



琥珀之劍
Heroes of Amber

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The Amber Sword

– 琥珀之劍 –

- Volume 2 - The Dust Laden Kingdom (II)

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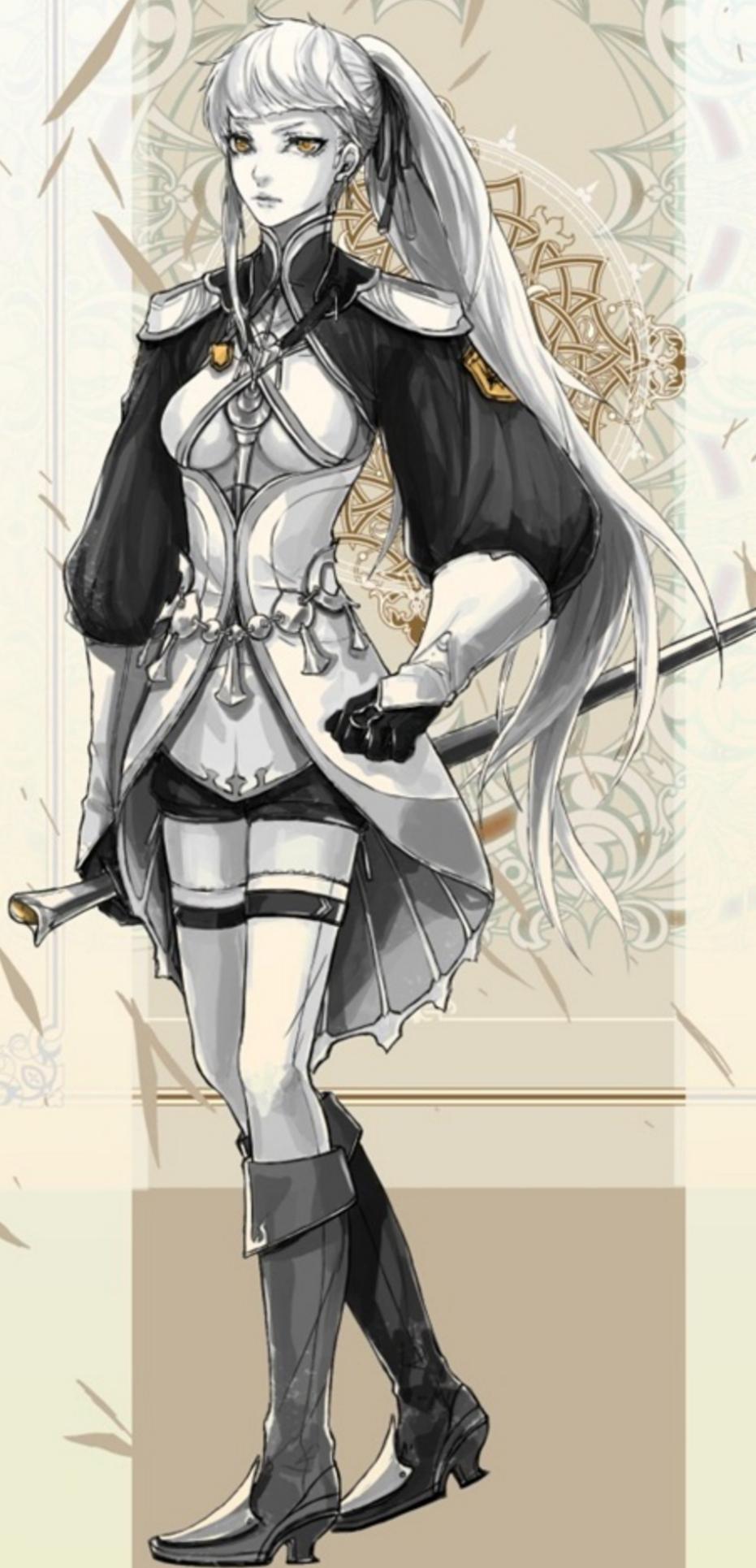




Brendel



Romaine



Freya



Ciel



Princess Gryphine



Rauze



Amandina

Chapter 56

The invitation from the Unifying Guild

The battle was over before it had started—

Brendel ordered the Lopes Mercenaries to bring the two soldiers who were knocked unconscious to the room's corner.

[That swordsman is probably going to reach here soon. The difference him and my stats is nearly twenty times, and he's even worse than Ebdon or the Crusader Executioner. Even the slightest mistake in fighting him is fatal.]

Brendel held his left shoulder where the sword struck him. It was burning and the pain came in pulses. If Tirste came with full strength at him, it was literally impossible for him to even see his movements. Brendel wiped away the perspiration on his forehead and rubbed his forehead.

[We just met for the first time and the reaction he did was to attack me. The only organization that I offended was the Unifying Guild, so is he one of the assassins for them? But it doesn't really fit their actions. Their typical actions are subtle and intentionally so. Even if they want to take revenge, they wouldn't pick this place as a venue. Collaboration with Madara? That's even more ridiculous. The Unifying Guild believes in Chaos and follows the Twilight Dragon, how can they work together with Madara believes in the Laws of Darkness?]

He shook his head to clear his messy thoughts. He pointed at different directions and instructed: "The six of you, move separately."

The most important thing right now was to save his own life.

[Ah. But maybe what I told them to do was unnecessary. Should I call them back?... No, it's better to be prepared, especially since it doesn't make a difference if they are here or not.]

Brendel would have normally been delighted to order these Iron-ranked mercenaries to and fro, but right now in this cold and harsh reality, there was a Gold-Ranked

swordsman who was trying to pick a bone with him, and it made him unsettled.

For a person to unlock the Third-tier strength, his Overall Power Rating had to be over one hundred OZ.

[That swordsman is using a thin blade, so he is probably training in the Elven swordsmanship which focuses on agility. If that's the case he might have over 120 OZ in agility and his reactions must be faster than a normal person by twenty over times. That kind of speed burst is two times faster than a racing car. To handle that, his physique is also strong enough to handle the pressure from the air resistance. 60 OZ in physique. That defense is the rough equivalent of a tank. If I use the wind bullet against it... A dent?]

A swordsman who had unlocked the Third-tier, could be described as a monster in human form. Brendel thought of what was going to happen if he received a blow from him.

[Boooooom, fly into the walls, passing through several of them before finally stopping? That person could run around the entire place under one minute and search for me. Even if I send the twelve men out to delay him, that's only a few seconds worth. A few seconds means nothing to me, but in that time he could have killed me many times over.]

Brendel sighed. He thought he had basically controlled the situations under his plans. He was always very careful to avoid the existences of these people. In his adventures, the only mistake that he had was offending the Unifying Guild, but he was certain to avoid their eyes.

The only thing that he did not realize, was that this current situation was nothing more than a coincidence. Brendel got up and pulled out the soldier's sword, then looked back at the door. The remaining Lopes Mercenaries had secured the passageway, while the corridor was silent and empty. But this silence made one uneasy.

Brendel displayed the Holy Sword card. White wings extended behind him, and a gigantic sword appeared behind him with the sigils of golf flowers. This was the third time he brought out this card. The power of the sword entered his body, and he like he could destroy the walls with a single finger. But he knew that it was just an illusion, and he only became as strong as mid-tier Silver-ranked fighter.

[Sure, it allows me to hurt the opponent, but the agility difference between us will result in me getting pierced through my throat. But this still gives me a chance.]

There were several screams that came from the corridor, and the Mercenaries of Lopes card immediately darkened by half.

Brendel's heart gripped tightly. He raised his head and happened to see the young silver-haired noble slowly walking out from the corner. He wore a short black colored cloak and held a rapier in his hand, and there were droplets of blood on his blade.

[Crystal Scorpion Sting. It's not even close to the most damaging weapon for its level at 60, but the toughness of the sword is amazing. When I was still a noob, I heard a veteran saying users of this weapon had extreme confidence in his skills.]

Brendel did not know if that statement was true, but at least from the appearance of this man, he looked like he trusted in himself.

At the same time he looked at Tirste, the noble was looking back at him with amethyst colored eyes. When he saw the remnants of the Holy Sword on his back, it narrowed slightly, before looking at the rest of the men behind him.

[It looks like he has some skills, but that's nothing really much for me to take note of. Even if I don't show my fangs at him, I'm still able to pressure him. If that's the case...]

Tirste flicked his sword and returned it to his sheath, and the corners of his lips lifted. His smile was as sweet as a girl's serene smile.

The attractive youth's eyebrow lifted slightly: "Have I seen you before somewhere?"

Brendel did not know what he was planning, and could only force himself to be calm. He gave a derisive smile, showing part of his teeth, before saying: "Indeed. I believe that you stabbed me with a sword about a minute ago. But before that moment, I have not seen you at all, Ser."

He spat the words out. As he did so, he was quietly opening his Window Stats, and the lines appeared before him like a waterfall.

[4730 XP. The Elemental Scroll saved me nearly 2000 XP, and most importantly it saved me the time from completing the mission. Even a few days are too wasteful.]

Tirste shook his head, not angry at all: “No. We met much earlier. I am certain that I have seen you inside the Cavalry Headquarters.”

“Cavalry Headquarters?”

“Correct.”

“Who are you?” Brendel suddenly realized something, but he was much more relaxed after he thought about it, and he spoke calmly.

“My name is Tirste. I chose this name for myself, taken from the Kirrlutz ancient word ‘Tiryhd’ which means ‘struggle’. If you are asking about my identity, then I am the Master Sergeant of the White-Mane army, and the right hand of the Silver-winged Cavalry’s commander, as known as viscount Marnowell. But compared to these boring titles, I still like my name. It is simple, meaningful and full sacrifice.”

[...This is the first time I have seen someone bragging his own name with a smile like that.] Brendel thought to himself.

[So it’s him. Does that mean that he had already found the truth to Amandina’s situation? It’s unlikely, unless that cripple betrayed me... Does the cripple have that kind of courage?]

Brendel forced himself to remain calm in case Tirste discovered something.

[Viscount Tirste. He did not make too much of a splash in the Aouine’s history. The only impression I have of him is how he fell in love with a bard which ended sadly. But I do know of his personality. He might appear frivolous, but this person is careful to the point of being inflexible.]

Brendel suspected that he had something to do with the Unifying Guild since he was the right hand of the Silver-winged commander, Megeska. Looking at how mysterious his actions were, he was most likely related to the Unifying Guild. But Brendel was quite surprised. Tirste did not match the lore within the game, where he was described as bullied since he was young and had a twisted personality because of that. The Tirste in front of him was completely unperturbed without appearing to be a hypocrite.

Tirste’s smile was like a beautiful snake. Even though Brendel knows there was danger coming from him, but he could not help but appreciate that elegance.

Tirste's hand was still on his sword, as though he was trying to say 'there is still unfinished business, and I don't deny the fact that I might run you through, but other than that, we can chat freely.' It was as though he had put aside life and death, and held on to his own principles.

Brendel was unable to find any weakness from his appearance. But the other soul in him had a fiery resistance to the powerful, otherwise he would not have fought against Madara for ten years. A cold smile illuminated his face, showing that he was calm.

"I don't recall offending you. Vicount Tirste."

Tirste's eyes contracted slightly.

[This man isn't simple. I made a sneak attack on him and he actually managed to escape my attack as a low tier Iron-ranked fighter. This means that he has some measure of skill. And now...]

It was a simple rebuttal, but it was a riposte and it was a trap to get more information out of him. The noble with silver hair felt a little awkward, and he rubbed his nose a little. He did not want to be led by his nose, but his pride did not allow him to pretend that he did not hear Brendel's words.

"Well spoken. But not everyone in this world has a choice." Tirste said.

Brendel's eyes narrowed a little. Tirste was offered a carrot before using a stick, and it appeared the situation was not as good as he imagined. But handing over Amandina was not a possible choice. He worked his mind furiously as he quietly put all his points into the Mercenary class, finally reach level 20.

For the first time, his strength broke past the limits of 10 OZ. Even though it was still beneath Tirste eyes, he had risen to a mid-tier Iron rank fighter.

"What are you trying to say?" Brendel's hand suppressed the Holy Sword's strength, and his hands were sweaty.

Tirste seemed to have seen through Brendel's actions, but he did not act upon it. However, this behavior actually made Brendel feel like he was facing a great enemy, and as a veteran warrior, Brendel was trying to find every possibility where Tirste was going to attack, and a bead of cold perspiration streaked past his forehead.

[This damned Tirste... Even though he looks like he doesn't care, but he's watching me closely.]

“Let's be straightforward. What is your relationship to Leto?”

Brendel's face color nearly turned when he heard Tirste's question, but the qualities that he had gotten so far from his experience were not false. Within an instant, he had calmed down and answered coolly: “What Leto.”

Brendel looked like he did not know anything, but his mind was crashing around like a ship at the mercy of a thunderstorm.

[From what position is Tirste asking me from? Regional noble? White-mane army? Unifying Guild? Shit, it feels like all these possibilities are possible, but there's no hard evidence. But the most important thing is how much they know.]

Brendel stared at Tirste's eyes as it was his forte, and he had tricked many top players from Madara, but appeared like it was ineffective here.

Tirste did not find any mistakes from Brendel, but that was precisely why he became suspicious. He smiled: “Your answer doesn't mean anything, and killing you is the simplest solution to me. But your performance has me appreciate your talents. I don't really care what you say, because there's no meaning— Brendel, right? I only want to ask you this, are you willing to join us?”

Brendel really wanted to act ignorant and say ‘Us?’, but when he saw the hand on the sword wearing a black ring with the shape of a snake biting its tail, he gulped down his answer. He knew that Tirste was giving him a final warning, either join him or report to Mother Marsha.

But joining the Unifying Guild was a torture to Brendel. They were just second to Madara as his greatest enemy. That was not the only thing, because joining the infamous Unifying Guild meant that he had to accept their branding for his whole life. This was not a road that he was willing to walk, unless there was no road left.

Brendel stopped fiddling with his Windows Stats.

He had to choose between Tirste's sword or the Unifying Guild.

The room was full of dead silence.

Chapter 57

Weight

Brendel sat down on a chair with a hesitant face and looked at viscount Tirste, but his mind was conscious of the new facts that came to him, and was moving quickly.

[The Unifying Guild most likely suspects the relationship between Leto and me. I don't know how Tirste recognized me, but this means that the news leaked very much earlier than I suspected. The Unifying Guild bastards' goals are authority. The entire kingdom, royal family or the government are their enemies. If the Unifying Guild is interested in us, then it's because of the effects we had on the refugees.]

Brendel's lips curled up slightly.

[If I consider that, then I still have a certain gambling chip... No, I shouldn't see it as a chip. A balance scale is more appropriate for this situation. Tirste has a Weight called "Brendel's life", and my Weight is "The ability to control the masses". Which is heavier, that's difficult to say.]

Brendel would not act like a rookie at this juncture, and he was certain that he had an advantage for knowing what the opponent had in his hand.

[I won't give on the stakes yet!]

Brendel tilted his head and gave a small smile, lowering his attitude: "Very well. You won, or perhaps I should say your sword has won. Viscount Marnowell, Ser Tirste. I have not dealt with you before, but since you believe that I have something to do with the Red Bronze Dragon, Leto, then I will be open with you. I'm sure you want me to join you, but your goals should not end just there right—"

He spoke and send a small gesture to his summons to watch for any other intruders around the area, as he did not want anyone else to interfere with his plans. The gesture was mostly hidden, and it did not fool Tirste's eyes. Brendel had intended to show that on purpose.

A gesture could sent the correct signals, and it could also transmit the wrong hint.

After receiving the order, the two mercenaries expressed themselves through their eyes. They took their axes and stood silently on each side of the door. The mercenaries had all the qualities of the legends, unified, brave, loyal, as well as having a great insight to strategies.

Tirste placed most of his attention on Brendel with a hand on his sword, but when the mercenaries moved, he lifted an eyebrow.

[These mercenaries are as good as the rumors. No wonder they are able to clear a path through Madara's armies.]

Brendel had successfully led Tirste to reconsider the situation.

Tirste believed that the youth in front of him was quite likely to be the mastermind of the mercenaries, and in truth his guess was not wrong. But the problem it was only a guess. When he tried to find some evidence through Brendel's words, he did not say anything useful at all.

The first basis of the negotiation was, 'Brendel is the leader of Leto and the mercenaries'.

Brendel looked slightly nervously at Tirste, afraid that Tirste would somehow object or just stab him with his sword. But he exhaled quietly with great relief.

[It looks like the viscount is at least a capable and self-conceited person. The first step is working well, but here comes the next step of maintaining the power struggle and manipulating him—]

Tirste did not have Brendel's skills in manipulation. He merely smiled with agreement in his heart. Brendel was willing to disclose his identity, so Tirste felt that Brendel was being sincere. The Unifying Guild did not mind giving out generous promises, as long as they were given absolute loyalty.

"You're not wrong. So tell me, what exactly are we planning?" The young noble put down his sword and asked patiently.

Brendel took a silent breath and cursed him. Tirste was really troublesome to handle.

"A normal person in your position would be wondering what the mercenaries are planning to do, especially when the mastermind is hiding behind someone's back.

With the tens of thousands of refugees gathering in Bruglas, and the slow reaction from the nobles, these refugees might as well be a barrel of gunpowder waiting to erupt.” Brendel held onto the armrest and said without any change to his expression.

“Very good,” Tirste: “So what are your goals?”

[Goals? What are my goals, you ask? Isn't it to find some base so I can level up, set up some political party and become the president?]

Brendel rolled his eyes in his mind, but he was unable to find a good answer to this question so he countered with the same question: “And what are your goals?”

“I will do what the Unifying Guild orders to me.” Tirste smiled and said politely.

Very few people knew what the Unifying Guild's true goals are, but there were many who had heard of its infamy, and it reached even distant shores. They had caused great tragedies in different places, and the people who discussed the events would have their expressions changed. People saw them as devils incarnate.

Brendel knew them well, but he acted like he was understanding them for the first time. He laughed twice: “It seems that we don't have the same idea, but our plans line up together on this matter.”

Brendel lied through his teeth.

Tirste turned his head back to look at the other mercenaries. They looked like they were indifferent. He believed in his eyes, and he could find even the smallest change in one's expression. His conclusion was that the youth's followers were not against Brendel's words, or at least he did not lie.

Tirste thought for a while but he did not understand Brendel's words: “Explain.”

Brendel recalled some words from his female leader. ‘The best way to lie to someone, is to let them hear what they want to hear.’ It was not something that was too complicated, but he thought that beautiful women knew how to lie well. Since his female leader was one of the top beauties in the game, she was most likely correct.

Stray thoughts entered Brendel's mind, but he had already decided on his words.

“To put it simply. You're against the country. I'm against the country. But you're

idealists, I'm someone ambitious, that is as simple as it is." He answered with half truths.

The word 'idealists' won Tirste's good will. "It seems like our paths are indeed different. But I think I understand what you're trying to say. You don't want to join us, you want us to become allies." His thumb stroked the sword's hilt. "Are you not afraid to die?"

"Even if you kill me, Aouine is a dying country that has many predators waiting for it, and you won't hurt the overall situation. But if I'm alive, we would have mutual benefits, and you might even get assistance from my side. Of course, this isn't entirely free—"

"But you must know, the Unifying Guild's job isn't to create a new kingdom on top of ruins." Tirste was all smiles.

"Allow me introduce myself. When the old system fails, a new system would grown on its corpse. That is my job."

Brendel had exceptional talent in lying as he had no change to his heart or expression.

"That is certainly brave," The noble started clapping in spite of himself: "Because of Aouine's different factions gathering their own power, the local nobles are scheming hard to gain independence. I am quite certain they would not expect a youth to rave like this. Tell me, what exactly do you have to steal power from the Corvado Family that had ruled this land for centuries."

Brendel laughed with confidence, but it hardly hid his guilt. However, Tirste had already started to believe in Brendel's words with a preconceived mindset and completely did not expect he was full of shit.

"Gamblers don't have the confidence of a certain win. As long as the returns are big enough, the only thing that matters is the bravery to see it through. You must understand that 'risks' had never been used to test the desperate."

"But if that's the case, that means we're doing pointless stuff right?" Tirste put his weight into one side as he raised his arms.

The Unifying Guild's directive was to return to Chaos, but Brendel was telling him that the Laws were continuously destroyed and repaired like a natural cycle.

“If there are no advantages for us, what do you think I should do?” Tirste asked.

“When a kingdom falls into internal strife, civilization would decline, isn’t that your goal?” Brendel went straight for the jugular.

Tirste’s expression changed slightly, as if to reflect his heart: “Looks like you really do understand us.”

“I understand ALL my friends and enemies.” Brendel said with double meaning in his words.

Brendel’s forehead was starting to perspire. This was the final moment.

Tirste fell into deep thought. At this moment his condescending attitude was gone. It was the first time that he found the youth in front of him to be much more complicated than what he had imagined.

He did not entirely believe Brendel’s words, but Brendel’s steadfast resolution had intrigued him. His hand was on his sword, his heart was clear on the numerous events that letting a person to have disastrous consequences.

But was the youth going to threaten him?

“I still have another question, have you been to the Pine Fortress?” Tirste finally raised his head and asked a question without really thinking about it.

Brendel’s expression changed. He was incredibly worried that the Unifying Guild would discover that he killed a high ranking member. He had an advantage that the bodyguard in the fortress was at least two sub-tiers above his Iron-rank, and he would hardly be suspected.

But if the Unifying Guild was able to discover his presence, what was to say they could not discover the truth now?

But before Brendel had the chance to think about his reply, Tirste’s hand suddenly flashed, and the sword was already coming towards him.

[He discovered the truth?] Brendel’s heart turned cold and he subconsciously turned on the charge technique, but he immediately suppressed the thought to counter attack, as he had seen the path of Tirste’s sword when he raised his speed by ten fold—

Brendel knew that Tirste was testing him.

And just like he thought, the sword struck behind him and into the chair.

Brendel felt his forehead turning cold with perspiration.

“A mid-tier Iron-rank,” Tirste muttered to himself, frowning: “Looks like you’re not that garbage’s match. But this is really strange, how can the timing be such a coincidence?”

Brendel did not say anything, but he was cursing at Tirste for suspecting his abilities even at this moment.

Tirste put his sword back into his sheath and looked deeply at the youth. “How much trouble can you create for the nobles in the near future?”

He asked.

Chapter 58

Disaster's aftermath

TL: Scroll down a lot if you want to skip to the story, otherwise read on for some analysis on the in-text power rankings.

I recall a comment on Mahouka Rettousei's protagonist Tatsuya, describing him as a shark swimming in a very small pool, because he owned everyone in school. I find that it kind of applies to Brendel too. Most of the commoners/mercs react in a very WTF manner whenever Brendel does his stuff, but when it comes to the really strong people like Tirste, Brendel gets his ass handed to him.

Just for some level info rehash

Iron-ranked Tier is 16-30 (Brendel recently increased his level to 20.)

Silver-ranked is 31-40

Gold-ranked is 41-60 (Tirste is assumed to be level 40+ since his description is one who has just entered Gold Rank)

– Gold-rank + nearly unlocks Elemental power, 50-51

– Gold-rank + unlocked Elemental power, 51-60

Above that is some other term that I'll revisit later since these characters have not appeared yet.

Here's a power hierarchy that's based on innate talent (ranked by me).

Commoners

Soldiers/most mercs

Freya/Felix/Brendel (without the cheat system)

Ebdon/some of the Madara undeads

Tirste/People with 'Blessed' status/Brendel's grandfather probably/Players in the game

Tulman (Planeswalker candidate to surpass level 160, but he failed)

Planeswalker who surpassed level 160

So just based purely on the history and lore, Freya managed to climb to the Goddess of War level some time later at the end of Aouine's demise. I'll assume that she's at level 60+, maybe just slightly higher than gold rank and reached the next level.

Brendel/Felix has been described to be really good in the path of the sword, so if they are still alive, they will reach around Freya's level, but probably slightly lower.

And they have basic NPC commoner stats.

I think I read somewhere from Brendel's description in the story, Ebdon becomes really powerful if he's not killed, and he's alive even after Freya died in the original lore, and gave players a really hard time, so he's next in hierarchy.

'Blessed' Status. As you can see, Tirste's stats are off the charts. He has been described as having two times the speed of a F1 racing car (120 agility), and he has the toughness of a tank (60 phys), and stopped the Crusader Executioner with one hand. And he's just level 40+.

Brendel's grandfather is very likely to be powerful as heck, because Brendel had repeatedly said that he's too good to be just a veteran from the November war.

When I look at it from a DnD POV, the stats growth of Brendel's profession is also garbage. His mercenary growth stats are better than his militia growth, certainly, but he's actually trying hard to save his XP, probably for his Knight or Paladin class which has much higher stats growth. Since there's a limit at level 160, I can assume that his stats growth from his profession is limited, and he also has to compete with 'Blessed' enemies whose stats are maybe two times higher than him.

This is where I'm still immensely impressed because the author is really quite intricate with his overall stats progression and still makes sense from many angles. I think that it's a little strange that Brendel is the only one with MTG/Planeswalker status, but I

don't really think it makes him that OP yet, considering that he's simply lacking that base growth compared to a 'Blessed' character.

Anyways, I still find TAS to be awesome. There's quite a bit of fine details that I think people might miss so I'm putting my input here.

"A riot?"

Batum was sitting on top of a thick tree branch, which appeared to be a elm or beech tree. His legs stomped onto the base of it as he suddenly sneezed. He rubbed his nose and looked up with an expression of disbelief.

This abandoned sawmill was outside Bruglas, right along the edge of the forest. Sparse tree stumps could still be seen. Most of the wooden logs came from the north of the Pine River, and the people here intercepted the logs and process them here. The factory could be seen from the nearby pine trees, while one could see the corner of the building here.

It was time for the moon to be nearly up in the sky, indicating that the rise of Mana. Matteya described this period 'The slumber of myriad creatures'. Planeswalkers could only use the Blue, Black, Gray, Green and White cards during this phase, allowing them access to defense and counterattack maneuvers.

Brendel watched the last few birds fly into the shadowy forest as the white moon appeared above the pine forest, before everything went quite with the exception of the occasional sounds from the birds.

The city of Bruglas was to the north, and if one was to gaze from the edge of the forest, they would find an aurora on top of the darkened mountains. Stars lit the sky and it looked like there were precious gems decorating it.

Brendel was familiar with this place. One half of him recalled that he used to train with a sword here with his grandfather. The other half recalled that this place would become a bandits' den seven years later, and after the Regent Princess went after the illegal merchants, the underground auctions were moved and held here.

Brendel felt slightly dazed as he went back and forth to the two memories, and the images felt like they were faded yellow photos.

Amandina stood uneasily beneath the open sky. She wore a pretty white dress. She had never been out to the outskirts of Bruglas so late, and even she was still a young noble girl, she had rarely attended slumber parties with the other girls. She had always felt she was somewhat of a loner, but she had proudly thought that it was because she was nothing like the other ignorant ladies.

She gazed at the silver moon. She was slightly apprehensive in the dark forest, but she was also feeling curious, and she wanted to keep on going with the people around her as the adventurous streak and thrill seeking feelings grew in her heart.

It was completely new and exciting for her.

But she quickly stopped that and calmed down. She took over Batum's words and gave her own opinion.

"If Tirste isn't testing us, then the Unifying Guild is planning something and needs us to draw the attention of the nobles. And I think there's the possibility of both that."

"It's just as well, my lord. We shouldn't have any dealings with these devils in human skin." Batum raised his voice: "Now that the bastard in a noble's attire isn't here, he can't threaten any of us. My lord, didn't you say ou're going Randner? All of us will follow you there! I want to see if he can do anything to us once we're gone!"

Amandina listened to Batum and looked at Brendel. She finally realized that Brendel was not just a high ranking member of the mercenaries, he was the leader amongst them. This made him appear more mysterious in her eyes...

But what made her steel her heart was Tirste's identity as the Unifying Guild's member. That organization name in Aouine was not just infamy, and the girl paled when she heard of that name. Even though she wondered if Brendel was lying to her, but it looked there was no need for the young knight to do so.

She quickly saw that Brendel was shaking his head.

Brendel took his mind off the Windows Stats. He was certain that Planeswalker was not a profession. He had seen no indication of the word anywhere in it, and it was not even a title or sub-profession.

[A Planeswalker's core is still the Cards of Fate. If I'm able to read the cards through the system, then maybe I can see this as a unique item that has its own system, and

based on that a player can simulate and implement the abilities of any profession. Even though this is outside the rules of the game and it looks like it's very powerful, but if any player can make use of it, it's not something that's uniquely powerful.]

Brendel could only guess why it did not appear in the game but appeared in this world.

But what Brendel was surprised was how this 'item' system could grow. It was not limited to just gathering more cards, but was also based on the individual level. When he was level ten as a mercenary, he had four cards, when he rose to level thirteen, he had five cards, and the Elements related to the Knight card combination, Red, Gold and Gray, had risen by one cell in his Elemental Pool.

That was when he heard Batum's words.

Batum's words somehow reflect his own heart, but he knew that it was not possible for him to think this way right now. He was no longer a pure gamer.

[Aligning with the Unifying Guild might be an advantage. It's quite obvious that I'm not going to work with them, but I need to consider how to stab them in the back from this position...]

So he shook his head.

"What?" Batum was stunned and asked hesitatingly: "My lord, are you going to work with them? These people are terrible, they have never had any goodwill to their name."

Amandina wanted to say something but she stopped herself. Brendel's decision had made her sigh with relief. She had originally wanted to warn Brendel that the Unifying Guild's influence was not small, and if Tirste allowed him to leave, he must have a backup plan.

She did not wish for 'The Amber Sword' mercenaries to have a strong enemy behind their backs even before they left Grinoires. As her advisor, she was already placing them as his private property.

"I understand what they are, Batum. But you have to consider the aftermath for everything. If I suggested this idea to that bastard, I wouldn't say a lie that can be broken anytime." Brendel said.

"Doesn't it mean we have to encourage the refugees to cause a riot?" Batum scratched

his head, and appeared unwilling to do it.

“Of course not, Brendel will definitely have a solution. Back in Bucce, we all called him almighty Brendel!” Little Romaine was picking rocks up and throwing them into the river, but she turned her head around and argued with indignance.

[When did you give me a new nickname in Bucce again?] Brendel eyed the lass with chargin.

The original dresses that Romaine and Amandina wore were damaged during the chaos in the auction site, and they had gone back to change before regrouping.

Brendel had bought a few dresses for during the escape from Bucce and she had kept them like they were treasure, but now she wore one of Amandina’s formal black dress, which was exceptionally compatible for her. It was a splendid dress that flowed behind her, and underneath her skirt a white lace petticoat.

She walked with assured confidence and a unique air, and her full chest was matched by the tight fitting dress, and her slim waist ended with a beautiful curve, even making Amandina jealous of her.

But Amandina still specially tied her light brown hair with a flower ornament into a stylish hairstyle, and when Brendel saw Romaine, she proudly spun one round with a sweet smile, even throwing him a foxy wink. Even till now, Brendel would still lose himself when he looked at her.

[She looks like a great merchant from Ampere Seale who deals with huge transactions... Except no one would roll up her sleeves and pick up rocks to throw in the river with a serious expression to see if the rocks went further than the last.]

Brendel did not really understand why she had to wear such a troublesome outfit into this wilderness, but he guessed that it would be something like ‘Because I’m a merchant!’, which was an answer that really did not go through thinking.

Batum looked doubtfully at Brendel after listening to Romaine’s answer.

Brendel nodded: “Even before half a month, these refugees that gathered to the south of Bruglas will cause problems. The festival right now might soothe them for a while, but it ultimately does not solve the root of the problems. This is not something that the nobles living a lavish life will understand.”

“Really?” This time Amandina was curious.

Brendel nodded. “The August’s Riot”, was not a big deal in history, but it was enough to give an answer to Tirste and they did not have to lift a finger.

Brendel did not have any thoughts about stopping the riot, especially when he did not have the means to do so. Finding a suitable place for the refugees to live in was a difficult problem, and none of the nobles wanted to receive this burden, and no one could handle it either.

[How is one going to find food for these tens of thousands of people? That’s finding three hundred tons of food per month.]

Batum opened and closed his mouth. He did not expect for this complicated problem to be solved easily by Brendel’s lips. He looked back at Amandina who did not seemed to worry as much as him. She was unlike Batum who thought of only the simplest profit and loss, but even she found that Brendel seemed to know something more than any of them.

Brendel spotted Roen walking out from the dark forest, and he became alert. He had let the cripple check something out in the city, and it seemed that he had answers ready.

Indeed, Roen came along with two short thieves from the bushes and came to Brendel.

“We discovered the cause. It’s really because of the fuckwits who were negligent and allowed the undead to come in as disguised merchants.” Roen said.

“Who exactly was the culprit?” Brendel asked.

“It’s one of the cavalry leaders, called Calancadr.” Roen wanted to say something more, but he saw Brendel shaking his head.

[That person is the future commander of the Silver-winged commander—]

“That person swears allegiance to the Royal Crown...” Brendel muttered to himself.

[Negligence... I see. This matter isn’t as simple as it looks. Just thinking about the Fire Seed, it seems like this event has something to do with the political strife with the Royal Crown and the other factions. Because of the riot in Bruglas, some of these

historic events are not noted down, otherwise I would have known about it.]

Brendel thought about it carefully and he suddenly broke into cold perspiration.

[What does this mean? Did the Royal family lure the top nobles by selling the Fire Seed, and allow the undead to come into the auction so they would kill them? What the fuck? Isn't this playing with fire? I can't believe Oberg the seventh can think of this fucking plot. It's fortunate that Incirsta isn't here in Grinoires, otherwise the entire southern region would be overrun if he attacked. Damn it, perhaps this bastard is even the cause of the erosion in Southern Aouine.]

Chapter 59

The last night in Bruglas (1)

The start of Aouine's final demise came about from civil wars. Oberg the seventh had gradually felt that he was becoming frail from his old age, and he was desperate to clear the path for the new king's ascension to the throne. In the end, he was unable to wait any longer and acted against the two southern duchies in the southern kingdom, which were his greatest threats.

Oberg the seventh had ascended to the throne only when he was thirty nine years old. This king who was fated to have a terrible demise had great ambition when he was young, and he was determined to his grandfather, King Ansen. That was the period where he created the militia draft and city guards in the cities, allowing central Aouine to become the strongest in its era.

Unfortunately, Oberg the seventh witnessed how the arrogant duke Arreck practically forced Oberg the sixth to change the militia laws, and that event had forever left a dark impression in his heart. Unlike King Ansen who ruled with both firmness and flexibility, as well as ruthlessness and clemency at the right moments, Oberg the seventh did not possess the skill to do so. In addition, the era during King Ansen's rule was peaceful and without wars. The royal crown was able to control the military forces without any trouble, while the current era was fraught with constant wars.

The wind became stronger in Bruglas's outskirts. It came from the direction of the sea, and the wind followed the northern mountainous region Karanjar to Randner's mountainous region, bringing along the scent of the forest and rivers across its long journey, and finally entered everyone's lungs.

Romaine was standing barefooted in the water as she held the hems of her dress up. She looked up and closed her eyes to feel the wind on her face and neck.

"Brendel, the wind in this place feels like the exact same in Buccel!" She took a deep breath and exclaimed excitedly.

Amandina also took a deep breath, but she immediately coughed.

Brendel glanced at her before looking up. The night wind was bringing a dense cloud from the west and it covered a huge area. It blocked the stars, as if to signify that the kingdom was facing a bleak future.

Brendel did not feel any burden on him, and instead felt excitement coursing through his nerves. The future civil chaos that was coming soon, was a chance for him with his meager strength to change a heavy and cold history that was seemingly carved onto a rock.

This dark cloud was not a manifestation of a delusion, but a signal for him to start moving. Brendel suddenly turned his head back, as if he had sniffed out a sign from the air, and his cheeks even had a faint blush of excitement.

“Did you get the money?”

Roan did not understand why a simple news of the guard’s mistake sent Brendel into a short daze, and he felt that Brendel was becoming harder to read. He had witnessed Brendel’s strength when he fought against the Zombie Outlander.

[That ability isn’t normal at all. Now that I think about it, this man really is that old bastard’s descendant.]

He looked at Brendel for a moment longer before answering in a convinced attitude.

“The money has been received, and I transferred the money to a safe place according to your instructions.”

“Did the people from the auction site pay any compensation?”

Roan was startled, but he immediately nodded.

Brendel knew that the auction was ran by a famous noble. It was an open secret, and to these people having a good reputation was more important than money, thus he was not afraid that that there was going to be a loss.

“How much did you receive?” Brendel asked.

Roan counted with his fingers.

“Around two hundred and fifty thousand Tor.”

Brendel nodded and looked back at the river's direction and found Romaine walking back to him with a pair of shoes in her hands.

He looked at Batum and Amandina next.

“Very well. With this our business with Bruglas should be concluded.”

[Although there are a few other things that should be done... There's a mission within the nobles' library that teaches some low level techniques, and the Star-crossed inn's quest on the golden wine, increasing 1 OZ strength permanently... If I attempt these quests, I'll be using at least a month to get them, and that will delay things.]

He wanted to pursue perfection and get every advantage here, but the change in Bruglas as well as the Unifying Guild's appearance made him realize that this place was not suitable to stay any longer.

Once these signs appeared, Brendel had made the decision with his fastest reaction and decided to leave as soon as possible.

[Either the east or south area. We should go deep into Randner's mountains or forest to seek the treasures there.]

“Where should we go?” Even though Batum kept grumbling about leaving this damned place, but he was a little uneasy when it was time to move. Even though he understood from Brendel's suggestion that they could escape to Randner's forest and mountains, they were still entering an untamed wilderness.

It was said that following the river or crossing over the forest after Randner's mountains, was a desert that did not seem to end. The people living there described a story about a kingdom in the eastern desert: The famous Village of Pearls, the Kingdom of Nine Phoenix.

“We're going to split our forces into two. Batum, take Roen with you and return to the squadron, and let Leto bring everyone to a place called Gris. You need to hire a guide in order to reach there. At least for now, the safer road in Randner's main road. Based on the local etiquette, if you bring out your mercenaries flag, there shouldn't be any danger.”

“Where is this place, Gris?” Batum asked.

“The most eastern port of the kingdom.” Brendel laughed. “The scenery there isn’t bad at all, and the girls there are warm. You might even find a girl of your taste.”

Batum’s face actually turned red as he grumbled: “My lord, I’m a mercenary who doesn’t have a fixed place.”

“That’s something of the past, you’re my subordinate now.” Brendel answered earnestly.

Batum turned quiet. Although he looked like he was still holding on to the past, he was ready to try and move to a new direction.

“My lord, what about you?” Batum asked after a moment.

“I have a few private things to settle—” Brendel felt that it was a pity to lose the Thorn of Light in the auction site, but it was about time to switch to a better weapon after he was level twenty, and it was necessary to switch to a new weapon.

In truth his stats and equipment had not really changed since the start of the month. Although reality was still within the acceptable levels of his plans, and the stay in Bruglas was a necessary must, he was just simply not satisfied even if he was moving at a reckless speed.

This was especially true after he encountered Tirste, and he felt the need to raise his strength once again.

[There’s a need to move faster. The next target is still that sealed kingdom, but before that I need to confirm Ebdon’s words about the Lionheart.]

Brendel did not dare to turn his back on this particular secret.

[I need the Sage Slate to make the statue speak, but that’s a no go for the one coming into Bruglas in a few days. First of all I can’t wait for it, and the second is I can’t find five hundred thousand Tor to buy that. The best option is to get one by doing ‘Instances’. The nearest one is the Lost Forest near Rander, the Undead Temple Ruins and the Dragon Valley. It’s possible for me to go there with my level, and I just need a little preparation. Indeed, this is killing two birds with one stone since I can level up as well.]

Batum did not say anything else after Brendel said he had other things to do, especially

when his heart was taken to Gris. Brendel's description of the place tickled his heart, as he had never seen the ocean before.

"Romaine, what's your plan? Do you want to go with me or stay here to overlook the festival's work?" Brendel asked.

Romaine turned her head slightly to look at him and replied naturally: "Of course I'm following you."

But the lights in her eyes were obviously screaming 'Adventure! Romaine is going on an adventure!'

"You're not thinking about money?" Brendel was stunned and he wanted to check her forehead to see if she was having a fever.

"Of course not," Romaine swatted his hand away and said smugly: "Lady Romaine has distributed the task properly to Sue, and the only thing left is to invest the money."

"Sue?" Brendel was surprised as he recalled the girl who glared at him with an icy expression, as he owed her a million Tor coins: "Isn't she Leto's daughter?"

"Yes." She nodded: "She was looking for Freya. Since I'm Freya's best friend, I can ask Sue for a little help, heh."

"You really trust people too much—" Brendel smacked her head lightly. This action was becoming a habit recently.

Romaine's smile was like a little cunning fox.

"If that's the case, I should stay back." Amandina suddenly said. "This is supposed to be my job."

Brendely immediately stopped to look at her.

"You can't stay behind."

[Mother Marsha above, you're not staying here. Right now you and the future grandmaster Tamar are my greatest assets. Leaving both of you behind in this chaotic Bruglas is not an option. In order to guard against accidents, both of you are leaving this place.]

Tamar had to bring his heavy alchemist tools along, so he was setting with Leto, and it was a risk to have all his eggs in one basket, so he decided to take Amandina separately with him.

[It's good that Romaine is coming too. It's easier for a girl to take care of another girl.]

"Tirste is still here and you know his identity. The Unifying Guild is a formidable organization and there is too much risk to allow you to stay here. Romaine can take care of you if you come with me." Brendel answered carefully after a moment.

"How can I do that?" Amandina looked blankly at him. Even though she was slightly inclined towards adventuring, but she knew clearly that she could never adjust to that kind of life. For someone like her, adventuring was only something good in her dreams.

Some people obey their rash thoughts but Amandina had a good head about her. Even though she still wanted to refuse Brendel, Romaine broke through her defences.

"Of course you can, Amandina. Adventuring is really interesting."

Amandina looked at Brendel. He nodded.

"There's nothing else to be said. Everyone should go ahead and prepare. We will enter the city separately. I'm going in alone in case that bastard Tirste comes after me again. Before the last star disappears in the morning, we will gather at the eastern gate."

Everyone nodded.

Chapter 60

The last night in Bruglas (2)

————— Princess POV —————

The heavy gilded door was slowly pushed open. The air currents gathered and rushed out as a low rumble pierced through eardrums, as if a dignified kingdom was welcoming the visitors with open arms behind the doors.

The light from the corridors were becoming visible, and there was a young girl with an angry expression standing behind the door.

The half Elven princess wore a long full silvery-white dress, and the hems of her dress reached to the bright marble floor. Her head was raised while she stood with her back straight. Her long silver hair extended past her shoulders, while her hands were placed on the crinoline of her dress. In this dark hall with deeply marbled flooring was a blooming lily.

She glared coldly at the few people who walked out from the dim corridors—

“My lady.” marquis Kluge who was at the front displayed a faint surprised smile. The senior minister who had worked for the Corvado royal family for decades, placed his right on his chest and bowed deeply.

He then regained his posture and curled his lips upwards. His smile on his gaunt face seemed to always carry a subtle condescension in it.

“Enough with the pleasantries, marquis Kluge,” The young girl stared in front of her without looking back at Kluge. “Is my Father King in there?”

“My sincere apologies, my lady, His majesty is currently receiving the Madara’s ambassador, and I’m afraid he would not be able to see you for the time being.” Kluge replied with a slight smile.

The princess’s brows frowned slightly, but they quickly disappeared.

“Then I’ll wait here,” She held her head up as she answered: “It’s already midnight, I believe that Madara’s ambassador wouldn’t take too long.”

“My lady, please take care of yourself—” marquis Kluge looked at her back with admiration in his eyes, but his tone did not change.

“I thank you for your concern.”

“Then I shall take my leave.”

“Please do.”

The young girl’s faint silver-colored eyes did not move, and simply waited for the group of people to walk past her. But after marquis Kluge took a few steps in front of her, she suddenly said quietly:

“Minister Kluge, you should be careful from playing with fire—“

marquis Kluge was slightly surprised from the the princess’s warning. He stopped as he thought of something, and gave a gloomy smile.

“My lady, what are you talking about?” He asked.

“You know clearly what I’m talking about. I cannot stop the things that are happening in Bruglas and Fortress Cruke. But do not forget whose side the Holy Cathedral of Fire is standing on in Aouine.” The princess replied dispassionately.

Kluge’s expression changed slightly but he quickly recovered himself. The old cunning minister took a deep breath and answered indifferently: “Thank you for the reminder, my lady.”

The two of them did not wish to talk any longer, and marquis Kluge quickly left with his men behind him.

A young man who was in the marquis’s group asked: “My lord, what did the princess mean?”

“This royal flower cannot be underestimated, Welmar.” Kluge answered with a dark expression: “Even though our positions are in a good position, she is not idling either. The news from the outside points to the princess gathering funds by using Church

Havel's name. Even though I don't know what she's thinking, but she's definitely going to take action."

Kluge glanced at the sky through the arched windows in the corridor: "She gave us a warning today, but in doing so tells us that the princess still has her reservations in taking action—"

"She's afraid to strike because she fears that her actions will damage the surroundings."

He sighed and rubbed the ring on his finger. The ouroboros looked as if it was alive on the ring, and reflected a green light to its surroundings.

Everyone around him turned silent.

The Elven princess did not utter any noise after Kluge left. When she turned her head back, she saw Benninger walking out from one of the pillar's shadow.

"How is it?" The young girl asked immediately when he was close enough.

The young man shook his head bitterly: "It's no good, my lady. I did not see his majesty either—"

The princess composed herself.

"My lady?"

"I'm going back to my territory tonight. Ser Benninger, please bring Hasel along." She looked calmly in front of her: "Be careful not to alert them."

"My lady, do we really have no other solutions?" Benninger asked in a wry expression.

He was Seifer's son and his status was very prominent, but ever since he met princess Gryphine, he was impressed and submitted to her charm, and was willing to even lead her horse on foot to serve her.

To the world he had overstayed his duration for a traveling noble youth, and his father had sent letter after letter to urge him to go back and inherit his position, but the youth was still lingering beside her.

It was clear to people around them that it was the princess that held onto the youth's heart.

Gryphine had turned sixteen on the seventh month, and was at an age for marriage discussion. However, Oberg the seventh was very fond of her and wanted her to stay by his side, and he knew that his son Hasel had a weak personality and required her sister's help.

It was good news for Benninger. Even though he understood there was no possibility for him and the princess, he would stay by her side as long as she stayed by the king's side. Still, it was not as if he lamented over his position. If he was the eldest son and not the youngest, then there would be another situation altogether.

The princess's words made his heart beat faster.

[This is a huge turnaround if the princess says she's returning to her territory. It is rare for the royal family's direct descendants in history to go back to their own territory, but something really big happens whenever it does.]

Benninger looked at the princess intently and showed uncertainty. His heart was a little expectant and fearful of the future, and felt that once they left, it would not be a simple political fight in Aouine.

The princess's determined eyes fell onto the youth's hesitant expression under the dim light of the hall's candles. There was nothing but silence for a while.

"What are you afraid of, Ser Benninger?"

"I'm a little worried about his majesty's..." The youth did not know how to describe his current feelings.

[Ever since the sixth month, or more accurately, the time when the Madara's ambassador came here, only minister Kluge saw him. The king's trusted ministers did not even meet up with him even once. Even the princess and prince were forced to stay within the capital.

People are gossiping about how the king is under house arrest, but yet the nobles do not have any reaction to it. Ever since Kluge became the prime minister, the king's trust in him keeps growing and it's a known fact that Kluge's party is controlling most of the government.

But the party don't have any interactions with the locals and received the king's trust. The royal family's faction also trusts them. Kluge's administrations and plans don't have any problems with them too. People are even describing him as the greatest politician since King Ansen's rule...]

The situation changed during May, and Kluge appeared like he intended to vie for more power. Along with the Black Rose War, it seemed like a storm was brewing in Aouine's internal political situation.

Admidst the suspicions and guesses that kept growing in the nobles' higher echelons, the core people from the royal faction, Oberbeck and Everton went out to settle issues with Madara. The only remaining giant faction was the leader of the Church Havel who kept out of the political situation.

[This situation within the capital is appearing even more bleak. But at this point of time, princess Gryphine actually wants to go back to her territory. Ignoring the part where we're literally under house arrest, is the princess really going to leave her father behind?]

It was public knowledge that the king and the princess relationship was good, and Benninger understood that fact even more.

The princess answered after a moment, without any change to her expression.

"Based on my father's personality, I'm certain that he wouldn't agree to Madara's ridiculous proposal. Even though I don't know what that bastard Kluge has in mind for his goals, but I know that we're useless here."

"The first thing I want to do is to send my younger brother out of here. I have to take this step for the sake of the royal family in case something untoward happens to my father. I believe that he will understand my actions as this is my responsibility."

"My lady..." The youth looked blankly at the girl in front of him. He felt that she was a young girl of sixteen summers, but a brilliant and mature politician.

"Don't worry, Ser Benninger. It's not as if I'm not prepared. With the aid from my teacher's social links, we can set down our own pieces on the chessboard. I have never trusted that despicable bastard Kluge, and they won't harm my father with Aouine's eyes on them."

The princess suddenly stopped talking, as the Madara ambassador came out from a door with a somber expression.

At that moment, the living and the dead, exchanged glances, and their bodies passed by each other.

————— Brendel's POV —————

As the storm brewed in Aouine's capital, Brendel was sitting leisurely in the 'Crossed Star bar' in Bruglas mulling over the capital's situation. He then asked the barkeeper for the news about the 'Golden Wine', and glanced at the clock on the inn's wall from time to time.

[It's nearly twelve.]

Brendel did not expect to receive the mission's hints and complete it within a night. He was merely waiting for someone and wanted to find something to pass the time with.

When the clock finally rang twelve times, the door to the bar was pushed open.

A girl with a long ponytail wearing a deep blue military uniform entered the bar, and she looked at him with light brown eyes with a slightly flushed face.

[It looks like Freya is a knight now.]

She wore a formal knight's uniform with ribbons, and there was a longsword distributed by the church worn on her waist belt, and she wore boots that was highly polished.

She gave the impression of a heroic knight.

But her concerned eyes betrayed her. She glanced at the people in the bar and found Brendel. She took a deep breath, walked over and immediately asked:

"Are all of you leaving? Brendel?"

"Yes."

Freya became silent.

Chapter 61

Bruglas last night (3)

Freya became silent.

She looked like she was thinking of stray thoughts for a while, before she raised her head up to look at him. Her light brown eyes resembled like a pair of orange gems under the candlelight.

She hesitated for a while and then raised her left hand, and took off the ring on her thumb: "Take this ring with you. You will need it more than I do outside here."

Brendel was slightly taken aback. He looked at the Ring of Fireball, and the red ruby glinted brightly in his eyes under the candles' flames.

He looked at Freya again, while the latter turned her head away slightly.

"This ring was originally yours. I-I... was only, borrowing it temporarily. Have you forgotten about it?"

The barkeep who was chatting with Brendel before Freya arrived, stood up and patted the young man's shoulder. He smiled: "My friend, it seems like you're in a bit of trouble. I'll be off doing my things, and I'll tell you about the wine cup's legend later."

The moment he finished speaking, he took his cup away and intentionally moved to the other corner of the bar, and started to gossip with a few drunk mercenaries.

Freya immediately snapped her lips shut without saying anything else after she heard him.

Brendel shook his head upon seeing this. His smile could not suppress the warmth in his heart. He gazed at her carefully and felt the weight of her concern in his heart. He originally wanted to simply leave her a message, but the stubborn girl insisted on seeing him after she talked to Romaine.

[Certainly, you're not here just to hand me the ring back. You're here because you're

concerned about me.]

Freya's heart was beating quickly. She clenched and unclenched her fists. When she heard that Brendel and the others were leaving, she had only one thought in her mind and ran out without thinking. She wanted to see them one more time, as if she was a little child who could not bear to leave the adults around her.

When she calmed down, she could only feel her face burning.

She thought of her current situation in front of her. She was going to set off to Aouine's Royal Cavalry Academy, and was leaving everyone behind, especially Brendel.

[Am I really able to do what Brendel said I can do? To gain the power of protecting little Felix, and everyone else?]

She felt no confidence in the undetermined future that was in front of her feet, and there was much uneasiness in her mind. Brendel was a lifeline in front of her, but when things came to the point where it counted, she found that she was unable to raise her hand up to grab hold of it tightly.

She stared at the corner of Brendel's clothes and looked blankly at it for a while.

Brendel naturally saw through her thoughts because it was written all over her face. He smiled and received the ring from her. She looked slightly surprised and looked up: "Y-you accepted it?"

"Certainly. How can I find the courage to refuse the ring that the Goddess of War is giving me?" Brendel smiled. He knew that she would not come to any danger within the academy, while he certainly needed every single bit of power. If that was not the case, he would have not accepted the ring just so that Freya can be relieved.

"Goddess of War?"

"I have heard of a legend called 'The Goddess of War'. In it she was the heroine who was beautiful and gallant, riding on her horse into battle, with one hand holding on to a swallowtail flag trailing behind her figure, while the other held onto a majestic longsword, leading her citizens towards victory and protecting her kingdom."

Brendel smiled fondly as he recalled another story about the Goddess of War in his heart.

At the end of Vaunte's turbulent era, a female knight wore a full plate of silver plate armor, and watched every soldier under her with light brown eyes. The sky in Fort Malgar was dark gray and the Silver Cross army flags were fluttering weakly on long flagpoles. She was shorter than many warriors before her, but their dejected figures did not appear to be much bigger than her right now.

Her long ponytail that was kept ever since from Bucces' demise fluttered behind her, and it was a symbol of hope that made people feel there was a reliable figure on the battlefield.

Freya was Aouine's Goddess of War.

She rode out slowly on her horse and came to the front of everyone. The horse's saddle was ornately decorated and silver robes shimmered and flowed on it.

A drizzle was falling from the sky.

Her followers were only from the Royal Cavalry Academy, only one hundred odd students, comprising of many rich nobles' sons and daughters. There were a few of them who ultimately became her enemies in the future, but right at that moment, the cavalry who wore white uniform rode on their horses and followed behind her.

They were soldiers who were defeated again and again but they continued to stay by her side.

The gamers in the game had lost their confidence, fell into deep despair and became spiritless. They lamented and blamed themselves for choosing this kingdom. There was no hope, no tomorrow, and the only thing that awaited them was defeat, along with the humiliation that came along with it.

"Aouine is done for! This broken kingdom cannot match Madara at all!" They cried out.

But Freya rode out and brought about her soldiers, marching towards the battlefield. It was like a pure ray of light, that tore the dark sky asunder with a sharp blade.

Brendel could not forget that moment—

Her first sentence:

"My fellow soldiers, please, come with me and we will set out to defeat Madara—"

“Please forgive me. I am unable to sympathize with your pain, fears, cold and hunger. But I could see the deep despondent feelings on you. These despondent feelings, I feel the same way too! That is because right here and right now, my country has been defeated and we are about to retreat. The undead will soon ravage our lands. We are the losers, no matter how you twist the situation.

