

Legion lich 261

Chapter 261 Unfortunate accident

Furthermore, his petty spirit refused to waste materials, even if it was something free like his own body parts, he hated waste.

The skeletons moved forward to grab the other potions, even the monster generals, when a sudden cry of pain froze them in place.

The ogre patriarch once again fell to the ground screaming in pain and writhing, but this time it was different. The magic organ began to fall apart, the skin melting and dripping to the floor as the flesh peeled away from the bones.

The most sensitive organs detached themselves from the body and sprawled across the floor, the eyes falling out of their sockets while the brain spilled out of the sockets like mush.

“Hmm...it looks like the effects are only temporary and last for a few minutes at most. It’s a matter of lack compatibility with semi-human skeletons or maybe the potion is still incomplete and needs a few more ingredients for effects to be permanent ?” Athos muttered and scratched his chin thoughtfully.

“Anyway, I need more specimens to investigate what’s missing.” He concluded and turned to the skeletons frozen in place. “Hmm? You still haven’t had your potions?”

“And we never will, you idiot master!” Treevor exclaimed indignantly, throwing the potion to the ground angrily. “I thought you already tested this thing and kept it a secret just to brag about the result. Why would you use something untested on us instead of useless skeletons??”

“Maybe why I forgot about it?!” Athos said as if it were a plausible excuse, as indignant as Treevor.

Treevor wanted to strangle Athos in place, but the chains on his soul prevented him.

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“Haa... let’s look on the bright side. We’ve already taken the first step towards getting our bodies back, so let’s consider this a victory.” Emilia said to try to calm everyone down, but she was clearly disappointed.

‘I thought I’d finally get my chance with the master, but it’s still going to take a little longer.’ Emilia thought in frustration, looking at the ogre lying in agony on the ground.

The decomposition process was already over, but the ogre was still a pile of bones lying on the ground. The gray mass had replaced the darkness that moved his body, so he would remain unconscious until the darkness was restored.

To make matters worse, the ogre had felt the pain of having his brain turned to mush and it would take some time to recover from the trauma.

“Exactly, you should look on the bright side of things. It’s not because I almost caused all of you agonizing pain that you have to react in such an extreme way.” Athos spoke, refusing to accept his mistake and blaming his subordinates for getting angry over anything.

“Completely changing the subject, I need guinea pigs for an experiment that has come up out of the blue and I need them to be smart and high enough in the hierarchy to talk so they can answer all my questions. Any volunteers among your subordinates?” Athos asked with his best poker face and this time even Emilia glared at him.

“Hey, I’m not going to do anything to you guys, those captains with a few hundred skeletons below them should be enough for me. It’s not like you or I care about those nameless skeletons and they won’t die anyway, so it’s not a problem.” He shrugged it off like it was no big deal and the others had to agree.

None of them cared about any of the skeletons that were so low in the hierarchy, the only ones they cared about lightly were those around them, everything else was just weapons of war or manpower.

“I’ll stop there, but make sure you don’t give us those potions until the effect is permanent and free of side effects.” Trevor spoke as he scratched the leaves at the back of his head in annoyance.

The other generals nodded and dispersed to their respective tasks, but everyone’s mood was high. Even though the initial attempt failed, they had a glimmer of hope of getting their bodies back again.

Continent Caprio, in the beast realm Brumia.

The kingdom of Brumia was in the northeast of the continent, bordering Tivan and Evergreen. Its population was exclusively beastmen, a race of humans with characteristics of animals or monsters.

The church of Eishin said that beastmen were originally humans who performed blasphemous experiments to merge with monsters, while beastmen themselves believe that intelligent monsters had bonded with humans in the past and they were their descendants.

It was known that ancient and powerful monsters like dragons were capable of shapeshifting and taking on a human form, so it was possible that ancient intelligent monsters did the same.

The only ones who knew the truth were the old gods and their associates, but they kept the secret to themselves.

The kingdom of Brumia had been at war for centuries with the kingdom of Tivan, both over religious and territorial issues. The northeast of the continent was rich in magical and natural resources, much of its territory was fertile plains suitable for crops and the growth of magical plants.

There were also mines of metals and magic stones in the few mountains scattered throughout the kingdom.

They also had a commercial and military alliance with Evergreen, but it was called off decades ago when the elven dukes staged a failed coup attempt.

Three of the four dukes were killed and only the duke of spirits remained loyal to the yggdrasil sprout. The realm had been renamed Evergreen, the realm of spirits, and the surviving elves had become slaves to the spirits.

Despite Brumia’s extensive territory, there were only three major clans that held all the power in the realm, with a few smaller clans serving them.

The Sky Wing, Silver Fang, and Dragon Heart clans were the clans that ruled the kingdom of Brumia. They were respectively clans of white eagle beastmen, black werewolves and dragonewts.

Other small clans were all bird, canine or lizard beastmen and served their respective main clan.

One of the most famous and powerful was the Black Feathers clan, one of the clans that served the sky wings.

The clan was composed of black hawk beastmen and they were one of the most powerful clans just below the main clans, their power almost matching the main ones. They were a clan of mighty warriors, who had sired thousands of soldiers and mages to the realm over the generations.

Their ability to fly at high speeds and generate black flames from their energy-burning wings made them almost unstoppable in close combat.

Their territory also had fertile land and metal mines, so they were self-sufficient in almost everything. Even so, they were completely loyal to the sky wing clan, considering themselves the sword and shields of the clan.

They were incredibly honored and proud of their position as the right hand of the sky wings.

His clan's headquarters was at the top of a mountain named after the clan's name. The headquarters was built vertically on the mountain itself, as all its residents could fly and had no need for roads.

There were still a few paths and roads for visitors and members of other races to visit, but they were few in number and only led as far as the main buildings.

The houses had an oriental style, made mainly of wood and with curved roofs. It was the unique style adopted by winged beastmen, who preferred homes with more spacious rooms and long corridors.

Residential homes were built near the base of the mountain, while shops, workshops and markets were located in the middle of the mountain, with several training arenas for warriors and mages just above and the clan chief's mansion occupying the top of the mountain.

The training arenas had five floors, but their central area was open to everyone, forming a large space for battles. The black hawk beastmen could fight both on the ground and in the air, so the arenas were built that way to allow for three-dimensional battles.

There were bleachers in all directions, allowing anyone to watch the battles and training. In one of the training arenas, several mock battles were taking place simultaneously, while several older beastmen watched the battles with interest.

The fighters inside the arenas were mainly young warriors who were about to join the army and wanted to demonstrate their skills to the older ones watching the battles.

It was an ancient tradition for young warriors who reached adulthood to flaunt their powers in front of the clan's upper echelons, those who performed well would receive perks upon joining the army or a good commendation, depending on which department of the army they joined.

All of the youth currently fighting were the best of the best of the new generation, most having already reached the fourth tier of life, though they had barely reached the 25-year-old range where beastmen would be considered adults.

Beastmen aged much slower than humans and had a longer lifespan depending on their monster bloodline, so they took longer to reach adulthood.

Despite dozens of fights taking place simultaneously, all eyes in the audience were focused on one specific battle, where the two most promising young men were clashing with a ferocity that overshadowed the other battles.

Chapter 262 Black feather clan

Both youths faced each other in close quarters combat, using quick spells just to cover a gap in their defense or try to break the other's posture and finish the fight, but neither of them had broken the stalemate.

Despite knowing how to use advanced spells and spells, the two preferred to only use simple spells and focus on the melee combat they specialized in. They knew that if they tried to focus on casting a complex spell, the other would exploit the moment of concentration to attack and end the fight in an instant.

The beastmen on the right wore short single-edged swords similar to Japanese wakizashis and wore only a conjuration ring on one finger of the left hand and cotton pants, tradition requiring all warriors to use only their weapons and the minimum of protective equipment.

He was approximately 1.84 meters tall with white skin, black hair and eyes characteristic of black hawk beastmen and appeared to be in his late teens despite being 25 years old.

The beastmen on the left, on the other hand, stood out not only from their opponent, but also from all surrounding fighters. Despite being a member of the Black Feather Clan, it had gray hair, eyes, and feathers, setting it apart from all other Black Hawks.

