

My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone

Chapter 161 161: 5.18 - A woman of her words

The kiss felt better than the slap, but it still brought a different type of pain to him.

Lucian would prefer her to stop with the sudden switch between violence and kindness, and pick one.

"Your kiss feels like an insect bite, my lady," he commented, trying to ease his discomfort and bring back some resemblance of control, "It's doing the opposite of making things better."

"..." Celine's lips hovered over his cheek, her breath hot on his skin.

His own breathing stopped when he felt her tongue on his skin, licking the bruise, before her teeth bit into it.

"Ugh!" He jolted at the sensation.

Her mouth then enveloped his lips in a kiss, shutting him up again, her fingers holding his jaw in place.

Her lips moved against his, and Lucian found himself opening his mouth to her. No. No. He wanted to pull away. No, no, no...

She invaded his mouth, her saliva mixing with his. He could feel the wetness of her tongue as it brushed against his teeth.

Celine's grip tightened, keeping him from escaping her. Her free hand slid up his thigh and then down his torso.

Lucian sank his teeth into her lip, stopping her from going further.

"!!!" She let out a pained groan, pulling away from him, but his teeth only sunk deeper into her flesh.

A punch landed in his chest, but he didn't budge, not letting her escape.

She punched him in the head, harder than before, and he finally released her lip from the prison of his teeth.

She stumbled backwards, her hand covering her bleeding lip.

The blindfold slipped down his nose, revealing his dilated pupils. He was panting heavily, the blood dripping from his chin. His heart was beating wildly. He could hear it pounding inside his chest.

He wanted to wipe off the blood from his lips, but he couldn't move his arms. He had to keep them behind his back, where they were bound together.

So he licked his lips instead, tasting the metallic tang of her blood on his tongue, and swallowed. His tongue ran over his lips again, and again, and again, until the taste was gone.

The small win brought a smile to his lips.

"Heh...I can't decide if I like or hate your new style," Lucian forced a tease, "It's not very ladylike."

Celine sat there, watching him, her chest rising and falling rapidly as she breathed heavily.

"Untie me, I want to taste more," he whispered, and Celine's face twisted in disbelief, "Come on. Just one more kiss. Please, my lady?"

Staring death in the face had a strange effect on people. Some go quiet and accept it, while others fight until their last breath.

Lucian went with the latter, even if he knew he was going to lose anyway.

His heart beat faster and faster, and the adrenaline rush that came from his fight or flight instinct kicked in, giving him the strength to tackle her to the bed.

He straddled her hips, her body trapped beneath his weight while his wrists were still tied together behind his back.

He leaned down to bite her again, but her hand covered his face. The curse she had cast on him took its effect, weakening him to the point where he fell on top of her like a rag doll, "..."

This wouldn't do. He needed to get stronger, be able to resist her curse, and then he would get his freedom back. No one would have any control over him ever again.

Celine's hands untied the rope on his wrists and he let them fall to the side, unable to move a limb. She wrapped them around her waist, making it look like he was hugging her.

She didn't give up on her advances. She continued kissing him, cupping his face.

He asked for a kiss after biting her, and instead of lashing at him, she gave him what he wanted.

Why?

Because she promised to kiss his pains away even if he became the biggest scum in the world.

She was a woman of her words.

"You can have as many kisses as you want," she whispered, her lips brushing against his as she spoke. "You can have me all to yourself, if that's what you desire, too."

Sweet words that would melt anyone's resolve, if only he could move his lips to respond to her, but he wasn't allowed to.

He just crushed the trust she had in him to not bite her, so there was no way she would undo the curse.

He felt her hands running up and down his back as if trying to soothe him. He would rather she torture him than make him believe that things were going back to normal.

"Sleep," she ordered, his body relaxing on command.

His eyes closed, his breathing slowing down. How she managed it was beyond his comprehension. His mind was in shambles, yet his body was at peace, trusting her more than it trusted him.

It should be twitching in fear, trembling at her touch, and yet it was content in her embrace.

His mind wanted to tear her to pieces and rip her to shreds, but his body only wanted to be closer to her. His traitorous heart. If he could, he would have cut it out and thrown it into a fire.

Lucian didn't remember falling asleep, but he woke up in her bed, with her cuddling him, her face buried in his chest.

She looked so harmless when she slept. Her hair was tied in a loose fish tail, messy, but still charming.

He didn't want to wake her up, but the feeling of being trapped wouldn't let him go back to sleep.

He quickly searched the surroundings. The vial should be inside her bag.

He carefully moved her arms and legs to the side and slid off the bed.

Quietly approaching the bag on the floor, he searched through its contents and found the vial.

It was empty and clean of its content.

'Is it too late?'

'She can't be pregnant already, can she?!'

══ Author's note ══

Is this novel dead already?

Didn't receive any comments in a while, sigh. ☹️

Thanks for those who keep giving me powerstones. This novel's fate is on your shoulders now. 🏪☹️🙏



Chapter 162 162: 5.19 - [NSFW16+] A man on a mission

"Leaving so soon?" Celine asked, her voice raspy from just waking up.

"No," Lucian quickly answered, putting the vial back in its place, his heart pounding in his chest, "I was looking for something to eat."

Her lips were swollen red, so much that it looked painful. Their state had worsened since last night. He had bitten her too hard.

'No, it was not hard enough. Not nearly hard enough,' the devil on his shoulder whispered. 'She deserved worse.'

'But she's pregnant...what if—'

"Come here," Celine patted the spot he had just left.

Lucian automatically got under the blanket and pressed his body against hers.

"It's strange seeing you so obedient for once," she said, squeezing his body in a bear hug, "It's nice. I might get used to it."

Lucian grumbled in protest, but didn't try to free himself. He wasn't going to ruin her mood. Not yet.

"I had a strange dream," she began, "I was standing on the edge of a cliff, and you were there, telling me to not jump."

He didn't say a word, listening to her story.

"But I was a bird. So I jumped, and you jumped after me. But you were not a bird," she paused, looking at him, "Why are you such a fool even in my dreams?"

"...you would have given me wings if you had the power to do so. Means you didn't have full control over the dream," Lucian defended the dream version of him.

She was interested in mastering her dream control like him, and imagining themselves as animals was part of the training.

"Perhaps," she hummed, blinking at him as if expecting him to share his dream with her as well.

Lucian dreamt of her cheating on him with another man and how he murdered the unrealistic version of her in his dream together with the man. The prophecy better not come true.

He was not going to share it and ruin her good mood, so he lied, "I dreamt of flying pigs, so I could bring them to you and have my little wish of watching you bathe fulfilled."

She chuckled, releasing him from her hug, and got up to retrieve the long pieces of cloth she used for binding, handing them to him.

"You can help me bind my chest instead."

She then sat on the bed in front of him, her arms raised and her back turned towards him.

"..." Lucian helped her remove her shirt, sliding it down to her waist, his hands lingering on the sides of her breasts.

"Aren't they being crushed to death? I don't want my future children to starve to death because you're killing their milk supply."

Celine laughed, her body shaking, her breasts jiggling from the movement.

He cupped them from behind, checking their shape to make sure they were fine, "Don't laugh, it's a serious concern. I'll be sad if I can't drink from them too."

"They're for the children," she scolded him.

"But I'll have some too," he insisted, "How could a small body like theirs drink all of this?"

He weighed them in his hands for good measure, "They're so big, and our child is going to be so small. What a waste. You'll have to feed me with them, I'm a growing man after all. I need to eat more than a child to stay strong."

