

Guardian gods 471

Chapter 471:

He was not like other children. He never would be.

His blood-red and dark-shadowed eyes clashed with Yuki's own, an unspoken challenge hanging between mother and son.

Yuki, still in her devil form, regarded him coldly. There was no warmth in her gaze, no gentle embrace awaiting him. This was no ordinary birth, and she was no ordinary mother. She had felt his intent before he was even born—his desire to make her his first kill, to emerge into this world baptized in her blood.

But she was his mother.

And she would not be prey.

Slowly, her lips curved into something that was not quite a smile. It was neither amusement nor affection—it was simply acknowledgment.

"You'll have to do better than that, my son."

The air grew thick with power as the tension between them hung, palpable and unrelenting. The prince's small hands clenched into tiny fists, his annoyance shifting into something more calculating. He had wanted to emerge into the world a predator, but his mother had denied him that satisfaction.

Perhaps that was why, rather than lash out, he let out a slow exhale and descended from the air, landing on the ground before her, feet touching the bloodstained floor with perfect balance.

Yuki's devil form slowly receded, her robes reforming around her as she observed him. He had chosen not to strike—an understanding passed between them.

Not now.

But one day, he would test her again.

The prince talked about now strode across the frozen expanse, his bare torso exposed to the biting cold, yet he moved as if the frost and wind were mere whispers against his skin. His frame, far larger than any ten-year-old should possess, exuded an eerie presence, each step pressing deep into the thick snow beneath him. Resting against his shoulder was an Odachi, a blade so massive that it should have been impossible for a child to wield, yet it fit him like an extension of his own being.

Behind him were his supposed guards, though from their behavior, one would question if they were truly guarding him or simply tagging along. A large wooden table had been set onto the ice-covered plain, and atop it sat a well-worn chessboard, pieces carefully arranged mid-game. Instead of keeping watch, the men were hunched over the board, murmuring strategies to one another, their breaths forming thick clouds in the frozen air.

The prince stopped, observing them in silence. He tilted his head as they debated their next move, his blood-red eyes narrowing with mild amusement before shifting into boredom.

"Idiots."

With a sigh, he turned away, trudging off on his own.

One of the guards, barely looking up from the board, called out, "Remember to bring back a succulent prey, preferably a bear! We all—"

He cut himself off abruptly, eyes darting toward his fellow guards, realizing his mistake too late. He coughed into his fist before correcting himself.

"Your mother has been craving one."

The prince paused in his steps. He didn't turn back, didn't acknowledge the slip. Instead, he simply raised a middle finger before continuing forward, disappearing into the vast white expanse.

The guards exchanged glances, their easygoing expressions briefly replaced with something sharper, something more dangerous. Then, as if nothing had happened, they returned to their game.

Above them, the wind howled, the snow swallowing all traces of the prince's passage.

After walking for some distance, the prince stopped as he took a sniff in the air, his blood red eye trailing the area. In his sight a blood red line was shown, he had found his prey and it's realm was just perfect for him.

His boots dug deep into the snow as his figure turned into blur as he trailed behind the trail he found.

Far away from where the prince is, a beast like a dragon with pure white scales but no wings can be seen surrounded by wolves. A dragon beast not lucky enough to be reborn as a dragon.

Yet the draconic bloodline flowing through its vein still made it a top predator and quite a delicacy for creatures seeking evolution as no matter how little or diluted the dragon blood is, it still is a dragon blood.

This dragon beast has just woken up from its long promotion slumber not too long ago and now it is at the fourth stage. The promotion left it empty and hungry and so it went out and at the same time didn't suppress the fluctuation of its bloodline which was an instinct most dragon beasts inherited to protect themselves.

And just like a bait, this pack of wolves were hooked. Once it found his target, it once again suppressed the fluctuation, leaving the wolves confused but once they laid eyes on it, they knew they had found their target.

The dragon beast, having just emerged from its slumber-induced weakness, stands at the center of the snowy expanse, its eyes locked on the encircling wolves. The wolves, sensing the potent draconic blood, move with a predatory grace, their breaths forming icy plumes in the frigid air.

The first move comes from the wolves. Two wolves, their eyes glowing with azure light, launch forward, leaving trails of frost in their wake. They unleash a coordinated attack, conjuring razor-sharp ice shards that hurtle towards the dragon beast. The dragon beast, reacting with surprising speed, roars, and a

wave of pure ice erupts from its maw, shattering the ice shards and sending a shockwave of freezing air outwards.

The wolves, however, are not deterred. Four more wolves, their eyes shimmering silver, begin a flanking maneuver. They move with incredible speed, blurring across the snow, the wind itself seeming to bend to their will. They unleash gusts of razor-sharp wind, swirling vortexes that cut through the air, attempting to slice at the dragon beast's flanks.

The dragon beast, its immense size and strength allowing it to withstand the wind attacks, pivots, its powerful tail sweeping across the snow, creating a wall of ice and snow that blocks the wind vortexes. It then lunges forward, its massive jaws snapping, attempting to seize one of the wind wolves. The wolf, with its superior speed, narrowly evades the attack, leaving a trail of shimmering silver as it leaps away.

The remaining four ice wolves, seeing an opening, unleash a barrage of ice spears, each tipped with a chilling frost that threatens to freeze anything it touches. The dragon beast, its scales shimmering, absorbs the impact, its icy aura deflecting the spears. However, the sheer volume of the attack forces it to take a step back, revealing a slight vulnerability.

The wind wolves, taking advantage of this moment, intensify their attack. They create a swirling cyclone of wind, a vortex of razor-sharp air that threatens to tear the dragon beast apart. The ice wolves, coordinating with their wind brethren, launch another volley of ice spears, aiming for the dragon beast's eyes and vulnerable underbelly.

The dragon beast, its eyes blazing with icy fury, unleashes a devastating ice breath attack. This time, the breath is not just a wave of cold; it's a concentrated beam of pure ice, a freezing laser that cuts through the cyclone and shatters the ice spears. The beam strikes one of the wind wolves directly, encasing it in a tomb of solid ice. The wolf falls to the ground, frozen solid.

The remaining wolves, realizing the sheer power of the dragon beast, begin to coordinate their

attacks with greater precision. The wind wolves create a swirling shield of wind, deflecting the dragon beast's ice breath, while the ice wolves launch coordinated attacks, aiming for the dragon beast's limbs and joints.

The dragon beast, its movements now showing signs of fatigue, retaliates with a series of powerful swipes and bites. It manages to catch another wolf, this time an ice wolf, in its jaws, crushing its bones with a sickening crunch. The wolf's icy energy flickers and dies.

The battle rages on, the snow and ice stained with the blood of the fallen wolves. The dragon beast, despite its injuries, continues to fight with a primal ferocity, its draconic blood fueling its determination. The remaining wolves, their numbers dwindling, continue to attack with a desperate tact, their elemental powers flickering in the face of the dragon beast's overwhelming might.

The dragon beast, with a final, earth-shattering roar, unleashes a blizzard of ice and snow, a freezing tempest that engulfs the remaining wolves. The wolves, their elemental defenses overwhelmed, are frozen solid, their forms encased in icy tombs. The dragon beast, its chest heaving, stands victorious, its white scales stained with the blood of its enemies.

The dragon beast, its massive frame heaving, finally succumbed to its fatigue, collapsing onto the snow-covered ground. Its glacial blue eyes, though still alert, held a weariness born of the brutal struggle. The air, thick with the scent of blood and ice, hung heavy around it. The frozen forms of the wolves, encased in their icy tombs, dotted the expanse, a testament to the battle's ferocity.

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A subtle mental fluctuation rippled from the dragon beast, a faint pulse of energy that seemed to resonate with the frozen wolves. A moment later, one of the icy tombs, containing a particularly large ice wolf, began to levitate, hovering slowly towards the exhausted beast. With a crunch that echoed across the silent landscape, the dragon beast took a massive bite, its powerful jaws shattering the frozen carcass.

The taste was a strange, almost paradoxical blend of icy cold and rich, meaty warmth. The frozen flesh, infused with the wolf's concentrated mana, proved to be an unexpected delicacy. The dragon beast's powerful digestive system worked with astonishing speed, breaking down the frozen meat and absorbing the vital nutrients and mana. A palpable surge of energy coursed through its veins, revitalizing its weary body.

As the dragon beast consumed the frozen wolf, a visible transformation began to occur. Its famished, thin frame, previously showing the strain of the battle, began to fill out, the muscles rippling beneath its white scales. The sunken hollows around its eyes vanished, replaced by a renewed sharpness and vitality. Its wounds, previously gaping and bleeding, began to close, the damaged scales replaced by

new, even harder ones. The older scales, too, seemed to thicken and harden, their surface shimmering with a newfound resilience.

The dragon beast's height increased, its massive frame expanding until it was comparable to the size of a large truck. Its previously lean and muscular form became even more imposing, its powerful limbs and thick neck radiating raw power. The icy blue of its eyes intensified, glowing with a renewed ferocity. The previously exhausted beast now radiated a renewed power, the mana it absorbed fueling a rapid and visible evolution.

The consumption of the magical wolf meat became a catalyst, accelerating the dragon beast's natural regenerative abilities and pushing it to a new level of power. The dragon beast, now fully replenished, rose to its feet, its massive form casting a long shadow across the icy expanse.

The dragon beast, now fully restored and significantly larger, unleashed a thunderous roar that reverberated across the frozen plains. The sound, a primal declaration of its renewed strength, echoed through the icy peaks, a clear message to any rivals or allies within earshot: it had awakened, and it was powerful.

The roar faded, leaving a chilling silence in its wake. Suddenly, a voice, laced with arrogance, cut through the stillness. "Quite a big one, we have here."