Standing 1,90 meters, he was easily the largest of the fighters and wielded a tachi with both hands, making use of his large build and physical strength to fight. Unlike his opponent, he had the mana body trait and could cast magic without relying on items.

Despite his trait propelling him beyond his peers, he was struggling to keep up with his opponent. He was only in the third layer, although he was about to break through to the fourth, his core required much more energy than usual and slowed down his progress compared to the others.

The young man's name was Ash Blackfeathers, the only son of the master of the Black Feathers Clan. His obvious name was both a pun on his unique colors and a reminder of how different he was from the rest of the clan.

Most of the audience's eyes were focused on the fight between the two and the influential members discussed how the fight would play out. More precisely, how long would Ash be able to last in battle.

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Although Ash was the clan master's son, he was an outcast to the entire clan because of the color of his feathers. Among the beastmen clans, babies were sometimes born with genetic defects that would not inherit the clan's abilities, or would have defective abilities.

Normally, clans would kill these babies while they were young to weed out the bad apples, but Ash was spared. Babies born with a mana body would become extremely powerful warriors or mages, so the clan raised them with great care.

Most would also be geniuses provided they were properly nurtured, many of the magical discoveries being made by such geniuses. The clan had been torn between sparing him and eliminating him, but they chose to spare him out of respect for the clan master, on the condition that Ash never had children and couldn't take over the clan when he grew up.

Ash's mother had died during his birth, leaving his father the only member of his family and one of the few people who cared for him.

As the clan master refused to remarry and the position of clan master could not be passed on to Ash, it was decided that the next most influential family in the clan would assume the position, although they would only have power the moment the current master abdicated of your position.

Even though he was spared, Ash's childhood was surrounded by loneliness. Even before forming its core, Ash was forced to train in order to prove to the clan that he was worthy of life.

But it was after surviving the core formation and starting to manifest its flames that the real hell broke out. Ash was unable to control his flames and they indiscriminately burned the energy of anything they touched, even the spells themselves.

The black hawks took great pride in their energy-burning flames, and knowing that Ash was incapable of using them was enough to make him a source of distaste for the entire clan.

Isolation changed to contempt and they even considered going back on their word and eliminating him, forcing Ash to train ten times harder to prove he was still useful alive.

Ash hated his situation and the clan for forcing him to live that way, but there was nothing he could do to reverse his situation. The most he could do was train because his life depended on it and hope for a better future.

"What are the chances of the tarnished winning the fight? To have someone like him win the competitions would be a disgrace to the entire clan." One of the beastmen in the audience asked aloud, calling Ash by the nickname the entire clan addressed him.

"It's almost nil. He can't use the devouring flames, our greatest weapon, so it's impossible for him to win. Even though he endlessly casts spells with his body, Loke just needs to burn his spells and keep putting pressure on. This fight is already won." The head of the army's magic unit spoke loudly in mockery, sneering at Ash.

"I bet three bars of white platinum on Loke. This tarnished one is barely able to fight back, even though he's blessed with mana body." He continued talking and people in the audience started to join in the betting.

"I bet one earthen tungsten spear that the tarnished can't handle lasts another 5 minutes. If it wasn't for the mana body, he wouldn't even have set foot in this arena." The leader of the assault unit deliberately spoke loudly, making most of the audience members laugh.

Earth tungsten was the second strongest metal, second only to adamant. The metal had a high affinity for the earth element and did not have the same weakness to magic, so it was highly prized.

"Hey, it's no fun if nobody bets on the tarnished." One of the retired warriors who had been watching just for fun spoke up, but didn't step forward to support Ash. Nobody would be a fool to bet on a losing horse, the game would just end up as a joke between them.

"I cover the bet." The clan master approached them silently while hiding his presence and spoke, startling all the beastmen around.

The master was a 2,00 meters brute with thick eyebrows, a broad jaw, but what stood out most were the huge black wings on his back, which were almost twice the diameter of the other beastmen.

He glared coldly at the surrounding beastmen, causing most to lower their eyes from staring at him.

Despite the contempt they felt for Ash and how much they considered him a failure, they wouldn't dare do that in front of the clan master. Not only was he the leader of them all, he was also the most powerful warrior in the clan.

"My lord, what are you doing here? I thought you would be busy preparing for the next attempted invasion of the Tivan kingdom." the head of the mage unit asked confused by the sudden appearance of the clan master, who shouldn't be present at this event.

The kingdoms Tivan and Brumia had been at war for a long time, but despite that, it was mostly Tivan trying to invade them while Brumia defended itself. Alone, the kingdom of Tivan was unable to even dream of matching Brumia and its mighty beastmen, but it was a different story when the order and the church became involved.

The order and the church always supported the Tivan kingdom in battle, turning the battles in Tivan's favor and forcing all clans to band together to stop the invasions.

The clan master should have been busy preparing to support the sky wing clan in battle, so it was odd that he was here to witness the battles between the rookies, even if it was his son who was fighting.

"More than half of the clan's important figures are present here, so I thought it wouldn't be a problem to postpone the preparations for a day and watch my son's battle. Humans are strangely quiet anyway, so there's no reason to rush." The clan head spoke, unaware that the humans were too busy dealing with the evolved demihumans to continue the war.

Many soldiers and mages were sent to support Belaster and Mirkor, so the kingdom of Tivan was taking a more defensive stance.

"What were you saying about betting on my son's defeat?" The clan head continued, not letting the audience members change the subject after hearing them insult his son.

He couldn't openly punish them for insulting Ash, as the clan was already being merciful as per their traditions, but nothing stopped him from fighting back at his own game.

“My lord, we were just discussing the contestants’ chances-” The head of the army’s magic unit tried to explain, but the clan master didn’t let him get away.

Chapter 263 Ash Black Feather

“Don’t be like that, let’s make these matches more interesting.” The master spoke with a wild smile that became even more frightening on his face, sending shivers through the surrounding beastmen.

“I cover all bets, no, I’ll do better. I’ll bet my personal weapon on Ash to win.” He spoke, touching the katana at his waist. It was his personal weapon and was definitely worth more than the crap others were betting on, making them frown deeply.

Now, they would be forced to raise their stakes to match the clan master, or they would be seen as cowards who wouldn’t keep their word. Until a few seconds ago, they were bragging about how certain victory was and all the beastmen around heard everything they said, so retreating was not an option.

“I understand your willingness to believe in your son even with his condition, but are you sure losing your best weapon is the best way to do that?” The chief of mages asked to try to escape without betting against the clan master, fearing the consequences of win him.

He was still confident that he would win the bet, but taking the clan master’s blade would make him a true enemy of the master instead of just a random one who pissed him off for insulting his son.

A warrior’s weapon was a great pride for a clan of warriors like them and taking it would make them mortal enemies.

“I said I’d bet my katana and I keep my word. How about you?” the clan master asked with one of his eyebrows raised, sealing off all the rival beastmen’s escape paths.

All of them started to bet their own weapons or something worth equivalent to the clan master’s kanata, though most of them begrudgingly. Unlike the chief mages, they sensed something strange in the clan master’s absolute trust, even though his judgment was tilted in Ash’s favor as his son.

The clan master had trained Ash personally, so maybe he knew something none of them did.

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After receiving confirmation that everyone who had gambled on Ash’s defeat stood by their words, the clan master sat around them to watch the fight, silencing any beastmen who wanted to continue their mockery.

He watched in silence as the fight between Ash and Loke reached its climax.

Both young men were using their abilities to the fullest, pushing their bodies beyond their limits, but the battle was clearly in Loke’s favor.

The wakizashi in Loke’s hands were surrounded by black flames that burned the tachi’s mana whenever they touched, forcing Ash to consume even more mana to replenish the lost energy.

“Why don’t you just give up at once, tarnished? This useless struggle of yours is just a waste of your energy and my time.” Loke spoke as he blocked an attack with the short sword in his right hand and tried to slash Ash’s wrist with the other.

Ash ground his teeth in annoyance but said nothing and concentrated on defending himself. He flapped his wings to get away as he conjured a shield of bright light, but the blade sliced through the shield and the black flames consumed it completely.