She held in her laughter and waited for him to start binding her chest.

"You should let them free sometimes, they're suffocating."

"They're not suffocating," she defended herself.

"If they could talk, they would be begging for their freedom."

"Lucian. Bind them."

"Let me say goodbye first," he protested.

She sighed, but did not stop him.

He turned her body around and hugged her breasts, his head leaning on top of them.

She sighed, waiting for him to finish his shenanigans. "Are you done?"



"Not yet," he replied, rubbing his face against them, and then kissing them, his mouth lingering on her nipple, sucking on it lightly. His hand came up to play with the other one.



He shouldn't be doing this, playing house like this. It used to be a fantasy they both liked to indulge in. It made them feel like a normal couple, and not two cursed people who were doomed to be apart.

The bruises on his body tingled in reminder. He shouldn't get seduced by her body and lose focus of why he was here.



He pulled his mouth away, watching the trail of saliva drip down, connecting to her swollen nipple.

He switched to give the other the same treatment, and was satisfied when it swelled under his tongue.

♡

Pulling away, Lucian wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

Celine's face was completely flushed. She was hot and bothered, needing him to cool down the fire he had ignited, only for him to slid her shirt back on.

Celine realized what he was doing, her leg flying towards his head to kick him to the ground, but he anticipated it, and leaped to the side, dodging her attack.

As long as he wasn't touched by her or her weapon, he would be alright. She was still a woman, her speed was not enough to keep up with his.

Lucian started to put on his clothes again, leaving her upper body naked to give himself extra advantage in their fight.

A fist flew past his face, "You don't know when to quit, do you?"

Lucian buttoned his shirt, her second punch missing him again. He searched for his belt, dodging another one of her attacks. He grabbed his mask and cloak.

"You really need to work on your temper, my lady," he commented, moving out of her reach and putting on his mask, "Before you kill someone."

"Get here!"

"I'll be back by dinner, don't overwork yourself while I'm gone," he advised her before leaving her tent, "If you want to take it out on someone, use a training dummy and not me. My body can't handle much."

Celine grabbed her bindings, a vein pulsing on her forehead, a blush spread across her face, suppressing a foolish smile that only he could bring on her face.

"It's hard for me to be the only sane one in this relationship," he sighed dramatically as he fled from her camp.

What did pregnant women needed the most?

Rest.

What was Celine not getting?

Rest.

Lucian quickly traveled to the nearest city, changing a couple of horses along the way to move faster. He had some nutritious meals prepared for Celine, which he planned to pick on his way back.

Sitting inside the infirmary with a physician who had a few decades of experience, Lucian was eager to learn more about Celine's condition.

"Is she the type who is prone to anger?" the physician asked.

"Annoyance is her middle name," Lucian answered, "And her last name is Anger."

"Try to avoid conflicts with her," the physician didn't get Lucian's sense of humor. He went straight to the point as if he could spot the root of their problems already, "Putting too much strain on her body and mind could cause a miscarriage."

Lucian paused, remembering how he provoked her and made her angry. He had done the complete opposite of what he should've done. He began to sweat buckets as if the world depended on him and his actions, "Is there a way to check on the baby's safety?"

"For how long has she been pregnant?"

"Half a day," Lucian counted on his finger, bending his pointer.

"..." The physician looked at him strangely, like he had never met a more stupid person than Lucian.

No mask could hide the idiocy that hid underneath, and Lucian couldn't bother with bringing fear and respect to his face.

He was a man on a mission.

A mission of a father to be.

Chapter 163 163: 5.20 - Too soon to be a parent

Currently, Lucian looked nothing like a reputable man, but a masked freak with a cloak and a hood. The only thing missing from his attire were the bells, and he would look like a jester.

Even the physician started to believe that Lucian came here to make jokes on him, not to receive treatment.

"Half a day?!" the physician exclaimed, "Nobody would be able to know that she's pregnant this early, not even the Gods can know!"

"She's not a normal woman, she's a special woman!" Lucian exclaimed back, "If she wants to be pregnant with my child, then she will be pregnant with my child! She's the most determined woman I know!"

The physician's expression changed from shock to horror, "What did you say?"

"She's pregnant with my child," Lucian repeated, "I'm the father. Can you give me advice on what to do?"

"No wonder she is annoyed and angry," the physician mumbled under his nose, "Having a child with the likes of you..."

As expected of the southern physicians. They were not afraid to speak their mind and lose a customer.

Lucian was offended by the physician's attitude, and the fact that he was not even trying to be subtle about it.

"Please, I really need help," he pleaded, "I don't know what to do. What kind of food should I get her? What kind of clothes should I get her? Is it safe for her to travel in her current state? Does she have special needs? Can she do physical exercises? Will the child die if I touch her? Will the child die if she touches me?" he listed the questions that came to his mind.

The physician waved his hand in front of Lucian's face, "It looks like she is the more mature one between you two. Just follow her lead and do whatever she says."

"..." Lucian didn't expect the physician to say something like that, "If she tells me to jump off a cliff, should I jump? I don't think she likes me at all now. What if she tells me to jump off a cliff?"

Lucian could tell that the physician was getting annoyed by his questions, and the way he kept asking them, but he couldn't stop himself.

"Listen, boy, the last thing she needs is a pest like you to annoy her. Go to the temple, pray for the child's safety, and then go home to sleep. My job is done."

The physician chased Lucian out, not even asking for payment for the consultation.

'Pfft...I'm not a boy,' Lucian grumbled to himself, 'What boys do you know have a pregnant wif..woman at this age?'

He mocked the physician under his breath, walking away.

The physician was right though. He should go and offer his prayers for the child's safety.

This city wasn't the most grandiose. The run down temple looked more like an old building, smaller than the size of a commoner's house. The walls were dirty, the floor covered in a thin layer of dust, and the ceiling was cracked, revealing the sky above.

There were no statues of the gods. Only symbols of the sun on the wall behind the altar.

The revolutionary's raids had left their mark on the temple, and the current King showed no interest in fixing it, busy with building his military and preparing for the next war.

There were believers, just not enough donations to keep the temple standing. They preferred to spend their money on their own needs and wants.

Lucian bought an offering of incense and flowers from a vendor, and made his way to the altar.

He placed the offerings in front of the statue and lit the incense, then knelt on the ground.

He clasped his hands together and started to pray.

'...I humbly request your blessing to protect my child and... and its mother...from any harm that may come their way.' he prayed in his thoughts, '...I beg for your forgiveness for any wrongdoing I have committed. And I ask you to bestow your mercy upon my child, for it has done no wrong.'

After a moment, he stood up, dusted off his knees, and walked out of the temple, feeling no different from before.

He still had to depend on himself to ensure his child's safety, not some unseen force who would only show its power if it wanted to.

Lucian went to pick up some treats for Celine, no, the child inside her, and then headed back to her camp. But when he arrived, the place was deserted, the tents had been taken down and the supplies had been packed away.

"..."

He was not used to Celine leaving without notice, or at least telling him beforehand.

Their relationship had regressed to the point where he couldn't trust her, and she couldn't trust him.

He even planned about escaping her clutch if the opportunity presented itself to him. But now, he was just...

He was just...

...afraid.

Afraid of the uncertainty of what the future held. At least when with her, he knew that they were both going to be in the same boat together.

'She's too irresponsible!' he scolded Celine in his mind, riding to the canyon where his camp was set. 'What if something happens to them?'