We cannot choose. We cannot win. We cannot fight back. This feeling suffocates me! Have we reached our limits? My fellow soldiers, please, set out for the battlefield once more! We still have a chance, please let me lead you to fight them once more.”

“I ask you to trust in me.”

She placed her hand on her chest.

“I will fight along with you.”

“I will shoulder all your burdens.”

“Follow me, and allow me to fight till I fall gloriously in battle. Allow me to use this promise, to bring about the courage for everyone to continue onwards!”

That was the first time the Silver Lily appeared magnificently on the battlefield. The legend of the Goddess of War, an epic story that was written into the annals of history and moved countless players.

When compared to the many other NPCs who defended Aouine, gamers had a deeper impression of her. She was the one who brought them out of the unending fate of defeat and gave them glory. Her name became Aouine’s pride, and she was their flag of pride. Everyone was willing to battle for her because they were willing to fight for honor and dignity.

Aouine’s battle song was written by a relatively unknown gamer on the forums, but there were numerous people who sang—

“We the proud citizens of Aouine—

Shall never bow our noble heads and hold it high up even if we are defeated

Our courage shall be carved unto our weapons

Our faith shall guard our flags

Our blood will flow towards the same path

We pledge solemnly

To raise the flags of the Silver Lily once more.

We pledge solemnly

To believe in Aouine and never falter.

Upon our deaths, our voices will echo

and reverb throughout this land.

Our voices shall chronicle

The love for our hometown.”

Brendel lowered his head and rubbed his eyes. When he looked back up, he saw Freya looking down onto the ground, mumbling: “How can I do the same thing like a legendary figure? I’m just a foolish girl who tries her best, even the point of screwing everything up.”

[That’s right! Your efforts are the source of this legend—]

Brendel stared at her. He admired the past and current Freya for her earnest attitude. No matter what it was, she had always tried her best to do it.

[Perhaps you don’t know your own potential, but one day you will shine brightly like a diamond.]

He laughed softly: “Then just treat it like a dream that you can aim for.”

Freya looked at him and nodded. “Is that a legend from the Highland knight?”

Brendel paused momentarily, and nodded.

Freya stopped speaking. After a while, she asked quietly: “Is there anything else you

want to instruct me?”

“Not really... Wait.” Brendel paused for a moment, before calling her. He thought for a while before asking. “Freya, what do you think of Aouine?” Brendel lowered his voice when he spoke.

The truth was he had already checked his surroundings once to see if anyone were paying attention to them.

“Aouine? What about it?” She was confused.

“If I was to put it into an analogy, Aouine is currently akin to an old dying man who’s sick all the way to his core.” Brendel said.

Freya was completely stunned.

After all this time, she was no longer that naive militia leader. She had observed the filthy nobles with her own eyes, and she was worried about the upper echelons who ruled the kingdom, but she did not know where the problems exactly laid.

[Was it really like this? Maybe I misunderstood something—]

The uneasy girl could only comfort herself. In this world, there were both light and darkness. Perhaps everything would get better, but it was nothing more than a vicious cycle. Despite that, she kept hoping to get to the truth, to see if the world was in line with her naive thinking in the past.

But she did not expect for Brendel to strip away all her thoughts, and left the worst one behind with his words.

Freya was unable to say anything.

“Listen closely.” Brendel had hesitated many times before he was finally determined to speak to her what he thought.

He was constantly afraid that he would affect her future route, but she was not only the Goddess of War in his heart, she was also a reliable partner that he could trust in, and the latter occupied more of his heart.

He had no true relative in this world, and Freya lost both of her parents who took care

of her, and he felt that he needed her support, and it was the same for her. Ever since that night in the village, he understood that his link with her could not be broken anymore.

The two of them were isolated and weak, blindly moving ahead and relying each other as they moved forward in the murky future.

[If I didn't meet the people in Bucce, I would have found it to gain a relationship with this world, and would have constantly felt isolated here. Right now for Freya, she is heading to the path of that lonely Goddess of War.]

"Aouine can no longer go back to the past where it is peaceful. The only thing that can save this kingdom is having a drastic change. Certainly, an upheaval in the kingdom would fracture it into pieces, but everyone of us who were born in this era will try and restore it. I don't know how many people can see this outcome, and I don't know whether anyone understands what I'm saying, but do you understand?"

She looked at him in a bewitched manner, but she nodded subconsciously.

"Do you know now why I wanted you to go the Royal Cavalry Academy?"

"But I..."

"Freya, do your best."

Freya took a deep breath and said with uneasiness: "I don't know if what you say is true, but I think I need to believe in you. But I'm a little confused and I'm really scared. How about everyone in our militia, can we try and change everything?"

"I am also going to try my best to change that future. I need your help."

"...What must I do?"

"If there is anything that happens, then throw all your support towards the princess. I heard that princess Gryphine in Aouine is famed for her intelligence, if there's anyone in the Corvado family who could lead this kingdom out of her predicament, we can only trust her." Brendel paused and thought for a moment: "I believe you might have the chance to meet her in the Royal Cavalry Academy."

"Why do you know she would be there?" Freya blurted out: "Are you trying to mess

around with me?”

“I wish I was joking, but when you are a chess player in Aouine’s politics, no matter if you are willing or not, you would be able to see all the situations clearly. You will understand in time.” Brendel laughed: “Don’t worry about it too much. We will still be able to meet with each other. Don’t forget my words, I’ll definitely stand behind you—”

She lowered her head and pondered for a while to take in his words. She then spoke in a tiny voice : “I got it. I’ll take my leave now.”

Freya’s lonely figure was like a isolated bird on its migrant journey. When she turned around, he had the urge to call her back and ask her if she wanted to come along with him, but at the end, he stopped himself. She had her own path, and he could not be so selfish.

But at that moment, she stopped and looked back over her shoulder.

“Brendel.”

“Yes?”

“I—- Please help me take care of Romaine. She’s my best friend.”

After throwing out her words, she walked out of the bar with large strides without turning back again, leaving behind Brendel who was trying to carefully figure out that sentence meant. In the end, the youth shook his head and drank from his wine cup.

Chapter 62

Chablis

Recap: Freya met up with Brendel. The latter advised her to put her support behind Princess Gryphine. She faltered because she felt that she was just a small militia captain, but he told her that she could follow the example of the 'Goddess of War' in his memory. Soon after, Freya got up to leave, but told him to take care of Romaine in an ambiguous manner. Brendel pondered on her words and drank his wine.

The end of summer's breeze brought a hint of sweetness in the air. Under the warm sun, it made people slightly drunk. August had gone by, and October was approaching soon.

The youth stretched his hand towards the blue sky, his fingers blocking part of his vision, while the pleasant sunlight poured through the fingers' gaps. He felt like he was seeing a colorful flare as the dazzling light entered his eyes.

He then sighed as he lowered his head and hand to survey Chablis's surroundings. The viridian mountains once again invited themselves into his eyes. The dry air and clear weather made him feel comfortable and peaceful, which put him into a good mood.

The emerald trees that used to decorate the mountains during summer's peak had started to fade at one corner. The fir and sycamore trees were starting to have a layer of faint yellow, while the maple trees had a faint red applied to them. The intermixing colors were like a canvas speckled with different oil paints blended together to form a naturally pleasing painting.

He rode on his horse with one hand on the reins. He peered a short distance ahead, observing the white walls of the nearby mountains that intersected with a river. Houses with red roofs were near that area.

The town Chablis.

Brendel did not know much about it as the town was not renowned in the game. He only knew that it was situated in the center of Randner, and there were not many Aouine citizens living there.

To the north of this little town was a dense forest, and there was an Elven ruins that was hidden under layers of trees. It was called Baern Shyrltaesi, a temple build by the Silver Elves a long time ago. The silver courtyard was constructed in the center of the forest. The corridors were made with ornately carved white marble, and there was a divine feeling to it. It was aesthetically beautiful and mysterious at the same time.

However, during the Year of the Giant Shadow Dragon, the elves left this area for unknown reasons, and the temple was abandoned.

[Now the only creatures that live near it are a bunch of Lizardmen bandits, if I remember correctly.] Brendel started to recall the details surrounding this place.

[There really isn't any backstory to this region, and players only gathered here to steal the loot from the Lizardmen. The game designers probably wanted to give a reason like getting rid of evil or something. Which is quite hilarious actually, since we really didn't need any real reason to 'farm' them.]

But he shook his head after a moment.

[Certainly, it looks like it's just an excuse to feed the 'content locusts'...But the backstory I didn't understand back then, looks like there's some sort of mystery behind it in this world.]

Brendel had never been to Chablis. There were no less than a hundred 'instances' in the Grinoires region and low leveled players did not need to take risks. Players spread out to every region and made the kingdoms look active, while the location here was made for higher level players.

Even so, as a veteran player, he had more or less heard about the rumors in this area. The Lizardmen holding on to the Baern Shyrltaesi territory, a tomb guarded by undead, and a floating city nearby. They were adventures that promised treasures accompanied with fights.

He had collected all these information without even thinking that he would had the chance to visit here. When he stood at right at the top of the mountains overlooking the town, he saw the smoke rising from the chimneys of the houses slowly dissipating into the air, and felt a strange sense of tranquility.

[It's fortunate that I took time to research back then, otherwise I'll be completely in the dark for this particular plan. But Chablis is just as beautiful as the forums

described.]

Chablis looked so peaceful that it felt like it could be a place that someone could stay there forever.

Romaine led her beloved horse out from the forest. She had bought it from Bruglas and she loved it so much, that she could not bear to ride on it all the time. Her black eyes darted curiously at Chablis's surroundings, shining with excitement.

"Brendel, this is the place?" She asked.

"Yes," Brendel answered and nodded: "The Silver elves left the name Chablis behind, and the meaning of the word is 'The sweet mountains'. Our luck is quite good. The Madara's undead did not pass through here and it is still undisturbed."

[Although from a tactical standpoint, Incirsta would definitely choose the regions that are wealthier. He left Bruglas alone because of its solid defense and went around it to get to Randner to find a more suitable place. He wouldn't bother to come to this secluded place.]

Brendel was even more confident of his reasoning since these were 'stories' that already happened in history.

"Is there anything to eat in Chablis?" She quickly asked.

"You can try their stew." Brendel looked back and grinned fondly at her. "But our little Romaine is becoming more and more picky with food, be careful of becoming fat."

Romaine's pair of eyebrows immediately stood up as she frowned. She desperately tried to refute him.

"I-I won't become fat. I'll just eat a little!"

But it sounded like she was comforting herself. She stealthily went around her waist and furrowed her eyebrows further.

It looked like she was agonizing over becoming fat or to eat delicious food.

"My lord, is there a 'Sage Slate' that you had talked about before?" Amandina rode on a black horse which had a radiant sheen on it. The young girl's face was much better

compared to the sickly white that she had when she first met Brendel. Even though the journey was tough, she did not have to worry about the next meal.

There was a scroll box tied on her horse, which contained her prized possessions of knowledge. Brendel also saw them as priceless, and insisted on bringing her along the journey because of them.

The girl coughed twice, and looked at the clear sky ahead of her. She muttered: "It's nearly October."

"Don't worry, nobody's going to get ahead of us." He knew what she was asking.

They had left Bruglas for over a month, and the news of Aouine and Madara's truce had reached every part of the southern noble parliaments. Back at that time, they had just reached the Randner region, and rested their feet in Magitan, the 'City of Forests'.

Brendel had hoped to get the Sage Slate within the Forest of Fogs in the west, but it was taken by the Northern Wind Church, just like how it was in the game. Brendel did not deal with the northern wind knights in Randner, so he could only leave the place after a short stay.

But during that stay, he had introduced the most popular snack to Romaine. It was a dessert drenched in honey, and it caused her to be interested in the snacks in other places.

Brendel smiled a little before his mind suddenly thought about the political coup in December. He was certain that he could not do anything to affect it, and he could only leave it to the future Regent princess and the girl who came from Bucces—

Freya.

[She must have reached the Royal Cavalry Academy by now. I wonder how tense is the situation over there...]

The academy was situated within the princess's private lands, but he had no reach over there to play any games with the ministers. Right now, his biggest task was to gain power as much as possible.

[Leto and the others should have reached the Arreck region by now.]

“Are we going to search for the Sage Slate here?” Amandina asked.

“Yes. There’s an Elven ruins to the north in this area here. Legends state that the slate is within the ruins.” Brendel replied.

He wanted to find a native guide. While he knew about the region’s background well enough, he did not know where the the ruins were exactly.

[There are Lizardmen Bandits here so the situation will not be as easy. In the game the area is a level 23 instance, and while it’s much lower compared to the Golden Demonic Tree’s Forbidden Garden, there are no shortcuts.]

After thinking it through, he decided to enter the town before deciding on the next course of action.

The three of them descended from the mountains and reached Chablis in less than thirty minutes.

The buildings were very different when compared to the southern Aouine towns. It was not an easy task to construct something in the mountains, but they used their forefathers’ wisdom to level the valleys with rocks. The slope was layered one at a time, following the river’s contours, and they appeared to be like a chiseled rock fortress.

[If I describe how this town looks like... It’s like a ladder. Or a series of ladders that connect to each other.]

The houses were placed orderly with each flat layer, while they were narrow paths cut in the form of a ladder that connected the layers together. The mountain folks preserved the underlying landscape of the mountains, and they rarely used magic. They sculpted rock statues as lamp posts and they placed braziers at the empty top, replacing oil lamps or magically lit lamp posts.

Brendel recalled there was a famous inn called ‘Chablis Winter Cherry’. It was a place where almost all the adventurers, mercenaries and players gathered together. Its appearance was like a vast living room, and the rooms were below the living room. Travelers gathered up there and exchanged information and rumors, and it was the only inn that was designed in that manner in southern Aouine.

However, once they entered the town, he immediately felt something was out of place

with his keen senses. Amandina and Romaine did not appear to notice anything.

He carefully observed his surroundings. The people who appeared in front of them were mostly young adults that wore different attires from the mountain citizens, and some of them cast suspicious gazes at Brendel and the girls.

[Mercenaries. Adventurers. Travelers. Monster hunters. These people can appear anywhere in Vaunte, but... isn't the number a little too high for a small place like Chablis? This isn't like the game where players gathered here.]

Chapter 63

Eke

“I’ve got to the bottom of things, these adventurers were already here even before one week ago. No, to be more precise, they are actually mercenaries.” Amandina spoke without rushing her answer.

Brendel looked at her with surprise.

The young woman found a sliver of satisfaction as she noted his surprise.

“My lord, is it unexpected that an aristocrat’s daughter who doesn’t venture out of her home would be able to handle a situation like this?”

“I’m just curious where you learned all these negotiation skills. As you well know, it is necessary for a Highland Knight to learn how to negotiate like you did, but it is impressive that a noble lady like yourself can conduct yourself so confidently.”

Brendel patted Romaine’s shoulders to prevent her from losing herself in the scenery, but she unexpectedly turned her head back to assure him.

“Don’t worry Brendel, I won’t lose my way.”

Brendel was speechless for a while. He could only look at her with a distressed gaze as he wondered.

[Just what exactly is stored in your head...]

It was fortunate that Amandina solved his crisis.

“Negotiating has always been our forte, my lord.” Amandina spoke humbly, but it was not difficult to discern that she was secretly delighted.

Brendel raised his eyebrow and laughed in spite of himself: “Not every noble lady is willing to put down their social status and talk to country bumpkins.”

It was indeed true. In Aouine, the mountain folks were considered as uncivilized boors. Even if their status were raised to lords, they might not get along with the imperial lords in the north.

[It was said that two important ministers during King Ansen's rule frequently squabbled in the court, giving many headaches to the king...] Brendel remarked to himself.

"That's because I'm different from them. I'm merely a poor noble lady, my lord."

Brendel shook his head with mirth.

"If these mercenaries come at this point of time, I think they are here for the bandits in the forest. The various regions in Aouine frequently hire mercenaries to destroy the bandits' territories nearby the village, and it has become the norm."

He walked past a masonry workshop, and brought the topic right back to their current problem: "In a place with a dense population, the people who hire these mercenaries would either be the local security forces or the militia. But in a remote location like this, it is the entire village's citizens who pool all their money together to pay them."

Amandina paused for a moment. She had never read what Brendel described in her books.

"Something like this happens—?" She asked.

"Bucce in the past also did the same thing, I also paid for it~" Romaine excitedly poked her head out from the narrow alley and stared at the inter-crossing street roads, and answered Amandina without turning her head back.

"Only places with a garrison will eliminate the bandits on their own. The Royal Faction places much hope on this 'new forces' for a good reason. While it is true that the garrison forces represent a new type of strength for Aouine, but no one knows if this strength has the opportunity to become bigger."

"Even if they do become a force to be reckoned with, their strength is merely a generation long." Brendel said with many thoughts in his mind.

Amandina lowered her head and started to reconsider a number of things.

Suddenly Brendel and the others heard a violent yell behind them: “Stop right there!”

The three of them were shocked and turned their heads back, only to discover that the voice was not directed at them. They first saw a panicking young man parting the crowd with his arms to run past them, but he did not take many steps before he was stopped by the two mercenaries in front of him.

The two mercenaries pulled out their swords and blocked the youth’s path. They roared loudly:

“Eke, where the fuck are you running to?”

“You fucking bastard, have you forgotten our rules?”

The youth’s eyes widened slightly and he glanced in every direction, and he discovered there were even more mercenaries with leather armor and shining swords pulled out to surround him. Brendel and the others were at the edge of the surrounding encirclement, and he was glad that no one else noticed them. He pulled Romaine back and took a few steps back in order to avoid this strange situation.

“Capo, what do you want?” Eke said tensely. He found all his escape routes sealed and he stopped moving to take a deep breath. He pulled his short sword out from its sheath with one hand, while he wiped away his perspiration with the other.

“You know clearly what you did.” A mercenary with grey robes walked out from the crowd and eyed him coldly: “Otherwise you wouldn’t get a guilty conscience and chose today to run away. Have you forgotten the oath that you took when you joined the mercenaries? Our leader and the rest of us treated you like a real brother, and you repaid it by betraying us?”

The youth shook his head and revealed a conflicted expression: “Capo, I didn’t betray any of you.”

Capo carefully studied his eyes and sighed. He shook his head and replied: “Come back with us and we will believe you.”

The youth shook his head firmly: “Capo, no. I beg of you to stop asking. I already said we can’t go to Forest Baern...” He faltered his words, but he shook his head again: “Please believe me this time... Trust me, I won’t hurt any of you. Just think of the past, how can I betray any of you—”

“Enough, Eke!” Capo interrupted the youth with a pained expression: “No matter what you say here, you must come back with us to see the leader. If you have anything to say, you can explain to him once we’re back to our camp. He practically raised you since you were young, but you’re leaving us at this point of time? This is the same as abandoning your comrades.”

Capo pointed to himself and the other mercenaries, then he spoke again.

“Do you see them? These are your allies who stuck with you through thick and thin. What are you trying to do now?”

Eke gritted his teeth and hesitated, but he finally took a step back: “Stop it, Capo. I know I am definitely in the right this time, and I won’t go back with you. I also want to stop all of you from going to that place, but I don’t know how to persuade you...”

He took another look around him and discovered the mercenaries were coming closer and closer to him: “Capo, please let me go on account of our relationship. Trust me, I swear I won’t let you regret it.”

“Brendel?” Romaine asked as she watched the scene unfold.

“My lord?” Amandina also turned her head.

The two ladies asked him questioningly at the same time, ‘should we leave?’ in their words.

But Brendel shook his head as he observed the youth with an expression of deep contemplation.

Capo saw Eke was adamant in his decision and he knew that nothing was going to be resolved from talking. He took a step back and sent his men a signal. The mercenaries immediately swarmed towards Eke and sealed off every path.

Brendel was immediately surprised when the mercenaries moved. The mercenaries who looked like they were nothing special, actually were considerably skilled, and a few of them matched Leto’s abilities.

[Mid-ranked Iron tier fighters... Although it’s true most of the mercenaries with a little fame stuck to their names have this level of capability, but to think there are so many here in this small town.]

Brendel was slightly bewildered. Amandina also discovered this point. She had wanted to ask Brendel again to reconsider leaving, but she stopped herself and observed the situation.

Eke maintained his composure under the mercenaries' combined enclosing movements.

[What...!?] Brendel was shocked.

Eke suddenly rushed forward to his front in a blur, his hand grabbing onto the nearest mercenary's sword hand and disarmed him. His actions were so fast that Brendel almost did not see what he did, and with a shake of his arm, the mercenary was hoisted off the ground and over his shoulder, then thrown onto the ground.

He shifted his body to the left and launched his whole body as a strike, and another mercenary was immediately knocked away. The direction of the flying man accurately flew towards Brendel and the other girls' direction.

[This youth is at least a Silver tier fighter— Judging from his appearance, he's younger than I am by two or three years. This is certainly fitting for the chaotic world ahead. Monstrous talents just keep appearing one after another. That little Felix, Freya and even Bretton could be considered as prodigies but Tirste and this youth here are even more exceptional than them.]

Brendel was astonished by the youth's movements.

[The number of people with such talents are no more than a handful in a normal generation if you look at history, but I already saw at least five ever since Bucce. It's no wonder that Vaunte fell into such a chaotic state of constant wars soon after Aouine's demise. It looks like it was actually fated to happen because there are so many skilled people.]

Brendel did not stop moving even though his thoughts raced through his mind. He had activated Power Break to catch the flying mercenary, and he placed him back onto the ground.

[Amazing... The force nearly pushed me back. If the mercenary knocked onto a normal citizen, he might have caused serious injuries. If I still have the Thorn of Light, my stats would make it easier to catch this man— This youth is really reckless.]

The manhandled mercenary took a short moment before he finally recovered. He turned his head back and looked at Brendel with a pair of surprised eyes. He had not expected a passerby to have such strength, but he suddenly remembered that he ought to thank him.

“...Thank you, kind sir.”

Brendel shook his head to interrupt him and his eyes went back to the small ‘battlefield’.

Chapter 64

The mercenaries

There was another man who flew out from the battlefield. Eke then struck down three mercenaries in the blink of an eye, and caused the crowd to have an opening. He moved towards the opening before anyone was able to react, but Brendel was slightly intrigued by his choice.

Capo was directly in the youth's path.

The elderly mercenary brought his sword horizontally with his body inclined forwardly, and charged forward like a fearsome beast with tightly pursed lips.

[Randonian fencing. This swordsmanship was created by Swordmaster Imaria and was widely used in the continent in its early days. But there are not many practitioners in this era due to its technical difficulty. The number of users in this world who are truly able to use this style are exceedingly low.]

Brendel's eyes narrowed a little. Almost all the people who knew this swordsmanship are highly skilled.

[Just raising this swordsmanship alone requires 133 TP from level 1 to level 2, and virtually exceeds the requirements of any typical sword styles by sixty percent. The accuracy rating is 2 times better than a military swordsmanship, while the damage increase is 1.3 times more, but there are not many players who actually spent time on it. That's because the market price for the skill over one million Tor coins. As for book copies, there are only a few kingdoms who possessed them in their museums.]

Eke apparently realized his mistake as well, but trying to retreat backwards had become impossible, and he could only charge forward recklessly. Even though he did not use a sword from the beginning, it was clear from his fighting techniques that he was trained in the ways of the sword. Brendel recognized it as one of the knight's varied swordsmanship.

[These two mercenaries look like they are close with each other, but the techniques they used are completely different. That's quite interesting.]

But it was not exactly a rare thing to see in a group of mercenaries, so Brendel was just slightly interested in seeing how things turned out.

Eke directly charged into Capo while using his body to avoid the sword's path, but Capo did not disappoint Brendel. He cleanly swung his sword twice and sealed off the youth's options, and forced him to leap sideways.

If Capo took one more step, he would certainly force the youth into a dire state.

Brendel's current stats were unlikely to match either of them, but he was certain of this fact more than anyone in the battlefield. As expected, Capo had seized the best position to attack where Eke was going to retreat next, and his sword was pulled back to prepare for a decisive strike.

But Brendel's irides widened slightly.

Capo's movements was slower by half a beat, and the youth grabbed his shoulder from the smallest opening to stop his arm from moving. He then lurched forward and smashed onto Capo's body, knocking the veteran mercenary backwards by five steps. This change nearly surprised everyone, and even the youth's stupefied expression was clearly reflected in Brendel's eyes.

But Eke immediately shook his head. He saw that Capo's stagger was a momentary thing, so he immediately turned around and escaped into the crowd.

[Well done.]

Brendel secretly praised Capo. He had deliberately received the blow from Eke but the way how he did it was really covert, and the average person would not be able to see through his actions. Brendel was the only exception with his unimaginable experience behind him, and everyone his age would have been deceived.

Brendel did not exclusively use a sword in the game and used other weapons for at least a decade. He had spend over a hundred and forty summers as a warrior. With one hundred and ten years in the way of the sword, and his foundation was beyond many people.

(TL: The game is 8 times faster in VR, so if the protagonist started off as 16 years old, then he would be around 33 years old IRL when he teleported to this world.)

When I translate/localize, I also think about various aspects visually. So how I imagine it is from way early on when I TLed this series, this young naive fresh green kid Brendel met Freya for the first time and fought with her for years, then witnessing her death on the battlefield and Aouine's demise, etc, which is the starting point of what Brendel is doing now and why he acts that way.)

Brendel's true stats were merely that of a mid tier Iron-ranked fighter, and it looked like he was not even close to Eke's match. But if they were to truly have a fight, Brendel would not lose even if there were two Ekes fighting him, especially when his military swordsmanship was at level 10 (9+1).

With the memories of the original Brendel about his grandfather's swordsmanship, he was literally unmatched by anyone his age, and the military instructors in the army would just barely be proficient enough to become his students.

Still, even with his own vast experience, he did not reach his grandfather's unapproachable aura that made people feel like they were on a tight rope hanging over cliffs. He was somewhat close to that state and becoming a grandmaster, but the more he raised his levels, the more mysterious he felt his grandfather was.

[A mere veteran soldier in that November War...? Even a level 100+ warrior like myself can't gather up an aura to fight against him, it would really be ridiculous to write my grandfather off as a simple soldier. Especially when I don't even see a hint of his strength on Leto.]

Leto was another soldier who experienced the November war. The only difference was the fact that he joined in the later part of the war, while Brendel's grandfather experienced the entirety of the whole war.

[Who exactly received the Candlelight Emblem from the Holy Cathedral of Fire?]

Brendel had actively worked with Aouine's government in the game, and joined the Church of light. This thought streaked across his mind and vanished.

Everyone looked at each other in silence as the situation suddenly changed, but the first noise that surged was from the surrounding citizens. Everyone started talking about why and how the mercenaries failed to capture the youth. Even though the majority of them did not really see how the fight started and ended, it did not interfere with their gossiping nature.

The mercenaries who were knocked onto the ground by Eke climbed up slowly. Even though they did not speak, their eyes did not show any signs of anger or depression, and instead showed like they were relieved.

Brendel naturally did not miss any of that. When he turned back to the girls, he saw Amandina also turning towards him, and their glances exchanged certain information.

“Brendel, they don’t seem like they want to go after him.” Romaine muttered next to him.

Brendel chuckled and nodded.

“Captain Capo, are you alright?”

Brendel saw a few mercenary soldiers going up to Capo carefully and asked. Capo looked blankly at his wrist for a while and then regained a strict face and look at his men.

“I’m fine. Alright, everyone form into groups and seal off Chablis. Don’t let Eke escape. If there are any problems with this afternoon’s situation, I’ll take full responsibility--”

“Oh.”

“Okay.”

“Understood, Captain Capo.”

The mercenaries answered stiffly, but their reactions were slow enough to raise a few heads.

But Capo seemed to ignore their actions. He surveyed his surroundings and his eyes fell upon Brendel. He had observed the entire battlefield and noticed Brendel helping his man out, but it was only now that he had the time to scrutinize him.

Capo was actually surprised when he studied Brendel.

He had noted Brendel’s abilities with at least a mid-tier Iron-ranked fighter, but he did not expect him to be so young. Any twenty years old youth with his skills would raise surprise anywhere, and his immediate thoughts went to Eke. That youth was the most talent person he saw in his life, and he was the commander ‘Maned Wolf’ Maccarlo’s

adopted son. He had attained the Tier 2 Prowess at the mere age of seventeen, and in his memories, only the Blessed prodigies would attain such results at his age. *(TL: Tier 1 prowess is iron rank, Tier 2 prowess is silver rank)*

Eke has been the mercenaries' hope and pride since he was young, and when he deserted from the mercenaries, commander Maccarlo merely wanted them to bring him back, and the rest of the mercenaries did not wish to see the youth get punished because of this reason. It was clear that the youth was dearly beloved by them.

When he thought about Eke, Capo's heart steadied itself, and someone like Brendel appeared to be a natural thing. He exhaled and walked over to him, with his expression slightly more relaxed.

"I am grateful for your assistance, please call me Capo. May I ask for your name, Ser-?" He said.

"Brendel, there's no need to be so courteous." Brendel was also studying him.

The veteran mercenary had a pair of ashen irides, and his brows looked as if they were constantly bunching up together like he had uncountable problems. Coupled with his looks was shoulder-length grey hair, and a pair of hands with long fingers. If he did not have calluses on the hands, he would look like a piano player.

Because of his looks, he did appear to be an attractive older man and he might even attract fangirls' screams.

Brendel was somewhat jealous. Even though he was quite good-looking as well, he lacked a certain maturity that Capo had, who looked like he had been through ups and downs.

[Looks like these mercenaries are not your average ones either. I wonder which famous group they belong to in the southern regions. There doesn't seem to be any indication on their clothes, or any easily identifiable emblems on them right now. If they went out for a mission, there might be some clues...]

Chapter 65

Mercenaries' code

Brendel was thoroughly familiar with the background knowledge in the game. While Amandina's understanding was restricted to the books, Brendel was a complete veteran. Even though the captain apparently did not use his full strength, Brendel accurately discerned his true strength.

[About a Mid-tier Silver Rank fighter. At this level, he can match the White-Mane army captain of a full corp, and nearly reaches the strength of a commander. This fact makes it clear that this group of mercenaries cannot be underestimated.]

Leto and the other mercenaries were retired, but they possessed the strength of a Mid-tier Iron Rank fighters, and Brendel thought they were no weaker than the group here when they were at their peak.

He had tried asking Leto a few times about their background, but Leto did not wish to talk too much about it.

On the other side, Capo observed Brendel and felt a strange feeling crawl over his heart. His instinct was almost innate. When he looked at his black irides, they were as calm as though the event earlier did not happen. He had visited many places and seen many important men, consisting of Aouine's nobles, great merchants, people from the desert and even a couple of mysterious wizards. None of them matched the youth's demeanor, who gave a faint smile like everything was under his control.

It was a look full of confidence as though he knew everything.

For one moment, the veteran mercenary felt as though the youth had seen through all his secrets. He frowned and shook his head, trying to get rid of the ridiculous notion out of his mind. He did not know that was the truth, and Brendel had seen through everything just by observing him a little longer.

In this age, not many people knew Randonian Fencing, including Capo himself. He had learned the swordsmanship when he was young, and he thought it was ridiculous that it was impossible for the youth to know about it unless he was a grandmaster

swordsman.

He noted the girls beside Brendel.

[Their clothes seem to indicate they are from Bruglas... While the citizens of the Grinoires region have similar clothes throughout the region, they are relatively different from the mountain folks.]

Capo wanted to speak about this point, but Brendel had stolen his initiative.

“I take it that you mercenaries are not from this village?” Brendel’s eyes looked past Capo on purpose to look at the mercenaries behind him.

Amandina and Romaine stood quietly on Brendel’s left and right when he spoke. Amandina had learned enough political etiquette to know that it was not the time for her to speak, while Romaine obediently blinked her eyes without saying anything through a merchant’s instinct.

Capo looked blankly at him for a short moment.

“Yes, and you?”

“We would pass through Chablis a few times every year. Even though we’re not locals, we’re at least familiar with this place. The truth is I was wondering why Chablis had so many tourists of a sudden.” Brendel lied through his teeth. “Until I saw what happened earlier did I realize you were mercenaries—”

Amandina’s eyes glinted behind his back, but she did not change her expression. Romaine listened with smiles, as though what Brendel said was the truth, befitting of her profession.

“We’re here to accept the invitation to subjugate the lizardmen bandits.” Brendel answered smoothly and calmly without breaking a sweat, making it impossible to see through any mistakes. The veteran mercenary did not think there was any issues with Brendel’s reply, and it was not a secret as to why they came here.

But Capo still held on to his wary characteristics and did not continue talking about the lizardmen bandits.

“You pass by Chablis a few times every year? You must be a merchant. If there’s

anything our mercenary group can do for you, please feel free to hire us and we will provide the best service for you.”

He turned his head around to look back as he spoke: “But I have to apologize now. We have a small problem on our side, and I’m afraid I need to leave immediately. If you have the time, I can represent as my commander and welcome you to come to our camp any time.”

Brendel smiled. Capo was obviously irritated that he was wasting his time, and wanted to seek the youth who escaped earlier. He pretended that he did not notice the hidden meaning behind Capo’s words, and expressed himself like he understood something: “I see.”

“This must be a coincidence.” Brendel immediately added.

Capo was ready to leave, but he stopped upon hearing these words: “What?”

“It’s like this.” Brendel smiled and continued his reply: “TO be honest I’m not here for business this time. I’m here to search for a particular item.”

Capo frowned and stopped moving.

“What are looking for?”

“I’m just looking for a rock slate that has ancient text written on it. This particular item is within the Baern ruins, and describes a historical incident about the Silver Elves. As you know, the ruins have been occupied by the lizardmen about one year ago.” Brendel spoke evenly, as though this event actually happened.

“I came to Chablis three months ago to investigate the lizardmen situation. I brought a number of mercenaries along with me with the intention of stealing the rock slate, but I did not expect to meet Ser Capo and the mercenaries with you.”

Capo was completely surprised. “You mean to say...”

Brendel immediately nodded: “Yes, in order to have any outbreaks amongst us, I suggest using the 314th rule in the Mercenaries’ code. We will temporarily join your men and assist you under the condition that we won’t risk our lives. After we are done with the mission, we will part our ways and take what we need. How does that sound?”

There is no formal agreement amongst the Mercenaries' code, but the rules could solve common disputes.

Long ago, the mercenaries had iron-clad agreements with the people who hired them and typically executed them faithfully, but the mercenaries tend to fight amongst themselves from verbal agreements.

It was only about a century ago before the Holy Cathedral of Fire became the administrators for adventurers, that they establish the agreements amongst into a bible, known as the Mercenaries' code, and ended disputes temporarily.

This code had been edited constantly and finally became a complete book. This time, Brendel had used a rare code that was established one hundred and fifty years ago in the Northern Aouine region, but there were very few people who brought this rule up in this era.

Capo paused for a while when he heard this suggestion.

"I don't have a problem... with this oath." Capo eyed Brendel cautiously: "But I don't have the authority to rule on this. If you're interested, you have to meet our commander. His name is Makarov, and more commonly known as the 'Maned Wolf'. He's now in the inn, and you should be able to find him there."

"Understood." Brendel nodded. "Then I shall take my leave and not waste your time."

Capo seemed to come out from his trance and nodded.

Brendel did not mind his reaction. He had planned to make use of these mercenaries when he saw them. Even though the lizardmen in the Baern forest were not malicious foes, it was still considerably difficult for him to lead his current forces to deal with them. If he had the additional help of the mercenaries in front of him, things would be much easier.

[Right now the Sage Slate is nothing more than a piece of rock in the eyes of most people. The value of it rose in the game only after players started to cross other regions. I'm sure I can persuade that commander... but what was his name again? Maned Wolf Makarov?]

Brendel paused for a moment.

[The Blue Woods mercenaries. So it's them. One of the most famous mercenaries in the southern region... But didn't become famous only after the Year of the Spring's dawn? That's five years later.]

He rubbed his forehead and started to doubt himself.

[A lapse in my memories? Or has something changed in history?]

Brendel did not know that Capo was facing doubts about the youth as well.

=====Capo's POV=====

"Captain, who's that?"

Capo looked at one of the followers who came towards him. He shook his head: "I'm not sure, he appears to be a merchant in this local region."

"I heard him talking about our Mercenaries' Oath. I have never heard of 314th rule, is that a fake rule?" Another mercenary asked.

Capo shook his head. He knew that it was true, but it was only after Brendel described the rule that he recalled about it. It was not a particular thing to note of, as there were over seven hundred rules, and people only took care to remember the thirteen core rules. The other rules were just additional interpretation of how things should be done, and there was no strict regulation amongst mercenaries to use these rules.

But Capo felt that Brendel was the most mysterious and not a simple merchant.

"Having more people is a good thing." One of the men immediately said.

"Not really, who knows if these people are spies from the other side."

"That is quite true—"

"Don't worry. If he wants to join our group even for the shortest time, he needs to pass the commander's test according to the core rules." One of the mercenaries replied: "The commander is definitely going to let Buga fight personally..."

The mercenary sighed and finished his words. "It's a pity that Eke brat suddenly created trouble, otherwise he's going to become the center of attention again."

The young mercenaries suddenly fell into a silence when the topic suddenly changed to Eke.

Chapter 66

Brendel's swordsmanship (1)

===== Makarov's POV =====

The Chablis's Lantern Grass inn sits on top of the town's highest point of an ashen cliff facing east. The hall resembled like a painting, depicting a scene where heroes and mysterious godly entities congregated. The huge wooden logs that made up the walls had been beaten by countless storms and the sturdy structure was slowly turning black.

Lines of packed windows decorated the building's exterior, and this unique sight appeared like a giant beehive or a dragon's nest on a mountain when looked from a distant place.

But the truth was, these windows belonged to the inn's rooms.

The 'Maned Wolf' Makarov, was temporarily staying in one of the rooms, and the door was opened approximately fifteen minutes ago. The veteran commander looked at the map of Chablis local region, then raised his head to look at the old man in front of him. His subordinates continued to explain several things to him, and one of his bushy eyebrows lifted high up. His deer-skin gloves still held a magnifying glass with a bronze handle as he spoke.

"314th rule in the Mercenaries' code?"

"If there is a dispute amongst mercenaries in a formal mission, both parties shall join together and achieve the goal together. The details in the collaboration should be decided by both parties."

The old man's hair had turned completely white. He answered the commander without looking away from a thick red-leather book that was nearly four inches thick. He appeared to completely uninterested in the topic.

"Master Lockwood, can such a rule really be interpreted in this manner?"

“It can.” The old man answered.

“Fine. Then let me see who exactly is that lad first,” Makarov beckoned to a youth standing in front of his table: “Go, let Redi test him—”

Makarov paused for a moment before calling out to the youth: “Hold on, did you find that rascal Eke?”

“There’s still no news yet, commander.”

“Very well, I got it. Dismissed.” Makarov shook his head and snorted, mumbling to himself. “I’ll make sure that brat gets it from me this time. Seems like I had indulged him one too many times. If this continues I won’t be able to give an an answer to my lord.”

The old man continued to look at his book, but a faint smile streaked across his face and he shook his head slightly.

===== Brendel POV =====

“You’re Brendel.”

“I’m Brendel.” Brendel looked up to the young man who was taller than him by a full head. His hair color was a rarely seen pure-white, and his eyes were like an unblemished gold that was as clear as an amber stone. His features were delicate, and he looked a little feminine.

[A citizen of Ablis?] Brendel secretly thought in his heart. The impression of the minority group was a young grandmaster swordsman named Gory Keyes with silver hair who was active in Vaunte approximately thirty years ago.

[Even though I suspected the mercenaries wouldn’t accept my request so easily, their commander actually sent a youth to test me. Honestly, other than a person with ‘Blessed’ or ‘Chosen’ status, there really isn’t anyone who could defeat me.]

Brendel was level 23 and a upper-tiered Iron rank fighter. Once a profession has crossed the barrier of level 15, then additional profession stats would be added to the progress from Tier 1 power level to Tier 2 power level.

Even though he had lost the Thorn of Light, his strength had increased to 15 OZ, and a

dozen times stronger than a trained soldier. He might appear to be a youth who had a lithe figure, but he could easily kill a boar with a single punch easily if he wanted to.

His current overall power rating had exceeded 220 OZ, and he could face any mid-sized company of any kingdom's second line of defense unit with much ease. With this level of ability, Aouine's adventurers perceived them to have the equivalent strength of a Mid-tier commander.

Brendel's hidden strength did not stop at his stats. His military swordsmanship at rank 10 was enough to make the majority of Aouine's military personnel's blood turn cold. Still, Brendel only thought he was still lacking as he was still a certain distance away from his grandfather's swordsmanship.

Before he finished his thoughts, the youth in front of him had pulled out his sword and pointed to him. The tip of his blade shook slightly, causing the reflected light to dazzle him.

"Listen carefully, merchant. I have never accepted a weak challenge and I don't show any mercy. It is in fact the exact opposite, because the fights between warriors are sacred. Bladed weapons cross each other's path to end the opponent's life—" The youth with white colored hair said: "The commander might have asked me to duel with you, but I will never betray my will to go easy on you. Do you understand?"

Brendel turned his head back to Romaine.

"Brendel, does he mean to say he's stronger than you are?" She opened her eyes in an exaggerated manner in order to blink after.

"No, I don't think he meant to say that." Brendel sighed and replied, secretly relishing the fact that he did not become angry from Romaine's comment.

"My lord?" Amandina asked.

Brendel shook his head.

[Does anyone here have any confidence in me?]

But his sword was already out from its sheath. He used an ordinary steel longsword after the loss of the Elven sword. Once the white-haired youth saw his sword, he showed off a look of disdain. The blade was completely new, as if it was just bought

recently from a blacksmith.

He was not wrong. The truth was indeed so, as the previous sword had been destroyed as it could not withstand Brendel's strength.

Brendel raised his sword and swung it randomly, as if to get used to his new sword. However, his actions immediately drew the boos from the nearby mercenaries and adventurers who were gathering around them. Brendel's actions were like someone who had never fought before.

"Redi, isn't your idol the grandmaster swordsman, Gory Keyes? Show us your skills by defeating this tenderfoot!"

"Well said, since you came from the same homeland, you can't disgrace the name of Ablis."

"You have my support Redi, trounce him till his mother can't recognize him!" The mercenaries immediately made a din. The lawless lot would forever be a chaotic group regardless of where they are.

"Gory Keyes?" Brendel paused for a moment as he heard the familiar name.

He was prepared to enter Aouine's military stance, but his actions were half completed and he was off form.

The mercenaries booed again.

"You're not fit to mention that name!" The white-haired youth's face turned dark and thrust towards Brendel with his sword.

The sword might have been swift and deadly in the eyes of a normal person, but before Brendel's perception at 3.7 OZ, it was much too slow. Unfortunately, because his opponent had made the first strike without waiting for him to finish speaking, he subconsciously entered into a defensive parry that deflected the sword upwards with a long ringing.

The white-haired youth could not hold on to his sword at all, and it embedded deeply into the slightly black wooden ceiling with a slight vibration.

The entire hall turned silent.

The mercenaries who cheered loudly earlier had their mouths dangling openly, as if they saw a dragon or some monster. They watched Brendel blankly, completely forgetting to either praise or boo him.

Brendel's action with the earlier defense could not be seen as elegant. To put it mildly, it was like a barbarian swinging a stick, void of any technique. But the key point of his defense was not a matter of elegance, but his strength.

[A natural born with freakish strength?] Everyone thought of the same thing.

This was not anything that was out of the ordinary. There were rumors of a portion of people who inherited the Golden Lineage that was in the past, and a few of them would transcend themselves to become a 'Chosen' being. Even if they did not transcend themselves, they would still retain a particular feature of their ancestors. For example, boundless strength, or an incredibly strong regeneration factor, and even someone who could see elements compounded into a magic spell.

Right now, the bodies that were known to still hold onto the Golden Lineage were dragons, unicorns and a few other mystical creatures.

But someone immediately yelled out:

"Tier 1 Power Rating!"

"Iron-Ranked fighter!"

The white-haired youth clutched his wrist and retreated five steps. He gazed at his swollen arm after he took on his opponent's blow, and was unable to accept what had transpired for a moment. Even though he was not as talented as Eke, he was still able to achieve the strength of a low-tier Iron-ranked fighter, and was considerably impressive compared to the majority of the people out there.

He definitely did not expect that there was someone even younger than him who was stronger than him, and that he could not even hold his own against him even once.

[How can there be so many monsters like Eke?] Redi was confused.

His confusion only lasted for a few seconds, as Makarov and another tall middle-aged man walked down from the rooms to the hall. They did not witness the earlier scene, but looking up at the sword in the ceiling and the expressions of everyone around, the

commander had a grasp as to what had happened.

He looked at Brendel and frowned. Even though he had heard that the merchant who wanted to join his mercenaries was a young man, he did not expect him to be a youth who did not look like he was past twenty summers.

“Buga,” Makarov lowered his voice immediately to the middle-aged man next to him. “Test him.”

“Me?” The middle-aged man had a strong Arreck’s accent.

“Yes. I suspect this man might be a person from ‘Paper Cards.’” Makarov stared at Brendel as he explained himself.

“How many talented youths do they have? Makarov, are you not overthinking things?” Buga said as he released the gigantic sword behind him: “But it’s fine to test him anyway since you already pointed this out. In any case, this youth definitely has some backing to him.”

Makarov turned to his old friend and looked puzzledly at him.

“Nothing much, it’s just that there’s a familiar scent that I’m smelling here.” The middle-aged man looked at Brendel with a hint of doubt.

Chapter 67

Brendel's swordsmanship (2)

The silence in the hall continued. Brendel looked at Redi who still wore an incredulous face, then peered up at the still vibrating longsword in the ceiling and sighed.

He was not surprised at the outcome. When they exchanged the blow, he had felt that he was approximately five times stronger than the average man, which meant that he had just qualified as an Iron rank fighter, and was roughly the same standard during the time when he first entered the valley of the Golden Demonic Tree.

[Considerably impressive at this age, but you're certainly not my match.] Brendel reflected on his current abilities. He was almost cheating in his growth. Entering to a Tier 1 power rating within one week, climbing to a mid-tier Iron Rank fighter, then becoming a entry level Silver Rank fighter. While he still did not match the growth of a 'Chosen', he definitely had the most impressive result in history for an ordinary man.

[I wonder if there's anyone who can surpass this result.] Brendel mused to himself.

[According to the game's calculation, a mid-tier Silver Rank fighter starts off at level 35. I need to get to level 40. That's nearly 600,000 XP needed. I have to do this in seven months. Aouine's Civil War starts off on December, and there's a time limit after that for me to take part in it. If I miss it...]

His mind was working quickly, but he suddenly saw that the crowd was parting away.

Amandina uttered a surprised murmur.

Brendel also paused for a moment, then focused his gaze on two men behind the crowd. One of them wore a chainmail along with a blood-red robe. He wore a tall hat with colorful feathers on them, like an adventurer from Randner's royal geographical society in Aouine. However, the emblem on his chest was not the Flaming Amber but a simple wooden medal.

There was an Emerald Bird carved onto it.

The man next to him was even bigger in physical size, and he wore a simple leather armor which covered only the most vital areas. His incredibly muscular arms were exposed outside his clothes, and carried a huge sword over his shoulders with a single hand.

His forehead was broad, but his cheeks were deeply gaunted as if they had been sliced away a knife. His lips were tightly pursed together, and coupled with his presence, gave the people who saw him for the first time a sense of great awe.

Brendel looked blanked at him.

[Isn't he that man?]

A single strand of suspicion grew in his mind. The latter looked like a barbarian who came from the northern highlands that snowed throughout the year. The instant Brendel saw him, he immediately thought of this person: Arreck's 'Crosshand' Buga, the right hand of Duke Rhun, commander of Fortress Lantonrand.

[One of the three most famous swordsmen in Arreck, a grandmaster swordsman who is placed equally with 'Grand Eagle' DeJarre, and the 'Silver Knight' Sivia.]

Brendel knew of Buga because he was a famous character within the game.

Buga was the quest giver of 'Bravery', the primary quest for Duke Rhun. Brendel personally participated in that battle along with a number of gamers, and even till to this day, recalled that frightening battle with exceptional clarity.

[That final mission of the quest was to eliminate one of the twelve leaders of the Tree Shepherds, the Envoy of Sorrows, 'Funica'. Right at time, the Envoy of Sorrows was level 97, and held the highest tier of the Darkness Element, almost completing the first step of shaping the perfect self, 'Bronze Physique'. During that era, the players' peak levels were at 83, and it was an impossible task to defeat the Tree Shepherds...]

The story during that time progressed in this manner.

Buga carried along the greatsword 'The legend of Irving', and led to the gamers straight into the heart of the Tree Shepherd's base in the Forbidden Forest. He was the only one who held the Seaghan Cavalry Swordsmanship at Rank 17 which was a legendary existence. With merely four swipes of his sword, he struck Funica to his death.

The gamers were almost like an audience watching a movie throughout the entire mission, and their task was merely to delay the mobs.

[This battle truly cemented my decision to continue the path of a warrior, and in turn became the rare few gamers who played as one.]

Brendel observed a younger and healthier Buga moving towards him, and he felt his hands were a little wet from sweat. He did not expect to meet Buga here.

[This is the future Greatsword Champion, Buga— should I consider the fact that he has already attained the skills he had in the future?... But why is this man here? In my memories, he trained the Seaghan's sword style when he was seventeen years old, and only got to know Duke Rhun a little later on. Why did he appear in this rural place?]

“Did you use Aouine's military swordsmanship?” Buga's eyes were focused on Brendel.

Buga's faint blue-greyish eyes glimmered with slight delight. His eyebrows were very bare and his eyes appeared almost vacant, but other than that his appearance did not appear to be that of a foreigner. However the air around him was not of a regular person, but of a terrifying beast.

The higher one's perception was, the more he would experience that fact.

Brendel's current perception allowed him to listen to hear whispers even from a separated wall and even perceive the air currents, but as he stood there, he felt that Buga was an immovable mountain that stilled even the winds—

[I definitely see a man in front of me, but I feel like I'm facing a wall where nothing can go past it...]

Brendel swallowed. Only people who had crossed level 50 would have an aura like that.

[Does this mean he has already unlocked his Elemental powers? At such a young age?]

Brendel knew that Buga was not a 'Blessed' person, but this achievement might even cause a number of them to break out in cold sweat.

[As expected of this monster.] Brendel remarked to himself.

“Are you from the army, or a youth from the guards in some random city? The militia should not have someone of your skill in them.” Buga’s eyebrow raised a little as he asked. Brendel’s reaction did not surprise him. He did not react to his aura, and the only person who could do so in the mercenaries was only Eke.

[Eke is really an incredible talent.] Buga smiled faintly when he thought of Eke, but that smile immediately disappeared as soon as it appeared.

[Military swordsmanship. Only three types. Army, city guards or militia. Most of the cavalry nobles have their own household swordsmanship, and even the adventurers or mercenaries would have added their own style into what they have after they experienced battles. But this youth here, does everything prim and proper in regards to his stances. He’s obviously a student trained in some camp.]

Buga’s real identity allowed him to see things quite clearly.

But Brendel shook his head: “No, my ancestor is a Highland Knight. Currently I am attending to matters on my own and did not bring along my squire. I believe you have heard of my proposal. I wish to join forces with you because it is advantageous for the both of us. I have no other goals, and if you have any thoughts otherwise, please stay them.”

He thought for a while, but did not reveal Buga’s identity in order to avoid his suspicions.

The man who wore an adventurer’s hat and stood beside Buga, gave a small cordial smile when he heard of the reply: “We are very willing to accept your suggestion, but as you well know, mercenaries do not like to bring along baggage.”

Brendel glanced back and forth between the two men in front of him and understood.

“I hear you loud and clear. Please select the men that you wish to cross blades with me. I believe I have already defeated the first one. According to the rules, this test should not happen more than three times.”

Makarov and Buga exchanged glances.

The huge man brought his sword down onto the ground with a loud crash, and simply said: “Then let me be your opponent, young man.”

[Just like I thought!] Brendel took a deep breath. He stared into Buga's eyes with a confident smile. He did not feel anxious but was enthralled with excitement.

[This is just as well. I don't know how strong he is now, but having the opportunity to test out my abilities now is not a bad idea!]

Brendel's heartbeat started to quicken. He raised his own sword as he felt every cell in his body burn. When he finally became level 130, Buga had passed away. One of his regrets was not having the chance to face the grandmaster who was his goal. Even though he had unlocked the 'Silver Physique' like Buga did, there was no longer a chance to duel with him.

He definitely did not think he had the chance to fight with him.

[Even though you're not a grandmaster now, your battle senses are not beneath anyone else!] Brendel raised his head up like he had returned to when he was a level 130 warrior, and his eyes seem to burn with vigor.

The youth lowered his sword to his hip and pointed the blade up to Buga.

Aouine's military swordsmanship at Rank 10 was not something to be seen as a basic sword style. A striking aura came naturally to Brendel and wrapped everyone with it. His grandfather was even more impressive when he took his stance, giving off an impression that one was on top of a cliff.

But this was enough to shock the mercenaries around him.

"A grandmaster's understanding of the sword. Good. Aouine's Military swordsmanship." Buga's eyes glinted: "You have the right to duel with me."

Chapter 68

Brendel's swordsmanship (3)

After the words left through Buga's lips, the greatsword in his hand swung vertically down towards Brendel's head. He was ten meters apart from Brendel, but he combined it with a powerful jump that closed the distance, and in just a split second the heavy sword had already reached Brendel's head.

Brendel did not need to look at the oncoming sword to know how dangerous it was. It was almost like an avalanche happening on top of a snow mountain. Before the sword reached its mark, the sound that emitted from was like thunder.

[Definitely a Gold-tier's strength!] Brendel gritted his teeth and prepared his stance.

He tilted his neck and lined his left arm to form a triangle on the upper half of his body. It was the best defense he could use at his disposal. The system he had combined the levels of his skills and shaped into a reality where his physical feats were raised; if he was still in the game, the description would be 'Aouine rank 9 Swordsmanship defensive stance – 27% chance to parry'.

The swords met in a blaze of sparks, and Brendel's sword screamed as if it was in pain. The sword twisted back as it failed to stop the greatsword. He constantly adjusted the strength in his hand, but the immense power behind the greatsword seemed to press forward every inch like an unstoppable tidal wave, and he realized that he was unable to avoid it.

[There's no road to escape-] Brendel's mind calculated coldly and furiously.

But the years as a warrior in the game seemed to let him reach an epiphany, and he shifted his body weight to match the greatsword's path which caused it to deviate slightly to the side. The greatsword smashed onto the ground, the force fanning out and destroyed the wooden planks at the same time, and at that moment the wooden splinters danced around like butterflies flying together.

The sword was different from Tirste's lightning thrust. Brendel felt like he was an insignificant object when his strike came and there was no possible way to avoid it.

He had seen this attack before in the game when Buga killed one of the Tree Shepherd's high ranking members, but experiencing the attack personally was an utterly different experience.

[But he didn't use full strength.] Brendel suddenly realized this fact. [It showed off his trump card that he have unlocked his Element, and it's a considerably high level 'Earth' Element at that, otherwise it wouldn't show off how skilled he is in the sword.]

Brendel exhaled coldly. The hall was quiet.

