

The Mafia 401

Chapter 401 The Result of the Wager

At the start of the third round, Vicente and Landon stared at each other as they began their moves, sensing that this match would be much better than the last.

The third and final artifact of this fast-paced contest was Landon's strength, which Vicente had been aware of as he had studied his opponent over the past few days.

Even though Vicente had won the last round, and historically, he had always improved when competing, that didn't give him any certainty that he would win this last round.

'I don't want to have to participate in that blacksmith competition...' Vicente thought as he looked at his opponent.

As much as it was exciting and even fun for him to compete with other blacksmiths, something he had felt in the past and could feel now, it wasn't his priority. He could learn a lot from other blacksmiths, but for now, he could do what he thought was good enough for him alone at his master's side without having to give up his freedom.

But if he lost the next round, that would change, and he would have a permanent obligation to the local association.

Still, he didn't show his first magical form, which made some spectators even more curious about him and his powers.

At this point in the competition, few doubted that Vicente was already a better blacksmith than Landon. He might even lose the bet since he didn't use everything he had. But that in itself showed his level of skill in forging.

So while they competed, young people like Lukas and even experienced elders watched with great interest as the two played for more than 40 minutes, watching their artifacts gradually take shape.

Those who had nothing to do with the competition simply enjoyed watching two 2nd-stage blacksmiths compete. However, Landon's and Vicente's supporters were quite tense in the contest's

final moments, as both sides cheered on their chosen one while watching their opponent with apprehension.

During this crucial part of the evening, Benson and Henry focused on each other's students, wondering if they would win or lose the bet.

Henry would have to give up 10% of the rock he had recently purchased if he lost. If Benson lost, he would have to deal with Vicente's frequent absences from town, which could seriously disrupt his plans.

In this tension over the outcome, Vicente and Landon finished their artifacts almost simultaneously, adding to the excitement of the entire audience on the platform.

"Who will be the winner?" Nina asked with a smile, not knowing what was at stake and not caring much about the outcome.

Of course, she wanted her older brother to win. But just the fact he showed such good skills and was so competitive in a contest with a well-known local blacksmith was enough for this child.

On the other hand, Nova had her fingers crossed, waiting for her boyfriend to win, something she wanted even more than Nina.

While everyone waited for the results, the council elders quickly made contact with the artifacts of the two sweaty men staring at each other.

Vicente and Landon were too exhausted to notice the quality of each other's items. But no matter who won, each had the other's respect.

Competing at such a high level and ferocity was a rarity, and one could only respect the other. That was especially true for Landon, who hadn't known much about Vicente until recently.

Lukas saw this and clenched his fists, feeling that Vicente would win. 'It looks like he's going to make it... I don't know if I should be happy or sad.' He thought since he was going to the province's annual blacksmith tournament. It would be great if Vice were there, too.

Henry looked at Benson and sighed deeply. "Congratulations on getting such a talented apprentice. This victory is yours."

With those words, everyone in the surrounding seats realized the winner of the final match!

"Vicente Fuller wins the third round with a 94% efficiency item against the 93% efficiency of his opponent's item!" One of the four members of the council of this association announced the result, confirming to everyone that Vicente and Benson had won this contest!

Benson and Vicente were all smiles as their supporters in the area raised their voices and commented with great excitement on his heroic victory.

"Hahaha, he turned the match around! He was losing and went for a win in a round that gave his opponent the advantage!"

"Now that's a real contest! That's the kind of competition we must strive for in every match!"

"Sigh... But how many blacksmiths can compete that well? Anyway, we must take what we've seen here today with us. We may not see such a good competition for a while."

"Tsk! It's a shame we can't take Vicente Fuller to the tournament this year. Otherwise, we'd have a chance to win one of the tests in the competition."

"It's good to have had the chance to see someone like him in action. His methods are truly fantastic."

Several blacksmiths commented among themselves as Vicente greeted his opponent and the elders amidst their congratulations.

"Thanks for the kind words. I was just trying to do the best I could." He said as he made a gesture of thanks while being watched by the four old men.

Landon looked seriously at Vicente and asked. "Vicente Fuller, tell me something. Why haven't you ever used your magical form? Doesn't it improve your performance in the forge?"

Some people had an affinity for certain professions, but their abilities didn't give them an advantage in those areas. For example, Newton had several professions, but he didn't really practice some of them, and he was just considered a scholar because his skills didn't really allow him to act faithfully as a professional in those areas.

After being beaten by Vicente, Landon wanted to know if that was the case with this young man or if his opponent had taken it easy on him.

He wasn't a bad loser, but he needed an answer to the doubt in his mind.

All the old men around them looked at Vicente expectantly.

Vicente said. "It can help me. But I prefer not to use it in competitions. It encourages me to improve my skills faster."

The 3rd-stage blacksmiths listened to this with sighs, feeling they had lost much more than they had imagined with Landon's defeat.

"So that's it..." Henry commented. "No chance of you representing us in the annual tournament, Vicente? I'm willing to give you anything you want that's within my means."

Vicente closed his eyes and sighed. "I have nothing against the association. But I don't fit into this kind of event. If there are other ways to contribute to it, I see no problem in getting involved. But I have too many things taking up my time right now to think about such contests."

"I see..." Henry sighed.

"You win. Here's the 10% I promised." He tossed Benson a spatial ring with the part of the mineral under the bet.

Chapter 402 A Warm Farewell?

After the competition between Vicente and Landon was over, Henry's group was the first to leave before the audience in the bleachers slowly began to leave.

Benson and Vicente were pleased with the outcome of the evening, both smiling as the white-haired old man placed a hand on his student's head.

"You outdid yourself tonight, Vice. After the first round, I wasn't sure what would happen. But fortunately, your talent doesn't disappoint." The old man said. "Anyway, congratulations on your victory. This is yours."

Vicente looked at the ring Henry had given Benson and said. "You can keep it, master. We'll use it to make the first robotic armor. All I ask is that you let me use it on my family until we can build more like it."

"All right," Benson said as he put it away in his storage item. "What are you going to do now?"

Vicente looked at the increasingly empty surroundings and saw Shelby and Livia getting up to leave while Nova, Nina, and Eve were still sitting, probably waiting for him.

"I'm going to rest for the night and spend some time with my sister tomorrow. After that, I'll stay away from my real identity for the next few days. In the next few days, I'll secretly go to your estate to continue working on the robotic armor."