He reached the canyon, his men were busy training in the open space, while others were busy with their chores. He spotted Jax and asked him about the newest development.

The Southern Alliance have been moving their troops towards the border, and they were probably trying to catch up on the progress of the military of the North.

It was a race to see who would get the most objectives first.

Lucian had a meeting with commandant Grim, who he bought Jax from, to secure a deal with him.

Commandant Grim was going to join the war efforts and help with the invasion, and spoke in Lucian's favor to Nareon King, securing his deal for the gold mine.

"How are their manners?" Lucian turned toward the feral army, watching them as his people tried to give them simple orders, "Any progress?"

"I wouldn't say progress," Jax replied, looking in the same direction as his boss, "More like, the opposite of that. The longer you are away, the harder it is to keep them in line."

"Did you track the time it takes for them to become hostile?" Lucian asked.

"It seems to take around five to seven days before they demand your presence," Jax answered.

Lucian thought for a moment, "Prepare to move out. We are heading to the Nareon's gold mines. We also have to prevent the ferals from acting out, their identity as ferals shouldn't be revealed to the enemy."

Chapter 164 164: 5.21 - New Vice

Because Lucian had yet to find a way to make the ferals stay loyal for longer than a few days, he had to tag along with them, and make sure they stayed in line until he found a way to make their obedience permanent.

He could order them to listen to his Vices, but yet again, only a few days at best.

'She better take care of our child and not get into trouble,' Lucian had no choice but to neglect their child.

The only thing that kept him sane was knowing that she would never allow anything bad to happen to the child, and even though he hated to admit it, she could protect herself better than he could.

Currently, a group of ten ferals ran out of a forest and attacked the unsuspecting supply of ten wagons of the passing merchants.

The merchants, who came from the north to do business in the south, had no idea what was going on.

"Aaarrgh!" one of them screamed in fear as the ferals attacked them, ordering the mercenary escorts to attack, "Save us!"

"Run! We must run!"

"Kill them!" The sounds of fists clashing filled the air.

Lucian, the man behind this attack, stood on top of a hill overlooking the scene, watching the events unfold through his binoculars.

The camouflage net before him allowed him to blend in with his surroundings, hiding him from sight.

Lucian had ordered his feral soldiers to ruthlessly ambush the Northern merchants' supply wagons, camps, and warehouses across the Southern Alliance.

Because the attackers appear to be wild, untamed beasts, the Northern Merchant Guild would blame the harsh Southern environment and feral outbreaks. This would destroy his rivals' logistics while granting Lucian perfect plausible deniability.

Lucian was not observing the scene alone. Accompanied by the rest of his Vices, they grouped up together, standing around him.

"The southern weather is truly something," Cansan fanned himself, his shirt unbuttoned to let the wind caress his skin.

"I still feel like a roasted pig even when the sun is hiding in the clouds," Lord As, the newly assigned Vice, said. The hat on his head was large enough to hide his entire face.

As the only northerner with a knight rank in their group, he started working as Cansan's bodyguard. A copper rank was still high enough compared to commoners, so nobody complained.

The Mad Hatter's son proved himself useful in ship building and had some experience in trading. His father went missing and he was terrified of meeting the same fate, begging Lucian to take him in his ranks.

He earned his Vice title because of his luck and the fact that he was always in the wrong place at the wrong time. It became a running joke between the members to be at the opposite side of the battlefield as him.

He could play for both sides, accepting bribes from Lucian's enemies, and selling them false information. He had the face of a scumbag that would do anything to save his own ass, and the fact that Lucian was giving him a Vice title only helped strengthen his position as a double spy.

One would wonder how Lucian kept him on a leash, but it was simple, truly.

Lucian handed him a vial with an antidote for the poison that was already spreading in his body.

Lord As quickly gulped down the contents and sighed in relief. It was just a safety measure, which he believed in.

"Any new ideas on how to make this operation go smoother?" Lucian asked his Vices, keeping an eye on the battle from afar.

"..." The silence from his Vices was deafening.

"Nobody?"

"..." Another round of silence.

They were on their way to take control of the gold mines, and they needed to come up with a strategy to sustain its operation. Which included, but was not limited to, finding a way to keep it safe, a way to transport the gold, and a way to sell it.

Lucian had no time to deal with every little detail himself, so how to sustain his army of ferals became his vices' responsibility.

He just gave them four hundred new mouths to feed.

Four. Hundred. Including the mines' workers.

As if the work piling on their shoulders was not enough.

They were currently following Lucian's orders, attacking their targets, but what was going to happen after that?

Were they going to be released back in the wild?

They were not.

They needed a long term solution.

The first to answer was Cansan, the smartest among them. But he was a northerner who had little to no knowledge of how the South worked, despite having a wife from the south.

Lucian waved away the idea as soon as Cansan finished talking.

"We can plant and harvest our own food," Goblin suggested, "The demand for gardeners in the north is going to drop soon due to the war, and they'll be willing to work in the south as long as the pay is right."

"What food?" Lucian didn't shrug off his idea as quickly. Southerners depended mostly on animal products to sustain their lifestyle, "We are not planting a potato field and waiting for it to grow while our people die of hunger."

"If we can build greenhouses for cold climates, we can build ones for hot climates, too. I've been thinking about it for a while. They will be cheaper and faster to build," Goblin explained his idea further.

It would be like a large shade canopy that would block the heat from reaching the crops and protect them from drought and harsh sunlight. Since he worked on building and managing the greenhouses, it was obviously the first idea he thought of.

Lucian didn't really like the idea, so he waited for another Vice to speak up.

"Women will be handling most of the logistics during war, we can take advantage of that," Mumbai spoke up next, her voice low, "Shipping them ingredients for preparing long lasting rations and collecting them will be cheaper and more effective than processing our own food."

The Glory in the south were experts in moving and transporting goods, not food production. Mumbai's idea was much closer to their expertise.

The idea would also serve Lucian's plan of gaining some military contribution points to his name. Helping sustain an army would be enough proof that he had contributed to their victory.

Weapons were a no go, because that would show his support for "violence" in the eyes of the public, and his position as a neutral party would be compromised.

He couldn't depend on the previous system the gold mine had, which would highly be affected by the war.

"Can you handle the local transport and storage?" Lucian asked her, and she nodded, "Then it is settled. I'll be relying on you."

"W-wait," Cansan was about to protest, hugging Mumbai protectively to his side.

Chapter 165 165: 5.22 - Refuse To Be Wronged Again

"I'm not letting Mumbai stay with a bunch of men," Cansan protested, "It's dangerous."

"Fishbone's wife can help her, they've been getting along," Lucian suggested, which Fishbone agreed with.

"If Boss can arrange that, then I'll agree," Cansan was satisfied with that.

"Good," Lucian prepared himself for departure, "Let's begin the operation."

The ferals had successfully raided the Northern Merchant's caravans, destroying the wagons and stealing some of the vulnerable cargo, not all.

The mercenaries and merchants were all injured, but not killed.

'Greed is a sin, and sins get punished severely.'

The defenseless merchant group soon attracted some local bandits and robbers, who took advantage of the weakened merchants and robbed them again.

'Would I get punished if I shared some of my gains with the poor and unfortunate?'

'How would the Gods judge this act?'

'Would they see it as an act of greed or charity?'

During the movement, Lucian used the advantage of having so many soldiers to play fetch with his new weapon, which reminded him of his time with Seline so much.

After two days of travel, Lucian divided the group into four smaller units. Each moved in a different direction, their targets already decided: the Northern Merchant Guild's warehouses.

