindly through the sky like the Mermen, but they had their own method—one born of precision and finesse.

"We'll create bridges," Drea instructed, moving quickly. "We can control the flow of the water and use it to swing from island to island. Stay close, and don't lose focus!"

The first member of the Ripple Clan grasped the water rope and swung toward the nearest island, their body flowing like the water they commanded. As they touched down, they formed another rope, allowing their teammates to follow. One by one, they began slinging themselves across the islands with practiced grace, moving steadily toward the central floating island with the golden flag.

Korak narrowed his eyes at the Mermen's airborne surge and the graceful arcs of the Ripple Clan. His packmates stood ready, their breath misting in the cold air, their icy blue eyes gleaming with anticipation. They had hesitated earlier, unsure of how to deal with the floating islands that kept them far from the solid ground they were used to. But now, Korak had a plan.

"The air is thin, but it holds enough moisture for us," Korak growled, his voice a deep rumble. He raised his hands toward the sky, sensing the dampness in the clouds. "We've got the cold. We've got the ice. We'll make our own

Chapter 337:

The pack watched as Korak summoned his ice magic, drawing moisture from the atmosphere around them. His movements were slow at first, deliberate, as he condensed the moisture into small patches of frost in midair. Gradually, these patches grew into solid plates of ice, connected by shimmering bridges.

"We're not leaping like the Mermen, and we're not flowing like the Ripple Clan," Korak explained, his voice steady and determined. "We'll run through the sky on a highway of ice."

The pack members grinned, their fangs gleaming. This was the kind of bold, reckless strategy they thrived on.

"Now!" Korak barked, and the werewolves sprang into action. With a roar, Korak leaped forward, landing on the first plate of ice he had created. The moment his feet touched it, more ice shot out ahead, forming a bridge from one floating island to another. It wasn't just a path—Korak was building a road made entirely of ice, reinforced with the werewolves' elemental magic. As each wolf landed on the frozen surface, the ice crackled and expanded, growing beneath their feet as they dashed forward.

Meanwhile, in the front, you would think the Harpies or the Zephyr Clan would have reached the flag by now. But surprisingly, neither had gotten close.

Just like everyone else, they were also surprised at their progress. This all stems from the fact that they had turned the Sky Zone into an even more hostile environment than the Earth Zone before it.

Those further back hadn't yet noticed the changes, but as they got closer, they would. Now, back to the startled godlings—both the Harpies and the Zephyr Clan were used to combat and using their abilities to fight. However, this was the first time they were forced to use their powers for something other than combat.

As for the members of the Zephyr Clan, they had always considered themselves the weakest of all the Apeling clans. All they had was wind, which made them faster or sharper when cutting something down. Only their leader, Zephyr, had shown a wider range of abilities, such as pulling the breath from someone's lungs, leaving them dead, or creating a bubble with no air and altering the weather. While these were abilities most in the clan could only dream of mastering at higher stages, large weather manipulation was thought impossible for any Zephyr clan member aside from their leader.

In the Earth Zone, to keep the Harpies from getting ahead, the Zephyr Clan had been forced to improvise. The only solution they could come up with to hinder the Harpies' flight was to create an environment so hostile it would disrupt their wings.

It was a challenge, but when the whole team worked together, it became easier. Their grandfather and god, Ikenga, had left them a great gift: from birth, the wind element had always loved them. They couldn't imagine life without that connection, and for that reason, they respected the ordinary Apelings, who worked hard despite lacking this gift. This sentiment was shared by all the cursed clans.

Their surprise grew even more in the Sky Zone, which was brimming with wind energy. It seemed like an advantage, but they weren't the only ones loved by the wind. The Harpies, descendants of Crepuscular, the god of the sun and sky, also had a deep connection with the wind.

Both felt at home in the sky, and both tried to hinder each other from reaching the flag. But instead of gaining the upper hand, they had inadvertently created an even harsher situation than in the Earth Zone.

The Harpies were equally taken aback. As one of the oldest races of the godlings with their powerful background, they had rarely been pushed to their limits. Like the Zephyr Clan, they too got carried away.

It started with the Harpies gaining speed, only to be thrown off course by the Zephyr Clan's winds. In retaliation, the Harpies hurled lightning bolts, and those among them attuned to flames cast fire at the Apelings.