"Okay, I'll prepare an alternate entrance for you," Benson said before he let Vicente go.

Vicente had already ordered all the materials he would need in the short term. He had also recently seen several books for 2nd-stage blacksmiths, so he would be fine if he was away from this association for the next few days or weeks.

As such, he wanted to return to his identity as Cesar, advance in level, and proceed with his plans to rescue Jasmine.

Before that, he had these three girls in mind.

"Thank you for coming to see me tonight." He said as he smiled at Nova, Nina, and Eve, taking the little girl in his arms while the two adult women looked at him with pride.

"Congratulations on your victory." The two said similar words, with Nina being the happiest, saying how incredible her older brother was.

After a few brief comments, Vicente looked into Nina's eyes and told her. "I want you to go home with Eve. I will be busy with Nova and then have to prepare for a new journey. I'll soon reach 3rd-stage, and it'll be time for me to hunt for a new pentagram."

Nina didn't like being away from Vicente. Yet, when she heard that he was about to become a Mage, she could only be happier, knowing how incredible it was for someone of Vicente's origin to reach the 3rd stage.

"All right, big brother. Take your time. I'll be waiting for you!" She said excitedly.

Vicente smiled at her and went on. "I'll be home before dawn so we can spend some time together. After that, I'm going to take care of this matter."

With that, Nina and Eve soon left for their estate while Vicente went with Nova to her house.

"You were fantastic tonight, Vice..." Nova said, avoiding looking into his eyes as she thought about the women from before.

She didn't want to ask him about them yet, but she couldn't help but think about how he might be involved with some of those women or how he might get involved.

Nova knew who Layla and Shelby were, so she knew they weren't promised to anyone right now. On the other hand, Vicente was handsome, strong, and promising, so how could single women who were in some kind of relationship with him ignore him?

Even if he didn't look at them inappropriately, that didn't mean they didn't look at him that way. If at least one of them had a more intimate interest in him, a lot could change quickly.

Nova was a beautiful woman, but even she couldn't deny the beauty of Shelby and Layla. How could Vicente resist their charms if they tried to seduce him?

"I'd like to hear that compliment later." Vicente teased Nova, making her blush as she understood the hidden meaning of his words.

She practically forgot about her potential competitors as she looked at Vice in surprise, seeing how bold he was to say that as they walked through the streets of Millfall.

"Vice! We're on the street. You shouldn't say things like that!" She said to him quietly, feeling nervous, as if they were talking about something very wrong.

He laughed at her manner. "What kind of thing?"

"Don't play dumb. Let's hurry home and don't say things like that on the way."

"Okay, ma'am." He felt her grab one of his hands and walk faster.

As he followed Nova's lead, she told him in a more serious tone. "I'm going into seclusion at dawn, so we won't see each other for a few days or weeks. I don't know what might happen in the meantime, but I'll send letters to your family whenever I can."

"Hmm, I'll wait. When we have something definite about where you'll be sent, I'll see when we can see each other again. In any case, I'll be leaving town soon, too."

When they arrived at her house, they stopped talking about anything and quickly started kissing and undressing.

They were both very good at unbuttoning and unzipping. Soon, they were both down to their underwear, both full of desire for each other's bodies.

Having seen earlier that Vicente could interest other women, Nova felt twice as interested in the man before her, as if she had to prove herself.

Even though she hadn't had any experience with Vicente before or even talked about intimate things with any of her friends, today, she took the initiative to do things he hadn't seen before.

Vicente was naturally surprised by the special treatment tonight and quickly realized that Nova could be very creative when she wanted to be...

Sensing her creativity, he naturally loved every moment, letting her take the lead in that first moment, but already planning to take care of her for hours to come.

So began this hot night between these two, a temporary farewell marked by bodily fluids and a lot of carnal heat.

Vicente didn't have to worry about a possible pregnancy because the mana of both the man and the woman could do the job of contraception. As long as one of the parties didn't want to get pregnant, there was no way that such a thing, wanted or unwanted by many, could happen.

Chapter 403 What Layla Knows?

After a long night with Nova, Vicente said goodbye to her and went to spend time with his little sister.

He would wake Nina up on this new day, help her prepare for another day at the academy, and then have breakfast with her and Eve.

After dropping his sister off at the academy and giving her a note to give to Shelby, he leaves town to change his identity and reappear locally as Cesar Mazzanti.

On his way back to his mansion on the east side of town, he would soon encounter a masked, grey-haired woman waiting for him.

"Layla..." He saw this woman and remembered the night before when she had surprised him negatively by showing an unusual knowledge of him.

She took off her mask as they entered the building and pointed towards Vicente's office. "Shall we talk inside?"

Rory wasn't there, having left earlier to deal with the family's daily problems. The person in charge of the building was a level 3 Acolyte, while Bart was resting on the roof, ready in case he had to act.

Since Layla was already officially an ally of the group and couldn't intentionally harm them, no one blocked her.

Taking off his mask and looking into the gray eyes of that standing woman, Vicente was silent for a moment, feeling he should put this woman in her place.

"We have a lot to talk about." He took one of her wrists and led her into his office, making Layla smile as she accepted the situation.

"Sigh... Why do you act like this, Vicente? I don't wish you any harm. I just want to know who I'm involved with. I bet your friend Shelby did the same thing. So why are you like this with me?" Layla asked as he closed the door to his office.

"Why? Do you have the nerve to ask me that? You almost threatened me the other night!" He gave her an ugly look.

"That's not true. I could have kept quiet, but I went to you and showed you what I knew. Do you know why I did that?"

"To show me that you can threaten me?" He asked in a sarcastic tone as he approached her.

"That would be foolish of me." Layla shook her head negatively. "I told you because I want our relationship to benefit both of us. If your story weren't disturbing, Vicente, I would never have bothered to act the way I did last night. But what happened to you was terrible.

It could have consequences not only for your life but for everyone close to you. I can't ignore it since I'm not just an acquaintance but an ally who will be working with you for a long time.

We have to talk about it because you don't know what's waiting for you if you continue your revenge plans. I have different information and knowledge than you, so I can't help but try to discuss it with you."

He stopped 30 centimeters away from her, staring into her eyes as he clenched his fists.

But Layla's words were too good, so he could do nothing about it right now. "You said I should listen to you, right? Well, I'm here. I'm here to listen to what you know and your advice."