The warehouses were built on the outskirts of the city with tighter security measures compared to the caravans.

He knew that his enemies would suspect him behind the warehouse attacks, and they would try to find evidence to prove it.

Lucian was fine with it. He would hand the evidence to his enemies on a silver platter. A silver platter with poison in it.

Fishbone and Roland had built his reputation around being a ruthless man against his competitors, with very little proof to back it up. So it was time to live up to it.

The North wouldn't want back a defeated man with his tail tugged between his legs.

Being fair and honorable didn't equal weakness, but being a push over did.

He had to show the consequences of trying to trample over him, or it would only be asking for trouble in the future.

People would have no second thoughts of trying to harm his interests at a first sign of weakness.

He could always twist the rumors before they reached the north like he had been doing the whole time, that the God's were not on the North Merchant Guild's side. From feral attacks, to robbery, bad trade deals and now, a wronged businessman who refused to be wronged again.

Thick walls and iron doors protected the warehouse from bandits and thieves.

A cluster of buildings surrounded the warehouse, built from the same dull stone, their windows narrow.

The warehouse itself stretched over a hundred meters from end to end, with an inner yard that was used for loading and unloading cargo.

There were around eighty guards guarding, all armed. A few of them had bows. The rest of them were armed with spears and swords. They wore leather armor, and some had chain mail.

The patrolling guards were lazy and careless. Some of them were even sleeping on the job. The ones that were awake were either playing dice, drinking, or chatting with each other.

A dozen of employees loaded crates into the warehouse from the outside, and a dozen more unloaded them from the inside.

Outside the iron gates, four guards were playing card games, gambling their wages.

Swoosh!

The sound of the wind whistling was accompanied by a sharp, metallic sound.

A metallic boomerang with a sharp edge cut through the air, slicing a few cards in half.

The guards stared at the boomerang in surprise, their hands reaching for their weapons.

The boomerang spun in a perfect circle, returning to its owner's hand.

They looked up at the neighboring buildings' rooftop, where the weapon had originated.

A masked person stood there, his cloak flapping in the wind, the mask covering his face, and a hood hiding his hair.

The figure stood still, looking down at them from above.

Lucian rotated his new weapon in his hand with a glowed hand for protection.

The weapon opened into a boomerang shape, had a blade on one side and a metallic surface on the other, which he could use to block or deflect attacks.

This was a southern weapon, a gift from commandant Grim. The man was a collector of weapons and had offered a vast array of choices to Lucian, who still hadn't decided on a primary weapon.

The guards quickly raised their bows and fired arrows at his figure.

One, two, three...five, six.

He counted the arrows and jumped to his left, dodging three of them and cutting three with his weapon, the broken arrows falling on the roof. He moved out of the range of the other arrows, the ones he dodged were stuck to the roof behind him.

He had a grudge against arrows since childhood and took great satisfaction in cutting them in half. One almost killed him, after all.

"Attack! Intruders!" One of the guards yelled, and the rest of the guards drew their weapons, ready to fight.

They positioned themselves in a circle, facing outward with their shields raised.

"Shut the gate!" another ordered, "Don't let anyone in!"

The mercenaries began to close the gate, but Lucian threw the boomerang, and it sliced the surface of their legs, tripping them.

His weapon landed on the ground, and Lucian jumped down from the rooftop, holding onto the rope he had tied to it.

Avoiding more arrows, he used the momentum of the fall and the rope's support to slide down to the ground, landing on his feet.

"Attack," Lucian whispered his command.

Twenty soldiers charged out of the caravans and wagons in a surprise attack.

Another twenty ferals shot a hook from another roof, and slid down a rope.

The guards and mercenaries were caught off guard, not expecting an attack from the inside.

Twenty more feral soldiers slipped through the open gates.

Another twenty scaled the walls, the guards too focused on the attackers inside to notice the attackers outside.

A spear head flew past Lucian, and he caught it, pulling on it, and making the man fall to the ground.

He sprinted towards another guard who blocked his attack with his shield, but the force of the impact sent the man stumbling backward, losing his balance.

"Who goes there?!" The guard in charge shouted, raising his spear.

"Lord Ashtor," Lucian spoke to the man, who showed by his side, "Do you want to do the honors?"

I don't know if you've noticed, but Lucian has a habit to pick up random weapons to play with, study, and then eventually use as a weapon: 😊👤

Examples: gardening shovel, trick cane, ship cannon (his favorite so far), axe, short spear, handkerchief, dagger, broadsword (he took from a shackled that held Karolaina captive), syringes, stink bombs, traps.

There will definitely be more, so please don't be surprised when he pulls out something out of his toy box (warehouses) again. 😊



Chapter 166 166: 5.23 - Not So Peaceful

Lucian picked up the dropped weapon in the middle of the skirmish, while the guards fought against his men.

"We are here in the name of Glory's founder to take over the warehouse," Lord Ashtor announced arrogantly, enough to make one want to punch him in the face.

"Hand over the keys and you'll live to see another day," Lord Ashtor repeated, his threats meant to scare the guards, "Or die and the next person to open the door will get the keys from your dead body!"

"Is that a joke?!" one of the guards shouted, "This warehouse is under the protection of the Osul Hunter King! You won't get away with this!"

"Ha, only the Osul Hunter King?" Lord Ashtor chuckled, "That's good news," he then laughed, harder, "I thought we'd have to deal with more enemies."

Despite Lord Ashtor's loud voice booming through the warehouse, the opposing guards couldn't ignore the masked person.

Out of place in the midst of the battle, the masked man merely strolled between the combatants. Whenever some of their people tried to attack him, he would simply step out of the way.

He only assisted when his men were at risk of being killed. It was as if he had eyes everywhere. A sword aimed at their neck would miss, the spear meant to pierce their hearts would fly off into the air, and a bow string would snap in the middle of aiming at their bodies.

Lucian leaped and jumped around, his feet never staying on the ground for long, appeared and disappeared between his soldiers, assisting them.

A guard was about to strike at one of his soldiers with a spear.

Lucian appeared out of nowhere, kicking the guard's spear to the side, causing it to miss its target and strike the ground instead.

The guard was thrown off balance and fell backwards.

Lucian picked up the spear and swung it at the guard's head.

The guard ducked down, the spear missing its target and striking the wall behind him.

The guard rolled on the ground, avoiding Lucian's next attack, and got to his feet.

'He's good.'

Lucian took a step back, not attacking anymore, his attention already drawn to another soldier in danger.

It was a good training opportunity for them and he was not going to rob them of it.

The guards were mostly one marked hunters, enough to deal with markless bandits and robbers. They were equally matched against his men.

Lucian was the only one with a clear advantage, nobody above four markings in their ranks.

Merchant groups, especially foreign ones, were heavily regulated by the Southern Alliance. They were not allowed to bring their own army to the South.

They could only rely on the Southern army and local mercenaries to guard their goods.

Lucian passed by one of his soldiers, whispering, "The rope, use it. We need to tie them, not kill them. Pass it on."

The feral soldier quickly obeyed and stopped punching the guard he was beating up. He pulled out a piece of rope and started tying the guard's hands behind his back.

Lucian made his way towards the warehouse's office, the guards unable to follow due to the chaos of the battle.

They already sent a telephatic message to the city's garrison, asking for backup, which would soon be on its way.

The warehouse manager was on his way to flee when he saw Lucian enter his office. His eyes widened in terror, and he tried to escape, but it was too late.