Soon, it escalated. The Harpies seized control of the surrounding clouds, creating a small storm to block the Zephyr Clan while they attempted to get ahead. The Zephyr Clan, seeing this, shrank the winds into a whirlwind, disrupting the storm.

They slowly were using their mana disrupting the flow of elements in the sky. They were slowly using their mana, disrupting the natural flow of the elements in the sky. Unknown to them, they were making a grave mistake. Even the birds that occasionally tried to interfere with them began to retreat, sensing the growing imbalance. The godlings' manipulation of the surrounding elements only worsened, and the elemental spirits themselves became excited by the reckless usage.

The blend of mana signatures from both godling races started to merge, and soon it spiraled out of their control. The elements grew overly excited, feeding off each other. By the time the godlings realized what was happening, it was too late. The once white clouds had turned dark, and the sun had disappeared from view. The only light now came from thick bolts of lightning that struck randomly, illuminating the ominous sky.

Had Ikenga been watching, he would have immediately recognized that the two godling races had created something akin to a turbulence—or perhaps something even worse. No longer focused on fighting each other, both groups now struggled to maneuver through the chaotic environment they had unintentionally created while still heading for the flag.

The ones faring the worst were the Apeling students, who had been competing with the two godling races. Though their bird forms had kept them in the race for a while, the increasing intensity of the storm made it nearly impossible to continue. Eventually, they gave up and found an island to land on, hoping to wait out the storm.

As they rested, a sound caught their attention. They saw three Sharkmen leaping from island to island, moving at an impressive speed. Soon, the Sharkmen landed on the same island as the Apeling students.

The Sharkmen leader, surprised by the chaotic state of the sky, surveyed the scene. "Those flying fools must have gotten the elements too excited," he muttered to his teammates.

As a race accustomed to living in harmony with their elements, the Sharkmen recognized the current state of the Sky Zone. This kind of turbulence occurred in their underwater kingdom from time to time.

Raindrops fell heavily on them, and their bodies shrank slightly under the deluge. They looked toward the distant island where the flag stood, now questioning whether they should proceed or not.

The Sharkmen leader turned to his teammates. "Do we continue or stop here?" he asked, noticing the hesitation in their eyes.

"We've pushed ourselves this far, but going any further might just be testing our luck," one of them said. "We might not make it to the flag, and we could end up falling out of the competition."

The leader nodded in agreement and glanced at the Apeling students. "They probably think the same. The flag on this island is now a battle between the Harpies and the Zephyr clan."

The Sharkmen sat on the edge of the island, watching as the distant dots of the flying godlings headed toward the island with the flag. The Ripple clan, following closely behind, made the same decision and landed on a nearby island. Even the Werewolves, who had been running along their icy path, recognized the danger. They landed on an island with the Ripple clan, content to wait for the next stage and the next flag.

However, not all competitors were content to sit on the sidelines. One clan still participated in the chaos created by the Zephyr and Harpy races. Though many had forgotten about them, the spectators in the colosseum had not. All eyes were now on the Terra clan, who had stayed hidden but were now making their move.

In the hologram above the arena, the Terra clan's island had risen high into the sky—so high that they could now see the battling godlings heading toward the flag. Garrok and his team emerged, controlling the island's descent as they positioned it directly above the island holding the flag. Then, they released their control, letting the island fall like a meteor.

Below, the Harpies and Zephyr clan finally noticed the massive shadow looming overhead. The island was descending fast, blocking out the last remnants of sunlight. The realization hit them both at once—they weren't the only ones vying for the flag. Garrok's clan had been lying in wait, positioning themselves like hunters stalking prey, and now their island was falling directly toward the flag.

"Those cowards think they can just swoop in and take it?" screeched one of the Harpies, their wings flapping furiously as they struggled to maintain control in the storm. Pride surged through the Harpy warriors, and they pushed themselves harder. Lightning crackled at their wingtips as they accelerated, refusing to let the Terra clan steal their prize.

Chapter 338:

The Zephyr clan leader narrowed his eyes as he too noticed the descending island. The winds around him picked up violently, swirling into a deadly whirlwind. "Focus on the flag!" he yelled to his clan members. "Forget the Harpies, we take it now or it's over!"

The final phase of the race had begun. As the Terra clan's island descended into the heart of the storm, a blinding bolt of lightning tore through the dark clouds, striking the edge of the floating rock. The crack of

thunder was deafening, and the impact sent chunks of the island flying. One large fragment of rock broke off, plummeting into the storm below, disappearing into the chaos.