She sighed before sitting on a sofa in the middle of the room, crossing her legs as she settled in.

Looking into Vicente's eyes while he was still standing, she said. "You want to know about your sister, right? I told you that my people watch anyone who awakens the powers of the Dark Path. But it's not that simple.

Lauren is not a Dark Path magician without support or a known position. Years ago, when you last saw her, she was abducted by a member of a sect called Nixlas' Shadows. That is a powerful organization from outside the Seidel Kingdom, with powerful members who are difficult to track.

When the member of Nixlas' Shadows kidnapped her in Saltstar City years ago, he had a brief fight with some people who were interested in Lauren before he managed to escape. Since then, we have no information on her whereabouts or current situation. At least, that's what I had access to. But maybe there is deeper information that only higher-ups have access to."

"So you have no idea of her current situation?" He asked as he sat down across from the woman, a little calmer than before.

"That is the case. I would like to tell you that I know where she is and how she is, but I don't really know anything about it. However, I can make some assumptions based on what my people know about Nixlas' Shadows and its methods."

Vicente's eyes narrowed even more.

She said. "What happened to Lauren Fuller is not unheard of. In fact, Nixlas' Shadows is a sect that has been known to do everything in its power to bring talents compatible with their path over to their side.

If invitations don't work, they simply kidnap such people if they are not strong enough to fight them. If such people have power, they will try to somehow use the weaknesses of such a person to make them work for them.

It's not uncommon for them to kidnap entire families and keep them as collateral for the work of those they have an interest in having on their side."

As she said that, Torne listened, hearing about a Dark Path organization that followed the classic business model of the path's practitioners.

'This woman's words are reliable, master. Dark Path organizations usually follow these methods. They have no qualms about blackmailing their targets into joining them. After that, they do their best to dominate the minds of such people and conquer them forever.'

Layla continued. "In Lauren's case, she was weak, so they didn't have to go after her relatives. I imagine that the kidnapper took her to one of the sect's outposts and then put her through the basic training of Nixlas' Shadows, which includes brainwashing..."

She looked at him pitifully, feeling sorry for Vicente since his sister was probably lost.

She wouldn't tell him now, but it would be better for him to consider that Lauren had died.

'Poor family... Even if she survived the rigorous training of Nixlas' Shadows, she is now a weapon of the Shadows. She probably doesn't remember her past and has no feelings. Her only purpose is to kill for the sake of Nixlas' Shadows.

If she stood up to Vicente...' She closed her eyes at the thought, feeling sorry for this person in front of her, feeling how cruel the world was.

Cesar was a monster, powerful, talented, and full of potential. But underneath this imposing figure was a young man full of trauma, who only wanted to avenge his family and recover what could be recovered.

Unfortunately, all of this was impossible from Layla's point of view, making the sad reality even more melancholy.

'And then there's that little girl...' Layla thought to herself, feeling sorry for the family.

Chapter 404 Time to Advance

Layla really felt sorry for Vicente and Nina. Especially for the black-haired young man in front of her because he thought he could take revenge and maybe even get Lauren back one day.

But from what she knew about Nixlas' Shadows, the chances of Vicente succeeding were slim, even considering his talent level.

Achieving the goal of avenging his dead parents and rescuing Lauren wouldn't depend on his level alone!

Even if Vicente became powerful enough to destroy Nixlas' Shadows one day, Layla didn't know of a single case where someone from that force managed to return to their former self after being brainwashed by such an organization.

It was very likely that Vicente would never get his sister back, even if he managed to free her from Nixlas' Shadows and bring her back to his side!

That's why Layla felt sorry for him, almost to the point where she felt her eyes tear up, remembering a little of the pain she had felt in her own story.

Everyone had their way of dealing with loss and problems. Still, having already lost a brother she loved, Layla could understand some of Vicente's feelings.

"Brainwashed?" Vicente muttered as his face paled, the dark circles under his eyes more visible than ever.

Torne told Vicente the same thing Layla would tell him. 'Brainwashing is a method of indoctrination capable of erasing one's old memories, including different desires and worldviews in that individual's personality and manipulating them to be something else, master.

Brainwashing is something that even some Dark Path magicians shy away from because of how wrong it is. There are old cases of mothers who loved their families, children, and husbands, but after a single session of brainwashing, they were able to betray them, sell their children into slavery, and kill their spouses.

For these people, their past disappears or instead changes completely, depending on the will of the person behind the brainwashing.

Some of the cruelest individuals would not erase their targets' pasts. They would manipulate their targets' old memories, allowing them to still recognize loved ones but making them think and act in entirely different ways, sometimes to the point where mothers hunt down, kill, and devour their own children.'

Gulp!

"... Ultimately, your sister may not even remember you or see you as an enemy. There's no telling how she is or will be in the future. Brainwashing has a high success rate on low-level people, as was the case with your sister when she was abducted...

Sigh, I hate to say it, but don't get your hopes up about a possible reunion with her. If you want to go to her and see her again, fight Nixlas' Shadows. But don't expect things to go back to the way they were before. That will never happen.

I'm sorry." Layla finished speaking, being quite honest about what she knew.

Vicente clenched his fists as he heard similar things from Torne and Layla, feeling more or less the same way he had felt years ago in the Awakening Temple in Saltstar City.

"I see..." He murmured, remembering all the feelings of that time, how he had fainted under the attack of a member of that temple, only to wake up later to find that his father had died.

'Nixlas' shadows... One day, one day, I will repay the debt we owe each other!' He closed his eyes as he felt angry. He had never imagined that Lauren's situation could be so bad.

Until today, he didn't know what kind of organization Lauren's kidnappers were. Not only that, but he thought she would eventually return to being his older sister, and at least they would be a little bit like they were before that fateful trip to Saltstar City.

But when he thought about what Torne and Layla had just told him, the future looked much darker for him and Nina.

Feeling terribly ill, his hands began to tremble subtly while the mana in his body stirred, and his Magic Gems suddenly began to absorb the mana in the area.

Layla realized something was wrong with Vicente and stood up, trying to understand what was happening. 'Is he going to attack me?' She feared, sensing he was about to activate an ability.

But Torne understood better what was going on. While in his cocoon in Vicente's mind space, this ghost saw the darkest part of Vice's essence stirring, becoming very active, which rarely happened.

