

VILLAIN 181

Chapter 181: The True Predator

Above the desolate island ground...

Only a few players remained.

But it was safe to say they were the best of the Temple's surviving students.

Each one had lived their own story since the start of the trial...

Near one of the island's darker corners—

That colossal tree still served as a sanctuary for the princess.

Sansa, along with Adriana, had been staying there—and now, Jessica Thivenin had joined them not long ago.

Rain fell often, so the trio found shelter inside the tree, which resembled a natural cave.

Sansa—her golden hair soaked, eyes tinted with black—stared absently at the gloomy sky.

Who knew what occupied her mind at that moment?

No one could say for sure.

"Princess... staying out in the rain like this isn't good for you..."

"It's fine, Jessica. I like the feeling of rain soaking through me."

Jessica called out to her from inside the tree.

She had tried several times to convince Sansa to come in—but the princess refused.

Adriana, on the other hand, had stayed inside the whole time—quiet and composed, likely because Jessica was nearby.

But Sansa never moved from her place.

The rain washing over her...

To the princess, it felt comforting—

As though it were cleansing her of everything that had scarred her wounded soul.

Beneath that downpour,

She found something close to peace.

With a faint smile, Sansa turned toward Jessica.

"Are you sure you want to stay here, Jessica? You were in the top ranks not long ago..."

It was true—Jessica Thivenin had held a very high rank since the trial began.

But ever since choosing to stay close to the princess, she had slipped out of the top ten.

"There's no point in trying... I can't beat monsters like that."

After her crushing defeat at the hands of Snow, Jessica had accepted that first place was out of reach.

She'd already secured qualification—since the second-years hadn't been particularly outstanding this year.

And so, she remained at the princess's side—to protect her.

"If that's your decision... I won't argue."

"Thank you... my princess."

Jessica Thivenin treated the princess with deep respect—

But when it came to Adriana, she was cold.

To Jessica, the girl was little more than a leech clinging to the princess for selfish gain,

Even though Sansa had declared her a friend.

Now, the second-year's strongest had already begun to think of ways to get rid of her soon...

Amid all that—

Jessica's body suddenly tensed.

Both Sansa and Adriana frowned.

They all heard it.

The sound of footsteps—heavy, constant—pounding the earth.

It was growing louder and louder.

Whatever was approaching...

There were a lot of them.

Too many.

"Get back, Princess!"

Jessica darted forward, gripping her crescent-shaped sword and placing herself in front of Sansa.

The princess remained perfectly calm.

Behind them, Adriana readied her spear.

"What the hell...?"

The sounds were overwhelming—like an army charging their way.

And just a few seconds later—

They finally saw the source.

With multiple limbs and mask-like faces, they were...

The terrifying creatures of the Baij.

"Feed me! Feed me! Mee! Mee!"

Dozens appeared at once.

The numbers were so insane that Jessica's face darkened instantly.

"Princess! I'll try to hold them off—please, run!"

Jessica charged straight into the approaching nightmare.

Pushing her aura to the limit,

She released a powerful field of gravity, forcing the creatures back.

With her signature blade, she lunged at the closest one—

"Feed me! Feed me!"

"Shut up!"

Jessica slashed with ferocity, clashing against the Byge horror.

She had the upper hand.

Her strikes severed its limbs quickly—then she crushed it down with her gravity field.

But that only worked...

In a one-on-one fight.

No sooner had Jessica slain one of the Baij, covered in its foul blood, than a massive swarm of the same creatures surged toward her, tearing through her gravity field with overwhelming force.

At this rate... she'd be completely devoured.

Jessica was confused.

Why were Nightmare creatures attacking in such overwhelming numbers? It didn't make sense.

But something about the Baij's behavior felt... off.

They didn't seem to be attacking—

They were running.

She couldn't process her thoughts properly amidst the chaotic stampede of Nightmare creatures.

Behind her, Adriana grabbed Sansa's hand, her face pale with fear.

"Sansa! We need to run! We can't fight them!"

Adriana was already trembling—

She could barely hold her spear, let alone fight.

But Sansa remained perfectly calm.

She pulled her hand away from Adriana and walked toward the battlefield.

"Are you suggesting we abandon Jessica while we run for safety?"

Adriana said nothing.

She knew it would be a cowardly act...

But she didn't see any other way.

