

The World 65

Chapter 65: The Battle At The Black Market, Part 1 (5)

Or so I thought, but when I slashed at his neck, a sudden surge of darkness abruptly arrested my blade mid-air.

"It's not going to bode well for me if one of my chess pieces falls, so if you would excuse me," a mysterious man stated nonchalantly, as an ominous force coiled around my blade, preventing it from reaching Norman's vulnerable neck.

My focus shifted to the enigmatic figure, and my eyes widened with disbelief. "You're the one who halted me...?" I was genuinely taken aback. The man sat in a wheelchair, his entire form concealed beneath layers of bandages. It wasn't an exaggeration – he was a mummy-like enigma, with only a single, piercing red eye peering out from the confines of the bandages.

"You're a remarkably powerful woman. And one with such an unmistakable and weighty bloodlust as well."

Attempting to retrieve my dagger from the immobilizing darkness proved futile; it wouldn't budge. With that realization, I decided to leave my blade behind and distanced myself from him.

"Who are you...?" I questioned, slowly adopting a fighting stance.

"...Just someone who relishes caring for their pawns," he responded. "I polish them, dust off the remnants of their battles. I detest the idea of them being mere standbys; I prefer them in active play."

Chess is a game I thoroughly enjoy, after all. Now, how about you, the lady with the striking purple hair? Who are you?"

"I'm a member of the Silver Blades. I'm sure you're already aware of that."

"Silver Blades. The organization plotting rebellion against Milham's monarchs. I have a sense of their motives, but what about you? Do your convictions align with theirs? Do you share their fervor?"

"Why are you prying into my affairs like this?"

The singular visible eye narrowed, "Just out of curiosity. I have this inkling that you and I are quite alike. Individuals drawn to violence. Those who prefer war over peace. It might sound baseless, merely gauging it from the bloodlust you exude, but I can sense a warmonger when I see one. The bloodlust you emit—it's that of someone who revels in the chaos of war."

I maintained a stoic silence.

"I'm guessing you aligned with the Silver Blades because you catch the scent of blood there, a scent you love inhaling. I, too, relish the intoxicating aroma of blood, but with time, that enjoyment morphs into disdain. The sight of blood is my deepest aversion, yet paradoxically, it's the sole trigger of such visceral emotions in me.

The Silver Blades, an organization that orchestrates wars for their cause, might appear as warmongers, but they aren't, much like you. Their ultimate aim is peace, and dethroning the monarchs is a method to that end."

I could sense the direction of this discourse, so I urged, "Get to the point."

"You're remarkably impatient, but fair enough. I'll get straight to the point. Given that the Silver Blades probably aren't the optimal environment for a woman like you to appease the bloodlust you crave, why not join forces with me? Together, we can ascend to rule this entire world."

Raising an eyebrow, I questioned, "And what's the payoff for me in that?"

The man chuckled, "You'll have everything you desire."

I flashed a smile at him, but it wasn't a smile of amusement; it was a smirk at the sheer naivety of this man, thinking that I could have everything I wanted. Unfortunately for him, there was nothing in this world that held any appeal for me. Every aspect of this realm was just a fragment of the world I hailed from. Thus, I harbored no liking for anything here.

What I craved the most was a return to my world, and I'd go to any lengths to achieve it. I had a plan, and the first step was aligning with the Silver Blades to topple the current monarchs of Milham. They possessed something I desired, and for me to obtain it, the Milham monarchs had to vanish.

"I assume from that smile that you won't be accepting my offer?"

"That's correct," I affirmed. "Even the gods of this world can't grant what I truly desire."

"I see..." the man exhaled. "Well, would you permit me to pose a question then? I won't engage in combat if you agree. I'm sure that suits your preferences."

Honestly, the prospect of fighting this man didn't intimidate me. It was more about the concern that a confrontation might not end well for Miss Arianne. She, frozen in an inexplicable timelessness, would be defenseless, and in a one-on-one dialogue, she might become a casualty. Despite my general disinterest in humanity, Miss Arianne was someone I wished to spare from death.