'It looks like he's ready to move on...' Torne looked and felt this was happening. 'The consciousness of his second magical gem seems to have recognized some feelings and is waking up.'

He said to Vicente. 'Quickly, master, go to your cultivation room. It's time for you to start your meditation to advance to the 3rd stage!'

Vicente was still thinking about how frustrating it was not to be able to do much to help his family. So, at first, he didn't understand what was happening. 'What?'

'Being on the cusp of the 2nd stage is no guarantee of quick and easy progress. It's common for people in your situation to need weeks or even months of seclusion to make progress. But your second magical form is helping you now in a strange way, master. Take advantage of this opportunity. In a few days, you may be able to become a Mage!'

Listening to Torne's advice, Vicente tried to control himself and went to the cultivation area of his estate.

"Thank you for your words, Layla. Go back to your place and cultivate to try to become a Mage. I'll do the same."

With these words, he left the grey-haired woman behind and quickly went to where some of his men were meditating.

Once there, Vicente ignored everyone around him and quickly sat down in a lotus position and began to control what his second magical form had started on its own.

'Lauren, I don't know what will happen in the future, but we will still meet face to face! I'll do my best to bring you back.' He promised before pushing all non-magical thoughts aside and focused on himself.

It was time for him to go into seclusion and move on to the 3rd stage!

Chapter 405 Low-Level Mage?

In the blink of an eye, two days had passed since Vicente's seclusion began.

As one grew stronger, more mana and elemental affinity would be required for successful qualitative and quantitative progress.

Ordinary people would need one to three weeks of seclusion to achieve a breakthrough from the end of the 2nd stage to the beginning of the 3rd stage. However, Vicente was anything but ordinary, and in just 2 days of hard work meditating at the Mazzanti estate, he had achieved his breakthrough!

Early this afternoon, the entire Mazzanti estate was thrown into turmoil as the surrounding mana stirred and the entire building shook under the influence of the family patriarch's powers.

The azure sky above the city closed in with heavy clouds as thunder rumbled for all the locals to hear the approaching storm.

Amid Vicente's influence on the local weather, his first pentagram evolved qualitatively, reaching the second pentagram classification, orange!

He was now standing in the cultivation room of the Mazzanti estate while his two pentagrams were circulating in their surroundings. The first, smaller one, was a bright orange, with new inscriptions around it, things that had not been there before.

Meanwhile, the second pentagram, the larger of the two, was still yellow but had green lines and inscriptions here and there, indicating it was also evolving along with the rest of Vicente's powers.

It wasn't yet time for this other essence of his to advance qualitatively. Still, it was clearly improving so that one day, it would go through what the first pentagram had just gone through.

While these pentagrams showed Vicente's new power and his possibilities, the men in the room watched him with wide eyes, some more anxious than the head of the family himself!

But how could they not be anxious? Their leader's power had reached such a level that the thought of expanding their operations throughout the province was no longer a distant dream but something within their grasp!

As for Vicente, he received congratulations from Torne, who had regained much of his strength due to his master's progress.

Previously, Torne had been in a cocoon of mana within Vicente's consciousness. Now, he was outside that cocoon, in his spirit form within his master's consciousness.

Torne said after congratulating Vicente. 'Master, now it's time for you to consider what your next power will be. Since your pentagram configuration is already exceptional, we must find a green essence for you. It won't be as easy as finding lower-level pentagrams, so you need to discuss this with your men as soon as possible.

But don't worry about the stability of your powers. You already have three pentagrams in you. You can remain unaffected by new pentagrams until the end of the 3rd stage.

I just don't advise you to do that because it may take a while for us to find a green pentagram that fits you. So it's best not to get too relaxed.'

'I know. I already have a few people looking for it for me. Anyway, I will solve some problems in Ironcrest and follow my plan with Shelby. If I don't get any clues from a pentagram by the time this is all sorted out, I'll concentrate on finding an essence compatible with me.' He said to Torne as he felt his senses become much sharper.

Vicente felt that his normal senses had more than doubled in capacity. But that was the least of it. When he felt his first pentagram, he realized he had gained a new quality in addition to the improvements to the old qualities of this essence.

All of his abilities from that pentagram had evolved. For example, he could now manipulate many more metals in his influence space and over a much greater range than before. His mana had almost doubled compared to level 5 of the 2nd stage. Still, due to the qualitative change of his first pentagram, he could now manipulate more than four times as many metals as before.

All of his old characteristics associated with the first pentagram had improved by that amount due to the qualitative change of the pentagram and the increase in mana due to his new level.

But amid these improvements, a new quality had appeared!

From what Vicente could sense, he could now create a magnetic core capable of repelling or attracting all metals within a certain range.

He would still need to train this ability to understand it better and know how to use it skillfully. But soon after his promotion, Vicente could already feel what this new part of his powers would be like.

As for his understanding of the elements of Earth and Lightning, as well as what he had learned about the forge, everything he thought he knew before had changed. Things he didn't understand before had become clearer. And he could easily see mistakes he had made and even better ways to do things he had done well before.

That's how beneficial leveling up was for magicians in general!

After talking with Torne for some time and looking at his new abilities, Vicente gathered his two pentagrams while controlling his mana.

As he did so, Torne gave him some advice. 'Master, it will benefit you to leave Millfall as soon as possible. Your first gem is changing color. As you progress, your true talent will gradually reveal itself.'

Vicente immediately focused on his yellow gem, seeing it had a greenish tint to it at the moment.

Talents stayed the same after Magic Awakening. That's what the literature said, and it had been observed countless times throughout the known history of the Polaris Empire.

However, Vicente had two magical forms, two gems, in other words, two talents.

From what he had seen and heard, his talent associated with the Throne of Darkness was much greater than the talent associated with his first Magic Gem. His talent would remain the same as he grew strong, but his first gem would gradually show his greatest talent, that of the second gem.

According to Torne, this would happen when he could freely use the Throne of Darkness without worrying about negative consequences.

If that were to happen, and Vicente saw that it would most likely happen, he would have to find a way to explain himself to his contacts, or he would have to move.

It wouldn't be possible for him to justify something that had never happened before, so moving to another city would be much easier.

'I know. I'll make my preparations to move before I become Sovereign.' He sighed, feeling it wasn't close, but it wouldn't be long before it happened. 'I intend to move here when Nina finishes the academy, so don't worry. It's already in my plans.'

With that, he ended his conversation with Torne and left the cultivation room.