The dragon beast turned its massive head, its icy blue eyes scanning the landscape. Its gaze settled on a frozen mound some distance away. A figure stood atop it, a young man, a prince, his sword glinting in the pale light. A smirk played on his lips, a mixture of amusement and predatory intent. The dragon beast huffed, a plume of icy air escaping its nostrils, a silent acknowledgment of the prince's presence.

As a fourth-stage beast, the dragon beast possessed the ability to speak, its voice a deep, resonant growl. "Who are you?" it demanded, its voice carrying the weight of its newfound power.

The prince's smirk widened. "I am the one who will claim your heart, beast. A worthy trophy for one of my lineage." He drew his sword, the polished steel reflecting the icy landscape. "You are a rare and powerful creature, a testament to the might of dragon blood. Such a prize is worthy of a royal hunt."

The dragon beast narrowed its eyes, the icy blue intensifying. "A hunt?" it rumbled, its voice laced with disdain. "You believe you can hunt me?"

"Indeed," the prince replied, his voice brimming with confidence. "Your power is impressive, but it is nothing compared to the power of a true hunter. I have faced beasts far greater than you, and I have always emerged victorious. Your dragon blood will be a valuable addition to my collection."

The dragon beast shifted its weight, its powerful limbs digging into the snow. "Arrogance," it growled. "A dangerous trait for a mortal."

This wiped the smirk off the prince's face as he looked at the dragon beast with disdain. "You are indeed a stain to the mightiness of the dragons, if your nose still tells you that I am a mortal!"

The prince's confident smirk vanished, replaced by a mask of cold disdain. "You are indeed a stain to the mightiness of the dragons," he hissed, his voice laced with venom. "If your nose still tells you that I am a mortal."

The dragon beast's icy eyes narrowed, its massive frame shifting slightly, a subtle display of its growing anger. "What are you then?" it rumbled, its voice echoing across the frozen expanse. "If not mortal, then what?"

The prince smirked as his Odachi sword pointed at the beast, a crimson aura began seeping out from his body and surrounding him, his eyes took a red hue and his voice with anticipation said "Why don't you find out yourself"

A guttural roar echoes through the area, and a wave of frigid air slams into the prince, forming a wall of ice spikes. The prince, his eyes narrowed, sidesteps the initial barrage, the crimson aura around him flickering as it interacts with the biting cold.

"So eager to die," the prince hisses, his voice a low, venomous rasp. He dropped from the ice mound he was on, once his feet touched the ground, he lunges, his sword flashing, aiming for the dragon beast underbelly.

The dragon beast, anticipating the attack, whips its tail, a massive, ice-encrusted appendage that raised the snow around them. The prince, his enhanced senses warning him, deflects the blow, but the force of the impact sends him skidding across the ice.

The prince was at the peak of the third stage of his people power system called "Demonic affinity" where one develops and find out their affinity, in the prince's case, his demonic affinity manifests as a heightened, almost precognitive sense of his opponent's movements, allowing him to anticipate attacks with unnerving accuracy.

The beast not letting go unleashes a torrent of ice shards, each one a deadly projectile. The prince, moving with unnerving speed, weaves through the barrage, his blade deflecting the closest shards. The crimson aura around him intensifies, the scent of blood filling the air, a heady, intoxicating aroma that begins to affect the dragon beast, stirring a primal, aggressive response.

But the draconic blood and the power of Ice flowing through it's body managed to keep it calm. It needs to keep the prince away from coming close to him.

Just the initial burst of speed from the prince showed how much of a problem it would be in once the prince closes in, especially since it's body is the size of a truck, fast but not fast enough and unlike true dragons, it can't shrink it's body.

It has to push it's ice manipulation to the max and wear the prince out.

"It seems your calm is a facade," the prince taunts, his voice echoing across the frozen expanse, though his breath plumed white in the frigid air. "Beneath that icy veneer, I smell fear." He rose from his skidding halt, his boots crunching on the newly formed ice. The crimson aura around him pulsed.

The dragon beast, its reptilian eyes glowing with a cold, blue light, roared, a sound that shook the very ice beneath their feet. A cascade of ice spikes erupted from the ground, jagged and razor-sharp, forming a deadly barrier between the prince and the beast. The creature then unleashed a blizzard, an almost impenetrable wall of swirling snow and ice, designed to obscure its movements and disorient its agile opponent.

The prince, however, was not deterred. His demonic affinity, now heightened to an almost supernatural level, allowed him to perceive the slightest shifts in the air currents, the subtle vibrations in the ice, and the minute changes in the beast's energy signature. He moved like a phantom, his blade slicing through the swirling snow, deflecting the ice spikes with effortless precision.

"You hide behind your ice," the prince hissed, his voice cutting through the blizzard. "But I see you." He channeled his inner power, the crimson aura around him flaring, and a wave of heat radiated outwards, melting the surrounding snow and creating a momentary clearing. He saw the beast, a massive, hulking silhouette within the blizzard, its eyes glowing like twin, malevolent stars.

The dragon beast, realizing its cover was compromised, shifted its strategy. It began to manipulate the very ice beneath the prince's feet, creating fissures and unstable patches, attempting to trap him or throw him off balance. The ice twisted and writhed, forming grasping tendrils that sought to ensnare his legs.

The prince, anticipating the move, leapt and danced across the treacherous surface, his movements fluid and graceful, like a dancer. He used the ice itself as a weapon, channeling his demonic energy to shatter the grasping tendrils with precise strikes of his sword.

"You want to wear me out?" he chuckled, the sound chillingly devoid of warmth. "You underestimate my resolve. My power grows with every drop of blood spilled, every near-miss, every desperate attempt you make." He landed on a relatively stable patch of ice, his eyes locked on the beast. "And the scent of your fear, it fuels me."

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The dragon beast, its frustration mounting, unleashed a devastating wave of ice magic. The air shimmered, and a massive ice construct, shaped like a colossal fist, slammed down towards the prince. The sheer force of the impact sent a shockwave through the ice, cracking the surface and sending shards flying.

The prince, however, had already moved. He had used the moment of the beast's attack to propel himself forward, his blade leaving a trail of crimson light as he closed the distance. He was now within striking range, the scent of the beast's icy breath and the metallic tang of its draconic blood filling his senses.

"Now," he whispered, his voice a low, menacing growl. "Let's see how well your ice protects your underbelly." He aimed his blade, the crimson aura around it intensifying, ready to strike.

The dragon beast, its massive form surprisingly agile, reacted with a speed that belied its size. The icy floor beneath it surged upwards, tilting precariously, propelling the creature backward in a desperate attempt to create distance. Simultaneously, it tucked its enormous body, minimizing its profile, and its

tail, encased in a rapidly forming sheath of ice, transformed into a colossal, jagged sword. The ice sword, crackling with frozen energy, slashed down towards the prince, a brutal, sweeping arc designed to cleave him in two.

"You think your speed will save you, whelp?" the beast roared, its voice a guttural rumble that echoed across the frozen wasteland. "My ice is more than a shield; it is my weapon, my very essence!"

The prince, caught off guard by the beast's sudden maneuver, had to react instantly. He couldn't fully evade the massive ice sword. Instead, he channeled his demonic affinity, his crimson aura flaring, and used his sword to parry the blow. The impact was cataclysmic, a shockwave that sent tremors through the ice, cracking it further. The force of the blow sent him skidding backwards, his boots carving deep furrows into the frozen surface.

"Impressive," the prince hissed, his voice strained, "but not enough." He felt a searing pain in his arm, where the ice sword had grazed him, and a thin line of crimson blood welled up, staining the pristine white of the snow.

The dragon beast landed with a resounding thud, the ice beneath its feet cracking and splintering. It then unleashed another barrage of ice shards, this time infused with a chilling, necrotic energy. The shards, glowing with an eerie blue light, flew towards the prince, leaving trails of frost in their wake.

"You bleed still punk," the beast taunted, its eyes gleaming with malicious satisfaction. "Your crimson aura cannot protect you from everything. You are but a fragile thing, a flicker of flame against an eternal winter."

The prince, his breath coming in ragged gasps, weaved through the barrage, his blade deflecting the closest shards. However, the necrotic energy of the ice was tricky, seeping into his wounds, slowing his movements, and chilling his very soul. He felt his limbs growing heavy, his reflexes sluggish.

"You will freeze, little man," the beast boomed, "and your arrogance will be a tombstone for your foolish ambitions." The ice beneath the prince's feet began to shift, opening up a chasm to swallow him up.

The prince, battered and frozen, his movements sluggish, felt the necrotic chill creeping into his bones. The beast's taunts echoed in his ears, a chilling reminder of his precarious situation. "Foolish ambitions," he muttered, a flicker of defiance in his eyes. "You know nothing of my ambitions."

A surge of raw, demonic energy erupted from within him, a desperate, primal scream against the encroaching cold. The crimson aura surrounding him flared, then twisted, contorting into an unexpected and almost comical form. His body swelled, his stomach bloating outwards, two curved horns sprouted from his forehead, and a thick, segmented tail lashed behind him. The transformation was grotesque, almost absurd, a stark contrast to the elegant warrior he had been moments before.

"What is this?" the dragon beast roared, its voice laced with confusion and a hint of mockery. "A bloated imp? You dare face me in this...form?"

The prince, now in his demonic form, grinned, a wide, unsettling expression that revealed rows of sharp, pointed teeth. "Don't underestimate this form," he rasped, his voice now a guttural growl. "This is the form that will devour your icy heart."

He raised his hands, and a torrent of demonic flames erupted, a swirling inferno of black and crimson that crackled with unholy energy.

The dragon beast, taken aback by the sudden shift in power, unleashed a massive wave of ice, a frozen tsunami that crashed towards the prince. The demonic flames, however, met the ice with a searing roar, melting it into steaming water that hissed and evaporated into the frigid air.