Loke tried to give chase while casting wind blades to try to block Ash’s escape route, but the latter didn’t plan to flee.

A meteor of three meters made of light and fire surged forward and engulfed Luke’s hastily conjured blades of wind, hitting the beastmen square in the face.

“That’s just a drag, tarnished!” Luke screamed as he released a blast of black flames with a flap of wings, scorching the surface of the meteor.

“A loophole!” Ash screamed as he crossed through the meteor and slashed horizontally, his sword surrounded by tiny, superheated blades of wind.

Loke blocked with the short sword in his right hand, but his hand went numb from the impact and he almost dropped the sword. Even though Ash was below him in layers, the amount of energy the core could store and circulate through the body was more than double, so the physical advantage was with Ash.

Half of the superheated wind blades were consumed by the black flames on the short sword, but the other half spread out and made several seared cuts on Loke’s right arm.

“You bastard!” Loke screamed, conjuring a blast of wind and flapping his wings at the same time, gaining space between himself and Ash. The wounds weren’t bleeding thanks to the temperature of the wind blades, but they still hurt a lot and temporarily broke his concentration.

Ash didn’t give him time to think, however, releasing a breath of fire as he chased after Loke. At the same time, he made the air extremely heavy, but only around Loke’s wings to bring him down.

Loke shouted furiously as a second burst of black flames devoured the air spell and flaming breath.

Ash kept trying to pressure Loke, but the devouring flames blocked his attempts every time. There was a limited amount of flames the wings could generate before running out of gas, but Loke was releasing it in small bursts to conserve energy, so it could last.

Ash tried every way he could think of to get past Loke’s defense, but only managed to inflict superficial wounds. His attacks were getting more and more savage, but his expression only got worse as he broke out in a cold sweat.

‘I’m already reaching my limit.’ Ash thought in frustration, realizing that his mana core had less than a tenth of its full energy. To make matters worse, his body was also saturated with energy and on the verge of collapsing from exhaustion.

He had been circulating mana, using skills and casting spells constantly since the fight started and was almost at the limit. If the fight persisted for a few more minutes, he would run out of mana and his body would collapse.

'If I lose this fight, everything I've fought and suffered for until now will be for nothing. I'm not going to let that spoiled brat take away my only chance at a better life. Now it's everything or nothing!' Ash thought determinedly and kicked Loke's abdomen away, before flying above him while waving his hand teasingly to follow, annoying the latter profusely.

"Don't you dare fly above me, spotted!" Loke screamed, his pride like a wounded black hawk. His instincts as a monster told him that he should always be above others, so seeing someone he considered inferior in a higher position infuriated him.

Loke used wind magic synchronized with his flapping wings to propel himself upward while surrounded by black flames, but not a drop of his spell's energy was affected thanks to his fine control over the flames.

The black hawk reached Ash in less than a second, slashing upwards in an X shape and releasing two blades of aura surrounded by black flames at close range.

"Keuk!" Ash blocked with his tachi, but the pressure of the attack was too strong for him to block and the blade nearly broke in both places the short swords touched.

The black flames devoured the energy reinforcing the tachi, allowing the aura blades to cut the sword almost in half.

At the same time, the flames around Loke's body devoured the energy surrounding Ash's body, weakening him profoundly. Without the mana to keep him steady, Ash's body began to collapse and he began to suffer from internal bleeding in different parts of his body.

"You shouldn't have insulted me or tried to fly above me, tarnished. I can't kill you in front of so many elders, but I will make sure to humiliate you and pluck all your feathers so you'll never fly again." Loke muttered, his face inches away from Ash as they flew higher and higher.

"And you shouldn't be such an idiot as to fall for such obvious provocation." Ash replied as he smiled with a mouth full of blood, releasing its silver flames.

Silver flames engulfed Ash and Loke, spreading around them in a huge sphere of flames. Ash had no control over his silver flames, so all he could do was release his flames at full power and hope for the best.

He had avoided releasing the flames, as it would be an all-in situation and consume both Ash and Loke's mana, leaving both weakened. Now, however, there was barely any mana left in his core while Loke was still nearly halfway down, so it was his only chance to level the playing field.

"You stained bastard, just because you know you're going to lose, do you want to take me with you??" Loke asked in a panic, releasing all his flames to try and resist and failed miserably.

Loke had consumed a lot of his flames to save mana for skills and spells he knew would be inferior to Ash, so he was almost out of gas.

Chapter 264 Silver flames

Its black flames were smothered by the silver flames and extinguished as soon as they left the wings. Ash and Loke began to fall a second later, unable to flap their wings to fly as they were engulfed in flames.

They couldn't see their surroundings and were unable to differentiate between up and down, so they could only fall helplessly. The mystic flames of the black hawks were not hot and only burned energy, even the silver flames were no exception to the rule.

The two falling youths were not burned, although their bodies were collapsed and severely injured internally. Loke's condition worsened the moment he ran out of mana, leaving him at the same status as Ash.

As he fell, Ash twisted the tachi in his hands and hurled it away, along with Loke's short swords. Even without being able to see, he grabbed Loke by the wings and moved behind him, so that the black hawk fell headlong to the ground and he could use it to break his fall.

Loke tried to get rid of Ash on his back, but he couldn't hit him in the back and the ground reached him before he could think of a solution.

But before he could touch the ground and die an agonizing death, a pillar of black flame appeared around him and engulfed the silver fire, nullifying Ash's ability in an instant.

A float spell prevented them from touching the ground and the flames disappeared and a blast of wind separated the two to prevent them from fighting further.

"The battle is over, Ash is the victor!" One of several black hawk referees screamed as he landed between the two youths. He had delayed his announcement in hopes that Loke would turn the tide of battle at the last second, but he couldn't stall any longer.

Not with the clan master's gaze focused on his back and the constant bloodlust he exuded.

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"Wait, that's wrong! I can still fight!" Loke screamed as he got to his feet, but his knees gave out and he fell to the ground as he vomited blood. The internal wounds only got worse as her body was forced to come to a sudden stop from a free fall, her organs being pressed and against her bones and almost breaking.

Ash was in a similar position, but he was smiling deeply as he clenched his fists in victory, happy tears almost running down his eyes.

This fight was important to him, because it would prove his power and allow him to join the army, his only chance to gain achievements for himself and try to improve his position in the clan.

"Looks like I won our bet, colleagues. I hope you honor your words and hand me my prize by the end of the day." The clan master spoke, but the other beastmen were too incredulous to hear him.

He flew over to where Ash was and took out a high grade healing potion from his storage item and offered it to him gently.

“Congratulations son, you did it.” He made Ash drink the potion and the young beastmen collapsed from exhaustion. The master looked at him with pride that his son had managed to win and had achieved something with his own hands.

“I’ll let you rest for now, you deserve it. Leave the rest to me.” The master lifted Ash’s body and carried it to the recovery rooms where mages with an affinity for light waited for the battles to end to heal the injured youths.

A few hours later, in the middle of the night.

After being completely healed to perfect condition, the clan master took Ash back to the master’s mansion at the top of the mountain.

Normally, young men who won their duels would receive congratulations from the top beastmen in the clan, as well as receiving awards and promises of high positions in the army, but Ash was hurt too badly and the important beastmen despised Ash and would hate the idea of ??praising him up front from others.

Ash would still receive his awards and a position in the army, but unfortunately he wouldn’t have the pleasure of seeing those who hated him so much being forced to praise them.

‘Hmm...what happened?’ Ash thought as he slowly woke up, but his body was still exhausted from the fight and the effort of healing so he couldn’t move.

His eyelids were heavy and he was barely able to open them, but his vision was blurry and he wasn’t able to recognize anything.

‘Did I win the fight? Yes, I remember hearing the referee declaring my victory, but what happened next? I remember my dad showing up and offering me a potion and...’ Ash thought and suddenly panicked, trying to get up only to feel sore muscles.

“Don’t try to get up yet, son. The doctors said you pushed your body beyond its limits, so even healing magic couldn’t recover your tiredness.” The clan master spoke as he placed his hand on Ash’s shoulder and forced him to lie down.

