Wanderer 103

Chapter 103: House Talos

“Lord Bronn, the bastards have taken over the iron mine!” the boy reported.

The former’s features twisted into a grimace. While a powerful mage could tear a sheet of iron apart as easily as paper, it was still a valuable resource across Remior. After all, most people were at the lower grades. They relied on everyday tools made of the mundane metal. Consequently, House Talos regularly exported it, making the mine an important economic asset for their family.

“What about the casualties?”

“Sixteen dead. Over thirty injured.”

Bronn wanted to clench his fists, yet he had enough awareness to hold back. Even the tough gemstone vials would shatter into powder in a Violet’s grip. It would be a shame to spill their contents – the elixirs had cost him an arm and a leg. Forcing himself to calm down, he spoke again.

“Who?”

“Most of the dead were Red-borns. Only four were Orange-borns… though… one of them was uncle Zin.”

Bronn sighed. It could have been worse. At least they hadn’t lost any Yellow-borns. Still, Zin had been at Blue, making him one of the family’s strongest fighters, regardless of what grade he’d started with. It was a significant loss. Bronn’s only consolation was they hadn’t been that close. The man had only been a distant nephew of his.

“Do we know who’s stationed there?”

The boy scratched his head for a few moments.

“Only a couple of our people made it back, so we aren’t too clear on the details. All we know is they have at least two Blues. Rellan is among them.”

Bronn’s eyes widened. Rellan was a Yellow-born and one of House Antaeus strongest mages. Perhaps the third or fourth from the top.

“Are you certain?”

The boy nodded before clarifying. “There’s no mistake. We spotted him from afar after he used his ability.”

Houses Talos and Antaeus actually had the same bloodline, Gigantification. This was a common occurrence on Remior, as neighbouring families often shared ancestors. Rogue mages frequently left their homes for various reasons, establishing rival branches nearby.

In any case, Gigantification allowed a person to increase their size based on their grade. At Red, one could only double their height, while a Blue core like Rellan could grow six times as tall. People jokingly referred to it as a poor man’s beast affinity, though the transformation wasn’t nearly as drastic.

“Tell Lorin, Sedon and Hert to pick ten Greens and go drive those assholes away.”

“But Lord Bronn! What if it’s a trap?!” the boy protested.

Bronn shook his head.

“It isn’t. They never intended to keep the mine. It’s much closer to our estate. They know they can’t hold it. They just wanted to hurt us.”

The boy bobbed his head in understanding before bolting out. However, the door didn’t get the chance to close before another person ran into the office.

“What is it now, Floria?” Bronn asked in exasperation.

The girl bent over, holding her knees as she caught her breath.

“Grandpa… they’ve attacked Oakbridge town… they took the guards out and razed the warehouse down.”

Bronn couldn’t stop himself this time. Slamming his free fist on the desk, he crushed it into a rain of splinters. It was lucky Floria was at Green, or he could’ve hurt her.

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“Are they still there?!?!”

Oakbridge town was one of three under their jurisdiction. Unlike House Talos’s estate where the members of their family lived, the towns in their control were full of commoners. This was another relatively widespread convention on Remior. Still, these towns were far from worthless. They constituted important trading hubs for the noble Houses. Even more notably, the nobles often married Yellow-born commoners, bringing new blood into the fold, enhancing their strength.

Flinching at her grandfather’s outburst, the girl took a moment before answering.

“No. They left as soon as they were done.” she muttered, her voice barely a whisper.

Bronn rubbed his eyelids.

‘Damn it! Why couldn’t they wait just a few more years?!’

Truth be told, he had expected their enemies to escalate at some point. While House Antaeus currently had the upper hand, both sides knew this wouldn’t last forever. Bronn’s son was getting closer to Violet. As soon as he advanced, the tides would change.

Of course, a single Violet core couldn't take on an entire family by themselves, but their strength still couldn't be ignored. On paper, a Violet core was about three times as strong as a Blue. However, conventional wisdom was that it would usually take about five Blues to pin one down. That's because they'd fight less efficiently, some of their strength wasted due to bad teamwork. Then there was the entire morale aspect of having another powerful leader at the head of an army.

Overall, getting a second Violet core would be a huge deterrent. It might even let House Talos go on the offense.

"Call Fyn over."

Floria scurried away, probably glad to be out of her grandpa's sight right now. A few minutes later, a man walked into the office. He threw the broken desk a passing glance before chuckling.

"Dad, you have to stop smashing desks. We can't keep up with you."

Bronn almost snapped at him, but he caught himself. Instead, he plopped down on his chair – at least this piece of furniture was still standing – before tilting his head up at the ceiling. Then, he laughed bitterly.

"This is the fifth attack in the last two months. We've already lost about 10% of our men."

Fyn stopped smiling.

"The bastards must really want to build up their advantage before my promotion…"

Bronn nodded.

"At this rate, they'll succeed. How close are you?"

But Fyn shook his head.

“Dad, you know this is my third promotion already…”

It was true. Fyn had been cleansing his core for centuries. It wasn’t easy to calculate the exact date it would bear fruit.

“Give me your best estimate.”

Fyn appeared to ponder his words for a while.

“Well, before you brought me these new elixirs, I would have said maybe between eight and fifteen years.”

And it had already been around nine months since he’d started taking this so-called Aurora Dew. It meant he was anywhere between two and four years away now…

‘So close…’

For Blue and Violet cores like them, four years were nothing. If only those assholes had waited just a little longer… They could have caught them by surprise and wiped their stench off the region!

But alas…

“We can’t wait that long. At this rate, they’ll burn everything to the ground by then.”

“They can’t eliminate us completely. As soon as I advance, we’ll turn everything around.” Fyn protested.

Yet Bronn disagreed.

“I’m sorry son. We can’t afford to do that. We might win in the end, but half our family will be ruined by then.”

“Hey, you’re the boss… It’s your decision.” Fyn shrugged, before adding. “But I’m confused. What’s the alternative?”

“What else? We flip the table.”

The two men looked down at the broken pieces of wood as Bronn scratched his head.

“…figuratively speaking.”

Then, he crouched by the remains of his desk, digging through the pile. A few seconds later, he found what he was looking for inside a somewhat-intact drawer. It was a bottle of ink.

“You mean…?” Fyn asked, realization flashing in his eyes.

Bronn nodded. He handed his son the elixirs, before walking to a cupboard. There he found a quill and a piece of paper. Dipping the quill in the ink, he held the paper against the wall as he began writing.

“We’ll reach out to the Divine Order… Ask them to get those bastards off our backs…”

Fyn didn’t say anything. He stood by silently, watching Bronn compile the letter. What the latter had left unsaid, was that the Divine Order wouldn’t interfere in a conflict between two Houses just because one of them asked nicely. They’d only do so if they gave them a good reason to...

About half an hour later, Bronn reread everything, nodding in satisfaction. Folding the letter, he slid it into an envelope, before digging through his desk’s remains again, this time for his seal. Then, he extended his hand towards Fyn, holding out a red candle. The latter heated it up with his fire mana, before Bronn splotched a blob of wax on the envelope, stamping it down with the seal. Only then did he hand it to his son.

“I’m sorry, Fyn. I suppose you’ll have to reach Violet with the regular elixirs like everyone else.”

“Two years… Thirteen years… It’s not that big a difference.” Fyn shrugged, before assuming a more serious tone. “But… are you sure about this?”

“It’s the only way.” Bronn smiled bitterly. “Take the letter and the elixirs to the Divine Root.”

Father and son looked each other in the eyes, knowing they were about to turn Remior upside down…