The prince, now moving with a surprising agility despite his bloated form, launched himself towards the beast, his demonic flames trailing behind him like a fiery comet. He weaved through the remaining ice shards, his sword surrounded with flames, shattering any that came too close.

He reached the beast, his demonic flames engulfing its icy hide. The beast roared in pain, its icy armor cracking and melting under the intense heat. It thrashed wildly, its tail slamming against the ice, creating fissures and sending shards flying.

The prince, however, was relentless. He pressed his attack, his figure was all over the beast body. his sword lashing out with brutal force. He aimed his strikes at the beast's vulnerable underbelly, the same spot he aimed for earlier, the one spot the beast was trying to protect.

The dragon beast, its icy defenses failing, unleashed a desperate, final attack, a blast of pure ice magic that threatened to freeze the entire battlefield. The prince, however, met the attack with a concentrated burst of demonic flames, a fiery explosion that countered the ice and sent a shockwave through the air.

The beast, weakened and wounded, stumbled backwards, its icy hide blackened and cracked. The prince, his demonic flames still burning, lunged forward, his tail wrapping around the beast's neck, and his bloated form slamming into the beast's chest, the demonic flames burning its insides.

With a final, agonizing roar that echoed across the frozen expanse, the dragon beast collapsed, its massive form hitting the ice with a resounding thud that sent tremors through the ground. Its body, still smoking and crackling with the remnants of the prince's demonic flames, began to steam in the frigid air, a grotesque monument to the brutal battle.

The prince, his grotesque demonic form still partially intact, walked across the beast's immense body, his clawed feet crunching on the shattered ice scales. He reached the beast's chest, the point where his demonic flames had inflicted the most damage, and with a savage grin, he plunged his sword deep into the creature's flesh, drawing a long, crimson line across its chest. Then, with a guttural grunt, he withdrew the blade, the air thick with the metallic tang of draconic blood.

He bent down, his clawed hand reaching into the gaping wound, and with a powerful tug, he ripped out the dragon beast's heart, a massive, pulsating organ the size of a basketball. It pulsed with a faint, icy glow, a testament to the creature's immense power.

"The gift of Björn is a hungry gift," the prince rasped, his voice thick with demonic power. He opened his maw, revealing rows of razor-sharp teeth, and devoured the heart in a single, gruesome gulp. The raw, icy energy of the heart surged through his veins, a potent cocktail of draconic power and frozen magic.

He closed his eyes, his demonic senses heightened, and he felt the reward of his victory washing over him. The fourth stage welcomed him with open arms, a surge of power that felt both intoxicating and terrifying.

As soon as the prince broke through the fourth stage, the crimson aura around him bloomed, growing thicker and more intense, a swirling vortex of demonic energy. His demonic form, already grotesque, underwent another transformation, his body growing to nearly half the size of the fallen dragon beast.

At the same time, intricate, glowing markings began to appear on his skin, like living tattoos, tracing patterns of arcane power across his flesh.

His affinity, now amplified by the fourth stage, surged, flooding his senses with a torrent of information. A fleeting, almost ephemeral glimpse of something distant, something significant, flickered at the edge of his perception. His head snapped up, his gaze drawn to a distant mountain of ice, a jagged peak that pierced the horizon, far removed from the carnage of the battle.

His pupils dilated, his vision sharpening, zooming in with an unnatural clarity. On the mountain's peak, he saw a figure, a woman of ethereal beauty. Her silver hair cascaded down her shoulders, blending seamlessly with the icy backdrop, and she wore a white dress that seemed to shimmer with the same icy light. Lying beside her, a stark contrast to her pristine appearance, was a wolf, its fur a vibrant, unsettling red, its body marked with strange, unsettling textures.

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The woman's brow arched, a clear expression of surprise etched on her delicate features. She had seen him, sensed his presence, his gaze piercing the distance. The sight of her, the unexpected encounter, sent a jolt through his demonic form, a strange mix of recognition and raw, primal hunger.

His demonic form, no longer content to stand amidst the ruins of the battle, surged with renewed purpose. The ground beneath his feet, the remnants of the dragon beast's body, liquified into a grotesque paste of meat and blood, sinking into the ice. He launched himself into the sky, his demonic form propelling him upwards with explosive force, leaving a trail of dark, swirling energy in his wake.

He became a falling star, a crimson comet streaking across the frozen sky, his trajectory fixed on the distant mountain, the woman, and the strange, red wolf. His abandoned sword, lying amidst the wreckage, shuddered, responding to its master's will. It pulsed with demonic energy, then propelled itself into the air, a dark, gleaming projectile following its owner's path, a silent promise of violence or maybe something else.

The woman and the wolf exchanged a curious, almost perplexed look as the prince's form, a fiery descent, drew nearer. The wolf, its red fur slightly ruffled, gave the woman a sidelong glance, a silent accusation.

The woman, noticing the look, tapped the wolf lightly on the head. "This wasn't my fault," she repeated, her voice calm.

The wolf, rubbing its head, grumbled, "You said watching the 'barbarian' would be enlightening."

The woman shifted her gaze, a faint trace of annoyance in her eyes. "The demonic scent was...unexpectedly potent. It piqued my interest."

The prince, now almost upon them, brandished his enlarged odachi, the blade engulfed in swirling flames. He swung, the movement a clear, unyielding attempt to bisect the mountain and the woman along with it.

The woman remained seated, her posture unchanged. With a subtle gesture of her hand, a massive ice hand, formed from the mountain itself, rose to intercept the prince's attack.

The clash of demonic flames and icy construct sent a shockwave through the mountain, a brief, violent eruption of steam and fractured ice. The prince, momentarily thrown off balance, landed heavily on the shattered ice, his demonic form still radiating intense heat. He stood, his gaze fixed on the woman and the wolf, his expression a mixture of surprise and intrigue.

He had expected fear, perhaps even a desperate attempt to flee. Instead, the woman remained seated, her posture composed, her expression a cool, almost clinical observation. The wolf, though its red fur bristled slightly, held its ground, its eyes fixed on the prince with a curious look.

The prince, his voice a low growl, addressed the woman. "You do not fear me?" he asked, his demonic form towering over her. "You should."

He gestured towards the still-smoldering remnants of the ice hand. "Few can withstand my flames."

His gaze swept over her, taking in her serene expression, the strange wolf at her side, and the almost unnatural calm that clung to the air around them like mist.

It was maddening.

Leiko wanted to see fear. No, he craved it. The sight of it, the scent of it, the taste of it in the air. His body had long been starved of such a feeling, and the people of Björn had never been able to provide it for him. His homeland and kin—those wild, reckless fools—felt no fear in his presence. No matter how he moved, no matter what shadows coiled around his form or how his voice dipped into something inhuman, they only ever met his actions with excitement, with challenge, with that damnable eagerness that mocked the hunger festering in his core.

Truly, a crazy bunch.

But here—here was an opportunity. The woman and her wolf should have given him what he desired. She should have been trembling, breath hitching, eyes wide with the unmistakable gleam of terror. And yet...

Nothing.

Leiko's lips curled downward in the slightest frown, irritation flickering in his crimson gaze. He took a step forward, shadows rippling around his form like smoke, curling and dissipating as if reaching for something just out of grasp.

"Who are you, woman?" His voice was low, demanding, a blade dulled only slightly by his curiosity.

The woman—unbothered, unshaken—rose with a regal grace, lifting the hem of her dress ever so slightly as she dipped her head in a courtly manner. The movement was effortless, polished, and spoke of someone accustomed to standing before power without bending to it.

"I am Princess Lunara of the Werewolf Kingdom," she said, her voice steady, her tone carrying a quiet strength.

For the first time, a flicker of caution passed through Leiko's expression. It was subtle—a brief tightening of his jaw, a narrowing of his gaze—but it was there. His demonic form dissipated in an instant, the darkness retreating as his human guise took its place. Gone were the sharp, inhuman features and the smoldering glow of his eyes. Now, he stood before her with the bearing of a prince, shoulders squared, chest slightly puffed in a way that reeked of both habit and pride.

Lunara arched a brow at the familiar stance but said nothing at first. Instead, she turned slightly and gestured toward the wolf beside her.

"And the wolf at my side," she continued, "is my friend, Nova."

Nova, who had been watching in silence, let out an amused huff at the exchange. His golden eyes flickered between the two royals before rolling in exasperation.

Lunara's gaze flicked back to Leiko, her expression unreadable. "And you?" she asked.

Royal training, ingrained from birth, took hold of him immediately. One arm crossed his chest in a formal gesture of respect.

"Pleased to meet you, Lady Lunara," he said smoothly, his voice shifting into the well-practiced cadence of nobility. "I am Leiko Björnson, Prince of the People of Björn."

Silence.

The reaction wasn't immediate, but Lunara's eyes widened just slightly before she caught herself.

Nova, on the other hand, was far less composed. The wolf sat up, ears twitching as he gave Leiko a long, appraising look, then let out a dramatic sigh.

"Well, that's her problem to deal with," he muttered, standing up and turning away without a second thought. His tail swished once, lazily, as he padded off, leaving the princess alone with the prince whose presence had just become far more interesting than she'd anticipated.

While the prince and princess stood face to face, locked in their silent exchange, their guards were engaged in their own standoff high above them, just beneath the clouds that crowned the mountain peak.

The once-playful guards who had accompanied Leiko no longer bore their usual mischievous grins. Their expressions had hardened into something cold and unreadable, their glowing red eyes burning like embers against the sky. Gone was the carefree attitude they carried in their prince's presence—now, they stood as warriors, their very presence radiating a quiet, simmering menace. Opposite them, the werewolf guards were just as unwavering, their stance just as disciplined. Behind them, dots of celestial light shimmered in the air, forming shifting constellations that pulsed in harmony with their magic.