“By the way, congratulations on your victory. It was a big blow to those arrogant to defeat the best young warrior using your silver flames.” He spoke with an amused smile, remembering the expressions of disgust and embarrassment on the faces of the beastmen in the audience.

“I was also able to make a lot of profit thanks to your victory, so we all win.” He took out various magic weapons from his dimensional ring, displaying his newly acquired treasures.

“!” Ash’s eyes widened in surprise after his vision adjusted enough to recognize the weapons in front of him. He looked at his father in disbelief, silently wondering how he managed to get his hands on those weapons.

The clan master briefly explained his wager with the other important figures in the clan and how by taking their weapons he had made most of them his mortal enemies.

Ash tried to say something about his father's recklessness, but the latter just dismissed it as nonsense.

"Those bastards decided to gamble on my son's defeat as if it were a game, so they deserve to become my enemies. Let those bastards keep hating me and if they try anything, I'll deal with them personally." The clan master crossed his arms and snorted irritably like a bull.

"Father..." Ash whispered in a cracked, hoarse voice, feeling touched by his father's attitude as his eyes filled with tears.

"Besides, I was sure that you would be able to win this battle by surprising him with your silver flames, so I was confident of earning some easy money." The master grinned greedily as he boasted, making Ash swallow his emotional words back.

"And then? What happens to me now?" Ash asked as he stopped ignoring the blue elephant in the room. He knew he would join the army after that, but in which division of the army was a big question mark.

There were different divisions in the army, such as the regular army, the mage unit, fast attack units, medic units and etc...

"About that, I'm having a hard time deciding where we should allocate it." The master spoke while frowning deeply.

"Why? Haven't I already proven myself to be the best of the new generation?" Ash asked indignantly, thinking that the clan's army members were sabotaging his entry into the army even after winning the duel.

"No, that's not the problem. Although many refuse to admit it out of pride and stubbornness, everyone has already recognized its strength." The master shook his head, noticing the doubt in his son's eyes. He was silent for a few minutes, looking for the right words to break the news to his son.

"Unfortunately, the main problem still remains. As you are unable to control your flames, it is difficult to assign you to a high position, as our army makes use of our flames in our tactics and you would be unable to be a part of it." The master spoke as gently as he could, but Ash clenched his fists in rage with what little strength he could muster.

"So what I did was in vain?" Ash asked angrily.

"No, but it will be impossible for you to join our clan's army. However, I thought of a way to solve the problem while discussing your situation with the rest of the clan." The master spoke cryptically, as if he didn't agree with his own plan.

Ash looked desperately at his father and urged him to continue, forcing the old man to sigh and continue talking.

"I plan to send it as an tribute to the sky wing clan." He explained his plan, surprising Ash. All secondary clans had the custom of sending members of their own clan to their respective main clan, as a way of demonstrating their loyalty.

The smaller clans would send members of their respective specialties, in the case of the Black Feathers clan, Mages and Warriors.

The Black Feathers clan usually sent out common beastmen warriors with a few powerful warriors, so it wouldn't be a problem to include Ash after he won the duels.

Chapter 265 New destination decided

"Is this really going to work? Sending a tarnished like me to the sky wings wouldn't be seen as disrespectful?" Ash asked doubtfully. "They are even more traditional than the elders of our clan and would hate to have someone like me."

"Even if they hate the idea of ??welcoming someone like you, they will have no choice but to accept you, since you won the duel against the most promising young man in the clan in front of most of the clan's influential figures." The master replied while shaking his head to clear Ash's doubts.

"If they reject you as a failure, it would be the same as saying that all the other members we send who were unable to even participate in the tradition were useless and could return to the clan."

"I think I understand what you mean, father, but I don't understand why you would send me there. It doesn't make much difference to serve in the sky wing clan or join the army, so why should I do that?" Ash asked doubtfully.

"Our clan only has black hawk beastmen in our army, but the sky wing clan has different beastmen, so their strategies are different and not as strict as ours. You can adapt and find a new place to call home."

"When do we leave?" Ash asked after some time thinking, agreeing with his father's words. It would be difficult for him to start a new life elsewhere, but it was still better than continuing in the Black Feathers clan.

"I'm going to visit the sky wing clan in a week and I'm taking the warriors as tribute with me, so you have until then to prepare for the trip, son." The clan master explained and prepared to leave the room.

Left alone, Ash began to think about what his future would be like as a soldier of the sky wing clan.

'I'll probably be isolated just like here, but hopefully things will get better after some time. There are different species of beastmen, so I won't stand out as much.' Ash thought hopefully.

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'Other clans also have a tradition of killing defective babies, but none of them are as traditional as ours and maybe I can finally make a decent living.' He thought and started to feel excited.

Ash knew he shouldn't get his hopes up and would very likely be the target of a lot of hate in the near future, but he still held out hope that things could be different.

'I'm tired of this clan shit and their stupid rules. It might be a good idea to breathe some fresh air and meet new people. Maybe I'll even get to make some friends my own age for the first time.' Ash was tired of his own clan and hated everyone except his father.

Everything and everyone could burn and he wouldn't blink as long as his father lived.

'I should start preparing for the trip...' Ash thought, but his head started to feel heavy and he felt sleepy. Ash was still extremely tired and went back to sleep within seconds.

When he woke up the next day, it was almost noon and his stomach was growling after almost an entire day without eating anything.

Ash got up with difficulty and felt his body aching and tired, but hunger spoke louder and he left the room towards the mansion's cafeteria without even changing his clothes.

He stinked and badly needed a bath, but his stomach kept growling and all Ash could think about was food.

The clan master's mansion served as both the master's residence and the clan's meeting place, so the place was huge enough to hold many guests and was defended like a fortress. There were dozens of employees and it was an important place where many beastmen visited frequently and Ash hated it as it made him feel hated inside the only place that should be a safe haven.

'What is happening?' Ash wondered as he walked down one of the halls of the mansion and looked confused at the beastmen passing by.

Normally, beastmen would look at Ash with hatred and contempt, but now they looked at him with doubt and even a slight fear, something he wasn't used to.

The beastmen's attitude had changed after Ash defeated Loke and although they still didn't accept him, there was no more contempt and they were just ignoring Ash, unsure how to treat him now.

'Well, I'm not going to complain about this treatment. It's still a better treatment than before where they called me names and purposely bumped into me just to humiliate me.' Ash asked in relief as he reached the manor's dining hall.

The dining hall was a large two-story space with wide wooden tables and dozens of beastmen employees who worked in the mansion were having lunch during their break.

All the beastmen stopped eating their lunch when they saw Ash's arrival, something the last one ignored as something normal and moved to get his lunch and find an empty place to eat.

"Mister Ash? Do you need something?" One of the employees mustered up the courage to approach and asked nervously.

"Mister?" Ash echoed, incredulous that someone called out to him in such a respectful manner. It was something as foreign to him as waking up in the morning and finding that the sun had risen in the west.

"Yes, can we help with something?" The beastman asked again.

"Yes. I mean no, I don't need anything. I just came to get something to eat and then I'll be gone." Ash responded with a stutter, not used to the respectful treatment he was receiving.

"Why would you have lunch with us and not with the clan master?" the beastmen asked confused.

Ash looked around and noticed that all the beastmen were watching Ash's reactions and were looking at him strangely.

Ash used to have lunch with his father and when he couldn't, he just had lunch alone in the cafeteria and avoided contact with the employees.

“My dad must be busy and I just want to eat something quick, so can you leave me alone?” Ash spoke and went out to get something to eat, increasingly annoyed by the behavior of others.

The beastmen didn't bother him anymore and stayed away from him throughout the meal, annoying Ash a lot. He was used to getting mean looks, but the fear and concern on the staff's faces was something he wasn't used to and it bothered him a lot.

Ash finished eating as quickly as he could and walked out of the mess hall towards the clan master's office, hoping to question his father why everyone was acting so strangely.

'I understand ignoring me, but staring at me with fear is too much.' Ash thought as he arrived in front of the clan master's office.

“Dad, this is Ash, I'm coming in.” Ash yelled outside the office and opened the door.

“Son, are you feeling better yet?” The clan master was working on documents at his desk.