Chapter 406 Almost at the Same Level

As soon as he left the family's cultivation room, Vicente found the main names of his family waiting for him.

He saw Rory and some level 3 Acolytes, the first to join him, who were still standing on this Mazzanti family journey. Several of his family members had died on the way here, and only 4 men had managed to reach level 3 with the chances they had.

Vicente smiled at his friend and most trusted soldiers, greeting them as he received their congratulations.

"Thank you all. That is not just my progress but that of the whole family. Without the help of everyone here, I would not have reached this level so quickly." He said as he looked at his men with sincerity.

Rory patted Vicente on the back and said. "Your advance relieves me, man. The soldiers from the capital are about to arrive in the city, and very soon, The Faceless Ones will react to the previous events. But with your advance, we'll have a chance to survive it all."

He looked at Rory, this young man who was close to reaching level 4, and said. "You should use one of our magic stones and go into seclusion for the next few days. Try to get to level 5 as soon as possible because I'm going to Ironcrest very soon."

Rory and the level 3 men became more serious as they listened to their leader.

"Won't that be dangerous? Isn't it better if we solve the situation with the soldiers coming from the capital first?" One of them asked.

"There is no time. If we try to solve one problem after another, we'll fail." Vicente shook his head negatively. "I will leave before the soldiers from the capital reach the city. But first, I'm going to finish a certain project and improve the family's weapons, which still need upgrading.

Anyway, you won't be defenseless. I'll leave Rory in charge, and Bart will be at your disposal. And if you've done your job well, you won't have to worry about soldiers in the short term. You did what I told you, didn't you?"

One of them said affirmatively. "Yes, boss. We've already started to spread the word about The Faceless Ones' involvement in the deaths of the kingdom's soldiers. In no more than two weeks, the Congregation of Revelation staff investigating the matter should notice these clues.

As for the soldiers from the capital, they will probably notice the clues at the beginning of their local investigation. They won't have much time to think about us when the disturbing clues about their men's involvement in the deaths of Congregation of Revelation members arrive."

"Perfect. Then, just try to stay quiet for now. After I leave, you'll just have to stay under the radar. It'll be a while before any of those soldiers from the capital try to harm us." Vicente said confidently.

Things might turn out a little differently than he had planned. But given how disturbing it would be to realize the involvement of soldiers from the kingdom in the deaths of members of the Congregation of Revelations, it was more likely that the soldiers from the capital would be more concerned with the incident at The Vile Altar before they turned their attention to the Mazzanti family.

With evidence that The Faceless Ones were there as well, it was very likely that the army would try to create some sort of story to distance themselves from the deaths of the Congregation of Revelation members, perhaps even using that Ironcrest faction as a scapegoat.

In short, Vicente planned to let these three forces bigger than his family waste time on each other while he moved on to other goals.

This gave him confidence.

He said to his men. "I'm going to my master's estate now to take care of some things, and I'll be back later. In the meantime, prepare the family's materials and weapons for when I return."

"Okay." One of the soldiers said before they separated.

The family had recently acquired a lot of resources, using their coins to buy items that could improve their strength and raise the level of the family members.

Among these items were materials for the production of weapons, which the Mazzanti family could obtain without Vicente's involvement due to a recent deal Rory had made with a local noble power.

...

Vicente would later arrive secretly at Benson's estate to show his master the changes he had undergone.

Benson had been surprised by Vicente on several occasions. Still, when he saw his pupil this afternoon, he was even more surprised to see a Mage with two pentagrams, one orange and one yellow.

Normally, newly advanced Mages would have a red and an orange one, while those with the third essence would have a yellow in their third space. But Vicente was completely abnormal.

After the initial surprise, Benson watched Vicente show what he could do, gaining a better understanding of Vice's new abilities and how they would affect the young man's production of new items.

After a moment of reflection on what he had seen, Benson said, forcing his student to stop meditating and listen. "Vice, now I want you to spend the next few hours getting used to your new powers by using them to forge weapons. Once you've had a few hours of experience, we'll make our first attempt at robot armor."

Vicente had not only shown Benson his special abilities by coming to this estate. He had also talked to his master about how he saw the forging art now that he was a Mage and his opinions on his master's theories regarding robotic armor.

Considering what he had heard from Vicente, Benson felt that his student was prepared, having reached almost the same level of understanding as him on some points.

Vicente would still have to study the 3rd-stage theory, which would take him at least a few weeks, but he already had some insights similar to Benson's.

Considering Vicente's unique ability, Benson thought this young man could already succeed in producing the robotic armor for the first time.

"We won't use the mineral that old Henry gave us yet, but if you succeed, we'll be able to use it in our third attempt within the next six days. Until then, I believe we can make some corrections to the original design to better suit your characteristics." The old man chirped.

Vicente accepted Benson's advice, quickly grabbed the materials his master had given him, and began to use his skills to form new firearms.

In the next few hours, he would create the first weapons and ammunition capable of killing Low-level Mages even when used by mere Acolytes!

Chapter 407 First Version of the Robotic Armor

By the next day, Vicente had used practically all of the 2nd-grade materials Benson had on his property for his students to use.

Vicente produced 100 new weapons and more than 5,000 bullets, all of which were 100% efficient, still 2nd-grade, of course.

He had advanced one stage, but since he had not studied the theory of the 3rd stage and he had used 2nd-grade materials, it would have been difficult to produce items of the 3rd grade.

In any case, these new weapons could withstand the full power of level 5 Acolytes and even be useful in dealing with Mages!

Benson saw this when he tested one of Vicente's weapons and saw the power of the things his student had created.

As much as there were flaws in the initial design of this weapon, something Benson had already shown Vicente, he couldn't help but be fascinated by these weapons.

'They really are fascinating...' He thought about taking one of them and pointing it at things around his forge. 'The Mazzanti family is here to stay. With weapons as good as these, it will be tough for any power in the province to get rid of them...'

While thinking this, Benson noticed a problem and alerted his apprentice, who was having a bite to eat while resting after hours of work. "Vice, don't let your men use these guns in public. Have them use them only when they are out of town or on a mission to kill without leaving witnesses.

Even if the kingdom doesn't ban or restrict the sale of weapons, this upgrade to your weapons could threaten even the royal family. If the royal forces discover that you have weapons that can kill Mages, it will only be a matter of time before someone more powerful tries to kill you or take everything you have.