A moment of stillness passed between them, charged with unspoken challenge. Then, breaking the quiet, one of the werewolf guards floated forward, a sleek magical device in hand. Its polished surface gleamed as he raised it, activating a pre-prepared transmission.

On the opposite side, mirroring his actions with precision, the captain of the prince's guard stepped forth, holding an identical device. Without hesitation, both warriors channeled their mana into their respective artifacts.

A flicker. A hum of power.

In an instant, the translucent figures of their rulers materialized before them.

The image of Wulv, King of the Werewolf Kingdom, took form in the air, his imposing presence alone enough to command immediate reverence. His guard, without hesitation, bent the knee mid-air in absolute deference.

Simultaneously, from the opposing device, a regal figure adorned in ice-blue robes appeared—Yuki, sovereign of the People of Björn. Her presence was no less formidable, a folding fan delicately poised in her hand, partially veiling her expression. The moment she manifested, the prince's guards followed suit, kneeling in perfect synchronization.

The tension of the moment shifted, replaced by a weightier silence as the two monarchs regarded each other.

Wulv stroked his chin thoughtfully, his keen blue eyes locking onto Yuki's own cool gaze.

"This would be our second time meeting, Your Grace," she said, her tone composed yet carrying a quiet undercurrent of amusement.

Wulv inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment. "Indeed," he mused, his voice deep and measured. "Though I must say, our positions are vastly different from our last encounter."

Yuki's lips curled ever so slightly, a knowing glint in her eyes as she tapped her fan lightly against her palm.

"Change," she said smoothly, "is the natural occurrence of time."

Wulv's gaze drifted downward, his golden eyes momentarily leaving Yuki's own. Curious, she followed his line of sight, though she already had an idea of what was on his mind.

Chapter 475:

"I must apologize for my delayed congratulations on your newborn child," Wulv said, his deep voice carrying a formal, almost solemn weight.

Yuki, ever composed, resisted the urge to roll her eyes. As if he hadn't known the moment my son drew his first breath. The werewolf king was not one to be out of touch with such matters, yet he played this game of diplomacy with the practiced ease of a seasoned ruler.

A soft chuckle escaped her lips as she flicked her fan open with a graceful motion. "Oh? Your Grace must have a great many concerns occupying his mind. There is no need to trouble yourself over such trivial pleasantries," she said, her voice laced with polite indifference.

Wulv responded with a scoff of feigned offense, his lips curling into a smirk. "Nonsense," he said. "Such an occasion is anything but trivial. The birth of a prince is a momentous event, one deserving of proper recognition. I will have my people prepare a fitting gift."

Yuki's brow arched ever so slightly, though she concealed her intrigue behind the delicate veil of her fan. A gift? The werewolf king was not one to offer simple tokens. There was always intent behind his actions, and she wondered just what meaning he sought to weave into this gesture.

She let out a measured hum, lowering her fan just enough to reveal the faintest trace of a smile. "I am sure the young prince will be most pleased with Your Grace's generosity," she said smoothly, feigning reluctant acceptance.

The air between them remained poised on the edge of unspoken meaning—both monarchs aware that, in their world, gifts were never just gifts, and words were never just words.

Yuki's fan paused mid-motion, her sharp eyes studying Wulv with quiet calculation. The casual way he spoke belied the significance of his words. A meeting between our heirs? It was not a simple request—it was a move, one she had to consider carefully.

She let the silence stretch just long enough to make Wulv wonder before responding, her voice as smooth as ever. "My son is still young," she said, tapping her fan lightly against her palm. "Yet, if Your Grace wishes for them to meet, I see no harm in it."

Wulv's lips curled into something between a smirk and a knowing smile. "Good. I believe it will be beneficial for them both."

Yuki did not respond immediately. Instead, she tilted her head ever so slightly, her fan concealing half of her face as she observed him. Beneficial, is it? The werewolf king was rarely so direct—there was a reason he wanted their children to meet, and she intended to find out exactly what it was.

"I trust Your Grace has no ulterior motives?" she asked, her tone light yet laced with something sharper.

Wulv let out a deep chuckle. "Ulterior motives? Me?" He placed a hand over his chest in mock offense. "I simply think it wise for the future rulers of our people to be acquainted. Perhaps even form a bond."

Yuki's gaze did not waver. A bond, indeed. Whether Wulv meant a mere political relationship, an alliance, or something more, she could not yet tell. But she would not let herself be outmaneuvered so easily.

Lowering her fan slightly, she offered him a small, unreadable smile. "Then I suppose we shall arrange something in due time."

Their guards, still kneeling in mid-air, remained motionless, their expressions unreadable as they listened to their monarchs weave their words.

Wulv nodded, seemingly satisfied. "Very well. I look forward to it."

As his image flickered slightly, a gust of wind howled through the sky, sending Yuki's long robes billowing behind her. She remained still, her expression composed, though inwardly, she was already contemplating the implications of this meeting.

Just what are you planning, Wulv?

Her figure soon was gone, nothing was said between both guards as they fell back into the shadow where they protect the two royalties.

Meanwhile the princess and prince were both in a weird standoff as none of them thought their actions today would lead to the other being face to face with another royalty, especially one from a powerful and prestigious kingdom.

A tense silence stretched between them, thick with unspoken thoughts. Neither had expected this encounter, nor the weight that came with it.

Leiko Björnson, Prince of the People of Björn, studied the woman before him with a mix of curiosity and mild frustration. Why does she not fear me? His presence alone should have shaken her, yet she stood there, poised and calm, as if meeting him was nothing out of the ordinary.

Princess Lunara of the Werewolf Kingdom mirrored his gaze, her sharp eyes taking in every detail—the confident stance, the puffed chest, the slight tension in his fingers. She had met many royals in her lifetime, but Leiko carried himself differently. He radiated an energy that was both commanding and wild, yet behind it lurked something restless, something... unsatisfied.

Nova, the wolf at Lunara's side, flicked his tail in mild amusement, his sharp ears twitching. "This is awkward," he muttered, glancing between them before shaking his head and stretching out on the ground. If neither of you will speak, I'll just take a nap.

Leiko's golden eyes flickered toward Nova before returning to Lunara. "You carry yourself like a warrior," he noted, breaking the silence at last. His voice was smooth but edged with something unreadable.

Lunara raised a delicate brow, tilting her head slightly. "And you carry yourself like someone who wishes to be feared."

Leiko's lips twitched. Was that amusement in her tone? He crossed his arms, exhaling through his nose. "Is that a problem?"

Lunara's gaze didn't waver. "Only if you think fear is the same as respect."

A flash of something unreadable crossed Leiko's face before he scoffed lightly. "And what do you prefer, Princess? Fear, or respect?"

Lunara smiled, slow and deliberate. "Both have their uses," she admitted. "But I prefer loyalty."

Leiko hummed, considering her words. Loyalty? That was an interesting answer. Fear was easy to instill, but loyalty... that was something earned.

Their conversation, though brief, had shifted the air between them. They were still strangers, still wary, but there was something else now—a quiet understanding, a recognition of strength in the other.

"Since we are both here," Lunara said at last, stepping forward, "perhaps we should make proper use of this meeting. A conversation between two royals could be... enlightening."

Leiko smirked. "Or dangerous."

Lunara's eyes glinted. "A little danger makes things interesting."

At that, Leiko let out a genuine chuckle, the tension easing just a fraction. Perhaps this meeting was not such a waste after all.

Lunara turned as she began walking down the mountain with Leiko trailing a bit behind her "Do you greet everyone the way you did with me" Lunara asked the prince who chuckled nervously.

The prince suddenly smirked as he looked at the woman before him "I do greet people that way but only the special ones"

"Oh, so you think I am special?" The princess said with a slight teasing tone.

Hearing the question made Leiko think back on the princess' previous appearance, how her beauty merged well with the mountain, and how it made his heart skip.

"Very special" He leaned in on the princess ear as he whispered that.

"Aren't you a bit too young to be flirting?" the princess asked.

Leiko let out an exaggerated gasp, placing a hand over his heart as he walked beside her. "Flirting? Me? Princess, I am simply stating facts."

Lunara chuckled, glancing at him with amusement. "Facts, huh? You must be quite popular with the ladies in your kingdom."

Leiko grinned. "I like to think so. Though, to be fair, my people are... a bit different."

Lunara arched a brow. "Different how?"

Leiko exhaled, rubbing the back of his neck. "Let's just say they don't scare easily. No matter what I do, they're always entertained. It's frustrating sometimes."

Lunara hummed in understanding. "Ah, so you want people to be afraid of you?"

Leiko shrugged, a small smirk playing on his lips. "Not necessarily afraid, but respect comes easier when people know what you're capable of." He turned his gaze to her. "And yet, you weren't afraid of me either."

Lunara scoffed. "Please. I've faced worse things than a smirking prince with a taste for theatrics."

Leiko laughed at that, genuinely amused. "Fair enough." He studied her as they walked, noticing how effortlessly she navigated the mountain terrain. There was a confidence in her stride, a sense of belonging.

"So, what about you?" he asked. "Do people fear you?"

Lunara's lips curled slightly. "Some do, but I haven't given anyone any reason to fear me"

Leiko nodded. "And what about me? Should I be afraid?"

Lunara gave him a sideways glance, her expression unreadable. "That depends."

"On?"

"On whether you can keep up."

Leiko's smirk widened. "I do love a challenge."

Lunara smirked back. "Good. Then you won't mind a little competition."

Chapter 476:

Leiko raised a brow. "Oh?"

Lunara's eyes gleamed with excitement. "We both enjoy the hunt, don't we? Let's see who's better."

"You hunt?" Leiko asked, intrigued.

Lunara nodded. "I was raised to. Tracking, chasing, taking down prey—it's in my blood."