“Did you see how people are acting strange in the mansion? What happened while I was passed out?” Ash asked as he walked over to his desk and sat down in one of the office chairs.

“That's only natural. After winning the duel, you proved your worth to the entire clan and though they don't recognize you, no one will openly attack you now. Those arrogant beastmen may feign ignorance to try to maintain their image, but the same cannot be said of the mansion staff.”

“They live with you constantly and fear retaliation, so they were walking on eggshells around you about how to proceed from now on.” The clan master spoke with an amused smile, imagining the desperate faces of the manor staff.

“Didn't you tell me that I'm leaving in a week along with the rest of the soldiers sent as tribute?” Ash asked doubtfully, feeling awkward at the idea of ??being feared instead of hated.

He felt hatred for everyone in the clan, but he wouldn't do anything as big as attack them personally for revenge. Ash's life was not yet in a situation where he could fully relax, one misstep and everything he had fought for until now would be in vain.

Chapter 266 Departure moment

“And spoil the fun? Of course not.” The master spoke like a child proud of his prank. “By the way, you should go take a shower, son. I can barely breathe with you so close.”

“I'm going to go take a shower, I just need to confirm something before I leave. How's my Tachi, has it been fixed yet?” Ash asked anxiously. He remembered throwing his weapon away to get rid of Loke's short swords, but he didn't find him after waking up.

Ash felt naked and insecure without a weapon to defend himself, so he hoped the clan master had retrieved the weapon and ordered it repaired.

“About that, the blade of your tachi was badly damaged and broke while the blacksmiths were trying to repair it. I thought about getting a new sword as a replacement and to commemorate your victory, but I had a better idea.”

“Give me some of your feathers and I’ll order the clan’s runesmiths to make you a unique weapon, rather than something generic and mass-made like your old tachi.” The clan master spoke.

“Are you serious? A gun of my own?” Ash leapt to his feet in sudden excitement, only for the clan master to flap his wings lightly and force Ash back down.

“Calm down, son, it’s no use getting too excited. It’s a normal prize for the winners of duels to have weapons customized for themselves. Our clan forges the personal weapons of our members using our feathers, that way we can channel our flames through the weapons easily and without worrying about burning the energy of the runes.” He calmly explained to Ash.

“My hope is that by using a gun to channel your silver flames, you can partially control them and use it as a valve to not release everything at once, or at least direct the flames in one direction instead of exploding in all directions.”

“Wait, if using a weapon to facilitate flame control was always an option, why didn’t you tell me sooner??” Ash asked offendedly, sensing that his father had purposely withheld the information.

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“Customized weapons are something we only offer to powerful army warriors or promising young men, and you’ve only just become one.” The master explained to calm Ash’s doubts.

“I understood.” Ash got angry once more at the clan as he pulled a feather from each wing and handed it to his father. “Ack. Here, take this. How long will it take for my sword to be ready?”

“It should take a couple of days at most for the sword to be ready, so you’ll still have some time to try and get used to your equipment before you leave. Now get out of here before I lose my sense of smell.” The master shooed him out of his office while pressing his nose with his right hand.

Ash left the room after being kicked out of the office, but he was incredibly happy at the thought of being able to control his flames for the first time in his life. Although he didn’t admit it, he was envious of the black hawks who could control their flames perfectly.

The days passed quickly for Ash, who was too busy preparing for the journey and enjoying his newfound peace now that the clan’s beastmen no longer teased or intimidated him.

Ash enjoyed those moments of peace as much as possible, knowing that he would lose as soon as he left for the sky wing clan. He even considered the idea of giving up and remaining in the clan, but abandoned the thought soon after.

He couldn’t and didn’t want to stop now, knowing he would lose everything the moment he settled down and stopped evolving.

Ash had also received his new sword in the meantime and found the result incredible.

The sword was even bigger than the previous one, being almost 1 meter long and could no longer be called a tachi. The blade was made of magic steel and was curved from the middle of the blade, gleaming silver thanks to Ash’s gray feathers.

Ash had tested the blade during those days and discovered for the first time that he could control its silver flames, at least partially. Using the sword as a crutch, Ash was able to draw the silver flames from his wings to cover the sword or launch it in waves whenever he swung the blade.

The problem was that the flames kept their characteristic of burning all kinds of energy and Ash couldn't use skills or reinforce the blade with mana, even the enchantments would be absorbed, so Ash would have to activate all the enchantments until the energy ran out to avoid the waste of mana.

He was also given standard black feather clan army armor as proof that he belonged to the clan, something all tribute envoys and soldiers would receive.

During that time, the clan master also announced to the entire clan that Ash would also be sent as a tribute and although some questioned this decision, most approved.

Some feared that sending a flawed one like Ash would be seen as disrespectful, but most found the idea of sending him away from the clan more interesting.

The day before the departure, the clan organized a big party all over the mountain to honor the beastmen who would leave for the sky wing clan and for the first time, Ash participated.

He always avoided participating in this type of event for obvious reasons, but he proudly participated this time.

The clan elders tacitly ignored Ash while those who lost their weapons to their clan master glared at Ash, but they didn't dare to provoke him, not when he would be sent as a tribute.

Those who disliked Ash's presence at the festivities were the young men who would also serve as tributes and were overshadowed by someone they considered a failure.

Many of those who were dissatisfied with the course of events tried to provoke Ash with mean and sarcastic comments, but the latter did not fall for the provocations and just released his aura against the most insistent.

Ash was among the most powerful of the new generation and although the young men who would serve as tributes were also talented, none of them could compare to him, most being only halfway through the second tier.

The party went off almost without a hitch and Ash was able to enjoy the clan for the first and last time before he left.

When the day of departure arrived, all the young men who would become tribute gathered in front of the mansion before dawn, all of them outfitted in full armor and carrying suitcases with their personal belongings.

Ash was among them, having been the first to arrive and the most excited of all. Originally he hadn't intended to wake up so early, but his father shoed him out of the house, saying he wouldn't get preferential treatment and would have to wait outside like the others.

Although the clan master was already awake, he waited until after dawn to leave, leaving the young warriors uneasy, with the exception of Ash who knew the clan master was just pestering them.

“Looks like everyone is already gathered here.” The clan master spoke as he exited the mansion while yawning loudly, ignoring the gathered beastmen.

“Clan Master, when are we going to leave?” Some of the gathered beastmen asked anxiously, but the clan master just laughed at them.

“We’re leaving now, we’re just waiting for a few guards to arrive before we travel.” Master’s smile only widened as he looked at the weight the youths were carrying.

In a matter of minutes, a few dozen beastmen reached the front of the manor and curiously, they all started laughing as they looked at the gathered youths.

‘What are they finding so funny?’ Ash and many others noticed the strange behavior and thought about the situation, but the clan master kept talking.

“The surrounding guards will surround you to ensure your safety and you should just follow us and make sure you don’t get left behind.” The master spoke briefly and began to flap his wings to fly.

“Well, is that all? I heard from my parents that serving as a tribute was difficult, but it doesn’t seem so bad. I think the difficulty is only when you reach the sky wings clan.” One of the beastmen near Ash spoke to his companions near him as they all flight and followed their clan master.

Chapter 267 Exhausting journey

“I don’t know. The sky wing clan is almost a day away by flying and the trip can be quite difficult for us. I don’t know how long it will be before we take a break during the trip, but it can be tiring for the most weak.” Another fellow beastmen spoke while flapping its wings heavily.

The beastmen was carrying two huge suitcases full of runesmithing tools and weapons he had created himself, so he knew he would get tired quickly.

‘That it!’ Ash thought as his eyes widened and he realized the trick behind the gait. ‘They are testing us now, especially our travel stamina.’

‘Flying type beastmen can travel great distances thanks to our wings and all clans are proud of that, but most people never leave the place where they are born and don’t know how difficult the journey can be.’ Ash contemplated and looked down at his own luggage.

He was carrying his sword at his waist and besides the full armor, there was only a suitcase with clothes and personal belongings.

‘Luckily, I’m not very attached to things and I’m a minimalist man, so I’m not taking anything beyond the essentials.’ Ash looked around at the beastmen, noting that many of them were carrying nearly three suitcases full of assorted items.