Lucian's leg shot out, tripping him to the ground. The manager let out a scream of fear as he fell, hitting the ground hard.

Somewhere in the distance, a horn sounded.

The city's garrison.

They arrived in a timely manner.

Lucian picked up the fallen manager, holding the blade of the boomerang to the manager's throat, leading him outside as a hostage.

"Halt!" The city's captain shouted from atop his horse, a curved sword pointed at Lucian and his group, "You are surrounded. Release the hostage and surrender!"

The captain was accompanied by a hundred of his men, who were all armed to the teeth, their weapons drawn and ready. They were not afraid, but confident and sure of their victory. There were more of them than the attackers.

"Release the hostage, you hear?!" the captain shouted in repeat.

Lucian tightened his grip on the manager's throat, and the man gasped, trying to pull away.

The city's garrison had higher ranked hunters in their ranks, with their captain at the top, with four markings.

Lucian moved behind Lord Ashtor, dragging the manager with him.

Lord Ashtor cleared his voice, "The Glory will be taking over the Northern Merchant's Guild' business from now on. If you have any issues, complaints, or questions, please address them to," he took out a scroll from his pocket and read from it, "Hunter King Scythe, Hunter King Savage, Hunter King Blade, Hunter King..."

The names alone weren't enough to make the captain falter, but the sheer number of them was.

"Why would you attack the Northern Merchant Guild's warehouses if you could have resolved this matter peacefully with our King?!" the captain shouted, but there was a slight tremble in his voice, "We'll be reporting this incident to our King!"

"Peacefully?" Lucian began to carve a letter G on the manager's neck, making him squirm and scream, "This is a high risk, ridiculous reward field of work, captain. The Glory's people in the north are at risk, too. You have to understand. We have to protect our own, and protection, sometimes, requires methods that are not so peaceful."

"Please, please, don't," the manager begged, blood dripping down his neck from the cut, "He'll kill me!"

Lucian ignored his pleas, and instead, forced the manager to focus on his words.

"With all the witnesses here, Glory sends its message to the Northern Merchant Guild," he said loudly, making sure everyone could hear him. "Tell your guild's leaders not to trample over our people in the North... or the gods' wrath will be upon them."

The manager nodded frantically, "I'll tell them, I'll tell them! Just don't kill me!"

Lucian released the manager, letting him run back to the safety of the captain's men.

The captain's men were all tense, their hands on the hilts of their weapons, ready to draw and charge at the moment's notice.

But they didn't.

The captain knew that if he ordered an attack, something worse than a dispute between two merchant groups would happen.

"We'll be reporting this," the captain repeated, glaring at Lucian and his soldiers, before ordering a retreat.

They left with the manager, leaving Lucian's group behind.

Chapter 167 167: 5.24 - Spiritual Rot Age

Lucian turned to Lord As, who had been watching him silently,, "What's wrong?"

Lord Ashtor shook his head, lost in thoughts.

He was probably thinking about how Lucian made it sound like the merchant guild had been causing him a great deal of trouble, but it was the other way around.

Lucian was the one who had been causing trouble for his rivals, not the other way around.

The merchant guild hadn't done much to him, besides halting his sea trade, poaching a few of his employees here and there, trying to obscure his southern trade influence, but nothing to the scale of what Lucian had done.

Lucian had destroyed their caravans, ruined their reputation, robbed their supply lines, took over their warehouses, sabotaged their south business, and now he had the audacity to claim that he was the victim of the merchant guild's hostility.

There were only two outcomes for Glory after this. It would either die with its founder, or it would become even greater than it was now.

He hoped it was the latter.

Lucian was using the warehouse's ambushes as a fear and intimidation tool against his rivals, making them look weaker.

It would definitely catch unwanted attention from the bigger players. The nobility, specifically.

Lucian had received another pile of marriage proposals and requests for his presence. He was more useful alive than dead for most of them.

However, some were not pleased by Lucian's growing influence, the church and the merchant guild, but they were being held at bay. While they made one step, Lucian had made two, and he was not slowing down.

"Boss, can I kneel and kiss your boot?" Lord Ashtor suddenly asked.

Lucian walked away without a response, leaving his new Vice behind.

"Boss?"

"You're not worthy of kissing my boot," Lucian responded when Lord Ashtor continued to follow him around, "And you'll never be."

"..." Lord Ashtor was left in a state of disbelief, "Boss...I thought you were a gentleman of class and manners."

"Only to those who deserve it."

"..." Lord Ashtor wiped a fake tear away, raising his fist in the air, "I'll be worthy of kissing Boss' boot someday!" he declared with pride.

"..." The odd gazes from the enemy mercenaries were ignored by the new Vice.

Lord As had thick skin, shameless was his second name and his middle name was death seeker.

If someone got killed first, it would be Lord As. The bets had already started, and the odds were not in his favor.

The guards, who called for help, watched how they were being abandoned and left behind. Their days of slacking were coming to an end. Their new employers were not a fan of wasting human resources. "..."

"Well," Lord As turned to one of the hostages, "Would you be nice enough to show my men around? Trade routes, lists of supplies, and other information would be of great help."

A similar situation happened in three other warehouses, where the guards were tied together, and the workers and clerks were being questioned.

Leaf and Roland, Fishbone and Goblin, Cansan and Jax, they all split up to take care of their own part of the plan. Taking over a business they had experience in running allowed them to work in an organized manner.

They met up after a week, traveling towards the Gold Mines, and sharing their results over a campfire.

Their funds were being drained soon, so it was a race against time (like always).

Having a personal army now definitely made them feel invisible and on top of the world, until Lucian stomped their egos down with a single comment, "I want to retire already."

"Boss, you aren't even twenty! What retirement?!" Goblin couldn't help but laugh, "You have a long career ahead of you!"

Lucian, the man who made his Vices' lives hell with his demands, had the audacity to say he wanted to retire already. He was too ambitious. There was no way he would be satisfied with the status quo.

"My hair will be grey by the end of the month. I'm turning into an old bald man," Lucian complained, removing his hood as they sat around the fire.

The cool man his Vices came to respect was not acting cool at all, and they were starting to feel embarrassed for him.

"It's just dust. Your hair is not turning grey," Leaf corrected his boss.

"You don't have to worry about growing bald, Boss," Fishbone assured him, "Your hairline is still strong and intact."

"Are you sure?" Lucian asked, showing them his head.

They all looked at the spot and confirmed that it was fine. Their Boss had more hair than a lion's mane, yet he kept fussing about his looks. In fact, he had too much of them. They thought it was time for a haircut.

"You're just paranoid, Boss," Leaf said, handing him a spoon and a bowl of stew.

Lucian thanked Leaf before digging into his meal, "Do you know how many times the world almost ended because of some silly prophecy?"

"Someone had predicted the Spiritual Rot age before it happened," Cansan spoke up what he had learned in the royal academy before he dropped out.

Spiritual Rot Age was an age where the first shackles started to appear, bringing the world into the brink of destruction.

It was an age where diamond knights were a normal occurrence and were not considered a rarity, like nowadays.

People were powerful enough to shake the earth and the heavens, and were able to make miracles happen.

It was an era of prosperity and wealth, and the people's lives were better than they could have ever imagined, until the Spiritual Rot spread through the world, killing the strongest, the most talented.

The world fell into chaos, triggering a Loom period, an era of total war.

The strongest of the strong perished, and with them, their bloodline and legacy.