Just looking at those things made her shiver—

Her nerves couldn't handle it.

But Sansa didn't flinch.

"It's fine.

They won't lay a finger on her."

Sansa's eyes darkened.

"I won't allow it."

Back on the front lines, Jessica was completely surrounded.

She barely deflected the flurry of wild attacks coming from every direction.

"Feed me! Feed me!"

One of the Baij found a gap in her defenses—its limbs were just about to strike her.

But the impact never came.

Jessica blinked—

A massive black hand had appeared out of nowhere.

That terrifying, shadowy hand gripped the Baij mid-scream...

Its suffering didn't last long.

The hand slammed it violently into a massive boulder, crushing its skull.

The blow was so brutal, the Baij turned into a mess of pulverized flesh.

Sansa now stood beside Jessica.

In front of them—dozens more of the same creature.

The princess extended her hand toward them—

It looked as though she was inviting them to grab her.

But that wasn't it.

As her hand moved forward, Sansa's shadow expanded, stretching far ahead, covering the ground beneath the Baij horde.

The Nightmare creatures suddenly found themselves standing atop a shadow...

A shadow pulsing with cursed aura.

Then, with another flick of her hand—

The shadow exploded.

Dozens of massive, spear-like tendrils shot up from the ground, piercing through the Baij like mad,

Skewering them into twisted sacks of spikes.

Their bodies were lifted high by the black tendrils,

as streams of crimson blood gushed down the black spears, staining them with a darker hue.

It was a horrifying sight.

Jessica Thivenin stared in disbelief.

The princess beside her still wore the same calm expression...

But she looked like a completely different person.

It wasn't just her eyes that had turned black—

Even her golden hair now showed streaks of black.

Jessica didn't know what to do.

So she grabbed Sansa's shoulder—who looked like someone caught in a trance.

"Princess!"

At the sound of her voice—

It was as if Sansa snapped out of it.

The shadow receded, and the impaled Baij fell from the sky—

Crashing to the ground, powerless.

Sansa held her head, a blank expression on her face.

"..."

She said nothing.

Jessica hesitated before speaking.

"Princess... are you—"

"I'm fine."

Sansa answered quickly.

"It's nothing. Everything's fine."

Jessica said nothing more.

Neither did Adriana, still trembling behind them.

But they were both likely thinking the same thing...

'What... was that power?'

The answer was vague...

But that aura they had felt—

It sent a chill down their spines, shaking them to the core.

Amid the corpses of the Baij, they didn't even have a moment to think—

When the ground suddenly trembled,

Far more violently than before.

"What now?!"

Jessica cursed.

It only took a single second for her expression to darken completely.

All three girls heard it—

A deep, sorrowful wail, accompanied by a terrifying roar.

Adriana looked like she could faint at any moment.

They all stared at the enormous creature approaching them...

And as the realization hit—

Jessica finally understood what was happening.

The Baij weren't attacking.

They were fleeing.

Running... from a predator far more terrifying.

"The Lady of Eight Legs..."

That monstrous being—

With her countless limbs and grotesque spider-like form—

She was now unbelievably close.

They'd been too caught up fighting the Nightmare creatures earlier to notice her presence...

And now, she was right there—within reach.

They all froze in place, staring at her.

And she...

Stared back.

Dozens of horrific eyes locked onto them.

The Lady of Eight Legs was watching from a distance.

But all her eyes were fixed on just one person—

The princess.

Sansa.

Those black eyes met hers...

And the Lady stopped.

Everyone stood frozen, unable to comprehend the scene.

Jessica felt like her heart might explode at any second.

And Adriana—

She had already fainted.

The Lady of Eight Legs remained motionless, simply staring.

Minutes passed.

Then, something strange happened.

She moved.

The Lady of Eight Legs stirred—

But she didn't approach.

Instead, she turned away... and left.

Jessica's eyes widened in disbelief, watching the Nightmare creature walk away—

Avoiding them.

She couldn't believe what she'd seen.

With a stunned expression, she turned her head toward the princess—

Who was still staring intently at the Nightmare Lord.

'What just happened?'

'Why didn't she attack?'

Jessica didn't know the answer.

But for some reason...

She was certain the reason was standing right next to her.

Because maybe—

The Lady of Eight Legs wasn't the apex predator on this island...