Garrok and his team braced themselves, the island trembling beneath them. Another flash lit the sky, and this time, the lightning came closer, grazing the stone just feet away from Garrok. The island was falling apart under the relentless fury of the storm, and they hadn't even made their move yet.

"Hold steady!" Garrok barked, his voice cutting through the roar of the storm. His team was tense but focused, their feet rooted firmly to the stone beneath them, using their control of the earth to keep the island from crumbling completely.

The winds howled louder, as if the storm itself sensed the Terra clan's intentions. The Harpies and Zephyr members, both caught in the thick of it, had to fight not only each other but the increasingly violent storm. Lightning struck indiscriminately, and gusts of wind threw them off course.

Another bolt of lightning, even larger than the last, struck the island dead center, shattering a massive chunk from its core. The ground beneath Garrok's feet trembled violently. A portion of the island split off and was sucked into the storm's winds, tumbling into the chaotic maelstrom below. It was becoming a race against time for the Terra clan—if they didn't act fast, their own island would be torn apart.

"Now!" Garrok shouted, urgency in his voice.

His team sprang into action, using their earth magic to stabilize the remaining chunks of the island as they began their final approach toward the flag. They rode atop pieces of stone that shot downward like jagged comets, but even their well-honed abilities weren't enough to protect them from the storm.

Lightning danced in the sky, striking at the Terra clan's falling platforms. One of Garrok's team members, a stocky man named Nara, was nearly thrown off his stone as a bolt struck near him, breaking the platform beneath him into pieces. Nara screamed as he fell, but with quick thinking, he summoned a new pillar of rock from the debris, barely managing to steady himself mid-fall.

"Keep moving!" Garrok yelled, his own platform shuddering as the winds grew stronger, threatening to tear him off course. The very air seemed to resist them as if the storm had a mind of its own.

Meanwhile, the Harpies and Zephyr clan had finally realized the Terra clan's plan.

"Those rats!" shrieked one of the Harpy leaders, a fierce woman with wings crackling with electricity. She flapped her wings furiously, calling down another bolt of lightning, this time aimed directly at Garrok.

Garrok saw the flash of light and reacted just in time. He threw his hand out, commanding a slab of stone to rise from beneath him, absorbing the full impact of the lightning. The stone shattered, sending debris raining down, but Garrok emerged unscathed. His eyes narrowed as he locked onto the Harpy leader, his determination burning even stronger.

The Zephyr clan was not far behind. Their leader, the sharp-eyed wind master, quickly summoned a vortex of air beneath his feet, propelling himself toward the flag with incredible speed. He ignored the chaos around him, focusing entirely on the goal.

But Garrok was already moving. With a grunt of effort, he propelled himself and his team downward, riding their rocky platforms like falling meteors. As they hurtled toward the flag, they had to navigate not only the storm but also the fierce attacks from the other two clans.

The Harpies were relentless, hurling bolts of lightning and flames, trying to disrupt the Terra clan's descent. One of Garrok's teammates was hit by a sudden burst of wind from a Zephyr clan member, knocking him off his platform. He tumbled through the sky, desperately trying to regain control. Garrok gritted his teeth and reached out with his power, summoning a new stone beneath his falling teammate just before he was carried away by the wind.

"We're almost there!" shouted one of the Terra members, but they were far from safe. The Zephyr leader was now within reach of the flag, his vortex of wind carrying him closer with every second.

Garrok's heart pounded in his chest. He could see the flag just below, tantalizingly close. But as they neared, the storm intensified, whipping up violent winds and hail that hammered against them like a wall of force. Garrok knew they had one shot, and they couldn't afford to miss it.

"Break through!" Garrok roared, and his team responded. Using their earth magic, they summoned a series of stone pillars, smashing them into the wind vortex created by the Zephyr leader. The pillars exploded on impact, disrupting the vortex and sending the Zephyr leader spiraling out of control.

The Harpies saw the Terra clan making their move and screeched in fury. One of the harpy leaders, wings crackling with lightning, made a desperate dive for the flag, claws outstretched. But as she approached, the ground beneath her shifted. Garrok, controlling the earth with effortless precision, moved the stone just enough to send her spiraling off course. With a scream of frustration, she crashed into a nearby cliffside, her chance lost.