Ash thought for a second about warning them about the test, but thought better of it and decided to stay silent. An amused smile began to grow on his face, much like his father and other guards around the youngsters.

He couldn’t wait to see the panicked and tired expressions on the black hawks when they realized their mistake when they were halfway there.

“All of you, get ready to accelerate! We need to reach the sky wing clan before midnight, so let’s fly at full speed for the entire trip!” The clan master shouted, his voice amplified by wind magic to reach all the beastmen.

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“Wait a second, clan master! It’s impossible to reach the sky wing clan today, no matter how fast we travel. We’ll end up getting tired faster if we speed up and we’ll need to take more breaks during the journey.” A young beastwoman who was next to the master nervously exclaimed, but the latter just laughed.

“And who said we are going to take a break? This is a military march and I am ordering you to accelerate, so you will accelerate without complaining. You are no longer young warriors in training, but soldiers of the clan and you must act as such.” The master spoke in a stern tone of voice, reminding the youths that their circumstances had changed.

“Even so, it’s true that we can’t reach the sky wing clan until midnight. We weren’t prepared for such a long journey and some are still tired from the party the day before.” Other beastmen started to voice their opinions, but quickly fell silent.

All the beastmen who up until a second ago were complaining froze in midair and started dropping like flies. The clan master had released his aura to strike them down, but kept it focused only on those who complained.

“I said, obey my orders and speed up the flight. Any complaint will be seen as an act of insubordination and will be treated as such.” The clan master warned and the guards around the youths dove in to rescue those who fainted before they reached the ground.

The young beastmen finally realized that the soldiers around them weren’t protecting them, but watching them so they wouldn’t run away.

The clan master didn’t care about the confusion that ensued and accelerated more and more, leaving everyone behind.

Many of the youths were confused and hesitated to continue following, but the smartest among them accelerated to keep up with the clan master’s speed, even flowing mana onto the wings to accelerate further.

Ash was ahead of them all, having been the first to realize the trick and was just waiting for his father to start accelerating to keep up with him.

Those left behind began to panic when they saw the guards who had swooped in to save the youths and taken them back to the clan’s.

Everyone knew the stories of people who returned to the clan before they had completed their mandatory service as tributes, and the stories were not pleasant.

Soldiers who were taken back could not join the army and for a warrior clan, it was a disgrace and would make it difficult to get jobs through the clan, even if they had the advantage of using mana.

This type of tradition was created to discourage quitting, but it made life very difficult for those who were caught unprepared.

“Wait!” One of the beastmen who stayed behind screamed at the top of his lungs and flew after the faster youths. As if on cue, everyone else desperately flew to catch up with them, but the clan master kept accelerating faster and faster and the distance between them only increased with time.

‘Damn, how much does he plan to accelerate until he’s satisfied? It’s impossible to keep up with him if he flies at high speed and everyone will be left behind!’ Ash thought in frustration as he struggled to keep up with his father.

He was using wind magic to fly faster, but he was struggling to keep up with the clan master’s pace. Luckily for the youngsters, the clan master stopped accelerating and just maintained the speed he considered enough to reach the sky wing clan headquarters by midnight.

‘Even if he stopped, it’s impossible for any of us to follow him for more than 12 hours at that speed. We’ll be exhausted and out of mana before we reach the halfway point. Ash thought in frustration, trying to figure out a way to overcome the situation.

‘There has to be a way to maintain our current speed and keep pace with dad. He wouldn’t purposely make everyone fail, so there must be a trick, I just don’t see it.’ Ash thought as he looked around to try to figure something out.

The young warriors were flapping their wings as hard as they could to keep up with Ash and the clan master, but they were slowly being left behind.

The guards who were watching them, on the other hand, were keeping pace with such ease that it surprised Ash. Using mana vision, he realized that they were all at the fifth layer and it shouldn’t be easy for any of them to keep up with the speed they were at.

‘Even if they are above me in layers of life, my core must have almost as much energy as theirs, if not more. They seem to be using wind magic to make their flight easier, but they won’t last much longer than me and they know it.’ Ash looked questioningly at them, his eyes narrowing as he took in the guards in even greater detail.

Thanks to his black hawk blood, Ash’s eyesight was much better than an ordinary human’s and he could make out details of other beastmen despite the distance that separated them.

He noticed that the guards flying around were flying in groups, and those at the front cast a blade of wind in front of them to cut the air, while those at the back just used the vacuum generated by the blade to fly faster.

‘Understood! The guards at the back aren’t consuming much energy because they’re using the vacuum conjured up by the wind mages. That way most of them will still have energy to spare when the mage runs out of mana or they can take turns taking the lead and lowering the air resistance for those right behind.’ Ash realized the secret to being able to maintain speed without becoming exhausted.

‘How do I get these idiots to cooperate with me? They still despise me because of my color, so they’ll just dismiss my words as bullshit or use my idea among themselves without including me.’ Ash racked his brains as he thought of a way to make the arrogant youths listen to him.

'Wants to know? Fuck them. If they don't want to cooperate even after I explain how to solve the problem, then that's their loss. I can slow down a bit to save energy and keep pace with those who are left behind.' Ash thought and flew towards the beastmen closest to him.

"What are you doing, tarnished?" The group of beastmen looked vigilantly at Ash as he approached, even pulling back slightly to ensure they had time to react in case it was a trap.

Chapter 268 Sky wing clan

"Don't panic, I came in peace. I think you've already noticed, but if we continue at this pace, we'll be exhausted before halfway through. I believe that father- I mean, clan master is testing our ability to work together, so we need to cooperate if we are to keep up and not fall behind and have our careers ruined." Ash tried to sound as polite as possible, but his words fell on deaf ears.

"And why the hell would you tell us that? We're not friends and we don't work together, so why would we trust anything you say? It could very well be another one of your tricks to eliminate the competition, just like you did to beat Loke in the duel." The only beastman in the group capable of using wind magic responded on behalf of the group, making his suspicion against Ash obvious.

After losing bets against the clan master, many of the leading figures in the army hated the master and Ash for making them lose their bets, so they spread slurs about him in petty revenge.

Among these lies, they said that Ash had won the battle against Loke using tricks and the only reason the truth didn't come out was because the master himself was in cahoots.

It was a groundless lie and anyone who knew the clan master would immediately know it was a hoax, but the young men who would leave as tribute had never interacted with the clan master and already openly hated Ash, so they swallowed the lies without thinking deeply.

"That's an obvious lie and you would realize it if you stopped to think about it for a second, but every second matters and we don't have time to argue right now. Do you want to work together to pass the test or lose everything at once??" Ash yelled impatiently, barely containing his rage.

He was used to being insulted and had learned to deal with it from an early age, but he became enraged when someone insulted his father and it took sheer willpower not to attack the beastmen in front of him.

The beastmen looked at each other unsure what to do and a beastwoman flew to the front of the group before the others could insult Ash again and make him give up sharing information with them. "What do you know?"

"Hey, what do you think you're doing? Are you really going to trust this guy?" The surrounding beastmen questioned him in confusion.

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"Shut up! I don't care about your useless disputes, I just want to finish the march and not lose my position as a tribute." The beastwoman answered back and turned to Ash. "Keep talking."

'At least someone here has a brain.' Ash thought with relief and flew closer to the young woman to explain his theory.

“Makes sense, but there’s a catch.” The young woman spoke thoughtfully after hearing Ash’s theory. “Most of us are not capable of using magic and those capable of using wind magic are even less so. It is impossible for us to employ the same strategy as them.”

“Don’t worry, I know how to overcome this without using magic. We just fly in formation to make use of the vacuum to save energy. The one at the forefront will get tired faster, but we can replace the person front at any time.” Ash continued talking and a light of understanding sparked in the young man’s eyes.

The young woman passed the idea on to her group and soon they changed positions, assuming a V formation with Ash in front. He was the strongest and had the best stamina, so naturally he was at the forefront.

‘I just hope these idiots don’t change their minds and leave me behind when it’s their turn at the forefront.’ Ash thought cautiously as he looked back, but none of the beastmen following him seemed to have any intention of attacking him, only doubt and fear towards him.