Even though the exchange between them was nothing short of remarkable, almost no one saw what happened clearly. The only thing that they felt was how Brendel did not seem like he was at a disadvantage. The mercenaries held their tongues and suppressed their gasps, not knowing how they should react.

[[[Buga's sword was avoided by a Iron rank swordsman?]]] The mercenaries who had the same rank as Brendel started to put themselves into Brendel's situation, imagining what they could have done under Buga's attack.

The only option that seemed available was to wait for death.

"That attack seemed to look like the vice-commander used seventy percent of his strength, right?"

"T-that was... luck right?"

"Just look at how he deflected it, at that level of skill, it's not just luck."

Whispers started to spread amongst the crowd, with varying degrees of expressions, ranging from excitement and shock.

Brendel and Buga did not pay attention to them.

"Hmmm." Buga uttered a surprised voice and lifted his head. He was not in a hurry to lift up the greatsword from the floor, but he took a longer look at Brendel in surprise.

He thought that Brendel was a youth who had slightly more talent in the sword. He had gotten used to Eke's talent, and certainly did not think much of others because of that.

[This young man isn't simple at all.] Buga pondered deeply. [That slide earlier definitely belonged to a high level technique.]

Buga was not wrong. Brendel had copied the Elves' techniques who fell a long time ago; the swordsmanship which had been lost to the ages in history. This particular technique focused on agility and dexterity.

Brendel's gamble had paid off, and his mind shifted slightly to the thoughts of acquiring it before dismissing them entirely.

[Right now, Vaunte's current era is definitely chapter 1 in the game. 'The empire's birth', the title of chapter 1, describes Madara's rise as a kingdom. Dredging up old manuscripts from the past requires me to wait at least to the time where chapter 3, 'Ancient Heritage', happens. These techniques can only wait till then.]

Brendel relaxed slightly when Buga stopped his attack. He shook his sword arm and realized that it was not numb, indicating that Buga had deliberately lowered his strength to match his standards. A thought sprang up in Brendel's mind. If Buga only saw this as a test, then he might have the chance to win.

As long as Buga lowered his standards and sought to defeat him with the mere understanding of his swordsmanship and techniques, he was definitely sealing his fate.

Even though Brendel was not the amongst the top players in the game, it was not possible for Buga to compare with him. Brendel's character in the game had trained in seventeen different sword styles, and there were more than half of them that reached over ten levels and above. He even saw and fought against countless opponents who had different techniques.

[Buga's techniques came from a renown knight that focuses on strong openings and closings, one vertical and horizontal strike, which is where the name of 'Crosshand' comes in. With the combination of his Earth Element, that majestic aura around him would intimidate his enemies. Unfortunately, this doesn't work on me.]

Brendel understood that he should not fall into his opponent's rhythm, and he sought to have the first strike before Buga had the chance to pull up his sword.

The distance between them was over five meters as Brendel had backed up a few steps earlier. His attack was very simple, it was Aouine's one handed thrust.

But it startled everyone—

The mercenaries who learned Aouine's swordsmanship understood that it was an rudimentary technique, and in the game's term – level 0 Aouine Swordsplay. Many of them had learned the technique and trained in it repeatedly, but they did not understand how his thrust covered over five meters in distance.

Brendel snickered inwardly when he saw Buga's slight astonishment.

[It seems like the future grandmaster had learned of Aouine's swordsmanship to a certain level, but he's not at an advanced level yet. If you do, you would come to understand a master's understanding in the sword increases the effectiveness of the technique greatly.]

Aouine's military swordsmanship basic effectiveness covered a meter and half, and a master's understanding increased it to three meters. Brendel had the advantage of knowing to increase it further through varying means from the game, and had the option of increasing it up to seven meters in distance.

Brendel's swordsmanship in the game reached level twenty and above as a grandmaster, and he had heard rumors about a huge barrier at level thirty and a new title that superseded the Grandmaster rank, but he had never seen anyone or a player that reached that level.

The sword approached Buga with a flash. His speed was enough to cease the whispers amongst the crowd, while Buga smiled at Brendel when he discovered his intention to seize the initiative. He thought that it was nothing more than a clever trick to catch the enemy off-guard, and he was prepared to teach the youth a lesson.

It was an unfortunate oversight.

Buga suddenly realized that it was not a mere trick. Brendel's sword seemed to dance even though it started off as a simple thrust. He should have followed up with another step and use the sword's hilt to strike the opponent in a daze, then attack with a flourish. Brendel's actions seemed to do that, but he pointed his swords in three different feints at three different targets before lunging the sword into his chest.

Buga was momentarily dazzled by the feints and he had to retreat a step to avoid the lunging attack, but Brendel seemed to have predicted his action and took an even larger stride. Before Buga knew it, the sword was already inches away from him.

This action jolted Buga and he drew back in haste, but Brendel followed closely with the same attacks that he did earlier; three feints at different vital areas after the first thrust, followed by a lunge at the area that was the most exposed.

Buga had never seen Aouine's swordsmanship used in this manner, but Brendel's techniques were beautiful in design and effective in reality. Buga swore that he had never even heard of Aouine's military swordsmanship being used in this manner, but the youth in front of him showed that it was possible to bring this commonplace military swordsmanship to heights that one had never seen before.

This was the crystallization of countless warriors who spent decades in the game.

The gamers started to discuss the core of the various techniques in earnest around the time when it was about thirty years into the game. They came to the realization that the game had enough freedom to implement new techniques into the game without the need to rely on what was available in the game.

It was the era where a revolution in abilities and techniques.

Buga was facing what gamers defined as the basics, or more accurately, the modern Aouine's system of military swordsmanship. He was also facing Brendel who had become a grandmaster warrior in the game as well, and he had also fallen into Brendel's pace of attacking.

He felt tremendous pressure as the youth seemed to predict his every move, leaving him confused and lost, and that feeling made him feel like he was a novice swordsman who had encountered a grandmaster swordsman. He even recalled the moments where he had started to train in the sword for the first time in his life, and how his teacher corrected his every move.

This was the absolute level of disparity in skill when it came to techniques.

Buga was forced back by Brendel again and again, until he finally came to the conclusion that there would not be a result where he could win by skill alone. He had no choice but to use his full abilities, and channel his 'Earth' Element into his fist to defend against Brendel's sword.

A huge clanging sound resounded through the hall.

This time it was Brendel who flew back ten over meters and smashed into the crowd.

Nobody cheered for Buga's punch.

[Aouine's swordsmanship? Is that really it?]

[How could it be used in that manner?]

[Just exactly how talented is that young man in the sword? Buga actually failed to defend against his attacks even once?]

Chapter 69

Mountain winds

“I did not expect my lord to have such impressive skills.”

Amandina praised as she walked across the hall. The only time she had the chance to see Brendel in action was during the time in the auction site in Bruglas. However, she was busy pulling Romaine to safety and did not witness Brendel’s skill in action.

Three different sets of footsteps resounded throughout the stony walls of the inn’s corridor, echoing towards the dim exit. The owner had carved out windows from the wall’s section, allowing the ambient lighting to cast a soft glow on the dark floors.

“Yes, but Brendel has always been impressive.” Romaine added with flushed pride. Her beaming smile allowed her eyes to narrow in a bewitching manner, and she turned back to look at Brendel. He flinched as he became wary of her brewing strange thoughts in her head again.

This worry was not misplaced. Romaine first impersonated a regional noble to investigate the market, then enlisted a pair of thieving brothers to scribe a map to enter Chablis. It was a dangerous move because scribing a map without permission was a risk to be sent to the gallows.

Her actions were initially kept from Brendel but her words gave her away, otherwise he would still be kept in the dark.

[Not only that, she faked identification papers... I thought I looked down on Aouine’s laws, but here is someone who seems to flout the rules at every turn... Wait, does she even know what laws there are?] Brendel rubbed his forehead.

Romaine was remarkably cautious in her actions, and was quite alike to a cunning politician who did not reveal their misdeeds in any way. Brendel accidentally found her counting her coins in the carriage, before he realized that she had earned a considerable amount of pocket money illegally.

In the end he severely lectured her for hours, with her nodding and agreeing in assent

with sincerity, but only Mother Marsha would know how much she actually heeded his words.

“What are you thinking about now?” Brendel blurted out.

“Nothing.” Romaine shook her head rapidly and hurriedly.

“...Then why are you so tense when I asked you?” Brendel sighed in exasperation, his doubts doubling.

“Did I look so tense?” Romaine rubbed her cheeks with her hands, and asked curiously with wide eyes.

“Oh little Romaine, your innocent acts aren’t fooling me any longer.”

“D-don’t call me that n...” The merchant girl’s eyebrows raised upwards, but she immediately blinked and asked: “Can I go out alone for a stroll?”

“No.” Brendel said curtly.

He refused not because he was afraid of her driving the scenic town into a frenzy of chaos, but of another consideration.

The battle earlier had impressed everyone in the hall, and even Makarov admitted that he was competent enough. Once Brendel’s fiery warrior’s blood waned, he felt his mind regain its clarity.

It was a common thing for a group of adventurers to join up with mercenaries in the game. It was easy for them to get into trouble during their travels, and it was more than necessary to rely on others for help.

While it was rare for the Mercenaries’ Oath to come into formal actuality, it was not uncommon for them to be invoked. Most of the time, the different mercenary groups are quite wary of each other and only aided each other when it was necessary to do so.

[The test that was done today was really nothing more than empty words to try and hinder me from invoking the Oath. That Makarov and Buga’s actions are too strange, and they definitely have a hidden agenda.]

Brendel reflected on Buga's facial expressions.

[He looked like he was suspicious of me. Is that really necessary to be so suspicious of a stranger?]

He was quite puzzled. He thought back on the situation that happened in the afternoon. The mercenaries tried to surround Eke and bring him back to their commander, but it looked overly complicated.

[A different goal? Or have they encountered some form of trouble? The worst outcome is if they are after the same thing that I'm going for...]

Brendel rubbed his furrowed brows.

"What's wrong?" Romaine asked. "Are you angry at me?"

"No." Brendel glared at her in annoyance. He knew that she was not afraid of his anger, but because she was hoping to get a response out of him. "Amandina, what did the mercenaries say they called themselves again?"

His thoughts shifted as recalled of another issue which might turned out to be a new problem for him.

"The Grey Wolves."

"The Grey Wolves?"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing—" Brendel replied in a casual manner, before mumbling to himself: "...The Grey Wolves... Isn't it supposed to be the Greenwoods Mountain Mercenaries? Makarov looks exactly like how he's described, but why is the name different?"

[Did history change? While it's a possibility that they changed their names, but registering a change in the kingdom's records would have been a huge task, it would usually be rejected unless there's a huge incident—]

Brendel suddenly looked up to the stony window to look at the faint skylight.

“What do you think of him?”

The middle-aged man with red hair felt the scar on his face as he turned back to ask Buga.

The cool breeze that stroked his face made him feel heavy-eyed. He narrowed his eyes to look at the town below the hill's inn. Man-made steps were carved in winding paths to lead up to the inn.

The ‘Maned Wolf’ Makarov was renowned in the mercenaries’ circle for nearly seven years. He was famed for his bravery and unforgiving duels he had, almost as if he had no regard for his own life like a starving wolf. The wolves in the southern Aouine’s mountainous regions are also called the silver maned wolves, which was also the reason why he was named so.

“Hah.” Buga smacked his head with his hand and gave a gruff laugh: “That young man’s ability in the sword is nearly faultless. He almost has the standards of a grandmaster, and amongst the military—”

He suddenly coughed: “You know what I mean. I cannot compare to his talent when it comes to the sword. That young man, Brendel, is someone who’s born to carry a sword. I can hardly believe someone of his age can reach to such skill. Do you know that I couldn’t even fight back—”

He continued laughing: “Before young master Eke, I truly did not think there’s talent in this world. To reach the name of ‘talented’, would require determination and hard work. Young master Eke proved me wrong. Today, I was proven wrong again. I feel like I have been wrong all my life.”

He grinned when he was finished, revealing his white teeth.

“You’re comparing him with young master?” Makarov’s eyes went wide, forcing the scar to become even more prominent. It was left from a Night’s Son, and the people who knew him well know that the scar was already there even before he became a mercenary. “I did not see such skill in him.”

“This is why you’re the commander and I’m the fighter.”

“Your opinion of him seems very high, it seems.”

“Yes. But that young man reminds me of someone.”

“Who?”

“Hah, a really stubborn bastard. But putting that aside, I don’t think he’s a spy for ‘Paper Cards’. If they had someone as talented as him, they would have been signs.”

Makarov shook his head to disagree: “This is hard to determine. The timing of this is too sensitive to be certain of anything. I do not think that ‘Paper Cards’ would fight for just a simple mission. Chablis is a small town with no prominent resources, so why would it attract them?”

“You mention before that they had other motives?”

“Indeed.”

“But for what exactly? The lizardmen bandits have some other goals, or for another reason entirely?”

“I do not know. Eke has been very strange lately,” Makarov closed his eyes and sighed. “This makes me a little worried. I do not wish for a group of unknown men to follow us with ill intentions. The last mission was meddled with by ‘Paper Cards’, this time I want no incidents.”

Buga eyed him for a fleeting moment.

“Has the maester agreed to this as well?”

Makarov nodded, then shook his head. “He did not say anything.”

“Then why not wait?”

“We can’t put it off any longer. Do you not feel the signs that the Tree Shepherds are catching up to us?” Makarov said with a chilly breath: “Three days. That’s the limit. We’re moving out.”

“And the young man?”

“Let him come with us.”

Chapter 70

Setting out

The July morning in Chablis was a song of birds' warbling that filled the forest. When the morning sun covered the town, it also seemed to fill it with vigor and life.

Brendel's habits had completely changed ever since he entered this world. He used to sleep in late whenever he could back in his original world, but now he woke up early as a swordsman. He took in a deep breath, filling his nose with the air inside his room that smelled of peppermint leaves.

Having the luxury to sleep felt like it was ages ago.

He walked towards the nearest window to look outside the inn's window. The scenery was Chablis's undulating mountains, with the town's stony architecture giving an indescribable charm. As he admired the landscape, he held down a paper card with two fingers and opening it with his thumb. The Wind Crystal that was placed beside it immediately turned into a path of green smoke that went straight into the paper card. A small gust of wind blew within the room, and numerous dimension cracks appeared to reveal twenty Wind Spirit Spiders which jumped out.

He immediately gave them an order, and the chattering spiders scattered away, becoming blurry and transient, before they finally disappeared as wafts of smoke and went outside the room. The cracks closed and the wind stopped, and upon witnessing this event, the youth smiled.

"The current situation appears like it's a quest mission." He furrowed his brows as he opened a bottle of mana potion. This thought has been lingering for two days and he did not sleep well over it.

The game had events that appeared randomly without warning, which either led to a chain quest or a dungeon. There were hints of how the quests were going to be spawned from logical events, and it was an attractive selling point.

[Should I treat this current situation like the game or should I worry how far it is going to deviate from the game? Wait. Think about it, thus far, all the major events have

followed the game's history. Surely there's a possibility that this mercenary group that appeared here was in the game's history as well.]

Brendel went back and forth in his mind, trying to recall the insignificant events during the early years in the game. After a short while, he finally recalled about an event about within the Baern's ruins. The people involved claimed to be the first team that got a chain quest.

[It's really familiar—]

As he tried to recall details about the event, a series of impatient knocks could be heard from the door.

[Not Romaine, she wouldn't bother knocking, not Amandina either, it's unlike her to knock in such a rude manner— Makarov's men.]

Brendel immediately guessed.

“Please enter.”

The door opened to reveal two young men. One of them was the youth with white hair and a feminine face, who looked at Brendel with considerable scorn. The other man was one whom Brendel had not seen before.

Brendel observed the second man closely; he had short near hair, a skinny and short figure, and he looked inside the room with an expression full of curiosity.

“S-ser Brendel, we're ready to move, may we know if you're ready?” The short youth glanced at him with an inquisitive expression that's mixed with doubt and admiration. It was evident that the battle Brendel had against Buga had given him a deep impression.

It was well known that Buga's abilities was far beyond Makarov, and a young man whose age looked about twenty had bested him in terms of technique, was something that beyond imagination.

[I have heard of the people who are 'Chosen', but I don't know how strong they are... I wonder if he's one?]

Brendel would have laughed if he knew what the small youth was thinking. At his

current strength he was not even close to be a 'Chosen', he could not even compare to a 'Blessed' person either.

"Understood. We will be there shortly. I thank you for informing me." He nodded.

The youth with white hair immediately scoffed.

Brendel's eyes darted over to him. He had socialized with some of the mercenaries and found out that the white-haired youth was a noble's scion. It was not surprising that he had a temper and a condescending personality. Brendel guessed that his reason for joining the mercenary was an entire whole story altogether.

He had no interest to learn of it in any case.

But while Brendel ignored him, the white-haired youth did not do so. In fact, he became even angrier for being ignored at, and he scoffed again: "You listen to me. Even though I'm not your match, I'll constantly have my eyes on you, and if I find out you're trying to do something out of order—"

The youth beside him turned around in shock as he did not expect his partner to say something like that. His eyes went back to Brendel. He mouthed wordlessly, but no sound came out of his throat.

"Oh, you—?" Brendel secretly added 'moron' in his mind, then held his gaze on him: "Are called Redi, are you not?"

"My name has nothing to do with you." He spat the words out.

"Are the nobles in your homeland without manners?" Brendel asked.

"You..." Redi said through gritted teeth, his hand reaching for his sword, before he recalled the difference of strength between them, before he dejectedly lowered his hand.

"Eke escaped?"

"How did you know of this, you...!"

Redi's brows creased together and he wanted to question Brendel, but he saw him in a contemplating manner, and immediately realized he made a mistake. He grunted

heavily: “Hmph. You concern yourself too much with this matter. I will inform your transgression to the commander.”

[Blah, blah, whatever. I wonder how many idiots like you are out there.]

But a smile appeared on Brendel’s face: “I merely ask because I had the chance to meet Ser Eke, if you must know.”

[I don’t gave a shit.] Redi was furiously grinding his teeth, but there was no other expressions about putting on a taciturn face.

“I heard that you are from the same homeland as the Saint of the Silver Sword, Gory Keyes.” Brendel suddenly said.

“That’s none of your...”

The white-haired youth finally realized that Brendel was mocking him. He ceased talking and added a dismissive snort. Since he realized he could not have the upper hand against Brendel, he turned around and pulled his partner away, with the intention of leaving Brendel behind to find the way on his own, and it would be even better if he was unable to find his way.

Brendel kept laughing in his mind.

[It seems that bastard Gory has an ardent admirer.]

He had tried to learn his sword skills from Gory, but he failed to get any quest related to his techniques, and even suffered considerably under the old man’s temper.

[I wonder if he knows that old man’s real nature. He really loves to gamble, but he’s always unlucky and he completely denies making a bet when he loses... But there might be an opportunity to get one of his skill someday. It’s a pity he is traveling in Kirrlutz currently, otherwise I might try to find him.]

...

Makarov and Buga exchanged long looks with each other. In the end it was Makarov who asked: “Ser Brendel, they are?”

He pointed at the twelve mercenaries who wore different uniforms.

[Mother Marsha above, we locked down the inn's entrance and exit. We had scouts at the town's gates, but how did these conspicuous men escape our notice? Did they arrive long ago before us? But we have been here for three days and these men did not appear!]

He stared at the men who carried axes, spears, shields, longswords along with full headgear.

Brendel did not understand the conflict in Makarov's mind, so he merely shrugged as he explained with a smile: "These are my men. I believe I had mentioned before that I have mercenaries under me. Hmm... They hail from distant lands, and as you know as a merchant, I had the chance to travel to different kingdoms. These mercenaries are from a minority tribe from the eastern Kingdoms. Please do not mind what they wear."

The smile never left his face, as though something like that really happened.

Amandina and Romaine threw furtive glances at him.

[Brendel actually has contact with minorities from the faraway lands! Incredible!] Romaine's innocent mind praised him wholeheartedly.

But Amandina had different thoughts. Even though she knew he had another group of mercenaries under him, they were most likely from Arreck and not minorities.

[There's something amiss. Even though Brendel said Ciel had to go back to Karsuk for a certain matter, there's something wrong somewhere.] Amandina buried these thoughts in her heart as she did not want to question her lord.

Makarov and Buga who had more experience than Amandina obviously came to the same conclusion, but they did not understand how these mercenaries came about. Their Silver-ranked scouts even found Eke, but these new mercenaries who looked like they only had Iron-ranks fighters amongst them actually bypassed every scout.

Makarov subconsciously knitted his brows together. His opinions rated Brendel three grades higher, and he appeared to be on the realms of mystery.

"Then, Commander Makarov, should we set off?" Brendel asked.

"Certainly." Makarov nodded with some difficulty. He was determined to place Brendel in the center of his own mercenaries to keep close watch over him. He was originally

confident that he could keep trouble to a minimum, but there were twelve 'Silver-ranked' mercenaries who escaped detection, led by a youth who he himself was physically capable as a Silver-ranked fighter who was armed with incredible talent in the sword.

He felt a headache coming up. He looked back at Buga with a little blame in his eyes: "My old friend, this was the result of your investigation?"

Buga shrugged.

Makarov had asked Buga to search the mercenaries that Brendel had mentioned, but there was not even a hint about them, but there were twelve of them that suddenly sprung up. Even though they looked like they only were 'Iron-ranked' fighters, but Makarov did not believe his own eyes. These men were strangely dressed and he thought they had the means to hide their own strength.

Buga also shook his head inwardly when he saw the mercenaries.

Chapter 71

The oncoming premonition

Brendel rubbed his forehead as he recalled a particular battle during the game, as he traveled into the Baern's forest.

Before entering a war filled with bloodshed, the gamers who led a peaceful lifestyle could hardly imagine the fanatical eyes of every person that seemed to be swallowed in bloodlust. The battles were as chilling as it appeared, the cold and merciless blades that went into each throat, causing crimson blood to spray everywhere, filling the air with iron rust, while each victim struggled on the ground as the night melted into the background. Their weary eyes saw their final moments before their vision became dim.

That did not mark the end of them, because their own blood would pool within their lungs and they would cough incessantly, in a painful bid to cling for life before they finally expire in sorrow.

Once upon a time, 'Sophie' thought 'The Amber Sword' was going to progress like a scene in a novel. He recalled the moments of how the battles unfolded in a bizarre manner.

There were no two armies deployed in an orderly fashion facing each other. His first true battle with large numbers occurred in the Deltal Forest. Tall trees with dense leaves lined across a precipice which led into a meandering shoreline. The enemies that consisted of slavery merchants and their private armies hid within the cliffs' large fissures.

The number of gamers and NPCs were more than three times the slavers' private armies, but the true battle was decided by how proficient their scouts were in a place like this.

The initial battle started off with the gamers completely falling into chaos as they were flanked from an ambush in an unfavorable spot. Team members were separated from each other and the appointed leaders lost sight of their position, and the majority of the people had to form into small groups to fight for themselves.

The enemy employed multiple highly mobile ambushes that came for the flanks and back, and the thousand odd gamers were held back by a single unit of cavalry.

No one knew where the scouts were spying them from, and the chaos had made it impossible for the leaders to keep track of where their flanks were. In retrospect, Brendel felt that having the option to command a battleground from an isometric view like how other games were, was something of a blissful thought.

During the thick of the battle, countless swallow-tail flags were carried by a myriad number of guilds that served to obscure sight and contributed nothing but disorder. They were ushered to move in a direction that no one knew where they were going, occasionally encountering small groups of the slavery's private army and defeating them easily. Everyone thought they had the greater numbers and thought they were going to win, but the longer the battle went on, the more splintered the groups became.

The slavers' main private army moved in an organized manner with numbers that dwarfed the splintered groups, picking them off one by one, like how Brendel had done so earlier when he fought the undead army with the refugees.

By the time dusk came, the remaining gamers found themselves surrounded by the enemies' flags—

[‘The Delttal’s massacre’, aptly named in the forums. Seventeen hundred gamers gathered together by three large guilds to fight along the NPCs. There was no question to the gamers’ skill and courage. Even until the end they formed small parties to fight to their deaths, but the result was the gamers being utterly obliterated.]

The irony in the situation was how the smaller groups of gamers caused more damage to the slavers in the night, compared to the situation in the daytime where they had the advantage in numbers. Brendel gave a wry smile.

[This memory still chills me to my soul even though that battle happened just after Bucces’ battle with Madara. The gamers only learned how to employ tactics and memorized the guild flags and whether they belonged to the cavalries or foot soldiers. The commanders situated themselves onto higher grounds so they could observe the battleground and adjust their positions accordingly within a ten-mile radius.]

Brendel watched Makarov issued commands that the gamers had to learn themselves.

There were certainly differences to the battle Brendel had because of the scale, but the principles behind them were similar. Brendel held the horse's reins closely and directed it to avoid shrubs so that they would not prick it. He glanced around from time to time, and discovered figures wearing green robes and painted bows darting across. Normal people would not have noticed them.

[‘The Forest Spirits’? They are definitely the best hunters that appeared in this world as far I can see. Kirrlutz's soldiers called them the ‘Forest Spirits’ when they invaded this land two hundred years ago, but it's a name that the local citizens saw as praise. This meant they were the swiftest hunters, the most accurate archers and the best rangers.]

“I wonder where Makarov found them.” Brendel subconsciously mumbled as he tapped the gold plated bits on the reins. He had actually teamed up with them before, even though the time he had with them was not long, they left a deep impression on him.

“I wonder if they scouted this place for a long time.”

The mercenaries would have an easy time if they had excellent scouts. Makarov certainly handled things well. Brendel understood that mercenaries could only perform well if they were far more familiar with the lands compared to their enemies.

The members of Makarov's mercenaries were definitely veterans. It was a common thing for mercenaries to be hired to clear bandits, and the more famous their name was, the more experienced they tend to be. Makarov himself was clearly someone who's renowned.

[There wouldn't be many differences to how I would employ our positions if I was to lead the mercenaries. He even has an advantage over me since he already knows where the lizardmen are. The Elven ruins in Baern should prove to be a difficult place to access if they are not locals, but it seems his men knows this place well. I wondered how I'm going to work with him and I considered the possibility of hiring other mercenaries to follow his tail, but that itself can be considered as a great affront.]

Brendel ultimately chose to use the Mercenaries' Oath, and was secretly delighted that Makarov had a great number of scouts. It also highlighted the disadvantage if he chose to chose his former plan. If he followed them from the back, he would not have seen the scouts.

He looked over to Makarov and Buga.

Their faces were taut. They had shown Brendel's their scouts because they had no choice. If they hid them, sooner or later Brendel would have noticed them, so revealing them now was a choice they made to give him a warning. Brendel's men seemed to be like a bomb waiting to explode. Placing them in front or at the back was even more dangerous, compared to placing them at the center where they could surround them quickly.

If he had a choice, Makarov would have Brendel thrown out a long time ago. Even through the journey he wanted to do so several times, but he shook his head in the end.

[Even if other groups of mercenaries would do something otherwise, the Grey Wolves must not do something dishonorable. The agreement stands.]

"Is Eke still in the town?" Makarov turns to Buga and asks.

Buga nodded.

"Forget it. Let him do whatever he wants. This isn't his fault," Makarov shook his head and let a sardonic smile spread across his face. "It's unfortunate that we couldn't tell him too much."

"He's doing this because of you."

"I know he's concerned about the 'Paper Cards', but he doesn't know that we know about their presence already. That idiot bastard Drake thinks he's fooling us, but what he doesn't know is we're playing along with his trick." Makarov tilted his head with contempt: "But the most troublesome person is not him, but the youth in front of us. I'm certain that he's not with the 'Paper Cards' yet that doesn't give me relief."

Makarov gave a rarely seen expression that was full of disdain.

"That's a terrible irony, you do know that right." He said.

Buga agreed as well.

Brendel did not know that he caused such grief to them, but started to calculate the number of men marching. There were seventy odd men altogether heading straight to

the Elven ruins.

[It would be best if we could ambush the lizardmen, otherwise this excursion would take a few days.]

Brendel's thoughts drifted to this morning.

[The insignia of the Grey Wolves are lilac flowers that specifically blooms in the southern region. The insignia are the exact same as the Greenwoods Mountain Mercenaries... Wait... what's the composition of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries again?]

Brendel looked at the Makarov's men around him.

[Half of them are Iron-ranked fighters, a fifth are Silver-ranked, along with 'The Forest Spirits'? With such a group of mercenaries to clear a hundred odd level 20 Lizardmen Bandits, there's no need to even arrange tactics here. Something is off about this.]

Brendel finally realized the origins of the Grey Wolves as he observed them, but his train of thoughts were interrupted when he heard Amandina snapping in a loud voice.

"Why are you placing your men over here? This isn't normal!"

Brendel could imagine Amandina's frown on her face without turning around.

"What the hell do you know, you wench." Redi's voice rang out loudly.

Brendel's face immediately darkened.

Chapter 72

Brendel's strategy

Brendel turned back and indeed saw the white-haired man wearing a frosty expression.

What came next into his sight were ten odd Juddelan heavy infantry men. The Juddelan was one of Aouine's most commonly hired mercenaries. These men lived in regions near the sea, and all their eleven ports were frequently hassled by pirates. With these constant battles, the citizens of Juddelan naturally became mercenaries.

A typical Juddelan mercenary wore a well crafted and heavy scale armor, a long flame-forged steel spear, and on top of the spear held a shield half the size of a man. Finally their waist was adorned with higher grade swords and axes that were handed down from their ancestors.

Brendel knew them well from the game.

"What is going on?" He jerked his horse to stop it from moving as he asked.

"These are clearly heavy infantry... Messere," Amandina's obsidian eyes beheld a clear alertness as she turned around to answer Brendel: "They clearly do not trust me if they place this group of heavy infantry behind us."

Brendel took another glance behind her and realized something suddenly. He merely smiled: "Not trusting is a normal reaction."

"But—"

Redi snorted in displeasure at Amandina's continued disapproval.

Brendel eyed at him once and asked: "Then what is the reason for putting these Juddelan men behind us?"

"It does not concern you." Redi snapped.

“Ser, these men usually move slower in the forest,” It was the shorter youth who came along with Redi in the morning who walked over. He jerked Redi’s sleeve, while he continued to answer: “Commander Makarov also placed them here to handle ambushes, and it’s not because of the distrust towards everyone here.”

“Wonderful, killing two birds with one stone.” Brendel expressed an understanding face, but he did not forget to ridicule Redi: “But your partner is just awful at communication compared to you.”

Redi’s face flashed in anger and flung his arm to get rid of his partner’s pull, leaving the other youth behind. Brendel took a longer look at the youth in front of him: “What’s your name?”

“I’m Sanford.”

“Sanford, that name doesn’t sound like the locals.”

“I’m originally an apprentice baker in Bruglas... which was before I became a mercenary. Ser, your accent seems like one from there too.”

“I’m not, but the girls are.” Brendel pointed his chin at them.

Sanford gave a shy smile and looked at the girl riding behind Brendel. But she turned her face away to the side and did not look at him. Even though she was a poor noble, she had the temperament of a typical Aouine noble who refused to be friendly to typical commoners. Romaine did not have the same concern, so she winked at him as she was from Bucces and considered as a neighbor.

“It sounds like this reasoning is fine, but to bring heavy infantry in the forest is a sign of ill consideration.” Amandina looked at the Juddelan men as she spoke.

But there was a loud retort that came swiftly when she finished her words.

“Serah, messere, pray hold your words. We have to work for our meals, and commander Makarov was kind enough to accept us, so we have to pledge our loyalty. It behooves us to follow our group, have you ever heard of mercenaries leaving their comrades to go forth in danger while we stay back?”

A Juddelan mercenary came into sight as he walked out from the shrubs. He was carrying a large black weapon, his face full of stubble along with a lop-sided grin. He

shook his head as he spoke with a heavy accent.

Brendel's group looked at him.

[Here's someone who can walk freely out of rank. His position within the mercenaries is definitely not low.]

"Frank, assault captain." He introduced himself as he rubbed his nose.

"What is that?" Brendel's gaze fell upon Frank's weapon in his hand.

"A flintlock gun, this is my precious baby." Frank patted his black weapon and gave a harsh laugh.

Brendel recognized that weapon. Abandoned mana crystal fragments were used as gunpowder, while an Element Needle was used as the ignition mechanism. They are the unique firearms of this world. The Ovlans had started making guns approximately thirty years ago, and even had two squads of soldiers armed with flintlock guns; and dating even further back the Silver Years was the Dwarves creating matchlock guns.

A gun was extremely powerful in close range. The best flintlock gun one could find did the same damage within forty meters as a Brass-ranked artifact. Furthermore, the gunners in this era were very familiar with the usage. The only ranged unit that might possibly outperformed it was a trained squadron of mages who specialized in projectile magic. *(TL: Examples of the Brass-ranked artifacts are Brendel's wind ring and flame ring.)*

[Many mercenaries love using firearms, especially pistols. Using a long barreled gun like this person here is rare. Even throughout the game, guns didn't change how wars are fought, unlike my original world. Since mana crystals are limited, so is the quantity of guns.]

Amandina felt her face burning up slightly but she maintained her vigilant attitude. "What did you mean by that?"

"It's very simple. It seems that you're following what the kingdom's army was taught to do in books. We're simple mercenaries. Regardless of whether we're light or heavy infantry, the only thing we do is to fight together under any type of situation. You are not wrong in saying we shouldn't be here in this forest, but we need to consider reality..." Frank answered in a polite tone, but it was not hard to listen to hear the

indifference in his voice.

Amandina hiccuped once. She knew that her knowledge that she had gotten from the books was shallow, but pointing it out directly made her feel slight anger. She cast a quick glance at Brendel, and whispered quietly.

“Do you believe them, my lord?”

Brendel looked at Frank and nodded.

“But-”

“But what?” He asked her instead.

Amandina’s eyes said ‘Are you really going to believe him?’.

Brendel merely gave a smile and exchanged greetings with Frank and Sanford, before urging his horse to move forward. He did not give a reply to her, but her obstinate personality did not allow her to stop at that, and gave chase to him.

“My lord, I don’t think these men are normal.”

“Why?”

“Instinct.”

“What do you say to that, little Romaine?” Brendel said without turning his head around.

“I don’t know,” Romaine shook her head: “But my aunt has said that being overly formal and detailed are the signs of being guilty!”

Brendel grinned when he heard her answer, and he urged his horse near Romaine and flicked her forehead.

“You cunning little fox. You obviously know what they are up to and yet you have to do it in such a roundabout way.”

“I, I really don’t know!” Romaine’s brows raised up as she quickly tried to justify herself.

Amandina did not know what to do in front of their flirting, but she finally understood that Brendel feigned ignorance and already suspected their motives from the start. It was finally then she relaxed.

“If that is the case,” Amandina’s face was slightly red as she eyed both of them: “What should we do?”

“Be ready to handle things as they come.” Brendel merely said.

He had finally recalled all the clues mentioned from the forum’s guide to this related quest. As long as the mercenaries were not going to create trouble for him, anything they did was negotiable. Still, this was a headache that he did not need, the enemies that the Grey Wolves Mercenaries was about to face was going to embroil them into another new kind of trouble, but he could only blame Makarov for getting involved with such a tricky opponent.

[Rather than calling it a fight between two groups of mercenaries, it’s the organization behind ‘Paper Cards’ targeting the Grey Wolves Mercenaries.]

He monitored his surroundings, taking into view of the men around him. He was not really concerned about their fates, but he was trying hard to think how he could escape from this problem.

[What I don’t get is how a mere mercenary group got the attention of the damned Tree Shepherds—]

The Unifying Guild’s members were like law-abiding citizens compared to them.

Brendel started to ponder the entire situation as a gamer.

[Even though there’s no need to stick my hand into this beehive, it’s best for me to consider the outcomes. While the guide gave a walkthrough to how they handled the events, the details are entirely lacking. The background information isn’t mentioned at all.]

He rubbed his forehead.

[We should leave before they fight. The boss in this quest is the God Acolyte ‘Ekman’. According to lore, the name is derived from ‘eaam’, and represents verdant mountains and limitless seas as a spellword. In ancient times, there had been a gigantic creature

called 'Ekman' as well, both existing in Kirrlutz's legendary fables and mountain folklore, and represented immortality—]

Brendel shook his head.

[The gigantic beast Ekman, is a descendant from the Titans, but the God Acolyte is nothing more a monster's name. These so called 'God Acolytes' are nothing more than twisted abominations like the Golden Demonic Tree, and really nothing more than the product of being nurtured with the corrupted blood of a god.]

Brendel recalled the time where he fought with the God Acolyte of Skies 'Amar' and God Acolyte of Darkness 'Black lotus'. The former was an incomplete form at level fifty. He had fought with it in a random encounter with his allies in the Freedom Port, Ampere Seale, and emerged victorious with much difficulty. The latter was a level sixty-seven elite boss within the primary heroic quest which two guilds participated in to vanquish it.

[The God Acolytes are terrifying because they are so much more powerful than what their level indicates. Even with an incomplete form at level fifty, they are able to match several Gold-ranked fighters at one go. I don't even have the slightest intention to go against this opponent... Still, there's the chance to get some advantages here. The Grey Wolves Mercenaries must have been decimated here but at the very least Makarov and Buga didn't die.]

Brendel's mind ran through the series of possibilities as to why they survived, before it wandered to the loot that the Tree Sheperds dropped.

[The God Acolyte of Skies drops the Spear of Blue Skies, 'Phana'. That's the highest tier of the Gold-ranked (Fantasy) weapons, allowing to ignore all physical defence. The God Acolyte of Darkness even drops a Dark Gold-ranked (Godly) weapon, the Death Scythe, 'Lunar Velit'. Its ability was Coup De Grace, a one percent chance to deal damage equivalent to the target's current life (non-boss) and ignores all defense. The secondary trait is Annihilation, and prevents the target from receiving any heals with a ten percent chance.]

Even though they were immensely powerful, they were a walking treasure vault, and one could only wonder where they were able to get so many rare items.

"The rarest thing these God Acolytes has is actually the blood running in them... All of

them has the corrupted blood of gods in them. Mother Marsha above, how did they get the hands on the blood of these gods who have disappeared?”

He muttered to himself.

After the Era of Darkness, these Gods had passed away and became constellations. The only God that was still in this world was Mother Marsha, and the world was no longer controlled by these powers. Anyone who tried to call themselves God would be a false one.

“What are you thinking about, my lord?” Amandina saw Brendel was lost in his thoughts.

Brendel shook his head and said: “The powers of the mountains.”

“Powers of the mountains?”

TL: So about these three titles... They are loan words from game of thrones and dragon age 2, but the meaning might differ for this novel.

Ser – Given to fighters and knights, gender neutral.

Messere – Elevated respect of Mister, but not necessarily Ser.

Serah – Elevated respect of Miss, but not necessarily Ser.

Chapter 73

Deceptive currents

‘The Power of the Mountains’ was a pair of vambraces.

A pair of vambraces was considered as a unique weapon that was usually used by monks. It was uncommon to see warriors and hired mercenaries wearing them, but Brendel was interested in getting them.

If Ekman was allowed to grow into his complete form, he would drop the sword ‘Lightning Sunder’ as well, but Brendel did not waste time trying to figure out a plan to stop a level sixty-seven elite boss, who would easily destroy them with just a flick of his finger to unleash the corresponding Element that he had.

The current Buga might have unlocked his Element, but there was a huge difference between humans and corrupted creatures with a god’s blood in them. Unless he was able to attain a perfect self and reach the Golden Blood, he would have a great disadvantage against mythical enemies.

[Putting aside that level 62 Dark Gold-ranked weapon, even a level 45 Gold-ranked weapon is enough drive gamers crazy. The damage output would be several times of what the Thorn of Light can do. Some players who got these weapons even deleted their characters to start over again, just for the sake of showing off their weapons.]

Brendel was willing to redo his plan to level up just to get the vambraces. There was a definite chance to get the item in contrast to the sword, Lionheart. Many kings had sought after it in the history of Aouine, only to fail. Furthermore, it was only a level seventy Gold-ranked weapon.

[I might have a few clues to get that weapon, but given my history within the game, the chance of finishing a quest like that might as well be finding a needle in a haystack. But if I’m able to get the vambraces, then I should consider planning my character’s path around it—]

He rubbed his forehead, as he suddenly realized that he was chasing after a delusion. Currently there was no sign of the Tree Shepherd, let alone the ‘Paper Cards’, and to

finish it off, it was still a question if Makarov and Buga was able to kill the God Acolyte.

[Safety should be my first concern. Getting greedy after that should be the way to go.]

Brendel started to plot out scenarios to exact details. If he had the knowledge of what was to come, his plans made him an impossible foe to beat.

[Even though the Tree Shepherds are frightening opponents, but they are nothing more than that.]

Brendel had faced three of the twelve Tree Shepherds and defeated two of them. Even though he did not have his original strength, his foresight and experience were kept at his peak.

The God Acolytes were not without their weaknesses.

“Power of the mountains?” Amandina’s eyes were slightly perplexed as she asked in confusion: “What is that?”

“Uh... I’m just thinking of a famous treasure in this area. There are rumors that it’s within the Silver Elves’ ruins, but it’s just that no one has seen it.” Brendel had to find a suitable excuse for his mistake. He could not say that Ekman, who was a God Acolyte, was going to bring it over to him.

He still had no intention of letting his image become a mentally troubled person in Amandina’s eyes.

Even so, his words still drew Amandina’s ire with her eyes complaining. She sighed: “My lord, now is not the time to consider this, right?”

“Most certainly.” Brendel could only offer a dry smile: “I was just a little distracted.”

But his words could only fool himself. Amandina was incredibly perceptive. She looked at him with doubt. In her mind, he was a careful and brilliant knight who would not be merely distracted by something unimportant. He seemed to be constantly thinking about something, and even though it looks like the things he did were not connected together, it was clear that he had planned them from the very beginning after the dust had settled.

Amandina was very suspicious of the fact that he was able to do something like that.

A great plan might be great indeed, but the level of which Brendel exhibited was something akin to precognition, and that he was merely waiting for events to come to pass.

She had thought of several reasons as to why he had that air around him, whether it was because of having huge confidence or exceptional insight. The only possibility that she did not consider was knowing the future. Even the seers in the royal court could only predict the direction of great events, and that only gods would be capable of such feats.

She certainly did not imagine at all that Brendel was not from this world.

“Momentarily distracted?” Amandina frowned slightly and showed her small displeasure. “My lord, if there are things that you don’t wish to tell me, I won’t ask for it either—”

Brendel felt like he was suddenly a victim who had been blamed of great crimes. He had secrets that he could not say because it was really impossible to do so.

[Mother Marsha, how do you expect me to talk to them about these things. Even if I tell them, nobody would believe me, and just give me a label of a madman. This is a deal that will never be in my favor.]

He could only explain patiently: “Miss Amandina, I assure you that I have no intentions like that...”

But before he finished, Romaine came to the conversation after she roamed around without anyone know where she went, and promised in an excited manner: “I won’t ask for your secrets too Brendel! I promise!”

Brendel glared at her. If there was anyone who was capable of creating great chaos, she would definitely be at the top.

In the end he sighed and raised his hands: “Never mind. Let’s get down to business. The two of you must pitch your tents closer to my own tonight. Don’t take off your armor and don’t sleep like a log, understand?”

Amandina immediately checked her surroundings with a pair of watchful eyes. “Why?”

“I’ll explain it during then.” He turned around and saw Romaine nodding in an exaggerated manner, but her face clearly showed that she was not paying attention. Brendel’s eyes narrowed dangerously. He knew her character all too well.

“Dearest Romaine, I know you too well. You had better stay awake all throughout the night. Don’t think that I don’t know you will sleep like a little pig, where no one can wake you up other than Mother Marsha.”

“But my aunt says that a woman will grow old quickly if she doesn’t sleep.”

“I didn’t see you turning old when we didn’t sleep in Bucce for several days.”

“But the Madara undead will catch up with us if we sleep!”

“The situation right now is the same...” Brendel said exasperatedly.

===== Eke’s Pov =====

Eke was able to differentiate the fennel and cinnamon spices that were transported from the Silver Sand seas. He had trained his abilities to discern poisons in his trainings, and differentiating spices was a part of his training.

Still, the spices in the air nearly caused him to sneeze. Right now, Eke wished his heart would stop beating, but it was still pounding loudly in his chest.

He shut his lips tightly so that he would not leak any sounds out. Even if he wanted to breath in deep gasps of air, he could only resist in doing so. His lungs were screaming for oxygen and his mind was assailed with dizziness, and perspiration poured down from his forehead. The white bags that were made from wool were blotched with dark areas.

“Who are you people? What are you doing here?”

Eke was not able to see that man, but he could guess who it was. It was the second squadron’s leader, Captain Capo, and the familiar comrades he had in the mercenary group.

[Don’t come over here— Turn around, everyone. Don’t let these fucking bastards get suspicious!]

He stared at the shadows that covered the opposite wall, afraid that he would miss even the slightest details.

He prayed in his heart to plead with Mother Marsha to let Capo and his men leave immediately. It was impossible to imagine that they would leave unless a miracle happened. Even though he knew Makarov left some of his men behind to keep watch over him, it was more alike to having them to take care over him. Capo cared the most for him, and he was the first teacher that taught him how to use a sword. Everyone, even his stepfather Makarov, knew that he was hiding in the town.

[They probably even know the fact that I slipped back into the inn. I know you care a great deal about me, and you always treat me like a child, but these damned bastards are not from the 'Paper Cards'! Do you really think I'm afraid of them? Why don't you understand this father?]

He clenched and unclenched his fists.

[I can't let the enemy notice me. But Capo and the others aren't their match... And these bastards are like devils who wouldn't bat an eyelid even if the whole street is flooded with blood!]

Eke struggled with himself. He wanted to jump up and warn Capo, to yell at them and flee. In the youth's heart, Capo was his friend and teacher, and he wanted to fulfill his moral obligations to him. His eyes felt wet.

[...There's a mission that's more important than both of us. I can't let these bastards get away with their plans.]

"Where is that young man you were chasing?" Capo said.

Eke's heart skipped a beat.

"Hand over Eke, we saw you chasing him!" There was a another voice that was younger, and sounded even more impatient.

[Chris, you bloody moron!]

Eke's hand subconsciously went to his sword. His whole body was trembling. Then he heard a familiar laughter so cold, that he thought needles were entering his spine.

“Ahahaha, all of you are indeed together with him—”

===== POV ends =====

Chapter 74

Night assault (1)

===== Unknown POV =====

“Here’s someone we know, Carles.”

A man wearing a black cavalier’s uniform watched the valleys from afar. The fire torches lit up the dark forest like stars in the sky. The Grey Wolves Mercenaries seemed to slumber as there were no sounds within the camps. The only noise within the forest were the rustling of leaves caused by the western wind that came from the sea.

[It sounds like a roaring tide.]

There seemed to be a creature bellowing deep within the mountain forests as the echoes spreaded out. Moments later, a giant monster emerged out from the trees with its immense claws dragging a female guard’s corpse.

She was also a scout that Brendel had seen in the afternoon, but she had turned into a lifeless corpse. The monster gurgled as the the orange flames shimmered; it was clearly displeased with the cavalier’s flippant attitude.

“It’s not your place to lecture me, small one.”

The monster’s voice was raspy and broken, like a clockwork mechanism that had not been maintained.

It straightened its body and threw the corpse down from a cliff. The dead mercenary fell into a number of dense shrubs, causing many branches to snap loudly as she fell some thirty or forty feet. Despite the noise, the distance to the camp was too far away for anyone to hear the commotion, especially when there was a strong wind.

The cavalier frowned as he looked at his partner—

Then he saw a group of ghastly translucent spiders with poisonous green eyes

screeching noisily as they pounced from the nearby trees...

===== Brendel POV =====

There was a cracking sound.

Brendel stopped what he was doing and located the source of the sound. He found one of his cards on the floor. When he turned it over, he saw the Wind Spider Spirits had turned grey, an indication that it had entered into the Graveyard.

His first reaction was not to mourn for the loss of it but quickly kept it into his pocket and extinguished his lamp, causing his surroundings turned dark immediately.

[That's too fast.]

Brendel felt like he was slightly caught off guard.

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries had selected an ideal vale to avoid the winds and constructed tents there. Brendel suggested their forces to be situated further from each other to avoid suspicion, Even though Makarov and Buga felt surprised, they happily agreed. Brendel did not trust them, and they did not trust him either, thus the two scheming parties found this arrangement to be agreeable.

What Makarov did not expect was why Brendel wanted this arrangement; it was just so that he could run away in the middle of the night with an excuse.

The youth crawled out of his tent and immediately felt the hair on his bare skin stand up. Chablis was mired in deep fog in its area, and had high temperature during the day time with the temperature falling quickly in the night. Unprepared travelers would certainly find themselves to be chilled if they did not prepare adequate bedding.

Brendel shook off any intention to sleep and observed his surroundings. Human figures came in the form of shadows, and despite Brendel's lack of vision training in the night, his high stats in perception allowed him to perceive things in clarity during the night.

[It seems like Makarov is only suspicious of us, but they don't intend to harm us.]

After confirming that there was no one nearby, he slowly stood up. He was already dressed and ready for full combat. He wore a set of studded leather armor, with

pouches attached to his belt as well as a longsword. In his hand was a backpack with necessary water and food. He quietly went over to a nearby tent and patted on the tent's cloth. After a few seconds, a curious voice came from within:

"Brendel?"

"Romaine, why are you in here!" Brendel felt confounded as he had checked repeatedly that it was supposed to be Amandina's tent.

"It's a surprise!" She giggled with a little pride.

"Cut your bloody surprises." Brendel growled.

Someone emerged from the tent, and he saw Amandina tying her hair while she stood up. She had an apologetic face, but Brendel knew that Romaine would have ignored her protests. He gave an audible sigh and apologized to her.

"I'm sorry for the trouble..."

Amandina took a few moments for Brendel's apology to register in her mind, then smiled faintly as she glanced at her tent.

"My lord, it seems that you are really fond of Romaine." She whispered.

Brendel nodded. He allowed Romaine to do whatever she wanted, was not only because lesser half of him had spent his life with her as a friend, but also because the greater half of him acknowledged her as the first friend that he had when came to this world.

[Unfortunately, that naive and shy youth is no longer here. This body might be nineteen in this world but I'm certainly not of that age. what I want to attain here will demand an equivalent amount of responsibilities.]

He pulled back the corner of the tent's opening, and found Romaine beaming at him.

"Are you both ready?" He asked.

They both nodded.

Brendel looked back at the other tents, and as if to respond to his action, a dozen men

came out from their tents at the same time. There was no need for them to exchange words, and they began to pack their tents quietly. Even though they were fully equipped with armor and weapons, they did not make any sound from their actions.

Amandina had seen these men in the day, but her eyes quickly betrayed her surprise.

[These men are exceptionally well trained, where did he find them?]

The Mercenaries of Lopes were certainly renowned in history. This specific 'Card' summoned beings seemed to represent a certain collective nature, and these twelve mercenaries were the best representation of 'Heroic', 'Loyalty', 'Honor', 'Morale', and 'Discipline'. They also did not fear death and pain, and were most likely to be the best soldiers that graced this world.

Brendel wanted more men like them.

The more Amandina watched them, the more impressed she was. She quickly felt her face, then looked at Brendel, wondering whether she was seeing things wrongly—

It was not as if she had not seen mercenaries before. The nobles had more or less done dealings with them to protect their properties. Most of the mercenaries were related to the kingdom's formal army, if they exclude the local bullies and criminals.

She thought she had seen the best of them when she traveled with the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, but Brendel's men clearly distinguished themselves beyond reproach. They seemed to exude something that a normal mercenary would never have—

She showed a slight frown as she tried to find the words to describe them.

[...Pride and dignity. How many mercenaries would maintain what they do like it was some form of sacred duty, like a knight's oath? These men doesn't look like they could be paid with coins, but more like they are retainers from a noble's family.]

The more she thought about it, the more she believed in her supposition.

A noble's scion leaving his own family to create his own fiefdom. It sounded like it was came out from some legendary stories. When Brendel invited her to join him to create a land of his own, she was unable to resist her adventuring self, even if she had received the strictest education from young.

It was an immense enticement that compelled her to want to assist a young knight without using any help from his family to create his own territory.

[It seems like this lord of mine isn't starting from scratch... But this is more a delightful find rather than a depressing one. It is better for him to be prepared, rather than someone who's a hot-blooded knight who wants to imitate the legendary figures of old.]

Brendel did not know what Amandina was thinking about from his single 'Cards of Fate'. If he knew, he would have tried ways to show off his mercenaries and recruit loyal retainers.

When the twelve men were done with their packing and had gathered before him for his next order, Brendel found he had encountered a small problem.

Two people, a man and a woman, from the Grey Wolves Mercenaries' camps were heading over to his camp area.

He squinted and identified one of them—

[It's that white-haired brat, Redi. Did they notice some form of commotion here— No, these two are clearly not heading for our tents. Judging by their direction, they are cutting across our camps to go out... Why are they going out there?]

He suddenly formed a new possibility.

[Spies?]

Chapter 75

TL: Again, there's no chapter 75, there's one raws chapter that's mislabeled and never corrected. Move on to chapter 76.

Chapter 76

Night assault (2)

Redi and the person beside him walked closer and closer, the two lithe figures looking like they were floating specters in the thick fog.

Everyone at Brendel's side had stopped their actions and looked over to their direction. Amandina lowered her head, estimated their direction and immediately paled. She raised her head and looked at Brendel, her eyes full of worry—

They had camped in an area where there was a clear landing, and the Mercenaries of Lopes had cleared all their tents. Even if they simply passed by the forest, they would surely discover this abnormal scene.

“Keep your hair on.” Brendel merely stared ahead and said. *(TL: In here it's a chinese idiom, so I replaced it with the english equivalent, sort of. It means “to stay calm.”)*

Even though the people around him did not understand what the phrase meant, they regained their composure when they saw Brendel's raised hand and unperturbed face. His action meant that they should not act rashly.

Amandina's lips opened slightly.

The mercenaries were Brendel's summoned creatures and completely obeyed the Planeswalkers' commands. Even if there was a precipice in front of them and Brendel ordered them to advance, they would do so without hesitation.

However, in Amandina's eyes, these proud veteran soldiers ceased their murmurs and actions just because of Brendel's small action. Everyone became silent, and she subconsciously held her breath, not daring to exhale loudly.

The strength of the valley's gale was at its peak, howling across the southern mountain's entrance towards them. The branches beat upon each other and caused the leaves to drown out any other noises. Faint starlight danced across Redi's face as the leaves swayed to and fro, making him feel like he was brooding.

The two people made their way across the thick foliage, but they did not act cautiously like how Brendel predicted they would be, to the point where they freely broke the dry branches beneath their feet.

Brendel changed his opinions and believed that Makarov did not tell his subordinates where Brendel's camp was, and the two people had no idea they were near them.

[The 'Maned Wolf' probably wishes to avoid trouble as well.] Brendel thought.

They were less than a hundred feet away and Brendel was certain they would discover the abnormal sight here.

[If that stupid brat claims that they are suspicious of us, it will become impossible to explain our actions. Even though these two people are equally suspicious, Makarov will most likely believe in his men than any explanations of our own.]