She was the only one who took genuine care of me, and I sensed that protecting her wouldn't be a straightforward task with this mysterious man, given the dark aura emanating from him. Hence, I replied, "Very well. What would you like to ask?"

"Do you know the name 'Mephisto'?" he questioned.

I quickly shook my head, "No idea. Why do you bring it up?"

He closed one eye, took a deliberate breath, before opening it and fixed his intense gaze on me. "We have a kind of good relationship, you could say."

"Let me guess. Mephisto is the one responsible for all that, am I right?"

The man skillfully avoided the question, responding with, "...As promised, I will leave you alone now and allow you to leave." With those words, an encroaching darkness swallowed him and Norman, who, for

some mysterious reason, seemed suspended in time, akin to Miss Arianne. After an unsettling duration, they vanished.

The surroundings underwent a surreal shift, and the oppressive atmosphere dissipated instantly.

"S-Shredica...?"

A voice emerged from behind me. As I turned, I saw Miss Arianne struggling to stand, her hand clutching her stomach. As she nearly stumbled, I rushed to catch her, providing support by placing her arms around my shoulders.

"...W-What happened?"

I shared her perplexity, "I... don't know either."

I gazed at Mr. Herkz, Mr. Seria, and Miss Neith lying on the ground, where a pool of crimson red painted the earth beneath them. There was an eerie silence, and I felt nothing within their lifeless bodies. They were gone, already dead. I searched for the two women who Norman had caught earlier, but they had vanished from the vicinity.

Then, I turned my attention to Miss Arianne, who stood there, eyes fixed on the three fallen comrades.

"...Do you think it's my fault that this happened?"

Miss Arianne avoided eye contact as she replied, "I don't. Every member of the Silver Blades understood the risks when they joined. They faced the possibility of this fate. I can't blame you, Shredica. I only hope I won't have to witness more comrades like this."

I remained silent, contemplating her words. Yet, deep down, I found her hope unrealistic. As long as the Silver Blades continued to fight, the inevitable loss of comrades was something to be expected. Born in a world accustomed to the scent of blood and the sight of death, I was certain of that truth.

"...What do we do now?" I inquired.

Miss Arianne finally looked away from the bodies. "For now, let's head back."

"Okay."

I carried Miss Arianne with me, and we retraced our steps to the base. I didn't spare a glance for the lifeless forms of our comrades strewn across the dark streets of the Black Market. It was peculiar. Despite knowing them for a while and fighting alongside them, their deaths didn't stir any sadness in me. While Miss Arianne occasionally looked back, I didn't.

This world, as expected, wasn't meant for me.

Upon our return, we informed the leader that the other three met their end in the clash with Norman. I also confessed that the confrontation happened because of me. In response, the leader delivered a

punch to my face. Strangely enough, I didn't feel a thing. After that solitary blow, she instructed me not to show my face to her for a while. Yet again, the impact left me emotionless.

"Why the hell did you stop me?!" Norman's scream echoed in the dimly lit room, his rage radiating like a palpable force that threatened violence, as if he wanted to tear me apart for halting his assault.

"Do you honestly think you stand a chance against that woman?" I countered.

"Why the fuck wouldn't I?! She's just one damn woman!"

Norman's lack of understanding was no surprise. But I grasped the situation all too well. The woman emitted a bloodlust so intense it could freeze a normal man's heart. I had felt a similar surge before, though hers held a distinct quality. The source of the bloodlust that once engulfed me was none other than the person who called himself Mephisto.

"For now, Norman, adhere to the plan of kidnapping Charlotte Sierra. Don't get entangled in these meaningless conflicts. I need Charlotte Sierra for my plan to unfold," I commanded, trying to assert control amid the brewing storm of emotions.

"Fuck this!" Norman shouted. "I'm not your fucking dog! Why the hell should I follow your orders?!"

It seemed this man still hadn't grasped who held the upper hand after all this time. I employed my skills to remind him of his place, and as the realization struck, his face twisted with terror and tears.

"Remember your place, Norman. You're just a pawn," I asserted. A dog baring its fangs against its master was unacceptable, so the proper response was to instill discipline until they trembled, tails tucked between their legs.