The other groups noticed Ash’s group’s formation change and how they were flying in a way that relieved pressure from the others and decided to do the same.

‘Well done son, I knew you would understand the trick easily, but I hope you manage to keep the pace until we reach the destination.’ The clan master spoke as he looked back and noticed his son’s group following close behind him.

They spent the next few hours flying without rest and although the beastmen’s V formation alleviated some of the wind resistance and lessened the effort of flying, many groups were still exhausted after the halfway point and had to land on the ground to rest.

Even replacing the beastman at the forefront, the weakest among them couldn’t withstand the long journey while wearing heavy armor and carrying heavy bags.

Some fought until the last second to try to reach the finish, while others gave up when they started to get exhausted. A guard stayed behind with the exhausted beastmen, to guide them once they recovered enough.

They also encountered monsters along the way, but the Clan Master dealt with them all easily without even slowing down, making Ash and the others wonder how strong the Clan Master really was.

Ash’s group and only a few others managed to keep pace and keep up with the clan master’s flight speed, which remained at a constant speed without breaking a sweat the entire way.

“Hold on just a little longer! It’s almost midnight, so the clan headquarters should be visible soon!” Ash called out to his temporary companions, although he himself was exhausted and could hardly bear to continue flapping his wings.

All the beastmen had already switched positions and taken the vanguard job and Ash was on his second shift. Everyone was exhausted and barely had the strength to go on, but they refused to give up so close to the goal.

“Hey, I’m getting to see the sky wing clan headquarters!” The beastwoman who spoke to Ash initially squealed excitedly, seeing a mountain starting to appear on the horizon.

All bird-type beastmen liked to fly and live in high places, so the mountains scattered across the kingdom were the territory of the bird beastmen, while the plains and forests were occupied by the canine and reptile clans, respectively.

“We’re almost there, so resist a little longer and you’ll make it.” The clan master spoke using wind magic to convey his message to all beastmen.

He accelerated further, leaving the exhausted youths behind. Now that they were so close to the clan, he no longer needed to hold back to guide the youths and he flew at full speed, leaving everyone behind.

Ash and the other beastmen still took almost twenty minutes to reach the mountain as they flew exhausted. They slowed down the moment the clan master walked away, too tired to continue flying at high speed now that they no longer needed to follow their master.

They landed on top of the mountain in a large open area where the clan master had landed and several beastmen from the sky wing clan were waiting for them.

The beastmen of the sky wing clan were Tempest Eagle, having golden feathers and they get lighter and lighter until they become white at the tips. Unlike the black feather Clan who could release flames capable of devouring energy, the Tempest Eagles were able to absorb electricity and store it in their feathers.

Tempest eagles were capable of releasing electricity as a form of attack or able to flow through their bodies to absurdly increase their agility, or flow through spells cast to accelerate them without having to sacrifice destructive power.

Ash and the other black hawks collapsed as soon as they hit the ground, their wings burning with pain and refusing to move. They fell to their knees as they gasped for air desperately.

“Are those the only ones who made it through the trip?” One of the Tempest Eagle beastmen stepped forward and asked the Black Feathers Clan Master curiously, looking at each of the fallen youths and narrowing his eyes as he looked at Ash.

The man was nearly seven feet tall, with straight shoulder-length platinum hair and no beard. He appeared to be in his 30s by human standards, but his actual age was close to 90, thanks to his monster blood plus years of training making his appearance more youthful.

Chapter 269 Nero sky wing

His name was Nero Sky Wing, the leader of the Sky Wing clan. He personally came to receive the young tributes from the different clans he was due to arrive the next day, but he knew that the competitive master of the Black Feather clan would not accept that the other clans arrived before him and would make everyone run desperately to get to the front.

“Is everyone here, Kilian?” Nero asked the master of the dark feather clan, realizing that the small number of beastmen was not even a tenth of that agreed between the clans.

“No sir, those are just the best who were able to withstand the journey and keep up with my speed, those unable to withstand the journey stayed behind along with clan guards and will arrive later after

they have had enough rest.” Kilian responded helpfully and in a polite tone, though his look was anything but polite.

He noticed that Nero continued to stare at Ash while the latter was still recovering from the trip and he didn't like it at all.

“Those who give up, on the other hand, will be sent back to the clan and will have a hard time. I hate those who give up easily and I made sure they would have a hard time rethinking their actions in the future.” Kilian spoke to try to get Nero's attention, but it was in vain.

“So this is your son, the grayman with the faulty flames?” Nero looked Ash up and down with mana vision, unimpressed by what he saw.

He had known of Ash's existence for a long time, and although he disapproved of Kilian's decision to leave the child alive, he wasn't too bothered by a matter that didn't directly involve him. His thinking changed when Kilian contacted him a week ago, informing him that Ash would be sent as part of the tribute.

Nero criticized Kilian for doing this and pushing the defective boy into the sky wing clan, but Kilian claimed that Ash was one of the best of his generation and had won the coming of age duel as proof of his power.

“Yes sir, he is my son. As I said before, he is a talented young man who possesses the mana body trait and the most powerful of the current crop of warriors, even if he is not able to control his devouring flames.” Kilian started to explain Ash's achievements again, fearing that Nero would kick him out before evaluating him properly.

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“I already know all that, Kilian. I'm not doubting your son's individual ability, but the ability to work together with the army.” Nero crossed his arms, not trusting the black hawk's words, but Kilian had already prepared for that.

“If that's the problem, you needn't be worried, Mister Nero. As you know, I like to test the obedience and teamwork of the beastmen that I offer as tribute to eliminate the worthless and cowardly ones from the truly competent.”

“Ash passed my test with flying colors, being the first to realize that they only survived the trip by working together and flying in formation, and he led a group of his own during the trip, in addition to leading other groups by example. If you don't believe me or think that my judgment is clouded by my son, ask the surrounding guards and they will all confirm.” Kilian explained Ash's deeds and pointed to the resting guards, though they maintained their composure compared to the youths.

The guards didn't want to admit it, but they were forced to when they received the simultaneous glares of Kilian and Nero. Everyone had seen Ash's performance during the trip and knew that the group was only able to hold out because of him.

“If you're willing to go to such lengths for the boy, I won't complain anymore, Kilian. But know that I won't give Ash special treatment and if he proves inept or useless, I'll cast him out like any other black hawk. Is that enough for you?” Nero asked with a raised eyebrow, refusing to budge any more than that.

“A fair chance is all I’ve prayed for over the years, Nero.” Kilian bowed deeply in thanks before turning to leave.

His job was over when he brought the tributes to the sky wing clan, all he had to do now was greet the important beastmen tempest eagles and wait for the other clans to arrive.

As the hours passed, the dark feather beastmen who had been left behind began to arrive and were welcomed by the sky wing clan. The clan held a feast for all the beastmen, who were starving after nearly a full day of travel.

When dawn came, the other clans started to appear and unlike the dark feather, they came in formation leaving no one behind. Kilian was the only one stubborn enough to drive out those weaker ones before they even arrived.

The clan masters greeted Nero and Kilian, while the youths mingled with one another. They were surprised by Ash’s appearance, which stood out among all the black hawks, but they didn’t question much and just gossip among themselves.

Ash, on the other hand, was experiencing an entirely new and strange situation for him. The beastmen who flew with him were grateful for his help and admitted that they wouldn’t have made it in time without Ash shouldering most of the burden.

Most of them walked away after greeting him in order to maintain good relations in case they were placed in the same unit in the future, but one of them stayed behind and kept trying to talk to him about any matter.

It was the beastwoman who spoke to Ash when the latter approached the group to talk. She was anyway trying to get in Ash’s good books, feeling awed by his skill.

Internally, she still felt a little uncomfortable with Ash’s gray feathers, but she didn’t let it show and tried her best to put her prejudice aside to talk to Ash.

“So, Ash, answer me one thing. How did you realize that we should work together and fly in formation to withstand the trip? My friends and I believed that it was an endurance test to measure our resilience, so we could only pass with praise thanks to you.” The girl spoke in a flattering tone as she followed Ash.

“I, err, just noticed, you know, like my monster instinct told me that was the answer, I guess.” Ash answered while stuttering, unable to concentrate.