A grin slowly stretched across Leiko's face. "Now that," he said, "is interesting."

Lunara raised a brow. "And you?"

Leiko scoffed lightly, placing a hand on his hip. "Of course. The thrill of the chase, the moment you bring down your target—there's nothing quite like it."

Nova, who had been lazily listening, sighed. "Oh no."

Lunara caught the familiar glint in Leiko's eyes and smirked. "Sounds like we both enjoy the hunt. Perhaps we should put that to the test."

Leiko's grin widened. "Now that is the best thing you've said all day."

Nova groaned. "Of course."

Leiko crossed his arms, eyes glinting with mischief. "Let's make it interesting. No mana—just physical strength. A true test of skill."

Lunara blinked, then let out a laugh. "No mana? You do realize I have a natural advantage."

Leiko shrugged. "Exactly why it'll be fun. I like a challenge."

Lunara's smile sharpened. "Fine. But don't complain when you lose."

Leiko smirked. "I never lose."

Nova muttered under his breath, "This is going to be a disaster."

The princess smiled as her body visibly grew bigger in the eyes of Leiko as her head grew out horns, from her back grew out two dragon wings. The wings flapped slowly taking her to the sky.

A bow appeared in her hand, which she drew and shot it up to the sky where snow was falling. In the eyes of the prince, a huge bird can be seen falling from the snowy cloud with an arrow stuck deep in its chest.

He then heard the princess word in his ear "Game on"

Leiko's grin widened as he watched the massive bird plummet, its dark silhouette contrasting against the endless white of the icy expanse. The way Lunara moved, the precision of her shot—there was no denying it. She was a hunter through and through.

But he wasn't about to let her have all the glory.

His muscles tensed, his breath misting in the frigid air as he focused his senses. The howling wind carried the faint sound of shifting snow, the distant thrum of unseen creatures moving beneath the frozen landscape. He could feel the pulse of life in the tundra, hidden but waiting.

Lunara hovered above, her wings keeping her effortlessly aloft. "Don't tell me you're already falling behind, Prince," she called teasingly, her voice carrying through the cold air.

Leiko chuckled, rolling his shoulders. "Just making sure you get your moment before I take over."

With that, he launched himself forward, his boots digging into the snow as he sprinted across the ice. His keen eyes locked onto movement in the distance—something large, powerful, and fast. A white-furred beast, nearly indistinguishable from the landscape, moved between the ice formations.

A smirk tugged at Leiko's lips. Perfect.

Without breaking stride, he leapt onto a jagged pillar of ice, using his momentum to propel himself forward. His body twisted mid-air, and as he landed, he drove his hands into the snow. With sheer brute strength, he grasped onto the massive creature beneath him—an ice-furred sabertooth—its muscles tensed under his grip.

The beast let out a deafening snarl, twisting violently in an attempt to shake him off. But Leiko held firm, his fingers digging into its thick fur as he maneuvered his body weight, forcing the beast onto its back. With a sharp pivot, he brought his arm down, snapping the creature's neck in one fluid motion.

Silence followed, save for the wind and his steady breaths.

Above him, Lunara let out a low whistle. "Not bad, Prince," she mused, descending gracefully to land a few feet away. She eyed the fallen beast, then back at him. "But I hope you don't think this means you've won."

Leiko smirked. "I wouldn't dream of it."

Without another word, Lunara took off again, her wings slicing through the air. She flew low this time, her sharp gaze scanning the frozen wasteland for her next target.

Leiko wasted no time either. He took off running again, weaving through the icy terrain, his heartbeat syncing with the rhythm of the hunt.

The air crackled with anticipation, the silent challenge hanging heavy between them. Lunara, with her aerial advantage, spotted a herd of massive, shaggy-coated mammoths lumbering through a distant valley. Their thick hides and powerful tusks made them formidable prey, a true test of skill.

"There," she called down to Leiko, her voice echoing across the frozen expanse. "A worthy challenge."

She drew another arrow, this time tipped with a shimmering, blue-tinged metal. The arrow glowed faintly, a stark contrast to the white surroundings. With a precise aim, she released the arrow, its flight a

streak of light against the overcast sky. The arrow struck one of the mammoths, not in the vital organs, but in the thick hide of its flank. The beast roared, a deep, earth-shaking sound, and the herd began to stampede, their massive forms crashing through the ice and snow.

Leiko, seeing the chaos unfold, grinned. "You like to make things interesting, don't you?"

He knew he couldn't match her aerial speed, but he could use the terrain to his advantage. He spotted a narrow crevice, a deep fissure in the ice that would funnel the stampeding herd. He sprinted towards it, his boots finding purchase on the slick, uneven surface.

As the mammoths thundered closer, Leiko positioned himself at the narrowest point of the crevice. He drew his own weapon, the Oachis sword changed into a massive, two-handed axe, its edge gleaming with a frost-like patina. The axe felt heavy in his hands, a tool of pure, brutal force.

The first mammoth reached the crevice, its eyes wild with panic. Leiko braced himself, his muscles tensed, and swung the axe in a wide, sweeping arc. The axe bit deep into the mammoth's leg, the force of the blow sending the beast stumbling. It crashed into the ice wall, creating a bottleneck.

The rest of the herd, trapped by the narrow passage and the fallen mammoth, began to panic. They pressed forward, their massive forms creating a chaotic pile-up. Leiko, using the ice walls for leverage, began to climb onto the backs of the struggling beasts. He moved with surprising agility, his axe flashing as he aimed for the joints and weak points of the trapped mammoths.

Lunara, watching from above, was impressed. Leiko's raw strength and tactical thinking were a formidable combination. She shifted her attention to the lead mammoth, the one she had initially wounded. It was still enraged, its tusks tearing at the ice and snow. She drew another arrow, this time a larger, heavier one, its tip glowing with a fiery red.

She aimed for the mammoth's eye, the only vulnerable spot on its massive head. The arrow flew, leaving a trail of fiery light, and struck its target. The mammoth roared in pain, its massive body shaking violently. It began to thrash, its tusks ripping through the ice, threatening to collapse the entire crevice.

"Careful, Prince!" Lunara called out, her voice laced with concern.

Leiko, still atop the struggling mammoths, felt the ice beneath him begin to crack. He knew he had to act quickly. He leapt from the back of the nearest mammoth, landing on the ice with a thunderous thud. He raised his axe, preparing to deliver a final, decisive blow.

The ice groaned and splintered, the deafening roars of the trapped mammoths mixing with the crunch of collapsing ice. Leiko, his boots slipping on the fractured surface, knew he had to act fast. The lead mammoth, blinded and enraged, was thrashing wildly, its tusks tearing through the weakening ice walls.

He braced himself, planting his feet firmly on a relatively stable patch of ice. With a surge of adrenaline, he swung his axe, aiming for the base of the lead mammoth's tusk. The impact reverberated through his arms, the axe biting deep into the thick bone. The mammoth bellowed, its thrashing intensifying, and the ice beneath it began to give way.

The lead mammoth, its tusk now partially severed, stumbled, its massive weight shifting the balance of the already unstable ice. The crevice began to buckle, a network of cracks spreading across the surface. Leiko, realizing the danger, abandoned his axe, leaping onto the back of the nearest mammoth, which was struggling to climb out of the collapsing fissure.

"Come on!" he shouted, urging the beast forward.

The mammoth, sensing the urgency, surged forward, its powerful legs straining against the crumbling ice. It managed to gain purchase, its front legs scrambling onto a relatively stable section of the ice wall. Leiko, clinging to its back, felt the ground beneath him shift and crack.

Lunara, seeing the precarious situation, swooped down, her wings creating a powerful gust of wind that helped propel the mammoth forward. The combined effort allowed the beast to pull itself free, its massive form crashing onto the solid ice.

Chapter 477:

The crevice collapsed, the remaining mammoths plunging into the icy depths below. The ground trembled, and a cloud of snow and ice dust erupted into the air.

Leiko, covered in snow and ice, slid off the mammoth's back, landing on his feet. He looked back at the collapsed crevice, the gaping hole a stark reminder of the near-disaster.

Lunara landed beside him, her wings folded neatly behind her back. "That was... intense," she said, her voice slightly breathless.

Leiko nodded, his breath misting in the cold air. "Intense is an understatement." He looked at her, a grin spreading across his face. "But I have to admit, that was a team effort."

Lunara smiled, a hint of playful competitiveness in her eyes. "Don't get used to it, Prince. I still intend to win."

She gestured towards the horizon, where a massive, snow-covered peak rose against the overcast sky. "There's a legendary ice snake that nests on that peak. They say its scales are harder than any metal, and its breath can freeze any man solid in an instant. Shall we see who can claim its head?"

Leiko's grinned and was about to answer when a deep booming voice sounded on the head of both the prince and princess, sending a shiver down their spine "That snake happens to now be in my stomach, why don't you both come grab it from there"

Nothing was said as Lunara took on her hybrid dragon werewolf form with a full body armor dotted with starlight appeared on her, her facial expression cold and serious.

The prince was not lacking as he took on his full demonic form, the axe changing back into a sword, at the same time an armor was also adorned on his body. He and the princess stood back to back as they looked around for where the voice came from.

Joining them was Nova who was also in his werewolf form with armor on his body.

The two royalty watched as the crack they both created close up, like it was never there. Soon they found a huge shadow covering them. Even with both their increased height.

The prince and princess both find themselves looking up to see what was casting the shadow. There it was a huge humanoid mammoth with snow with furs, arms folded in front of it as it looked toward the two who brought about the death of its children.

"A beast king" The word appeared on everyone's mind as they quickly began to think of the best route to escape. There was no chance of winning and this beast king even with a body almost the size of a mountain was able to approach this close with no sound.