He was actually tense like the others but he did not show any signs of it. When he looked to his side, the leader of the mercenaries, 'Nightsong Tiger' was also looking at him with queries in his eyes. He was shrewd as well as experienced, and his intentions were quite clear, "Do you want to take the initiative and 'off' them?"

[Off them? A decision not to be made lightly. This is a normal decision for any mercenaries, but this is different from the time in Pine Fortress. That time was simply because there was literally no choice as our lives are on stake. I have not fallen so far as to disregard lives... but...]

Brendel was conflicted. He had come from a civilized land in a more peaceful time, and murdering people out of a mere thought went against all his senses. In spite of that, his position at this juncture required him to act decisively, otherwise the consequences would be of dire proportions.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

[Should I follow the rules of this world and sever the connections of my past? Or hold on to a single thread. Denying Sophie would mean denying my entire past... Maybe I'm actually dreaming in my sleep, a nightmare of sorts... No, even if everything is a delusion in this world, all the memories that I had in the previous world are clearly there, carved into my very eyes.

How can I deny them?

If I cut off my past, then what meaning is there for me to work so hard in this world. Losing my 'self', can I still call myself 'Brendel'? The answer is clearly right in front of me.]

Chaotic thoughts filled his mind, but he cleaved them apart like a sharp sword through ropes. He opened his eyes as if he was the king of gamers, his eyes crystal clear as he found his answer.

“My lord?”

Amandina's sharp senses had noticed Brendel's hesitation. She was surprised that a decision would have been easily made as he had constantly presented himself as an unwavering noble who had never needed to even question himself to make ruthless choices.

These were certainly the rules of the nobles' game—

Brendel looked back at Amandina with a look that was full of self-mockery, yet he was relaxed with a tinge of regret. She was surprised to the point where lost her words. Had she ever seen an expression like this amongst the cold-blooded nobles in Aouine?

[Is he faking it? But there's no reason to do so...?]

Brendel raised his hand to gather the attention of the mercenaries. His mind was still somewhat conflicted when he did so, but when he lowered it, there was nothing but relief in him.

“Prepare to act. If it is possible, knocking them out will do. I do not wish to have a war with Makarov.”

Brendel's voice was a nearly a whisper. He did not know whether his actions would cause him to look foolish to others, but if he did not give this order, then he would certainly look foolish to his own self.

The Mercenaries of Lopes nodded at the same time. The Nightsong Tiger felt a slight pity at Brendel's answer. The situation should be handle once and for all without any hesitations.

Amandina's reaction was different. She looked at Brendel with new eyes as she discovered there was something in him that she did not know at all. She could not tell

if this unique quality of his was good or bad, but there was something about him that did not fit in this world. Yet she did not find that it was unnatural, and it conversly made her feel at peace after a very long time in the nobles' circle.

The two people were seventy feet away.

“Brendel.” Romaine suddenly called out with a little anxiety in her voice.

He puzzledly looked at her but still whispered: “Now is not the time.”

She thought for a while and nodded. The mercenaries scattered and fell into position to await the two people to approach closer. Once they were within reach, they would move together. They outnumbered the two people and their experience vastly exceeded them, so they were confident they could subdue them with ease.

Brendel felt restless. There was most likely a strong enemy, or enemies that sent his card to the graveyard, and he could not afford to waste time here.

The two people were about to made their way out of the foilage, but they slowly stopped before they exited it.

“Did they discover something?”

Brendel's eyelids flinched, and almost commanded the mercenaries to suppress them immediately, only to forcefully stop himself. The distance for the mercenaries to attack was still too far away. It was more likely to alert them than to catch them unaware. He slowly steadied his nerves as he was certain that they had not discovered anything.

He looked around to observe the mercenaries, and they were still as composed as before. Romaine gazed the area curiously, while Amandina's face grew paler as time passed by.

Redi had stopped completely and he faced his companion to speak with her. Despite nearly a hundred feet away, Brendel still managed to catch a few words with his high perception.

Redi did not speak loudly, but looked at Brendel's camp from time to time, as if he had noticed something.

The conversation between soon became heated, and even ended up as a quarrel. Even

though everyone with the exception of Brendel could not hear what they were talking about, they understood that neither of them managed to convince each other. Brendel felt a little annoyed and even wondered if they simply came here to quarrel.

Their voices were raised even higher, and Brendel managed to catch a few key words, 'Eke... ', 'Chablis... ', 'Necklace... '.

Brendel raised his eyebrow.

[It seems like Redi knows that Eke is still in Chablis, and if he knows, then Makarov should also know that fact. This mercenary group seems to have a number of troubles. But I still don't understand why this discussion has anything to do with the 'events' that are to follow.]

He looked up at the sky to find the Blood Star. The moment when the Blood Star appeared was the moment when it was nearly midnight.

Chapter 77

Night assault (3)

Brendel's thought went to the quest's walkthrough—

“...During a certain midnight on the ‘Vanquish the lizardmen bandits’, the enemies took action for the first time.”

[This either points to the Tree Shepherds or the ‘Paper Cards’ as the vanguard, or perhaps they both acted together—]

“...The sudden ambush assailed us to the point where everyone was thrown off their game. The attack had started from the northern hill, but everyone who escaped to the south was probably killed at least once. This was because that monsters’ (The Tree Shepherds) main forces were at the south. Fine, I’ll admit that TorrentialRain’s AI isn’t something to laugh at...”

“...Our strategy was to save the Grey Wolves Mercenaries from annihilation. The most important thing to note is how strong Makarov and Buga are. They are the rough equivalent of a player’s level 45 and 55 respectively. Ensuring that they live is the most important aspect of completing the quest.”

“...But we did discuss our options and think that there’s another way we could about this. This was something that we had discovered in the east. Perhaps TorrentialRain considered the strength of the gamers and designed a Temple of Light in that region.”

“...Our team discussed over solutions, but regardless of what it is, we believe that to achieve one hundred percent completion in the quest, you must rescue from the Grey Wolves Mercenaries’ complete demise—”

Brendel rubbed his forehead.

[As I had gone through so many times, this really isn’t a walkthrough but more of a lesson they learned from. This was a unique quest that was only open to the first team who discovered it, and they ultimately did not manage to complete the quest in its entirety, which was why the Grey Wolves Mercenaries were routed. The group’s

adventure is actually quite exciting if one looks at it like a movie.]

Brendel loved quests that immersed him in the game's world.

[But damn it, if you bothered to write a report about it, why didn't you write down the timing, location and the characters properly? 'During a certain midnight' — exactly which day was it?! Honestly, pursuing a hundred percent completion rate in this world is silly. The rewards might be double in the game, but where would I get something like this here?]

The only option that was open to him was to rely on his own experience, and leave everything else to the gods. Brendel's plan was straightforward. He was to leave the Grey Wolves Mercenaries before the Tree Shepherds attacked them and travel to the Temple of Light to activate the quest's side branch.

Then he would finish off by killing the lizardmen bandits and get the Sage Slate and leave. The Grey Wolves Mercenaries' fate was not of a big concern to him. Vaunte's constant wars had seen many of these groups rise and fall regardless of their size. There was also the fact that he did not believe he had sufficient strength to help Makarov and Buga resolve their crisis, or recruit them as retainers and give them commands when the battle commenced.

What he wanted to do was to put effort into people like Amandina and Tamar, where they had great potential in the future. Since he had the knowledge of the future, then this investment was low risk with high rewards.

His plans looked perfect, but reality had suddenly turned against him quickly. The enemies had probably discovered his Wind Spirit Spiders, then the two people in front of him might discover their actions any time.

[Will that Redi brat finish quarreling already?!] Brendel was becoming increasingly annoyed.

Romaine finally could not bear it any longer too.

"Brendel."

She raised her pretty brows as she poked his back, and used a voice that she thought was very small, which of course was purely her wishful thoughts.

Everyone near her jumped.

Romaine's voice was actually not very loud and at most a little urgent, it stood out because the forest she was a female.

“Br— Mmfff.”

Brendel covered her mouth quickly and looked back at the two people. Redi had stopped talking and was looking alert.

Brendel imagined himself strangling Romaine while shaking her to and fro, but he certainly would not do that because he could not bear to do so.

Fortunately, Redi's alert behavior only lasted temporarily, before he turned back to continue to talk with his companion. Brendel sighed with relief, before he recalled Romaine's action, and glared at Romaine.

Romaine was still trying to shake his hand away with muffled noises, apparently quite unhappy with Brendel's action. Brendel nearly got angry with her, but he suddenly felt something was wrong.

[Even though her head is sometimes lost in the clouds and acts like she doesn't care, she's much more cunning than she lets it show, otherwise she would have been taken advantage of many times already.]

Before he could ask her exactly what it was, the Nightsong Tiger came over and tapped his shoulder. It was an unusual sight since the mercenaries rarely acted on their own. He looked at him and saw that the Nightsong Tiger had a wary look on his face.

Brendel released his hand and Romaine stopped struggling.

It was not only them, Redi had stopped talking once again and was looking over at them.

The forest had suddenly turned quiet. It was not only the humans in the forest who had stopped moving, even the wind had stopped.

“Did you hear something?” Brendel whispered and asked. He knew that Romaine's perception was even higher than his own. She glared at him with narrowed eyes before nodding.

Brendel's nose suddenly caught something in the air. It was an odd smell that pierced through it; an acrid smell that seemed to occur when a sea volcano erupted.

[Sulfur?]

Brendel pulled out his sword immediately without thinking.

[The Disciples of the Fucking Black Flames! That gamer who wrote the walkthrough didn't mention this shit at all. If they are involved in this bloody mess, I wouldn't even bother messing with this crap!]

Brendel finally knew what enemies he was facing. The Disciples of Black Flames were the direct forces of the 'Wurm Leader' Mayad. There was really nothing about wurms at all, but they worked with the forces in 'The Sulfur River'—

In other words, they worked with demons from the underworld.

Brendel clenched his sword tightly. He scolded himself for not linking the southern region to the Disciples of Black Flames as their territory was located there. His focus had been on the Sage Slate and the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, and had forgotten this common knowledge for the past few days.

Brendel avoided them with a passion, not because of their prowess, but because of their crazed actions in battle that even surpassed a berserker. Each disciple had different demons that they chained up. Even though they fought together, the duo schemed against each other. While this should have affected their abilities to fight, but the demons had bizarre abilities that were hard to defend against.

At higher levels, the disciples were even able to absorb the demon's power and become one with the demon. Recalling the gory scenes made Brendel feel nauseous.

[One or two demons are still fine, if there are more than my mental health is going to take a beating.]

Brendel wanted to flee immediately but there was an odd wind within the forest that seemed to buzz in and out. He shrank back as he was too familiar with the sounds. Black chains with two spiked balls flew out from within the dark forest.

"A Lord of Thorns." Brendel saw the spiked balls smashed through the trees and landed near the two young men. Even though they did not receive damage from the attack,

they were completely shocked.

Brendel felt a shiver within his body. A Lord of Thorns was a level 29 demon, and was one rank higher than the underworld helldog, Cerberus. Brendel had encountered them in the past with his level higher than the Lord of Thorns, but they had given him much pain and agony when he fought against them.

But there was no time to reminisce about it, Redi and the other youth started to run from it—

“Morons!” Brendel nearly jumped up from the frustration. The Lord of Thorns did not miss easily; this was apparently to sound out the enemies. But because of that, he was almost certain that the enemies consisted of a small scouting party.

The problem was because Redi’s retreat was most likely going to attract the main forces of the enemies. Brendel was not keen on helping him, but his men were also on the crossfire. He quickly growled a command to Nightsong Tiger:

“Catch that two bastards right now! Drag them back here if you must!”

Chapter 78

Outside one's control

The two people started to sprint to their own camps, shouting at the top of their lungs. The Nightsong Tiger immediately pursued them. His body seemed to meld together with the trees' shadows; he was not fast, but his movements were silent and practiced to the point of awe, as if he was a creature of the night.

The chains dragged across the floor and created a ringing sound.

[The disciples have discovered the commotion over in this area, my plans must change.]

He frowned as the girls behind him withdrew their crossbows. The other mercenaries took out their weapons in silence and stared anxiously into the forest, readying themselves for combat.

"My lord?" Amandina asked.

Brendel shook his head. The plans he had decided earlier had developments that were outside his prediction, and he needed to solve the situation quickly. He reached inside his pouches and took out a gleaming crystal.

The crystal lid up in an instant, casting soft light in the area.

"M-my lord?" Amandina opened her eyes in shock.

"Brendel!" Romaine was also stunned.

Everyone's attention was taken by the sudden appearance of light, which grew increasingly bigger before it expanded in all directions, but Brendel threw it out as soon as it did so.

The lit crystal flew in an arc that passed through trees before it ended in thick foilage. Despite the layers of leaves, the amount of light emitted from the crystal still managed to light up the surrounding area.

Three human figures who wore black hooded robes stood there. Even though their faces could not be seen, they appeared to be startled as they stood motionlessly for a few moments. However what took Amandina's breath away were three demons half the size of an average human standing beside each man. The creatures had hoofs for their feet, grey-greenish skin with black spiraling patterns, long goat horns and sharp teeth.

Chains were wrapped around their feet and ended with the disciples' wrists. These were indeed the lowest ranking familiar from the Jurgen Underworld.

"The higher ranking familiars are on the opposite area!" The mercenaries immediately yelled out. These legendary mercenaries had fought against great malevolent forces, and certainly knew what these creatures were.

But Brendel already knew where they were.

Once he saw the three figures, he had turned to the other direction and raised his hand. The silver ring on his thumb shone brightly as he recited the word to activate it.

"Oss!"

The air currents seemed to be like visible lines that surged forth towards the area, before an immense blast resounded throughout the forest. The nearby pine trees were dragged along the shockwave, cause them to break and splinter, while the trees that were directly in the shockwave's path were turned into powder.

Once the maelstrom of wind ended, the trees were gone and became a clear path in front of Brendel.

The mercenaries showed signs of awe in their eyes, but Amandina screamed and covered her ears.

[He's a wizard! A wizard! This knight is actually a wizard!] Her mind kept echoing this thought.

Romaine had seen Brendel's action more than once and merely tilted her head, and just as she expected, Brendel had disappeared from his original location as his body blurred—

Only the mercenaries saw his action clearly. Brendel had charged forward ten times

his speed, casting afterimages in the opening area before he disappeared.

“The Sun Knight’s ‘Charge’ ability!” One of the mercenaries immediately commented.

Even though both their leaders were gone, someone from the mercenaries stood out and pointed his sword at the location where the crystal fell: “I, vice-captain Rocco, am taking temporary command. My first order is to launch an attack on these disciples!”

“”I hear and obey.”””

Eleven figures immediately pounced on the three surprised disciples.

On the other end, Brendel had caught up with the Lord of Thorns. The red demon was standing beside his owner, a man who wore crimson robes.

The Lord of Thorns appeared like a red version of the smaller demon familiars, but it had a gigantic pair of muscular wings, which resembled the descriptions of a demon within medieval folklore. On it were chains with a steel spiked ball at the end.

It had considerable injuries on its body. Not only was it missing an arm, one of its wings were gone. Brendel did not feel surprised as his ring were incredibly effective against monsters that were level thirty and below. It was considered the best artifact of its tier, with the only criticism that it had a long cooldown.

Typical demons also did not have any defensive armor, with the exception of bladed monsters.

Brendel observed the man in front of him with narrowed eyes while he was still in the air.

[A high ranking member of the Disciples of Black Flames.]

He turned once in the air with his sword pointed at them and ready to strike. This battle was different from Buga’s duel, and he did not hold back his strength. A high ranking disciple was only level 21, but there was a real demon beside him.

“White Raven, Sword Rave!”

Brendel’s sword slashed vertically with the addition of Power Strike, and a wind blade was released from his sword. The disciple was still checking the injuries of its familiar,

and completely did not expect the enemy to come so quickly. He raised his head, only to find the invisible shockwave ravaging through his whole body.

Brendel would have likened the disciple as a boss a month ago, but now the disciple was unable to resist Brendel's full power.

The man screamed as blood splattered all over the place.

When Brendel killed a disciple in the game, the demon would regain its freedom once the summoner was dead, but the contract's dark energy between them would cause it to go insane, and Brendel wanted this situation to happen.

When he landed on the ground, the chains had already swept past his back.

"Gah..." Brendel felt fiery pain on his back.

[The demon is moving twenty percent faster from a 'Berserked' status, it seems like the disciple is dead. Damn that hurts... The skin on my back is definitely torn off.]

Brendel grabbed the spiked chains and ignored the sharp apin in his hand, allowed himself to be dragged by the demon's pull and went straight to the opponent.

Even though the Lord of Thorns was considered to be a high ranking familiar, it was a low level demonic existence in the Jurgen Underworld without a complete soul. Furthermore, it was driven insane by the dark energy and did not possess the intelligence to handle the unexpected attack.

Brendel borrowed its strength and pointed his sword at the demon, directly sending it into the enemy's eye. His action was as trained as ever in the game.

The Thorn of Lord bellowed in agony as it felt the sword went through its eye, and the guttural noise echoed throughout the forest. The youth creased his brows, landed easily on the demon's shoulders and swung his sword across the gigantic creature's neck.

Blue colored blood spurted out like a sharp arrow, cutting the bellows to a stop and turned it into gasping noises. It struggled for a while before it finally fell over to the ground with a heavy thud.

Brendel finally relaxed. The disciples were known to be dirt poor, so he ignored the

bodies to look at the situation with the remaining three disciples, but the mercenaries had already dispatched them like he expected.

This did not mean that the matter had come to a close. There were movements within the forest that he noticed, regardless of whether it came from the Grey Wolves Mercenaries' camps, or the opposite direction.

“Damn it.” He ordered his summoned men in his heart: “Prepare to retreat, and bring along that two bastards.”

He turned his head to look at the red demon. It was still holding on to life and did not die yet. The demons were known for their resilience, and were ranked amongst the top three hated monsters in the game, along with the undead and plant-type monsters.

Suddenly Brendel realized that the creatures he had encountered were undead creatures, the Golden Demonic Tree and its creatures, and now demons. Before he had the chance to mock himself for his bad luck, green words filled his vision.

“The creature’s contract has ended.”

“The creature is a weakened state—”

“Conditions have been met.”

“Would you like to establish a contract?”

“Yes/No.”

Brendel looked at the sentences for a moment before he shivered in fright and shook his head quickly.

[Never!]

Brendel refused the contract and quickly escaped the area along with his mercenaries.

After a short time, the Nightsong Tiger threw Redi and his companion onto the ground. The white-haired youth raised his head in defiance and glared at the people around him. But when he saw it was Brendel and his mercenaries, his irides shrank a little and tried to stand up.

However, the Nightsong Tiger suppressed him by pressing down on his shoulder and neck, causing him to kneel down. His silver eyes glared at Brendel like an untameable wolf.

He roared: “You fuckers, I knew that you’re colluding with the enem— Khhk, cough!”

Brendel did not waste time talking to him, and simply punched him in the face. He used enough strength to force Redi to cough out blood and saliva.

Amandina took a silent breath, while Romaine thought Brendel’s anger was somewhat similar to Freya at the Golden Tree Valley. The latter was also concerned with Brendel’s hand. He was bleeding from the injury when he fought the demon but he refused her aid.

The weapon from the Lord of Thorns was poisoned, but Brendel had no trouble resisting it with his high physique and he did not want her to have any accidents.

Redi turned his head back at Brendel as if to challenge him to strike again. He glared at him with hatred as he licked the blood from his lips. Brendel took a quick glance into the distance. The battle earlier had caused both parties to be alert, and there was chaos from the nearby forest. If he did not act swiftly, he would have been stuck between them.

Brendel’s eyes went back to Redi. Even now, they were not out of danger. It was why he felt incredibly annoyed.

“Unless you’re a fool, you should already know that we are not your enemies. If you don’t want to die, please stop struggling.” Brendel’s voice was cold.

Redi gritted his teeth. He came to the conclusion that Brendel and his men were not on the same side with the Demon he just saw. But he was furious over the fact that Brendel punched him, and thought he was taking personal revenge on him and to teach him a lesson.

Even so, he subconsciously thought that Brendel was trying to scare him.

[The ‘Grey Wolves Mercenaries’ is not a simple mercenary group and I’m not worried if we’re going to fight the ‘Paper Cards’. But this bastard actually dared to hold me here.]

Redi cursed in his heart and thought Brendel was nothing more than a naive idiot who knew nothing. He looked at Brendel with scorn, only to find him looking elsewhere.

Brendel was looking at a girl who approached them. Her eyes were closed and the long black hair seemed to accentuate her pale face in the moonlight. Brendel found it surprising that the girl did not appear to be in any panic despite the chaos in the forest.

[Who is this?] Brendel wondered how he should act, but the Nightsong Tiger came beside him and asked.

“My lord, it’s the Disciples of the Black Flames again. What should we do next?”

“Disciples of the Black Flames?” Redi’s heart jumped slightly.

Brendel looked to the northern hills before he answered: “We head to the east.”

The white-haired youth snickered. He came from a noble’s family that was involved in the military and had a certain level of insight. The ‘Paper Cards’ had already established a foothold in the northern area, while the southern valley allowed forces to regroup much more safely.

[An amateur pretending to know what he was doing. This is so laughable that I feel sorry for these veterans working under him.]

Redi started to think that Brendel was a useless leader, but he was deeply impressed when the Nightsong Tiger captured him without giving him time to react. Even though he secretly mocked Brendel, he was genuinely concerned with the phrase ‘Disciples of the Black Flames. He secretly spied on the mercenary beside him and thought he had no reason to lie.

He thought it was impossible to gather any information from the mercenary himself, so he decided to try and fish information from the idiot instead.

But the Nightsong Tiger was quite interested with Brendel’s opinion, contrary to Redi’s views.

“My lord, have you fought against the Disciples of the Black Flames before?”

“You can think of it that way.” Brendel answered without much thought. “I fought against their high ranking priests.”

[In the game.] Brendel added that detail in his mind.

“Oh?” The Nightsong Tiger’s eyes brightened up: “The high ranking priests?”

“Ha... Cough... Haha, why don’t you say you met with the Tree Sheperd leaders,” Redi laughed in derision: “The priests in the Disciples of the Black Flames are all silver-ranked and above. Even the army in Aouine’s capital would not claim they could score a victory against them. May I know Messere Brendel, which army were you in when you encountered them?”

He laughed again and looked at him in condescension: “You might want to get a better script if you wish to brag. Also, if you’re heading to the east, release me. I don’t want to die along with you.”

Brendel was highly amused and annoyed at the same time.

[Not only did I see more than one of them, I even killed one. At the peak of my level, I became a Crusader Knight where only one or two people within their organization that could fight against me.]

But Brendel did not want to waste time explaining with him. He merely showed a beaming smile with exposed teeth, although his dark expression made him appear intimidating.

“It seems like you don’t understand the situation you are in.”

Redi’s voice got stuck in his throat. He finally recalled that he was in no position to even speak, so he simply ignored the annoying youth in front of him and scoffed loudly.

Brendel did not mind that he acted as a mute, and he gave the order to his mercenaries to bring the girl to him.

“Who are you?” He asked when she was near him.

Redi took a quick glance at her before he turned away.

“My name is Yula, Ser knight.”

“You know that I’m not a merchant?” Brendel was surprised.

“I know even more than that. Our mercenary group is in grave danger, and I know that Ser knight is capable of helping us, right?” The girl nodded to admit that and continued to ask.

“Hey, Yula?” This time Redi looked completely stunned: “...But these people are—”

“May I know who exactly are the enemies?” Yula asked a strange question.

Brendel looked at her curiously, but he decided to focus on the first question she asked.

“How do you know I can help you?”

Chapter 79

The story of fishes swimming in chaos (1)

Brendel observed Yula who sat down on the ground filled with pine needles. He quickly realized that the girl's hair was a lovely pure black that was unlike Amandina's, which was tinged with a purple sheen.

Surprise streaked across his eyes.

[Amandina's bloodline probably came from the Miirna's bloodline, which causes her to have that black-purplish color in her hair and eyes. Over countless eras, that bloodline had eroded and they no longer had special traits related to that race. The only thing left was their appearances. But this Yula girl is probably not from that bloodline.]

"I am unable to say why that is so as well, Ser knight. You could think it as a premonition instead. The 'Paper Cards' mercenaries should have nothing to do with the disciples, but they appeared together tonight. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but I would believe in the possibility that this a planned scheme.

If I may, Ser Brendel, I believe that the common man would have sought for their allies' help. Even though we do not deserve your full trust, but it would surely be better to have our aid. But you and your men chose to to leave here without any hesitation to preserve only for yourselves—"

Yula closed her eyes and listened to the battle that the Grey Wolves Mercenaries were having with the Disciples of the Black Flames. Her tone did not change as she stated her opinion: "But if I was to change my way of seeing things, this would mean that Ser Brendel has already analyzed the current state of events— That you have known that the 'Paper Cards' was following us from the very beginning.

The oddity in your plan was the choice to escape to the east. I would think that a decisive decision like this would mean that you are not a rash person. If the enemies lies ahead of you and yet still you choose to charge forward, then that would be bravery. However, I believe that Ser Brendel thinks otherwise and has a different opinion as to what exactly lies ahead. Perhaps, it's not guarded by the enemies?"

Brendel did not change his expressions, although Redi had been showing rich expressions of mockery whenever Yula called Brendel a knight.

“As for the reason why Brendel is a knight.” She gave a small humble smile: “That is simply because I heard the lady over there calling you ‘my lord’. Although I was not given sight, Mother Marsha has given me sharp hearing, which really isn’t something that I should brag.”

Amandina reacted by gasping and watching Yula in vigilance.

The blind girl raised her head up to Brendel, her eyes opening slightly. Even though she could not see him, she pleaded with him earnestly. “Ser Brendel, I humbly beg you to help the Grey Wolves Mercenaries.”

Brendel took in a deep breath.

[If Amandina is someone who can aid me as an advisor, then this girl in front of me is a kingmaker. Her senses are sharp enough to send me jitters.]

He studied Yula’s black eyes which had a tinge of brown in them. When he went over her pale yellow skin and delicate eyebrows, he suddenly recalled there was a certain region that he was familiar with.

“I also have a question. Is your surname Phenix?” He asked.

Her eyes have already closed again, otherwise she would have shown great surprise. She felt the area around her chest subconsciously before she relaxed, as Brendel took in all her actions.

He frowned slightly, as if he had thought of more things.

“Yes, my surname is indeed Phenix, and my original name is Phenix Yul. It appears that Ser Brendel is very knowledgeable, and my appearance would certainly reveal itself to them. However, I do not wish to bring this up again. Please call me Yula and let me off with that.”

Brendel agreed to do so. He had guessed of a certain NPC which had the same skin tone and hair color, and she was certainly from the far eastern desert, the Nine Phenix kingdom.

The Nine Phoenix kingdom was ruled by nine different clans, and the kingdom possessed an advanced swordsmanship called 'Sword of the Flaming Lotus'. Many gamers had tried their luck by going to that country, but no one had ever obtained it.

Many of the country's citizens traveled to Aouine and Kirrlutz, just like the elves who had traveled from the north. It was not rare for different explorers to leave their homeland and travel around.

In regards to Yula's request, he shook his head. "I am sincerely sorry to say that we can't help you. I can tell you that the Black Disciples will not be strong enough to cause your commander any real problems, but if I am Makarov I will leave this forest immediately."

"You..." Redi was so angry he seemed to lose his words for a moment: "Our agreement, you can't throw it away. The Mercenaries' Oath..."

The Nightsong Tiger punched him in the abdomen, causing the white-haired youth to bend over in pain. The Nightsong Tiger shook his head with a look of disdain.

"Stop lying to yourself, your commander doesn't care about the agreement, even if they are fighting against the Black Disciples."

"Do you understand our position?"

She nodded.

"Then what would Ser Brendel want? Money? Power?"

Brendel perked up his ears before he immediately shook his head again: "I am interested in all those things, but compared to money and power, I would rather not get embroiled into this troublesome situation. I will give you another hint. The mastermind behind the Black Disciples are the Tree Shepherds. Surely both of you have heard of that name before?"

Their countenances changed at the same time.

"How did we get targeted by them?" Redi asked with skepticism.

But Yula lowered her head in anxiety.

Amandina poked him from behind and whispered: “My lord, are you not letting them plead for help if you keep scaring them? Isn’t the conclusion of this ending going to end with something you don’t wish to see?”

Brendel raised his hands in defense: “I don’t wish to lie to them.”

But under Amandina’s suspicious gaze, he could only offer a more detailed explanation: “Helping them is not impossible, but I won’t let us get dragged into this situation.”

“Then what is to be done?” Romaine asked with blinking eyes.

“They have to rely on themselves.”

“That’s the solution?” Romaine did not believe Brendel.

“Of course it will work.”

“Ser Brendel, what are we supposed to do?” Yula overheard them and understood that Brendel was reminding them on purpose. She hesitated for a while, as if she was considering whether she could trust them.

[‘The Tree Shepherds’ is like a bomb. The Unifying Guild can drive a kingdom into chaos, but the Tree Shepherds have enough clout to create a Holy War. Many of the people in this era probably had harrowing experiences because of them. Since Yula is from another country, she would probably know less than Redi.]

When Brendel looked back at Redi, he discovered that the white-haired youth looked deeply perplexed.

“I have already given you the answer,” Brendel said: “Tell your commander to retreat and leave this area. Judging from the circumstances the Tree Shepherds have targeted you, but they have a certain habit. Once they realized that their plans have been found out, they will most likely back off to plan again. With this, you have gained precious time and I think your commander will take measures to defend the Grey Wolves Mercenaries.”

Brendel might have appeared to analyze things thoroughly, but he was actually following what was on the walkthrough. The things that he did not know were the exact details and why the Tree Shepherds targeted the mercenaries.

However, that did not mean that he was unable to handle them. He had fought against them as long as he had fought against Madara, and there were still cards that he could use to fight back.

Redi looked at Yula once.

“How do we know that what you said is true?” Redi grimaced.

“I am not forcing you to believe me.”

“You... irresponsible bastard.” He barked.

“We have no need to be responsible to you. Do you understand the situation? It is your mercenary group which is under attack, and my lord is helping you out of his kindness. It is your choice to choose not to accept the advice, if you are so proud.” Amandina’s feathers have long been ruffled by Redi, and openly criticized him.

But once she was done with her outburst, she suddenly stopped and looked apologetically at Yula who was still kneeling down: “I’m sorry, I mean...”

“There is no need to be concerned with my feelings.” Yula shook her head. She had been pondering in silence for quite some time, and she merely asked: “I believe that Ser Brendel is going to leave this place, right?”

“Yes.” Brendel nodded.

“You can’t stay for one more night?”

“No, we can’t.”

[The Unifying Guild is one troublesome affair to deal with, having another Tree Shepherds would mean that the future is fraught with dire consequences. Since Makarov and Buga have a strong chance to come out of this without harm, there’s no need for me to meddle with things too much. Well, as long as they follow my advice, that is.]

Even if he chose to leave, it was not as if he had let the Grey Wolves Mercenaries down. The agreement between them was as weak as it sounded, and the only real trouble was if he wanted to work with them in the future.

“Ser Brendel, are you willing to let us go?” She asked again.

“We did not intend to do so, and the truth is we actually saved you. I believe you know this already, Miss Yula.” Brendel replied.

“But are you not afraid we will leak your location to the enemies?”

Brendel laughed and said confidently: “There is no way that your group or the enemies can catch up to us.”

Brendel trusted in his experience, but Redi merely eyed him in silence.

It was clear from his expression that he thought Brendel was bragging. Even though there were many things that shocked him, he thought that Brendel had given himself away as an amateur by heading east, and he planned to persuade Yula not to be deceived by Brendel.

Chapter 80

The story of fishes swimming in chaos (2)

Amandina watched Redi's back as he limped away, while Yula was beside helping him walk.

"Are you letting them just leave, my lord?" She asked.

"What do you expect me to do here? Instead of letting them pile onto our problems, it's better to dismiss them." Brendel answered simply.

"But I still feel like you're scheming something." She glanced at him with slight suspicion.

Brendel rubbed his nose with a dry smile: "Is my character that awful in your eyes? I thought that I did things openly in the past."

"Yes, it would appear so. But I have never thought that my lord has ever done things that appear to be as simple as they look. I recall that you arranged miss Freya to enter the Royal Cavalry Academy, which could be seen like a friend's encouragement, but I would think that it is because you noticed the fights between the Royal Faction and the Regional Nobles.

If I recall correctly, the Royal Cavalry Academy is within princess Gryphine's private lands, and she's the most outstanding individual out of the current royal family members. Not only that, the younger and weaker brother of hers is strictly cared for by her, almost like a guardian and not as an older sister.

Based on the king's health, it is likely that the princess will become a Princess-Regent in the future. Once that happens, my lord's action will also become a long-term investment."

Romaine nodded quickly when she heard the words 'investment'.

"These other invisible investments that you made from the time that I met you might not look like they are of any use in the beginning, but once my lord has your lands and

reap the benefits that you have sown earlier, then you will become a direct supporter of princess Gryphine.

If it is someone else, I would think nothing much of these actions that have been done, but the people close to my lord will surely understand that your ambition is nothing as straightforward as it seems.”

Amandina looked up to Brendel: “Am I wrong, my lord?”

The young girl took a long breath after she finished her speech. She had spent a lot of time speculating in the past few days because Brendel’s actions were becoming stranger and stranger, to the point where she did not understand them at all, and she did not wish to fall behind too much.

Especially if she was the chief advisor.

Brendel blinked a few times before he answered: “You’re close enough.”

[Although you missed a few points.]

He thought to himself.

[Rather than call it an investment, I would rather call it a relationship. There’s no need for me to gain ‘honor’ here, what I need is something I can grow and use in the future. A gamer is different from a lord, especially when I have ‘that’ land in mind.]

He could have waited until the civil strife within Aouine reach its highest point, with Madara invading the kingdom with its full might, until the Princess-Regent would finally not be able to control the situation, then garner the biggest profits by stepping in at that point.

But he did not do so.

His attachment to the people in the game made him send the future Goddess of War to the princess, and believed that these two brilliant women would not disappoint him. Even if he predicted wrongly, at least he would not leave behind any regrets.

Still, he did not expect Amandina to know his thoughts that well, so he merely smiled and gave a neutral reaction. She certainly showed off her intelligence if she was able to predict that much.

He turned back to look at Romaine who looked like she was having fun. She did not seek to understand why Brendel needed to do what he did, and only wanted to help him do the best he could in his plans.

[The future ahead might call for even more drastic measures. Sometimes knowing too much hurts, and one might not attain happiness, Amandina... But looking at Romaine makes me feel it's a pleasure on its own.]

“Beyond that,” Amandina continued: “The money made from the auction was invested into Miss Romaine’s goods which were subsequently used for the celebration after the Madara war. The returns were then poured to gain deep access into this local region. This is the first time that I realize that having gold coins is an amazing thing. Miss Romaine’s touch seemed to go permeate into the complicated noble society and the underground thieves’ guilds.

There wasn’t even a need to maintain a good relationship in order to gain access to the information too. I thought it was only at Bruglas that contact was made with the Brotherhood of Thieves, but it seems like it was done much earlier.”

“This is one of the reasons why I formed a coalition of merchants.” Brendel admitted it: “But it is not for the reason of acquiring more money but power. Once people brought themselves into some form of any system, even if they have their own personal agenda, their actions would most likely benefit others just like how the circulation of goods would bring about abundance.”

“Information gathering isn’t really hard. My aunt says that information is everywhere around us.” Romaine interrupted as if she was interested in the topic.

“That’s because the information we require isn’t particularly demanding on quality. The hardest part on acquiring information is not on the process of collection, but to determine which information is useful. This requires skilled professionals.” Brendel gave a laugh.

“My lord, you’re changing the subject. All the things that you do is because there’s some form of benefit.” Amandina gazed at him.

“Even if you point out only these two things, I can only say that they are a coincidence.” Brendel did not wish to spend time on this topic. He had too many secrets and each lie that he gave, would inevitably lead to more lies to cover up the old ones.

“The Red Bronze Dragon mercenaries retired as if they wanted to stay away from the public’s attention, but I can safely state that it was a measure to make sure Miss Freya enters the Royal Cavalry Academy... But my lord, how did you know there were openings in the academy? No, not only that, it seems that my lord has the ability to see even further. While we are still focused on the problems before us, you seemed to have already seen the end results.”

Amandina looked a little ill and grumbled.

“I-I’m not sure if this is some form of talent, but I feel tremendous pressure.”

“Alright, alright,” Brendel quickly raised his hands to surrender: “I got it. You’re right, it’s a form of talent. But there are areas that I can miss out if I plan things alone...”

He looked at the trees into the distant. The night battle seemed to intensify as the camps started to get burned by fire. The northern sky was gradually filled with red light. Their location was starting to become unsafe.

This was a temporary stop after all.

“...We’re discussing too many things that are not related to our current situation. We should leave this area before the fight reaches here.”

He quickly ended his sentences and grabbed the longsword near him and fled from Amandina, and prevented her from asking more questions.

[At this rate you’re going to even get my identification number...] Brendel obviously would not divulge himself as a parallel-world traveler with knowledge about the future.

Amandina understood that it was a poor attempt to change the topic, but she had gone a little too far by saying too much. It was normal for a leader to keep things from his subordinates, and Brendel’s foresight boosted the confidence she had in the things they were doing.

Thus she followed him without any objections.

A few moments later she turned around and whispered: “Ser Nightsong Tiger, are we really fine if we head east?”

She had carefully observed Redi's expressions, and saw him making a scornful face when Brendel said they were going east.

The Nightsong Tiger looked at her with an impressed expression.

"Yes." He added a motion to pat his left arm, which was a gesture to guarantee something: "Miss Amandina, I have never seen anyone like my lord who is as familiar with these bastards who deserve to go straight to hell—

He looked at Brendel's back.

"I say this humbly, we have frequently fought them in the past, and the Disciples of the Black Flames love to use distractions as a strategy. However, it is difficult to discern their true locations. Even if it's me, I can only pinpoint their ambushes to two locations, either in the south or west area."

He pointed towards Brendel's injured hand.

"Do you see our lord's wounded hand? I'm willing to bet that he took less than a minute to deal with that high ranking contract demon, and he probably did it with less than ten moves. Only a veteran can see through the Lord of Thrones attacking style and approach this monster quickly. Even though it has a wide range, it is far less threatening to fight in close combat."

Amandina listened to his explanation and understood about half of it. It was evident that the veteran soldier was immensely respectful of Brendel. As she looked at Brendel's injuries on his back and hand, she suddenly realized something.

The current generation of Aouine nobles were 'soft', unlike their ancestors.

[Brave, wise, decisive and tough. A lord like this makes me wonder how far his accomplishments will go.]

Amandina exhaled quietly.

Chapter 81

The story of fishes swimming in chaos (2)

===== Eke POV =====

The battle abruptly ended as soon as it had started. Eke was almost certain that the bastards draped in black robes were at least silver-ranked fighters. While he predicted there would be a fight, he did not expect the ending—

He was almost certain that Capo and the others were going to be cut down; he finally could not suppress himself and wanted to pull out his sword in order to prevent the tragedy from happening.

But there was an old man with wispy white hair who walked out from Capo's back and pointed his finger at the enemies. The enemies that Eke saw as nightmarish devils were struck by grey beams and turned into piles of dust.

The youth's mouth went wide and for a moment, wondered if he was dreaming.

When the old man cast his magic, the Holy Sigil of Earth briefly appeared on top of his hand. The signs of an unlocked Element was apparent and visible, and Eke knew there were no more than ten people in Aouine who had this kind of power.

[Who is this? Amongst this ten people are a certain lord and several famous high level wizards. The remaining people who could possibly have such power are from the Black Tower and the owner of 'The Association of Stars and Moon'.]

Capo bowed to him and spoke respectfully.

"Grandmaster Liszt, thank you for taking the trouble to aid us."

The words struck Eke like a lightning bolt, rooting him to the ground. There were many people who had the name 'Liszt', but there was only one worthy of the title 'Grandmaster'.

Liszt Hardaway Gemmer.

The chief royal wizard in Aouine and a great minister who aided the throne.

Eke was momentarily confused and did not understand why someone of such importance appeared in such a remote area. It seemed like Liszt was actually there to aid them.

“This... I...” The youth was tongue-tied and he stared and pointed at him: “Y-you’re...”

Liszt nodded and acknowledged his guess.

“It is going to take a while to explain things, mister Eke. Let knight Capote take us to safety, and I’ll explain the situation in detail.”

“Knight... Capo..... Capote?” Eke looked at Capote and felt his world spinning out of control.

===== Brendel POV =====

Brendel and his men traveled on the quiet eastern forest which led them upwards to a mountain slope. The fifteen-strong group’s footsteps across the dense tall grass caused a rustling noise, like an invisible long snake passing through the darkness. If they looked back, they would be able to see parted grasses leading back into the lower valley’s smouldering camps.

It was originally an area which was lit with proper fire torches, now it was nothing more than scattered burning remains.

“Our horses are still in the camp.”

Romaine said this sentence for the third time. Brendel knew she was hurting over the horse she had, but he shook his head.

“The mercenaries will retreat, right?” She looked up at Brendel and asked.

Her eyes went back to the areas that used to be the heart of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries’ camps. She understood Brendel’s meaning, but she was still soft-hearted.

Even though she and her aunt were not very popular amongst the Bucce citizens, it was still a place that she could call home, and also why she wanted to help Freya

rebuild Bucca. Now that their former allies were in trouble, she was reluctant to leave them behind.

“I’m afraid only Mother Marsha would know the answer.” Brendel replied.

[Whether or not the Grey Wolves Mercenaries’ name will become part of history lies not with my decision but Makarov’s.]

“But if they discover that it’s a trap he will be on the alert, right? Do you think that Makarov is a smart person?” She asked.

“He’s too smart.” Brendel thought back on Makarov’s past.

He was the chief advisor in an effort to revolutionize the Royal Faction, but his failure in a political fight eleven years ago caused him to end up in this current state.

“So he and his enemies are plotting against each other?” Amandina asked.

“That sounds about right.” Brendel nodded.

“I don’t understand. What is the reason for them to fight each other?” She made a new hypothesis: “Is there something in this forest that would drive them to such greed?”

[There are secrets in this forest, certainly, but they are not precious enough for people to act on them. They are fighting over something else entirely.]

She saw his smile and immediately asked: “My lord, you do know something.”

“That young man we saw a few days ago, do you still remember him?” He nodded his head: “His real name should be Eke Ophelon Lantonrand.”

“That name sounds familiar.”

“Naturally. Because you should have heard of the name Canon Ophelon Lantonrand.”

She formed her breath into a gasp, but because of the acute rush of air she took in, she started to cough instead. After regaining her composure, she asked breathlessly: “Duke Lantonrand?”

“Eke should have his own rank and land, the Earl of Merak.” Brendel narrowed his

eyes, “It’s just that he probably doesn’t know about it.”

“You mean... It has something to do with that political fight eleven years ago? Hold on, Duke Lantonrand’s son had already been missing—”

She suddenly stopped and looked at Brendel with an odd expression.

“My lord, why do you know so much about this?”

“It’s a public secret in the upper echelons.” Brendel lied through his teeth.

“Then this would mean...”

“The current Aouine is no longer the Aouine of the past. The so-called high nobles are rotten to the point where they don’t deserved to be saved. This sickness have spread into their very bones, to put it mildly.” Brendel deliberately said these words in front of her.

“I am not the only one who sees this point. You can mark my words, Miss Amandina, this kingdom will break up in a civil war within three months. The events that you are seeing now are the final struggles to stop it.”

“Can the Corvado empire be saved?” Amandina’s mind was thinking of the once glorious royal family that brought honor to Aouine.

“Perhaps it can.” Brendel stroked his chin and thought about the ‘princess regent’.

“What are we going to do, my lord?” Amandina broke his chain of thoughts as she asked quietly.

“We should first search for the Sage Slate.” Brendel looked at the landscape of arching mountains and gentle slopes that repeated itself. It appeared to Amandina like he saw things differently; as if he was able to see past the darkness and opaque obstructions as if he was already there at their destination.

He brought everyone across a mountain peak; the gale from the southern sea strengthening and billowing towards him, which made his cloak unfurl and spread out behind him.

He sniffed the air and stared into a dark and silent valley, his eyes glazed over with

surprise, then turned into an evident look.

“It’s really here. The only question is whether the person who wrote the walkthrough isn’t lying.”

Everyone heard his murmurs and turned towards him.

“Do you see the valley down there?” He said.

“What’s wrong?” Romaine asked.

“Hmm...” Brendel pointed into the valley, but they saw an empty carpet of darkness with trees lined on each side. He turned towards them and his eyes were gleaming: “Have you heard of altars?”

“My aunt and I have seen an altar in the ‘Temple of the Flame God’. Do you mean something like that?”

“Of course it’s not that. But everyone has heard of ‘Nests’ right?”

They nodded as they knew about monsters spawning from them.

“There’s a Nest within the valley.”

“What?” The Nightsong Tiger jerked with fright.

A Nest allowed a kingdom’s forces to prosper as they produced creatures that could be used for wars. However, a natural Nest was much more dangerous than a man-made Nest, and subjugating and purifying such natural Nests would require a tremendous price.

“What rank is it?” He immediately asked.

“No need to worry,” Brendel motioned him to calm down. He paused for a while before he continued. “That’s an Altar of Order, and related to the Temple of Truth.”

“What is an Altar of Order?”

“Have you heard of the Heaven’s Gate?”

The mercenaries felt their breaths chill. The Mercenaries of Lopes came from a kingdom known for its cavalry and knew what the term signified. The Nightsong Tiger looked at the clueless Amandina and Romaine, before he explained: “Angel of Thrones.”

Amandina gulped and looked at Brendel in disbelief; the kingdom Glace was only one-fifth of Aouine’s land area, but its combat prowess towered over all other kingdoms because it possessed two powerful armies.

The Knights of Fanaticism and Order of Brilliance, and part of their armies consisted of living creatures from Nests.

In the previous Holy War, the Aouine forces under the banner of the Holy Cathedral of Flames had suffered under these two armies greatly.

The Nightsong Tiger looked at Brendel with an incredulous look, and he stuttered to get his words out: “My lord, are you saying there’s a Heaven’s Gate there?”

Brendel immediately shook his head.

[Of course not. Are you kidding me?]

The Heaven’s Gate was unlikely to be found by him. The Heaven’s Gate gave birth to the strongest creature that could be used by the ‘Order of Brilliance’, the Angel of Thrones. Any place that had a Heaven’s Gate would have shown strange omens in the near vicinity, and unless the local Holy Cathedral of Flames were foolish enough to miss it, he would never be able to get to them.

“No, the Altar of Order below is similar to the Heaven’s Gate.”

“Similar?” The Nightsong Commander reflected on the words Brendel said. He was not as learned as a scholar and most of these Nests were controlled by rulers or great lords. A man of his position was usually not privy to know such things.

“You mean that this natural Nest has been blessed by Mother Marsha?” Amandina caught on to what Brendel was trying to say.

Brendel stopped for a moment. Even though his mind had the explanation available for the local citizens, but he still used the linguistic words from the game. He could only nod with an awkward smile.

“If that’s the case, then it’s a great find. A natural Nest is difficult to purify, and changing them requires at least ten years, and perhaps even twenty years.” The Nightsong Tiger immediately said.

The Nests that were blessed by Mother Marsha were gifts to the citizens in the world. The living creatures that were born from within are allies of sentient creatures. As long as the mana and maintenance was paid for, the forces that controlled the Nests were able to gather a powerful army.

Any kingdom who offered the Holy Cathedral of Fire an Altar of Order would immediately get a rich land three to four times the size of a knight’s. In addition, that land was hereditary and transferable.

Amandina’s eyes seemed to flare up with vigor.

But Brendel immediately raised his hands: “Everyone is overthinking things. That is merely an abandoned altar.”

“Abandoned?” Amandina’s first reaction was disappointment, before it went back to curiosity: “How does my lord know that?”

Brendel did not reply. He knew where the approximate location was because there was a serene and tranquil air to it, and he was familiar of that feeling in the game since he traveled throughout the continent.

There was also the fact that a game window with the words ‘Holy Area’ appearing in his vision. As to why it was already abandoned, the walkthrough had already stated clearly that it was abandoned, of course.

The group made its way to the valley, and once they did so they realized that the outside world seemed to be cut off. There was no sound within the valley, not even the common shrill of the insects commonly heard in the summer.

With the aid of the light from the moonlight, they slowly walked through an unclear path filled with cracks and holes. Within the dense foliage, they would sometimes catch glimpses of glimmering lights.

They could simply be fireflies, but perhaps they were the eyes of animals.

Amandina and Romaine had traveled through the night several times. Even though

they were tense, they were not exactly afraid of the environment. The Mercenaries of Lopes were not fazed in the slightest, but the surroundings made them feel that there was something odd about the place.

“This altar wasn’t actually discovered by me.” Brendel finally spotted some man-made fragments of a large boulder, and suddenly spoke aloud.

Chapter 82

The story of fishes swimming in chaos (3)

===== Scarlett's POV =====

“Scarlett.”

A clear voice rang out from the forest, accompanied with hurried footsteps as if there was a group of people approaching towards a girl with long red hair. She tidied her hair band before turning back; her long eyelashes flickering once as she blinked at a burning torchlight nearby. Her irises were like red wine as they reflected the shimmering orange flames, but the expression she gave was a little hesitant.

“That voice sounds like it belongs to Cecilia. Wasn't she supposed to find Yula and Redi, why is she back already? Did she find them, or did she encounter some form of trouble?”

The girl named Scarlett picked up the halberd in her hands warily. Brendel would have easily recognized the origins of this weapon. Beyond the ink-black body of the spear, the most prominent feature of this weapon were the faintly golden edges that fanned outwards at the tip, giving it a graceful deadliness.

‘Spear of Lightning, Roglas’ was a famous drop in Chablis. Any gamer with the appropriate level who used a spear would have wanted this spear. Even though it was a level twenty-five spear, the price within the online trading community did not fall regardless of time. There was only one reason why: The spear had a 1% chance of a special effect called ‘Whispers of Lightning when the user attacked.

This special effect was the same spell that an Elementalist used. It added 10% additional lightning damage, and was a particular strategy used by gamers. They would first use the spear until they got the special effect, then switch their weapons with the skill ‘Preparation’ without any penalties, as well as adding potions that were usually made by Wind Elementalists to increase their damage output.

However, if they saw the spear in Scarlett's hands they would certainly be surprised. As far as they knew, it belonged to an undead knight that burned with crimson flame.

The first rumors of the spear was two years after the Grey Wolves Mercenaries' battle, and was still held by the lizardmen bandits.

Scarlett raised her head up to look at the nearby hill. and saw several figures dashing out from the trees. She furrowed her brows. The Grey Wolves Mercenaries had a different meaning to her compared to her comrades. She was an orphan raised by Capo, and the group was like a huge family to her. She went into battle not for the sake of money, but for the sake of protecting this family.

Other than fighting in battles, she felt that she did not know anything else.

She had witnessed the Grey Wolves Mercenaries scoring victory after victory for eleven years, and her personal confidence improved every day until it formed into a feeling of glory. But this glory was shaken tonight when she did not understand where the enemies came from. There was no question their opponents were incredibly difficult and filled with a strong desire to battle.

She felt an uneasy feeling growing in her heart, and the tension and fatigue caused her heart to drum loudly.

"What's wrong?" She asked as Cecilia and the group of mercenaries behind approached her.

"I found Yula." Cecilia replied.

Scarlett uttered a low sigh and her eyes wavered. She put her halberd down onto the ground and tousled her hair.

"And? What did the commander say? Do we press forward or retreat?"

There was a series of low giggles from the crowd. It was a known fact amongst the mercenaries that Scarlett was fond of Eke, even though she tried to hide it. A few of them even gracefully pretended that they did not know anything about it and even cheered her on, despite the fact that Yula was Eke's fiancée.

"Yula is something of a star seer and she's highly intelligent. The commander is most likely to follow her advice. Hmph." Scarlett made a nasally scoff before she glared at the giggling mercenaries.

"Careful that I tear your lips apart." She said viciously.

But uncontrollable laughter burst out and one of them said kindly: “Scarlett, the commander has already made the decision to head north to fight the enemies. Redi, Lothar and you are to take one squad of mercenaries each to create an open path. Can we go along with you?”

Scarlett flashed a toothy grin: “Why would you want to come along with me. All of you have other intentions right?”

“Of course not.” The few men who had their intentions revealed quickly waved their hands.

Scarlett raised her head and eyed one of the youths with an angry glare who quickly turned away.

[Idiots.]

“Whatever.” She turned away as she answered.

The few youths looked at her back with stunned expressions. They did not know that she was filled with grave worry. The ‘Paper Cards’ had exceeded all their initial expectations, but Makarov did not issue any orders to retreat and insisted on carrying on with the usual plans.

[Is the commander that confident, or is there another reason?]

Scarlett clenched her fist and placed it over her heart which was beating quickly. Since the commander had already given the command, there was no room left to disobey the order. Everything had to be left to the spear in her hands.

She gripped it tightly. Eke had bought the spear from a merchant when she was fifteen years old, and she made the decision to fight with her spear until her life was expended. She even felt at times that this was her life’s reason.

She started to move forward but she suddenly recalled something and turned her head.

“Didn’t that merchant camped a fair distance away from us? Where is he now?”

“He probably... got separated from us when the attack started...”

The mercenaries who followed her closely looked at each other, before one of them hesitatingly replied. They were not Makarov's direct subordinates and not all of the mercenaries knew his exact identity. Many of them still thought he was still allies with them, even if it was just temporarily.

She frowned: "We're moving in this direction to search for them."

"Is that really... okay?"

"What do you mean by that, the Grey Wolves Mercenaries cannot be seen as a group who abandons their allies."

A few chuckles could be heard amongst them. Scarlett was obviously being soft-hearted but she simply had to find a grand reason to cover it up. The mercenaries were willing to group along with her was partly because of the funny atmosphere around her, although, it was mostly out of a good-natured perspective.

But as the chuckles died down, there was another cackling laugh that echoed throughout the greenwoods, yet the voice was hollow and empty, comprising more of a frightening tone to it that was not unlike the Demonic Rotten Beasts.

Scarlett's expression changed and sought for the source of the voice.

She immediately found the origin of the voice; a dark figure with long black robes with red sigils on either side was standing next to a gigantic green colored creature. They were atop on a great black pine tree, while the creature shook his massive wings, causing the chains around them to jangle loudly. The creature's head was that of a goat's and their line-like pupils stared at the mercenaries.

"When did it appear?" Scarlett's heart suddenly jolted and she gritted her teeth. Even though she had no idea what manner of the creature was, she understood they were opponents that they most likely could not face.

"Lass." The Disciple of Black Flames trilled with a piercing voice: "Did you say someone got separated?"

"That has nothing to do with you." She raised her halberd and said through clenched teeth.

The initial assault had caused the Grey Wolves Mercenaries to lose a squad of

patrolling guards, and one of them was Scarlett's close friend. Even though the mercenaries had gotten used to seeing life and death, it did not mean they were able to calmly deal with them. The enemies and them were beyond conciliatory terms and only had enmity between them.