The current people were the descendants of the weak, the commoners, and the civilians.

The strongest people from that age would look at the current strongest knights and laugh, calling them children who hadn't even seen the true power of their own kind.

People were still suffering from the aftermath of Spiritual Rot age. The hay heads.

"Boss must be a new generation of hay heads, then," Goblin as he listened to the old folk tale.

All people used to carry the same sickness in them, but over time the sickness became weaker and more tolerable for each hair color.

Other kingdom's hay heads have all died out, only the North's hay heads managed to survive, thanks to the church's medicine that managed to prolong their life.

They continued to discuss the topic while finishing their meal.

Roland's scouts soon interrupted their meeting, reporting back to Lucian with the information regarding the ferals, sharing how much longer without Lucian they would go before rebelling this time.

Chapter 168 168: 5.25 - A Morning Spar

It seemed like the more drilling the feral soldiers went through, the longer they could last without rebelling.

Every morning, they had to be reminded who their leader was to remain calm and obedient. Then training of mind and body would follow.

Roland had taken upon the responsibility of sixty feral soldiers, while Jax took upon the rest, one hundred and forty ferals. They had created a telephatic bond with them, resulting in small symbols of their connection appearing on their arms.

"How is it going?" Lucian joined Roland for a morning run.

"Good," Roland wiped the sweat off his forehead, his shirt wet with it.

A group of feral soldiers were running ahead of him, their steps becoming more and more in sync.

They wore rags for clothing. Lucian had yet to get matching outfits for their soldiers, so looking like bandits would do for now.

The rest of Glory's staff members were also awake, some preparing breakfast while others were cleaning the camp for departure in a few hours.

The Southern lands were vast and open, which allowed them to see the horizon and the rising sun.

"I believe they can last up to ten days before we start noticing any changes in their behavior," Roland continued.

"Ten days," Lucian repeated, catching up with him, "Too short. Separate them into groups of five, I'll fight each group in a one-on-five spar. Let's see how far we can push them."

"You sure, Boss?" Roland looked at him, "You've been looking tired lately. Don't push yourself too hard."

Lucian chuckled, "You and your men should start sparring them as well. You can't stay markless forever."

"What if we can't tame our beasts? The southern business depends on us," Roland voiced his concern. He had been thinking about advancing his mark for a while, but the risks were too big.

All the Southern Vices except Jax had the same thought in their minds. They were important to the organization, and losing them would be a great blow.

"You'll be fine," Lucian waved away their concerns, pointing at the feral soldiers, "Tell your beasts that if they don't want to end up like these guys, they'll cooperate with you. They are too weak against me."

At least up to two marked. Lucian would have to advance to gold rank, or even higher to advance his feral soldiers' ranks. Then the loyalty training would have to begin anew.

It meant that every time he advanced his soldier's rank, he had to retrain the newly unlocked beast.

The process would be a painful one, and for the Gold Mine's needs, they didn't need to be more than one to two marked hunters.

"Alright!" Roland shouted, his voice carrying through the air. "Five of you! Get over here!"

Five soldiers he pointed at stopped running and walked over to him, standing at attention, their eyes fixed on Lucian.

Roland explained to them that Lucian was going to test their strength, and that they had to do their best.

Lucian could see the frustration in Roland's eyes.

Rolan didn't mind that he had to talk to them as if he was talking to children. He was used to dealing with not the smartest people.

What he desired was for the feral soldiers to look up to him too and respect him as a second in command. The only way to do that was through force and his leadership abilities.

Jax yawned, stretching his arms above his head, the hundred and so soldiers behind him, following his every move. They seemed to be more disciplined, and less feral at the face of a one marked hunter.

Roland gave Jax a glare, "Are you trying to make fun of me?"

Jax rolled his eyes, "Of course not. You're a role model, sir," he said sarcastically, his eyes moving to the feral men behind him, and then back to Roland's group, "You're a good example of what not to do. Sir."

Anger rose in Roland's expression, his nostrils flaring, the jealousy of the younger man's achievements was getting to him.

Jax was tackling the second beast already, which was obvious with the way his attitude was changing. Before, he was easily provoked and short tempered, now he was doing the provoking and taunting.

It helped him satisfy the beast's needs, while also improving his control.

"..." Rolan scowled at Jax, his beast demanding he give the younger man a piece of his mind. He held himself back though, or he would end up regretting his actions later on.

Fishbone and Leaf on the other hand, barely confronted their beasts at all, maybe once a month at most.

Goblin was a different story. Tattoos with facial expressions and symbols were a cursed thing. Nobody succeeded in controlling them, calling them demonic beasts, not the normal ones.

His tattoo would change expressions randomly, from happiness, to anger, to sadness, and then back to normal.

The boy still worked hard in getting stronger, but it was obvious he was having a harder time than anyone else.

"Master," the five feral soldiers surrounded Lucian, bringing his attention to them.

They slowed down their pace, moving to the side and away from the group.

None of Lucian's men received military training, but he did some spying on the royal army after the ambush incident with the Rocheforts to learn some basic techniques.

Rolan passed on his intention through the telepathy link, making the feral soldiers attack Lucian.

Lucian was forced to use his full speed and strength to dodge their attacks.

There were one hundred and ninety five left, which meant at least an hour of intense exercise, or so he thought.

Jax and Roland did not go easy on him, making turns with each other and coming up with new formations and attacks that were harder to counter.

Everyone turned their spar into a spectacle, watching Lucian's stamina and power running out.

The feral's soldiers' punches and kicks were heavy, and Lucian was forced to block instead of dodging them. The sand beneath his feet would sink, making it harder to stand his ground.

Twenty, thirty, forty...

Lucian made a time out sign with his hand, catching his breath. His entire body was sore, his legs felt like lead, his chest hurt with every breath he took, and he had to wipe the sweat off his forehead.

He couldn't fall to the ground to rest, or the feral's respect for him would diminish, and their loyalty would waver, so he stayed standing, enduring his aching muscles.

Rolan and Jax also took this chance to catch their breath from the telephatic strain of ordering the feral soldiers around.

"Take a short break," Lucian ordered them as if it wasn't him who needed it the most but his two Vices, his breathing still a bit labored, "And then resume."

"..." Jax's brows twitched as the feral soldiers smirked at him, their expressions saying, 'Master is not a weakling like you, he's taking a break to let you rest.'

He could only swallow his retort or his hard work of making them worship their boss would be for nothing.

"I think... I just advanced a mark," Roland muttered under his breath, his eyes wide in shock, "What...? How?"

Chapter 169 169: 5.26 - The Boss's Right

Roland, to his own surprise, advanced without even knowing it. He tried to activate his tattoo, his arm glowing with a soft light as the beast's power flowed through him.

Fishbone and Goblin cheered for him, slapping his back and congratulating him.

"How did you do it?!" Goblin was the first to ask, his eyes glimmering with admiration, "Can you teach me?"

Roland shook his head, he was still dazed from the sudden advancement, "I don't know. I just..."

He was sure the fear of turning feral had prevented him from advancing, but how did it suddenly happen?

He glanced at Lucian, who was surrounded by the feral soldiers, all docile and well-behaved around him.

Maybe witnessing how his life wouldn't end if he lost control of his beast, gave him the courage to overcome his fear.

"Boss," Roland addressed Lucian, walking towards him, the crowd of ferals parting to let him pass.

His knees sank to the ground before his boss, his head bowing low in respect, "I'm honored to serve under you, Boss. My life is yours."