Lunara's grip tightened on her bow, her knuckles turning white beneath her gauntlet. Her keen eyes traced the massive figure before them, its sheer presence making the frigid air feel even heavier. Even with her heightened senses, she hadn't detected its approach. That alone was enough to make her stomach twist.

Leiko, standing beside her, felt the weight of the moment settle on his shoulders. The Beast King's deep-set eyes, like frozen pits of rage, bore into him. His instincts screamed at him to run, but something in the creature's gaze told him that fleeing would be just as futile as fighting.

Nova, his fur bristling beneath his armor, let out a low growl. "It was lying in wait," he murmured, just loud enough for the two royals to hear. "We walked right into its territory."

The mammoth-like beast let out a breath, the sheer force of it sending a wave of frost-laced wind crashing into them. Snow flurried around them, the very air humming with power.

"You two have taken much from me," the Beast King rumbled, his voice resonating in their bones. "Tell me, what shall I take in return?"

Lunara's wings flared, her eyes never leaving the towering figure. "If we give you a proper fight, will you let us leave with our lives?"

A slow, rumbling chuckle escaped the Beast King's throat. "A bold proposition, little ones. But a mere fight will not satisfy my loss." His gaze shifted between them. Before looking off into the space behind them.

The beast king could sense multiple powerful beings who were locked in on him, he knew the identity of the children before it was not small.

Still it can't do nothing when it's kids have just been taken from it. Problem now, is how come they have not made an appearance even with his presence here.

The mammoth frowned, it felt like it was caught in-between a web, as for the supposed guards on both side. They all have gotten order not to make a move until both prince and princess could no longer hold on.

They have no idea what was going through the head of Yuki and Wulv, nonetheless it was not their place to question orders. The beast king that made an appearance was powerful, without knowing it's possible talent, they could only specify on it's strength which was definitely strong and will take every one available to bring it down.

The Mammoth wanting to test things out had a a glint of something almost... amused flickered within. "I will grant you a choice. You may flee, and I will give you a head start before the hunt begins. Or you may stay and entertain me."

Leiko exhaled sharply, his fingers twitching over the hilt of his sword. He cast a glance at Lunara, their unspoken thoughts aligning in an instant.

"Running isn't an option," Leiko muttered.

Lunara nodded. "Then we make sure this so-called entertainment keeps us alive long enough to find an opening."

Nova stepped forward, flexing his claws. "I hope you two have a plan, because if not, I suggest you make one fast."

The Beast King let out a low, approving growl. "Very well then. Amuse me, little royals."

The moment those words left the Beast King's mouth, the icy air grew heavier, as if the entire tundra was holding its breath. The towering creature unfolded its massive arms, its thick fur bristling with an unseen energy. Snow swirled around its feet, the ground beneath them cracking from the sheer weight of its presence.

Lunara's eyes flickered toward Leiko for a fraction of a second, their silent understanding reaffirmed. Neither of them had any intention of running, but neither were they foolish enough to engage recklessly. Their survival hinged on reading their opponent's movements—on testing its limits before committing to a true attack.

The Beast King grunted, rolling its massive shoulders. "Good," it rumbled. "It would have been disappointing if you fled."

Without warning, the creature stomped its colossal foot into the ground. The force sent a ripple through the ice, fissures spider-webbing outward at an alarming speed. A deafening crack split the air, and before any of them could react, massive ice pillars erupted from beneath their feet.

Lunara shot into the sky, her wings beating against the frigid wind, narrowly avoiding being impaled by the jagged ice. Leiko leapt onto a rising shard, using the momentum to launch himself forward. Nova, with his heightened reflexes, dodged to the side, his claws digging into the frozen surface to keep his balance.

The Beast King's laughter rumbled like an avalanche. "Fast enough," it mused. "But let's see how long you can dance."

With a flick of its wrist, the ice pillars shattered into countless shards, transforming into a blizzard of razor-sharp projectiles. The storm of frozen death rained down upon them, the wind howling as if the tundra itself had turned against them.

Lunara twisted mid-air, her wings tucking in for a brief moment before she shot through the onslaught. She weaved between the shards with calculated precision, the cold sting of near misses grazing her armor. With a powerful flap, she ascended even higher, drawing her bow in one fluid motion.

She exhaled. The world slowed.

A single arrow of pure energy crackled to life, glowing like a fallen star in her grasp. With an almost serene grace, she released the string.

The arrow shot forward, cutting through the ice storm like a comet.

The Beast King's eyes flickered with interest as it raised an arm, allowing the arrow to collide against its thick fur. A burst of energy erupted upon impact, yet when the dust settled, the creature stood unscathed, barely even acknowledging the attack.

Leiko narrowed his eyes. "Tch. That confirms it. It's playing with us."

Nova bared his fangs, irritation flashing across his face. "Then let's give it something to actually deal with."

With a growl, he pushed off the ground, his body blurring as he closed the distance between himself and the Beast King. His claws ignited with a deep crimson glow as he slashed upward in a fierce arc, aiming for the beast's exposed torso.

The strike connected.

For a moment, silence. Then—

BOOM.

An explosion of force erupted from the point of impact, sending a shockwave rippling outward. Snow blasted into the air in thick waves, momentarily obscuring everything from view.

Chapter 478:

And yet, as the snow settled, the Beast King remained unmoved. A shallow mark had been left on its fur, but nothing more.

It smiled.

"Not bad."

With blinding speed, the creature's massive hand shot forward, aiming to swat Nova away like an insect.

Leiko was already moving.

His sword gleamed with blackened energy as he intercepted the beast's attack, the collision of their forces sending cracks through the frozen earth. The sheer force behind the Beast King's blow sent Leiko skidding back, his boots digging into the ice as he struggled to absorb the impact.

Lunara landed beside him, her wings folding behind her. "We're going to need more than brute force."

Leiko wiped the blood from his lip, "There is nothing else we can hope to do"

The Beast King rolled his massive shoulders, his amused smirk never faltering. "Enough games, then," he murmured.

Then, with a single motion, he breathed in.

The air itself seemed to vanish.

A terrible force pulled at the very fabric of reality, the wind shrieking as it was drawn toward the Beast King's gaping maw. Snow, shattered ice, even the lingering energy from their attacks—all of it was sucked inward, disappearing into the darkness of his throat.

Leiko's heart clenched. This wasn't mere wind. It was something deeper, something unnatural.

Lunara's instincts screamed at her. Move. Now.

The Beast King exhaled.

A tidal wave of pure cold erupted forth.

Not just cold—absence.

The world turned white. A monstrous blizzard howled through the tundra, swallowing everything in its path. The very ice beneath their feet cracked and vanished as the force of the breath erased it from existence.

Leiko barely had time to react. He was grabbed by Lunara on his wrist as she shot into the sky. Nova, trusting his instincts, followed in an instant.

They ran.

There was no other option.

Leiko's voice was sharp. "That wasn't normal ice breath—!"

"I know!" Lunara snapped. "It's like it erased everything it touched!"

Below them, the tundra was utterly changed. An entire stretch of the icy expanse had simply... disappeared. The land itself was gone, leaving behind a void of frozen mist and silence.

The Beast King's laughter rumbled through the air. "So you can run!"

The sky cracked. Before they could even process what had happened, the Beast King was there.

He had jumped.

From the ground to the heavens in an instant, his massive form blocking out the sky. A hand, larger than a boulder, swung toward them.

"Scatter!" Leiko roared.

They split apart, barely avoiding the crushing blow. The impact of the Beast King's strike sent shockwaves rippling through the clouds, distorting the very air around them.

Lunara gritted her teeth. We can't keep running forever. The Beast King was preparing to move again—when the air shifted.

From both sides of the battlefield, the presence of overwhelming power pressed down.

All the guards in hiding could no longer stay hidden as they made an appearance. The beast king immediately forgot the two ants as it looked at the figures surrounding it.

The Beast King halted, its gaze flickering between them. For the first time, the amusement faded from its eyes.

"So," it murmured. "You finally decided to join."

No words were exchanged between Lunara and Leiko. They both turned and fled, their movements blurring as they surged through the frozen landscape at full speed, never once looking back. Their hearts pounded in sync with the unnatural stillness that gripped the land behind them. The weight of what was about to unfold pressed against their backs like an unseen force, urging them to retreat faster.

A near-dozen fifth-stage powerhouses were about to collide. That was no mere battle—it was a cataclysm waiting to be unleashed. Neither of them wished to be caught in the aftermath. The next time they returned to this place, they knew it would not be the same. The land itself would bear the scars of what was to come, twisted beyond recognition by the sheer force of the impending clash.

Above, the Beast King now hovered in midair, his massive form suspended like a dark omen against the grey sky. His presence alone was overwhelming—a vast, living mountain of flesh and power, exuding a raw, primal authority that made the towering figures of the fifth-stage experts surrounding him seem insignificant in comparison. And yet, despite their smaller frames, the aura that radiated from each of these warriors distorted the very air around them, pressing back against the Beast King's suffocating dominance.

The sky bore silent witness to this gathering of power. The ever-falling snow, which had blanketed this land for centuries without pause, now recoiled from the battlefield, avoiding a wide stretch of sky as though nature itself feared what was to come. In the void left behind, something unnatural appeared—a rift, a scar splitting the firmament, revealing glimpses of another world. Ethereal landscapes flickered within it, fractured visions of domains woven together by the combined presence of so many fifth-stage entities.

This was no mere mirage. It was a phenomenon known to those who understood the laws of power—a temporary overlap between reality and the domains of those present. Each warrior's inner world, the very foundation of their might, bled into existence, clashing and merging in a chaotic dance. This was proof that their combat prowess had reached its peak, that the battle about to take place would not be confined to the physical realm alone.

Still, no one spoke. The silence stretched taut, thick with unspoken anticipation. The rift continued to widen, the air itself humming with the promise of devastation.