"It is fine if we can't get to them. My comrade has probably been done in by them, so I'll quench my thirst for revenge with your deaths." The Disciple of Black Flames laughed in a crazed manner. "Abechas!"

The black chains swept towards the girl with a ringing sound caused by the chain links, while she responded with a loud yell and struck away the chains. The force of the chains secretly swayed her confidence, it was merely a single strike but her arm felt slightly numbed. Her performance was apparently outside the expectations of the Disciple as he exclaimed in surprise. "A Silver-ranked fighter! Makarov's subordinates are certainly full of surprises. Even a little girl is skilled, how truly unexpected!"

"There are more to come, you bastard! Roglas, Arrow of Lightning!"

Scarlett reversed her spear and pointed it at the disciple. Electricity immediately gathered from the tip of black-bodied spear and crackled with an explosive noise. By the time the sound reached the mercenaries' ears, the lightning arc had leapt towards the disciple.

However, an invisible shield blocked the lightning and sparks sprayed everywhere from the contact, causing the trees around the high-ranking disciple to smoke and turn black from the heat. The black-robed disciple did not move at all, and not even the edge of his sleeves reacted to the Arrow of Lightning.

"A tier 2 Magic Artifact. That is certainly uncommon." The disciple clicked his tongue after a moment later.

Scarlett's blood had turned completely cold. She drew in a sharp breath as she tried to dispel the numbness that was spreading throughout his fingers. The moment of shock quickly turned into anger and she roared at the mercenaries who pulled out their weapons in order to participate in the fight: "Run! What the hell are you staying here for!"

"What do you mean?"

"Captain, we..."

“You idiots, I’m not his match at all, quickly get the commander to send help to me!”

“Your plans seem to be thought out pretty well.” The disciple sneered audibly, raised his hand, and the creature beside immediately flung a long chain out. This time the targets were the mercenaries.

“Damn it!”

She threw the halberd like a javelin towards the chain. There was a loud grinding noise as the spear and chain collided, deflecting each other to the opposite direction. She immediately raised her hand, and there was a lightning flash in between the spear and her. A moment later, the halberd flew back to her hand as if they were connected to each other.

“Element Resonance!” The disciple screeched.

Chapter 83

The story of fishes swimming in chaos (5)

===== Makarov's POV =====

“He really said that?”

Even though the Grey Wolves Mercenaries were attacked in the night by the endless stream of Paper Cards' mercenaries and Disciples of Black Flame, and forced to retreat to the south, Makarov did not lose his composure and calmly retreated in an orderly manner. He was even able to regroup and gather his forces to make an organized army. Just that point alone would have qualified him as a famous general.

He was with Buga as usual, and wore a fiery red military uniform that was reminiscent of the previous king's personal cavalry guards' uniform.

Makarov was once the commander of the king's personal cavalry guards, and his fiery red uniform had been his symbol ever since he took on that position. The things that were missing from before were the shoulder emblems, badges and tassels.

His personal sword had not changed since the time he was the commander of the 35th cavalry unit.

That particular brand of sword was immensely popular amongst the level 30-40 gamers. It had the right balance of stats for its price and was one of the best Magic Swords at the 'Brass' rating. The quantity of the swords was also sufficient in the market, so it was well received.

Makarov calmly listened to Yula's report without showing any signs that he was concerned with the enemies, but merely raised an eyebrow upon Brendel's advice. He turned to Buga and asked.

“That youth seems to be prepared. Do we head east as well?”

“Hold on,” Redi urgently cut in. He had a higher degree of authority amongst the other mercenaries, otherwise they would not have interrupted the Makarov: “Commander,

the enemies we are facing now are the Tree Shepherds! We should retreat and seek for a better plan right? If they are attacking openly now, I'm sure they are well prepared to fight us, continuing to fight with them in this forest would be falling into their plans!"

His words were rash and rude, but Makarov was used to his attitude and did not mind it. Redi suddenly thought of something and asked. "And Eke is still in town, he might not be safe either!"

Makarov eyed the youth and nodded: "Your words are not wrong, but there is no guarantee that the Grey Wolves Mercenaries would be safe even if we retreat to Chablis."

He saw that Yula had lowered her head and knew that she was worried with her fiance. "In truth we have already suspected that Conrad wouldn't be so easy to deal with. But we are prepared to face him ever since we stepped into the forest. As for Eke... I am not sure what he discovered, but him staying in the town is also fine. Capo stayed behind specifically to protect him, so worry not."

Buga did not offer any comments and simply listened to the conversation, but he suddenly turned his head around and immediately discovered a blinding light coming from the distant forest. A ear-piercing explosion soon permeated the entire forest. Their expressions turned and Redi was about to say something, but the mercenaries around them had started shouting.

"The seventh chord, thunder!"

"Scarlett is in trouble!"

Buga reached for his greatsword behind his back, but he quickly stopped and turned to peer closer at the direction he was looking at earlier.

"The battle is already over." He said gravely.

"You mean, Scarlett is..." Yula paled.

"I'll bring some men to get to her now!" Redi finally reacted and reached for his sword, intending to rush out to that area, but Makarov laid a strong arm on his shoulder and forced him to stay right where he was.

“Stop.”

“Commander...?”

Makarov did not say anything but frowned for the first time and looked somberly at where Buga was looking at as well. A few moments later, dark figures appeared in their line of sight, followed by two gurgling screams. Whether or not they belonged to a human’s dying throes or a beast’s, the mercenaries could not tell.

But they took a few steps back, as there were groups of men coming from the southern forest. They were certainly the Disciples of the Black Flames, their chains dragging across the ground and shrubs with metallic ringings from the chain links.

The bizarre sounds were clearly at odds with the supposedly tranquil forest.

— The attacks in the north are a distraction, while the enemies laid in the south to ambush them.

Everyone thought of the same thing. Lothar and Scarlett had clearly failed to stop the enemies in the north, but the mercenaries did not have the time to mourn for their losses, because they were also mired in danger as well. The mercenaries were experienced enough to recognize that the enemies had three times their numbers.

Redi gulped. Even though he was not afraid of death, but he felt suffocated to face such odds. Yula listened closely and also realized the danger they were in.

“Conrad!”

Buga growled, his voice low but powerful.

“Oh?” A flippant voice immediately came back, even sounding young: “Ser Buga, do you know of me personally? Would you like me to address you as the ‘Crosshand’, or are you Duke Lantonrand’s or Grand Duke Roan’s guard commander?”

The stone thrown by Conrad was like a ripple amongst the Grey Wolves Mercenaries. They looked back their vice-commander with stunned expressions. Even though they did not trust the enemies, they felt curious over the sudden information. Buga and Makarov did not react to Conrad’s words, while the latter even stuck out a hand to prevent Buga from doing anything rash.

“I did not think that the mercenaries of Paper Cards would work together with the infamous Tree Shepherds. I’m sure it would be terrible if words of your deeds are circulated to the masses.”

The forest turned silent.

Conrad had not expected Makarov to know the relationship between the Disciples of the Black Flames and the Tree Shepherds. He only replied with sarcasm after an afterthought: “As expected of the Cunning Fox of the past. You do know plenty.”

[That youth’s words are right.] *(TL: Makarov is referring to Brendel.)*

Makarov frowned deeply. He was actually confirming Brendel’s words, but he was also disregarding his men’s morale. In spite of that, he believed his men were not afraid to die in battle.

Mercenaries were men who risked their lives for coins. Although they were not as formidable as a formal army, they were still recognized as a force to be reckoned with in Vaunte.

“We should skip with the pleasantries, Ser Makarov.” Conrad walked out from his spot, although it was dark enough to only identify him as a young man. “I’m here to confirm only one thing. Is the only son of Duke Rhun with you presently?”

The mercenaries were once again stunned and stared at their commander. In their eyes, high nobles had nothing to do with them.

Makarov broke into sheer laughter: “Have you gone fucking insane? Leaving aside the face that I don’t understand what you are talking about, but even if I do, do you think I would bother to tell my enemies anything?”

But the young man’s reaction was merely to shake his head at Makarov’s sarcastic remarks—

“You shouldn’t put your foot down so firmly, Ser Makarov. Do you truly wish to see your faithful subordinates who followed you for over a decade to be put down like animals?” But he immediately shook his head: “But perhaps you are right. Your original status puts you far above them. It is a natural thing to fulfill your mission and abandon this baggage that is holding you back.”

“That’s enough, Conrad!” Buga snapped coldly at Conrad and shook his head. “We are all hired mercenaries. Do you think your taunts are going to affect our men? If you have any skills, then bring it out and show it to me. The worst fate that we can go through is merely death.”

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries immediately laughed. That was how it should be. They were already prepared to meet death in the battlefield, and Conrad’s little speech before they fought was something of a laughable thing.

It was especially so when they were facing their own kind. In order to show what they thought, they drew out their weapons, and there was a series of metallic noises created by the weapons in the forest.

===== Conrad POV =====

“This old fucking bastard.” Conrad took a few steps back and hid himself in the forest once again. He looked at the dying girl with long red hair who was covered with numerous wounds beside his feet. “This cunning fox Makarov is really hard to deal with. Unfortunately our target isn’t him, otherwise I wouldn’t waste my time to persuade this Royal Faction idiot.”

“If you already know he wouldn’t talk about it, why don’t you attack them right away?” There was a man who wore long black robes standing behind Conrad, quietly advising him with a low voice. Two red stripes were sewn onto both sleeves, and Brendel would have recognized the man as a ranked bishop in the Disciples of the Black Flames, and several ranks higher than the high ranking acolytes he had faced.

“We could have done that, but there are two groups of men within the Grey Wolves Mercenaries that are unaccounted for. Makarov is well known for his devious tactics.” Conrad spat the words out with a displeased expression. “He left a group of men to chase after Eke in the town. They really do know how to act like he was running away, but no matter how I look at it, this is a plan to distract us.”

“It might be possible that he really ran away.”

“It doesn’t matter. To make sure that nothing goes wrong, I have already left a Gold-ranked swordsman behind. Capot might hide his true skill, but he wouldn’t be able to go against my placed swordsman.”

“Then what else do you have to worry about?”

Conrad scoffed lightly. He crouched down and grabbed the girl's hair, jerking her head up. Blood immediately flowed and trickled down her face.

Scarlett jerked slightly and groaned softly. She tried to see past the blood in her eyes to see who was in front of her, but the young man pulled her hair even higher and caused her to curl up in pain.

“Urgh—”

Conrad gave a devious grin: “The other group of missing mercenaries. The report says it's a merchant along with two women protected by a group of twelve mercenaries. How am I supposed to believe such a ridiculous lie like that? Makarov has definitely planned something, but even if I can't get him to talk, he can't ensure his men to do the same.”

“Isn't that right,” He stared at the girl who had breathing in shallow gasps: “Little girl?”

Scarlett seemed to realize her situation, gritted her teeth and turned her face away.

Chapter 84

The story of fishes swimming in Chaos (6)

===== Conrad POV =====

“Why is it, that you don’t wish to tell us where they went?” Conrad chortled with mirth, smacking the flat blade of the dagger on the girl’s cheek: “Why do you want to risk your dear life for that group?”

The cold blade reflected the dim light seemed to emit a chilling feeling to her, and she twitched once. She lightly gasped and answered with a pause on every word: “...My responsibility... for failing to defeat you... Only the weak... would save themselves... by betraying others.”

“I... am... different... from... you.” Her half-opened eyes hid the burning fury within her.

“Really?” Conrad did not get angry: “But you see, I’m not a patient man. As both you and I know, the Grey Wolves Mercenaries have seventy to eighty of their men here. I’m actually quite certain that not everyone is willing to sacrifice themselves for other strangers. I don’t need to remind you that mercenaries are mercenaries, after all. There is really no need to be so loyal. If you think about it, the results won’t change and I’ll get my answer. Why do you still want to persist in resisting? I can assure you that I don’t enjoy killing, so I’m giving you one more chance, little girl, otherwise you’re going to that useless goddess Mother Marsha.”

Scarlett’s eyelids twitched, and he waited with bated breath. In the end the girl gritted her teeth and shook her head.

“The other mercenaries... are not me.” Her reply was curt.

“Then farewell, little girl.”

Scarlett tensed her body and paled. She was a normal human being who still feared death at the last moment, but it still did not overcome her willpower. She feebly clenched her fists and waited for her fate, closing her eyes tightly while two streaks of tears flowed from them.

Conrad turned his head.

The high-ranking Disciple of the Black Flames who had stood behind Conrad throughout the interrogation nodded his head once. It was just like what Conrad said, the mercenaries were already in their trap and there was nowhere to run. There was no need to worry. Even though the mercenaries were not afraid to die in battle, they would not easily give up their life to meaningless loyalty or honor.

Makarov and Buga needed to keep their secrets, but the men under them did not.

Conrad took the dagger and plunged it into the girl's chest.

The disciple looked coldly at this scene. The red blood that flowed from the girl did not look like a life was ending, but more of a painting to be admired. She gurgled and her body convulsed a few times, causing her red hair to flutter about. Her eyes opened wide and she looked like she was thinking of something in her final moments, but they quickly became vacant and void of all expressions.

Her willpower and strength were quickly leaving her own body.

[Am I dying...? Eke... do you know... that I really like—] She felt extremely sleepy, but felt something was placed onto her chest before she fell to a sleep she would not wake up from.

“What is that?” Conrad turned his head back and asked.

The disciple had placed a glowing dark ruby on the girl's body. In a few moments, the ruby extended dark tendril-like lights around the wound. The dark lights passed through the veins of the girl and her body quickly gave out a faint crimson glow.

“The Divine Blood of a God.” He said.

“Do you wish to awaken her as an undead?” Conrad asked.

“No.” He shook his head. “This woman has an Element Resonance with her weapon, and even defeated our high ranking disciple with just her current status as a Silver-ranked fighter. This means that her potential is very high, and with such a tender age as well. What I gave her was the blood of the Lightning God, Cabal. If she raises as an God Acolyte, then this gamble is worth it to me.”

“Blood from a high ranking God?” Conrad narrowed his eyes: “You’re a lower ranked bishop. How did you get your hands on the blood jewel when you don’t even have the qualifications to handle it?”

“A mere coincidence. Luck plays a great factor, as dictated by the highest truth in this world, chaos.”

Conrad gave an incomprehensible hum in response to that, and looked back at Scarlett. The tendrils were gradually turning her body into a cocoon.

“The chance for failure is very high.” Conrad said.

“The loss is acceptable.” The disciple said coldly.

“You can do whatever you want, my next move is going to launch an attack. You had better stay back. Makarov and Buga are not your common fodder. If both of them put their lives on their line, my chances to survive are not that favorable.”

Conrad got up and place his white gloved hand on his sword. Even though he could supposedly lose his life, there was no tremor to his hand. The disciple knew that he was in charge of their current mission, so he did not oppose his rudeness. He moved to one side to allow Conrad to pass, then spoke suddenly: “The group that left the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, is that truly ‘Eke’?”

“The possibility is almost certain.” Conrad continued to walk towards the edge of the forest and spoke without turning his head: “Regardless of they do, they won’t be able to escape here. If I want them to die here, then they would assuredly be dead.”

The disciple merely gave a sneering smile at Conrad’s declaration.

===== Brendel POV =====

The silence was quickly broken within the quiet forest —

“My lord, do you mean to say you knew that Eke was Duke Lantonrand’s son since the beginning?”

“Of course not, Miss Amandina. I was only suspicious of his identity in the beginning.” Brendel sighed. “But seeing Miss Yula made me certain of that fact. She is not only a Star Seer, her other identity is Eke’s fiancée. I had seen them before in the Black

Tower.” (TL: *Black Tower probably refers to where the wizards congregate.*)

[A lie, of course. I haven't been to the Black Tower in this world yet. Not that anyone's going to break my lie anyways. But it's true that Yula is Eke's fiancée and the most famous Star Seer in Aouine in the future. At the same time, her capabilities in the battlefield are beyond imagination.]

Brendel clearly remembered that Yula was a Chosen, and her blindness was proof of that. Mother Marsha favored certain humans, but mortals were imperfect and unable to receive such pure divine energy, resulting in a damaged body.

Over Vaunte's long history, only two Chosens did not have any defects on them. One was the King of Flames, Gatel, and the other future emperor of Madara who possessed the Mercury Staff. The other Chosens might have been famous, but they were still flawed.

[Telling them that Yula would be a Grandmaster Brawler who awakened her Element status and was at a peak level of 115, will be treated like a running joke. She aided the Princess Regent and the Goddess of War to form a stalwart defense against Madara. Right now, her abilities as a Chosen have not awakened yet— Hold on, is there a possibility that she awakens her abilities in this battlefield?]

Brendel wanted Yula's abilities, but she was already in Eke's faction and they were still loyal to the Royal faction. The civil war would temporarily shake their loyalty, but the couple ultimately emerged victorious and pledged their support for the Princess Regent. Unfortunately, the two prodigies died in the war and left behind a daughter, Airrah Lantonrand Orphelon, who led the Aouine's final resistance against Madara.

At that time, Brendel had left the frontlines to join the Knights' Order, Glace.

Brendel rapid thoughts were interrupted by Amandina's reply who sounded like she doubted him.

“You mean to say that the fight between these two mercenary groups are a cover for the nobles' civil war, while Makarov is actually Duke Rhun's retainer? The Grey Wolves Mercenaries are actually the guards of Eke, and the mercenaries of Paper Cards are hired as assassins?”

“No, the majority of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries probably do not know the real truth behind their commander.” Brendel explained: “When Duke Arreck was in control of

the political arena, the entire family of Duke Rhun was nearly wiped out by assassins. I'm sure you have heard of that incident."

"Yes, the nobles' blood that was shed on that day caused great political changes in a month. It's not possible for me to be ignorant of it..." Amandina's eyes shimmered.

"Duke Rhun knew that the assassination was coming, and he planned to send his only son away. This is the truth behind that incident; he used the deaths of his other family members in order to protect his only child." Brendel sighed and answered wearily.

Amandina did not respond after listening to Brendel's explanation. The fights between nobles were bloody and difficult. From a certain point of view, Duke Rhun's actions were understandable.

Romaine merely glanced around, seemingly disinterested in this topic.

"Then instead of an assassination, they would want to capture his only son to threaten him?" Amandina asked again after a short while.

"Yes, an astute observation." Brendel praised her: "Duke Rhun is currently the strongest supporter of the royal family, and if someone wants to act against them, they would naturally need to shake this 'pillar'."

"That would mean..."

Amandina frowned with worry. Even though a chaotic civil war was an advantage to them, she was still a citizen of Aouine, and did not wish to see the worst outcome happening.

"No more than three months." Brendel said.

"Makarov also knew about the movements of the Paper Cards and the Disciples of the Black Flames from the beginning? He used his own mercenaries as bait?"

"Most likely."

The girl took a deep breath and sighed wistfully. The entire Grey Wolves Mercenaries consisted of more than a hundred men and women altogether. There were people who had served Makarov for over a decade.

She understood that being merciless was the only way to survive in a cruel war, but she still felt a certain chill spreading throughout her entire body when she experienced it first hand. She cast a glance at Brendel's youthful face.

[I wonder if my lord is going to be like them in the future...]

Brendel's eyes were already placed somewhere else as he prepared himself to solve a troublesome problem.

Chapter 85

The story of fishes swimming in Chaos (7)

Brendel had been thinking of ways to break through the Tree Shepherds' plans from the start. Makarov brought them along with the intention to attract the enemies to them, and also the very same plan that doomed the gamers in Brendel's memory to be utterly wiped out.

[Even though the plan to escape was delayed by the arrival of those two, we managed to escape the ambush. While that cunning fox used this plan to trick the enemies into thinking Eke is amongst us, I'm sure he doesn't know there's an Altar here.]

Brendel believed that his own plans were superior to Makarov's plans, as he was confident in his own experiences that were forged along with other gamers who had spent a lifetime in the game.

The currents of the water had changed, but the fishes swimming in it might not follow the currents.

The gamers who later explored the land found out bits of historical content from the Altar. The monks from the Holy Cathedral of Flames were the first to discover the temple approximately one hundred years ago from the first era of the game, but the records were mysteriously erased as if they never existed.

Amandina glanced at Brendel's unfocused gaze into the valley, and looked at the direction at where he was looking at. She saw dense tree crowns but was unable to discover anything. She checked his expressions again, only to discover his solemn looks, and forced back her questions into her throat.

She had guessed for herself that Makarov had planned to use them as baits from the very beginning, and was quite furious over his actions. She subconsciously placed Duke Rhun's and the people associated with him into a list where they were not welcomed.

Brendel continued to lead them down into the valley.

There were two mercenaries who were ahead of Brendel to clear a path for them. Branches and vines were constantly hacked away with their swords, and periodically cast dim light reflected from the stars into the group's eyes.

Brendel checked the Stats Window and paid 2 Wealth to keep the Card, 'Mercenaries of Lopes' to keep them in the field. He currently had 10 Water EP and 150 Wealth.

He suddenly canceled the Stats Window and narrowed his eyes as he discovered the two scouts ahead of him had stopped. They looked at each other as they had discovered something in front of them, then turned their heads to Brendel.

"My lord, there's something in front..."

"What is it?" The Nightsong Tiger was the one who responded with a strict voice.

The two scouts were the youngest within the group and had the least experience. He had the intention to train them, but did not expect their inexperience to embarrass him. He moved towards them with large strides as he spoke, almost like he had wanted to cover up the mistakes that his subordinates made.

But he was also stunned when he pushed the shrubberies away to get a better look.

It was an large open clearing that was about the size of three hundred meters wide, and in the center of it stood a temple that was covered with vines.

The Nightsong Tiger raised his head up subconsciously to study the entire temple; he was almost able to imagine how the grand structure would look like under the sun. Even now, he could almost feel how glorious it looked like in the past under the dim light.

Brendel had also gone forward to look at the reason why they stopped.

It was a temple that had tall marble pillars shaped into an arch with intricate patterns carved onto it. It was nearly sixty feet tall and the overall design was certainly a temple to worship the Elven Goddess.

However, many of the Gods had already died and became star constellations, leaving behind only their Will and Laws that shaped this world. The temple had already lost much of its former glory as it lost its divine protection.

“Wow!” Romaine exclaimed.

“This is...” Amandina was also stunned.

“The holy temple of the Silver Elves.” Brendel said.

He had seen much of the grand designs in the game. The Elves and Dwarves’ cities took his breath away when he saw it for the first time.

“This building used to be the burial grounds for the Elven Royal Family. The humans had left them untouched throughout history because they treated them as sacred allies, starting from the timeline of the War of the Holy Saints when they defeated the Dragon of Darkness and continuing unto this day.”

“But why would the burial grounds for the royal family be turned into a temple?” Amandina turned around and asked.

“The ancestral kings of the Silver Elves swore to protect their territory for all eternity. Their Elven Goddess had asked Mother Marsha to allow their souls to forever reside in this land.”

“A ‘Nest’ of Heroes?” She asked again.

Brendel nodded.

“But why did it get abandoned?”

“History states it was due to wars, but in actual truth the Ancestral Kings did not wish to participate in wars between humans. The citizens of Aouine nearly angered Mother Marsha as well because of the civil wars, so the real truth was covered up.” He cast a meaningful look at Romaine and Amandina: “You won’t find this in any historical text.”

Both of the girls nodded without asking why, as Brendel would have answered ‘This is recorded in the wizards’ historical records!’.

“This Altar might still work.” Brendel’s words stunned everyone.

“””What?”””

“Calm down everyone, it’s just a possibility.” Brendel was certain that the chance to

activate the Altar was one hundred percent.

[According to the research done by the gamers, the 'creatures' that dwell within can exist for thirty days, which is more than enough to finish the quest here.]

Brendel's words did not soothe Amandina or the Nightsong Tiger. Both of them were greatly excited of the possibility of the advantages that could have if it still worked. It was as if a treasure chest was in front of them, which could either contain treasures or was actually an empty box.

The Nightsong Tiger licked his lips before he asked Brendel in a low voice. "What are your orders, my lord?"

Brendel turned around and looked at the mercenaries behind him, then pointed at two of them: "Two of you are Elementalists right?"

"Yes, my lord." They nodded at the same time.

"Do you have men who use the crossbow?"

"Yes." The Nightsong Tiger immediately picked two more mercenaries out: "Is two enough?"

"Yes." Brendel took a coiled rope out from his backpack. "Come, the four of you. We need to practice a bit of combat tactics."

Amandina frowned: "There's going to be fights?"

"Don't worry, it's just a Spectral Knight." Brendel answered nonchalantly before he saw the Nightsong Tiger's incredulous face. He looked at him in confusion and asked subconsciously "What's wrong?"

"M-my lord, did you said 'Just a... Spectral Knight'?" The Nightsong Tiger asked with a bizzare look on his face.

Brendel coughed once. He suddenly realized that the Spectral Knight was a level thirty-five Elite Undead which was easily stronger than a Silver-ranked fighter. The gamers had even described the encounter as a 'mini boss'.

Since then, however, the gamers had researched deeply into finding the weaknesses

of the various Undead, and he was easily able to handle the spectral knights even with a lower level with tactical means.

Brendel consoled him: “Don’t worry. The Spectral Knights have a specific weakness. As long as you listen to my commands properly, it’s not difficult to defeat them.”

The Nightsong Tiger looked at his lord, partly doubting his words but also trusting in his knowledge. Any common mercenaries would have fled the area immediately, and they would roared at Brendel with spittle.

‘Are you crazy? Do you have goat shit for brains? A Spectral Knight is one the most terrifying Undead you can encounter! It can move swiftly in the forest like a horse undeterred in the plains, and kill someone without even making a sound! Anyone below the Gold rank should run because it would have fucked us up to our deaths with their weapons!’

The Nightsong Tiger instantly shooed away a voice that crept into his mind. The twelve mercenaries they had here would be easily slaughtered by the enemy, and even if they had twice the numbers, they would also be done in.

However, the mercenaries were summoned by Brendel, so the Nightsong Tiger merely nodded. Amandina observed his fearless attitude and merely served to convince her that he was a loyal retainer.

Chapter 86

The king and the dead (1)

The Spectral Knight under the moonlight looked like it was a translucent statue made of crystal, glowing faintly from the dusty air. It held a silver spear as it rode on its horse around the temple, which then disappeared from the group's eyes at the other side of the temple's wall.

The whole process of the Spectral Knight's movements were silent. There were no sounds of hooves hitting the ground or the metallic grind from its armor. However, Brendel had already determined the subclass of the Spectral Knight in a few moments and decided on his strategy.

When he looked back at his men, he found thirteen pair of eyes with hesitation, doubt and anxiety. Even the Nightsong Tiger held his breath. Amandina covered her lips and muffled her coughs, trying hard to regain her composure.

The only exception was Romaine, whose eyes were bright from excitement at checking out the temple. Brendel's heart skipped a beat and warned her to be careful and not to slip away without his consent. In regards to girl who called herself 'The Great Merchant Romaine', he was not sure what she would not do.

Brendel fiddled with his thumbs as he grumbled inwardly on how Romaine's aunt disciplined her to have such a unique personality. He quickly waved away that thought and addressed the mercenaries.

"Our strategy is quite simple," He brushed away the shrubs and pointed towards a nearby slope: "See that black pine tree? Other than the four people that I requested, I want the rest of you to lay an ambush there. Wait for me to lure the Spectral Knight over and wait for my signal to attack it."

[[[[That's it?]]]]

Everyone was stunned.

"But... just what exactly should we do, my lord?" The Nightsong Tiger asked with

doubt creeping into his voice.

[What do you mean by that... Do you need me to teach you to attack someone when you ambushed him? Just kill it!]

Brendel answered after a split second with an answer: “Just hit him with everything you got...”

He suddenly realized what the problem was.

“Well, imagine this, treat this enemy like he was the one who murdered your wives and children.” Brendel said.

[Murdered my wife and children?] The Nightsong Tiger did not understand.

“But my lord, to tell you the truth, my woman had died long ago during the fight with Kirrlutz.”

Brendel placed his palm over his forehead and sighed.

“Imagine that he owed you a million gold coins to your mercenary group and he intends to evade payment—”

[[[!!!]]]

The mercenaries had never been refused payment after they became famous. They looked towards the direction where the Spectral Knight was earlier with bloodshot eyes as if he had murdered everyone they loved. The Nightsong Tiger gripped his axe so hard that it seemed to groan.

“Mother Marsha above! So this Spectral Knight is the same type of horseshit like the people of Anjou! My lord, we swear by Mother Marsha’s name, we will beat that cursed undead till it’s nothing more than a pile of rotting flesh—” He said with a loud voice.

Amandina listened to the Nightsong Tiger’s tirade in embarrassment. Even though there was coarse language used within the nobles’ circle, she rarely heard it used directly in front of her. She gritted her teeth until he was done with his rant, coughed once and asked with a crimson face.

“My lord, the enemy is a Spectral Knight that appears in fables, can we truly defeat it?”

She asked.

The Mercenaries of Lopes might have trusted him whole-heartedly, but she was still hesitant of Brendel's simple plan. If everyone used his method, would it not mean that everyone was capable of handling a Spectral Knight?

[Our group consists of simple mercenaries. There is no great wizard, a Grandmaster Swordsman or even a battlemage. The description of a Spectral Knight requires at least someone with the equivalent of a Gold-ranked fighter, but none of us here are that skill level, not even you, my lord. A simple ambush wouldn't raise the skill level of anyone here.]

"Of course." But Brendel's reply came naturally.

"Why?" She blurted the word out.

"Don't worry, he wouldn't be able to attack us, or to be more accurate, he can't."

"He can't?" Amandina's jaw lowered itself.

[What reason is that? Is the Spectral Knight somehow crippled? Or maybe it's actually a peace-loving undead?]

She got a little angry at Brendel's flippant reply, but she was unable to refute him when he had never seemed to fail in his plans. Even the most ridiculous answer like this might somehow come through.

She calmed down a little, but still grumbled in a small voice.

"As your advisor... I can't accept that explanation, my lord."

Brendel shrugged as it was not an easy thing to explain.

[It's rare for a monster to follow a path to patrol, and when it does, it will do so dilligently. It's quite obvious that this particular Spectral Knight has a strong fixation in this area. However, he has to move within a fixed area. Once it crosses a certain line, it will return to guard its path, regardless of what situation there is.]

Most of the creatures that appeared in the game that patrolled a pathing area were incredibly powerful, and gamers were usually not able to take advantage of their

behavior because they were able to attack from incredible distances.

However, this Spectral Knight did not fall into that category. It was limited to a certain attacking range and was unable to leave their position. Brendel was certain that he could do kill the Spectral Knight with this method, and even if it failed, he was certain that he could take it on directly.

The only thing that he was feeling sorry about was the fact that quest mission's loot tended to be half of the normal encounters, and this world seemed to follow the game's logic quite closely.

[The game lore states that Mother Marsha sealed this particular Nest in the past. Aouine's high ranking priests tried to change the oaths that the Elven kings made so they could be used, but the resistance made from the kings made the oaths twisted and turned to negative emotions. Many of the priest died that day as the guardians turned on them. The kingdom stopped providing mana, and all of the evil undead could not be sustained any longer, except one. The temple itself still provide remnants of what little mana it has, so it can only patrol around the area.]

Brendel's mind reviewed the contents of the history behind this temple. Explaining it would require the knowledge of the Souls and Mana Cores, and these were closely guarded secrets from the Holy Cathedral of Flames. If he tried explaining it to Amandina, she would immediately doubt his real identity.

"Well... I kind of feel that the Spectral Knight is kind of friendly, maybe he won't attack us?" He took a few more moments before he answered in a serious tone.

"Lord Brendel." Amandina took a deep breath.

"Look," Brendel patted her shoulders: "Relax. Learn from little Romaine. Don't worry, when have I ever lied?"

[Learn from Romaine?] Amandina turned her head to glance at Romaine. The latter was looking all over the temple, as if she was hoping to see a second Spectral Knight.

"I feel that you're lying a lot..." Amandina mumbled to herself. Events always turned out the way Brendel said it would as if he had foreseen everything.

Brendel smiled in response, as he knew that she was convinced. He waved to his men to allow them to move out, then approached the Nightsong Tiger and borrowed a

heavy crossbow. He felt the materials of the crossbow with his finger, then placed it on the ground with his foot in the cocking stirrup, pulled the string back and placed a bolt on it.

[A treasure amongst any serious gamers.] He remarked to himself.

The Nightsong Tiger kept frowning as he watched Brendel's strange actions. "My lord, do you want me lure the undead?"

"No, I'm the expert in this." Brendel patted the heavy crossbow with confidence, making the string tremble greatly, as if the bolt was going to be released any moment.

The Nightsong Tiger looked at him in great dismay. No matter how he looked at him, Brendel appeared to be an amateur, otherwise he would not have said something so impolite. Many nobles took their reputation more seriously than their lives, and it could be perceived as disloyalty to their lords.

But there was the issue of letting Brendel go out to meet his death. Amandina saw his worry as well and asked: "My lord, is there a problem?"

Brendel looked strangely at her: "What problem is there?"

The girl nearly choked to death.

Brendel laughed: "I know what your worries are, but if I find a particular crystal on the Spectral Knight's, I'll treat everyone to stay at Ampere Seale's most expensive inn and drink their fine wines till everyone drops—"

The Nightsong Tiger and Amandina exchanged glances after they looked at Brendel without confidence.

Chapter 87

The kings and the undead (2)

Brendel smiled and showed off his white teeth when he thought about the Spectral Knight's Crystal.

[Three Billion Tor. That's how high a price for the 'Engraved Spectral Knight's Crystal' was sold for in the auctions. Even up to the second era in the game, there were only a few pay-to-win gamers who could afford this artifact. The chances to get it is incredibly rare, up to the 7th decimal point as a loot drop. Nope, it's definitely impossible to get this item.]

He slung the crossbow over his shoulder and asked: "Do you have magic bolts?"

"Yes." The two Elementalists immediately answered. There were female twin Elves, with grey-orange long hair neatly braided into thin strands behind their pointy ears. Brendel recognized them as Wild Elves from the Orrgesh region. When he was still a member of 'The Godly Force' guild, he had spent a long time fighting the undead and was familiar with the natives there.

The Wild Elves were the children of the female goddess, Gaia, and were closely related to the Rock Dwarves. Their customs were quite similar, and the Wild Elves were closely attuned as Hunters and Elementalists, as well as Woodsman Knights. These three professions had strong attacking stats, and it was quite easy to recognize their daring exploits.

When the Fourth King of Kirrlutz invaded the Lopes' capital, he suffered a great deal of pain under their defense. Even though he won in the end, he paid a great price, till the point where the people of Kirrlutz bore hatred for the Wild Elves.

It was also because of their nature that many of the Wild Elves permeated the human mercenaries, allowing the formation of Mercenaries of Lopes.

"My lord, which type of bolts do you wish to have?" The older twin with a sharper chin and paler skin asked with a melodious voice.

“Bolts of Ice and Wind, how many of these two bolts can you create altogether?”

“If I use all my magic, I can create ten.”

“I can create six.” The younger twin answered with a crisp voice.

“Good,” Brendel cut them off: “Give me seven each for the two types I asked for, then give me two Bolts of Guidance.”

The two sisters exchanged puzzled looks with each other, then back at their lord. In the end the older sister asked with a small voice: “My lord, I understand if you wanted the Bolts of Binding Wind and Bolts of Shattering Ice, but isn’t the Bolt of Guidance paired with an additional Magic property?”

Bolts that were created with magic could have multiple properties applied to them, especially when if higher ranking magic was used. If someone wasted the usage of a Dragon-Slaying Bolt, that would be a great loss. Therefore the Bolts of Guidance would have a prefix usually placed in front, and the most common type of such bolts was the Fire Bolts of Guidance.

The only time when the Bolts of Guidance were typically used, was when the nobles who wanted to cheat during a hunting competition—

Brendel answered with a cheerful smile.

“Don’t worry, the both of you just need to follow what I asked for. When you’re done, go behind the back and rest alongside with Amandina and Romaine. You can leave the battle ahead to the other mercenaries.”

The older sister nodded. Even though she had her doubts, she knew that her lord was overly confident and incredibly stubborn, and wisely chose to not question his decisions. However, her sister frowned deeply and asked: “But, my lord—”

“Tia.” The older sister shouted with strictness in her voice.

Tia looked at her older sister in surprise, understood her intentions, and ceased any thoughts of speaking again.

Brendel’s eyes went wide for a moment.

[Surely... These are real people. Though all of them here are summoned from a card, they had their own judgment, memories and feelings. Even Amandina thought they are truly my retainers.]

Brendel thought about Ciel's sacrifice for a moment, and a bitter smile formed on his lips.

[Did I appear like a cold and cruel lord? Am I not smiling enough in front of them? The sisters' reactions feel like they are treading carefully around me. Surely there isn't a huge misunderstanding somewhere right?]

He suddenly turned his head back and saw Amandina trying to suppress his giggles while Romaine was smiling freely at him, as if they were watching a great show.

[Am I still your lord? What's with your attitudes!] Brendel grumbled in his mind but tried to squeeze a cheerful smile.

"Don't worry about it..." He said to the girls.

The bolts were quickly handed over to him after a short while. Brendel required only half of them back in his world, but he made sure to be cautious because there was no second try in this world.

[Two Elementalists of the Second Circle would not be able to help out much in the battle ahead, so it's good to allow them to rest now and prepare for any unforeseen events later on.]

He placed each bolt to the holding area of the heavy crossbow to allow the quick access to them. He raised his head and found the mercenaries to be in place. He was more relaxed now that the mercenaries followed his orders carefully, but the Nightsong Tiger crunched his already weathered face into further furrows and wrinkles as he observed his lord's actions.

"I already said everything is going to be fine, Commander." Brendel sighed.

No matter how much he explained, the Nightsong Tiger refused to leave his side. He had the same concern as Ciel had, and if there was any danger that arose, he would be able to sacrifice himself to give Brendel enough time to escape.

"My lord, please allow me to accompany you. Even if I am to perish, you can still revive

me. Please treat me like a shield.” The Nightsong Tiger answered without any fear.

[Revive, revive. Hear, hear, that would mean that I have to pay an additional maintenance fee for you and I have to wait an additional day to resummon you, Ser Nightsong Tiger!]

Brendel listened to his reasoning with exasperation and humor. He looked back at Amandina and Romaine, making sure there were far enough where Romaine was unable to hear them, before whispering to the Nightsong Tiger in the softest voice possible.

“Do your men know about the Planeswalker’s magic to revive you?”

The Nightsong Tiger shook his head: “Each Card of Fates has its own core, or you can think of them as the leader. My men are branches of the main core, and within this card, I am the core who helps the Planeswalker maintain the branches and attach this card to another related card or magic.”

“There’s a setting like that?” Brendel furrowed his brows as he thought of something: “That would mean each ‘Core’ has their different knowledge about the Planeswalker?”

“Yes, and it has something to do with the cards themselves.”

“Then do you know how to get a card out of the Graveyard?”

“The Black Cards are mysterious and could easily shift out of life and death. If you wish to use a strategy around fishing the cards out of a Graveyard, then you would probably need to acquire the cards with Dark Elements. Such cards are typically found in swamps, graves, or places with the undead like to gather.”

Brendel nodded and prepared his bow.

“Very well. You can stay here, but do not make any sudden moves.” He gazed on the derelict temple beneath the cold moonlight.

[It probably has been two hundred years since any sentient life entered here, ever since the citizens of Aouine left this place behind.]

His thoughts strayed a little as he checked the time. In the game, luring a monster was a considerable skill, and pro-gamers were able to predict their path down to their

position. Against monsters with lower intelligence, remembering the path was sufficient, against sentient monsters, it was a battle between wits.

Brendel had never stopped practicing this particular skillset, even though it was mostly a job that Hunters took. However, a party was sometimes found lacking of such a profession, and as a Warrior, it was expected to have some experience in luring.

“Eight, seven...” He muttered to himself.

The Nightsong Tiger did not understand what he was counting. His actions were completely bizarre to the natives of this world.

With the advancement of the technology in the world, the artificial intelligence in the game had reached to a point where they accurately mimicked humans. However, the gamers still perceived them as numbers and data to a certain extent, and calculated their actions like a precision machine to perceive fluctuations in the data.

Everything had their own rules.

Brendel estimated the remaining time, and the crossbolt’s trigger was pressed with his finger. The first bolt notched into the crossbow was an ordinary bolt, which sang across the air with a shrilling scream, parting the misty air into two as it flew in an arc to the temple’s grounds covered with shadow.

“Six, five...”

The noise from the bolt immediately attracted the attention of the hostile undead, appearing quickly to the sides of the temple to investigate.

[Here he comes!] The Nightsong Tiger was tense as he gripped his axe tightly.

But Brendel threw away his heavy crossbow and took out a shortbow which hung from his waist belt, another incomprehensible action in the Nightsong Tiger’s eyes.

Brendel merely signed with his hand.

‘Retreat, now!’

Chapter 88

The Kings and the dead (3)

The Spectral Knight immediately discovered the arrow's flight and turned its horse silently. It raised its lance as the horse charged across the land, splitting the misty night apart and leaving dust behind it.

Brendel's reaction was instant; he pushed the Nightsong Tiger away and rolled to his side. Three loud crashes resounded throughout the forest as the Spectral Knight smashed through with a vortex of air in front of it, destroying everything in its path.

The enemy thrust out its lance to clear the debris on it. A path as wide as ten feet had been gouged out, and both Brendel and the Nightsong Tiger had narrowly escaped its charge.

[Fuck, Vortex Strike?! Are you fucking kidding me? You used an ultimate skill right off the bat?!]

Brendel swiftly wiped the cold sweat on his forehead and got up immediately. He discovered the Spectral Knight had raised its right hand and acted on his foreboding feeling. The Vortex Strike had the same effect as the White Raven Sword Arte as an Area of Effect attack.

[If we didn't escape in time that would be the end of us—]

The Nightsong Tiger was overwrought with frayed nerves as well. He had heard of rumors about how terrifying the Spectral Knight could be, but when he came to face it, he discovered that it was even beyond imagination.

He spat onto the ground, thinking to himself that he still had to fight like a greenhorn at his age. He suddenly realized he had not checked on Brendel, and immediately turned to his direction, fearing the worst, but the youth had a resolute face that did not seem to falter even after the frightening attack.

He took a deep breath.

“We can’t defeat it!” He shouted to Brendel. He was still a veteran mercenary, and he quickly gauged the difference between the enemy and their forces.

Brendel merely signaled him to be silent. His eyes trained onto the enemy carefully, studying the designs and patterns of the gothic armor. It was the crystallization of the old grandmasters in Vaunte’s history, and the armor was glimmering with faint light. Even the horse was wearing heavy metal armor and he would not be able to cut through it with a sword. The long lance that was pointing on the ground seemed to extend its length with a dazzling brightness, with the Spectral Knight gripping tightly onto it.

[The Spectral Knight’s Element type is causing my eyes to fail in discerning its length...]

When any profession reached the Gold-rank, they would more or less display their Element type, and while the Spectral Knight had not reached that level, it was an Elite creature that rivaled a Gold-ranked fighter.

The Nightsong Tiger got up to his feet in a rush to try and stop Brendel’s next action and pull him back. In his eyes, Brendel was utterly mad as they were completely not the match of the monster, and its prowess had gone beyond a normal Gold-rank fighter.

Brendel ignored his shouts and notched a silver bolt onto the crossbow, took aim, and released it.

The Bolt of Ice flew just across the Spectral Knight’s head and exploded onto a tree. A silver mist of ice slightly grazed the monster’s left shoulder and left a touch of frost on it.

Brendel blushed a little and coughed to hide his embarrassment. Due to his strained nerves, he had forgotten that he was merely proficient in the weapon in his current state, and no longer the expert warrior in the past.

Even so, the meager damage had actually caused the Spectral Knight to miss its marks by a centimeter. It had actually raised its lance to attack and a silver line of light swept across both their heads just after Brendel attacked it.

When the Nightsong Tiger quickly turned his head behind, he was in time to witness the trees’ crowns lopped off and falling down to leave behind the tall stumps. His mouth went wide and he nearly lost his ability to breath. This level of strength had

gone beyond what he knew was normal and he wondered if the trees were actually packed with explosives instead.

Brendel saw that the Nightsong Tiger did not notice his problem with accuracy and relaxed a little. It would be a disastrous result if the mercenary commander suddenly tried to interfere with his actions at this point.

[Ten seconds. Using Vortex Strike two times in a row requires a great amount of Soul Fire, and he's going to be on cooldown.]

He notched another bolt into his crossbow and extended the amount of time to aim.

The Nightsong Tiger had regained his senses and could only watch him helplessly as the youth half knelt like a statue without moving, while the Spectral Knight rode slowly towards the youth. It was akin to suicide in his eyes.

The second Bolt of Ice was released after three seconds and exploded around the Spectral Knight's waist, causing the mist of ice to cover more than half of its body. Brendel confirmed the damage with the Window Stats in his eyes, and dealt 13 points of damage, as well as slowing the attack speed and recovery by 12.5%.

[The effects have not changed as compared to the game.]

Brendel sighed with relief as he noted the changes, while his hands did not stop reloading the bolts. Normal physical attacks were considerably weakened against Spectral Creatures, but weapons imbued with magic bypassed such defenses. If the twin Elementalists had higher levels, the effects could go up to 50% with a single strike.

[4 more bolts left.]

"There's actually an effect?" The Nightsong Tiger's experience also allowed him to perceive the difference as the Spectral Knight slowed down.

"Stop stating the obvious." Brendel heard his mutterings and snapped at him. He was annoyed at the mercenary for causing him to have a harder time.

"But my lord! We are still not his match even if you slow him down—"

"And?" Brendel started to move back as the Spectral Knight rode towards him.

“We should leave this place. Compared to this monster, I would rather fight with the Black Disciples!”

Brendel could not be bothered with his yells and threw a bundle of magic bolts at him. The Nightsong commander received it with a questioning look: “What are these for?”

“Are you here to help me or drag me down?” The Nightsong Tiger’s face turned slightly red, but he kept grumbling in his heart about his lord being an hopeless idiot or a fearless fool. However, he was a renowned mercenary and would rather obey than to disregard his orders.

Brendel shot out his third bolt and missed, but his fourth bolt struck the Spectral Knight’s right shoulder and turned his armor to be covered with a thick layer of ice, and was even more effective the previous bolt, causing it to now move slower by thirty percent. The Nightsong Tiger was secretly delighted to see that the enemy to be affected, but Brendel quickly called for him to retreat to the location of their planned ambush.

The Nightsong Tiger’s eyes nearly popped out when he saw that the Spectral Knight suddenly began to accelerate in spite of its rigid movements. It was almost comical to look at, but he felt like his blood was turning to ice because he was convinced that it was going to do the very first strike that it did again.

However, it was merely a Charge skill and not a combined Vortex Strike with a Charge skill.

Brendel also used his Charge skill.

The human and the undead streaked across the forest. It was a surreal sight where two lines were drawn across a canvas filled with trees, continuously extending themselves while time seemed to stop. Brendel fled in a manner that made use of quick twists and turns, while the Spectral Knight was forced to follow him in an awkward manner because of its mount.

When Brendel finally stopped, the Nightsong Tiger who had ran in a straight line nearly found himself at a loss for words.

“My lord, that’s—” The Nightsong Tiger shouted to Brendel who was considerably close to him.

“The Charge skill. It’s a technique that all knights should learn.” Brendel glanced at him: “As a Mercenary of Lopes, surely you would know this at least.”

“No, my lord, I want to ask how did you know that it would use a Charge skill at that moment.”

“Oh? When I was at the Orrgesh region, my primary job was to fight against Spectral Knights. Did I not mention this before?” Brendel quipped.

The truth was Brendel was also quite afraid as he felt his heart beating loudly all the way to his throat. The Spectral Knight had traveled a ridiculous amount of distance during its first attack and they were nearly a hundred meters apart from each other, but it had been reduced to no more than fifty meters.

[The error of margin is no more than a meter...] Brendel peeped behind him. Beneath the Spectral Knight’s mask laid two white flames for its eyes and it looked directly at him, seemingly puzzled as to who the intruder was.

Brendel shuddered slightly. He found that he was relying purely on instinct rather than experience because the enemy was much faster than he expected.

===== Amandina’s POV =====

Amandina gasped softly when she saw the two lines charging across the forest. The mercenaries behind her were completely silent and taken in by the sight where Brendel seemed to always stay one step ahead at turning at the best possible moment, as if he had eyes behind his back who constantly kept watch of the Spectral Knight. The chase only lasted for a few seconds, but they recognized the significant amount of danger that Brendel was in.

Romaine bit her lips as she watched with excited eyes at Brendel’s escape.

“If every Highland Knight youth in Karsuk is capable of such feats, then Aouine would be one of the strongest kingdom!” Amandina drew in a deep breath: “My lord... You’re a liar—”

===== Brendel’s POV =====

But Brendel was not in an optimistic position like she thought. The Spectral Knight’s Soul Fire was being replenished again, and the Vortex Strike was not only the trump

card that it had. He quickly signaled to the Nightsong Tiger and they made their way to the mountain's valley, where they would gain a greater advantage because the sharp rocks affected the Spectral Knight's horse.

"Nightsong Tiger."

"Yes, my lord."

"Prepare to use the Bolts of Wind."

"What?"

Brendel pointed to the Spectral Knight's horse, and the Nightsong Tiger quickly understood after a short pause. Even though the latter kept rejecting the idea to fight with the monster, he found himself ready to engage it.

Chapter 89

The Kings and the dead (4)

The Spectral Knight raised its spear for the third time, moving much slower than before, and the Nightsong Tiger shot a bolt before it was ready to attack. The sky-blue Bolt of Wind struck the Spectral Knight's horse from the front, and trails of colored wind wrapped around its hooves.

The binding magic was effective, and both the Spectral Knight and its mount were slowed down once again.

[-12.7%]

Brendel immediately pulled the Nightsong Tiger to safety while he read the effective data. The Spectral Knight's attack had landed on their original positions.

[That projectile was almost spot on for accuracy. For someone who has the stats of just an Iron-ranked fighter, the Mercenaries of Lopes are quite impressive indeed. Right now the distance we have is giving me enough time to read his moves, and we just need to lead him to the ambush.]

The ambush was no more than fifty meters away. Brendel believed that the effects of the bolts were going to last more than two minutes, which gave them enough time to lure it.

The Spectral Knight thrust its lance after missing the third Vortex Strike. The lance's stab through the air seemed to create a vacuum, which created an explosion of air rushing to fill its void, distorting the vision of the nearby trees into a maelstrom, causing them to break and crunch loudly, with the void rushing towards the two men.

Brendel quickly dragged the Nightsong Tiger behind the cover of the largest boulder while he summoned the Magic Control card in his hand. *(TL: Magic Control, a Planeswalker's card that seizes control of a magic.)*

[This time it's Seismic Blast. Let's see if this still works.]

The card lit up brightly and the blast of air was directed back at the Spectral Knight, causing its body to shake massively. Brendel saw that it did more than three hundred damage and chortled in his mind. The thrusting of the lance made it seemed like a physical attack, but the gamers eventually discovered that it was Soul magic, and countered it by sealing off such properties to render it useless.

Because the Magic Control card was a counter-magic spell, he thought that it might work. The damage caused it to lose a third of its health, and Brendel was certain that it entered into a Stunned state, and would enter Stage Two of its boss phase. Brendel quickly pulled the Nightsong Tiger to his feet and they started to run to the location of the ambush.

The intelligence stat of the undead Spectral Knight was considerably high, so he was also certain that it would not use the same attack again.

When the Spectral Knight shrugged off its Stunned status, the two men had already reached the ambush point with shallow breaths. They were pushed to their utmost limits from the very start. Even though the entire exchange was done in less than thirty seconds, they were starting to get tired. Brendel's forehead was full of perspiration, which was no better than his own.

The Nightsong Tiger was certain that the Spectral Knight had not shown off its full prowess, so he looked at Brendel and wondered what other tricks he had that could reverse the situation.

Everyone at the ambush's location was also thinking of the same thing.

The Elementalists twins felt their limbs were turning cold when they saw the Spectral Knight made its first attack. The level of how it fought was beyond any battles they had before, and the strength that it had was beyond common sense. The younger sister even trembled as the older sister hugged her tightly, with both of them gritting their teeth and staying where they were. Any other mercenaries would surely have run away.

There was an infamous incident in the game where the gamers incited a war against the NPCs against the Kirrlutz's White Lucerne city with a population of five hundred thousand. Eleven Gold-ranked gamers fought in the war and caused half of the city to be destroyed. Even though the gamers were routed at the end, the damage that was caused by these high ranking adventurers were fully shown.

Every kingdom eventually tightened the control of such adventurers after that incident.

The damage of the Spectral Knight that it caused with the Seismic Blast silenced Amandina. The unending might of the Spectral Knight appeared like it could distort nature, and even though it was an illusion, it made her feel nothing but despair.

The Spectral Knight started to charge forward towards Brendel once again, covering an immense distance in a short period of time, and everyone held their breaths.

But a miracle seemed to happen.

The Spectral Knight suddenly stopped after charging through a certain point. It raised its head and stared at the two men in front of it, then attacked with its lance twice, causing two blasts of wind pressure to sweep across them.

The two currents of air rushed forward and caused deep gullies, forcing the nearby trees to bend and groan, but before it could strike Brendel and the Nightsong Tiger, they vanished.

[[[[[What?]]]]]

The Spectral Knight paced back and forth against an invisible line, swinging its spear again and again, trying to slay the two men in front of it, but it was quickly proven that it was pointless to do so. Everyone started to wonder if Mother Marsha had given her blessings to their lord.

Amandina was initially surprised but she quickly became suspicious of how the events turned out.

Romaine was also in a state of nervousness, and she sighed with relief and showed a faint smile.

[Auntie, little Romaine has an outstanding sweetheart—]

The mercenaries started to cheer loudly, while the Nightsong Tiger looked at Brendel in disbelief. Brendel had not relaxed in the slightest. He had estimated the distance correctly but the battle was not over.

“Everyone is to enter the attacking range of the Spectral Knight.”

And everyone looked at him in disbelief.

“My lord, isn’t this good enough? We can hit him without being worried that he would hurt us!” One of the mercenaries said, while a few others took out their crossbow and prepared to aim at it. They were somehow worried that their lord had gone half mad.

“My lord...” The Nightsong Tiger began to speak.

“These are my orders! Are you going to obey them, or not?” Brendel roared loudly. The situation was not as simple as the mercenaries thought. Perhaps they thought that the undead was unintelligent, but if the situation continued as it was, the Spectral Knight would return to the temple.

He was the first to move into the attacking range of the Spectral Knight, which quickly reacted by slashing its lance in his direction. While he nimbly avoided the attacks, he shot another Bolt of Ice and caused damage to it.

Even though the mercenaries were unwilling to fight within its range, they still moved in once they saw Brendel did so. With the cumulative effects of the magic bolts, they were able to avoid the slow ranged attacks made by the undead monster.

The undead monster kept striking at them but it did not use the powerful Seismic Blast, and the Vortex Strike was continuously interrupted by Brendel and the Nightsong Tiger. The mercenaries were delighted to see that the enemy could not reach them as they continued to scurry around it like rats, poking and hurling their projectiles at it, completely disregarding their image on how unsightly and cowardly they were acting.