The Zephyr clan forcefully took control of the wind as they rushed toward the flag, only for Garrok and his team to merge with the surrounding earth. Both the Harpies and Zephyrs felt their hearts in their throats as they saw it.

For a brief moment, they were close to touching the flag, only for Garrok's hand to stretch out from under the earth. His fingers closed around the flag just as another bolt of lightning tore through the sky. The storm, the chaos, the race—it all seemed to freeze for a heartbeat. Then, with a triumphant roar, Garrok planted the flag into the ground, claiming victory for the Terra clan.

The colosseum erupted in cheers and gasps as the hologram confirmed the winner. The Harpies, Zephyr clan, and other competitors stood wide-eyed, taken aback by the result.

The race was far from over, as this was still the first flag, but it was undisputed that the Terra clan was now two points ahead of the others.

The Zone shifted again with the capture of the flag, throwing everyone into a new, even more disorienting area. The team even more disordered this time.

Meanwhile, somewhere on the eastern continent, in the territory of the Apelings, lay a land of great importance to their prosperity. This land was guarded by the Terra clan. Even the most revered Apelings were rarely allowed to set foot on it—yet today, on a significant day for the Apelings, a certain group had their eyes on this land. They knew how vital it was to the Apelings, and if they succeeded in their plan, the Apelings would suffer greatly.

Not too far from Terra clan territory, amidst the trees of the forest, patches of red moved through the foliage. Upon closer inspection, they were revealed to be a group of burly humans, each wielding blood-stained weapons. Their armor and clothing bore the markings of the followers of Björn, the god of insanity and warfare. A familiar figure could be seen among them.

This figure was the first priest of Björn to arrive on the eastern continent, welcomed by the people of the Omadi kingdom. It had been three years since the priest came to this land. At first, he thought allying himself with the Omadi kingdom would advance his cause, but time proved him wrong. Unlike other priests who had made significant progress in the lands they were sent to, his efforts had been dismal.

This outcome had been expected when he was first deployed, but everything changed when there was rapid progress on the western continent, which had also been expected to be a tough challenge. The success in the west put pressure on him from the higher-ups, who believed his lack of progress was due to incompetence.

For Björn's followers, who cared only for blood and war, this might not have bothered him—but their society had grown more complex, and it was no longer solely about one thing. He had begun to enjoy the privileges of his position and didn't want to lose them, so he promised to do better. That was when rumors began to spread that sacrificing godlings would be a superior offering to Björn.

The priest had started this rumor because his time on the eastern continent had taught him that the Apelings were a quiet race who preferred to keep to themselves, unlike the werewolves, who were often seen on hunts. The Apelings were rarely encountered, but that changed after his arrival. He didn't know why they had become more outgoing, but he believed it worked to his advantage.

Chapter 339:

Watching the Apelings interact with the human world revealed their naivety. Their willingness to flaunt their wealth as if it were normal was fascinating to him. When he started spreading the rumor, he believed it would work.

However, once the rumor took hold, he realized how little he understood the Apelings. The retaliation and brutality they displayed were no less than what the followers of Björn would do.

His failure reached the ears of the higher-ups, and he was given one last chance before being replaced. Despite the threat, he wasn't as concerned about his position as he was about the indirect damage caused by the Apelings.

The small kingdom he had allied with began withdrawing after the Apelings' actions, and even ordinary people became afraid to join Björn's teachings. This news hadn't yet reached the higher-ups, but he knew that if they heard of it, he would be killed.

In a desperate attempt, the priest turned his attention to the guarded land of the Apelings. Though desperation gnawed at him, he had come prepared. He knew the risks, but he also knew the rewards if he succeeded. If Nwadieube, the enigmatic and powerful figure in the region, accepted his offer, the chances of success would skyrocket. But even without Nwadieube's assistance, the priest was confident that this mission could restore his standing and bring in a wave of new followers and worshippers for Björn.

Looking up at the sky, he noted that it would still be some time before the sun dipped below the horizon. Time enough to prepare. His gaze shifted to the group of red-robed figures standing before him, their faces obscured by deep hoods. These were the mages he had brought with him, each essential to his plan.

"Keep yourselves hidden and start laying the groundwork for the spell," he commanded, his voice low and urgent. "I'll let you know when it's time to activate it. Until then, stay concealed. We can't afford to alert anyone."