Then—something changed.

A presence.

It was foreign yet undeniable, a ripple in the very fabric of the frozen battlefield.

The Beast King and his guards all turned their gaze toward a single point in space.

This place—this very land—had once been erased by the Beast King Mammoth's might, reduced to nothingness in a show of dominance. Yet now, within that void, something stirred.

A golden portal split open, its radiance stark against the desolate, frozen wasteland.

And from within, a figure emerged.

Clad in a suit of gleaming gold, he stepped onto the ruined earth with the unhurried grace of a figure who feared nothing. His very presence seemed to shift the air around him, a quiet, measured power that did not need to announce itself with wild displays.

The battlefield, once thick with the oppressive energy of gathered fifth-stage titans, now held something else entirely.

Yuki and Wulv, who had been closely observing the unfolding scene, both frowned in unison as the same thought crossed their minds.

"An Apeling."

Yet, almost immediately, they dismissed the idea. Something was off.

Wulv, who was deeply familiar with the apelings, knew they would never appear without informing him first. This figure, despite its resemblance, carried an unsettling presence—one that set his instincts on edge. Yuki, more attuned to the nuances of aura, felt a prickling recognition, her sharp gaze narrowing.

"A demonic aura."

Realization struck her. This was no mere Apeling. This was the Golden Gorilla Beast King, a subordinate of Krogan. Yuki of course knew of Krogan, her father made sure to keep an eye on all his counterparts, so she also knew a figure close to Krogan.

The golden gorilla himself was a powerful envoy sent on behalf of his leader—one who had come with the sole purpose of recruiting a fellow Beast King, one whom he believed would be a worthy addition to Krogan and his plans.

But now, instead of an invitation, the Golden Gorilla found himself walking into a battlefield.

Zirikon's first impression of the scene was the unnatural wound upon the northern continent—a vast erased stretch of land, devoid of the ever-present ice and snow. A place that should not exist here. But his curiosity was soon overshadowed by something far more pressing.

A sudden, crushing weight bore down on him.

Multiple auras locked onto him.

Zirikon's golden eyes flicked upward, instinctively seeking out the one he had come for—the Mammoth Beast King. But instead of finding a regal figure waiting to be courted into an alliance, he found a cornered titan. The Beast King was surrounded, hemmed in by figures of immense importance. Some he recognized. Others carried an air of dominance that made his muscles coil in tension.

And then—there were the werewolves.

Zirikon's expression darkened. The presence of these werewolves made it clear: this was not just a mere confrontation between beasts. This was something far greater.

The golden-clad figure adjusted his tie with an air of mild annoyance, smoothing out an invisible crease. His movements were unhurried, deliberate. From the inner pocket of his tailored suit, he pulled out a thick cigar, inspecting it with a brief glance before snapping his fingers together.

A strange sound echoed—a sharp, metallic clash, like two iron bars striking against each other. Sparks flew, igniting the tip of the cigar with an unnatural brilliance.

Bringing it to his lips, he inhaled deeply. The embers flared, casting fleeting shadows across his sharp features.

Then, as he exhaled a slow stream of smoke, a gentleman's smile curved his lips.

His deep, velvety voice cut through the thick tension with a casual ease, laced with an undeniable undertone of amusement.

"Well, this is awkward, wouldn't you say, my fellow men?"

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The battlefield, thick with unspoken hostility, remained deathly silent. The only sound was the distant howling of the northern winds, swirling around the frozen wasteland.

Yuki and Wulv, taken aback by this unexpected development, wasted no time.

Both of them swiftly signaled their men to stand down. Their warriors, who had been coiled like springs ready to strike, hesitated for only a moment before obeying.

Yuki had her own reasons—reasons she chose not to voice just yet. But Wulv...

Wulv saw something deeper in this.

This golden-clad gorilla standing before them was a testament to a power beyond what he and the other godlings were aware of. It was an unknown force, an unaccounted existence—and Wulv had no intention of meeting such an unforeseen development with brute strength. Not without understanding it first.

A flicker of mana surged as both sides activated their magical devices. The air shimmered, refracting light for a moment before two spectral figures materialized—a projection of Yuki and Wulv, towering over the battlefield. Their presence, though not physical, carried an undeniable weight.

Zirikon, however, remained unfazed.

He still wore his calm, gentlemanly smile, his cigar smoldering faintly as he let out a slow breath of smoke. Yet, beneath this composed exterior, his free hand moved with practiced precision, fingers making rapid, almost imperceptible gestures against the fabric of his suit.

He was sending messages to Krogan—feeding information, detailing this sudden shift in events, and awaiting further instructions.

The silence was broken.

Wulv's voice, steady but laced with unspoken scrutiny, rang across the frozen battlefield.

"Who are you?"

Zirikon's golden eyes flicked toward Wulv. With a practiced, almost theatrical grace, he stepped forward and offered a deep, deliberate bow. His movements were smooth, exuding the kind of effortless refinement one wouldn't expect from a beast king.

"I go by the name Zirikon, your grace," he responded, his voice deep and polished, like a seasoned diplomat.

Wulv nodded slightly, his expression unreadable.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Zirikon. But you still have not answered my question. Or... should I be more specific?"

There was no threat in Wulv's tone—only patience. A predator waiting to see how its prey would move.

Zirikon chuckled softly.

"I would like for your grace to be more specific."

A challenge. Wulv fell into thoughtful silence.

For a brief moment, the weight of the unspoken conversation settled over the battlefield like a dense fog. Zirikon's presence here was no accident. His words, his actions, even his mannerisms were calculated, measured. He was playing a game of retaining control, a game of information.

It was Yuki who broke the stillness.

Her voice, sharp and to the point, cut through the cold air.

"What are you doing on this land? Which force do you belong to?"

Her eyes remained locked onto Zirikon's, searching for any flicker of deceit.

Zirikon exhaled another slow drag of smoke, the ember on his cigar flaring in the dim light.

Zirikon's golden gaze flickered with mild surprise as Yuki took the lead in questioning him. He hadn't expected her to be the one pressing forward so assertively.

Still, he followed protocol.

With fluid grace, he once again bowed—this time towards Yuki.

"Your grace," he acknowledged smoothly before straightening, his cigar still smoldering faintly between his fingers.

He exhaled a slow stream of smoke, his voice calm and unhurried as he continued,

"I came from the distant western continent to visit a friend of mine. As for the force I belong to..."
Zirikon's eyes gleamed slightly, observing their reactions. "I belong to no force, your grace. But perhaps you have heard of the Cursed Land from the western continent?"

The words were carefully chosen—neither an outright lie nor the full truth.

He had no choice but to tread carefully.

If he had falsely claimed allegiance to another land, the werewolf godlings would easily uncover the deception once they consulted the other godling races. And that... would have been an unnecessary complication.

Besides, he was no ghost. He had stepped into the world's gaze centuries ago.

The harpies.

That encounter had not been forgotten. He wasn't sure how meticulous the godlings' records were, nor how far back their knowledge stretched. He could not afford to take the risk of contradiction.

This was the answer Krogan had given him.

"Give them just enough to hide our true purpose."

And so, he had done exactly that.

And sure enough, Zirikon's answer yielded the exact response he had anticipated.

He watched the subtle shifts in Wulv's expression, the flicker of thoughts running behind his sharp gaze.

Yuki, on the other hand, tried to act surprised.

But Wulv was no fool. He caught it immediately—the faint hesitation, the way she schooled her features a fraction of a second too late.

She knew something.

Wulv's mind rapidly sorted through the implications.

The Cursed Land.

While it wasn't officially considered a unified force, it still harbored powerful beast kings—beings that could shape the course of events just by their existence alone. And now, a formidable creature had stepped forth from that land, carrying itself with both undeniable intelligence and unsettling poise.

How had this gone unnoticed?

The mere fact that such a being had emerged without prior warning sent a dangerous ripple through his thoughts. He would need to consult the Harpies' godlings immediately.

How had something of this magnitude transpired right under their noses?

Wulv masked his growing irritation with ease, his lips curling into a wry smirk as he spoke with a light, almost jesting tone,

"I take it this Beast King was the 'friend' you came to visit?"

He gestured casually toward the Mammoth King, who had remained conspicuously silent throughout the entire exchange.

The massive beast had not uttered a single word—not out of deference, but out of sheer confusion.

He had no idea who this golden gorilla was. A 'friend'? He had made no such acquaintance.

In fact, which Beast King would allow another to step into their territory unannounced?

And yet, the Mammoth King was not a fool. He had been moments away from disaster.

The presence of so many powerful figures had all but sealed his fate—had Zirikon not appeared, the clash would have been inevitable, and he would not have walked away unscathed or alive even.

And so, for now, he chose silence. Watching. Waiting. Letting the pieces fall where they may.

Zirikon, without missing a beat, lied with a straight face.

"Indeed, it has been quite a while since we met."

The Mammoth King remained silent, unwilling to contradict the statement but inwardly wary of this sudden claim.

Wulv, however, was not the least bit surprised. He had already anticipated such a response. With a casual nod, he shifted his attention to the glowing portal still swirling ominously behind Zirikon.

"I believe gates such as these fall under the jurisdiction of the godlings on the Western Continent," Wulv remarked, his smile holding a sharp edge. "How exactly did you manage to acquire such magical technology?"

A simple question. Delivered with an easy going tone.

Yet it struck like a dagger.

Zirikon's carefully maintained composure faltered for a fraction of a second. His smile twitched—so slight it was almost imperceptible, yet Wulv caught it.

This question... he hadn't been expecting.

A sudden, uneasy respect grew within him toward the werewolf godling. With just a single question, Wulv had unraveled his lie.

Not belonging to any force?

If that were truly the case, how could he possess a godling level-sanctioned gateway?