The Nightsong Tiger could only expressed his astonishment in his heart. If the prowess of the Spectral Knight was beyond his imagination, the fight they had right now was the most bizarre he ever had.

Brendel was feeling a little smug when he saw the Nightsong Tiger’s expression. The gamers had spent countless hours trying to bend the rules in the game, and the endless creativity they had created numerous strategies in the virtual world. In his former life, there was a well-known meme:

‘The more freedom a gamer has, the more cheats they possess.’

They would always seek the easiest solution to solve a problem and never stick to common sense. If any resources and advantages were available, they would use it in

order to defeat the enemies beyond their means.

Brendel believed in such a creed. They represented the crystallization of wisdom that would allow him to progress through the darkness and conquer this world that was full of difficulties and pain. He took out the remaining Bolts of Ice and tossed them to the mercenary commander.

“My lord?” The Nightsong Tiger was confused.

Chapter 90

The kings and the dead (6)

“I’m going to go behind his back.” Brendel replied.

The Spectral Knight was not going to stick around till it was finally killed by the cowardly mercenaries. Brendel checked on the HP of the monster and quickly prepared ahead. Once it reached about ten percent of its health, it would retreat decisively, and he could not allow his prey to escape.

“My lord, that’s too dangerous.” The Nightsong Tiger looked blankly at Brendel for a second before he guessed what he was about to do and tried to stop him: “Let me do it for you.”

“You know what I’m about to do?” Brendel’s incredulous reply came.

“You can teach me, my lord,” He answered earnestly: “We’re your loyal men, and you should leave this to us.”

“...I wish I can leave it to you as well,” Brendel smiled as he took out the long rope that was prepared earlier: “Sadly, you can’t do this task.”

“Why, my lord?”

“Do you know alchemy?”

The Nightsong Tiger’s mouth opened wordlessly before he rolled his eyes.

Brendel truly did not wish to do it personally. It was always up to him to clear up some form of mess in the past, but he had been worried about it every time he did so. Any mistakes here would not mean that he lost a level but death. The only safety line for him was the Unyielding talent, and as long as he protected his heart and head well, he could at least have a chance to survive, or at least write his final will.

The battle persisted for some time. The mercenaries used fortified crossbows that were banned, but most nobles closed an eye when it came to their usage. It was highly

uncommon for most citizens because the people required at least 5 OZ in strength to use it properly, yet the damage done to the Spectral Knight was almost negligible.

In addition to that, the armor that it wore was resistant to physical attacks. The only time where it truly took damage was when the bolts struck critical points of the armor, but the Spectral Knight was not a wooden doll that sat there quietly. Despite the loss in speed from the debilitating effects from the magic bolts, it was still agile enough to avoid most of the projectiles.

Brendel was not in a particular hurry. The Nightsong Tiger had enough magic bolts to make the Spectral Knight weakened for at least ten minutes. With that amount of time, a dozen Iron-ranked mercenaries would deal enough damage to a Boss-level creature for it to retreat, and the current enemy was only an Elite-level undead.

He slipped quietly behind its back while it was distracted by the mercenaries. The distance he took was neither far nor near, about half a soccer field. It was the perfect balance for him. If he was any closer, the undead creature might notice him, if he was any further, his accuracy might drop too much.

His goal was not to backstab it. Even if he attacked the Spectral Knight, the damage done would not be effective to finish off the remaining 10% HP.

[If I am already at a Silver-rank, if I already learned some form of bow-related skill, if I managed to land a critical hit, just maybe...] *(TL: Silver rank = Over level 31)*

Brendel's mind wandered a little as he explored the possibility of a backstab, but it was never going to work.

He glanced at the battlefield one more time before he concentrated on his task. The silence was deafening in this area compared to the battlefield. He parted the foliage and drew an Alchemy Magic Circle on the ground with his longsword.

Tamar would have persuaded Brendel not to do it if he saw what the youth was doing. After the Alchemy Magic Circle was drawn, he drew a Blood Magic Formation which was going to strip away his health.

He placed the rope onto the Magic Circle along with the Soul Crystal he took from the intermediate-ranking necromancer at Fortress Riedon. Brendel lamented over the usage of it. It was not going to be easy to get something like this again until many years later. There was no better replacement for it, otherwise he would not have wasted

such a rare material.

He cut his finger with the longsword and dropped it onto the formation, and his heart tightened greatly. Brendel felt his vitality drain, and the Stats Window reported a loss of half of his health. Brendel had tried to prepare himself for it, but he still got a shock over how much health he lost.

He rubbed his forehead a little and was thankful that the Soul Crystal was not of a higher quality. If it was, he might have been sucked dry. But that notion suddenly made him remember that thing in his bag. He flipped it open and a golden light poured out from it. The light glowed and dimmed with rhythm, almost like it was an actual heart. *(TL: The Golden Demonic Tree's fruit, The Golden Apple. In case anyone was wonderin.)*

Brendel sighed. This was a secret that he had not told anyone. He was certain that there was someone who placed it in his bag. What he did not understand was who the person was. At best they were mere acquaintances, but why would that person do something like this?

[What motive is there for that person to this... To make me a scapegoat? Or to test me?]

Brendel felt unhappy when he thought about it. This thing was highly important to some people, but it was not of much use to him. He needed about four more levels to reach level 25 and allow him to activate the second talent, and this thing in his bag was not something he needed. After a few moments of pondering, he still did not arrive at any plausible answer and quickly returned to reality.

His biggest trouble was still the Spectral Knight, and any other matters could be solved later.

He focused on the transmuted object in the Magic Circle. The ordinary rope had turned completely black and even gave out a shimmer from time to time. It looked quite impressive and he was reminded of a shiny new pair of handcuffs.

Brendel mocked himself for thinking of that. This was clearly a horrifying product of alchemy. It was merely a simple rope infused with the energy from a Soul Crystal. Because the quality of the Soul Crystal was so high, it actually turned out to look like this.

[If Tamar was to see this... He would come after me with his legendary scythe— Wait, he hasn't reached the grandmaster status yet.]

Brendel corrected himself as he stood up to watch the battlefield again. The Spectral Knight had managed to graze a few mercenaries when Brendel was not there to interrupt it. They were bleeding slightly, but in exchange they became even more cautious than before. Just like Brendel had predicted, the battle took close to ten minutes before the Spectral Knight finally retreated.

Its upper body creaked loudly as the armor was hindered by the ice. The Nightsong Tiger shot the final Bolt of Ice at it, covering it with another layer of ice, but the speed at which it fled was beyond their belief.

[The Charge skill.] Brendel remarked to himself.

The Nightsong Tiger's quick reactions allowed him to fire another Bolt of Wind, but the effect was not any better as it continued to speed away. The mercenaries wanted to pursue it, but the Nightsong Tiger stopped them. It was too dangerous for them to cross that invisible line. Once they did so, the undead monster was free to attack them directly without restrictions.

He was certain that his mysterious lord was planning something to stop it, and he simply cast his eyes into the forest.

Indeed, two dazzling bolts shot out one after another, causing two white lines to extend out in the dark forest— Such was the sight before him.

Chapter 91

The Kings and the dead (6)

“The Bolts of Accuracy!” The twin Elementalists spoke at the same time. They were the ones who made the Magic Bolts and clearly the best people to recognize what the bolts were. The Bolts of Accuracy were uniquely imbued with Light Magic, and even the other mercenaries could make a guess.

But they did not understand what their lord was attempting to do with the magic bolts. There was no difference in damage even if a normal bolt was used. What was different was the accuracy.

[Is there some weakness somewhere on the monster?] One of the mercenaries thought.

However, the bolts nailed themselves deeply onto two giant trees with two dull thuds, completely disappearing from sight.

“Hold on... The bolts are off their marks?” One of them said.

Everyone had a strange thought. A few even expressed showed disbelief as to how someone could actually missed their marks with the Bolts of accuracy, but they were quickly interrupted by the sharpshooters in the group.

“Look closer, do you see that—”

“Is that a line?”

“No, it looks like a rope.”

They finally saw that there was a rope connected to the bolts at a person’s chest height.

[[[Anti cavalry rope trap!]]]

They were quickly surprised by Brendel’s ingenuity, but some of the magic savvy men pointed out that the Spectral Knight was a spirit creature, which was resistant against

physical objects and hardly effective.

The Spectral Knight noticed the bolts and charged towards Brendel's direction without considering it as a trap. Unfortunately it did not expect the rope to actually work against it. The black ropes emitted black light as the Spectral Knight approached it. A living warhorse of considerable strength might actually break it apart, but the Soul Energy in the rope was incredibly effective against the Spectral Knight.

That unexpected barrier threw it off its mount and its entire body was launched straight into the air. Brendel had waited for that moment where it was helpless in the air. The agility it had on its mount was too high for him to aim properly, but now he was able to attack it without fail.

"Flamme!" Brendel raised the ruby ring towards the Spectral Knight. Red light poured forth like a laser from the ruby ring after a short delay and struck the Spectral Knight's chest.

It was as if any other light sources dimmed and the surroundings turned darkened. Flames with the intensity of the sun's brightness flared from the center of the Spectral Knight. An explosive blast resounded throughout the whole forest that even Brendel had to cover his ears. The surroundings of the Spectral Knight had completely evaporated while the sandy ground turned into glass.

The foliage that was further away had turned black and was smoking from the intense heat.

"Oss!" Brendel followed up with another merciless attack with his other ring and a blast of wind directly struck the Spectral Knight. The air distorted as the blast of wind struck the Spectral Knight before the sound reached Brendel's ears.

The mercenaries watched the events unfold in stunned silence. The younger Elementalist muttered to herself: "Fireball, Wind Blast, is our lord a Silver-ranked Elementalist..."

The older sister combed her hair neatly after it was affected by the gust of wind: "The magic came from artifacts."

Her voice did not disguise the surprise she had. They had won the battle without anyone dying and got away with mild injuries.

Brendel confirmed it with the Stats Window. He had successfully risen by two levels.

[Two more levels before I can select the next talent. The first talent decides the different physical attributes, while the second talents dictates that path of what a character can take on in the future. It's the most important talent amongst the others.]

"It's a pity that the fireball magic takes time to activate. If it's an instant spell I wouldn't have to pull off all these stunts." Brendel sighed as he watched the burning trees. The flames would soon die down as they were made from magical properties.

He made a long sigh and drank thirstily from his waterskin. This battle was not as exhausting as the ones he had earlier, where he found it hard to even lift a finger. However this was highly dependent on being flawless in executing the strategy, and every mistake caused him to shake in fright.

His reflection on the battle quickly turned into shock as he found that the Spectral Knight did not turn into dust. It was lying quietly on the ground as the mount stopped beside, nuzzling against its hand.

The Soul Fire slowly disappeared on both the Spectral Knight and the mount at different speeds. The glowing armors on them started to crack, before vanishing into the air like tufts of smoke, revealing the body under the heavy armor.

"A unicorn?!" Brendel first identified the mount.

He gaped at the transformation of the supposedly evil beast, revealing a body with bristling muscles that could only belong to the fittest warhorse. A single horn was adorned on its forehead which easily disclosed its identity.

[— Wait, but doesn't the legends in Vaunte state that only the purest of maidens can ride a unicorn?]

He turned his head to look down, and spat out the water in his mouth. Some of it even went into his nose and made him cough uncontrollably. The armor that covered the Spectral Knight had completely disappeared, and a young Elven girl was lying there like a sleeping princess dressed with an finely tailored dress, or perhaps to be more accurate it was the spirit of the Elven girl that was there.

A silver seal was still present on her forehead, which signified that she had not become an adult as according to the Elven customs, perhaps one who was unfortunate enough

to die early. Brendel's pupils narrowed in utter dismay as he realized what he had been fighting against.

[A young girl?! That was... what we were fighting against?]

Brendel was seized with mental anguish as memories of the past came flooding back. The drowning blood scents of iron-rust and distressing screams as the slave merchants slaughtered the gamers and NPCs one by one, till they were finally routed. Did it not resemble the same actions they took when Brendel led his men to slay this undead monster?

Everyone else had come up with the intention to congratulate Brendel as they approached him, but once they saw the real figure of the enemy they had fought, they were taken by surprise.

"This..." The Nightsong Tiger looked at the translucent sprit and did not know what words to utter.

Amandina was also startled, and she breathlessly asked: "...That thing from before... Is her?"

Brendel gritted her teeth as he nodded.

It might have been quite inconceivable that a young girl was capable of the feats that she did earlier, but that was the truth. In the back of his mind, he had faintly thought of the possibility of the idea that it was some corruption of a former Elven king that made it turn into a Spectral Knight, but seeing it as the girl in front of him made him shudder.

Amandina frowned but accepted the explanation.

"Do we kill her?" A small voice asked.

Brendel turned to the voice and found that it was the younger Elementalist. The older sister only furrowed her brows, but it was clear that both of them were conflicted over the decision to kill a fellow Elf.

The Silver Elves and Wild Elves were quite different. The Wild Elves had sunny dispositions, were kind and agreeable. They got along with humans more so than many other races, and even stayed in the human cities, as well as marrying them.

But the Silver Elves were aloof and the true lineage of the noble Elves, stayed faithfully to the prophecies and avoid the material world, giving the world a mysterious and venerated image. They were usually taller than the humans, having lithe figures and graceful actions. They were the earliest descriptions of 'nobles' and seemed unreachable like the moon.

Such was the difference between the pair of twin Wild Elves and the spirit of the Silver Elf lying before them.

Brendel felt a pair of eyes on him, and he turned towards Romaine. She seemed to ask the same question, but she yearned to hear the answer she expected the most.

Brendel licked his lips nervously and shook his head. He turned his gaze back at the spirit. The Soul Energy was breaking down as the spirit became more transparent. Even though she had not disappeared yet, she would not be able to hold on much longer.

"She is already dead. What you see now is the soul disappearing."

Romaine uttered a disappointed sound.

Brendel was also feeling puzzled. The damage that she received was far beyond a Spectral Knight could handle. Even if she was ten levels higher, she should had been turned into dust and not appear like a sleeping beauty.

Chapter 92

The kings and the dead (7)

===== ??? POV =====

Am I in a dream?

The Silver Elven Court was as perfect as my memories. The saintly white luster of the walls, ceilings, corridors and fences.

How long ago have I not dreamt of this...

“Sister.”

“What did you address me?” That voice in my dreams became sharp as usual.

“I-I’m sorry.”

That dream...

I remember my mother said to me, when I pressed gently on my chest, I would be able to feel my warmth and life from my ‘heart’ with my fingertips. Only when one touched there, would they feel at peace.

It was precisely because of that, that my memories of the Cherau village became clearer, and how have I yearned to return to that time...

“Father king, my noble sister... I am sorry. It is all my fault.”

===== Brendel’s POV =====

Brendel’s mind shuffled through different answers as to why the girl’s spirit was still around. He had calmed down from the shock, and thought if he saw it through a gamer’s perspective, this would be a developer’s immunity settings, that it was a follow-up to a quest and possibly the key to activating the Altar, and even though he could probably find the answer on his own—

Did it not look like the solution was in front of him?

[If this is a mission, then this little girl is going to wake up pretty soon. The only exceptions thus far in this world are the Planeswalker and the cards...]

Brendel looked up at the starry sky and waited patiently, wondering if the spirits also adhered to the game.

The mercenaries whispered amongst themselves, as Amandina grabbed Romaine's hand and watched the Silver Elf warily. No one dared to approach her, as the unicorn was still beside her. The might exhibited by the Spectral Knight's mount was still fresh in their minds and nobody knew whether it would go on a rampage.

But it was just as Brendel had predicted, the Elven girl's eyelids moved and opened.

It was a pair of slightly vacant silver eyes with a little confusion in her eyes, which quickly seemed to be poured in with many things all at once. It was as if memories and complicated emotions filled her eyes up as it suddenly flickered with comprehension.

Her body moved a little, and she turned her head around to look at everyone around her.

She seemed to recall something, before she her brows were crunched into a sorrowful expression. Her body curled up as she coughed vehemently, and she brought her hands to her lips. Once she uncovered them, her hands were filled with silver blood. She reached out with her hands, trying to grasp the silver lance on the ground.

The mercenaries pulled out their weapons and were on their guard, and a few of them wanted to stop her.

"My lord, she has no more strength left to fight us." Amandina quickly tried to persuade Brendel into stopping the mercenaries. She recognized the expressions of the Silver Elf, which was how she felt when she was at her lowest point.

[Indeed, she has no strength left.]

Brendel nodded. The spirit had reached the final stage of fading away. Even if he was to stand in front of her, she would not even be able to raise her weapon to strike him down. The spirit was holding on to some wish or mission to persist in this world. It was also the source of her Soul Energy. Once it was gone, she would have no more

connection with this world.

After a short moment, the girl suddenly stopped and stared at her transparent hand. It was becoming fainter and seemed like it was going to disappear anytime.

Brendel raised his hand to make everyone stop, which was not necessary to do so. If the Spectral Knight struck fear in the mercenaries' hearts, then the Elven girl in front of them was so weak and pitiful that they felt like they needed to protect her.

"Messere... Am I going to... disappear?" The Silver Elf stared at her hand while she spoke. Her voice was like the fabled nightingales within the deepest forest.

Her tone made the twin Elementalists gasp. The Wild Elves were considered as great musicians, and they could hear how beautiful and trance-like the voice was.

[There are two Elven blood lineage that were derived from the Golden Bloodline. The first is the Silver Elves, the latter is the Mist Elves. As expected, the voice from a Silver Elf is beautiful.]

Brendel nodded silently to the Silver Elf's question. The related quest indeed came, but he felt he was unable to feel happy. If it was in the game, he would have seen her as a NPC, but at this moment, he discovered that he was unable to cut his emotions off.

"Was..." Amandina asked timidly in a small voice: "That Spectral Knight... you?"

The Elven girl did not speak but silently nodded. Her arms and legs were becoming transparent as well. She looked up to sky with a melancholic smile, and said with a tearful voice: "I... killed so many people... Mother Marsha, must have abandoned me..."

"That is not your fault." Brendel's voice sounded angry.

[The Holy Cathedral of Flames was the faction that caused this incident. Mother Marsha would not have gotten angry if it was not for their interference. As punishment, luck as never been on Aouine side ever since then.]

Brendel had essentially made sense out of the entire situation.

The priests of the Holy Cathedral of Flames probably wanted to change the oath between the Elven kings, the Elven Goddess and Mother Marsha. He personally had changed similar contracts before as a gamer, and the risk presented to him was

acceptable precisely because he was a gamer. The citizens of Aouine must have been either bold or greedy enough to attempt something like this, and the conclusion was distorting the oath and allowing evil spirits to invade the sanctuary.

It was a tragedy.

The evil spirits surely did not stop at controlling just the little girl, and many more Elves must have been possessed. Despite that, the high ranking priests were not simple pushovers and a dire battle not recorded in history broke out in this area. After the battle ended, all records of the Altar disappeared.

“What is your name” Romaine asked.

Brendel suddenly discovered her question was really constructive.

“Medissa Lunette.” Came the reply.

““You’re not from the royal family?”” Brendel and Amandina spoke at the same time. Only the royal bloodline, the Aavlon royal lineage, was permitted to enter this tomb.

“Yes, I am a craftsman’s daughter.”

“But this is the tomb of the Elven kings...” Amandina continued to ask.

The question from Amandina made the Elven girl pause for a while. Half of her body was becoming transparent: “There are unique circumstances...”

“Unique circumstances? I have heard of the Silvers Elves interring their bravest and greatest heroes along with the ancient kings...” Amandina looked doubtfully at the girl, unable to find traces of a ‘greatest hero’ in her.

Medissa caressed the unicorn beside her as her eyes became misty: “That isn’t it. I am here to replace someone else.”

[What?]

If there was another mouthful of water in Brendel, he would have spat it out again. He had never heard of substitutes or was there a queue for being entombed?

Amandina had a clearer grasp of the situation. “A replacement in order to save

someone? Or to be buried as a sacrifice?"

[What kind of third rate development is this? To think that the 'noble' elves would also do something like this, looks like they are no different compared to humans.] Brendel was surprised.

But Medissa shook her head: "I volunteered."

"Volunteered?" Brendel could not understand how an ordinary citizen was able to replace a royal family member.

She had a faint smile on her face, as though she had recalled a memory to be proud of. "I, volunteered to replace... my older sister... No, I came here... for the sake of the her Royal Princess."

She was becoming fainter.

"Hold on." Brendel interrupted her, "Sister? Her Royal Princess, what do you mean by that?"

"My mother, is a craftsman in the Cherau village. My father, is the king of Aavlon. I think, I am half a princess..."

"Does this mean your sister is the Silver Elves Kingdom's princess?"

She nodded.

"Why did you need to replace her?"

"My noble sister was cursed by the Miirna people. The royal court magicians told me father that a related blood member had to die for her sake, or else she will continue to weaken in her prime until she died." Medissa slowly explained: "But my noble sister is the best leader within the kingdom. The human allies, the dwarves, our citizens, no one wished to see that happen..."

"In the end, my father chose me."

Amandina was so indignant that her brows knitted together tightly: "...He's your father, how could he have done something like this!"

Brendel could only pat her on her shoulders to calm her down. “During the era of Chaos, the twilight dragon was a force that exceeded the imaginations of the various races. They paid a great price in order to resist that existence, as the king of the Silver Elves, it could only be seen as something normal.”

He stared at Elven girl in silence, before he asked: “Why have you told us about all these?”

“Because... I wish to ask you for help?”

[Just like a mission.]

“What help do you need?”

“The lizardmen in the forest had stolen my sister’s necklace. I don’t know what they want to do with it, but without that trinklet, my sister’s curse would not be able to focus on me, I’m afraid it would—”

“You’re already about to disappear, why are you still trying to care about someone else!” Amandina interrupted her after listening in dissatisfaction.

Medissa cast a glance at her and smiled.

“Precisely so, I wish... That my disappearance... has meaning...”

Amandina did not know how to refute her.

“But this matter is none of our business. We do have the right to refuse your request.” Brendel spoke quietly. Even though logic told him that he should accept the quest, but he felt a little angry when he looked at the Elven girl who had nothing to do with the cruelties and violence in the world.

Her eyes momentarily turned sad, but was quickly replaced with a touch of slyness: “Messere... human, you came to seek, for the souls of the Ancestral Elves... right?”

She was nearly gone.

“You know of our intentions?”

“I was able to listen in, through the gust of wind in the valley...” She closed her eyes.

“To gain the acknowledgement of the Ancestral Elves, you would have to gain my acknowledgement...”

She paused for a moment, as though she was too tired to continue speaking. “That is why, I want to make a deal with you.”

[I’m actually being held hostage. And I’m even threatened by a little girl.]

Brendel felt bitter feelings emerging from his heart. Did he had the option to get angry? He turned back to look at everyone, but the girls and even the Nightsong commander nodded their heads.

“Very well, but I have also have my own request. In order to deal with the lizardmen bandits, I would have to gather the help of the Ancestral Elves, otherwise I would not be able to deal with them.”

The girl nodded.

“I acknowledge your presence and you have my permission.”

“Are you not afraid that I will betray you?” Brendel was slightly surprised.

Medissa was silent for a moment. “I am... worried.”

She started coughing and flecks of blood could be seen spluttering out, before it disappeared into thin air. She raised her head weakly, as tears spilled across her face: “I’m... worried... I... do not wish to disappear... I still... have things... that I want to do. I’m really sorry, can you... help me... please?”

A sudden rush of wind blew across the top of the forest, as though it was wailing—while Medissa completely vanished before their eyes.

Everyone was stunned into silence as the heartrending pleadings wormed their way into their hearts. Each word seemed to hang around their ears, and Brendel had an inscrutable expression.

Chapter 93

The Eversong Elves

The winds died down and the forest sank back into silence.

Brendel deliberated for a moment before he looked back at the girls. They were looking at the Elven girls with teary eyes. Even though they were enemies a moment ago, they quickly realized that it was not Medissa's fault for attacking them.

"Do you wish to save her?" Brendel suddenly asked.

Romaine snapped her head to look at Brendel and furiously nodded. Amandina hesitated and bit her lips, but every time she wanted to say something her words did not come out.

(Nightsong Tiger.) Brendel communicated to his summon in his mind.

(My lord?) The Nightsong Tiger faced him.

(I have been wondering about the abilities for quite some time, but is it possible for me to turn the Elven girl into a card?)

Brendel had wondered from time to time as to how Ciel and the Mercenaries of Lopes came about. The only answer he had was that a Planeswalker was somehow able to seal them into cards.

(Yes, you can do so, my lord. This Elven girl's abilities are incredibly powerful, and if you try to seal her, she might turn out to be a high quality summon card. At your current abilities, you can only spend up to a maximum of 100 Wealth and a little mana to seal something into a card. With this amount of resources spent of sealing, you can only seal someone who's extremely weak and willing to be sealed.) The Nightsong Tiger explained quickly.

(That's fine—)

(But my lord, you do not know whether she would agree to be sealed. 100 Wealth is

approximately a month's worth of your savings.)

Brendel shook his head. Even though a loss of 100 Wealth was painful if she rejected it, he needed to do this.

(If I don't do this, I feel that I would carry this regret in my life.) Brendel gave an embarrassed smile. His past regrets in not saving the NPCs from the slave merchants, his guilt in fleeing Aouine after Freya died, the things that he could not achieve in his past life, he wanted to absolve himself of such feelings.

[For what purpose have I come to this world? This is a chance for Medissa, but this is also a chance for myself—]

He formed a blank card in his Deck according to the Nightsong Tiger's instructions. The card was a blank canvas, as though it was waiting for a guest to move into it.

"What is that?" Romaine saw Brendel taking a card out of from nowhere and asked curiously.

"My lord is going to save the little Elven girl." The Nightsong Tiger explained: "He's going to transfer her soul into the card and stabilize the Soul Fire that's collapsing."

"That sounds like the abilities of a summoner, but don't they use crystals for that? Can you seal souls aside from magical beasts?" Amandina's eyes glinted as she asked.

"You can think of it as a type of summoning." The Nightsong Tiger answered: "But this is done because it's the only way to let the girl stay here."

The girls nodded. If the Soul Fire broke down, the energy was returned to its basic elements and not returned to the embrace of her goddess. Disappearing in that manner was the most painful way for a spirit, not to mention a sentient one.

Brendel raised the card into the air: "Medissa Lunette, do you wish to join in my travels and become part of the Laws in this world?"

The words were repeated in his heart, as though someone's else voice spoke them. The blank card flew out from his hands and floated in the air. Brendel waited for a full minute before he repeated his words again, but no reply came. A mellow sadness spread within his heart as he sighed inwardly, certain that Medissa had refused and was gone.

“I... have a wish, can you grant me that? Brendel... No, Lord Planeswalker.” Medissa’s voice echoed in his mind.

Brendel’s elation soared and he exhaled loudly.

“Of course, Miss Lunette. Please state your request.”

“I... wish to see my sister on your journeys, just once would be fine.” Came the small voice.

Brendel was slightly dumbfounded. He did not think that her wish was so simple. Even if she requested to have full freedom, he could agree to it.

The Silver Elves had superior bloodlines and their lives were exceedingly long. Perhaps her father and older sister were still alive, so that wish was not as impossible as it seemed. However, the Silver Elves avoided contact with the world and might be slightly troublesome to find them.

He nodded after a few moments.

The card immediately emitted a flash of black light, and the words were written in his retina:

“Contract established.”

A line came next:

“A new card has been found, please name it—”

“Eversong.” Brendel decided to name Medissa after the most famous Silver Elves’ army from the ancient era.

The card gradually came back to his hand. Brendel inspected the card, and saw a female knight equipped with silver armor and a long lance in her hands. She wore a warm and friendly smile— It was the very image of Medissa.

Unicorn Knight

(Eversong I)

Darkness 15

[Heroic spirit/Knight, Level 35 Elite]

Pay 15 Darkness EP and places the Unicorn Knight, 'Medissa Lunette', into play.

Maintenance: When 'Medissa Lunette' is in play, pay 1 Darkness EP, 6 Wealth every day.

'The flag of the Elves are raised proudly, with her heart and sword shining brightly in darkness.'

Brendel stared at the card for some time. The response from the card seemed to show off the difference compared to his other cards.

[Amazing. Even though she's on the level of a Gold-ranked fighter, I didn't think that that she's on the level of a legendary artifact. Apart from the Thorn of Light, this is my second legendary. Tulman told me that my Cards of Fates are much rarer compared to other magic artifacts, but I didn't think it would be as rare as this.]

A gleeful smile spread across his face.

[That 100 Wealth is completely well spent! Guahahaha!]

Brendel roared with laughter inside his mind. If it was not for the fact that he would ruin his image because of the people around him, he would shamelessly laughed with a greedy voice. He had constantly faced ridiculously overpowered enemies one after another, and was starting to wonder if he was cursed with some unlucky status.

Fighting against Ebdon before he reached level 15, fleeing against the Crusader Executioner, fighting against Tirste, then dueling with Buga, Tree Shepherds, Black Disciples and the Spectral Knight. It was driving him up the wall. *(TL: Ebdon – Level 31 and above, Crusader Executioner, Level 40 and above, Tirste – Blessed stats, Level 45 and above, Buga – Level 51 and above, Black Disciples – Level 31 and above, Spectral Knight – Elite level 35, comparable to a level 51~ mob.)*

He was not really afraid of the Unifying Guild, Tree Shepherds or the Madara army, but being targeted by them at every waking moment made him feel awful.

[I finally have a Gold-ranked follower. This is at least enough for me to travel across

Aouine's southern region without any issues. Even if the Tree Shepherds or the Unifying Guild have the numbers, they can't possibly send a Gold-ranked assassin after me right?]

The two organizations only sent such assassins after highly ranked earls, and he thought he had not reached a threatening level yet. With Medissa's abilities, he would be able to combine their abilities to fight against any such threats.

[A good deed is rewarded.] Brendel was proud of himself and felt like there was sunshine everywhere.

He wiped off his crooked smile and turned back to everyone: "It's done, everyone."

The girls' eyes shone brightly, and Romaine even urged him impatiently: "That's wonderful! Quick, summon Medissa to let us take a look at her."

"Ahem." Brendel coughed and his expression changed. Romaine's words stabbed at his weakness. Even though it was a godlike card to him, the problem was the summoning cost of fifteen Darkness EP. There was also the maintenance of 6 Wealth and 1 Darkness EP.

[Never mind about the Darkness EP. Right now 6 Wealth per day is enough to make me bankrupt. I only have 4 Wealth of income per day, and 2 of it are used to pay off the Mercenaries of Lopes. If I want to summon Medissa I need to have another Gold Mine.]

Brendel rubbed his forehead.

Chapter 94

Crystal

Brendel explained to the girls there was a requirement to summon or use the cards he had at hand, and expressed that he did not have the necessary materials to summon Medissa. Even though he had revealed part of his abilities as a Planeswalker, Amandina did not suspect the Mercenaries of Lopes to be summons.

[Medissa is one thing, but the Mercenaries of Lopes act like people who are still alive. If people start to think that I can somehow trap people and turn them into cards, I might be sent to the gallows or to be cut down on sight. Fortunately, Amandina is loyal enough so she probably wouldn't reveal what I did here. I can probably spin a nice story somehow...]

After keeping the card, he directed the two mercenaries to scout the temple. At the same time a few of the mercenaries went to pass him the loot. The Spectral Knight had left behind a crystal and a pair of boots.

When Brendel saw the crystal he thought his eyes were deceiving him. He rubbed his eyes to make sure he was not dreaming.

[No, I must be seeing it wrongly. I'm called the Luckless King in the game, so how did I managed to get so lucky?]

When he fought the Golden Demonic Tree, it did not have any Golden Apple on it, and he did not find it strange because he simply possessed awful luck. He thought the crystal was a delusion, but after checking it various times and confirming on the Stats Window, it was the Spectral Knight's Crystal.

– Spectral Knight's Crystal [Boosting Equipment, Arm]

– +10% strength upon equipping.

Brendel pinched Romaine's face, and the latter immediately furrowed her pair of delicate eyebrows in protest: "W-what are you doing Brendel!"

Even though he would ignore that level of protest, he really caused her pain this time. She started to complain loudly.

“No, I’m just confirming if I’m not dreaming.” Brendel spoke as though as he was sleep walking.

“Pinch your own cheeks, you idiot!” Romaine was angry enough to lift her leatherskin shoes and kicked him.

This time Brendel knew that he was not dreaming because of the pain.

“Ow!”

“You deserve it!”

“I forbid you to wear leatherskin shoes.”

“Never!”

Amandina shook her head when she saw the two were acting like children. The mercenaries were giggling in one corner as they knew their lord was in a good mood to act in that manner.

She looked at the crystal and wondered if it was really that important.

“Is that the Spectral Knight’s Crystal?” She suddenly asked a question out of curiosity. The others were also waiting for Brendel to tell them what it was used for.

It had become a common thing for them to see Brendel as a walking dictionary.

“Yes, this is the Spectral Knight’s Crystal.” Brendel stopped his quarrel with Romaine and answered. Then he suddenly smiled “It looks like I got my prediction right, so I’ll treat everyone at Ampere Seale for a day.”

Compared to how valuable the crystal was, the mercenaries were obviously more interested in hearing that line and everyone cheered loudly when they heard him. Even though they were summoned creatures, they still possessed emotions and their memories.

Amandina had visited the biggest free-trading harbor of Aouine during her childhood,

but other than its busy nature, she did not have a deep impression of it. When she thought of his irresponsible actions, she started to avoid the topic about that place.

“Is this crystal really that important?” She asked.

“Of course.” Brendel answered in a matter-of-fact tone. It had reached the price of three billion Tor coins even in the later parts of the game, which proved the value of this small Boosting Equipment.

These crystals were placed directly into the body, and there were three areas that a level 20 character can put them. The arms, the head and the torso. The price of it was even higher in the game because it was not an item that dropped upon death. While this advantage was lost in this world, it did not mean that it was any less valuable.

At least compared to the Thorn of Light, such crystals would never be lost or destroyed.

[I have enough experience to upgrade Power Break and turn the burst of strength into 30 OZ, 10% of that is 3 OZ, and pretty much the equivalent of a level 20 legendary equipment. Once I get to over several hundred OZ worth of strength, what kind of bonus stats would that be?]

Brendel knew how much value it was able to bring him.

“If you want to put a tag on this,” He smiled as he brought the crystal up: “Three billion.”

[[[[Three billion?!]]]]

The mercenaries’ faces turned into incredulous expressions. If Brendel said three million, they might start to have difficulty in breathing. But three billion was more than the richest duchy could earn in a year. This astronomical figure was beyond the imagination of the mercenaries who were born as commoners.

They could only think that Brendel was joking with them.

Even Romaine snorted lightly and glared at him, while Amandina frowned and thought he was exaggerating again.

But Brendel ignored them and happily placed the object on his right hand, which

gradually sank into it. He was used to the odd sensation, and he brought the legguards up once the process was over. Once he did so he exclaimed loudly.

– Blood Greaves, [Brass Quality], +10.5% in movement speed, +5 Physique

– Requirements: Level 20; Equipment rating (20 OZ)

Brendel suddenly thought the world was not realistic anymore.

[Is this the end of the world? Am I being promoted to become the Lucky King? A Spectral Knight's Crystal with a Magic equipment. This is an Elite monster, not a Boss...]

He stared at it before he suddenly recalled something and asked in a hurry: "Who touched the corpse!"

[[[Touched the corpse?]]]]

Everyone did not understand what he meant, and he realized he spoke wrongly. He coughed and changed his words: "I mean, who cleared up the battlefield and collected the loot."

That question sounded a little strange. Was there a need to assign someone to do something like that? The mercenaries looked at each other and was momentarily quiet, but a voice finally responded.

"It was me, my lord. Is there something you are dissatisfied with?"

The voice sounded a little taciturn. Brendel turned his head and found that it was the older Elementalist sister. She raised his head up to him but she could not hide the sliver of anxiety in her eyes. He had asked with such fervor that she wondered if she did something wrongly.

"Nothing," Brendel nodded: "I'll leave the matters of clearing the battlefield to you."

"Me?" She looked blankly at him with her hand placed over her chest. It looked like some kind of glorious task but she did not understand why she caught Brendel's attention. She thought for a long time and could only think that it was some fetish of the nobles, and her eyes became suspicious of Brendel.

Brendel whirled around and did not explain to her. He was secretly delighted because he used to lead a bunch of luckless party members. This time there was a lucky person who was also a hot babe...

The Blood Greaves were a standard 'Tank' item in the game. Brendel wanted to let the Nightsong Tiger wear it, but the latter explained that summons were unable to benefit from any magic equipment. Even though they could use the sword and bow to do damage, they could not access the energy from the artifacts.

The only possibility for them to be equipped was through the rules of the Planeswalker's system. By equipping a card onto them, they would be able to benefit from it. For example, if Brendel equipped the Holy Sword card onto the Mercenaries of Lopes, one of them could use the full benefits of the Holy Sword.

Although, the maintenance still had to be paid out.

The girls were not combatants so they were not suitable for the Blood Greaves. In the end, Brendel wore it with a little guilt in his heart.

[If this is done in the game, everyone would have posted in the forums about my greedy actions to take all the loot...]

When he finished putting them on, the two scouts returned.

Chapter 95

The holy alliance

The scouts returned to report that they did not discover any more enemies, and Brendel led everyone into the temple.

Once inside the temple of the Elven Goddess Sayel, the sealed Altar opened again after nearly two centuries —

Each tall elf walked down with a cold expression, their silver long braided behind their ears, their heads fixed with pointed silver helmets with wings adorned at the sides, their hands carried a doubled-bladed sword, their bodies covered with full silver-chain armor. They descended down the Altar made of obsidian rocks with large steps, and Brendel was unable to suppress his feelings, and only one thought was left in his mind.

[Heavy infantry! The strongest infantry rumored in the continent, the Royal Elven Guards!]

Twenty of them nodded towards Brendel and then stood at each side of the altar. At the end, a faint shadow appeared in the center of the altar, like a spirit that was slowly forming. Sounds of weapons being drawn could be heard behind Brendel, as the mercenaries pulled out their weapons, but Brendel was not anxious as he somehow guessed what was going to happen and faintly nodded.

Under everyone's anxious eyes, the figure gradually became clearer and his appearance could be seen. An adult elf with silver eyes, hair wore a silver robe appeared before them. Even his skin was a pale silver. He was taller than everyone in the room, and appeared brawny even amongst the Elves.

He swept across everyone with his stern gaze as though to discern them. Most of the mercenaries lowered their heads, including the Nightsong Tiger. Even though it was just a projection, everyone held their breaths as they could feel the strength of the figure in front of them. Their first thought was that he was one of the ancestral kings of the Silver Elves.

The Silver Elf thought for a while before he spoke: "Are you humans?"

Everyone nodded.

"Who is he?" Amandina whispered behind Brendel.

"I believe he is the First King, Elandorr. I have seen the likeness of him in engravings." Brendel spouted lies. The eleven portraits of the Silver Elf Kings were posted in the forums and Brendel could naturally recognize them.

But once he spoke, the gigantic Elf looked at him: "You recognize me?"

Brendel nodded without any choice. What else could he have done? The ancestral kings of the Silver Elves experienced the War of the Holy Saints, which happened during the terrifying Era of Chaos. There were people with the Golden Bloodline, and all the races were descendants of the Silver Bloodline. The strong appeared everywhere, and even Medissa who was underage had the strength of a Gold-ranked fighter. It might appear to be unbelievable in this era, but they were everywhere back then.

[The gamers who had nothing to do estimated the levels of the strongest fighters. Their conclusions ended up with the Four Holy Saints with at least level hundred eighty and above, while the leaders of the humans, Dwarves, Elves, had no less than a hundred and fifty. A warrior had to have at least their Elements unsealed, while everything under the Gold-rank was cannon fodder. In other words, that was the Era of Legends.]

Brendel thought that some of the data might have errors in them, but he felt they were not too far off the mark. In front of him was a projection, whose aura made him feel it was hard to breathe.

Elandorr pondered for a while before he spoke again: "That matter about the Child Medissa, I thank you for it. But what is your purpose for coming here?"

Brendel nodded again.

[Didn't you say that your agreement is given an 'okay pass'? Why is there another Elandorr? Did that little girl lie... But I can't ask her about it now since I can't summon her.]

But Elandorr continued after pausing for a while: “Speak, what aid do you wish, our old allies.”

The Elven King’s voice was very low, as though he was not used to Kirrlutz’s language, thus he spoke slowly. However, his meaning was clear. Everyone except Brendel thought the Elven King was easy to talk to.

[I’m afraid things are not so simple with this king—]

Brendel decided to be honest in his reply: “I am here to deal with the Lizardmen bandits in the forest. This is also Medissa’s wish, and I wish to receive your help.”

“This is a fight between the living, how can the dead interfere with it?” Elandorr said.

[Shit! This sly bastard!] Brendel complained in his mind, but he answered:

“No, this concerns you.”

“Why?”

“The bunch of Lizardmen are probably under the Tree Shepherds.” He boldly looked at them.

“The Tree Shepherds?” He answered in a low voice.

“After the War of Holy Saints, the Twilight Dragon had been sealed permanently. The Miirna were driven by our ancestor, the King of Fire Gatel, to the icy regions in the north. Although the world had not recorded their presence ever since, the fact is they still exist. They separated and integrated themselves into the world, calling themselves the Tree Shepherds, the Platinum Sky Snakes, and worked from the shadows to overthrow civilization and unseal the Twilight Dragon.”

Amandina uttered a sudden gasp. She looked at Brendel in shock as she listened to him. She did not expect that the Tree Shepherds were the fabled Citizens of Darkness.

[My lord seems to know about this the very beginning, but he knows, then the higher echelons must have known about this. Why have they not taken any actions to drive this group out? If the Citizens of Darkness exists, then what about the Twilight Dragon, is it really going to come back to this world again?]

She did not think that Brendel would lie in this situation, especially in front of the Elven King. The War of the Holy Saints lasted for nearly seven hundred years, and it was a chaotic world that resembled hell. She could not imagine the world to return to that chaotic era, and the fact the Golden Lineage had completely died out, while the people with Silver Bloodline waning, how would the mere commoners of this world save it again?

She paled a little.

Elandorr raised his eyebrows when he finished listening to Brendel.

“Gatel was too soft. I had warned him of this when I was still alive, but it seems that young man did not listen to me in the end. But perhaps he was crowned king precisely because of that...”

Brendel kept his silence, but the others were appalled to the point they nearly could not speak. In the end it was the younger Elementalist sister who asked: “King Elandorr, you said that the King of Fire Gatel, was soft hearted?”

Brendel understood why they were surprised. History depicted Gatel as a cruel and cold man. He was the last of the Holy Saints, and the rumors about him were how he cut a bloodbath to set up his own empire and chased the Mirrna to the harsh north.

The real history was something entirely different.

In order to avoid the topic being changed, he interrupted and said: “The Lizardmen are here partly because of the interest in stealing the treasure from the tomb. Medissa said they had approached the Altar more than once and stolen an artifact that belongs to her. Your majesty, even though you had slumbered throughout the ages, I believe that you were able to notice their actions.”

Elandorr nodded. He looked at the two Wild Elves. Although he recognized them as Elves, he was not able to discern which bloodline they were from.

“That is to say—” Brendel said with a confident look.

Elandorr revealed a warm smile for the first time, but it was quickly gone and his face became cold again: “Even though the creatures of the dark have almost no chance to break through Mother Marsha’s barrier, our oaths of the paths are still binding. We will stand together to fight against the Darkness, our human friends.”

“We are most grateful.” Brendel placed his hand on his chest and bowed.

“What should we do now?” Amandina gathered her courage and asked Brendel. There was encouragement in his eyes.

“I will lend my guards to you.” Elandorr replied: “They are the bravest warriors amongst the Silver Elves, and swore to fight against the Darkness for all eternity after their deaths. They will follow you and help you clear the enemies of darkness. However, the Altar has grown weaker since. They are unable to leave this region and cannot be projected for too long. The last thing...”

He paused.

“Treat Medissa well. She’s a pitiful child.” The Elven King said in a quiet voice.

Brendel nodded. Amandina whispered to Brendel: “Why does he trust us so much?”

“Simply because,” Brendel’s expression was solemn as he whispered back: “You don’t understand the era they were living in. The humans have sworn oaths with the other races under unthinkable circumstances. The oath is treated as sacred and did not involve any conditions. It was an alliance that they made in order to simply survive. During that era, the races who fought against the Twilight Dragon were as close as brothers and sisters, otherwise there was no need for the war to continue...”

“The War of the Holy Saints?”

Brendel nodded.

Then he suddenly frowned and turned to a specific direction. He saw that the Nightsong Tiger was looking in the same direction. The latter was silent, but he talked to Brendel through his mind:

“Card Resonance.”

Chapter 96

Fallen (1)

The battle was over. Conrad and the Disciples of the Black Flames's bishop stood together to survey the battlefield strewn with corpses, as wafts of white smoke rose thickly. There was death everywhere.

Demons, disciples, mercenaries' bodies were gradually becoming colder as their blood poured into the ground. They were still living a while ago, but their skin were becoming taut and their muscles rigid.

Conrad walked over a few steps, turned over a female mercenary's body and a groan could be heard from the latter. He frowned and ran his sword through her heart and ended her life.

He then raised his head and said impatiently: "No, Duke Rhun's only son isn't here. That fucking bastard Makarov!"

"Since you knew him so well, why did you fight this battle?" The dark bishop said with a low voice: "We lost quite a few men, and it was that giant who was beside Makarov."

"How do you reap the benefits if you don't invest?" He laughed as he licked his lips. He pulled out the sword stained with blood and pointed to his nearby men: "Bring the rest of the prisoners to me!"

Several shivering men from the Grey Wolves Mercenaries were quickly brought before him. They fought like the bravest warriors during battle, but once they were out of it they realized they had no chance to fight back. Their comrades-in-arms were skinned alive or eaten by the demons and they realized they had no chance to change their fates.

Once they understood this, fear of their unknown fate gripped their hearts.

Amongst them was the familiar white-haired youth that Brendel knew well. He looked condescendingly at the other frightened men who were pale. He had stayed behind to cover Yula and a few other Grey Wolves Mercenaries to allow them to escape, so it was

a given that he got caught.

He glared defiantly at Conrad. He had once thought he was the commander of the 'Paper Cards' mercenaries.

[Bloody fucking hell... That bastard Brendel was actually right. Not only was this shit bastard colluding with the Disciples of the Black flames, he was the dog of the Tree Shepherds.]

Conrad did not look much older than Brendel, and Redi was furious over how Brendel had humiliated him. Now that Conrad did the same thing by catching him, he saw Brendel and Conrad as the same arrogant fucks who deserved to get their faces crushed by hammers.

He used the most condescending gaze he had to look at his enemies, trying to incite their anger.

[If this piece of garbage intimidates me, I'll be able to shame him and let these unworthy bastards know the bravery of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries.]

He planned to do so, but Conrad merely paused and smiled at him. The latter then shifted his gaze and looked at another mercenary.

"Are you looking down at me?" Redi was angry and said muffled words because his mouth was gagged, trying to struggle and rush at Conrad, but the latter's men restrained him tightly. He could only watch helplessly as Conrad walk over to the last man of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries on the right and said something to him.

That mercenary was momentarily stunned before he shook his head with much difficulty.

Redi thought that Conrad would have tortured him at least for a while, but that monster waved his hand and his comrade was taken away. Redi could not turn his head, but the sounds of flesh tearing apart could be heard behind him. It was as if flesh was being ripped apart from the bones while organs started slipping out from the body and dropped on the ground. Desperate shrieks of pain echoed throughout the forest, which gradually turned to sobbing howls and finally hoarse gasps with a final low bellow.

The voice disappeared after a while, and the remaining mercenaries trembled at the

same time.

Conrad walked to the next mercenary and asked something. That mercenary was scared out of his wits and merely knelt on the ground and said nothing. The young commander shook his head with regret and signaled to the men behind the mercenary. They moved away, and Conrad suddenly stabbed through the mercenary's eye with his sword and kicked him backwards.

He clapped his hands and let his men take the corpse away.

There were three men left, including Redi. The white-haired young man saw that his fellow mercenaries seemed to lose their sanity because of fear. It seemed like they had started to remember they joined the profession because they simply wanted to live and not die from starvation. All the glory and belief that they got from their various feats in battle crumbled in an instant.

The two men realized they only wanted to live on.

Redi watched them act like cowards. They used to laugh in the face of danger and were proud of themselves, but their actions now made Redi curse at them in his heart, but he hurled muffled abuses at Conrad.

“Kill me now, you cunt!” Redi wanted nothing more to prove himself. Was it not just death? He wanted to prove to his comrades who were controlled by fear that death was nothing to be afraid of.

The most shameful thing was to submit to the enemies.

Conrad seemed like he could not hear Redi. He dismissed the other mercenaries without even asking any questions. Before the final mercenary was dragged away, he managed to loosen his gag and kept begging for his life. He swore to join the Paper Cards and said that he was willing to tell everything that he knew, but in the end he was taken away.

Redi was the only one left.

Conrad stood right before him—

Redi acted without thinking, and he tried repeatedly to pounce at him like a crazed animal. But his chest was immediately kicked hard backwards, and he looked like a

kicked dog who rolled a few times on the ground. When he crawled back up, he realized that he was the only one left.

[There's no one left to witness my bravery? Who should I show now? The enemy?]

He looked at the reticent Conrad and the bishop who had his features hidden in the shadows. They would not give appreciate his heroic actions. A bone piercing shiver permeated his whole body and Redi trembled. He thought of a problem. Was he going to die here like the cowards in a shitty death without reason or rhyme?

[I'm the most talented youth aside from Eke in the mercenaries, if I die here just like the corpses here, who would know of my heroic deeds? No, I can't die just like that, but there's no one else in the forest to record them. Was there really no one hiding in the forest? Someone who's pretending to be dead?]

Redi did not want to die a meaningless death like the cowards before him, but he knew that it was a wishful thought for someone to record his honorable death. Before the Disciples of the Black Flames, no one except the commander and Buga could hide in the forest.

He hesitated in his heart. Dying an ignoble death was something that he could not bear and his expressions kept changing.

Conrad looked coldly at him. He had said nothing from the start to him, then he suddenly pulled out a dagger from the bishop's waist and approached the white-haired man. Redi's straightened up subconsciously as he realized death was approaching. He did not expect Conrad to say nothing at all. He was from a long lineage of high nobles and descendant of the Knight Mark, and he struggled before feeling the cold dagger blade on his neck.

He did not want to die.

Redi's heart finally had the color of despair in it. The will to fight back had disappeared, and Conrad did not miss the expression of his eyes. The knife was instantly withdrawn and his gag was loosened.

"Do you want to die?" Conrad asked.

Redi opened and closed his mouth several times, wanting to curse at him, but he realized that he was merely trembled and could not say anything. In the end he nodded

once, before he suddenly realized what he was doing and shook his head repeatedly. He suddenly felt his face hot. It was not because of his own weakness, but because he was actually afraid till the point where he did not even listen to his question properly.

An utter disgrace.

“Then I’ll ask you a question.” Conrad straightened up to look down on the kneeling man: “The other group of men who traveled with you, where did they go and how many men did they have?”

Redi was stunned. If the monster in front of him wanted him to reveal the core information about the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, he thought he would not be able to bring up anything, but to mention that particular group of men would mean getting revenge. At that moment, Redi saw them as people to cooperate with, and not surrendering to them.

[I will first get revenge on that bastard.] He gritted his teeth.

“They headed for the east before you attacked. They are fifteen in total and their leader is around your age. Amongst them are twelve guards and two girls.” He paused for a moment: “The guards are at least Silver-ranks. I know this because I secretly listened to the commander and Buga talking.”

He spilled everything out without even Conrad’s reminder. If Brendel was to see this scene, he would have been laughing out loud from anger. He only punched him once while Conrad had kicked him like a dog, and it seemed like he had completely forgotten about that fact.

Conrad and the bishop exchanged glances.

Chapter 97

Fallen (2)

===== Conrad's POV =====

They did not say anything after Redi finished speaking.

The slightly cool wind swept across the entire battlefield under the night sky, and the scent of blood permeated the air. The monster-like commander of the 'Paper Cards' and the dark bishop stood there quietly, as though they were digesting the information that Redi told them.

Conrad smiled as he looked at Redi as if he praising the latter's cooperation. The truth he would find it praiseworthy, regardless of the latter's brave resistance in order to die or his obedience towards him in order to live.

"Twelve guards with the Silver-ranked strength." He repeated the white-haired youth's words: "What do you think?"

"Twelve?" The dark bishop looked at Conrad: "I feel that group is a decoy, but it's also the truth that Eke was not in Makarov's forces."

"No, you should stop doubting the information in front of you. If you keep hesitating it will only ruin things." Conrad waved him off and looked at the kneeling youth on the ground: "Are you a noble from the Kingdom of Unchanging Skies?"

Redi nodded quickly after a lull.

"Good, it seems like you have more value compared to these miserable fools." Conrad's smile was like a devil: "We don't need people who have no value so they got disposed of. But you are different; you have a strong will and clearly know what you want. The Grey Wolves Mercenaries are done for, and those who are smart know when to go over to the other side. Do you want to join us?"

Redi looked at him in with a dumbfounded expression. He did not understand what Conrad meant. The latter had guessed of his identity, and he was afraid that his noble

status would actually harm him when he heard Conrad speak of it for the first time.

However, it was clear if he refused to join them, his ending would be the same as the useless cowards before him.

Redi was once again hesitant. He had betrayed his conscience once, and right now he was like a merchant who kept losing money. He poured in more investments in order to gain back capital, but it did not seem to be working at all no matter how much he wished for it. Conrad had given him a final rescue buoy. His hesitation only lasted for a few moments before he gritted his teeth and grabbed it.

Even if he was to die, that would come later on.

Conrad laughed: “Very good. I’ll lend you a few men, no, a whole squadron. I want you to lead them and chase that group of fifteen people. You don’t need to kill them all, but if you managed to do so, I’ll give you the leadership of the Paper Cards.”

He slapped Redi’s face lightly: “Don’t worry, I am not lying to you. I have somewhere else I need to be after this mission.”

Redi did not pay much attention to the leadership because he was more interested in killing Brendel. He was secretly relieved as he thought he was going to be killed on the spot. Now that he was offered a chance to live along with an enticing position, he started to feel glad that he had made the right choice.

Even though the Paper Cards were not as famous as the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, they were one of the biggest mercenary groups in the southern region. When he thought of the leadership position offered to him, he felt slightly inclined to become a leader.

When he finished reveling in that future, he suddenly caught a glimpse of a familiar figure shrouded in darkness. The dark bishop had stepped away to reveal a figure behind him, and Redi recognized her from the weapon.

“Scarlett...?”

“Oh, is her name Scarlett?” The dark bishop’s sinister laugh echoed in the forest: “Then I shall call her Scarlett since I have no talent in giving names. If you complete this mission, I’ll give her to you—”

Redi’s throat gurgled once, and his hands balled into fists. Everyone in the Grey Wolves

Mercenaries knew that he was fond of her, but Scarlett only had eyes for Eke and treated the rest of the mercenaries like siblings. He understood that fact clearly, but he still yearned for the day when Eke and Yula got married, which he would hope for a chance after that to gain her affection no matter how small the chance might be.