A smile appeared on Lucian's lips, "Who is the best Boss?"

Roland chuckled, "You, Boss."

"Who?!" Lucian asked louder.

"Lucian Arclight!" Roland shouted, a bit awkwardly, "The best boss in the world!"

"Who else?!"

"Nobody!" the rest shouted in unison, their voices echoing through the desert, "Lucian Arclight! The best boss in the world!"

Lucian raised his fist in the air, the soldiers following his lead. "FOR GLORY!"

"FOR GLORY!" The shout was repeated, louder than before.

"Today, we celebrate our brotherhood and our victory over our fears!" Lucian announced, more like an excited youth than a boss, "Today, we march towards a future where we are the masters of our own destiny! FOR GLORY!"

"FOR GLORY!" the soldiers roared, their spirits high.

"To Roland!" Lucian raised his fist again.

"Roland! Roland! Roland!" they chanted his name, the feral soldiers doing the same.

Infected by Lucian's energy, they pumped their fists in the air, so whatever he said, they repeated without a second thought.

No matter how childish their boss sometimes acted, he built that right for himself.

Wealth and influence gave him a lot of freedom to do as he pleased, be it drawing stick figures of his Vices during meetings, building sandcastles with the feral soldiers because he thought they needed to learn how to build instead of destroying things.

...or coming up with ridiculous demands such as "The Glory should have a theme song" and "the theme song should be catchy, one that I can hum to myself all day".

They would hire composers and poets to make it happen, no questions asked.

Their boss didn't even have to poach for employees anymore, people were knocking on the Glory's doors themselves, even for less pay, for a chance to rise in the ranks and become a Vice.

Lucian didn't flaunt expensive mansions, jewellery, or fancy clothes. He flaunted his Vices and how he could make even a beggar rich beyond their wildest dreams.

Roland felt tears prick his eyes, bowing his head lower. The five people under his command joined him, bowing their heads. There were around fifty more that he commanded, but they were not present at the moment.

From the biggest doubter to the most faithful follower (Roland believed that he was more loyal than Jax). He had witnessed a child beggar who tried to engage in a conversation with him to learn the local language and customs, and now, that same boy had grown into a man who could make grown men cry and bow to his will.

With their spirits and morale high, they resumed their training, and the remaining soldiers got their turn to fight against Lucian.

Fishbone's wife had joined their group at lunch, and the guy became a lot more proactive, sending orders left and right to look like a busy man in front of her.

Her stomach was showing signs of pregnancy, and Lucian couldn't help but stare at it for a second too long.

It was an odd feeling, to be an almost father. He wondered how his child within Celine was doing. He tried to push the thought of her out of his mind. She didn't deserve to be in his thoughts.

Fishbone's wife felt his gaze and looked up. Seeing the panting Lucian surrounded by five fallen men, her cheeks turning red.

Jax obscured her line of sight, "Enjoying the show?"

Fishbone's wife quickly waved her hand in denial, "No, no. I was just...I was..."

"Any problems?" Fishbone asked, wrapping his arm around her shoulder, pulling her close to his side, "Stay away from her, Jax."

Jax leaned over his shoulder, "Our boss hates disloyal people. If your wife's feelings will cause you to make poor decisions, you might have to be removed," he whispered, loud enough for his wife to hear, but too quiet for anyone else.

"Haha, very funny," Fishbone responded dryly, his arm tightening around his wife, who looked a little pale, "If things go south, I'd have her out of the picture before she becomes a problem. Nothing will come between me and Glory."

His wife hid her face in his chest, her hands clenching his shirt. It was a warning to her too, she realized. She had to make sure her emotions didn't get the best of her.

Jax's smile widened as he walked away, leaving the couple behind. He moved toward Lord Ashtor, who was coming up with plans for sea trades and shipping routes, the map spread in front of him.

"We will have to smuggle a few soldiers to the north," Lord Ashtor said as Jax stood beside him, "The pirates are going to be a problem. They have been hunting merchant guild's ships lately, and they are getting bolder. If we don't find a way to deal with them, our shipments will be at risk."

"How many men do you think we need?" Jax asked.

"Fifty, maybe sixty. Enough to deal with a pirate ship or two," Lord Ashtor answered, "That's if we don't stumble upon the deep zone reavers."

"The fish heads with glowing hair?"

"Yes, those. Even the Royal Navy has problems with them."

== Author's note ==

Do you enjoy these adventure parts?

Chapter 170 170: 5.27 - The Prophecy's Villain

"I thought reavers only target the Royal Navy's ships," Jax commented.

"I wish. They target anything that floats on water now. Blame it on their new leader, a madman who thinks he's the God of the sea, they say," Lord Ashtor scoffed arrogantly, "We can try to bribe them, but they are too unpredictable. The best course of action is to avoid them."

Leaf, who overheard their conversation, saw danger signs written all over the sea routes, "Does boss know? He might cancel the whole plan if we tell him."

"He must have known and just didn't tell you," Lord As reasoned, "You look like a scared rabbit whenever he suggests something new."

Leaf coughed, "Like you never get scared."

"Scared? Ha!" Lord As barked a laugh, "I'm just a humble servant who worships his boss. I'd swim through shark infested waters if he asked me to. Unlike you cowards."

Leaf rubbed his temples, "As if rivalry between Roland and Jax isn't enough, now we have to deal with a bootlicker. How lovely."

"The biggest scaredy-cat is calling me a bootlicker," Lord Ashtor tapped his chin, pretending to think, "Shouldn't you be polishing our boss' boots and begging him to stay out of the sea right now, Leaf?"

Leaf took a deep breath, giving up his attempt to befriend the new Vice. "The boot that you'll never get to kiss." He walked away, not wanting to waste any more time on the argument.

He had voiced his concern to their Boss before, but Lucian didn't seem to mind the tension between his Vices, even encouraging it at times.

It was a paranoid way of keeping himself safe, that was his answer to Leaf: keep each other in check. If they kept each other in check, nobody would dare to betray him.

"Goblin," Leaf called out to the boy, who ran around with the feral soldiers. Lucian had given him a dozen to play with.

Goblin stopped growing taller at ten, still looking like a child even at fourteen, which seemed to be due to his tattoo.

"Yeah?" Goblin beamed a smile at him.

"Are you okay with returning to the slave camp?"

"As long as Boss is with us, I'm fine," Goblin replied, his expression full of trust in Lucian.

"Even you..." Leaf frowned, seeing how much of a hold Lucian had on him. He also used to be like this, trusting until he was used as a scapegoat, and ended up in the slave camp, "Never mind. Let's go help Fishbone's wife unload the supplies."

"Okay!" Goblin followed after him, waving at his underling feral soldiers to do the same.

They were like big pets in human form, and it was a bit eerie with how they seemed to follow Goblin more than the other Vices. Again, it must have something to do with his humanoid tattoo for sure.

The schedule was packed as they continued their journey to the gold mines.

The Nareon's Hunter King was going to be a big obstacle to overcome, but as long as they acted their part, they could secure a deal with him.

When on the move, they would rehearse their roles, practice how to present their offer, and prepare for the worst.

The gold mines were the most vital piece in Lucian's plan, and he couldn't afford to lose it.

The desert changed, showing the first signs of civilization.

After passing by Savage's territory, the gold mines came into view.

They encountered the first patrol, who questioned them, asking for their reason for being in their territory.

They introduced the feral soldiers as a mercenary group, explaining that they were there to assist in the protection of the gold mines.