The mages nodded in unison before disappearing into the shadows of the forest. The priest watched them go, ensuring they moved silently and undetected. He turned back toward the center of the camp, where a crude statue of Björn stood, fashioned from rough stone and wood. It was far from a masterpiece, but it served its purpose—a focal point for his rituals and the embodiment of Björn's power.

His hand instinctively moved to the space ring he wore, his fingers brushing against its surface. A familiar sensation stirred within him, one he hadn't felt in a long time. The warmth of power, the echo of his lost status, began to rise inside him once more.

A red light flickered in the priest's eyes as he breathed in deeply, anticipation growing. Soon, the night would come, and with it, his opportunity to turn the tides in his favor. Tonight, he would make his move. The land he coveted, the land so precious to the Apelings, would be the key to his redemption—or his downfall.

For now, all he could do was wait and prepare. But with each passing moment, the hunger for power swelled within him, eager to be unleashed.

As the mages moved into the forest, their red robes blending with the deep shadows cast by the thick canopy, they worked in silence, each fully aware of their role. They spread out in a wide perimeter, their faces hidden, their hands moving with practiced precision as they began inscribing runes into the earth. Each symbol they carved into the soil glowed faintly red, leaving behind a shimmering residue of energy. The air grew thick with an almost imperceptible hum, a warning that the spell was slowly taking form.

The mages' movements were swift and coordinated. One began tracing lines between the runes with a small dagger that seemed to never run out of blood, the blade leaving glowing bloody streaks that interconnected each symbol. Another raised a staff, muttering incantations under their breath, their voice low and steady. The runes flickered in response to the words, brightening as the spell weaved together, piece by piece.

Back in the camp, the priest stood before the statue of Björn, deep in thought. His fingers continued to absentmindedly trace the edges of his space ring as he considered his next steps. With the mages hard at work, he turned to the few trusted lieutenants that remained by his side. They haven't experienced war like his brethren but they have shown exceptional talent each powerful figures in the fourth stage.

"The Apelings will likely sense something is wrong once the barrier is in place," the priest began, his voice calm yet edged with intensity. "That will be our signal to move. The spell will hold them, cutting off any chance of communication with the ou. But the mages must remain undisturbed until the spell is complete. Once the barrier is activated, we strike swiftly."

One of the lieutenants, a brutish man with a heavily scarred face, grunted in approval. "Do we expect heavy resistance? The Apelings may be quiet, but they can fight when provoked."

The priest's red eyes gleamed. "We don't need to defeat them all. Besides, our goal today isn't to battle the Apelings."

A few of the men raised their brows in surprise, and the priest smirked. "You are among the very few who will witness something thought to be a myth."

He continued, "In the teachings on the Nature God, it's said that he gifted his son something to ensure the prosperity of the kingdom his son created. There has been much speculation about the nature of this gift."

The priest pointed toward the shadowed walls just visible from the forest. "Behind those walls lies the gift the Nature God gave to his son."

"Our mission is to claim that gift. If it's something we can take, we'll take it. But if it cannot be taken, we will destroy it." His gaze swept over the group's eager faces.

The priest's words hung in the air, heavy with intrigue and promise. His lieutenants exchanged glances, their curiosity now fully piqued. The prospect of laying their hands on a mythical relic, one tied to the very foundation of the Apelings' kingdom, stirred a sense of excitement that even seasoned warriors found hard to suppress.

"The gift of the nature god," one of the younger lieutenants muttered under his breath, almost reverently. His eyes shone with wonder at the thought.

Meanwhile, behind the ancient walls, the Apelings were enjoying themselves, their guards lowered as they drank and laughed. A hologram floated before them, displaying the images of the competition in the capital, where their fellow Apelings competed with pride. Laughter echoed through the hall, but it was suddenly cut short.

For a brief moment, sharp looks flashed in their eyes as every Apeling felt it—an almost imperceptible shift in the earthen element that coursed through the land. It was a subtle, unsettling sensation, like a foul presence pressing against their connection to the earth, disrupting their bond. It passed as quickly as it came, replaced by confusion.

They exchanged wary glances. A collective unease settled over them. One of the elder warriors frowned, his eyes scanning the surroundings as if seeking the source of the disturbance. "Did anyone else feel that?"

The Apelings murmured in agreement, unsettled. A disgusted shiver ran through them. The land, their sacred connection to the earthen element, had reacted as though something unnatural had touched it, something foreign and unwelcome.