Even though she looked a little different from her usual self, he was excited over the prospect of having her. With so many temptations before him, the greed that was hidden deep in his heart started to grow.

Conrad observed Redi's expression and gave a subtle grin. He tossed the dagger back to the dark bishop. That ominous blade was used for rituals and not for killing, and as a member of the Tree Shepherds, he understood that such rituals were sacred as they were part of the plan to revive the Dragon of Darkness.

He started to walk away after giving instructions to his men and Redi. The dark bishop glanced at Scarlett before catching up with Conrad. He nodded his head respectfully and praised him: "You truly are a master at manipulating minds."

He knew that Conrad had no real interest in asking the other Grey Wolves Mercenaries for information. Everything was done in order to show a performance for Redi simply because Conrad was certain about his weakness.

"Human nature is weak. We are keen on gaining profits and possess an instinct to avoid danger. But I don't toy with people's hearts — The only thing I offer to them is more choices." He replied: "Sadly, compared to the people who speak of honor and justice, I have a flaw; I cannot lie like them."

The dark bishop crackled: "But we humans are cunning, he didn't show his weakness, did he."

"That is why interrogation is an art." Conrad smiled: "To be honest, I was after his noble status. Having a pawn in the Kingdom of Unchanging Skies might prove to be useful. But why did you agree to lend your new pet to him?"

"That little girl is still holding on to her will. I'll let her witness how bad her former comrade is. Only when she recognized the darkness of a human would she synchronize faster with the Blood of Gods."

"A wonderful plan."

“What are your current plans now?”

“We should prepare and rush to meet Hewjil. They actually headed for the east despite knowing it’s the Lizardmen territory. Their actions go against common sense. If I didn’t have the ability to control hearts, that cunning fox Makarov would have deceived me.”

“I must say that I detest working with that barbaric Lizardman.” The dark bishop shook his head.

“I don’t like it either.” Conrad took off his bloodied gloves as he replied.

===== Brendel’s POV =====

The starry night yesterday was proof of the crystal clear weather that followed, but no one knew about the cruel battle in the forest other than those who participated in it, and the only evidence left behind was the smouldering ground.

The scorching sun was up and lit the entire forest despite the trees’ dense leaves. The vivid-green foliage was surprising to their eyes, and the mercenaries started to wonder if the battles that happened allowed the trees to absorb nutrients from the bloodshed.

They whispered amongst themselves, but it did not escape the youth’s exceptional perception.

“Creating a myth like this is really scary.” Brendel muttered. He kept flipping the black card in his hand. Even though it was a legendary artifact, the baleful black color from the card’s back was perplexing. Medissa’s smile was warm and pleasant so the contrast was striking. This was the only Black Elemental Card he had, and he had no other cards that provided Dark EP.

If he was able to summon the little girl, then he would be able to move freely without any worries. It seemed like it was still impossible to do so.

He suddenly stopped his fidgeting. He was feeling the same sensations again from yesterday’s night. The Card Resonance was happening again in his heart.

[According to the rules of the Planeswalker, a Card Resonance means that there’s another card with the same series. I searched through all my cards but the Eversong

card is the one causing a resonance. I didn't think a card that I created myself would have something related to it. Does this mean that new Laws were written in relation to the card? Or that it's because of the Darkness Element that is causing the Card Resonance? Or both?]

"Nightsong Tiger, is it possible for a Land Card to resonate with the Eversong Card?"

"It's quite unlikely, my lord. It is very rare for a Land Card to resonate with any cards. The cards that resonate with Eversong could be equipment, creatures or barriers, or specific creatures that can be sealed into the same series." *(TL: Medissa, Unicorn Night is Eversong I. If there are similar creature cards in the Eversong series, it will probably be Eversong II.)*

"The Card Resonance had happened six times since last night, and it gets closer each single time. The last time it happened was an hour ago, and I feel like it's near to our left." Brendel was puzzled. Was it a creature, or someone who was holding on to that card and moving about?

He raised his head to peek at the location of the sun. They had been moving since last night without rest, and it was nearly noon. Most Iron-ranked or people with 3 Physique and higher, had no problems for not sleeping a night or two, but Romaine and Amandina were having a tough time. Brendel glanced at them to check their conditions. The Elementalist sisters took care of them which helped them to barely manage to keep up with the group.

[There isn't much time left. Because of the delay in the Altar, we can't afford to waste even a second.]

*TL: About Redi and Brendel. I think that's where the anger comes from. He sees Brendel as a merchant who offended the status quo in this world, i.e, merchant vs noble. When it came to Conrad, he's a Tree Shepherd who doesn't give a flying **** about social classes, so Redi is being a hypocritical noble here, as he probably perceives them as outliers who wield considerable power and can be worked with.*

Remember that it was hinted that some of the nobles allowed the Madara undead to invade the southern region in order to wrestle power from the royal family, so that 'noble' inside Redi probably accepted Conrad's proposal more easily than he would think. I read criticism about Redi being that stereotypical Chinese trope of setting up as a villain against the protagonist, but I actually think he's quite subtle as a character since he

probably reflects the typical Aouine noble heading to the fallen path (at least that's what I think the title of the chapter means). I think with a little bit more editing and handling on his character, he could be quite interesting.

Chapter 98

Fallen (3)

The Disciples of the Black Flames were actively searching in the forest for their enemies, which meant that Brendel's group could encounter them any time.

[There's no need to be too worried about encountering any boss fights. The disciples are probably searching for Makarov and Buga, while the only trouble we should encounter are the Lizardmen. This battle can't be avoided, otherwise there would be trouble later on if I don't clear them as soon as possible.]

The entire quest was a trap. A few of the government officials were bribed by the Tree Shepherds and the Tree Shepherds simply waited for Makarov to fall into their trap, which he did. However, Makarov deserved his fame and managed to send Eke out safely just with his instincts.

Brendel did not care about what was going to happen to them. The problem he faced was the situation evolving past what the strategy guide in the forums had written. In the game, the group of gamers were completely wiped out when Conrad appeared to battle Makarov, which then led to Makarov and Buga's escape by sacrificing both the Grey Wolves Mercenaries and the gamers.

If the situation continued to the point where the gamers did not die, Brendel speculated that the Tree Shepherd's next move was to give orders to the Lizardmen Bandits and search for his group. Once Makarov and Buga were out of the forest, then the Tree Shepherd's attention would turn back to his group.

Brendel needed to vanquish the Lizardmen before he was surrounded by the enemies. Once the Lizardmen had the Tree Shepherd leading them, he was not sure whether he would be able to handle his enemies.

At this point of time, the Lizardmen were nothing more than a mob of monsters. With the group of Elves who wore full silver armor and helmets to only show a pair of irises, he felt fully confident that he would easily defeat them. They were after all the royal guards during the alliance of the Holy Saints who went undefeated during their time.

The Elves had explained to Brendel that they would quickly lose their strength once they were outside the Altar, but the latter was not worried as took less than two days to reach the Lizardmen. Even if they were weakened to half strength, they were at least level thirty Elites which was more than enough to sweep the Lizardmen away—

He definitely wanted to leave their corpses behind to get back at the Tree Shepherds.

[I won't let any treasure and XP slip past me...] Brendel was still trying to figure out a way to kill the level 50 BOSS, the dark bishop of the Tree Shepherds. Conrad was another great appetizer, if he could get to him. It was one of the game's highlights to make use of high level NPCs to kill bosses. In this case, the Silver Elves were supposedly a good choice if he managed to encounter them right away, but it was far more likely they would encounter the enemies at a much later time.

At the same time, Brendel felt troubled by the Silver Elves. They were mostly proud and had reticent personalities, and chose to follow Brendel's group from a far distance. They were confident that no enemies would be able to bypass them. Even though the humans held alliances with the Silver Elves, the prideful lot was not keen on working with the human mercenaries. It was common sense for them to act in that manner, but the Mercenaries of Lopes were angered by them because they had never been slighted before.

The Nightsong Tiger frowned at them as he cast glances at the Silver Elves. He knew how terrifying they were so he did not wish to talk about them.

"My lord, I'm sure that it's another card within the Eversong series—" He spoke patiently in his mind.

"Yes, yes, yes," Brendel interrupted him inside his mind: "You already told me that six times already. The Eversong card is a legendary card, so the resonating card is most likely a legendary card as well right? I even memorized every word you told me. I know that very well, but that card keeps getting closer and closer to us and it's just too strange. Rather than actively seek for the card, I think we should just wait and see what happens."

The Nightsong Tiger smiled while shaking his head. He knew that point very well, but his lord looked as if he did not care about these important things. The more powerful the Planeswalker was, the stronger the summons would be, but Brendel did not want to listen about it. Even though he kept hinting to Brendel that he should focus to train

as a Planeswalker and gather Cards, the latter simply continued doing what he wanted to do without changing his plans at all.

The Nightsong Tiger had seen many things in his days but he was unable to guess what Brendel's plans were.

[Does he want to become a lord of a region? But this is quite meaningless for a Planeswalker, especially when they experienced the Planeswalker's world for the first time. A mortal might be interested in gaining authority, but the ultimate goals for a Planeswalker are to discover the truth of this world and seek a higher path of power. Is there anything in the mortal world that is more attractive than that?] The Nightsong Tiger scratched his beard.

Certainly, the thing that he did not understand about Brendel was his greed for items. The latter was practically drooling for items that might not even exist. As a hardcore gamer, there would be no way for him to escape from the idea of killing and looting a BOSS.

When the youth nearly fell into a state of delirious giggling, someone patted his back.

The shock was extraordinary. He jumped up a little and whipped his head to the back to a shining golden helmet and a pair of silver-grey eyes.

[The Elven commander. Gosh, fucking hell bro, do you even make any noises when you move?]

Brendel recognized him in an instant, before cursing at him in his mind. He patted his chest and asked: "What's wrong?"

The Silver Elves were formidable because of their abilities and equipment, and not known for their subterfuge. Brendel was frightened because he did not pay attention to his surroundings in the slightest.

The Elven commander did not feel guilty for scaring him, and did not show any expressions at all. He merely pointed to a direction and said quietly: "A group of people is escaping and moving to our location."

"Escaping?" Brendel paused for a moment as he noticed the word the Elven Commander used.

[Who's escaping in this direction? Buga's men should be in the south. Was there anything in the guide that said otherwise or did the gamers miss out something relevant?]

The Elven commander's gaze went back to Brendel, as though there was a slight dissatisfaction to Brendel's questioning tone, but the latter nodded.

Brendel knew that this blockhead-like fellow would not be joking with him. He even wondered if the Elven commander had the word 'joke' in his dictionary. In any case, he quickly raised his hand to signal for his group to stop.

The sleepy Amandina and Romaine were jolted when the mercenaries immediately stopped upon Brendel's signal, and the merchant girl asked in curiosity: "What's wrong Brendel?"

Brendel put his finger to his lips, and very quickly, he could also hear footsteps rushing through the shrubs. Their chaotic footsteps seemed like they were in great disarray, and he could understand why the Elven commander said they were running away.

[Amazing. As expected of someone who's a high level NPC, this level of alertness isn't something a normal person would have.]

He had seen many gamers playing like they were tourists in another country, hardly fitting for the brewing wars in Aouine. However, their given abilities were strong enough to fend off ambushes, so that was perhaps why they did acted like tourists.

He listened carefully once more, and detected another source of troops who had mounts pursuing them. His expression became solemn. Two forces possessed mounts in this region. The first was the Lizardmen with their traditional Riding Lizard mounts, the other was the Disciples of the Black Flames and their demons.

Warhorses did not fare well in the forest, especially in this mountainous region, but he still thought it as a third distant possibility. He then signaled for everyone to fall into formation and prepare for battle.

Very soon, the panicking people who were trying to escape entered his eyes. There were six of them, males and females split equally into half, and their clothes were tattered and torn like refugees. They had numerous wounds but they did not throw away their weapons, indicating that they still had the willpower to fight. Under the circumstances, Brendel thought they were excellent mercenaries.

[Judging from their attire, they are the Grey Wolves Mercenaries. Wait— They are heavy infantry made up of Juddelan’s citizens. I think I have seen them before. Does this mean the disciples are nearby fighting the Grey Wolves Mercenaries?]

Brendel narrowed his eyes, but he believed that it was far more likely that they were stragglers who did not managed to group up with Buga. The injured mercenaries seemed to be stunned when they saw a group of men ready for battle and their expressions were full of despair. But someone amongst them recognized Brendel. It was the very same youth next to Redi when they came in the morning to tell him that the Grey Wolves Mercenaries were ready to set off.

[I recognize that kid... What’s his name again? Oh, right! Sanford!] Brendel had a better impression of him compared to Sanford.

“Ser Brendel, please help us!” Once Sanford saw Brendel, his whole body seemed like he was stripped of energy and he fell to the ground. He yelled out like to him like he saw someone who came to rescue them.

Brendel disliked meddling with things that did not concern him, but he was not one to disregard those in need. Furthermore, he was aided by the Elven guards, and it was the best moment for him to act grander than he really was. Makarov threw the Grey Wolves Mercenaries behind and treated them like cannon fodder, but it had also given Brendel an opportunity to recruit them, especially when most of them were experienced fighters.

[The Juddelan mercenaries are one of the finest around—] Brendel nodded quickly as he thought about it, ordering his men to protect them.

“Why are you here?” He asked the crucial question.

“We...” But before Sanford had the chance to answer, the troops chasing them literally answered his questions.

The rusting of leaves could be heard somewhere nearby, and soon after several disciples were riding on large ‘boars’ who charged out.

Brendel recognized them as Demonic Boars, with green and orange spots covering their entire body, with four pairs of tusks and eyes. They were low level demons, but formed the majority of lower ranked cavalry and certainly fitting for the disciples. However, when Brendel saw the attire of the disciples, he took in a cold breath.

“Ser Brendel, be careful... T-they are somewhat strange!” Sanford yelled towards him.

[Of course they are fucking strange!] Brendel cursed. The odd ten plus Disciples of the Black Flames were all high ranking members, was it not strange for their elite to chase these six forlorn mercenaries who looked like beggars?

[No, wait—] Brendel pulled out his longsword to prepare for battle. [If they really wanted to chase them, there’s no way for Sanford and the rest of them to reach here at all. This meant they specifically drove them to this area. What is the reason for doing that, to intimidate me?]

He did not know if he was targeted, especially when these detestable disciples seemed to have no reason as to why they would track him in the first place.

“There’s still someone else in the forest over there.” The Elven commander suddenly spoke as he pointed to some tall bushes.

Brendel immediately turned to the indicated location, but he could only see layers of dense leaves made up of different colors blocking his view. But a moment later, he suddenly felt a sensation in his heart. The Unicorn Knight Card seemed to beat once like it was alive.

[Again, it’s a Card Resonance! So that is what— No, ‘who’ it is, these disciples and that person are here for trouble!]

Chapter 99

Fallen (4)

Brendel shook his head.

[I was hoping to meet the disciples during the journey to the Lizardmen, but to think that you would really offer yourself on a silver platter to me. This service of offering your equipment and XP is exemplary. But that figure over there—]

He rubbed his forehead and then beckoned with his hand to that direction.

“Come out.”

Silence answered Brendel.

The mercenaries in front of him were puzzled because they did not see anyone there, and they turned back to look at Brendel and the Elven commander with confused eyes; Brendel was slightly surprised to see nothing happening despite his invitation.

“Hmm? You don’t wish to come out?” He sneered, and pointed with his thumb. “Oss!”

He did not have any patience for hide-and-seek, and did not mind to use violent methods to bring his wretched enemies out. The air around him instantly went into a frenzy, seeming to converge into a single point where it was compressed with violent winds before it was released forward with a loud explosion. The blast of wind shot directly towards his targeted area and the trees that were in its path snapped and cracked one by one. A deafening thunder echoed throughout the vicinity as it exploded in a circular radius, and once the dust settled, a red-haired girl was revealed.

The powerful gale had torn the robes on her body, revealing red-black armor and a war-dress that reached to her knees. She wore a pair of boots fashioned out of layers of overlapping steel armor, and was similarly painted with red and black. She stood in a battle stance and guarded her body with a halberd, as though this action was enough to prevent the Wind Bullet from advancing any further.

There were clear tracks on the ground where the air current split in front of her and

traveled into two directions where it pulled dirt over ten over meters before gradually stopping.

Powerful.

This was what Brendel's group thought of the girl.

[That ring has the destructive force of a Silver-ranked fighter, so it also requires a Silver-ranked fighter to defend against it. But to withstand it without any damage and not even flinch... A Gold-ranked fighter.]

The Nightsong tiger rubbed his forehead amidst the gasps of the mercenaries. He wondered if they actually came to the Era of Chaos. They kept encountering Gold-ranked fighters for the past few months and every one of them was young. Perhaps the capital or the most crowded cities would have such people appearing, but they were in the southern region and they even traveled to a rural place like this. What was going on in this era?

After a moment of silence, the red-haired girl raised her head up and stared at Brendel without blinking. Her reddish-gold irises seemed to burn with the intention of battling. She straightened herself up and swung her halberd forward. A bright arc of electricity trailed behind the weapon, and at the same time, the trees in the direction of her weapon were lopped off and crashed down loudly onto the ground.

She smiled, revealing her canines. "Is that all you have?"

[It really is her.] Brendel sighed as he had completely forgot to factor a boss like this. The Bishop of Lightning, the Crimson Spectral Knight, Milford. Brendel stared at her unique halberd and immediately recognized her. He had forgotten about this character and her Spear of Lightning which had made numerous gamers vying for that weapon. It was unexpected because this Spectral Knight was already in this forest while she was only supposed to appear a few years later.

When the Card Resonance happened he had formed an answer, but until the girl was revealed he was not certain that he was right.

[The Laws of Eversong. They turned out to be related to unyielding hearts. Their hearts yearned for the light but fell into Darkness, and the Song of Lament is sung over and over again. This region gave birth to two Spectral Knights and actually resonated with each other.] Brendel took out the Eversong Card and glanced at it. [Mother

Marsha, I named this card in the hopes of gaining an undefeated army like the Elves, and not because of this reason!]

Suddenly he jerked his head back at the red-haired girl, realizing that she was not a spirit yet.

[But that appearance is definitely Milford's appearance. But what is up with the air around her? She feels like there's a complete transfusion of the Blood of Gods within her, not to mention the contradictory facts within the game. Milford is an incomplete bishop of the Tree Shepherds, and she also has a Spectral Knight's form, but that's definitely a real body.]

"Scarlett! Redi!" A voice rang out beside him.

Brendel turned his head and saw it was Sanford who was brought back by the Mercenaries of Lopes. He then followed the shocked gaze and saw white hair somewhere behind the girl. He was hiding behind a bush, trying to shrink as much as possible into it. Was it not that arrogant little prick, Redi?

[Fuck. It's this pretentious bitch again.] Brendel cursed inside his heart. He thought he had given a good lesson to him last night and at least became a little more humble, but he came to look for trouble again—

Brendel narrowed his eyes as he wondered how he actually hooked up with the disciples. There was indeed a demonic boar beside him.

[Hah! So that's how it is.]

He could not help but laugh with contempt: "You defected to a new owner in a single night, and couldn't wait to drive your former friends to their death. My, my, my, you really are quite hardworking to try and please the Tree Shepherds."

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries were stunned—

"Redi, y-you joined them?" Some of them could not believe their ears but they are not idiots. If they thought about what happened earlier, everything made sense. There was one who had a bad temper and immediately yelled at him: "You fucking cuntface, I treated you like my brother!"

"Redi, how could you let us down like this!"

Sanford simply asked: “Redi, what’s going on?”

If glares could kill someone, Redi would have executed Brendel many times over and even eat his heart alive. He had wanted to hide behind in the back to allow the disciples to kill his ‘companions’ and ‘brothers’. That way, he would not need to have such a guilty heart.

But that was quickly broken by Brendel’s attack, and he started to curse everyone in Brendel’s group—

[These fucking pointy-eared shit pieces of... Elves?]

He suddenly realized there were twenty Elves who were covered in full armor.

[Where did these bastards come from? Did the commander, no, that cunning fox, Makarov, place them here?]

He looked carefully everywhere, afraid that it was a trap. He soon calmed down as he realized Scarlett was here. She had become a full Gold-ranked fighter and with the numbers of high ranking disciples he had, the thirty odd Silver-ranked fighters guarding Brendel would not be able to win.

He straightened his body up and looked down on the Elven warriors. These Elves were really crazy to act like heavy infantries. Their weak bodies were more suited to become rangers, archers or hunters. He smirked as he observed them, before he realized his former allies were staring at him with questioning gazes or hateful eyes.

He needed to explain himself. How could he allow himself to be branded as a traitor?

Redi relished that he had made this plan to drive the Grey Wolves Mercenaries to Brendel’s location. He wanted Brendel to guard these weakened mercenaries, while having an excuse to defend himself if the situation required it.

“No, everyone! I did not join Commander Conrad. I merely made a deal with him to borrow his forces in order to deal with this bastard—”

He pointed at Brendel: “This is the fucking son of a bitch who is the cause of all our trouble.”

“Me?” Brendel pointed at himself and felt the situation was a little funny.

“That’s right, it’s all because of you!” Redi roared at him, his old and new memories of hatred mixed together, causing his eyes to be bloodshot. “If it’s not because of you, I wouldn’t end up like this. That fucking shit Makarov used us as baits in order to lure the attention of the disciples, just so that you can leave safely. It looks like the treatment for people are really different for some individuals. I think Makarov did not expect the final situation to turn out this way.”

He laughed manically: “Ser Brendel. You’re so amazing with your twelve Silver-ranked guards. I’m really so terrified. What do you want do now? Do you really think you still have the confidence and courage to teach me a lesson again?”

Brendel was infuriated over the crazy narcissist in front of him. He wanted to speak but Redi raised his hand and interrupted him: “There’s no need to worm your way out of this. Commander Conrad has already told me everything. Why would he send me with so many elite members of his troops just to attack you? I’m not an idiot as well.”

He took a pause to emphasize his point. “You are the real Eke, right?”

[Huuuh? I’m Eke?] Brendel felt like he was being turned into stone— [Fuck your ‘right’ you imbecile!]

Chapter 100

Fallen (5)

[My fucking god, why not claim that I'm your grandfather too, you stupid fool!] Brendel already regained his senses and started to curse Redi in his mind.

Makarov still managed to make use of him even though he escaped to the east to avoid such a situation from developing. He took a deep breath and penned it down inside his mind. When he had the time, he would visit Lantonrand and get the score even. Right now, he needed to deal with the dolt in front of him.

[I'll probably lose ten years of my life if I have to talk with this crazy person any longer.]

But before he had the chance to speak, Sanford had already cut into the conversation: "So to sum it up Redi, you joined hands with the Paper Cards Commander, Conrad?"

Brendel turned to look at Sanford, only to witness his calm face with a pair of cold eyes. The latter did not have much expression on him, except that he was mildly disappointed. Brendel did not think this friendly youth had a steely side to him.

Redi was surprised by Sanford's words. He looked at his former allies who were glaring at him with anger, then back at Sanford's gaze who made him shrink back.

But these angry gazes stoked his feelings to resist and he scoffed coldly: "It's that simple. Can't you see that Makarov has abandoned us? The old fucker had only treated us like usable pawns. Why should I continue to work for him? Why can't I choose a better option?"

"Thus you came over to kill us and display your loyalty to your new owner?" Sanford's voice was biting: "I am your best friend. These men and women were once your comrades. Makarov had wronged you, have we wrong you too?"

Redi was silenced.

He gritted his teeth and hesitated for a while. He struggled to find a reply as he answered with a guilty heart: "I didn't wish to kill you in the first place. If you join me,

I'll still treat you like my comrades.”

“I don't want your pity!” Sanford replied in disgust: “I treated you as my best friend because I thought you had the sense to do the right thing. I must truly be blind not to see for what you are!”

“We're the same as well!” The remaining Grey Wolves Mercenaries spoke bitterly.

Brendel watched the scene unfold in front of him, but he was constantly on the alert to see if the situation changed. However, Sanford suddenly turned and bowed to him.

“Ser Brendel, Redi is right in saying that Makarov had abandoned us. The old commander had treated us like family for over a decade, whatever hatred that we have is negated by that fact. From this moment forth, we are a group of pitiful worms who is being hunted right now. If you would lend a hand to save us, we will pledge ourselves to you and fulfill whatever task that you have for us. We merely wish to live.”

Brendel was slightly surprised and he looked at the rest of the mercenaries, and realized that the refugees more or less accepted Sanford's suggestion. It was clear that the youth had considerable influence amongst them.

But he tilted his head and looked at Redi: “Though it is true that I can save you, that bastard over there said that I have a deep relationship with Makarov. Even if that's the case, can you still accept it?”

“That fool has been taken over by the mere thought of revenge. He is no different from a moron! Who would believe what he's saying?” One of the mercenaries with a burly figured snapped.

Brendel turned back to Sanford and the latter merely nodded.

He was secretly laughing inside as that he thought the moron Redi did not entirely do bad deeds. At least he did managed to send over a group of veteran mercenaries for him.

However, his face was serious and said solemnly: “That matter can be discussed later. It seems that I have some personal grievances with this Redi. Once I take care of him, we can discuss further—”

Brendel peeked at him, but that apparently was a terrible move because he saw Redi's

smug face. He had opened his mouth in an exaggerated manner which made Brendel feel really irritated to the point where he wanted to rip a new one for him.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” The white-haired youth laughed three times. “Take care of me? Ser Brendel, oh, or should I say, Ser Eke. It seems like you have not understood the situation you are in. The disciples here are the elites amongst the Disciples of the Black Flames, every one of them has the strength of a peak Silver-ranked fighter, not to mention miss Scarlett here who has the strength of a Gold-ranked warrior. With such a force on my side, you are actually arrogant enough to say that you want ‘to take care of me’, haha, with just thirty silver-ranked guards? Your joke isn’t funny at all.”

He walked to Scarlett’s back as he spoke, reaching out to her face in order to pat it. However, the latter batted his hand away and glared coldly at him. He coughed once in embarrassment to clear his throat. It was good that his former comrades did not notice his plight.

That was because Sanford and the others were shocked at the strength of his forces, and even wondered how the crazy fool managed to get Scarlett working for him. They only saw that there was something odd about her, as though she did not recognize them at all.

They subconsciously took a step back. Were they going to die today?

They looked at the their new ‘boss’, but everyone was stunned at his reaction. That young ‘merchant’ actually had the time to comfort his female companions—

“Don’t worry, you can ignore that narcissist.” Brendel turned over and unexpectedly patted Romaine’s face with a convincing voice.

“I-I’m already ignoring him, w-what are you doing, don’t randomly touch a girl’s face!” Romaine’s eyebrows were raised high, and quickly prevented his hand from taking any further advantage with a loud voice and blushing face.

The Mercenaries of Lopes merely looked at the squadron of twenty odd Silver Elves’ heavy infantry behind them. They were certain of who was the one going to be in trouble. Their lord might look like he was a straightforward person but he was actually a sly and devious person, and there was no way he would let himself get into a disadvantageous situation.

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries could only look on and scream inside their hearts as

they looked at Brendel's reaction.

But Brendel's actions of ignoring Redi had the effect he wanted. The latter was trembling with rage from all the humiliation from Conrad and Brendel, and barked like a rabid dog: "Attack! Attack! Kill them all! No, leave their leader alone, I will let him know the price of offending me—"

He quickly calmed down: "The two women beside him, keep them alive as well—"

He planned to repay Brendel's humiliation a hundred fold and licked his lips with anticipation.

But Brendel merely looked at him and raised his hand.

[Did he signal for me to wait?] Redi looked at him with a confused look. It was late for him to beg for mercy when his orders are already given. The disciples had already rushed out with a fervor and would not stop for any other orders. He thought it was just as well for the disciples to attack them and let Brendel know the meaning of fear.

"Continue to pretend, you bastard—" He muttered angrily.

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries' immediately paled. Their limbs were cold and shivering, but they still took up their weapons and intended to fight to their deaths. They still clung to their namesake and oaths for the Grey Wolves Mercenaries.

Redi glared at their resistance, as though he wanted to enjoy looking at the idiots who wanted to oppose him. He quickly saw Brendel who was smiling and mouthing a few words. They were not asking for mercy. He pieced each word slowly after a long while before they were formed into a coherent sentence:

"Unfortunately, you're too early."

[I'm too early?] Redi did not understand what it meant [Has he gone crazy from the shock of seeing my men?]

When Brendel's hand was lowered, the twenty odd expressionless Silver Elves immediately acted. When they did so, Redi's expression completely changed.

He was indeed too early. If he came later, even though he still could not do anything to Brendel, at least he would not have sent himself to a death that he could not avoid.

The Grey Wolves Mercenaries, the Mercenaries of Lopes, Amandina's expressions changed.

The Silver Elves' bodies suddenly lit up with all sorts of colors that gathered on their armor and weapons, as though a rainbow had formed in front of them. These signified one thing.

The powers of Elements.

The strongest heavy infantry of the Silver Elves who were the match for the Knights of the Holy Cathedral in this era!

Redi wanted to slap himself for thinking that the Elves were suited for only a few professions. The disciples could not wake up in time from their crazed trance and were drowned by the dazzling light.

The swords were drawn from the Silver Elves' sheathes, and the disciples and demons' heads flew up in the air as the twenty odd lights charged forward without stopping.

Chapter 101

Perfect completion

The battle was over before it started.

The high ranking Disciples of the Black Flames were no match for the Elven heavy infantry who possessed the Element powers. The Silver Elves who lived long lives were exceedingly focused on learning combat techniques. Not only did they have high physique and excellent equipment, they had continuously sought to improve their skills for centuries.

Under their watchful eyes, the slight movements that their enemies made were enough for them to see through their intentions. Brendel watched the disciples use their abilities in front of the Elven warriors and could not resist laughing. In front of the Silver Elves who pursued perfection in combat, it was the equivalent of desecrating the highest form of art.

The Silver Elves could not believe the servants of darkness dared to use such mediocre techniques against them. Their battles against the Dragon of Darkness and the Miirna were the greatest they had ever faced. Their enemies had exceptional magic spells and combat techniques that made them gasp. They had never despised the servants of Darkness, simply because they were truly at the forefront of the world's civilization.

They were so skilled that more than a few of the Silver Elves actually turned to the Darkness. Yet these foes had declined, no, they did not even have techniques to speak of now.

It was an insult.

The disciples did not expect their last resistance to draw the ire of the Silver Elves. In fact, everyone under Brendel's group felt ashamed when they saw the skill of the Silver Elves.

It was true!

After the War of the Holy Saints, civilization did not flourish but waned. The ultimate

skills that both factions possessed had become nothing more than legends.

But regardless of what others thought, the battle in front of them was over in the blink of an eye. The disciples turned into headless corpses with black blood pouring out from their wounds, turning into streams that filled the uneven ground's cracks.

It looked like a network of veins with black blood.

The white-haired youth seemed like he was rooted to the ground by an invisible force. His mouth was wide open with gurgling sounds in his throat, unable to form a word.

Suddenly a clattering sound could be heard behind Brendel's group. They turned back and discovered it was the biggest man in the Grey Wolves Mercenaries who dropped his greatsword. That man did not seem to realize he dropped his weapon, and merely looked at the group of Silver Elves who had regrouped.

[Twenty Elves who had the unsealed their Element powers! Marsha above, the strongest forces in Aouine are not any better than them!]

Some of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries glanced at Brendel, wondering who exactly was the person who used them as guards.

[Is this merchant actually one of Kirrlutz's princes? Did he come to this place by coincidence? Or is it a high level successor to the Holy Cathedral of Fire and these knights are here to guard him?] *(TL: There was a small description in the past chapter about how the people who unsealed their Element powers needed to register in the Holy Cathedral of Fire. I don't think the Silver Elves are under that faction or bound by their rules in any way. The people who unsealed their Element are called Knights of the Holy Cathedral of Fire after registering. While there might be some church faction that is related to the Holy Cathedral of Fire, these knights are not under them but more of a formality, probably.)*

They had wild guesses as they could no longer believe he was just a simple merchant.

Only Scarlett kept her wits about her and she swung her halberd onto the ground with a loud crash. Her meaning was clear; she did not want the Elves to kill Redi. Her lips were pursed tightly and her expression solemn. She knew that she was not a match for anyone amongst the Elves, but even so, there was no intention of retreating in her eyes. Her body was placed slightly forward like a panther ready to pounce.

“Scarlett?” Sanford knew of the girl’s movements. He and the other mercenaries were previously too focused on the Disciples, but now that they were gone they realized that it was someone they knew all too well.

“Scarlett, that bastard is a traitor! Why are you defending him!” The big mercenary yelled loudly.

“It’s only this time—” She said through gritted teeth, but she suddenly shook her head as if to drive a thought out of her mind: “Only this final time, I can’t watch him die here.”

“Scarlett?” Redi was momentarily confused. He suddenly saw the former Scarlett from her figure.

“Get lost right now!” She roared angrily: “Find Conrad!”

Brendel looked at this scene in surprise. He had seen enough in the game to recognize that the will of this ‘Crimson Spectral Knight’ had not completely disappear.

[It’s her desire to protect Redi! A bishop of the Tree Shepherds who doesn’t care about life will never protect someone of their own volition, so this means she’s actually at her infancy of becoming one.]

Brendel suddenly realized how she turned into a Spectral Knight and gave a thumbs up in his mind. Her spirit was actually able to resist the Blood of Gods’ invasive nature. But even though he admired her tenacity, he was not one to let this disgusting narcissist escape, not to mention he hated to let any enemy of his get away from him.

[I can’t let this crazy idiot escape. What happens if he turns to some form of ultraman to fight me? Even if there’s no plot armor protecting him, I’m going to regret it if he hurts someone close to me.]

He decisively gestured at both of them: Knock out that girl, kill that bastard.

The Elven commander looked at him in surprise. The gestures that Brendel did were the very gestures that were used in the Era of Chaos, but he quickly followed his orders and ordered his men to move out.

Even if Scarlett had turned into the complete version of the Crimson Spectral Knight, there was no way for Redi to escape.

seemed like you are proud of acting like bandits.” Conrad snapped coldly as he surveyed the surroundings: “These things that you stole must be worth quite a lot, aren’t they.”

“No, no, doing serious work.” Hewjil’s wrinkles became even deeper as he resisted shaking his head.

“Then what have you discovered?”

“A little. But not much progress.” Hewjil shook his head vigorously: “We could approach not the surroundings of the temple. But this item help me do so.” He grabbed a necklace and shook it. “Wizard, I need more of these.”

The two men exchanged looks. It seemed like Hewjil was really doing proper work, but that particular matter was not of priority at the moment. Conrad arranged the thoughts in his mind and spoke: “That is not a problem. We require your help in another matter right now.”

“I helped you already.” Hewjil said unhappily. He spread the news of his group looting in the area in order to lure the Grey Wolves Mercenaries over to this location, but it had also attracted the attention of the nearby adventurers as well.

“There will be benefits for you.” The dark bishop spoke in a low voice.

“What benefits?”

“Something big enough.” Conrad’s expression was solemn.

===== Brendel POV =====

A loud thud could be heard.

Brendel had grabbed Redi’s white hair and smashed it onto the ground, causing the latter to scream out. The news gotten from Redi had made it clear to Brendel that the script had deviated from the walkthrough, even though that result was something that he did not hope for.

[Conrad and the dark disciples have targeted me even before I reached the Lizardmen— I should have predicted that this might be an outcome. Was this moron going to betray Makarov regardless, or did I change something? The fact that he

showed up with the Crimson Spectral Knight... It doesn't really matter now. What is important is knowing Conrad had gone to Baern's ruins and has completely abandoned the idea of chasing Buga and Makarov. Instead he has turned his full attention to me.]

Brendel's fury was at its peak at Makarov's scheme. This outcome of events had turned into a grave situation and caused serious trouble.

"My lord, should we retreat?" Amandina did not speak after listening to Redi's description of what happened, and only spoke after a long while.

Brendel waved his hand.

[They are going to pay a bitter price if they really want to cause trouble for me. Very well, it seems like it's going to be a 100% completion route where I kill them all. It's not as if I have never completed 100% in similar quests before. I wonder what Mother Marsha would give me as a reward...]

Brendel quickly calmed down. He wanted to see how strong his enemies were and was imagining how he would cut them down one by one, but his thoughts was soon interrupted by Sanford.

"My lord, what about Scarlett?" Sanford cautiously came over and asked quietly.

Brendel glanced at the unconscious girl. Several Silver Elves were standing beside her, waiting for the order to kill her. There was never going to be a kill order for her in Brendel's mind. Putting aside what the new Grey Wolves Mercenaries would think, he would never agree to kill her. There was a connection between her and the Eversong card, if her fate could not be turned her next best result would be something like how Medissa turned out to be.

[Based on Redi's description on that strange figure, it should be that bishop mentioned in the walkthrough. Since she is only turned recently, then there might be some hope.]

Brendel was not inhumane enough to try and seal a living person as a card, and he was very willing to rescue this girl who had a fiery personality. Perhaps she might even be willing to his subordinate, with the strength of a Gold-ranked fighter.

"Bring her along. She's your companion after all. Perhaps there's still some way to save her." He said without thinking much.

“She can be saved?!” Sanford was shocked and urgently asked.

“I will try my best.” Brendel nodded.

Sanford nodded to accept his answer. He understood that Scarlett’s condition was somehow strange.

“How about this person?” Amandina asked quietly with a little disgust when she looked at Redi. He was forced to taste the mud as he struggled to breathe.

With those words, he seemed to regain his strength and tried to raise his head up with effort. His face was mingled with soil and tears as he yelled with all his might: “You promised, as long I told you everything you wouldn’t kill me—”

“My words count.” Brendel nodded.

He patted his hands as he released Redi, then looked at the Silver Elf beside him: “Commander, I will have to trouble you to take over what I wanted to do originally.”

Chapter 102

Lure (1)

The difficulty of attaining a perfect rating for the quest was harder than Brendel imagined. He initially thought that he simply needed to protect what was left of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries, but it seemed like he needed to wipe out every single enemy that was in his path.

[The reports from the Grey Wolves Mercenaries stated there are over a hundred Lizardmen Bandits, but the walkthrough states otherwise.

Lizardmen mob – Over a thousand.

Disciples of the Black Flames – Over two hundred with the average strength of Iron-ranked fighters.

Paper Cards – Over seventy with the same average strength as the disciples.

Hewjil – The peak strength of a Silver-ranked fighter.

Conrad – Gold-ranked fighter.

Earth Bishop – Boss tier headache.]

(TL: I might have made a mistake somewhere. There are TWO bishops that he's most likely going to fight, the one currently with Conrad is the Dark Bishop who corrupted Scarlett. Brendel is now referring to a new Bishop who hasn't appeared yet and probably took the Blood of Gods, particularly a God related to the earth element.)

Brendel pondered for a while before he turned around. The Silver Elves had already ended Redi's life, while the Mercenaries of Lopes were helping the Grey Wolves Mercenaries with their injuries. Perhaps it was because of their similar professions, they seemed to bond well.

“What are you planning to do?” A voice called out from his side.

Brendel looked at the Elven commander in slight surprise.

“If that human did not lie, the disciples and the Lizardmen are going to meet soon. Their speed is probably the same as us, and the foes we are going to face will not be mere Lizardmen rabble when we reach our destined location.” The Elven commander described the scenario like it did not concern him.

“You are basically right,” Brendel’s response was quick: “But I believe the Paper Cards’ leader Conrad has already reached the Lizardmen commander Hewjil, and are discussing over how to prevent us from escaping to the north.”

The Elven commander merely looked at him without saying anything. Brendel was certain that the Silver Elves would not be able to perform as well as he did with the earlier fight, and in his own experience he had never seen a SSS completion rating with just the mere help of the NPCs.

“If that is the case, then the Lizardmen will send out their scouts now.” Brendel laughed: “They think we’re going to escape, haha, that is wonderful; I want them to commit such a mistake.”

Brendel’s guess was not wrong. The Lizardmen rode on their mounts and spread out from the Baern’s ruins.

A day passed and the next morning came. The dry shrubbery on the hill top was rustling constantly due to hands pushing them apart. Brendel and the Elven commander hid behind a thick bush as soon as they spotted movements in the valley. The youth observed for a while before he spoke:

“The Lizardmen Dragoons.”

“That’s the third group that moved out since yesterday—” There was no change in Elf’s expression. The scenery of the emerald forest was reflected in his eyes; the speed and agility that the dragoons moved in the forest was faster than any cavalry in this era, but it could not compare with the Miirna’s shadow knights.

Even though the dragoons darted through the forest and appeared through the gaps of the trees, it was considered to be much too slow in the Elven commander’s eyes.

“It’s two times the normal patrolling radius at this distance. This is just abnormal even if they are under the Tree Shepherd’s command...” Brendel muttered to himself: “In

the end this looks like a quest mode.”

“What?” The Elven commander turned to look at Brendel.

“Nothing,” He realized his mistake and tried to change the topic: “I’m gauging the distance.”

“Pointless.” The Elven commander eyed him. They had estimated the distance more than once since yesterday.

Brendel quickly nodded: “Indeed there’s nothing else to look at, so let’s proceed as planned. Sanford!”

The former mercenary who turned into his subordinate ran up the hill panting and looked up to the two men: “I’m here! My lord, what do you need?”

Even though the Grey Wolves Mercenaries just joined them, Brendel accepted Amandina’s idea to tell them his ‘true identity’. Even though it was common to travel as an adventurer or merchant, they were delighted to know that Brendel trusted them with his identity, and a future lord strongly appealed to them.

Compared to the nomadic-like lifestyle, they were more willing to be a noble’s retainers. At least they could settle down, and from the other mercenaries’ description, it was apparent that the young lord was different from most nobles’ arrogant and cold attitudes who treated their subordinates’ lives like dirt.

They had suffered a lesson of betrayal from Makarov but such was the era of nobles and commoners. What could they do when they had no power?

They could only work harder to gain the favor of their new lord.

“Convey the order to get ready.” Brendel answered as he looked at the valley.

“Understood, my lord. I will go immediately.” But as soon as he took a few steps, Sanford suddenly turned back and asked: “My lord, there’s something I do not understand...”

“Hmm?”

Sanford hesitated for a moment but he gathered his courage and asked: “My lord,

there's no need to use such a complicated plan. I'm sure these Lizardmen would not be able to fend us off if we strike at them. I'm sure the result would be the same even if they are working with the disciples. As far as I know, even Aouine..."

He did not state the latter half. 'Even Aouine would not be able to gather twenty knights of the Holy Cathedral'—

While it was true that Aouine had more than twenty knights within the kingdom, the majority of them did not work for the nobles or even loyal to any faction. But these words made it sound like he was questioning Brendel's identity, so Sanford stopped himself from going any further.

Brendel still managed to understand what he was trying to say. He smiled:

"Perhaps you might be disappointed but these Elven allies are not under my command. They fight with us because we have the same goal. And one other thing, they get weaker the further they are away from their home."

Sanford did not quite understand what Brendel meant by the Elves getting weaker, but he immediately spoke in a loud voice:

"My lord, you misunderstand me. We will never get disappointed. We swore an oath to follow you not because of you possessed a great army but to repay for your aid. Regardless of whether we are the former Grey Wolves Mercenaries or not, we will never break our oath." But he quickly asked again: "Are the Elven allies Knights of the Holy Cathedral? Do they still possess such strength if they get weaker from their home...?"

Brendel understood what he was thinking. Even if their 'strength' was weakened by half, they could still be considered as people who had the peak strength of a Gold-ranked fighter. Twenty such Gold-ranked fighters would certainly be enough to annihilate the enemies in this region.

However, the rules did not apply in such a manner. A single stat reduction merely degraded their powers by a single rank, but in truth it was a level loss by over half. These Silver Elves were originally level sixty Elites, but Brendel judged that they would become lower than level thirty when it was time to meet the enemies in battle.

This meant the Silver Elves could not even maintain their Gold-ranked stats. That would spell trouble, especially with the threat of the Earth Bishop and Conrad. He

needed to find other ways to defeat the Lizardmen.

But explaining these things required some effort, so he merely folded his arms and answered: “Don’t worry and head off to convey my orders. Believe in me, and I will show you victory—”

Sanford’s reaction was delayed for a moment as he listened to Brendel’s words, before he nodded furiously.

The Elven commander watched Sanford’s figure disappear in the woods, then glanced at Brendel and said: “I did not think you are this arrogant, human.”

“You mean confidence.” Brendel tilted his head slightly as he corrected him: “Remember, this isn’t the battlefield of the Holy Saints, nor the era of your brilliant generals who are capable of commanding the battlefield to dwarf all other tactics. Perhaps the future might welcome that era again, but it would not be right now.”

Brendel paused as he looked to the north forest.

“At this point of time in this battlefield, I am certain that no one here has the capabilities to steal victory away from my hands. You can jot down my words, commander. I will lead them to victory.”

The Elven commander took a long time to respond: “To be honest, I do not understand what you mean by ‘the future might welcome that era again’, do you mean to say that the Dragon of Darkness is going to return to this continent again?”

“No, that is entirely another matter, I meant that there will be capable people emerging in the future.”

“How do you know of this, human? Can you see the future?”

Brendel’s voice was stuck in his throat. He hesitated for a while before replying: “It’s not foresight but intuition. When the future comes I’ll return to this place and tell you what had happened in the world if you don’t believe me—”

Brendel did not know why he said all these words. Perhaps there were too many secrets in his heart which he kept away for too long. After all, the Elven commander was a spirit that could not leave this place.

The Elven commander looked at him for a while and gave an emotionless smile: “My name is Nalaethar.”

“I’m Brendel.”

“I shall wait to see that victory you claim will happen.”

[This bastard doesn’t believe me at all.]

“As you wish.” Brendel said through grinding teeth.

Chapter 103

Lure (2)

Aakkin was the commander of a dragoon squadron. His orders were mostly straightforward amongst his usual missions, to either assault or pillage. However, he would sometimes take on the scouting role which was one of his most hated missions. It was too dangerous, especially in the forest where technical expertise was more important than speed and agility. He also disliked the fact that he could not use his best qualities in this role.

He raised his head and took in the golden rays of the rising sun. He trembled as the sun's warmth drove away the vestiges of the cold night and permeated into his blood. He shook his head in annoyance before sniffing the air, trying to discover any signs of the humans he was tasked to search for.

In his eyes, the silence in this valley was quite odd.

He did not like the eerie peace because it was the calm before the storm, like how a poisonous snake was lurking around the corner that would suddenly appear and bite. The northern Chablis region was like an ocean of trees, and he felt that it was impossible to find the humans in this huge forest.

Still, he cautiously gripped his spear and raised his right hand, pointing all his three fingers into the forest ahead of him. He chattered a series of noises, ordering his men to spread out and search.

He did not realize he made a mistake.

He only reacted when his men suddenly disappeared without a trace; his first thought was to retreat and find an excuse to explain to his commander Hewjil as to why he sent four dragoons to their deaths.

He did not find an easy answer. Even though Hewjil was a irregular amongst the Lizardmen who was churlish, he was considered to be sharp and Aakkin did not think him easy to fool.

But there he soon discovered there was no need to worry over it.

That was because he saw a human and Elf waiting when he turned around. He did not know when they appeared behind him, but he only knew that it was a Silver Elf staring coldly at him. The Lizardmen had recently caused trouble near the temple so Aakkin had an idea of what race he was from.

The Silver Elf had an Element power gathering on his armor.

The only thing that Aakkin could do was to surrender. A small mistake of spreading his men out, allowed each individual to be caught without any commotion, and was enough to seal his fate. What was fortunate the two men who caught him seemed like they did not want his life for the time being.

At the same time, he understood as a scout that his current fate would not last for long. He would be allowed to live for a while before they obtained the information they needed, be treated like a burden and disposed of in the end.

But death was not the most terrifying outcome. If the human and Silver Elf were scouts like himself, then they would know of many ways to make him experience a fate worse than death. Aakkin was a veteran as a scout, and even more experienced as a bandit, so he was certain of what was coming next. He was not afraid, because he intended to spill everything out if they interrogated him.

There was no sense of dignity amongst the Lizardmen, especially so as a bandit.

His limbs were securely tied up with ropes so he studied the surroundings he was brought to. The other four dragoons were lying dead in front of him. He strangely discovered that he was the only one alive and it made him slightly puzzled. Did they think that a single Lizardman was enough to get accurate information?

He suddenly realized that he was in considerable danger.

[Who are these men? What do they want exactly?] Aakkin wondered in his mind, before light was blocked in front of him. He looked up and saw the human and Silver Elf standing in front of him. He gulped immediately and his eyeballs turned to both at them in succession. He was willing to do anything in order to live. But what exactly could he do to keep his life?

Brendel was also staring at him while he considered this difficult question,

[If I think about it, there are differences going from a console controller to a computer's keyboard and mouse. No matter how close it is in the game to this world, I need to get used to this world's characteristics and social state.]

Brendel stood in front of the dragoon and carefully studied him before smiling.

He knelt in front of Aakkin, reached out with his hand and patted his rough and narrow face, and spoke with a gentle voice: "I know what you are thinking. You are wondering what kind of questions I would ask, which you would then tell me everything you know about them. After that you would ask me to spare your life, right?"

Aakkin's mouth opened wide, displaying over a hundred sharp teeth. He had prepared himself to face his enemy's questions but he did not expect to receive this answer, and it made him feel like he had been punched straight on. He shook his head once as he did not understand how the human knew what he was thinking. Did the human read his mind?

If that was true, did it not mean there was already no reason to keep him alive? Aakkin trembled. He did not hope to live, but he hoped that he would at least be spared from any torture from these terrifying enemies. He stared cautiously at Brendel with his diamond-shaped pupils.

"Afraid?" Brendel asked again.

When he spoke, soft giggles could be heard from behind his back. He could discern who they were; Romaine, Amandina, the twin Elementalist and many of the Mercenaries of Lopes were amongst the giggles. Brendel fumed for a moment, grumbling in his mind to tell them to give him a little respect. Did they not see he was trying to work seriously here?

But this was something that could not be helped. The truth was that he tried this with every Lizardman before Aakkin. At first the girls and the other mercenaries were really surprised by Brendel's words, before they discovered that he was just pretending to know what they were thinking.

He attempted several times to adjust each interrogation method he learned in the past, based on his previous experience with the various NPC bandits.

But Aakkin did not have the mood to care what the others were thinking. He was completely afraid of Brendel, and was almost certain that this human was a wizard,

one who was frightening enough to be able to see through his mind.

Brendel took out a ruby from his pouch and shook it in front of him: “Try answering my question—”

Aakkin looked at him in confusion and tried to respond, but he realized there was no voice coming out from himself. Even though he was desperately closing and opening his mouth, there was no sound at all.

Aakkin’s body shook in fright. The wizards in this era were not as mysterious as those in the past, but the people in the rural areas still believed that they possessed incredible magic. Aakkin could only look at Brendel in fear, not understanding why he ‘stole’ his voice.

Brendel covered the ruby and took away the Silence spell. He looked at the energy left through the system and saw that it still had six uses left. Then he sternly said to the Lizardman: “Do you understand? I can take away your ability to talk and I can return it to you. The voice is part of the soul, and I am capable of taking away not only your voice, but your soul.”

The youth’s voice turned cold and merciless: “A body can decay but the soul lives on forever. The torture on a body can only last so long but have you seen a soul being burned for all eternity?”

Aakkin’s body shrunk as he shook his head immediately.

Brendel smiled warmly and stroked his forehead: “Then how about helping me out a little?”

The Lizardman nodded furiously.

===== Hewjil POV =====

“You said they are escaping to the southwest?” Hewjil said.

“Yes, chief. My men from the center of the hill saw them escaping through the southwestern valley, but I am not sure if they discovered our presence...” A Lizardman was reporting to Hewjil.

When Aakkin opened the doors to the grand hall that belonged to Hewjil, he saw his

comrade reporting something to his chief sitting on the high chair. The atmosphere made him a little tense, but the instinct to live overtook it. He took a deep breath to regain his composure and walked up to his chief.

That Lizardman who reported to Hewjil seemed to finish what he was saying and turned to leave under Hewjil's indication, passed by Aakkin and left the hall.

The blackmailed Lizardman did not dare to look at him or Hewjil and walked on the red carpet with his head lowered, and allowed him to spot two other pairs of human boots at the edge of the carpet. He had seen them before and knew they had some relationship with his chief, but he had not dared to inquire about them from his chief.

He read out Brendel's words in his heart, Marsha above, he swore he had never been so serious even when he prayed. The threat from that human wizard was still echoing in his ears...

Chapter 104

Lure (3)

At the same time Aakkin planned his maleficence, Conrad and the Dark Bishop were observing the new Lizardman who came in. But what made them feel wrong with this scene before them was how the Lizardmen's faces all looked the same. At least from their point of view, the 'lizard' who came in earlier did not look any different from this 'lizard'.

Perhaps their patterns on the skin were different?

Hewjil recognized his subordinate and asked in his own native tongue: "Aakkin, you came back earlier than I expected. Why, did you find your targets?"

"Yes, chief." Aakkin answered with a stuttering chatter.

His attitude did not draw Hewjil's suspicion as he wanted deference from his subordinates, but he was a little annoyed at Aakkin's behavior. He waved his hand and replied: "When did you become inarticulate, Aakkin? If you have anything you want to report, just spit it out. What else did you see?"

"My men and I were attacked in the southern area." Aakkin gulped as he continued to chatter. "The people who attacked us seemed to be the men we are supposed to look for. There are fifteen of them, two female, and a youth who is leading twelve guards. They are really formidable, and before we could react... four of our brothers..."

"The south?" Hewjil answered blankly, as if he did not hear the loss of men: "Are you sure it's the south?"

Aakkin was also in a daze as he thought his chief would go into a rage. But he quickly recovered and nodded.

"What did he say?" Conrad had no more patience when he heard them talk in their native language. When Hewjil raised his voice, he knew something was up and immediately grabbed his shoulder and asked.

Hewjil smacked away his hand and yelled out: “This time, in the south region. Conrad, your foes, they playing hide and seek with us?”

“They are appearing in the east, south and southwest.” The Dark Bishop was thoughtful: “This goes against common sense, there has to be a scheme somewhere.”

“Damned your scheme,” Hewjil growled loudly: “The situation, simple. Enemies discovered where we are, that shitfaced youth you sent to bite them, is definitely killed already. They are escaping to the south! In three separate routes! They are dividing focus, I have seen enough of these ploys!”

“Impossible!” The Dark Bishop nearly jumped out from his chair: “That fool went with my acolyte,” He grabbed a crystal out from his robes with his bony fingers: “This crystal has not cracked, which means my acolyte is still fine!”

“Then your, foolish acolyte lost her way.” Hewjil spat his words out coldly with sarcasm dripping in his voice.

“An acolyte of the Gods losing her way? Have your brains rotted, you witless lizard!” Conrad interrupted Hewjil and blocked the Dark Bishop from attacking the latter with his arm. He roared at the Dark Bishop: “Why are you losing your temper! That lizard is right in saying that the enemies have discovered our intentions. They won’t break through the north any longer and they are sure to retreat. We can’t wait for them here any longer.”