At that point, you will have nowhere to run. No matter how weak the Seidel Kingdom is, the king can influence even Paragons.

The Seidel Kingdom was a state with an average power of 2nd stage, a place where most magicians were Acolytes. There were thousands of Mages in the kingdom, but also a few Sovereigns. However, there wasn't a single Paragon.

But as Vicente already knew, coins spoke loudly in this society. Just as some Acolytes could use their wealth to influence Mages, there were Mages who influenced Sovereigns and Sovereigns who gave orders to Paragons.

Even if this state wasn't strong on the continent, the king had so many resources and people at his disposal that it would be relatively easy for him to get a Paragon.

In the worst-case scenario, someone like Vicente could even be hunted by Paragons, which would be almost impossible for him to endure.

He said to his master. "I will make it clear to them, master. I'll only leave my most important men at headquarters with these weapons and those who carry out secret missions. My men will use simpler versions of my weapons in public operations."

"Hmm, do that as long as you don't have Mages to carry these weapons. Once there are Mages in your family, no one will mind seeing Mages with such powerful weapons." Benson said before he put one of Vicente's weapons aside to finish the preparations for the robotic armor.

Vicente had already done all the training he needed to better understand his current characteristics and just needed to finish recovering to start his first attempt at the robotic armor.

The minutes passed quickly, and soon Vicente had put all the weapons away in his spatial ring. Since Benson had given him the materials used in the weapons as a parting gift, he volunteered to help his master with this project.

"I'm ready," Vicente said as he looked at the materials, tools, and components lined up around him.

"When you're ready, start making the basic armor pieces according to what we agreed upon earlier. Once you've done that, you'll join them together according to the assembly order I've shown you."

Vicente remembered the step-by-step instructions for assembling the robotic armor and soon began to use his special abilities, causing his Magic Gem to glow and his pentagrams to appear around his body.

A few moments later, the minerals around him turned into metals and parts that were useless for Vicente's process of interest, and he quickly began to shape them as he wished.

It wouldn't be a difficult job, but it would be tedious considering the amount of parts he would have to produce. However, after more than 3 hours of going back and forth between resting and working, Vicente would finish making this first part of the armor.

He followed Benson's advice and began assembling each smaller piece of the armor, using his skills to join the various pieces together in a way that only he could.

Since there was no need for him to make joints between the pieces, he could proceed with this part of his work more easily than Benson had expected, taking no time at all to complete the assembly of the smallest parts of the armor.

...

After more than 6 hours of working on the robotic armor originally designed by Benson, Vicente began assembling the larger parts of this artifact.

He was now acting on the advice of his master, who was actively using his skills to find flaws and possible methods to improve the final quality of the armor.

Meanwhile, Vicente carefully pieced together the larger armor pieces, gradually giving it a sturdy and imposing body shape.

It was very complex. But despite the many parts, it wasn't as bulky as Benson thought it would have to be to be functional.

With Vicente's special skill, he had made his master's design much less bulky, creating something that looked like ordinary full-body armor from a distance.

But inside this armor were complex mechanisms that would give it various special abilities, putting it on a completely different level from ordinary armor.

Vicente had a special feeling in his being as he finished assembling it. He felt a great affinity for this artifact with the same elemental affinities as his own.

Not only that, even though he didn't know if he had succeeded in Benson's project, Vicente could already see that this armor was completely different from the metal doll that served as the butler of this residence.

He honestly didn't know if he needed to make any adjustments to make it better. But he couldn't help but look forward to putting it to the test and seeing different things, things that Benson had imagined a long time ago and thought impossible until recently.

After almost 10 hours of work on this armor, Vicente finished his work. He produced something wonderful, an armor that went from head to toe. It was completely golden and had a kind of aura that only powerful items could have!

Chapter 408 Testing the Armor

When Vicente finished assembling the robot armor under Benson's supervision, the two stood in front of the golden artifact.

Vicente was exhausted and needed to drink some cold water before resting. But Benson was in a state of ecstasy, gazing with joy at this armor that looked like a doll from a distance but could be opened for individual use.

From what he felt, this armor completely differed from the flawed one he had created before!

He could sense it could still be improved and was still in the 2nd grade, but it already had some of the capabilities he had envisioned in such a project.

It wasn't ready to play the role he expected it to play, but it was clearly on its way to becoming the artifact of this old man's dreams.

With some work, he and Vicente could improve the properties of this artifact and make it similar to or even better than the original expectation for this project!

"We need to test it." He told Vicente, watching the young man drink a restorative potion not far from the armor. "But you can't be the one to test it—least of all me. We need an ordinary person from the beginning of the 2nd stage. Someone like that will be able to show the true power of the armor."

It seemed strange to say that someone weaker would show the true capabilities of a magical artifact. But given the context, it was true.

Vicente and Benson's robotic armor was an auxiliary artifact. In other words, it worked best on people who needed help.

Vicente said to his master. "Let's meet at The Rocky Gorge in an hour. I'll stop by my building and pick up some of my men to test it out."

With that agreed, the two went their separate ways to meet in that wooded area near Millfall in the next few minutes.

...

Without much delay, Vicente did as he was told, picking up three men from the Mazzanti estate and making his way to The Rocky Gorge.

These men included a level 1 Acolyte and two level 3 men.

Since they were going to help test the robotic armor, Vicente deliberately chose a weak Acolyte and two opponents for this weaker man to fight while wearing the robotic armor.

If all went well, such a person would win easily, even considering the difference in level and number between him and his opponents.

When an hour had passed, Vicente met Benson in a part of The Rocky Gorge where there were few living beings, and the area's relief gave the place privacy.

"Are these your men?" Benson asked as he looked at the masked men walking behind Vicente.

Vicente nodded affirmatively before pointing to the weakest man. "Clark, put on the armor that's with my master. It's not difficult to put on, so just do what you would do with other similar armor."

As Clark walked over to Benson's side, where the beautiful gold armor was already waiting for him, Vicente said to the other two men. "You will fight Clark. Don't hesitate to use everything you have, including your old weapons.

I'll be watching your fight, so if there's any danger for either of you, I'll intervene in time to make sure nothing happens."

The two were surprised by Vicente's order, telling them to use everything they had. But since their boss was already a powerful Mage, neither of them doubted Don Mazzanti's ability to stop the fight if necessary.