Zirikon clenched his fist slightly, his other hand hidden beneath the fine fabric of his suit, making rapid movements as he signaled Krogan.

"What do I say?" The response came swiftly.

"Tell him I did it."

Zirikon hesitated. His instincts screamed against it.

"If I do that, he'll immediately realize we're working together."

Krogan was silent for a few moments, then finally answered.

"It's inevitable. We must accept some losses."

Zirikon's grip tightened. "He is a smart man, but that can be used against him."

"His growing suspicion of me will blind him to other things. While his focus remains on me, you and the others will move freely."

Zirikon exhaled through his nose, forcing himself to relax.

Sacrificial misdirection.

He had played this game before, with Krogan. He understood the strategy.

Slowly, he lifted his gaze back toward Wulv, and with a new plan in mind, he prepared his answer.

Zirikon's mind worked fast. The weight of Krogan's decision settled on him, but he showed no outward hesitation. Instead, he straightened his tie and exhaled a deep breath of smoke from his cigar, his expression once again the picture of calm.

"Ah, that," he finally said, as if the question had been nothing more than a mild inconvenience. He brushed off some nonexistent dust from his sleeve before looking back at Wulv. "A rather simple matter, really. It was granted to me by Lord Krogan himself."

He spoke the name with practiced ease, watching for Wulv's reaction.

The werewolf godling's smile didn't fade, but there was something dangerous in his eyes now. He tilted his head, his fingers drumming lazily against his forearm.

"Lord Krogan, is it?"

A few murmurs arose from Wulv's side, confirming his suspicion. The name was unknown but the figure behind it was not, and if they knew it, that meant Krogan had made himself known before.

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That's right. Focus on Krogan, not me.

Zirikon watched as Wulv ran the name through his mind, his calculating nature evident. He was already piecing things together, trying to recall everything he knew of this 'Krogan.'

Perfect. Let him sink deeper into his thoughts.

Meanwhile, Yuki, who had been silent up until now, shifted her gaze between the two men. Unlike Wulv, her sharp eyes weren't entirely on Zirikon's words—they were on his movements.

She had caught that faint hesitation before he answered.

Something about this still didn't sit right with her.

"Lord Krogan," Yuki repeated, her voice smooth yet questioning. "And where, exactly, does this 'lord' of yours stand?"

Zirikon chuckled, taking another slow drag of his cigar. The ember flared, casting a brief glow over his golden fur.

"Where he has always stood," he said smoothly. "Watching. Waiting. Calculating."

That answer didn't satisfy her, but before she could press further, Wulv chuckled.

"I see," he mused. "So, we have a hidden hand moving pieces from the shadows. How very... fascinating."

The werewolf's tone was light, almost amused, but his eyes told a different story.

He was not pleased, more importantly, he was not fooled.

He knew there was more to this but there was nothing he could do. Wulv's fingers tapped lightly against his forearm as he studied the situation. His mind worked quickly, piecing together the fragments of information laid before him.

The mammoth beast king.

A creature that had stumbled into this mess, meant to be eliminated, yet now it had become something more—a vital chess piece in a game that had been unfolding long before his arrival.

Wulv's gaze flickered back to Zirikon. The golden-furred figure stood with the ease of a man who believed he had already won. The mere mention of Krogan was a move meant to end this game prematurely. A warning.

We've shown you our hand. You know our name. Walk away.

But Wulv wasn't the type to back down just because someone wanted him to.

His smile widened, but his sharp, predatory eyes betrayed the amusement he projected.

"It's funny, isn't it?" he said, his voice calm but carrying a distinct edge.

Zirikon merely raised a brow, waiting.

"A moment ago, this beast was nothing more than an obstacle." Wulv gestured toward the mammoth. "Yet now, I find myself wondering... why do you want him so badly?"

The Mammoth King, still silent, shifted slightly. His massive frame remained tense, his tusks glinting under the dimming light. He was no fool, either. He had been thrown into something far bigger than a mere territorial dispute, and now even the godlings were playing games around him.

Zirikon exhaled a slow breath, the ember of his cigar glowing faintly. Wulv was pushing.

A dangerous game.

But Zirikon was prepared. He had been preped for this role before.

"Want?" Zirikon chuckled, shaking his head. "I believe you misunderstand, Wulv. My concern lies in ensuring that unnecessary bloodshed is avoided."

A blatant lie, and Wulv knew it.

His smile didn't waver. "Is that so?"

His men, the ones who had surrounded the Mammoth King mere moments ago, still held their positions. Their weapons were lowered, but the tension remained. They were waiting. Watching.

Wulv had a choice to make.

Let the mammoth go and risk Krogan's influence spreading unchecked.

Or—

Make a move of his own.

His eyes gleamed with an idea.

"You're right, Zirikon." Wulv sighed dramatically, stretching his arms. "Unnecessary bloodshed should be avoided."

Zirikon narrowed his eyes. Something was coming.

Wulv's grin returned.

"Which is why I think it's best... if the Mammoth King remains under my protection."

The air grew still. Zirikon's cigar paused midway to his lips.

The Mammoth King, who had been keeping his silence, now turned his head slightly, his massive eyes focusing entirely on Wulv.

Protection? Even Yuki's brows lifted ever so slightly in surprise.

Zirikon recovered quickly, but Wulv had already seen it. That slight hesitation.

Good. Now the board had changed.

Wulv didn't know what Krogan and his men truly wanted with the Mammoth King, but one thing was clear—they wanted him alive.

And now, he was making sure they wouldn't get their hands on him so easily.

"Under your protection?" Zirikon repeated, voice measured.

Wulv shrugged. "You came here to save him, did you not? Well, consider your mission complete. He lives. But he'll do so under my watch."

A dangerous gamble.

The Mammoth King had no reason to trust him, and Zirikon had every reason to retaliate.

But Wulv thrived in these situations. He knew how to make himself the bigger threat.

Now, Krogan's men had to decide.

Risk a confrontation with the godlings to take the Mammoth King.

Or accept the loss and retreat.

Zirikon exhaled through his nose, his easy demeanor returning, though Wulv could see the calculations behind his gaze.

"A generous offer," Zirikon mused. "But is the Mammoth King willing to accept it?"

Wulv's grin widened. He turned his gaze toward the massive beast.

"Well then, King of Beasts, what will it be?"

The Mammoth King's massive frame remained still, his breath slow and steady, but inside, his mind was a storm.

Lunara and Leiko.

Their appearance were carved into his soul, burned into his memory with the blood of his children. A crime that could not be forgiven.

To bow his head to Wulv now, to remain under his so-called "protection"—it was unthinkable. A disgrace.

He would sooner walk into the depths of the cursed land itself than allow those who had taken his young to call themselves his saviors.

His gaze, cold and determined, shifted to Zirikon.

This one was different. He did not trust him. But he did not hate him either.

Zirikon had come with purpose, and though his true intent was unclear, the Mammoth King could feel it—this man did not see him as something to be owned.

Wulv, despite his honeyed words, did.

The godling leader saw the Mammoth King as a chess piece, a symbol to wield against his unseen enemies. A tool.

And the Mammoth King... was no one's tool.

A deep, rumbling exhale escaped him, like the shifting of mountains before a storm.

Then, he moved. Massive legs carried him forward, the ground trembling beneath each step as he walked toward Zirikon.

The choice was made.

Silence stretched over the battlefield.

Zirikon did not react immediately, merely tilting his head slightly as if in mild surprise. Then, with a knowing smirk, he exhaled a slow breath, the ember of his cigar flickering in the dim light.

"It seems I have earned a companion for the road."

Wulv's expression didn't change. But his eyes darkened.

The Mammoth King had just made a very dangerous decision.

Yuki's lips pressed into a thin line, her gaze flickering between Wulv and Zirikon. She understood the weight of this moment.

A powerful beast, a king among its kind, had rejected the godlings, sided with an unknown force, the implications were monumental.

Wulv exhaled through his nose, forcing a chuckle. He knew how to lose gracefully, but deep inside, he was not pleased.

"Seems I was mistaken," he said lightly, though the sharpness in his voice remained. "You are free to make your own choices, Mammoth King. But remember—alliances shape the future. And some choices cannot be undone."

The warning hung in the air like a blade.

Zirikon gave Wulv a long look before smirking, turning on his heel as he motioned for the Mammoth King to follow.

The deal was set.

As they stepped toward the portal, leaving Wulv and his men behind, Zirikon sent a quiet thought to Krogan.

"We have him." Krogan's response came almost instantly "Now we wait to see how the godlings respond."

Nothing happened at first as Zirikon and the Mammoth Beast King—whose massive frame had significantly shrunk after Zirikon tossed a peculiar ring toward him—stepped through the shimmering portal. Then, with a faint hum, the portal collapsed in on itself, vanishing into nothingness, leaving behind only a brief gust of displaced air.

Wulv turned to Yuki, his ever-present grin still tugging at his lips. Though his posture remained relaxed, there was an unmistakable sharpness in his golden eyes.

"I have made a fool of myself," he admitted lightly, though whether he truly believed it was another matter entirely. "I shall take my leave first, Lady Yuki, if you don't mind."

Yuki simply nodded, her expression unreadable.

With that, Wulv's phantom shimmered and vanished. The intricate device that had projected his phantom form shot through the air, returning to the hand of the werewolf captain guard. He caught it effortlessly, inclining his head toward Yuki and her warriors in a silent gesture of respect before stepping back.

The werewolves moved in unison, each taking a precise step that traced the shape of a constellation in the air beneath them. As the pattern aligned perfectly, a glow of celestial light enveloped them, and in an instant, they were gone—transported back to their homeland.

Yuki's phantom faded soon after, her presence dissipating like mist in the cold night air. Her men followed, one by one, each disappearing into nothingness.