“Then what should we do?” The Dark Bishop asked after looking blankly at Conrad for a while.

“Of course we need to chase them.”

“Into which direction?” Hewjil snapped.

Conrad gave him a piercing look and answered in a tone void of warmth: “Are you truly brainless? Are there only three of us here? What about your men, you imbecile, of course we’re going to divide our forces into three separate directions. Are you afraid that a mere ten odd Silver-ranked guards defeating our forces?”

Hewjil’s mouth opened, but found his voice dying in his throat as he discovered the damned human was right. His tone was slightly deflated as he asked: “Then when do we set out?”

“Of course we should set out right now!” Conrad said.

“No, this time we need to be cautious.” The Dark Bishop stopped him: “When my men are here to rejoin me, we can set out in the night.”

“You’re too cautious. By the time we set out, they will be way ahead of us.” Conrad grumbled, although he also shared the same concern of a trap when he heard the reports from the Lizardmen.

Hewjil merely reminded them: “Do not forget, half of the promised rewards, are mine.”

The two men glowered at him in disgust. The three figures did not pay attention to Aakkin who was secretly relieved.

[What did that terrifying wizard say? If I am not dead when the moon is up, my soul is returned to my body?] Aakkin’s heart was pounding and he shivered. Would that cunning wizard keep his promise?

Night quickly arrived. Conrad and Hewjil’s men acted first. Hundreds of fire torches could be spotted near the Elven ruins. This gathering of Lizardmen was highly unusual and complicated, especially when they had no notion of gathering as a unit before. Grouping them up and dividing them into separate forces was a huge task.

After an hour later, another long snaking group entered the ruins from the west, and they carried fire torches with them as well, with the gathered torches lighting up the entire area with a fiery red hue.

At this moment, four shadows were waiting at the top of a nearby hill—

“The disciples have gathered.” Countless lights were reflected in Brendel’s eyes as he spoke.

“So are Conrad’s men.” Sanford chimed in.

Brendel nodded.

“Are you sure they will divide their forces into three, my lord?” Sanford turned to him and asked: “What happens if they see through our scheme and concentrate their forces?”

“There is no ‘if’ here.” Brendel firmly said. If he was fighting against Madara’s talented commanders, his tricks would not work, but he was facing a bunch of Lizardmen bandits and mercenaries. Based on their quality, they would never be able to guess what he planned to do. One clear advantage he had was knowing how much men they had, while they only knew that he had twelve guards with him.

Under this situation, none of the enemy commanders would even consider that he had an additional squadron of Silver Elves and that he planned to consume them as experience points. Even if Brendel went up to them and personally told them he was going to wipe out this thousand odd Lizardmen bandits, they would think he had lost his mind.

Brendel was quiet for a moment before he replied: “Even the worst outcome now would be the enemy forces gathering into one direction, but we are already here and ready to exploit our tactical advantage. Know this well, they are the hunters and we are the prey. In this hunt, the party that decides where the battle would be, is the prey and not the hunters.”

Sanford nodded as he listened quietly.

The Elven commander stood there quietly. At this distance away from the Altar, he felt a great limitation on his strength, and he did not see any better than Brendel did. The last person that stood behind them was Romaine.

She saw much more than the others did when she looked at the field of fire torches. These lights appeared like stars gathering in the darkness to form a painting, and she thought it was truly beautiful.

Very soon, the fire torches started to spread out and reform into three straight lines.

“You were right, my lord!” Sanford’s eyes brightened up and he exclaimed excitedly, but his expression quickly darkened as he saw an image of Makarov’s confident figure on Brendel’s back. In the Grey Wolves Mercenaries’ hearts, the person who always had the means to lead them with victory was Makarov, but now it was proven that was merely their wishful thinking.

Brendel’s reactions were not as unsteady as Sanford. The curtains on this play had just been lifted and about to begin. He pointed towards the front of the fire torches: “Romaine, are you able to see the appearances of the leaders?”

Sanford and the Elven commander were startled. How was she able to see that far? They were approximately four kilometers away from the enemies, and the fire torches were about as bright as a firefly, and it was quite impossible for them to even see the figure carrying the torches.

They suddenly realized that the girl who came with them was not an ordinary person as she nodded immediately: "Of course I can! Hmm... The one of the left looks like a lizard."

"That's the commander of the Lizardmen, Hewjil. Continue." Brendel was confident of her abilities. She was able to spot the Madara army at Fortress Riedon even when the night sky had no starlight or moonlight. In this clear night, along with the fire torches, she definitely found it easy to see what they looked like.

"The leader of the center group seems to be a human. He's a young man wearing leather armor... And there seems to be something strange following next to him." Romaine carefully described what it looked like, and Brendel replied: "That's Conrad and the Earth Bishop. Strange, if those two are together, then who is leading the third group?" *(TL: I'll see what happens in the future when Brendel encounters the 'Dark Bishop' and 'Earth Bishop'. Currently I'm using Bishop because I don't know what the appearances of the bosses are, but I might change it to Avatar of Earth [name?] and Avatar of Lightning [Scarlett] in the future to differentiate them.)*

She nodded and her gaze moved over to the third group and described what she saw.

"It looks like the figure is wearing a black long robe with several red stripes on the side? I can't see anything further than that."

Brendel took a while to think about it: "Hmm... It's a Dark Bishop. That means that bastard Redi was talking about him and not the Earth Bishop. The one who cursed Scarlett should be him, but judging from the strength of the curse, he isn't one of the higher ranked members of the Tree Shepherd."

"My lord, do we stick to the plan?" Sanford asked with concern in his voice.

[This is a problem. The plan was to kill off the Earth Bishop alone, but if that boss is moving with Conrad then the entire battle would be extremely tough. The worst outcome is letting both of them flee without being able to stop them. This level 50 boss is the rough equivalent of a level 65 creature, and against the weakened level 35-40

Silver Elves... With another Gold-ranked fighter like Conrad, trying to get both of them would be difficult. Luring them into a trap will obviously work only once, and they won't repeat their mistakes...]

Brendel rubbed his forehead. He needed to gain the best results from this trap. He agonized over the situation for a while, should he kill the Lizardmen or the Dark Bishop?

[Wait, the Dark Bishop? Holy shit! Dark Bishop?! Isn't he a dark elemental? I should smack myself for being an idiot. Killing him would mean I can get dark elemental crystals, and heck, the Dark Bishops are famous for dropping nothing but crystals. Even the gamers called them one of the poorest mob creatures around.]

Brendel's mind was used to think about the overall picture, and actually forgot that he could really use some dark elemental crystals. *(TL: To summon Medissa, in case anyone is wondering.)*

Once he thought about it, his mind seemed to clear up and even predicted how the future events would flow. If the Dark Bishop died, the Blood of Gods in Scarlett's body would also be suppressed because of the lack of control, and he would gain another powerful Gold-ranked fighter.

He clapped his hands and said: "No, we're not retreating. I want to go after the Dark Bishop now."

Everyone did not understand why he changed his mind so easily.

Brendel patted the stolen Lizardman's mount and made the beast turn its body. He smiled with embarrassment: "It's common to change a plan when there are unforeseen circumstances. Don't worry, this doesn't affect things. In any case, we should return to our ambush location, I don't want to get caught in a battle here."

Chapter 105

Lure (4)

Four of the Lizardmen's mount darted through the darkness, their faint shadows passing through the valley like river streams. A few moments later, the rider who was leading them raised his hand high up, and the others quickly pulled back their reins to turn their mounts around, then started to dismount one by one.

Brendel held his sword down with one hand while he nimbly left his mount by standing on the stirrups, jumped up from them and landed gracefully onto the ground. When he did so, he heard Romaine grumbling loudly behind him:

"Brendel, riding this thing is awful—" She was still on her mount with her eyebrows in a frown with her hands rubbing her neck: "It's not exciting at all and it's painful."

Brendel laughed as he went over to her and helped her down.

[If I let our highness Romaine have fun on this mount, would you still follow me properly?]

The Lizardmen's mounts were creatures that crawled on the ground, moving in a 's' direction that jerked from side to side. If the riders did not have specific training on it, they would not have an easy time on it. Brendel had wasted ten-odd skill points on it from the Lizardman prisoner to learn how to ride it.

He had learned this lesson in this game once already and would not fall into such a trap again. But when he saw that her face was slightly pale, he felt a few pangs in his heart and replied gently: "Take a short rest."

The battles ahead did not involve Romaine.

"Then I'm going off to nap—" She jumped down from her mount with Brendel's support with his arm, and blinked at him: "I'll be praying for you."

"In your dreams?" Brendel asked with some exasperation.

“Yes, in my dreams.” She nodded seriously, her smiling eyes forming in a line like she scored a small victory, then ran past the Mercenaries of Lopes who walked out from the forest. Brendel’s mood also lifted up when he saw her actions. He was truly fond of her optimistic mindset even under dire circumstances. Every time she smiled, he found his heart getting conquered by her, regardless of the old and new Brendel.

Even from the first night in Bucce, he found it hard to take his eyes off her whimsical actions.

He took in a deep breath and allowed the cold air of the night to enter his lungs, and slowly cooled down his slightly dazzled mind which was getting hot. When he spotted the Nightsong Tiger, he paused for a moment before moving straight to him while waving the back of his hand at him:

“Prepare for battle, the enemy is only two miles away from us. Hurry up, I want all these XP from the two hundred Lizardmen to be taken completely.”

Brendel did not like to waste time on pointless banter before the battle. He had explained everything clearly to them and it was just a small ambush. It was not even really an operation that required tactical maneuvers like those in the game.

“XP?” Sanford looked like he was confused as he got down from his mount as he heard this unknown word. The Nightsong Tiger merely curled his lips as he glanced at him. He was used to his lord spouting some strange words from time to time. The other mercenaries had even learned what they meant.

“I meant that none of these enemies is to be left alive.” Brendel changed his words with a straight face.

The Elven commander’s lips twisted subtly at the corner without anyone noticing.

Brendel’s orders were quickly executed—

His men quickly moved in the forest and the youth started to deploy them at strategic positions. He chose to use the most common tactic in the game against these low level mob of Lizardmen. He hid with the Elven commander and the Nightsong Tiger, while the other Elves and mercenaries moved to their designated positions. The Elves’ armors were made by the Elven craftsmen not to reflect moonlight, while the majority of the mercenaries painted their leather armor black. They hid well enough that even trained eyes would not spot them unless they specifically looked for them.

The Elves crouched down behind bushes with a single hand on their broadswords which were covered with fallen leaves, while the mercenaries were approximately thirty feet behind them, waiting anxiously with readied shortbows or crossbows, not daring to breathe loudly.

Brendel did not want any deaths in this battle, so he let the Elves lead the forefront while the mercenaries were in charge of ranged suppression. This subconsciously made decision looked like he was taking care of the newly recruited men. Even though Makarov was able to bring victory for them every time, he was a commander who was born in nobility, and the nobles tend to see the deaths of their subordinates as mere numbers.

With the high birth rate of Vaunte surpassing the medieval ages' birth rates on earth, the rich population was always a resource to be used in the commanders' eyes.

However, Brendel paid for each NPC from his own pocket in the game, and some of them were obtained from unique missions; it could be said that every one of them was obtained with effort, and he was reluctant to treat them like cannon fodder.

Naturally he did not notice his actions had raised the loyalty from the remnants of the Grey Wolves Mercenaries; he merely checked the time from the stats window.

[I have about an hour more.]

He exhaled and shook his body to get some warmth in this cold forest. He mocked himself a little. It was just a small battle but he actually felt a little tense. He had led so many battles in the game against Madara forces, and even did so in this world by leading the refugees, but here he was, almost like a new soldier who was participating in battle for the first time.

[I haven't done an ambush against such numbers for quite some time. My heart seems to be beating faster.]

He looked at the constant numbers fluctuating in the Stats Windows. It was calculating the penalty for the distance in both projectile and magic constantly, and he felt like it did not fit reality. Brendel blinked a few times before he checked his own stats:

Strength: 19.4 (+0.1)

Agility: 10.9 (+1.1)

Physique: 21.2 (+2)

Intelligence: 1.1

Will: 3.6 (+1)

Perception: 3.9

(TL: The stats are inclusive of the bonuses as stated by the author. Strength isn't 19.5 but 19.4. Also, his intelligence has not grown since the start of the series. Brendel is currently below level 25, and still classified as a Iron-ranked fighter.)

[My stats are almost at a Silver-ranked fighter. If I gain another level I will definitely reach it. But compared to my basic stats, my techniques are truly outstanding. The encounters in this world are much better than the last, Power Break and the White Raven Sword Rave are pretty much the best techniques for a warrior.]

He could not really remember how he was able to survive back then in the game with his basic stats and techniques. Right now with his current skillset, he was truly invincible amongst his enemies at his level. If he added the various techniques that he had right now, he could fight against against a mid level Silver-ranked fighter. If he combined his experience in the game, he could even go against the Gold-ranked fighters who had not unsealed their Element.

Brendel rubbed his forehead as he pondered on several things, before he suddenly turned to the Elven commander and asked: "Are your techniques from the Holy Land?"

The Elven commander was taken slightly aback, but he immediately looked back with a little caution.

"Don't worry, I know your rules. I haw no interest in your Elven techniques but I'm just a little curious." Brendel's mind said otherwise, of course. If he had a high renown he might have a better answer from the Elven commander.

"Even if I tell you about them, you wouldn't be able to learn because our Elven techniques are designed specifically for us, human." The Elven commander replied coldly.

There was a scene in Brendel's mind where he was pulling the Elven's commander cheeks with a 'A lie keeps growing and growing until it's as clear as the nose on your

face!

He had learned the Silver Elves' techniques before but he did not break his lies and merely smiled:

“Come on, Ser Nalaethar, don't be so cold. You experienced the War of the Holy Saints right?”

The Elven commander eyed him coldly, not understanding how the topic turned to that, but he still nodded.

“Have you learned any Dark Techniques?”

“No.” Nalaethar snapped. His eyes glared at him, while his lips parted again to say something before he resisted doing so. Any Silver Elf who learned Dark Techniques meant they had joined the faction of the Dragon of Darkness. Even though he thought Brendel was being sarcastic to him, he convinced himself that the latter was innocent.

Very few people in this era would know that era well.

Unfortunately Brendel was one of them, and he was indeed making fun of him.

Nalaethar was silent for a moment before he suddenly spoke again: “Do you really wish to learn something, human?”

This time it was Brendel who was surprised. His mouth went open but he did not know how to respond.

[You really want to teach me something? You're not yanking my chain? But it's the hardest to raise one's reputation amongst the Silver Elves—]

Chapter 106

Lure (6)

“You don’t wish to learn?” Nalaethar looked at Brendel with complete ridicule in his eyes.

“I want to, of course I want to.” Brendel rushed his answer out.

[Is there a need to even ask? Which idiot would refuse a Silver Elf’s technique?]

“The Elven techniques can’t be taught to you, so there’s no need to think about it.” Nalaethar’s eyes changed back to its usual taciturn look. “Don’t be so hasty, I already told you our techniques are specifically designed for my race.”

Brendel nodded, but his mind said otherwise: “Then...?”

“I can teach you something else that we learned,” Nalaethar paused for a moment: “Do you know how important it is to determine how strong your enemies—”

“Hold on!” Brendel drew in a breath rapidly and interrupted: “Are you talking about the ability ‘Probe’?”

Brendel was trying hard to restrain himself from beating his fists into the air. The unsociable Silver Elf suddenly looked like he was becoming affable, Brendel looked hopefully at him.

He had been relying on numbers from the system to gauge the NPC enemies’ levels, and had always felt disturbed by the lack of accurate information on their stats. He used his own experience to recall vital enemies’ stats and their favored techniques, but there was no way for him to recall every one of them.

With the ability ‘Probe’, he would be able to see the characters’ entire list of stats and their skillsets, and once the ability was raised to high levels, the system would even give an Overall Power Rating. Judging whether they are strong or weak would be a breeze for him.

In the game, Marden also taught this ability, but when Brendel tried asking him about it in this world, he discovered that the old soldier did not know that ability at all. When he thought about the reason, he recalled that he met Marden very late in the game and that the latter learned the ability from someone else. *(TL: Marden is the captain of Bucces guards, in case you can't remember. Also I checked this with prior records and I TLed it as 'exploration' back then. Now that the ability is explained clearly, I'm changing it to Probe.)*

“Probe’?” Nalaethar shook his head: “We simply call it ‘Evaluation’, if a name is needed. It is something every Silver Elf warrior would learn, so that we can gauge the battlefield with that particular skill.”

“Huh?” Brendel looked blankly at the Elf. “What exactly is it used for?”

He had never heard of a skill like that before. The closest skill to Probe was Eagle Eye, a skill that was much better. Not only did it have the same effects of Probe, there was a chance to steal techniques of the enemies killed. However, he would never be to learn this technique because the person who taught it was against Aouine’s princess, and he had no interest to betray this kingdom.

But he was certainly interested in this new skill that he had never heard before. Given how formidable the Silver Elves were, the skills that they recognized would definitely be good stuff.

The Elven commander stared at Brendel as he replied: “I remember that you said you would bring victory to us. I had kept your words in my mind and shall use this skill as a bet. I’ll teach this skill to you if you are able to bring victory to us.”

Once the Elven commander finished speaking, he turned his head away and smiled faintly without Brendel’s notice.

[Shit, I knew it wasn’t going to be that easy. Well that’s fine. Both victory and the skill are as good as mine anyways. An unknown skill in the game that I have never seen or heard before... That’s a little surprising.]

Suddenly he felt the Nightsong Tiger’s elbow knocking on his side. He looked at where the latter was pointing and noticed the mercenaries readying their weapons. Even though it was only for a short moment, he knew that the long awaited enemies had arrived.

The first group that entered the valley were thirty odd Lizardmen dragoons.

They trod under the moonlight and proceeded through the cold boulders, quickly reaching the lowest point of the valley. The next group of units were the Lizardmen infantry with lances and crossbows. These monsters were not like a formal army, and the equipment on their bodies were messily put together. There were no banners that they carried, and were comprised of small squadrons led by Lizardmen who wore an armband.

The leaders of the small squadrons chattered and made a din, gurgling high pitch noises that kept the individuals who were out of order and their flanks from becoming too scattered. They marched in disorderly lines of twos and threes and did not form a tactical formation because they were still far away from the humans they were after.

The long snaking army of Lizardmen passed through the valley, and the mercenaries turned their heads one by one to look for Brendel's signal, but he shook his head. The Lizardmen were not the only enemies and it was not the best moment to attack yet.

After a few minutes later, the Dark Bishop finally appeared. Because he was not a melee profession, he did not appear in the front or flanks, and was surrounded by a bunch of high ranking disciples. Brendel recognized them easily as high-ranking disciples from their attire, and also spotted two single-armed demons walking along them with large strides. They were called Bachsa; they were once warriors with great sins cast into hell and subsequently turned into lesser demons which had formidable attacking strength.

More than half of the Lizardmen had crossed beyond the mercenaries.

Brendel suddenly looked to his left and right before asking: "Where's Amandina?"

"It seems that Miss Romaine had called her away." The Nightsong Tiger answered.

Brendel answered with a contemplative affirmation. He was slightly worried about that crazy lass causing mayhem again, but he felt better once he heard Amandina was with her. The only thing left to do was to properly handle this battle. He stared at the valley, with the Lizardmen not detecting the killing intent from him.

The youth carefully pulled out his sword, taking care to place it under the shadows and pointing to the enemies.

It was the signal to attack.

The curtains were pulled back and the battle commenced with crossbows firing at the same time. The mercenaries carefully aimed for their preys as they clenched their teeth and pulled the triggers. The taut strings shot the metallic bolts out and returned to their former unloaded positions. The slightly misty air parted from the projectiles and dull thuds could be heard as the bolts bit into flesh.

The Lizardmen were only in time to turn their heads as they heard the 'twang' sounds, and more than a dozen of their men who carried crossbows were shot down. Even though most of them did not lose their lives from that, the immense impact had knocked them painfully to the ground and caused them to lose their abilities to continue fighting.

""Attack!"" High-pitched chattering and screams could be heard from the Lizardmen.

The Lizardmen who were not fully evolved instinctively tried to get ready for battle, but the second wave of bolts were fired unerringly into their midst once again. Their own ranged Lizardmen were picked off one by one, and panic started to spread amongst them like wildfire. The foliage suddenly parted and twenty Elven warriors wielding broadswords charged at them with a disciplined formation, displaying the fervent aura of the warriors seven centuries ago and making it seem like there were thousands of warriors behind them.

Such were their killing intent.

The Dark Bishop were nearly frightened out of his senses when he saw this scene. He immediately thought that the Lizardmen must have offended this ancient race one too many times and caused them to reappear in this world after disappearing for hundreds of years.

[I'm going to kill that fucking lizard Hewjil! Shit, this is the famous Silver Elven army that participated in the War of the Holy Saints!]

The Dark Bishop's hands trembled as he stared the Silver Elves who had the strength of the strongest Gold-ranked fighters.

He really wished that the Lizardmen were enough to act like cannon fodder and stall for a little time, but it seemed like it was wishful thinking. The immense potency of

their charge was like a stake driving into the heart of the Lizardmen's formations, causing them to be knocked high up in the sky with blood and sinew raining down. Their lithe and bony structures then crashed loudly onto the ground, causing them to die immediately or become heavily injured.

The heavy Elven infantry quickly regrouped and continued to decimate their lines. Even though the Lizardmen outnumbered them by ten times, they were one-sidedly slaughtered.

The mercenaries continued to reload and fire and gave support to the Elven infantry, while Brendel and Nightsong Tiger and the Elven commander stealthily moved at the same time towards the battlefield.

Brendel was seeing something that he did not expect as numbers and lights kept flashing in his eyes. His XP was going up all the time. The XP obtained from his mercenaries was one thing—

[Holy shit! Boosted XP mode because I entered the conditions for a 100% completion rating for this quest? Going by game logic I should actually receive very little XP because the Silver Elves have higher levels than the Lizardmen!]

Chapter 107

Lure (6)

Brendel quickly recovered from the surprise and eagerly rushed to activate his Charge skill, moving across the terrain in a straight line, passed through the mercenaries and Elven infantry to swoop down into the thick of the fray. Dozens of Lizardmen rushed at him with their lances.

“Good! Come at me!” Brendel roared.

He activated Power Break and swung his sword to strike at the incoming weapons, knocking back the Lizardmen easily. With his current strength, he easily pushed back the Level 19 creatures.

He then took another large step forward, gripped his sword’s hilt tightly with two hands and swung it from right to left. The air instantly distorted and a translucent ripple could be seen rending the Lizardmen’s flesh and passing through them.

The foliage around him fluttered backwards freely from the Sword Rave’s shockwave. A series of green words and numbers filled his retina as the Lizardmen’s bodies separated into half. The enemies around him fell into a quick silence as they retreated in fear as the body parts were strewn in a fan-shaped area in front of Brendel.

There were only a few physical techniques that utilized thin air to wound the enemies other than magic and unsealed Elements. Medissa’s area of effect abilities did not come from her own Elven techniques but the Spectral Knight’s techniques. In order for a Silver Elf to do the same thing, they had to reach the peak level of 60 before possessing similar capabilities.

Brendel drew his sword back and changed his stance into a defensive one, taking time to breathe in properly.

Even though he killed only seven Lizardmen, the effect was more than enough to demoralize them. The Lizardmen nearest to him had their morale bars plunging to a red color, and they started to retreat away from him. The space around him was empty and gave enough time to check the amount of XP that he got.

[60 XP for these Lizardmen wielding a lance. A level 19 creature would give around 20 XP. I'm getting nearly three times the XP of a normal mob creature when I killed these lizards, this is just like how it is in the game. The Elven infantry got me 200 plus XP, I got 420 XP from my charge. If I kill a few Lizardmen leaders and the mobs around them, I'm going to level up!]

Brendel felt his blood burning hot. He was at 3200/7900 XP, and only had a chunk of XP required to get to reach level 25.

[Level 25 is a new checkpoint. Not only do I get a new talent, I can get the third ability from my profession. Along with that, I'm going to be classified as a Silver ranked fighter, and only at the age of only nineteen. That's at the level of a 'Blessed' character!]

Even though Brendel had never looked down on his NPC status, he was quite irritated to see ridiculous talents popping up around him with Gold-ranked abilities and stats.

[Or maybe I should target the level 25 dragoons or disciples first— Hold on, should I go after the Dark Bishop now?]

Brendel quickly swiveled his eyes around to look for the Dark Bishop in excitement. His eyes were starting to become bloodshot as he drooled over that sizable XP. However, what he saw was a group of high ranking disciples rushing to the Elven infantry like a wave. He realized that the Dark Bishop did not wish for the Lizardmen's formation to break completely.

Once the Lizardmen's army was cut into half, it would become difficult for the Dark Bishop to give orders, as well as becoming slower to respond to the enemy's attacks. He knew that if he lost control of the battlefield, his chances to escape will be reduced significantly, thus he had no choice but to send out his disciples in order to prevent the situation from becoming worse.

Over ten Disciples brandished their weapons while riding the boar-like demons certainly looked imposing, but the Elven infantry had already moved back into position and lined up with Brendel, ready for them. The Lizardmen were impeded by the mercenaries' ranged attacks and there were not many obstacles between the disciples and the Elves.

If the Dark Bishop was a little better in commanding, he could order the Lizardmen around him to charge at the mercenaries on the hill. This would even the odds a little

bit more, but he was simply not suited to lead. The only things he had in mind were to prevent the lines from splitting altogether and protecting himself.

After issuing his commands to his men to prevent any enemies from coming near him, he started to prepare his spells, but Brendel had already found him and formed a plan—

===== Amandina's POV =====

The war cries in the valley started to mix together and Amandina could no longer discern what was happening. The battle below seemed like it was happening in another world

When the cool wind blew over the hill's top which was completely bare and void of foliage, she shivered and coughed lightly once, before tightening the cloak around herself. She stood alone in the open cliff and looked at her surroundings in slight fear, then turned back to check a certain crevice in the wall and whispered in exasperation:

“Romaine, are you still not done?”

“I'm almost done.” Her voice came back like she was finishing soon.

Amandina sighed. She had heard of that answer a few times already, but she knew that Romaine would definitely ignore her grumblings even if she tried, so she could only stomp her feet to get rid of the cold.

However, Romaine was really about to finish what she was doing. She went deeper into the narrow crevice and walked in the dark area without hesitation. Any normal person would feel frightened of this tight area that was void of light, but she walked with an excited expression as she reached her destination. She reached into her pouch and pulled out a crystal, bent down to her feet, cleared the small rocks on the ground and placed the crystal on top of it.

She got up and count the places where she laid five other crystals, nodded and finally came out from the crevice with a light-hearted expression. She discovered Amandina with her frowning eyebrows that nearly touched her eyes which were filled with full of discontent and blame.

“I'm regretting this already. Let's go back now.” Amandina shivered and coughed from the cold.

“Don’t worry, it’s just a small experiment and Brendel won’t notice it at all,” Romaine showed a lopsided grin and pulled Amandina’s arm: “Let’s move on to the next location.”

“W-wait...”

“Give me more of that crystal.”

“What are you trying to do!” Amandina’s wary hands went over her pouch. It was unlucky enough that that damned girl discovered her secret, but she did not want to have anything to do with her crazy acts.

“But your calculations are fine right?”

“Of course!” She gritted her teeth as she answered: “Romaine, you horrible woman, I’m actually a recognized student in Lantonrand’s Royal Geology Circle...”

Romaine immediately made a disappointed sigh.

===== Brendel’s POV =====

A Wind Bullet and a Fireball.

When the explosion of burning air finally dissipated from the battlefield, the high ranking disciples had been turned into ashes.

[Ring of the Wind Empress, 20 OZ, 30 damage, Flame ring, 24 OZ, 70 damage. That’s enough to clear out these Silver-ranked disciples. I was worried there might be some elite demons that came along with the disciples, but it looks like my concern was for nothing. If I think about it, they are unlikely to come into this world in great numbers... Unless a flag is somehow raised and the Gate of Demons is opened, cough—]

Brendel’s XP was raised by two thousand points. He was nearly level twenty five. He quickly lowered his sword and gave new orders to the Elven infantry: “Attack the enemies’ flanks, get rid of the Lizardmen and clear a path for me. The BOSS, I mean, leave the leader to me! Got it?”

Twenty Elves nodded at the same time.

“How about me, my lord?” The Nightsong tiger asked.

“Go along with Nalaethar.” Brendel replied.

“You don’t need any help?” The Elven commander asked.

“Just leave the leader to me, I don’t want that bastard to die off too quickly.” Brendel answered.

He had other thoughts about the Dark Bishop. Even though the latter had abilities and stats equivalent to a level 35 normal NPC, his true level was only 25 and Brendel actually had an easier time to deal with enemies with lower levels.

Without giving them a chance to argue, the youth charged towards the Dark Bishop, but two Bachsa demons that were nearly three meters tall were obstructing him.

They were aggressive demons who also had the Charge abilities, and could be said to be the bane of low level archers and wizards. Brendel stopped before them for a split moment before going around their backs like a stealthy spirit. His hair flitted about as their weapons missed him before they landed onto the ground with a resounding crash.

Although the demons had the Charge abilities, their agility was incredibly low and their regular strength were also no match for Brendel’s strike combined with Power Break. His sword danced across the demons’ bodies, painting injuries across them one after another as he constantly moved behind them and biting at their backs. The demons were slowly bleeding to their deaths, but they were not even able to catch a glimpse of Brendel’s appearance.

The Dark Bishop did not waste any time and quickly finished casting his spell. He screamed and directed a bolt of lightning towards Brendel who had kept an eye on him.

[Claws of the Demon, a magic spell of the Third Circle.]

Brendel easily recognized the magic spell. It was a spell that had two effects. Even though it was based on the Dark Element, the dark energy converted Hellfire into burning damage, while the second effect caused a loss of speed. As a magic spell of the Third Circle, the effects were much more effective than an Ice Arrow. It would literally seal the enemy onto the ground with dark energy unless they had over 40 OZ strength, and would only dissipate after a couple of minutes.

This spell was one of the most common spells amongst Dark Elementarists and Witches, and were primarily used for a sneak attack. Brendel really wanted to tell the Dark Bishop it should not be used in this manner when he saw this ugly sight. During the early days in the game, players simply used this spell without thinking until much later, where they discovered that it was better used with a combined spell to hide the flashy effects, or even used as a close combat spell.

The reason for that was because the spell needed careful aim.

When Brendel saw the Dark Bishop's hand stretched out, he immediately kicked the Bachsa's body in front of him to block the lightning's path. Hundreds of black electricity sparks chained the body onto the ground and spluttered hellfire everywhere. It was an impressive sight, but the spell effectiveness was rendered to zero as it missed its intended target.

He then activated Power Break again with an upwards swing of his sword, sundering the other demon's neck and arm and instantly killed it with the body parts flying high up into the air.

Brendel took a moment to take a deep breath. The recent addition of the Spectral Knight's crystal had caused the effectiveness of Power Break to increase his strength to over 30 OZ, but the drain on his stamina was even higher than before.

Fortunately, the balls of light that flew from the demons into his body caused him to level up and his body felt lighter than before. Green words streaked across his retina:

- You have reached Level 25. New talents are available.
- You have gained the technique Frontal Assault;
- Frontal Assault (Level 0): Spend 5 stamina and break the opponent's defenses (Armor, Magic, Natural), causing your enemies' defenses to weaken by 1.7 OZ.
- Detected an Item of Destiny: 'The Golden Seed of Destiny'. Do you wish to activate the destiny of 'The Golden Dawn'?

[What the fuck! No, I refuse to activate!]

Brendel was stunned for a moment before he hurriedly shook his head.

Chapter 108

Lure (7)

The Golden Apple was a unique God-tier item in the game. Using that item would open the Destiny's Gift of 'The Golden Dawn'. The unique talent from this gift was 'The Leaves of the Golden Tree', derived from the true Golden Tree, and not the corrupted and useless Golden Demonic Tree.

The in-game lore of the Golden Tree described its true name as 'Prana, The World Tree', which was found at the edge of the world next to the Deep Lake. Indeed, it was one of the sources that provided the Golden Bloodline, and the talent rewarded a full 10% growth for all stats, and increased the Spiritual Points (SP) by ten times.

In the game, only a few of the best Elementalists managed to activate this talent through a quest. The Golden Apple was a dream for countless gamers.

This chance was presented in front of Brendel and in reach of his hands. As soon as he nodded, all his stats would increase and effectively add his MP pool by two times. He would even gain the passive ability 'Quaduple Casting', which made it possible to effectively cast four different spells at the same time. It was the best ability any profession that used spells could have, and affectionately called as 'The Fairy's Language' by the gamers.

All the analysis websites rated the Golden Dawn with a S+ Grade, and was even seen as an option for the warrior class simply because of the stats growth. It was even more compatible with Brendel, because he ultimately had to take on a side profession as an Elementalist to become a Planeswalker.

However, he did not hesitate for one moment and refused it entirely.

Even though the talent was good, he only had one chance to choose and wanted only the best talents, or at least the best available talents for his plan in this world. The game had countless gamers vying for the limited professions, but this world was different because there was no one at all—

He understood there were many opportunities in this world, and the Golden Dawn

was merely something that looked decent.

He had two Talents he wanted:

Primeval Bloodline – All Stats increased by 10%, a reduction of 50% in penalty for taking side professions.

Genealogy Unification – All professions gain a unique modified skillset.

The first ability gave incredible value as Brendel had no idea how many professions he had to take on in the future, and the more professions he had, the more penalties he was going to have.

The second ability boosted all professions in some form, and he remembered that it added Fabled Hero to the Warrior Class: All abilities within the Warrior Skill Tree were increased by one level.

In the game, techniques were classified as such.

1-5: Elementary

6-10: Advanced

11-15: Veteran

16-20: Master

21 and above: Grandmaster

Classifications above Grandmaster had various names, but the highest of them all was Legendary, and could only be achieved by Genealogy Unification, or at least this was the only method Brendel knew of.

The grades of each ability would go up by one when they reached the Legendary tier. Many gamers wondered how overpowered a character would be if they managed to raise their all their professions' abilities' levels to the max, but that was practically impossible to achieve even for pay-to-win players. *(TL: Basically Grade B skill will become Grade A, etc.)*

That was why some of the gamer analysts called Genealogy Unification the 'fake SS'

Talent. Other rumored SS talents in the game were Marsha's Progeny or The Azure Catastrophe described by NPCs which had never appeared in the game.

Brendel did not hope to acquire any of the SS rated talents, but he had a rough idea on how the quests for these two Talents he wanted to have. As long as there was a general walkthrough or described process he had read, he was confident that he could do the same like what the previous title holders had accomplished.

[I'm not going to make a shitty choice again. Choosing a garbage talent like Unyielding... If I had the choice of choosing the talent Dragon's Scion or Ironwill, my combat stats would be twenty percent better. I need to choose the best talents available now so that I can recoup my losses. No, no, no, I refuse to activate!]

Brendel answered in his mind and rotated his body to evade a Mana Arrow from the Dark Bishop. It was a low level spell which did not need a long casting spell, designed to prevent Brendel from getting too close, and not for the purpose of hitting him.

All the disciples had died and there were only ten plus Lizardmen who were shivering from fear as they guarded the Dark Bishop. He knew they were useless and could only rely on his own strength, even if the situation looked hopeless. He threw another Mana Arrow while hurling curses on Hewjil for failing to provide information on the twenty Silver Elves. Even up to till this point, he did not understand that he had being lured into a trap by Brendel, who continued to dodge his arrows.

[If you reach level 30 and got the passive ability 'Spirit Vein' from your profession, I might worry about your ability to do dual casting. Why are you wasting your mana to cast low level spells? Is your MP higher than my stami—]

The option to activate the Talent had faded away when Brendel rejected it, but a new message appeared:

– Your character has reached Level 25. Your talent Unyielding has been upgraded as a bonus.

– Unyielding (Level 2): Your character has obtained gained Elemental Resistance +5, and a 5% physical damage reduction.

[.....]

Brendel immediately canceled the Window to stop it from interrupting his mood to

fight. Even though it was quite a good talent for a tank there were no warriors in the game who took on the role of tanks, especially when Brendel took on a variant profession as a Mercenary. This message looked like it was mocking him.

[Just exactly who would allow a monster to hit them on purpose in this world?!]

The Silver Elves forced the Lizardmen to the sides of the hill, and the Dark Bishop finally realized his mistake when the path between Brendel and him cleared up slowly. Brendel also noticed the Mana Arrows had stopped and peered at the Dark Bishop who was gathering Dark Element around him, which caused black smoke to circle around him. It was apparent to Brendel that the Dark Bishop was casting a high level magic spell.

The latter forcefully swung his sword to knock any remaining Lizardmen in his path and activated his Charge ability, and instantly turned into a straight line rushing towards the Dark Bishop. Before any of the Lizardmen around the Dark Bishop could react, Brendel had bypassed them to reach the Dark Bishop's side.

He planted his right foot forward, raised his sword upwards to the sky, activated Power Break and cleaved the Dark Bishop into two — that should have happened, but a black shield that reflected no light appeared, and caused a loud clang when the sword crashed onto it.

[What...?]

Brendel was slightly stunned as he saw the Dark Bishop's bony arm holding on to a shield that suddenly appeared out from nowhere. The Dark Bishop leered at Brendel as he shrugged off his sword and pointed with his other hand, firing off black flames from his fingers, and formed into a familiar shape.

“Mana Arrow!”

Chapter 109

Looting the body and an accident

“Mana Arrow!” The Dark Bishop screeched as he launched it towards Brendel.

Brendel clenched his teeth and evaded the arrow by twisting his body, letting it slide across his chest. The hellfire scorched his skin and he felt like his whole body was set ablaze. Even though there was damage done, the outcome was much better than having a few of his ribs broken.

[Damn it. Even though I was on my guard against the Dark Bishop’s Cast Invisibility spell, I still got damaged.]

In the game, the tanking professions would usually take this damage, but Brendel was certain that he would not get caught by it with his reactions and was not disappointed by his agility.

If he failed to evade it, then the next few attacks would be a set of combination spells from the Dark Bishop. He would not get killed by that, but would definitely suffer for the next few days.

[But this is the only time where I can get full solo XP, since the Nightsong Tiger and the others will probably rush to help me out. In any case, now that the Dark Bishop has failed, it’s going to be my turn for a counter-attack.]

Brendel leapt and immediately got behind the Dark Bishop’s back with another swing of his sword.

As he expected, the Dark Bishop flung his arm in an arc and allowed the black shield to intercept Brendel’s sword, while a pile of black flames appeared on his left hand again.

[Although my attack only took 1/3 of the durability away, do you really think I can’t break your Shield of Darkness that only has 10 points?]

Brendel scoffed as he jumped backwards to avoid the second Mana Arrow. There was

no need to be impatient.

The exchange of attacks took place during Brendel's Charge ability. The Lizardmen realized their target had disappeared, and paused for a moment blankly before they started to search for him. When they spotted him again, they saw him attacking the Dark Bishop with a sword that was shining brightly—

He had called out the Stats Window during his retreat, and raised Frontal Assault to level five. At that level the defenses would be weakened by 10 OZ, and was effectively the bane of warriors who wore Heavy Armor as well as wizards with high level barriers.

Brendel's sword started to vibrate intensely as the blade reflected the moonlight, and making it seem like it was clad with light.

The sword went in a straight line.

[Power Break, Frontal Assault, activate!] Brendel felt as though all his strength leaving his body and poured into the thrust.

The results did not disappoint him. The Dark Bishop stared at his shield which was breaking into a shower of fragments in great disbelief. That ordinary looking sword emerged past his abdomen and back without stopping, and once it did so, Brendel immediately released his sword and went behind his back.

When he did so, the Dark Bishop screamed loudly as excessive quantities of dark flames poured out from his eyes, nostrils, mouth and injuries. The strength of the flames which were more than ten times stronger than the Mana Arrow, caused Brendel who went behind his back to feel the Dark Element boiling in the sky and made his skin prick painfully.

Burning life points and converting them into Mana. This was the last defense of any Elementalist. It could be used instantly, but only someone like the Dark Bishop was insane enough to use every bit of his life force to kill Brendel along with himself.

Brendel had suffered this suicidal move in the past so he made sure to avoid it. If he took that head on, he was most likely going to be dead or at the very least near death.

That well made Whitesteel Longsword was probably destroyed. Unless it was a magic artifact, most of the normal artifacts would be destroyed from the Mana Explosion. He

was not even sure if there was anything going to be left from it.

He then turned around and smiled at the Lizardmen who were planning to surround him.

He felt that his smile was quite sincere and friendly, but the Lizardmen looked at him like he as though he was a horrifying monster. Even someone as strong as the Dark Bishop was killed by the youth in an instant, while they were just insignificant minions who would not make a difference in this battle. They could not help but look at each other with doubt, then quickly turned around and ran away.

Their actions certainly fit the actions that stereotypical bandits would make.

They were able to relish that the fact that the youth did not go after them. The truth was Brendel was actually in a weakened state. The combination of Power Break and Frontal Assault had used up fifteen times the Stamina required to use a full swing. Even though he still had stamina remaining he felt quite exhausted.

[Whatever. This battle is at its end anyway. Let's see. I got 4200 points from the Dark Bishop, and my current XP is 5645/13600, oh, it's still going up huh...]

He looked up and saw the Silver Elves breaking the Lizardmen's formation wide open, and chased them to paths that were narrow and complicated. When the Dark Bishop died, the Lizardmen were unable to form any resistance any longer and started to flee.

In the beginning, there were still some resemblance of a defensive formation, but it quickly descended into a chaotic retreat.

[The only thing left to do in this battle was to just wait for the XP to come in.]

Brendel went ahead and sat beside the Dark Bishop without touching anything. Since he was unlucky in finding good loot from the bodies, he wanted to wait for the older Elementalist sister to handle the corpse.

He took out a Moonlight Crystal out, activated it and threw it up into the air. This was the signal to inform the mercenaries they no longer needed to support the battle with ranged attacks, and they should regroup with him.

Since it was boring to wait for them, Brendel started to study his stats.

[Strength and Physique are over 25 oz, agility was added by 3 OZ from the level up. I've definitely reached the minimum qualification for a Silver-rank fighter. Adding my other abilities like Power Break and Frontal Assault will allow me to reach the top tier fighters of this rank.]

“That’s two months. Do you believe that, old pal? You turned from a common militia to the level of an Apprentice Knight with the strength of a Silver-rank fighter. Even the formal Bucces guards can’t even compare to you now. Trust me when I say our road is still far ahead-” Brendel smiled a little as he placed his hand over his chest and muttered. The Brendel from the game world felt a surge of emotions within him. It was true that level 25 was really nothing to him.

The mercenaries made their way down from the forest, and the former Grey Wolves Mercenaries were especially excited. They knew very little about their new lord compared to the others. Even though Brendel said he would bring them victory, they did not realize that it would be won so easily and without casualties.

They were outnumbered by nearly seven times, and there were Silver-ranked demons and the Dark Bishop who constantly hounded them in the past like an unending nightmare. Sanford was still a little agitated when he ran to Brendel’s side, and he suddenly felt there was something different about his lord, and caused him to forget his manners. He approached close to him and asked excitedly: “My lord, did you break your limits?”

Brendel nodded.

“The lord is only twenty years old, and he attained the might of a Silver-rank fighter,” The Grey Wolves Mercenaries looked at each other and murmured amongst themselves. “We are fortunate enough to witness the birth of two prodigies.”

“Two?” Brendel said.

“The member within our former Grey Wolves Mercenaries. His name is Eke.” Sanford replied.

“So it’s him.” Brendel raised his eyebrow. He was not really concerned with that name, so he quickly looked for that person amongst the mercenaries, spotted the Elementalist older sister and immediately beckoned his hand in that direction: “Over here, lucky babe, come over here and loot this body!”

Everyone stopped talking when they heard him —

They first looked at where Brendel was looking at, hesitated for a while, before putting their eyes on the older Elementalist sister. She looked at the people around her before pointing at herself: “Me?”

“Yeah, didn’t I ask you before to do this task?” Brendel pointed at the Dark Bishop: “Loot the body... No, I mean, tidy up the victory items.”

The girl’s pretty looking brows frowned as she bit her lower lips, while she glared at Brendel: “My lord, my name is Felaern, and not l-lucky babe!” Her heavily accented tongue caused her to nearly bite her tongue. She was looking coldly at him as she thought he was trying to cause trouble for her.

“Ah, no, you see, Felaern, lucky babe is something we say to praise someone in my hometown.”

But he immediately saw her looking back at him with suspicion.

“My lord, I have also been to Karsuk, but the locals have never said something like that before...” Sanford reminded him from the side.

“No, this talk is between us wizards.” Brendel’s recovery was very quick.

“What does it mean?”

“It means that the person’s luck is very good, very moe, and a totally hot girl.”

Even though the Elementalist sister did not know what moe meant, she understood there were some ill intentions somewhere. She glared at her lord as she confirmed in her heart that all human males were certainly lustful beasts. However, she was a subordinate to him, so she did not make any disrespectful actions, nodded and did what she was ordered to.

Suddenly there was a series of soft bangs in the east hills. At first the sounds continued with low rumbles, before clear cracking sounds mixed with thunder-like booms could be heard. The ground where they were standing trembled.

Brendel looked at the pebbles at his feet which moved like they were dancing.

[Why are these sounds so familiar. They sound like Exploding Crystals used in the second Madara War. Come to think of it, I haven't heard these sounds in the game for decades. How nostalgic... Wait, what?!]

Brendel's expression changed and immediately looked up. Indeed, the cliffs in the east were being destroyed in a pile of rising dust clouds.

Everyone stared with gaping mouths as they watched the rocks fly everywhere —

Chapter 110

Accidental bounty

Romaine was in a rare state where she was quiet and still, sitting obediently in front of Brendel with a lowered head. If she did not peek from the corners of her eyes at Brendel, she actually appeared to be quite like a noble's daughter.

Of course that would only be true, if one was to discount her shabby appearance, with her face covered with soot and her tattered clothes.

The real noble's daughter who sat beside Romaine was roughly in the same state. She clutched her cloak that was full of holes from the explosion with a lowered head that was covered with full of ashes, and appeared anxious.

"Brendel, I..." Romaine saw Brendel's furious face relaxed a little and rushed to explain herself, but before she was able to finish her sentence, the latter's glare sent her words back down her throat.

She had no choice but to lower her head gloomily.

She was sure that her plan was perfect, and if it was not for the small mistake at the end, she would have helped him a lot. Even if there was just a tiny problem at the end, it flattened a few Lizardmen right? It even sealed off their escape route too.

She told herself that she needed to put less Exploding Crystals the next time she did it.

If Brendel knew what she was thinking, he would probably spank her immediately. He and Nalaethar went to inspect the area after the explosions. Based on Amandina's calculation, the plan was indeed able to kill the majority of the Lizardmen that escaped towards the hills. Unfortunately it was clear that she worked with the wrong person, or to be precise, that plan would never have materialized. If the troublemaker Romaine did not see that plan, then the plan would simply remain on paper.

Unfortunately, history did not have the word 'if' in it. Just like how Romaine did not have the word 'caution' in her dictionary, her plans were constructed in reality.

Brendel cast his gaze back on Amandina. She seemed to feel his eyes looking at her, and she shrank a little and said in a small voice: "I'm sorry my lord, this is my fault..."

"No, this has nothing to do with you." Brendel shook his head.

Amandina's mind was blank for a moment. She thought he would ask her to take responsibility for this matter. It was clear to everyone how much he spoiled Romaine, and if something was to happen to her, she did not know how Brendel would react. She had gotten used to being Brendel's aide and his finances, and she felt that she would not be able to go back to her old life if he did not want to use her any longer.

[If Romaine did not change Amandina's dosage on her own she would not have caused the explosion to go wrong. In the end, only a few Lizardmen died and nearly caused the two of them to get buried because of the improper explosion. If Amandina did not realize something was wrong and reacted early by getting to safety, the results would have been disastrous.]

Brendel could not help but glare at Romaine when he thought about this point. This was also the thing that made him the angriest. He did not mind Romaine helping out, as long as she did not act senselessly and placed herself in danger.

He sighed and rubbed his forehead.

This girl from Bucca looked as if she was able to see things clearly like it was an innate talent, but at times she seemed so out of the world that it caused him headaches.

"Amandina, did you create plans like this all the time?" He suddenly asked.

Amandina felt troubled again and was full of shame. He had treated her like an equal noble of his status, and other than the slight difficulty of traveling, she felt that there was nothing to complain about.

"I apologize..."

"No," Brendel continued to glare at Romaine to check whether she was reflecting on her mistake.: "I'm asking if you're coming up with plans on your own whenever something is happening."

She blinked twice before nodding. Ever since she joined him, she had planned various schemes every time he acted and was even proud of them, but he was always better

and certainly proved that she was always lacking. In front of his foresight which was verging on precognition, she felt that it was almost like a joke for wanting to become his advisor

Even so, she had never given up on this habit. Now she made these plans to judge herself instead of her initial goal to become his advisor. She would constantly check her plans as the events unfold to see whether she had improved on her old mistakes, but she did not expect Romaine to peek at her boldest plans amongst the ones she did.

She felt like Mother Marsha was playing a joke on her.

“Why didn’t you show them to me?” He asked.

“I...”

The youth was silent for a moment as he guessed what she was thinking. “Miss Amandina, you were the one to recommend yourself to become my advisor. Since that is the case, isn’t it to be expected for you to tell me your plans?”

“I’m sorry... I know that, but all the time your plans... I didn’t know that I’m so immature. In the future, I’ll—”

“Brendel, the entire thing is my fault, stop picking on Amandina-” Romaine interrupted the conversation.

Brendel nearly failed to keep a straight face from the sudden interruption because he was angry.

[Shit. Luckily I told the Nightsong Tiger and Nalaethar to give me some space, otherwise I really can’t maintain my appearance as a lord.]

He took a deep breath, ignored Romaine and continued his words from before: “Miss Amandina, there’s no one who is accomplished from the very beginning. You are especially different, as there are very few who has an astute mind like yours. If you give up your chance to become my advisor because of your childish thoughts, then you’re wasting your talents and Mother Marsha’s efforts.”

Amandina looked at him with confusion and incomprehension.

“There is always a limit to a person’s understanding of a given situation. The Nightsong

Tiger is able to help me solve many things because of his experience, but he cannot match one particular thing that you possess.” He pointed repeatedly at his head as he looked at her. “Miss Amandina. I hope that you don’t stay outside of my circle any longer. I believe you can help me. Are you willing to do so?”

He wanted to give her confidence and comfort. A conman like himself could easily shake her confidence, especially when she had such a strong desire to win.

[Even if I don’t change history too much, this foresight of mine can only last for a few years. In the game the players had a great impact of how the world turned out, and without their interaction in this world, ‘history’ will definitely differ from what I know. Even though I can still use my experience to look at things, the ability to know what the future holds will be heavily discounted. Just this mission alone is enough to show me that there were things I missed out.]

In the game he was not the best warrior or the best commander, and while he could try to become the former with items and experience, the latter had to be done with other means.

[I have the Goddess of War with me in the future, but that won’t be enough. Amandina can see the entire situation just from a few details and that isn’t something that I can do easily. While she isn’t someone who’s omniscient she’s more than enough to be an advisor.]

Amandina was deeply moved by Brendel’s words. There was nothing more precious than give trust to someone like her who was proud. Even though she still felt that Brendel was merely consoling her, she nodded earnestly and was determined to help him.

Brendel did not expect the shy Amandina to have such a strong reaction as he thought he was only able to dismiss her worries. His eyes went back to Romaine as he asked: “Do you still have any Exploding Crystals left?”

“My lord, you know about them?” Amandina looked at her in disbelief.

“Something like that...” Brendel coughed awkwardly.

[This thing isn’t invented yet? Don’t tell me that this girl also invented the Exploding Crystals too, coincidence much?]

But he still tried to gloss it over: “The High Tower’s wizards have something similar, so I’m just asking.”

“That’s a coincidence,” Amandina said in a small voice: “I named them as Exploding Crystals too. I used the discarded materials during the creation of Magicite. They are capable of piercing through the surrounding structure of an object, displacing their stability, allowing the Elements to become active, and ultimately causes an explosion.”

[You really created this!]

Brendel’s head spun to her again. This was something quite big in the game, although it was gradually phased out in the later half of the Madara War. Gamers agreed that they were the ‘explosives’ in this fantasy world, but the stability of the crystals were poor and not suited to be kept in storage. It was quite effective in the early stages, but the strength of the undead units were eventually strong enough at the end of the war to withstand it.

“Do you have more of them?” He asked.

“I have a few more left,” Amandina immediately answered: “If my lord needs them, I can make them overnight.”

“Overnight?” Brendel’s eyes became wide. Was it not supposed to take at least half a month?

Brendel thought history might have changed because he took her along with him when he saw her nodding. He wanted to ask for more details, but he saw the Nightsong Tiger beckoning at him with an urgent expression.

[Damn it, isn’t he supposed to be with the lucky babe to gather the loot? I wanted to ask about this hack.]

But the Nightsong Tiger looked like he was about to run up, so he quickly gave his instructions: “If it’s possible, I want everyone to have one or two of them. Also, these crystals are unstable right?”

Amandina felt a little numb at Brendel’s know-it-all words and nodded after a moment of shock.

[Okay! It looks like there’s no sudden change in history.]

“I’ll teach you a method to let it stabilize a little longer. But that method’s effectiveness has its limit, so you need to research on it.”

“What?” She uttered a surprised gasp as she watched Brendel leave who appeared relieved.

[He even knows how to stabilize it...]

Her confidence that was repaired from Brendel’s encouragement was once again shattered with his words. She thought she would have at some advantages in creating Magicite-related artifacts, but he seemed to know even more than her.

However, this was a misunderstanding because Brendel did not take on such a profession in the game and knew nothing about it. He did have some knowledge about a few recipes and materials regarding to the profession though.

While Amandina was swimming in a pool of misery, Romaine finally gave a long sigh of relief as the only person who could control her left.

“Thank you, Amandina.” She looked gratefully at Amandina and said.

[I’ll be grateful enough if you don’t give me anymore trouble.] Amandina glanced at her and shook her head hurriedly. She was terrified of this girl.

But Romaine did not seem like she intended to let the only one whom she could talk to off the hook. She thought for a while and asked: “Oh, that’s right, did you see that earlier?”

“That?”

“You know, there are a few flying lights that came towards us like fireflies when we were escaping. Did you notice them?”

“I...”

“Did you?”

“I think I did...”

===== Brendel POV =====

When Brendel met up with the Nightsong Tiger, he saw him with a thick book covered in leather. That was without a doubt an item from the Dark Bishop, which were covered with scorched marks left from the explosion of Dark Mana.

[The lucky babe really has the golden touch of Midas. She can even scrounge items from one of the poorest mob. Damn, it would be fun to watch the reaction of the other gamers if I can post them screenshots online.]

“What’s this?” He asked.

The Nightsong Tiger looked at him secretively, and opened the book in front of him.

Brendel’s eyes turned into dots when he saw what was in them.



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