They were picking up plates from the buffet prepared by the sky wing clan to receive the tributes, but their hands were moving automatically as their eyes focused on the girl, even using mana vision to make sure it wasn’t a hallucination.

‘Why does this girl keep talking to me and not move on after saying thank you like the others? I was already glad they came to talk to me instead of just pretending they didn’t know me after I helped them, but that’s an exaggeration.’ Ash thought troubled, unable to understand why the girl kept talking to him.

‘Besides, she’s a little too close.’ As someone who wasn’t used to interacting with other people without hostility, Ash didn’t know how to react to the girl in front of him and while he was flattered by her attention, he was a little uncomfortable with the invasion of his personal space.

“Instinct, you say? Maybe your instinct is better than most because of the mana body.” The girl muttered for a moment before changing the subject. “And how was your duel against Loke? There are several rumors that you cheated to win, but seeing your performance today I’m sure they are nothing but lies.”

“I won the duel fairly, but it was an uphill battle. The opponent was really strong, but I managed to turn the tide in the end.” Ash spoke a little more naturally now that the subject had shifted to fighting, something he was used to.

“Yes, I heard that you managed to win using your silver flames and that’s why the entire clan was shocked by your victory. I’m not strong enough to participate in the duels, but the duels had been recorded and spread all over the clan.” She took a step closer to Ash, getting dangerously close for someone as antisocial as Ash.

“Well, I-” Ash stammered as he tried to think of a response, but Nero saved him the embarrassment.

“Everyone, please give me a second of your attention.” Nero spoke with his voice magically amplified, drawing the attention of all the beastmen around.

He walked into the middle of the crowd and flew so everyone could see him easily.

Chapter 270 Ash’s Hope

“I welcome all clan masters and young beastmen who have gathered under the wings of the clan sky wings today. It is an honor to be able to see so many talented young rising men gathered in one place, each of you a talent in your respective area.” Nero spoke in the same tone as a father praising his son, making most young men puff out their chests with pride and straighten their postures.

“Whether it’s the Black Feather Clan with its mighty warriors, the Night Wing Clan and its vast spy network, or the Fire Plume Clan and the mighty weapons they forged. All of you are the pillars that support our clan and protect us from the threat of the humans in our long war against the Tivan kingdom.” Nero looked at each of the clan masters and nodded in respect.

“Your presence is even more important these days, thanks to the information that the night wings brought.” He was silent for a second to heighten the tension and suspense among the beastmen and only spoke again when the youths were on tiptoe.

“The borders in the Tivan realm are thinner than ever, most of the church and order of that would normally be stationed in the realm have left the borders.” The youths who had never been to the battlefield didn’t understand the importance of Nero’s words, but the two clan leaders who hadn’t been informed yet widened their eyes in surprise.

Nero withheld the information and discussed the information with the leaders of the other two major clans before deciding to pass the information along to the minor clans. He took advantage of the fact that the leaders would meet to inform them personally, instead of calling for magic items and spending hours arguing.

“According to what the spies have discovered, the human kingdoms are going through a crisis and suffering a great invasion on the other side of the continent, so most of their forces are focused on the opposite side, leaving the kingdom of Tivan exposed.”

"I discussed the information with the leaders of the dragonewts and silver fangs, and we made an important decision. This is a golden opportunity to finally strike back after so long just defending ourselves and you will all have the opportunity to be part of this important mission."

"All of you will have the chance to put your names in the history of our kingdom and bring honor to your respective families and clans. The chance to be the first to take human territories, something that hasn't happened in decades." Nero's voice grew more animated the more he spoke, to the point of sounding fanatical.

Like most beastmen, he mortally hated humans, considering them an inferior species and mortal enemies because of his constant war against Tivan.

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"What do you say, young beastmen? Will you come with me and leave your names in history? Become the spear of our people and pierce the human borders, bringing land and resources to our kingdom and families??" Nero shouted to the beastmen, who squealed in response.

"Then it is decided. We will go to war in the near future and destroy these arrogant humans with our own hands!" Nero raised his fist in the air and all the beastmen did the same, yelling in unison.

"That's crazy. Are we going to war as soon as we start our service in the army?" Ash muttered in shock, temporarily forgetting about the girl next to him.

"I know, I almost can't believe this. We've barely joined the military and we'll already have an opportunity like this!" The girl, on the other hand, was incredibly excited about the idea of going to war.

"I don't know if we can call this an opportunity or not. Nobody here has experience with warfare and if the last test taught me one thing, it's that most here are inexperienced and unprepared, to say the least." Ash spoke pessimistic, feeling uncomfortable with the carefree girl.

"Don't be so pessimistic, Ash. It's true that we were taken by surprise and we wouldn't have made it without you, but the best way to learn is to practice and no amount of training will compensate for that." The girl disagreed with Ash, but still tried to cheer him up.

"Besides, I don't think there will be a better opportunity than this to gain experience. According to the sky wing master's words, the human armies will be weak and we can easily win." This time, Ash had to agree with her.

"I think you're right, I'm just a little surprised that we're participating in such a huge operation so soon after joining the military." Ash replied with a forced smile to agree with her, but he still felt that it was too soon for them to fight such an important battle.

'Am I just being pessimistic here? It's not like we're going to play a major role during such a crucial operation. Nero's speech must just be a way to boost our morale, weak young men like us often work as supply troops, at least according to their father.' Ash repeated to himself in an attempt to convince himself.

Even so, he still felt that something was wrong. His instincts were telling him it was dangerous to participate in this operation, but Ash didn't know why. He also couldn't refuse to participate in the operation, as the tributes served the sky wing clan and had no choice but to comply.

"All black hawk beastwomen gather here now! I will guide you to your dorms." A beastwoman tempest eagle screeched, indicating that the newcomers' leisure time was over.

"Well, time for talking is over. See you later, Ash." The girl said good-bye to Ash and walked away, but the latter moved before she could pull away.

"W-wait!" Ash grabbed her wrist reflexively, but froze in the next moment. His body moved before his brain could follow and he only realized it after he was holding her wrist.

"What it was?" The girl pulled her arm back, startled by Ash's sudden movement, and took a step back in surprise.

"Uh, how do I say this..." Ash stammered nervously as he retracted his hand awkwardly.

'How do I say I don't remember her name and ask after so long of conversation?' Ash racked his brains for a way to ask her name without being seen as an asshole.

He only pretended to listen to what the beastmen who came to greet him said, thinking that he would probably never speak to any of them again. Unfortunately, the girl was between them and Ash had ignored her until he realized she hadn't gone away and continued talking.

"You know, I ended up hearing a lot of names when you introduced yourself and I don't remember exactly. So, you know..." Ash asked embarrassed while scratching his head in embarrassment.

"Pfft... is that why you've been embarrassed this whole time?" The girl burst out laughing in relief and reached out to shake his hand. "Laura. My name is Laura. Nice to meet you again, Ash.

"Yes, it's a pleasure." Ash shook Laura's hand and again the beastwoman storm eagle called all the women and Laura said goodbye.

'What a strange girl.' Ash thought, but an unconscious smile spread across his face. Soon, another beastman called out to the black hawk men, snapping Ash out of his reverie.

"Sounds like you already made a friend, good for you." Kilian's voice rang in Ash's ears, surprising him. He turned his head towards the voice, finding his father standing in the distance, looking at him with a proud smile on his face.

"Yes, although I'm not sure why she insisted on talking to me, I think I've made a friend. Maybe things will finally change for me around here." Ash spoke quietly as he made his way to the dorms, certain his father would be using air magic to hear.

'Maybe I really can make a decent living here.' Ash really thought, feeling hopeful for the future and walking tall among the other black hawks.

The others looked uneasily at him, unsure how to react to Ash's presence. Even the beastmen tempest eagle glared at Ash, but said nothing, having been told in advance that the black hawks would have a different boy among them.

Only after all the black hawks had gathered in front of him did the tempest eagle speak again.

“I am Sergeant Brain and the only contact you will all have with the outside world for the next few weeks.” The beastmen spoke in a stern tone, contrasting with Nero’s proud tone.