At the center of the group, a female figure shifted her gaze away from the hologram, her eyes narrowing with suspicion. She was the daughter of Terra, left in charge of the sacred lands while her father

attended the annual competition in the capital. Her father had guarded the "Garden" for centuries, and she had no intention of being the one to let it fall.

She stood, her commanding presence silencing the murmurs around her. "Send scouts," she ordered, her voice calm but firm. "Have them search the perimeter. We need to know if something is out of place."

Her warriors nodded and swiftly dispersed. She remained still, her eyes hard as stone. Whatever the disturbance was, it could not be ignored. The Garden was too important, too sacred. If there was a threat, she would eliminate it before it had a chance to take root.

She turned back to the hologram, but her mind was elsewhere, focused on the nagging sense of unease. Whatever was happening outside the walls, it would be dealt with. The Apelings would not be caught off guard. Not on her watch.

Five scouts moved out quickly. With their attunement to the earth element, they could pinpoint the source of the disturbing sensation. The Terra clan members were always large and heavy, yet as they ran this time, the earth absorbed their sound, allowing them to move swiftly and silently.

Soon, they reached a point and halted; any farther and they would be leaving their territory. The scouts exchanged glances, and one placed a hand to his ear. "Princess, we've located the source of the disturbance, but it's beyond our territory."

Chapter 340:

The princess frowned upon receiving the report. "Was it intentional? Is someone trying to lure us out?"

Recalling her father's advice, she replied with the clan's motto, "Defense is the best offense." With that, she ended the call. She looked back at the Hologram "If someone is waiting beyond the territory then sending message back to the capital won't work so that means it can only be done when the attack begins"

The scouts looked at each other before heading back. Just after they left, a group of red-cloaked figures appeared ahead, lowering their hoods briefly as they watched the Apelings retreat. Saying nothing, they pulled their hoods back up, disappearing into the shadows.

The priest received this news and sighed. He had thought he might be overestimating the Apelings, but this only confirmed their caution. Though he wanted to call off the mission, he knew this was his only chance. "Stay alert," he called out, informing everyone. "The Apelings know we're here."

Back within the walls of the Terra clan, the mood had shifted. No longer interested in the competition, the clan had taken action. Non-warriors and children were promptly moved to a shelter built for them.

Meanwhile, the fighters and the princess donned a strange, rune-like armor. As they put it on, root-like tendrils merged with their bodies, making the armor seemingly disappear as their normal clothing reappeared over it.

The streets were empty, and the princess stood tall, leading an army numbering in the thousands. Some fighters lay hidden in the houses, waiting in silence.

The princess stood silently, her gaze intense as she assessed the empty streets. She could feel the subtle pulse of life hidden within the walls around her, each Apeling warrior connected through the living armor that bound them to the earth itself. This was their home, and nothing would breach it without a fight. The words of her father echoed in her mind: "The earth remembers who it shelters and who it rejects. Trust in it, as it trusts in you."

Meanwhile the priest was staring at the sand clock in front of him waiting for the sand to empty out which means it will be night time. Right as he was waiting the sun slowly went down.

With haste he immediately ordered the mages to activate the spell, Chant of incantations can be heard echoing from the forest. The princess and her men looked to the sky to watch a red dome that was covering their land.

The red dome even had the light of the moon turn red casting a red light over everyone. The princess stood still, her gaze unwavering as she watched the crimson dome cast a blood-red glow over the village. Even the moon's light had turned to the priest's ominous hue. For a moment, she felt the unsettling churn of magic ripple through her blood, but it subsided as quickly as it had come.

"At arms," she commanded, lifting her heavy hammer and resting it on her shoulder with practiced ease. The warriors around her mirrored her readiness, their armor pulsing with the energy of the earth beneath them.

On the other side, the priest led his force of five hundred to the edge of the towering wall. The weight of their mission settled heavily upon them. Breaking through the Terra clan's mystical barrier would be no easy task, but they had come prepared.

A few men stepped aside as the mages emerged, dragging a captive toward the wall. The man struggled, his eyes wild with fear, but his mouth was stuffed, leaving him only able to issue muffled pleas. They pushed him to his knees before the priest, who drew a dagger with a chilling calm.