"We'll do our best." The two said as they watched Clark quickly put on the robotic armor, both feeling slightly jealous of the man.

They were all looking forward to putting on the robotic armor that their leader had developed with Benson!

But how could they not? That was supposed to be the Mazzanti family's next great weapon, surpassing firearms in power.

Who wouldn't want to try something new?

So, while the two of them were jealous of Clark, the man himself was grinning from ear to ear, curious to see what it would be like to use this new artifact created by his boss.

As soon as he had finished dressing, he gave the signal to Vicente and Benson.

Master and student looked at each other, and both moved out of the way of the three Acolytes.

Vicente said to Clark. "Our goal here is to test the armor you're wearing. But don't worry about doing anything other than what you would normally do in battle with your skills. I want you to remember that this armor will only do the defensive work that any such device would do.

For now, you should try to defeat your opponents with your skills."

"Okay!"

"All right, start fighting!" He gave his order, causing the two level 3 Acolytes to move, one drawing a gun capable of killing even level 5 Acolytes while the other moved closer to Clark.

"Shit! These two aren't going to take it easy!" Clark tried to move to dodge the enemies coming at him.

Bang!

The moment he moved, the opponent, who had drawn a pistol, pulled the trigger and fired in the direction of Clark's right shoulder.

Clark went cold at the sound but soon realized he had escaped.

No victim of the Mazzanti family's guns ever heard the sound of a gunshot before being hit!

Feeling no pain in any part of his body, Clark cracked a smile while feeling a sense of euphoria inside himself.

"That was fast!" The second level 3 Acolyte exclaimed in amazement after seeing Clark move faster than he and his companion.

Clark was only a level 1 Acolyte. But for a moment, he had moved at the speed of a level 5 Acolyte!

It wasn't enough to dodge a bullet. Still, since Clark had moved quickly before his opponent pulled the trigger, he succeeded.

Realizing that his armor was helping him without him having to give it any commands, Clark perked up as he understood Vicente's orders.

He then circulated the mana in his body in his Magic Gem, quickly making his two pentagrams appear as he activated the abilities of the two.

"Ronan, Easton, today I will defeat you!" He said in an immensely satisfied tone before jumping into the air towards one of the men, and a spirit weapon appeared in his hands.

Seeing this, Ronan and Easton frowned, realizing that they really couldn't take him lightly, or they would suffer in this fight.

Seeing their opponent in the golden armor, the two changed their ways and quickly made their pentagrams appear as they began to use their skills and spells.

Chapter 409 End of the Test?

The first few minutes of the fight between Clark and his two opponents would have been quite hectic as they took the fight to a level that would have killed them in other situations.

But with Vicente and Benson watching them, they could fight with everything they had and trust that one of those two Mages would intervene if someone's life were in danger.

But even when those two level 3 Acolytes shot at Clark's vital points, this level 1 Acolyte didn't need any help at any point in the fight.

When he was prevented from moving in time to dodge his opponents' bullets, the armor acted in his defense, creating an electromagnetic field that essentially stopped the bullet from hitting his head.

That came as quite a shock to the two level 3 Acolytes, as this was their leader's ability. However, by wearing the robotic armor, Clark could experience some of his Don's powers.

The electromagnetic barrier wasn't the only one of Vicente's powers to show up through the armor. It had also generated lightning and used it against the two men at various points in the fight, helping Clark with his attacks.

At the same time, it gave him more speed when he moved, reducing the weight of his body and making him lighter.

But as a suit of armor, its main purpose was to protect its wearer's body, something it proved very effective at when it received one of the enemy's attacks when Clark had used up most of his energy and could no longer use the electromagnetic barrier.

When he was hit by one of his adversaries, he felt only the contact of the adversary's weapon with his back, not the pain or even the damage to his armor.

Because of all this, even though he was weaker than his opponents and alone, he didn't need Vicente's and Benson's help during the fight so far.

The same couldn't be said for Ronan and Easton, both of whom had needed Vicente and Benson's intervention at least three times each.

Now, at the end of the fight, they were tired, with bruises here and there, blood dripping from their lips, and looking rather pale.

Their clothes were soaked with sweat, and the sound of their breathing was audible to beings tens of meters away.

On the other hand, the level 1 opponent stood, his face covered by a golden mask that covered his entire face, with only two bluish areas at the level of his eyes that differed from the rest of the mask.

Whether Clark looked good or bad, there was no way to tell. All they knew was that their opponent was still standing, looking as if he had suffered no injuries, while they could barely stand.

"This is a defeat for us..." One of them sighed as Vicente and Benson approached Clark.

Benson said. "Splendid! The armor worked very well, although it still can't do everything we expected it to."

"Hmm, anyway, it is on its way to becoming as good as we planned," Vicente muttered as he watched Clark remove the golden mask from his face, revealing a tired appearance but no signs of worry.

Clark had simply lost his energy while fighting.

The robotic armor was based on Vicente's powers and had its own essence based on his mana. However, it did not consume that mana to express its abilities. It depended on the mana of the person wearing it.

Therefore, it was only useful as long as that person could sustain the mana consumption required to make it work.

Even though that man was only a level 1 Acolyte and had used his innate abilities to fight those two level 3 men for a few minutes, he hadn't exhausted himself that quickly.

That was the main point of the armor Vicente had made. It had a relatively low mana consumption and could make a big difference in a fight without causing excessive damage to its wearer.

After all, even after Clark was exhausted and could no longer keep the armor's special powers active, this defensive item still had the classic characteristics of normal armor.

In this way, even after the last attack by his opponents, which had hit him in the back, Clark had no injuries to his being and was able to fight again after his mana had been restored.

The situation was different for his opponents, who had used up much of their mana and were physically injured and mentally exhausted.

"What now? What do we do?" Clark asked with a sigh.

Vicente answered him. "You can take off the armor, Clark."

As the man did so, his two temporary opponents approached him to ask how it felt to wear such a thing.

Meanwhile, Vicente said to Benson. "Master, you should take this armor back to study it better over the next few days.

I'll try to join you in the next few days to understand what we did right and what can be improved. But I intend to leave for Ironcrest before the weekend."

"That will be enough. Before you leave, leave this armor with one of your men. It will help keep your group safe in your absence." Benson saw no problem in keeping the item for a few days before Vicente took it with him permanently.

With that settled, they headed back to Millfall separately, Benson returning to his estate with the robotic armor to study it further and Vice returning to the Mazzanti estate with his men.