The patrol's leader recognized Lucian and gave him a curt nod, allowing them to pass through.

It was only when they reached the mining site that they were faced with the real challenge. They had to wait outside, while watching their boss enter the mines by himself.

The Hunter King was there, with just a dozen of his servants. His seven marks was such a high level, there was no need for a big protection force.

He was overlooking the mine's operations when Lucian arrived, a cigarette hanging from his mouth, a lazy yet deadly gaze in his eyes.

His black hair was pulled back into a ponytail, and his sun kissed skin was covered in tattoos.

He was shirtless, wearing only a pair of loose pants, his muscular chest exposed to the sun, absorbing its rays.

He was young, in his mid twenties, yet his aura was that of a crazy man who had lived through many lifetimes.

The South's prodigy and the prophecy's villain was standing before Lucian.

His name, Eon. Hunter King Eon.

A bloodthirsty killer, a ruthless warrior, and the man who would bring the South to its knees, due to a single female, the heroine.

"Hunter King Eon," Lucian bowed his head in respect, "We've come to fulfill our part of the deal."

King Eon dragged the cigarette from his mouth and blew out the smoke, his eyes fixed on Lucian.

"Glory's founder," he said in a rough voice, "It's about time you showed up."

He gestured for Lucian to follow him.

They walked towards the mine's entrance, the miners not daring to pause their work to look at the newcomers.

But to their surprise, King Eon ordered them to stop their work and leave.

The miners obeyed without question, dropping their tools and leaving the area.

The mine was a massive pit, dug deep into the earth. It was a maze of tunnels and shafts, with wooden beams supporting the walls and ceiling.

Lamps hung from the beams, illuminating the dark tunnels.

"Tell me about the deal," King Eon said as they walked.

Who in their right mind would ask for a gold mine that could be taken away after the war, if the owner wished so? On what basis did Lucian believe he could keep it? It was a foolish demand to make.

"The north has lost its two ruby knights," Lucian began, "They are currently in a state of panic, trying to find a way to fill the power vacuum. The Lost East Walls won't be able to withstand the Southern Alliance's invasion. The North will be forced to pull back their forces and abandon the resources in the Lost East."

"Aren't you a northerner?" King Eon shot him a look, an intimidating smirk on his lips, "Why are you betraying your homeland?"

══════ Author's note ══════

Thank you for the golden tickets!

Chapter 171 171: 5.28 - A New Base Of Operation

Lucian kept his expression neutral, "I'm not betraying it, it's just the lost east walls you'll conquer, and those don't belong to the north."

"Or the south," King Eon added. He stopped, turning to face Lucian, his eyes narrowing. "How much do you know about the Lost East Walls?"

"Enough to know that they are worth more than a gold mine." Lucian didn't back down, chuckling at the King's challenging tone. "I'm not here to steal from you, Hunter King Eon. I'm here to offer a trade. I keep the gold mines, and in return, I provide you with a path to the Lost East's resources and the east walls themselves."

"I can take them myself." The King's smirk widened.

"For how long until they get retaken? You will need more than an army to keep your hold on them," Lucian pointed out, "My influence in the north will make your life much easier."

"..." King Eon was silent for a moment, considering the offer. He took another drag from his cigarette. "Half."

"Full. I'll be investing in this mine, the cost of the operations and the workers' wages will be on me. Not a small fortune. Half is not worth it." Lucian's tone was firm, but not disrespectful.

The King dragged on his cigarette, the tip glowing red. "Why would I give you the whole mine?"

"Because you know that if you don't, the South will be the one to suffer the consequences." Lucian leaned forward, his voice lowering. "I will make sure of it."

The King's eyes flashed dangerously, the cigarette between his fingers crushing into ash.

He grabbed Lucian by the collar, pushing him against the wall, his face close enough that Lucian could smell the tobacco on his breath. "You dare threaten me?"

Lucian waved his hand before his face to move the smoke away, his eyes burning with cold fire. "I'm not here to beg for scraps, and from the way you are treating me, I'm no longer sure if I want to deal with you at all."

Getting rid of Glory's founder would be easy for the king, but the mess that would follow was not worth it. It was called Southern Alliance for a reason. Eon didn't rule all of the south, nor did he have the power to take it all for himself.

"I just got a little bit too excited, that's all," the King said, letting go of Lucian's collar, dusting it off as an apology, "Taxes will be raised, however. We are at war, and the funds are needed."

Lucian adjusted his clothes, "I expected as much."

The agreement was settled, and they shook hands on it, sealing the deal. The official document would contain more details, such as the responsibilities of each party, the penalties for breaching the contract, and the terms of the trade.

There was no information about Lucian supporting and helping the southern army in it, for he was supposed to be a neutral party.

But the deal included infrastructure development for the gold mines, which would benefit the southern army in the long run, through the supply lines, roads, and other facilities.

Lucian's men were waiting for him outside, relieved to see him alive. Though the worst has yet to come.

For the next few days, they were going to set up their base of operations and begin the process of taking over the gold mines.

The Hunter King didn't leave the mines yet. He watched them like a hawk, scrutinizing their every move for a whole week as his people got ready to move.

The performance of the Vices was crucial for the success of the mission, as well as the behavior of the mercenaries (feral soldiers).

King Eon even pulled over Roland, the new mercenary captain, for a little chat.

Roland explained that he worked as a loan shark, his group had grown in numbers, and began protecting their clients' caravans and warehouses as well.

It was a believable story, trackable and easy to find witnesses for, should the King wish to verify it.

After making sure they were not spies and not there to cause trouble, he left them to their own devices.

"Comandant Grim," Lucian greeted the man as he prepared to leave with his men, "Thank you for your help."

There was no action in the mines, and commandant Grim was a man of war, he was excited to go back to the battlefield.

"Keep it in top shape," he said in a gruff voice, the sternness in his eyes softened by a rare smile, "Or I'll have to come back and take it myself."

"You're welcome to try," Lucian replied, matching his tone. "Good luck on the battlefield, commandant."

With the commandant gone, and the King's attention shifting elsewhere, Lucian and his team started their work.

The first order of business was to change the soldiers' uniforms, giving them a new set of clothes that had the Glory's symbol on them.

The gold mine workers were kept the same, and so were their tasks. Lucian didn't want to disrupt the production process until they were fully settled.

He and his Vices spent most of their time in meetings, discussing the future plans and the steps they needed to take.

The mine had its own problems, which were quickly addressed.

The mines became Glory's new base of operations, taking advantage of the defenses already built around it.

The southern Vices moved their families near the area, and began living and working there.

Leaf's projects in the north had been passed down to their loyal employees to handle, while he took over management of the gold mines' operations.

Fishbone and his wife were tasked with handling the logistics of the supplies, making sure the food, water, and other necessities were delivered on time.

Mumbai took charge of the finances, tracking the income and expenses, and making sure the budget was balanced.

She also communicated with Fishbone's wife regarding the new rations plan, contacting the local suppliers, and managing the contracts.

They couldn't invest all their capital in the gold mines, so they had to find ways to make the business profitable as soon as possible, which was Cansan's job.

He would focus on finding buyers for the gold and negotiating the best deals in the northern markets.

Lucian, on the other hand, was busy bonding with the feral soldiers most of the time, increasing the duration of their loyalty.

The rest of the time, he would spend planning and strategizing, going over the reports from the other Vices, and making the final decisions.

"An invitation to the Royal Academy's annual ball." Jax handed over an envelope to Lucian, who was having a bath after a long day of working.