"You are performing a great service to our lord with your sacrifice," he murmured as he sliced the man's throat, steadying him as his blood splattered against the wall. The mages chanted, and the blood began to sizzle and hiss against the protective barrier. It wasn't meant to break the shield entirely, only to create a breach wide enough for an entry point.

Across the wall, the princess and her forces watched as the wall began to melt, and the opening widened. She wasted no time. "Attack!"

The Terra clan warriors surged forward, but before they could close in, small black balls were thrown through the breach, releasing a thick gas that quickly spread, fogging up the area. The princess raised a hand, signaling her men. "Hold your positions! Stand in pairs, back-to-back. The gas is not poisonous."

Taking advantage of the confusion, the priest's forces poured through the narrow breach, spreading out to cover the town's streets. His strategy was clear; he knew that in such close quarters, Terra's forces would dominate. By spreading his forces, he kept them from being an easy target.

As the smoke began to clear, the princess saw the red-robed figures scattered throughout the village. The priest, at the forefront, began to release a red mist that enveloped his men, and she watched in horror as their eyes turned bloodshot and feral, their faces twisting with a savage intensity.

The priest locked eyes with the princess from across the street, his gaze full of cold arrogance. "Where is the gift the God of Nature left for his son?" he demanded.

The princess's eyes flashed with fury, echoed by her warriors. "Such arrogance," she muttered, gripping her hammer tighter.

In response, the earth beneath her feet seemed to pulse with life, resonating with her anger. The armor on her warriors began to glow faintly as the roots and tendrils embedded within them pulsed, enhancing their strength.

Without waiting for another demand, she raised her hammer high, and the ground rumbled as her forces surged forward. "For the Terra clan!"

The Priest watched as the princess charged into battle, her aura blazing. Without hesitation, he bellowed, "Attack!" His voice boomed over the field, igniting the bloodlust in his eager soldiers. Like a violent wave, the army surged forward, crashing toward the Terra clan with wild abandon.

While the army advanced, the Priest fell back with his mages, one leaning close to whisper hurried words. As the spell settled over him, his eyes flared a deep, ominous red, casting his vision far beyond the immediate carnage. He peered through the storm of chaos, and there—on the far side of the Terra clan's forces—he glimpsed a faint golden shimmer, the elusive glow of divinity.

A dark grin curved on his lips as he drew his hood up, shrouding his face. In the next breath, he and his mages vanished, their energy signatures fading into nothing. He spared no thought for the army he'd sent to the slaughter; their lives were merely coins he'd spent for a greater reward.

From the moment he'd agreed to this, he understood that death awaited them all. But if they could buy him the time he needed, if they could hold off the apelings long enough, then perhaps he'd finally seize the power he craved.

The air grew thick with tension as both forces locked eyes across the narrow street. For a heartbeat, there was only silence, and then the princess brought her hammer down with a deafening roar. The ground cracked, sending tremors through the village, and with a unified cry, the Terra clan warriors surged forward.

The priest's soldiers met them with equal fervor, their bodies transforming under the red mist of the priest's spell. Muscles swelled, and their eyes gleamed with a wild, primal hunger as they charged into

the fray. They moved faster, with reckless strength fueled by their faith in Björn, reveling in the chaos. But the Terra clan warriors were relentless.

The first clash of weapons was brutal. A Terra warrior swung his jagged stone axe into the chest of a red-cloaked zealot, shattering bone and ripping flesh as blood sprayed across the ground. But the zealot, even with his dying breath, grabbed the warrior's arm and bit down savagely, his teeth gnashing against the armor. It took a brutal stomp to the zealot's skull to end him, and the Terra warrior moved forward without a pause.

A red-robed soldier slammed into another Apeling with a ferocity that belied his size, clawing at the warrior's face and tearing away strips of flesh. But the Apeling's armor reacted, roots springing forth and stabbing through the zealot's wrists, pinning him in place as the Apeling brought a stone gauntlet down on his head. The zealot's skull cracked with a sickening crunch, his body twitching as the roots writhed, draining the last of his life.

Nearby, the princess fought her way through the mob with lethal precision, her hammer smashing bone and rending flesh in her wake. She swung it low, shattering the legs of one zealot, then lifted it high to crush another who lunged at her. The zealots, undeterred, threw themselves at her, hands clawing for any piece of flesh they could grasp. But her armor pulsed, roots bursting forth to impale the attackers, wrapping around their throats and twisting with bone-snapping force.