The three of them were naturally excited about the new armor and asked Vice on the way home if there would be more of them in the future.

Vicente didn't know if all of his men would have one, but he promised that there would be a squad of Mazzanti family soldiers armed with such armor.

With that in mind, the three of them were more excited than ever, eager to improve their strength as much as they could in the short term to have a chance of being in such a group.

Later, they would tell their fellow Mazzanti family members what had happened, while Vicente, as Cesar, would go about his business.

Later that day, he would visit his hostage, Sarah Mercer, a member of The Faceless Ones faction, to arrange his upcoming trip to Ironcrest.

Now that he had made significant progress in his forging skills, it was time to rescue Jasmine!

He would stay in Millfall for the next few days, upgrading all of his family's weapons, creating new models of weapons, and giving Layla a little more time to level up. But he would leave in no more than four days!

Chapter 410 Leaving for Ironcrest

Three days after the test of the robotic armor...

Everyone in Millfall already knew that Cesar had become a Low-level Mage.

With his advancement to the 3rd stage, his status in the town grew once again, and he was now recognized as the strongest and most influential in the area, even more so than Viscount Symons had been.

The nobles who still shunned him changed their ways. At the same time, his old contacts sought to improve their relationship with him, including making more favorable deals for the Mazzanti family.

Amid the many invitations to meetings, dinners, etc., that came to the Mazzanti family, Vicente turned them all down without bothering to justify himself to anyone.

Meanwhile, the army continued to watch the house from a distance, obviously suspicious of Cesar since the current Commander felt that all the problems in the city had to do with this man.

In any case, without the reinforcements from the capital, which weren't supposed to arrive in the city until next week, Nova couldn't do anything against Cesar and only watched him from a distance.

Vicente knew this and could only laugh when he thought about how complicated his relationship with Captain Bain was.

He was at the Mazzanti estate right now, next to Rory and one of the family's oldest soldiers, who would be wearing the robotic armor in Vicente's absence.

Why wasn't Rory the chosen one? Because the Mazzanti family's second-in-command had leveled up the day before, becoming a level 5 Acolyte!

Rory could still benefit from the 2nd-grade armor Vicente had produced. However, since he could fight stronger opponents due to his above-average talent, Vice thought leaving the armor with his best friend would be a waste.

Rory was at level 5, so he could protect himself against all Acolytes. It would be much better for the family if someone else wore the item.

Deputy Point knew this very well and didn't complain when Vicente said who would wear such armor while he was away.

But right now, he, Vicente, and the level 3 soldier were paying attention to a black-haired woman as they stood in their house's basement, the building's detention section.

Facing them was Sarah Mercer, who had an angry look on her face as she had to deal with her enemies once again.

"I'm not telling you anything, Cesar." She said as she looked at Vicente's mask. "I may have told you things that are easy to find out about my people. But I won't say anything compromising about them. I'd rather die than give them up to you!"

Vicente said to her. "We'll find out later, Sarah. But right now, I'm not here for compromising information about your people. Earlier, we talked about the composition of your group and the kind of operation you're involved in, among other things. But where do I find Jasmine? Where can I find your leaders?"

"My leaders?" A teasing smile formed on her face.

Her first thought was that Vicente wanted to die!

After all, she was only the fourth strongest of The Faceless Ones, and there was even a High-level Mage in that group. How would a mere Acolyte deal with these people?

Sarah didn't know about Vicente's advancement. As far as she knew, he was an Acolyte who relied on accessory items to fight Mid-level Mages. So, his death against a High-level Mage would be almost certain.

She laughed and said. "What are you going to try? Talk? I don't know exactly where Jasmine is, but she's definitely with one of my superiors. She's just too valuable for us to leave her with someone weak. If you want to see her, go to one of my faction's three outposts in Ironcrest. Sooner or later, you'll find what you want..."

'Death!' She thought silently, feeling that playing this person against her leaders was the best way to eliminate him.

She thought that Vicente would come to her today to try to learn about her superiors' weaknesses or find out something compromising about them. She was determined not to open her mouth to talk about such things.

But Sarah really didn't care about setting up a "meeting" between Vicente and her superiors.

'If Nash finds out what you did to me, he'll kill you, Cesar!' She thought of the leader of her faction as she felt her whole body ache.

She had been tortured by Vicente and his men several times in the last few days. She now had wounds all over her body, her face was pale, and her ears were deep. At the same time, her hair was a mess, and she constantly tasted blood in her mouth.

Thinking of the leader of her group, with whom she had had an affair in the past, she was sure that Nash would avenge what she had suffered and put an end to Cesar Mazzanti's race!

Rory looked at Vicente and asked in a quiet voice. "What are you going to do? It will be hazardous to follow this woman's instructions. She may be trying to deceive you, and even if she is sincere, she is probably only doing so because she thinks you will perish at the hands of her allies."

"I know... I'll take her with me to Ironcrest," Vicente said. "She must think of her own life. If I fall into a trap because of her, I'll make sure I kill her before I die."

Sarah gave Cesar an ugly look, seeing that things would be difficult for her for a while.

"I'm going to use you as a living shield, woman." He said, looking into her eyes. "I hope you'll think carefully about your priorities during the next few days we'll be traveling. Your life will depend on it."

"Damn you, Cesar!"

"We leave at dawn the next day. Be prepared to die if things go badly for me!"

With these words, Vicente left Sarah behind while he advised Rory and the soldier next to him on what to do in his absence.

After taking care of these two, Vicente went up to the roof of his estate to talk to Bart.

"Bart, I'm leaving for Ironcrest tomorrow. I wanted you to go with me, but right now, the family needs you more than I do." He said to his mount, using his mana to change his voice so the beast could understand him perfectly.

Mages could manipulate their words to convey their meaning in a way that beasts could understand.

The creature listened to its master and used the same ability to transmit its thoughts back to Vicente while the young man understood them.

It was necessary to be at least level 3 for that as well.

"Master, I'd like that too. I hope to carry you on future journeys."

"For now, take care of these men. Some troublesome people will come to town soon, so be prepared."

"All right."

With that, hours would pass, and Layla would appear at the Mazzanti estate, having reached the beginning of the 3rd stage after several days of meditation!

At dawn, Vicente, Layla, and Sarah would leave Millfall and head for Ironcrest, using Vicente's abilities to move there.