

The Vampire 202

Chapter 202 202: One Against Five

Standing on the stage, bare handed and apparently unarmed while facing five armed and armored fighters, Jacques cut a heroic and imposing looking figure in the eyes of many. The audience on the lower levels cheered enthusiastically with several rushing up against the railing to get a better look at the spectacle that was about to unfold.

"Y'all go on ahead and make de first move," Jacques said, taking a defensive stance against the five men. "Dese folks, dey came here for a show, non?"

The group of fighters looked at each other for a moment, as if confirming that they'd heard correctly. A moment later, the three spear wielding fighters from the Horned clan charged in a loose arrow formation, rushing toward the lone witch with their spears raised.

"It's over," Virve said, shaking her head sadly. While these men had been dressed to resemble soldiers from the Vale of Mists, they clearly didn't fight like it.

"Already?" Nereida said, pausing with a spoonful of berry trifle half way to her lips. "How do you know?"

"Watch," Virve said, just a moment before the spearmen reached within a few feet of Jacques.

"Thorn. Ring," Jacques said loudly, waving a hand in an arc in front of himself. Instantly, a glowing golden ring six feet in diameter formed in front of him, covered in wicked thorns the size of arrow heads.

Two of the spearmen managed to dodge aside while the one in the center used his shield to smash through the glowing ring of thorns. Several small cuts appeared on his body and blood dripped to the stage as he charged forward, pressing his attack relentlessly.

Jacques, however, seemed completely unconcerned, taking a powerful step forward and striking out with a meaty fist. The instant the witch's fist made contact with his opponent's shield, an explosive sound like a crack of thunder split the air and the shield shattered into countless fragments, sending the lightweight horned fighter tumbling across the stage.

"Y'all must be better den dat," Jacques boasted, thumping his muscular chest before turning on the remaining spearmen, waving his hands to taunt them forward.

On the lowest level of the House of Iron, the opening exchange generated a wave of excited comments from the spectators, some of whom completely forgot their meals as they watched the fight in awe.

"Did you see that, did you see that?" A young member of the Glass Eyed Clan shouted, pressing against the railing for a better view. "He shattered that shield like it was made of clay!"

"The thorns! The thorns!" another spectator called out. "Just look at how deep they cut! And look, he's trying to get up! If it was me, I'd lie there like I was dead after taking wounds like those."

At this point, the two heavily armored warriors from the Clan of the Great Claw circled in, approaching steadily like the jaws of a vice closing on Jacques while the two remaining spearmen danced in and out, thrusting from the limits of their reach.

"The spearmen aren't used to their weapons," Virve pointed out. "I'd bet that they're knife fighters. They don't advance well behind the cover of their shields and they're too uncertain of their distance."

"These men didn't learn to fight in the Vale of Mists," Heila agreed. She didn't know much about fighting but she had watched Commander Bassinger and Captain Lennart drill their men countless times while she was hanging linens or doing other chores outdoors that gave a good view of the training yards. These men didn't fight anything like the soldiers of the vale.

"I've heard that many people from the Vale of Mists left more than a century ago when the humans attacked," Nereida said lightly. "These men should be descendants of those people who settled here in the High Fen."

"We encountered similar people at the Masquerade," Heila said, shaking her head when she saw Jacques ignore the swinging sword of one bearish fighter in order to deliver a blow to the other. What would have been a life threatening injury for most people did nothing at all to the thick hide with bony spikes that protected Jacques back.

"Thorn. Explosion," the witch called out in response to taking the sword blow. In a flash, dozens of motes of light, shaped once again like the heads of arrows, streaked away from him, peppering the opposing fighters with dozens of small cuts and the occasional deep wound.

"Such power," a grey furred man from the Clan of Painted Masks praised, his eyes tracking Jacques' every movement as well as the flow of magical energy around him. "To face five armed men with nothing but his fists and magic. The stories about the Sandbox Witch and the Mother of Thorns aren't exaggerated at all."

When the fighters managed to regroup and go back on the attack despite bleeding from dozens of small and large cuts, even more excited chatter erupted from the crowd.

"Now that's courage!" someone shouted. "Cut a hundred times and still standing! Someone give these men a bonus!"

"None of these men are weak," the first man's companion agreed. "But to face someone like the Sandbox Witch, even five against one, you couldn't pay me enough money to take their place right now."

High above on the top floor of the House of Iron, however, the opinions expressed at Heila's table were very different.

"He's toying with them," Virve said, shaking her head at the fight on the stage. Following up on his explosion of thorns, Jacques shattered the shield of another fighter with a heavy blow from his tail and he tore the sword from the hands of another fighter, tossing it aside like discarded rubbish.

"How would you fight him, Virve?" Heila asked, setting down the last bits of mountain cherry tart that she'd turned to after finishing her berry trifle. Nereida was right, it was an excellent treat, one that she enjoyed even more than her own trifle. The combination of the two desserts, however, already pushed her stomach to its limits and she still had three other portions sitting in front of her.

As much as Heila wanted to press on to at least sample the other treats, the fight unfolding below was giving her too much to think about. It felt clear that Jacques wanted her to have the impression that the soldiers of the Vale of Mists didn't amount to much in the face of his magic, but was that really true?

As Heila asked the question, everyone else at the table turned their eyes to Virve as well. Just how could a common soldier defeat someone like Jacques? It was impossible, wasn't it?

